

(Re) Constructing Gender in a New Voice: The Role of Gender Identity in SLA, the Case of Malaysia

Karen Kow Yip Cheng

Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya, Lembah Pantai,
Kuala Lumpur-Malaysia
e-mail: kowyc@um.edu.my

Abstract: This study is a qualitative study of Malaysian children aged between four and six years engaged in a story-telling task. The question posed in this piece of research then: Is the role played by gender in SLA? If it does play a role, what then is the nature of this role? The path taken by this study is to analyze discourse in story-telling.

Key words: story-telling, children, Malaysian, reading, gender, Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Kow (2000) carried out a study on children and the gender factor in story-telling. In this study it was found that there is a clear gender distinction in the stories the respondents chose to tell. The female respondents appeared to treasure romantic fairy tales like Cinderella and Snow White. On the other hand, among the male respondents, there appeared to be a preference for cartoon movies shown over television, for example, 'Power Rangers' and 'Batman'. This clearly points to the difference inherent among male and female children in the area of story preference. Girls clearly displayed their inherent romantic nature in their preference for romantic fairy tales in which the Prince marries the heroine. Boys true to their heroic nature had no time for romance and preferred action-packed stories where the hero triumphed over evil.

The study also showed that the boys' preference was for visual stories in the form of videotapes which they could watch and not just read. Girls on the other hand treasured fairy tales told or read to them by their parents or teachers. Perhaps girls being the more imaginative of the two genders prefer to build castles in their own imagination, while boys being the more aggressive in nature, prefer stories that can feed their hunger for adventure. It is obvious then that gender plays an important role in determining a child's choice of story and ultimately what they select as

their favorite story. The issue that arises then is whether SLA has an effect on gender. If gender dictates the choice of story, what effect then if any will it have subsequently on the actual act of story-telling.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative study of Malaysian children aged between four and six years engaged in a story-telling task. In this task the respondents were given the opportunity to tell their favourite story. There were no restrictions as to the respondent's choice of story or the style they chose to tell their story. This task was designed to study the respondent's ability to tell a story without any aid which meant that the respondents had free reign to utilise their creativity in telling the story.

In this task the researcher gives help only in the form of open-ended questions that would help advance the story-telling sessions, for example:

Example 1.

Respondent: Ayoh, so big, big, big one oh...

Researcher: What is so big?

The question posed in this piece of research then is the role played by gender in SLA. If it does play a role, what then is the nature of this role? It has been shown that gender plays a determining role in story-telling. The path taken by this study is to analyze discourse in story-telling. The aim is to examine narrative forms employed by the two genders in the act of story-telling. Listed below are the aims of this study:

1. To chart relatively uninterrupted discourse of story-telling among children aged between four and six.
2. To discover gender differences in narrative forms.
3. To analyze factors that may account for or influence these forms.
4. To examine the gender identity of children.

The choice of the story-telling task is based on the rationale that deconstruction and reconstruction of meaning takes place during the process. The child who reads/watches/listens to a story and then retells it has first to deconstruct the meaning of the story and when he retells the story, he reconstructs it. It is the reconstruction that is crucial because it is at this point that meaning is externalized. What is meant here is that the child derives from the story the message that makes meaning for him, he then reconstructs what he has drawn from the story.

This study is exciting in that actual transcriptions of the story-telling can be analyzed. Hence narrative structures employed by the two genders can be closely examined. Perhaps this analysis will provide new insights into the role played by gender in SLA.

Identity

The question raised in this paper is a universal one, that is, “Is identity and gender determined by sex or other factors?” The hypothesis taken in this study is that gender is determined by sex but identity is highly dependent on factors as religion, culture and social-economic background. If gender identity plays a role in the perceived success of SLA then the other factors as religion, culture and social-economic background also play an important role in SLA. It is the dynamics of these factors that will be of interest in this study.

Even more pertinent to this study is the question of children and gender identity. Sex is determined at birth and to a large extent is to be taken as a biological fact. On the other hand, gender identity is “a person’s own feelings about their gender – whether they are male, female, both or neither” (Paechter, 2001, p. 47). The only way to establish gender identity is to ask the individual himself/herself. Further gender roles are “a set of behavioral prescriptions or proscriptions for individuals who have a particular assigned gender. These will vary between cultures.” (p. 47). Given all these interlocking dimensions how then can one determine if children have a gender identity? Paechter (2001) states: “Gender identity...is a private matter; we demonstrate our gender identity, by and large, by the playing out of gender roles, and these roles are learned – usually unconsciously, and usually in early childhood and in adolescence.” (p. 49). It will be of interest in this study to examine how gender roles are played out and gender identity established by Malaysian children during the course of story-telling.

