



Research Article

WHAT'S IN A NAME? – A SNEAK PEEK INTO MALAYSIAN CHINESE CULTURE THROUGH THE NAMING METHODS OF EATING HOUSES

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ABSTRACT

Much can be studied on names, because names by themselves are typical instances of language use in society. In a multilingual and multicultural setting such as Malaysia, it is interesting to find out how do the Malaysian Chinese deal with the naming of their eating houses. As such, the current paper attempts to explore the naming methods of Malaysian Chinese eating houses from the sociolinguistic point of view. In specific, this paper aims to explore the methods applied by Chinese shop owners in naming their eating houses and to identify the cultural elements reflected in the names. The analysis of naming methods and cultural elements is based on Chinese names of eating houses collected from several states in Malaysia. Results show that use of auspicious words, personal names, reserved words, wishing words, numbers, fine words, flora and fauna, dialects, and homophonic words are the nine major methods in naming Chinese eating houses, in the sequence of popularity. Overall, it can be concluded that they show elements of innovations while retaining the essence of their Chineseness.

KEYWORDS: Malaysian Chinese; culture; naming method; eating house.

INTRODUCTION

Informally referred to as eatery, eating house is indisputably an integral part of any society in contemporary setting. At first sight eating houses are so commonly seen that people always tend to neglect the valuable sociolinguistic data being offered behind them. In fact, observing the eating house industry at a closer perspective will reveal much information about the culture and belief of the specific community who get involved in this age-long industry which existed since the dawn of civilization.

Language serves as an irreplaceable tool for communication. As far as language is concerned, inspecting eating houses from the point of view of how each eating house is named is no doubt of sociolinguists' interest. As a matter of fact, name of eating houses is a linguistic phenomenon which exists alongside with the eating house industry. While exemplifying the notion of language reflecting society, it in turn induces changes in the way people live in that society.

In the present study, eating houses refer to premises rendering food and drink services i.e. coffee shops, snack bars, food courts, and restaurants of varying grades.

Name of eating houses is similar to trademark in the sense that they both share the properties of being universal and eye-catching, hence offering precious cultural information that can contribute towards understanding the community inventing as well as using them. This is especially true for the Chinese community which is notably rich in their food culture.

Good omen is always a pursuit by the Chinese in almost everything they perform (Huang & Teng, 2009; Ying & Zhang, 2012). Hence it is totally normal yet equally crucial for the community to have a good name for their premise if they were to start a business. Despite the fact that food quality plays the utmost important role in ensuring the smooth operation of an eating house, most, if not all, Chinese will still inevitably spend some time when it comes to naming their eating house. Indeed, from a sociolinguist's perspective, much can be studied on the names of Chinese eating houses, because names by themselves are typical instances of language use in society.

Naming methods vary across time. In the olden days, for example, name of Chinese eating houses can take the form of 华商号 (*Hua Shang's mark*¹) or 南和兴 (*Nan He Xing*, most probably the name of the owner). These examples nicely correspond with Chen (1989, p. 74) who points out that most shopnames are based on the name of shop owners and that can be traced back to as early as in Song Dynasty (960AD – 1279AD). Evolving until current days, it is no longer foreign to see names which incorporate elements of creativity and innovation such as 金满楼酒家 ('Filled with Gold' Restaurant), 您我爱茶餐室 ('You I love' Coffee Shop), 老翁茶 (Old man's Tea) etc., hence '... reflecting commercial and societal advancement' (Xing, 2003, p. 94).

The basis for this study to specifically look into name of Malaysian Chinese eating houses is that Malaysia is reported to be the country which successfully preserves Chinese culture and traditions, apart from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Clammer, 1979; Borneo Post, 2013). Alongside with that, food culture is an aspect worth exploring when talking about Chinese culture – thanks to its long and rich history (Shi, 2015), and the name of Chinese eating houses provides us with a different angle to complement our knowledge regarding Chinese food culture.

Malaysian Chinese have their own unique ways of naming eating houses, hence taking a closer look at the name of eating houses not only serves as an alternative for one to learn more about Malaysian Chinese, but also presents to us a living fossil demonstrating language use by the community. Name of eating houses can reflect the cultural inclination of Malaysian Chinese in the most direct way, and this agrees with Lb (as cited in Chang, 1995, p. 2) who claims that 'studying the language of a race cannot help from intertwining with its culture'.

