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**Journal of Language and Communication**  
**Vol. 2(2) September 2015**

**Contents**

Editorial Board	i
International Advisory Board	ii
Reviewers	iii
<b>NURUL AIN MOHD HASAN</b> Communicating Corporate Social Responsibility: How Messages in Texts Influence the Standards	105
<b>MARDZIAH HAYATI ABDULLAH, HO SOOK WAH, WONG BEE ENG</b> Delivering the ELEX Package: An English Language Experience Approach for Developing Undergraduates' Language Proficiency	119
<b>MANJET KAUR MEHAR SINGH</b> Malaysian Public University Students' Attitude towards Plagiarism	133
<b>SEYED FOAD EBRAHIMI</b> Authority and Invisibility in Research Article Abstracts Across Four Disciplines	147
<b>MUHAMMAD NADZRI ABDUL AZIZ, TAN BEE HOON</b> Impact of Composing Medium on the Quality and Quantity of Writing	157
<b>SUSANNA BITHIAH VARMA, HELEN TAN</b> Hedges Used by ESL Students in Single-Sex and Mixed-Sex Informal Conversations	169
<b>DARIUSH SABERI, CHAN SWEE HENG</b> Snapshots of the Relationship Between Photo, Caption and Headline in News Articles on Food	183
<b>HOOI CHEE MEI, YONG MEI FUNG</b> Intercultural Communication Strategies Used by Frontline Administrative Staff When Interacting with Foreign Students	195
<b>ARIFF IMRAN ANUAR YATIM, SHAMALA PARAMASIVAM</b> Linguistic Sexism and Gender Stereotypes in the Writing of Selected Malay Male University Students	207

SOON BAN YEE, WONG BEE ENG Comprehension of English VOS and VSO Sentences by L1 Korean and L1 Malaysian Malay Speakers	223
NURUL SOLEHA MOHD NOOR, RUZBEH BABAEE, ARBAAYAH ALI TERMIZI Effects of Trauma in Don Delillo's <i>Point Omega</i>	243
SOROUR KARAMPOUR DASHTI, IDA BAIZURA BAHAR Foucauldian Concepts of Madness, Power and Resistance in Jack Keroauc's <i>On the Road</i>	259

## **COMMUNICATING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: HOW MESSAGES IN TEXT INFLUENCE THE STANDARDS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Engaging in corporate social responsibility (CSR) not only requires the practice of strategic communication but also the carefully constructed use of messages in reporting CSR in public documents. This is because appropriate usage of messages in corporate documents potentially enhances readability and awareness of companies' activities in CSR. Strategic reporting projects substance in practising CSR beyond window dressing, a practice that raises the bar in CSR performances. This study aims to create a snapshot of existing CSR standards of Malaysian multinational corporations through the processes of communication in text particularly in the delivery of the content as written in annual reports. A qualitative textual analysis is employed to detect instances of CSR communicated in annual reports. The data provides a discussion surrounding communication as an important process in achieving readability of messages in the area of CSR grounded within communication literature and theories. The study adds value to research in communication and beyond.

Keywords: communication in corporate social responsibility, corporate social responsibility, readability in social reporting

### **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Many researchers agree that corporate social responsibility (CSR) simply does not have a distinct, consistent definition (Atan, Razali & Mohamed, 2010; Carroll, 2008; Ismail, 2011; Matten & Moon, 2008). In a broad sense, CSR, as defined by Moon (2014) is concerned with ways in which companies manage corporate relations with communities, within the organisations and beyond. The term CSR is derived by one of the pioneers of CSR scholars, Howard Bowen, whereby he saw CSR as a social obligation (Moon, 2014). CSR is often loosely defined and terminologies of related words are intersecting and complex. Initially, CSR was derived from scholars, mainly from the management school of thought. For instance, Carroll (2004) categorised CSR as encompassing four responsibilities in practice, which are: a) philanthropic, b) ethical, c) legal, and d) economic.

Ideally, the commitment of corporations to CSR is to improve the lives of the community and the environment. The unprecedented CSR commitments are driven by capitalist ideology which promotes ideas that corporations are powerful engines for social change. Often times, these ideas are strategically projected through reports in corporate documents. While the notion of public engagement as a reflection of a company's accomplishment is the norm in today's globalised world (Freeman, 1984; Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Palmar, & deColle, 2010; Harrison & Freeman, 1999), instances in the past have shown the lack of significance in CSR communication. For example, multinational corporations (MNCS) operating in developing countries are under attack by

social activists who question the significance of the ways in which CSR is communicated when companies reporting CSR activities are the same companies that are being investigated for going against human and environmental rights.

It is important to note here that Bursa Malaysia has set a standard in Malaysian reporting, in that publicly listed companies in Malaysia are to report financial as well as CSR practices in annual reports. While policy makers and regulators encourage companies to report their CSR initiatives extensively, reporting is still poor in Malaysia (The Star, 2009), and producing an independent CSR document remains a voluntary act. Therefore, CSR best-practice guidelines appear to be useful for an organisation, because a specific CSR guideline would reposition an organisation's priorities on social obligation. This is particularly important in a developing nation, because social practice that is based on specific CSR best-practice guidelines allows corporations to break away from a capitalist orientation in CSR practice. This orientation in CSR has often largely portrayed a negative image of transnational corporations operating in a highly unstable environment. For example, since developing countries began to open doors to foreign investors, exploitation of local communities in a form of unjust labour rights has escalated (see Brown, Deardorff, & Stern, 2004; Varley, 1998). As a result, transnational corporations are under scrutiny for their ethical conduct in developing nations. Practising stringent CSR best-practice guidelines shows companies are willing to commit to changing the stigma surrounding transnational corporations operating in developing nations.

Realistically, outsiders that read corporate documents have the tendency to assume messages are one-sided and less credible. Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2010) suggested that CSR communication from corporate documents will often times trigger more scepticism and have less credibility from the readers. For instance, individuals who are against cigarette smoking are more likely to be critical to a tobacco company's social contributions as communicated in its corporate documents. Thoroughness of CSR reporting helps to a certain extent, because it provides the idea that companies are doing CSR. However, the thoroughness of such messages is questionable. The comprehensiveness of communicating CSR in corporate documents gives readers details and significance of CSR activities beyond window dressing motives. Therefore this research creates a platform to explore the degree of thoroughness in communicating CSR within the context of documented text in annual reports and measure the documented text against existing global standards. The existing literature on global standards as discussed below served as the study's theoretical framework as well as guidance in formulating the best-practice instrument employed to measure CSR standards and performances for this study.

### **Global best practices**

In this particular study, a qualitative instrument to interpret best-practice aspects of CSR reporting was developed based on a collation of literature on global best-practice guidelines. The instrument was used to guide the qualitative textual analysis of annual reports. The best-practice instrument consists of eight macro-categories. They are: a) human rights, b) labour rights, c) environmental stewardship, d) fighting corruption and bribery, e) social reporting, f) financial necessity, g) compliance with certified international standards, and h) community driven. These macro-categories are based on existing best-practice guidelines as discussed in the literature. Below is an explanation of the macro-categories.

### **Human rights macro-category**

Within the human rights macro-category, three micro-categories were used to identify reporting of CSR best-practice initiatives in the annual reports. These areas are: a) respecting the right to practise religion, b) employees' awareness of human rights violations in company's policies and, c) adherence to local values, customs, norms and government policies. The human rights micro-categories were collated based on the requirements set forth by Bursa Malaysia and the securities commission of Malaysia. As a way to respect the human rights of the employees, every publicly listed company in Malaysia is required to show sensitivity to religion and the local values, norms and government policies (Bursa Malaysia, 2008), which include allowing employees of various faiths to perform their daily prayer routines as well as being sensitive towards various ethnic cultures and values. When analysing human rights micro-categories in the context of this study, company annual reports based on these elements of human rights were analysed.

### **Labour rights macro-category**

The labour rights micro-categories illustrate companies' initiatives in communicating labour rights in accordance with the international labour standards (ILO) and/or local Malaysian employment standards. Within the labour rights section, 11 labour rights best-practice areas (micro-categories) were used to analyse annual reports. The areas covered under the labour rights category are: company's conformity to local labour standards; working hours as stipulated under the ILO standards; sensitivity to local practices and norms in dealing with discrimination which includes race, ethnicity and gender; employment rights; educational opportunities for employees and families of employees; training for employees; collective bargaining under the ILO 1949; company's initiatives to protect the union; initiatives with regards to no forced or compulsory labour; industrial relations and health and safety issues.

### **Environmental stewardship macro-category**

The micro-categories under the environmental stewardship macro-category covered a company's initiatives towards global standards compliance, greenhouse emission in tons of carbon dioxide or equivalent, compliance with local environmental regulations and the company's efforts for environmentally efficient technology. These micro-categories were collated based on requirements developed for MNCs in developing nations particularly those that were listed by the United Nation Global Compact, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and Bursa Malaysia, the securities commission of Malaysia.

### **Fighting corruption and bribery macro-category**

Anti-corruption and bribery was only added to the United Nation Global Compact in June 2004 (Jenkins, 2005). As part of Bursa Malaysia's efforts to monitor the integrity of publicly listed companies, ethical practices in Malaysian business relate to the practice of corporate governance (Abdul Wahab, How, & Verhoeven, 2007; Salleh, 2009). These micro-categories under fighting corruption and bribery covered a company's initiatives in educating and informing its employees about corporate corruption and bribery. This macro category, therefore explores a company's initiatives in this area of CSR as reported in annual reports.

### **Social reporting macro-category**

Social reporting within the context of this study covers companies' initiatives to report on employees' social actions and accountability. Accountability in the context of this study includes transparency of the company's efforts in communicating its policy and actions to wider stakeholders. The social reporting macro-category includes a micro- category that represents the company's active participation to reach out to its publics through various channels, in particular through corporate websites and other social media (blogs and chat rooms are included). Most importantly, social reporting allows publics opportunities to gain knowledge of the companies' CSR initiatives. Hence communication about social reporting is important in the annual reports as part of measuring a company's CSR initiatives to communicate to the wider stakeholders.

### **Financial necessity macro-category**

It is a legal requirement that Malaysian companies, including MNCs, report financial standing in annual reports under the Malaysian Companies Act 1965 (Malaysia Government Official Portal, April 15, 2011), however financial dimensions of CSR and social reporting remain voluntary. The financial necessity macro-category within the context of this study looks at how companies communicate their financial tools to wider stakeholders as a way to adopt a CSR best practice which is sustainable in terms of reputation and financial standing.

Within the context of the best-practice instrument for this study, some of the ways companies indicated in the annual reports their inclination towards financial sustainability are through reputational and image enhancement strategies, adoption of risk management and a shareholder-value focus. The socially responsible investment (SRI) micro-category within the context of this study looks at the companies' CSR initiatives and sustainability in terms of long-term investment. The practice of long-term investment for sustainability is related to reputational management and is therefore covered under the financial necessity section in this analysis.

### **Compliance with certified international standards macro-category**

Complying with the international standards such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards in Asian companies was often understood as a common practice of CSR (Matten & Moon, 2008). Therefore it is important to explore a company's compliance with international standards as communicated in annual reports. For instance, the ISO 9000/9001 consists of a company's organisational governance and quality management practice (Murphy & Yates, 2009). The ISO 14001/14004 promotes good governance towards the environment and energy consumption (ISO, n.d.). Whereas, Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES) environment (CERES, n.d.; Fombrun, 2005) is an international standard certified and registered under the ISO 9001, which assists with the management of a company's environmental stewardship through monitoring and auditing of the company's environmental performance.

The SA 8000 (Social Accountability International, n.d.) covers employee relations standards. The AA 1000 (Accountability, n.d.) covers stakeholder standards practised in a company, whereas the Investors in People (IIP) learning and training standard (Fombrun, 2005; Investors in People, n.d.) covers a company's initiatives towards sustainable employee management through a workable framework that meets international standards. Lastly, the Occupation Health and Safety Assessment (OHSAS) Health and Safety covers a company's initiatives to protect employees' security in the workplace. These standards are some of the key standards often used by MNCs globally, particularly in developing

nations (Matten & Moon, 2008). These micro-categories explore Malaysian MNCs' initiatives as reported in annual reports.

