Speaking in Two Tongues:

An Ethnographic Investigation of the Literacy Practices of English as a Foreign

Language and Cambodian Young Adult Learners' Identity

Soth Sok

Student Number: 3829801

College of Education, Victoria University

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Abstract

This study focuses on how the literacy practices in English of young Cambodians shaped their individual and social perception as well as performance of identity. It examines the English language as an increasingly dominant cultural and linguistic presence in Cambodia and endeavours to fill the epistemic gap in what Gee (2008, p. 1) has identified as the 'other stuff' of language. This other stuff includes 'social relations, cultural models, power and politics, perspectives on experience, values and attitudes, as well as things and places in the world' that are introduced to the local culture through English literacy and practices.

Merchant and Carrington (2009, p. 63) have suggested that 'the very process of becoming literate involves taking up new positions and becoming a different sort of person'. Drawing on the life stories of five participants and my own-lived experiences, the investigation is in part auto-ethnographical. It considers how reading and writing behaviours in English became the 'constitutive' components of 'identity and personhood' (Street 1994, p. 40). I utilised semi-structured life history interviews with young adult Cambodian participants, who spoke about how their individual and social performance of identity was influenced by their participation in English literacy practices and events in Cambodia. Sharing life stories, my participants and I revisited our past. We re-evaluated our life and recalled moments that made us smile, laugh, and sometimes even cry. Narrating and exchanging our life stories appeared to help my participants and I to come to term better with our life. In the process, my investigation became embodied making me vulnerable to both the research process and the data. Instead of pretending that embodiment and vulnerability did not happen, I learnt from Behar (1996) to include them in my methodology.

As our life stories covered various themes that spread across disciplines and genres such as culture, peer, society, politics, economics, psychology, and pedagogy, I employed bricolage (Kincheloe 2001; Kincheloe & McLaren 2005) as a theoretical framework to "interpret … and deconstruct" the data in a multiperspectival manner (Kincheloe 2001, p. 682). Using voice centred relational method (Brown & Gilligan 1993) as a tool for data analysis, I was able to understand how English literacy and practices could help Cambodian young adults to discover their voices and selves and navigate in a supposedly hierarchical social and cultural context of relationships of

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Cambodia. I found that literacy is not just the ability to code and decode linguistic signs. Instead, literacy is everything we do with a language that define self, identity, and ultimately the meaning of being and becoming at a personal level and culture and society at a higher degree.

Student Declaration

I, Soth Sok, declare that the PhD thesis entitled 'Speaking in Two Tongues: An Ethnographic Investigation of the Literacy Practices of English as a Foreign Language and Cambodian Young Adult Learners' Identity' is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, the thesis is my own work.

Signature   Date

                                   24 February 2014
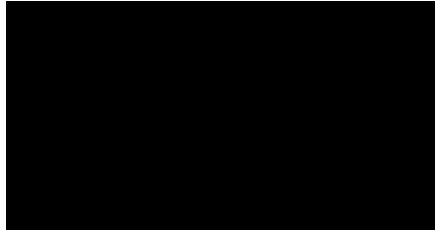
Soth Sok

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List of Abbreviations

ALA	Australian Leadership Award
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CELT	Cambodian English Language Training
COERR	Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees
CGDK	Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
FUNCINPEC	Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant Neutre Pacifique Et Coopératif - National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
KPNLF	Khmer People's National Liberation Front
NBC	National Bank of Cambodia
NEC	National Election Committee
PDK	Party of Democratic Kampuchea
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
RULE	Royal University of Law and Economics
SAC	Self-Access Centre
SEAP	Southeast Asia Program
SMS	Short Message Service
SRP	Sam Rainsy Party
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
VCRM	Voice-centred relational method
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Map of Cambodia with Bordering Countries
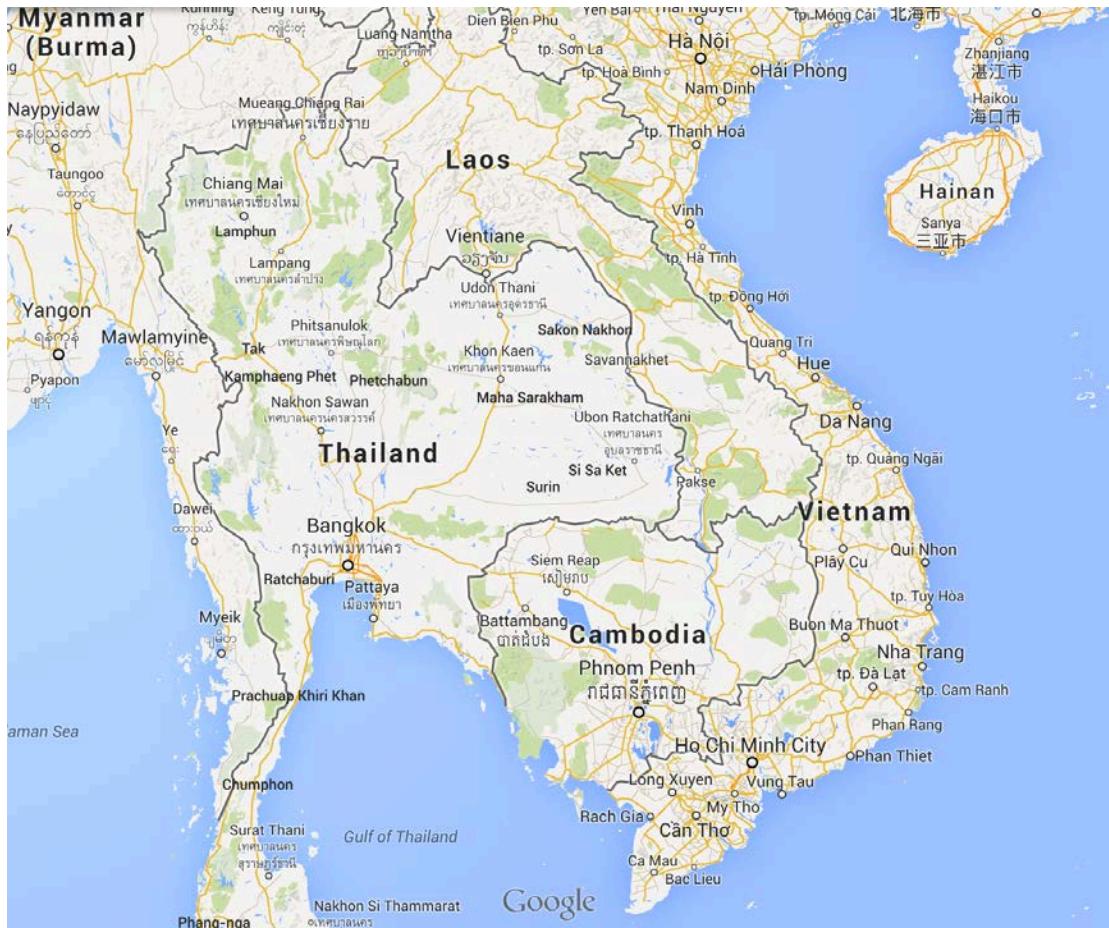
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Map of Cambodia
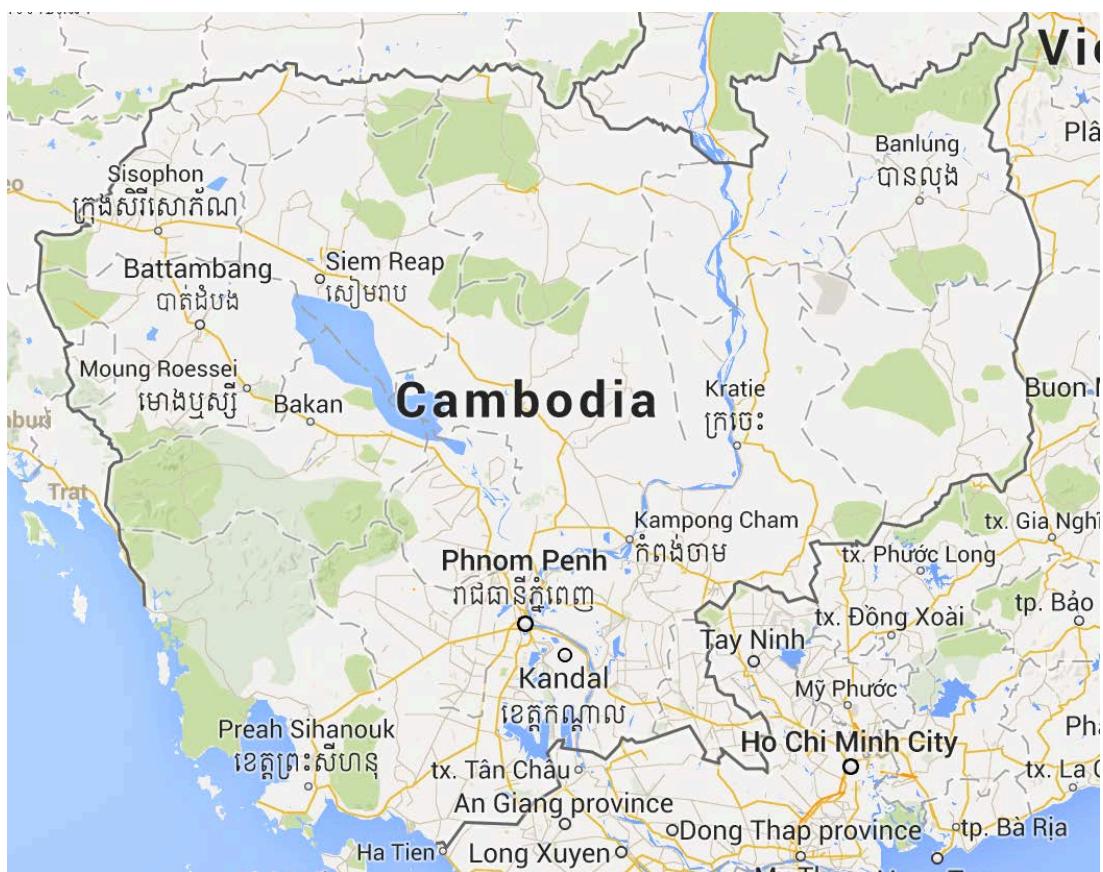
Source: Google Maps

Timeline of Historical Events in Cambodia

4200 BCE	Traces of people living in caves in northwest Cambodia
1500	Remains at Samrong Sen show evidence of bronze use
180 CE	Legendary founding of the Empire of Funan
243	Funan sends its first tribute mission to China
6th century	Decline of Funan
611	Earliest Khmer-language inscription
7th century	Flourishing of an entity called Chenla
802	King Jayavarman II establishes the Kingdom of Angkor with the introduction of the *devaraja* cult
950	Khmer armies invade the Kingdom of Champa
1050	Sdok Kak Thom inscription, a major source of the early history of Angkor
1113	King Suryavarman II starts the construction of Angkor Wat
1131	Dedication of Angkor Wat
1145	Khmers defeat Champa in battle
1177–1178	Chams launch surprise attack on Angkor
1181	King Jayavarman VII crowned
1190	Jayavarman VII defeats the Chams and introduces Buddhism
1220	Khmer armies driven from Champa
1296–1297	Chinese emissary Zhou Daguan visits Angkor
1432	Capture and destruction of the city of Angkor by the Siamese
1434	Legendary date for the founding of the city of Phnom Penh
1512–1513	Portuguese writer Tomé Pires writes the earliest surviving European account of Cambodia
1623	King Chey Chettha II allows the establishment of a Vietnamese customs post at Prey Nokor (modern-day Ho Chi Minh City)
1651–1656	British East India Company establish a factory at Oudong

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1749	King Chettha V cedes lands in the Lower Mekong to Vietnam
1772	Siamese invade Cambodia and oust Phnom Penh
1779	Ang Eng, age seven, is made king of Cambodia by the Siamese
1811–1812	Siamese and Vietnamese fight in Cambodia
1835–1840	Vietnam occupies Cambodia
1848	Coronation of Ang Duong as King of Cambodia; he makes contact with the British and then the French
1860	King Ang Duong dies; his oldest son becomes King Norodom
1863	King Norodom agrees to the establishment of a French protectorate
1865	The Cambodian capital is moved from Oudong to Phnom Penh
1866	Poukombo Revolt against French rule
1876	Prince Si Votha starts a guerrilla campaign against the French
1898	Thiounn becomes Minister of the Palace, remaining in power until 1941
1900	Crown Prince Yukanthor goes to France to criticise the French colonial administration and is sent into exile
1906	King Sisowath goes to France for Paris Exhibition
1911	Establishment of Collège Sisowath, which becomes Lycée Sisowath in 1936
1916	Peasants revolt against high taxes imposed during World War I
1920	Opening of the Albert Sarraut Museum, later the National Museum of Cambodia
1925	French *résident* Félix Bardez murdered
1927	Death of King Sisowath; succeeded by his son Sisowath Monivong
1930	Formation of the Indochina Communist Party
1936	Publication of *Nagara Vatta*, the first Khmer-language newspaper
1939	Start of World War II
1940	Thailand attacks Cambodia, sparking short Franco-Thai War

1941	Death of King Sisowath Monivong, who was succeeded by his grandson, Prince Norodom Sihanouk; Japanese soldiers arrive in Cambodia
1942	Umbrella Revolt against the French; organisers jailed in massive crackdown with Cambodian nationalist Son Ngoc Thanh fleeing to Japan
1943	French try to Romanise the Khmer alphabet, leading to protests from Buddhists
1945	Japanese force King Sihanouk to proclaim independence; return of Son Ngoc Thanh, who becomes prime minister; return of the French
1946	France grants internal autonomy to Cambodia; establishment of political parties, notably the Democrat Party, which wins the elections for the Constituent Assembly
1947	Death of Prince Sisowath Youtevong; elections to the first National Assembly
1949	Yem Sambaur becomes prime minister; dissolution of the National Assembly; France grants Cambodia semi-independence
1950	Assassination of Democrat politician Ieu Koeus
1951	Elections to the second National Assembly; Son Ngoc Thanh returns from France
1952	Son Ngoc Thanh leaves for the Dangrek Mountains; start of the Royal Crusade for Independence; sacking of the Huy Kanthoul government
1953	France grants independence to Cambodia
1954	Geneva Accords end Indochina War; Cambodian independence recognised by international community
1955	Sihanouk wins referendum on popularity; Sihanouk abdicates in favour of his father Suramarit; elections to the third National Assembly won by the newly established Sangkum Reastr Niyum
1958	Elections to the fourth National Assembly, with women voting for the first time; Cambodia establishes diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China
1959	Sihanouk denounces 'Bangkok Plot', with Sam Sary fleeing Cambodia; Dap Chhuon plot ends with death of Dap Chhuon; assassination attempt on Royal Family
1960	Death of King Suramarit; National Assembly elects Sihanouk as head of state; referendum approves Sihanouk's rule

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1962	First census of Cambodia; elections to the fifth National Assembly; World Court awards Preah Vihear Temple to Cambodia; Saloth Sar (Pol Pot) becomes acting secretary of the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party, which is renamed the Workers' Party of Kampuchea
1963	Pol Pot confirmed as secretary of the Workers' Party of Kampuchea, then flees Phnom Penh; Chinese President Liu Shaoqi visits Phnom Penh; Sihanouk names Prince Naradipo as his heir; overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam
1964	Nationalisation of banks in Cambodia; execution of Preap In
1965	Cambodia breaks diplomatic relations with the United States
1966	French President Charles de Gaulle visits Phnom Penh; elections to the sixth National Assembly; Lon Nol becomes prime minister
1967	Outbreak of Samlaut rebellion in Battambang; pro-Communist parliamentarians Khieu Samphan, Hou You and, later, Hu Nim flee to the jungle; Lon Nol government collapses
1968	Increase in tensions along the Cambodian-South Vietnamese border; schoolboy Hun Sen also flees to the jungle
1969	Lon Nol returns as prime minister; Prince Sirik Matak becomes deputy prime minister
1970	Sihanouk leaves for France; demonstrations are held in Phnom Penh against the presence of Vietnamese Communists on Cambodian territory; Sihanouk ousted by the National Assembly; first civil war starts with Sihanouk proclaiming the National United Front of Kampuchea, later known as the Royal Government of National Union (GRUNK); US-South Vietnamese soldiers 'invade' Cambodia; proclamation of the Khmer Republic
1971	Lon Nol launches Operation Chenla II, the last Republican military offensive
1972	Keo Ann criticises official corruption, leading to student demonstrations; Lon Nol appoints himself president and Son Ngoc Thanh as prime minister; presidential elections held; elections held for the National Assembly and the Senate
1973	Lon Nol proclaims a 'State of Siege'; Sihanouk tours liberated areas of the country; formation of the High Political Council to run Khmer Republic; Long Boret becomes prime minister
1974	Assassination of Keo Sangkim sparks more demonstrations in Phnom Penh

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1975	Lon Nol leaves for Hawaii; US evacuation with Operation Eagle Pull; Sak Suthsakhan becomes head of state; GRUNK forces take control of Phnom Penh and begin forced evacuation of all urban areas in the country; establishment of Democratic Kampuchea; Prince Sihanouk returns to Phnom Penh
1976	The Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea promulgated; 'elections' held for Assembly of People's Representatives; Pol Pot becomes prime minister
1977	Disputes along Cambodian-Vietnamese border
1978	Radio Hanoi broadcasts Khmer-language appeal for uprising in Democratic Kampuchea; border dispute escalates; Vietnam invades Cambodia
1979	Vietnamese soldiers capture Phnom Penh; proclamation of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK); China invades Vietnam; several hundred thousand refugees head to Thailand; formation of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF)
1980	Reintroduction of money and postal services into Cambodia; heavy fighting along Thai-Cambodian border
1981	Prince Sihanouk establishes the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC); elections held for a National Assembly in the PRK
1982	Establishment of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) by FUNCINPEC, the KPNLF, and the Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK); CGDK obtains Cambodia's seat at the United Nations
1983–1984	Fighting intensifies on Thai-Cambodian border
1985	Hun Sen becomes prime minister
1987	Hun Sen meets Prince Sihanouk in France
1988	First Jakarta Informal Meeting held
1989	Second Jakarta Informal Meeting; PRK transforms into the State of Cambodia, with Buddhism as the state religion and the right to own private property restored; Vietnam announces the withdrawal of its soldiers from Cambodia
1990	Third Jakarta Informal Meeting; establishment of the Supreme National Council

1991   People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea transforms itself into the Cambodian People's Party (CPP); signing of Paris Agreements; near-lynching of Khieu Samphan during his return to Phnom Penh

1992   Yasushi Akashi arrives to head the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia; the PDK decides to pull out of the electoral process

1993   FUNCINPEC wins elections; CPP refuses to accept defeat and after secession attempt by some CPP supporters, forces itself into coalition government with Prince Ranariddh as first prime minister, and Hun Sen as second prime minister; new constitution approved; restoration of the constitutional monarchy

1994   Political strike with Prince Chakrapong and Sin Son attempting another coup; finance minister Sam Rainsy ousted after trying to push through an anti-corruption drive; Prince Sirivudh, foreign minister, resigns in protest

1995   Sam Rainsy is expelled from FUNCINPEC and forms the Khmer Nation Party; Prince Sirivudh hounded from Phnom Penh by Hun Sen

1996   FUNCINPEC decides to form electoral alliance with Sam Rainsy and some of the remaining PDK members; Khmer Rouge officially splits

1997   Hand grenade attack on Sam Rainsy kills 16, which is blamed on the CPP by the FBI; Son Sen murdered on orders from Pol Pot, who is then arrested by Ta Mok; Hun Sen launches coup d'état against Prince Ranariddh; interior minister Ho Sok murdered; Royalists regroup at O'Smach; US journalist Nate Thayer witnesses trial of Pol Pot at Anlong Veng

1998   Prince Ranariddh returns to Phnom Penh; death of Pol Pot; elections to the National Assembly won by the CPP, with many claims of irregularities in the vote-counting procedures; last remaining Khmer Rouge surrender

1999   Formation of the Senate; arrest of Khmer Rouge security chief 'Duch'; Cambodia joins the Association of Southeast Asian Nations; murder of actress Piseth Pilika

2000–2002   Law and order crisis, with increases in politically motivated assassinations; conservation groups condemn the clearing of the forests

2003   National Assembly elections results in victory for CPP, with Sam Rainsy's Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) coming in second, ahead of FUNCINPEC; major political crisis as opposition refuse to take part in a new government

2004   King Sihanouk abdicates; Throne Council convenes and elects Prince Sihamoni as the new king

2005	Hun Sen hounds Sam Rainsy out of the country after the opposition leader accuses Hun Sen of being behind the 1997 assassination attempt; FUNCINPEC ousts Prince Norodom Ranariddh
2006	Trial of former Khmer Rouge continues facing procedural problems
2007	Formation of the Human Rights Party
2008	Border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand over Preah Vihear Temple; National Assembly elections, which are held amid massive voting irregularities and a divided opposition, sees the CPP win 72 of the 123 seats; Sam Rainsy emerges as the main opposition leader in the country

(Corfield 2009, pp. xxiii–xxx)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

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Multiple studies have been conducted on the relationship of speakers of the English language and their literacy and identity practices across Asia: in China (Bian 2009; Gao 2009; Li 2009; Tsung & Clarke 2010), Thailand (Boonchum 2009), Vietnam (Ha 2007, 2008, 2009) and Malaysia (Cheng 2007; Hashim 2002). However, there is a paucity of scholarship that examines English-language literacy in Cambodia. Within the contemporary linguistic landscape of Cambodia, the English language, it could be argued, has become a carrier of Western cultural events (e.g. Christmas, Valentine's Day and birthdays). Such celebrations are repositioning the use of English language and literacy as an increasingly dominant, globalising cultural and linguistic force. This phenomenon informed the focus of this investigation.

Globalization and English Literacies

Globalization appears to have introduced many Western values (e.g., industrialization, technologies, politics, economics, linguistics) into Asian countries. With regards to family values, Jung (2002), for example, argued that, "as an inevitable consequence of industrialization, the family-centered East Asian societies are also rapidly moving toward self-centered individualism" (p. 268). Pieterse (2009) went so far to compare globalization to "a steamroller that erased cultural and biological diversity in its way" (p. 43). It also altered, Pieterse added, the understanding of cultural difference, which was longer understood in the sense of national differences across countries, but rather the differences in terms of "gender and identity politics, ethnic and religious movements, minority rights, and indigenous peoples" (pp. 43-44) within a community. Globalization was "emant[ing] and disfus[ing] outwards from *within* 'the West'", which is often time a euphemism for the United States of America (Carr, 2004, p. 1).

More relevant to this thesis, Yue (2012) has pointed the Westernization process of Eastern culture on the spread and the acceptance of English language and English literacy practices among the affected countries. Mandal (2001) has written

that:

> Today English dominates in the economy, diplomacy, the mass media, academia, education and popular culture across the globe. Cultural iconography from the USA, with its own accent on English, has made particularly visible inroads in many societies (p. 1001).

Since 1990s, Cambodia was one of such societies. Globalization and English literacy practices appeared to play their roles in Westernizing while developing this once war-torn and isolated country to varying degree.

In this thesis, I specifically examined through interpretive life history narratives of an insider the processes through which English literacy and practices informed Cambodian young adult users of English language of certain Western cultural values and practices. My decision to explore the English language and literacy practices of young adult Cambodians was in part influenced by my experiences of being an English-language user, teacher and teacher trainer in Cambodia. My insider positioning in this research has, on reflection, productively worked to reinterpret the narrative of literacy elicited during life history interviews (Goodson & Sikes 2001). However, the process of coming to knowledge has not been straightforward. Indeed, it could be characterised as, at best, transitional and, at worst, doubtful and messy. I will now contextualise the process of my research journey and my reorientation to understanding how knowledge becomes reproduced to illustrate my transition from positivism to a more experimental paradigm as well as the doubts and messiness resulting from this shift.

Choosing the Research Topic, or Did the Topic Choose Me?

Having been a language teacher in Cambodia, my understanding of language and literacy was orientated around my practice as a language educator. My background in applied linguistics was shaped by an adherence to grammatical rules, an understanding of English as a singular form, and the view of teachers as masters and students as disciples.

In 2010, I left Cambodia for Australia as a recipient of a prestigious Australia Leadership Award (ALA). As an English-language user, teacher and teacher trainer with an applied linguistics background, I was orientated to conduct a positivistic

analysis of English as used by Cambodians. I intended to examine extensively linguistic features that had led some scholars (e.g. Keuk 2009; Moore & Bounchan 2010) to suggest the emergence of Cambodian English as a new variety of world English (Kachru & Nelson 2006). Because of my positivist-orientated methodological preference, I was following the course of linguistic discourse analyses (Fairclough 1992; Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton 2003) as a theoretical framework for analysing written and spoken texts, communicative events (Short Message Service [SMS], email, Facebook chats and comments, as well as recorded classroom conversations and presentations). I had planned to work with 1,000 participants drawn from 10 major provinces, cities and towns throughout Cambodia. The participants would have comprised second-language learners and teachers of English, school principals and national policymakers. In addition, I had planned to interview at least 10 native speakers of English who had lived in Cambodia for a minimum of two years and therefore were deemed familiar with the use of 'Cambodian English' (Keuk 2009, p. 98).

However, this approach was problematised by my reading of scholarship that utilised a new literacies approach—specifically, research that examined the relation between literacy and identity (Barton & Hamilton 1998; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic 2000; Bell 1997; Bianco, Orton & Yihong 2009; Gee 2008; Ha 2007, 2008, 2009; Jiménez 2000; Vicars 2006a, 2006b, 2009). As I learnt from Street (1984, p. 97) that literacy 'is a social process, in which particular socially constructed technologies are used within particular institutional frameworks for specific social purposes', I realised that literacy within a sociocultural theory could be viewed as a situated cultural practice. I became aware of different domains and uses of literacy, and interrogated the concept of 'multiple literacies' or 'multiliteracies'—'a concept that emphasises what is *different* about the use of literacy in diverse contexts'—which originated in Bartlett (2007b, pp. 52–3). I started to reflect on the kinds of literacy found in Cambodian schools, homes, workplaces and religious institutions, at different times, and in different cultural contexts and situations. Bell (1997) suggested that the meaning of literacy needs to extend to practices beyond language, turning attention away from a singular form to multiple literacies or situated literacy—what Gee (2008, p. 42) called 'literacy practices'. These, from a social theory perspective, are seen as:

> the general cultural ways of utilising written language which people draw upon in their lives. In the simplest sense literacy practices are what people do

with literacy. However practices are not observable units of behaviour since they also involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships. This includes people's awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy and discourses of literacy, how people talk about and make sense of literacy. These are processes internal to the individual; at the same time, practices are the social processes which connect people with one another, and they include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities. (Barton & Hamilton 1998, pp. 6–7)

Gradually, I realised that literacy practices are linked to understanding of the self, identity and culture of the user. Luna, Solsken and Kutz (2000, p. 278) suggested that individuals possess 'varied repertoires of literacies'. According to Luna, Solsken and Kutz (2000), the ranges of literacies included five important characteristics. First, literacy is not a single body of knowledge, but a varied set of social practices. Second, the meanings of oral and written texts are embedded in sociocultural contexts, and interpretation depends on those contexts. Third, the forms of oral and written texts are designed to serve personal and social purposes—in particular, sociocultural contexts—and are difficult, if not impossible, to generate or evaluate in the absence of purpose and context. Forth, literacy practices involve the interrelated use of oral language, reading and writing, which become altogether different practices when decomposed into separate, discrete skills. Finally, there is no continuum or hierarchy of literacy—different literacies serve different purposes and are valued differently in different social settings (pp. 277–9). Papen (2005, p. 26) suggested that literacy events could be connected to the notion of 'social activity in which reading and writing, or texts, play an essential role', and Heath (1983, p. 50) underlined the nature of the participants' interaction and their interpretive process around a text.

As I reflected on these characteristics of literacy repertoires, I began to understand how my practices of English had reshaped my Cambodian being and becoming. For example, informed by my interaction and interpretive process of English literacy practices, over time, I had become more self-orientated, caring less about Cambodian norms and traditions. What I had done through my engagement with English-language literacies was my means of showing an identity that was viewed as different among my peers. My understanding of literacy now appeared to me to have a broader epistemic network constituted through social and cultural roles. From this stance, I appreciated that 'literacy cannot and should not be defined *a priori*' because it is 'the result of on-going, complex sociocultural negotiations'

(Bartlett 2007a, p. 738). Literacy should be understood and 'studied in its full range of context—not just cognitive—but social, cultural, historical, and institutional' (Gee 2010, p. 17). '"Becoming literate" requires critical inter- and intra-personal identity work accomplished through engagement with cultural artifacts' (Bartlett 2007b, p. 52). These powerful realisations led me to reflect on my own English literacy practices vis-a-vis identity construction. In this thesis, I examined these literacy practices and identity construction processes of mine as well as those of five other participants to understand how our literacies informed us of our perception and performances of the selves. I started with the following anecdote that first problematised my notion and relation of identity and literacy practices.

The Awakening Experience: *Khmer-min-Khmer, Erop-min-Erop*

In 2008, while working as a lecturer of English in a Cambodian state university, I was invited by a first-year student, Phalla (pseudonym), to her birthday party. It was late November and, en route, my two-year-old son became excited at the sight of Christmas decorations that festooned restaurants, shops and supermarkets.

Phalla welcomed us into her spacious apartment furnished with expensive imported sofas and local hand-carved artefacts. A long glass coffee table sat in the centre. Phalla's parents and grandmother were facing a large flat-screen television, sipping iced tea. Phalla's father stood up as she introduced us.

'Pa, this is my teacher and his family.' Then she turned to me and said, 'Teacher, this is my father, mother and grandmother'.

I noted the loan word from French that meant 'father' as I shook hands and turned to *sampeah* (greet with both palms pressed together and placed before the chest accompanying with a slight bow) her family. As we sank deep into the soft Western-styled sofa, a young maid appeared from the kitchen with glasses of iced tea. Addressing Phalla's father as *Lok Pu* ('mister' or 'sir younger uncle'), I complimented him on his house and the decor. I went on to chat with his wife, *Ee,* and Phalla's grandmother, *Ah Mah* (Chinese words for 'younger aunty' and 'granny', respectively). None of us used our names. There was no need. Social hierarchical titles sufficed. *Lok Pu*'s mobile phone rang, bringing our conversation to a halt. I glanced at the television while he picked up his phone.

'Sorry', he said while reaching into his trouser pocket.

I replied with a smile and a nod, impressed by his humbleness in the use of the word 'sorry'. Not many Khmer elders would do that because it could make them lose face.

As he walked towards the door, *Ee* turned to me and explained, 'It must be his workers in need of something. He is a property developer, you know?'

'Oh! I see', I said, 'Where is his project located?'

'Along Veng Sreng Street.'

Before I could ask another question, *Lok Pu* returned and addressed me as *Lok Kru* (literally, 'mister' or 'sir teacher'), explaining that he was required at work. He turned to his wife and pointed to the car key near the television. She stood up and fetched it. I replied with another smile. Smiling is important when one is talking to someone older or higher in social hierarchical rank or authority.

Lok Pu left, taking the car key from his wife. There was no 'thank you'. His position allowed him not to use it.

'Do you celebrate Phalla's birthday every year?' I asked.

Ee explained that they had been hosting a party for quite a few years. *Ah Mah* interrupted firmly.

'I don't know why kids these days are so crazy about their birthdays. It was a very painful day for their mothers. Some mothers don't even make it out alive. Kids now have forgotten about this. They think only of themselves, their presents and their friends. Their birthdays should be the day they show their *kun* [gratitude] towards their mothers. Don't you think so?'

'Yes. Yeah. Uh…' It was important I agree with her. After all, she was an elder. I would never want to make her lose face or risk losing it myself.

Ah Mah continued.

'It's all about them now. They don't care very much about their *chas-tum* [elders] anymore. They are all *vuk* ['obsessed with' or 'crazy about'] with the European culture. They have copied everything from the West now. They have forgotten about the proper behaviours and values of being Khmer. Just look at the singer and those dancers', she said pointing to the television, on which a pop rap singer was performing. 'What kind of song is that? And look at her hair and her clothes! Whose daughter is she? Disgraceful!'

Then she turned to me. '*Lok Kru*, are traditional Cambodian values still taught at school these days?'

'Well, um…'

'You should teach them. They ignored all advice given by their *chas-tum*. And those who learn foreign languages like English are even worse. They copy everything. With all these *Khmer-min-Khmer, Erop-min-Erop* (not exactly Khmer, nor European), what will the future hold for our culture and tradition? Because traditional proprieties—'

By '*Khmer-min-Khmer, Erop-min-Erop*' *Ah Mah* was referring to those modern young people who act and look half-Khmer, half-Westerner (e.g., colourful hairs, tattoo, short skirts or shaggy clothes, highly animated gesture as seen in hip-hop music videos or movies). Before I could answer, my son ran back into the room from the kitchen. 'Daddy! Daddy! Come here!' Suddenly, I felt perturbed. Even my son was speaking Khmer, he was addressing me as 'Daddy' instead of *Pa*, or *Puk*, as most typical rural Khmers would do. I was praying that *Ah Mah* did not notice it.

Identity Trouble

> Cambodia is a society with a troubled history, and one that is struggling to find a way between traditional and modern values.
>
> (Miles & Thomas 2007, p. 383)

Prior to the birthday party, I had never doubted my identity. I was a Khmer. I met all the criteria: emblematic indicator of brown or sun-tanned skin, unique facial features with less almond-shaped eyes (Papiha et al. 1994), Khmer language (Smith-Hefner 1999, p. 138), conformity to sociocultural hierarchy (Fuderich 2007, p. 29; Ledgerwood, cited in Derks 2008, p. 12) and Buddhism (Mortland 1997, p. 171). These criteria narrated me as a 'pure' Khmer or *kmae-sot* (P Edwards 2001, p. 389).

After 30 years of being Khmer, I had played a range of different sociocultural roles. I was the eldest of four siblings. I had been an accomplished student of the English language, and then had become a teacher. I had become a husband and a father. Among all the social roles, my core identity had always been clear to me—I was a Khmer. I had hardly noticed that, somewhere along my identity-construction

process, I had become *Khmer-min-Khmer*. Thinking it over, I concluded I must have been corrupted by my English literacy and practices.

Reflecting the Self

While English renewed my hope of finding my self, it might also have been unbecoming of my Khmerness at the same time. Through English literacy, I had learnt popular notions of Western culture—democracy, justice, fairness, human rights, gender equity and freedom. These concepts informed my being and becoming as I became bold and moved away from the shadow of my family. BR Kelly (1996, p. 5) explained that:

> In Cambodian culture, individual identity is not encouraged; individuals are expected to become self-effacing. Children see and learn that the family is the all-important, defining characteristic of one's being. An individual's actions are accountable insofar as they bring pride of shame to the family.

My departure must have been shaming for my family.

Hara (2012, p. 19) observed that the way in which individuals act within the system of relationships called 'social structure' is influenced by historical, social and economic factors. He argued that 'structure and agent mutually reinforce each other' in a 'dynamic and changeable' relationship, resulting in the structure either being maintained or being altered by the agent. If what Hara argued was the case in my situation, I must have been viewed as either a destroyer of the traditional Khmer culture or a creator of the modern one. Becoming an English speaker had inspired me to unearth and do many things that did not fit the criteria of Khmer. I read numerous English-language texts, both print and multimodal. I felt inspired to make daring choices for my own life – daring because my choosing of life choices could disgrace my family and myself. One of the important duties of a Khmer is to honor his or her parents' choices of his being and becoming "…without question, and…in all matters" (Mortland 1994, p. 13). My English literacy practices provided me with stimulation for my establishment of personal self (Cellini, cited in Jones 2005, p. 7). As *Ah Mah* noted, I had become *Khmer-min-Khmer, Erop min Erop*. As I wondered what had become of me, I was uncertain about identity. Re-reading cultural texts about Khmer civilisation, culture and identity that I used to study at high school (e.g. Meun 1974, 2008; C Ou 1955; PPP Ou 2011; Teav 1971; Trueng 1974), I could see clearly that I

was the odd one out in the supposedly Khmer life choices. In particular, I saw myself as two different people: a once 'proper' child who completely followed his parents' choices and a *Khmer-min-Khmer, Erop min Erop* who prioritised his own choices, and preferred to be independent, individualistic and critical. This epiphany subsequently informed and prompted this research journey.

Joining the Dots

Through reading cultural studies, ethnography, narrative research and personal life narratives, I hesitantly found my own voice and my passion. Offredy and Vickers (2010, p. xiv) claimed that, in pursuing a PhD, passion:

> is essential because if you are only half-hearted about what you want to research, then either you will get bored with it and abandon the research or, if you do manage to complete the research project, because you have not put all your effort into it, the result will be substandard.

My research questions that framed this investigation were:

1. What were participants' inspirations to acquire and practice English literacy in Cambodia?
2. In what sociocultural setting was English literacy practiced?
3. How did English literacy practices affect the performance of Cambodian identities? Did English literacy practices impart Western cultural values?
4. What is the relationship, if any, between English literacy practices and the performance of identity in Cambodia?

In the next chapter, I will briefly discuss the notion of culture before highlighting some general differences between Western and Eastern cultures. I will then consider the role culture plays in the construction and performance of Cambodian individuals' sociocultural identity.

Chapter 2: 'Looking East, Facing West'

***

In this thesis, I call the country of my birth by its Western nomenclature of Cambodia. Although Kampuchea is closer in pronunciation to my country's mother tongue, I rarely use it because it is a formal name. Kampuchea also reminds me too much of the tragedies that happened during the times the country was officially known as *Kâmpŭchéa Prâcheathippadey* or 'Democratic Kampuchea' (Etcheson 1984), during the regime of Pol Pot. While I refer to the country as Cambodia, I use Khmer to discuss the language usage of Cambodians. Khmer also refers to the people of Cambodia. The term identifies me as a member of the Cambodian community and reflects both individual and collective cultural membership. Kramsch (1998, cited in Nunan & Choi 2010, p. 3) suggested that, through membership in a discourse community, 'a common social space and history, and a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting' is afforded. Exploring the role of language in culture, Yue (2012) argued that the spread of language strongly promoted the transmission of Western ideology, and Caughey (2006, p. 7) described culture as 'a language-concept system that a particular set of people uses to interpret experience and act in the world'. Nonetheless, culture and its nomenclature are problematic. There are controversies and ambiguities in geographical boundaries, and Durkin (2008), citing Said (1995), articulated the difficulties in monolithic descriptions of culture as 'Eastern' and 'Western', suggesting a neat homogeny that does not take into consideration a range of other affiliations and considerations.

In this thesis, the term Western culture or society is used to refer to those cultures heavily influenced by or connected to Europe or America. In the same sense, I use Eastern culture to refer to the social structure and philosophical system of Asia, particularly South-East Asia, in which Cambodia is located. It has been argued that the essence of Western civilisation is based on a classical inheritance, whereas Sinic civilisation is founded on:

> values such as authority and hierarchy, the submission of rights and interests of the individual under the collective, the important of consent, the avoidance of confrontation, face-saving and generally the supremacy of the state and the society over the individual. Asian people, moreover … tend to consider the evolution of their societies over long periods, over centuries or even millennia. (Senghaas 1998, p. 72)

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These genealogies have shaped concepts of self. Schweder and Bourne (1984) defined the Western concept as egocentric and the Eastern concept as sociocentric. Triandis (1989) distinguished the Western and Eastern concepts as individualist and collectivist, respectively, and Markus and Kitayama (1991) identified them as independent and interdependent. WL Gardner, Gabriel and Lee (1999, p. 321) characterised this distinction as the 'extent to which the self is defined as an autonomous and unique individual or is seen as inextricably and fundamentally embedded within a larger social network'. Among many traditional Asian and South-East Asian countries, the notions of self are generally collective and tightly intertwined with the concept of an extended family (Nguyen & Williams 1989; Nidorf 1985). Sociocultural differences between the two cultures have been summarised by Senghaas (1998, p. 92) as follows:

> Today 'Asian values' are especially propagated in East Asia and South-east Asia: different from 'Western individualism', the integration of the individual into a comprehensive existential collective is conceptually emphasized. This collective is supposed to be the family, or rather a family clan or network. The group is considered to be important in working life. In both—family and work group—the individual is considered to be embedded, or *aufgehoben* in Hegel's terminology: the dignity of the individual is assumed to be fundamentally based on its symbiotic relations with encompassing collectives.

However, Eastern ways of life are arguably being Westernised in various ways because of the innumerable influences of globalised industrialisation, technologies, politics, economics and linguistics. For example, Yue (2012) has directly linked the Westernisation process of Eastern culture with the spread of globalised English language and literacy practices. In this thesis, I draw on this model of practice to interrogate how English language and literacy is shaping a cultural consciousness for Cambodian young adults. However, I will first address the historical significance of linguistic imperialism in Cambodia.

The Rise and Fall of Linguistic Imperialism in Cambodia

The presence of English in Cambodia, unlike French, is a rather recent phenomenon. In 1953, Cambodia received its independence from France; however, French remained the only foreign language taught and used officially in Cambodia

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until 1970. At that time, when the Cambodian government was overthrown in a coup backed by the United States, English was introduced as an alternative foreign language to be studied at high school. Table 1 summarises the history of foreign language education in Cambodia.

Table 1: Changes in Cambodia's Foreign Language Education (Igawa 2008, p. 352)

#	Period	Year	Foreign Language Education
1	King's Sihanouk's Government	1953–1970	French only: French was the only language officially included in school curricula. It was used in all sectors of Cambodia at the time.
2	Lon Nol Republic	1970–1975	French and English: Because of American involvement (political and military) in the Indochina War, the study of English was also encouraged.
3	Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea	1976–1979	No use of study of foreign languages: No formal education was implemented. The study and use of a foreign language were severely prohibited.
4	President Heng Samrin and the Age of International Politics	1979–1986	Vietnamese and Russian: Vietnamese and Russian were the languages officially included in school curricula. The study of English or French was prohibited. Anyone found to be learning either language would be severely punished and even imprisoned.
		1989–	English and French
5	The 1993 Election and Afterwards	1993	English and French

S Clayton (2008) considered the following three factors to be significant for the present high demand for English-language skills at the individual and institutional levels in Cambodia: (1) the introduction of the Australian-aid-funded English teacher training project Cambodian English Language Training (CELT) from 1985 to 1993; (2) the presence of the English language in refugee camps in Thailand from the 1970s to the 1990s; and (3) the use of English as the official language of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), which was established and deployed to Cambodia to organise and conduct its first 'free and fair' election in the year to come (Azimi 1995, p. 5).

UNTAC and English Literacy Practices

With the Paris Peace Accord signed in 1991, the remaining refugees in the refugee camps in Thailand were repatriated. In the camps, English was a language for international communication. The repatriation of the refugees was in a way an influx of English speaking Cambodians to Cambodia. They were badly in need when UNTAC arrived in Cambodia a year later.

In 1992, UNTAC was established and deployed to Cambodia to organise and conduct its first "free and fair" election in the year to come (Azimi, 1995, p. 5). English was their chosen official language to be used and those local who were literate in it were awarded with very well-paid jobs in US dollars.

From the early 1990s onwards, along with the multinational UNTAC officers who could only be communicated with in English and the 4.5-billion-dollar operation came a free market, state-of-the-art vehicles, American dollars, discotheques, beer, mobile phone services, the Internet and FM radio stations. Before long, supermarkets, cinemas, fast-food restaurants, Christmas, Valentine's Day, hip-hop, rap and other Western ways of life were common in Cambodia. These new ways of life, along with English literacies, continued long after UNTAC departed.

Initially, English literacy only functioned as an extra tool for survival. 'You learn English to survive, it's a language you acquire for your stomach', explained Kieng Rotana, 43, a former interpreter for UNTAC (Bun 2010). However, soon it had become coupled with the processes of modernisation and world-making. Tep Livina, a young graduate with a bachelor's degree in English education, claimed that English 'opens and widens up my world view, since I am able to read textbooks, newspapers and magazines in the English language, not to mention to watch foreign TV channels and movies' (Bun 2010). By 2010, the presence and the use of this language was reported as 'pervasive', 'be it in the signage of streetscapes, in various media or as the default language of choice in dealings between Cambodians and visiting non-Cambodians' (Moore & Bounchan 2010, p. 114). S Clayton (2008, p. 146) articulated his impression of the rise of English as follows:

> Whilst working in Cambodia, I encountered numerous Cambodians studying English including market stall holders, usually female, in the expatriate/tourist markets of Phnom Penh; *moto* drivers (often state employees in their second or third job), who wanted to communicate with tourists; street children in Phnom Penh selling English-language newspapers; staff and students from schools and

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colleges; officials from various government ministries studying English for current or future employment prospects, and many others.

The status of English in Cambodia eventually changed so that it was no longer merely a tool for employment opportunities, as posited by T Clayton (2006). It served to inform many who used it of what Hall (2004) and Strozier (2002) referred to as senses of subjectivity. English-language literacies in Cambodia gained popularity in conjunction with popular Western culture: music, movies, fashion, fast food and digital technologies. Elders, educators and government agencies had strong negative reactions to the presence of Western cultural celebrations. The most notable moral panic was in response to the celebration of Valentine's Day. Young adults used it as a pretext to break away from proper traditional conduct: youths exchanged flowers or presents, some skipped school to spend time together, and many dined out in romantic places prior to proceeding to hotels or guesthouses to have sex. In 2010, for example, *Xinhua* (2010, online), the Chinese state newspaper, published an article entitled 'Cambodia Worries Teenagers Engage in Sex during Valentine's Day'. In the same article, Secretary of State for Women Affairs Sivann Botum was quoted as saying, 'We decided to make advertisements in order to outreach teenagers because we don't want them to misbehave on Valentine's Day, which may impact to the good customs and tradition with high respect to Cambodian women'. The article also reported the results of a survey conducted among 458 people aged 15–24 in Phnom Penh, in which '12.4 percent of them answered that they expect to have sex on the upcoming Valentine's Day, and more than 14.3 percent in a couple answered that they expect to have sex with their sweethearts on that day too'. On 14 February 2013, the *Phnom Penh Post* reported that guesthouses were being strictly patrolled by the police force to discourage people from celebrating in an improper manner (Worrell & Khouth 2013). The clash of cultural ideologies became visible in the consumerist commodification and celebration of Saint Valentine.