On the other hand, name of Malaysian Chinese eating houses reflects the people's mastery level of Chinese language. It might be tedious to go through the name of each eating house individually, but if efforts were taken to gather and then tabulate a long and considerable list of them, one will be presented with the exact and most genuine use of language by the Malaysian Chinese. This logically justifies the reason for Xing (2003, p. 1) to refer shopnames as '[a] mirror reflecting the society'.

RELATED STUDIES

In the recent decades, there has been a resurgence of interest by Chinese scholars in the study of naming methods on shopnames. Chen (1989, p. 74-81; 1999, p. 157-166), for example, conducted studies on shopnames with specific focus paid on the use of auspicious words, owner's name, as well as regional/local terms, all of which scaffolded his hypothesis on how much influence had been brought about by the social reformation in China towards shopnames. Complementing Chen's study is Chang (1995, p. 201-204), who based his study on Chinese lexical and culture, in which he found that the restaurants, inns and common stores in Beijing were very particular about their shopnames which reflected the Han Chinese cultural features.

Other scholars, on the other hand, tried filling in the research gap from different angles. In his study, Liu (1991, p. 487-500) studied on the naming methods of shopnames and their historical significance from the sociolinguistics and business language psychology point of view; whereas Jia (2003) attempted to erect his viewpoint that by virtue of fundamental differences between Chinese and English, name system employed by each of these languages was in fact a vivid cultural reflection of the Eastern and Western societies. He arrived at such conclusion by analysing his data on Chinese and English shopnames from the linguistic, psychology and cross-cultural communication perspectives. Parenthetically, an equally interesting study was conducted by Xing (2003) who attempted to exemplify the liveliness of urban language in terms of linguistic, culture, psychology and aesthetic elements embodied in shopnames. On this basis, she surveyed on the shopnames and brands found at Wangfujing (a frontline commercial street in Beijing) and in Tianjin, detailing to the length, structure, foreign words, translation strategies used and even typography of the shopnames.

Narrowing down further to studies pertaining to name of eating houses, Ren (2004) and Zheng (2006) looked at the characteristics of name of eating houses in different major cities in China and the cultural information embedded onto them, with the latter concluded further that there were significant loss in the number of elements that used to make up a shopname in the cities surveyed, entailing that changes were happening on shopnames though they seem similar at the first glance. These studies might not be the pioneers in the field, but they contributed in the sense that more studies turned up from then. Based on previous studies, Huang (2012), for instance, reported results on naming methods of 741 eating houses in view of linguistic and psychological factors, as well as the self-cultivation of

All translation of names in this paper are literal translation (i.e. not the original English name of the eating houses, if they had any) unless indicated otherwise.

shop owners, whereas Fu (2011) had her study differed from Huang when she came to the macro conclusion that the city she was studying, Guangzhou, was gearing towards embracing the universal qualities of fair play, openness, and inclusiveness, as reflected in shopnames there.

As in Malaysia, sifting through the relevant literature returned relatively few results, and this is especially true when it comes to naming methods of eating houses, with most of them could only be found in non-academic publications. Ang (2001, p. 20-35) is among the very few who conducted a study on translation of hotel names and the hidden/lost messages behind it.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In a multilingual and multicultural setting such as Malaysia, it is interesting to find out how do the Malaysian Chinese deal with the naming of their eating houses. As such, the current paper attempts to explore the naming methods of Malaysian Chinese eating houses of varying grades from the sociolinguistic perspective. And as culture and language are always inseparable, the cultural element will be taken into account in the study. Hence the research questions for the current study are: how do the Malaysian Chinese name their eating houses and what are the cultural elements reflected in the names?

Data collection was carried out from 2007 to 2015 and covered a total area of five states (Penang, Selangor, Malacca, Johor, and Sarawak) and the federal territory of Kuala Lumpur. 1241 names of eating houses were obtained and then categorised based on their naming methods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Name of eating houses is expected to fulfil its essential function i.e. to advertise albeit it is static in nature. Owing to such property which makes it different from other kinds of advertisements, the use of language on it becomes prominently crucial in order to attract potential customers. On top of that, Chinese being a language which is endowed with rich cultural heritage, and if used suitably could invoke positive connotations, shop owners have a strong ground to invest in the Chinese name of their eating houses. The name may not be semantically sound to some people but how the owners name their eating houses definitely discloses their mindset and cultural personality.