### **Community-driven macro-category**

Companies' initiatives to report community work and philanthropic activities are in line with the Malaysian government's policy for nation building (Abdullah, 2010). These micro-categories are: a) charity or philanthropy and monetary contribution to the community, b) governmental sponsorships, c) affected publics and community sponsorships.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study investigates Malaysian MNCs' CSR standards through the practice of CSR reporting in the companies' annual reports. The CSR standards identified are discussed according to locally owned and foreign owned MNCs as well as sectors. The following research question illuminates the understanding of specific CSR areas that are heavily focused on and areas that need improving:

1. How do Malaysian MNCs in the customer-service sector communicate their CSR performance through annual reports, when measured against international and Malaysian CSR standards?

## **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative textual analysis was employed grounded within an interpretive paradigm. Specifically, a qualitative textual analysis was employed for the purpose of uncovering new perspectives and ideas of the current standards of CSR as communicated in selected Malaysian MNCs' annual reports. Fürsich (2013) further stated that a qualitative textual analysis is often relevant to be used to explore the "underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text" (p.240), and is often chosen for the purpose of illuminating implicit patterns and assumptions.

In this study, both development and application of the coding instrument were interpretive. Firstly, the researcher interpreted, based upon insider knowledge gained from working within the Malaysian public relations industry, which aspects of all the global best-practice guidelines reviewed were relevant for the Malaysian professional and cultural context. Secondly, the coding itself was interpretive. Annual reports do not use the exact language specified in global guidelines. Therefore, a process of interpretation was involved in deciding whether a form of words in an annual report constituted the presence of a particular category of reporting. As is standard in interpretive research, these decisions utilised the researcher's positionality (cultural and professional background).

This study therefore uses terminology describing textual analysis, which is derived from an interpretive analysis approach. The understanding of the usage of textual analysis for this study was drawn from an interpretive analysis method because the data gathered were based on instances found in the text and compared against a set of global best practice guidelines.

The textual analysis is grounded in a qualitative approach. To sustain the accuracy and precision of data found in the textual analysis for this study, frequency numbers of the themes that were interpreted are presented in tables to illustrate a systematic approach to the qualitative work. Many researchers have argued that using numbers in a qualitative method contributes an additional value to the process of uncovering new ideas in a

qualitative sense (Sandelowski, Voils & Knafl, 2009; Fielding, 2012; Maxwell, 2010; Sandelowski, 2001). In particular, Sandelowski, Voils and Knafl (2009) favour the use of numbers in describing qualitative data, a process that they called “quantitizing qualitative data” (p.210). Similarly, Maxwell (2010) argued that presenting qualitative data in a numerical context adds value to a qualitative approach because numbers allow for precision in presenting and discussing interpretations of qualitative data. Therefore, data gathered from the public documents for this study were presented in numbers solely to support and illustrate the interpretation of instances found in the documents.

The sample for textual analysis of annual reports consisted of large organisations that have MNC status in Malaysia (both local and foreign organisations), and have businesses that are either regional or global. A non-probability method using qualitative purposive sampling was chosen, because in selecting annual reports various factors needed to be taken into account to help answer the research question (for explanation on qualitative sampling see, Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Selection was based on the size of the companies, meaning they are publicly listed MNCs on the *Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange* (KLSE) main board or they are listed in the Forbes Global 2000 companies. The ranking of companies on Forbes Global 2000 was based on Forbes’ website (Forbes, 2012, April 4).

The list may have been updated from the time the listing was viewed on 20th May, 2011. MNCs were specifically divided into two key industrial sectors, mainly customer product and service sectors. The selection of key industrial sectors was based on Ahmad, Sulaiman and Siswanto’s (2003) selection of large Malaysian companies for content analysis research, namely, consumer products, construction, trading, service and finance. Classifying the sample into relevant industrial sectors has worked for some research in the past (Benn, Todd, Pendleton &, 2010) and provides a way to organise the data. In this study, customer product and service sectors were specifically chosen because these sectors have a broader customer base which also means that corporations under these sectors are likely to be customer-focused in communicating their CSR in annual reports.

During the selection process, the researcher incorporated companies that were prominent, in that they had either won CSR awards or were listed in the Forbes Global 2000 best-ranked global companies. Low-key companies were also selected in that they either had not been publicly recognised for their CSR initiatives or were not in the Forbes Global 2000 best- ranked global companies. For this study, annual reports accessible to the public were selected. Pollach, Johansen, Nielsen and Thomsen (2012) argued that it is relatively common for research to experience obstacles in gaining access to an organisation due to corporate policies. Therefore, for those that were not publicly accessible, a convenience-sampling factor affects the selection in that organisations that did not respond to requests for their annual reports were not able to be included.

Overall, there were 861 organisations listed on the main market of KLSE (at the time the textual analysis was conducted). It is important to note here that not all of these companies listed on the KLSE main board have MNC status and most of the companies listed on the main board were local companies. The list of companies was therefore carefully scanned in order to be sure that the ones selected were MNCs (either foreign companies operating in Malaysia or local companies operating in other parts of the Southeast Asian region or abroad). The present study also made sure that the largest foreign MNCs operating in Malaysia with high reputation and image throughout the world were included in the selection. By way of contrast the study also ensured that not all of the companies selected had won CSR awards or were listed in Forbes Global 2000 top companies, in which case, these companies were low key in their CSR work. This

purposive method of selecting samples was conducted in order to gain balance in the data gathered.

The selected annual reports ranged from 31 December 2009 to 1 July 2010 and covered 45 selected publicly listed MNCs on the KLSE. Typically, annual reports in Malaysia are produced twice a year, covering a company’s activities from January to June (which is made accessible online at the end of the year, typically in December) or July to December (which would be published and made accessible online between March and June). The annual reports were analysed based on the instrument of eight CSR best-practice macro-categories as indicated earlier. Overall, there are 38 micro-categories within the eight macro-categories.

### RESULTS

The macro-category was counted once and was not counted again throughout the same report. This particular technique was done to ensure that the macro category was counted once for one annual report. The idea was to avoid excessive numbering and percentages that will potentially increase confusion and complication when discussing what the numbers imply. Therefore, standardisation was done whereby macro-categories detected were coded as one (1) in a Microsoft Excel worksheet, and macro-categories that were not detected were coded as zero (0). The following tables display the eight categories of the best-practice instrument, listed as, human rights, labour rights, environmental stewardship, fighting corruption and bribery, social reporting, financial necessity, compliance with certified international standards and community driven. The numbers in the tables below display the instances of micro-categories from the instrument detected in the text of annual reports. The results are discussed below.

Table 1. CSR best-practice micro-categories

CSR best-practice micro categories	Sector				
	Service		Consumer product		Total N
	N	%	N	%	
Human rights					
Respecting the right to practise religion	0	0	1	8.3	1
Employees’ awareness of human rights violations in company’s policy	1	11	0	0	1
Adhere to local values, customs, norms and government policies	4	44	4	33	13
Labour rights					
Conform to local labour standards (meritocracy)	5	55	1	8.3	6
Work hours adhering to the ILO Standards	0	0	0	0	0
Sensitive to local practices and norms in dealing with discrimination (race, ethnicity and gender)	3	33	1	8.3	4
Equal rights and opportunities for employees	4	44	3	25	7
Educational opportunities for employees and/or family	3	33	5	42	8
Provide training for employees	5	55	10	83	15
The rights for collective bargaining (ILO 1949)	0	0	1	8.3	1
Initiatives to protect the rights of Employees against acts of anti-union	1	0	3	25	4
Initiatives to practise: no forced or compulsory labour	0	0	1	8.3	1
Industrial relations	3	33	3	25	6

Health and safety issues of employees	6	66	9	75	15
Environmental Stewardship					
Global standards compliance	4	44	7	58	11
Communicates greenhouse emission in tons of CO <sup>2</sup> or equivalent	2	22	4	33	6
Compliance with local environmental regulations	6	67	9	75	15
Communicates company's efforts for environmentally efficient technology	6	67	10	83	16
Fighting Bribery and Corruption					
Efforts are communicated to the employees about corruption and bribery in the forms of education and information	2	22	5	42	7
Companies communicated and presented efforts to fight corruption and bribery	6	67	8	67	14
Social Reporting					
Companies communicated awareness towards accountability issues and actions	9	100	11	92	20
Companies practiced transparency in reporting	3	33	5	42	8
Companies communicated initiatives in disseminating information about CSR work to various channels (corporate websites and the media)	5	56	8	67	13
Companies practiced open dialogue with publics (to non-investors)	4	44	6	50	10
Financial Necessity					
Socially responsible investment (SRI) initiatives	1	11	1	8	2
Reputation or image enhancement	3	33	7	58	10
Adopt risk management	8	89	12	92	20
Direct and active two-way communication with shareholders (shareholder value-focused)	8	89	11	92	19
Compliance with certified international standards					
ISO 9000/9001 (quality management system)	1	11	3	25	4
ISO14001/14004 (environment)	3	33	3	25	6
SA 8000 (workplace and employee relations)	0	0	0	0	0
AA 1000 (stakeholders)	0	0	0	0	0
CERES environment	0	0	0	0	0
IIP learning and training	0	0	0	0	0
OHSAS18001 (health and safety)	1	11	4	33	5
Community-driven					
Charity or philanthropy and monetary contribution to community	8	89	12	100	20
Government sponsorships	0	0	2	17	2
Affected publics and community sponsorships	4	44	7	58	11

\*N=Number of companies communicating this micro-category in their annual reports;

\*\*%=Percentage of companies communicating this micro-category;

\*\*\*Total=Total of number of companies in each micro-category.

As Table 1 suggests, with the exception of sensitivity to local practices, and equal rights and opportunities, foreign companies were always more likely to report labour rights than local companies in companies' annual reports. Training of employees as well as health and safety were most often reported in annual reports within these two sectors. Consumer product sector was more likely to report environmentally efficient technology (83% of the companies within the sector). In particular, a majority of the companies under the consumer product sector communicated the company's efforts for environmentally efficient technology (10 out of 12; 83) with the service sector is less likely to communicate this micro-category (6 out 9; 67). In contrast, greenhouse emission in tons

of CO<sup>2</sup> or equivalent had the least number of companies reporting this micro- category throughout the two sectors.

Fighting bribery and corruption macro-category was relatively throughout, in which a majority of the companies that communicated about corporate governance (companies' attempts to fight bribery and corruption or show awareness of the issue) are from the consumer product category with 42% communicating employee involvement and education with corporate governance and 67% communicating the company's actions to fight corruption and bribery.

Overall, the social reporting macro-category was the most frequently reported. Within that, the accountability issues and actions category was most reported in annual reports. In other words, a majority of the companies under the two sectors communicated about initiatives to educate and inform employees about accountability. This is spread throughout all the two sectors with service sector scoring 100% and consumer products scoring 92%. Given that only 8% within the selected annual reports for this study did not communicate this macro-category across both sectors, the social reporting macro-category almost met a consensus.

Both sectors did not specify standards in annual reports with the exception of ISO 9000/9001 (organisation and governance standards), ISO 14001/14004 (environment standards) and OHSAS 18001 (health and safety standards) categories. ISO 14001/14004 for environment was equally lacking, however, a majority of the companies from both sectors communicated ISO 9000/9001 and ISO 14001/14004.

A majority of the companies throughout the two sectors did not mention companies' government sponsorships practice. This significantly suggests that most companies do not provide government with any monetary contribution or sponsorships to support the government's events or activities, although it may occur but not be reported separately, as disclosure is voluntary.

