

*Journal of the Association for Communication Administration*  
27(1998), 59-70

# A Speech Communication Program in Malaysia: Case Study in the Conundrums of Teaching Abroad

ROBERT C. DICK  
BRENDA M. ROBINSON

## INTRODUCTION

**I**N 1985, a cooperative international educational program was established between Indiana University (IU) and the government of Malaysia. It was entitled ITM/MUCIA, acronym for Institut Teknologi MARA/Midwest Universities Consortium for International Activities. The program was designed so Malaysian students could take the first two years of their baccalaureate course work in Malaysia from U.S. faculty on location there, and receive Indiana University academic credit. This credit then was transferred to U.S. colleges and universities at which students completed undergraduate degrees.

An increasing number of international students have attended U.S. institutions in recent decades, but economic conditions had prompted this new academic configuration. Because of the small number of universities in Malaysia, it had been and still is necessary for Malaysians to obtain their education in countries such as the U.S. Prior to 1985, the Malaysian government spent an estimated \$15,000 (U.S.) annually for housing, living expenses, tuition and other costs for each student it sponsored in the U.S. (*ITM/MUCIA cooperative program*, 1993). The economic downturn in 1983 made it necessary for the Malaysian government to address its educational needs in a more cost-effective manner.

Altogether, more than 4,500 students went through the system. By the end of 1992, more than 3,000 of them had transferred from ITM/MUCIA to approximately 175 U.S. institutions, and over 900 of them already had completed their degrees and returned to Malaysia (McKibben, 1995; Summers et al., 1993).

Speech communication courses were among those taught in Malaysia to provide students more preparation and background for their academic experiences in America, and the demand in today's world for such courses promises to become more commonplace.

All courses in the Malaysian program carried the same numbers and descriptions as those in the IU curriculum, and each academic area had a U.S. supervisory liaison. Speech communication offerings in ITM/MUCIA were from the IU Indianapolis curriculum, and one of the authors was the disciplinary liaison responsible for final recommendations on syllabi, texts, and faculty applications from the inception of the program.

Both administrative and actual classroom teaching decisions affecting our discipline were made within the parameters of 1) providing high quality instruction at freshman and sophomore levels, and 2) facilitating "Malaysianization of the program," i.e., the eventual assumption of full academic control and responsibility for the ITM/MUCIA program by ITM itself, including the issuance of its own diplomas and transcripts (*ITM/MUCIA cooperative program*, 1993). While courses taught by the Malaysians would continue to carry the same numbers and descriptions as those in the IU bulletins, they no longer would be assigned regular IU academic credit. Instead, students would directly apply for transfer of their Malaysian credits.

U.S. faculty worked as mentors to the Malaysian professorial counterparts who were eventually to be their replacements, and the official transition was completed in August 1995. To gain a final, firsthand perspective on the classroom teaching experiences that had been curricular concerns of expat faculty in the field, the authors assumed one-year appointments on the Malaysian campus beginning in Fall 1994.

The substance as well as the teaching process of courses in some disciplines might remain somewhat similar in the U.S. and Malaysia. However, the variables in speech communication, particularly those relating to culture and language, can present more country-specific challenges and demands, especially for instructors who are supposed to teach the same nucleus of materials in Malaysia as they would in the U.S. under the same course title, number, and description.

The purpose of this study was 1) to discover directly the unique elements of the culture of the ITM/MUCIA students that affect their speech communication, and 2) to suggest the issues to be addressed in the "Malaysianized" program in order to maximize the effectiveness of the courses under their local faculty and enhance the likelihood of credit transferability.

The intercultural dimensions necessarily are unique, but the exploration of them might suggest some general areas of consideration for those involved with teaching or establishing a curriculum in speech communication abroad elsewhere in the future. To gain a full perspective, one must consider such elements as the cultural background, demeanor, constraints vis-a-vis freedom of speech, and characteristics affecting classroom speechmaking.

### HISTORICAL-CULTURAL MILIEU

Malaysia gained independence from England in 1957. At that time the proportionment of the three predominant cultures—Chinese, Indian, and Malay—was nearly the same as now. Over 30% were Chinese, mostly Buddhists, who were primarily urban and entrepreneurial; they had established themselves in business and professions, and had acquired a sizable portion of the nation's wealth. Indians, mostly Hindus, comprising over 10% of the population, were divided between urban and rural; the former primarily were in small business and service, including many domestic laborers, while the bulk of the latter worked in agriculture, mines, and on rubber plantations. Malays, the largest group with over 50% of the population, were almost all Islamic and historically had remained rural, earning a relatively meager income through farming and fishing. While reviewing that group's economic status in the 1960s, Rehman Rashid remarked of the new constitution, that "The Malays may have been assured of the pre-eminence in government and a clear majority in the

population, but what did such platitudes mean when they held only 2% of the nation's wealth" (Rashid, 1993, p. 86)?