Gender Identity and SLA

Gender dictates communication styles. It is known that male versus female communication is seen as the ‘competitive’ versus the ‘cooperative’ style. Further gender determines thinking styles where males in their traditional roles of hunter and provider cope with strong emotions

through silent problem solving, devising strategies and then acting accordingly. Females as nurturers, on the other hand, cope with strong emotions through talking and sharing their feelings with family and other members of the family.

The statement above points to the fact that the female genders are communicators. Communication is important to women and Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman and Rimm (1999, p. 9) in a study of one thousand successful women found that: 'The overall best subject for the total group of women was English, which should delight English teachers and reaffirm findings that women tend to have strong verbal skills. It's unlikely we'd find that a best subject among many successful men.'

Davies (1989, pp. 1-2, 13) writes: "In learning the discursive practices of their society, children learn that they must be socially identifiable as (either male or female). Positioning oneself as male or female is done through discursive practices and through the subject positionings which are available within those (linguistic) practices." In other words, language is associated with gender roles and ultimately gender identity. In Malaysia where English is a second language, one has to take into consideration the fact that English is functional. English is not the mother tongue, neither is it the first language acquired. English as a second language is seen as a tool to acquire knowledge. The question then is whether this will have an impact on the male and female gender.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this study the following definition of discourse is taken into consideration in the analysis of data. "A discourse is a way of speaking, thinking or writing that presents particular relationships as self-evidently true. Because such truths are presented as unchallengeable, this means that within a particular discourse, only certain things can be said or thought; to challenge the discourse. Another way of putting this is to see discourses as socially organized frameworks of meaning that define categories and specify domains of what can be said and done." (Burman, 1994, p. 99).

In this section excerpts of children engaged in the story-telling task are examined. The focus of analysis is on the role of gender in SLA. The evidence of the need to demonstrate gender identity playing out gender roles is seen in the transcriptions below:

Excerpt 1

Respondent 10 is a 4-year old Chinese girl. She is from a middle class family and speaks a Chinese dialect and English at home. She is enrolled in a kindergarten in an urban area. English is used as the medium of instruction in the kindergarten while Malay is taught as a second language.

Re = researcher

Re 10 = respondent 10

Re: Please, what is it about?

Re 10 : The cartoon... send the ...the boy go to school...the boy see a bus...the bus give him to go to a school...he say don't want to go to a school.

Re: Why doesn't he want to go to school?

Re 10: He don't want to go to the school he say .

Re : Why?

Re 10: The so his ...his teacher and his father...his teacher and... His...uncle is here ...he take him to go to that people there loh (a particle commonly used in Malaysian English)...he going to see there then he don't want to go to people there ...maybe he want to go and find his father.

Re: Where is his father?

Re 10: His father in he home.

In excerpt 1, a little girl tells a story of a boy who refuses to go to school. The reason posited is that he wants to look for his father who is at home. Although this is a story told by Re 10, it speaks volumes about the role of gender. Working on the argument of the deconstruction and reconstruction theory, the hypothesis can be drawn that perhaps the little girls own reluctance to go to school is camouflaged under the guise of a gender of the opposite sex. Further the boy wants to be with his father. The negative connotation associated with not wanting to go to school is credited to the male gender. Arguably this may be seen as reading too much into the excerpt. However, look at excerpt 2 and 3 below:

Re 43 and Re 44 are both 5 years-old and are enrolled in a Kindergarten where the medium of instruction is English. Re 43 is a Malay girl from an upper-middle income family and at home she speaks Malay and English while Re 44 is a Malay boy who is also from an upper-middle income family and at home he speaks Malay and English.

Excerpt 2

Re: And what's inside the cave?

Re 44 Don't know.

Re: Uh?

Re 43 : Don't know.

Re: Gold?

Re 43: Don't know ...he say, 'He don't know'.

Re 37 & 38 are both 5 year-old Malay pupils who are enrolled in a kindergarten where the medium of instruction is English. At home they both speak Malay and English and both Re 37 and 38 come from upper-middle income families. Re 38 is a boy and Re 37 is a girl.