Figure 1: A public display of kissing by Cambodian youths that many Cambodians thought was influenced by foreign cultures, Western in particular. Photo: Kang (2013)

Cambodia and Khmerness

Cambodian culture prides itself on its static traditions, conservatism, timelessness and changelessness (Ayres 2000a, 2000b; Chan 2004; Curtis 1998; Grabowsky 1997). Its traditions even survived the direct attempt by the French to modernise it. Adams and Gillogly (2011, pp. 234–5) pointed out that, in Cambodia, 'the French colonial government had not developed the kind of bureaucratic infrastructure it had established in other colonial territories; hence locals initially did not experience the same level of disruption to their "traditional" ways of life under colonialism'. T Clayton (2005) explained the static continuation of the Cambodian culture by pointing out that the education system of every Cambodian government and regime has emphasised the moral education and ideology pertaining to the national culture. However, the extreme Khmer Rouge regime, almost all of whose top leaders were European educated (Bergin 2009), viewed modern Cambodian culture as impure and regarded literacy as one of its possible causes. In its attempt to 'purify' the culture, the regime 'prized illiteracy' while inhumanly condemning 'all modern

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technology' and 'high culture—including art, literature, dance, music, and Buddhism art and teachings' (Bergin 2009, p. 32). Aiming for 'primitive socialist equality and conformity', the regime thus tried to systematically execute all the literate people 'to utterly purify the Khmer people according to their antimodern, racist, Marxist ideological amalgam' (Goldhagen 2009, p. 371). The nineteenth century was a significant period of cultural politics that shaped Khmer identity around a distinct language, ethos, culture and nation with an increasing awareness of sociocultural identity (P Edwards 2004).

In Khmer, culture or *vabthor* is a branch of civilisation or *areythor*. According to Trueng (1974, p. 12), the word *vabthor* is a combination of two smaller word parts: *vaba* (meaning 'sowing', 'seedling', 'cultivating') and *thor* ('substance', 'method', 'supporting condition'). Therefore, *vabthor* means 'any methods or supporting conditions that lead to fruitful cultivations be it in terms of knowledge, mind, ideas, or body' (Trueng 1974, p. 13). Culture covers three smaller branches: knowledge, publication and practice (So, Tith & Chea 2008, p. 16; Trueng 1974, p. 11). Included in the branch of knowledge are beliefs; morals and virtues; doctrine and religion; and philosophy and sciences. Publication covers language, letters and symbols; literature; and philosophy and science. Finally, practice embraces smaller branches of custom and tradition; education; and sports, entertainment and law. *Vabthor* is usually used together with *areythor* as in *vabthor areythor Khmer* (literally, 'Khmer cultural civilisation') or *vabthor areythor Europe* (European cultural civilisation). They usually appear together because:

> It is understood that *vabthor* highlights anything that brings about developments which otherwise cannot be found in the nature of ordinary people, and that *areythor* emphasizes on the characteristics of any societies whose consciousness, development, changes, and prosperity make them different from those ordinary societies and people. (Trueng 1974, p. 14)

It is normal for different *areythor* to interact and exchange certain features and, as Trueng (1974, p. 21) further suggested:

> Although Khmer civilization was affected by foreign influences, Khmers did not apply or copy everything entirely. Khmers always adjusted, modified, or nationalized those influences to comply with Khmers' visions and ways of life. Any foreign characteristics that are not compatible with Khmers' visions and likings will be discarded or will perish themselves.

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Shaping Khmer Being and Becoming

Traditionally, Cambodians have been raised to be *tumpeang snorng russei* or 'the bamboo shoots that would replace the bamboos'. In this sense, we Khmers exist to inherit the cultural values that defined our parents and to pass them on to the next generation. The extended family stereotype has allowed grandparents to ensure their children bring up their grandchildren 'properly'. These practices have embedded great authority in the elders of society and families. Therefore, parents and grandparents have decided for their young ones in almost all important aspects of life. In this process, individualisation has had little room to establish itself because it interrupts or distorts the regeneration of Cambodianness. In addition to education, other codes of conduct or *chbabs* and proverbs have been used to shape Cambodians' being and becoming.

Chbabs (or *Chbaps*)

Chbabs are 'codes of proper ideal gender-appropriate behaviour in Cambodia' (Lilja 2008, p. 70). *Chbabs* serve as "guidance to the people to learn about the appropriate behaviours within the established social structures and legitimised the top-down system of relationship and dependency" (Ayres, 2000a, p. 17, in Pellini, 2007, p. 187). According to Pellini (2007) *Chbabs* were religious precepts in the form of poems taught in pagodas (p. 187). Before the modernization of educational system and printing by the French Protectorate (1863-1953) these *Chbabs* could have been learned by heart and passed on through words of mouth before they could have been inscribed on dried palm leaves (*Sleuk Rith*). During and after the French protectorate, these *chbabs* were compiled and printed. Some (e.g., *chbab srey* and bros) have been included into the educational system ever since.

These *chbabs* have been central to the notion of Khmerness, particularly during the Khmerisation period when Cambodia gained independence from France. In this thesis, these *chbabs* serve an important role of "proper" behaviors expected of Cambodian men and women.

There are different *chbabs* for different types of conduct, for example, C Ou's (1955) *chbab*s for respecting one's parents and earning a living, Meun's (1974)

chbabs for men and women. Among these *chbabs*, a few (e.g. *chbab srey* and *bros*, i.e. codes for women and men, respectively) are still included in present-day national curricula. They have been central to Khmer individuals' being and becoming, particularly among Khmer women because the Khmers have always focused on women, who are known as the 'culture bearers' par excellence in Cambodian society (Ledgerwood, cited in Derks 2008, p. 12). With such a status, there have always been high expectations that Cambodian women would be perfectly proper in their being, or *srey krup leak* (perfect virtuous women), to bring 'fortune, peace, and honor to her husband and to the whole family' (Derks 2008, p. 43). Strictly following *chbab srey* has been a way to achieve this status. As P Edwards (2001, p. 390) explained:

> The cultural subtext lay in the *chbab srey*, or code of conduct for women. Instilled through generations, from mother to daughter and preacher to pupil, the *chbab srey* prescribes the modes of behavior through which women can achieve the ideal status of the *srey-krup-leakh*, or perfectly virtuous woman. Among its many injunctions, the *chbab* stipulates that 'when a woman walks one cannot hear the sound of her silk *sampot* rustling'.

In Cambodian culture, the *srey krup leak* has usually been depicted as 'industrious, sexually naïve, timid in the presence of males and, when unmarried, always a virgin' (Tarr & Aggleton, cited in Derks 2004, p. 131). Traditionally, to qualify for this status, Khmer women used to be provided with a different kind of education from men. They were to learn hands on from their mothers and close relatives about how to behave properly as well as about their roles in the family. When they reached puberty, they would have to *chol malop* (literally, 'enter the shade'), during which time they lost all contact with the outside world, staying indoors to beautify themselves and to study other *chbabs* more seriously, especially *chbab srey*, in preparation for eventually becoming wives and mothers. They were not allowed to talk to any males—not even their fathers—and only their mothers or close female relatives could interact with them. This process usually took between three months and a year, depending on the family's resources. Today, becoming a *srey krup leak* still exists in both political and cultural agendas. A Cambodian political candidate in the lead-up to the 1993 elections echoed the sentiment. He 'assured his audience that Cambodian women would never be permitted to become as loud and brash (and thus, un-Khmer) as American women' (Jacobsen 2010, p. 218). Such was the case because, 'according to *chbab srey*, a young woman must know how to take

care of the household, cook and clean, and serve elders and guests. She must be industrious, shy, and modest (*ean khmah*) if she is to please her in-laws' (Smith-Hefner 1999, p. 105). Following is an extract from the *chbab srey* about a woman's duty to her husband:

> Never turn your back to your husband when he sleeps and never touch his head without first bowing in his honour … respect and fear the wishes of your husband and take his advice to heart … if your husband gives an order, don't hesitate a moment in responding … avoiding posing yourself as equal to your husband, who is your master; if he insults you, go to your room and reflect, never insult or talk back to him … have patience, prove your patience, never responding to his excessive anger … but use gentle language in response. (I Brown 2000, p. 46)

Following the *chbab* is not easy. The *chbab* itself noted the difficulties of appropriately following it to become a perfectly virtuous woman. Derks (2008, p. 44) translated the following verses:

> Oh my dear daughter, my darling, it is very difficult, my child,
>   to apply the *Chbab Srey*.
> First difficulty: a woman who does not speak right, and is
>   incapable of using soft words that will please the family.
> Another difficulty: a woman who does not think carefully,
>   and at the sight of relatives close or far, doesn't invite them
>   to eat betelnut.
> Whether she is provided with wealth or not, if she speaks
>   sweet words, she will be loved by others.
> Don't be rude, shameless, or greedy, don't fall short of
>   devoting yourself to all members of your family.
> One obtains wealth, one acquires happiness, one acquires
>   well-being and peace, thanks to a daughter.
> When you talk, or converse, think of your reputation as a
>   woman; don't make frivolous remarks.
> Don't babble affectedly like little girls. And at the sight of young men,
>   be cautious in making the impression of liking them.

In 2006, the *chbab* was attacked by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, a committee that monitors the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW):

> While noting the value of the culture heritage of Cambodia, the Committee is concerned about strong gender-role stereotyping, in particular that reflected in the traditional code of conduct known as *chbab srey*, which legitimizes discrimination against women and impedes women's full enjoyment of their human rights and the achievement of equality between men and women in Cambodian society. (*Camnews*, cited in Lilja 2008, p. 70)

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In response to such criticism, Ms Ing Katha Phavi, minister of Women's Affairs at the time, reacted, arguing that 'teaching *chbap srey* is a matter of national identity' (*Camnews*, cited in Lilja 2008, p. 70).

Proverbs

In addition to *chbabs*, proverbs are yet another form of Khmer literacy practices that have also been widely used by Cambodian elders to educate the younger generation. Because this thesis examines how identity is shaped by literacy practices, I briefly discussed the role of proverbs in Cambodian society in this section.

Proverbs are known in Khmer in their many various forms as *pheasit* and *sopheasit* (words of Indic origin meaning 'correct speech'), *peak chas* (sayings of elders), *peak bauran* (ancient sayings), *peak tumneay* (traditional sayings), and *putthapheasit* and *Putth tumneay* (sayings and predictions of the Buddha [Brahma 1982; Fisher-Nguyen 1994, pp. 91–2]). These wise words have inspired the Khmers across generations and times. As Fisher-Nguyen (1994, p. 92) explained:

> In prerevolutionary Cambodia, proverbs were held in such high regard that they played a role in the public education of children. Not only could they be found scattered throughout many of the required teaching materials, such as primers, novels, and the *Chbab,* but the study of proverbs in and of themselves was also part of the school curriculum at certain level. In refugee camps in Thailand and the Philippines, proverbs also appeared prominently in campwide Khmer publications and could be found painted on the walls of public facilities to serve as an inspiration to the youth.

Even in post-revolutionary Cambodia, this practice has never changed. Proverbs still find their places on the walls of Cambodian schools and in the teachings of elders. To ensure the continuity of Cambodianness, one proverb prescribes the following:

> *Phlauv viech kom boah bang phlauv trang kom daoe haong*
> *daoe daoy konlong tamray neak chas bauran*
> Don't reject the crooked road and don't take the straight one;
> instead, take the road travelled by the ancestors. (Fisher-Nguyen 1994, p. 97)

To Be or Not to Be?

To maintain the old Cambodian ways of life as prescribed in the proverbs and the *chbabs*, many Cambodian elders and parents have felt it was their duty to their

country to ensure the survival of Cambodianness. Failure would shame them and their ancestors. Therefore, they would be very strict with the ways they brought up their children. They would use all means deemed necessary in their effort—even corporal punishment (Ong 2003, p. 176; Weaner, Burkhardt & Weaner 2008, p. 92). If all else did not work, a child could be publicly disowned with such a simple reason as *min sdap dambonmean ovpuk mday*, or 'being disobedient to parents' advice'. Disownment of children in Cambodia was a common recurring 'notice to public' in the local newspapers during the late 1990s and early 2000s when many of the new-generation children were enjoying their newly discovered selves by moving beyond the traditionally acceptable Cambodian behaviours, becoming involved in, for example, gangs, drugs and homosexuality. Even the Cambodian prime minister disowned his adopted daughter in 2007 simply because she was found to be a lesbian (Reuters 2007, p. 55; D White 2010).

'Proper' Khmer children have grown up prioritising their families before their selves. By being their parents' good children, they can be good Cambodians at the same time. They know that anything deviating from the teaching of the Cambodian proverbs and *chbabs*, for example, changes in beliefs, behaviours and physical appearances, is considered improper, un-Khmer and arguably a threat to the Khmers' identity. These mutual expectations appear to have cultivated a strong sense of family identity, in which interdependence rather than independence is fostered from as young an age as possible (Englar-Carlson & Rath 2009, p. 209).

My life story and those of my participants represented in Chapters 4 to 9 will illustrate the tensions of traditional Cambodian cultural values vis-a-vis our English literacy practices. These chapters will highlight different themes of both *chbabs bros* and *chbabs srey* expected by my participants' elders and how my participants' perceptions and performances of these themes were influenced by their English literacies and practices. The specific themes related to the propagation of the *chbabs* are encapsulated in the titles of the five chapters, namely (1) "Leaves never fall far from their tree", (2) "A Cake is never bigger than its mould", (3) "Looking after the three fires", (4) "A well-disciplined child", and finally (5) "A frog in the well". In the next chapter, however, I will first discuss the methodology underlying my reconstruction of our life stories to be eventually presented in those chapters.

Chapter 3: Methodology

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A Khmer saying posits that *ches min dol, chgol min kert* (not knowing enough, one can never question); this saying accurately describes what happened to me. When starting this investigation, I found myself in unfamiliar territory. I was afraid and confused. My fear was the unknown. The ground on which I was travelling was quick mud—dirty and sticky. I doubted my ability to find the way out. I felt I was a failure. Qualitative research had never been my area of familiarity, let alone expertise. I never imagined that research could be so messy and embodied. 'To reexamine the ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations of [my] scientific endeavor' (Lapid 1989, p. 236), I started with the questions: What is the nature of the means of knowing? What is the nature of the known? (Fox 1999, p. 4). I critically questioned the position of the inquirer (me) and my relationship to the methodology and my participants. I risked my 'comfortable norms and truth claims'. I came to realise that the researcher's position is his or her relationship to the knowledge produced.

Here We Go Again!

My formal education in the positivist tradition, particularly that heavily influenced by David Hume's (1711–76) logical empiricism (Addison 1961), was the foundation of what I assumed was research: treating 'the world as made up of observable, measurable facts' (Glesne & Peshkin 1992, p. 6). I viewed knowledge as a 'passive copy of reality' (Hiebert 1999, p. 3) and its practitioners—social scientists—as observers of social reality whose end products of their investigations can be 'formulated in terms parallel to those of natural science' (L Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007, p. 10). Being positivistic-orientated from my previous learning, I unquestioningly believed that phenomena could be contained 'into measurable or common categories that can be applied to all of the subjects or wider and similar situations' (Golafshani 2003, p. 598). I was wholeheartedly committed to the notion of objective knowledge, and the related concepts of validity, reliability, replicability and generalisability, to name a few.

As a teacher in Cambodia, these notions were not only relevant but also very important for me to produce the 'bias-free' test results desired by my institution. I was fully convinced that 'all propositions about the world are only meaningful if we can show how they can be *verified*' (M Williams 2003, p. 12). Embarking on my PhD, I brought with me my deep-rooted understanding of research structured as hypothesis driven, generalisable and neutral. I was an objectivist who believed that knowledge is scientific and can be discovered only through scientific methods. I thought that reality was external and fixed, people were mere subjects and statistic results never lied. The topic had nothing to do with me other than my position as a 'neutral' inquirer. That was when my research appeared to go uncontrollably off the rails (Streiner & Sidani 2009).

A Messy and Embodied Methodological Experience

Deciding to explore the present topic qualitatively, I was aware of the importance of my positioning in my knowledge-making process. However, I had no clues about how I should proceed. For months, I was lost. I became even more lost while reading the foundation works of Heidegger, Ricoeur, Merleau-Ponty and Foucault. I found the philosophers' works extremely difficult and abstract, both linguistically and conceptually. For the first time, I felt the insufficiency of my linguistic competence in addition to my confucianistic and instructivistic dependency (Thornton & Houser 2005, p. 221). I lost track of my research. I failed to see any relation between my study and the ontology and epistemology governing my methodology. My research was a complete mess. I was constantly facing uncertainty. I saw my entire research as unplanned, disorganised and undoable. Without even a blueprint to visualise the steps to take, I increasingly feared failure. At times, I began to doubt my ability to find the way out. The ellipsis between positivism and my paradigm shift made me express myself like a half-sane and half-insane person:

> The human sciences are currently undergoing an acute bout of self-doubt and heightened metatheoretical ferment. Indeed, some of the most highly prized premises of Western academic discourse concerning the nature of our social knowledge, its acquisition, and its utility—including shibboleths such as 'truth', 'rationality', 'objectivity, reality', and 'consensus'—have come under renewed critical reflection. (Lapid 1989, p. 236)

Such was how I began this research.

At the End of the Tunnel

At a time of 'ideological crisis', the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) proposed a new philosophy in which he 'sought to develop a new philosophical method which would lend absolute certainty to a disintegrating civilization' (Eagleton 2008, p. 47). In Husserl's new philosophy, the search for certainty started with his rejection of the independent existence of external objects and the reliability of the information about them. He argued that, although people cannot be sure of the independent existence of things, they could be certain about how things appear in their consciousness. Certainty emerged when people ignored anything beyond their immediate experience and reduced the external world to the contents of their consciousness only. In this sense, realities were treated as pure 'phenomena' and these pure phenomena served as the only absolute data from which to begin. Husserl called his philosophical method 'phenomenology' (Eagleton 2008, p. 48).

As a methodology, phenomenology is considered the basis for understanding human experiences (Pringle, Hendry & McLafferty 2011). It is commonly used to study marginal or sensitive areas (Donalek 2004, p. 516), highlighting a holistic understanding of people's life-world reality and relationships (Oiler 1982; Van der Zalm & Bergum 2000) and their reasons for their existence. Sartre's (1905–80) notion of existentialism revolves around the construct that the 'human world comprises various provinces of meaning' (Vandenberg 1997, p. 7) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61) proposed that freedom is limited by our embodiment (Merleau-Ponty 2002). These theories became the new philosophical foundations of my study. With my new philosophical foundations, I critically viewed truth and reality as relative, subjective and messy constructs (Ackofff 1999; Smyth & Holian 2008). I agreed with Jacobs (2009) that absolute truth does not exist and reality is only a relative understanding. 'Reality can be thought of along a continuum, with objective truth (*Truth*) at one end and subjective or multiple truths at the other end (*truth*)' (Hays & Singh 2012, p. 34, original emphasis). Reality is interpretive and 'there are a multiplicity of constructions of reality, limited only by one's life events, historical facts, culture and imagination' (Cooper & White 2012, p. 6).

Therefore, my study is situated in what has been described as the eighth moment of qualitative research, the time of 'methodological backlash' (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p. 20). In this methodologically contested domain, researchers are required to return their attention to 'the demand of moral discourse' as well as 'the critical conversation about the diversity of human life' (Higgs & Cherry 2009, p. 7). In this sense, research and knowledge is increasingly commonly 'messy, uncertain' and has 'reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis, and intertextual representation' (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p. 26). Applying all the concepts above, I consider my approach aligned with what Patton (2002, p. 91) called 'postmodern age' inquiry 'in reaction to the oppressive authoritarianism and dogmatism that seemed so often to accompany claims of having found "truth"'. My study has explored my own and my participants' lived experiences of literacy practices in Cambodia. They are sensitive and intimate accounts of lives lived, which are critically examined and represented as 'unified wholes' (Aldridge 1989, p. 92).

Through the casual life story conversations, I crosschecked, verified and elaborated the accounts of life with my participants as extensively as possible. I was mindful, as Moustakas (1994, p. 13) advised, to learn not only the what but also the how of the phenomena experienced. In doing so, I became aware of how extremely difficult, if not impossible, it would be for me to represent the stories in the utmost loyal manner. All I could do was my best in representing the stories that the participants shared with me. This is the best truth I can offer. I knew the emotions we shared over the conversations were genuine. The laughter, the sadness, the sighs and the tears were real. Thus far, I have felt an experience that needs to go beyond standardised research protocols to guide a research method.

Going Beyond

Contemporary social scientists and feminist scholars (e.g. Behar 1996; C Ellis 1999, 2004; Lawlor & Mattingly 2001; Plummer 2001; Stanley & Wise 1993) have contested the notion of starting without preconceptions or bias, be it from their own existing knowledge or their interpretation. Across disciplines and genres, researchers' acceptance of their own existing knowledge in the form of embodiment is increasingly a common phenomenon. For example, Behar (1996) put forth an

anthropology that intertwined very closely with her personal voice, dislocating herself as an observer from a traditionally 'neutral' position to a sympathetic one. Likewise, C Ellis (1999) developed an approach that included researchers' vulnerable selves, emotions, bodies and spirits.

These research reports were evocative, portraying realities, meanings and human experiences with intimate details of embodiment. Ellingson (2006, p. 298) argued that 'researchers' bodies matter regardless of method' and that 'the erasure of researchers' bodies from conventional accounts of research obscures the complexities of knowledge production and yields deceptively tidy accounts of research'. I view the inclusion of bodies in research as an acknowledgement of personal and cultural understanding of the knowledge they are constructing. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argued about the inseparability of research and interpretation, and Higginbottom (2004, p. 8) indicated that qualitative research may be 'underpinned by theoretical frameworks that provide a lens through which phenomena are viewed and interpreted'. Becker (1967, p. 245) has implied that 'there is no position from which sociological research can be done that is not biased in one or another way' and Malterud (2001, p. 484) went so far as to claim that, in qualitative research, 'the investigator always enters a field of research with certain opinions about what it is all about'. The place of the personal within research has been persistently argued for in feminist sociology, concluding with a view that reality is therefore interpretive at best.

Hermeneutics

My investigation tried to make sense of the lived experiences of the participants. I must admit and acknowledge that *my own* presuppositions and understanding of Cambodian culture and what constitutes Cambodian identity are present throughout this text. My arguments and discussion are thus based on this personal and subjective understanding. I have come to believe that 'interpretation becomes a merger of data sources, or a construction' and that, 'in subsequent analysis, data generated by the participant is fused with the experience of the researcher and place in context' (Koch 1996). In applying this hermeneutic approach to my research, I have intentionally used my own voice and that of my participants to represent the life stories. This thesis is thus built on my being an insider, a Cambodian whose

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identity, I believe, was shaped by my bilingual literacies and practices of Khmer and English literacies. My preconceptions of my Cambodian sociocultural values have aided my interpretation of the participants' narratives. I have also been constantly guided by what N Drew's (2001, p. 19) suggestion that, 'unless we acknowledge our already meaning-endowed relationships with the topics of our research, we are deluded about grasping the essence of any phenomenon'.

Researching Research

> It would be safe to assume that most forms of social science and education research are an intervention into the lifeworlds of other people and their communities. It would also be safe to further assume that research is a mode of cultural practice predicated on the adoption of certain roles and positions by the researcher vis-a-vis those people or phenomena which 'falls' within the ambit of what is to be explored.
>
> (Loxley & Seery 2008, p. 15)

Given the complexity of knowledge, I decided to employ the notion of bricolage and combined divergent methods of inquiry. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) used the term bricolage with reference to the works of structuralist anthropologist Levi-Strauss (1966, 1968), in which two modes of thought, the mythical and the scientific, were illustrated. Levi-Straus compared mythical thought—that grounded in observation of the sensible world—to *bricolage*. In French, *bricoleur* describes a handy(wo)man who makes practical use of whatever tools are available to complete his or her task (Harper 1987; Kincheloe 2001). According to Bogost (2006, p. 1):

> Unlike the engineer, the scientific thinker who strives to construct holistic, totalizing systems from the ground up, the bricoleur performs his tasks from spare parts, from odds and ends. The scientist strives to create events by means of structures, and the bricoleur seeks to create structures through events.

The connotations of the term *bricolage*, according to Kincheloe and McLaren (2005, p. 316), involve 'trickery and cunning' and are a reminder of 'the chicanery of Hermes, in particular his ambiguity concerning the message of the gods'. The authors went on to argue that, 'if hermeneutics came to connote the ambiguity and slipperiness of textual meaning, then bricolage can also imply the fictive and imaginative elements of the presentation of all formal research' (Kincheloe and

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McLaren 2005, p. 316). Acknowledging ambiguity and slipperiness, I also now acknowledge how these sources were in fact generated by my insiderness in the research process.

To Be Emic or Etic

My research can be considered 'research from the inside', 'insider research' or 'member research' because I 'already have an attachment to, or involvement with, the institutions or socials in, or on, which their investigations are based' (Sikes & Potts 2008, p. 3). Sikes and Gale (2006, p. 46) have written about the need to avoid 'Cinderella's slipper syndrome', when 'researchers do as Cinderella's ugly sisters did and remorselessly cut and slice bits off their data (feet) in order to make it fit the theory (shoe)'.

In the second half of the twentieth century, attention was no longer exclusively on the unfamiliar. Instead, the focus was on the familiar (e.g. Cavan 1972; Owusu 1970; Roy 1975; Srinivas 1966) with emphasis on 'their own culture, gender, religions, residential and ethnic backgrounds' (Hockey 1993, p. 201). The latest development of insider research appears to have emerged when the insiders—the marginalised included—took up the role of the researcher to self-examine the experiences that matter to them (e.g. C Ellis 2001; Golden 1996; Lahman 2008; B Smith & Sparkes 2008; Tillmann-Healy 1996; Vicars 2006a, 2006b, 2009).

The emic approach is one of Pike's (1954/1967) two longstanding methods for understanding the role of culture. Originally, the terms 'emic' and 'etic' were derived from analogy with the terms 'phonemic' and 'phonetic', respectively. The American linguistic anthropologist Kenneth Pike believed that a society's cultural system can be studied using similar approaches in a language's sound system, that is, through the points of view of the insider and the outsider. Unlike the etic approach, whose emphasis dwells on 'the *outside* perspectives of comparativist researchers, who attempt to describe differences across cultures in terms of a general, external standard', the *emic* approach stresses 'the *inside* perspective of ethnographers, who strive to describe a particular culture in its own terms' (Morris et al. 1999, p. 781, original emphasis).

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With the inclusion of my own story, the 'insider perspective' of the researcher presented in this thesis is understandably built on feminist, auto/biographical research that gives great importance to reflexivity (Atkinson 1998; Cole 2010; Sparkes 1994) and challenges the notions of the 'value neutral' position of the researcher (Cole 2010, p. 335). In so doing, I am also aware that 'being there' in the field, personally observing and describing lives as they go on, is by no means fully expressible 'authorially, palpably on the page' when 'being here' (Geertz 1988, p. 23), producing the contextually thickly detailed literature (Geertz 1973).

Specifically, this study is insider research for at least three important reasons. First, at the outmost level, I am a Cambodian national whose personal and professional language and literacy practices have been entirely constructed within the Cambodian context that I am investigating. Second, the participants in the research were all selected from the institution where I worked as a lecturer. Finally, my own lived experience relating to my English literacy practice and my identity performance is also part of the data to be analysed together with those of the participants.

To initiate cooperation between research and participant, I used collaborative forms of data analysis to minimise any potential gaps among the insiders (Loxley & Seery 2008; McGettrick 1994). Therefore, my being an insider conducting this study should naturally have guided my analysis, interpretation and representation of the data through the emic perspectives. The emic approach stresses 'the *inside* perspective of ethnographers, who strive to describe a particular culture in its own terms' (Morris et al. 1999, p. 781, original emphasis).

Insider Research Challenges

I am aware of the limitations that some might argue arise from cultural insiderness. However, I no longer believe in the existence of purity. Gilroy (1993, p. xi) suggested the notion of 'inescapable hybridity' as an inherent property of all cultures. Thus, pure or fixed culture is nothing but an imaginary construct in a person's perception (Hobsbawm 1983; Woodward 1997). Accordingly, in this investigation, my utilisation of the term 'insider' (of either a community or an institution or a group) cannot convey my perceived shared collective commonness with the others as specified by the context.

As with many other approaches, insider research has both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, it provides an ideal opportunity to deal with practical problems experienced on a daily basis, and the reflexive insights, assumptions, perceptions and consequences that emerge can be learnt from and used to make changes (Smyth & Holian 2008, p. 34). Normally, a topic of this nature might be of little interest to an outsider researcher, who, traditionally, 'not only possesses (and professes to have) a range of technical competence to undertake research, but also, more importantly, has a monopoly over the production and, to some degree, circulation and consumption of that knowledge' (Loxley & Seery 2008, p. 15).

Therefore, insider research is a platform for typical researchers to project their own voice and present their meanings in their own way. Brayboy and Dehyle (2000) argued that trustworthy knowledge of a cultural group is necessarily and sufficiently best generated by no others but the members of that particular community themselves. It has long been suggested that non-member researchers of a target community need to 'go native', that is, to emphasise their roles as 'participants' rather than 'observers', if they are 'to grasp the native's point of view, his relations to life, [and] to realize his vision of his world' (Malinowski 1922, p. 290). Other advantages of insider research include the researchers being able to give back to their homelands and their people, to bring their knowledge back to those they consider their cultural families, to account for whatever information Western researchers and practitioners lack about their communities or countries, and to move their marginalised communities towards feminist and empowerment-focused action in both society and academia (Yakushko et al. 2011, p. 279). This is not to mention other advantages such as 'the relative lack of culture shock or disorientation, the possibility of enhanced rapport and communication, the ability to gauge the honesty and accuracy of responses, and the likelihood that respondents will reveal more intimate details of their lives to someone considered empathetic' (Hockey 1993, p. 199).

However, Kanuha (2000, p. 444) noted that:

> For each of the ways that being an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population that may not be accessible to a nonnative scientist, questions about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity of a research project are raised because perhaps one knows too much or is too close to the project and may be too similar to those being studied.

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Insiders as researchers can also face the problems not only of 'over-familiarity and taken-for-granted assumptions', but also of their partialness resulting from their insider knowledge and the assumptions that 'their views are more widespread or representative than is the case' (Hockey 1993, p. 199). In addition, research from the inside can place sensitive aspects of one's own 'insidership' under scrutiny (Bathmaker & Harnett 2010; Sikes & Potts 2008). A Cambodian proverb compares such an act to *hek pus oy ka-ek* (that is, 'opening one's abdomen to the crows'). In such an act, one is risking disastrous results when the blackbirds start ravaging all the exposed internal organs.

Despite the numerous challenges in insider research, a study of this nature is 'special' and worth conducting (Smyth & Holian 2008, p. 34). It is even more so for this particular research because barely anything at all is known about Cambodian young adults' English literacy and its effects on their performances of cultural identity in the age of globalisation when, as Bird and Stevens (2003) posited, global culture is emerging at the expense of local cultures.

Drawing on the life stories of the participants as the primary source of 'data', I will now consider the usefulness of a life story/life history approach.

Life Story/History

My investigation has involved the representation of my own and five young adults' life stories. Atkinson (1998, p. 8) defined life story as 'the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another'. Such stories may be the most effective means for understanding the individuals' lives and their roles in the larger community, and how the individuals' selves evolve and their identities develop over time (Atkinson 1998, p. 11).

Atkinson (2002, p. 125) appeared to use the term 'life story' synonymously with 'life history', referring to them both as birth-to-present narratives of the important events, experiences and feelings of a lifetime. However, other scholars differentiate between the two. For example, Miller (2000, p. 19) used 'life story' to refer simply to an individual's account about his or her life. For him, a life history, or

validated life story, is a life story arranged in chronological order and supported by additional external sources (e.g. newspaper reports, official records, photographs, letters or diaries).

In this study, I agree with and chose to adopt Miller's (2000) distinction between life story and life history. Operationally, I used 'life story' to refer to a particular account narrated at a particular place in a particular time with themes revolving around an epiphany (i.e. a problematic experience revealed at certain moments of a person's life [Denzin 1989, p. 33]) or a turning point (McAdams & Bowman 2001; McAdams, Josselson & Lieblich 2001) of a person's life history. A life history, in this regard, is a chronologically ordered narrative of different life stories. Therefore, in my representation of my participants' reconstructed life histories, I intended to present my own and my participants' reconstructed life histories, chronologically ordered and supported by verifiable historical accounts and related scholarly literature.

According to Chase (2005, p. 652), a life history can be either 'an extensive autobiographical narrative, in either oral or written form, that covers all or most of a life' or 'a social science text that presents a person's biography'. For Watson and Watson-Franke (1985, p. 2), a life history is 'any retrospective account by the individual of his life in whole or in part, in written or oral form, that has been elicited or prompted by another person'. This form of investigation owes credit to the work of Thomas and Znaniecki (1918–20), *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. Throughout their five-volume work, Thomas and Znaniecki downplayed the involvement of innateness in human behaviours and attitudes. They argued that the interaction between individuals' situations and their behaviour is the source of their socially and culturally significant thinking processes and attitudes. This approach was further extended by the work of the Chicago School. Since then, the life history has become a new lens for observing sociocultural practices, as seen in the works of such scholars as Atkinson (1998), Goodson and Sikes (2001), Hatch and Wisniewski (1995), Plummer (2001) and Tierney (2010).

In the past, the purpose of most studies was simply to explain the present state of an individual's being (Connell 2006). For example, Lewis (1964) conducted his study to understand how the poor came to be poor. Unlike these past studies, the more recent studies are orientated more towards the process than the endpoint (Tierney

1998, p. 55). In particular, more recent research 'rejects the idea that a "subject" can be objectified in such a manner' (Tierney 2010, p. 132). The 'search' should not be 'so much about why someone acts in a particular way but about how it is that he or she has come to act that way' (Tierney 1998, pp. 54–5).

In the field of life history study, Goodson and Sikes (2001, p. 1) suggested that the focus is on relationships, in particular, how individual social actors, their behaviours and their attitudes towards society are related. This kind of focus can also be found in Mills's (1959/2000) remarkable work that highlighted individual experiences and societal relationships. Through the life history, personal troubles are made available to public issues through narratives. It is this understanding of the connection between personal and public concerns that is central in narrative and life history research (Bathmaker & Harnett 2010, p. 1). This connection provides a means to access the experience of those whose ordinary, marginalised and silent lives and histories go unheard, unseen and undocumented (Riessman 2008). According to Riessman (2008, p. 9), life history 'narratives invite us as listeners, readers, and viewers to enter the perspective of the narrator'. In line with these perspectives, my aim has been to reveal through my own and my participants' life histories the ongoing performances and construction of self and identity around our English literacy practices in Cambodia.

Putting the Ethno in the Study

Pellatt (2003, p. 29) asserted that 'to increase the plausibility or rigour of ethnographic research it is suggested that researchers include a reflective account in their report' and that 'ethnographers recognised that they are unable to put their own knowledge of the social world to one side in the hope of achieving objectivity, because both research and researched use the same resources to understand meaning'. Koch and Harrington (1998) recommended this as a way of informing the readers about what went on during the research and whether or not the text is believable. Lindlof and Taylor (2002, p. 6) discussed 'a holistic description of cultural membership'.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 1) suggested that ethnography is a useful theoretical framework for interpreting and integrating firsthand empirical data. The

authors proposed five characteristics of ethnographic work as follows: (1) research should take place 'in the field' and not be conditioned by the researcher; (2) data should be gathered from rich sources, among which 'relatively informal conversations' are usually the main source; (3) data collection should be relatively 'unstructured'; (4) the focus should be on a few cases, small in scale (e.g. a single setting or group of people) to facilitate in-depth study; and (5) the analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts. What are produced, for the most part, are verbal descriptions, explanations and theories (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, p. 3). In line with these principles, Goetz and LeCompte (1984, pp. 57–8) reiterated the key characteristics of ethnography: a real-world setting, a holistic approach, the utilisation of multiple methods, and the interpretiveness as well as the representation that are based entirely on the participants' perspectives.

In this study, I adopted Field and Morse's (1996, p. 1973) description of ethnography as 'a generalized approach to developing concepts and to understanding human behaviors from the insider's point of view'. This approach, as interpreted by the authors, 'is always informed by the concept of culture' (Field & Morse 1996, p. 1973). Generally accepted characteristics of ethnographic research include multiple methods of data gathering (Field & Morse 1996) and in-depth investigation of a small number of cases (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). The investigation usually occurs within the participants' own cultural environment through intensive field work with the emphasis given to the 'subject's frames of reference' while maintaining openness to the participants' understanding of the world (Singer 2009).

I specifically intended an additional feature of this study to be interpretive ethnography (Denzin 1997, 1999). An interpretive ethnography for the twenty-first century should presume 'a feminist moral ethic, stressing the sacredness of human life, dignity, truthtelling and nonviolence' while simultaneously being 'minimal, existential, autoethnographic, vulnerable, performative and critical' in its attempt to embed the self in 'storied histories of sacred spaces' (Denzin 1999, p. 510). Interpretive ethnography seeks to develop a thorough understanding of the participants' life-world and how they make sense of their experiences (Gehart & Lyle 2001) through constructing a 'layered account' of 'many-storied stories' that

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continuously unfold while they are being told (Goodall Jr. 2003). For these last few scholars, the emphasis of interpretive ethnographic work appears to be primarily on the participants' stories; however, I second Denzin's (1999, p. 510) view that interpretive ethnography is not just about the researched but also partially about the researcher, particularly his or her self-disclosure through the articulation and detailing of his or her personal views and perceptions in narrative.

Narrating Inquiry

According to AA Berger (1997, p. 4), a narrative is a story about things, people, animals and the like with a sequence of events over a period, which can be very short, as in a nursery tale, or very long, as in novels and epics. Stories have always been a part of human existence. Johnstone (2001, p. 635) posited that 'the essence of humanness, long characterized as the tendency to make sense of the world through rationality, has come increasingly to be described as the tendency to tell stories, to make sense of the world through narrative'. Similarly, Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 2) have observed that 'humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives'. In this sense, the authors suggested that 'the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world' (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, p. 2). In their more recent work on narrative inquiry, they proposed that:

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. (Connelly & Clandinin 2006, p. 477)

Schank (1990, pp. 29–40) categorised narrative stories into five basic groups: official stories, invented (adapted) stories, firsthand stories, second-hand stories and culturally common stories. These are grounded in temporality, sociality and place. Temporality emphasises transitional time frames—that is, the past, present and future—of the studied narrative. Sociality concerns both personal and social conditions, the former referring to 'the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions of the person, whether inquirer or participant' and the latter to

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'the existential conditions, the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and otherwise, that form the individual's context' (Connelly & Clandinin 2006, p. 480). Sociality also accounts for the relationships between participants and inquirers. As Connelly and Clandinin (2006, p. 480) observe, 'inquirers are always in an inquiry relationship with participants' lives. We cannot subtract ourselves from relationship'. Finally, place as a narrative inquiry commonplace demands that attention be given to 'the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place where the inquiry and events take place' (pp. 480–1).

Identity through Narrative

One way to study identity is through narrative. Fina (2003, p. 6) observed that narrative is one of the 'privileged forms used by humans to elaborate experience' to understand their communities and the individuals themselves in a wide range of fields such as anthropology (Levi-Strauss 1963), ethnography and folklore (Bauman 1986; Hymes 1981; Rosaldo 1986), social history (Griffin 1993), psychology (Bruner 1990; Mishler 1986; Polkinghorne 1988; Rosenwald & Ochberg 1992) and sociology (Somers & Gibson 1994). Narratives, Fina (2003) added, are popular because of their ability to invite and promote involvement and participation. They are also methodologically rich in that they are both highly spontaneous and organised texts that can be 'recognized and analyzed as a specific and highly constrained discourse genre' (Finn 2003, p. 6).

Fina (2003, p. 17) further argued that narrative is central to the study of identity, particularly from the social constructionist viewpoint, in which two dominant paradigms can be distinguished between 'on the one hand the tradition centered on autobiography and based on psychological theories of identity, and on the other hand, the conversation analytic and ethnomethodological tradition'. In the first paradigm, the relationship between narrative and the expression of identity is generally examined through the relationship between 'the self and the act of narrating, positing the act of narrating as an act of constitution of identity' (Fina 2003, p. 17). Unlike the first paradigm, the second paradigm views 'identity mainly as emerging in interactional circumstances, thus a process in itself, constituted in "performance", negotiated and enacted, not internalized in any way, and with no substantial existence

outside the local interactional context' (Fina 2003, pp. 17–8). According to the author, identities are the result of 'discursive works' to be examined within their historical, social and interactional contexts (Fina 2003, p. 26).

Central to the issues surrounding narrative and identity is narrative identity. Farren (2010, p. 9) regarded narrative identity as 'an understanding of the self through the stories we tell and the stories that others tell about us'. McAdams (2011, p. 99) defined narrative identity as the 'the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life'. The autobiographical story, according to the author, is selectively reconstructed from the person's past when he or she reaches late adolescence and young adulthood. The narrator will anticipate his or her imagined future into the story as well to explain, for the self and others, his or her being and becoming. This self-defining reconstruction of life stories draws heavily from 'prevailing cultural norms and the images, metaphors, and themes that run through the many narratives they encounter in social life' (McAdams 2011, p. 99). According to McAdams, Josselson and Lieblich (2006, p. 6), stories in narrative identity are shaped by history and culture and develop around ongoing conversations and within the evolving social relationship between the narrator and the audiences. Because I have already presented Cambodia's history and culture, I now proceed to narrate my story.

In this investigation, I was primarily concerned with firsthand life stories that were narrated in the first person and then transcribed and provided to the informants for review.

Data Do the Work

Lincoln and Guba (1985) viewed data as the results of the interaction between the inquirer and the data sources, both human and nonhuman. They defined data as 'the *constructions* offered by or in the sources' (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 332, original emphasis), 'the observational and interview notes accumulated in the field, documents and records, unobtrusive traces, and the like' (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 333). Because I worked with lived life experiences, I drew on St. Pierre's (1997) problematisation of the traditional notions of qualitative data. The author introduced the concept of transgressive data and suggested that the way we thought about our

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world was governed by the signifiers (e.g. 'science, method, validity, truth, power, rationality, objectivity, identity, sexuality, culture, history, democracy' [St. Pierre's 1997, p. 175]) used to guide our thinking. Her notion of transgressive data extended the typical kinds to include emotional data, dream data, sensual data and response data, all of which were considered to be 'out-of-category and not usually accounted for in qualitative research methodology' (St. Pierre's 1997, p. 175).

In this study, I have drawn on transgressive data to supplement the transcripts of the conversations between my participants and me. For example, like St. Pierre (1997, p. 181), 'my interpretation was influenced by emotional data, data that I could hardly textualize, code, categorize, and analyze'. Encountering transgressive data in the field is uncomfortable. Van Maanen, Manning and Miller (1993, p. viii) observed that field work is 'yet another addition to our repertoire of ways to make ourselves uncomfortable', that 'emotional labor is thus central to the trade', and that 'we might be made somewhat more comfortable if less of our efforts were devoted to the avoidance, denial, and control of emotions and if more of our efforts were directed to the understanding, expression, and reporting of them'.

Coffey (1999, p. 8) discussed the notion that 'fieldwork is itself a "social setting" inhabited by embodied, emotional, physical selves. Fieldwork helps to shape, challenge, reproduce, maintain, reconstruct and represent our selves and the selves of others'. Wolf (1992, p. 128) clearly underlined the importance of 'the context—the smells, sounds, sights, emotional tensions, [and] feel—of the culture' within which the researcher works. Ellingson (1998) also emphasised that researchers' bodies never cease to influence all aspects of the research process. The author further suggested that 'the erasure of researchers' bodies from conventional accounts of research obscures the complexities of knowledge production and yields deceptively tidy accounts of research' (Ellingson 1998, p. 299). It is along this line of argument that this study originated. For me, embodiment is a process of meaning-making interactions between me (i.e. my body, emotions, senses, reflections and reactions) and the world, particularly in terms of my language uses and usages.

In this study, the researcher embodiment data emerged while I was both in the field and back at my writing table. The data involved my own accounts of personal feelings, reactions and understandings that progressively arose throughout the time I worked with the lived life experiences. Thus far, I agreed with St. Pierre (1997, p.

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181) that the research embodiment data in this study were 'most often produced when, in a search for some kind of scandalous, rhizomatic validity, I forced myself to theorize my own identity as I theorized my participants' and I sought refuge in the author's advice:

> In the end, you must take me at my word, and whether and how you do that is undoubtedly beyond my control. I will give it my best, since I care immeasurably for the [participants] of this study. I find my own validity when I write and cry and then write some more. As the bones of my soul break ground for my intellect, I push through into spaces of understanding I did not particularly want to occupy. Why do the tears come? My posture as academic researcher and writer is jolted and deflated and displaced by connections and thoughts and folds erased from awareness until they are worded. As I write and theorize the lives of my participants, I theorize my own, as Fay (1987) says we must. The outside folds inside and I am formed anew.

> My writing disturbs the fear which skulks among my own identity relays and flushes my attachments which furtively dodge analytical attention. In the thinking that writing produces, I wobble in the move Trinh (1989) describes between other and not other; I am provoked into Butler's (1995) subversive citation: I am flayed by Spivak's (1992) wounding process of deidentification. This is deconstruction at its finest, most caustic and abyssal—my own displacement and irruption into difference—self-formation. (St. Pierre 1997, p. 114)

Sampling Technique

In this study, I utilised selective sampling (Schatzman & Strauss 1973; Strauss 1987) so that the target phenomenon could result. This sampling method, frequently used in qualitative studies (Malterud 2001; Strauss 1987), is defined as 'the calculated decision to sample a specific locale or type of interviewee according to a preconceived but reasonable initial set of dimensions (such as time, space, identity) which are worked out in advance of a study' (Strauss 1987, p. 39). Malterud (2001, p. 485) called this means of sampling 'purposeful' or 'theoretical sampling', chosen under the guidance of both the researcher's previous experience and his or her theoretical frameworks. In favour of purposeful sampling, Marshall (1996, p. 523) noted that:

> Qualitative researchers recognize that some informants are 'richer' than others and that these people are more likely to provide insight and understanding for the researcher. Choosing someone at random to answer a qualitative question would be analogous to randomly asking a passer-by how to repair a broken

down car, rather than asking a garage mechanic—the former might have a good stab, but asking the latter is likely to be more productive.