Indeed the Constitution had recognized the native origin of the Malays, symbolized by granting political roles to the sultanates, but only later were specific policies developed to give greater employment and other resource opportunities to the Malays. In effect, the Malays gave themselves a form of affirmative action treatment to compensate for having been alienated over time from the prosperity of the country in which they were the majority.

The most direct preferential treatment in education came as a result of the New Economic Policy (NEP) of 1971. The NEP was designed to eliminate the economic, geographic, and other demarcations among the ethnic groups of Malaysia. Along with greater preferential treatment in employment and ownership of resources, a quota system was set for Malays in higher education and a majority of government scholarships was reserved for Malay students. The future Prime Minister, Mahathir, had issued a rationalization for such educational discrimination in his 1969 book, *The Malay Dilemma*, in which he wrote that exclusive scholarships "are not a manifestation of racial inequality. They are a means of breaking down the superior position of the non-Malays in the field of education. The Malays are not proud of this treatment . . . They would like to get rid of their privileges if they can, but they have to let pride take second place to the facts of life" (p. 76).

Thus, ITM was established, admitting only students of Malay and indigenous origin, a group known as Bumiputras (Pong, 1993).

### STUDENT Demeanor

There are multiple influences on student behaviors and no generalizations can be made to fit all students at MUCIA. But, there were some characteristics that were extremely common.

The students at ITM/MUCIA were highly conservative, at least ostensibly, and nearly all were Islamic. In programs such as this, there had been an effort by many local academic administrators to combat what they perceived to be a "slavish imitation of the liberal and permissive life-style of secular universities in the West" (Hassan, 1994). Indeed, in Malaysia there was an expansion of the Islamic consciousness in the late seventies and eighties, with heavy criticism of "immoral" aspects of campus life. The Islamic ideas of modesty and values of the "proper relationship between the sexes" and "decent" attire began to spread all over the educational system (Hassan, 1994). Female students in our classes wore formal Islamic garb and insisted on sitting as a group in a separate part of the room from the males. The males likewise automatically seated themselves separately from the females, but several wore more casual, western-looking attire.

A number of social and cultural behaviors of ITM/MUCIA students were directly observed on campus, particularly in the classroom. They were undergirded by the learning styles these students brought and exhibited from their earlier Malaysian education. There has been some effort during the past ten to twelve years to change learning styles at lower grade levels in the country, but the students on our campus clearly represented earlier practices. Research by our academic colleagues had corroborated our own experiences, noting that:

Traditional education in Malaysia has been very authoritarian. Students were expected to accept, without question, the facts and explanations given by their teachers. The system rewarded verbatim recall and practice of methodology. Strong emphasis on standardized national exams, which changed only in their details from year to year, reinforced traditional values of student performance. (Summers et al., 1993, p.12)

Malaysian educational practices had been similar to what Samovar and Porter (1995) assert about the practice in China, Japan, and Korea, in which teachers lecture more extensively than in the United States: "In those cultures, learning is passive, and students are expected to do a great deal of rote memorization" (p. 246).

A survey of the ITM/MUCIA faculty and staff, from a wide cross-section of Americans and Malaysians (Summers et al., 1993), revealed near unanimity on strengths and weaknesses of Malaysian students, reflecting the nature of their earlier learning styles. And these probably were especially exacerbated among our students as they were required exclusively to speak English. Among the strengths were: conscientious, hard-working, well motivated; polite, respectful, seriously committed, cooperative; and good at learning facts (p. 55). Weaknesses included: passive absorption, dependent; lack of self-reliance, lack of confidence, unquestioning; lack of developed ability to reason; emphasis on 'face,' conformity, lack of ability to question authority; and the propensity to plagiarize" (p. 55).