Excerpt 3

Re: What is this 101 Dalmatians about? Is it about a cat or a dog?

Re 37: Dog.

Re: What happened to the dog?

Re 37: Cry.

Re: The dog cried. Why did the dog cry?

Re 37: Because his want two bone.

Re: What about you Re 38 ?

Re 38: No response.

Re 37: I got some 'back' game.

Re: You got some?

Re 37: Game.

Re: What's your favourite game?

Re 37: 101 Dalmatians, my mummy one. (One is used here as a particle. It is definitive of Malaysian English.)

Re: How do you play the game?

Re 37: You can read and play.

In excerpt 2, Re 43 a girl comes to the aid of her male partner by reporting to the researcher that Re 44 said he doesn't know. In excerpt 3, Re 37 dominates the discourse and when the researcher tries to redirect the turn to Re 38 (male), Re 37 (female) holds the floor by changing the subject and announcing that she has a game.

One also sees the creativity of Re 37. When questioned as to how the game is played, she changes the topic. She informs the researcher that

'101 Dalmatians' is a game that belongs to her mother and that it is a game that one can read and play. By denying 'ownership' of the game, Re 37 perhaps safeguards herself from having to produce physical evidence of this game. Next her vague answer that the game is one that 'you can read and play' absolves her from having to explain how the game is actually played. Hence 'creativity' is a strategy employed by Re 37 to overcome the tedious task of having to carry out a long, complicated explanation of a game. Compare this to the strategy employed by Re 44 (male) in excerpt in 2 where he states he does not know and Re 35 in excerpt 4 who chooses to remain silent. The pattern of female domination holds in excerpt 4 below:

Excerpt 4

Re 35 is a Malay girl and she is 4-years old. Re 36 is a Malay boy who is 4-years old. Both are enrolled in a Kindergarten where the medium of instruction is English and Malay is taught as a second language. Both are from middle-income families and at home both speak Malay.

Re: Re 36 ? Once upon a time...

Re 36: There was a greedy dog.

Re: Then what happened?

Re 35: Re 36 don't know.

Re: Why doesn't Re 36 know?

Re 35: But em... he always play. Then when teacher was em...and angry with him then Re 36 cry.

Re: Why is the teacher angry with Re 36?

Re 35: But Re 36 is naughty. But Re 36 shout. Teacher say, "Don't shout, don't shout" then Re 36 shout.

In the dialogue above, Re 35 becomes the spokesperson for Re 36(male). She announces that her partner does not know. What follows amounts almost to a 'knocking' of Re 36's character? According to Re 35, Re 36 does not know because he is always playing in class. Further when he is reprimanded by his teacher for shouting in class he cries. The final analysis of Re 35 by Re 36 (female) is that Re 35 is naughty. It should be noted that the opposite is not found in the data, that is, there are no instances where the male respondents talks down to and tells tales on the female respondents.

Examination of excerpt 1 and excerpt 4 also shows that girls favour the use of reported speech, for example:

Re 43 reports, “He say, ‘He don’t know’.”

Re 35 reports, “Teacher say, ‘Don’t shout, don’t shout’.”

Further evidence of this is found in excerpt 9 (see examples below)

Re 32 reports, “He told her, ‘You must run away and not come back’.”

“Then the dwarf say, ‘Who are you?’”

An examination of Malaysian children engaged in a story-telling task has thus far yielded the following insights:

- girls are quick to come to the aid of boys who remain silent (see excerpt 2)
- girls appear to dominate the discourse (see excerpts 3 and 4)
- girls do not hesitate to ‘knock’ the character of boys (see excerpt 1 and 4)
- girls employ a creative strategy whereas boys employ a passive strategy (see excerpt 2 and 4)

At this stage analysis will take into account the view(s) that Malaysian children have of gender identity. In excerpt 5 below the researcher raises the issue of the identity in the light of the fairy tale character ‘Cinderella’:

Excerpt 5

Re 17 and Re 18 are Chinese girls and both are 4 years-old. Both are from middle-income families and are enrolled in a day-care centre where the medium of instruction is English. At home they speak English.

Re: Who is Cinderella?

Re 17: Me .

Re: You’re Cinderella...

Re 17: You also...(points to Re 18 .)

Re: Is Cinderella a girl or a boy?

Re 17 & 18: Girl.

Re: What happened to Cinderella?

Re 17 & 18: No response.