My chosen sampling technique suited my study design well, particularly when the insiderness nature of the study offered me insightful access to the particular people and phenomena worth investigating (Sikes & Potts 2008). Driven by this principle, I selected the participants in this study based on the following general criteria: physical appearance and self-acknowledgement of being influenced by certain Western cultural practices.

Specific initial selection criteria targeted those:

1. whose ages ranged between 20 and 25;

2. who had at least 10 years of learning English in Cambodia only;

3. who were doing a bachelor's degree in English language in Cambodia and had completed at least three years of the four-year programme;

4. who were perceived to be active participants (i.e. active consumers and producers) of Westernised global cultural practices;

5. whose parents were both of Cambodian nationality and were non-English-language learners or users; and

6. who were born, brought up and grew up in Cambodia and had been living in Cambodia for at least 15 years of their life.

Finally, I ensured that there were both males and females among my participants, with no regard for their academic performance. To select the participants for the study, I travelled to Cambodia and stayed there for three months (8 January–9 April 2011). I purposefully planned my arrival in Cambodia to occur during the last two weeks of the first semester for the fourth-year students in the English Department of a local university so that I could recruit volunteers and interview them during the short study break after their first-semester exams.

I arrived in Cambodia on Sunday, 9 January 2011. On Monday, I was at the school informing the head of school of my arrival and the steps I would take in recruiting volunteers and collecting data. I was encouraged to start the process as soon as possible because it was the last study week for the year four students. The following week would be the exam break, during which time, as the head of the department suggested, the students should be left alone so that they could study for their semester one exams. Having received permission to start, I drafted two memos,

one for the lecturers and the other for the potential year four volunteers (see Appendices B and C, respectively). I printed the memos and distributed them among the year four lecturers. In addition, I sought to meet these lecturers in the two lecturer rooms and at the department canteens during the study breaks. After briefing them on my study aims and data-collection procedure, I requested their assistance in spreading the information among their final-year students as well as personally recommending any potential participants for the project.

I waited for two days without any contact from the students or suggestions from the lecturers. I was anxious. Not wanting to waste any more time because the weekend was fast approaching, I decided to take a more drastic approach to ensure the information reached the students. This approach was also to maximise my chances of obtaining a certain number of potential volunteers. I asked for permission from the school head to visit every year four classroom in each of the three shifts (morning: five classes, 117 students; afternoon: five classes, 142 students; and evening: 10 classes, 3,812 students) to deliver a 10-minute briefing on my research and to encourage participation. I also took this opportunity to hand out the consent form and information to participants involved in research form (see Appendices E and F, respectively) to all the students to read and consider at home. They were told that they had until the end of the month to express their interest. Nevertheless, by the evening of the same day, to my surprise and delight, I had received 19 text messages and emails expressing interest in participating in my study. Between 13 January and 30 January, I received 24 more text messages from potential participants, resulting in a total of 43 interested participants. I replied to each message that I received, thanking them for their interest. I also informed them that I would contact them after their semester exam. I finished by wishing them luck in the exam.

I had not expected to receive so many expressions of interest with so much enthusiasm. Through my experience as a lecturer in the institute, I knew how much the students hated to participate in research projects or to complete surveys or questionnaires. I knew that most of them, if they were not studying two degrees at the same time, worked full-time and studied part-time. They barely had time to rest because of the many assignments they were given. With 43 potential participants, I was both very excited and worried. I was excited because I believed that I could select the most suitable volunteers that met all my selection criteria. However, I was worried

about what to do if a large number met all the criteria. I did not want to let any of them down.

Having found 43 volunteers, I was thinking of selecting at least 10 of them. My change of mind was based on Flick's (2002, p. 62) suggestion to use three levels of sample selection: one during data collection, one during interpretation, and one during the presentation of results. I also had other concerns. First, I was afraid that if I selected only five as planned, I would not know what to do if any of them decided to withdraw later into the study. I would be left with too few cases and re-recruiting would be time-consuming and costly because I would have to fly back to Cambodia again. Second, because of my positivistic quantitative background in research, I felt continuing scepticism about the credibility and validity of my data if it were drawn from only five cases. In my reasoning, if I increased the number to 10, it would still be a small number but at least it would be twice as many as five and hence twice as credible and valid. Third, I would hate to disappoint anyone who had shown enthusiasm for my study. Finally, I had suddenly realised how laborious and intensive it would be to transcribe the interviews, particularly when I planned to transcribe all the interviews myself without any assistance. Unsure of how to proceed, I wrote an email to my supervisors and asked for their suggestions. In their responses, I was reminded about the proposal and the data-collection plan that I had submitted to the ethics committee, an excerpt of which follows:

> If more than five people respond, I will accept the first five, but keep the names of other potential participants in case any of the initial five withdraw from the study.

> When I have the names and contact details of five participants I will invite them to attend a presentation where I will outline the nature of the research and present them with the Information to participants form. Here I will ascertain that they meet the criteria below. They will be given consent forms and asked to return these to me within 3 days by dropping them with the student affair secretary of the department from whom I will collect, or returning them direct to me or through their lecturers when they come to school. This has all been made clear on the Information to Participants form.

I was also cautioned about the extra work I would face if I decided to select five extra participants. The reminding message is as follows:

> This suggestion from your email below: *'I am thinking of interviewing at least ten to be safe if any of them would withdraw sometime into the process'* could take several days—perhaps even weeks—of extra work. The sorts of

interviews that you are considering are very detailed and time-consuming. To conduct an extra five would be a massive increase in workload. It is up to you, of course, but my suggestion would be that you stick pretty much to the original plan, but if you sense a strong need to change, then just quickly jot down your reasons for the change and when you return to Melbourne we'll inform the Ethics committee in a more formal way.

I thought it over and decided to recruit three females and three males—one extra participant instead of five. This was decided after the first meeting with most of the volunteers on Monday, 31 January 2011. After meeting them in person, I realised that, although my life story is also part of the thesis, there were certain elements I do not share with them. I admitted that I had not thought of these differences while I was proposing my study. First, I was born during the Khmer Rouge regime, 13 years before they were. Second, the ways in which I was taught English, I believe, were different from those experienced by the participants. For example, having worked as a teacher trainer, I knew that I had been taught according to a more teacher-centred pedagogy than my participants were. The learning materials were also essentially different. Third, none of them had the experience of mobility that I did. I was born in a rural province far from development, literacy, media and technology. In addition, I was a refugee for almost 10 years, during which time I was relocated many times, each relocation giving me a different sense of self and identity as I grew up. In addition, after I was repatriated back to my home country, I experienced certain kinds of discrimination among my own country's people before I could assimilate among them. In terms of social exposure, only when I journeyed to the capital city in 1995 did I start to experience the same kind of development, literacy, media and technology that they did. These elements had their roles to play in constructing my identity and sense of self.

The six participants were selected from the full group of 43 potential candidates using the following procedure. First, I invited them all to an introductory meeting to the research project on 31 January 2011. The meeting was scheduled to start at 9 am and was supposed to last for 90 minutes, but the participants did not all arrive until 9.30, which was expected because this is common behaviour for Cambodians attending such unofficial events. Still, I appreciated the participants' commitment because many had had to ask for leave from work to attend the meeting.

They had left their offices at nine and thus were a bit late. The English Department provided a venue for the meeting and breakfast was provided to the participants.

Only 27 people could make it to the meeting, so I decided to hold another meeting for those who could not make it. At the meetings, I presented my study proposal, and I answered more questions and clarified all the concerns raised. I also clearly elaborated on the two forms (information for participants involved in research and consent form) that I had handed out when I visited their classes. Again, I answered and clarified all their concerns, ensuring that each of them who was to return the consent form was as well-informed as possible about the project. I clearly reiterated the long-term involvement on their part that might be required for the study. I also detailed the necessity of numerous interviews, follow-up meetings, transcript verification and, finally, their approval of their crafted life stories, completion of which could take up to two years from the moment they signed the consent form. I made it clear that those who proceeded to submit the consent forms at the end of the meeting needed to be seriously interested in contributing their personal life stories to the construction of knowledge. I also informed them that if they wished to withdraw from my study, they were free to do so anytime without having to tell me their reason for withdrawal.

At the end of the meeting, out of 27 participants, 23 submitted their consent forms; out of these 23, four (one male and three females—Leang, Sreyna and Thida) were recruited as participants. However, later that night, before I could send a text message to inform the recruited participants that they had been selected, I received a text message from a participant who had submitted the consent form earlier in the morning asking to withdraw from the study. He told me that his two friends who had also submitted the consent form also wanted to withdraw but were reluctant to say so. I called both of them, thanked them and removed their names from the list. I was a bit disappointed because one of their names was being marked as the most suitable for my study. I thus had to choose another participant from the list that I had marked during the meeting in the morning. I chose Bros and he showed excitement as he agreed to be interviewed.

By 1 February 2011, I had informed four participants and arranged a first meeting with each of them for the interviews. However, the first week of the month was not ideal for interviews because it was Chinese New Year week, the time when all

Sino-Cambodians celebrate the occasion. That year, the first New Year Day, when Sino-Cambodian people pray and offer food to their ancestors as well as enjoy feasts with their loved ones, fell on 2 February 2011. On the second day of the New Year, they stay indoors as required by their tradition. The third day is for visiting families and relatives, during which any people who are financially independent gift their financially dependent family members with red envelopes containing money. The exact amount of money varies depending on how wealthy the givers are. However, by the weekend of the first week, all four participants had happily agreed to meet for their first interviews. I felt that this was due to their curiosity about the project as well as their enthusiasm to participate in the research. The participants chose to be interviewed in various cafés where they felt most comfortable.

The second introductory meeting with the rest of the interested participants took place two weeks later, on Saturday, 12 February 2011. Among the remaining 14 interested participants, only seven came to the meeting. The second meeting followed the same procedure as the first one and received the same highlights and treatment. Two male informants (Virak and Dara) were selected from this meeting and the interviews were arranged soon after.

Adjusting the Selection Criteria

After my introductory presentation, I allowed the participants to ask me questions. I also probed them about their perceptions of Cambodian and Western culture. I marked those who felt strongly about Western culture. With reference to my initial literature review, I also observed and sought the following characteristics as my extra criteria. I was specifically looking for those who:

1. demonstrated their confidence in asking and in speaking (Gao et al. 2005) among other interested participants at the meeting;

2. demonstrated 'non-linguistic outcomes' (RC Gardner 1985) of Western gestures and behaviours (e.g. nodding, eye contact, using facial expressions when answering questions, shrugging shoulders, vivid body language) in expressing themselves or in communication in general (Gao et al. 2005);

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3. showed strong appreciation and liking of Western ideology, values, arts and ways of life, for example, freedom of speech, human rights, equity, democracy, individualism (Yue 2012);

4. showed signs of being a subtractive bilingual practitioner (Lambert 1975; Landry & Allard 1993; Wright, Taylor & Macarthur 2000), that is, chose to communicate in English instead of Khmer and also preferred listening to English songs and movies rather than to Cambodian ones;

5. actively used the English language in surfing the internet, communicating through social networks and following development of technologies (BT Williams & Zenger 2012);

6. constantly accessed information primarily using sources in English (Lambert 1975; BT Williams & Zenger 2012);

7. dressed in ways that are typically found in Western pop culture (e.g. short skirts or trousers, loosely fitting shirts for boys, or tight and revealing shirts for girls, Western style jewellery).

I had thought that my initial criteria for selecting the participants would be sufficient and clear enough for me to select the participants without difficulty. However, it turned out that it was not that simple.

The Selected Participants

The six selected Cambodian young adults were all in their early twenties. At the time of the interviews, they were all in their final semester of their bachelor of English degree. Among the five, three were female: Leang, Sreyna and Thida (pseudonyms). Dara and Virak (also pseudonyms) were the two male participants. Over the data-collection period, the teacher trainees were completing their practicum before taking their final exam to graduate. Thida had chosen professional communication, which was an alternative for those who wanted to earn a degree in English but not be trained as a teacher of the language. Although I had planned not to select anyone whose parents were literate in English, I learnt from my interviews that one of the participants' parents was an active user of the English language. He travelled back and forth to the United States and was fond of American TV

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programmes and movies. I decided to continue including the participant because I was hoping to see how this person was influenced by her parent's knowledge and practices of the English language.

The Conversations

Although I had planned to start collecting data as soon as possible after my arrival in Cambodia (January 2011), the interviews did not actually take place until February 2011. The interviews were casual conversations taking place in various Internet cafés throughout Phnom Penh that had been chosen by the participants. We would normally choose a quiet table in a corner where we could talk without much interruption.

The first conversation usually started with me telling them my life story up to the point when I began conducting my current study. I was drawing on my own story as a language learner and sharing my experiences of English literacy as it related to my performances of identity as an intersubjective bridge (Herda 1999) with the participants. I intended my data-collection interviews to be an equitable and mutually supportive framework for frank and honest conversations to result (Goldman et al. 2003, p. 566). Normally, during the first 20–30 minutes of the first conversation, the participants would listen without interrupting. However, after this time, the participants usually took over by either asking questions or contributing their own stories. We then would talk until we felt we had talked enough for the day. Stretching, toileting and long pauses after finishing the second cups of coffee were normally the signs we had had enough of the talk for the day.

I had planned the conversation with the participants to be semi-structured, but in the event, the guiding questions I had prepared were hardly used at all. However, I was always conscious and mindful of the central topic or theme for each talk. The three broad themes were (1) early schooling and literacy and identity performances, (2) learning and practising English literacy and identity performances, and (3) current English literacy practice and identity performances. In the first two themes, the conversations evolved around the following broad questions:
-    How do you remember your childhood?

- What was it like being able to read and write Khmer/English? How did it contribute to your understanding of Khmer identity?

Four broad questions guided the third conversation and the focus-group discussion that was implemented after all the participants expressed their interest in meeting the other informants:

1. How do non-Cambodian movies, songs, advertisements and celebrations presented in the English language influence the participants' understanding of the world and their performance of identity?

2. What do Westernised global cultural events (e.g. Valentine's Day, Christmas or Birthday celebrations) mean to them?

3. What kind of English literacy do they generate?

4. How does the presence of Westernised global cultural artefacts (Christmas cards, Valentine's cards) affect their Cambodian identity? That is, how are they dissonant with the indigenous Cambodian culture?

Before each interview, the participants were always asked about the language they preferred to use for the purpose (Khmer or English). Khmer was chosen most often, but code-switching occurred frequently. There appeared to be times when one language was deliberately chosen to express certain feelings or events over the other. However, what exactly caused this was not discussed because it was irrelevant to the present study's aims and objectives.

Re-storying My Story

> When a researcher is a research instrument, it is likely that the researcher would develop a heightened awareness of his/her own cultural conditioning, especially in the case of cross-cultural studies. And that such awareness would make him/her realise that one's own cultural background may indeed have an influence on formulating his/her research methodology.
>
> (Maeda 2011, p. 355)

I drew on my own life stories as a language learner and shared my experiences of English literacy in my identity construction and performances. In this way, our conversations about our life experiences became increasingly intimate as they progressed. There were moments of laughter and of sadness. Talking about certain

emotional events brought anger, tears, sighs and even long silences when neither of us seemed able to find the words to carry on with the stories.

At the beginning of the interviews, I tended to do most of the talking as my participants listened carefully and only interrupted when they noted particular points that they wanted to be clarified or were relevant to their experiences. From such turning points, the dialogues became more and more two sided. Because politeness, social hierarchy and face-saving are important in our culture, my participants addressed me as 'Lecturer'. Nevertheless, we felt more like friends as we became better acquainted. I felt the closeness through their tone of voice, the frequent interruptions, the casual and relaxed interactions as well as the teasing or the jokes they would interject into a conversation. I believed that sharing my life stories frankly and sincerely not only helped to establish a sense of fairness among the participants, but also encouraged them to share as much as they could. We immersed ourselves deeply in the field. This was essential for producing rich data and 'thick description' (Geertz 1973).

There was another important role my life stories played in the field. As I repeatedly recalled and retold my own life stories with every participant, I continuously reflected analytically on my life in relation to English literacy and identity performances. It gave me ideal opportunities to examine what was central in my own lived life experiences, and was the first step towards textualisation and analysis of my own stories. Van Maanen (1988, p. 95) explained that '"textualization" is Ricoeur's term for the process by which unwritten behavior[s] become fixed, atomized, and classified as data of a certain sort. Only in textualized form do data yield to analysis'.

Transcribing Texts

Initially, I had planned to finish interviewing and transcribing all the conversations during the field work in Cambodia. Not having conducted qualitative research before, let alone transcribed fieldwork data, I greatly underestimated the workload. While I was in the field, I was not able to transcribe much because I was busy interviewing, taking and reviewing notes, and organising the next interviews.

Overall, it took me six months after I returned from Cambodia to finish transcribing all the fieldwork texts.

The transcribing was very time-consuming for several reasons. First, I was the only one transcribing the conversations, as specified in the ethics application form and promised to the participants. I made this decision and offered the promise because the data comprised intimate personal life stories, both my own and those of my informants. I also expected the process to familiarise me further with the data. Second, I had to type in two languages because of the regular code-switching between Khmer and English. Although my typing in English was quite fast, it was very slow in Khmer because I had never done it before. In addition, I had to change system fonts (from English to Khmer and vice versa) and adjust the different font sizes regularly to make them fit well together in the same lines or paragraphs.

Table 1: Details of Interviews and Field Texts (*Data from Bros were not used because his literacy practices were very similar to those of Virak and Dara)

No	Interview Date	Participant (Pseudonyms)	Interview Order	Length of Conversation	Data in Pages
1	03-02-11	Leang	1st	1:48:40	61
2	05-02-11	Sreyna	1st	1:51:08	40
3	05-02-11	Bros*	1st	1:36:13	34
4	06-02-11	Thida	1st	2:04:47	37
5	15-02-11	Virak	1st	2:58:09	45
6	21-02-11	Dara	1st	1:28:25	29
7	11-02-11	Leang	2nd a	1:34:30	32
8	13-02-11	Sreyna	2nd	2:19:24	49
9	14-02-11	Leang	2nd b	1:42:56	41
10	18-02-11	Bros*	2nd	2:14:52	56
11	18-02-11	Virak	2nd	2:02:38	42
12	19-02-11	Thida	2nd	1:02:42	23
13	25-02-11	Dara	2nd	1:51:58	47
14	13-03-11	Focus group	1st	2:38:17	59
15	26-03-11	Focus group	2nd	2:34:45	52
15	15 days	6 participants	2 interviews per person	1789.3 min (29 h 8 min 21 sec)	647 pages

It was not until October 2011 that all the interviews were completely transcribed, after which a copy of the transcripts with each participant was sent to them by email to be verified. They were given a month to read through and comment

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on the interviews. Thida, Sreyna and Virak, made some clarification to what they said in their transcripts as well as adding some new information. Dara and Leang were happy with the transcripts and had nothing more to add.

Data Analysis

Voice-Centred Relational Method

I used LM Brown and Gilligan's (1993) voice-centred relational method (VCRM) as the primary method of data analysis. Gilligan (1993, p. 2) underlined that 'the way people talk about their lives is of significance ... the language they use and the connects they make reveal the world that they see and in which they act'. With her colleague Brown, Gilligan (1993) proposed VCRM as an analytical technique to allow 'each respondent's story to be heard as a whole at the forefront of the analysis' and 'the researcher's role to be made explicit in the cocreation and analysis of the data' (Paliadelis & Cruickshank 2008, p. 1446).

According to LM Brown and Gilligan (1993), the interviewed texts were to be read at four different phases with four different themes in mind. The first time reading through the interviewed text, the focus is on 'the who, what, when, where and why of the narrative' (LM Brown & Gilligan 1993, p. 15) to make sense of the happening, the plot, the unfolding events and the drama of the story. In the second approach to the interview text, the focus shifts to self-representation—'the voice of the "I"' (LM Brown & Gilligan 1993, p. 16)—of the interviewee with relation to the interviewer (i.e. the researcher). In the third and the fourth approaches to dealing with the data, the focus is on the interviewee's relationship with the other social actors, that is, 'how they experience themselves in the relational landscape of human life' (LM Brown & Gilligan 1993, p. 16). These two last steps try to understand how the participants position themselves in the dominant institutional, cultural and social restraints.

In other words, the method focuses the analysis of the life stories according to four different themes: '(i) the content of the story, (ii) how the interviewee talks about [him- or] herself, (iii) how [he or] she talks about relationships, and (iv) [the] representations and effects of the dominant societal voice' (Proctor 2001, p. 366).

In my analysis of the data, I not only searched for the 'life-as-a-whole perspective' but also for important life themes related to the influence of English-language literacy and its practices that emerged from the stories—'how the themes of

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continuity, purpose, commitment, and meaning were expressed in their stories and addressed their major developmental influence' (Atkinson 1998, p. 6) and how the individuals' identity was performed in those stages. My aim was to understand the story, the participants, their perceptions of relationships and how all these were represented in the societal and cultural framework.

Throughout the analysis process, the participants and I collaborated in the analysis and the reconstructions of our life histories using all practical means of communications (e.g. Facebook chats and messages, Skype, email exchanges and long-distance telephone calls). In the process, the participants were able to verify the translated quotations from the interviews that I used to support different points made throughout the analysis of their stories. They were given opportunities not only to provide their insights but also to correct or remove parts of their stories that they found sensitive or too revealing. This is important because, as Vicars (2006b) warned, laying oneself open to the scrutiny of the public is a risky business at both personal and professional levels. Through collaboration, the participants were able to exercise some control to make the sensitive stories more presentable. As Donalek (2004) pointed out, to make phenomenological research really phenomenological, a researcher must work cooperatively with the participants to produce a collaborative research report.

Working with the Data: Learning from My Narratives

In the first conversations with all the participants, I told them about my life. I roughly followed the following progression: the kind of person I was brought up to be when young, why I learnt English, what I did with it, and eventually how I thought my identity changed over those years. I did not plan exactly what to say or how long I should narrate before giving up my turn. I wanted my narrative to be naturally driven by the mutual interest between my interlocutors and me. When I finished, I would ask my participants, 'How about you?', and wait for them to tell me whatever they had planned to share during my narratives. From there, the conversations were driven by whatever themes emerged about English literacy and identity construction and performances.

As I repeatedly narrated my life stories, I began to understand my life better. This understanding resulted in variations because of omissions, and the addition of some events in my eventual telling of the story. To ensure that the participants were able to reflect and make changes to their stories to mirror the ultimate understanding of their lives, when the interviews were over, I gave them a copy of our recorded conversations and encouraged them to listen to them while I transcribed the dialogues. I transcribed the interviews using whatever languages (Khmer or English) were spoken during the conversations.

After I finished transcribing the stories six months later, I gave them a copy of the complete transcripts and again encouraged them to read through and suggest any changes they would like to make. They were given a month to do this, after which I would seek their approval to chat with them (using either Skype or Facebook Chat) regarding any changes that they had thought about or any information they wanted to remove from their stories. None of the informants wished to add or change anything. However, one participant, Thida, requested that her husband be excluded from the writing of her life history. She did not specify the reasons behind the request but insisted that it be done.

A year later, after I had finished drafting their life histories, the participants were given a copy of the stories and a month's time to read and verify them as their words had been quoted and translated into English. Again, none of the participants made any significant changes besides offering some corrections as well as clarifications concerning times, places, order of events and persons in the stories. They all agreed with the translations of their words and signed their approvals (see Appendix C). However, Thida insisted that those remaining references to her husband still needed to be removed from the story. She made deliberate efforts highlighting the parts in the story to be removed and asked to sight her chapter again prior to the submission or publication of the story. I was more than happy to oblige, knowing that 'language can never contain a whole person, so every act of writing a person's life is inevitably a violation' (Josselson 1996, p. 62).

Translating the Texts

Temple and Young (2004) raised the question of whether it matters if the translation act is identified or not in qualitative research. They suggested that the answer depends on the researchers' epistemological position along a line of which one end was objectivity and the other subjectivity. At the objective end, the authors suggested that the translation act needed to be identified so that bias could be eliminated or resolved. Regarding the opposite end, where other approaches to knowledge such as social constructionism, interpretivism and non-positivism were positioned, the authors advised that 'translators *must* … form part of the process of knowledge production' because their location within the social world influenced the way in which they saw the world itself (Temple & Young 2004, p. 164, original emphasis).

Given the nature of my present study, I was fully aware of my positioning as both an inquirer and a translator. As mentioned, subjectivity, interpretiveness and embodiment were parts of my data through which I constructed meanings. As to how exactly I translated my data, I turned to a meaning-based translation approach (Marschan-Piekari & Reis 2004), particularly that suggested by Nida (1964), Nida and Taber (1969) and Xian (2008).

Xian (2008, p. 3) underlined that 'translating was never a straightforward process, because there is not always formal correspondence between two languages'. Xian specifically pointed to two problems with translating qualitative data: linguistic (e.g. lexical, grammatical and idiomatic) and sociocultural differences (proverbs, history and myths). To overcome the challenges, Xian turned to the literature of sociolinguistic translation theory to bridge the gap between cultural and linguistic differences, specifically, Nida's (1964) dynamic equivalence translation theory.

Nida's (1964) dynamic equivalence translation theory is pragmatic in nature; the emphasis is on the relationships across languages, cultures and societies through two approaches to decoding the meanings of a message: universalist and communicative. The universalist approach holds that 'anything which can be said in one language can be said in another, unless the form is an essential element of the message' (Nida & Taber 1969, p. 4). In contrast, the communicative approach posits that 'what one must determine is the response of the receptor to the translated

message. This response must then be compared with the way in which the original receptors presumably reacted to the message when it was given in its original setting' (Nida & Taber 1969, p. 1). This translation process, as Xian (2008, online) explained, 'was promoted whereby, without losing sight of the original message producer, the focus is shifted to the role of the receptor. In other words, audience of the target culture should react to a translated text the same way as the audience of the source culture would'.

For this study, I found Nida's dynamic equivalence translation theory, despite being old, particularly relevant and useful because the theory prioritised meaning and regarded words and symbols as only messengers. Xian (2008) further pointed out that:

> For Nida, words and symbols are mere labels, and the form of the message is thus relegated to secondary status. If words need to be changed or replaced in order to effect communication, then they should be adjusted accordingly. According to Nida and Taber (1969), dynamic equivalence procedures include substituting more appropriate target-language cultural material for less accessible source-language item, making references which are implicit in the source text linguistically explicit in the target language, and using repetition in utterances to avoid a high information load.

There were also other issues that motivated me to adopt Nida's approach to translation. First, it was related to language variety. I had mentioned earlier in this chapter that Cambodians used English with unique features, be they lexical, grammatical or pronunciation (Keuk 2009; Moore & Bounchan 2010). It was these features that inspired me to pursue my PhD in the first place. Given this scenario, even if my participants and I were talking in English, certain parts of our English could require familiarity with its usage, if not 'Khmerness', to be able to be fully decoded.

Second, sociocultural (Xian 2008) and conversation-specific contexts (e.g. topics, time, place, space, interlocutors and emotions) were another, equally important issue. This last issue mattered most when we talked in Khmer because the language itself is already socioculturally orientated. Given all the issues, I honestly did not believe that any translators, no matter what their qualifications, would be able to capture the meanings of the texts better than my participants and I working collaboratively to translate the texts of the conversations I used in this study. Nevertheless, I believed we would still not be able to capture all of the original meanings. I illustrate these points in the following excerpts taken directly from the

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transcribed field texts. These excerpts were the first sentences the participants spoke when they took over their conversational turn:

មុនដំបូងឡើយ ខ្ញុំគិតថា ប្រហែលជាដំបូងឡើង ប្រហែលជាអត់មានហេតុផល ប៉ុន្តែដោយសារឃើញបងស្រីនៅផ្ទះ ហ្នឹងគាត់រៀន ។ ពេលបន្ទាប់ម៉ោ ប៉ាម៉ាក់ខ្ញុំគាត់មិនដឹងយ៉ាង ម៉េចទេ គាត់ឱ្យគ្រូដែលបង្រៀនបងខ្ញុំហ្នឹងមកបង្រៀន abc ចោលទៅ ។ បង្រៀន abc ចោលក៏ចាប់អារម្មណ៍ព្រោះអីខ្ញុំរៀនភាសាពេលនោះរហ័សលឿនដែរ ។

(Leang, first interview, 03 February 2011)

Word-for-word translation:

> At first, I think, maybe, at first maybe there was no reason but because saw my elder sister at home she studied. The time after that, my parents they don't know why they asked the teacher who taught my sister then taught me ABC threw away. Taught ABC threw away became interested because I learnt language quite fast.

In the word-for-word translation, the phrase *my parents they don't know why they asked…* required some common knowledge of the Khmer oral communicative strategies and linguistic features, as well as familiarity with the speaker's speaking style, to be decoded correctly. To the best of my knowledge, there is hardly any literature available to account for Khmer oral communicative strategies. A discussion of this issue, despite being relevant, would be too lengthy and impractical here. Thus, I address only the most relevant points here: the double subject and the pro-drop linguistic feature of the Khmer language (Sak-Humphry 1996).

The double subject is quite common in oral communication in Khmer, especially when the subject is other than first-person pronouns. Ironically, the first-person pronouns are usually dropped, thus making Khmer a pro-drop language. In the example above, Leang used both these common features when saying *my parents they don't know why they asked.…* Properly punctuated and correctly translated into English, the phrase should read *my parents, they, I don't know why, they asked.…* Were I not a Khmer and a teacher of English, I might misunderstand the phrase to be two separate sentences: *My parents don't/didn't know why (either). They asked.…*

I suggested *don't/didn't* in the possible translation because Khmer is not a tense-based language. Adverbs of time are usually used to signify tense and thus conversational and topical contexts should carry the tense aspects.

Finally, Leang's speaking style was unique in that she usually mixed many subjects together before introducing one main verb to accompany her intended

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subject. Her doing so may have resulted from the different pieces of related information that were popping up in her mind and competing to be expressed. Only after all the conversations with Leang in person and transcribing everything she said did I manage to understand what she had intended to say better. All this knowledge dictated that my translation be meaning based if I were to capture better the lived experiences that my participants intended to share. Thus, I translated what Leang said as follows:

> I don't think there was any particular reason for my learning English at the beginning. It was my elder sister who was learning English with a home tutor at the time. For some unknown reasons, my parents decided I too should learn the English alphabet with the tutor. I learnt quickly and this sparked my interest in learning the language.

Because my participants sometimes expressed themselves in English as well, I offer the following example to illustrate the scenario in which translation was still needed:

> Um… honestly speaking, I often listen to hip-hop songs the most. But somehow I also spend some romantic slow songs. But it's a little bit new, rather than the traditional song. Maybe, like 'Yesterday Once More' (Virak, 1st interview, 15 Feb 11).

What Virak meant to say was:

> Um… honestly speaking, I listen to hip-hop songs most frequently. However, I also listen to some old love songs. Not old like classical music, but those from between the 70s and 90s.

I knew that it was between the 1970s and 1990s because 'Yesterday Once More' was among the first most popular songs commonly played and requested on many FM radio stations in the early and mid-1990s, shortly after UNTAC and the English language arrived in Cambodia. It was also among my favourite songs. My bilingual knowledge helped me to understand that by 'traditional song', Virak was actually talking about classical music.

Reconstructing the Texts

When drafting the participants' life histories, I worked directly with the transcripts of the original interviews in the languages in which the participants chose

to speak. I only translated certain excerpts that I used to illustrate my points in the chapter. There were two main reasons for this. First, translating all the data would take a long time, and much would be wasted because only certain parts were needed. I spent six months transcribing the data, so I anticipated it would take from three to five months to translate everything. For practical reasons as well as the one offered below, I decided not to translate everything.

Second, I believed that making sense from the original data brought me closer to understanding the phenomena the way they were intended to be understood. As a bilingual language user, I knew that it was impossible to convey exactly the original message of one language in another.

Re/Presentation of the Field

I presented reconstructed life histories of the participants in this study. The life histories were chronologically organised oral narratives of the lives of the participants. Informed by Behar's (1996) work *The Vulnerable Observer*, I presented the reconstructed life histories using double-voiced text (Olesen 2005), intertextual and multivoiced (Denzin & Lincoln 2005), scaffolded by cultural and historical accounts.

Using VCRM (LM Brown & Gilligan 1991, 1993; Fairtlough 2007; Mauthner & Doucet 1998), I went through all four of the reading stages: (1) making sense of the whole story, (2) examining the voice of the 'I', (3) examining the relationships, and (4) placing people within cultural contexts and social structures. After each reading, I wrote a version of the story focusing on its corresponding reading purpose (e.g. after the first reading, I wrote a version of the story called 'Making Sense of X's Story'). By doing so, I ended up with very long life history for each participant with a great deal of overlapping information.

To reduce the redundancy and repetitiveness of the information, I rewrote the entire life history of each participant once again, synthesising all the results of the four readings. These stories are presented in this thesis. They are shorter, but no longer follow the strict pattern of plot—voice of 'I'—relationship—cultural and social context. The four key parts blended together in the final version of the story

with some traces of my original approach to the reconstruction process, as seen in some of the subheadings of each story.

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Chapter 4: 'My Khmer Being and My English Literacy and Practices'

***

In this chapter, I narrate my life story before and after my acquisition and performance of English literacy practices. I start by discussing literature relevant to identity, self, and narrative.

Identity: Personal and Collective

From a social science perspective, '"identity" is presently used in two linked senses—"social" and "personal"' (Fearon 1999, p. 4).

> In the former sense, an "identity" refers simply to a *social category*, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes. In the second sense of personal identity, an identity is some distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable. (Fearon 1999, p. 4)

Eder (2009, p. 428) stressed the notion of personal identity—that 'persons have an identity by positioning themselves relative to other persons and by giving to these relations a meaning that is fixed in time'. This argument, according to Eder, also applies to a collective identity against others. He explained that 'a group has an identity if it succeeds in defining itself vis-à-vis other groups by attributing meaning to itself that is stable over time' (Eder 2009, p. 428). Central to Eder's argument of identity as an analytical concept is the notion that identity emerges by linking past social relationships with those in the present and, in some cases, even those in the future.

From a sociocultural linguistics perspective, Bucholtz and Hall (2005, p. 586, original emphasis) have broadly defined identity as '*the social positioning of self and other*'. Again, identity revolves around relationships. For Vickers (2012, p. 1070), 'identity is almost always embedded in networks of relationships and its survival in both the subtle and the basic senses depends in part on what happens to those networks'. From the perspectives of linguistics and linguistic anthropology, the definition of identity is primarily concerned with the role of language in the identity-

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construction process. For example, Kroskrity (2000, p. 111), while referring to identity as 'the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories', underlined that language plays an important role in identity construction. He explained this as follows:

> Identities may be linguistically constructed both through the use of particular languages and linguistic forms (e.g., Standard English, Arizona Tewa) associated with specific national, ethnic, or other identities and through the use of communicative practices (e.g., greeting formulae, maintenance of mutual gaze, regulation of participation) that are indexed, through members' normative use, to their group. Language and communication are critical aspects of the production of a wide variety of identities expressed at many levels of social organization. (Kroskrity 2000, p. 111)

Kroskrity's typology of identity was in its collective sense, including national, ethnic, racial, class and rank, professional and gender identities.

Hoover and Ericksen (2004, p. 2) reductively categorised all the disciplines that studied identity into three schools of thought: construction, essentialist and individualist. According to the authors, the first school views identity as 'an artifact of power, or, more broadly, as the work of social forces … created to serve the purposes of dominant interests' (Hoover & Ericksen 2004, p. 2). In this sense, identities are entrusted upon those who are powerless to resist the forces. In the second school, identity is viewed in the form of fixed categorisation: gender, race, class and the like. Finally, the individualist school treats identity 'as self-created, as chosen, or as a matter of "affinity"' (Hoover & Ericksen 2004, p. 2). From this perspective, the self-inventing 'I' is the core of identity construction.

From both methodological and theoretical viewpoints that are specifically concerned with the role of language in identity construction, Joseph (2004) and Lane (2009) raised in their separate works only two views that have dominated questions relating to identity: essentialism and constructionism. The earlier approaches to identity were primarily those of the essentialist in which identity is viewed as 'constituted of essential or core categories' as well as 'fixed and stable' (Lane 2009, pp. 451–2). Sociolinguistic research, particularly in the variationist paradigm, adopted this understanding of identity, resulting in patterns of language use often being 'analysed as merely reflecting an identity or macro-level social factors, such as social class, gender, sex, age, etc.' (Lane 2009, p. 452). When the focus on the notion of identity shifted away from the self to a group or collective identity (e.g. national,

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ethnic/cultural, class and gender identities, and identities of communities of practice), language was no longer viewed as merely expressing identity. It was instead viewed as 'mutually constitutive' to identity (Lane 2009, p. 452).

The social constructionist approach is the second view of identity. This approach rejects the essential or core categories as defining the collective's members. In this sense, identities are 'multiple, fluid and dynamic, and seen as both shaping and being shaped by cultural expressions' (Lane 2009, p. 452). They are constructed based on social realities (PL Berger & Luckmann 1966) and therefore 'need to be regarded as accomplishments to which human beings arrive through social work' (Fina 2003, p. 16). Nevertheless, Joseph (2004, p. 90) cautioned researchers not to completely reject the essentialist's notion of identity because entirely adopting a constructivist view of categories may result in a loss of 'analytical rigour'. For Joseph, the process of constructing an identity is that of constructing an essence. Lane (2009, p. 452) agreed arguing that identity is both 'something we have' and 'something we create, mould and change through action'. Bauman (2000, p. 1) best described this notion of identity, succinctly explaining that:

> Identity is an emergent construction, the situated outcome of a rhetorical and interpretive process in which interactants make situationally motivated selections from socially constituted repertoires of identificational and affiliational resources and craft these semiotic resources into identity claims for presentation to others.

In Cambodia, Khmer identity has always been socially, religiously and linguistically materialised and defined (Marston & Guthrie 2004). As I understand it, the Khmers' notion of identity conforms to the three schools of identity that Hoover and Ericksen (2004) proposed. I believed that both constructionist and essentialist theories explained the formulation of the Cambodian collective identity through upbringing, socialisation, mass national media and public education policy. However, individualist theory was ideal to account for the way in which personal identity prospered to counteract the collective identity and values.

Therefore, in this study, my definition of identity is a synthesis of Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) broad and open-ended definition and the constructionist view of identity, particularly those put forth by Lane (2009) and Bauman (2000). Khmer identity, for me, is the sociocultural positioning of self and others in a multiple, fluid and dynamic manner constantly shaped by the *chbabs* (codes of conduct),

sociocultural expressions, appropriacy and contexts, as well as individuals' personal aspects, including sex, age, education and social status. It is primarily collective in nature with very little room for personal self, desires, dreams or choices. Khmer community members, especially the elders, are to monitor one another's behaviours and practices to ensure traditional and cultural values are maintained. Any sociocultural practices that stray from this understanding will be criticised and condemned, usually in the forms of social gossip and isolation. When the entire society appears to deviate from these social norms, a catastrophe can result. For example, between 1975 and 1979, the Khmer government had had enough of 'modernism' and the leaders took matters to the extreme in their efforts to purify Khmerness by destroying everything considered 'foreign', including modern education and ways of life.

When the brutal regime collapsed, the extreme philosophy of Khmerness went with it. The survivors tried their best to restore the Khmers' sociocultural ways of life back to the time before the tragedy. The *chbabs* and Buddhism became key sources of being and becoming Khmer. In this thesis, it is my knowledge of these two sources to which I primarily refer in my discussion of Khmer identity related to the English literacy and practices in present-day Cambodia.

Identity and Language

> The mother tongue is the foundation of cognitive development. Through it, we develop a sense of self and begin to explore the world.
>
> (Lemaistre & Flowers 2013, p. 16)

Smith-Hefner (1999, p. 138) observed that Khmer language and literacy remain critical elements in Khmer identity. A Khmer proverb, *samdei sor cheat*, suggests that one's *samdei* ('language' or 'spoken words') mirrors one's *cheat* (that is, 'nationality', 'originality' or 'birth'). In second-language literacy, research has shown connections between language literacy practice and its culture. Yue (2012, p. 164) suggested that language is an 'important carrier of culture' and ideologies, and Gao (2009, pp. 101–2) asserted that learning and teaching a language involves learning and teaching its culture. Other studies have more specifically linked the changes to individuals' identity and identity performances. For example, Ha (2007, 2008),

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studying groups of Western-trained Vietnamese teachers, suggested that some individuals change their professional identities as a consequence of being exposed to 'a new context with different cultural and pedagogical practices' (Ha 2008, p. 181). According to Ha (20008, p. 182), this change is by no means permanent because the Vietnamese teachers studied repeatedly negotiated their identities in relation to the dominance of the target-language culture, while simultaneously trying to retain their '"existing" and persisting Vietnamese values'.

In America, Jiménez (2000) conducted a longitudinal study investigating 85 students and four teachers in four bilingual classrooms in the United States. He found that the participants' identities were 'shaped and profoundly influenced' by what he termed living in the 'cultural borderlands' (Jiménez 2000, p. 985). He used the concept of 'hybridised identities' to discuss problems in school performance and socialisation in mainstream community life. In Europe, Demont-Heinrich (2005) conducted a study in which he analysed scholarly and public discourses of English in Switzerland. He sought to understand how English affected local culture and language. His findings suggested that the rise of English, although useful for the Swiss economy in terms of modernisation, could also have negative effects. In the worst scenario, he feared, it could even lead to the extinction of the national language, Romansch. In the study, the author suggested that the English language can habitually colonise indigenous languages and cultures and recommended that, for local languages to survive, 'particular cultures and languages must mould themselves to fit the criteria of modernity' (Demont-Heinrich 2005, p. 79). Unfortunately, Demont-Heinrich (2005) did not consider the ongoing relationship between foreign language literacy and identity performances of the local learners in his study. My investigation should fill in this gap.

As for Cambodia, since UNTAC, the English-language literacy and practices in Cambodia have resulted in the co-occurrence of 'Western' cultural practices and local ways of life, particularly among young adults. Looking back at my own English literacy practices and identity performance, I began to suspect a link between my English literacy acquisition and practices and my passion for Western ideologies. Many of my cultural values must have been 'Westernised' during the time I began to primarily communicate in English. When I moved to Phnom Penh in 1995, I spent a lot of time with American English teachers as well as Cambodian friends who shared

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similar passion for using English to do almost everything in everyday life. When sharing my life stories with the participants, I normally elaborated on this point in life.

Self and Identity

Bucholtz and Hall (2005, p. 586) saw identity in the social positioning of self and others, suggesting the social aspect of the both the self and identity. This view is also shared by Holstein & Gubrium (2000). The authors wrote that,

> [The] self was the virtual reflection of social participation, a veritable "looking glass" for us all, as Cooley would call it. Social life meant constant commerce with others. As society's member interacted, they took other into account. In the process, they developed a sense of who they were from how others responded to them; *individual* selves arose out the *social* (p. 4).

In other words, the self is socially grounded and is dynamic changing in relation to others' responses and is formed through reflection of social engagement. Self in this sense is closely linked with discourses. As Butler (2005) wrote, "The recognition that one is, at every turn, not quite the same as how one presents oneself in that available discourse might imply, in turn, a certain patience with others that would suspend the demand that they be self-same at every moment" (pp. 41-2).

To differentiate "self" from "identity", I adopted Goffman's (1959) analysis of the two concepts:

> [The dramaturgical] movement assumed that people are like actors in a play who perform for different audiences. As people take on various identities, the self is merely a consequence, rather than a cause, of the performance, a "product of the scene that comes off" (p. 252). Once people lay claim to an identity, they are obligated to remain "in character" until they move to the next scene, at which point the former self is discarded in favour of a self that fits the new context (in William & Bosson, 2010, p. 590).

William & Bosson (2010) asserted that, "For Goffman, there was no enduring sense of self; instead, Goffman envisioned the self as an ahistorical construction that emerged and vanished at the whim of the situational cues that regulated its form and structure" (p. 590).

In this study, in line with Goffman (1959), I see self as a product of an identity situated in a particular sociocultural context. Specifically, when my participants are situated in a Khmer speaking context with their conservative elders, they would perform an identity of a Khmer youth to avoid conflict or criticism. However, when they are in a Khmer speaking context among their peers, they could either perform an identity of a Khmer or that of a Westerner youth. Whatever results from these alteration of identities is their selves in those situated contexts.

Acquiring Khmer and Khmerness

I was born during the ruling of the Democratic Kampuchea or the Khmer Rouge, a brutal regime that was obsessed with its extreme mission to create a new society free of Western influences. Upon its successful toppling of the previous regime after years of civil war, it wasted no time in changing society to the way it deemed 'right'. As Quinn (1989, p. 181) observed:

> The goal of the new Cambodian rulers was fundamentally and drastically to change the nature of Khmer society. Cities were viewed as creations of Western influence, centers of the decadence and conspicuous consumption, and impediments to change ... By literally tearing the great bulk of the country's population from its roots and familiar patterns of work and life, the Khmer Rouge leadership intended irrevocably and irretrievably to move toward a new egalitarian agricultural society.

According to Ringer (2000, p. 385), the Khmer Rouge revered the medieval empire of the Khmers that had built the great temple of Angkor Watt and considered that period and its ways of life as culturally pure from 'all modern (foreign) things as well as ideas'. Ringer also noted that the regime intended to exist in total isolation and self-reliance. As a result, the Khmer Rouge permitted only one class of agricultural peasants while it systematically prosecuted hundreds of thousands of Khmers who were educated. Besides the educated Khmers, many minority groups including Muslim Cham, highlander Montagnard, Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese people too were executed (Ringer 2000, p. 385).