One of the most problematic yet benign behaviors was the tendency for students to talk among themselves, often very loudly, while designated speakers were delivering discourses in the front of the room. This was done frequently despite admonitions from the instructors to the effect that it is impolite to speak at most gatherings in the U.S. when others have the floor. Yet, one must ask if an instructor in such a foreign communication class should expect the audience members—or speakers for that matter—to conduct themselves according to standards or expectations of the students' own culture, with which they might well be learning to communicate, or according to the instructor's cultural criteria? The program was designed for students to learn the same nucleus of materials taught in U.S. university classrooms. Students in U.S. classrooms learn to analyze and adapt to their audiences. Accordingly, one could say that the instructor had the responsibility for learning cultural practices in order to evaluate student adaptations to them. Yet, in keeping with programmatic objectives, student audiences were directed to be polite and attentive when fellow students were speaking.

Nonetheless, soon the authors did go to forums, symposia, and other types of speaking events in the area, and discovered that the norm is to have frequent if not constant talk among audience members during formal presentations. Thus, there was a possible disservice in asking the class members to remain quiet during a speech. Instead, perhaps student speakers should have been challenged to vie for the attention of a chattering audience. Even at non-political events, Malaysians customarily need to speak in a context not unlike that of western political conventions.

Yet, the students were significantly quiet whenever an instructor spoke. Whether it was because of uncertainty in speaking English, fear of breaking a code, or because they were accustomed to an educational system in which they primarily listened to lectures—which they claimed was the case. Whatever the reason, the students preferred not to say anything during lecture-discussion sessions. If an instructor asked a question, the classes became deadly silent. This problem of non-participation in the classroom is common for Asian students, and can intensify when they transfer to the U.S. and are supposed to interact with Western students (Dick & Robinson, 1992). In our classes, if a student contribution was made, voluntarily or otherwise, invariably it came in the form of a whisper. Asking the student to speak more loudly often brought only slightly increased volume that carried for two or three rows at most. Therefore, if the instructor wanted to know what the student said, it often was necessary to go to the student's desk and listen carefully. Lecturers on campus frequently called this the "Phil Donahue Method." Our classrooms were not unlike those in China, in which "North American teachers . . . often find the silence unnerving" (Powell & Andersen, 1994, p. 324). There were ways to bring out these students' participation, but it took considerable effort from the outset of each semester.

Another student behavior that merits considerable thought concerns types of mutual cooperation that were hard for Westerners to differentiate from cheating. This accentuated their "cooperative" culture whereas American culture is "individualistic." Of course, there are some unacceptable practices that are similar in both the U.S. and Malaysia. For instance, in the U.S. speech outlines are placed in fraternity and sorority files or other such locations from which they emerge in recycled form from time to time. In Malaysia, there are similar files that seem to be accessible to greater numbers of people and there, perhaps, is more indiscriminate use. For instance, in a fall semester 10:30 am class, one author heard a speech that had all main points and supporting material nearly identical with what he had heard during the previous hour. The sense of "sharing" resources, even those that were supposed to be created or otherwise handled independently, had to be addressed and monitored carefully in order to maximize the learning process for all.

A disturbing practice that transpired in Malaysia was that of students going through instructors' materials in faculty offices. On the MUCIA campus, two to four Malaysian and American faculty members shared the same office, occupying partitioned areas that had desks with ununlockable drawers. On several occasions each semester, students came in while one of the authors was present, and looked through the papers of absent instructors. When confronted, the students explained that they were given permission by the instructor to come get their papers, exams and the like. Subsequent inquiry in all but one instance revealed that the instructor did not recall having given said permission.

Perhaps the greatest frustration concerning this matter came when a student in one of our classes gave a persuasive speech asserting the proposition that there was a problem with instructors not locking exams and papers they did not want circulated. The implication was that anything left in unsecured drawers was fair game to be taken so long as it was shared and not "selfishly hogged" by the one(s) who took it.

While some of the written work was analytically and perceptively prepared, and submitted in neat, legible form, a large portion of the work appeared, in form and substance, to be in various stages of "rough-draft." It was handwritten in pencil, the writing usually was microscopic, and trying to read it was similar to having a microfiche but no machine with which to magnify it. Consequently, when students were asked to have a brief, extemporaneous "speaking outline," careful procedures had to be worked out and understood. Otherwise, a large number of the oral communication students were capable of getting a lengthy manuscript on a 3" by 5" card, and would attempt to do so because of stage fright or language concerns. And notwithstanding the size of the writing on "speaking outlines," there frequently were cross-outs and editorial markings on "preparation outlines" as well as other papers that were supposed to be in final form when handed in.

