

THE DYNAMICS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE USE AMONG MALAYSIAN BLOGGERS: PERCEPTION OF TESL STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Blogs are now marking a new mode of communication, making impact on domains such as virtual formation of speech communities, knowledge-sharing, pedagogical implication as well as formation of virtual identity. It is estimated that more than three billion websites in the world today and more than 70 million are blogs. In Malaysia, it is estimated that half a million blogs existed. Language used by bloggers could reflect the unique pattern of discourse within the blogosphere where the combination of both monologue and dialogue in a space-bound, digital environment is observed. Some studies show that a strong sense of identity is seen within the literacy practices in blogosphere where bloggers tend to use code-switching and code mixing in their blogs. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the dynamics of English language use among top-ranked Malaysian bloggers from the perception of final-year TESL undergraduate students. The study reveals that there are various linguistic features found in blogs and also in the interaction with one another in meaning-making process. Several implications are discussed.

ABSTRAK

Blog merupakan mod komunikasi yang baru yang memberi impak kepada domain seperti komuniti maya, perkongsian maklumat, implikasi pedagogi dan pembentukan jati diri maya. Dianggarkan lebih dari tiga bilion laman web sekarang dan lebih dari 70 juta adalah blog. Dianggarkan setengah juta blog wujud di Malaysia. Bahasa yang digunakan oleh pemblog melambangkan keunikan pola dalam sfera blog dengan gabungan monolog dan dialog dalam

persekitaran digital. Beberapa kajian mendapati identiti yang tersendiri dalam amalan literasi blog di mana pemblog mempunyai kecenderungan untuk menggunakan pertukaran kod dan pencampuran kod dalam blog mereka. Tujuan kajian ini untuk mengenalpasti dinamika penggunaan bahasa Inggeris dalam blog oleh pemblog Malaysia dari perspektif pelajar tahun akhir dalam bidang TESL. Kajian ini mendapati beberapa ciri-ciri linguistik dalam blog dalam pembinaan makna hasil dari interaksi di antara pemblog dan pembaca blog. Beberapa implikasi dibincangkan.

INTRODUCTION

Blog is a relatively new medium and yet, it has become a social phenomenon. An increasing number of people are jumping into the personal (individual) or corporate “blogwagon” (Mercado, 2006). Weblogs or blogs are defined as frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence (Herring et al., 2004). Weblogs are becoming an increasingly popular form of communication on the World Wide Web. Millions of people around the world maintain weblogs, also known as the internet journal covering a huge range of topics and interests. Blogs are particularly popular in sectors such as technology, marketing, media, law and politics. In general, people used them to write about virtually anything from gardening to world news. While some are very personal, others use them as a springboard to express their views on the current issues. Blog has become an effective platform for people to express their ideas, publish one’s thought online, influence society, engage in global discussion or even promote oneself as a leader.

Today, it is estimated that more than three billion websites in the world and more than 70 million are blogs. In Malaysia, it is estimated that half a million blogs existed (Johan Jaafar, 2008). According to the survey conducted in 2005 by Pew Internet and American Life Project, a new weblog is being created every 5.8 second (Rainie, 2005). Meanwhile, the blog analysis firm, Technorati, tracked 23.1 million blogs and 1.8 million links as of 13th of December, 2005 (Mercado, 2006). Since its establishment in the mid-1999, blogging as an online activity has increased exponentially. With the popularity and population of the blogosphere, blogs are emerging as a powerful organizing tool,

giving momentum to ideas that shape public opinion and influence their behaviours. For example, Malaysian bloggers have recently become quite effective in confronting perceived corruption in the government despite state's powerful control of the mainstream media. In addition, language used by bloggers could reflect the unique pattern of discourse within the blogosphere where the combination of both monologue and dialogue in a space-bound, electronic environment is observed. Some studies show that a strong sense of identity is seen within the literacy practices in blogosphere where bloggers tend to use code-switching and code mixing in their blogs. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the dynamics of language use among top-ranked Malaysian bloggers from the perception of final-year TESL students.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There has been growing interest among people to read and write blogs among Malaysians. As a type of web document, blogs are related to – and some claim, replacing – personal home pages; both are typically created and maintained by individuals, and their content tends to focus on the bloggers' interests (Herring, et. al., 2004). However, due to the changing status of English in Malaysia, particularly since the 1960s, when Malay language, renamed “Bahasa Malaysia”, became Malaysia's sole official language that replaced English as the predominant medium of instruction in schools for several decades, the command of English among students especially in rural areas has thus “deteriorated” (Cheshire, 1998). As a result, the emergence of Manglish, code-switching and other variations are greatly seen in this country (Cheshire, 1998). Due to the sub-standard usage of English, a number of our bloggers too fall into this category. As blogs are very influential tool in our society today, it is high time we look into their language use in order to get a better view of what kind of English are Malaysians exposed to in the cyberspace. Influential blogs get a daily hit of 8,000 or more and this is a tremendous amount that we cannot just simply ignore it.

