I "Speak Chinese, but …"

Code-Switching and Identity Construction among Chinese-Filipino Youth

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Abstract: The younger generations of Chinese-Filipinos have assimilated themselves in Philippine society, adapting to local customs and traditions, as well as speaking in English and Tagalog. While most of these Chinese-Filipinos have Hokkien as their first language, for some of the younger generations, English or Tagalog has become the first language acquired, supplanting Hokkien, thus the inability to converse in the Chinese dialect. However, what is distinct with these younger ethnic Chinese is the inclusion of Hokkien words and/or phrases when talking to their co-ethnics. These Chinese-Filipinos tend to shift from Hokkien to Tagalog to English. It is apparent that this code-switching is a conscious effort to maintain an ethnic identity and a sense of belongingness to the ethnic Chinese community, while being members of a larger Filipino community.

This study looks at the occurrence of code-switching among the younger generation of Chinese-Filipinos, its factors and implications in the construction of an ethnic identity. It is also argued that this particular switch, while serving as an instrument for the maintenance of a distinct identity and a sense of belongingness to the Chinese community, also serves as a cultural and social capital for this group to establish their place in Philippine society.

Keywords: ethnic identity, hybridity, code-switching, Chinese-Filipinos, Chineseness, Hokkien, Tagalog

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"In every aspect of Philippine life, in every phase of Philippine history, in its culture and tradition, language and songs, in everything Filipino, there throbs a Chinese presence which found its way there long before Philippine recorded history… in everything that is Philippine, there emerges the Tsinoy, the Chinese who is Filipino or the Filipino who is Chinese…"

(Bahay Tsinoy Museum)

1 Introduction

The Chinese in the Philippines (those who are Filipino citizens) constitutes only a small percentage (around two percent) of the country's population. However, they have been instrumental in the country's cultural growth and change, not to mention the role they played and continue to play in the country's economy. Regarded as economic elites with their business acumen, hard work, and vast business networks, these Chinese continue to serve as the backbone of the Philippine economy, while maintaining and a Chinese ethnic identity through the language (i.e. Hokkien) and traditions handed down by their forebears.

These Chinese-Filipinos, also known as Tsinoys, particularly the younger generations, have assimilated themselves in Philippine society, adapting to local customs and traditions, as well as speaking in English and Tagalog (or one of the provincial languages and/or dialects). While most of these Chinese-Filipinos have Hokkien as their first language, acquiring Tagalog and English only in school (and in most cases acquiring Chinese Mandarin as well for those who studied in Chinese schools), for some of the younger generations, English or Tagalog has become the first language acquired, supplanting Hokkien, thus the inability to converse in the Chinese dialect. However, what is distinct with these younger ethnic Chinese is the inclusion of Hokkien words and/or phrases when talking to their co-ethnics. While it is characteristic of most Filipinos (especially those living in the metropolis) to switch from Tagalog to English (which enabled the creation of a language genre, Taglish), these Chinese-Filipinos tend to switch from Hokkien to Tagalog to English (or from Hokkien, to Taglish). It is apparent that this code-switching is a conscious effort to maintain an ethnic identity and a sense of belongingness to the ethnic Chinese community, while being members of a larger Filipino community.

This study looks at the occurrence of code-switching among the younger generation of Chinese-Filipinos, its (code-switching) factors and implications in the construction of an ethnic identity. It will also be argued that this particular switch, while serving as an instrument for the maintenance of a distinct identity and a sense of belongingness to the Chinese community, also serves as a cultural and social capital for this group to establish their place in Philippine society.

2 Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The contents of this paper are mainly based on observations I had in interaction with the younger generation of Chinese-Filipinos, specifically as a member of a Rotaract Club (younger version of the Rotary Club) in Binondo, a predominantly Chinese district in Manila. Being a non-speaker of Chinese myself, I saw myself in an ambiguous position not so much in being a member of the organization (as I do not trace my Chinese roots to Binondo but instead to a certain province in the Philippines) but in claiming a certain "Chineseness", which entails a performance of one's "being Chinese"[2] In this case, the performance of "Chineseness" comprised being able to communicate in the Hokkien dialect, either entirely or through code-switching. While I understood however, most of the code-switches to Hokkien (having taken some formal lessons both in Hokkien and Mandarin), I rarely spoke and replied in the dialect, and only "performed" code-switching to an extent deemed negligible. As with my claim to a certain "Chineseness" placed me in an ambiguous position, their perception of my "Chineseness" brought forth ambivalent feelings in claiming me as "Chinese", i.e. "being one of them" or not; that is, if I could perform "Chineseness" as Chinese-Filipinos are expected to do so.

