

PERCEPTION TOWARDS *BANGSA MALAYSIA* AND EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS

Faridah Noor Mohd Noor and Xavier Thayalan

University of Malaya and Universiti Teknologi MARA Malaysia

Abstract

In the process of nation-building, solidarity is a factor that depends on racial integration among its people. As racial integration is a crucial but slow process, voices of the younger generation indicating solidarity among them can be seen as a strong indicator that racial integration is at work. In the Malaysian context, unity in diversity is the focal point in moving towards solidarity in its multiethnic and multicultural landscape. As studies have shown the proliferation of blogs as means of communication among young Malaysians, the focus of this study is to investigate the language of student bloggers from different ethnic groups to glean elements of racial integration and the acceptance of the Bangsa Malaysia concept among them. A blog was set up by the researchers to foster a virtual discourse community for 13 months. A combination of discourse analysis and social presence theory was used in the analysis of data. This not only gives an insight of the language used but also their perspective of other bloggers. The study found that the language features of bloggers fostered solidarity among the various ethnic groups and exhibited positive support for the general concept of Bangsa Malaysia.

KEYWORDS: SOLIDARITY, *BANGSA MALAYSIA*, BLOGS, ETHNICITY, INTERCULTURAL, YOUTH

Introduction

Solidarity through racial integration has been a continuous effort by the Malaysian government. As Malaysia races towards being a global player, solidarity among the multiethnic Malaysians is crucial to stand united against the changing economic and political demography of the world. Efforts to integrate different ethnic groups to see themselves as a Malaysian race or *Bangsa Malaysia* have been taken to task by several quarters. However, what matters more than ever now is not so much as debates among the out-going generation but more so what the younger generation perceive about solidarity and *Bangsa Malaysia* mean to them. As the future torch bearers, their views of racial integration and being part of a united Malaysia bear credence for solidarity in the years ahead. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to examine the views of young Malaysians regarding the concept of *Bangsa Malaysia* and seek evidence of solidarity in the language used in blogs.

Solidarity in nation building and *Bangsa Malaysia*

The notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* was first put forward in 1991 by Tun Dr. Mahathir when he was the Prime Minister as part of his 2020 vision for Malaysia to forge ahead towards becoming a developed economy by the year 2020. In his speech on his vision for Malaysia, he outlined racial integration as the fundamental factor for Malaysia to become a united nation:

PERCEPTION TOWARDS BANGSA MALAYSIA AND EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS

The first of these is the challenges of establishing a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny. This must be a nation at peace with itself, territorially and ethnically integrated, living in harmony and full and fair partnership, made up of one 'Bangsa Malaysia' with political loyalty and dedication to the nation.

Dato' Seri Dr Mahathir Bin Mohamad
Vision 2020, 1991.

Vision 2020 was applauded for achieving economic transformation within the Asian region, and dubbed as 'one of the great Asian success stories' and 'the great economic star of the Muslim world' after achieving 8% economic growth rate (*The Guardian*, 15 August 2008).

However, on the issue of racial integration, in 2005 after more than a decade that *Bangsa Malaysia* was introduced, the public were still uncertain with the new label of *Bangsa Malaysia*, questions were raised as to whether it would mean ethnic dilution. Datuk Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak, as the Deputy Prime Minister then, he responded that it is a 'general concept' in which "we do not evaluate someone by his skin colour, race or religion," nor does it question the special rights of the Malays but more so "is related to an individual's state of mind" (Tan, *et al.*, 2006). In the same spirit as the present Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak incorporated *Bangsa Malaysia* in the 1Malaysia concept. This policy resonates with the aspiration for solidarity through *Bangsa Malaysia*.

1Malaysia is a concept to foster unity amongst the multi-ethnic rakyat [citizens] of Malaysia If the idea of "Bangsa Malaysia" which was engendered through Vision 2020 becomes the final destination, then 1Malaysia is the roadmap that guides us towards that destination. This definition is built upon the argument that in order achieve the status of a developed nation in the predetermined time frame, the key requisite is a strong and stable country, which can only be achieved when its people stand united.

Datuk Seri Mohd. Najib Tun Abdul Razak
June 15th, 2009

Despite this, a study reported that polarisation seems to be the order at public universities as students tends to group themselves and interact among their own ethnic groups (Mohd Koharuddin bin Mohd Balwi, *et al.*, 2003). In a survey conducted in 44 schools nationwide, it was found that that racial integration among the younger generation in Malaysia seem to have a long way to go judging by the results that only 52% of the 4,400 Form 4 high school students had a friend of a different race (Simrit, 2007). In fact, the survey reported that mixing with other races was not something that concerned many of the respondents.