According to Nilsson (2005), weblogs are almost always written in the first person, and fairly informal. This is further exemplified in the text when the blog posts were found to be written mostly in short

sentences. Further, there are certain jargons used in the blogs. Due to the evolution of blogosphere, jargons specific to blogging are also emerging. Due to this feature, blogging brings in a new community, where those outside of the blogging community would not be likely to understand certain words or meanings used by bloggers.

Another issue in blogosphere is code switching and code mixing. Code switching is the ability of an individual to switch from one language or language variety to another, within the same utterance (in conversation), or in a sentence (in written form). Koo (2005) states that it is a common phenomenon that occurs in a multicultural and multilingual nation, which sees people changing the language they speak or write from one variety or code to another, and this implies the multiple identities of the speaker. Code switching in blogosphere can be seen in Smedley's (2006) research on blogs written by Filipinos demonstrated a strong sense of identity seen within the literacy practices used in blogosphere. The study was focused on code switching in Filipino blogs and the association between the two languages (English and local language). Code switching seems to show a sense of identity of the bloggers. In addition, the study examined the narrative structure of the blogs — how blog writers wrote their blogs and applied code switching as a means of textual communication in a monologist manner. Since there is little research conducted regarding the language use by Malaysian bloggers, it is critical to conduct this study. The purpose of this study was to examine the dynamics of language use among top-ranked Malaysian bloggers from the perception of final-year TESL students.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A weblog (blog) is a simplified form of web publishing that allows anyone with a computer and Internet connection to post content online (Gurzick & Lutters 2006). A blog is actually a short form of weblog. Blogs are websites or homepages, frequently updated with almost daily new entries in a reversed chronological order consisting of the most recent post and offer many links to related information (Mercado, 2006). For instance, blogs can contain commentary or news on a particular topic, such as food, politics, or local news. Unlike websites,

blogs are written in an informal style that reflect the interest, view and personality of the bloggers. According to Mercado (2006), blogs usually allow room for readers' comments, and because they often contain numerous links to other blogs and websites, they each act as a unit in a dynamic community. Together they form an interconnected whole of the intellectual cyberspace which bloggers called the "blogosphere". Information flow in the blogosphere has its own way: personal, fast, connected and networked.

The term "weblog" may have been coined by John Barger in December 1997 (Mercado, 2006). The term "web log" was initially coined referring to a server's log file and then expanded to include the meaning of online personal journaling. Later on, to avoid confusion, the word "blog" was adopted to refer to personal journaling (Mercado, 2006). According to Winer (2002), the first weblog was the first website, <http://info.cern.ch/>, the site built by Tim Berners-Lee at CERN. Since mid-1999, blogging as an online activity has been increasing exponentially, enabled by the release of the first free blogging software (Pitas), and fueled by reports from the mainstream media of the grassroots power of blogs as alternative news sources (Herring et al., 2004).

Characteristics and Types of Blog

The Webopedia (www.webopedia.com) defines blog as a web page that serves as a publicly accessible personal journal for an individual. In 2005, the word "blog" was included for the first time in the U.S. Merriam-Webster Dictionary although it has entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 2004 (Mercado, 2006). Typically updated daily, blog often reflects the personality of the author. According to Mercado (2006), blogs are characterised by the following:

- Weblogs are intended for general public consumption
- Weblogs allow readers to enter their own comments to individual posts
- Weblogs links generously, allowing readers to follow conversations between weblogs
- Weblogs are serial
- Weblogs are like a short public lecture

A blog that contains video clips is called a video blog, or vblog. In its simplest form, a video blog (vblog or vlog) is the posting of serial videos to a website, with an audience response encouraged. Even though this new form of web communication is in its infancy, videobloggers have already started making regular postings online (<http://ezinearticles.com>). The term blogosphere refers to the worldwide collection of blogs, and the vlogosphere refers to all the vlogs worldwide. A vlog author is referred to as Vlogger (Gary et al., 2008). Other than that, blogs with shorter posts and mixed media types are called the tumblelogs. The ones comprising links are called a linklog, a site containing a portfolio of sketches is called a sketchblog while one comprising photos is called a photoblog (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog). Blog can also be defined by the type of device used to create them. A blog written through a mobile device, such as mobile phone or a PDA is called a moblog (Teh, 2008). Some blogs focus on a particular subject, such as political blogs, fashion blogs, project blogs, or legal blogs (often referred to as blawags). And last but not least, we have a slog (site or website log) which is a section or 'slice' of a regular business website, and seamlessly integrated within the regular website structure but is produced with blogging software (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog). Irrespective of what their type and name of blogs, just like what was mention earlier, most of the blogs allow comments to be placed by the readers to reflect their views as a form of feedback towards blog entries.