Most of these efforts are in the forms of monetary contributions such as sponsorships, donations and foundations. For instance, one of the specific activities emphasised in the annual reports was Petroliam Nasional Berhad (PETRONAS Malaysia's, 2010, p.88-89) annual report, in which PETRONAS provided a section on CSR activities. Two of the companies from the consumer product sector communicated in the annual reports that they are involved with sponsorships to affected publics and the community in general. Companies in Malaysia set aside an annual budget for charity work as a way of giving back to society. The ACCA and The Edge (2006) suggested that CSR should go beyond the usual sponsoring of events and "signing of Cheques" for charity giving, to a legitimate role that shows deep initiatives to assist with issues in the community, employees and the environment (p.2).

## DISCUSSION

This study found that when CSR is measured against the current best-practice instrument, the communication of CSR in corporate public documents lacks thoroughness. The low reporting found from the results of the textual analysis corroborated Chapple and Moon's (2005) study of CSR reporting across Southeast Asian MNCs which found Malaysia to be one of the lowest in reporting within the Southeast Asian region (with only 25% of companies extensively reporting CSR).

While Haw (2010) claimed that there is an increase in the levels of CSR disclosure in the annual reports of publicly listed MNCs in Malaysia, the findings from the present study demonstrated that what Malaysian MNCs were likely to communicate in annual reports in regard to overall CSR practices were corporate risk management,

accountability actions, corporate philanthropy and charitable contributions. Currently, when Malaysian companies' CSR performance was measured against international best practices, companies may be underperforming in their CSR reporting.

Communicating comprehensively to meet international standards remains a challenge. This is apparent in the controversial areas such as labour rights. For instance, labour rights practice in Malaysian companies is often not in accordance with international standards (Raman, 2008), and companies generally follow local labour standards. It is difficult to explain these results; however the government's quest to lower the labour law standards in Malaysia for competitive growth in foreign direct investment may have influenced Malaysian MNCs, particularly foreign-owned MNCs' tendencies to accommodate to local laws and requirements set forth by the government as an excuse for their low international CSR standard practices.

The lack of information about specific certified international standards practised by companies suggests two things. The first indication is that companies may well practise standards but do not find the need to report them to their publics. Without documented evidence of internal standards practices, companies which are in actual fact practising good standards in CSR would put themselves at risk of reputational damage. The second possible indication is that these companies are simply not guided by any particular standards (neither international nor local standards).

Malaysia has been practising an implicit concept of CSR embedded in the laws and policies of the nation similar to that practised in most European nations (Salleh, 2009; Tee, 2008). Therefore, this may explain why some companies are not aggressive in reporting CSR. The concept of embedded CSR initiatives exists in government regulations, codes and standards. Embedded CSR initiatives within the context of this study include initiatives that may not stand out as a CSR activity but are intertwined and grounded within particular standard regulations or international codes, such as the ISOs which are standards that organisations subscribe to, to meet CSR international standards.

Matten and Moon (2008) assumed that companies operating in countries with a *laissez-faire* economy such as in America will need to be more explicit in CSR reporting. Matten and Moon (2008) argued that there is a common tendency for companies operating in a collective type of economy to be less engaged in corporate philanthropic activities due to high taxation, in tandem with the common perception that it is the government's responsibility to give charitable donations to the community. In line with Matten and Moon's (2008) hypothesis, such "coordinated economies" reduce the need for explicit communication of a company's CSR initiatives (Gjolberg, 2009, p.11). Indications of this nature may help explain previous studies that have suggested Malaysian companies have been consistently low in reporting CSR over the past 20 years (Atan et al., 2010; Tee, 2008).

As presented in the results above, only one company (EON) mentioned the company's effort to create employee awareness about violations of human rights in the workplace and beyond. This particular effort by EON shows a voluntary initiative that goes beyond the required initiatives in CSR best-practice reporting. The Malaysian government highlighted in 2006 that all publicly listed companies must disclose CSR initiatives in their annual reports and within the CSR framework set by Bursa Malaysia. This consists of four areas in CSR: Environment, workplace, community and marketplace (Bursa Malaysia, 2008). Atan et al. (2010) argued that it is particularly important for Malaysian MNCs to show willingness to disclose comprehensive CSR standards and practices in line with the government's efforts to adopt "a socially responsible culture" (p.108). Comprehensive and readability in communicating text shows a company's commitment to building relationships with stakeholders beyond internal stakeholders who

would traditionally and ideally be the ones to be more interested to read a company's annual reports.

From the results, the study concludes that company may opt to play a passive role in some CSR areas particularly in areas that may evoke sensitive issues such as religion. In support of the contingency theory in public relations, Cameron (1997) suggested that organisations will communicate according to the saliency of a particular issue that affects both the organisation and its publics, and whether or not an organisation chooses to accommodate or advocate depends on the particular issue and the credibility of the public and how much it will affect the organisation.

When discussing MNCs operating in multi-cultural settings, the contingency theory of accommodation allows plausible explanation and support for the complexities companies face in developing nations. For instance, Choi and Cameron (2005) conducted in-depth interviews with CEOs and client leaders of Korean MNCs to explore how these MNCs resolve conflicts with Korean publics. The central theme which emerged from Choi and Cameron's (2005) study is that the MNCs in Korea accommodate to the needs of the public due to factors such as the general ethnocentric culture of the Korean public and the power the media have to influence the public in Korea. The understanding of an "indigenous culture of a given nation" (Choi & Cameron, 2005, p.187) as influential on reporting and disclosure helps us to understand the position and challenges MNCs face to sustain reputation.

In explaining and making sense of some of these realities of CSR standards as communicated in text by Malaysian MNCs, the contingency theory of accommodation helps this research to explain the issues grounded within the context of sensitivities involving culture. Culture may influence how CSR is being practised in Malaysian MNCs. In particular, within the context of the contingency theory in public relations, identifying how far these companies are willing to accommodate such CSR initiatives is visible through their communication efforts in public documents.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that when CSR best practices were measured across two sectors, namely, the consumer product and service sectors', consumer product sector is more likely to report more comprehensively than CSR macro-categories compared with the service sector. The practice of CSR reporting in MNCs is selective, in that thoroughness in reporting CSR best practices is to a certain extent influenced by the type sectors. These findings appear to support Cancel, Mitrook and Cameron's (1999) contingency theory of accommodation which supported the notion that a company with higher exposure to consumer-related businesses would be more accommodative to its publics. Cancel et al. (1999) argued that businesses in the area of consumer products were more susceptible to criticism from social advocators than services and industrial types of businesses. In relation to textual analysis data for this study, MNCs in the consumer sector demonstrate a tendency to report CSR more effectively and comprehensively than MNCs from the service sector. Therefore, the legitimacy of CSR initiatives in Malaysia becomes crucial. Visibility is the key in order for CSR to take precedence in Malaysia. This study has provided a framework for the understanding in communicating CSR standards within the scope of readability in communication as a role for reputational management. It has helped in advancing the body of literature on CSR reporting and communication in Malaysia, and it has assisted with previous scholars' quests for understanding the motivation that drives Malaysian companies towards increased communication in CSR.

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## **DELIVERING THE ELEX PACKAGE: AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH FOR DEVELOPING UNDERGRADUATES' LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

It is unanimously agreed that many Malaysian graduates lack English competence and proficiency to function adequately at the workplace. To address this problem and to develop more employable and linguistically marketable graduates, Universiti Putra Malaysia endorsed the bold move taken by its Centre for the Advancement of Language Competence to revamp English Language teaching and learning at the university and develop an unconventional English Language Experience (ELEX) package for its undergraduates. ELEX takes UPM undergraduates on a chartered English language learning experience throughout the entire duration of their academic programmes, providing students with increased engagement with the language in and beyond the classroom, as well as experience in a variety of structured and less structured learning environments. The paper discusses the rationale for ELEX, the learning principles and theories on which the package is based, as well as the structure and innovative components of the package. In addition, it discusses issues and challenges faced in the implementation and considers actions that need to be taken for further improvement.

Keywords: English Language Experience (ELEX), formal learning, incidental learning, informal learning, Universiti Putra Malaysia

### **INTRODUCTION**

English has long held a place of significance as the language of knowledge in tertiary education, with much effort and myriad resources expended on improving students' proficiency in that language. Understandably, the focus of English Language (henceforth EL) education in universities has largely been on enabling students to perform well in academic tasks. Increasingly, however, the purpose and scope of EL education has had to include equipping their students with language skills for the workplace. Specifically, universities are now expected to make their graduates employable and linguistically marketable.

Developing soft skills and language competence for the workplace has gained equal, if not greater, importance than developing language skills for handling academic tasks. This added onus has prompted some universities to review their EL proficiency programmes and make them more appropriate for meeting current needs. One such effort has been made by Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), which implemented the English Language Experience (ELEX) package for its undergraduates in 2013.

Developed by a team at the Centre for the Advancement of Language Competence (CALC) in UPM, the ELEX package is an innovative departure from what is offered in most universities. This paper presents the ELEX package as a response to the continuing need for English proficiency within tertiary learning and the growing importance of competence in English beyond the university.

### **Importance of English for employability**

English has long been the language of communication in social and economic milieu on a global level, and there is no sign of that role diminishing any time soon. Indeed, as the world grows ever more borderless, and as societies and economies become more internationalised, competence in English is gaining importance in the eyes of employers and employees.

Honda Motor Company, for instance, has announced publicly that it is switching its official corporate language to English (Editorial in The Japan Times online, 2015). Its decision to make English the corporate *lingua franca* is a response to business realities and the awareness that the company's operations need to be "more fully international in scope and character". Honda has stipulated that by 2020, its senior executives will have to prove their fluency in English before assuming their positions, and "internal documents that need to be in English will be written that way rather than translated from Japanese". The decision by Honda follows in the wake of other Japanese and international companies making the same move, including Uniqlo, Rakuten and Bridgestone, which all have English-only policies, as well as Lenovo, Nokia, Audi, Airbus, Aventis, Daimler-Chrysler, Renault and Samsung, among others. Elsewhere, according to a LinkedIn research conducted for Pearson English, 79% of international human resource directors look for English proficiency when recruiting (Gulf News online, 2015). EL proficiency is now a major determining factor for hiring employees; applicants, despite having the right technical skills and experience are passed over due to poor English skills. This situation is particularly pertinent to the UAE, which is a growing destination for multinational firms and business start-ups.

On the local front, studies have also indicated a similar importance being attached to English proficiency. Rozila and Noor Azimin (2011), for example, found proficiency in the language to be one of the requirements for managerial posts in Malaysian five-star hotels. A study of more than 3000 graduates' characteristics showed a good command of English to be one of the factors that improved the employment prospects of graduates (Noor Azina Ismail, 2011). Kahirol Mohd Salleh, Nor Lisa Sulaiman and Khairul Nazry Talib (2010) found that communication skills in English were especially essential in international business circles. According to market research on 295 Malaysian employers from 14 industry sectors (Ainol Madziah, IsarjiSarudin, Mohamad Sahari Nordin & Tunku Badariah, 2011), 95% of the respondents agreed that EL competence was important in the workplace, with 15 of the 16 sectors indicating between 87% to 100% agreement. Of the 16 sectors, 15 ranked English as the most important of four languages used at the workplace (the other languages being Malay, Mandarin and Tamil). Overall, 80% of the respondents rated competence in English as equally or more important than content knowledge or professional skills. On the average, only 53% of the sectors indicated a willingness to hire candidates who did not meet minimum English proficiency requirements.

Despite the overwhelming need for graduates to attain a good command of English, less than half of the graduates produced annually by Malaysian public universities demonstrate the level of EL competence required by potential employers. The National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017 commissioned by the Ministry of Higher Education found that more than half (54%) of undergraduate students from six Malaysian universities had only a limited command of English. A 2011 survey conducted on 174,464 university students found that 24.6% of them were jobless for more than six months after graduating and among the reasons cited for the unemployment was the lack of language proficiency, particularly in English (The Star Online, July 27, 2013). The JobStreet Annual Survey Report 2013 cited poor command of English and communication skills as a top reason for fresh graduate unemployment. Pandian and Baboo (2013) who conducted a study on 1,200 final year students in IPTAs between 2007-2011 found that while students felt they were competent enough to handle communication and working in multicultural groups, they faced great difficulty with EL skills. Their study further indicated the serious need to bridge the gap between literacy skills of students and demands of the workplace.

