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Power, Dominance and Homosocial Solidarity in Young Men's Cyber Talk

Kuasa, Dominasi dan Perpaduan Homososial dalam Interaksi Siber Remaja Lelaki

AZIANURA HANI SHAARI & SHAHRUL NAZMI SANNUSI

ABSTRACT

Men and women speak differently as their linguistic behavior reflects their gender identity and signifies their position in the society. This article discusses the conversational style of men in the online communication environment, using the Kiesling's framework of men's language. A documentation of naturally occurring conversations on Facebook was made over a 12-month period whereby data is categorized and analysed using Content Analysis, WordSmith Tools 5.0 and MS Word Advanced Find Function. Purposive sampling was employed in selecting the participants. The sample consisted of 60 males and 60 females to allow for comparison. Language produced by the male participants, however, remained as the central issue of the analysis as well as discussion. If Kiesling's framework discusses men's language from the western sociocultural perspectives, findings of the present research indicated a list of variables of men's discourse in the specific context of the Malaysian online communication environment. Apart from that, the findings have demonstrated some culturally-embedded elements of power, dominance, and homosocial solidarity as well as a strong use of masculine speech forms in this specific context of male's interaction. Finally, the findings have also suggested some significant aspects of men's discourse in the specific context of the Malaysian online communication environment.

Keywords: Power; dominance; homosocial solidarity; men's language; online communication environment

ABSTRAK

Lelaki dan wanita bertutur secara berbeza disebabkan tingkah laku bahasa yang mencerminkan identiti jantina dan menandakan kedudukan mereka dalam masyarakat. Kertas kerja ini membincangkan tentang gaya perbualan lelaki dalam persekitaran komunikasi dalam talian di Malaysia. Dapatan kajian dianalisis dengan menggunakan kerangka bahasa lelaki yang disarankan oleh Kiesling. Dokumentasi perbualan yang berlaku secara semula jadi di Facebook telah dibuat dalam tempoh 12 bulan di mana data dikategorikan dan dianalisis menggunakan kaedah analisis kandungan, WordSmith Tools 5.0 dan MS Word Advanced Find Function. Kaedah persampelan bertujuan telah digunakan dalam memilih peserta. Sampel kajian terdiri daripada 60 lelaki dan 60 perempuan untuk tujuan perbandingan. Bagaimanapun, bahasa yang dihasilkan oleh peserta remaja lelaki kekal sebagai isu utama analisis serta perbincangan. Jika rangka kerja Kiesling ini membincangkan bahasa kaum lelaki daripada perspektif sosial and budaya barat, hasil kajian ini menunjukkan senarai pembolehubah wacana remaja lelaki dalam konteks persekitaran komunikasi dalam talian di Malaysia. Selain itu, hasil kajian telah menunjukkan beberapa elemen budaya terpendam seperti kuasa, dominasi dan perpaduan homososial serta penggunaan perkataan maskulin dalam interaksi khusus kaum remaja lelaki di Malaysia. Akhir sekali, dapatan kajian ini juga telah mencadangkan beberapa pembolehubah penting wacana remaja lelaki dalam konteks persekitaran komunikasi dalam talian di Malaysia.

Kata kunci: Kuasa; dominasi; perpaduan homososial; bahasa remaja lelaki; interaksi atas talian

INTRODUCTION

For decades, people have been arguing and reconstructing the concept of women's language (Lakoff 1975; Tannen 1990; Coates 2002; Coates 2013; Bucholtz 2014), leaving men's speech unattended. Suffice to say that in the studies of language and communication, men are literally invisible and always seen as a homogeneous group (Kiesling 2007). There is no universal framework of men's language as it is very much culturally oriented and diverse according to societies and regions. Regardless of the diverse social roles and expectations, men across the globe, however, demonstrate similar qualities of dominance, power, homosocial solidarity and hetero sexism in their communication behavior (Cameron 1997; Kiesling 2007). Tannen (1990) believes that men and women are born to speak differently due to personality factors. Men are not expected to speak like women, as it might tarnish their image of masculinity while women should adhere to certain norms of interaction that highlight their values of femininity.

By the time boys and girls become adults, they would have acquired two different norms of interaction that reflect their gender identity. One of the possible factors that shapes and promotes this deviation in gender-based linguistic style is the tendency of children to play and make friends with those of the same gender during their school years (Maccoby 1990). In other words, women and men are shaped to communicate differently since childhood (Lakoff 1975). As a man is not supposed to talk like a woman, a woman is also not encouraged to communicate like a man (Tannen 1990). It is very important for them to maintain this communication behavior, prescribed by their norms and culture, in order to get accepted by their society and the surrounding people (Tannen 1990). Men purposely employ certain linguistic features and patterns that reflect their gender identity and personality (Coates 2002, 2013; Bucholtz 2014).