In light of this, according to Wan Norhasniah Wan Husin (2011), there is an ongoing debate as to whether the 1 Malaysia concept is able to establish the national identity principles in forming a united nation in multi-racial Malaysia. She goes on to say that 'even if Malaysia has gained independence for 54 years, a national identity that should form the backbone of unity is still vague to the citizens' and "debated up to this day" (2011: 229). The question now lies in how the different ethnic groups demonstrate solidarity after *Bangsa Malaysia* was announced in 1991. Thus, the aim of this paper is to gain some insights into what young Malaysians studying at a public university think about solidarity and their perceptions of *Bangsa Malaysia* including national symbols. Although this study looks at a small section of the population, it is hoped that the insights obtained through blogs which form the data of this study could paint the future scenario of national integration among various races aspired by Malaysian leaders.

PERCEPTION TOWARDS BANGSA MALAYSIA AND EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS

Bloggers as an online *Bangsa Malaysia* discourse community

The formation of an online *Bangsa Malaysia* can be analysed based on the contact levels between the different ethnic groups which are often reflected in the voices of the hearts – blogs. As it appears, blogging has become a natural thing for the Generation Y to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences. It seems to have become the democratising force in Malaysia with freedom of expression (Tan and Ibrahim, 2008). Blogs have become a tool for the younger Malaysian generation to participate more directly in debates on social justice, education, politics and policies (Nardi, *et al.*, 2004) among their peers.

This study takes a stand that the voices expressed in blogs are worth investigating to glean evidence of solidarity and racial integration among the younger generation of Malaysians. In terms of online communication, when cyberspace becomes a 'place' for individuals to converge, the notion of bloggers as members of a virtual discourse community develops. In this study, this community can be seen as a group of individuals who conform to the appropriacy of topics and discursal elements as purported by Swales (1990). Additionally, bloggers contribute towards the growth of their community by observing Lakoff's (1975) 'Rules of Rapport' and act as gatekeepers on the use of camaraderie features in their language use.

Methodology

The purpose of the study is to examine the language used by bloggers of different ethnic groups that feature signs of solidarity as Malaysians. The conceptual framework used in this study is represented in Figure 1.

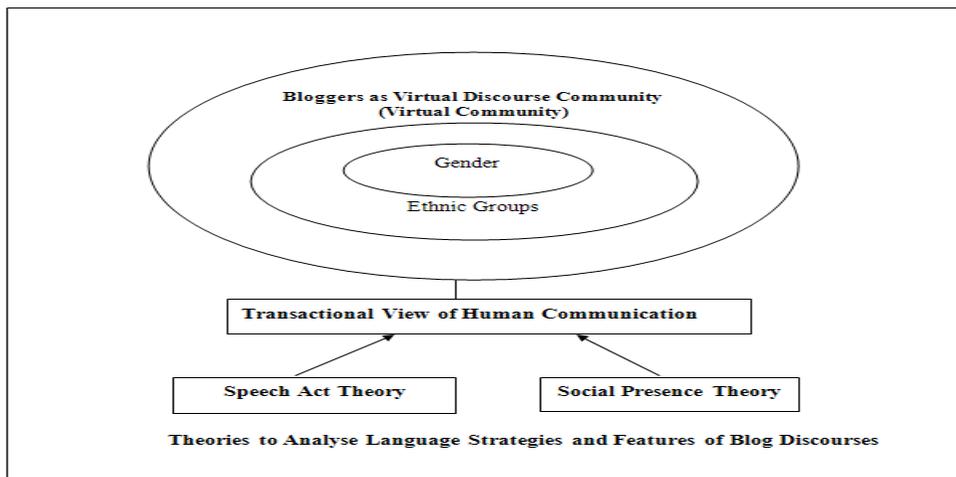


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework

This study looks at bloggers as a virtual discourse community and analyses the social networking practices of the community. The virtual discourse community that is formed in cyberspace is made up of bloggers from different ethnic groups and gender. Social networking practices in the blog discourse community is examined based on the transactional view of communication. In this model,

PERCEPTION TOWARDS BANGSA MALAYSIA AND EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS

communication is seen as an ongoing two-way communication process and occurs within a context that affects how people communicate (Tyler, 1999). The context includes the shared systems of communicators, ethnicity, culture, religion and perception of others (Wood, 2004).

The speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and social presence theory assist in the analysis of the language strategies and features of blog discourse. According to Pearce (1994), most speech acts are co-constructed because the act performed is as much given by the response of other people. In blog communication, speech acts are co-constructed by the bloggers and reflect the cultural awareness of the participants and context in which language is used. Hence, the study of speech acts in blog interaction takes into account the context and the people that make up a blog discourse community.