Although communication and other language-based skills are, in principle, not necessarily limited to English, the realities of today's global market require a workforce that is able to conduct a substantial amount of professional interaction in English. In addition, as pointed out in the article on Honda's move towards making English its corporate *lingua franca*, a workforce that is "willing to engage with English is a workforce willing to engage in other challenges with a forward-thinking, flexible attitude" (The Japan Times online, 2015). Currently, however, employers in general feel that university EL courses do not sufficiently prepare undergraduate students for the workplace.

### **Impact on goals of EL education in universities**

The unrelenting emphasis placed on English competence in the workplace has subjected universities to increasing pressure to produce graduates capable of performing work-related tasks with adequate EL skills. The Graduate Employability (GE) Blueprint, which identifies a poor command of English as the most common problem for 55.8% of the employers surveyed, also views universities as "the cornerstone of a country's supply of quality and talented human resources" (p.4). This role to be fulfilled by universities has brought about attendant changes in the goals of EL education in Malaysian institutions of higher learning. Universities are thus currently faced with the task of meeting two major goals:

1. To equip students with enough EL skills to handle academic tasks during their programmes of study, and
2. To ensure that the graduates' English proficiency upon exit meets the demands of the employment market.

Given the low proficiency levels of English of undergraduate student intakes, compounded by constraints of time and resources, the task is inexorably challenging. Producing employable graduates requires an EL curriculum that shapes students into competent language users and independent learners who can continue to develop language skills on their own. Indeed, the GE Blueprint calls upon universities to review current curricula in order to produce more knowledgeable and marketable graduates. It was in response to these needs that Universiti Putra Malaysia implemented ELEX for its undergraduates.

The ELEX package is aimed at developing UPM undergraduates' EL proficiency for general, academic and professional purposes through a package of courses and language activities designed to help meet those needs. This challenge has to be met while contending with the exacting demands of teaching undergraduates entering the university with very low Malaysian University English Test (MUET) proficiency levels of 1 and 2, as these students require more substantial and intensive help. ELEX also addresses another issue. Prior to 2013, EL learning for undergraduates at UPM ranged between three to nine credit hours for the entire duration of the study, depending on the proficiency level at which they entered the university. At most, they received EL instruction during the first few semesters of study; subsequently, no further guidance in EL was given for the rest of their academic programme. This lack of continuous EL learning is dealt with in the ELEX package.

### **Principles informing ELEX**

ELEX was conceptualised and developed based on several teaching and learning principles drawn from language learning theories. It was designed to provide students with the opportunity to improve their EL proficiency through increased engagement with the language, both in terms of time and cognitive involvement, and by experiencing both structured instruction and less structured learning activities in a variety of learning environments.

The L2 learning literature has presented evidence to indicate that an effective option for the enhancement of L2 among learners is via immersion in the language. Specifically, the argument for implementation of immersion programmes to improve L2 learning has been shown in findings of studies on the French immersion programme. According to Lightbown and Spada (2013, p.172) students in this programme “develop fluency, high levels of listening comprehension, and confidence in using their second language”.

In addition, they exhibit comparable success in academic subjects to students whose education has been in English (Genesee, 1987, as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p.172). However, since an immersion programme is not compatible with the current education system in Malaysia, the best alternative is a programme where students are afforded regular and intensive engagement in the L2, in this case English. In fact, such engagement at all levels of language in both structured and unstructured contexts is necessary for optimal and sustained L2 learning. The former is akin to formal learning while the latter, to informal learning. In both contexts, learners' attention to the elements being presented and interaction in the L2 are important ingredients to bring about optimal learning.

In order for learners to be engaged, we would have to first make them notice the elements of language. Related to this notion are two terms often referred to in discussions related to L2 learning: consciousness raising and noticing. These are important notions in the teaching and learning of L2. The term consciousness raising is defined as “the deliberate attempt to draw the learner's attention specifically to the formal properties of the target language” (Rutherford & Sharwood Smith, 1985, p.374). Once students' consciousness is raised, they should be helped to notice the elements that are presented to them. According to Ortega (2009, p.63), “attention to formal detail in the input” is an important ingredient for optimal L2 learning. Ortega refers to Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (e.g. 1995) in which he claims that “in order to learn any aspect of the L2...learners need to notice the relevant material in the linguistic data afforded by the environment” (2009, p.63). The term ‘noticing’ here refers to the registering of the new material by the brain, with brief awareness at the point of encounter although there may

be no understanding of the workings of the new material. Crucially, as Schmidt (2001) concluded, the more learners notice, the more they learn, and that learning without noticing, even if it exists in other types of learning, plays a minimal role in the learning of a language. A learner's propensity to notice and attend to linguistic material can be effected internally or externally (Ortega, 2009, p.63). An example of the former is when learners try to structure sentences in the L2 in order to express their thoughts and an instance of the latter is when interaction occurs between learners and the teacher or other students in the L2 classroom. This process ends with them paying attention to new L2 features (Schmidt, 1995, as cited in Ortega, 2009, p.64). In other words, "attention and noticing act as filters that moderate the contributions of the environment" (Ortega, 2009, p.64).

Another environmental ingredient for effective L2 learning is interaction. Interaction involves negotiation for meaning and comprehension (Long, as cited in Ortega, 2009, p.64). In fact, negotiated interaction which "focuses a learner's attention on linguistic form, on ways of creating discourse" (Gass & Varonis, 1994, p.298) seems to promote L2 acquisition (see e.g. Mackey, 1999). In her study on input, interaction and L2 development, Mackey found empirical evidence to support the claim that "more active involvement in negotiated interaction led to greater [L2] development" (Mackey, 1999, p.583). This can be afforded either formally in the ESL classroom or informally between the learner and another interlocutor. Thus to optimize L2 learning, learners need not only regular and structured intensive engagement with the language, but also less structured engagement as long as attention and noticing is effected through consciousness-raising.

An important byproduct of activities, such as interpersonal interaction, trial-and-error experimentation or even formal learning, is incidental learning which almost always takes place although people are not always conscious of it (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, as cited in Marsick, Watkins, Callahan & Volpe, 2006, p.795). This type of learning is neither intentional nor planned and results from other activities. For example, in the process of L2 learning, it is possible to learn L2 vocabulary incidentally during pleasure reading (Ortega, 2009, p.94).

Based on these teaching and learning principles, it is therefore recommended that learners, in the main, be instructed formally. However, instructors should also "find ways to enhance the input learners get to maximise the triggering of unconscious development". This can be done by "getting them to interact with samples of the target L2 which exemplify a wide range of structures" (Hawkins, 2005, p.17) and by facilitating learners to be engaged in activities that are less structured where the objective is practice and where the goal is fluency rather than accuracy in the L2. They could also be steered towards self-access resources in the form of online materials and the Internet. In this way, they are afforded the kind of multi-modal learning that is now taken for granted and the norm rather than the exception for students who are millennials or part of Generation Y. In other words, they are guided to learn autonomously when the formal instruction in the L2 classroom finishes.

### **Overview and structure of ELEX**

The ELEX package takes UPM undergraduates on a chartered language learning experience throughout their study at UPM. ELEX is anchored on the philosophy that the process of developing language competence requires:

1. continuous language engagement,
2. structured and planned instruction,
3. incidental learning through more unstructured activities, and
4. content that meets skills-based and domain-based language needs.

The package also answers the call of the Ministry of Higher Education to focus on the mastery of grammar and vocabulary as the foundation for language fluency and accuracy in the teaching and learning of English language at tertiary institutions.

The design of the ELEX package considers the language needs of undergraduates with varying English proficiency levels ranging from MUET Band 1 (very limited ability) to Band 6 (very high proficiency). Students who enter UPM with MUET Band 1 or 2 should ideally be in an immersion language programme, but in the absence of an immersion experience in Malaysia, ELEX provides them with as intensive a programme as possible to give them fundamental help and to build their confidence while helping them meet their immediate needs of handling academic tasks, before engaging them in courses to help them meet the demands of the employment market. For students with MUET Bands 3 to Band 6, the ELEX further develops their language competence to both facilitate their academic performance and boost their graduate employability. In view of the general reticence among Malaysian students and graduates to express ideas and views in English, ample opportunities are built into the package for students at all levels to develop confidence and fluency.

As such, the ELEX package is designed to provide a language learning experience that is planned, continuous, and as customised as possible. It is also comprehensive in meeting national agenda, in that it is designed to both equip students with EL skills to handle academic studies in the university and to meet industry and professional needs upon graduation. The ELEX package comprises three main components:

1. Compulsory English Language Proficiency (BBI) Courses

These are three-credit courses within the curriculum providing structured classroom-based instruction focused on developing language forms and skills. The main aim of these courses is to equip students to handle academic studies.

2. Certificate in English Language (CEL) Courses

These are courses considered to be outside the curriculum but which need to be completed for graduation. They are not assigned credits, but students can obtain certificates if they complete the courses satisfactorily. CEL courses are semi-structured with two hours of face-to-face workshop style learning and two hours of self-directed learning (SDL) weekly sessions. The courses are aimed at strengthening domain-based language forms and skills in English for general, academic and professional purposes.

3. Language Activities without Credit (LAX)

These are beyond-classroom language activities aimed at building students' confidence and fluency in speaking in English. The aim is to encourage students to communicate in English in a flexible, fun and stress-reduced environment without being corrected by an instructor and with little or no fear of being ridiculed. A point system is used in which students need to complete a stipulated number of LAX points in order to graduate. In keeping with the idea of fun LAX, the eligibility for points is based on attendance and task completion rather than correctness of content. Figure 1 summarises the main components of the ELEX package.

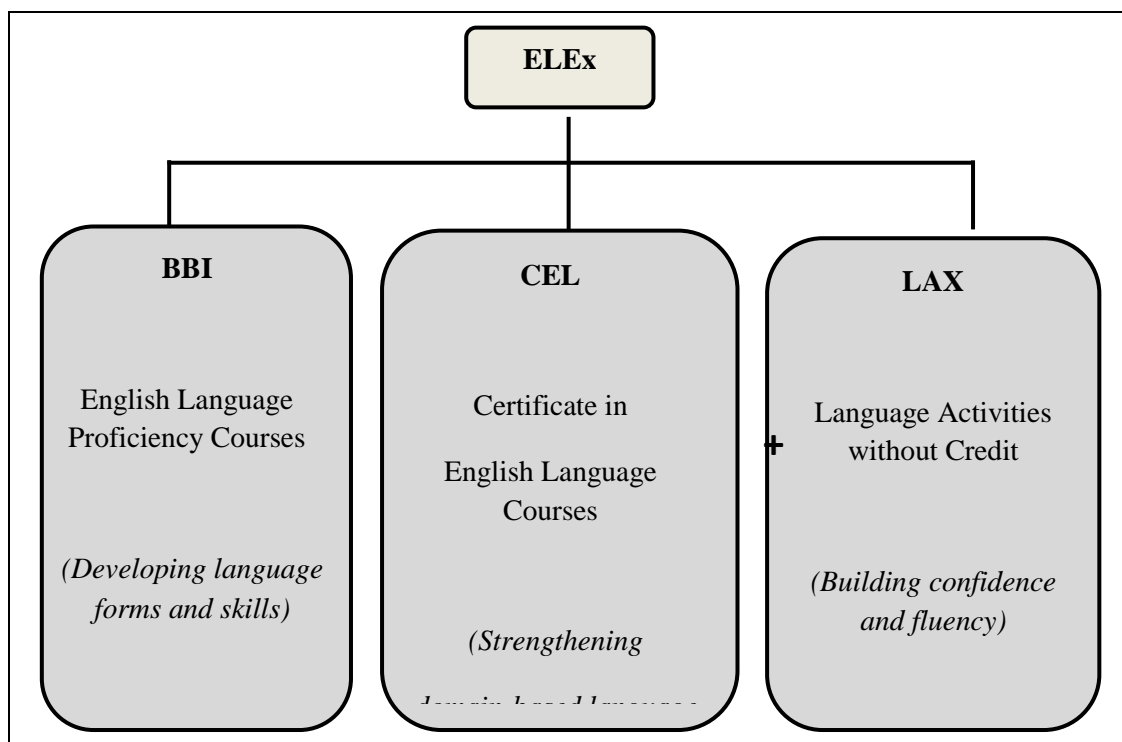


Figure 1. Overview of the ELEX structure

The three components of the ELEX package are built on L2 learning principles that, if conscientiously observed, should provide students with a fulfilling English Language learning experience.