In discourse, the word power is referred to the act of "powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants" Fairclough (1989: 46). According to Fairclough (1989), the concept of power in language and communication may work in terms of the "content, social relations and subjects" (1989: 46). Coates (2013) describes the concept of dominance as an approach that portrays women as

an oppressed group. Researchers employing this model (for example West and Zimmerman 1983) are concerned to demonstrate how male dominance is portrayed through certain communication behaviors and linguistic practices. Sedgwick (1985) defines the word homosociality as a form of bonding and mutual understanding that people of the same gender have among each other. This concept is frequently employed in studies on men and masculinity. The concept is usually applied to discuss how men, "through their friendships and intimate collaborations with other men, maintain and defend the gender order and patriarchy" (Hammarén and Johansson 2014:1). This article, however, will use homosocial solidarity as a concept that refers to the similar explanation. However, the word solidarity is seen important in our context as it demonstrates men's social closeness based on their similarities such as interests and social activities, the amount of contact, mutual knowledge as well as shared values and cultural background. The present research, therefore, will learn about men's language in the online communication environment and unpack the following issues at the same time: What do young Malaysian men talk about, when they communicate online? And how do they express dominance, power and homosocial solidarity in their online communication practice?

EXPLORING MEN'S SPEECH

Among the important elements in each phase of adolescents' life are the formation, construction and reconstruction of identity. The years of adolescents' life mark some physical and emotional changes and a self-definition process; a period of transmission from the parents' dominance to the manifestation of self-independence. Neinstein (2008) describes the late and older adolescents as more stable in defining their self-identity, capable of making judgments and think critically, more prepared for a serious intimate relationship and do not entirely rely on friends as a major support system.

When it comes to language and communication, Thurlow (2003) believes that teenagers, especially males, are often perceived as "inadequate communicators or language users, which is why it is very common for one to hear the exaggerated folk-linguistic complaint of "I just can't understand what the teenagers are saying these days – It's

like a different language!" (2003:51). Men do not only have their own communication strategies and norms of interaction, but also have some unique ways of performing certain speech acts.

Noller and Bagi (1985) posit that men prefer interpersonal communication more than women. Coleman and Hendry (1999) also stress that men "have more instrumental and action-centered relationships" than (1999:142-143) women and this is supported by Thurlow's (2003) arguments as he states, "boys prioritize transactional concerns, thinking in terms of more technical or formal qualities such as being knowledgeable or the ability to speak in certain languages" (2003: 55) in their conversation. For most men, a talk is generally a way for them to keep their independence; negotiate, and maintain their status in the society (Tannen 1990). This is done by demonstrating certain knowledge and skills, as well as holding central stage through verbal performance, such as storytelling, joking, or imparting information. From childhood, men learn to employ verbal interaction as a way to get and keep attention. Tannen (1990) also found that men are more comfortable speaking in big groups made up of people they know less than a private and personal conversation.

Apart from that, men are also described as less supportive contributors to the conversation than women (Hannah and Murachver 1999) and they enjoy being in charge and dominate a conversation, especially when introducing new topics to be discussed or bringing upon the conversation (Fishman 1980). In other words, men like to be in control and demonstrate their individuality through certain styles of language.

Furthermore, men establish their status through language when sharing information with others and their conversations are developed and maintained based on mutual activities rather than relationship (Aries and Johnson 1983). They do not use standard forms and prefer vernacular forms because they carry a macho image of masculinity and toughness. Holmes (1995) suggests that men are not used to employing polite forms of speech, are not comfortable apologizing and are less facilitative conversational partners. Unlike women, men can be very talkative or expressive in formal or public situations. Mehl and Pennebaker (2003) forwarded a few criteria of men's language. Mehl and Pennebaker (2003) found that men use a lot of articles in their language, they employ a lot

of swear words, prefer to use large and long words (6 characters and above) and prefer to show their anger instead of hiding it.

Mulac, Bradac, and Gibbons (2001) reviewed and analysed more than 30 studies, and proposed a list of systematic ways of distinguishing language features according to gender preferences. Some details are given as follows:

1. Men prefer to use more "references to quantity" than women, for instance, by giving percentage and figures.
2. Men like to use "judgmental adjectives" such as good, dumb and etc.
3. Men prefer directive language.
4. Men like to use a first person singular pronoun in their conversation.
5. Men's language is perceived to be higher in terms of its "dynamism" – a stronger and more aggressive language than women's.

KIESLING'S ANALYSIS OF MEN, MASCULINITY AND LANGUAGE

Kiesling (2007) put forward a thorough discussion about men, masculinity and language. He describes men's language as invisible to society, since not many studies have been conducted on men's linguistic behavior. The theory of masculinity according to Kiesling (2007) relates social performances with semiotic utterances and these social performances vary according to different cultural models and practices. "This lack of specificity entails a flexibility such that the definition can remain constant from culture to culture, while the nature of masculinity may differ" (Kiesling 2007: 659).

Men's speech according to Kiesling (2007) is something performed, instead of inherent. Masculinity and men's language don't have to be exclusively related in all men's communication since the concept of masculinity is not only restricted to men. However, men, stereo typically, regardless of what they practice and where they come from, are expected to demonstrate certain qualities of masculinity in their speech behavior. Kiesling (2007:658) identifies four main cultural discourses of masculinity:

1. Gender difference – a kind of discourse that distinguishes men's and women's types of speech. This is present in almost all cultures.

2. Heterosexism – the idea of heterosexism lies in the notion of, to be masculine is to be interested in women and not men.
3. Dominance – a universal ideology that associates masculinity with dominance, power and authority of men are expected and always being portrayed as stronger, in control, and more powerful than women in various ways.
4. Male solidarity- this refers to the natural bonding and mutual understanding that men have among themselves. This involves men's activities without women's participation.