Apparently, such "final products" were not totally peculiar to MUCIA instructors, and not to be taken as a personal insult by anyone. We were amused to find some corroboration by a native who recorded similar experiences when paper grading became part of his job as a graduate research associate at another Malaysian University. He noted:

"The scruffiest pieces of work—a few paper-clipped sheets of longhand—would invariably come from Malay students . . . . Then, upon reading the papers, I'd see an equal gulf in diligence [between Bumiputras and non-Bumiputras] that had gone into them. One or two of the Malays were so obviously lackadaisical that I thought they must have handed in their rough drafts by mistake. But no: this was indeed all they thought necessary for their course work. I was enraged. Didn't they know what they were up against? Couldn't they see how earnest their non-Malay colleagues were, and the standard they were setting? (Rashid, 1993, pp. 155-156)

We emphasize that an appreciable number of MUCIA communication students were thorough and conscientious, and this is merely to express concern that several students, particularly those remaining in the final semester, did not apply themselves fully.

### FREEDOM OF SPEECH

The substance of classroom speechmaking was greatly affected by a lack of freedom of speech in Malaysia. Unlike in some more liberal nations, one cannot presume that Malaysian students can feel free to express themselves. Yet, whenever a communication course is to be taught in a foreign country and subsequently transferred to the U.S. with the same number, title, and description as one in the U.S. after which it is modeled, these overriding questions persist: Does enough freedom of speech prevail to allow substantive analysis and discussion of political, social, economic, religious, and other such issues? If not, can adaptations be made to compensate for that situation? These questions require study of the laws and practices of that specific culture.

A number of Malaysian laws place direct threats and limitations on the right of free speech in that society. These range from and include the Sedition Act of 1948, the Internal Security Act of 1971, the Printing Presses Publication Act of 1984, and the 1986 amendments to the Official Secrets Act.

After a review of modern law in Malaysia, Kamali remarked that the "Malaysian Parliament may, by law, impose on the freedom of speech whatever restrictions as it deems necessary or expedient . . . to provide against . . . incitement to any offence." He concluded that "restriction on freedom of speech is quite elaborate" (Kamali, 1994, pp. 261-262).

As our students knew, recent Malaysian history is replete with examples of strong subjective interpretation and enforcement of laws related to free speech. In his 1986 book, *The Challenge*, Prime Minister Mahathir asserted the belief that "words are meant for communication, but too often they are used for miscommunication leading to confusion and chaos. I have long felt this about words like freedom, equality, democracy . . . and many more" (Mahathir, 1986, p. i).

The Internal Security Act, implemented under Mahathir's direction, permits the arrest and detention without trial of any person speaking in a manner threatening to the national security. On the night of October 27, 1987, operatives of the police Special Branch spread out across the nation, arresting and detaining 115 social activists, environmentalists, Chinese educationists, opposition politicians and sundry radicals. "The small fry among them would be released within several weeks while the more prominent would be kept behind barbed wire for eighteen months" (Rashid, 1993, p. 231). Local newspapers in Kuala Lumpur, including the *Star*, *Watan* and the *Sin Jew Jit Poh* had their publishing permits suspended after running front-page stories on the most socially active detainees.

Even the current Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, served eighteen months in detention for his activities as a university student leader of the Muslim Youth Movement. Anwar had been a "firebrand" in his university days, a "flaming orator," who had been sentenced under the Internal Security Act (Rashid, 1993, p. 208).

Near the beginning of Fall Semester, 1994, the leader of the Al-Aqam Movement, an Islamic group, was arrested and detained without trial under the Internal Security Act (Richardson, 1994). In addition, leaders of one of Mahathir's opposing parties with Islamic ties, the PAS (Partei Islam SeMalaysia) were put under government watch in May 1995 because of "fanaticism." The Prime Minister alleged that PAS could "deteriorate the akidah [faith] of Muslims and lead astray its members and followers [and that] if not checked in time, the impact could be more far-reaching than that of Al-Aqam." As a means of rectifying the situation, Mahathir said that his group, the UMNO [United Malays' National Organization] was "responsible to bring them [PAS followers] back to the right path" (Valentino,

Kam, & Singh, 1995, p. 1). At that time, the PAS was told it was a "threat to national security" (Wong, 1995). In short, there was a pervasive concern that problems arise when "different leaders . . . of Islamic teaching have different interpretations . . . Muslims of one nation are so divided among themselves [that they] seek to destroy one another" (Mahathir, 1986, p. 105). Moreover, even public rallies were disallowed during election campaigns. The Secretary-General of the Prime Minister's political party, the Barison Nasional, explained that "overzealous speakers and sensitive topics can incite racial and religious unrest" (Awalludin, 1995, p. 2).

