



## THE ETHNO CULTURAL CONCEPT OF SMILE IN MALAYSIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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### Abstract:

The ongoing paper aims to investigate the concept of a smile in Malaysian literature in English. The concept is a linguistic phenomenon that emerges from the combination of logical models that identify the knowledge in organizing a group of some ethnos, and demonstrate the solidity of language patterns in associative, synonymous and other relations (Abdikalyka and Abitzhanova, 2016). People transfer their feelings metaphorically to depict abstract concepts with other ordinary concepts. Metaphor is an important tool for communication and cognition; it provides us with an unfamiliar way of visualizing familiar things, and a familiar way of visualizing unfamiliar things (Lakoof and Johnson, 1980). The concept considers as one of the basic units of cognitive linguistics. This branch of linguistics studies the language which concentrates on presumption, that language reflects thinking patterns (Green and Evan, 2005:5). However, the present study analyses the way smile is contextualized in Malaysian culture through Malaysian novels in English: 'The Rice Mother', 'Evening Is the Whole Day', 'Green Is the Color' and 'The Garden of Evening Mist'.

**Keywords:** smile, friendly smile, concept, metaphor, cognitive linguistic

### 1. Introduction

A smile seems to be related to cultural values and norms. The idea is that the process of a cultural build, a social act of smiling is attached to the cultural idea of happiness. Theorists believe that a smile is a good conductor of happiness. Though a smile can be faked, it can disguise negative emotions.

Duchen (1990) notes two different types of physical smile a "fake smile" which results from deliberately and doesn't activate the eyes, and "a genuine smile which indicates strain in the muscles around the eyes".

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Smile differs in its types and potential meaning. It is used to deliver a zone of various psychological signs which include social intention positive emotion or a social status of a person (Matsumoto & Willingham, 2009).

However, a smile may be misinterpreted by people of different cultures. If we feel happy, we smile in general. But smile may differ according to cultures. In many Asian cultures, smiling is often a signal that they are embarrassed or uncomfortable. Global communication site clarifies the confusion between cultures about smiling when an American manager visited once China to meet his counterparts to celebrate the opening of a new factory. The Chinese wanted to make sure that everything was organized to convince their manager. So they booked the American manager in a nice hotel. The next morning, the American manager woke up and found that there is no hot water in the hotel, so he went down to the receptionist to complain about no hot water, the Chinese receptionist greeted him with a smile which made the American manager frustrated, because he thought that the Chinese receptionist was smiling as he thought the situation was funny, but indeed Chinese smile in such occasion means feeling uncomfortable for not having a solution for the situation so, therefore, was trying to prevent loss of face (2019). This is a basic example of a misunderstanding of a smile. Here in our topic, we will try to analyze the theme of smiling for different cultures in Malaysia, since Malaysia is a multicultural society, and Smile will be interpreted for the Chinese, Indians, and Malays in Malaysia. Are they similar in meaning for expressing a smile or sometimes misunderstood?

The paper integrates linguo cognitive, and ethno cultural method showing the decoy of mind and language in highlighting ethno cultural concepts, values and way of thinking embedded in the ethno cultural space in text. Analysis of the novels was done by collecting the data through strategies. The steps for the analysis contained: reading the novels carefully to understand the background of the stories: 'Rice Mother' by Rani Manicka, 'Green is the Color', 'Evening is The Whole Day' by Preeta Samarsan, 'The Garden of Evening Mist' by Tan Twan Eng. These writers have good knowledge of English language. They use the English language in their works to transfer the Malaysian cultural tradition.

## 2. Analysis the ethno cultural concept of smile in Malaysian literature in English

### 2.1 Statement

*"I smiled friendly; I feared both of them now."* (3, p142)

The concept of *smile* is associated with *fear*. In this example, Lakshmi greets her Chinese neighbor with a friendly smile when she saw her with a Japanese soldier. Lakshmi considers Minah as her enemy since she accompanies a Japanese soldier during the time when Malaysia was invaded by Japan *"I feared both of them now"*. Lakshmi was afraid that her neighbor Minah would reveal her secret *"My secret depended on the weakest link and I was looking at it"*. (3, p142) She was afraid if she would ask her about her daughter Mohini, who was so beautiful that Lakshmi was hiding her from Japanese soldier: *"I smiled slowly. Gratefully. My secret was safe with her. For now. She knew I had six children. She had just counted Mohini out for his benefit"* (3, p143).