Based on Jupiter Research (2006) on American adults, about 54% of bloggers are under the age of 30, much like the Internet population in general. The research signifies that the *raison d'être* behind this most probably is because users under the age of 30 have less commitment to the family or perhaps most of them are still single or students that spend a higher number of hours in front of computer, as compared to the people from higher age ranges, who most probably need to spend more time with their family, career, etc. In addition, the majority of the bloggers cited that their main interest is to share stories and to express creativity. Most of the bloggers also stated that the reason for blogging does not involve making money. Whereas almost half of the respondents said that they are trying to influence the way other people think. But the main reason for all these bloggers activities' is to document their own personal experience and to share them with others. This has resulted in a huge obsession and fascination in the blogosphere.

Impact of Blogs and Language Used in Blogs

Blogging is a new opportunity for people to express their thoughts. In the process of blogging, bloggers become involved in commenting and reflecting on diverse topics and ideas. Blogging is a practice which requires a weblog author to be connected to processes, discourses and communities. A large spectrum of research has been conducted regarding the effect of blogging (Johnson, 2004) which indicated the remarkably positive impact of weblogs on students' critical and creative thinking, their analytical writing skills, and their intellectual confidence and independence. Fiedler (2003) defines weblog as a reflective conversational tool for self-organised learning, which best captures the constructivist spirit used for fostering autonomous, self-directed learning approaches. Other than becoming a meaningful medium to improve social interaction, a weblog also helps to promote creative and reflective writing.

In a study conducted by Nardi et al. (2004), the social aspect of the blogosphere was analysed from the angle of how blogging becomes a social activity. The study found that bloggers tend to relate to the known audience of their personal social networks as well as the wider, unknown audience in the blogosphere. In other words, blogs are regarded as a social activity because blogs create the audience just as the audience creates the blogs. The social communication in which bloggers and audience are "socially" related is through the writing and reading of blogs, as well as the commenting that is essential for two-way communication modes, via blogging activities.

Nilsson (2005) studied the function of language to facilitate and maintain social networking in weblog. She examined the structure of the weblogging community and its network strength. The study found that a certain type of network suggests a particular language norm. Every environment within the Internet has its own format, and within each format evolves a specific "dialect" native to that space. Blogs are generally accepted as having a form over function relationship in that a blog is often defined singularly by its form. Within the blogosphere, a certain variety of language has developed, one that rationalised the human need to communicate with the constraints of the medium. This makes weblog group into tight social networks that consists of varying

degree of community. Each community is anchored around a topic, whether it is job-related, interest-related, age, gender, etc. Because of the closeness of the blogging network, communicative practices can be standardised, strengthening further the sense of group identity.

Smedley's (2006) research on blogs written by Filipinos demonstrated a strong sense of identity seen within the literacy practices employed via blogosphere. The study was focused on code switching in Filipino blogs, and how the association between the two languages shows a sense of identity for the bloggers. He studied the narrative structure of the blog – how blog writers wrote their blogs and applied code switching as a means of textual communication. Smedley also studied the issue of style shifting in relation to motivation for code switching, thus resulting in the enactment of identity via blogging. Rampton (1995) asserts that language switching is a common characteristic of the linguistic repertoire of the world's population, and represents those who use the practice extensively and purposefully.

Another study is by Bosire (2006) which uncovered that code switching contributed to the identity of Kenyan Americans. The purposeful exercise of code switching was seen as a way for the community to strengthen their ties with one another in maintaining their identity as migrants and also as a way to promote their linguistic legacy (by speaking Swahili and other Kenyan dialects). According to Bosire, the practice of code switching was seen to be the group's way of retaining their identity as it is seen as a "marker of membership" among the Kenyanese. From this research, it is clearly seen that language plays an important role in retaining kinship ties and promoting linguistic legacy.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the study was two folds. First, to investigate the perceived effectiveness of Malaysian blogs in general and second, to determine the dynamics use of English among four most influential Malaysian blogs based on their respective genres. Specifically, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- i. To examine the perceived effects of blogs on respondents' lives
- ii. To determine the dynamics of English language use in Malaysian blogs
- iii. To study the effectiveness of the blogs in delivering their intended message

This study has several limitations. For the first part, the study was confined only to the blog entries that existed in the blogosphere during the research period. For the second part, only four Malaysian blogs were selected from a list of 50 Most Influential Malaysian Blogs as listed by Gaman (2007). Finally, the respondents (to view the blogs) were selected from the final-year TESL undergraduate students in one public university only. Thus, the results of this study have a limited generalisation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research utilised a survey method. According Gall et al. (1996), survey research involves providing careful descriptions of a phenomenon. Its purpose is to generate an accurate description of an event, attitude or behavior.