## SPEECHMAKING IN THE CLASSROOM

### *Textual Materials*

Our course in public speaking was to help acclimate students to the American university classroom, and the content was to be similar enough to transfer, so we chose a text to meet those objectives. At the same time, we wanted to include some units of speaking that were emphasized in the Malaysian culture, e.g., those that were ritualistic in nature, designed to heighten emotion and build camaraderie and unity of groups with shared ideas, attitudes, values, and beliefs. Thus, we wanted a text that included a strong segment on "Speaking on Special Occasions," including commemorative speeches. While a number of books in the field have this focus, our selection was *The Art of Public Speaking* by Stephen Lucas. The book's inclusion of numerous samples with commentaries at the end of chapters gave these non-native speakers of English some tangible reinforcements of theoretical material. The appendices, with speeches for analysis and discussion, gave written demonstrations, and the ones by students were especially useful and non-threatening. In addition, the accompanying videos of student speeches provided complete samples for our enrollees to view.

To provide closer identification with Malaysian speakers, a videotaped collection had been made, since the late 1980's, of Speech Night final round speeches. Speech Night was a well attended, campus-wide competition of students who had been judged top persuasive speakers from each MUCIA section.

### *Topics and Purposes*

In American classes there can be a propensity for many students just to describe phenomena and report information that has been compiled by others; likewise, Malaysian students tended to explore noncontroversial materials, and put them into oral discourses. But, their "descriptions" seemed to go beyond vicarious reading, which is often the focus of their American counterparts. These Malaysian students were interested in traditions, ceremonies, rituals, entertainment, and myths told to them or otherwise experientially learned in their rural environments as youth. There was minimal questioning of what they were told. This corroborated faculty surveys noting that many students desired to learn by rote, to "emphasize conformity" and "not question authority" (Summers et al, 1993). In fact, many of these rural students seemed more desirous of continued life back in the Kampung, i.e. their happy, secure, insular home villages, than of pursuing the urban-type careers urged upon them by parents and/or the government. They had been awarded scholarships and "assigned" majors by the Jahatan Perkhidmaton Awam (JPA), i.e., their Public Services Department (Summers et al, 1993).

Malaysian students had great emotional attachment to their pasts, relatives, friends, and leaders. They shared strong involvement in the Islamic faith and a singular view of government. In light of common interests and backgrounds, these students developed more affinity for speeches of the informative and commemorative genres. In subject areas on

which the audience was friendly and already supportive, the students were especially strong in enhancing or stimulating feeling. There was an aversion to conflict or confrontation. Persons both in and out of the classroom had difficulty expressing anything negative. In requesting service from them, if you said you needed something done that afternoon, the persons we encountered would generally say "can, can," even if they thought it totally improbable. Rarely was an assignment not presented on time—generally students would attempt to complete it when required, even if they had other commitments or demands.

### *Organization*

Probably the least problem our Malaysian students had was with organization. They were able to structure the body of a discourse with clear central ideas, main points, and sub-points.

Introductions were generally clear, with appropriate attention-getting material and evolution of definite statements of the central ideas. At the very outset, the students generally would utter in a soft, nearly inaudible tone, a ritualistic statement, followed by recognizing the instructor and classmates. Upon inquiry, we learned that in those statements the speakers were lightheartedly "confessing their terror" at speaking on the occasion, or "thanking God" for His beneficence in letting them and the audience meet on that morning, and similar sayings. We took their word for it. Then during the year, a news article was released on the subject, noting that "When you have to give a speech, there are a number of styles [of introductions and conclusions] you may choose" (Amin, 1995, p. 35). The article contained samples that sounded similar to what the students automatically injected into their introductions, e.g., "Biarlah saya akui betapa gerun rasanya hati kerana teraksa berucup di majlis yang demikian hebatnya" (Amin, 1995, p. 35).

The conclusions of student speeches were less complete and usually did not contain the ritualistic materials, although such also are plentiful. Instead, the students frequently used types of conclusions described in the lectures and textbook. Naturally, some stopped abruptly and unexpectedly. In America, the typical abrupt, catchall conclusion is: "That's about all. Any questions?" In Malaysia, the same unfortunate situation is adorned with: "With that, I thank you." After that is a fast exit from the platform.