Another aspect investigated in the study is whether bloggers are aware that blogging is not writing in isolation but rather as social presence theory goes there is the influence due the feeling of the presence of others (Short, *et al.*, 1976). Therefore, in terms of blog interaction, social presence theory suggests that the manner bloggers interact is dependent on the degree they perceive the presence of others in online communication. This is particularly important in virtual communication due to the absence of visual and auditory cues.

Table 1 presents the demographic factors of the participants who took part in this study.

Table 1: The demographic factors of the participants

Gender Race	Malay	Chinese	Kadazan- Dusun	Bajau	Total
Male	5	6	10	7	28
Female	8	7	5	5	25
Total	13	13	15	12	53

As is seen in Table 1, a total of 53 participants who volunteered comprising of four ethnic groups (13 Malays, 13 Chinese, 15 Kadazan-Dusun and 12 Bajau) took part in the study. A blog was set up as the study needed details of the bloggers such as ethnicity, gender and age of the bloggers. Bloggers were asked to create a pseudonym that will be used only for this study so that they will not be identified in their in their own blogs and remain anonymous as they cannot be tracked beyond this study.

Throughout this section, the following codes are used to identify the gender and ethnicity of the participants for data obtained from the blog forums and interviews.

MM - Male Malay	MK - Male Kadazan-Dusun
FM - Female Malay	FK - Female Kadazan-Dusun
MB - Male Bajau	MC - Male Chinese
FB - Female Bajau	FC - Female Chinese

As an example, the code (FK25 B3:102 - 105) refers to a female Kadazan-Dusun, participant No. 25, Blog Issue No. 3 and excerpt from the blog lines 102 to 105. Any insertions by the researchers will be in parenthesis [] to facilitate the reading of the excerpts. For the purpose of discussion, certain words or phrases are highlighted (underlined, in italics or both) in the excerpts.

PERCEPTION TOWARDS BANGSA MALAYSIA AND EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS

The analysis of this section is based on the functional moves each segment of the blog postings appear to perform (Herring, 2004; Tan, 2006). As speech act theory states that language is used to perform an action, each blog postings is categorised according to the functions it appears to perform (Herring, 2004; Tan, 2006; Job-Sluder & Barab, 2009). The categorisation of functional moves is guided by the working definition of solidarity by Brown. *et al.*, (1960, p. 258) who define solidarity as follows:

Solidarity refers to perceived like-mindedness or similarity of behavioural disposition between a speaker and addressee.

Based on this working definition, similarity in solidarity is derived from similar backgrounds, acquaintance or personal characteristics that influence the choice of expressions of social deixis.

Deixis includes the choice of pronouns and words to express familiarity, politeness, intimacy and status between the speaker and the addressee. In this study, solidarity is seen in the choice of words and phrases bloggers used in the discussion of topics in blog forums listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Title of Blog Issues for National Topics

No.	Blog Issue No.	Blog Issue Title
1	Blog 1	Equal Rights for All
2	Blog 9	What is Happening to Malaysia?
3	Blog 11	<i>Bangsa Malaysia</i> [Malaysian Race]
4	Blog 14	English a Malaysian Language
5	Blog 22	Give Peace a Chance
6	Blog 23	Malaysian Identity
7	Blog 27	Nuclear Power
9	Blog 33	The Spirit of Merdeka [Independence]

The title of blog issues in Table 2 are those pertaining to national interest and identity for this study. To facilitate the natural process of data collection, the participants were free to choose any language they felt comfortable with although English was the study's main language. They were encouraged write the way they were most comfortable with so as to encourage the natural use of language by the participants. No editing was made to any of the excerpts presented.

Based on the data collected in the above blog postings discussion of findings will be presented according to the following categories:

1. Perception towards the *Bangsa Malaysia* concept
2. Identity as Malaysians
3. Perception towards National Symbols
4. Perception towards the National Language
5. Attitude towards Local Ethnic Customs and Display of Tolerance

Perception towards the Bangsa Malaysia concept

The blog posting titled "*Bangsa Malaysia*" or Malaysian Race refers to the concept introduced in 1991 in Vision 2020 by Tun Mahathir Mohammed. When this concept was first presented the bloggers' age ranged from 3 to 7 years. Therefore, their exposure and familiarity of the subject is most likely through

PERCEPTION TOWARDS BANGSA MALAYSIA AND EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS

formal education and the media, apart from their social upbringing. The following excerpts are proof of their awareness of the concept and the issues related to multiethnicity in Malaysia.

Excerpt 1

Do we have our ethnic and cultural differences as Bangsa Malaysia? Yes there are differences. Although our country has many different ethnics and culture, we still can ... make it look like one Bangsa Malaysia.