[2] Being of Chinese mestizo descent (with predominantly Chinese features), the claim as well as the resistance to "being Chinese" has become a challenge in defining my own identity.

I do not want this study to be seen as autobiographical, or a study that relies more on my personal experiences, in order to authenticate the ideas I put forth in the succeeding sections. Nor is there any intention to resort to my own experience as, in the words of Ien Ang (2001), "a privileged source of authority, uncontrollable, and therefore unamendable to others" (Ang 2001: 23). Writing this paper situated me in a position which is outside the subjects of analyses (i.e. the younger generation of Chinese-Filipinos), and enabled me to locate myself inside as well – as part of the club, negotiating and authenticating what it is to be of Chinese descent in the Philippines.

For this study, I use the concept of "hybridity", calling the Chinese-Filipino or the Tsinoy identity as a hybrid one. The diasporic Chinese have constructed their own identities, distinct from those in the homeland by adapting to the local conditions of the communities where these overseas Chinese are now situated. Ang gives examples of cultural adaptations such as the *nyonya* food in Malaysia, "developed by the *peranakan* Chinese with their encounter with local, Malay spices and ingredients" (2001: 35). This is also true with the Chinese in the Philippines, who have adapted local customs and traditions, including the language, giving them a distinct identity among the diasporic Chinese.

In line with the above, Floya Anthias said that hybridity is "linked to the idea of 'new ethnicities', which attempts to provide a non-static and non-essentialized approach to ethnic culture" (Anthias 2001: 625). This reiterates the assertion on ethnic identity as not fixed, as fluid, and ever changing. Moreover, Anthias stated that "hybridity designates the formation of new identities that may have a more transethnic and transnational character" (Ibid). These "new ethnicities", such as the Tsinoy, while involving the search for one's roots, are not "prevented by a search for identity on the basis of origin. Ethnicity in this sense, relates to both homeland and to the society of settlement, and is reconfigured within a diasporic space" (Ibid).

For these diasporic identities, the notion of authenticity is significant as these subjects continue to define and negotiate their own identities. The Chinese identity has been "confined to essentialist and absolute notions of 'Chineseness', the source of which can only originate from 'China'" (Ang 2001: 30), and hence someone who does not adhere to this perceived "Chineseness" may experience his or her Chinese ethnic identity questioned. Ethnic identity then, aside from being perceived as fluid, is also a conscious choice by these individuals. To use a symbolic interactionist perspective here, the claim to an ethnic identity calls for the performance of this particular identity in accordance with expectations of what it is to be Chinese.

3 The Chinese in Philippine History

The Philippines is not known to have a significantly large population of ethnic Chinese compared to Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. Despite the small numbers however, the Chinese in the Philippines have made significant contributions to Philippine culture and society. Moreover, the Chinese presence in Philippine history and pre-history only goes to show the undeniable significance of this group in the country's history and culture. Documents attest to early contacts through trade between the Chinese and the natives during pre-Hispanic times, whereby the country now known as the Philippines had not yet existed.

Spanish colonization of what is to be later known as the Philippine islands saw the social exclusion of the Chinese, in which "Parians" or Chinese enclaves, in the capital city of Manila, were created for non-Christianized, unassimilated Chinese. These "Parians" were situated outside the "Walled City", called Intramuros, which

housed the Spanish elite, and are separated from it by a body of water. While the Spanish saw the Chinese as a threat during that time, the former considered the latter as crucial to the colonial economy. At that time, only Christianized Chinese (mostly married to native women) were assimilated into Philippine society. They were situated in a particular district in Manila called Binondo, now popularly known as Manila's Chinatown, where most of the present-day Chinese-Filipinos in the capital region reside and engage in their businesses. (Hence Binondo was for the assimilated, Christianized Chinese, while the Parians where for the unassimilated Chinese.) Intermarriages between the Chinese (mainly men) and the Filipinos (mainly women) as well as between the Chinese and the Spanish brought forth a new group of individuals commonly known as *mestizo,* due to their mixed parentage. These *mestizos* went on to become the new Filipino elite to effect political and economic changes in the country at the turn of the century.