Re: Is she a pretty girl or an ugly girl?

Re 17 & 18: Pretty girl.

In excerpt 5 above the stereotyped gender roles are played out. The two little girls are quite happy to announce that they are both ‘Cinderellas’ and the fact is that Cinderella is a girl and a pretty one. The discourse here signals a warning as to the stereotyped gender roles depicted in fairy tales, that is, the pretty heroine who is all female and the tall, dark, handsome prince who is a hero. Compare this to excerpt 6 below:

Excerpt 6

Re 29 and Re 30 are 4-years old and are both Malays. Re 29 is a boy and Re 30 is a girl. Both are enrolled in a kindergarten where the medium of instruction is English and Malay is taught as a second language. At home both Re 29 and 30 converse in Malay and English. Both are from middle-income families.

Re: Can you tell me your favourite story?

Re 29: I like Jack and the Beanstalk.

Re: Can you tell me the story?

Re 29: Once upon a time there was an old man *mumbles* and then he give to the old man and then the old man give a bean ...he go down and then his mother so happy and then go...Jack go up back to the beanstalk and he go into the giant house again and then the mother giant give him eat and drink and then... his father ...his father told his mother where is his farm but his mother don't know but Jack already hide and then ...then Jack see the giant have chicken, his egg a gold egg, but he take it and the giant after it and then he told his father to take a axe and then he ...he cut the ...the Jack ...beanstalk and then the giant fall down.

In excerpt 6 above, once again the stereotypical role is played out, that is, where the father takes the axe and cuts the beanstalk down. However, little boys are not ‘superman’ and this is echoed in their discourse as seen in excerpt 6 and excerpt 7 below.

Excerpt 7

Re 7 and Re 8 are Chinese boys, are 4 years-old and are both enrolled in a nursery in an urban area. English is used as the medium of instruction in the nursery while Malay is taught as a second language. They are from middle class families and speak a Chinese dialect and English at home.

Re: Looks like a horse...are you scared of a witch?

Re 8: Witch ...I don't scared of any ...people kill one. (One is used as a particle.)

Re 7: Who make mummy...who make ...who make mummy sad the witch at night will close the light then you sleep then the ...carry people put inside the basket then fly leave you on the moon there...

In excerpt 7, the brave little boy states that he is not scared of witches. However, examine the next part of the discourse:

If you make your mummy sad, the witch will come in the night, after the lights are switched off. When the naughty child goes to sleep, the witch will carry him off to the moon in a basket and leave him there.

Behind the brave front then is first of all the boy who is scared of the dark. Next, the boy is one who is sensitive enough not to want to hurt his mother. Likewise in excerpt 6, the little boy's mother is so happy when he returns with the gold: "his mother so happy...then the mother give him eat and drink..."

His reward is the mother's love externalized in the form of food and drink; 'give him eat and drink'. The gender roles are clear cut; the father is the 'hunter' who chops the tree down and the mother is the 'nurturer' who happily provides food and drink. The bottom line, however, is seen in excerpt 6 and 7, that is, little boys are vulnerable and want to be loved by their mother – or as the cliché goes all they want is to be 'mothered'.

The stories told here are stories that many are familiar with. Nevertheless the excerpts seen in this study portray the deconstruction and reconstruction of these stories. The retelling of the story is shaped by the messages that the child deems as important to him/her. Hence, the examination of the excerpt above reveals the inner thoughts of the child.

Little boys like little girls are vulnerable. However, gender roles are dictated by society. Therefore, these little boys will adhere to the roles of the Malaysian patriarchal society. Evidence of this is tendered in excerpt 9.

An examination of the conventions employed in story-telling is necessary at this point. Analysis of the story-telling conventions in excerpt 6 told by Re 29 (a boy) is seen to take on a systematic format. Re 29, aged four does not have the sophisticated conventions used by the adult presenter, rather the child uses a convention where the whole story moves forward using the phrase 'and then'. Nevertheless the convention is one that works and one can easily chart the course of the story:

Step 1: Once upon a time there was an old man.

Linker: and then

Step 2: the old man give a bean

Linker: and then

Step 3: he go to the hole

Hence the story unfolds systematically where the linker ‘and then’ functions as an adverbial conjunction that signals time relationship. Compare this to excerpt 8 where the same format is found except that here the linker employed is ‘then’.