The above masculine discourses are seen relevant in most contexts and fairly universal, especially among those who observe the European cultures (Stephen et al. 2001). By relying on the universal premises of “men are socialized to desire to be men and men actively try to be men through their social performances” (Kiesling 2007: 658), the present study aims to unpack some aforementioned masculine cultural discourses (dominance and male solidarity) from the Asian perspective, particularly on the types of men's speech in the Malaysian online communication environment.

POWER AND DOMINANCE IN MEN'S SPEECH

Regardless of how power and dominance are portrayed, discussion of masculinity across cultures would always revolve around these two aspects. Asma (1996) also describes the higher position of men in the traditional Malay society than women. The Malay women who observe the traditional culture, according to Asma, not only are expected to make indirect comments and requests, but also use a low tone of voice with the elders (men in particular). Apart from that, women are also expected to lower their gaze and avoid eye contact when interacting with their fathers, husbands or older brothers as these men hold higher hierarchical positions in both family and social institutions. The men's speech is constantly associated with strong personalities, dominance and power and men in most cultures around the world (if not all) are brought up with such perceptions and ideology on the kind of communication behavior that they are expected to perform.

As dominance and power are quite subjective, men therefore carry out these qualities differently, such as by talking about their positions in organizations, physical abilities, wealth, knowledge or skills (Kiesling 2007). Among the communication behaviors that demonstrate these qualities would be interruption, as men are said to interrupt more often than women (Tannen 1993) as part of their strategies of showing dominance. Finally, men also demonstrate dominance through certain masculine linguistic features and once again, these features vary according to cultures and societies.

MAINTAINING HOMOSOCIAL SOLIDARITY THROUGH INSULTS AND COMPETING DISCOURSES

Men have their own ways of using languages as solidarity markers. If women employ words that are emotionally invested in order to maintain their relationships (Tannen 1990; Coates 2002), men on the hand, would insult each other to develop homosocial relationship and achieve solidarity (Coates 2002; Kiesling 2007).

Not only is it clear that the insults and competition are building solidarity, it is clear that the men are displaying this playful competitiveness for the potential member to create a desire to join the fraternity. Therefore, the men not only engage in competitive speech forms, but they also treat them as desirable and joyful. Competitive speech genres, acts, and stances, such as insults and boasts are also used in other homosocial activities in the fraternity (Kiesling 2007: 665)

Acting cool is also another strategy in men's speech. They use the word '*dude*' constantly, in order to appear less formal and intense in most situations (Kiesling 2004a). Men are also less polite and more competitive than women and employ more vernacular forms as it indicates toughness and working-class masculinity.

Keisling's (2007) study addresses how the cultural discourse of power influences the way men interact and how their speech is observed. Men have their own ways of achieving solidarity through communication. Sampath (1997) for instance, describes male identities in Trinidad as a conflict values of respectability and reputation that influences power and solidarity. According to Sampath (1997), men are observed as success objects and they are valued based on certain material achievements. For the men in Trinidad,

their reputation in society is highly important, thus solidarity is established through achievement and material possession. Herdt's (1987; 1999) study of the Sambia people show the men's extreme prejudice against women and how it is subordinated to their solidarity.

When it comes to online activities, male and female adolescents are said to have different needs and interests. Greenfield and Subrahmanyam (2003) found how the Internet functions as a platform for youngsters to build solidarity. The male adolescents for instance, use the Internet as an avenue to share common interests and discuss men's topics that reflect masculinity such as sports, men's hobbies and academic achievement.

Just like in verbal interaction, it is also not normal for men to express their emotion and feelings in their online conversation as they are more interested in entertainment instead of relationship (Rainie 2003). Solidarity is not built based on emotion. Men's cyber speech normally revolve around current issues (Greenfield & Subrahmanyam 2003) and they swear a lot too (Newman et al. 2008).

Our previous studies, however, found that men use fewer words than women in their online communication. They write short and simple messages, use informal closing and opening and use fewer acronyms and abbreviation than women, in their online communication practice (Siti Hamin & Azianura Hani 2012). Solidarity is not portrayed through emotional expressions, but common interests and shared ideologies.

THE STUDY

A documentation of naturally occurring conversations on Facebook was made over a 12-month period whereby data is categorized and analysed using Content Analysis, WordSmith

Tools 5.0 and MS Word Advanced Find Function. Purposive sampling was employed in selecting the research participants. The sample consisted of 120 online speakers, 60 males and 60 females and this group of different genders was found valuable for comparison purposes. Language produced by the male participants, however, remained as the central issue of the discussion.

The age group of the sample was determined according to the duration of Generation Y, as given by several researchers such as Tapscott (2009). The participants were born between 1990 and 1993, and are known as Generation Y, who represent Malaysian young adults from different parts of the country. The sample is also a group of college graduates from various higher education institutions in Malaysia. Another rationale for selecting participants of this age group is that they are perceived as the IT generation who has had the most influence on the Internet and its online lingo (Tapscott 2009).

According to Castells (2010), people with a four-year college degree are more attached to the Internet, compared to those with elementary or basic levels of education. Due to such reasons, this group of young Malaysian Facebook users consists of those who are still studying in a college or university, or had recently graduated from any local or overseas institution. Another criterion considered in the selection of participants was their multiracial background and identity. The group of participants consisted of Malays, Chinese and Indians. The reason for employing Malays, Chinese and Indians as respondents is that these three ethnic groups are the major races in Malaysia. They represent the identity of the country that consisted of people from different mother tongues, cultures and beliefs. All participants were selected from the same large Malaysian Facebook network.