During the American colonial period, immigration of Chinese into the Philippines was restrictive and after the middle of 1898, a policy of Chinese exclusion was implemented (Wong 2001: 3). Hence, the country only has a small number of Chinese immigrants, as migration of labourers was prohibited. Moreover, Chinese migration to the Philippines is characterized as kin-based, owing to the presence of kin-based migration networks, thus explaining the geographically homogenous origin of the Chinese in the Philippines, wherein 80 percent are Fujianese in origin and are Hokkien speakers, and 20 percent are Cantonese (Ibid, 15-16). In the middle of 1898, there were around 40,000 Chinese in the Philippines, with only a slight increase in population in 1904, with 49,659 (Ibid, 4). In 1939, the population was at 130,000 (Ibid, 4). In 1972, it was around 600,000, of which 150,000 were China born and 450,000, Philippine-born (Tan in Cushman and Wang (eds.) 1988: 180). From the 1970s onwards, an estimated 85 to 90 percent of the Chinese-Filipino population were born in the Philippines (Ibid, 187). The population was pegged at one million in 1989 however this comprised only two percent of the country's population (Wickberg in Wang and Wang (eds.), 1998: 174). While the population is scattered all over the country, majority reside in Manila, with significant numbers in Cebu in the Visayas and in Davao in Mindanao. It is generally said that ten percent of Filipinos have Chinese blood.

4 Rethinking the Tsinoy Identity: Of Diasporas and Hybrids

In the Philippines, the ethnic Chinese' identity has undergone various transformations in accordance with the historical and social changes the country has undergone. In order to trace the changes in identity perception of the ethnic Chinese throughout history, Tan (1988) looked at three generations of the ethnic Chinese, marking the immigration of the first generation in the late 19th century. This generation went to the Philippines between the 1880s and the 1930s, and regarded themselves as "sojourners" (Tan in Cushman and Wang (eds.) 1988: 180). Their orientation is towards their homeland, particularly their village in Fujian province where they would still return after spending years abroad (Ibid). Hence, they never cut their ties with China (Ibid). The second generation was born in the Philippines and came of age between the 1930s-1950s. The older second generation, so to speak, were more culturally oriented towards Chinese culture than their younger counterparts (i.e. the younger members of the second generation). Especially in the provinces, where Chinese communities are more scattered, these younger second generation ethnic Chinese were more exposed to Filipino culture, values, and ways (Ibid). The third generation, meanwhile, are seen as more Filipino than the previous generation, being more exposed to Filipinos and Filipino culture and being further removed from the first generation. A number of factors are seen to cause this shift

in orientation. Among these are the Filipinization of Chinese schools, the move away from Chinese enclaves to settle in other areas tantamount to more exposure to Filipinos, and the fact that these younger generations are more fluent in English and Tagalog (or other Philippine languages or dialects) than Hokkien.

Furthermore, these identity transformations are also apparent if one looks at how the ethnic Chinese are called throughout the years. Kaisa Para sa Kaunlaran, an organization of Chinese-Filipinos who emphasize commitment to Philippine society as well as the preservation of their ethnic heritage (Wickberg in Wang and Wang (eds.) 1988: 179), has distinguished several terms commonly used to describe the Chinese in the Philippines. The term "Ethnic Chinese" is used to refer to people "with some measurable degree of Chinese parentage, who can speak and understand at least one Chinese dialect, who have received a minimum of Chinese-language education and who have retained some Chinese customs and traditions enough to consider themselves and be considered by their neighbours as Chinese" (Kaisa Para sa Kaunlaran homepage). Meanwhile, **"Filipino-Chinese"** is used to refer to those "traditional or older Chinese who are predominantly Chinese in identity but Filipino in citizenship". The commonly used identity marker nowadays, **"Chinese-Filipino"**, "refers to younger generation, mostly native-born (Philippine-born) ethnic Chinese who identify themselves as Filipinos first, but maintain their Chinese cultural identity" (Kaisa Para Sa Kaunlaran homepage, accessed 27 March 2007).

