

ULT 2299
The Politics of Language and Literacy

Instructor:	Mark Brantner
Section:	D
Day/Time	Tuesday 4.00-6.00 and Friday 12.00 am-2.00 p.m.
Classroom Location:	SR1
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Office and Office Hours:	Tuesday 12-1; Friday 2.30-3.30 and by appointment

Topical Introduction

Are you literate? Every student in USP would probably answer this question with a resounding “Yes!” But this seemingly simple question hides many important issues concerning identity, politics, and technology. Cathy Fleisher writes that “the concept of literacy is problematic; literacy is always a representation of something, a naming of an individual or group of individuals that reflects as much about the namer’s beliefs and values as it does about the person being named.” This course will investigate the beliefs and values that are often hidden in naming someone or a group of people “literate.” Furthermore, it will demonstrate the ways in which these values and beliefs are reflected in and shaped by governmental policies, historical trends, such as globalization, and technological transformations.

Some of the questions that may be taken up are: In what ways has language and literacy shaped a Singaporean identity? Where and when is Singlish accepted as an appropriate way of speaking and writing? Is this changing? What is at stake in government sponsored literacy programs such as the “Speak Good English” and the “Speak Mandarin” campaigns? How has governmental policies on language affected the use of non-official languages such as Hindi or Chinese dialects other than Mandarin? How have iPhones, the internet, and facebook influenced the ways we write and speak?

Organization

The module is divided into three units. In the first, students will examine the literacy trends that they discover in Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (daln.osu.edu), housed at The Ohio State University. They will produce an electronic argument that analyzes a pattern of literacy practices in the United States of America. In the second unit, they will examine their own histories to discover how they developed the literacy practices that they rely on today, and they will collect literacy narratives from fellow students and people living in Singapore. The third unit will ask students to investigate the common traits of Singaporean literacy narratives. On many days this semester, the class will be conducted in seminar format, which means we will engage in discussions about reading, writing, and speaking practices, and we will examine the rhetorical strategies used to help people become literate citizens. As a class, we will raise questions, pose problems, interpret readings, challenge others’ ideas, and develop strategies for successfully completing assignments. There will also be many sessions in which we perform workshop-style activities, including developing interview questions, reporting, and writing in different/multiple languages and technologies. In addition, this course will also focus on writing processes. As a result, we will also develop peer review, conferencing, drafting, and editing strategies. Although there will be mini-lectures on a variety of writing-related topics, we will spend the majority of class time engaging in collaborative discussions and activities.

Course Objectives

- Identify common literacy practices in Singapore
- Trace the historical, political, and technological trends that privilege these practices
- Relate these practices to practices in other countries
- Relate these practices to Singapore's current historical, political, and technological standing in a globalized world.
- Learn and practice strategies for gathering evidence: including primary observation, interviews, and secondary research
- Learn and practice strategies for reading carefully, closely, and critically.
- Work through a full range of writing processes – including invention, planning, drafting, revision, and editing – in order to produce effective college-level essays.
- Develop, organize, and produce effective analytical and argumentative essays.
- Encounter a variety of challenging texts representing a range of literary and non-literary genres.

Required Texts

You will be required to visit the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives, housed at The Ohio State University, on a regular basis. The address is: daln.osu.edu

Other required readings will be distributed in class.

Assignments:

Literacy Argument I: The literacy argument asks you to analyze the literacy practices in the United States. In this paper, you will develop a claim, which you will support using several different types of evidence, including personal and historical examples, facts, statistics, and expert opinion. In preparation, you will collect a range of perspectives on the issues by performing research in the Database of Literacy Narratives as well as library research. You will use this research in creating an academic argument, establishing what has already been written and said ("They Say"), and adding your interpretations and perspectives to the conversation ("I Say"). I will help you identify appropriate issues and develop an academic research question, but in the end, the focus of your research will be up to you. What is important is that you are invested in the issue you research and the argument you make, that you allow your writing to be a genuine form of inquiry.

Literacy Narrative: The first paper asks you to think about how you learned to read and write in the language or languages in which you feel most comfortable. In this paper, you will develop a claim, which you will support using personal examples as evidence. It will tend to follow a narrative structure.

Literacy Argument II: The third paper asks you to think about the ways in which historical, political, and technological trends influence Singaporean literacy practices. In this paper, you will develop a claim, which you will support using expert opinion and ethnographic evidence, culled from interviews. It will tend to mix narrative and argumentative structures.

NOTE: Literacy arguments I and II will be electronic arguments. You will produce web pages that make an academic argument. To accomplish the Literacy Narrative, students will need recording equipment. Most likely, the camera and audio recording functions on your handphones will be sufficient. The recording capabilities of the Iphone will work pretty well for this assignment. If your phone does not have these functions, see me.

COURSE POLICIES:

Attendance Requirements

It matters that you come to every class on time. If you are repeatedly late, it will hurt your final grade.

- If you miss more than a week of class, your final grade will be reduced by a letter. (That is, more than two classes on a Tuesday/Friday schedule).
- If you miss two weeks of class, your final grade will be reduced by two full letter grades.
- You cannot pass the course if you miss more than two weeks of class.

Typically, excessive tardiness, early departure, or lack of preparation will result in your being marked absent. If you know you will be absent, ask me if you can turn in work in advance. If you experience a crisis that prevents you from completing your work, speak to me about it, or ask an appropriate campus official to document your situation. You would be wise to reserve an absence or two for everyday illnesses or other unpredictable events such as failed alarm clocks, transportation problems, unforeseen travel, etc. Missing a conference counts as an absence.

Drafting Requirements, Due Dates, and Deadline Extensions

To pass the course, you must turn in all drafts of all major assignments on the days they are due. This is part of your participation grade. You may not turn in late homework assignments, but you may turn in work in advance. If you anticipate needing a deadline extension for an assignment draft, you may request one *a week in advance of due dates*. I have the right to deny deadline extensions, and/or implement appropriate penalties when you turn in late work.

Classroom Participation

I expect you to be in every class, on time, fully prepared. You are expected to fulfill all homework requirements. Invest yourself in readings and discussions—doing so will pay off in your writing. Because one of the objectives of this module is to make you comfortable engaging in different forms of public discourse—both written and oral—you should make an effort to add your voice to discussions during *every* class. While joining classroom conversations is difficult for some, not doing so will negatively impact your grade.

Workshop, Peer Critique, and Sharing Your Work

When you meet in workshop groups to get feedback on your writing, it is your responsibility to have a *complete draft* and to bring enough copies for everyone in your group; I may also request an additional copy for record keeping. Students who arrive without multiple copies will be marked absent. Sharing your writing is perhaps our single most important course activity. Take peer review seriously and work hard to establish the kind of climate that will make it successful. Occasionally I may request drafts to share with the entire class or with other USP instructors. You may decline such requests. All work shared in public settings is treated with respect, with student names removed.

Staying in Touch

Think of me as someone who is on your side and willing to help, and contact me if you have questions, concerns, or difficulties. Check e-mail daily so I can stay in touch with you, too. I use the IVLE course page to update students about classroom activities and homework assignments; you should use IVLE as a resource for module information.

Plagiarism

A primary goal of this class is to teach you how to use and document sources appropriately. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to ask. I will follow NUS's and USP's policies regarding plagiarism.

GRADING:**Assessments**

The Grading Assessment breakdown for the module is as follows:

Project grades include assessment on all pre-work, drafts, revisions, and conferences:

Literacy Argument I:	20%
Literacy Narrative:	30%
Literacy Argument II	30%

In-Class Participation and Daily Writing:	10%
Presentation and Preparation for the Literacy Event:	10%

Total	100%
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