This example highlights the nature of Malaysian character by showing friendly smile to reflect their *fear* from their enemy and to avoid *conflict*. Furthermore, the writer wants to emphasize his idea to the reader by using the adverb (slowly, gratefully, friendly). The character smiles gratefully and slowly to express her gratitude for not disclosing her secret by her neighbor.

The limitation of adverb to smile is heightened in the following examples:

## 2.2 Statements

a. "I smiled back restlessly." (3, p31)

The adverb restlessly implies Lakshmi's happiness toward her husband, for knowing his entrance with a salary inside an envelope "He delved into his pocket and brought out a thin brown envelope. He had given me his entire salary. I tore open the envelope and counted the money. Two hundred and twenty ringgit in all. A lot of money." (3, p31)

The money helps Lakshmi, it brings her good future and lets her help her mother by sending some amount of it "I would send my mother some money and a nice chunk. I would save and save and soon we would be as rich as Old Soong. I would make a rosy future for us" (p31).

Her happiness for helping her mother and the feeling of being a helpful wife were expressed by "smiled restlessly".

b. "I smiled back tentatively." (3, p34)

The adverb tentatively is used to express Lakshmi's hesitation whether to reinforce her relationship with Mui Tsai after discovering that she works as a servant in her neighbor's house "later found out, was a pitiful domestic slave. I smiled back tentatively. I had found a friend but it was to be the beginning of a lost friendship." (p34)

c. "My mother smiled at me happily." (3, p18)

The adverb happily emphasizes on Lakshmi's mother agreement with her daughter's groom "My mother smiled at me happily, her eyes shining proudly in her poor face. I could never disappoint her. She had wanted this for me. In the face of our abject poverty his wealth had blinded her to everything else" (p18).

The sentence indicates Lakshmi's is proposed by a wealthy man who deceives her and turns to be poor. The writer uses happily to express the mother's prototype, how they feel proud when their daughters get married to a wealthy man.

d. "I smiled back reassuringly." (3, p73)

The adverb reassuringly is used to show tranquility "I looked at the boatman worriedly and he smiled back reassuringly. Obviously he had done this before" (3, p73). During their journey they found tree "full of small monkeys" which makes the family terrified "The children were dumb with

*fascination and secret fear. Would they bite? Would they snatch, scratch?"* (p73). The smile with *reassuringly* by the boat man helps them to overcome their fear.

e. *"The two soldiers smiled scornfully at the big, stupid beast writhing on the floor."* (4, p93)

The line indicates Aya's being tortured by the Japanese soldiers. The writer uses *scornfully* to express Malaysia's situation during the time of Japanese invasion "*smiled scornfully at the big, stupid beast writhing on the floor"* (4, p93). The writer uses the word *beast* to describe Aya's lying on the ground with full blood and cut nail finger.

### 2.3 Statement

*"The memory make me smile."* (1, p96);

*"I smiled remembering."* (1, p65)

The concept of smile associates with memory. It can be noticed from the line which indicates Yung's strength and insistence of not to be falling back from her decision from leaving her job as a judge and obtains her promise to her dead sister to build her a garden.

*"The memory makes me smile."* (p96);

*"I smiled remembering."* (p65)

Memory here indicates Yung Ming's dead sister, whom she lost at the Japanese camp during the war. This line contains a culturally moral: memory may not be the smile itself, but it surly provokes smile.

### 2.4. Statement

*"Greeting to the new lady of the house, Lakshimi said who are you, he smiled to her then answered, I am your moneylender"* (3, p32).

The cultural concept of smile is hospitality and kindness, as it is well known Asian people keep on smile to show hospitality. It indicates that Malaysians show *smile* instead of anger as it is shown in the example above when the woman spoke with the man in a provocative way he should be angry but instead "*he explained with a large smile that showed reddish brown teeth.*" (p32)

### 2.5. Statement

*"He smiled slightly and brought his palms to meet in the age-old Indian gesture of polite greeting, then said Namasté, with a smile."* (3, p307)

Smile indicates greeting. "Namaste" is an Indian word used for greeting in a polite way; the writer shows the interference of Indian language and their greeting way in Malay and consider it as a part of Malaysian culture now. Nerveless, he use 'Namaste' to create local color effect.