The breakdown of the sample is as follows:

TABLE 1. Breakdown of sample

Participants/ Research Tools	Malays		Chinese		Indians		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Content Analysis- (12-month's documentation of online conversation)	20	20	20	20	20	20	120

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Purposive sampling was employed in selecting the respondents. 20.0% of the sample population reported their hometown around Selangor, 11.67 % from Penang and 12.5% from Johor. Furthermore, 23.33% of the respondents reported their current location as Kuala Lumpur, 31.67% currently located in Selangor and less than 5% are currently working or studying in other countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore and Pakistan. No evidence existed indicating that any

of these participants are non-Malaysian citizens or international Facebook users from other countries.

The entire analysis draws on a compilation of 324,362 words, which were documented using the Word Count Function in WordSmith Tool 5.0. Selected variables and linguistic elements were then analysed based on Kiesling's (2007) general elements of men's language such as dominance, power and solidarity. The findings were further analysed based on the following variables (such as solidarity, power and dominance) within the same framework of Kiesling's Men Language:

TABLE 3. No. of words according to different groups of participants

Group of Participants	No. of Words
Malay Male	54 972 words
Malay Female	88 440 words
Chinese Male	31 496 words
Chinese Female	44 802 words
Indian Male	23 213 words
Indian Female	81 439 words
Total	324 362 words

FINDINGS

MEN'S SPEECH IN CYBERSPACE: WHAT DO WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE COMMUNICATE ONLINE?

Joseph (2010) believes that solidarity is achieved when a group of people shares the same interests towards something for quite some time. Table 4 demonstrates some common social interests and online activities engaged by the participants:

TABLE 4. Social Interests and Online Activities

Topics/ Social interests	Malay Female	Malay Male	Chinese Female	Chinese Male	Indian Female	Indian Male	Total-unit (1discussion=1 unit)
Entertainment- singers/ actors, songs, movies	400	284	324	479	576	819	2882
YouTube	651	511	693	1755	341	651	4602
Love/Relationship	34	3	37	29	67	43	213
Japanese-pop culture- anime, 'Manga'	2	52	1	20	0	0	75
Korean pop culture- music/songs/singers/ actors/actresses/ dramas	25	22	31	74	5	1	158
Fashion-clothes, make up	22	0	44	4	15	1	86
Daily activities- lectures, exams, tutorials, assignments	58	77	97	85	66	64	447

Politics- government, political parties	0	9	0	44	0	0	53
Religion	0	11	0	2	0	0	13
Food	99	19	76	62	81	61	398
Gadgets-laptop, mobile phone, I phone	83	80	20	18	21	15	237
Online Games –(e.g. DOTA)	1	42	8	27	0	1	79

With 2,882 units of occurrences related to entertainment engaged by participants from all ethnic groups, it is found that entertainment stands as the most popular online activity among these young people. As noted by many other researchers (Horrigan & Rainie 2002; Rainie 2003), the Internet provides various sources of entertainment to its users. With unlimited access to a number of websites that offer all sorts of entertainment around the world, the Internet acts as the main channel of entertainment for participants with better options and choices compared with other inventions such as radio and television.

One of the findings pertaining to online activities and social interest would be the massive use of 'You Tube' (an entertainment website that provides various types of online videos) among the participants. With 4,602 videos downloaded by participants from this website throughout the year, finding implies how this online entertainment tool (You Tube) plays a significant role in providing a vast source of entertainment for both male and female young online users in Malaysia. Finding also indicates a bigger number of discussions pertaining to entertainment among the male participants (1582 sets of discussion employed by 60 males), thus supports previous researchers

(Rainie 2003; Newman et al. 2008) who suggest that men's talk normally revolve around general topics such as entertainment and current issues and avoid discussing personal matters such as relationship, family and feelings.

We found some dissimilarities between males' and females' online activities and social interests. Online games (such as DOTA) for instance, are more popular among the Malay and Chinese male users and not the females. Paechter (2003) termed some online activities (such as online games) as 'masculine', and other personal-related activities such as online chatting as more feminine and highly associated with girls (Holloway et al. 2000).

We also found that not all participants from the three ethnic groups share the same social interests when it comes to online activities. One finding observed through this study would be the infiltration of both Korean and Japanese cultures through various entertainment resources such as music, movies and animations. Discussions on Manga (comics created in Japan) and other Japanese animation, however, are only popular among the Malay and Chinese male participants, but not the Indians. The following conversations engaged by 7 male participants demonstrate the trend:

TABLE 5. Men's topics of conversation

Sample 1:
i. P1: There is somehow some special resonance between her voice and music instruments...
P2: like it!XD
P1: love her vocal...XD
P2: dun tease me dude...XD
P1: haha...not tease..i am praising
P3: yar meh?haha...XD
P4: You love her appearance la..dont geh geh
P1: zzz...don't blow my cover la...i love everything on this video, including those pretty girls with their violins..XD
P2: very nice!!!
P1: I just like this video very much! Watch over and over again...