Recently, the term Tsinoy has been commonly used to refer to Chinese-Filipinos. Tsinoy is a shortened form of *Tsinong Pilipino* (Chinese-Filipino), where the colloquial form of Pilipino – *Pinoy* – is employed, and was coined in August 1992 by Kaisa Para sa Kaunlaran for a show celebrating its fifth anniversary. The Tsinoy, though his/her "features and language may be Tsino, he/she is Pinoy in heart and in mind" (Ang See and Go, 2000).

It is characteristic of diasporic identities to manifest some sort of ambivalences – of being both here and there, of both belonging and not belonging. While commonly involving a sojourning feeling or mentality mainly among the older generations (e.g. first generation immigrants), this diasporic consciousness is somehow lost in the younger generation of Tsinoys, who know the Philippines as their homeland, first and foremost, and China only as the distant land of their ancestors. Moreover, the concepts of "dispersal" and "return" that characterize diasporic communities cannot be appropriated to the discourse of the (younger) Tsinoy's identity. As an illustration, I quote a young Chinese-Filipino girl who, in 1970, longed to belong to Philippine society through the granting of citizenship. Her sentiments apparently manifested her perception of her own identity (quoted in Tan, in Cushman and Wang (eds.) 1988: 190-91):

> "My father and my mother are both Chinese. But being Philippine-born myself, I like to think that I am a Filipino. Young as I am, I found it hard to understand who I should not be... I saw the first light of day right here in this now bustling suburb of Davao City, as did all my brothers and sisters. Our names are Filipinos (sic). We have been studying in Philippine schools. We speak Filipino and talk in the local vernaculars even among ourselves... *For me there is no other world. China is only a word. The Philippines is my native land* (italics, mine)."

These subsequent generations of Tsinoys have already assimilated into Philippine culture and society, with the majority growing up speaking better Tagalog (or other Philippine languages and/or dialects) and English than Hokkien. Some even lost their ability to speak the latter (See in Cushman and Wang (eds.) 1988: 327). Tan (1988) stated that a 1970 survey by scholar Robert Tilman (in Tan 1988) showed that students (those who were studying in Chinese schools) have

had difficulty reading and writing in Chinese Mandarin. Moreover, they are more fluent in English or Tagalog or other local dialects and are more at home using Tagalog than Hokkien.

I term the Tsinoy's identity as a hybrid, not mainly in terms of being a racial hybrid, that is, racially mixed, rather in their being, a "cultural hybrid" (Bhabha 1994). This cultural hybridity stems from characteristic mix in language, culture, as well as in perceived identities. While "racially" Chinese (or part Chinese), these Tsinoys see themselves as Filipinos first, not only owing to their citizenship, but due more to their perception of their homeland, which is not China, but the Philippines. They have known only the Philippines, the place of their birth and upbringing, as the place in which their identities have been formed (through socialization and exposure and assimilation to Philippine society). It is apparent that, while being Filipino much like the non-Chinese-Filipinos, the Tsinoys' consciousness of their being of Chinese descent made their identities distinct from other groups in Philippine society.

Moreover, the Tsinoy's hybrid identity may be perceived as what Homi Bhabha calls a "Third Space" (Bhabha 1994) that is seen to enable the appearance of "new and alternative identity options" (Pavlenko and Blackridge (eds.) 2004: 17). Located between that of being Chinese and Filipino and is arguably distinct from other diasporic Chinese identities in South East Asia, the Tsinoys may be said to have opted to identify themselves as Filipinos first that bespoke of their desire to find their "rightful place in the Philippine sun" (Kaisa website). As Ien Ang stated, to be Chinese in South East Asia is "never a simple issue", as it is "both an expression of political marginalization in the post-colonial nation-state and an indication of (real and imagined) economic privilege" (Ang 2001: 12).

5 "I Speak Chinese, but...": Code-switching and Identity among the Younger Generation

To look at the Tsinoy identity then as a hybrid, also entails looking at the Hokkien dialect in the Philippines, as it went through centuries of change, as well as the influences it had on the native language and dialects. In looking at the language use and code-switching of this group, I argue that the (younger) Tsinoy's hybrid identity is emphasized and that this very hybridity (manifested through code-switching) has functioned as a cultural and social capital for them.