The analysis highlights the 'gentleness' and 'kindness' nature of Malaysian national character and the ethno semantic of Malaysian personality as 'passionate'.

## 2.6. Statement

*"Smiled shyly at mother."*(3, p198)

Smile indicates shyness. For instances: "smiled shyly at mother" indicates young girl greeting Lakshmi with a smile, the adverb 'shyly' is used with smile to let the reader focuses on the Malaysian children prototype, they show shyness with smile.

## 2.7. Statement

*"He gave me an embarrassed smile."*(1, p25)

Smile indicates embarrassed, indicates Fredrick's feeling of pride for young Ming "your judgments are clear and engaging. You really should compile them into a book" (p25). Smile with shyness and embarrassed highlight the nature of Malaysian cultural personality.

## 2.8. Statement

*"Strangers smile fondly and wait for them to finish before walking past them. Nice family saying goodbye."* (4, p231)

The cultural norm of smile is friendless .It encourages established of an attitude. It encourages smile to stranger which is not observed in European culture. The line indicates Uma's family taking pictures when passed by strangers giving them a fondly smile, "Uma takes the camera out of her bag, they begin to take pictures" (5, p.231). Nerveless the adverb fondly is used with smile to emphasize on Malaysian etiquette which requires everyone to be friendly "strangers smile friendly". Friendly smile and nice words can be predicted as something normal during every day social interaction.

## 2.9. Statement

*"Everything he did and said brought a smile of pride and joy to her heart."* (3, p78)

Smile is compared to joy and pride. From this line we preserve a happy and pride heart of Lakshmi on her son. The line highlights the nature of Malaysian mothers who always feel proud from whatever their son did or say. "The only person who could tweak a smile out of my face was my darling Lakshmanan". (4, p5)

## 2.10. Statement

*"My great aunt's smile was dusty with age." (3, p378)*

The text indicates the use of metaphor. It can be noticed that, smile is compared to age. Moreover from this line we preserve a happy and young soul of Dimple sharing her memory with her niece Lolita by showing the statue she hides long time ago.

*"Can I see the Kuan Yin statue.*

*I thought it was supposed to be deep green?*

*Yes, it was gloriously deep green many years ago when first out of its box but every year since then it has faded a little.*

*My great-aunt's smile was dusty with age." (3, p378)*

Another example "A smile floating to her lips, her voice arid with age" (3, p94) smile compares to age too. Thus we can sum up that smile is life. The following examples will reveal us a tendency how metaphor of smile according to its implication tends to vary:

## 2.11. Statement

*"On the morning we found him dead, he lay with a smile on his face, the kind of smile he has only for you." (2, p116)*

From the example above, we noticed that the image of the smile is chart onto the image of death, "he lay with a smile on his face". The line shows the image of Sara's father smile when he is dead is the same happy smile he shows to his daughter "The kind of smile he has only for you".

## 2.12. Statement

*"His smile balances on the rim of his troubles for a moment." (1, p94)*

It can be seen from the above example, smile is compared to rim of trouble. In this case it is balanced to the character's trouble. Accordingly, we can estate that smile is metaphorically conceptualized as rim of troubles.

## 2.13 Statement

*"Yun Ming's smile froze as he thought how easily the memory of old friendship could be repulsed." (2, p17)*

It is evident that *smile froze* is reflected through Yung Ming's old memory of friendship. Yung Ming surprised when Dahlan greets him in a formal way as they both were best friends. The

inferences can be drawn that there is a violation on friendship and the person cannot experience warm feeling anymore.

#### 2.14. Statement

*"Her newborn face teetered playfully on the edge of a smile." (4, p77)*

The concept of smile is mapped onto the knowledge of chastity. Thus smile is captured as being away to reflect on a child innocent and pure face. Accordingly, we can draw a conclusion that smile is purity.

### 3. Conclusion

After analyzing the concept of a smile, some points are concluded such as: smile is associated with fear. The nature of Malaysian character is showing a friendly smile to reflect their fear from their enemy to avoid conflict. Smile also associates with memory and it shows hospitality. The metaphor of smile is based on a positive notion such as: life and purity, and it can be based on a negative notion such as: trouble and death. What is more, a smile shows lifeless notions such as: memory.

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