Presented below are the most commonly found naming methods of eating houses employed by Malaysian Chinese shop owners.

AUSPICIOUS WORDS

As obtaining good omen in everything they do (or even about to do) is a belief that is deeply ingrained among the Chinese, the use of auspicious words is one of the most popular methods one can see in the naming of eating

houses. Superstitious as some might call it, this kind of culturally inherited naming method is not foreign among Malaysian Chinese who get themselves involved in business.

It is evident that the remarkably rich vocabulary in Chinese is the main reason for the community using it to have the privilege of expressing the world in a handful of auspicious words. In his book entitled *民俗与文化杂谈* (A Discussion of Popular Custom and Culture), Zhong (as cited in Tan, 2004, p. 302) once presented a poem comprised of a series of commonly used auspicious words which was popular in the business world of the olden days. It is worth noting that the poem is made up of 56 characters, such as 顺 (smoothness), 安 (peaceful), 裕 (rich), 昌 (forever glory), with each of them being able to freely attach to each other to express positive connotations. Since all of the characters are auspicious in nature, upon choosing any one or two of them, any shop owner can come out with a highly propitious shopname.

In the present study, it is hard for one to go unnoticed of the frequent use of 福 (prosperous) on the name of eating houses, occupying 56 counts from a total of 245 names which employ auspicious words. Chinese civilisation has always been a blend of extreme richness and poverty, despite the glorious dynasties it had. Those living in poverty had to depend on their farms (i.e. the 田 sign in the character 福) for income. This has in a way provided explanation for why the Chinese character for prosperity had been made synonymous with good luck and fortune since the ancient time (Oishi, 2012). Malaysian Chinese inherit the notion of prosperity and apply it in daily life. Evidences encountered in this study are 福民园 ('Park of the Blessed'), 福远茶室 ('Long Prosperity' coffee shop), 福来茶餐室 ('Prosperity Arrived' coffee shop) etc. This clearly shows the wish of shop owners to have a better life.

Ranked second in the list is 兴 (flourish), with 47 counts. Examples are 兴利美食中心 and 兴发小食中心 (both literally mean 'Profit Flourishing' food court), 兴兴茶室 (literally 'Flourishing' coffee shop), and 兴兴兴 ('Forever Flourishing'), embodying the shop owner's will to have the business ever growing and maturing. Repeated use of the character 兴 as in these two instances is rare in daily life, but its existence on the name of eating houses has presented to us how the shop owners creatively integrated language and culture in the shortest and most prominent way possible to highlight their will in getting a good business.

Other major auspicious words encountered are 发 (getting rich) 33 counts, 利 (profits) 32 counts, 顺 (smooth) and 成 (success) 29 counts respectively, 源 (resourceful) 23 counts and 丰 (abundance) 16 counts. The large amount of auspicious words used in names of eating houses has told by itself the hope and objectives in life for the Chinese community in general.

PERSONAL NAMES

Though the use of personal name as the name of eating houses seems nothing extraordinary, it is in fact the pioneer in such regard. The tradition of Chinese using surname and brand name to help the public in identifying their shop started around the Song Dynasty (Tan, 2004, p. 296), and it had been inherited by the ancestors of Malaysian Chinese who came to Malaya centuries ago. Following that, a great number of Chinese eating houses were named this way and could still be found nowadays.

Apparently, naming an eating house with owner's name serves the purpose of easy to remember, apart from being convenient. A total of 230 names of eating houses are identified as the names of the owner. This second biggest number of data reflects its importance as a generic way in naming an eating house. This kind of shopname is unique in its structural characteristics, where one can encounter instances like 何牛记面家 (*He Niu* noodle house, wherein *He Niu* is the name of the shop owner) and 李香花号 (*Li Xianghua hao*, or *Li Xianghua's*, with *Li Xianghua* being the name of the shop owner). It can be observed that 号 (pronounced 'how') or 记 (pronounced 'jee') is always preceded by the name of shop owner, with 号 or 记 means mark/brand. Studying shopnames of this kind, one will notice that those which follow such structure as 'owner's name + mark' invariably imply obsolete form of naming method. Viewing from the sociolinguistic perspective, this serves as a concrete evidence for a change in language use as well as the end of an era.