**The ELEX components: A closer look**

In summary, the BBI component focuses on the mastery of grammar and vocabulary as the foundation for language fluency and accuracy. The CEL component, in addition to developing grammar and vocabulary, provides domain-based learning in which course contents are customised to meet the learning of English for general purposes (EGP), academic purposes (EAP) and professional purposes (EPP). The LAX component aims to build students’ confidence and language fluency through incidental learning beyond the language classroom.

*BBI Courses*

The three credited BBI courses within the curriculum provide instruction in reading for academic purposes, academic interaction and presentation, and academic writing. The courses focus on developing language forms and skills to equip students to handle academic-related tasks. Students receive three hours of face-to-face structured classroom-based instruction, and spend a further one hour working on SDL activities to further consolidate and strengthen their EL skills. Besides formal tests, students are also assessed throughout the semester through projects/portfolios and various language tasks and be given a letter grade (i.e. A, A- to F) for their performance in the courses.

### CEL Courses

One of the innovative aspects of the ELEX package is the CEL component. The component consists of seven domain-based courses geared to meet language needs for general, academic and professional purposes, as indicated in Table 1. In a 4-year degree course, for example, students spend their first four semesters doing CEL courses for general and academic purposes. In the last two years, to prepare them for executing EL skills at the workplace to project themselves professionally in English, students are offered CEL courses in English for the professional domain.

Table 1. Domain-based CEL Courses

EGP (English for General Purposes)	EAP (English for Academic Purposes)	EPP (English for Professional Purposes)
Courses:	Courses:	Courses:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocabulary and Grammar for Communication</li> <li>• Oral Presentations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective Listening and Speaking</li> <li>• Writing Academic Texts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication for Professional Development</li> <li>• Spoken Communication for the Workplace</li> <li>• Written Business Communication</li> </ul>

Besides this, the semi-structured CEL courses with two hours of face-to-face and two hours SDL weekly sessions provide students with multi-modal learning. Through the SDL sessions, students are steered toward self-access utilising the Internet and online materials provided by instructors to empower them to be independent language learners who take charge of their own learning. The face-to-face sessions, which employ a workshop-style and a flipped-classroom approach, see language instructors playing the role of facilitators who provide students with feedback on their language forms and language skills.

Students are assessed throughout the semester via projects/portfolios and various tasks. Feedback on their grammar and vocabulary use is provided to draw their attention to language skills. At the end of the semester, students are accorded Levels 1 to 4 to indicate their EL proficiency. Students who are rated Levels 3 (Good) and 4 (Excellent) are awarded a certificate which is added value for their resumes. Those who attain Level 2 (Modest) are considered to have passed the course but are not awarded a certificate. Students who appear to be at risk of finishing the course at Level 1 (Weak) are, before the end of the course, given remediation to help them attain Level 2. Those who still attain a Level 1 despite the remediation provided, need to repeat the course.

### LAX

Another innovation in the ELEX package is the LAX component which takes students beyond the language classroom. A typical LAX activity requires students to form small groups of five to six, six to eight or eight to ten persons in order to complete a given activity. The activities require the students to communicate in English, but this oral discourse is done in a relatively stress-reduced and flexible environment to help build their confidence and language fluency. There are two types of LAX, namely, 6-point and 12 point LAX. The first kind requires students to meet for two hours for six weeks, while the latter requires students to meet for two hours for twelve weeks.

To date, more than thirty LAX have been designed. 6-point LAX such as *Movie Reviews*, *Karaoke in English*, *My Comic Strip* and *After Five*, and 12-point LAX like *Teh Tarik Book Chat*, *Musical*, *Travelogue*, and *UPM VMag* provide a range of contemporary

language activities that interest the undergraduates. For example, *Travelogue* requires students to produce a digital brochure promoting places in UPM or outside that they personally visit, inserting pictures of themselves and brief descriptions of those places. For *My Comic Strip*, students create comic strips in English.

In addition to these LAX designed for general application across the university, there are also 6-point and 12-point LAX customised for specific Faculties. These customised LAX were developed in response to requests from various Faculties which asked that CALC design activities related to topics found in the students' regular curriculum. As a result of collaboration between the Faculties and CALC staff that were developing the ELEX package, there are currently ten customised LAX that are based on discipline-based themes but which serve the purpose of engaging students in stress-reduced communication in English.

Language instructors at CALC act as supervisors in monitoring these student-led activities. Students need to submit video recording clips online as evidence of their weekly attendance and group discussions in carrying out the given tasks. To further motivate students to participate actively in LAX, contests are sometimes held. For instance, students can choose to enter their work (e.g. musical videos, digital travelogues) to win prizes for the best video or the best product for different LAX categories.

The LAX component is operationalised through a point-earning system. Students are awarded LAX points if they obtain a *Satisfactory* grade which is given based on attendance and completion of tasks. Students who fail to meet the minimum 80% attendance and 80% task completion are given a *Unsatisfactory* grade; this means that they have not collected any LAX points and will need to sign up for other LAX in order to earn sufficient points to fulfil graduation requirements.

### **The ELEX scheme and graduation requirements**

The ELEX package stipulates that students need to complete a required number of BBI and CEL courses as well as LAX points in order to graduate. Additionally, in line with the philosophy that one improves one's language skills through practice and continuous engagement with the language, the package requires students to be involved in some form of English activity every semester as prescribed in the scheme. Therein lies another innovative feature of ELEX: the requirement for every student to engage in at least one BBI or CEL course or LAX each semester throughout the duration of their study. It was a recommendation that UPM made a bold and laudable decision in endorsing, as it does translate into additional – but necessary – hours of engagement with English.

The students need to observe the ELEX Scheme according to their MUET Band every semester, and they need to pass a particular course before they can register for the next course. For example, for a 4-year academic programme, this is what the students have to do (Figure 2):

English Entrance Results		Number of Courses & LAX Points		
MUET 1 & 2		3 BBI	3 CEL	24 LAX points
MUET 3&4 or IELTS 5.5-6.0/TOEFL 500-599		2 BBI	2 CEL	36 LAX points
MUET 5&6 or IELTS 7.0-9.0/TOEFL 600-677		-	3 CEL	36 LAX points

Sem	MUET Bands 1 & 2		MUET Bands 3 & 4		MUET Bands 5 & 6
Sem 1	BBI 2422	CEL 2101	CEL 2102	LAX	LAX
Sem 2	LAX	CEL 2102	BBI2423		CEL 2103
Sem 3	BBI2423		BBI2424		LAX
Sem 4	BBI2424		LAX		<i>Choose ONE:</i> CEL 2104/2105
Sem 5	LAX		LAX		LAX
Sem 6	<i>Choose ONE:</i> CEL 2105/2106/2107		<i>Choose ONE:</i> CEL 2105/2106/2107		LAX
Sem 7	LAX		LAX		<i>Choose ONE:</i> CEL 2105/2106/2107
Sem 8	LAX <i>or</i>	<i>Options:</i> CEL2105/ CEL2106/ CEL2107	LAX <i>or</i>	<i>Options:</i> CEL2105/ CEL2106/ CEL2107	LAX <i>or</i>

Figure 2. ELEX Graduation requirements and scheme for 4-year academic programme

Students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts (English), Bachelor of Arts (Literature) and Bachelor of Education (TESL), whose medium of instruction is English, are only required to complete and pass one CEL course and 12 LAX points.

### Issues and challenges in implementation

The ELEX package has undergone two years of implementation in UPM since its initiation in the 2013/14 academic session. As with most new or fairly new initiatives, issues and challenges are inevitable. There have been three main challenges in the implementation of ELEX.

#### *Limitations in the supporting infrastructure*

Inadequacies in infrastructural support have presented various problems. Firstly, most of the SDL activities in the courses require the use of technology for students to conduct research in assigned language tasks, to complete online activities, and to record group discussions. Slow Internet access and insufficient bandwidth sometimes impede online activities or submission of tasks. Secondly, some lecture venues are not sufficiently equipped with the technical facilities required for effective execution of listening tasks or online access to online resources during the class sessions. Thirdly, the unconventional

nature and assessment approaches of the CEL and LAX components (requiring the determination of eligibility for certificates and points rather the calculation of grades and CGPAs) do not easily fit into typical formats in the university's online student management system which was designed to record, report and generate letter grades based on numerical scores for credit-carrying courses within the curriculum. The continuous assessment practice for CEL courses (an alternative assessment approach) for instance, has also been limited by the deadlines set for the reporting of scores for all other degree courses.

#### *Materials development, teaching and assessments*

Two main challenges were noted in the implementation of CEL and LAX. The CEL courses call for a different paradigm of understanding in teaching, learning and assessment. The development of materials, teaching and assessments for the courses were understandably challenging in the initial stages as language instructors were used to a more structured-classroom instruction approach. Hence, instructors had to grapple with concepts such as independent and autonomous EL learners, language engagement and consciousness-raising in EL learning, provision of continuous language feedback, the use of multi-modal learning and blended learning, and the flipped classroom approach. An understanding of these concepts is essential as it has an impact on decisions made regarding course materials development, teaching techniques and assessment practices.

Additionally, having been trained to observe language errors and offer help in rectifying them, some instructors find it difficult to come to terms with the purpose of LAX and the underlying need for students to express themselves freely unhampered by intervention and correction. Likewise, staff at some Faculties were also initially apprehensive that students' language is not corrected during LAX sessions and that all that is required is for students to speak freely. It has to be understood that the ELEX is designed to allow for both structured instruction and incidental learning in social interaction, and it takes instructors time and restraint to be aware of the need to observe these different purposes.

#### *Student attitude*

Student attitude has proven to be another challenge. Prior to the ELEX package, UPM undergraduates were only required to take credited BBI courses within the curriculum. In the ELEX package, students are now required to take non-credited courses outside the curriculum, namely, CEL and LAX which must be completed in order to graduate. Despite the benefits of engaging in these other components, some students adopt a rather apathetic attitude towards CEL and LAX as these components are viewed as less important. This attitude is seen in the lack of attention paid to registration, attendance and completion of assignments. LAX, in particular, which is student-driven, see some students skipping the weekly sessions regularly. Thus, these students do not reap the benefits of domain-based English learning and increased opportunities to engage with the language. In addition, many students fail to learn independently as they come from a school system without a strong culture of independent learning. Their prior experience in a test-oriented system also makes them unwilling to complete weekly SDL activities that are not given a letter grade. Failure to work on the activities hampers the effectiveness of some of the face-to-face sessions which need students' completion of the SDL tasks as input for further classroom discussions and learning.

Despite the various issues and challenges confronting the administrators and instructors implementing ELEX, efforts are being made to address the shortcomings and inadequacies. Workshops and other continuous professional development activities are

conducted to further familiarise instructors with an approach that is different from what was previously followed so that they fully grasp the underlying philosophy and spirit of ELEX. Language instructors are guided to embrace the purposeful and contextualised integration of language forms and skills, and to conduct ongoing, formative assessment more effectively. Efforts are made to re-orientate students' understanding about what constitutes effective language learning and the role they need to play to become more successful language learners. At the same time, actions are being undertaken by administrators to resolve operational problems. The university, in general, recognises the value in an EL education package that addresses the current and potential language needs of its undergraduates. What is needed are swifter responses to the issues from all quarters involved so that this much-needed package can be effectively used to meet those needs.