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Despite its plan to build a classless society, the regime categorised people into different social categories; of these, two primary groups were 'base people' and 'new people' (Bogdandy, Wolfrum & Philipp 2005, p. 134). Base people were those who lived in the territory before 1975 and 'new people' were those who were evacuated from cities and towns. In many places, the old people were treated slightly better than the new ones because they had originally been peasants in rural areas. My parents were among the base people who were arranged into marriages by the new regime shortly after they came to power. They gave birth to me a year later and my sister the next. Being base people who were used to hard work, my parents and their parents and families were able to survive the regime and their cruelty without the death of a family member.

Khmer language plays various important roles along with other cultural messages, rituals, and practices in shaping the Khmers' identity. Khmer people, particularly the elders, consider Khmer literacy, together with a few other things, central to being Khmer, regardless of where they live. For example, in various dialogues with several Khmer parents living in America, Smith-Hefner (1999, pp. 137–8) was told that:

> [Male, age 39] I want my daughter to know our culture and our race, as Cambodian people, to be able to identify themselves as Khmer. If my daughters grow up and someone asks them, 'What nationality are you?' sometimes I am afraid they will say, 'I don't know if I am American or Cambodian or *cham* (Khmer Muslim)!' So they needed to know their language and identity.

> [Male, age 31] My son must learn to read and write Khmer, because we are Cambodian. When he grows up and his American friends ask him, 'Where are you from?' and he says, 'I'm from Cambodia—my father's from Cambodia'. And then if they ask, 'Can you speak Cambodian? Can you write Cambodian?' if he can't, that's a terrible thing.

'These parents feel, as Khmer do in general, that to be Khmer is to speak Khmer. Language and literacy remain critical elements in Khmer identity' (Smith-Hefner 1999, pp. 137–8). This issue is addressed in the present Cambodian constitution; the Cambodian law on nationality passed in 1996 clearly highlights the relatedness of Khmer literacy, Khmer identity and Khmer traditions and customs. It specifies that any foreigners may be qualified for applying for Khmer citizenship if they know 'Khmer language, Khmer script, and … Khmer history. In this sense, the

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new law clearly suggests that the social values adopted by the Khmer Rouge were un-Khmer in that they attempted to change the timelessness and changelessness of the Khmer culture while executing anyone who was found to be educated.

During the time of the revitalisation of Khmer culture after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, I was old enough to communicate fluently in Khmer and was thus made aware as early as possible by my elders of my Khmer being and becoming. This was done through direct teaching during after-dinner storytelling. Mostly, I was told about the horrors that the Khmer Rouge had brought upon its own people and country. I learnt that the Khmer Rouge was *thmil* ('atheistic', see also Chandler 1991, p. 212; Houn 2012, p. 162; Martin 1994, p. 140) and that they did not deserve to be Khmer. It was then that my elders would tell me about how to be Khmer and how to behave accordingly. At the age of six, I was sent to school. I learnt Khmer script, history and *chbabs* (codes of conducts), as well as sociocultural and traditional values. Cambodian schools were known to be 'institutions that were respected as places where children were taught not only to read and write but also to learn culturally appropriate behaviors that would make [the students] good parents and citizens in the future' (Welaratna 1999, p. 25).

In addition to schooling, my Khmer being was further informed through my participation in and exposure to the sociocultural and religious values and practices, within both my family and society. As Steinberg (1959, p. 7) noted, to be a Khmer, one needs to live in accordance with the hierarchical social order, an integral and natural part of society that strongly emphasises gender roles and differences (Ledgerwood, cited in Derks 2008, p. 12). Fuderich (2007, p. 29) observed that:

> The hierarchy of authority within the families is determined by age and gender. Generally, the husband has control over decision making and assumes absolute power over his family's affairs. Females usually occupy lower status than males but they hold key positions that include taking care of the family's finances, maintaining harmony among both sides of family or Kin, and taking care of the family members' well being. These matriarchal duties are passed down from mother to daughter.

To navigate the hierarchical social orders, I learnt from an early age the importance of face-saving. Brinkley (2011, p. 223) underlined that, 'for Cambodians … few things are more important than saving face, [an act of] protecting personal dignity'. 'Cambodians sustain and strongly encourage the culture of face-saving'

(Sovatha et al. 2007, p. 194). For so long, this practice could not be 'attenuated' by '[]either knowledge []or the coming of the modern world' (Martin 1994, p. 14).

The practice of saving face begins with properly greeting and correctly addressing one's family members, relatives and acquaintances. Apparently, strangers do not exist in Cambodian culture because the words used to address them are the same as those used with family members. For example, *Oum* is someone who was older than one's parents, either male or female, related or not. By addressing a person as *Oum*, one knows where one belongs in the social hierarchical order and thus how to behave towards and pay respect to that person, which is the same way one does with my one's own blood-related *Oum*. Magocsi (1999, p. 299) observed that for Cambodian refugees in Canada, 'terms for family-based relationships and recognition of differences in status are used within the extended family and among friends, as well as in more formalized, community settings'.

In addition to Khmer literacy and practices, Buddhism and Khmer social hierarchy, I was brought up to be as culturally 'proper' as my parents and elders deemed right. When I behaved improperly, I was usually physically punished by my mother if what I did was not very serious (e.g. not carefully looking after my younger siblings or helping with the house chores) and by my father if it was serious (e.g. skipping school, being rude or inconsiderate). As a result, I grew up feeling afraid of my father because his punishments did result in me being hospitalised or bedridden for days in pain.

Because we were poor, we hardly spent any quality time together doing something fun. In addition to being physically punished every time I did something wrong, I never felt my parental love. The feeling was made worse because my parents never bothered to tell me they loved me. Only through reading English texts did I learn that:

> Cambodian culture does not generally promote overt displays of affection between parent and child … Cambodians view raising children to be proper as one of the most important of parental duties; hence, they tend to express their love and concern for their children through instruction in and admonishment of behavior. (Lay 2004, p. 228)

Despite feeling unloved, I had to bear in mind that *meh ov mean kun thgun* (mother and father had heavy *kun*) on us because they endured the hardships of pregnancy, the pains of *chlong tunle* ('crossing the river', a metaphor for giving birth;

PM White 2002), and the exhaustion and difficulties of raising and providing for us. They also had the obligation to find us a spouse, pay for our marriages, share some of their property with us, and ensure we lived together well. All these duties incurred great *kun* that we children would owe for the rest of our lives. When still young, we paid this *kun* by obeying and honouring them; eventually, we would provide for them when they grew old. It used to be common for a son to become a monk for a period of time to honour properly and *song kun* (return the good deeds) to his parents. For a daughter, maintaining her good reputation and submitting to her parents' marriage arrangement is a way to repay them. As Magocsi (1999, p. 300) explained, 'parents want a daughter-in-law who is respectful and has a good reputation—it is important that no rumours exist about her dating other boys'. Once married, we continued to honour and *song kun* them by investing effort in making the marriage they arranged work; otherwise, we would have caused them to lose face in society. Normally, a young woman's marriage is arranged when she is in her late teens or early twenties. 'Khmer parents therefore often marry their daughters young, sometimes just past sixteen, when they can leave school' (Magocsi 1999, p. 300). Later than that, she would risk being a spinster. Both spinsters and widows are a shame to their families and are vulnerable to neighbours' gossip and criticism, a 'neighbourhood watch' way the Khmer communities employ to ensure that cultural values are well-maintained among community members. The same applies to bachelors and widowers, although not as severely.

Having been born a son, I carried on the family's 'line'. Unlike what is normally practiced in a Chinese family, my surname could be my father's first name, not necessarily his last name or that of his elders. Obviously, the actual bloodline was more important than the name that represented it. As a son, I was taught early that I was going to be the head of my own family one day. When I was of age, I would have some freedom to suggest my future spouse, but my parents were to make the final decision. If they disapproved of my choice, I would have to abandon 'love' obediently and marry whomever they choose for me instead.

Acquiring English and 'Englishness'

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My Khmerness was as 'pure' as it could practically be when I was growing up. However, when I began to learn and practice English during the time of globalisation, my Khmerness was becoming 'contaminated'.

The 'epiphany' (Denzin 1989, p. 33) or the 'turning point' (McAdams & Bowman 2001; McAdams, Josselson & Lieblich 2001) presented in this study evolved from the use of English literacy in Cambodia. Examining literacy practice through the lens of new literacy studies (Barton & Hamilton 1998; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic 2000; Street 2003), literacy is viewed not only as the ability to read and write; rather, it is the ways in which people use reading and writing in social situations to serve different social purposes (Bell 1997; Luna, Solsken & Kutz 2000). In this context, literacy is situated (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic 2000) and informs the construction and performances of sociocultural identity (Bell 1997; Ha 2007, 2008, 2009; Lambert 1975; Riley 2007).

Gee (n.d., p. 2) suggested the importance of defining 'literacy' in both social and cultural terms. He argued that literacy is a social and cultural achievement and therefore needs to be 'understood and studied in its full range of contexts—not just cognitive—but social, cultural, historical, and institutional, as well'. Meanwhile, Bell (1997) suggested that the meaning of literacy needs to consider those practices beyond language, turning attention on literacy away from a singular form to multiple literacies or situated literacy. Gee (2008, p. 42) referred to the multiple literacies as 'literacy practices'. In these literacy practices, individuals possess 'varied repertoires of literacies' (Luna, Solsken & Kutz 2000, p. 278). These views of literacy emphasise situating reading and writing within social contexts (Barton 2007, p. 24; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic 2000), which is the context within which this investigation viewed my own and my participants' literacy and literacy practices.

Through the lens of new literacy studies, language can be viewed as a social action constituting 'a social practice with value and meaning only in and through the discourse of which it is a part' (Gee 2008, p. 182). Gee (2008, p. 90, original emphasis) argued that language is composed of many sub-languages, which he called 'social languages', that 'stem from the fact that any time we act or speak, we must accomplish two things: (1) "we must make clear *who* we are", and (2) "we must make clear *what* we are doing"'. Gee problematises these two 'things' with relation to the social and situated contexts, arguing that one can have different identities in different

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contexts and the same thing that one says or does can also mean different things in different contexts. Given the relatedness of language and culture, Pica (1994) has posed the question 'how necessary to learning a language is the learner's cultural integration?'

A New Literacy Acquisition at a Turning Point in Life

I started learning English sporadically around the year 1989 in Site 2, a refugee camp in Thailand where my parents sought refuge from the civil war that continued after the Khmer Rouge again became guerrillas. I first started studying English at the same time as my family was experiencing tough times and changes. In 1990, I learnt my parents' marriage was breaking down. Secretly, I dreaded the day I have to choose to live with either of them.
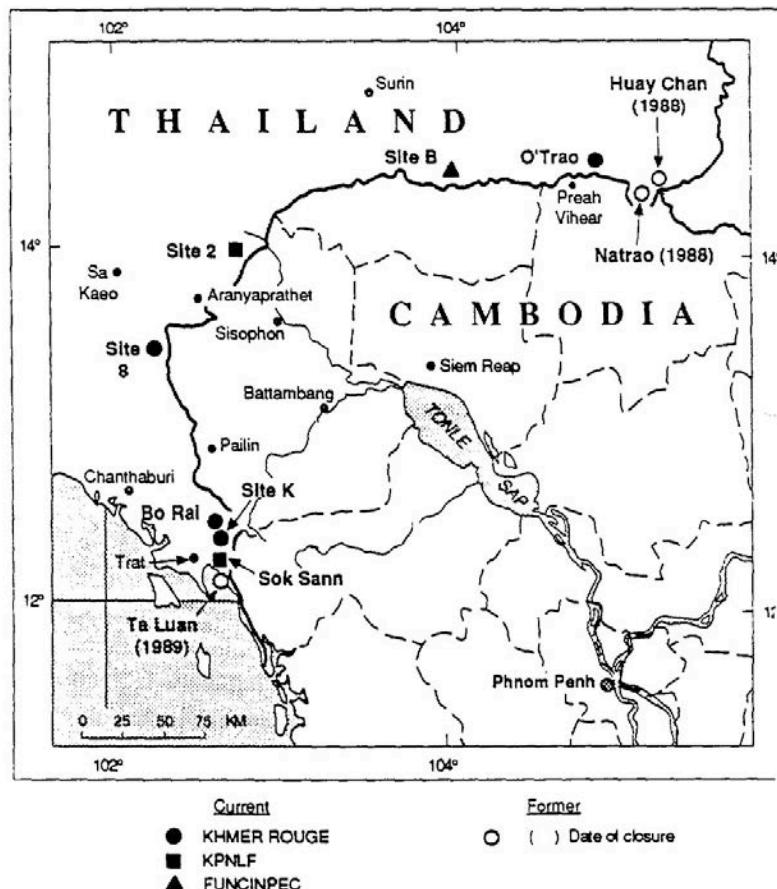
Figure 2: United Nations Border Relief Operation Camps 1985–1989 (Thai/Cambodia Border Refugee Camps 1975–1999)

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In February 1992, we were all repatriated to our home province, Battambang, a western province bordering Thailand. We lived in the provincial town with our father's uncle. As we anticipated, our father did not live with us. He was working in another province, having another affair. We were left to fend for ourselves. As newcomers after nearly a decade of being refugees, we did not have much. We were poor and life was hard.

I could tell that our mother did her best to be a good wife for our father. She did all the housework and looked after my three siblings and me. She even helped make a living by raising pigs to sell as well as brewing rice wine to distribute to local grocery stores. When our father could not join us for a meal, she would keep a good portion of the food for him before she allowed us to eat. Whenever we had little fish, which she normally fried after salting them, she would remove the heads and eat them with rice. She would keep all the fleshy parts of the fish for our father and us. 'I like eating the heads', she would tell us. I used to believe her. 'Don't throw away the heads of any fish', I would remind my younger siblings. 'Keep them for Mum. She loves them, you know?'

When our father left us the second time, our mother decided to let him go. To survive, we did everything we could. Our mother was undoubtedly a great mother. She knew the importance of education. She wanted all of us to continue studying even when she could barely afford it. 'I can always borrow some money with ease', she would assure us in a pretending-to-be-carefree tone. She kept reminding us that she would have nothing for us to inherit. 'I won't be able to afford anything for you to inherit', she kept reminding us. 'Study as hard and as high as you can. Knowledge would be the only thing you will ever inherit from my hard work'. As the eldest son, I took her words seriously.

I knew myself it was hard making a living from the dirt and the earth. It was not easy having to wake up at five o'clock to carry at least a hundred buckets of water to water all the vegetables. The watering was labour intensive. I had to carry the water on a stick, called *dong rek*, whose two ends were attached to strings tied to two 20-litre buckets. The watering had to be done twice a day—the second before sunset.

Even with me helping her, our mother could earn only around 10,000 riel (approximately AU$2.5) a day. It was barely enough with all the daily expenses and

our studies. However, in her commitment to our study, she never said no when we asked for money to pay for private classes, including those for the English language. At that time in Cambodia, as is still the case today, attending private classes was essential for learning anything in the public schools. The delivery of the schools' teaching and curricula was far from serious. All the core subject teachers offered private classes to generate extra income. To attract students, the teachers taught much better in their private classes than they did in the public schools. Those who attended their tutoring could easily pass the school exams, for the same things were retaught in a more attentive manner.

Practicing English and 'Englishness'

In 1995, I finished high school. I dreamed of continuing my study at a university. However, I knew my mother could never afford it.

Considering our living condition, I wanted to quit study to help my mother. However, she thought differently. Obviously, she did not want me to follow in her footsteps. She said I would end up living her life if I did not go to a university. She told me to look for my father to seek his support for my higher education because it was beyond her ability. I did.

I left my mother and three younger siblings to look for my father. I found him in Svay Rieng, a remote eastern province bordering Vietnam. My father was running a non-government organisation there. With his financial help, I came to Phnom Penh to continue my university education. I lived alone, renting a small room on the top floor of an old two-storey building about two kilometres from Phnom Penh's central market. Wanting to fulfil my father's dream, I took the entrance exam for medical school. I failed and decided to stay on to prepare myself for another exam the following year.

During the year of waiting for a second chance, I studied English intensively in an American language school. I found the experience very enjoyable. I learnt English with American teachers and made many local and international friends at the school. Being away from both my parents, I 'hung out' with my friends most of the time. Naturally, English was our language of choice when we communicated, both in school and outside. In my free time, I read newspapers and books in English. I

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listened to English songs on the local radio stations. I watched and became passionate about Hollywood films and regularly rented video compact discs from the local store to watch at home. I was feeling intoxicated by English. I loved the feeling that came to me whenever I spoke in this Western tongue and people around me give me admiring looks. The pride, confidence, and self-esteem that I felt were the first indication that I had found my self.

In 1996, I no longer wanted to fulfil my father's plans for my future. I decided to do a bachelor's degree in English language because I had a strong passion for it. I passed the examination. I was thrilled. At university, I continued using the English language as I desired, speaking Khmer only with those who could not understand English. When I was in my third year, I obtained a job teaching English to young beginners in a small language school. To do it well, I read and researched more extensively about what I was to teach, both content and context related. I wanted to teach my students in the ways I always wanted to be taught. That is, I needed to know more about the content of the book and its related wider world than what I had been taught, using all modern technologies available (e.g. the Internet, videos and cassette tape players). I was able to make the otherwise irrelevant and uninteresting lesson very appealing. The students very much enjoyed this way of teaching. Soon I was one of the most popular teachers in the school. In turn, it further motivated me to try even harder. The processes, while familiarising me with more English texts and genres, also increasingly engaged me and nourished my interest in English literacy and practices. In less than a year, I was confident enough to upgrade my teaching position from this small school to a much larger, international one.

I became even prouder when I was offered a full-time job as a teacher of English in an Australian language school upon my university graduation. It was a good job in a well-respected education centre run by an Australian organisation. Being self-financed and almost completely free from parental supervision and familial elders' control, I was able to pursue my true self. My English literacy and practices went hand in hand with my 'hanging out' with new friends following a new lifestyle, in ways I had never done before—listening to English songs, watching and talking about Hollywood movies, reading and discussing world news from English-language sources and, more importantly, partying, drinking, chasing the latest fashions,

technologies and gadgets. I soon forgot all my past and present troubles with my family. Never before had I found life so exciting and worth living.

Later that year, however, my father decided to remarry and settle down. He also planned to move to Phnom Penh and rent a big house in which we would live together. The changes were going to destroy my nearly complete freedom as a single young adult who, for the previous four years, had lived with almost total autonomy. I had grown used to the absence of house rules, curfews and the need to seek permission about where I went and with whom.

Influenced by the Western concept of dating through English-language novels and movies, I was attracted to a different principle of romance from that of the Khmer. Arranged marriages based on what elders decided did not appeal to me. The love I sought had to be mutual and built on understanding and compatibility, which could only be established through dating and knowing each other well enough before 'walking down the aisle'. Then I met a woman whom I really liked. Before I let myself fall in love with her, I did what all 'proper' Khmer sons do in such a situation—I sought approval from my parents first. Being closer to my mother, I telephoned her and told her the news. However, with my father, I behaved differently. I sent him an SMS instead. I began the message in English, addressing him as 'Dad'. My father's English was very good. He had learnt it in the refugee camp and had been using it as his official language in his work ever since. 'How are you and everyone over there?' I went on. 'I am fine here. I have some news to tell you in sending you this message. I am seeing someone her in Siem Reap. I don't plan to rush to a marriage anytime soon, but I felt you need to know. I hope you approve of our getting to know each other.' Having read and revised it a few times, I pressed the 'Send' button and waited nervously. It was around ten o'clock in the morning.

There was no reply. This made me anxious. I could not enjoy my lunch and kept checking the phone. I was hopeful for an SMS. If the answer were positive, it would be short enough to fit in an SMS. If not, he would telephone. Six weeks passed. On a Sunday in late October 2000, my father telephoned again. 'Hello, Dad!' I said into my Nokia mobile phone. 'Your [step]mum and I have visited her hometown and met her parents and family', Dad replied without even a hello. 'We found out everything we needed to know about her. We disapprove of her job as a "hotel girl" and her family. You must stop seeing her and quit your job there. We want you to

come back to live with us here if you choose us over her.' Just as abruptly as he had started, he hung up.

Three years later, I won a scholarship to do a master's degree in English-language teaching in Manila, the Philippines. In 2005, I finished and returned to Cambodia. Later that year, I married the woman I had been dating. I moved in with her family. Of course, all this was without my father and his young wife's consent. As a result, they cut off our familial relationships through their lack of support of my marriage, both in terms of their approval and financially. When I took my wife to visit them after the wedding, my wife was not spoken to and I was only given a short response to everything I said or asked. It was obvious they did not want to see us.

The end of 2005 was also the end of my relationship with my father, his stepwife and their two sons. Since then, whenever we ever saw each other, we pretended we did not know each other. I discussed the relevance of this life event to the focus of my thesis in the following section.

The Changes

> Teachers of the English word,
> we are tossed about,
> defined by others,
> insecure
> yet whole.
> We are special,
> knowledge experts, moral guides
> and yet the public's tails.
> We have access to the world,
> we belong,
> yet seem foreignised,
> unselectively
> Westernised.
> We are not allowed to be human,
> to fall in love
> (with students),
> yet we need to live, to change.
> We are nobody in this world of Others
> yet not the shadow of native English teachers
> we light the way for our own.
> We are the daughters-in-law of a hundred families
> And proudly ourselves,
> growing.

(Ha 2008, p. 1)

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Over the years that I actively acquired and practised my English literacy, I noticed many of my Cambodian sociocultural values becoming Westernised. The more I practised English literacy, the more I learnt about and adopted Western cultural values, many of which even provided answers to some of the questions about my past experiences. For example, influenced by the Western concepts of individualism and love, I finally applied these ideas to arrive at an understanding of the reasons my father had left my mother without divorcing her properly or legally. He had simply walked away.

My English literacy and practices helped me to understand that, when love died, it was all right to move on, to keep looking for the right person, and to start another relationship when love was found again. All these understandings led me to accept my stepmother and even call her 'Mum'. It was also the main reason behind my commitment to dating in order to know my potential partner better before marrying her so that I could be sure I truly loved her and that she loved me, and this way, I would never end up hurting her the way my father hurt my mother. When my father and his new wife did not appear to understand this, I had to distance myself and my family from them so that neither of them could harm my family in any way. It was my ultimate sacrifice for my new self and life.

My English literacy and practices continued to inform me on how to lead my family and bring up my son in a way that was not typical among Khmer husbands and fathers. For example, since I had been married, I had prioritised my family over my friends. We have almost always been together, whether socialising or spending quality time on our own. 'Can't you do anything without bringing your wife along anymore now?' some of my friends would tease. 'Soth is scared of his wife', others would comment. 'Forget about inviting him to our social drinks or partying.' I usually ignored such sarcastic remarks, forgiving them for being who they were. I never forgot to treat my wife with respect and equity, and I encouraged her to keep her job after our marriage. I wanted her to be strong and independent. Prior to making any decision for the family—from buying a car or a house to having a baby—we would discuss it together. We also shared our responsibilities for household chores. When my son learnt to write for the first time, I was proud to read what he wrote. I learnt to be content with his being when he appeared to be unable to outgrow his passion for dressing up in girls' dresses, high heels and make-up, complaining from time to time

about how he wished he was a girl. I learnt to let him be whomever he wanted or was born to be.

Figure 3: Love is to show; my son, a month away from his sixth birthday, liked to express both his feelings and his being (Photo: The author 2012)

Through all these choices, I was being un-Khmer in many ways. First, I refused to have an arranged marriage, committed at all cost to finding my own true love. Second, even though I had been brought up knowing that Khmers' 'proper' ways of being and becoming had no room for personal self, love or ambition, and that they were only born to repay the karma from past lives and fulfil their duties to their parents, their family, tradition and culture, I chose to believe in the scientific explanation of my conception. I also chose to be who I thought I should best be. Finally, my choice in this thesis topic and methodology was arguably very uncommon. Critically examining my own culture went against a Khmer saying that taught us Khmer not to *hek pus oy ka-ek*, or tear open one's abdomen in the sight of a crow.

Chapter 5: 'Leaves Never Fall Far from Their Tree'

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My parents, particularly my dad, usually reminded me that having a daughter is like having a toilet in front of our house.

Before, I never dared to talk back to my dad, but now I do. I told him what I wanted to do for myself. I told him about Western children and what they can do.

Since I have learnt and used English, I have become braver. I never used to talk much and only communicated with those I knew well. But that no longer happened; I loved making new friends now.

I love my parents, but I don't want them to control my life … I told them that in the Western countries, when the children are grown-ups, they have their own rights to decide for their life. I shared with them about the Western cultures quite frequently and they seemed to understand better. Now they understand better

When she was interviewed in 2011, Leang had been learning English for more than 10 years. With it, she had achieved many great things that she would not have otherwise. She became the first woman in her entire clan to have a career. She had been a part-time teacher of English and presently a lecturer of this same language in a private university. There is a Khmer proverb that predicts that a leaf never falls far from its tree. However, Leang was no ordinary leaf.

In her opinion, her English literacy and practices were like the wind that blew on her as a falling leaf. Although it was not a smooth process, generally she was happy about being blown away to fall far from the tree. She was pleased with whatever changes came with her English knowledge and her use of it. Asked if she regretted learning and using it, Leang very promptly replied, 'No!', before firmly shaking her head and repeating herself 'No. No. No…'.

'Clothes Make the Woman'

Vain trifles as they may seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us.

(Woolf 1928, p. 111)

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> Cambodian parents pay so much attention to their daughters' clothing for an important cultural reason … proper Khmer women are not supposed to flaunt their physique in a way that American clothing enables women to do. When a daughter is not properly attired, friends and neighbors or even strangers gossip about her.
>
> (Chan 2004, p, 214)

As 'culture bearers' par excellence in Cambodian society (Ledgerwood, cited in Derks 2008, p. 12), Khmer women are expected to be proper. This includes how they dress. They are told to be careful not to flaunt their bodies, especially the lower halves. *Sampot*, 'an unstitched piece of cloth approximately one meter wide and 2.5 meters long' (P Edwards 2001, p. 389) used as a wrap-around skirt, is ideal for this purpose. It is a typical and popular traditional garment worn among the Khmers, particularly women, so much so that it has become an important Cambodian national marker of visual identity for Khmer women (P Edwards 2001, p. 389).

Nevertheless, since the mid-1990s, an increasing number of young Khmer women have been dressing in Western fashions and changing their hair colour to blonde or brunette. Beautifying the body in this way is deemed 'improper' and against the *chbab srey*. For example, many high schools in Phnom Penh prohibit female students from wearing long hair, short skirts or highlighted hair (Mey 2013). In addition, in the university in which I was teaching, the library banned any students in 'inappropriate attire' from using its facilities. On the door, a sign with pictures of young women wearing shorts or miniskirts or revealing body parts was displayed with a caption that read: These types of clothing are not allowed in the SAC..

Making Sense of Leang's Stories

When I first met Leang, her way of dressing gave me the impression that she was very liberal and very much her own self. She came to the first interview on a Sunday wearing a loose zebra-patterned T-shirt with a very broad neck showing off both her shoulders and a pair of tight and extremely short jeans with tattered hems, not because of old age but as a style or fashion. She did not seem to care much at all if people gossiped about her clothes.

Leang was a confident young woman in her early twenties. Her hair was cut to around shoulder length. She styled it the way most modern young women of her age

did at the time, shorter at the sides and longer at the back. She also had dyed it light brown with certain parts highlighted. Her small dark-brown eyes with the slight epicanthic folds of a typical Chinese ancestry were adorned with a pair of light-pink-framed glasses. She later revealed that she no longer liked the ways Cambodian women were supposed to dress. 'I like Western fashions a lot', she said. 'I don't like Cambodian fashions at all. 'It's my style. It is something different from others. That's how people identify me', she continued. 'It is fast, comfortable and easy.' Choices of attire are one of the many processes of individuation (Le & Stockdale 2005, p. 682). How Leang dressed revealed not only her preference for personal expression of self, but it also showed her desire to deviate from her family's expectations, which in turn affected both her life outcome and how she was perceived by the others in her community (Eagly et al. 1991; Mulford et al. 1998; Ricciardelli 2011).

Reflecting back, she realised her personal choices in clothes and jewellery began to emerge when she found herself a part-time job as a teacher of English. She no longer minded much when her relatives criticised her for her 'Western' appearance. 'Dad was criticised because none of his daughters look Cambodian anymore', recalled Leang. 'With our red hair, we all look like Westerners. Dad was uncomfortable with the criticism. He gave us some money to dye our hair black again. I obeyed him, but a day or two later I dyed it red again.'

Leang also dared to talk back to her parents, defending what she called her right to choose for herself. 'Before, I never dared to talk back to my dad', said Leang. 'But now I do. I told him what I wanted to do for myself.' And she was also more successful in her study and job. She had even many more friends. 'Unlike before, it is easier now to make new friends', said Leang. 'In English, it is easier to start a conversation with strangers.'

For more than a year in the final years of her bachelor's degree in English-language education at a locally well-known institute of foreign languages, Leang worked part-time as a teacher of English in a small private school. She was the third daughter of a lower-middle-class family. Her parents, having had enough of working with the dirt during the Pol Pot regime, were determined to settle down in Phnom Penh after their marriage in the early 1980s. Her parents had decided to move to the city even though it could not offer much then. Just a few years earlier, it had been nothing more than a deserted concrete jungle. From 17 April 1975 to 7 January 1979,

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the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh had been left to rot (Osborne 2008, p. 159). The people had been evacuated to the countryside to live and work as farmers. The old ways of life had been abolished—education, religion, currency and socialisation had been deemed unnecessary. When the Khmer Rouge was defeated, rubbish and the debris of broken buildings were littered all around. Corpses of old rusty motorbikes, cars and trucks were scattered here and there along most main roads. It was still the same three years after the collapse of the genocide regime (Osborne 2008, p. 153). There was no electricity, running water or even a stable market yet. However, despite such terrible conditions, Leang's parents were sure that things would not stay in that condition forever. They knew from their past experiences that only the city could promise a better future for their family. Her parents settled down with hardly anything, struggling to make end meets.

Leang's Family

> Cambodia stands encapsulated within two dominant, and somewhat contradictory, narratives. On the one hand, it is commonly suggested that an era of civil war and genocide inflicted irrevocable damage and that Pol Pot's attempt to return to 'year zero' annihilated, even erased, the country's culture, whereas for others, Cambodian culture is being successfully restored, rejuvenated and, perhaps, even enjoying a renaissance.
>
> (Ollier & Winter 2006, p. 1)

The Early 1980s was the time Cambodia fixed its family foundation, repaired its agriculture and economics, and cautiously restored its traditions and culture, including religion and education (North 2008)—'cautiously' because the new government was seeking its own support from the people. They did so through 'fuel[ing] anger against Pol Pot', Khmer Rouge's leader, and the other leaders from the past regime who were fighting for their return into power (Gottesman 2003, p. 218). It was also struggling for its legitimacy in the world. By the end of the decade, Cambodia, along with Vietnam, Lao and Burma, were known to have been through 'four "lost decades" of economic development', which resulted in unfavourably low living standards for its people compared with the 'fast-growing outward-looking East Asian economies' (Leung, Bingham & Davies 2010, p. 3).

Throughout the 1980s, Cambodian internal conflicts continued despite the collapse of the Khmer Rouge. The country was divided into four different factions (Bartu 1999), each with its own political government, management system and foreign supports. Because it was not easy to earn a living, many Cambodians became smugglers and illegal loggers along the border with Thailand. They risked their lives for their families' survival. Leang's father was one of these. He left his family in Phnom Penh and waded through the landmine-infested forest to work as an illegal logger in Koh Kong, a province bordering Thailand and the sea. Leang was still very young at the time; her brother was a little baby. With her father gone, the atmosphere in the family became unpleasantly quiet. The first few days were especially hard. He would be absent for many long months or even a whole year before coming back to visit them. 'Sometimes Mum would leave the five of us behind to take care of each other while she went to visit him and to get the money that he had earnt to support our living', Leang said, looking down at her coffee cup while trying to control her emotions. Without her father around, her mother worked harder to care for her children. Leang's mother had never had a job. Her father would not allow her to work. 'There is more than enough you can do at home already', he would say.

I was privileged enough to be invited by Leang to meet her family over a dinner. Both Leang's parents looked Chinese—fair skin, small eyes and straight black hair. Leang's father was tall and fit. As a mechanic, he worked fast and looked strong for a man in his mid-50s. He held the highest power and made all important family decisions. He preferred running his own business, no matter how small, to working for others. He did not want his wife to work in addition to being a full-time homemaker. This attitude is common among traditional patriarchal families in South-East Asian countries such as Vietnam and Cambodia: women have lower-status positions than males and are expected not to be career women but only homemakers (Boman & Edwards 1984; Nguyen & Williams 1989).

Leang's mother was a cheerful woman, about the same age or a few years younger than her husband. Her skin was a bit darker than her husband's, suggesting stronger Cambodian blood running through her veins. She was a bit plumper than her husband too but no less agile. She had a loud, clear voice and always smiled readily. Her hair was cut well above her shoulders, typical for women her age.

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When UNTAC personnel arrived in 1992 to organise and run a democratic election for Cambodia, English literacy became popular. It was widely practised in most official and business settings. In response to the market, English schools and classes mushroomed everywhere, in both cities and the countryside. It continued to grow, and by 2010, its presence was 'pervasive' (Moore & Bounchan 2010, p. 114). All of a sudden, there was local and foreign investment, modern cars, FM radios, local and cable TV networks and all sorts of opportunities. As North (2008, p. 46) explained, 'with the advent of UNTAC personnel preparing Cambodia for the 1993 election, Phnom Penh became gripped by a strange new phenomenon; for the first time in its history, the capital was awash with money'. Wealthy people could show off their possessions and interests openly and freely. Personal identity was explicitly revealed through people's choice of clothes, hairstyles, music and the like. Bars, nightclubs, karaoke and other entertainment businesses sprang up like seedlings after the first rain.

Freedom and a free market brought other undesirable outcomes. Every day, newspapers, radio and television delivered the news of crimes being committed throughout the country. Kidnapping for ransom was common. People, both rich and poor, lived in fear. The former were worried about losing their money, while the latter were afraid of mistaken-identity kidnapping, which would invariably result in torture, rape or even death. The insecurity resulted in Leang's eldest sister, in her late teens, giving up her study just a few days before her grade nine exams into senior high school. 'There were many kidnappings and abductions then', said Leang. 'My sister was one of the prettiest girls in our neighbourhood. Many pretty girls like her had fallen victim to kidnapping', she added. It worried everyone and they lived in fear.

When her father came home to visit them, he was oblivious to the situation. However, he soon learnt about the risk from a friend. Leang said her father came straight home that day and without inquiring further into the case or finding a better solution, in his most serious tone, he declared his verdict to her mother and her eldest sister, 'No more going out of the house from today onward, not even to school. If you disobey me, I will disown you'. For four years, Leang's eldest sister lived like a prisoner in her own home. To lessen the risk, she was discouraged to go out at all, not even when accompanied by a relative. With her father working away from home, her mother agreed it was the best solution. She would not risk her daughter's safety,

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because she alone would be held responsible by her husband if anything happened to her.

Three years into the home imprisonment situation, her father came back from the forest. He decided to stay for good. He himself had just narrowly escaped what appeared to have been either a kidnapping or a robbery while he was logging. 'He was lucky that night. He hadn't slept in the forest as usual. He had spent the night in a nearby village. In the morning, upon his return to the worksite, a worker told him a group of men had come looking for him at the camp the night before', said Leang. 'He immediately knew his time in the forest was over. He came back home and never went back', she continued.

Despite his years of logging in the forest, they had barely been able to save anything. Because he was the only earner, the income was only enough to feed the many mouths at home. He had to start from scratch again, this time as a car mechanic apprentice. He worked hard and paid full attention to his job because he had a plan. In just two years, he became skilled enough to open a small garage on the ground floor of their house. A year later, the marriage of Leang's eldest sister was arranged. Her safety problem had been solved. In Cambodian society, families without the presence of men were considered highly vulnerable to violation and crime from opportunists. Leang's mother must have been very strong to bring up four daughters, two of whom were of marriageable age, and a young son. For four years, she did this all by herself. This situation appeared to have had a profound influence on Leang's perception of womanhood later in life. It helped her to see the differences in Western society through her English literacy and practices.

Before the Wind Blew

From birth to around 15 years of age, Leang learnt almost everything about a woman's being and becoming from her parents, particularly her mother and eventually her eldest sister. Leang and her sister spent most of their time helping out with the household chores. Leang helped with the cooking, washing clothes and dishes, shopping for food, managing the house, and even taking care of her younger brother and sister, usually after she came back from school. She grew so close to her mother that she said she would never leave her. With her limited exposure to the

outside world and the media, Leang's early perceptions of a woman's identity evolved largely around the roles that her mother and her elder sisters played at home. Every day, her mother arose from bed around five o'clock to clean the house, cook breakfast, wash clothes and feed the youngest ones. At around eight o'clock, she would head straight to the market to buy food for the day. She had to ensure lunch was ready by eleven-thirty, the time the children and her husband, before he went logging, returned home from school and work. At around four, she would start preparing dinner so that they could dine before it became dark, which was around six or six-thirty. More washing and tidying up would follow. There seemed to be endless things to do around the house. Even with her help and that of her elder sisters, her mother always appeared to be too busy. 'My second eldest sister never helped with the housework much. She hated it', said Leang. 'She would usually make me do all the housework on her behalf. As her younger sister, I had no choice but to do it for her too', she added. 'I was not happy. I still did it but I would be complaining a lot about the unfairness.'

Witnessing the roles her mother played at home, Leang used to think that such was all a woman had to do in life. She used to think women were lucky. They did not have to study much or earn money. They only worried about easy things such as taking care of the family, doing the housework and managing the money their husbands gave them. Leang barely understood that housework was hard, never ending and boring. She supposed it was the men like her father who were doing the hard work. Every day, her father had to go out under the burning hot sun, to meet and deal with all sorts of people. He had even risked his life working in the forest to make money for her mother to manage. Every time he came home in the evening she used to observe how exhausted he looked. He would go straight to his favourite chair and turn on the radio. Food and drink had to be served soon or he would be complaining, 'Why is food not ready yet? What else do you do at home?' 'Dad never touched the housework', said Leang. According to her father, housework was only for women. Not only did he never help with such chores, he would not allow his son to help either. 'It brings bad luck when a man does a woman's job, you know?' he would remind his wife and daughters repeatedly if he saw his only son helping with anything at home. 'Mum never opposed Dad. I think she thought the same', Leang added.

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Besides what Leang learnt from her family about 'a woman's duties', as a born Buddhist, she was raised to believe that good children have to obey and respect their parents and their elders:

> Proper Cambodian behavior for Cambodian children … includes honoring their parents and caring for them as they grow old. Children must marry when and whom their parents choose, must obey their parents without question, and follow their advice in all matters. (Mortland 1994, p. 13)

Her mother also taught her other codes of conduct for a woman. 'Whatever you do, do it appropriately, not too noisily or too quickly', her mother usually reminded her whenever she played, spoke or did something rather loudly. Cambodian *chbab srey* (codes of conduct for women) prescribed that 'when a woman walks one cannot hear the sound of her silk *sampot* rustling' (Ledgerwood, cited in P Edwards 2001, p. 390). Leang was also taught to be continually aware of potential shame she could bring upon herself and the family. For example, she should not dress in a way that could be viewed as sexually provocative. She should not have a boyfriend or go out on a date. Such acts could make people in the community misjudge her and thus bring shame to her and the family. Leang's mother did her best not to let any of her daughters break the *chbab srey*. She often criticised the neighbour's daughters to her own children if she saw them going out with someone. 'That girl was disgraceful', her mother would point out to all her daughters. 'She often goes out with a man until very late in the evening. Who knows what they do out there?' she would continue, showing a facial expression of disgust and contempt.

Leang knew it was not easy being a Cambodian woman, let alone a 'proper' one. She sometimes felt it was her fault that she had been born female. Even her father did not feel proud of having daughters. 'Having a daughter is like having a toilet in front of the house', he used to remind her. 'It's never easy to look after. And if it stinks, the whole house stinks.' Perhaps that was why he never took her or her sister out anywhere if he could help it. In those rare occasions that he did, he never introduced her to any of his friends. He would ignore her completely as if she did not exist. Normally, such treatment would remove all the self-esteem from a Cambodian daughter, making her submit her life completely to her parents' and eventually her husband's decisions. However, Leang was never discouraged or disheartened by such views and treatments. Informed by her English literacy and practices, she grew up to become the opposite—more stubborn and more determined to make a change. Leang

was going to be a revolutionary. In short, Leang's old self, her early being and becoming, had been heavily governed by Cambodian cultural and traditional values, beliefs and practices handed down through the family and society. There was so much control by her parents and she grew up with very little self-confidence and esteem. 'I was very shy when I was young', Leang recalled. 'Making friends was never easy.'

She also used to lack ambition. Despite growing up in Phnom Penh, Leang never had or was expected to have a career goal or ambition. 'Mum and Dad never seem to expect anything much of us daughters at all', said Leang. 'Dad usually says, "I have the money for you to study. To study or not is your choice". It was like that. Whatever we wanted to study, he had nothing to do with it.' Leang felt that her parents merely raised all their daughters only towards the day they would be married, arranged most likely, and settle down just like her mother did. She was supposed to be content with that. As was traditionally the case in Cambodia, a daughter's destiny was already determined by fate and by her parents. Leaves are not supposed to fall far from their tree.

English Literacy Acquisition

Leang never forgot her first English lesson. One evening after dinner, when she was about 12 years old, her father told her he had enrolled her and her second eldest sister in a private English school not very far from their house. The class was one hour a day, five days a week. He did not mention why he wanted them to study English and neither she nor her sister asked him why. They were not supposed to question their parents' decisions. What all children were required to do was to follow their elders and abide by their decisions, which Leang and her sister did. The following evening, their father took them on his old motorbike and dropped them in front of the school.

It was a typical Phnom Penh four-by-16-metre flat turned into a school. They were ushered into their classroom, in which two wooden rows of fixed tables and benches were waiting. About 12 or 13 students were already there, some sitting and the rest standing. They were all about her sister's age—15 or so. An old whiteboard was hanging on the wall facing the tables, all of which looked overused. They found an empty seat and sat down quietly next to each other waiting for the teacher.

The teacher arrived a few minutes later holding nothing but a whiteboard marker. He was a young man in his late twenties, tall, fit and with tanned dark skin, his shirt tucked neatly into his trousers. He greeted his class briefly and introduced the two new students to them all. 'We have with us two new students today', he said with a smile, pointing his five fingers at Leang and her sister. 'One of them is the smallest among you all, obviously.' Everyone smiled.

Leang had no idea what level they were in or what book they were studying. She had only brought with her a notebook and a pen bag, in which there were pens of different ink colours—black, blue and red. She had also brought a pencil and an eraser. Her elder sister, who had had some English lessons before, looked very calm. This calmed her down a bit, too. Unlike her sister, Leang had never studied English previously. She knew some of the English alphabet from overhearing her sisters reviewing their lessons at home, but that was all.

The teacher wrote something on the board and everyone took out their notebooks and copied it down. She did the same, drawing each single letter in her book: D-I-C-T-A-T-I-O-N. When she came to understand what they were doing that day, her heart fell to the floor. How could she do his dictation quiz when she had never studied English before? Although she was in a panic, she did not say anything. She would do what she could. When the teacher read his first word for them to write, a young man behind her was saying all its letters aloud while he was writing them down. It was loud enough for Leang to hear and she started writing, too. Despite not having studied English before, Leang's score, thanks to the man behind her, was among the highest. After that first English lesson, Leang was motivated to catch up with the others.

Leang struggled every day to make sense of the daily English lessons. She did not complain to anyone, not even to her sister. She remembered her mother's advice. She must accept life as it was. She did not even ask the teacher when she did not understand certain parts of the lesson. Instead, she would approach her classmates. For a few months, that was how her English lessons went as she tried hard to catch up with all her classmates. Her efforts paid off and she eventually became the best student in the class almost a year later. She would achieve the highest scores in all the quizzes and tests. She found pleasure in studying English, particularly its grammar. She really enjoyed the way her teacher explained his lessons; she found them very

easy to understand. As time passed, her knowledge of the language improved, and so did her motivation. 'You are very gifted with language learning', commented her teachers after having observed her improvement. Such feedback heightened her enthusiasm even further. Being able to read some of the English words on various signs and posters along the streets and elsewhere in Phnom Penh was a source of great pride and pleasure for her.

Over the next five or six years, Leang changed her English schools often. Her first teacher with whom she learnt best moved to work in another province—Siem Reap. Used to his teaching style, Leang tried to find another teacher who taught in a similar way. It was not easy, especially with a limited budget. She could only afford the schools whose teachers mostly worked on a casual basis. She tried many other schools and teachers and drifted from one school to another. Unable to find a school and teacher she liked, she decided to take a break from studying English. She also needed more time to devote to her final year of high school. Her proficiency was at the pre-intermediate level at the time. Her reading and grammar were very good. 'My speaking and listening skills were very poor', said Leang. Never having been taught by a native speaker, Leang dreaded the idea of speaking to foreigners. She did not want to risk embarrassing herself by not understanding what they said. 'I would try to stay as far away from them as possible', Leang recalled with a laugh.

In Cambodian schools, English and French are both official foreign languages. For young students such as Leang, the choice was never clear between the two languages. Therefore, usually the parents made the decision for them. They usually enrolled their children in private classes because the teaching in schools was never serious enough to be useful. Most parents wanted their children to study English. The presence of UNTAC was somehow a warning to turn away from French. Foreign investment, tourism, English-language media and technologies were other extrinsic motivators popularising the language that had once been illegal to learn. It was now the preferred language of the new generation, overtaking its rival, French, which had been in its prime during the French protectorate years. Although Leang's father had chosen English for her, it was her own love of it that made her a successful English learner and practitioner.