Most of the names of eating houses with personal name attached onto them nowadays, however, have found leeway to continue surviving by incorporating more information onto the shopname, such as 潘记包饺点心 (*Pan Ji* bun and dimsum), 荣生家乡小炒饭店 (*Rong Sheng's* home dish restaurant) and 鹏记纯正西刀鱼丸 (*Peng's* authentic wolf herring fish ball), with 'Pan', 'Rong Sheng', and 'Peng' being the name of each shop owner respectively.

In this study, it is found that eating houses named after the shop owner are mostly of mid-lower grades and operate on moderate basis. By placing the owner's name as the name of eating houses, the weightage of name is as much as the responsibility of the owner not only to his/her business but also his/her customers. The commitment hidden behind the name means a lot to the Chinese people, especially the traditional Chinese.

RESERVED WORDS

Compared to auspicious words, 香 (aromatic), 味 (taste), 美 (pleasant looking), 食 (eat) and characters of the like undoubtedly offer something more tangible that shop owners would like to showcase to the potential customers. Since such characters will signal to the customers directly that the premise is dealing with the business of food and drink, and that they are almost exclusively used by eating houses, these characters have been termed as 'reserved words' by Su (1994, p. 86).

From 95 names in data which are consisted of reserved words, it is found that 香 (aromatic) is used most frequently, with 52 counts over a total of 95 samples in the same category, such as 南香 ('Southern Aroma'), 香香园 ('Aromatic Park'), 来香茶餐室 ('Incoming Aroma' coffee shop), 粒粒香餐厅 ('Each Rice is Aromatic' restaurant), 八品香茶室 ('Eighth Level of Aroma' coffee shop), 满香楼大酒家 ('Filled with Fragrance' restaurant), 真香茶餐室 ('Really Aromatic' coffee shop), 色香味海鲜楼 ('Colourful, Aromatic and Tasty' seafood restaurant), 新奇香茶餐室 ('New Mysterious Aroma' coffee shop), 万里香美食中心 ('Remained Aromatic Till Tens of Thousands Miles Away' food centre), 四季香肉骨茶 ('Aromatic Throughout the Four Seasons' *bakutch*) etc. This is seconded by 美 (pleasant looking), 乐 (delighted), 好 (good), 味 (taste), with 38 counts, 34 counts, 24 counts and 24 counts respectively. Another interesting example is 芬芳豆奶豆花专卖店 ('Aromatic' soya bean milk) wherein the aroma of soya is highlighted in the shop's name. It can be said that such naming phenomenon goes in line with the abundance in Chinese food culture where the food culture itself is time-honoured. 色 (colourful), 香 (aromatic), 味 (taste) and 美 (pleasant looking) have always been the popular four characters used to describe a cuisine which is perfect or nearly perfect in every aspect by the Chinese. Malaysian Chinese follow the tradition of judging a delicious cuisine from these four aspects, hence names as presented above.

Perhaps another special feature pertaining to the name of eating houses of this category is the frequent use of 海 (sea) which amounted to 43 times use, such as 海景餐室 ('Sea View' restaurant), 海洋火锅餐厅 ('Ocean' steamboat restaurant), and 海外天酒家 ('Sky Beyond the Ocean' restaurant). Its frequency count is even higher than the use of 食 (eat) which is 18 times. One logical explanation is that most of the states in Malaysia have coastline, and since seafood has always been regarded as precious and a marker of wealthy, having 海 (sea) on shop name is expected to help boost business.

WISHING WORDS

Generally speaking, the use of wishing words on the names of eating houses can be categorised into 3 groups. The first group expresses the wish of shop owner, which can sound rather implicit, such as 朝阳海鲜酒家 ('the Morning Sun' seafood restaurant) implying business with a good start and energetic, 云来点心楼 ('Incoming cloud' dim sum restaurant) implying customers keep flowing in, 高朋茶室 ('Highly Honoured Guests' coffee shop) taken from a famous Chinese idiom which means a lot of guests; or at the other extreme such as 大旺海鲜饭店 ('Enormously Rich-becoming' restaurant), 富临门大酒家 ('Prosperity at the Doorstep' restaurant) and 长兴海鲜楼 ('Forever Prosperous' seafood restaurant). In addition to that, the study discovered a case where new character was invented i.e. 财 (wealth) with a 'boat' radical. Such character of the shopname was non-existent but according

to the shop owner, it was hoped that the newly invented character could make the wealth approach him by shipping in itself. It should be noted that names of this category tend to be the blended result of creativity and knowledge about Chinese characters as well as literature of the shop owner. The more elements of literary characters used, the more implicit, yet more aesthetically-sounding the shopname is. It is worth noting at this point, too, that this category of naming method differs from the use of auspicious words in the sense that wishing words are just ordinary words used everyday by the general public. Auspicious words, on the other hand, are generally used during big occasions or festivals. A rather big amount of names, i.e. listed the third popular with 226 counts, are found to have wishing words.