### *Reasoning and Supporting Material*

In order for analysis and discussion of issues to take place, students must be exposed to the various perspectives on those issues. Yet, because of the aforementioned restrictions on freedom of speech, student exposure to analysis becomes limited. At a 1989 Conference on Free Expression in Kuala Lumpur, Lee Min Choon, a legal expert, spoke on the judiciary's promoting "possible" unreasonable restrictions on "freedom of expression" and suggested that "this restriction tends to stifle the legitimate activities and aims of political opposition" (Choon, 1989, p. 5). And Raja Azlan Shah, a judge at the time, stated what Americans would regard as a truism, i.e. that "free and frank political discussion and criticism cannot be developed in an atmosphere of surveillance and constraint" (Kamali, 1994, p. 262).

In such an environment, the media did not provide opposition to the common points of view. Abdul Karim (1995) of ITM Shah Alam's School of Mass Communication, made a content analysis of recorded radio and television broadcasts in the 1990 election, from the nominations until election day. His research showed that "96% of material from broadcasts directly support and praise the ruling party's leaders and candidates" (p. 4).

In spring 1995, Mahathir called a national election in which opposing candidates' speaking again appeared non-existent. Political speeches of no kind were featured, but current government officials regularly were shown conducting their "elected duties." Of the 1995 election, the Research Project Leader on Media and Politics at the ITM campus in Shah



Alam, Sankaran Ramanathan, noted that "government control gives them [Mahathir's party] undue advantage" (Ramanathan, 1995).

Newspapers afforded similarly sparse coverage for opposing positions on controversial issues. With their desire to retain publishing permits, the newspapers have been proscribed by legal threats and restrictions to a "traditional role of sustaining government initiatives . . . dutifully criticizing the more egregious opportunisms" (Rashid, 1993, p. 260). The degree to which newspapers are held supportive of the status quo was suggested by Rashid when he wrote: "Once when asked to judge a school debate, I noticed that the written rules prohibited any mention of 'sensitive issues.' The definition of what was 'sensitive' was a negative one. Anything written in the newspaper, said the rules, was *ipso facto*, not sensitive" (p. 201).

In short, even if MUCIA students had wanted to be kept abreast of the current issues, the local media did not assist by providing stories for supporting material and further thought. In essence, newspapers became a standard for desensitization.

Placed alongside the other arrests and "monitorings" made in recent Malaysian history, this strongly suggests that freedom of speech as well as minimal exposure to issues through mass media are matters for consideration in a speech communication course that ordinarily addresses propositions of fact, value, and policy. Legal pressures had to have not only a direct effect on the attitudes of students toward speaking out on controversial issues, but also on their ability to learn, find, explore, and understand, as well as expound upon those issues.

Consistent with the unavailability of materials, many students in Malaysia do not study data and build arguments from them; they might not do so even if the data on controversial issues were more readily available. Instead, they often argue from authority. There is a strong acceptance of authoritative conclusions with little questioning of how they were derived. Such a reliance on argument from authority, especially when accompanied by the central belief that it is wrong to question or criticize the authority, manifests the *ipse dixit* or "he says so" fallacy. Even if "he" is often right, it can be dangerous to put our reasoning or critical thinking abilities "on hold" if we intend to be unmanipulated or uncontrolled by others. Discipline and "conformity" can have merit in society but not at the expense of analysis and critical thought. Thus, the following views of the Prime Minister can be inhibitive despite the good intentions with which they are stated:

If every member of society understands the importance of organization and discipline and plays his part out of a sense of responsibility, the society will be stable and progressive. But if many or all members of society refuse to conform to its organization and discipline and insist on acting outside the given limits, disruption is inevitable, with adverse effects on those concerned and indeed on the entire society. (Mahathir, 1986, p. 137)

The students in our classes were disciplined and generally intelligent. Several reasoned effectively, and could become effective leaders in the future. Still there were too many whose reasoning needed to improve beyond a level of merely confirming authoritative conclusions. Perhaps it was captured best by an Indian taxi driver who described some Malays in response to a casual question by a journalist: "These people are followers. With good leaders, they will be good people. With bad leaders, they will be bad people. (Rashid, 1993, p. 137).