Excerpts 1, 2, 3 and 4 have shown the link between SLA and gender. It is the female gender that appears to dominate and control turn-taking. There is almost the quality of ‘mothering’ seen in excerpt 2 where Re 43 (a girl) reports, “He says, ‘He don’t know’.” Girls tend to favor reported speech as compared with boys who favor a systematic ‘step by step’ unfolding of a story. Perhaps again the argument may be posited that this is an overgeneralization. A study of two excerpts of story-telling is given below. These two excerpts will allow a close examination of the use of English as a second language and its relation to gender.

Excerpt 8

Re 31 and Re 32 are 4 years-old and are both Malay girls. Both are enrolled in a kindergarten where the medium of instruction is English and Malay is taught as a second language. At home both girls speak Malay and English. Both are from middle income families.

Re 32: Once upon a time there was a King and a Queen...

Re: And then ...

Re 32: The Queens going to have a baby. And then...

Re: And then what happened?

Re 32: They have a baby.

Re: And then what happened to the baby?

Re 32: And then they name her Snow White. And one day she die. The Queen die then the father ... then the King marry again... Snow White has a stepmother. That’s why Snow White must die in the castle. One day the Stepmother say to the magic mirror, “Mirror, mirror who is the fairest in the land ?” The magic mirror answer Snow White was the fairest in the land so she must kill Snow White. The stepmother got a hunter to kill Snow White. He don’t want he can’t do that. He told her, “You must run away and not come back.” She run and then she see a house she knock the door (makes a knocking action with her hands.) the she push the door open. (Uses her hands to push and invisible door open)

Excerpt 9

Re 7 and Re 8 are Chinese boys, are 4 years-old and are both enrolled in a nursery in an urban area. English is used as the medium of instruction in the nursery while Malay is taught as a second language. They are from middle class families and speak a Chinese dialect and English at home.

Re: Now you tell me the story. (Addressed to Re 7.)

Re 7: Once upon a time... the witch hah ... the go...

Re 8: Witch hah?

Re 7: Once upon the time... the ...the Snow White... then...then...then ...the... she saw the ... then you ...clean the house very clean already then the small dwarfs go to ...to ...go to see the...the ...

Re 8: Princess.

Re 7: go to ...got...got...

Re 8: The Snow white.

Re 7: Snow white hah ...then she...cannot see oh Snow white come then she take the ...then she magic the apple and give her.

Re: Then?

Re 7: The witch* hah, hah, hah, hah...then the...then the snow hah...then kill her die.

Re 8: No, not Snow white kill him die. The Prince hah kill him die then the...um....

Re: Then what happened?

Re 8: Then not yet die then...

Re 7: Then the snow hah kill her ...then die... kill her again then die.

In comparing sentence structures, it can be seen that girls produce longer sentences as compared with boys:

Re 32: Once upon a time there was a King and a Queen. (Female)

Re 8: She eat already ... (male)

Re 7: She die... (Male)

Although boys can also produce long sentences, analysis shows that they constitute of repetition of words or phrases:

Re 7: Once upon the time... the ...the Snow White... then...then...then ...the... she saw the... then you ...clean the house very clean already then the small dwarfs go to ...to ...go to see the...the ...

Also the long sentences are fragmented and comprised of short phrases tacked together:

Re 7: Snow white hah ...then she...cannot see oh Snow white come then she take the ...then she magic the apple and give her.

The creativity in story-telling by girls is seen in the use of multiple strategies. First the use of reported speech:

One day the Stepmother say to the magic mirror, "Mirror, mirror who is the fairest in the land?"

The use of non-verbal:

She run and then she see a house she knock the door (makes a knocking action with her hands.) the she push the door open. (She uses her hands to push and an invisible door opens).

The attention to details:

Then she go she see six spoons, six forks, seven bed.

These are qualities lacking in the stories told by boys who favor a straight forward denouement as pointed out above in excerpt 6.

Finally the overall 'feeling' imbued in the story-telling adds creativity to the story-telling session, for example:

The stepmother got a hunter to kill Snow White. He don't want he can't do that. He told her, "You must run away and not come back."

Here one sees the moral stand taken where the hunter does not want to and cannot carry out the horrendous deed of murder, "He don't want he can't do that." So the picture is painted of a hunter who takes the moral stand of not wanting to commit a crime. The moral stand taken by the story-teller is also indirectly revealed via her choice of words, "He don't want, he can't do that." Murder is not right and hence one cannot and must not do it. Compare this to Re 7's statement:

Re 7: The witch* hah, hah, hah, hah...then the...then the snow hah...then kill her die.