Selection of Blogs

This study was conducted to examine the influence and language used by Malaysian bloggers. Gaman (2007) listed the 50 Most Influential Blogs in Malaysia (MIBM) in 2007 based on the ranking made by Technorati. The list of the four most influential Malaysian blogs are as listed in Table 1. The selection of blogs was based on the following criteria:

1. Included in Malaysian Most Influential Blog as listed by Gaman (2007) based on the highest ranking blogs of their respective category

- 2. These blogs have a readership and audience who leave comments in their comment boxes found at the end of every blog post

TABLE 1. List of Four Most Influential Malaysian Blogs

	Blog	Technorati Rank	Category
1.	kennysia.com	Rank: 234 (4,828 links from 2,406 blogs)	Personal
2.	sapiensbryan.com	Rank: 604 (2,676 links from 1,577 blogs)	Technology
3.	paultan.org	Rank: 7,360 (863 links from 369 blogs)	Auto
4.	chedet	Rank: 8,402 (1,015 links from 344 blogs)	Politics

Source: Gaman (2007)

Blogosphere

The blog site for the context of blogging is termed as the “blogosphere”. It is an invisible space where blog writing, reading and commenting (or talking about the text) were carried out between blog writers and blog readers. The study examined the blogosphere as a whole, in relation to the norms of communication which were observed by all bloggers alike. This study was designed to examine how blogs are influential towards individual and society, in general. Then, specific focus was given to the Malaysian blogosphere, with the purposeful selection of four blogs in the study to examine dynamics of the language use in those blogs.

Selection of Final-year TESL Students

Participants in the research were selected among final-year trainee teachers majoring in TESL at a public university in Malaysia. Because this was an initial study, a small group (n=30) of TESL fourth-year students was selected. The respondents were asked to surf the four selected blogs prior to filling in the questionnaires.

INSTRUMENT

The instrument used in this study was a set of questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises three parts. First Part (Part I) consists of Demographic Section; Second Part (Part II) is the General Perception Regarding Blogs; and the Last Part (Part III) is the Specific Perception on the Top Four Malaysian Blogs. Part II used 5-point Likert scale (5=strongly agree; 4=agree; 3=not sure; 2=disagree; 1=strongly disagree). Several drafts of the instrument were reviewed by experts in the field. Revisions were made based on their comments and recommendations.

RESULTS

Part I: Respondents' Personal Background

A total of 30 final-year TESL students responded to the survey question at a return rate of 100%. These students were fourth-year TESL students in a premier public university in Malaysia who have already gone through a 10-week teaching practice in selected Malaysian secondary schools. The students should have sufficient knowledge and experience to judge one's proficiency in using English language. Table 2 shows the demographic information of the respondents based on their gender, perception of their language proficiency and their ability to assess English written text.

TABLE 2. Demographic Information of Respondents

	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	10	33.33
	Female	20	66.67
Respondents' rating of their proficiency of the English language	Excellent	2	6.67
	Good	28	93.33
	Poor	-	0
Respondents' ability in assessing English written text	Excellent	-	0
	Good	30	100
	Poor	-	0

The respondents consist of 66.67% (n=20) female students and 33.33% (n=10) male students. The data show that there are more female TESL students as compared to male students in the fourth-year TESL class. The respondents were asked to rate their proficiency of the English language, where 6.67% (n=2) stated their level of English was excellent while the majority (93.33%) stated that their level of English proficiency was good. Respondents were also asked to rate their ability to assess English written text and all of the respondents stated that they were good at appraising English text.

Experience in Surfing Blogs

Respondents' background knowledge was examined to find out if respondents are familiar with blogging or the blogosphere. In addition, the respondents' frequency of visiting blogs are being assessed so as to make sure this survey is valid. Based on the results in Table 3, all of the respondents read blogs. As of the regularity in reading blogs, one-half (50%) of the respondents read blogs everyday, 33.33% (n=10) read blogs every 2 to 3 days and only 16.67% (n=5) of the respondents read blogs on a weekly basis. Based on the data, the respondents seem to be well experienced in reading blogs where the majority of the respondents, 93.33% (n= 28) has at least a year and above experience in reading blogs.

TABLE 3. Frequency in Reading Blogs

	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Respondent who read blogs	Yes	30	100%
	No	-	-
Regularity in reading blogs	Everyday	15	50%
	Every 2 to 3 days	10	33.33%
	Every week	5	16.67%
	Rarely	-	-
	1-6 months	-	-
Experiences in reading blogs	>6 months to 1 year	2	6.67%
	1 year to 3 years	18	60%
	3 years and above	10	33.33%

A descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the survey questionnaires. The statistics from the survey questionnaire were described based on these variables: respondents' background on reading blog, respondents' attitude towards the influence from the blogosphere, respondents' perception regarding the language of the blog and the effectiveness of the blog. Data on the variables collected from the survey questionnaires were described using frequency counts, percentage and means. To facilitate the interpretation of the results, the mean ranges were set as tabulated in Table 4. A mean score of 1.00 to 2.33 indicates a low level, 2.34 to 3.66 shows a moderate level, and 3.67 to 5.00 indicates a high level. The levels were analysed in relation to each of the variable discussed.