The Drifting Leaf

By around 2006, Leang had had significant experience with the English literacy being practiced in Cambodia. Her family had access to cable television for the first time. Many FM radio stations were featuring various talk shows in the English language. English songs and movies were very popular among teenagers and young adults. Leang's English knowledge enabled her to be involved quite actively in the new literacy practices. She took notes in English, listened to English songs, wrote text messages and emails, chatted online with friends, and watched English-speaking television channels. She even used English to write her diary. Without her knowing it, she was becoming increasingly accustomed to certain Western ways of life and cultural values, such as, as Locke (2004) underlined, reasoning, individual rights, science and technology. Her bilingual ability enabled her to compare between Cambodian and Western cultures. This was very likely because bilingualism leads to 'increases in linguistic repertoire', which in turn correlates 'with heightened sensitivity, enhanced cultural awareness, [and] even greater cognitive flexibility' (J Edwards 2009, p. 248).

When recalling, Leang could see how her English literacy practices enhanced one aspect of her cultural awareness. She had grown to 'dislike' the traditional Cambodian ways of treating women and the fact that Cambodian women accepted them. 'It is totally gender biased', she asserted. 'Women are greatly disadvantaged compared with men', said Leang bitterly before going on to illustrate her point with an example from her family. 'Mum usually works non-stop and yet is always being blamed if anything goes wrong. I don't want to be like Mum', she revealed. Driven by these ambitions, by her final year at high school, Leang was determined to continue her tertiary education.

After high school, Leang aimlessly explored tertiary education for a couple of years before knowing what she definitely wanted to study. Her first two years of university education had somehow been a waste of time and her parents' hard-earned money. With an overall grade of C from high school, she was not qualified for any government scholarships at all. 'I didn't know there were government scholarships', said Leang. Therefore, to continue her study, she had to pay full fees. Because of the

mushrooming of many private higher educational institutions at the time (Chet 2009), finding a university in which to study was not difficult at all.

Leang studied economics in the private programme of a local university before deciding to quit after two years because of its poor teaching quality. She felt they could do better and she was worried she would end up like her second eldest sister, who had graduated from a university but was not even qualified enough to look for a job. Given her passion for English, Leang spent the following year studying a non-degree general English course in yet another private university before being forced by financial circumstances to quit again. Her younger brother and sister were also in need of a great deal of money for their studies. In such a situation, Leang did what other typical Cambodian elder sisters do and were expected to do. She sacrificed her own chances for education so that her younger siblings could continue. When her parents had better luck with their business, Leang decided to resume studying English. Being quality orientated, she aimed to study at a school to which many of her teachers and friends kept referring for its strictness and quality in English education. To be able to study there, she had to pass its entrance exam. The entrance exam was notorious among interested candidates for how difficult it was. To prepare herself best, Leang underwent a few intensive preparatory courses. She studied very hard and finally applied for the exam. She passed. She was happy and proud of herself as well as her English competence.

Immersion in English Literacy: Facing the Challenges

However, Leang's pride and happiness were short lived and soon replaced by worries. 'Having learnt English a lot and passed the entrance exam, I thought my English was enough for me to study at the new school', remembered Leang. 'I was wrong. At school, I could hardly understand the lecturers, let alone the lessons. There was no way I could compete with the other students whose English was far better than mine.' However, Leang, being a very determined young woman, persisted. She decided to enrol in a general English course at another well-known university to maintain her study. While she faced academic challenges, her parents faced financial ones. Through the many lessons and academic requirements, she found the

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opportunities to perform her literacy practices. Slowly, she began to change her perceptions and performances of self.

The New Self: New Identity Performances

Learning English as a major at university, Leang was trained to use it to discuss, debate and present her ideas in a logical manner. The teaching method was unlike anything she had ever experienced. Through immersion, she found her voice among her friends and her lecturers. Slowly, she was being instilled with increasing autonomous learning skills through assignments and projects. This required her to search and research before organising information in various presentable ways. The process engaged Leang in a broader English literacy practices context. Through learning by discovering, Leang began to make sense of her life from an English-speaking perspective.

She related this period to her sense of self, freedom, bravery and critical thinking. She was proud she had found her voice, which had a significant influence on her sense of identity. Barnett and Napoli (2008, p. 198) observed that 'the voice is the projection of identity into the world'. For the first time, Leang opened up against the *chbab srey*. In Khmer, it was never that easy. Her proper Cambodian identity would normally hinder any unnecessary interaction with a male counterpart. With English, she found it easier to make friends. 'Hi' or 'Hello' slipped out of her mouth more easily to strangers. From casual greetings, more exchanges followed and thus friends were easier to make.

Not only did her English literacy offer her an easy communication strategy among strangers and acquaintances, it also changed the ways in which she communicated in Khmer. It is worth noting here that, in Khmer, it is not common to greet each other with *suo-sdei*, a direct translation of hello. People normally start by talking about the last thing they learnt about each other. Socially, it is important to know about each other's happiness. Prasso (1994, p. 71) observed that:

> Visiting Cambodia, one cannot help but be beguiled by its almost-constant sunshine, its tranquilly swaying palm trees, and the overt friendliness of its smiling people, who greet each other and everyone else with the words 'Sok s'bai?'—'Are you happy?' Indeed, happiness is one of the most valued aspects of Khmer society.

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Along with Leang's better interpersonal skills, her general knowledge and her English proficiency steadily improved, as did her confidence. By her second year, she had much a better and broader understanding of the world and its various cultures through the various subjects taught to her, such as cultural and literature studies. Her personal hands-on experiences of engaging with English texts in her course books recurrently familiarised her with Western societies, values and lives. Every day, she read, discussed and listened to various lectures. From some of her lecturers, she learnt about freedom and individual rights. For instance, she found the discussion of *Cry Freedom* by Briley (1989) in her literature studies sessions enlightening. She began to compare and contrast more critically different cultures' ways of life with those of Cambodian and her own. She particularly enjoyed reading about freedom and independence. She looked for individualism in the movies or television series she watched. She wanted to be able to live like their characters.

Throughout this time, together with her language and communication skills, her criticality was being refined. She recalled that she was no longer a naive person, easily convinced without concrete reasons. She started to apply her criticality not only among her friends and her lecturers at school but also among her family members. Leang still clearly remembered the first time she talked logic and reasoning with her father. She was about 19 then. She openly disagreed and argued with him that both son and daughter should help with the housework. 'Everyone is equal', she told him. 'Son or daughter, everyone should help with the household chores', she continued. 'I, too, study and am as busy with schoolwork as he is. Why should I alone help with the housework while he is going about doing nothing?' Leang went on, pointing her finger at her brother who was watching television. She did not stop there. The years of being unfairly treated had to be stop. 'If I am to be alone in doing all this, I don't have to go to school anymore', she raised her voice a little. 'If I only have to do the housework, I guarantee I will do it without whining', she went on to her father, fed up with how endless the housework was. At that moment, her father did not appear to react. He was quiet. Perhaps he was a bit shocked with the unexpected reaction. From that day on, although her brother still did not help with the housework immediately, she was able to involve him in helping her without objections from her father anymore. Leang was content, and so was her mother. She became braver with her parents. She knew that as long as she had good reasons, her mouth should not stay

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shut and her ideas unheard. She was not a horse or a cow that must follow all those pulls of the reins anymore. She was a person; she might be a daughter, but she was a person entitled to the same rights as everyone else.

There were other changes that Leang brought into her home through her performances of her new self. The most daring challenge she faced was probably explaining to her authoritarian father about gender equality and it reinstalled a sense of pride in her elder sisters and mother. Her father usually said her mother was very lucky to have married him and that without him she would not have survived because of her lack of income-earning skills. 'No, Dad, you too are very lucky to have married Mum', Leang blurted out. 'Without her playing her part, do you think you would have been able to come this far owning everything we now have in possession?' Leang challenged him. 'Mum might not have had any paid work, but she has contributed most significantly to our well-being. What she does every day is more valuable than wages', continued Leang. As usual, her father listened. Leang knew he was not totally convinced, but he listened.

Her sisters had also started listening to her opinions about their family issues. 'You must do something besides just staying at home [as a full-time housewife]', she told her second elder sister who was married, also arranged, to a Cambodian American. She had migrated to live with her husband in the United States shortly after her wedding. Over the telephone, Leang added:

> You will be more respected if you have a job and a life outside as well. There will be fewer problems at home too when you don't see your in-laws too much. Study if you can't find a job yet. Enrol yourself in a course, learn something that's of interest to you.

She took it a more personal level with her eldest sister, a very beautiful woman who had been married off to a military officer who neglected and abused her in many ways. In Cambodia, most such officers were known for their violence and aggressiveness. In the past, Leang had never dared to interfere—only watched with bitter feelings. However, since she had found her new voice and rights, she would no longer tolerate it. One day she confronted her brother-in-law about how badly he had been treating his wife and children. 'You can't just go out, have fun and come home drunk, leaving your children to take care of themselves', she pointed out to him one afternoon when she stopped by to check on her niece and nephew, three and four

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years old, respectively. The room was messy. The children were playing by themselves. Their father was asleep on the sofa, sobering up. 'You know your wife is busy at the shop. She thinks you are taking care of the children, not doing this to them', Leang went on while tidying their living room and dressing her nephew and niece. He made a scoffing noise and turned his face away from her. 'Before, you said my sister was uneducated and thus was in no position to discuss right and wrong with you. Let's discuss it; I am educated', Leang did not stop. However, he was ignoring her completely. She also raised the issue with her parents. 'You should have known them better before marrying your daughters to them', said Leang, referring to her brothers-in-law. 'I am going to choose my own partner. You can relax. If I make a mistake, I will be responsible. I won't bring my problems to you', she continued. Her parents only looked at each other and sighed.

According to Mortland (1994, p. 13), good Cambodian 'children must marry when and whom their parents choose'. Leang could not accept that. 'I made it clear with them that I must choose my own husband', said Leang. 'They made two mistakes already with my two elder sisters. They can't make another one with me. They don't know how to choose children-in-law. They only judge them on what they try to show off.'

Leang was determined to fight her hardest to avoid an arranged marriage. She had witnessed the problems of her sisters' marriages, stemming from a lack of understanding, responsibilities, and mutual respect and love. Although they moved out after their marriages, they would come back to her parents or call them every time a fight broke out in their new families. They were still doing so by the time this account was being written. Her parents had to intervene, trying hard to find ways to help them work out their differences. It happened so often that her father could not take it anymore. One day, he exploded. 'You don't have to give me any money', he shouted at her eldest sister, who had brought her two children with her to their house after a fight with her husband. She was crying. 'Just don't bring your problems to me. I will be grateful just for that', he went on and stomped off angrily.

Between the Two Selves

Leang might be talking back to her parents, but she meant no disrespect. She only wanted justice and some freedom for herself. To have that, she first had to update her parents' view of the modern world to which she now belonged. She said:

> I love my parents … but I don't want them to control my life … I told them that, in Western countries, when the children are grown-ups, they have the right to decide about their own lives. I shared with them about Western cultures quite frequently and they seemed to understand better.

Despite wanting freedom for herself, Leang still felt obliged to care for her parents when they grew old, a gesture of proper Cambodian children's behaviour towards their parents (Mortland 1994, p. 13). 'I don't want to migrate to the USA', she revealed. 'I am like the eldest daughter now in the family. If I migrated and my younger brother and sister wanted to do the same, what would happen to them?' Leang could not bear even the prospect of leaving them on their own.

Although her parents lacked ambition about her becoming, she did have many personal dreams. They were private, secret yearnings she had never shared or revealed to anyone before. Leang wanted to be a career-driven woman. She wanted to be successful in building her social status first before thinking about settling down. 'Another thing that I learnt through my English practices is gender equality', said Leang. Continuing, she explained:

> My [eldest] sister's marriage was a mistake. Her husband is an ancient person in that there is no gender equality between them. For me, there must be gender equality between husband and wife. I must get a job and have my own income. I won't touch my husband's income. That way, we won't fight. I don't want to depend on my husband. I don't want to be in the situation that, whenever I use his money, he says without him I would never survive. If after marriage, my husband betrays me by having an affair, I will leave him. When we cannot get along, we'd better not be together, or both parties will suffer. And I won't touch a thing that belongs to him. Gender is a big issue. That's what I learnt through watching American movies. The way Khmer women tolerate mistreatment in their marriages is self-torture.

For that matter, despite nearing her mid-twenties, Leang was not going to marry in haste. 'My parents are worried that I'll end up being a spinster, but I'm not worried. Mum keeps reminding me to start thinking about it, but I see no rush.' Leang wished to enjoy her youth and life when she still could. She wanted to continue

studying until she had at least a bachelor's degree. After that, if possible, she wanted to go on to earn a master's degree. She had been dreaming about an MA scholarship abroad. Complete freedom, total independence, ultimate self-reliance—oh, how she would love them all! She had promised herself she would have her own job and be completely self-supporting before she married. That way, she would have her own voice and rights and her future husband would respect her more. She had to have a better life than those of her two sisters and her mother.

Just two years into her bachelor's degree in English education, Leang's first dream came true. She found herself a job teaching English in a private school. The income was not much, but she was happy to depend less on her parents. She could finance her own study, buy her own laptop and have the Internet installed at home. The money also helped her to be more her own self overtly. She could have her hair styled by professionals and afford the latest fashions. Her self-esteem was further boosted and she became more conscious about her own being and becoming.

As her sense of subjectivity grew stronger, she had enough courage to reveal her true whole person inside and out. However, it did not go unnoticed and without reaction. 'Very soon after I first dyed my hair brunette, my parents forced me to dye it back to black again. They even provided me with the money for the service', Leang revealed. Giggling with her left hand covering her mouth, she continued:

> They told me they are not happy when everyone they knew kept telling them their children were no longer Khmer. They said we were like a bunch of young hippie Westerners now. I did dye it back to black under pressure. After a day or two, I changed it to red again.

She leaned back on the cushioned armchair and laughed even more loudly, obviously finding it funny. Leang had become immune to others' criticism, performing her identity as a Westerner.

Her English literacy enabled her to do many new things in life. She had a Facebook and a Skype account, a laptop, a smartphone and Internet connection in her room at home. She watched English-language films and television programmes and disliked Thai television dramas about which she had once been passionate. She became a window to the wider world for her mother, regularly updating her about women rights, gender issues and other recent developments of interest to her. She was no longer a mere daughter to her mother. They were like friends. They discussed their family problems together, and together they convinced her father to listen to their

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voices. She even managed to convince them that she should be the one in charge of her own future, deciding whom she wanted to marry and the like. 'I owe all this to my English-language education', concluded Leang.

Bodies and Selves

In telling her story, Leang used both English and Khmer. In the first interview, Leang preferred to talk in Khmer. In the second, she chose to speak in English most of the time, only code-switching when she wanted to use an expression for which it was hard to find an equivalent translation. The following excerpt illustrates her code-switching in the second conversation:

> Many things affected me while I was growing up. They still do now. I could only listen. I listened to everything. All this listening made me think a lot. But I never expressed what I thought. I cannot share my ideas with my mum because she easily trusts the others. She would follow whatever they suggest. So I don't want to talk. I can't share my ideas with my father either. He is not a very sensible person. He is not impartial when there is something wrong. For example, once my eldest sister told me that my second eldest sister's husband in the USA was secretly in contact with one of her friends. After knowing this, I called my second sister in the USA immediately telling her everything I knew. When my father learnt about this he blamed me, well, not really me, he blamed my mum and warned her that, like in Khmer, *kom ches dueng roeung ke pek* (that is, don't mind other people's business too much). But I told them it is not other people's business. It is our family.

In the above statement, when it came to family, Leang spoke from a Cambodian body, as a disagreeable, if not rebellious, daughter. It was because she cared. She minded her father's use of the word *ke*, which could be translated as 'the others' or 'the outsiders'. *Ke* suggested a detachment and a lack of relationship. She wanted to stress that her sister's husband was not a *ke*. He was not an outsider. He was her sister's husband—her brother-in-law. They were family and, as Cambodian family members, it was all right to mind one another's business. Leang might have been Westernised in other ways, but not in her sense of family.

Leang also assumed other identities when she discussed her story, something that she used to locate particular kinds of what Foucault (cited in Barker 2004, p. 194) referred to as 'regimes of the self' in specific historical and cultural events. She talked about herself as a student and an obedient daughter in the following:

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> At first, I don't think there was a reason [for studying English] … Mostly, I didn't know how to spell, but in the dictation quiz I would cheat.

> At the time, I learnt quite fast perhaps because I was quite smart. When I did well, at the time I was top [in the class] all the time but I didn't study in any big school. Just normal small English schools.

In the beginning, Leang did not know why she had to study English. She studied anyway because her father had already enrolled her in the class. At university, she began to feel the changes in her sense of subjectivity and in the way she learnt.

> I have more confidence than before. So now I don't wait for the teacher to pick me to share my ideas. I volunteer myself to talk without being made to.

That was when she talked about herself as an increasingly self-governing individual—a grown-up who fought for certain Western aspects for her life: freedom, independence and being critical. She wanted to be able to dress the way she wanted herself to look, not the way her parents and her relatives thought she should look. Her dialogue about such autonomous selves was progressively salient when she was employed as a part-time teacher and, most remarkably, when she witnessed the problems that her two married sisters encountered.

About Relationships

Leang's story began with and revolved around her relationship with her family, from whom she learnt about how to be a 'proper' and 'good' being as a Cambodian and a daughter. Later she concentrated on her quest for expression of self through schooling, socialising and English literacy practices. During this period, her relationships expanded to include other students and the teachers at her school, which helped to reinforce her perception of self and strengthened her identity. She then used this understanding to contest her space at home with the aim of informing her parents and sisters so that they would understand the modern ways of life better. In the climax of her narrative, her efforts stirred up the atmosphere and strained relationships among her family members, and ended with no evidence of a solution.

Several social structures (gender equality, power, freedom, independence, tradition and traditional responsibilities, peer pressure, age) and institutions (home,

family, school, work) were found to be central in Leang's narrative. First, through her education, socialisation in the broader Cambodian society and English literacy and practices, Leang's perception of gender completely changed. Originally content with having to do all the housework and being homebound, she later sensed the injustice of such ways of life. Leang became a career-driven woman and fought for gender equality at home. She did not want to be like her mother and ensured her sisters, who were following the same path, did their best to break free from this tradition. Leang also believed strongly that everyone was equal. Contrary to her father's belief, she did not think their family would experience bad luck simply because a male member helped with the housework. It became an invalid reason for not sharing the responsibility.

Secondly, she was informed about individualism and freedom through her English literacy and practices. At her English school, while studying for a bachelor's degree, she was given rights and encouraged to speak her opinions. She was able to do so without fear and with support from her classmates. Her exposure to media further informed this understanding. She became reflective and realised that many unjust treatments were occurring among her family members. She imported these rights to inform her parents. She made it clear to her father that she would have to be the one to decide her own future. She told her family that she should be allowed to dress and style herself in whatever way she deemed appropriate. She even told them to ignore what the relatives and neighbours would say about her. This was where she departed most remarkably from the traditional role of the Cambodian daughter, for whom a sense of community always preceded that of the personal self.

Third, she was also distancing herself in terms of traditional behaviours and responsibilities. In her protest, she tried to do away with dressing in the Cambodian way for women. She loved shorts, jeans and T-shirts. Even at formal functions, she did her best to avoid wearing the *hol*, *phamoung* or silk—three kinds of Cambodian traditional clothing that most Cambodian women treasure.

When first starting university, whenever her friends discussed certain English movies or songs, she had no idea what they were talking about. Similarly, when they discussed Facebook, the Internet, PowerPoint presentations and the like, she could not relate. The pressure forced her into trying all these things out and she was happy she could be an 'up-to-date woman'. Not only did it make her proud, her family was also

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delighted by her capabilities. 'Mum was very excited when I introduced Skype to her to voice chat with my sister in the US. She kept bragging about it to her friends and the neighbours.'

Home and school were the most recurring social institutions found in Leang's narrative. They played both constraining and enabling roles in her being and becoming, although it was not always clear that Leang was aware of this. While home and family were trying to reinforce Leang's Cambodian identity, her schooling, socialising, learning and practising English were liberating her. This resulted in a dilemma of identity for Leang—a confusion of double consciousness (Bruce 1992; Du Bois 2007). While she wanted to be her complete self—free and independent—the traditional duties expected from her by her parents were inescapable. As the most educated person in the family, she was exposed to a more desirable life, but her being in Cambodia and a Khmer limited her enjoyment of it.

Chapter 6: 'A Cake is Never Bigger than Its Mould'

***

I am a provincial girl. I was very quiet when I was young. It had been like that until high school. I was not brave, but I was a respectful child. I respect my family and I always follow their advice. I started to change most remarkably when I moved to Phnom Penh. I was alone and lonely here. I needed to do everything by myself, which taught me to be more and more independent. I prefer doing everything on my own now. I go shopping alone, eat out alone, and seek information [for work and study] alone. I'm not afraid anymore. I have also changed to be more and more talkative. As a result, I have made a lot of friends here.

As a person, I think I'm easy-going, but I can be quick tempered. I keep reminding myself that: I may not be pretty, rich or smart, but I should never regret being born who I am. I love myself for being born in this family and for having good people around. My life slogan is 'always be happy'. It helps cheer me up whenever I'm down. I like trying new things. I might be a woman, but I would never allow men to look down on me. I believe I can do whatever they can do, even in certain sports. If men can play those sports, I also want to try.

Sreyna was 23 years old when she was interviewed for this study. She was the eldest daughter in an above-average-income family in the town of Battambang, a north-western province of Cambodia bordering Thailand. According to Sreyna, her family brought her and her sister up in a rather 'conservative' Cambodian way. In addition to Khmer and English, she spoke Thai. Her father was a high-ranking military officer in the region and her mother had been a high school teacher before being promoted to an administration post. According to Sreyna, both her parents were equal in status in almost everything in the family.

The first 20 years of Sreyna's life was spent with her extended family in her hometown. Her family always came first. She took utmost care not to disgrace her family in any way. She was very much the 'proper' Cambodian girl they expected her to be. She was a Buddhist, reserved, hardworking and obedient. She would never question her parents. She led her life that way until she finished grade 12. After high school, Sreyna moved to Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, to pursue her tertiary education. It was arranged for her to live with her *Oum* (her father's elder sister) as her guardian. Her parents thought it was inappropriate for her to rent a place in which to live on her own. Having had no previous experience of living away from home by

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herself, Sreyna, as always, obediently adhered to her parents' arrangement. She was accepted into one university in her first year in Phnom Penh and another a year later. By this second year, the old Sreyna was transforming. Her life in Phnom Penh, her education and her socialisation had almost completely changed her. By her third year living and studying in Phnom Penh, Sreyna no longer wanted to live with her *Oum*. She wanted the same way of life as the characters in her favourite cable television situation comedy *Friends* (Bright 1994–2004). It may have been the inconvenience of switching between her 'double consciousness' (Bruce 1992; Du Bois 2007) selves that made her want to move out. It may have also been due to her respect for her *Oum*'s individuality as well as her own. She decided it would be better for everyone if she rented a place and lived with her sister and some friends instead. In this way, her *Oum* could have her old family life back. In addition, she could be more her true self. Everyone would be happy with his or her own privacy and space. After toying with the idea for a while, she gathered enough nerve to ask her father. In Cambodian families, 'the husband, as head of household, expected to be deferred to on all matters' (McKenzie-Pollock 2005, p. 292). Although her mother was 'equal in status' to her father, he was the head of the family. If he approved, it would be easier to convince the others—her mother, grandmother and her *Oum*. Unluckily, the proposal was immediately and firmly overruled. Sreyna persisted, thinking she must have chosen the wrong time. Perhaps he was not in the right mood. She tried again and again, pleading and then begging. As she feared, she never succeeded. She knew she would not. She had always known that, but she was persistent. Had she been her old self, she would not have been so insistent. Re-evaluating, Sreyna was not surprised her parents did not trust her enough to let her live independently. 'My family is very conservative', she said. 'And, you know, Battambang is rather traditional.' Having lived in Phnom Penh and been exposed to the modern world through her English literacy and practices, Sreyna thought of her hometown and its people as 'rather traditional'.

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Battambang: 'The Rather Traditional Place'

> It [Battambang] is a rather somnolent place—much of its allure deriving from the rows of endangered colonial-era shophouses around the centre of town and a handful of French-style villas in the leafy streets to the south.
>
> (Palmer & Martin 2008, p. 136)

Battambang province is not as modern as Phnom Penh. After all, it is 291 kilometres away from Phnom Penh—a vast distance given that most people do not own a car and the infrastructure is poor. Battambang itself is like a child suffering from an identity crisis. Along with its sister province, Siem Reap, it was repetitively taken from and returned to Cambodia. To understand Sreyna's story better, it is helpful to understand the land and the people to which she belonged. As AM Smith (2011) observed, 'the land came with people, and with the stories of those people'.

According to Tauch (1994), from 1768 to 1907, Battambang was occupied by Thailand. The Thai government attempted to take education away from the strong grip of pagodas and Cambodian monks. It built three schools specifically for Battambang and each school had about 50 students from grades one to three. For the first time, females were allowed to study in these schools. One-third of the students were female. Tauch (1994) underlined that the teachers were mostly Khmer nationals who were literate in the Thai language and, despite this modernisation or rather attempt at Siamisation, after more than a century of control, the Battambang people were still strong enough to maintain almost all their Khmer identity markers, including language, songs, dance, clothing, religious rituals and ways of preaching.

In 1907, Battambang officially became a Cambodian province again although controlled by France. It underwent remarkable renovation under French colonial rule. Today, many of the buildings in its quiet little town still bear great remnants of French architecture. Although it was under France's protectorate for four decades longer than other provinces, it experienced, directly or indirectly, France's attempt to update what it viewed as Cambodians' 'barbaric' ways of life (Chandler 2008; Osborne 2002, p. 35). France attempted to modernise the local ways of life 'toward nineteenth-century French standards of behavior' (Osborne 1969, p. 36) in what was known as a *mission civilisatrice*. According to Furlough (2005, p. 3), the *mission civilisatrice* in Cambodia was undertaken for the following reasons:

The French invoked two ideological perspectives as reasons for, and justification of, their activities within the French empire: its 'civilizing mission' (*mission civilisatrice*) and its responsibility to promote economic development in colonial territories (*mise en valeur*). The *mission civilisatrice* implied that France bore a moral responsibility to bring its 'superior civilization'—western government, rational administration, education, medicine, morals, capitalist economics—to other peoples.

France started with the introduction of formal educational systems, in which French was the medium of instruction. For the first time, the direct link between culture and education was broken. Before it became a French protectorate, Cambodia's culture and education coexisted in 'community-based pagoda schools', where 'Buddhist teachers integrated practical learning with religious and cultural instruction' (Fergusson & Masson 1997, p. 91). Only males were educated then (T Clayton 1995).

By the time Cambodia gained its independence in 1953, many aspects of French culture and language had become intertwined in almost everything Cambodians did, from the way people—particularly men—dressed, to the educational system and scientific understanding. As they did in Vietnam, the French authorities tried to Romanise the Khmer writing system. Unlike in Vietnam, this attempt failed because of the Cambodians' violent resistance to it (Osborne 1969). As a result, Khmer's centuries-old writing system has survived to this day.

Japanese occupation of Cambodia came next. Japan removed the French protectorate (Neau 2003) from Cambodia but plunged Battambang into another tug of war over ownership. After Japan was defeated in World War II, in early 1946, France resumed its rule. However, this return to power was challenged by a sense of nationalism among the Khmers. While Japan had ruled Cambodia, it had provoked nationalism among the controlled, who called for the 'indigenous rulers to proclaim independence' (Ross 1990, p. 246).

The nationalist sentiment reached its height less than a decade later when there was increasingly fiercer resistance by the king, monks, teachers, students and ordinary villagers (Chandler 1991; P Edwards 2007). This resistance led to Cambodia's total independence in 1953. After French rule, Cambodia did its best to refurbish Khmer identity, starting by restoring pride in its language—a process known as 'Khmerisation' (T Clayton 2002a; Jacob 1986). In a very short time, Khmer literacy

practices reached its peak and the Khmer language eventually replaced French as the medium of instruction in primary schools through to many higher education institutions (T Clayton 2002b, p. 90). During those years, Cambodia witnessed many great scholars, writers, actors, singers and composers emerging from Battambang, driven by their collective sense of identity and their willingness to express it.

Making Sense of Sreyna's Story

Well before she finished her high school studies, Sreyna's life was planned and her future job was chosen for her. Her parents and her *Oum* wanted her to be a banker. 'My aunt holds a respectable position in the National Bank of Cambodia [NBC]', revealed Sreyna. 'She and my parents all want me to work as a banker or something like that.' With her qualification, hard work and her *Oum's* position in the bank, Sreyna stood a good chance of working for NBC, and her family visualised her being promoted to a good position in the firm. When she left Battambang for Phnom Penh, a banker was what she was going to be. With her good grades, she won a government scholarship into the Royal University of Law and Economics (RULE), a well-known university in Cambodia. She was going to make her family proud. She was going to realise their dreams as her uppermost priority, with her own dreams coming second.

Sreyna's personal dream to do a bachelor's degree in English-language education emerged during her final year at high school. After having studied English for almost seven years, she had fallen in love with the language and relished all opportunities for learning and practicing it. Thus, alongside applying to RULE, she took the entrance exam to do a bachelor's degree in English, which she failed.

However, Sreya's will was strong. A little hiccup would never stop her. She studied English part-time intensively and a year later she took the exam again. This time she passed. That was when she knew the different kinds of happiness that came to her. It felt good when she was able to make her family proud by achieving their goal, but it felt far better when she could achieve her own. From then on she was doing two bachelor's degrees at the same time. While she was year two at RULE, she was a year one at the English major.

Everywhere she went in the new school, she heard English being spoken, in the canteens, the Self-Access Centre, the classrooms and on the grounds. She found studying a bachelor's degree in English very much to her liking. The major, student-centred pedagogy, the plentiful opportunities for extensive reading in English, the autonomous learning approach, and the many subjects related to English literature and global cultural studies were all exciting and fulfilling for her thirst for knowledge and to practice the English language. Moreover, by that time, her modern life in the city, Phnom Penh, had given her convenient access to technologies such as cable TV and the Internet. Her English literacy allowed her to devour the further language-learning opportunities these technologies provided, and they became a part of her new self and identity. It became almost impossible to imagine a life without them:

> I used English for chatting, Facebooking, e-mailing, working and communicating with my bosses. I read the instructions on such products like shampoo, soap, medicines, etc. I also used English to talk on the phone with my friends. Lately, I have been increasingly using English to talk with my peers because I didn't want people around me to know what we were talking about. When I rode a motorbike or drove along the roads in Phnom Penh, I liked looking at the names of the shops or anything that were written in English. I don't really know why I was doing that, but I think it was easier for me to read in English. I could even learn some new words as well.

Sreyna also underlined how thrilled she was when her ideas were valued and her voice was given a chance to be further heard among her English-speaking friends, lecturers, colleagues and bosses. From that time on, she transformed into a different person; first among her friends at school, but gradually at home too. 'Those group work, group discussions, and presentations that I do in learning English made me happy. I love to share my ideas with my friends, because I do have my own ideas', said Sreyna. 'I could feel my heart beat in excitement every time I express myself'. Recounting this, her face lit up and her eyes sparkled. 'I was changed into a new person who was no longer easily intimidated by the others. I also realised everyone was no different from me. They have their ideas and they want to share them, and so do I', added Sreyna. 'It was a good way to learn', Sreyna concluded.

Being actively involved in her own learning installed in Sreyna many qualities she did not possess when growing up or studying at the state school. She became increasingly self-assured and analytical. She knew what was best for her. Through her sharing with friends, she began to uncover many new possibilities and ideas. Living

away from her parents also played a role in enabling her to open up even more willingly and without interruption to everything to which she was exposed through her practices of English language. For example, through Facebook she could constantly stay in touch with many of her friends. She was also able to make even more friends and to regularly share her feelings and point of view with them. Many of her ideas were reinforced this way. Seemingly without knowing it, Sreyna was being transformed from the 'proper' Cambodian girl into which her conservative family had been moulding her for years, into a modern young woman who was daring and adventurous. For the first time, she began to feel that she lived her own life and that she was important and useful. 'Friends would confide in me their problems', said Sreyna. Continuing, she explained:

> I might not be able to advise them much, but I was pleased I could make them happier merely through listening to their problems. I changed a lot. When I was at high school, I had never been a class monitor. But since I did my bachelor's degree in English, I have always volunteered myself to be the class monitor because I think it helped me to be more sociable among all my friends. Also I intended to further develop myself through holding responsibilities. Ever since I became a class monitor, I have become central point of contact with everyone. Whatever happens, they will approach me. This gives me a feeling that I am are no longer lonely. Many people are in need of me.

Throughout this time, Sreyna had been making friends of both sexes. Having some male friends and having shared many things with them made her realise that she had missed so much about their perspectives and ways of life. This new appreciation for her male counterparts seems to have helped to enlighten her knowledge of self and being even further. Moreover, at times, she found their advice and condolence even better than that of her female friends. Sreyna quietly but persistently continued to embrace fully her sense of individualism. Eventually, her self-reliance grew to a point that she no longer felt any guilt in contravening her parents' and grandmother's instruction. At around this time, she became involved in another boyfriend–girlfriend relationship (the first being while she was in high school). This was a more serious relationship and she felt more in love with him than she had with her high school boyfriend. The romance filled her heart with so much happiness. He helped her to see the world in its complete form, he challenged her to be the best version of herself and

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he provided comfort in a way that friends and family never could. Her life had never been so beautiful.

Sreyna knew her parents would not approve of her choice but she did what she could to try to change their narrow perspective of the world. Asked if she felt guilty about not obeying her parents' advice, Sreyna said with a laugh:

> I don't feel any guilt. I've been thinking that I am making the right choice. I should be allowed to choose however way I lived my life. After all, I will be the one walking this path in the future. Well, it's not that I'm saying my parents are wrong, but because their ideas are conservative and because our society has advanced so much, I think that whenever possible, if I can change their ways of thinking, I will be very pleased to do so. Now my family understands me better. They no long mind me having any male friends. So I am not guilty. I am doing the right things.

Half way into her English degree, she was able to use her incomplete qualification to find a job. She came to love this job dearly. Besides providing her with a reasonable salary, she had her full rights, a voice and mutual respect among her colleagues and her American bosses. She was encouraged to be her true self: critical, independent, straightforward, equal, fair and free. She could also practice English every day. In many ways, it was an ideal situation for a liberal young woman such as herself. Gradually, she lost her interest in fulfilling her family's dream; it was time to do something for herself. She began thinking about how to escape being a banker when she graduated from RULE. She loved her job so much that she was worried about the prospect of working as a banker. She feared having to give up doing the things she loved to pursue her family's dream for her. She also dreaded the idea of having to comply with the social hierarchy, gender bias, social protocol, bureaucracy and politeness that working at NBC would entail. She could make herself comply with the traditional norms and hierarchy and change, but it was not appealing to her and she did not want to pretend. 'I want to live my life independently and do whatever I want to do', said Sreyna, looking very serious and full of determination.

Finally, after four years in Phnom Penh, she successfully graduated from RULE. She still had one year to go to finish her English degree. As predicted, she was made to apply to work as a banker in NBC. Although it went against her own wishes, as an obedient daughter she went to the selection test. However, she had her own plan; she purposefully ticked all the wrong answers on the test. This was the first time she had taken pleasure from failure, and without any regret, the way of life she loved

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continued. Naïvely, she thought her family would give up on forcing her to pursue a banking career. However, a few months later, she was told to apply to an audit firm. They knew she met all of the requirements and would pass without difficulty. Again, Sreyna went to the interview intent on sabotaging her changes of employment:

> At the interview, I tried to think of the answers that would definitely fail me. I knew it was not good to do so, but I did anyway. I failed *successfully*. I thought that was the best way out because since I already failed again and again, Mum wouldn't blame me for not trying and would no longer force me to apply for another job. I think that I am a grown up now. I have my own job. I have the rights to do whatever I want to do because even though it was my parents who sent me out to study and provided me with the financial support, I still should be the one to choose my own job.

Sreyna was fighting for change in the way she lived her life. She was swimming against the current of her parents' intentions and the family's tradition. She was following her heart, living *her* life and doing *her* job. As far as she was concerned, her years of following were over. Sreyna had not always been like this. The selves and identities she performed while living in Phnom Penh were new. She had learnt to perform them through her English literacy practices. For her family, this was shocking. As the Cambodian proverb warns, 'a cake cannot be bigger than its mould'; but this is exactly what the new Sreyna wanted to be.

The Bigger Cake

> The older tradition was canonical in the sense that it saw the concepts it worked with as authoritative, standard, accepted, given and unquestionable. The new tradition is skeptical in the sense that when it sees terms like 'deviant', it asks 'deviant to whom?' or 'deviant from what?'; when told that something is a social problem, it asks 'problematic to whom?'; when certain conditions or behaviour are described as dysfunctional, embarrassing, threatening or dangerous, it asks 'says who?' and 'why?'. In other words, these concepts and descriptions are not assumed to have a taken-for-granted status.
>
> (S Cohen 1972, pp. 3–4)

The new Sreyna had few remnants of her old self. Unlike before, she became lively, confident, brave, critical, outspoken and persistent. She also changed her appearances. With very fair skin, a slim body, bright brown dyed hair, colourfully

framed glasses and clothes of trendy fashion, she looked like a Korean movie star or singer. Her face was oval in shape with a beauty spot to the left of the upper lip. Her long hair was randomly trimmed at the ends in a style popular among liberal young women like herself. Sreyna preferred to be in T-shirts, usually tight, and jeans, shorts or pants. When I first met Sreyna at the introductory meeting, she looked at everyone with confidence when she walked into the meeting room. With an American accent, she talked loud and proud and was always ready with a smile, showing great self-assurance and friendliness.

Since moving to Phnom Penh, Sreyna's exposure to globalisation, socialisation, and her high educational attainments, particularly her English literacy and practices, had changed her perception of women's roles and their marriageable age. She now believed that women could do anything that men could. To prove her point among her male peers, she once went cycling with a group of young male friends to an island in the Mekong River, about 30 kilometres from the capital city where she lived with her *Oum*. To get to the island, after a long pedalling, she had to catch a boat and cross the Mekong River, its current fast and width tripled with murky water in the rainy season. Next, she had to pedal along a sticky, muddy country dirt road for more than an hour to reach her destination. She knew she loved adventure but was still amazed she had done it.

Cake in the Mould

> *Lut dehk tean kdao; Brodao kaun tean khmeng*
> Strike the iron when it's still hot; teach the children when they're still young.
>
> (Cambodian Proverb)

When Sreyna was younger, she was not allowed to talk to any male. She had to come home straight after school and spend time doing the household chores or helping her mother and grandmother with whatever she could. Primarily from these two senior women, she learnt virtually everything about her early being and becoming of 'Cambodianness' (Mortland 1994, p. 4) or 'Khmerness' (Poethig 2001, p. 196). The moral ethics imposed by her family deprived her of social interactions among

male peers until she was around 16 years of age, when the prevailing social and education conditions no longer allowed her to avoid them.

Although both of her parents were considered well educated, Sreyna did not recollect being read to at all when she was a child. The only exposure to her parents' literacy practices that she could recall was her mother reading Cambodian magazines in her free time and her father reading local newspapers. She also remembered her mother writing the lyrics of her favourite songs in a book so that she could then sing them to entertain herself. She did not consider her parents to have been encouraging concerning reading. Despite this, Sreyna grew up to be fond of reading.

Early English Literacy and Practices

As a student, Sreyna was competitive. She usually came first in her study. When she was about 10 years old (while studying grade four), her father enrolled her in an English class near their home. English-language education had been booming in Cambodia and 'communicative competence in English mean[t] a better job and a better pay (Igawa 2008, p. 344). Sreyna's father must have wanted his daughter to have a head start, as a foreign language (French or English) was not introduced into the curriculum until secondary school (UNESCO IBE 2011).

Although having no personal reason for learning English, Sreyna still did her best in studying it. It was her parents' choice, and she did not question it. She studied English until she was in grade seven, when she had to stop for a year to focus on her state school examinations leading into high school. It came clearly to Sreyna's mind that, during those early years, her English lessons were delivered using a traditional teacher-centred approach, just like all instruction in the state schools. There was no interaction or exchange of ideas in the classes. Learning was done primarily passively. As a result, her developing literacy did not alter her notions of self and behaviours moulded by her parents and grandmother from the time she was born: quiet, reserved, non-communicative and without much confidence. 'Following my parents', especially my grandmother's advice, when I was younger, I did not talk to any male classmates or even male teachers if I could help it', recalled Sreyna. 'My family did not like me to make any male friends at all. No male friends would be welcomed at my house'. From grade nine on, Sreyna resumed her English education more rigorously in a more

formal and structured language school, COERR Language Skills Center. She took the placement test and secured herself in quite a high level: level four. 'Most people could only pass levels 1–3', said Sreyna. 'I was very happy I got into level four.' Sreyna was the youngest student in this level.

In the new school, the medium of instruction was English, although most of the teachers were Khmer. It was at this school that Sreyna first encountered a more student-centred and interactive teaching approach. At first, Sreyna found it difficult to catch up with her classmates given her passive study skills. 'It became so hard I asked Mum to help place me in a lower level but Mum said it was one favour too many to ask the school for another help', said Sreyna. She was told to do her best. Obediently, she did.

Initially, Sreyna did not like her new school. She was uncomfortable interacting with male classmates, and she became tongue tied when called upon to share her ideas. It also came as a shock for her that she was expected to actively participate in class activities, such as in pair work, group work and whole class discussion. Slowly, she adapted. 'In the new school, I was involved in speaking a lot', recalled Sreyna. 'When I first spoke in the class, I felt very strange', she added. 'The first group I worked with was all males. Normally, at school I would never talk to any male classmates. When a guy talked to me asking what my name was, I almost burst into anger', Sreyna recalled with a laugh. At COERR, despite her initial discomfort, Sreyna engaged herself in the speaking activities and found pleasure in doing so. Through these activities, she discovered her voice for the first time. 'Having been involved in those speaking activities made me realise that I actually like talking very much', recollected Sreyna. Having been restricted for so many years in voicing her opinion did not limit her idea production in any way. As she recalled: 'Whenever there was something to share, I always tried to generate ideas to share with them all the time'. Gradually, the new Sreyna emerged: braver, more confident, more expressive and more talkative. With her new personality, she made many new friends of both sexes. She loved to share her ideas with them, and tried to spend as much time with them as she could afford. She felt truly happy to belong to such a social group, and she became much more open than she had ever been.

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Being Improper?

Although Sreyna was becoming a new person, none of her family noticed. At the end of the day, she would come home and turn back into her 'proper' self: quiet, obedient, reserved, hardworking and serious. In time, however, a bolder and more remarkable change to Sreyna's identity came when, in addition to having many male friends, she got her first boyfriend. Sreyna had breached the traditional *chbabs*. However, she rationalised that this would be fine, provided she kept her relationship a secret from her parents and relatives. Laughing, Sreyna remembered:

> At the time I didn't have a phone…, so if he wanted to call me, he had to call my Mum. He would put one of his female friends on the phone first and she would ask to speak to me. When I was given the phone, he would talk to me. … At that time, Mum didn't have a clue about our way of contacting each other. She couldn't help but wonder why I talked so long on the phone. She kept looking at my face. I didn't dare to tell her the truth because I knew that I would inevitably be in a big trouble if she knew.

Mean songsa or 'dating' is unacceptable in Cambodian tradition. Some parents would physically punish their daughters if they brought shame on the family by dating (Ong 2003). According to Welaratna (1999, p. 25):

> '[D]ating' is not part of traditional Cambodian culture and is still not accepted by most parents as proper behavior, particularly for girls. Cambodians come from a culture in which arranging suitable marriages for children has been considered a parental duty, although final approval has rested with the prospective partners. Even when two people met and fell in love, as sometimes happened, it was customary to obtain parents' permission and blessing before marriage.

Further, and even more substantial, 'improper' changes to her appearance, behaviour, lifestyle, life choices and communication styles emerged while she was living in Phnom Penh. Sreyna began to enthusiastically exercise her right to live as she chose. 'I dyed my hair and changed my fashions', said Sreyna. 'I also began to adorn myself with this jewellery', continued Sreyna, pointing to her bracelets and long dangling earrings. Eventually, she even built up the courage to argue with her father. 'After I started working, I started arguing with my dad', said Sreyna, again with a laugh. Switching to a more serious tone, however, she recounted:

> I dared to refute my parents and talk back. Usually I listened to Mum more than I do Dad, but I'm more afraid of Dad than Mum. But now whenever Dad

says something that was not logical, I started to disagree with him. I began to show my real emotion to him. I would tell him, 'Dad, don't do that. It is not right'. Usually he still does what he wants to and I become very angry when he's not listening to me.

Even more seriously, Sreyna dared to disagree with another of her parents' plans for her. It began unexpectedly one evening when her parents asked her to visit them at home. She was told to befriend a man, starting from adding him as her Facebook friend. She was supposed to tell them what she thought of him. Immediately, Sreyna knew what was happening: her marriage was being arranged. They were planning to marry her to the only son of a high profile government official who had been to study, and finally had gained residency, in Australia. She was told he was a good man, the perfect husband for any lucky woman. With a chill running down her spine, she utilised her go-to defence mechanism—rejection:

> I don't want to. … I don't like arranged marriages … I would like to choose a person that I like personally. But they don't understand. They told me the man that they chose for me comes from a good family. They think I should marry now because I am of age. They even jokingly questioned if I have the intention to live with them forever. They lectured that being parents, it is crucial to have daughters who honour them in marriages [that they arrange]. But I think differently. For me, I am satisfied with all I have in my present life. I have good education. I have my own job. I can survive on my own. So I think why bother about marrying. I'm not ready. I think it's necessary to be sinful by disagreeing with them for the time being. I'd rather please myself first this time. I can't follow them because I think that I don't know the man I was to marry well enough. I don't know how I will be treated if I marry him and move to live abroad with him.

When she refused the supposedly perfect marriage arrangement her parents had organised for her, they were furious. It was her mother who directly confronted her. When Sreyna still did not change her mind, her mother did what she had never done to her before. 'Mum did not talk to me for weeks', Sreyna said. She then added:

> Since I got my present job, I have assisted people with their paper work to live in the USA. I have come to know some of them who come from America. I find their life very easy-going. They are free to live with anyone they want to and break up whenever they don't get along. Their life is simple and easy-going. And I am keen on such ways of life.