### **CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD**

Given the importance of English as the language of knowledge acquisition and the language of communication in industry, UPM has taken a forward-looking step by putting in place the ELEX package, an English Language education approach targeted at raising the English proficiency levels of its graduates by introducing innovative components and effecting a bold increase in the hours of EL engagement. The ELEX responds to the first Shift of the Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint 2015 – 2025 on two counts: first, the Shift calls for the development of graduates whose attributes include that of being knowledgeable and entrepreneurial, which indubitably requires them to be proficient in English; second, one of the strategies identified in the Blueprint for achieving this aim is enhancing the student learning experience, and the ELEX package is designed to provide that experience.

Being a relatively new initiative, ELEX has the potential to be further developed to become more effective. Central to the achievement of the goals of ELEX and hence the university is the provision of regular and continuous briefings for instructors, course developers, administrators and students so that the philosophy is fully understood and the operationalisation of ELEX resonates with that philosophy. Continued efforts also need to be made to bring about a shift of mindset in teachers as well as EL learners: for teachers to see themselves as language facilitators to empower EL learning of independent learners and for students to take the initiative to engage with the language. The upgrading of infrastructural support is also imperative for the successful management of ELEX.

In line with Shift Eight of the Blueprint which seeks the achievement of global excellence, another step in the further development of ELEX is the alignment of curriculum content, pedagogy and assessment with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) so that learning and assessment outcomes of UPM undergraduates are eventually benchmarked against an international standard. This move would also be in line with the Malaysian Education Blueprint to adopt the CEFR as the frame of reference for English language education.

Finally, the components of the ELEX package themselves would need to be reviewed and refined after one cycle of the implementation has been completed and one cohort of undergraduates has gone through the experience. Data obtained at that point would be invaluable for the purpose of making improvements.

Developing and implementing the ELEX has not been an easy exercise. The construction of new components, new ways of assessing performance and new frameworks for interpreting achievement had to be done within the academic parameters of the university, but they were also different enough to require deliberation by various academic committees before the package was ultimately endorsed. No quick-win results

are sought as language development efforts take time, but it is hoped that the university's endorsement of this unconventional curricular package will be justified. If carried out with commitment, the ELEX has the potential to achieve its target: improved English proficiency for students who will one day exit the university and enter the Malaysian workforce as adequately confident and competent users of English.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## **MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS PLAGIARISM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty that affects the academic integrity of educational institutions worldwide. However, the need to curb plagiarism is immensely influenced by the lack of student understanding of what actually constitutes plagiarism. Thus, this study aims to explore Malaysian public university students' attitude towards plagiarism through a questionnaire survey among public university students in Malaysia. The findings highlight that the students were not aware that certain activities they considered as non-plagiarism actually constitute some form of plagiarism and vice versa. The study provided evidence that a significant proportion of the students had engaged in plagiarism activities to a certain degree. Students also looked forward for more lenient penalties by the university if they were found to have plagiarized. The findings have significant implications for educators if they intend to improve the detection and punishment of plagiarism to educate potential perpetrators.

Keywords: academic integrity, academic misconduct, attitude, plagiarism, university student

### **INTRODUCTION**

The race for academic achievement among institutions of higher education should not jeopardize academic integrity. As highlighted in a Malaysian public university's plagiarism policy (2013), academic integrity is at stake if plagiarism of published and unpublished ideas, writings, works or inventions of others in written or other medium as one's own original intellectual endeavors without clear acknowledgement or reference of an author or source occurs. As further stated in the policy, the reputation of an academic institution depends on the ability to achieve and sustain academic excellence through the exercise of academic integrity. However, in Malaysia's academe, students' awareness on the importance of academic integrity is not at a stage that can be applauded. According to Yeo (2007), studies that have examined students' involvement in plagiarism have the assumption that students have the same notions of plagiarism as academics although that is not the case always.

In a Malaysian study by Arieff, Ahmad, Azmi, Mohd Nasir and Nurazmallail (2008), it was found that university students' perception of plagiarism was not clear although the frequency of the students committing plagiarism was low. This indicates their lack of knowledge about plagiarism-based activities. A later study by Dahlia Syahrani and Umi Kalsom (2011) indicated that to ensure academic integrity, information pertaining to academic misconduct, especially plagiarism is disseminated to university students as they usually have zero knowledge on the issue. In order to ensure academic integrity in higher education, however, a question that needs to be asked is that do university students make good sense of information relating to plagiarism.

### **Purpose of the study**

This research through a survey questionnaire explores a Malaysian public university's students' attitude toward plagiarism. In addition, this study fills in the gap in literature by investigating the attitude towards plagiarism among university students. Specifically, the study seeks to identify university students' understanding of plagiarism. This is achieved by providing the students with a variety of possible behaviors that might or might not involve plagiarism to assess their understanding of it.

For the purpose of this study, definitions by Ooi, Sarjit and Fauziah (2012) and Universiti Sains Malaysia's (USM) Policy on Plagiarism (2013) apply. According to Ooi, Sarjit and Fauziah (2012), plagiarism is a theft committed by using another's work especially in writing without acknowledging the source. Specifically, USM's policy on plagiarism (2013) defines plagiarism as the act of presenting, quoting, copying, paraphrasing or passing off of ideas, images, processes, works, data, own words or those of other people or sources without proper acknowledgement, reference or quotation to the original source(s). In relation to the purpose of the study, this research investigates the following hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference between the students' attitude towards plagiarism across gender.
2. There is no significant difference between the students' year of study and their attitude towards plagiarism.
3. There is no significant difference between students' academic performance and their attitude towards plagiarism.
4. There is no significant difference between the students' prior knowledge of plagiarism and their attitude towards it.
5. There is no significant difference between the students' fear of being caught by the university and their attitude towards plagiarism.
6. There is no significant difference between the students' fear of being penalized by the university and their attitude towards plagiarism.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Researchers worldwide are of the opinion that the act of plagiarism is escalating in higher education (Anderson, 2001; Braumoeller & Gaines, 2001; Groark, Oblinger & Choa, 2001; Fain & Bates, 2002) and occurs across all levels of academia and is the most serious form of academic misconduct (Carroll, 2004; Decoo, 2002). McCabe and Trevino (1996) asserted that although students are aware that plagiarism is wrong, they often do not understand the various actions that constitute plagiarism. Through observation and the review of literature, they found students often receive inconsistent and vague messages about plagiarism from faculty. Marcoux (2002) and Roig (2001) also found a lack of consensus between faculty concerning definitions and forms of plagiarism. Pecorari (2003) also indicated that students, who had a very different understanding of what is permissible with the re-use of source text, would need more than a brief definition of plagiarism to grasp what it means. Pecorari's research into the definitions of plagiarism used by a large number of universities indicated that although they were largely similar, many lacked clarification about whether plagiarism consisted of an intention to deceive.

Subsequently, the advent of the Internet has made a wealth of information available for learners to research for writing papers (Weinstein & Dobkin, 2002). Some learners make use of the availability of information via the Internet to improve the quality of their work; however, others use it to simply "cut and paste" information into their paper. The existence of such range of information that is relatively easy to access makes

learners easily plagiarize the work of others. According to Szabo and Underwood (2004), more than half of the undergraduate students in the United Kingdom believed that plagiarizing from the internet was acceptable. Students' reasons for plagiarism included the increasing competitiveness and pressures to achieve academically, the knowledge that other students are "getting away" with cheating and using plagiarism when "it is easy to obtain other people's work" (McCabe, 2004).

Another prevalent reason why students plagiarize is lack of time to complete their task or poor time management skills. Harris (2001), JISC (2002) and Carroll (2005) claimed that students commit plagiarism due to the time pressures. Problems with plagiarism seem to be particularly prevalent as university students have to adapt quickly to new rules about using sources (McGowan, 2005), and a lack of pedagogical support (Murray & Kirton, 2006).

A few studies by Introna, Hayes, Blair and Wood (2003), Lahur (2004) and McDonnell (2003) indicated differences in academic culture that led to student plagiarism. The studies implied that Asian students tended to plagiarize more often than their western counterparts. Manjet (2014) in her study on academic writing challenges faced by international graduate students found that different academic literacy backgrounds and a mismatch with the present institutionally accepted codes and conventions in academic writing pressure students to divert towards copy and paste syndrome to complete their written assignment.

Some students simply view plagiarism as socially acceptable (Fain & Bates, 2002). The belief that everyone or a large majority of peers frequently cheats or facilitates cheating makes the choice to cheat less difficult (Academic Integrity, 2004). Bandura (1986, as cited in McCabe & Trevino, 1993) explained social learning theory as human behavior "learned through the influence of example" (p.527). If students are observing their peers cheating with nonexistent or minimal punishment, the students are more apt to plagiarize.

## METHODOLOGY

A quantitative survey study was conducted to examine university students' attitude towards plagiarism. For this purpose, convenience sampling was applied. Voluntary participation was sought from university students available at two locations (three libraries and lecture halls) in a public university. Students who agreed to voluntarily participate in the study were invited to complete a questionnaire and return it immediately upon completion. This procedure of administering the questionnaires was carried out for five consecutive days. In total, 227 completed questionnaires were collected.

### **Instrument**

A survey questionnaire that consists of three sections by Marshall and Garry (2006) was adapted for this study. The first section focused on the demographic information of the respondents. The second section provides variety of possible behaviors that might or might not involve plagiarism. These 14 items test the respondents' understanding of plagiarism. The last section elicits data on the resources that students refer to obtain information on issues pertaining to academic integrity and plagiarism.

### **Data analysis**

Quantitative data analysis was done using SPSS Version 20 to determine the descriptive statistics and one sample t-test. One-sample t-test is a hypothesis testing which is used to

determine the probability that the null hypothesis is true based on significance at alpha of 0.05( $p < 0.05$ ). This test gives an output of 95% confidence interval for the difference between the “value of the sample mean and the value of the mean predicted by the null hypothesis” (Szafran, 2012, p.304)

## RESULTS

The results are presented in three sections according to the questionnaire. It can be observed that for each of the hypotheses in Section A, the total number of respondents varies. This is due to the respondents not providing the required information for the specific questionnaire item.

### Section A

#### *Hypothesis 1*

Table 1 shows that there is no significant difference between the students’ attitude towards plagiarism across gender.

Table 1. Students’ attitude towards plagiarism across gender

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	95% confidence interval	
					Lower	Upper
Gender	61.146	220	.000	1.760	1.70	1.82

Based on 221 observations (N), the Sig. (2-Tailed) value is 0.000. This value is less than  $\alpha = 0.05$  from the 95% confidence interval. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean of the students’ attitude towards plagiarism across gender.

#### *Hypothesis 2*

Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference between the students’ year of study and their attitude towards plagiarism.

Table 2. Students’ year of study and attitude towards plagiarism

Year of study					
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error mean	
Year of study	225	1.80	.787	.052	
t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
34.240	224	.000	1.796	1.69	1.90

Based on the 225 observations (N), the Sig. (2-Tailed) value is 0.000. This value is less than  $\alpha = 0.05$  from the 95% confidence interval. It can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean of the students’ year of study and their attitude towards plagiarism.

*Hypothesis 3*

Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference between the students' academic performance and their attitude towards plagiarism.

Table 3. Students' academic performance and their attitude towards plagiarism

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error mean
Students' academic performance	223	3.48	.815	.05

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	95% confidence interval	
					Lower	Upper
Students' academic performance	63.64	222	.00	3.48	3.37	3.58

The result shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean of the students' academic performance and their attitude towards plagiarism.

*Hypothesis 4*

Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference between the students' prior knowledge of plagiarism and their attitude towards it.

