

Reflective Narrative Knowledging and Decolonising Epistemologies Related to Sri Lankan Law Undergraduates' Reluctance to Speak in English

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This study examines decolonial potential within the culturally posited narrative research, where it becomes possible for the researcher and the research participants to be critically self-reflective. The premise of this study is based on my experiences as an early career academic from a Sri Lankan state university, who has been researching the Faculty of Law (FoL) undergraduates' reluctance to speak in English from a cultural lens. Using an innovative conceptualization titled encultured axiom of linguistic shame-fear (linguistic *lajja-baya*), which is derived from Sri Lankan culture, I studied the different ways in which my FoL students displayed their reluctance to speak in English within and outside the English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom. Within this research, this conceptualisation is defined as culturally situated self-policing mechanisms which might prompt individuals to feel insecure and to regulate their language related thoughts and behaviours. This research is located within the social constructivist research paradigm, representing a poststructuralist orientation at its centre. Accordingly, the FoL undergraduate is identified as a diverse, contradictory and dynamic individual who departs from an essential, fixed or a coherent core. Thus, it was necessary to capture such nuances qualitatively in my research, where I wanted to critically explore my respondents' inner thoughts along with the way they behaved in the socio-cultural world in understanding their reluctance to speak in English. Accordingly, Narrative Inquiry (NI) was adopted as the data collection methodology of this research, where narrative interviews and Identity Portraits (IPs) were used as the data collection tools. This study specifically highlights the significance of using IPs as a rigorous data collection tool that can be used to visually represent the meaning making processes in social life. Accordingly, two participants of this study were asked to share their linguistic journeys of learning to speak English as narrative interviews and IPs. This process of narrative knowledging and self-reflexivity represented an epistemic turn that could deconstruct the thoughts and practices related to the Global North in order to incite the knowledge and the culture of teachers, students, and institutions of the Global South. In other words, both these FoL undergraduates identified themselves to be the 'deficient other' through the presence of culturally situated linguistic shame-fear, subscribing to the colonial

ideologies associated with ELT. This is where ELT echoes constructions of colonialism through the native speaker/non-native speaker dichotomy, as well as the images of self and other. This study argues that culturally situated linguistic shame-fear is also influenced through this colonial discourse, where it incites the individuals to identify themselves as 'deficient'. However, by being self-reflexive, these FoL undergraduates were able to be authors of their own decolonizing texts, where they could start challenging colonial ideologies on their own terms. Accordingly, this study represents decolonial potential through its methodological and epistemological approaches.

Keywords: Narrative knowledging, Self-reflexivity, Encultured axiom of linguistic shame-fear, Decolonial epistemology, Identity portraits