(MK27 B11: 38-40)

The first excerpt was posted by a male Kadazan who was positive about *Bangsa Malaysia*. Despite ethnic and cultural differences, Blogger MK27 was confident that the concept 'still can' materialize. The following excerpt by a male Malay blogger presented his interpretation of what *bangsa* or race means:

Excerpt 2

First of all, we have to change our mindset towards 'Bangsa Malaysia'. Different people have different perception about 'bangsa'. Some people think that 'bangsa' [race] is only referring to their own race . . . They have to know that *there is only one 'Bangsa' [race] in Malaysia and it is 'Bangsa Malaysia. Eventhough you're Malay, Chinese, Indian and so forth, but we are still one nation that is 'Bangsa Malaysia.*

(MM10 B11:5 – 10)

Blogger MM10 urged others by using the inclusive 'we' as a group identity marker to think positively and to change their mindset about the *Bangsa Malaysia* concept. Then he went on to explain that Malaysians should not be ethnic centric by 'only referring to their own race' but realise that only one race exists, namely, *Bangsa Malaysia*, for the nation.

Bloggers of Excerpts 3 and 4 voiced their hope in forming a true Malaysian society made up of *Bangsa Malaysia*:

Excerpt 3

Even when we [do] not know each other or we are from different background, it's doesn't matter. . . . we still live under one roof, that's what we call "Malaysia". . . in future, nothing is impossible, all dreams can come true. but, with a lot of efforts and realistic ways we can achieve it... "kerana MU Malaysia" [because of you, Malaysia]

(FC16 B11: 54-58)

Excerpt 4

. . . we tolerate other, we respect teach other, in a country called MALAYSIA. therefore, Its right to say that all of us in Malaysia can be called bangsa Malaysia.

(MM8B11: 36-37)

All bloggers seem to be confident of one *Bangsa Malaysia* could be accomplished and provided suggestions on how to make it work. In Excerpt 3, a Female Chinese blogger FC16 was just as hopeful, reminding others that they all 'live under one roof'. She even threw in the Independence Day slogan, *Kerana MU Malaysia* (For you Malaysia), highlighting the pronoun *MU* [YOU] to refer to Malaysia and implying all should put in their effort to sacrifice for the sake of the country. In Excerpt 4, the blogger identified tolerance and respect for one another to live together.

PERCEPTION TOWARDS BANGSA MALAYSIA AND EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS

The bloggers seem to indicate a positive attitude in their discussion of the blog posting titled *Bangsa Malaysia* as shown in the excerpts. They seem to show the basic understanding of the issues at hand in making *Bangsa Malaysia* a reality. The use of pronouns such 'we', 'our' and 'us' as group identity markers was intended by bloggers to bring together the other bloggers to support their views and soften the didactic effect as they were blogging with their peers.

Identity as Malaysians

Another aspect that could exhibit solidarity is how bloggers identify themselves as Malaysians. Excerpts 5 and 6 are from a postings on the blog issues '*What is Happening to Malaysian*', and '*Equal Rights to All*', respectively.

Excerpt 5

This topic is about us- *Malaysian people*.

(FC16 B9:23)

Excerpt 6

Because sometimes its *kinda embarassing* forus *malaysian[s]* if the foreignerssee [these] homeless street kids begging for money,food or even sell[ing] things . . .

(FB9 B1:8 -9)

In both excerpts, bloggers indicated a sense of responsibility as Malaysians when responding to the plight of homeless children posted in the blog. Blogger FC16 in Excerpt 6 pointed out it was a concern of all Malaysians (*us – Malaysian people*) while Blogger FB9 thought it would be *embarrassing* if the problem was not solved. Both used group identity markers (e.g. '*usMalaysian*') to mark their identity as Malaysians as well as to share common background with other bloggers.

The following excerpt illustrates a male Bajau blogger reminding his 'fellow friends' of their status as Malaysian citizens in the blog posting titled *Malaysian Identity*:

Excerpt 7

hallo2 all my fellow friends..*all of us are Malaysia[n] citizen[s]* . . .