TABLE 4. Range and Interpretation for the Mean Scores

Mean Score	Level
1.00 to 2.33	Low
2.34 to 3.66	Moderate
3.67 to 5.00	High

Part II: Dynamics of Language Use among Malaysian Bloggers

This section reports the respondents’ perception regarding blogs in general. The mean scores are shown in Tables 5, 6 and 7. To get a better understanding of the whole picture of the findings, this section is divided into (a) influence from the blogosphere, (b) language of the blog and (c) effectiveness in conveying the message.

Influence from the blogosphere

Respondents’ attitude towards the influences from the blogosphere looked into how blogs influence them individually and the society at large. These views are personally guided by personal past experiences and expectations of the respondents. The attitudes are measured by the degree of agreement towards the sub-construct using the 5-point Likert scale.

Table 5 illustrates the results of the statistical analysis of respondents’ perception regarding the influences from the blogosphere. The data were collected to answer the first research question: How weblogs influence an individual or society? The data were interpreted by referring to the mean ranges set earlier in Table 4. The overall mean score for this sub-construct was 3.63. This shows that the respondents agree that the influence of blogs on their lives was at moderate level. Table 5 also shows that the highest mean is 4.30 which signifies that the respondents believe that blogs are a form of new media. This is followed by the second highest mean which is 4.23. The respondents agree with the statement that blogs play an important role in society. Among the highest means was the belief that there should be a freedom of speech in blogs (m=3.80). However, the lowest mean in Table 5 is

3.03 which the respondents seems uncertain whether reading blogs can influence their thinking.

TABLE 5. Influence from the Blogosphere

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
I believe blogs play an important role in my life.	1 (3.33)	5 (16.67)	5 (16.67)	14 (46.67)	5 (16.67)	3.57
I believe blogs play an important role in the society.	-	1 (3.33)	-	20 (66.67)	9 (30)	4.23
I believe most of the things said in the blogs.	4 (13.33)	2 (6.67)	6 (20)	18 (60)	-	3.27
I believe blogs are the new media.	-	3 (10)	5 (16.67)	12 (40)	15 (50)	4.30
I believe reading blogs influences our language usage.	-	2 (6.67)	21 (70)	4 (13.33)	3 (10)	3.27
I believe reading blogs influences our thinking.	-	7 (23.33)	15 (33.33)	8 (26.67)	-	3.03
I believe there should be a freedom of speech in blogs.	-	4 (13.33)	6 (20)	12 (40)	8 (26.67)	3.80

Overall mean score = 3.63

Language of the Blog

Respondents’ perception towards the language use of the blogs in general are analysed. The view of language use in the blogs are personally guided by personal past experiences and expectations of the respondents. Table 6 presents the results of the statistical analysis of respondents’ perceptions towards the language of the blogs. The data therefore answer this research question: What is the English language proficiency level of Malaysian bloggers? The overall mean score for this sub-construct is 3.61. This shows that, on average, the accuracy of language usage by the bloggers is at moderate level as perceived by the fourth-year TESL students. The highest mean is 4.23 which means that the respondents have agreed that the bloggers use code switching most

of the time. The lowest mean is 2.90 which signifies that grammatical errors committed by bloggers in their blogs are still prevalent. The item states that “I believe the bloggers has little to no error in their grammatical structure.” And the respondents seem to disagree with the statement (m=2.90). Other items are rather well distributed on the medium range, ranging between 3.80 to 3.57.

TABLE 6. Language of the Blog

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
I believe that Malaysian blogs are easy to understand.	1 (3.33)	5 (16.67)	5 (16.67)	14 (46.67)	5 (16.67)	3.57
I believe that Malaysian blogs use code switching most of the time.	-	1 (3.33)	-	20 (66.67)	9 (30)	4.23
I believe that Malaysian blogs use a variety of sentence structure in their entries.	-	2 (6.67)	6 (20)	18 (60)	4 (13.33)	3.80
I believe that Malaysian blogs have little to no error in their grammatical structure.	-	7 (23.33)	5 (16.67)	18 (60)	-	2.90
I believe Malaysian blogs use accurate punctuation and spelling.	-	4 (13.33)	5 (16.67)	18 (60)	3 (10)	3.57
I believe Malaysian blogs use appropriate style and tone.	-	7 (23.33)	3 (10)	15 (33.33)	5 (16.67)	3.60
Overall mean score = 3.61						

Effectiveness of the Blog

Next, the respondents assessed the effectiveness of the blogs in delivering their intended message to their readers. Table 7 shows the results of the statistical analysis of respondents’ perception towards the effectiveness of bloggers in delivering their intended message to their readers. The data therefore answer this research question: How effective

did the bloggers deliver their intended message to their readers using English as their medium? The overall mean score is 3.68 indicating a modest effectiveness of the blogs in conveying their message to their intended audience. However, the respondents rated rather highly on blogs’ simplicity (m=3.93) and relevancy (m=3.93). Other items in this sub-domain were rated moderately with the means ranged from 3.67 to 3.36.