Death and murder occur in this version of the story where Snow White is the perpetrator. Snow White kills the witch. Why? It is an act of justice. The witch is the 'bad guy' and receives justice at the hands of the 'good guy'.

The different moral views portrayed in the discourse perhaps lie in the different gender roles prescribed by society and subsequently the gender identity. Boys think before acting and girls the 'nurturer' feels before acting. Hence the boys are clear cut about the fact that good triumphs over

evil. On the other hand, girls imbue their characters with feelings. Even the 'bad guy' (hunter) has kind feelings and is unable to carry out the evil deed. The triumph of good over evil is seen not in the murder of the witch but in the inability of the hunter to take an innocent life.

Another factor may account for the different story-line. Kow (2000) notes that the difference may lie in the fact that stories retold by the girls are stories they have read or have been read to them. On the other hand, the stories told by the boys are stories they have watched on television.

It is obvious that exposure to the book version is superior from a pedagogical point of view, that is, where the respondent is told the story from a book. This is because the exposure to hearing the story enables the child to pick up and store in his memory words and terms, which he can reuse. Further as the child listens to the story unfold, the plot and story line become etched in his memory which enables him to retell the story.

Sally Ward, a speech and language therapist has pointed out that television retards phonological awareness. This is because when the television is on parents do not talk and children do not listen. Children who constantly watch television lose their ability to single out significant foreground sound from background sound. (*The Sunday Star*, November 6, 1977). This finding parallels the findings of the American Academy of Paediatrics who advise parents to ban television for children under the age of two. At this stage children need interaction with real people and not television characters.

A child who watches a video-taped version of the story probably becomes absorbed and to a certain extent distracted by the visual details. This concentration on colourful objects, for example, birds, cats and flowers is detrimental. As a result of this visual assault, the child loses sight of the plot of the story and more crucially the language of the story as it unfolds. This does not; however, mean that children should not be given access to video- taped version of stories for the visual impact of learning is also beneficial. Rather it is advocated that children should be exposed to the written version and the visual version, and not the visual version in isolation.

More importantly the role of gender roles is seen to be at play, perhaps boys view reading as an activity carried out by girls. Likewise girls live up to and play out their gender role of being 'good girls' who enjoy the passive activity of reading. In a study by Swan (1992, p. 129) it was noted that:

“girls tend to have less confidence than boys...leads them to prefer language-related work, including reading and writing...”

While the girls love for reading holds true in this study, the lack of confidence does not. Rather this study has shown that Malaysian girls aged between 4 and 6 dominate the story-telling task (see excerpts 1-4).

Hence gender roles predetermined by culture and society shapes gender identity. The interesting finding in this study is that indirectly but nevertheless inadvertently this has had an effect on SLA. Girls are better equipped linguistically with their exposure to reading to handle the story-telling task. On the other hand, boys can tell a story but do so with less finesse. They handle story-telling in a factual, no frills, and no creativity style. The focus is on the unfolding of the story through action-based words and feelings play a minority role.

The reason posited for this is because the input was via watching rather than reading the story. Perhaps a more important factor is the fact that boys play out their gender role as the active members of society. They are the ‘hunters’ who have no time for ‘feelings’ and frills.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, an attempt has been made to examine gender identity via the path of discourse employed in a story-telling task. The table below sums up the salient differences found:

Boys	Girls
Structured story-telling	Use of reported speech
Focus on action	Creativity
Attention to facts and details	Attention to feelings

The conclusion may be drawn then that society and culture determine gender roles. This in turn moulds and has an effect on gender identity. The external evidence of this can be examined via the discourse and narrative forms employed by male and female respondents in the act of story-telling.

The relationship of SLA and gender can be seen as one that is the ultimate marriage of nature and nurture. Sex is determined by biology and gender roles are assigned based on sex. The gender roles are prescribed based on cultural, social and religious values. In this study it is clear that Malaysia is a patriarchal society. While girls can dream, boys focus on

action. Nevertheless boys are not ‘Superman’ and lapses are seen where they reveal their fear of the dark and their need to be taken care of or nurtured. Gender identity is present in Malaysian children as young as four years of age and this identity is the end result of nature (biological endowment) and nurture (prescribed gender roles).

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