Classroom supporting materials on most controversial issues were derived from U.S. sources, and they referred to problems in the U.S. concerning environment, penal programs, nutrition, and various other issues. Frequently, speeches contained evidence from

U.S. sources, specifying problems in the U.S., while their solutions were for Malaysia, i.e. what Malaysia should do to address such problems in Malaysia—however, the students did not produce documentation of the problem in Malaysia.

For instance, there appears to be no evidence or documentation in Malaysia on the negative aspects of palm oil. Maybe there are no such aspects. The newspapers asserted that the American Soybean Association had been trying to “strike terror” in the minds of the American people about palm oil, wanting it not to be classified as a “vegetable oil.” The paper did not cite the reasons or basis for the Association’s action. Instead, they countered with findings of the Malaysian Palm Oil Promotion Council, saying how good palm oil is (*Nutritional Aspects*, p. 9). One would hope for more than a Malaysian biased authority’s conclusion countering a U.S. biased authority’s conclusion, but such is rare.

### *Delivery*

Once the several students stopped trying to get away with reading encyclopedic quantities of microscopic words on 3 x 5 cards and started extemporizing according to the outlining requirements, the visual and physical elements of delivery became more effective and they established communicative contact with their audiences.

Vocal delivery remained problematic with many as they spoke so softly that they were inaudible. Further, the pronunciation was difficult for the instructor to comprehend, yet the audience appeared to comprehend readily. This prompts an issue: does the instructor of foreign students who are speaking to a foreign audience demand that the speakers adapt their pronunciation to him/her, or is the speaker performing effectively enough if the overall audience, less the instructor, does not find the vocal delivery distracting? If the latter, how can the instructor really know that the vocal delivery is not distracting or, for that matter, even what was said? Practicality demands that the instructor is a highly significant part of the audience for whose judgment the message is designed. This especially is the case when students are reluctant to criticize, even when they might not understand a word.

Yet vocal delivery does not appear to be the major problem in light of the trends of the new program. Because they are readily available, ESL instructors have been assigned to teach several sections in the non-American ADP (American Degree Program), and they have had little or no formal training in speech communication (yet, persons with such credentials constituted the bulk of mentorees in anticipation of Malaysianization). The students of those instructors appear to concentrate on language, pronunciation, and the voice. In fall 1994 and spring 1995, the authors invited the ADP communication sections to participate in the Speech Night event. It was evident on those occasions that clarity and projection of vocal English had been the focus of those participants. Vocal form stood out, whereas content and other significant aspects of speechmaking appeared subordinated (e.g., analysis of the purpose, topic, audience, and occasion; research and use of supporting materials; and other such matters).

It is understandable that the subject of speech communication in a foreign tongue can be thought nearly synonymous with oral delivery or language. In Malaysia, even such a content-oriented activity as debate can be thought of as a vehicle for developing language more than for the equally inherent reasoning and analysis involved. This was exemplified in a recent article in the Education Section of a local Malaysian newspaper. It began by saying “one cannot be a good debater without having a good command of language . . . . Students need to work on their grammar and vocabulary . . . but for a vast majority . . . two problems still remain a barrier: pronunciation and lack of confidence . . . . Pronunciation plays a big role in public speaking and debating competitions” (Sia, January 22, 1995, p. 35).

Indeed, elocutionary skills are vital to foreign students, so long as they are not allowed to overshadow or replace content.

## CONCLUSION

MUCIA communication instructors attempted to give Malaysian students training equal in core content to what was imparted in the U.S. They gave more attention to the language aspects of delivery than in U.S. counterpart courses, especially pronunciation, enunciation, and volume because of the unique situation. The communication instructors under Malaysianization, a large number of whom have ESL backgrounds, should continue demanding linguistic proficiency from the students. Yet, the speech communication courses, by definition, demand significantly more. If student credits are to be transferable, the instructors of Malaysianized courses should be expected to have bona fide graduate academic credentials in speech communication, per se. If the course taught is in public speaking or oral communication in business and professions, it is not enough that the instructor is conversant in English or has graduate work in English as a Second Language. There should be careful monitoring of the academic training and background of instructors vis-a-vis the specific communication courses they are assigned to teach. In addition to paying special attention to linguistic skills, there should be directness, spontaneity, rapport and the multitude of other characteristics inherent to the orality of our discipline.