TABLE 7. Effectiveness of the Blogs

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
I believe that Malaysian blogs are easy to understand.	-	1 (3.33)	5 (16.67)	19 (63.33)	5 (16.67)	3.93
I believe that Malaysian blogs talk about topics that are interesting and relevant.	-	1 (3.33)	4 (13.33)	20 (66.67)	5 (16.67)	3.93
I am always excited and anxious to know the ending of the entry.	-	2 (6.67)	10 (33.33)	18 (60)	-	3.53
I believe that the message the blogger is trying to convey is being delivered effectively.	-	7 (23.33)	5 (16.67)	18 (60)	-	3.36
I can often relate the blogger message towards myself and the society.	-	4 (13.33)	5 (16.67)	18 (60)	3 (10)	3.67
Overall mean score = 3.68						

Part III: Dynamics of Language Used in Specific Blogs

This section discusses about the influence and the language used in four specific Malaysian blogs. As mentioned earlier, the four Malaysian blogs were conveniently selected from a list of 50 Most Influential Malaysian Blogs (MIMB) as listed by Gaman (2007) based on rating by Technorati. The blogs include:

www.kennysia.com – Personal blog
www.sapiensbryan.com - Technology blog
www.paultan.org- Auto Blog
www.chedet.com – Political blog

Based on these blogs, we focused on their language use and content in delivering the intended message accordingly.

Accuracy and Effectiveness of the Specific Blogs

The selected final-year TESL students were asked to view critically the four selected Malaysian blogs for 30 minutes each blog. They were also asked to fill in the questionnaire after viewing each blog. The two main parts for the assessment are (a) accuracy of language use and (b) the effectiveness of the blog. For each part, there are several elements studied. For example, accuracy of language use has five elements: (a) varied sentence structure, (b) accurate vocabulary, (c) correct grammatical structure, (d) correct spelling and punctuation, and (d) use appropriate style and tone. The respondents just needed to tick [Yes] if the element studied is present in the blog or [No] if the element is not present. The percentage in each cell in Table 8 was calculated based on how many tick [Yes] in the cell.

Table 8 shows overwhelming majority (97%) of the respondents agreed that the bloggers used varied sentence structure. Almost 80% of respondents agreed that these bloggers used accurate punctuation and spelling while another 85% believe that the style and tone used are appropriate. However, only 69% of the respondents concurred that the bloggers used accurate grammatical structures.

TABLE 8. Accurate Language Use in the Blogs

	kennysia	paultan	sapiensbryan	chedet	Average
Varied sentence structure.	100%	88%	100%	100%	97%
Vocabulary shows sophistication and is used with precision.	72%	88%	72%	88%	80%
Accurate grammatical structure.	72%	72%	60%	72%	69%
Punctuation and spelling is accurate.	78%	83%	72%	83%	79%
The style and tone used are appropriate.	83%	100%	72%	83%	85%

Effectiveness of Specific Blogs

Table 9 shows, on an average, 83% of the respondents agreed that topics reported in these blogs are consistent and relevant. Similarly, majority of the respondents believe that the content of the blog is easy to understand (82%) and the message that they deliver across was done effectively (81%). However, only 66% of the respondents believe that the readers' interest is arouse and sustained throughout a blog entry. Based on the four blogs mentioned, it seems that these blogs are chosen to be in the list of Malaysian most influential blogs because of their well published blogs and of their loyal readers. In addition, through the analysis, these bloggers are perceived to be able to deliver their message across to their readers rather effectively.

TABLE 9. Blogs Effectiveness in Delivering their Message

	kennysia	paultan	sapiens- bryan	chedet	Average
The content of the blog is easy to understand.	83%	88%	72%	83%	82%
The topic is addressed with consistent relevance.	77%	83%	83%	88%	83%
The interest of the reader is aroused and sustained throughout the writing.	60%	60%	72%	72%	66%
The message is deliver across effectively.	83%	83%	72%	83%	81%

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The research results are discussed in two broad areas which include: (i) general view of the blogosphere, and (ii) specific view on the selected four most influential Malaysian blogs. In the first section, we examined the respondents' response towards the influence of the blogosphere, the language of the blog and the effectiveness of the blog as presented in the questionnaires. The second part of the discussion focuses the respondents' responses towards the accuracy of language use and the bloggers' effectiveness in conveying his/her intended message of the selected blogs.