Table 4. Students' prior knowledge of plagiarism and their attitude towards it

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Never been taught/told about plagiarism	227	1.91	.290	.019
University brochures	227	1.81	.393	.026
Course prospectuses	227	1.71	.453	.030
Course website	227	1.87	.335	.022
School website	227	1.85	.353	.023
Other students	227	1.69	.463	.031
Course lecturers	227	1.31	.465	.031
Course tutorials	227	1.63	.485	.032
Books	227	1.82	.386	.026
Journal articles	227	1.82	.382	.025
The WWW (other than the university)	227	1.89	.319	.021

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Conf. Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Never been taught/told about plagiarism	98.97	226	.00	1.91	1.87	1.95
University brochures	69.46	226	.00	1.81	1.76	1.86
Course prospectuses	56.99	226	.00	1.71	1.65	1.77
Course website	84.32	226	.00	1.87	1.83	1.92
School website	79.10	226	.00	1.86	1.81	1.90
Other students	54.83	225	.00	1.69	1.63	1.75
Course lecturers	42.57	226	.00	1.31	1.25	1.37
Course tutorials	50.49	226	.00	1.63	1.56	1.69
Books	71.10	226	.00	1.82	1.77	1.87
Journal articles	71.96	226	.00	1.82	1.77	1.87
The WWW (other than the university)	89.01	226	.00	1.89	1.84	1.93

The result indicates that all the variables of prior knowledge of plagiarism are significant value is 0.000 less than  $\alpha = 0.05$  from the 95% confidence interval. It can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean of the students' prior knowledge of plagiarism and their attitude towards it.

#### *Hypothesis 5*

Table 5 shows that there is no significant difference between the students' fear of being caught by the university and their attitude towards plagiarism.

Table 5. Students' fear of being caught by the university and their attitude towards plagiarism

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Students' fear of being caught by university	225	2.60	1.077	.072

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Conf. Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Students' fear of being caught by university	36.28	224	.01	2.61	2.46	2.75

The results shows the variables of fear of being caught by the university is 0.00 less than  $\alpha = 0.05$  from the 95% confidence interval. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean of the students' fear of being caught by the university and their attitude towards plagiarism.

#### *Hypothesis 6*

Table 6 shows that there is no significant difference between the students' fear of being penalized by the university and their attitude towards plagiarism.

Table 6. students' fear of being penalized by the university and their attitude towards plagiarism

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error mean
Students' fear of being penalized by the university	225	2.45	1.122	.075

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	95% conf. Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Students' fear of being penalized by the university	32.81	224	.00	2.45	2.31	2.60

The results show that the Sig. (2-Tailed) value is 0.00. This value is less than  $\alpha = 0.05$  from the 95% confidence interval. It can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean of the students' fear of being penalized by the university and their attitude towards plagiarism.

### **Section B**

In this section, the respondents were given 14 items on common cases that students regularly encounter while doing their academic work. Respondents were asked to identify each case as a form of plagiarism or not a form of plagiarism. The results of Section B are presented in Table 7.

*Which academic activities do university students believe to be acts of plagiarism?*

Table 7. Academic activities university students believe to be acts of plagiarism

Item	Definitions of plagiarism (bold items describe forms of plagiarism)	YES		NO	
		N	%	N	%
1	<b>Copying the words from another source without appropriate reference or acknowledgement</b>	178	78.4	49	21.6
2	Copying the words from another source with an acknowledgement	45	19.8	182	80.2
3	Resubmitting an assignment that was submitted in one course for assessment in another course	109	48	118	52
4	Creating a new piece of work structured according to a documentation standard, by referring to existing work of the same type	41	18.1	186	81.9
5	<b>Using a published work to identify secondary citations that make a particular logical argument and then citing only those secondary sources to support your own use of the same logical argument</b>	56	24.7	171	75.3
6	<b>Copying the organization or structure of another piece of work without appropriate reference or acknowledgement</b>	171	75.3	56	24.7
7	<b>Changing the words of material from another piece of work and presenting it as your own</b>	98	43.2	129	56.8
8	<b>Buying a complete piece of work in order to submit it for an assignment</b>	122	53.7	105	46.3
9	<b>Copying the ideas from another piece of work without appropriate reference or acknowledgement</b>	155	68.3	72	31.7
10	<b>Copying a website and putting your own words and name into the content part of the pages</b>	130	57.3	97	42.7
11	Creating a new piece of work on the same theme as an existing one but in a new context and without copying the existing one	30	13.2	197	86.8
12	<b>Using another piece of work to identify useful secondary citations that you cite in your own work without reading the cited material</b>	51	22.5	176	77.5
13	Quoting from an existing piece of work with a reference to the source	24	10.6	203	89.4
14	<b>Copying short sentences (less than 50 words) from another source without appropriate reference or acknowledgement</b>	123	54.2	104	45.8

The respondents were presented with a range of possible plagiarism and cheating behaviors and asked to indicate whether or not they thought these were regarded as plagiarism by the university. Bold and italicized items in Table 7 above were determined by Marshall and Garry (2005; 2006) to constitute plagiarism while other items include a mix of information uses that are not strictly plagiarism (Marshall & Garry, 2005; 2006).

Investigation of the results presented in Table 7 indicates some alarming issues. Activity or behavior that clearly constitutes plagiarism is not correctly identified by the respondents, while activity or behavior that is not plagiarism is perceived otherwise. This suggests that basic perceptions of what constitutes plagiarism are not understood clearly by the respondents.

Data collected for Items 1, 2 and 4 indicate that the basic characteristics of plagiarism are known to the students. Item 1 that assesses the respondents' basic knowledge of plagiarism indicates that lack of knowledge still exist on the forms of

plagiarism. Surprisingly, a small number of students still identify academic activities that are ethical as a form of plagiarism. Therefore, respondents do not have a clear understanding of academic activities that are categorized either as a form of plagiarism or non-plagiarism.

Analyzing the findings further, another alarming concern that needs to be dealt with is the attitude of the respondents on certain items indicating an average result for branding an activity as a form of plagiarism or not plagiarism. Responses for Item 3, *resubmitting an assignment that was submitted in one course for assessment in another course* indicates that 48% of the respondents indicate it as an act of plagiarism although it is not an act of plagiarism.

Of concern, majority of the respondents are of the attitude that *using a published work to identify secondary citations that make a particular logical argument and then citing only those secondary sources to support your own use of the same logical argument* is not a form of plagiarism. Furthermore, the respondents indicated changing *the words of material from another piece of work and presenting it as your own* as not a form of plagiarism. These findings reflect the inability of the respondents to recognize this subtle form of plagiarism that is very rampant in scholarly or academic writing among the respondents and failure to identify the procedure for copying and changing words from another source and acknowledging the source.

In addition, *buying a complete piece of work in order to submit it for an assignment* and *copying a website and putting your own words and name into the content part of the pages* are considered by 46.3% and 42.7% of the respondents as non-plagiarism activities. Although the figures do not represent the majority of the respondents, nevertheless the figure provides an implication that slightly less than half of the respondents are not concerned of the detrimental effects of plagiarism on academic integrity. Lack of information from university authorities and relevant university-related internet sources have led 77.5% of the respondents to assume *using another piece of work to identify useful secondary citations that you cite in your own work without reading the cited material* as non-plagiarism activity.

At the same time, Item 14, *copying short sentences (less than 50 words) from another source without appropriate reference or acknowledgement* was considered by 45.8% of the respondents as not a form of plagiarism. This slightly less than 50% of the respondents' findings also indicates that further intervention is needed to educate university students on issues pertaining to academic integrity specifically focusing on plagiarism.

The data provided in this section relates directly to Table 4 (Section A). The lack of understanding in identifying activities that are actually forms of plagiarism relate to the knowledge on plagiarism available or provided to the students. Majority of the respondents indicated that they have never been taught/told about plagiarism. Furthermore, there is lack of information in the university brochures, course prospectuses, course website, and school website. The respondents also indicated that other students, course tutorials failed to provide them the necessary information about plagiarism. It was found that books, journal articles and other websites did not disseminate information about plagiarism. However, course lecturers were cited as the best source information on plagiarism.

### Section C

This section provides results on the sources for obtaining information on plagiarism.

Table 8. Sources for obtaining information on plagiarism

Item	Source	YES		NO	
		N	%	N	%
1	Never been taught/told about plagiarism	21	9.3	206	90.7
2	University brochures	43	18.9	184	81.1
3	Course prospectuses	65	28.6	162	71.4
4	Course website	29	12.8	198	87.2
5	School website	33	14.5	194	85.5
6	Other students	70	30.8	156	68.7
7	Course lecturers	156	68.7	71	31.3
8	Course tutorials	85	37.4	142	62.6
9	Books	41	18.1	186	81.9
10	Journal articles	40	17.6	187	82.4
11	The WWW (other than the university)	26	11.5	201	88.5

Sources that students refer to for further information regarding plagiarism vary greatly. A greatly alarming number of respondents (90.7%) indicated that they have never been taught or told about plagiarism. This phenomenon greatly contributes towards the indifferent attitude that the respondents have for plagiarism. The role of university authorities as a reliable source for plagiarism is doubted as 81.1% of the respondents highlighted that university brochures do not assist much in identifying which activity or behavior constitutes an act of plagiarism. Their course prospectus (71.4%), course website (87.2) and school website (85.5%) also do not help in providing information on plagiarism.

Majority of the respondents (68.7%) indicated that the course lecturers provided information on plagiarism. Therefore, the present study indicates that course lecturers play an important role in educating the students on academic integrity. Fellow students have been found to be unhelpful in providing necessary information on plagiarism. Furthermore, other sources such as the books, journal articles and other websites apart from the university's website were also not good sources in providing the necessary information regarding plagiarism.

### DISCUSSION

Plagiarism is a problem that affects students, faculty and universities nationwide and worldwide. At present, plagiarism is not being given serious consideration necessary to promote academic integrity in the Malaysian higher education landscape. The findings of this study show that there is a lack of awareness and dissemination of information among the academic community members. A starting point based on the findings of this study is the dire need to address the clarity in defining the concept of plagiarism clearly and providing proper guidance to the students on academic integrity. Currently, this is one of the biggest challenges as educators themselves differ in their views of what constitutes plagiarism. Previous research (Marcoux, 2002; McCabe & Trevino, 1996; Roig, 2001) highlights a consensus among researchers on the lack of understanding and misinterpretation of plagiarism as a major problem. However, this study indicates the source of information pertaining to plagiarism is obtained mainly from their lecturers. In

this context, the lecturers are the best source to educate and create awareness among university students on the importance of academic integrity.

The results of this study indicate that students are significantly more likely to engage in serious forms of plagiarism as they are not able to relate to these activities as academic crimes. This is clearly indicated in this study as the data reflects lack of resources for students to gain information on plagiarism. Course websites and school websites were of less help in providing information on plagiarism.

The findings indicate that although the universities emphasise on academic integrity, they do not disseminate the information via suitable channels accessible to the students. Furthermore, student orientations do not emphasis issues pertaining to academic integrity among the new students' intake yearly. The institution should play an important role to enculturate and influence both individual and institutional behaviors in terms of good academic literacies practices to overcome the issues surrounding plagiarism through policies and guidelines. Students should be provided explicit and in-depth instruction to improve academic integrity in their studies.

One of the main reasons of plagiarizing among university students is their lack of understanding of the forms of plagiarism. Findings of this study indicate that the lack of awareness, lack of exposure to the definition and the standard academic writing techniques are barriers to the students' clearer understanding of plagiarism. The results also provide an indication that students display weak academic writing skills features in the context of proper referencing and citation to fulfil academic writing requirements. More instruction is required, at course level, to alleviate confusion regarding plagiarism activities, and to improve levels of understanding in doing citations and referencing. As previously proposed by Kamalia (1998), the inadequacies experienced by the students hinders awareness creation on the crime of plagiarism. Given this problem, it is not unexpected that such a big number of students stated that they are engaged in plagiarism.