Sample 2:

- ii. *P5: What Naruto character are you most like?*
P6: Neji.
P7: You have the ability to see one's power, chakra. You can kickass and still be loyal to your team.
P5: Can be true.. Clone of urself..
P7: become vampire... XD!!
P5: can't imagine a turtle turn into a vampire.. "Tur-pire" ? XD
P6: Hahahahaha...
P7: there will b 2 "Tur-pire" if wang wanna clone it summor.. =.='
XD
-

Online political participation is another common activity engaged by online users. Findings, however, show that this activity is only dominated by the Chinese male participants and not the others. Predictably, discussions on food and fashion were highly dominated by the females of all the three ethnic groups, while the majority of young Malaysian males are more interested in sports, especially football games and world known players.

Without a doubt, common social interests might help in creating unity and establishing solidarity. Men achieve homosocial solidarity through certain communication strategies and one of them would be through shared interests, similar activities and topics of conversation. These masculine discourses such as the Japanese animation and comics (Manga), online games, football and serious political issues are among the topics of conversation that men would only discuss among themselves, without the involvement of women. The idea of performing the same activities and having specific interests (associated with men) not only indicate a mutual understanding and homosocial solidarity but also highlight the qualities of being masculine. Researchers (Tannen 1990; Cameron 1997; Coates 2002; Kiesling 2007) agree that men basically practice certain social performances in order to distinguish themselves from women. "Male solidarity is a discourse that takes as given a bond among men. Men are understood to normatively want (and need) to do things with groups of other men exclusive of women" (Kiesling 2007: 658).

HOMOSOCIAL SOLIDARITY, POWER AND DOMINANCE

Solidarity, power and dominance are among the important elements of men's speech since for

most men, talk is primarily a means to achieve and preserve independence and maintain their status in certain social order. This is usually done by showing off certain knowledge and skills, as well as gaining attention through various verbal performances (Tannen 1990; Kiesling 2007). In the online communication environment, men have their own strategies of displaying such qualities.

Among the male Indian participants, for instance, the elements of solidarity, power and dominance were expressed through a unique way of addressing each other; the younger males address their older male friends as seniors, while the senior ones would address their younger friends as juniors. It is interesting to learn that this respectful way of addressing each other (senior and junior) is only common among the male Indian participants (1132 units) but not the others. The use of 'senior' and 'junior' in conversation is not only unusual among the Malay and Chinese males, but also among the female Indian speakers in the country.

Table 6 and Table 7 show the sample of short forms, 'snr' for 'senior' (1,224 units) and 'jnr' (junior) used by 12 male Indian participants in Malaysia. As the use of these culturally- embedded short forms were not found in any previous studies, we support Kiesling's (2007) notion of men's indexical language as not entirely universal as it could also be culturally refined and restricted.

The word 'snr' (senior) is understood as a part of the politeness strategy shown towards the seniors or much older male friends. It also performs as a specific pronoun that replaces the addresser's name; another way of saying 'big brother'. The word senior (snr) was uttered with respect and the word junior (jnr) was returned with appreciation.

The older ones act as big brothers, treating their younger friends with love and concern. Culture is believed to play a significant role in this context. The cultural discourse of masculinity among this group of participants blends both the

TABLE 6. Homosocial solidarity and respect: Young male speakers addressing the elders

(Sample 1)		
'snr'	i.	<i>Happy Befday snr..... have a blast... tc</i>
(senior)	ii.	<i>thanx alot snr !!!! nice to see snrs al da oth day after a long time !! tek gud cer</i>
	iii.	<i>nice meeting u da oth day snr !! tek gud cer</i>
	iv.	<i>thankkk you so much snr maargali poove roova n snr china peayi !!!</i>
	v.	<i>fuyoo snr..i tink you just had yours during the break :-)</i>
	vi.	<i>i knw snr he tld like tht.... bt my question is yen avaru poi sonnaru?</i>
	vii.	<i>snr... no vulgar wrds in fb</i>
	viii.	<i>hmm snr u oni cn dream ... abt...</i>

TABLE 7. Homosocial solidarity, power and dominance: Older males addressing the young ones

(Sample 2)		
'jnr'	i.	<i>?=)) thanx for d tag jnr... all the very best to you guyz ...</i>
(junior)	ii.	<i>sure da jnr.... without u all how can...??</i>
	iii.	<i>Happy Birthday jnr...njoy d day...hav blast party yor...!</i>
	iv.	<i>gud luck my dear jnr...tk cr alwaiz...:)</i>

universal elements of masculinity such as power and dominance, with some traditional values of respect and humility; all amicably come at once.

A socio-cultural explanation suggests that the use of this word might be an indication of one's sense of tolerance towards the elders. Valentine (1994) describes the Indians as one community that values the elements of respect and modesty in their communication. As Valentine (1994) claims that "certain patterns of language attribute to members of powerful or non-powerful group" (Valentine 1994: 3), the importance of social hierarchy is still very much observed among the new generation of the Indian males in Malaysia. Our findings suggest that men (particularly the Indians) would alter their language according to social position. Power and dominance come with men's social status (his seniority, probably based on age or higher positions in organizations). The younger males would observe these aspects in their communication behaviour when dealing with the

older male speakers, in order to maintain respect and achieve solidarity.