Influence of the Blogosphere

In general, the study found that most respondents believe that blogs play an important role in their life. This result comes in tally with the report from a recent research by Abu Hassan Hasbullah that claims 70% of the recent election results in Malaysia were influenced by information

in the blogs (The Star, 3 April 2008). This could be a manifestation of how influential blogs could be in a society.

However, only 60% of the respondents state that they believe most of the things that being written in blogs. This finding shows that blog readers are aware that the information portrays in blogs are not always accurate and can therefore be in doubt. Nevertheless, a large majority (90%) of the respondents agree that blog is a new tool that can be used effectively. As the popularity of blogs grew, many people started to create their own blog. This is in line with a report that states there are 500,000 active bloggers in Malaysia (The Star, 3 April 2008) and blogging in Malaysia is among the highest in the world. With so much activity and popularity, blogging is indeed a powerful tool that cannot be taken lightly.

However, more that two-thirds (70%) of the respondents state that they are uncertain regarding the blog's influence on their language usage. This is because the respondents are trained in English and therefore have high awareness of the different forms and function of the language. In addition, more than two-thirds of the respondents believe that bloggers should be given the freedom of speech in allowing them to write according to their hearts' content. But only one-third of the respondents believe that censorship has to play a role in blogs so as sensitive issue will not be get out of hand. This is in accordance with one of our blog participants who wrote "...having to self-censor is the worst thing that can ever happen. The blog is not very personal anymore, but I give myself generous leeway," Sia reflected. "And things can get out-of-hand and exaggerated online" (Sia, 2008).

Language of the Blog

The majority of the respondents believe that the four Malaysian blogs used standard English most of the time. This is supported by what Nilsson (2005) says of blogging patterns, where it is observed that there is a clearly defined sense of community within blogs, which reveal an obvious on-going conversation occurring within this phenomenon. The unique pattern of discourse within the blogosphere, Nilsson notes, is the combination of both monologue and the dialogue in a space-bound, electronic environment.

Interestingly, the respondents believe that the blogs exercise code switching most of the time. This shows that among the speech pattern identified within the blog interaction between participants (both the writer and the readers), there are elements such as code switching or code mixing, due to the fact that the readership of the audience are made up of bilingual and multilingual speakers. In the survey too, it shows that more than two-thirds of the respondents believe that the blogs used a variety of sentence structure in their blog entries and the four Malaysian bloggers used accurate punctuation and spelling. This shows that being considered a Malaysian most influential blogger, he or she needs to have certain level of English proficiency to be able to write entries with good English and therefore little errors are presented in their work.

Effectiveness of Blogs

In general, the majority of respondents believe that Malaysian blogs are easy to comprehend. Besides that, majority of respondents find that the topics discussed in the blogs are interesting and relevant where more than two-thirds of the respondents find that they can relate to the bloggers' message well. This shows that blog serves as a tool to facilitate social interaction. It can also be observed that the ability for a blogger to become "intimate" with their readers by sharing their personal thoughts and views, is the determining factor for attracting an "audience" or a reader who will keep coming back to read more, and even share his or her own feedback.

Perceptions on the Specific Blogs

All four blogs received favorable feedback from the respondents. This can be seen from the bloggers background where all the bloggers are fluent in English and has no problem in communicating or writing in English. However, there is a moderate use of precise vocabulary as most of the readers use specific linguistic features within the context of the blog conversation via written text. The accurate use of grammatical structure, punctuation and spelling is also on the lower end because of the use of conversational language and also Malaysian English. However,

the style and tone used in their blogs are pretty much appropriate and acceptable.

Because both the blog writer and blog reader (the audience) are bilingual (speaker of English as well as Bahasa Melayu) or multilingual (speaker of English, Bahasa Melayu and Mandarin) there is the inclusion of the Malay and other language in the interactions between the blog writer and the readers. This goes back to what Nilsson (2005) said about the conversational mode of interaction via Blogspeak, and within this context of communication, the bilingual bloggers include code switching (as if they were speaking in real life to one another), via the commenting and blog writing activities that they partake in.

Among the speech patterns identified within the blog interaction between the participants (both from the blog writer and readers), include short forms of spelling, emoticons (virtual 'laugh' and smileys), as well as code switching. The shortened form of these elements is very much apparent in the these blogs especially on personal blogs such as 'kennysia.com'. The full spelling of a word (example the word 'are' become 'r' and the word 'you' become 'u', are shorten in the form of internet language). Capitalization and punctuation do not seem to be relevant in several aspects of the blogs especially in the commentary as it is a seemingly 'spoken' language between the reader and the blogger. In terms of code switching, the question tag 'kan'? is an element taken from Bahasa Melayu (BM) and is seen throughout the four blogs mentioned. Besides that, affixes like 'la', 'leh' and 'ho' are also seen across the blogs giving it a feel of the Malaysian English. Besides that code mixing, it can be seen all across the blogs where words like 'haha' and 'lepaking'. 'haha' is deem a universally accepted mode of internet language to indicate laughter which can also be written in other forms such as 'hehehe' or 'LOL'. The word 'lepaking' however, is an element of code mixing where the English language continuous tense 'ing' is incooperated into the BM word 'lepak' which means loiter, thus changing the verb form of 'lepak' into a continuous verb 'lepaking'.