In the Philippines, both English and Flipino, a language heavily based on Tagalog, are both used in various social interactions. English is apparently a language of choice in business, as well as the primary language of instruction in schools and universities, owing much to American colonization, vestiges of which continue to this day. However, it should be noted that the use of both English and Tagalog, led to the creation of Taglish, arguably a language in itself, which is essentially a mixture of English and Tagalog words. This "hybridized language", so to speak, is particularly spoken in the capital region of Metro Manila, mainly by the educated middle-class (e.g. professionals, students, etc.).

Moreover, Tagalog in itself, through centuries, has been influenced by Spanish and Chinese cultures, and this can be seen in the adaptation of various Spanish and Chinese words, which have become part of the language. Hokkien, spoken mainly by Tsinoys [3], has undergone changes and cultural adaptation, through the influx of Tagalog words into the Chinese dialect. Hence, a hybrid form of Hokkien was created, characteristic only to that spoken by this group, and may be said to be distinct from the Hokkien spoken in Southern China as well as by other diasporic Chinese, particularly those in South East Asia.

[3] The Tsinoys of Cantonese origin have learned to speak Hokkien due to the predominantly Hokkien population of the Chinese in the Philippines.

The following are charts illustrating Hokkien influences in the Tagalog language as well as Tagalog words absorbed into the Hokkien dialect.

Table 1: Hokkien Influences in Tagalog (Ang See 2005)

Tagalog Words	Hokkien
Ate (elder sister)	Atsi
Ditse (second elder sister)	Ditsi
Kuya (elder brother)	Coya/Ahia
Diko (second elder brother)	Diko/Dihia
Susi (key)	Sose
Pansit (noodle dish)	Piensit
Toge (beansprout)	Tauge
Lithaw (plow)	Luey-thaw
Puthaw (ax)	Po-thaw

Table 2: Tagalog Influences in Hokkien (Go 2005)

Hokkien Words	Tagalog
Sab-un	Sabon (soap)
Ki-lo	Kilo (kilogram)
Lo-sin	Dosena (dozen)
Gu	Gross
Phian-sa	Piansa (bail)
Tse-ke	Tseke (cheque)
Sil-yo	Selyo (stamp)
Lo-bu	Lobo (balloon)
Tuwa-lia	Twalya (towel)

Code-switching posits bilingualism, and in the case of Filipinos, known to be both bilingual in English and Filipino, this has been part of everyday life. For the Tsinoys, the younger generation in particular, not only is there a switch between Filipino and English, but there occurs also the inclusion of Hokkien words and

phrases in everyday conversations, particularly among co-ethnics. For those who do not speak the language anymore, there are some words that have gained familiarity through interaction with family and friends, and hence are commonly included in conversations. Most of these are used to address people, such as family members (e.g. atsi, ahia, shobe, shoti – which mean elder sister, elder brother, younger sister, and younger brother, respectively), and words used to refer to Chinese cultural practices (e.g. tiongchu – for the mid-autumn festival, commonly known as the mooncake festival).

The following are examples of code-switching and inclusion of Hokkien words in conversations among young Tsinoys.

Example 1:

"What time is our meeting?" (English)
"Anong oras ang miting natin?" (Tagalog)
"What time ang meeting natin?" (Taglish)
"Kui tiam ang meeting natin?" (Hokkien, Taglish)

Example 2:

"How much did your elder sister buy this bag?" "500 pesos." "That's cheap!" (English)
"Magkano nabili ng ate mo 'tong bag na 'to?" "Limang daan (500 pesos)." "Ang mura ah!" (Tagalog)
"How much nabili ng ate mo 'tong bag na 'to?" "500 pesos." "That's cheap ah!" (Taglish)
"Dwa tsi nabili ng atsi mo 'tong bag na 'to?" "go-pa. (five hundred)" "Siok ah!" (Hokkien, Taglish)

It is said that code-switching serves as a means of "in-group communication" (Pavlenko and Blackledge (eds.) 2004: 8). It "commonly occurs when an individual wishes to express solidarity with a particular social group" (Skiba, 2007). Skiba moreover adds that "rapport is established between the speaker and the listener when the listener responds with a similar switch" (Ibid). This switching may also serve the purpose of excluding those who do not speak or are not familiar with the language from the conversation (Ibid). Hence, this particular code-switching occurs only between and among Tsinoys or those seen and/or considered as such. I argue that the use of Hokkien words also tend to create boundaries of "inside" and "outside", thus signifying belongingness to a Tsinoy identity. I also argue that this linguistic practice is consciously done, as it evokes a particular sentiment, that of commonality.