(MB3B23:133)

The following group of excerpts (Excerpts 8-10) shows bloggers expressing their pride in the country and of being Malaysians:

Excerpt 8

we should proud of our country..coz our country is known as "*berbilang kaum & berbudi bahasa*"[multiracial & polite]

(MB3 B23: 134-135)

Excerpt 9

We . . . are know[n] as MALAYSIAN[s] [so] *we should be very proud* [of]ourselves. Why??? Because people from different culture[s] n race can *live together* in . . . same place without fighting for food, shelter or even job...Don't u all think this is nice compared to other [places]?? . . . For me, *i [am] proud being known as [a] MALAYSIAN*...Even when I stand between Jawa, Chinese, bajau, kadazan and dusun :)

(FK25 B23: 36-43)

PERCEPTION TOWARDS BANGSA MALAYSIA AND EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS

In the above, both bloggers explained why they should take pride in being Malaysians as the country is known for its courteous multiracial composition (Excerpt 8) living in a prosperous (Excerpt 9) country. The following Kadazan blogger (Excerpt 10) was more direct:

Excerpt 10

Arent you proud to be Malaysian?? If you're not, you better please leave this beautiful country.
(MK26 B23: 111-112)

Bloggers in this study debated on the issue of ethnicity. The following excerpts show that despite the sentiment of remaining in their own ethnic groups, they see themselves as Malaysians:

Excerpt 11

i dont think race and culture [should] become barriers to our citizens [if] . . . [they] introduce themselves as Malaysians..We have to remember that our country has [different] races such as Indians, Chinese, kadazans etc...but it doesn't mean if they identify themselves as Indians they become less Malaysian and ... i am positive that all Malaysians have the great spirit of nationhood and they are united!!
(MB2 B23: 20-24)

Excerpt 12

we still can hang around with other people from different race and even get married. we don't see the color of our skin as something that stop us to be friendly with others...it just that people *see us differently on the surface, but in the inside, WE ALL ARE MALAYSIAN[S]*.
(FB10 B23: 31-35)

All bloggers accepted the fact that multiethnicity is part of being Malaysian. Blogger MB2, a male Bajau, as race and culture should not be a *barrier* and should not consider themselves to be '*less Malaysian*' (Excerpt 11) if they held onto their ethnicity. To Blogger FB10, a female Bajau, felt it was more than just skin deep in becoming a Malaysian.

Perception towards national symbols

The following set of excerpts from the postings on a blog issue titled '*The Spirit of Merdeka*' [independence] include their discussions on national symbols and *Hari Merdeka* or Independence Day in Malaysia and the National Flag named *Jalur Gemilang* or Stripes of Glory.

Below are excerpts in which bloggers shared what independence day celebrated on 31st August each year meant to them.

Excerpt 13

to me... *31st August is not just another holiday. it is independence day!* . . .
(FC19 B33:1)

Excerpt 14

like others, i'm also like to say that *independence day is not just another holiday*. It is also a holiday for us to rest but *the event is different from other holidays*. . .
(MK21 B33:111-113)

PERCEPTION TOWARDS BANGSA MALAYSIA AND EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS

In Excerpts 13 and 14, bloggers seem to be in agreement that Independence Day meant something special to them as it was *not just another holiday* like festive days. As revealed by the data, their use identical expressions *not just another holiday* display that they agree in their sentiments about National Day and support one another.

In the following excerpts blogger MC17, a male Chinese, referred to the National Flag acting as a canopy for all Malaysians:

Excerpt 15

malaysia is known as multicultural and we divide ourselves into races and yet *we are unite[d] under one flag* that we put in our heart[s] and also to show to the world. . . under the flag *jalur gemilang* [we] become *one independent race* . . . only [when] we are unite[d] and trust each other, all the side effect[s] will be nothing . . . *we become truly Malaysian* .

(MC17 B23: 94-100)

In this study, solidarity Excerpt 15 shows that Blogger MC17 takes pride in the symbolic meaning of the national flag and what it represents to the world. In his words, the flag symbolises Malaysians as *one independent race*. He admits that Malaysians still see themselves as separate ethnic groups, but the flag symbolises unity *under one flag*.

This set of excerpts illustrates that young Malaysians in this study appreciate the national symbols and the symbolic meaning attached to Independence Day and its celebrations as well as the *Jalur Gemilang* Flag. Blogger MC17, a male Chinese, was passionate about what the national flag represents when he wrote "*we put in our heart[s]*" in Excerpt 15.

Perception towards the national language

This section presents the bloggers perception towards the national language, Bahasa Melayu. The national language is the medium of instruction at national schools and public universities. The following excerpts were taken from the blog posting titled *English as Malaysian Language*.

Excerpt 16 presents a stand taken by Blogger FM14 on the status of the national language, Bahasa Melayu.

Excerpt 16

Malay language, not for the Malays, *but for the Malaysia*.

(FM8 B14:51)

Excerpt 16 is a clear statement by the female Malay blogger, FM8, that the National Language is not owned by any particular ethnic group *but for Malaysia*. These words indicate ownership of the national language by all.

The following bloggers opposed the change to the English language as the national language.