The second group focuses on the wish of customers. For example, 开心辣汤餐馆 ('Be Happy' spicy soup restaurant), for instance, bears the wish of customers coming to the eating house safely and enjoy the meal happily. Another eating outlet, 大家乐美食中心 ('All Enjoy' food court) wishes customers to put aside worries and come have a good time dining at the eating house; while 利口福茶餐室, 满口福咖啡厅 and 食得福啤酒花园 together revolve around the main message of customers being able to have a happy knack for chancing upon fine food. It is clear that shop owners hope to attract customers via good blessings shown to them, since a majority of the community prefer good omen, as mentioned above earlier.

The third group is a combination of both group one and two. Cleverly packed in puns, this kind of shopnames offers a spectacular view of the use of language by the shop owners. For example, at first sight 顺顺来茶室 ('Smooth Coming' coffee shop) seems like blessing for customers, in fact it also means wealth approaching smoothly. 食仙烧烤饭店 ('Food Fairy' barbeque restaurant), is praising customers who know where to look for good food on one hand, yet on the other hand the eating house is implying that it is capable of offering high quality food for customers to come patronising.

NUMBERS

Numbers constitute an important part in Chinese culture despite they are sometimes reduced to a variable elusive for communities which do not use the language. Since homophones are common in Chinese, certain numbers have been inevitably associated with some sort of meanings, resulting in positive or negative connotations, as how Wang & Wang (2003, p. 112) put it, the numbers tradition has rendered people to demonstrate likings or otherwise towards numbers and its application in daily life. From the numbers used, one can trace Chineseness easily in terms of philosophy, aesthetics, religion, and language use etc.

Due to homophones, Malaysian shop owners like to associate the numbers 3, 6 and 8 with 'live', 'smooth', and 'getting rich' in Cantonese. In fact, contrary to number 4 which is homophone to 'death', these numbers are the auspicious numbers widely accepted by the Cantonese community in particular and Chinese speaking people in

general. In addition to that, according to Chinese tradition, number 3 implies 'abundance' while 9 implies 'long-lasting', since the latter was used to refer to emperors who reigned during the time of dynasties.

In this study, samples of names containing numbers are 8号茶室 ('no. 8' coffee shop, with number 8 implying prosperity), 88海鲜餐室 ('88' seafood restaurant, hinting double prosperity), 888露天海鲜 ('888' open air seafood restaurant, indicating sumptuous wealth), 33茶餐室 ('33' coffee shop, of which double 3 carries the meaning of 'active growing business'), 663海鲜餐馆 ('663' seafood restaurant, where 663 in Cantonese means 'active business in whatever way'), 9936美食中心 ('9936' food court centre, with 9936 similar to 'long lasting prosperous route' in Cantonese) etc. Among all these, the most typical example is no other than 168小食馆 ('168' café) which resembles the Chinese saying of 'richness all the way'. These are perhaps some of the best examples in supporting the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis which suggests that people's thoughts are determined by the language they speak.

As a matter of fact, certainly there are other instances of shopnames with numbers not limited to homophones but also associated with other cultural aspects. For example, 2020海鲜茶室 ('2020' seafood coffee shop, inspired by Malaysia's vision of the year 2020) and 1001美食中心 ('1001' food court centre, inspired by Arabian Tales of 1001 Nights). Observing closer then one will find that lying in both examples is the homophone i.e. number 2 in Cantonese which symbolizes smoothness and number 1001 which implies the uniqueness of the eating house in the industry. Though the normally selected numbers are pun in nature, not many eating houses use this method. Only 34 data are found.