After the storm of rejecting her parents' wishes for her marriage had died down, Sreyna was tested by her parents to see whether family was still her utmost

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priority. She was made to apply to an audit firm. This was also an attempt to separate her from her friends, whom her mother referred to as 'bad people' from whom Sreyna received the influences to be disobedient and improper. Not daring to disagree with her parents, Sreyna applied. She was shortlisted, but at the final interview, she made sure to answer the questions with the intent to fail. Her parents, recognising that she had failed her interview on purpose, were agitated with her. Sreyna described her mother's anger when she told her daughter 'You hang out too much with those bad friends … That's why you are like this, not following parents anymore'. Sreyna recounts how she listened to her mother's words quietly, eyes brimming with tears, cast to the floor. In her lecture, her mother detailed all of the misbehaviours that Sreyna had committed. She emphasised Sreyna's refusal of her marriage arrangement, and made it clear how disappointed she was in her. That was what hurt Sreyna the most: she had disappointed her parents. If only they could understand her. Disappointing them was the last thing she wanted to do.

From Sreyna's perspective, it was a different story:

It is not like that … I was having too much pressure. Being with friends was the only one thing that can help me to forget my problems and the pressure. I hung out with them because I wanted to reduce my stress. I don't want to be stressed because it might make me do something stupid [here, referring to the act of self-harm] … But she wouldn't understand me. Sometimes, I really wanted to run away. I wanted to live my life independently and do whatever I wanted to do. I knew Mum wanted me to be good, but I have already become a bad daughter.

She blamed herself for disappointing her family. She condemned herself as a 'bad daughter'. This realisation was further emphasised after she read the transcripts of the interviews. 'I was shocked … I couldn't believe how much I have changed.' When asked to consider if the changes had anything to do with her English literacy and practices, Sreyna provided the following response in English:

I used to obey all the elders in my family. I mean I always listened to them. I never used to argue for things I wanted or things they didn't want me to do. However, now I can see that I use reasons to talk with them. They can't force me to do the things I don't want to do anymore. Well, it was not that they forced me to do something bad, but it was just something that I as a mature person should also have the rights to decide. For example, when my parents followed my aunt's advice and forced me to apply to work at the NBC, I opposed them. I didn't want to work there because I loved my current job. Plus, I felt that NBC was a very traditional place. The people working there need to be very well-mannered and deferential to the elders, so I really didn't

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want to work there. I loved to work with my American bosses because there I had my full rights to directly complain to them on the things I didn't think was good to do. Such a thing cannot happen at NBC. I am sure that under no circumstances would I be given the rights to decide or to protest about anything. I strongly believed that I would just be a yes-woman out there. Hence, I tried to tell them that I didn't want to work there. I tried to use so many reasons to convince them. My parents ended up following my decision, but they insisted at least I should try to apply because they really didn't want to upset my *Oum*.

In Different Bodies

Sreyna's story was narrated from the time she was living with her *Oum* and was already an independent person, exercising her freedom to make decisions about how she would live her life:

> I like to be independent. Since I came to live in Phnom Penh, I have been living my life independently. Although I live with my *Oum*, I did everything myself—shopping, choosing my university. I made my own decision to study the bachelor's degree in English. My parents provided the financial support, but I chose whichever school to study.

At the beginning of her story, her sense of self was dominant in her narrative. However, the more she talked about her story, the more prevalent her identity as a Cambodian daughter emerged. She was a student, a daughter and a dependent individual with very little idea about tertiary education. She did not know what she wanted to do with her life, so she let her family decide for her and took one step at a time towards her future. However, she was also an individual with very strong feelings towards learning English; although she did not know what a degree in English would offer her.

From this, Sreyna returned to the time she learnt English for the first time, talking in the body of both an obedient daughter and a student surrounded by the people who placed great importance on 'proper' Khmerness, both at home and at school. These two senses of self, as a student and an obedient Cambodian daughter, coexisted without any compatibility issues until she was in grade nine, or around 15 years old. Throughout this time, her Cambodian identity was reinforced both at home and at school. As Welaratna (1999, p. 25) underlined, Cambodian schools functioned in such a way that children learnt not only how to read and write, but also about the

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'culturally appropriate behaviors' for being Cambodians. With her limited knowledge of English and the traditional teaching methods employed by the local teachers, Sreyna's practices of English did not inform her much of the Western cultural ideologies yet. Further, she was living in a community that was, in her words, 'very traditional'. All sociocultural and educational circumstances were in favour of nurturing the desirable Cambodian identity.

However, her 'proper' self and identity began to split when Sreyna started her English education at COERR, where teaching was done in the more western, student-centred, manner. Her narrative at this point was still in a student's body, but with a less significant sense of the traditional Cambodian daughter as the new identity emerged. She was becoming an independent individual starting to make personal choices about her own being. Her involvement in the speaking activities at the English school helped her to realise that she was fond of voicing her own opinion. By this time, Sreyna had confidently stepped out of her taciturn Cambodian self, to grow into quite the opposite personality.

She now dared to defy her family's advice about not talking to or making male friends by constantly engaging with them in the classroom and beyond. Through her socialisation, she discovered an exciting life away from that to which her family had tried to keep her. Not long into this performance of the new identity, she found herself a boyfriend. Sreyna was smart and no longer naïve; she kept both her new individualistic identity and her 'forbidden' relationship a secret. When she was with her family, she was Khmer enough that they did not notice the change in her. Neither her parents nor her grandmother could have guessed what she was like behind their backs. She felt no guilt about this.

Sreyna soon discovered that her new life did not have to be the *sampot knong phnot* (literally, clothe in fold or virtuous in behaviours) all of the time. There was fun and excitement everywhere in Phnom Penh: cable TV, the Internet, fashion, entertainment. She continued to behave as a proper Cambodian daughter at home, but with her peers, she sought to enjoy in full the modernity that Phnom Penh could provide. Sreyna fully immersed herself in the new identity that used English primarily for almost everything, including for talking among peers, text messaging, emails, the Internet, social networking, classroom communication, assignments and entertainment. 'At home, I used English when I was talking to my friends. I don't

want my family to know what I was talking about', she said. Sreyna's sense of belonging among her modern, English-speaking peers served as a powerful force pulling her ever further away from the traditional body groomed by her traditional family.

Several relationships emerged in Sreyna's narrative: the relationship with her peers, her boyfriends, her colleagues, her sister, her parents, her grandmother and her *Oum*. At the opening of her narrative, there was a distance relationship between her family (both parents and *Oum*) and her. She talked of herself as 'independent', 'alone' and 'lonely'. She then talked of her relationship with her peers at RULE. They helped her to choose an English school to study at while waiting for the chance to retake the entrance exam to do her degree in English education. Through these peers, she was able to establish her relationship with the broader society within which she lived. That was the time she started opening herself to the new environment of a modern city. Many things were new: globalisation, development, modernity, technologies, freedom, fashions, fast-paced life and the more individualistic lifestyles.

When Sreyna returned to talking about her childhood years, her close relations with her mother and grandmother were conspicuous. Because she was not allowed to talk to men, Sreyna learnt most things about a woman's being and becoming from her two female elders. During all those years, she completely confided in them, and so did they.

Then emerged the relationship with her classmates at COERR English school. This was unlike any relationship she had had before, and it opened her eyes to a wider Cambodian society to which she had been denied access for her 16 years. Many factors made the relationship with her peers the most noteworthy. First, she had almost reached her young adulthood. Both intra- and inter-individual changes were taking place, physically, psychologically and socially (Jessor et al. 1991). She was drawn into the culture that the people her age were practicing and soon became aware of the differences between herself and her parents—the generation gap (Falk & Falk 2005; Mueller 2007). Second, Sreyna was acquiring and practicing English. She was being familiarised with peer interaction, discussion and the sharing of opinions. She was also being exposed to Western culture and different values and notions of being through the English texts she read, listened to and talked about. Practicing a foreign language goes together with practicing that language's culture (Bian 2009; Gao et al.

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2005). She also had a boyfriend for the first time during this period. Her time was no longer spent entirely on studying; she had discovered there was more to life.

As a result of this shift in her identity, problems began to surface between her and her family. Every time she visited her parents in Battambang, her parents and her grandmother had to tolerate the occasional male caller from the city. In her subsequent visits, Sreyna brought home the new curly hairstyle and later on a new hair colour. Then came the new fashions and jewellery. Her *Sampot* was replaced by miniskirts and shorts. Her neck, ears and wrists were beautifully adorned with stringy ornaments. Clothing, according to Barthes (1990), is a meaning communicating signs or codes. Sreyna was dropping hints, very obvious ones. Her reserved personality was being replaced by an active and cheerful disposition. She also displayed strong tendency towards social engagements as well as spending time with peers. Still her parents made concessions for this; although they were traditional, they were fully aware of the advancement of modern society and of the young people as its most active agents.

However, when given hints that her marriage was being arranged, Sreyna fought off this proposition, waking the sleeping tiger, as the Cambodian proverb goes. Her parents now blamed her for behaving improperly in almost everything she did. She was called selfish, inconsiderate and disrespectful. She was warned to keep herself on the right track and re-evaluate her choices in life. Her work, her colleagues, her friends were all accused of playing their roles in her rebelliousness. Her Facebook account was even deactivated. When contacted through email about her opinion regarding the transcripts of the interviews seven months later, Sreyna apologised for being out of touch. She said much had happened and she needed time to deal with the problems in her family. She did not go into details and I did not ask for fear I was being too intrusive into her family's affairs.

Societal and Cultural Frameworks

In Sreyna's story, the most predominant social structures and institutions were related to education and tradition. On the one hand, her early education both at home and at school had a critical role to play in shaping and informing her identity. It functioned as an invisible box for her understanding of selves and performances of

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identity. Her English education and practices, on the other hand, helped to remove this box and place her in the broader context of a globalised world. Sreyna was liberated. She was given wings and with them she flew. She was a modern young woman who believed strongly in gender equality, not as defined by Cambodian tradition, but by Western societies.

Sreyna's education was designed to make her a valuable member of society. It seemed she was being prepared to lead a very similar life to her mother. To give her a better chance of getting a job, she was also made to study English. However, this language study would upset her parents' plan for her, as her exposure to Western ideas caused Sreyna to pick a more Western identity. She became more individualistic and wanted more autonomy in her life. Her education and English literacy helped her to enjoy power, freedom and independence among her peers and, to an extent, her family members. However, Sreyna's choice situated her in a challenging position in relation to her identity as an obedient daughter and a Cambodian. She had to be careful about the way she performed her identity at risk of being forced to choose between her family and her chosen lifestyle. Sreyna's reluctance to lose either of her identities predicted she would need to sacrifice.

In short, Sreyna's early life was with limited freedom. In her teen, her education allowed her to be freer, being able to make some male friends. Her Khmer literacy and practices, however, still confined her to the proper behaviours and ideologies of a Khmer woman. Broader freedom came to her when she moved away to live in the city. Her English literacy and practices familiarized her with many modern behaviours and ideologies of the Western cultures. The English books she read, the Hollywood's movies and television shows she watched, and the American songs she listened to subconsciously informed her of a more individualistic self. There were occasions when her individualistic preference clashed with her family values. The clashes reminded Sreyna to be careful in the ways she performed her identity. After all, she is still Cambodian.

Chapter 7: 'Looking after the Three Fires'

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Thida was 23 years old at the time of interview. She had lived all her life in Phnom Penh, never far from her parents. In Thida's family, her grandmother seemed to have the most say. Traditionally, 'Khmer familial structure was organized primarily by age, rather than by gender' (Tyner 2009, p. 137). Thida's grandmother was also educated, which garnered great respect and the right to decide in many family affairs.

Thida's 'Sino-Cambodian' business-oriented parents encouraged her to study as much as she could, and she graduated from two universities in a row. Raised in the capital city of Phnom Penh, her family's financial status meant she never had to worry about having to do the household chores or helping her family in any way unless she wanted to. 'I was a spoiled child', she said. However, Thida preferred not to think she was rich; rather, she was just lucky to have many people attending to her.

Growing up in the UNTAC era, Thida was encouraged to start learning English from an early age. She went to a private English class with several of the older girls in the neighbourhood, all of whom were in their late teens. There was no pressure of any kind from her family when Thida started her English literacy journey, nor were there any goals. It was more like a time-killing hobby. Thida's English classes were supplemented by a more hands-on learning experience when the front part of her house was rented to an American couple on a mission to spread Christianity in Cambodia. Looking back, Thida realised she was influenced quite strongly at that time by her foreign tenants' religious beliefs. 'They had a very tactful way of influencing us, we liked to visit them', she said, using 'we' to refer to herself. 'And they would teach us to play piano and paint and so on before convincing us to go to their church to sing and have more fun.' They also taught Thida the English language using basic conversations and flash cards to teach new words. When she could understand simple instructions, she was allowed to play interactive teaching games on their computer. Such activities were very interesting for her and, after a while, the experience changed her personality to a certain degree. 'Against my mother's and grandmother's advice, I visited them almost every evening', recalled Thida. She also went to church every Sunday with them. 'When my family asked me to go to a pagoda with them, I hard-headedly refused', recalled Thida.

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In her mid-teens, Thida was enrolled in a well-known private English school. Here she studied with many native speakers of English. Learning with them, she was encouraged to talk, and these experiences gave her confidence, fluency and an American accent. Many of her friends admired her for her native-like English accent. Nevertheless, Thida never felt she was literate in the language given the rare opportunities to use it outside school. Only when she finished high school and attended another English course at a private university did she realise that she knew English 'quite a lot'. She was able to read the textbooks and write the assignments. She could also communicate with the teachers and her classmates using English. This was in 2005, when Thida was 18 years old. Knowing that she could use English for many school-related tasks encouraged her to study English harder. She was hoping to get a job in an office, rather than to work in the market place like her mother and her grandma. Only after she started pursuing her bachelor of English-language education did she realise other uses for English outside school. She was about 20 at this time, and had started spending her free time with her female friends. 'We would meet to discuss school assignments', she said. When they had finished their discussion, they would socialise, using English as their medium of communication in all these activities.

Having been 'Cambodian proper' all her life, Thida recalled how much fun she had had with her English literacy practices. She enjoyed so many things Western, particularly American: the accent, music, movies and lifestyle. They were like windows to her preferred lifestyle. As she explained, 'I learnt a lot from American movies'. In her everyday life, she enjoyed speaking in English with her close friends when they were going out or when talking on her iPhone. She was a committed fan of Apple products.

Thida was also active in digital communication. She used emails and the Internet almost every day and was quite active on Facebook. She made many friends, both in Cambodia and abroad, through online social networking. One of her best friends, from whom she would normally seek advice on personal problems, was living in New Zealand. They chatted online regularly through Facebook or Skype and she liked to hang out in one of the many modern cafés in Phnom Penh. European-like cafés were attractive to modern Cambodians, particularly teenagers and young adults, in many ways. Firstly, these establishments appeared much cleaner and more

comfortable than the older-style coffee shops. Equipped with air-conditioning, comfortable seating and free wireless Internet, the cafés offer people a place to socialise and connect digitally with the rest of the world. The interviews with Thida took place in three different such cafés.

While she was half way through her university education, a marriage was arranged for Thida. Her elders must have been worried that Thida's 'marriage age' would pass. This concern is common among families with daughters. Das (2007, p. 79) has written that:

> A Cambodian woman in her early thirties whom I have known for some years reported that there was a lot of pressure put upon her by her parents to get married. When I asked her if she was looking for a partner, she reported that she was not really interested and also that is not the way things are traditionally done. It is the friends or relatives who bring a proposal to the girl's parents … and at her age, it was difficult to find a match. In Cambodia, the appropriate age of marriage for girls in in the teens, reported many women in my study. While she was pursuing her education in preparation for her career choice, she had support of her parents. However, her parents also wanted her to settle down. She seems to be not keen to do so. The fact that she has thus far been able to resist parental pressure and remain single is indicative of both the change and continuity of Khmer cultural norms. In pursuing educational and career goals that she and her parents wanted, she had had gone past the 'marriage age'.

Married Life

Thida's fair skin, elegantly tall stature and dyed bright brown hair made for a striking appearance. At the time of her first interview, she had been married for almost a year and a half, and her husband had moved in to live with her in her parents' house, a traditional practice intended to safeguard young couples' living together, with supervision and advice from the new wife's elders to ensure that the marriage worked and lasted.

Obviously, Thida's elders did not want Thida's 'marriage age' to pass or they would risk finding her a partner at all. Since one of a Khmer's parental duties is to find a partner for their child, it is not surprising that Thida's elders interrupted her studies by arranging her marriage. It was when she had a family of her own that Thida fully realised the importance of Western ways of dating. She wished she had dated her

husband first, so they could learn more about each other. The dating period would have better prepared her and her husband for coping with committed family life.

Through her English literacy and practices, particularly through watching American films and TV shows, Thida learnt about commitment, trust, respect and gender equity in relationships. She also read about them in print and online. Subconsciously, she expected these important qualities when she was married. She did not think she would lose her freedom. Instead, she thought she would be freer because she would be with an equal partner, not controlling parents. Unfortunately, that was not what happened. Her husband was instead rather traditional. He expected her to serve him and be a 'Cambodian proper' wife. Among other things, he also thought he could still be 'fooling around' with other women.

During the first few months of their marriage, Thida did try to be a good Cambodian wife. 'I used to be soft, wanting to be a good wife, only to learn that I was not respected or valued doing what I did. Then I stopped caring.' Thida was not willing to lose her rights or change her personal self to meet her husband's expectations. This led to many clashes of personalities, and as time passed, the differences became more serious. At one point, she 'even thought about divorcing', and this may have happened, had it not been for the roles her elders, particularly her mother, played in uniting Thida and her husband. Thida said:

> That was when the Western values came to play their roles in my life. I need to find happiness for myself. I need to be independent. I saw the point why young Westerners would live with each other first. If they can't get along, they break up. I missed my single life. I no longer care about being a widower, but the elders kept reminding me that being a widower I would have to face endless gossips.

Divorcing would disgrace both her family and her husband's, and in the Cambodian sociocultural context, the disadvantages weighed more heavily on her if she were to become a *meemay* (divorcée) (Derks 2008, p. 52). 'Mum and Dad told me that my *chamnong apeapipea* (marriage tie) involved more than just me and my husband', said Thida. As a result, she had no choice but to be strong to work to maintain her honour and values while waiting for her husband to update himself, a process that would take much time and willpower on her husband's side. Feeling frustrated with the unhappy marriage, Thida spent her time studying and hanging out with friends both at school and online.

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Thida's unhappiness in her marriage was particularly around gender inequality. 'I have heard it with my own ears that it is all right for men to be flirtatious outside the home. I find it totally unfair and unacceptable. Why must women be faithful alone? Why only men can go wherever, whenever, and do whatever they want to?' questioned Thida. As a modern Cambodian woman, she deserved better in practice, not just in the legal arena. Thida acknowledged that such a way of thinking stemmed from her English literacy and practices as well as her critical thinking skills, a subject taught in the final year of her bachelor's degree of English. 'I was very analytical because of the critical thinking subject I learnt at school', said Thida.

Disheartened by her own family problems, Thida grew even more critical of the Cambodian culture by which she had to abide. She regarded it as 'unwise' and 'unfair'. Reflecting on herself in it, she realised how much she had been modernised, or even Westernised. For example, while her elders were worried that her marriage would not last, she was less concerned about avoiding divorce. 'I don't care anymore', she said. Referring to the *chbab srey*, Thida went on:

> If we take foreign culture into consideration, or just to be fair, we should be able to discuss our problems and seek the best solutions. And if divorce is the solution, I'm fine with it. Cambodian culture is appalling in that it suppressed women not to say anything about their problems, not even to their parents. Any women who do so will be called *srey 'at leak*.

According to Derks (2006, pp. 196–7), 'Just as the *srey krup leak* can lead her family—and husband—to success, the opposite means that a woman *'at leak* who is not behaving properly, especially in relation to men, can destroy the reputation and wealth of her family'. The code of conduct for women prescribes that a married woman must attend well to the three fires: her new family, her parents and her parents-in-law. That is, she must take care to provide for and be respectfully fair to her husband, her own parents and her parents-in-law. She must not bring one fire into meeting with another or she risks an inferno. In other words, she should never reveal any problems from one family to another, or all of the families would be in conflict.

Reflecting on her early reactions to Westerners' practices of dating that she found out through her English literacy practices, Thida commented:

> I used to think that I would never marry anyone who had no respect for my parents. Our parents gave birth to us. I used to think that Western culture was crazy when I learnt young people could fall in love against their parents' wishes. Only this year after having been married for nearly a year have I realised that their culture is much more advanced. There are some bad points,

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but generally their ways of life are better than ours. Now I think that it is all right to adopt some of their ideas and maintain some of ours. For example, we should preserve the ways we pay respect to our elders, but should be careful not to let our respect for them influence our own ways of life. We should start living our own life and stop thinking that doing so is wrong.

Thida found herself living with a double identity to make her elders and herself happy, putting her relationship with her husband at risk of a break up. When she was with her friends, she was like a Western young woman, carefree, easy-going, independent and critical. She behaved similarly when alone with her husband. 'With him, I am so Western', said Thida, before adding that she had to present herself as a proper Cambodian woman with him when their elders were present. Moreover, when she was with her elders, she was more Khmer in her behaviours. Recently, however, she had been increasingly more outspoken and rebellious with her parents. It irritated her mother the most. Thida recounted how her mother sometimes scolded her with cries of 'You European!' when Thida acted more like her preferred self in her mother's presence.

A year or so after her marriage, Thida rediscovered the usefulness of social media to relieve her stress from family problems:

> Only this year do I do my social networking most expressively. … I no longer care too much [about following the cultural norms]. I used to care too much about what my family and the others may think about me. I had taken myself for granted. I had lost chances to develop myself. Since I studied my Bachelor in English, I have understood life better. I saw myself trapped in a life for families. It was useless.

In Different Bodies

Thida's story started in the bodies of a student and a daughter, obediently attending English school without knowing a reason. As a student, she was a hard worker. She spent her free time studying English with older girls in the neighbourhood. Later she attended two universities simultaneously and graduated with a degree in banking and another in English education. As a daughter, she was generally obedient. Only after she befriended some Christian Americans renting a room in her house, when she was really too young to know what she was doing, did she start to refuse to comply with some of her family's wishes; that is, to go to pagoda.

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However, she honoured her family by agreeing to their arranged marriage and she listened to their advice and stayed on in the relationship to make the marriage last.

For much of her life, Thida had lived it this multiple way: good daughter, hardworking student and strong-willed wife. As a good daughter and diligent student, she was fully aware of the potential shame she could bring upon her family if she did something 'improper'. 'I never had a boyfriend until I was married', she said. She took her elders' advice seriously and was a daughter of whom they could be proud and that was worth bragging about. In her free time from school, Thida would spend time helping her mother in her shop at the market. Among the many things she achieved as a good daughter and student, she acquired English literacy. Before getting married, she was an active English user. She watched American films, listened to English music and read English texts. Through these literacy practices, she saw how Cambodian ways of life, particularly those of Cambodian women, were of lesser quality than Western ways of living. The differences became salient to her upon her marriage.

Traditionally, she was supposed to stay at home to take care of the household, waiting for her husband. However, that was impractical for Thida. She was still studying two degrees and an English course. She had assignments and classes to attend. In the process of completing all those assignments and class activities, Thida sometimes read, wrote and debated about gender equity. She saw that women in Western societies were capable of achieving anything men could. She learnt they were independent after becoming 18 years of age. They chose their own partners and were equal to their partners. Their partners would support them and love them just the way they were. Further, through the films and TV shows she watched, she learnt that generally, for a relationship to last, women and men had to be equally committed to the relationship. She was therefore disappointed that her husband appeared not to be as committed to their marriage as she was. Thida was not willing to lose her pride and self-value completely. She refused to accept the traditional Cambodian belief that compares women to white cloth and men to gemstones. This belief holds that, when a piece of white cloth becomes dirty, its originally purity cannot be regained; however, gemstones require only to be rinsed for them to shine again. Her discovery that her husband applied this belief to justify his infidelity caused her to consider ending her

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marriage. Her literacy practices had informed her that in the West when a relationship is not working, it is all right to end it and move on with living.

When Thida was frustrated with her marriage, she immersed herself more deeply into her study, her social media usage and her socialisation with her friends. She mostly used English when engaging with all these activities. Speaking a different tongue, she put on a different identity: she felt just like a young Western girl, with so much about life to enjoy. Even though coming home transported her to a different reality, she found she was less worried about facing life's challenges. Thus, Thida's story revealed her different bodies: as a 'good' daughter, a hardworking student, a partly Westernised young woman, and a wife who fought for equity and fairness for herself.

Societal and Cultural Frameworks

Thida's performances of self and identity evolved around many social structures (including family, gender equality, power, freedom, independence, tradition and traditional responsibilities and age), all occurring in two primary societal and cultural settings: home and school. At a younger age, at both home and school, Thida acquired and practiced her 'proper' Khmerness as a daughter and a woman. She learnt about the social hierarchical order, knowing what power her grandmother, mother, father and aunt had. From these elders, she learnt about her traditional roles as a woman: cooking, doing housework and managing the family's income. She also learnt that, as a daughter, she had limited freedom; she needed to obtain approval for her actions and movements. She understood that she was not allowed to go out without the company of a family member: her Khmer literacy practices informed her that, as a daughter, a girl depended on her elders, and that she would depend on her husband when she was married.

However, when Thida began learning and practicing English, she was exposed to different, and mostly conflicting, social and cultural values. Although she lived in Cambodia, she adopted many of these sociocultural values into her being and becoming. For example, she said she was more honest and direct when speaking in English. She thought as a Westerner would. However, when she spoke Khmer, she was constantly aware of face-saving. She became less direct and thus thought herself

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was less honest when speaking her mother tongue. Outside home, among her peers and teachers, she was more of a Western young woman, particularly in the ways she communicated and thought. She was carefree, lively and outspoken. At home, however, she was mostly her proper Cambodian self: reserved and submissive. There were times when she performed her Western identity with her parents as in being critical of or rebellious against her advice. In such occasions, her mother would criticise her as *puok Erop*, or of the European type.

Thida's life was hard, having to live between two conflicting societal and cultural frameworks. In her English classes, she was encouraged to be critical. At home, she needed to be aware of face-saving. At school, she learnt everyone was equal, but at home, she needed to know her place in the family hierarchical order. On social media, she could post any comments, but at home, she had to watch her mouth. When she got married, this became even harder. She was forced to care about everyone's feeling except for her own. She was given the 'three fires' to look after and prevented from expressing her frustration, to avoid bringing one fire to join another and risking an inferno. Knowing what was best for her, Thida was not going to change herself completely to save her elders' or her husband's faces. In Thida's fight for power and freedom, Thida challenged not only her family, but also tradition and culture. She was able to negotiate for equity and respect with her husband, but she still had a fight ahead of her to change the way in which Cambodian tradition and culture regards women.

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Chapter 8: 'A Well-Disciplined Child'

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Chbab Bros (Men's Code of Conduct)

> The Men's Code instructs men to behave moderately, to be knowledgeable and resourceful, to work hard, and to protect their property. It warns against adultery, drunkenness, and gambling. … It is noteworthy that the codes reveal an underlying cultural assumption that men are more spiritually evolved than women because one must be a man before one can become a monk before one can become a Buddha. Therefore, men are directed to follow Buddhist precepts and assigned responsibility to provide spiritual and moral guidance to women.

> (Hagadorn n.d.)

When I first met Dara, I was particularly interested in his thoughtful, smart and rather reserved appearance. His look gave me the impression that he was a serious person, hardworking and thoughtful. He reminded me of many qualities prescribed in the male code of conduct. With a look of a Sino-Cambodian, Dara's fair complexion and short dark straight hair, neatly cut and combed, gave the impression that he was a 'good' Cambodian son—serious, smart, observant, hardworking and apparently moderate in his tastes, fashions and behaviour. I was very keen to find out how his English literacies had influenced him. Was he still the same person as when he had started speaking in English? Or could he be the still water that ran deep?

I soon learnt the truth. Dara's communicative skills were obviously not typically Cambodian. When it was not his turn to talk, he attentively listened with constant eye contact. He usually appeared to think thoroughly before uttering any words, looking straight into his audience's eyes, as if to demand their similarly full attention. When he spoke, he organised his ideas in a logical manner and talked straight to the point. He freely expressed his opinions, demonstrating his critical thinking in the ways he reasoned. In Khmer, his sentences were grammatically full and correct. He was also very punctual. Such were the first few indications of some Western influences in his behaviour.

Dara's Family Background

Dara's parents were both from Kampot, a Southern province along the coastline of Cambodia. His father came from a Chinese business-oriented family who had been quite wealthy before the Khmer Rouge regime. Dara's grandparents were Chinese migrants and Dara's mother came from a Sino-Cambodian black pepper farming family. During Pol Pot's regime, Dara's parents were relocated to live and work in the same village, and the Khmer Rouge regime, who claimed to be the people's new parents (Ponchaud 1989, p. 166), arranged their marriage. Although Dara's father's parents were not happy with the arrangement, as his mother's parents were from a lower status and poorer background, they could not object to the arrangement and soon followed the birth of a daughter and a son.

As Sino-Cambodians, Dara's parent's families were very lucky not to have been executed under the Khmer Rouge's 'discriminatory policies' (Gottesman 2003, p. 174). They survived, albeit with certain trauma. Dara's mother was the most severely affected. She was depressed and required ongoing medication. When the Khmer Rouge regime collapsed, Dara's father's parents wanted Dara's father to divorce his mother. He refused. The refusal upset Dara's paternal grandparents and they consequently denied their son, Dara's father, his share of the family inheritance, which they had managed to bury during the Pol Pot regime. As a result, throughout the 1980s, Dara's family struggled to make ends meet. His father worked as a high school teacher teaching French and Mathematics, and his mother opened a small grocery shop at home. By the end of the 1980s, two more children had been born in the family, another daughter and son.

Upbringing and Growing Up

Although Dara's parents were both of Chinese ancestry, they were thought by Dara to be truly Cambodian in their ways of life. Dara referred to his parents as typical in many ways. For example, his father's area of responsibility was predominantly outside the house and any household affair was that of his mother. As he explained:

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> My father does not care much about the family, particularly about his children … Mum takes care of everything in the house and she is the one who cares about her children mostly. She wants us to be well educated so that we won't experience what she did. She expects us to at least have a bachelor's degree, with which we will be able to get decent jobs and live decent lives.

In terms of tradition, Dara also thought his family was far more Cambodian than Chinese. 'My parents follow Cambodian tradition very firmly', said Dara. 'They even prefer Khmer names to Chinese ones for their children'. As Dara explained:

> Like all Cambodian children, from the early days, I was taught to respect the elders. I have to keep silent when they talk. I am not supposed to advise the elders because they know better and their ideas are always good. In fact, I don't really believe in this last one very much now. I should be updated now. I believe younger people's voices and concerns should be heard, too. Old people are not always correct because, as human beings, we all make mistakes. I still respect the elders because they are older though. My parents are also typical in that in their bringing us up they expect us to be obedient to them. We follow their guidance and explanation. My father was very violent, using even electric wires to beat us. His punishments would usually leave us bedridden. He was really *kach* [or brutal]. Luckily, he never punished me as I am the youngest child in the family. My elder siblings were more unfortunate. They were not very obedient, so he had to do that to them. My sisters were also quite lucky because he was more gentle and affectionate to daughters. He rarely punished them physically. My father believes that sons are slyer and more mischievous and therefore must be disciplined more vigorously. The ways they brought us up did not make us feel much affectionate. My eldest sister may disagree though. She is the dearest to them. She is the only child they address as '*kaun kaun*' [literally, child which could be daughter for a girl, son for a boy]. I was not very happy about this. My sister is well-educated and quite influential in the family. Her education and her experiences from the engagement in the society help her to better understand her younger siblings and our parents alike. She explains about the modern world and ways of life to my parents and they understand better now.

The above quotation from Dara contains many elements of typical traditional Cambodian practice, including respect for elders, obedience, physical punishment by the father for serious wrongdoings, different treatment for the youngest child, a son's need of more discipline and a greater display of affection for daughters. However, the quotation also alludes to certain Western values that Dara acquired through his English literacies. For example, he no longer believed his elders were always right. He argued that children should be heard too, not just seen. He also thought his parents should have shown more affection to the children equally. Despite this mixture of traditional Cambodian and modern Western cultural values, while growing up, Dara

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was strongly Cambodian in one important respect. Just like in the Cambodian naming system, family came first.

Family First

Due to Dara's parents' limited knowledge of and engagement with the job market and the development of the country, the eldest daughter was empowered to guide what her younger siblings needed to study as their university majors. She chose accounting as a university major for Dara. Although Dara was thinking of becoming an engineer or a doctor, he did not object. His sister advised him that as an accountant he would dress nicely and work comfortably in an air-conditioned office instead of having to work on a dangerous construction site under the fierce sunlight as an engineer, or working with blood and sick people as a doctor. Besides, she added, the subject was not as hard as what he wanted to study. Upon finishing high school, Dara applied for a bachelor's degree in accountancy. He was successful.

A Need for English Literacy

Dara first started learning English as part of the high school curriculum. When first studying it, he had little knowledge of the language. In class, whenever the English teacher called on him to read some text, he would stutter and wait for help from his friends who, unlike Dara, had studied English prior to high school. 'From grades one to six, I had always been the top student', said Dara. From grade seven onward, however, Dara had difficulty maintaining his top grade. English was the culprit. 'From grade seven onwards, I found it hard to be the top student because of the English subject. I didn't know even a letter at the time. I topped the others in the rest of the subjects, but not in English.'

Although he performed very poorly in English, Dara was not motivated to master the new challenge for several reasons. First, he saw no immediate need to study it. The teaching of the language at school was not serious enough to capture his attention and the class tests were somehow passable. Second, at the time, he was more interested in playing computer and video games in the gaming centres around his

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school. When possible, he would spend almost all of his free time there. Third, his family did not push him to study the language. However, as Dara neared grade nine, he began to see the need to study English:

> During that time, many private schools and universities were mushrooming. English courses and schools were advertised far too frequently to ignore on all the TVs, radios and posters. It captured my attention. Also, my friends who were one grade higher than me motivated me. They were studying very hard for their transition exam into grade nine. I suddenly was worried. If would be shameful if I couldn't pass the entrance exam into the senior high school. Therefore, I started to study harder. That was when I noticed how English is widely used in our society and on the TV and how most of my friends were able to understand it much better than I did. I wanted to learn English because I was curious about its culture, their ways of life, freedom, and individual independence. I suddenly wanted to know and to read English.

There were other reasons, too:

> Anyone knows English is widely used in communication all over the world. In Cambodia if we are able to communicate in it, we are highly regarded by the others. They see us as wonderful people. This is the most important thing about using English. It is what later motivated me to study it more and more.

> Describing his hard work, he said:

> At elementary level, I did a lot of self-study at home … I didn't attend any class. I would get up at six o'clock in the morning and self-study those lessons until eight o'clock. I would study a page a day, skipping anything beyond my comprehension. I would play the CD and listen to the conversations many times to catch what was being said. I did this regularly until I came to pre-intermediate level. After that I jumped into intensive grammar courses for five or six years, during which I finished three or four grammar books.

Dara's motivation to study English was given a further boost when he saw the course books his elder siblings studied:

> I became increasingly motivated when I saw most university textbooks my brothers and sisters were studying were in English. I realised that at university level, English would be very useful for my study. I studied very hard during senior high school years because I was able to compete with other good students in all subjects. The competition was really fierce at the time. As for my English, it improved most significantly when I was studying TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language] skills. My reading skills improved so much from practicing all those TOEFL materials.

Immediately upon finishing high school, Dara applied to RULE to major in accountancy. As he had anticipated, English was very useful in his course. Although the lectures were mostly in Khmer, the core course books were in English, and so

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were the handouts. 'Because the school has some American lecturers, the students were divided into two groups: those who could attend lectures in English and those who could attend Khmer lectures only', said Dara. With his level of English proficiency, Dara was included in the group whose lecturers spoke English only:

> I was able to read and understand English quite significantly. All course books were in English. Even Khmer lecturers use English key terms in their lectures. Their handouts were in English, too. Besides, if we needed to know beyond what the lecturers covered in the class, we had to do some extensive reading. And the materials were mostly available in English.

Having extensively used English into his second year at RULE, Dara wanted to know how good his English literacy was. He wondered if he could pass the entrance exam of English to start a bachelor's degree in English language education in another state university. The exam was locally known to be very difficult. He took the test and passed. When his elder siblings knew he had been accepted into another university, they encouraged him to study two bachelor's degrees at the same, which Dara did.

The Roles of English in Everyday Life

Studying a bachelor's degree in English, Dara had even more chances to practice English. He read many more course books in English. Class activities, lectures, homework, and assignments all were done using English. In just a short time, Dara's English was improving, and so were his interpersonal skills.

Dara's English literacy and practice gave him a sense of pride and satisfaction that he had lacked in his pursuance of a degree in accountancy. Learning about and using English to do presentations, discussions and debates helped him to overcome his shyness. It also made him more critical and analytical. His extensive reading to improve his general knowledge also earned him broader understanding and more ideas. That he was able to present his ideas with reasons and logic fostered his confidence and self-esteem.

With his new qualifications, Dara was able to find himself a job as a part-time teacher of English when he was nearing the end of his third year of his bachelor's degree in English education. Dara now used his English literacy to plan his lessons

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and deliver them to his students. 'As I am both a student and a teacher of English, I constantly use English in reviewing, preparing and planning my lessons.' In so doing, he further improved his macro skills in English literacy as well as other related skills he had acquired through practicing English, including researching, preparing presentations and giving explanations. Nor did Dara stop there. He continued to incorporate English literacy and practices into his everyday life.

> Certain activities in my life involve my using of English literacy primarily. For example, I use English for social networking and personal corresponding through emails. My friends and I use English to talk to each other when we see each other. I was also able to use English in those job interviews that I have had in the past. Besides all these, I mostly listen to English music and watch CNN or Channel News Asia to update myself with the latest development of the world. For fun, I watch Walt Disney channel a lot.

Literacies Practices and the Self

When Dara was practicing his English literacies, he was not aware how the practices informed his perception of self and identity. However, when asked to reflect on this, he gave the following account:

> Through my practices of English, I have broadened my understanding of the world and other advanced technologies. It has improved my general knowledge significantly because it enables me to read many different kinds of books that I am interested in like linguistics, global studies, environmental issues, world economy, war, history, news, etc.

> I learnt that Western countries, particular the European ones, have done thorough studies in almost everything in the world and beyond. They publish their studies and thus made them available to people around the world to access and study. These studies are of great interest to me. I found that Western countries are different from communist countries that try so hard to hide so many things from their people. Communist countries also did their best to distort the truth.

> English language is an essential tool for innovations. Without knowledge of English, people would be left behind and have become traditional.

> Through English, I have become more informed about and have had more and better choices in life. I understand my life and the others' better and am ready for the developments. I am mostly interested in foreign cultures, particularly Western culture. I learnt that children in the Western societies grow up worry-free. They have freedom and a lot of fun in life and their parents don't use physical punishments on them.

> My interest in their culture grew most significantly after my uncle and his family who had migrated to America sent us news about their life in America.

Seeing those photos of my uncle's children, I think they look classy and developed. I even intend to migrate to the USA since then.

Dara concluded that, when a Cambodian can speak English, he or she can learn about the lifestyles and governance of other countries. 'It is beneficial in every way, from economy to military. In Cambodia, many foreign investors are from English-speaking countries. They use English to communicate with the local in Cambodia. Knowing English, therefore, give us chances to benefit from their investments.'

What It Means to Know English

Dara admitted that his English literacy gave him a sense of pride, boosting his self-esteem. He felt privileged because, he said, not many Cambodians were able to do what he could with his English language. He felt he was admired by others when they saw him using the language in his everyday life:

> It seems like I am living with a high status in the society. Whenever I speak English, people look at me admiringly. Those who can speak the language are considered to be educated people and I am happy to be one of them.

> English literacy and practices has given me these notions of independence, freedom and justice. I want to have a separate life from my parents. I have learnt that, in the West, children spend all day at school as their parents also work all day. They are encouraged to learn to live independently and depend increasingly less on their family as they mature. That they are able to live away from their parents enables them to establish strong foundation for their future life. This included interpersonal skills, social skills and communication skills. These skills are useful for them to adapt to all kinds of situations and cultures. I would like to live in such an open world, making friends with such people. I would like to add some spices to improve our lives.

Dara also preferred the flexibility commonly found in Western cultures. He contrasted this to the rigidness of Cambodian culture, which expects people to follow codes of conduct and traditional ways of life to be considered 'good' or 'proper'. He added:

> One more thing that I love about the Western ways of life is that their culture and tradition are updated with time and developments. For example, I know that they used to arrange their children marriages, but they don't do it any more now. They used to decide their children future, as in Romeo and Juliet,

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but it is no longer the case now. They have updated their ways of life. I love it that young people are given enough freedom and chances to decide their own future.

The Body of Evidence

Dara's life story revealed different bodies: a son, a student, a young man seeking opportunities for living independently of his family, a boyfriend, and finally a teacher of English. As a young Cambodian son, Dara was dutiful. When growing up he saw how his elder siblings were physically punished when they did something wrong. 'As a youngest son, I was never physically punished by my dad', he said. Dara sought to continue in this way through being obedient and helpful around the house.

Dara's perception of self and identity revolved primary around home and school and was guided by both his parents' advice and that of his peers. His peers encouraged him to study English and excel at school: 'Because my friends were studying English, I also wanted to study. My parents also forced me to learn.' More problematically, they introduced him to playing computer games. He became obsessed with games and lost interest in study. 'When my parents knew about it, they became even stricter with me. They would frequently hunt me down and drag me back home from the gaming shops.'

Digital literacies and information technologies came together with the UNTAC operation in Cambodia. Computer and Internet-based games were popular among teenagers and young adults. As most Cambodians were too poor to afford a computer and all the necessary accessories to run the games, gaming centres offering these services mushroomed. Many secondary school students became obsessed with the new kind of entertainment and some played truant from school or stole money from their parents to play these games. This activity upset many parents. Some even took extreme action to discipline their children. On 29 March 2012, for example, a 13-year-old boy in Battambang province was dragged from a game centre by his father, who later beat him brutally and chained him to a power pole on a nearby street for the public to see (Buth 2012). The authorities took action to locate all gaming centres away from schools. They are also required to display signs banning young players in school uniforms from using the services.

Figure 4: Thirteen-year-old Sok Khorn chained to a power pole after being beaten by his motor-taxi-driver father (Buth 2012)

Figure 5: Notice of warning in front of a video game arcade in a modern mall in Phnom Penh. The words read: Warning—no use of recreational drugs, no school uniforms and underage children, no cameras and no weapons. Photo: Dromonman (2010)

Dara talked of wanting to become a doctor or an engineer, but he was convinced by his sister to study accounting instead. During his university study, Dara talked of independence in relation to his English literacy practices. With his English, he wanted to study abroad. He also wanted to be free from the burden of his parents. 'My girlfriend broke up with me and migrated to America. I want to get a scholarship

abroad. I don't want to win her heart back, but I want to prove to her that I am capable of doing great things.'

As a young adult, Dara's self and identity were significantly informed by his English literacy practices:

> I really wanted to leave Cambodia for good. I want to live there [America]. I lost my liking of living in Cambodia. I was fed up with the situation I was in, especially my family situation. My family hardly cared about me. … And I know that I prefer the western ways of life to the Cambodian ones. I love to be individualistic and autonomous. I want to choose my own future.

Dara's English literacy practices also introduced a new religious belief into his performances of self. As a Khmer, Dara was born Buddhist. 'To be Khmer is to be Buddhist' (Smith-Hefner 1999, p. 32), to '"own" Cambodian culture: Buddhism, the Khmer language, [and] Khmer arts' (Mortland 1994, p. 4). However, at one point in Dara's English learning journey, he drifted into Christianity:

> I once study a conversation course in a church. It was free and taught by the native speakers of English. During the weekdays we studied, and at the weekends they invited us to attend their church services. I found it very difficult to understand the native speakers and after trying for three months, I quitted.

Dara mentioned no lasting effect of the experience. He was too well rooted in his Buddhist background and sociocultural environment to move into Christianity.

Societal and Cultural Frameworks

Dara's perceptions of self and being evolved in two primary areas of his societal and cultural frameworks: social structures and institutions (i.e. home, family and school). The themes emerging from Dara's narrative of his English literacy and practices were knowledge, self and social development, self-esteem, independence and open-mindedness. For example, Dara said that his English literacies had bridged him to a wider pool of academic resources and general information that he found very useful. He explained:

> I read books, various books about linguistics, global studies, environmental issue, world economy, war, history of countries around the world like in World Books. I also read up-to-date news. I read about technologies. Even though I may not apply new knowledge from my reading immediately, at least I know about all those things.

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Western countries and European countries are open to people around the world to study them. They often publish many books about their new research and discoveries, no matter if it is done on land, under water and in the space. Those studies are very interesting. I like that kind of sharing. It is different from the communist countries which try to keep a lot of things in secret.

Regarding development and tradition, Dara revealed that:

English-speaking countries always want something modern for themselves. They ignore underdeveloped traditional practices. I think I have a lot of choice in life because of my English literacy. I understand my life better and I am ready for more development.

By 'more development', Dara meant both of the personal and social variety. Socially, development could improve underdeveloped traditional practices. Personally, English literacies could improve a person's self-esteem. As he explained:

I am more proud of myself. It seems like I am living in a high status in the society. I can speak English and everyone looks at me and says wow! Most of the Cambodian people who can speak English are well-educated people.

Along with his self-esteem, Dara's confidence also improved as an indirect result of his English literacies and practices. He disclosed that:

I come up with an idea of building up my life depending on myself and start a separate life from my parents. That is the first stage of being independent. It will lead to freedom.