PERCEPTION TOWARDS BANGSA MALAYSIA AND EXPRESSIONS OF
SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS

Excerpt 17

I strongly disagree if english becomes a Malaysian language . . . English is not the best language to understand. But your idea is good. *Why not everybody speak BM only so that everybody can understand.*

(MM12B14:27- 30)

Excerpt 18

i think honestly, *we should be proud* for having 'bahasa' as our national language, then *why [we] should bother* to change our national language to " english"? sorry to say this. . . .

(FC17 B14:112-114)

Excerpt 19

We can [lose] our Malaysian identity. somehow we should be thankful, lots of peoples around the world are impressed . . . [with] malaysian[s], why? cause i believe each . . . malaysian can speak and understand more than one language

(FC17 B14:114-116)

In Excerpt 17, the male Malay blogger MM12 first suggested that Bahasa Melayu be used by all so that all Malaysians can understand the language. Then bloggers of the above excerpts disagreed when the topic was changed to making English as the national language as it would mean not being proud of the national language (Excerpt 18) and Blogger FC17 even went as far as it could lose one's identity as a Malaysian (Excerpt 19) if that were to happen.

The following bloggers demonstrated a strong sentiment against the idea of making English the national language but approved the practicality of acquiring the language:

Excerpt 20

bahasa melayu is our national language . . . i think *no one in malaysia would denythis fact.* however, if there are some parties who want to propose english as our national language,i think they may have made up a big mistake. but, *it's not wrong to learn english* in our country. as a university student . . .

(FC18 B14:103-105)

Excerpt 21

. . . ucan still use english on other occassions like parties, meetings but to change it into a national language. Sorry.

(MC18 B14:41-42)

Excerpt 22

Nope! Why not propose the Chinese or the Tamil language as the Malaysian language!!!. Let's be it that Bahasa Melayu the malaysian language, now and forever, for me, *we should not change what is ours and adopt what is not ours.* Most Malaysia[ns] speak in their mother tongue. but using *English in science and mathematics is acceptable.* . . .

(FC16 B14:88-92)

Excerpt 23

. . . I went to the Chinese school but I can still speak Malay and English. In conclusion, we still can learn english by *we should not forget our Malaysian language. . . .as simple as that!*

(FC16 B14:96-98)

PERCEPTION TOWARDS BANGSA MALAYSIA AND EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS

Blogger FC16 concluded that learning English is not a problem as long as they remember that *we should not forget our Malaysian language*(Excerpt 23).

5. Attitude towards Local Ethnic Customs and Display of Tolerance

The findings of the study also show that the bloggers shared information about their cultural practices. To live in harmony, different ethnic groups need to share and respect each other's customs which may range from daily practices and the type of food to serve one another. The following excerpts illustrate this sharing of knowledge regarding food habits among the bloggers in this study. All excerpts are from the blog posting '*Bangsa Malaysia [Malaysian Race]*'. In Excerpt 24, blogger MC16 shared his diet restrictions as a Buddhist:

Example 24

I don[‘t] eat beef *cos I am Buddhist* . . .

(MC16 B11:48-49)

In the following excerpts, they discussed on the choice of serving halal food to their guests.

Excerpt 25

As we see during any festive season in our country, many races are willing to gather around to celebrate it, eventhough it is not their culture. *We also cook halal food that everybody can eat.* Why? because we're living in the same country. . .

(MM8 B11:32-34)

Excerpt 26

. . . We must be sensitive to other people. Like me-in-me said, *we also cook halal food for everybody to eat.*

(MK27 B11:40-42)

In Excerpts 25 and 26, the participants seem to be aware that not all types of food are palatable to people from different cultures. Due to the customary house-to-house gatherings during festive seasons in Malaysia, people of different religious beliefs such as Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and Hindus, visit each other's homes. These two bloggers show that they are sensitive to the different dietary restrictions and tend to serve *halal* [livestock slaughtered the Islamic way] food that most could eat. The expression '*We also cook halal food that everybody can eat*' was also repeated by the male Kadazan blogger who was not a Muslim.

The data revealed that blog participants seem to indicate awareness of the cultural needs of others. Their concern for others could be seen as a politeness tactic. The modal *must* used in Excerpt 26 shows that that the blogger felt that it is important to be sensitive of others when gatherings are held. Thus the positive politeness demonstrated refers to the desire to gain the approval of others by portraying a positive self-image or personality (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

However, apart from being polite to one another in order to be able to live in solidarity, tolerance is needed among members of a society. The excerpts below illustrate views of bloggers on this issue:

Excerpt 27

One reason we are able to [live] together is tolerance for one another. but i sure like to listen to some other suggestions

PERCEPTION TOWARDS BANGSA MALAYSIA AND EXPRESSIONS OF
SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS

(MC1 B11 8: 16-17)

Excerpt 28

I think we are *like one big family*. We fight but we are friends. Siblingrivalry?? But he is still your brother/sister. Like blood is t[h]icker than water. It is *normal to quarrel but we are still Malaysians*.