Men can never escape from acting cool in conversation, and as expected, addressing each other as *dude* and *bro* is regarded as part of these young men's common style of conversation. This is not only common among the Malay and Chinese males, but also among the Indian males when interacting with those of the same age. According to Kiesling (2004a), it is important for men to appear calm (or cool) and less intense in most situations. In fact, the acts of doing ridiculous things and acting cool, have always been regarded as part of the young males' strategies in portraying masculinity (Martino 2000). We documented 630 units of the word *dude* and 2,239 units of the word *bro*, produced by the research participants. The following excerpts of conversations engaged by 11 male participants in Table 8 demonstrate such finding:

TABLE 8: The use of 'dude' in conversation

Sample 3:	
i.	<i>P8: Rather than money, than fame, than fairness</i>
	<i>P9: Give me truth</i>
	<i>P8: I'll show u some truth dude. Pull down my pants and you'll get the answer.</i>
	<i>P9: Knock yo brains out and b*tch slap you like sh*t. You want that?</i>

Sample 4:

- ii. P10: *looking like a fool with your pants on the ground, it doesnt matter what you choose*
 P11: *a Bugatti would cheer me up right now*
 P12: *dude, toy car Bugatti can?*
 P10: *how bout Ducati?*
 P11: *anything frm my Chelsea man, dude*
 P13: *Ducati? haha, no..Macho la.*
 P10: *macho is Harley-Davidson*
 P13: *handsome it is then*
 P14: *Lamborghini bro...Maserati is better...*
 P15: *GMC...haha!!*

Sample 5:

- iii. P16: *so whats up dude ?*
 P17: *ohh. doing fine. err it's a bit shaky for muet. :) hbu?*
 P16: *haha. MUET is like EST and they are like sh*t. haha. always and forever :)*
 P17: *lol! it's sooo true. except there's no element of science & tech. luckily i didn't take it. Huhu..*
 P16: *that bloody EST * ron weasly slang. haha. HP is coming!!!!*
 P17: *hahahahaha! yes!!!! make sure we'll watch it t 2gether. Dun wanna miss both parts, dude :)*

GAINING SOLIDARITY THROUGH INSULTS AND COMPETING DISCOURSE: OFFENSIVE WORDS AND ACRONYMS

Among the speakers of the same age, traditional cultural values might be less observed. This may not imply rudeness as it is mutually accepted as

a warm and friendly mark of solidarity. The use of offensive words is not a new thing in men's language (Holmes 1995; Mehl & Pennebaker 2003; Newman et al. 2008). Our findings also indicate the same tendency. Table 9 shows a list of insulting words employed by the male participants in the present research:

TABLE 9: Men and offensive words

	Word 1 unit = 1 word	Malay Males	Chinese Males	Indian Males	Total (unit)
1.	F*ck/f*ck*ng	202	106	21	329
2.	Sh*t	96	184	30	310
3.	Holy f*ck	-	7	-	7
4.	Holy sh*t	4	12	-	16
5.	D*mn	209	499	141	849
6.	Funny sh*t	4	16	-	20
7.	F*ck up	7	1	-	8
8.	D*mb*ss	2	14	-	16
9.	B*tch	17	22	3	42
10.	Assh*1*	12	12	2	26
	TOTAL	553	873	197	1623

The present study found 1623 units of offensive words, mostly employed by the Chinese and Malay male participants. The following samples in Table

10 indicate some of the excerpts produced by five Malay and Chinese participants:

TABLE 10. Offensive acronyms in online conversation

i.	Sample 6 <i>P18: You suck dude...WTF! I feel stupid to post this to numbers...i dun even know who the F*CK are you man...but everybody seem to post things to numbers..ahahahahahaha...</i>
ii.	Sample 7 <i>P19: ?: WTH how can u force me!! Bloody hell!! U big means just bully me ah??!!</i>
iii.	Sample 8 <i>P20: Dont you wanna be relevant??WTF man..im reliable.</i>
iv.	Sample 9 <i>P21: OMFG...nearly had a heart attack watching Slovakia vs Italy match...</i>
v.	Sample 10 <i>P22: OMFG!!!this guy is f*ck*ng amazing!!</i>
vi.	Sample 11 <i>P23: OMFG!!i can't imagine the f*ck*ng pain you've gone thru....hahaha</i>

Apart from that, these offensive words also come in various short forms and acronyms. The above samples demonstrate the use of offensive acronyms among the young males in various situations and contexts. Some of these acronyms were employed casually (to describe how wonderful the person is, like in Sample 10) and some other tense situations (such as in Sample 7 and 8). Sample 6 and 11 turned out as sarcastic jokes. Some elements of directive language (Mulac, Bradac & Gibbons 2001) were traced in Sample 3 (in Table 8) and Sample 8. In Sample 3, Participant 9 (P9) insisted on getting the information from his friend while Sample 8 shows how Participant 20 (P20) insisted his friend to trust his decision and action.

If women use romantic gestures to maintain relationship and build solidarity (Coates 2013; Holmes 1995; Brunet and Schmidt 2009), men on the other hand, insult and tease each other for the same purpose of communication (Kiesling 2007). Men insult and tease each other not because they are inconsiderate or less sensitive, but simply because, it is just the way they are. Participant 23 (in Sample 11) for instance, teased a friend who was in pain in order to decrease the intensity of the situation and reduce the stress. As opposed to women, men insult each other in order to create harmony and felicity (Kiesling 2007; Coates 2002).