FINE WORDS

In ancient time, Chinese scholars liked to use fine words when creating poems hence giving fine words a unique status. Most often than not, the fine words spelt out the fine background and good qualities of the scholars. As descendants of the same race, Malaysian Chinese, especially those who are Chinese educated, somehow have a special affection towards this kind of fine words, whether they realise or not. They can have all kinds of reasons of behaving so, but to put it short, it is the essence of Chineseness that they are pursuing in a very natural manner. This explains why some, if not all, shop owners use fine words on the name of their eating houses. As one of its chain effects, the use of fine words on name of eating houses is said to be able to lift the shop's image (Ren, 2004, p. 73).

人间茶坊 ('Tea Lane of the Human World'), 壶缘茶坊 ('Predestined by Teapot' tea shop), 天水轩茶菜小馆 ('Sky and Sea' pavilion), 龙门客栈 ('Dragon Gate' café), 妙轩素食坊 ('Wonderful Pavilion' vegetarian restaurant), 桃源小食店 ('Wonderland' restaurant), 道 ('Dao' of Daoism) are just some examples belonging to this category. There are 22 data found in this study. Having fine words on shop

names, as Ren puts it, is ‘not only a reflection of the shop owner’s self-cultivation and aesthetic judgement, but also the Chinese food culture’s traditional pursuit of fine spirits out of the ordinary and materialistic life.’ (2004, p. 73) Chinese tradition views food (and drink) culture as more than meals-dining; it also incorporates a higher level of self-cultivation (such as dining manner) while not neglecting the ingredients, food combination, or even the surrounding. The use of fine words, in this sense, plays a role in elevating the overall quality of dining. As Malaysia is a tropical country which is totally different from China, Taiwan or Hong Kong, employing Chinese fine words on name of eating houses can have the effect of imitating a native high culture for Malaysian Chinese.

FLORA AND FAUNA (INCLUDING CHINESE AUSPICIOUS ANIMALS)

As one of the varieties in material culture, flora and fauna are also popular constituents of name of eating houses by Malaysian Chinese. As pointed out by Jia (2003), Chinese shop owners have the tendency of incorporating words related to flora as well as the nature onto their shopname because they understand the psychology of consumers who long for returning to basics. Hence creating shopname of such kind is hoped to pamper their hasty souls. The naming method is quite popular as 120 data are noted to have applied this method. Reflected in Malaysian context, the present study encountered names such as 红竹林海鲜小食馆 (‘Red Bamboo Park’ seafood restaurant) and 椰园海鲜 (‘Coconut Farm’ seafood restaurant). Some examples such as 兰花海鲜大酒家 (‘Orchid’ seafood restaurant) and 樱花咖啡屋 (‘Sakura’ Cafe) indicate that deeper meaning had been embedded into the name, namely the shop owner tries to show that the eating house is comparable to flowers in terms of elegance. As for names concerning the nature, examples would be 青山茶室 (‘Green Hill’ coffee shop), 四海饭店 (‘Four Sea’ restaurant), 露夜园海鲜酒家 (‘Night-revealing Park’ seafood restaurant), 田园酒家 (‘Countryside’ restaurant), 草原乡村厅 (‘Prairie Village’ cafe), 星系西餐 (‘Galaxy’ western food) and 春夏秋冬酒家 (‘Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter’ restaurant).

As regards fauna, common species found are However, it can never be wrong to say that two of the Chinese auspicious animals, dragon and phoenix, are used extensively on names of eating houses. To the community, these two kinds of mysterious animals tacitly represent their identity. Since dragon was for a long period of time exclusively used to represent emperor (Liu, 2015) while phoenix representing queen, the ordinary people could not help but to pay their greatest respect to these animals, and the influence is long-lasting. In fact this study found that the use of dragon and phoenix has permeated names of eating houses regardless of their grade, such as 龙乡茶室 (‘Hometown of the Dragon’ coffee shop), 龙凤茶室 (‘Dragon and Phoenix’ coffee shop), 龙园餐厅 (‘Dragon Park’ restaurant), 龙苑冷气海鲜饭店 (‘Dragon Garden’ air-conditioned seafood restaurant), 金龙酒楼 (‘Golden Dragon’ restaurant), 金凤凰海鲜啤酒花园 (‘Golden Phoenix’ seafood and beer park), 九龙家乡小菜饭店

(‘Nine Dragons’ home dish restaurant) etc. Apparently, dragon has been used to wish for a boosting and lively business, while the use of phoenix carries the hope of smooth and unperturbed business. Though Malaysian Chinese of the current generation are basically born locally, their preference towards dragon and phoenix is still evident. On one hand, it may be suggested that these two kinds of auspicious animals have become a strong sign in representing the Chinese identity, but on the other hand, one can easily relate the use of dragon and phoenix with successful business, which, understandably, is the ultimate goal of every shop owner.