It is usually the case that children in the Western countries go to school and spend their time the whole day at school. They are encouraged to learn to live independently depending less and less on their parents as they grow older. They connect widely and make friends around the world. They can travel anywhere around the world because of their broad network.

Finally, Dara concluded that his English literacies and practices had transformed him into a different person. While considering himself to have once been narrow-minded and selfish, he now saw himself as open-minded and caring. Dara said:

I like to be open-minded and love that kind of people. We share everything together to make our lives better.

As the author suspected upon first meeting him, Dara clearly is a still water that runs deep. While his appearance gave the impression of a 'proper' Cambodian son who fully embraced the male code of conduct, Dara was in fact highly critical of many Cambodian traditional practices. Against the Cambodian proverb that teaches

that a bamboo shoot must replace a bamboo in its entirety, Dara sought to identify and overcome as many flaws in the old bamboo as possible, to create a new variety. For Dara, traditions and cultural practices should not be followed blindly. They should be open to criticism and improvement.

Chapter 9: 'A Frog in a Well'

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Virak was born in Bonteaymeanchey, a western province bordering with Thailand. His family was of Chinese ancestry, but he was given a Khmer name. In 1993, when he was less than 10 years old, his family moved to Phnom Penh. Virak's father owned an optic shop and his mother helped him with the business. She also had another small business that she ran independently at home to generate extra income. His family socioeconomic status could be considered slightly above the average. However, Virak did not think he was rich.

At the time of interview, Virak was in his early twenties. He carried with him his mobile phone and an iPod touch on which he had songs, mostly in English. Virak enjoyed listening to and watching hip-hop or rap music and dance. He was chatty and very fluent in his speaking, preferring English to Khmer in the interviews. 'I express myself better in English', he said with the American accent.

I was interested in Virak from the way he spelled his name in the emails and text messages he sent to me to express his interest in the research project. He placed his name first and his family name last. In Cambodian, as well as in the Chinese system of naming, family names appear before given names (Leonard 1999, p. 35). This was commonly understood as a means of signifying the importance of family over individuals.

At the orientation meeting, I could feel Virak's sense of confidence and pride through the way he expressed himself. He gestured self-assuredly and looked straight into the eyes of his listeners when he talked. He code-switched more frequently than the others and was very articulate in English in his conversation.

Discovering English

Virak started learning English when he was 11 years old. 'It was a cheap school. Dad did not think it was any difference for me to start in an expensive school. It was just a waste of money because I was too young and too clueless to what I was doing.' Virak still did not know why his father wanted him to study English. Perhaps he felt it was going to be useful in the future. Six years after UNTAC, English was

already being widely used in Cambodia. Its popularity was steadily increasing from year to year. In the same year Virak started studying English, Cambodia became the tenth member state of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The country was also looking forward to becoming a new member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Virak was the youngest student in his first English class. Reflecting on his experience, Virak revealed that: 'It was totally traditional, very teacher-centred. The teacher would read and we would repeat after him. He was not very serious in his teaching. He joked too much. Even worse, as the youngest student in the class, I was teased a lot by my classmates and even the teacher.' The teasing prompted Virak to study hard. He thought that to earn their respect, he needed to be better than them in his study. He reviewed his lessons at home daily. He also actively participated in the class. 'Finally, I managed to top the class', recalled Virak. As anticipated, he did earn some respect from his classmates and the teacher. The effort also sparked his interest in studying the language. He wanted to study with a better teacher. He decided to change class. 'I was in the same school, but in a different class with a different teacher. He was younger than my previous teacher.' Virak's new teacher still used the traditional teaching method, but he was much more encouraging and supportive. As a result, Virak was further motivated to be competitive. Slowly, his good grades made him prouder of himself. 'I always ranked first or second in the class', said Virak. 'I was determined to maintain my pride and would hard-headedly compete with anyone who was doing well in his or her study.' Virak was not able to use English to communicate much though. The traditional style of teaching English was geared towards preparing students to pass their tests:

> I was very talented with English grammar … I don't work hard studying it at all. I could grasp the points very easily through merely listening to the teacher's explanation. I usually reviewed the lessons only for five minutes before any class test began, shuffling through the notes and I would pass the heavily grammar-based test with flying colour.

Discovering Voice and Self

With his basic knowledge of English, Virak was allowed to study in a better school. After taking the placement test, he was placed at the pre-intermediate level in a class of less than 20 students whose English backgrounds, according to Virak, were

much better than his was. The teacher was a young Cambodian woman whose teaching methodology was more student-centred than those of his previous teachers had been. As part of student-centred teaching, all students were required to speak in English as much as possible in the class. 'How English was taught there was really new to me at first', recollected Virak. It did not take long for Virak to find out who the best students in the class were. 'After studying there for a while, in a mock test, I got lower score than two girls. Suddenly, I was triggered into being competitive again.' Virak studied harder, and by the end of the first term, the effort had paid off. 'In the final exam result, I was able to get the same grade as them.'

From this point on, Virak began engaging more actively in his English learning. The student-centred teaching approach helped him to formulate a new personality. He became more communicative and confident. He had more ideas and was becoming critical in the process. He knew how to discuss, persuade and disagree with skill:

> To win the two best females, I worked hard on my speaking skills. At school, I spoke English all the time. I raised my hand more than any others and I spoke as much as possible. I read intensively and extensively. Finally, I became top in the class as desired.

In just a short time, Virak had developed better interpersonal skills, as well as better speaking, listening and comprehension skills. The improvement continued. When he finished all the levels in the general English course, he decided to advance his English to a new course called the High Certificate in English Language. 'That was the time I immersed myself more actively into books with profound concepts.' However, despite all his improvement, Virak never wished to do a bachelor's degree in English education. 'I had no plans to do a major in English after I finished my high school. I knew my English was enough and there was no further need of it for me.'

University Choices

> Unlike Western culture in which individualism is supported, Asian cultures do not regards individual needs of being primary importance and instead put the interests of the family ahead of the individual.
>
> (Weil & Lee 2004, p. 220)

In year 12 at high school, Virak had to choose his bachelor's degree majors. He was allowed three choices, ranked by priority. With his family's and his own wishes his utmost priorities, Virak had no difficulty in choosing his first two preferences. 'My first choice was the degree in medical doctor and second in business'.

Virak's third choice was more problematic. The other available majors did not interest him. Only English held any appeal. However, he did not want to do a degree in English language. He thought what he knew about the language was enough, both for academic and professional purposes. However, thinking about the important role that English language played in studying abroad, he decided to list English language as his last and least preferred major. Then, disaster struck for Virak in his final high school exam: he did very poorly and his overall grade was disappointing. 'I was deeply disappointed with my high school final exam's results', said Virak. His average did not qualify him for either of his first two majors. 'Majoring in English became my only legible alternative', he said.

Bachelor's Degree in English Education

Virak took the entrance exam for English and passed. He was to be trained as a teacher of English, but he did not intend to be one. 'I only wanted to get a scholarship. I regarded the degree in English as a bridge towards this dream.' However, upon starting his bachelor's degree, Virak did not see how the teaching there would prepare him for international standardised tests like the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL):

> I was bitterly disappointed once the Bachelor's in English Education started. I was looking forward to the teaching that would improve my TOEFL score but it was nothing like I expected. In the foundation year, most subjects were very boring and were hardly anything to do with English. My motivation was fading.

Had it not been for his sense of competition, Virak would have quit the course. 'My classmates appeared to be very good at their English. I knew studying with them I might not be able to be the number one. I started to identify the most outstanding

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individuals and set my goal to win them.' However, there was something standing in his way:

> Shortly after the beginning of the academic year, there was this English Proficiency test for all the students to take. After completing it, I was ashamed of myself. I realised there were a lot I didn't know. My English ability was still very limited. I started to frequent the library and review all the grammar points I had studied. I liked studying English grammar. I practiced many TOEFL tests and exercises. I also read a lot. After doing this for two or three months, I was again very good.

The Roles of English

To improve his general English, Virak also engaged in a variety of English literacy practices. He listened to English-speaking radio. He read English books and newspapers. He became active in discussing and presenting his ideas in the classroom. He said he practiced self-talk in English to improve his speaking, critical thinking and debating skills. For entertainment, he opted to listen to English songs and watch English-language films and TV programmes. 'Khmer songs lack originality', he said. 'They are copied from Thai, Chinese and English songs.' Slowly, English became an essential part of his life. At school, he used it to talk with his peers and lecturers. Beyond school, among other things, he used it to search for information for school assignments and projects. His use of the Internet gave him even more reason to utilise English. He was familiar with such social networks as Hi5 and Facebook. He found them useful, particularly in widening his worldview and inspiring him. No longer was he out of touch with the people that were important to him. He became more sociable, friendly, open and self-assured. He was always connected to the world. Someone out there was always there for him, to hear what was on his mind, to comment on it, to share his or her own ideas or simply to 'like' his. He was also able to make many new friends and meet many new interesting people. He felt like he had jumped out of a deep, dark well. His life was enriched with new and exciting experiences and opportunities. His horizons were much broader than they had been.

Through films and TV programmes, Virak learnt about Western ways of life, values and lifestyles, fashions and communication. More importantly, through watching English music videos and American films about young adults, Virak noticed that Western young adults could study, work and have fun with their peers as much as

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they liked. This was different to the experiences of Cambodian young adults, who were still under the control of their family. Slowly, Virak learnt to enjoy life by maintaining a good balance between work and play. Agreeing that 'all work no play makes Jack a dull boy', Virak said he found young Westerners' lifestyles very appealing.

When asked for the specific effects his English literacies and practices had had on him, Virak detailed that:

> English has changed my way of thinking. It has given me more exposure to new values in life from different culture and nations. In this way, I am able to reflect on who I am. I have choices among values that are appealing to me. For example, I have compared between Cambodian ways of raising children with the Western ones. I would like to know which one could bring better results. Cambodian parents have this culture of prohibition as opposed the Westerners' culture of encouragement when it comes to bringing up their children.

> Cambodian parents don't normally talk reasons with their children. They give orders. They also have little tolerance to their children mistakes. Domestic violence is common in Cambodian families. It could be because of their lack of time or their tiredness from earning a living. Many Cambodian parents are no longer part of their children growing up. In some cases, this results in children learning only from trials and errors.

> I like the way Western parents communicate with their children, treating them like adults. They are reasonable and calm and without threads. Furthermore, I appreciate the way they show their love and care to the children. They encourage their children to try new things and prepare them better for whatever the consequences. They give freedom to their children to decide and generally respect their decisions once made. They would allow their children to try first before saying something is impossible.

> I think mutual love and personal relationship are not to be kept in secret. It's normal for young people to have boyfriend or girlfriend as in the Western culture. In our culture, it's socially and cultural inappropriate. I think, for long-term benefits, people should be allowed to go out with each other before they decide to marry and live together with someone. Doing so, they can choose more suitable partners for themselves.

> I also like their ways of getting married. They focus more on quality than on quantity during the evening reception. They only invite their close friends, not all their acquaintances.

> I think Western culture is gaining rapid popularity in Cambodia. Personally, it is more suitable to me than Cambodian culture. I like their ways of communication. For example, they usually go around meeting new people, chatting, and making new friends during a social event. I also love their lifestyles. They play hard and work hard.

> Comparing and thinking about all these issues have broadened my thinking and understanding. It has made me a person who would look for both pros and cons before doing anything. I don't think there is a right way or wrong way

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when it comes to cultural values and issues. It all depends on what we individually think and believe.

To a Different Beat

Virak's story began in the body of a music lover, carefree and 'cool'. Virak said, provided he was not interacting with anyone, he listened to English music almost every single minute. Most of his songs were in English. 'Very few songs in my iPod are in Khmer', he said. When asked why, Virak said, 'English songs are up-to-dated. They are always new and fascinating to me. I love the melodies and the meanings of the songs'. Virak loved hip-hop songs especially. 'But I also have some love songs', he added. 'The love songs I listen to are the contemporary ones. I don't listen to song from the olden days.'

Virak's early exposure to English music came when he started studying English. Occasionally, his teachers would select an English song to play to the students, from which they would pull some new words or grammar points. His interest in the music was more personal and intense when he was in his teenage years at high school. By chance, during this time, he came across a hip-hop music video with a dance that immediately captured his interest. He started to listen to and watch such songs more frequently. He even talked and acted like those hip-hop stars, causing his friends to laugh at him. Virak did not care. 'It helped improve my English and my listening skills.'

By the time he entered university, Virak's young adult self was deeply immersed in the world of English. At school, he studied it, expressed himself in it and learnt about the broader world through it. After school, he wrote his diary in English, listened to songs and watched English-language films and television. He used English to surf the Internet, keep up with Western popular fashions and social network. He even copied certain 'cool' behaviours. His family noticed the changes and teased him for being an American boy. However, they did not seem to mind his being and becoming. After all, Virak was very flexible. He seemed fully aware of the boundary of his self-expressiveness, be it in his behaviours or his appearance.

Towards the end of the interviews, Virak talked about his desire to be away from his family on a scholarship somewhere. He wanted to be free and independent.

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learners' identity

Although his father wanted him to manage the family business, he imagined a better
future for himself.

Story and Relationships in Societal and Cultural Contexts

Virak's story highlighted many relationships in his perceptions and
performances of identity around his English literacy practices. He began with his
ultimate connection with English music, his strong love for it and how he could be
lost in a world where nothing else mattered. Virak recalled the time he became carried
away while listening to his iPod, nodding with the rhythm and indulging in his own
thoughts. He forgot he was in the classroom. His classmates smiled at the behaviour.
Some laughed. One was concerned enough to give him a poke, bringing him back to
reality. Virak said he used English music to calm and relax himself when he was
angry or anxious. He also used it to energise himself when he was frustrated or in
despair.

Virak's story about his identity performances around his English literacy
practices can be seen as situated around at least three recurring societal and cultural
frameworks: family, school and peers. At home, Virak's English literacies played
several important roles. First, his literacies helped him to understand the world news
through watching international channels like CNN, BBC and Channel News Asia. He
also used English literacies for watching English music videos, listening to English
songs and socialising through social media. Another use of his English literacies was
to read both materials for schoolwork and self-improvement books in English, such as
'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People'. Virak said reading such books helped
to make him a better person. Occasionally, Virak would use his English to interact
with foreign customers who came to buy glasses from his family's shop or to have
their eyes checked. Virak said his family members were generally happy with his
English literacy practices. Occasionally, when he forgot himself and acted like a B-
boy in interactions with his family, they would tease him rather than criticise him.

At school, Virak used his English primarily for academic purposes. He read,
wrote, listened and discussed in English. His English enabled him to make easy use of
the Internet to search for materials related to his school activities and assignments.
Through these literacy practices, Virak had a chance to become actively immersed in

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broader social structures and institutions; namely, media, information technologies and globalisation. For example, to prepare for a debate in the classroom or an assignment for a school subject like Global Studies, Virak read news, listened to the radio and searched the Internet for current information to make and strengthen his points. In the process, he used his smartphone and the computer to store, retrieve and send information. The up-to-date information he obtained also allowed him to compare world trends to what was happening in Cambodia.

In addition to family and school, friendship was a significant social structure that provided Virak with opportunities and motivations to practice English literacies, which in turn further shaped Virak's notion of self and identity. Specifically, from the time Virak started his bachelor's degree in English education, he began to increasingly spend time 'hanging out' with his friends in places like modern cafés, where free Wi-Fi was offered in a comfortable air-conditioned environment. Together, Virak and his friends would chat over coffee and use social media. Sometimes, they would play online games, or read about the latest developments in technology, music culture and world news.

Combining these three societal and cultural frameworks, it is clear that multiple types of English literacy practices were constantly informing Virak's being and becoming. Nevertheless, Virak was flexible enough to avoid any serious conflict from happening. With his family, Virak mostly performed his Khmer identity while continuing to enjoy English literacy through social media, cable television, smart phone and iPod. At school among his friends, he fully embraced the B-boy identity that he preferred. Between these two selves, Virak was a hard working son at home and industrious student at school. Therefore, his family was happy with the way he was and so was he.

Chapter 10: 'Discussion'

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I'm old enough to have seen true change as a more incremental process—easier to recognize in hindsight than as it is happening. Yet the change in communication technologies that seems to happen almost daily is both real and dramatic in the ways it is changing how young people read and write with words and images.

(BT Williams 2008, p. 682)

"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

Figure 6: Steiner's depiction of online identity—'On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog'
(Steiner 1993)

In this chapter, I discuss the reasons for, and the consequences of, acquiring and practicing English-language literacy.

Reasons for Learning English

The end of the Second World War in 1945 heralded an age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale. This expansion created a world unified and dominated by two forces—technology and commerce—which in their relentless progress soon generated a demand for an international language. For various reasons, most notably the economic power of the United States in the post-war world, this role fell to English.

(Hutchinson 1987, p. 6)

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I did not really know why I started learning English. I knew it was not because of my parents. It could be because it was taught at the school I was attending as a refugee in Thailand. At the time, I was oblivious to the political situation that determined which foreign language that Cambodians living under differing governing bodies should learn. I did not know that in Cambodia, Russian and Vietnamese were popular foreign languages, while English was illegal. I also did not expect to be migrating to any English-speaking country. My father was committed to returning to Cambodia when the political situation improved. When I was repatriated, I continued to learn English because I felt I should know at least one foreign language. I knew it could provide many opportunities in the future, from studying abroad to finding a job locally. After high school, I studied English because I loved using it. It let me discover my sense of self and freedom.

Similarly, none of my participants had a clear goal when starting to learn the language. Leang did it because her elder sister was doing it and because her father likely observed the potential of the language, despite his apparent conservative attitude towards his daughters' education. Since he was a businessman, it could be that he was hoping that Leang could use English to help him with his business or her own in the future. Leang was motivated to study the language more seriously after she made good progress with it. She enjoyed learning and using the language so much that she decided to pursue a degree in English education.

Sreyna also did not know why her father enrolled her in her first English class. As it was her duty as a good daughter to fulfil her parents' wish, she studied English as hard as she did her other subjects. She made good progress and by the end of her time at high school, she felt she was competent enough in all the four macro-skills of the language. Throughout those years of studying English, Sreyna had become passionate in learning and using the language. When she was sent to Phnom Penh to undertake the tertiary education in finance and banking that was her family's dream for her, she decided to continue her English education as well. Sreyna's English qualification enabled her to find a job in an American company. She was very proud. Not only was she able to use English everyday both at school and work, but she also had the privilege to 'hang out' with like-minded people. She enjoyed this way of life very much and she hoped it lasted. Upon her graduation, when her family told her to

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get a job as a banker, she purposefully failed the selection interview and written test. She stayed on in the job she loved.

Thida's story is similar. She first went to an English class accompanying the elder girls in the neighbourhood. Months passed and Thida had hardly learnt anything. She only had vague reasons to acquire the language when an American couple began renting the front part of her house. Curious about the Westerners, she visited them frequently. They were nice to her. She enjoyed spending time with them as they taught her how to paint, play music and use a computer. They also taught her English in exchange for her teaching them Khmer, and they brought her to their church, introducing Christianity into her Khmer being and becoming. When Thida was around 15, she began studying English more intensively. She still did not know what she was going to do with it, but despite having no specific goal for learning the language, Thida invested much time, effort and money in pursuing it. She went through three private courses in three different private institutions before deciding to do a bachelor's degree in English-language education. However, Thida never wanted to be a teacher of English. She simply studied the language so she could use it well in her everyday life.

Dara first learnt English while in his early teens, upon entering high school, because it was part of the curriculum and he was the only one among his friends who did not know English. As a top student in his class, Dara did not want his lack of English knowledge to pull his grade down. Dara began to study English more seriously when he nearly finished high school after noticing that his elders' siblings' course books at university were mostly in English language. Unlike the rest of the participants, Dara never studied English in any expensive English school where the teaching was conducted in a more student-centred manner. The English school he attended was well known locally for delivering its curriculum using a grammar translation method. Typical lessons involved analysing English grammar and reading difficult texts. Only after Dara started his bachelor's degree in English language did he had exposure to a more communicative language teaching. Despite being trained to be a teacher of English, Dara said he did not enjoy being a teacher. He was looking forward to having a career using his other degree in accountancy.

Virak also started studying English in his early teens, because his father wanted him to. He said he started studying English in a 'cheap' school because his

father thought he was still young. Virak studied hard though. When he had enough foundation in English, his father enrolled him in a more expensive English school. According to Virak, the teaching was communicative and student centred. Virak studied there until he finished all the level and went on to study more advanced course in other school. When he nearly finished high school, Virak thought his English was good enough there was no need for him to do a bachelor's degree in it. When applying into university, Virak ranked English last among the three choices to which he was entitled. If he had any other subject that he liked better than English, he might not have chosen a bachelor's degree in English education. Unfortunately, Virak's high school scores were not high enough for him to study his desired subject. At the end, Virak ended up studying the university major he liked the least. He said now that he majored in English language, he was looking forward to getting a scholarship abroad. In 2013, I learned through his Facebook status that he did win a scholarship abroad.

That all six of the learners whose stories are told above persisted in studying English until the tertiary level, and some even further, can be understood through the lens of self-efficacy theory, a social psychological theory suggested by Bandura (1977, 1997). Self-efficacy is an 'individual's personal estimate of confidence in his or her capability to accomplish a certain level of performance' (Hagger & Chatzisarantis, p. 105). According to Bandura (1994, p. 71), 'Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives'. Applying this notion to our cases, once we were able to use English for everyday and academic purposes, we recognised we could use our English knowledge to pursue the life goals that mattered to us. For example, Sreyna wanted a career that involved regular English literacy practices. Thida needed to be sure that she was literate enough in English to avoid difficulty in finding a job, as most well-paid jobs inevitably require good English proficiency. Leang, Dara, Virak and I looked forward to winning scholarships to study abroad. These life goals were strongly associated with our respective abilities to secure good jobs and thus better lives for ourselves. In my case, I would not have dared to sever the relationship between my father and myself had I not been sure that I could earn a good living. As part of this, I sought to win a scholarship to further my education without needing to depend on my father's support, and for this, my English knowledge had to be good enough.

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Reasons for English Literacy Practices

While our narratives showed that family wishes and the school curriculum started us in studying English, personal, economic, social and technological factors kept us studying and gave us reasons to use the language. According to our narratives, personal factors included individual passion and enjoyment in learning and using the language, and personal expectation of certain benefits from knowing the language. In language acquisition theory, these are known as intrinsic orientations (Noels 2001). Noels (2001, p. 45) wrote that, 'Intrinsic orientations refer to reasons for L2 [second language] learning that are derived from one's inherent pleasure and interest in the activity; the activity is undertaken because of the spontaneous satisfaction that is associated with it'. Intrinsic orientations included intrinsic-knowledge—'the feelings of pleasure that come from developing knowledge and satisfying one's curiosity about a topic area'—, intrinsic-accomplishment—'the enjoyable sensations that are associated with surpassing oneself and mastering a difficult task'—and intrinsic-stimulation—'the simple enjoyment of the aesthetics of the experience' (Noels 2001, p. 45). Owing to these intrinsic orientations, we persisted in mastering and using the language, despite being lured to undertake other majors or jobs. Due to our persistence, Virak and I were able to obtain scholarships to study abroad, while Sreyna was able to work in the job she liked. Leang found a career in teaching English, while Dara and Thida simply enjoyed using the language for both work-related and personal purposes.

Economic factors refer to the language demands of the market economy. Economic transition and integration in Cambodia demanded that, to obtain a well-paid job, Cambodians needed English. According to T Clayton (2006, p. 26), 'Nearly all firms operating in Cambodia from bases in other countries … use English as the language of business communication and require knowledge of this language for managerial-level employees'. Sreyna, Leang and I were able to earn a higher salary than those without English fluency. Although Thida and Dara did not use English in their work, they did attribute their finding a job to their knowledge of the language. Virak was also in a promising situation, expecting to be able to find a well-paid job easily upon his graduation.

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Social factors included political changes and social acceptance and values. In the 1980s, Cambodia was a communist country and learning English was illegal (T Clayton 2006; Igawa 2008; Moore & Bounchan 2010; Slattery 2013). In the 1990s, however, Cambodia was becoming a democratic country with a free market. English became the official foreign language used by the UNTAC. When Cambodia became a member of ASEAN and WTO as well as other international organisations, the market for English literacy and practices became broader. Those who could speak the language were greatly admired. The language was thus imbued with value and social status, as were those who practiced it. Dara and Virak both emphasised that whenever and wherever they used English, they received admiring looks and compliments from those around them. I have had similar experiences.

In addition to the above factors, technology and social media have popularised English literacy practices in Cambodia. Many young adults, my participants and me included, own smart phones and use Facebook and the Internet extensively. In this respect, English has surpassed itself as a language. It now plays many important roles in developing individuals and their society. As the US Ambassador to Cambodia, Joseph A Mussomeli, put it:

> English, as I have often stressed, is no longer a language. It is, instead, a tool, a weapon, a vehicle. A tool to build a stronger society, a weapon to combat poverty and ignorance, and a vehicle for those who possess it to travel anywhere they choose throughout the world and be understood and understand. (Igawa 2008, p. 344)

Echoing this statement, Dara said his English literacy made him feel like:

> a high-class literate man. I am knowledgeable of not only Cambodian language but other foreign languages. Furthermore, I think because English is an international language and many developed countries such as England, the United States, Australia, Canada and so on, all use English, we stand a chance to develop ourselves through working with them. English becomes very valuable in this situation.

> Since the United States is the most powerful country in the world, we can learn so many things from it from everyday products to economy and military. For me, I think because the job market really requires English, I must adapt to the market. Many investors speak English even those who are from countries that do not use English as their mother tongues.

> One last thing, the ability to do global communication is very important for me to know and use English. As we all know that English is an international language spoken in most formal meetings among different countries. Knowing and using English, I feel that I am not alone in this enormous world.

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Similarly, Sreyna revealed that she used English for:

> chatting, Facebooking, e-mailing, communicating with my boss, reading the instructions on the products like shampoo, soap, medicines, etc. I use English for talking on phone with friends because I don't want people around me to know what we are talking about. When I ride or drive along the road, I like looking at the name of the shops or anything that are written in English. I don't know why I am like that, but I think it's easy for me to read in English and sometimes I can learn some new words from those signs as well.

For Virak, he used English to do many interesting things:

> I learn to talk fast as in rap because it's popular during my time. I listen to English songs especially R&B and hip-hop songs although I don't understand much of their meaning. I also surfed the Internet in English because content in Khmer is not available much. I communicate, chat, network, browse websites in English, not Khmer. Lately, I use English to apply for jobs and scholarships. I need English for English proficiency exams, write business plan, give presentation. I rarely use Khmer to do these things. I write my personal diary in English since I feel it's more expressive and convenient to me.

As for Thida, she disclosed that:

> Speaking in English, I am more direct. I could also generate many good reasons to support my points. If I speak or think in Khmer, I am less direct. I beat about the bush more.

English has become more than a language. It is an opportunity to communicate widely. It is a tool to seek education, jobs and wealth. It is a portal to become someone new, fun and exciting.

Along With the English Literacy Practices

Studies have linked the spread of English to Western culture (Demont-Heinrich 2005; Gao 2009; Ha 2007, 2008; Jiménez 2000; Yue 2012). The narratives in this study showed that English literacy practices did bring certain Western cultural characteristics to its practitioners. For example, we all preferred gender equity to the traditional *chbabs* that prescribed our being and becoming. We were critical of our traditional ways of life and adopted Western ways when possible. Both Dara and Sreyna had experienced dating. Virak was hoping to celebrate Valentine's Day 2011 with someone special. Leang did not care if she did not find a husband. Dara said he

would marry if he was arranged into a marriage, but he was certain the marriage would not last longer than a month. My father and I have not talked since the day I married the woman I chose to be my wife.

We all yearned for freedom and many of us dared or longed to move away from our families to live our lives independently. We became more individualistic, trying to find balance between family and self instead of family over self. Virak and I chose the Western way of putting our own names before our family names. Thida had an English name for herself. All the female participants dyed or highlighted their hair to blonde or brunette, depending on taste. They preferred pants and shorts to *sampots* or *sarongs*. Virak copied hip-hop styles into his behaviours. We all celebrate our birthdays and Christmas.

Our English literacy practices informed us of the culture of English language through our reading about Western societies, listening to English songs, watching English music videos and films and through the meanings of English words themselves. For example, I used to feel sad hearing the sounds made by birds. After understanding English, I was less so because, while Khmer describes the sounds as 'bird cries', English refers to them as 'bird songs'. Cambodians literate in English who are higher in the hierarchical order would normally avoid saying thank you or sorry, smiling instead for fear of losing face from using the words more often. It is thus common to witnesses a Cambodian smiling while apologising. When I first came to Australia, I was caught riding a bike without a helmet. When pulled over by a police officer, I was asked where my helmet was. With a smile acknowledging my mistake, I said, 'Sorry, officer. I just got this bike from a friend and I have not had time to buy a helmet yet'. I was shocked when the officer replied that the incident was not funny, and that if he fined me for breaking the law I would not be smiling anymore. All of the individuals whose stories are told here have had such experiences, causing us to begin to compare Western culture, as depicted through English words and actions, with our own.

Through our exposure to the Western culture, we came to see more choices in life. We discovered our individual voices and selves. Sreyna, Leang and I wanted to be able to live our own lives by making our own choices as much as possible. We wanted to redefine what was 'proper' by debating what needed improvement and what needed forgetting with time, rather than just following tradition blindly. For

example, Leang said wearing shorts was practical and easy for everyday life because Cambodia is a hot country and Cambodians are poor. Hard work in the heat would make any women in *sampots* less mobile and less comfortable. Sreyna said she was willing to be sinful when she refused the marriage her parents had arranged for her. She said she was going to repay their *kun* or good deeds on her through other methods. For me, I married the woman I loved. Unfortunately, while my mother could accept my choice, my father did not give me the chance to repay the *kun.* However, being individualistic and independent, I was not as guilty about my choice as would be expected in Cambodia. The other participants reported similar experiences. Our English literacy practices placed us in challenging situations. However, overall, we found pleasure and happiness through practicing this second tongue.

Beyond Selves

English literacy practices in Cambodia did not change just individuals. To a degree, they have also changed the society. In our narratives, we revealed how we used what we learnt through our English literacies and practices to change our smaller societies: our families. Leang tried to empower her sisters and mother against the control of her father. Thida made sure her husband respected her as she did him. Dara and Virak wanted to raise any children they might have with more affection and without physical punishment. I also try my best to raise my children to be my 'mates', through gaining their mutual respect, rather than through control and fear.

Seeing beyond our families towards the whole society, I began to understand what has been happening in Cambodia. For example, in the latest social and political developments in Cambodia, English literacies as used in technologies and social media have been bringing dramatic changes to Cambodia. The government controls the country's television and radio stations, but Facebook and YouTube have become important platforms for people to express their opinions about the government and to share information about social injustice, corruption and other abuses of power. As Kimsour Lim, a 24-year-old university student, told an Australian journalist:

> I use Facebook to coordinate with the youth to inform them when we are marching for the National Rescue Party [CNRP, the opposition party]. … I always send my friends information through Facebook because none of the 14 government TV channels support the CNRP. (Oaten 2013, online)

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The opposition party itself used social media to engage more youths and their families to participate in politics. The results have been overwhelming. Recently, for example, in a letter to the editor of the Phnom Penh Post, Ms Mu Sochua, a member of parliament from the opposition party wrote that, '…social media is a real force in Cambodia and it is seriously influencing the way youth are getting information, especially that which is missing from local mainstream media—be it state or private' (Mu 2013, p. 16). Referring to a pre-election rally of youths by the opposition party, the CNRP, Ms Mu added that:

> The CNRP youth rally on Sunday, June 16, was standing room only. The audience was more than the 1,000 expected. How did the information about the rally reach the public? Facebook. Who are these youths who made the free choice to attend an opposition rally, taking the risk of being identified as pro-opposition—the only party shouting loud and clear for change? They are students and youth in the informal sector who are actively communicating with each other, hungry for news that matters to their lives and future. They are the youth who cannot be controlled by government pressure, by offers of money or a free meal. They are not youth of the top 10 per cent of rich Cambodians, but the youth whose parents make tremendous sacrifices and investments in their education. They are not youth with body guards [sic] and luxury cars, they ride motorcycles and bicycles. They are the youth who see very little hope in the current government. They are the youth who came not to cheer but to ask hard questions about the future to leaders of the opposition. (Mu 2013, p. 16)

Oaten (2013) wrote before the general election in July 2013 that, 'Cambodia's upcoming elections have been dubbed the "Cambodian Spring", with an unprecedented number of young activists taking to the streets and social media, demanding a change'. According to the Cambodian National Election Committee (NEC) (cited in Oaten 2013), among the 9,675,453 registered voters for the 2013 election, 3,534,673 were aged 18–30. One of these young voters was quoted by Oaten as saying, 'Initially the young, including myself, didn't understand and were not interested in Facebook or politics, but later, I began to understand my problems in our society'.

Contact, Conflict and Adaptation

> In this new world order … the most persuasive, important, and dangerous
> conflicts will … be … between people belonging to different cultural entities.
>
> (Huntington 1996, p. 28)

I have already discussed how our English literacy and practices informed and influenced our constructions and performances of self and identity. In this section, I elaborate on what happened to us when we practiced two languages, lived two cultures and performed multiple identities. I categorised the process into three stages: contact, conflict and adaptation, using a model of acculturation put forth by García-Vázquez (1995).

In this study, 'contact' refers to those instances in which we used both English and Khmer as our choice of literacy practice. It also refers to our incorporation of both Cambodian and Western cultural values into our performance of self and identity in living our everyday lives. When we spoke in two languages, our languages and cultural values became hybridised. Linguistically, we code-switched, as evidenced in our conversations during data collection. Researchers are divided as to why code-switching occurs. Gumperz and Hernandez (1969, p. 2), for example, wrote that code-switching occurs 'each time minority language groups come into contact with majority language groups under conditions of rapid social change'. It was not clear what kind of changes to which Gumperz and Hernandez (1969) referred in their mentioning of "rapid social change". Since UNTAC arrived in 1992, Cambodia has experienced many rapid social changes in terms of politics, economics, foreign language education, media, and technologies including information technologies. Unlike Gumperz and Hernandez (1969), Giacolone Ramat (1995, cited in Gardner-Chloros 2009, p. 20) regarded code-switching as a feature of stable bilingualism in environments whose speakers are bilingual. In this study, because I do not think Cambodians who were literate in English as a minority groups, I find Ramat's claim to be more relevant. My participants and I code-switch because English is becoming a stable second language for our daily life communication.

Another linguistic contact feature besides code-switching was the use of the English alphabet to write Khmer words in text messages, emails and on Facebook. This practice is common for the majority of Cambodian users of English, particularly young adults. There are two reasons for this. First, typing in Khmer is difficult on a computer and almost impossible on a smartphone. As at early 2014, neither Apple nor

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the Android operating system has included Khmer fonts in their systems for smartphones yet. On computers, Khmer fonts can be easily installed. However, it requires much practice to master the location of the 33 consonants, 21 dependent vowels and 12 independent vowels on a keyboard designed for the 26 letters of the English alphabet. Second, typing Khmer words in English script ensures readability across devices and systems on which English is supported.

Instances of cultural value exchange included shaking hands; dating; celebrating Valentine's Day, Christmas, and birthday; using names to address each other, instead of social or family titles; objection to arranged marriage; and gender equity. These imported Western cultural practices may appear selfish and disrespectful to traditional Cambodian values, as articulated by Phalla's grandmother (see 'The Awakening Experience' in Chapter 1), but they promote closeness among family and friends. They make us feel cherished and supported. That Cambodians that are more traditional do not understand this can lead to conflict when the two value systems, traditional and Western, come into contact.

Throughout our narratives, conflict occurred when we adopted and performed certain Western values that contradicted Cambodian cultural practices. For example, in Cambodian culture, women who colour their hair, wear sexy clothes, talk and laugh loudly, hang out with men and go out at night are generally considered to be women '*at leak*' or promiscuous women (Derks 2006, p. 197). They are thought to lack moral education, or elders who provide such education. They could even be seen as antisocial. Similarly, men who befriend such self-expressive women are thought to be *bros khel khoch* or insubordinate men. This kind of man was considered cunning, irresponsible, unambitious and improper. Parents and elders of a proper girl would never allow their daughter to marry such a man. A Khmer proverb says it all, *chhnag na krop ning* or 'a certain pot matches a certain lid'.

However, through our exposure to Western culture, we saw that highlighting or dyeing hair was only a way of beautifying one's body. Short clothes are different from sexy clothes. Men and women can spend time together without lust being a factor. A woman can be roommates with a man. Dating is acceptable, and marriage is only the beginning of a committed relationship. When we practiced English and adopted some of the Western cultural values that are so contradictory to those of Cambodians, we ran into conflict. For example, when Sreyna would not agree to

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marry the man her parents arranged for her, she found herself in big trouble. When I married the woman I loved, I lost my father.

I give two main reasons that Cambodian elders are so hostile to their children adopting certain Western cultural ways of life. First, it is their cultural responsibility to pass on Cambodian cultural values to their children. Second, Cambodia has only recently recovered from a cultural revolution during the Khmer Rouge regime. The survivors have been trying to restore the pre-regime culture. If the elders were not strict, Cambodian culture would soon be unidentifiable or be mistaken for Thai culture, which is similar in many ways. Maintaining Cambodia's cultural values is important for identifying us as Cambodians. One Khmer proverb has warned that *vabathor rolot, cheat roleay* or 'when the culture ceases to exist, so does the nation'.

When conflicts occur, adaptation is essential. In this situation, one may choose to adjust, react or withdraw. Our narratives showed that we chose to adjust and react, but not to withdraw from practicing English literacy and performing our multiple identities. We had to adjust our values and the ways we lived our lives around English literacy practices to blend well with our families and continue to be accepted in our communities. We all adapted to address the differences between these sets of sociocultural values and practices. Sreyna, for example, prioritised the university major that her family chose for her while investing extra effort in pursuing her own dream, a degree in English. Similarly, Dara followed his elder sister's advice to do a degree in accounting, even though his preference was to do a degree in medicine or engineering. He also said that if he were to be arranged into a marriage, he would follow, but was certain that the relationship would be short lived. Similarly, Thida surrendered to her parents' arranged marriage for her, but refused to be treated unfairly when it came to committing to the relationship. She wanted to be equal in the relationship, or else divorce. Likewise, Virak appreciated his father's intention for him to take over the family business and start making money, but insisted on studying another degree abroad before doing so. I myself learnt to accept my father's second marriage although I was looking forward to the day he came back to be with my mother again, even in their old ages. I have learnt through my English literacy practices, particularly films and novels, that to make a marriage work, both parties must at least want to be together.

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At other time, we chose to react to the ways our identity performances were received by our societal and sociocultural communities. We used the small power we had gained from our English literacy and practices to navigate the criticisms we received while committing ourselves to our true selves. Leang, for example, refused to be offended by her neighbours' criticisms of her outspoken behaviour, her choices of clothes and her hairstyle and hair colour. When Sreyna's parents began arranging her marriage, she refused the idea. In Thida's case, although she did not object to her parents arranging her marriage, she refused to be treated unfairly by her new husband. That none of us withdrew from our English literacy practices and performances of our hybrid identities signifies how English and the cultural package that comes along with it has become deep-rooted in our being and becoming. This hybridity is, I argue, what makes us *Khmer-min-Khmer, Erop-min-Erop*. In other words, my participants and I are *Khmer-min-Khmer* because we do not follow all the traditional codes of conducts, which makes us not proper Khmers (*Khmer-min-Khmer*); nor are we Europeans because we do not completely follow all their cultural values and lifestyles, either. Like the express '*Khmer-min-Khmer, Erop-min-Erop*' itself suggests, we appear to the conservative as partly Khmer and partly European. I discussed below how exactly we feel about our identities.

'*Khmer-min-Khmer, Erop-min-Erop*'?

Who we think we are with our literacy practices of both Khmer and English is traced through our narratives: we are still Khmer, and we still made our selves conform to the Cambodian sociocultural and traditional social structure. For example, Leang still lived with her parents, helping, providing for, listening to and looking after them, despite her Western ideologies. She could have moved out and lived independently, but she chose to stay. She might be stubborn, rebellious, critical and indifferent to others' criticisms of her being and becoming, but she would always put her family first. She might dress in 'sexy' clothes, dye her hair, hang out with friends late into the night or even overnight, but she never *tver khos bropeyney* (literally, wronged the tradition; meaning, engaged in premarital sexual practices). The same was true with Sreyna. She had a boyfriend, broke up and had another later on. Although she initially tried to hide this from her family, they eventually discovered

the truth. With her second boyfriend, she went out with him, held hands and even kissed, but she knew her limit. Thida still listened to her elders' advice. Although she would not have minded being a divorcee, she still welcomed her parents' and her in-law's interventions when she had disagreements with her husband. She might go out with friends, but she always made sure her family knew whom she was with. She would also take her younger brother with her, as was the case during the interviews.

As for the two male participants, they both agreed that they were still as true Khmers as they could practically be. Dara, for example, used to study English with a Christian organisation and attended their religious services, but it did not affect his Buddhist belief and self. Although Dara admired Western children's ability to enjoy their freedom in living their lives and in making their own decision, he still chose to follow his elder siblings' advice, given on his parents' behalf. He knew his place in the family and the society. When asked in the final interview whether he thought he was Westernised, Dara said:

> I don't think I am Westernised. With everything I have learnt, I may appear that way. But most educated people would prefer peace and fairness. Educated people wouldn't die from poverty. Educated people would want the world we live in to be a better place. That is why the developed countries help the developing one. One way to do that was through human resources development as in providing scholarships, or providing accesses to the people to understand a broader world. Similarly, my ideas were broadened. I preferred negotiation to violence. I'd like to live independently. I hate war and I love peace, and freedom. Am I Westernised?

As for Virak, he saw himself as, to use his own words, 'a combination of a Westerner and a Khmer'. He said there were only three aspects in which he was more Western than Khmer:

> My thinking. I'm more open-minded comparing to many Khmer people. I look for choices and would choose the most beneficial one. I don't mind at all having to show respect to the elders, but they should be proper themselves.

> My attitude to women: I respect women. I think of them as equal to men. At home, I am happy to share the household chores. I don't like to sit and eat as many old Khmer men. I don't think there is work for just men or women only. We all are capable of doing what is to be done.

> My appearance. Right now, I'm thinking of making myself look cool, a little colourful top-edged hairstyle with hair gel. I try to dress myself in Korean men's fashion, and sometimes with just jeans.

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Among the participants, I am a slightly different case. When I was in my 20s, I was more extreme than my participants. I would not compromise and preferred to sacrifice my stereotypical familial relationship rather than lose my independence. I chose to live away from my family, and spent all I earned to enjoy my life while continuing to immerse myself deeply in my English literacy and practices. I taught at an international school and hung out with international friends. On Friday evenings after work, I would head straight to a bar with my like-minded friends. We would order some beer and chat the evening away before going to a discotheque to party until late at night. In many ways, I chose not to let my family interfere with my personal life. I was trying to be un-Khmer, living my life my way. Eventually, I decided to settle down. I married the person I truly loved, disregarding my family's disapproval. I am now raising my children differently to the way I was raised: with love, affection and mutual respect.

Despite trying my best to live a life of a Western young man embracing as many Western sociocultural values as I deem practical, I was never entirely separated from my Cambodian culture and tradition. I was wedded the Cambodian way, after which I moved in to live with my parents-in-law. Although I intended to let nobody other than my wife and I decide the ways we lived our lives, I soon discovered our elders' traditional practices were not always impractical or irrelevant. For example, after I was married, I moved in to live with my wife's family. In so doing, we could save more and afford a house sooner than choosing to rent. As a consequence of learning and practicing English, I began to better understand my own national culture, tradition and being.

This study has reinforced for me that, however many ways we have performed our identities, we were always conscious of our traditional cultural values. In appropriate times and circumstances, we were proud to perform these values. Although in our daily lives, we incorporated some Western cultural values into our exercises of agency, we never meant any harm to our Khmer culture, be it directly or indirectly. Fundamentally, how we lived our lives and performed our identities in ways that may have adversely affected our Khmer cultural values reflected the effect of education and the changeability of culture, both with a capital 'C' and in lowercase (Hara 2012).

This is another dimension of hybridity in identity performance. As part of

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growing up, our selves are formed in interaction with peers and technology and through performance of the forming identity. Once becoming more mature, an appreciation develops for our own cultural values, and we seek to pass them on in our own way to future generations, making necessary changes to remove any obsolete traditional practices, such as unequal access to education for girls, social acceptance of males' adultery, differentiation of responsibilities for men and women or lack of affection shown for significant others. That none of the participants in this study was as extreme as I was with the Western ideology acquired through my English literacy and practices made me feel much relieved. I had been troubled by the concern that English literacy and practices could be contaminating Cambodian culture and the Cambodian identity. However, this does not appear to be the case. English literacy and practices only influence our perception of self and identity to a degree. Many other forces and factors exist (e.g. social trends, media, globalisation and peers) that are as influential on their own, without the involvement of English literacy practices. This raises the final question to be discussed in this chapter: Is English or something else modernising young English-literate Cambodians and making them challenge their country's traditions?

English, or Something Else?

Were the participants' English literacy practices the main agents behind their various formulated identity performances? Could there be other factors? For example, could education explain the shift, as identified in the studies of Kwong (2011), Feliciano (2009) and Carter (2006)? Kwong (2011) examined education and the development of identity among school-age migrant children in Beijing's schools and found that the migrant students' education had a significant effect on their identity. They would like to belong to Beijing, but they were not accepted. They identified themselves as members of their home regions, but did not fit in or intend to live there.

Feliciano (2009) conducted a longitudinal study to examine changes in ethnic identities from adolescence to adulthood among children of Latin American and Caribbean immigrants, to determine how educational attainments and other life experiences related to those changes. Feliciano found that the most educated adult respondents identified with both their countries of origin and the country in which

they currently lived, regardless of how they had identified as adolescents. The study suggested that educational institutions are important contexts in which racial and ethnic identities are formed.