TABLE 11. The use of acronyms among men

Acronyms	Meaning	Frequency
FTW	Fight to win	16
Gf	Girlfriend	157
JK	Just kidding	47
LOL/LOLZ/LOLX	laugh out loud	3447
LMAO	Laugh my *ss off	88
LMS	Like my status	10
OMG	Oh my God	518
OMFG	Oh my f*ck*ng God	28
OIC	Oh, I see	41
TQ	Thank you	590
TC	Take care	797
WTF	What the f*ck	333
WTH	What the hell	111

With 6,491 units of acronyms employed by the young males, it is proven that men love acronyms in their online communication practice, as much as women do (7,444 units). In fact, there are some acronyms that are more popular among the male participants than the females. Acronyms such as 'LOL' (laugh out loud) and 'FTW' (fight to win) are very prevalent among the male participants. An online acronym directory known as "Acronym Finder.com" listed 37 different meanings of 'FTW' such as 'for those wondering', 'face the world', 'free to watch', 'feel the wind', 'follow the way' and 'for the world'. However, 'FTW' in this context mutually signifies just one meaning, which is 'fight to win' among the male participants. This is used when describing situations involving sports, football matches, or online games. The following sample of conversation engaged by 5 male participants demonstrates the finding:

Sample 11:

- i. *P24: Video Games ARE BETTER than GIRLS. So I've been playing a lot of Starcraft lately and I've come to the realization that games are BETTER than girls. And here's my list of reasons why! FTW!*
- P25: ahahaha!! Single FTW xD*
- P26: ROFL. i bet its he's gf that's videoing it for him....*
- P27: KL DRAGONS FTW!*
- P28: Steve Nash FTW! Nash's Top 10 Assists. Watch some of the best assists from Phoenix Suns' Steve Nash so far in the 2009-10 season.*

The above instances revealed the use of acronym 'FTW' among male participants from different groups of online friends and social circles. Sample 11, also revolves around the same issue of online games, and indicates a conversation between four male participants who believed that playing online games are better than keeping a girlfriend. Participant 25 (P25) stressed that single life instigate men to 'fight' (take up the game challenge) and try their best to win. Sample 6.6 indicates the use of 'FTW' (fight to win) as a motivational remark in supporting Kuala Lumpur basketball team, known as 'KL Dragon'. As acronyms are widely used in online communication among participants in the country, what is more interesting to learn is that the interpretations of these words or phrases are

somehow limited to certain meanings and specific contexts; mutually agreed by these online users who live in different parts of the country. The agreement between the four male participants such as the use of laughter and "I bet" shows solidarity and cooperation in building the interaction.

Once again, emotionally-related acronyms like ILU- I love you (6 units) and IMU/IMY- I miss you (3 units) are not favored by men, as compared to 3,503 units of LOL/LMAO (laugh out loud/laugh my *ss off), which were employed by all 60 male participants in their conversation. Among other acronyms that male online users like to 'say' when they communicate online would be some swear phrases like OMFG, WTF and WTH. As many studies indicate how men prefer to use impolite language in their conversation (Mehl & Pennebaker 2003; Holmes 1995; Aries & Johnson 1983), the findings of the present research also indicate the same. It is suggested that men insult each other (Tannen 1990; Kiesling 2007) as part of their online communication strategy in demonstrating power and gaining solidarity.

MEN AND EMOTICONS

As findings in the earlier sections indicate that men avoid emotional discourse and enjoy injecting energy into their language and communication, the final section will deliberate the use of emoticons in men's online communication. Table 12 shows the findings:

With a total number of 20,126 units from 16 selected emoticons produced by the male participants, it is shown that men enjoy having various emoticons in their online communication practice. It also explains men's recognition of symbols in their communication. Basic smileys such as :-), =) and :D are among the most common. To a certain extent, the claim that men are entirely inexpressive in portraying their emotions could be arguable and unsubstantial. Words alone may not be men's best friends. Men are not that eloquent in most emotionally invested conversations (using words and romantic phrases), but are able to express various emotions using symbols and emoticons, in their online conversation.

Firstly, men enjoyed emoticons that indicate a straight face or a serious look =.= (660 units), and angry expressions such as, : / (1,894 units compared to females 1,070 units) more than

TABLE 12. Use of emoticons among men

Emoticons/ Symbols	Meaning	Frequency
:D	Big smile/ overjoyed/grin	1907
:-)	Smile	470
;-)	Smile and wink	76
:)	Smile	5345
;))	Smile and wink	944
:(Sad face	818
:)) (or more)	Big smile/ overjoyed	202
=)	Smile	2214
=(Sad face	137
:/	Being cynical	1894
=.=	Straight face/ Serious look/ Blur/angry	660
=P	Tongue sticks out	781
:P	Tongue sticks out	1832
=D	Big smile/overjoyed/grin	580
XD	Big smile/overjoyed/grin	2134
@@	Big round rolling eyes	132
Total		20,126

women. This supports Arnold and Miller's (1999) findings that suggest a strong projection of confident through words and symbols in men's communication behaviour. It also correlates with Mehl and Pennebaker's (2003) idea of men's preference of showing their anger instead of hiding it. The female participants on the other hand, dominate in the use of some cheerful features such as ;-) and ;), both indicating a smiling face and a wink. This finding supports Arnold and Miller's (1999) findings who suggest that women prefer to be friendly and employ various smiling emoticons in their online communication practices while men prefer to project a confident and assertive image through their selection of words, use of certain symbols as well as the selection of topics and issues concerned in their discussions.