(FC14 B11: 72-74)

Excerpts 27 and 28 were from the blog posting on *Bangsa Malaysia*. Blogger MC1, a male Chinese, pointed out tolerance as a key factor while Blogger FC14 felt that quarrels are petty as Malaysians should tolerate one another.

In summation, the excerpts presented demonstrate that these young Malaysian bloggers are aware of the importance of tolerance in seeking solidarity. In fact, some bloggers in this study have expressed acceptance that living together in solidarity is a feature of Malaysian living among different cultures and multiethnic nation.

Perception of blogging in intercultural context

As part of the study, the participants in the study were required to take part in an interview and answer a 41 item Likert scale questionnaire to elicit information on the participants' perception of intercultural interactive practices in blog forums. Only the questions relevant to this paper are presented here. Table 3 shows the participants' perception of blogging in an intercultural context as elicited from the questionnaire.

Table 3: Perception of blogging in intercultural context

No.	Questions	Strongly Disagree n(%)	Disagree n(%)	Not Sure n(%)	Agree n(%)	Strongly Agree n(%)	Total n(%)
1	I think that crisis can occur when bloggers are not sensitive of each other's culture.	0	1 (2.4)	2 (4.9)	25 (61.0)	13 (31.7)	100
2	Fellow bloggers have to respect each other's different culture.	0	0	4 (9.8)	20 (48.8)	17 (41.5)	100
3	Different cultures is one aspect that makes every blogger very careful of what they say when they blog.	0	2 (4.9)	5 (12.2)	27 (65.9)	7 (17.1)	100

As is seen in the above table, the responses to Question 3 show that more than 80% of the bloggers agreed that the blogger were very careful in blog forums. In addition, the participants thought that crisis could occur when bloggers were not sensitive of each other's culture (Agree: 61.0% n=25). It was also revealed in the interview that the interviewees were careful with their choice of words used in blog forums.

PERCEPTION TOWARDS BANGSA MALAYSIA AND EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS

This is indicated in the responses to the interview question in Table 4 below:

Question: When choosing how to respond to the issues, what did you consider about your choice of words? Tick (✓) the top 3 from the list given.

Table 4: Considerations for choice of words

The sensitivity of the topic that was discussed.	100% (n=13)
My own social upbringing (e.g. respect for others etc.)	100 % (n=13)
The feelings of other bloggers.	69% (n=9)
The race and culture of the bloggers.	38% (n=5)
The background knowledge of who the bloggers were.	23% (n=3)

Responses presented in the above table show that 100% (n=13) of the interviewees indicated that they monitored their choice of words due to the sensitivity of the topic that was discussed in the blog. In addition, 69% (n=9) of the interviewees indicated their consideration for the feelings of other bloggers in particular on their choice of words. However, 100% (n=13) of the participants seem to be guided by their own social upbringing in their choices of words in the blog forums.

This study shows that bloggers felt the social presence of other bloggers which thus have an influencing effect on their use of language and how they handled their discussions in the blogs. In an intercultural context they fostered camaraderie among the various ethnic groups in the blogs as pointed out by Lakoff (1975). To promote intercultural understanding and denote positive politeness they used group identity markers, expressions to denote common background, appropriate conventions of interaction, identical expressions as support of mutual view and code-switching.

Conclusion

This study found linguistic features that denote racial integration to be an integral part of interaction among young Malaysia. Though the bloggers who participated in this study did not know each other except during interactions in the blog, this study found that they fostered camaraderie in their intercultural interaction by observing appropriate conventions of interactions. The language used in blogs can be said to typify that used by Malaysians they represent. When their discussions shifted from serious to casual topics so did their language - at times they chided each other and at other times they shared jokes among them. In this study, the bloggers from the various ethnic groups appear to be aware of the social norms of interaction in an intercultural context as they exhibited polite use of language in a stress free environment.

As the findings demonstrate, these bloggers represent young Malaysian university students who display that they recognise the call for solidarity and racial integration. This group of bloggers seems to be in solidarity with one another by marking themselves as members who share a common background, as one *Bangsa Malaysia*. They were found to embrace the fact that living in a multiethnic country, there are national symbols that identify and unite them as Malaysians: the national language, the Independence Day and the national flag, among others. All of these will contribute towards a positive future outlook for Malaysia in terms of racial integration and solidarity as Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, called on the rest of the world to see how Malaysia has made a mark during the first half of the century:

PERCEPTION TOWARDS BANGSA MALAYSIA AND EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS

August 31 marked the 50th anniversary of Malaysia's Merdeka after more than 400 years of colonialism. Malaysia's peaceful, non-violent struggle may not have received the attention that Mahatma Gandhi's did in India, but what Malaysia has accomplished since then is impressive - and has much to teach the world, both about economics, and about how to construct a vibrant multiracial, multi-ethnic, multicultural society.