Carter (2006) studied 68 low-income, African American and Latino youths, aged 13–20. He was interested in understanding how the participants negotiated the boundaries between school and peer-group contexts. He found that students who demonstrated multiple cultural competencies and deployed varied cultural tools and resources to achieve a more effective balance among the various cultural spheres in which they participated best traversed the social boundaries between their ethnic peer cultures and their school environments.

The studies indicated that education did influence individuals' perceptions and performances of their identities, but did not replace the original cultural identity with the new one. Instead, education raised young people's consciousness about how different sociocultural contexts demand specific performances of selves. I found the same applied to how education affected the performances of identity of my participants and me. I had expected this outcome, and when interviewing my participants, I never forgot to ask directly whether there was anything besides their literacy and practices that could have made them who they were. From this line of questioning, two salient cases emerged.

Leang was certain she had been influenced by nothing other than her English. In her family, she was the only one who studied and used English on a daily basis. When asked what her present life would be life if she had not chosen to study English and used it in her everyday life, she responded:

> It [my life] would be far different. Had I decided to go on with my choice of economics major and had not been shifted to the English major, I can't be what I am now. Besides, when I had good knowledge of English, I could access the Internet. I could read further and understand many things better. My economics major would not have given me this ability. I might only be able to read in Khmer. My English literacy wouldn't be sufficient for me to do what I have been doing. I would not have been able to know about news or how to do the many things I have learnt through English. Had I chosen the economics major, I would have missed the opportunities provided by the bachelor's degree in English. I would be finding it quite hard to find a job for myself now. Nowadays, English is the most essential requirement. If we don't know English, it will be very difficult. Generally speaking, English has informed me a lot. The assignments given by the lecturers and the searches I had to conduct to do those assignments taught me to know how to seek out information on everything. It motivated me to have the access to the Internet at home so that I

could explore more. With some help from friends, I discovered many things, like Skype. I taught myself to video-call my sister in the US. No one in my house knew how to do such a thing. My American brother-in-law, despite being in a Western world, had no clue about video-calls. I was the one telling him about Skype. It really helps me to know a lot of things. As a teacher of English, I knew I still don't have good English pronunciation. I used the Internet to improve my pronunciation, teaching myself the different phonetic symbols that I had not been taught. Before I was like a frog in a well. Now this frog has stuck its head out of the well and many things are familiar to it. Compared with the average Cambodians, I am much better than them. I am still not very good yet if compared with the best. But I am among the informed now.

Upon reading the first draft of the analysis of her own life story, Leang made a few corrections to the information and clarified many other points. At the end of the edited draft, she emphasised the importance of her English literacy as follows:

> With a major in English, I was able to find a job as an English lecturer. With the knowledge of English, I am exposed to the new technologies, namely the Internet. I have been able to learn whatever I want to know and read to further improve my knowledge.

Leang's English literacy and practices were undoubtedly a life-changing experience for her. They informed her of other possibilities for her being and becoming. This gave her hope and showed her ways to improve her present being to reflect who she really wanted to be. Her identity, as was the case in other studies, was really shaped by her contact, circumstances and life experiences. In particular, her knowledge of how Western children were allowed to exercise their rights in choosing their careers and partners helped her to stay single longer than any of her elder sisters, who were married when they were barely in their early 20s. In Leang's words:

> Those [life] experiences can make us know what is right to do and what is wrong to do. … With regards to friends and so on, normally we chat and they can give us good advice too.

By contrast, when asked to reflect on whether his English literacy or something else had contributed to his choices about how to live his life, Dara did not think that he had been influenced by the Western cultures to which he was exposed through using English. Dara drew a clear line between informing and influencing. He explained that:

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I don't think my learning and practicing English language has any influences on my being or becoming. We Khmer also have many good values. For example, some Cambodians are also punctual, the same ways most Westerners are. I have read some books about this punctuality issue. We were taught about this at school too. If anything, it is my English literacies that have changed my old good habits of punctuality, working hard and being serious in doing any given task. Through English, I learn about flexibility.

With regards to the issues of gender equity and gender roles, the arguments are valid among some obsolete elders only. My family don't discriminate household chores among sons and daughters. We all have equal share and responsibility in it.

I don't think I am Westernised. My present self is the result of my education, not the influences of Western culture through English. As an educated person, I see the values of sharing, justice, choices, development, and meanings of life. It is education that opens my eyes to the importance of independence, peace, and freedom. Because I am knowledgeable, I prefer negotiation to violence, and peace to war. Am I Westernised or just educated?

It is debatable whether I am more independent and prefer to have more freedom in my family and would like to have more rights to make my own decision because of my English literacy or because our society in which I grew up in is being developed with such changes being introduced. It still puzzles me.

Before concluding our final interview, Dara was asked to summarise his journey of becoming up to that point. Without thinking long, Dara replied:

I think I am who I am. I like to be challenged. I like to compete and I am curious to know something new. I think it is likely that I have these personalities because I have knowledge. I am not afraid of anything because I am proud of myself to be able to adapt well with new things.

It is worth noting that when he initially joined the study, Dara thought he had been influenced by his English literacy and practices in terms of Western sociocultural values and practices. However, he appears to have changed his mind. He thought his education and Cambodia's development had played the greater role. Nevertheless, he contended that his English literacy and practices were crucial in informing him of the differences between Cambodian and Western cultures.

Our narratives showed how our English literacies and practices informed us of Western cultural values. In this way, we were able to compare and contrast between Cambodian and Western cultures. This caused us to make choices and even change certain traditional and cultural values that were hindering our development of selves. In the process, conflicts arose. Most of us adjusted our values while continuing to use

English literacies. I reacted to the pressure initially, but I soon learnt to adjust. We all appear to have become more open-minded and happier owing to our English literacy and practices. As for the question of who we are, we were sure of the answer. Despite our English literacy and practices and our adoption of certain Western cultural values, we are still Khmers.

Chapter 11: 'Conclusion'

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I began this study by interpretively reflecting on the relationship between my English literacy practices and my identity. In this summary chapter, I revisit my understandings of (1) literacy and literacy practices, (2) knowledge and research and (3) self, identity and culture. I conclude the thesis by highlighting my key findings and discussing the implications, recommendations and limitations of my research, and indicating some future research directions.

Literacy and Literacy Practices

To illustrate my research experience, I refer to an English literacy event that I experienced with my son. Around mid-2011, in the middle of struggling to comprehend research methodology, I watched a film called 'Cars' (Lasseter & Ranft 2006) with my son. 'Cars' is a computer-animated comedy adventure in which the star racing car, 'Lighting McQueen, 'lost his way' in an unfamiliar place. The theme song, entitled 'Find Yourself', was what really captured my attention. I was in exactly the same situation as Lighting McQueen. I had come to my PhD feeling 'so sure of where [my research] was heading'. But I 'wound up lost' in 'some far off place'. I began to 'rethink' everything. Then I 'start[ed] to sense that slowly I [was] becoming someone else'. However, just as I thought I was 'lost', I 'found [my]self'. Conducting this research, I abandoned my positivistic orientation and rethought my understanding of Truth and knowledge in relation to my research. I found that literacy covers a broad range of practices and concepts, including graffiti (Aguilar 2000; Guzzetti 2002, p. 211) identity (Bian 2009; Jiménez 2000; Vicars 2009), power (J Collins & Blot 2003), technology (Olson & Cole 2006; Len & Lazuta 2012; Sefton-Green 1998a, 1998b; BT Williams & Zenger 2012) and culture (Bell 1997; Marsh & Millard 2000; Vincent 1989).

I learnt from Kelly, Gregory and Williams (2002) about multifaceted literacies and their broader application in community practices. 'Literacy practices are aspects not only of culture but also of power structures, and that school-sanctioned literacy is just one of a multiplicity of literacies which take place in peoples' lives. They raise

the question of how far classroom-based literacy practices acknowledge and value children's community literacies' (Fisher, Brooks & Lewis 2002, pp. 2–3). Literacy is a set of skills (Barton 2007), 'the ability to code and decode letters and words' (Papen 2005, p. 23) as well as actions (e.g. in body language) and objects (e.g. arts and artefacts). This realisation eventually brought me to the theory of literacy as a social practice (Barton 2007; Barton & Hamilton 1998; Gee 2000; Pahl & Rowsell 2005; Street 1993). From the New Literacy Studies perspectives (Gee 2008; Street 1995), literacy is 'not a single body of knowledge but a varied set of social practices', whose sociocultural contexts are crucial in interpreting the meaning of both oral and written texts (Luna, Solsken & Kutz 2000, p. 277). Through these lenses, literacy can be understood as multifaceted, meaning there are different forms of literacy, or literacies. Heath and Street (2008, p. 4) referred to this kind of literacy in its plural sense as multimodal literacies. Literacies are thus best understood through the variety of socially and culturally contextualised 'literacy-related activities that individuals and communities engage with in their everyday lives' (Papen 2005, p. 24). This is the model on which the life stories presented herein in particular, and this investigation in general, depended.

Applying my new understanding of literacy and literacy practices to my own life, I began to understand why my parents' marriage did not work and why Dad had remarried. One of the main causes could be their different literacy levels or their educations. Before the Khmer Rouge regime, my father was a university freshman. Mum was a grade-three dropout. After the genocidal regime fell, while in the refugee camp, Dad was being trained as a medical doctor, while Mum continued as a homemaker. For his study, Dad completed many short courses, both in Bangkok and in Boston, Massachusetts. By the time he became a doctor, Dad knew Thai and English and had a wide network of international friends. Mum was still a deeply traditional Khmer woman whose values and practices were completely different from Dad's. My parents grew distant. They talked less, disagreed more and eventually Dad left. Without even divorcing Mum, Dad married a much younger woman who had more in common with Dad, including an education, professional experiences and similar personal and social values.

As I now understand it, everyone is surrounded by literacy and literacy practices, through an endless variety of constant text producing and consuming. This

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understanding has since made me highly conscious of what I do with the text. What I read and write could affect my being and becoming, as well as those of others. It could even affect the environment in which individuals' being and becoming is occurring. With this realisation, as a language educator, I began to worry about not being able to raise the awareness about the endless possibilities and consequences that literacy can impose.

Knowledge and Research

> We do not receive wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness, which no one else can make for us, which one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come to regard the world.
>
> (Marcel Proust, in Horvath 1999, p. ix)

While my understanding of literacy was renewed, so too was my understanding of what counted as knowledge and research. Before undertaking this study, I understood knowledge in its classical sense as 'explicit knowledge'; that is, as that 'which we all have in mind when we talk about knowledge' (Jost 2008, p. 3). According to H Collins (2010, p. 80), explicit knowledge, in which 'explicit' is a relative term drawn on a subset of the ways we talk about communication, 'is knowledge that can, to some extent, be transferred by the use of strings in the right circumstances'. By 'strings', Collins meant 'interaction between physical objects' (H Collins 2010, p. 15) which 'always contains "information" in the sense connoted by "information theory"' (H Collins 2010, p. 16). As I saw it in the past, knowledge was simply what was taught to me by my elders and teachers, something I should pass on when I eventually became an elder and teacher myself.

Only through the process of researching this thesis did I learn about 'tacit knowledge'. According to Horvath (1999, p. ix), tacit knowledge is '[p]ersonal knowledge … so thoroughly grounded in experience that it cannot be expressed in its fullness ... knowledge that is bound up in the activity and effort that produced it'. It was at this stage that I learnt about the possible inexistence of absolute Truth and that reality was only a relative understanding, one of multiple truths (Hays & Singh 2012;

Jacobs 2009). This was the moment I became free from my obsession with the positivistic notions of knowledge, truth, validity, reliability and generalisability.

Moreover, research is should be much more than disproving a null hypothesis (Dantzker & Hunter 2006) or solving problems (CJ Drew 1980) with findings that are generalisable, valid and reliable. A large sample may suggest the trend of the population, but trend does not shed much light on individuals' voice and concerns. Instead, research should be about understanding the real world as constructed by people whose voices are paramount (Lowe 2007). In this sense, research should be 'messy, uncertain, multivoiced texts, cultural criticism, new experimental works, ... reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis, and intertextual representation' (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p. 26), not just easy to understand numbers or graphs.

Self, Identity, and Culture

Through conducting this thesis, I also developed my understanding of self, identity and culture. Whereas, self is 'an aspect of personality that consists of a person's view of their own identity and characteristics' (Richards & Schmidt 2002, p. 474), 'Identity is our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us)' (Jenkins 2008, p. 5). According to Jenkins:

> identity can *only* be understood as process, as 'being' or 'becoming'. One's identity—one's identities, indeed, for who we are is always singular *and* plural—is never a final or settled matter. Not even death freezes the picture: identity or reputation can be reassessed, and some identities—sainthood or martyrdom, for example—can only be achieved beyond the grave.

As for how self and identity relate, Ha (2008, p. 32) suggested that identity was more than self. She claimed that identity was invested in many levels of a person's life, from personal to national and even international. Similarly, Wodak et al. (1997) and Woodward (1997) have agreed that identity is constructed through difference from others. Riley (2007, p. 16) also underlined that social interactionists, psychologists, Marxists, social constructionists, phenomenologists and existentialists may have different ideas on identity, but all agree on two grounds: that (1) 'the source of personal identity is social' and that (2) 'the individual's consciousness of

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identities—their own and others'—is part of their overarching knowledge of social reality'.

These findings reinforced my understanding of the nature of self and identity—they evolve. As individuals' selves and identities do not remain static, their culture too changes with the individuals' new discoveries and knowledge. People become more open-minded and respect one another's choices, allowing democracy and human rights to prevail. However, in Cambodia, there has been no room for change. Cambodian selves and identities are still shaped by the *chbabs* and traditions. Effort, time and resources are invested to ensure that Cambodian culture remains static. Most Cambodians still think that anything new and different from tradition is 'improper'.

While my English literacy has allowed me to liberate my self and identity from the *chbabs* and the tradition of Cambodian culture, I now acknowledge that there are many good points about the *chbabs* and the tradition that shapes Cambodian identity. Yet, there are also certain points that require either improvement or outright rejection. As revealed through my own and my participants' narratives, these points include: gender inequality, arranged marriage, excessive parental control and repaying *kun*.

Having reflected on these three areas central to my literacy practice and investigation, the remainder of this chapter presents my key findings, the implications, recommendations and limitations of the study, and some future directions for research.

Key Findings

Through our life story narratives, English literacy was found to have a wide range of uses, which consequently shaped our perceptions, constructions and performances of identity to varying degrees. From note-taking to private conversation, entertainment to study and work, personal to social and political development, we used English to access a broader pool of information, learn about new cultures, make new friends, find our own voices and selves, develop self-esteem, exercise our rights, express our political views, share breaking news, use modern technologies, find jobs and gain higher social status.

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All of these uses introduced changes in our personal and social being and becoming in five primary areas. The first change concerned our attitudes towards English literacy itself. We embarked upon learning English with very vague reasons or goals for its use in our futures.

Leang: In the beginning, I don't think I had any reasons to learn English. I learnt English because I saw my sister do it.

Sreyna: In the beginning, Dad… Dad saw a new English class was being opened in the primary school where I studied. It was for real beginners. Dad sent me to study there without expecting anything. I was not taking it seriously, either. I didn't know what I had to study English for.

Thida: At the time, I was just a little girl. The bigger girls in the neighbourhood were studying English and they brought me along with them. They were all in their late teens. I went with them. I didn't learn anything. I only copied what was on the blackboard or the course book. I really didn't learn anything.

Dara: I was young, and I didn't think about learning for the future yet. I just learnt it because my friends learnt it. Also, my parents wanted me to learn it.

Virak: I started my English class in late 1999, when I was in grade five. Dad thought that my sister and I were young and we should study in cheap school only because we wouldn't be able to learn much yet.

However, when we started using the language in our everyday lives, we found pleasure in doing so.

Leang: I enjoyed learning English. It makes me feel happy, especially when I get good grades in learning it.

Sreyna: When I rode a motorbike or drove along the roads in Phnom Penh, I liked looking at the names of the shops or anything that were written in English. I don't really know why I was doing that, but I think it was easier for me to read in English. I could even learn some new words as well.

Thida: I used English for schoolwork and for social networking. English is like the oil inside an engine at work place. I feel superior to those who can't use English for communication.

Dara: I use English in writing on Facebook, email, and in planning my lessons. I speak English with my friends at school. I mostly listen to English songs. Being able to understand signs and posters in English makes me proud. I feel proud being able to use English.

Virak: I listened to English songs, especially R&B and hip hop songs. I also surfed the Internet in English. I write my diary in English. English makes it easier for me to express myself.

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Consequently, we discovered voice and self. We improved our being and becoming. In the process, we developed positive attitudes towards English literacy and practices.

The second change was in our preference for literacy practices. From studying to entertaining, we chose English.

Leang:	I always take notes in English, write text messages, write comments in Facebook, chat with friends, do assignments, and write diary. Also, I usually read English newspapers.
Sreyna:	I use English for chatting, Facebooking, emailing, communicating with my boss, reading the instructions on such products like shampoo, soap, medicines. I talk on the phone with friends mostly in English because I don't want people around me to know what we talk about.
Thida:	I Romanise Khmer words because it is easier to type in English.
Dara:	I read books in English. I learn a lot from doing so. There are a lot of books for different skills like communication skills, academic skills, and social skills.
Virak:	I learnt to talk as fast as in RAP because it's popular among my friends. I used English to apply for jobs or scholarships.

After we practiced English, we showed signed of changes. Prior to learning and practicing English, we used Khmer to live our lives. We were like fish in an aquarium. However, once we learnt English, we learnt about a natural lake not far from where we lived. Once we started using English literacy practices, we were given a choice to experience the lake. Before long, we found many exciting things in the lake. The life there was much freer and the choices there were more appealing. Over time, we preferred the lake to the aquarium and wished to belong there. Our preference for English literacy was encouraged by increasing social acceptance, the access it granted to the local job market and international study opportunities, the political situation and the regional and global integration of Cambodia into world organisations.

The third change was in our reasoning skills and our attitudes towards the Cambodian sociocultural environment. Through English literacy, we became open-minded yet critical, individualistic yet respectful of others' choices. We talked back to our parents when we knew what they did, said or thought could be improved. We rejected some traditional practices and introduced more modern alternatives. We wanted change for our families and society. With our limited power at this time, we knew we could not do much, but we were determined to make a difference once we had more power.

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With critical thinking, our interpersonal skills also changed. We became more sociable. We made more friends than our parents would have imagined possible. We spent more time with these friends, both in person and online. With the networks we created, we wanted to find our own jobs and careers, not be satisfied with those our parents chose for us. Many of us wished to be free of our parents' control and live independently.

Finally, our English literacy brought us concepts that changed our physical appearances. The female participants liked their hair to look blonde or brunette. They preferred pants and shorts to *sarongs* and *sampots*.

Leang:	I've become more fashionable. I read English language magazines, watch TV, and movies and I observe their fashions. I always pick some for myself. I dress to please myself. Myself is more important than anyone else. Sometimes people criticise me for wearing short clothes. I don't have problems with what they say. I do it because I think it looks good on me.
Sreyna:	Because I keep resisting their ideas, they let me have my ways to an extent. Now they don't mind I dye my hair or choose my own clothes. I like the ways I dress. I observe the ways Westerners use jewellery or style their hair, and I really like their ways. I remember the first time I visited home after dying my hair with even brighter colour than this. Dad didn't talk to me. He told Mum to tell me to dye it black back. Mum came to me and said with my hair colour, I should not let *yeay* [grandmother] see it. I had to dye my hair black again when I was visiting my family. But when I came to Phnom Penh, I dyed my hair into the colour I liked again. And also the kind of jewellery I am wearing, my family don't like it. They told me not to wear it. Whenever I am with them, I don't wear it. But when I am not with them, I wear it again.
Thida:	The American films I watch influence me to a degree. Not completely. Just to a degree. I observe the Western lifestyle in those films, the way they dress, and they ways they behave. Sometimes when seeing how they react to a specific situation I thought it was ridiculous. But then I began to pick up some of those reactions.
Virak:	I learn to talk like RAP. I do that sometimes with my family members and they called me 'America'. I used to wear hip-hop fashions. I like hip-hop songs.

Our English literacy informed us of Western values and choices, from which we selected ideas to adopt or adapt to enrich our lives. All of us are happy with what we have become and are becoming thanks to English literacy.

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Implications and Recommendations

Various implications and recommendations for language teachers and English learners and users can be drawn from this investigation. As confirmed by this study, culture is embedded in and spread with language. Language teachers, therefore, should be aware of the cultural package contained in the language they are teaching. Teachers should inform their students in advance that, when they learn the language, they are unavoidably learning the culture of that language. Indeed, teachers should raise cultural awareness among their students and encourage them to be culturally sensitive when they use the language. For example, in Cambodia, it is polite to compliment somebody for being fat. In English, however, this would be offensive.

The study also shows how our preferences of using English over Khmer literacy in living our daily life gradually introduced Western identity to blend with our Khmer selves. The changes were internalised first before we started performing them and these changes can raise conflicts inside the family, especially with the elders. Language teachers and learners should be aware of this influence. The awareness could help them to avoid conflicts as those that happened to Thida, Sreyna, and me. The data also showed that while we absorb and practice certain Western cultural ideologies, these principles also help us to reflect on our Cambodian selves and identity better. In other words, as young adults English learners, we could be considered to be successful in integrating helpful aspects of Western culture into our understandings of ourselves as Cambodians. This would suggest that the fears of Cambodian elders are not supported – that Cambodians traditions are not being thrown off by the young – even if it may appear that way while they are transitioning through their teenage years.

In learning and practicing English, our identity shifts appeared more extreme during the teenage years, but settled down afterwards, generally in favour of an updated but still respectful sense of tradition. I would therefor suggest teenage English learners to be more patient while they are moving through this process. Meanwhile, English language educators should be aware of this transition and therefore facilitate discussions that would help ease this transition.

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In addition, this study shows that, at the beginning, none of us felt any intrinsic motivation to study English. Even though we became successful at learning English, not all learners are likely to study as long as we did to discover their own motivation. Teachers should thus start motivating their students from the very first class. They should show the students how English literacy can be applied in real-world settings to make their teaching more practical and to help students to maintain their motivation.

I also revealed in this study a wide range of literacy practices in real-world settings. This finding suggests that language teachers need to make their teaching and testing cover a wide range of activities. These activities should resemble those real-world tasks performed by the students. This would help to make the lessons more engaging, and close the gap between the language taught and the language used.

For language learners and users, knowing that a foreign language carries its culture with it should remind them to be conscious about potential cultural influences and barriers in their literacy practices. Learners should constantly self-evaluate while actively engaging with and in a foreign language, particularly if they come from societies in which cultural sensitivity is paramount. Native speakers should also exercise caution regarding cultural differences when using their language in culturally conservative countries. Indeed, the consequences of breaking cultural rules could be fatal in some extreme situations—there have been cases of Afghan soldiers killing their trainers because of 'personal grudges and cultural misunderstandings' (Aljazeera 2013). In Cambodia, such extreme situation may never happen. Breaking cultural norms may at most resulted in father and son disowning each other like in my case.

Finally, as motivation and positive attitude could determine their level of foreign language acquisition (Dufon & Churchill 2006; R Ellis 1997; R Gardner & Lambert 1972; RC Gardner 1985; Noels 2001), these factors may also help to facilitate the learners' openness to the foreign language's culture and accelerate their adoption of the cultural values. In these case, conflicts could result if learners are not patient enough or are too extreme in their beliefs.

Limitations

Upon reflection, some limitations of my study are apparent. In particular, the composition and size of the sample, my position as an 'insider' and the difficulty in representing the lived experiences of others limited the outcomes of this study.

Regarding the composition of the sample, all of my participants were raised in large cities and towns in Cambodia. They were also from middle class families. These two factors alone gave them greater exposure to Western culture, such as through direct contact or media channels, than those learners raised in less urban locations or in lower-income families. That all my participants came from a Sino-Cambodian background could be another limitation. Although they considered themselves as Khmer, the findings would have been more representative if learners from non-Sino-Cambodian or rural backgrounds had been included..

The small sample size I used in my research could be seen as another limitation. However, qualitative research is not about sample size. It is about description, with deep and rich details as its foundation (Birch & Miller 2002; Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011).

Second, in analysing the data, I heavily invested my interpretations of the experiences as an 'insider' to the Cambodian sociocultural setting in which English literacies are acquired and practiced. This positioning helped me to arrive at a better understanding of the subject matter. However, I also realise that my understandings of the experiences could be drastically different to the understandings of readers of this thesis, particularly where they are outsiders.

My insider viewpoint projected into conducting this investigation could be another limitation, particularly in the area of objectivity, reflexivity and authenticity (Kanuha 2000). With this viewpoint, over-familiarity, taken-for-granted assumptions and partialness become an issue (Hockey 1993), as does my potential sensitivity of turning on my own insiderness and putting it under the scrutiny of others (Bathmaker & Harnett 2010; Sikes & Potts 2008).

Finally, there are possible limitations concerning the presentation and representation of the participants' stories. As Pope, Mays and Popay (2007, p. 147) put it, 'Within the qualitative research community there has long been a recognition that writing and presentation of qualitative research is about representing the data and

that this representation is influenced by the theoretical and methodological stance of the researcher'. Having the participants recall their lived experiences may have re-presented the reality of them once already, and my interpretation of those lived experiences compounded this re-presentation. My presentation of the reconstructed experiences in English, a language different to that through which most of the experiences were lived and revisited, adds a further layer of distortion to the stories.

However, as I have come to understand, there is no absolute Truth, only different perspectives of phenomena (Hays & Singh 2012; Jacobs 2009). Employing an interpretive methodology, reality is viewed as relative and subjective (Cooper & White 2012). Through this investigation, therefore, I could only present the version of reality and truth that I felt best represented the issue of English literacy and its influence on young Cambodian adults' identities, as seen through my Cambodian insider's eyes.

Future Direction

I have long been challenged by the notion that something else besides English literacy and practices could be influencing the changing Cambodian identities showcased in this study (e.g., globalization, travel, media, education). Although the data in this study strongly suggest that English literacy does influence young Cambodian adults' perceptions and performances of sociocultural identity, a study investigating these other factors more fully would shed more light. If possible, to address a limitation in the current study, the data should include the lived experiences of (1) those born and raised in the city and who have studied English for a number of years, (2) those born and raised in the city but who have never studied English, (3) those born and raised in a remote province and who have studied English for a number of years, and (4) those born and raised in a remote province and who have never studied English. Different age groups might also be considered, to offer a more complete picture of Cambodian's experience of identity formation.

Since this study was conducted from an insider viewpoint, the study could also be extended by including an outsider's viewpoint, insights and analysis. This outsider would ideally be from a Western country where English is spoken as a native tongue, so that cultural comparison could be conducted in even richer details.

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At The Meantime

For the time being, however, I have offered through this thesis an insightful investigation into how English literacies informed the perceptions and performances of selves among young Cambodian adults. Having conducted the study, I am proud to be the first to conduct such research, at least in Cambodia if not in Southeast Asia as a whole. Since ASEAN is using English as a medium of communication, my study should serve as a reflecting mirror of how those Southeast Asians are being influenced by the practices of this particular Western tongue, as well as any other.

It was undeniable that the development of a society in the age of globalization cannot do without English language for cross-countries communications, access to information, and entertainments. However, knowing that practicing a foreign tongue can be influential on the users' selves and cultures could be useful for users and their cultures to adapt and prepare for those intercultural communications. In so doing, modernisation should be achievable without the sacrifice of the local cultures. In other words, "modernisation" does not have be "Westernisation" at the same time.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Memo to Year Four Lecturers in the English Department

<div align="right">12 Jan 2011</div>

<div align="center">Memo</div>

From   : Sok Soth (SoS)
To   : Year Four Lecturers at IFL, English Department
Subj.   : Request for Assistance

Introduction:
I am writing to request your assistance in my research project which focuses on English literacy practices and the performances of Cambodian identities by our year four (in all programs) students who are in their early 20s.

About My Study:
My research topic for my PhD is "**Speaking in Two Tongues: An Ethnographic Investigation of the Literacy Practices of English as a Foreign Language on Cambodian Young Adult Learners' Identity**".

The following questions frame my investigation.

    i. What relationship is there between literacy practices of English language as a foreign language of five Cambodian young adult learners and their ongoing shifts in the performance of sociocultural identities?
    ii. Does learning and exposure to English language influence these Cambodian young adult learners' sociocultural identities?
    iii. To what extent are Westernised literacy practices consciously employed?
    iv. How conscious are the participants of their English literacy practices with regards to their sociocultural identity performances within Cambodian sociocultural contexts?
    v. What conclusions can be drawn from the participants' identity performance process and their learning of the target language?

I am using selective sampling method (Sandelowski et al. 1992 in Coyne 1997, p. 628; Schatzman and Strauss, 1973, in Strauss, 1987, p. 39) to recruit participants for my study. Strauss (1987, p. 39) defines selective sampling as "the calculated decision to sample a specific locale or type of interviewee according to a preconceived but reasonable initial set of dimensions (such as time, space, identity) which are worked out in advance of a study". This method is a sampling method frequently used in qualitative study, a type of study I am conducting. This sampling method allows me to specifically work with individuals who are perceived to be Westernised to a varying degree by the insiders, the Cambodian people who know them, **YOU,** in this case.

How You Can Help:
You can help me by identifying one or more of your students who meet the following criteria:

    i. The target participants' age range should be between 20–25 years old.
    ii. They have been learning English in Cambodia only for at least five years.
    iii. They must be doing a bachelor's degree in English language in Cambodia and should have completed least three years of the four year program.

iv.   They should be perceived active participants (i.e. active consumers and producers) of Westernised global cultural practices within Cambodian sociocultural contexts by **YOU**.

- o They dress and behave like foreigners (sexy clothes, hairstyles, etc.)
- o They talk in a foreign manner or manners (shrug shoulders, accents, etc.)
- o They like listening to and watching foreign films.
- o They are enthusiastic about or celebrate Western cultural events (Christmas, Valentines, birthday, etc.)
- o They find Western ways of wedding (clothes, cake cutting, church, etc.) more appealing.
- o They enjoy personal freedom and are less conformed to the expectations of the family and tradition (more individualistic).
- o They are or prefer to be open, critical, and straight forward in communicating with their friends and other people.

v.   However well they perform academically is not important for this selection.

What to Do When You Know You Have a Likely Candidate or More:

1. Please kindly note down their names, classes, and possibly their phone numbers and SMS me this information to this number of mine 097 39 35 8 99.

I will approach these students personally and inform them of my interest in interviewing them. That is all you have to do.

N.B.:
As this week is already the last week of the semester, I would be most grateful if you could do this (identify the potential students) within this week. This will give me next week to approach them to seek their interest. The interviews then can start the week after the exams.

I am most grateful to your help.

Regards,
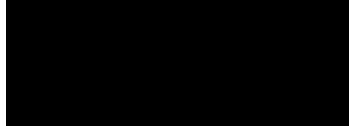
Ph.D. Candidate,
Victoria University, Melbourne,
Australia
(097 39 35 8 99)

Appendix B: Memo to Year Four Students

12 Jan 2011

Dear IFL Year Four Students (in all programs):

My name is Sok Soth, a Ph.D. Candidate in Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia. For my Ph.D. dissertation, I am conducting a study entitled "**Speaking in Two Tongues: An Ethnographic Investigation of the Literacy Practices of English as a Foreign Language on Cambodian Young Adult Learners' Identity**". I seek to explore how learning and practicing English language shapes the learners sociocultural identities.

I am writing to seek your interest in being my participants in this research project of mine.

What Benefits Do I Get from Participating in This Project?

1. You and I will have various conversations (**not boring interviews**) about identity matters**.** We will learn about each other in which I will share with you in details my life history and how my own English literacy practices influence and shape my identity, making me who I am now. You will know me better than anyone else that ever knows me. You will know almost everything about me, even things that my close friends and parents don't know about. Ultimately, you will have another friend, me.

2. Through various conversations with me about the topic, you will finally know yourself better than ever before with regards to how English literacy practice influence and shape your own identity. This will help you to make better choices for your life in almost every important area (study, career, marriage, etc.).

3. You will understand the importance of identity for personal and national gains, how it is constructed, how it changes, and how it can determine a person's life.

4. You will have the opportunity to experience first-hand how real research is conducted, how data for a Ph.D. dissertation is being collected, interpreted and written. This is essential for your future endeavours of higher education.

5. You will have a chance to see your story develop into a book as a document of life.

6. You are able to make yourself more useful by helping to contribute to the pool of contemporary knowledge through this study, not just studying it.

7. At the ends of the conversations with me, you will be awarded with an 8 GB flash drive as a token of gratitude for your time and sharing.

Importance!

Please note that all the information you give me is treated with highest confidentiality. Your name and anything that can lead to identify in my research will be removed. This research is approved under the ethics regulations of the Victoria University, Australia.

Who Are Eligible to be the Participants?

If you answer "YES" to all the following questions, you are the right person I am looking for.

i. Are you between 20–25 years old?

ii. Have you been learning English in Cambodia only?
iii. Have you been learning English **at least** for five year including the three past years at IFL?
iv. Are you doing a bachelor's degree in English language in IFL in Cambodia?
v. Are you an active participant (i.e. active consumers and producers) of Westernised global cultural practices?
   o Do you prefer the western ways of life (clothes, hairstyles, music, movies, etc.) to that of Cambodian?
   o Do you like a foreign manner or manners of communication (shrug shoulders, accents, etc.)?
   o Are you enthusiastic about or do you ever celebrate Western cultural events (Christmas, Valentines, birthday, etc.)?
   o Do you find Western ways of wedding (clothes, cake cutting, church, etc.) more appealing to the Cambodian ones?
   o Do your prefer living your life your own ways to living it under the expectations of your family and tradition?
   o Do you prefer individualism?
   o Are you or do you prefer to be open, critical, and straight forward in communicating with your friends and other people around you?
vi. Are both of your parents Cambodians?
vii. Are your parents not literate in English language?
viii. Were you born, brought up and grow up in Cambodia only?
ix. In the past 15 years, have you been living in Cambodia only (not other countries, visits don't count)?

If you answer "YES" to all these criteria, you are an ideal person I am looking for. If you are interested in participating in my research project, I would love to hear from you.

Please SMS me your name and telephone number and I will contact you as soon as possible. **My number is 097 39 35 8 99. My emails are sothsok@gmail.com or soth.sok@live.vu.edu.au.**

The project can start when your first semester exams are over.

I look forward to hearing from you. Best of luck with your exams.

Regards,
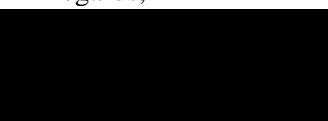
SOK Soth
Ph.D. Candidate,
Victoria University, Melbourne,
Australia

Appendix C: Participant Approval Forms

Leang's Transcript Translation Approval Form

Participant's Transcripts Translation Approval Form

I, ...(participant's name), acknowledge and agree in this approval form that:

1. I have successfully graduated from the English Department of the Institute of Foreign Languages with a Bachelor's Degree in English Language Education. Hence, I am proficient in English language enough to be able to comprehend and verify the translated statements from my own interviews used in the thesis chapter.

2. I have thoroughly read Mr. Soth SOK's thesis chapter about my life story reconstructed from the interviews I gave between February-April, 2011.

3. I am aware that my story is being reconstructed, analyzed and interpreted and presented as such.

4. I am given enough time to cross check the quoted statements with the transcripts of my own interviews that Mr. SothSoK gave mein 2011.

5. I am given enough time and opportunities to correct and/or to make necessary changes to the quoted statements in the chapter.

6. The translations of the quoted transcripts were accurate and presentable in the thesis.

7. My real name and information that can identify me in the thesis was sufficiently removed.

8. Any photographs illustrated in the chapter can be used as I am not identifiable in any of them.

Form and Thesis Chapter Received on: ......June 18th, 2012
(DD/MM/YYYY)

Form and Thesis Chapter Approved and Signed on: ...July 08th, 2012
(DD/MM/YYYY)

Participant's Name: ....

Sreyna's Transcript Translation Approval Form

Participant's Transcripts Translation Approval Form

I, .. ██████ ██..........(participant's name), acknowledge and agree in this approval form that:

1. I have successfully graduated from the English Department of the Institute of Foreign Languages with a Bachelor's Degree in English Language Education. Hence, I am proficient in English language enough to be able to comprehend and verify the translated statements from my own interviews used in the thesis chapter.

2. I have thoroughly read Mr. Soth SOK's thesis chapter about my life story reconstructed from the interviews I gave between February-April, 2011.

3. I am aware that my story is being reconstructed, analyzed and interpreted and presented as such.

4. I am given enough time to cross check the quoted statements with the transcripts of my own interviews that Mr. Soth SoK gave me in 2011.

5. I am given enough time and opportunities to correct and/or to make necessary changes to the quoted statements in the chapter.

6. The translations of the quoted transcripts were accurate and presentable in the thesis.

7. My real name and information that can identify me in the thesis was sufficiently removed.

8. Any photographs illustrated in the chapter can be used as I am not identifiable in any of them.

Form and Thesis Chapter Received on: 14/06/2012

(DD/MM/YYYY)

Form and Thesis Chapter Approved and Signed on: 27/06/2012

(DD/MM/YYYY)

Participant's Name: .... ██████

Thida's Transcript Translation Approval Form

Participant's Transcripts Translation Approval Form

I, ▓▓▓▓▓ (participant's name), acknowledge and agree in this approval form that:

1. I have successfully graduated from the English Department of the Institute of Foreign Languages with a Bachelor's Degree in English Language Education. Hence, I am proficient in English language enough to be able to comprehend and verify the translated statements from my own interviews used in the thesis chapter.

2. I have thoroughly read Mr. Soth SOK's thesis chapter about my life story reconstructed from the interviews I gave between February-April, 2011.

3. I am aware that my story is being reconstructed, analyzed and interpreted and presented as such.

4. I am given enough time to cross check the quoted statements with the transcripts of my own interviews that Mr. Soth SoK gave me in 2011.

5. I am given enough time and opportunities to correct and/or to make necessary changes to the quoted statements in the chapter.

6. The translations of the quoted transcripts were accurate and presentable in the thesis.

7. My real name and information that can identify me in the thesis was sufficiently removed.

8. Any photographs illustrated in the chapter can be used as I am not identifiable in any of them.

Form and Thesis Chapter Received on: 14/06/2012
(DD/MM/YYYY)

Form and Thesis Chapter Approved and Signed on: 16/09/2012
(DD/MM/YYYY)

Participant's Name: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓

Virak's Transcript Translation Approval Form

Participant's Transcripts Translation Approval Form

I, ████████, acknowledge and agree in this approval form that:

1. I have successfully graduated from the English Department of the Institute of Foreign Languages with a Bachelor's Degree in English Language Education. Hence, I am proficient in English language enough to be able to comprehend and verify the translated statements from my own interviews used in the thesis chapter.

2. I have thoroughly read Mr. Soth SOK's thesis chapter about my life story reconstructed from the interviews I gave between February-April, 2011.

3. I am aware that my story is being reconstructed, analyzed and interpreted and presented as such.

4. I am given enough time to cross check the quoted statements with the transcripts of my own interviews that Mr. Soth SoK gave me in 2011.

5. I am given enough time and opportunities to correct and/or to make necessary changes to the quoted statements in the chapter.

6. The translations of the quoted transcripts were accurate and presentable in the thesis.

7. My real name and information that can identify me in the thesis was sufficiently removed.

8. Any photographs illustrated in the chapter can be used as I am not identifiable in any of them.

Form and Thesis Chapter Received on: 14 July, 2012
(DD/MM/YYYY)

Form and Thesis Chapter Approved and Signed on: 27 July, 2012
(DD/MM/YYYY)

Participant's Name: ████████

Dara's Transcript Translation Approval Form

Participant's Transcripts Translation Approval Form

I, ...(participant's name), acknowledge and agree in this approval form that:

1. I have successfully graduated from the English Department of the Institute of Foreign Languages with a Bachelor's Degree in English Language Education. Hence, I am proficient in English language enough to be able to comprehend and verify the translated statements from my own interviews used in the thesis chapter.

2. I have thoroughly read Mr. Soth SOK's thesis chapter about my life story reconstructed from the interviews I gave between February-April, 2011.

3. I am aware that my story is being reconstructed, analyzed and interpreted and presented as such.

4. I am given enough time to cross check the quoted statements with the transcripts of my own interviews that Mr. Soth SoK gave me in 2011.

5. I am given enough time and opportunities to correct and/or to make necessary changes to the quoted statements in the chapter.

6. The translations of the quoted transcripts were accurate and presentable in the thesis.

7. My real name and information that can identify me in the thesis was sufficiently removed.

8. Any photographs illustrated in the chapter can be used as I am not identifiable in any of them.

Form and Thesis Chapter Received on: ...13 . 06 . 2012......
(DD/MM/YYYY)

Form and Thesis Chapter Approved and Signed on: ...25 . 06 . 2012...
(DD/MM/YYYY)

Participant's Name: .. ..

Appendix D: Consent Form for Participants Involved in the Research

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY | **A NEW SCHOOL OF THOUGHT**

CONSENT FORM
FOR PARTICIPANTS
INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

We, **Soth SOK (the student researcher), Dr. Mark Vicars (Principal Supervisor), and Dr. Mary Weaven (Associate Supervisor),** would like to invite you to be a part of a study into 'speaking in two tongues: an ethnographic investigation of the literacy practices of English as a foreign language on Cambodian young adult learners' identity'.

CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I, ..., a year four student at the English Department (ED), Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL), Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), Cambodia

certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study: 'speaking in two tongues: an ethnographic investigation of the literacy practices of English as a foreign language on Cambodian young adult learners' identity' being conducted at the English Department, IFL, RUPP by: Mr. Soth SOK, a student researcher at the School of Education, Victoria University, sothsok@gmail.com; soth.sok@live.vu.edu.au; ph: +63 41 378 6778, and supervised by Dr. Mark Vicars, principal supervisor, and Dr. Mary Weaven, associate supervisor.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by:

Mr. Soth SOK, the student researcher

and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures [please tick as appropriate]:

- Interview for in-depth information about my life stories/histories related to English literacy practices and my performances and construction of identity. ☐

- Participate in a focus group discussing my life stories and identity performances and construction with regards to English literacy practices and the practices of Westernized global culture in Cambodian context ☐

- Audio taping of the interviews and taking still photos during these sessions ☐

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher Mr. Soth SOK, student researcher at the School of Education, Victoria University, sothsok@gmail.com; soth.sok@live.vu.edu.au; ph: +63 41 378 6778, Dr. Mark Vicars, principal supervisor, and Dr. Mary Weaven, associate supervisor. If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics & Biosafety Coordinator, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 phone (03) 9919 4148.

V:0906   1 of 1

Appendix E: Information for Participants Involved in the Research

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled 'speaking in two tongues: an ethnographic investigation of the literacy practices of English as a foreign language on Cambodian young adult learners' identity'. This project is being conducted by Mr Soth SOK from the Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development at Victoria University under the supervision of Dr. Mark Vicars, principal supervisor, and Dr. Mary Weaven, associate supervisor.

Project explanation

This study will involve the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion of personal life stories/histories of learning English/English literacy practices and the performances of Cambodian identities and Westernized global cultural practices within Cambodian settings.

What will I be asked to do?
- You will be given a consent form and asked to place this in a sealed envelope (provided) and return this to me within 3 days by dropping it with the student affairs secretary of the department, or returning it direct to me or through your lecturers when you come to school.
- You will be interviewed about your life stories/histories related to learning and practicing English literacy and your performance and construction of identities
  You will also be involved in a series of interviews where you will be asked to reflect upon these practices. Each interview will take between 60 to 90 minutes.
- The interview sessions may be audio and video taped. Digital photographs of artefacts requested by or willingly presented to the researcher may also be taken during these sessions as part of the documentation process. Digital photographs of data collection activities may also be taken. However, deliberate efforts will be taken to de-identify you as the participants from these photographs (for example, by means of digitally blurring the faces or other identifiable parts or objects). These photographs should not be used in any publication without your written consents.
- You will be invited to join a focus discussion to share your stories with others whose life stories and identities were similarly performed and constructed. This discussion is specifically related to how English literacy and Westernized global cultural practices are carried out in Cambodia by you and other people that you have observed. What is to be shared is entirely of your choice. Everyone in the focus group will be asked to respect the privacy of all participants and not to reveal anything that they do not wish others to know.

What will I gain from participating?

Participating in this research will assist you to gain a deeper understanding of your identity practices and construction, particularly in regard to your learning English language, your English literacy practices, and the practices of Westernized global culture in Cambodia setting.

How will the information I give be used?

A PhD thesis containing de-identified examples of your contributions will be submitted for examination. An article or a series of articles will be written based on the information you provide in the interviews and focus group. You will be updated and confirmed with the use and the interpretation of the information that you provide through e-mails and/or phone calls.

Speaking in Two Tongues:

An ethnographic investigation of the literacy practices of English as a foreign language and Cambodian young adult learners' identity

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

There is a risk that you may become anxious about the disclosure of your life stories/histories as a result of participating in this research. To address these concerns, you are reminded that you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage and for any reason – all participation is completely voluntary. Additionally, all data will be kept confidential, and no individual will be identified in publications resulting from the data.

Should you experience any distress from participating in the project, you will be referred to the counselling service provided by the Department of Psychology of the Royal University of Phnom Penh which provide the services free of charge. If you do not like to use this service, you will be given the names of several counselling services provided by local non-government organisations who have agreed to discuss your concerns in confidence, free of charge.

How will this project be conducted?

You will be interviewed for in-depth understanding of your English literacy practices and your performances and construction of identities. As aforementioned, with your approval, you will join a focus discussion to share your stories with others whose life stories and identities were similarly performed and constructed like yours. This discussion is specifically related to how English literacy and Westernized global cultural practices are carried out in Cambodia by you and other people that you have observed. What is to be shared is entirely of your choice.

Who is conducting the study?

Mr Soth SOK, a student researcher at the School of Education, Victoria University, sothsok@gmail.com; soth.sok@live.vu.edu.au; Mobile: +61 41 378 6778. This research is supervised by Dr. Mark Vicars, principal supervisor, and Dr. Mary Weaven, associate supervisor.

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Principal Researcher listed above.
If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 phone (03) 9919 4781.