These conversational code switching and code mixing elements are usually used in spoken form among the bilingual speaking Malaysians. However, within the blogosphere, the bloggers seem to employ these strategies to communicate in more informal manner with one another. This is to further strengthen the camaraderie and kinship

characteristics of belonging to a speech community, which in this context is the Malaysian bloggers community. Thus, it can be said that the blogosphere interactions of bilingual or multilingual bloggers are colourful spaces to explore due to the vast array of speech patterns that exist within the discourse setting. As discussed previously, the usage of linguistic elements such as short forms of spelling, emoticons, as well as code switching and code mixing is being utilised by the bloggers in their blogs.

Content of Specific Blogs

The TESL students perceive that the four Malaysian bloggers wrote good content in their blog entries. Their blog entries are presumably easy to understand and often they address current issues which are relevant to the genre of their blogs. All the four blogs do fairly well in sustaining the interests of the readers throughout their entry. It is important to maintain the interests of the readers, as just like reading a book, readers get bored easily. Most of the blogs observed put in colourful pictures and moving animation to capture readers' attention. And when asked if the messages of the bloggers are delivered effectively, many respondents' agreed. Language proficiency, topics, popularity, acquaintance are several reasons that determine ones interest in reading a particular blog. Blood (2002) states that with blogging, there is an emergence of self-realisation and development that perhaps had not existed before one engages in the practice. Over a period of time, this development is expected to be enhanced as more and more readers communicated with one another via blogging, thus, enabling a feeling of camaraderie to emerge among the members of the speech community made up of participants who share similar goals and common interests. They are tied into the community based on the interests that they share, and that is the determining factor that keeps the member of the speech community reading and commenting within a particular discourse space of a selected blog. This idea of shared, common interest within a particular speech community is clearly seen in all the four blogs that would made them so popular and influential.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are several implications that have emerged from the study. The first implication is the varied linguistic features such as code switching and code mixing patterns dissected from the participants' blogs. This implies that blogs tend to have linguistic features of their own. For example, kennysia.com tends to talk about events and functions that he attended and his view on several current issues in Kuching and other cities in Malaysia. He is a representative of a working adult and his literary practices and views stated in the blog imply his roles and identity. Chedet.com on the other hand, talks about his political views on current political scenarios in Malaysia. He is a retired Prime Minister of Malaysia and therefore holds certain position and power to talk about what he is best at - politics. In his blog, which gains popularity, he puts forward critical comments on current issues especially regarding political scenario in Malaysia.

The findings also show that the world of blogosphere is such a complex wonderful world filled with colourful identities. This is shown in the various linguistic features presented in their blogs and also the interaction with one another (blogger-reader, reader-blogger) in their meaning-making process. The use of different media tool such as video, pictures, colours, songs makes each blog uniquely its own right and this in turn makes the bloggers aware of who they are, their surrounding and how issues affect their life through the discussion and interaction via the blog. For example, in code switching where it demonstrates the bilingual or multilingual identity of a speaker, when done through blogging, brings a wider impact to the world of blogging where it gives them identity when the world of internet is in fact inhabited by millions of countless faceless and nameless people. Through this research, it also implies the importance of language used in blogs for linguists and educationists to study. The implication for linguists and language educators of blog studies will grow many folds as this new mode of communication provides a whole new opportunity to explore. There is a new window of opportunity in blog studies but the language of the blog often holds the key to this window.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study support the thesis that blogs play an important role in people's lives. From this research, we can conclude that the blogosphere in Malaysia is quite influential and that blogs may influence some aspects of the people's lives. The accuracy of English language used in blogs is at moderate level and the use of code-switching/code-mixing are among the speech patterns identified in Malaysian blogs. Despite the use of code switching/code mixing in some blogs, the bloggers, in general, have no problem in delivering their message across. Analyses on the four specific Malaysian blogs found that there are the unique linguistic features such as code switching and code mixing patterns dissected from the participants' blogs. There are also the different codes and functions each individual bloggers have in terms of their own genre. This may imply that the influence of the societal and educational aspects on the bloggers' view points. Finally, the study demonstrates that the world of blogosphere is such a complex cyber world filled with colourful identities. The results also reveal the various linguistic features presented in the blogs and also the interaction with one another (blogger-reader, reader-blogger) in their meaning-making process.

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