Communication courses serve as vehicles for delivering dialectic among students and instructors. This contrasts with silence associated with "saving face" or with expecting the ultimate truth to come from the instructor, who is the "authority." Independent, critical thinking evolves in such dialectical and interactive contexts. This also stands in contrast with the cultural bent toward cooperation that is so great that it can become confused with cheating and plagiarism—characteristics that best be tempered for study in the U.S.

Critical analysis comes in the preparation and delivery of discourses on controversial issues. Students must learn to test evidence and know the reasoning behind an argument rather than assume that something is so if an "authority" says it is so. In an authoritarian society, the local instructors might find it necessary to encourage students to study problems and solutions of an issue from another nation, such as America, in which they are made interested and on which there clearly are opposing positions in the media and elsewhere.

The overall objective in the Malaysianized oral communication course accepted for transfer should be no less that of one taught in the U.S.: ability to formulate a substantive message inextricably with those qualities of good delivery that include yet go beyond linguistic skills.

## REFERENCES AND NOTES

**Robert C. Dick** (Ph.D., Stanford University, 1969) is Professor of Communication Studies at Indiana University, Indianapolis, IN 46202-3120.

**Brenda M. Robinson** (M.S., Indiana University, Indianapolis, 1998) is a doctoral candidate in Higher Education at Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405.

Amin, A. (1995, January 22). Beginning and ending speeches in traditional style. *Sunday Star*, p. 35.

Awalludin, A. (1995, May 22). Tok Mat: Public rallies can cause unrest. *Star*, p. 2.

Choon, L. M. (1989, December). *Should there be any restriction*. Paper presented at Conference on Freedom of Expression, Kuala Lumpur.

Dick, R. C., & Robinson, B. M. (1992). Should there be exclusive sections of basic oral communication courses for ESL students? *World Communication*, 21, 23-32.

- Hassan, M. K. (1994). The influence of Islam on education and family in Malaysia. In S. O. Alhabshi & S. O. S. Agil (Eds.), *The role and influence of religion in society* (pp. 119-154). Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM).
- ITM/MUCIA cooperative program in Malaysia. (1993). Bloomington, IN: ITM/MUCIA Program.
- Kamali, M. H. (1994). *Freedom of expression in Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing.
- Karim, A. G. (1995, April). *Content analysis of Malaysian radio and television during the election of 1990*. Paper presented at Seminar on Media and Politics: Media Performance in Malaysia's 1990 General Election, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.
- Mahathir, M. (1969). *The Malay dilemma*. Singapore: Asia Pacific Press.
- Mahathir, M. (1986). *The challenge*. Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications.
- McKibben, B. B. (1995, April 27). (Associate Director for Scheduling and Technical Services, ITM/MUCIA, Indiana University Cooperative Program, Shah Alam, Malaysia) Interview by Authors.
- Nutritional aspects and health benefits of palm oil (1995, March 5). *Sunday Star*, p. 9.
- Pong, S. (1993). Preferential policies and secondary school attainment in peninsular Malaysia. *Sociology of Education*, 66, 245-261.
- Powell, R. G., & Andersen, J. (1993). Culture and classroom communication. In L. R. Samovar & R. R. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Ramanathan, S. (1995, May 15). Lecturer and Research Project Leader on Media and Politics, School of Mass Communication, ITM, Shah Alam, Interview by Authors.
- Rashid, R. (1993). *A Malaysian journey*. Kuala Lumpur: Academe Art & Printing Services.
- Reece, R. (1969, September 18). Crimes for democracy. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, pp. 688-697.
- Richardson, M. (1994, August 5). Malaysia and neighbors to move against Islamic sects. *International Herald Tribune*, pp. 1,8.
- Samovar, L. A., & Porter, R. E. (1995). *Communication between cultures* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Sia, A. (1995, January 22). Debating skills can be acquired. *Sunday Star*, p. 35.
- Shah, R. A. (1994). Cited in Mohammad H. Kamali. *Freedom of expression in Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing, (p. 262).
- Summers, W., Dobson, D., Ahmad, N. A., & Valois, A. (1993). *The ITM/MUCIA cooperative program and vision 2020: A strategic planning document*. Unpublished manuscript, ITM/MUCIA, Strategic Planning Committee, Shah Alam, Malaysia.
- Valentino, Z., Kam, S., & Singh, P. (1995, May 7). PAS under watch. *The Sun*, pp.1-2.
- Wong, C. W. (1995, May 14). Strongest ever warning against PAS. *Sunday Star*, p. 15.