DIALECTS

Sociolinguists would be cognisant of the fact that Malaysian Chinese, composed of different dialectal groups, are living together and hence can be heard talking in a mixture of Chinese dialects. As a result of that, it is normal to find Malaysian Chinese who are able to understand or even converse in dialects different from their own group’s, aside from Malay, their national language, and English. Such phenomenon of a group of people having dialects, Chinese, English and Malay in their oral repertoire is termed as a ‘language mosaic’ (Ang, 2007, p. 71), and is regarded as one unique feature of the Malaysian Chinese society.

Evidence can be easily found to support such claim even when one simply looks at name of eating houses. Examples of names using the Hokkien dialect are 好势了饮食中心 (pronounced ‘hor-say-leow’, meaning ‘good luck has arrived’), 吉早人台湾粥馆 (pronounced ‘khoo-jar-lung’, meaning ‘people in the olden days’), 天公仔海边海鲜村 (pronounced ‘tee-kong-kia’, meaning ‘the son of heaven’) and 无理由泰式海鲜 (pronounced ‘bo-lee-yeow’, with its somehow curiosity-arousing meaning as ‘reasonless’); while 太蕃薯 (pronounced ‘thai-fun-swee’, meaning ‘big potato’) and 拉查面 (pronounced ‘la-jar-mean’, a kind of egg-made noodle) reflect pronunciation in the Hakka and Cantonese dialect respectively. Only in such a multicultural social setting of Malaysian Chinese community that would one find a variety of dialects appearing on different shopnames. Perhaps it could be safely said that names of this kind promote solidarity among the community, apart from showing the shop owners’ creativity. However, this method is not so popular compared with others as only a relatively small amount of 8 data is found.

HOMOPHONIC WORDS

Using homophonic words in name of eating houses calls for certain requirement from the name-giver as it challenges his/her ability to manipulate the sound of language while leaving the meaning intended to be expressed intact. Taking 港饮港食粥面餐厅 (Hong Kong drinks and Hong Kong food) as example, 港 (short for ‘Hong Kong’) and 讲 (means ‘talk about’) are both pronounced ‘kong’ in Cantonese. Hence the name encompasses the meaning of ‘everything related to food

and drink' while at the same time indicating to customers that the eating house serves Hong Kong food.

The other example is 一炮而红台湾美食泡沫茶坊 (becoming famous after making a time of tea). 一炮而红 is a Chinese idiom meaning catapulted to fame. 炮 (catapult) and 泡 (tea-making) both share the same pronunciation 'pow', hence enabling the idiom to be transformed into a saying which suits the purpose of promoting the bubble tea business.

While these two examples above show the influence from other Chinese language circle especially Hong Kong and Taiwan, there are other homophonic words which are created based on standard Chinese pronunciation, as in 煲煲经济快餐馆 where 煲煲 (pot by pot) sounds similar to 饱饱 (means eat till full and satisfied), both pronounced as 'bow'. The homophonic words appearing in name of eating houses are indeed brilliant blending products of creativity and linguistic features, uniquely found in Chinese culture. Due to its requirement of higher level of literacy, a smaller number of 18 data is found.

CONCLUSION

All owners of eating houses share an ultimate goal namely to have good business. As far as the Chinese community is concerned, in order to achieve this goal their first step would be to come out with a good name for their eating houses. This has provided sociolinguists with a good opportunity and an important angle to study the community as names are often reflections of how the community uses the language while portraying their culture.

It is found that the Malaysian Chinese have their own ways of naming their eating houses. The name of eating houses is a demonstration of language use by the local Chinese people encompassed with complicated historical and cultural influence, internally and externally. Overall, it can be concluded that they show elements of innovations while retaining the essence of their Chineseness. As the language itself is endowed with rich cultural heritage, many language tricks can be played upon the name of eating houses, hence showcasing a tip of an interesting and panoramic view of language use among the Malaysian Chinese.

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