It is also learned that the use of emoticons actually comes with specific purposes and intentions. The emoticon, :(that symbolizes sadness for instance, was equipped with words that describe negative expressions. Some words (adjectives) or phrases that accompanied this emoticon given in the following samples are: 'suffer', 'bored', 'hate', and 'tired'. One male participant rectified his wrong

usage of emoticons when he employed a symbol of happiness ':D' in describing his painful situation. Participant 32 (in Sample 12) even apologized to his friend for a wrong symbol that he used when describing the contagious and painful disease that he had. The following is the aforementioned conversation engaged by 4 participants:

Sample 12

- i. P29: will watch this after i suffer finishing my assignment :(
P30: yes...but it was not too good...there's always next year..:(
P31: cum to muar la..i have no frens here :(
P32: AND guess what!! I've got mumpsssssssss :D wait sorry wrong emoticon.. *:(LOL

In addition, both symbols ':/' (being cynical) and '=.= ' (angry) were also accompanied adjectives or adverbs that describe negative situations such as, 'annoying', 'stuck', 'wrong', 'cry', 'boring', 'bad', 'irritating', 'useless', 'bi*chy', 'crazy' 'sadly', 'jealous' and 'losers'. The following samples demonstrate some of the situations:

Sample 13

- i. *P33: wat's dat??...huhu :-/ its annoying....*
P34: Graphic photos like crazy!?! Makes me wonder what the hell went wrong with it?? :-/
P35: Its irritating....:-/

Sample 14

- ii. *P35: I good body aches after today's workout....more to come tomolo...gosh im old..=.=*
P36: I knw....tatz y me sayin u f a very bad taste =.=

Sample 15

- iii. *P37: Music flows to the ears..sadly the music is irritating...=.=*
P38: Contestants la. got gay dudes who are like the typical bitchy ones =.=

The use of symbols encourage men to express themselves better. Our findings indicate that most emoticons were accompanied with some relevant descriptive words that help convey the message in a more meaningful way.

Lee and Wagner (2002) found how emoticons might also function as a tool in softening some negative tones in online messages, such as anger, criticism or sarcasm. From the excerpts, one emoticon that is used to soften some negative comments and expressions would be the one that symbolizes a tongue sticking out, '=P'. This can be seen through the following excerpts:

- i. *Very confusing but what to do =P*
 ii. *George show off haha =P*
 iii. *Hahaha its ok den just ignore them =P*

As given in the samples, the emoticon =P is also accompanied by some negative comments such as one participant who complained about his friend's explanation which he found very confusing. Another situation would be another participant who was indirectly trying to advise her friend not to show off his talent. Both expressions were accompanied by a tongue-sticking-out symbol, employed as a strategy of softening arguments and criticisms.

THE STUDY OF MEN'S LANGUAGE AND ITS IMPLICATION TO THE SOCIETY

Tannen (1990), Gray (1992) and Wood (2001) agreed that men and women communicate differently, to the extent of, they might sound like people from two different planets. Without a rigid parameter, both men and women embrace different speech-style features due to the different way of upbringing, expectations and sub cultural values. If women employ the online communication environment as a place to express their freedom of speech and to maintain a relationship; men on the other hand, employ it not just as a platform to socialize and entertain themselves, but also as a place to demonstrate solidarity, power and dominance using several ways and strategies.

This study is important to the society and humanities in acknowledging the men's communication behavior in some specific domains. It also helps to rationalize the underpinning cultural values in men's interaction strategies and behavior. It also acts as an emancipation of men from the invisibility; preventing them from being overgeneralized as a homogeneous group, especially in the area of language and communication study. Men have certain embedded values that reflect in their style of language that the society (especially women) needs to understand in order to avoid miscommunication. "The minimum requirement for a social system is the interaction of at least two personal systems or two persons acting their roles" (Olutayo & Yusuff 2012: 146). Studies on men's language therefore, will help reduce the unnecessary conflicts and communication barriers that men and women always have in their societies (Tannen 1990). By understanding each other's language and communication behavior, men and women will be able to respect each other's role in their societies and embrace their differences in achieving a harmonious relationship and a better social system.

CONCLUSION

We also argue that the portrayal of power, dominance and homosocial solidarity among men in the Malaysian context could be slightly different from Keisling's observation and western perspectives. We therefore summarize our findings by suggesting the following aspects of men's discourse in the specific context of the Malaysian online communication environment:

Firstly, men achieve homosocial solidarity by sharing similar social interests and engage in men's conversations (without the involvement of women) to highlight the quality of manhood and embellish their masculinity.

Secondly, the Malaysian Indian men in particular, employ a culturally-embedded communication strategy in addressing each other (such as 'junior' and 'senior'). This not only signifies a certain level of power and dominance among the older males towards the younger ones, but also serves as part of the politeness strategy, as showing respect and modesty are two important values observed by their society.

Next, the use of masculine speech forms such as offensive words and acronyms, insults as well as teasing in creating harmony and maintaining homosocial solidarity.

Finally, the use of symbols and emoticons that encourage men to express their personal feelings in a more effective and meaningful way.

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Azianura Hani Shaari (corresponding author)
Sustainability of Language Sciences Research
Centre
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
43600 UKM Bangi
Selangor
Malaysia
E-mail: azianura@ukm.edu.my

Shahrul Nazmi Sannusi
Center for Media Impact and Creative Industry
Research
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
43600 UKM Bangi
Selangor
Malaysia
E-mail: nazmy@ukm.edu.my

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