The use of the Hokkien dialect, and the seemingly inadvertent albeit deliberate code-switching that happens, can be said to be mainly due to the idea that "being Chinese" or "Chineseness" is commonly equated with being able to speak and understand, even a little of, the Hokkien dialect. Hence the performance and the claim to "Chineseness", entails a particular consciousness towards the use of a Chinese identity marker, in this case, Hokkien. Hence, one's ethnic identity is seen to have an influence on one's attitudes towards a language and his or her use of it (Fishman (ed.) 1999: 451). This code-switching also serves as a means to establish the Tsinoy identity, and be further integrated in mainstream Filipino society. It may be apt to quote the younger Tsinoys as saying, "I speak Chinese, but…" wherein fluency in the Hokkien dialect is not the end-all of "Chineseness" (in the Philippine

or Chinese-Philippine context), but the capability to show one's comprehension in the dialect through code-switching.

Languages, in this case the Hokkien dialect, should not only be seen as "markers of identity", rather, they should also be seen as "sites of resistance, empowerment, and solidarity, or discrimination" (Pavlenko and Blackledge (eds.) 2004: 3). The code-switch to Hokkien, as mentioned above, functions as an identity marker for the performance of one's "Chineseness". Moreover, for the younger generation of Tsinoys, the conscious code-switching gives them a sense of solidarity, of belongingness to a group, to an identity. This also tends to create and signify which is "inside" and "outside", and while working towards an empowerment of the Tsinoy identity, it nevertheless is also inclined towards exclusion and discrimination – who is or who is not a Tsinoy; who can or who cannot be accepted into the idea of "Chineseness". (An example that clearly shows this is the use of identity markers in the Hokkien dialect – *lannang* and *hwan-a*, meaning "our people" and "barbarian" respectively, the former which is still commonly used (by Chinese-Filipinos) to refer to the Chinese (Tsinoy) and the latter used to refer to Filipinos (non-Tsinoy).) This notion of "Chineseness" calls for an authenticity by which the "ethnicized 'Chinese' subject" (Ang 2001: 30) is expected to adhere to. Hence, to claim to be Chinese or of Chinese descent in the Philippines entails knowledge of Hokkien, and not knowing the dialect brings forth doubts – from both the ethnic Chinese and the non-Chinese – to one's ethnicity.

Furthermore, language and the use of it may also be seen as a cultural capital in the Bourdiean sense. Cultural capital "refers to the symbols, ideas, tastes, and preferences that can be strategically used as resources for social action" (Scott and Marshall (eds.) 2005: 129). The language use and the code-switching employed by the Tsinoys may be seen as a cultural capital in this sense, as well as both social (relationships between and among individuals) and economic capital. Being Tsinoy or "being Chinese" speaks of a claim to "Chineseness" that is translatable to an economic status, which placed the ethnic Chinese in the Philippines (as well as in South East Asia) on a level of great significance to the country's economy. "Being Chinese" then, in the sense of being able to speak Chinese, has meant greater opportunities and greater mobility for business, as well as entry into Chinese business networks, which are mainly characteristically exclusive among co-ethnics.

6 Conclusion

The Chinese presence in the Philippines has undoubtedly been significant in the country's past and present. The transformations that the ethnic Chinese identity in the Philippines underwent may be encapsulated in the words Chinese-Filipino or in its shortened form, Tsinoy – the identity that speaks of their distinct and hybridized identity. Essentializing "Chineseness" to define its authenticity may not be anymore valid in looking at the construction of the Tsinoy identity. As have been aforementioned, the Tsinoy identity is best understood as a hybrid, culturally as well as linguistically. The Tsinoy identity continues to reconstruct and redefine itself, leading one to ask if it is "Chineseness" or "Filipinoness" that is being challenged. This, however, would open up another area of inquiry, as identities remain fluid and malleable. As Ien Ang said, "...any identity can only be a temporary, partial closure, for there is always a "but" nagging behind it, upsetting and interfering with the very construction of that identity" (Ang 2001: 17).

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