Malaysia's success thus should be studied both by those looking for economic prosperity and those seeking to understand how our world can live together, not just with toleration, but also with respect, sharing their common humanity and working together to achieve common goals.

Joseph Stiglitz: 2007

Acknowledgement

The researchers wish to thank the bloggers who volunteered to participate in this study.

References

- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, R. & Gilman, A. (1960). The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity. In Sebeok, T.A (Eds.). 1960. *Style in Language*. (pp. 253-276). Cambridge: MIT University Press.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1978). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Herring, S. C. (2004). Computer-mediated discourse analysis: An approach to researching online behavior. In: S. A. Barab, R. Kling, and J. H. Gray (Eds.), *Designing for Virtual Communities in the Service of Learning* (pp. 338-376). New York: Cambridge University Press. Preprint: Available <http://ella.slis.indiana.edu/~herring/cmda.pdf>.
- Jacques, M. (15 August 2008). Malaysia is a rare multiracial success. But its stability is being put to the test. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/aug/15/malaysia>.
- Job-Sluder, K. & Barab, S. A., (2009). Shared “We” and Shared “They” Indicators of Group Identity in Online Teacher Professional Development. In S. A. Barab, R. Kling, & J. H. Gray (Eds.). *Designing for Virtual Communities in the Service of Learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, R (1975). *Language and Woman Place*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Mahathir Bin Mohamad, Dato' Seri Dr. (1991). *Vision 2020: The Way Forward*. Retrieved from <http://www.Pmo.Gov.My/?Menu=Page&Page=1898>.
- Mohd. Najib Tun Abdul Razak, Datuk Seri. (2009, June 15). *The 1 Malaysia Concept Part 1*. Retrieved from <http://www.1malaysia.com.my/ta/blog/the-1malaysia-concept-part-1/>.

PERCEPTION TOWARDS BANGSA MALAYSIA AND EXPRESSIONS OF
SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS

- Mohd Balwi, Mohd Koharuddin and Hassan, Zainudin (2003). *Pendidikan Ketamadunan dan Cabaran Pembinaan Bangsa Malaysia : Sejauhmanakah Ia mampu Memupuk Nilai-Nilai Jati diri, Persamaan, Toleransi, Persefahaman dan Kejayaan di Kalangan Pelajar Universiti . Satu Perbincangan*. In: Seminar Memperkasakan Sistem Pendidikan, 19-21 October 2003, Puteri Pan Pasific, Johor Bahru. (Unpublished). Retrieved from <http://eprints.utm.my/2340/>.
- Nardi, B., Schiano, D., Gumbrecht, M., & Swartz, L. (2004). "I'm blogging this": A closer look at why people blog. *Communications of the ACM*. Retrieved from <http://www.ics.uci.edu/~jpd/classes/ics234cw04/nardi.pdf>.
- Pearce, W. B. (1994). *Interpersonal Communication: Making Social Worlds*. New York: Harper Collins College Publishers Inc.
- Simrit Kaur. (29 March 2007). Survey: Many youngsters aren't concerned about racial integration. *The Star*. Retrieved from <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2007/3/29/nation/172251&sec=nation>.
- Stiglitz, J. (2007). *The Malaysian Miracle*. Retrieved from <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/stiglitz91/English>.
- Searle, John. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University.
- Short, J., Willims, E., and Christie, B. (1976). *The Social Psychology of Telecommunications*. London: John Wiley & Sons.
- Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tan, Jun-E and Zawawi Ibrahim. (2008). *Blogging and Democratization in Malaysia – A New Civil Society in the Making*. Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: SIRD.
- Tan, M., Teh Eng Hock, Meera Vijayan and Farik Zolkepli. (7 Nov 2006). *Bangsa Malaysia In Mind*. The Star Online. Retrieved from <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2006/11/7/nation/15939803&sec=nation&focus=1>
- Tyler, S. (1999). *Communication: A Foundation Course*. Melbourne: Pearson Education Australia.
- Wan Norhasniah Wan Husin. (2011). Nation-Building and Malaysia Concept: Ethnic Relations Challenges in the Educational Field, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* Vol. 1 No. 9 [Special Issue – July 2011], pp. 228-237. Retrieved from http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol._1_No._9_Special_Issue_July_2011/25.pdf.
- Wood, J. T. (2004). *Interpersonal Communication: Everyday Encounters*. Singapore: Thomson Wadsworth.