Generally, it can be summarized that Malaysian university students' attitude towards plagiarism is not correctly reflected as they have insufficient knowledge on plagiarism. Therefore, one of the most important avenues to curb plagiarism is through education. New students entering higher education institutions are unskilled and unpracticed in the rules of academic conventions. As such, they should be given the opportunity to learn and develop skills suitable to ensure plagiarism does not occur in their academic work. The students should also be exposed to develop critical reading and note-taking skills as well as summarizing and paraphrasing skills. These skills will allow the students to integrate evidence into their academic writing. For example, a formal learning session should be administered before the students start with academic writing. At the same time, several other strategies such as the establishment, dissemination and sustainability of academic integrity policies should be implemented.

These measures should also be complemented with a deterrence method such as implementing plagiarism detection technologies with the use of plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin and prescribing punishment for students who have been found guilty of violating the academic integrity policies. More attention should be paid to ensuring that teaching and administrative staff are vigilant in their approach to the identification and punishment of plagiarism. Appropriate measures might include the streamlining of processes of dealing with those suspected of plagiarism, and the appointment of school-based academic integrity officers. Such measures might help to overcome current perceptions that plagiarism will be neither detected nor punished.

## CONCLUSION

This research has indicated that plagiarism is not an issue that is given pertinent consideration by the relevant stakeholders in public universities in Malaysia. As academic integrity is essential in ensuring the success of a higher education institution, plagiarism among university students is an ethical issue that deserves attention within the Malaysian higher education context. Therefore, educating students on the forms of plagiarism is crucial so that they are able to identify the academic activities that they are involved in as plagiarism or non-plagiarism. Furthermore, there is also weakness in channeling information pertaining to plagiarism to the students. Universities may appreciate the findings of this study as useful guide in their future implementation and strengthening of policies on plagiarism. Academicians can use the findings of the study to better guide their students in terms of propagating academic integrity in the world of academia. However, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to a wider population as it involved a small sample size in one public university. Finally, future research should be initiated to investigate the differences in awareness level of plagiarism among postgraduate students. This will provide information on their exposure to knowledge pertaining to academic integrity during their undergraduate studies. Furthermore, studies to identify the effectiveness of the plagiarism deterrence methods should also be encouraged.

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## **AUTHORITY AND INVISIBILITY IN RESEARCH ARTICLE ABSTRACTS ACROSS FOUR DISCIPLINES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study intends to explore the notions of writers' authority and invisibility in research article abstracts from four disciplines namely Economics, Applied Linguistics, Biology, and Mechanical Engineering. Twenty five research article abstracts from each discipline (total 100) were analyzed for the frequency, realization and roles of the self-mention (writers' authority) and the empty theme (writers' invisibility). The results suggested that there are disciplinary differences in frequency, realizations and roles performed by the use of the self-mention and the empty theme. These results could guide the novice writers of research article abstracts (especially those from the disciplines in focus) to express their authority and invisibility while writing the research article abstracts.

Keywords: authority, empty theme, invisibility, research article abstracts, self-mention

### **INTRODUCTION**

Research article (RA) abstract is a pivotal academic genre to investigate. It is the first section of research article that the readers encounter. It is the point at which the readers decide to continue reading the accompanying RA or ignore it and save their time (Hyland, 2000). It is responsible for selling the accompanying RA to disciplinary community members. It also plays a crucial role in convincing the editorial boards of academic journals or conference organizers to accept the RA. Having these features on board, the task of writing RA abstract is challenging for novice writers and this challenge become more daunting when it comes to novice non-native writers. To grasp this challenge, writers need two kinds of knowledge beside the content knowledge related to their own disciplines. One is the knowledge of organization, which includes the knowledge of moves and steps of writing RA abstract. The other one is the knowledge of appropriate use of linguistic features to convey the intended meanings, claims and findings in a more comprehensible way.

In the last three decades, a number of researchers have analyzed RA abstracts from one or more disciplines to shed the light on organization and linguistic features used in this academic genre (Cross & Oppenheim, 2006; Gillaerts & Van de Velde, 2010; Hu & Cao, 2011; Hyland & Tse, 2005; Khedri, Chan & Ebrahimi, 2013; Kanoksilapatham, 2013; Lores, 2004; Pho, 2008; Salager-Meyer, 1992; Santos, 1996; Sauperl, Klasinc & Luzar, 2008; Stotesbury, 2003). For instance, Salager-Meyer (1992) analyzed the realizations of verb tenses and modality in the organizational moves of RA abstract from discipline of medicine. Lores (2004) analyzed the organizational moves and realization of theme in applied linguistic RA abstracts. Pho (2008) studied the linguistic realizations of organizational moves of RA abstracts from two disciplines of applied linguistics and educational technology. Kanoksilapatham (2013) scrutinized the linguistic realization of organizational moves of RA abstracts from discipline of civil engineering. Hu and Cao

(2011) shed the light on the use of hedge and boost metadiscourse markers in applied linguistics RA abstracts published in English and Chinese-medium journals. The studies reviewed in literature reveal that writers' authority and invisibility in RA abstract have been neglected. Thus, this study intends to explore the notions of writers' authority and invisibility in RA abstracts across four disciplines namely: Economics (Eco), Applied Linguistics (AL), Biology (Bio) and Mechanical Engineering (ME). Concerning authority, the RA abstracts will be analyzed for the writers' self-mention.

Therefore, this study will examine the frequency and roles of first person pronoun (I, we, my, our) which are used at the grammatical subject position. Concerning invisibility, the RA abstracts will be analyzed for the frequency and roles of empty themes (It, there) which are used at the grammatical subject position.

## METHODOLOGY

### Design and corpus

This study is comparative and contrastive in nature. In this study, findings are compared and contrasted across disciplines. This study was run on a corpus of 100 RA abstracts (25 from each discipline) extracted from the four journals of 'English for Specific Purposes', 'Economic Modelling', 'Biologica' and 'Journal of Mechanical Engineering' (see Table 1). These journals are published by Elsevier and indexed in Thomson and Reuters.

Following Paltridge (1996), the corpus selection should meet three criteria. First, the data should represent a genre. The RA abstract is an academic genre on its own, thus it can satisfy the first criterion. Second, the data should be written for specific purposes, in this study, the selection of RA abstracts from four disciplines could help meeting this criterion. Third, the data must be similar in text type. The data of this study includes only RA abstracts of experimental (data-driven) RAs.

Table 1. Particulars of corpus.

Disciplines	AL	Eco	Bio	ME
Number of RA abstracts	25	25	25	25
Journal (source of corpus)	English for Specific Purposes	Economic Modelling	Biologica	Journal of Mechanical Engineering
Total number of words of RA abstracts	5535	5124	4729	3745

### Analytical procedures

To analyze the gathered RA abstracts for the writers' authority (henceforth self-mention) and invisibility (henceforth empty themes), the following analytical procedures were taken. First, 100 RA abstracts (25 from each discipline) were extracted from the target journals and converted into word file. Second, after establishing the corpus, the researcher proceeded to identify each self-mention and empty theme. To this end, the researcher read the 100 RA abstracts carefully and identified all realizations of self-mention and empty theme.

Third, the researcher analyzed the RA abstracts for the used self-mention and empty theme in terms of types and roles. In this step, especially for detecting the roles, the researcher again read the RA abstracts to mitigate the false detection of the roles due to partial understanding or misunderstanding of the RA abstracts. This would be more vital in detecting the role of self-mention and empty theme in the Bio, Eco and ME RA abstracts as the researcher has little or no knowledge about topics covered in these RA

abstracts. In addition, in the cases where the researcher could not understand the content to detect the roles, the researcher would discuss the content with an M.A. or PhD candidate practicing the same discipline.

Forth, having all the RA abstracts analyzed for the types and roles of self-mention and empty theme, researcher increased the reliability of his analysis by having a sample of 32 RA abstracts to be checked by the three PhD candidates who peruse their PhD in Applied linguistics. Fifth, the frequency and occurrence of the self-mention and empty themes and their roles were recorded and tabulated to be discussed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Self-mention

Table 2 presents the results obtained from the data analysis concerning the realization of the self-mention in the RA abstracts from the four disciplines.

Table 2. Frequency and percentage of the self-mention

	AL	Eco	Bio	ME
Self-mention	10 (100%)	32 (100%)	22 (100%)	30 (100%)

The greatest and lowest realizations were reported to be found in Eco and AL RA abstracts. This result could suggest that Eco writers use the self-mention to show their familiarity with the topic under investigation. Such a use could help writers to promote their study as the writers could convince the disciplinary community members that they are expert in the area. This result suggests that the Eco writers intend to show their authorial stance in relation to arguments, findings and claims stated in their RA abstracts. Beside the authority, the Eco writers display their confidence in highlighting their evaluation and commitments of their ideas. Thus, the Eco writers enjoy greater freedom compared to other disciplines to present themselves in the RA abstracts. In addition, this result can suggest that the Eco writers see themselves at the “cutting edge” of their discipline; therefore, they use self-mention to personalize arguments, claims and findings stated in the RA abstracts.

The less inclination of the AL writers can be discussed on the grounds that these writers prefer to free themselves from taking the responsibility for the arguments, claims and findings presented in their studies and leave it to the study itself. This can put them at the safe hand in relation to the possible falsification of their arguments, claims and findings. This result also could suggest the AL writers’ preference to guide the reader in a more indirect way to infer the authority behind the presented arguments in the RA abstracts. One possible justification for the little use of self-mention in the AL RA abstracts is the soft science nature of the AL discipline where there is always a room for subjectivity, which mitigate the use of self-mention and leave the authority to the study itself.

The four sets of RA abstracts were analyzed for the realizations and roles of the self-mention in the rhetorical sections of RA abstracts across the four disciplines and the results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Realizations of the self-mention in the rhetorical sections of RA abstracts

	AL	Eco	Bio	ME
Introduction	6 (60%)	7 (22%)	5 (23%)	10 (34%)
Method	-	14 (44%)	8 (36%)	2 (6%)
Result and Discussion	4 (40%)	11 (34%)	9 (41%)	18 (60%)
Conclusion	-	-	-	-
Total	10 (100%)	32 (100%)	22 (100%)	30 (100%)

Table 4. Roles of the self-mention in the rhetorical sections of RA abstracts

Rhetorical Section	Roles	AL	Eco	Bio	ME
Introduction	Stating aims of a study	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Imposing a contribution of a study	✓	★	★	★
Method	Describing a process or a step of procedure	★	✓	✓	✓
Result and Discussion	Displaying a full ownership for a finding or claim	✓	✓	✓	✓

The results in Table 3 indicate that AL writers showed a greater inclination to present themselves in introduction section of the RA abstracts. Such use of the self-mention might suggest that in the discipline of AL, the writers prefer more to show their authority right at the anchor point of the study, where they claim the novelty of the space created for research and claim the centrality of the topic. It could suggest that AL writers try more compared to their counterparts in other disciplines to catch the attention of the disciplinary members and convince them to read the accompanying RA. The Bio and Eco writers, according to the results in Table 3, show the least inclination to state their authority at the anchor point of their study. This use might be sourced from the nature of these disciplines where earlier studies in the literature generate new lines of research. In another words, the nature of researches in these disciplines which mostly presented in introduction section follow the simple rule of moving existing knowledge one-step further. Thus, the standard based nature of the studies in these disciplines free the writers from showing great inclination to authorize the introduction section of RA abstracts.

The self-mention performs three roles in the introduction section of the RA abstracts analyzed. The first role is stating aim of a study (example 1-4). This role was found in the introduction section of the four disciplines. This might suggest that stating aim of a study is an obligatory step in writing RA abstracts. Thus, the writers in the four disciplines prefer to show their authority and accept the responsibility for generating the topics.

Example 1: In this paper, **I** use two case studies to show how corpus linguistics can be used to help in the teaching of business English. (AL17)

Example 2: **We** explore the implications of trade liberalization in economies with State Owned enterprises (SOEs) both theoretically and through simulation analysis. (Eco4)

Example 3: *We* investigated if PCV1 sequences are present in other viral vaccines. (Bio24)

Example 4: *We* investigate the viscous instability of a miscible displacement process in a rectilinear geometry, when the viscosity contrast is controlled by two quantities which diffuse at different rates. (ME13)

The second role enacted by the use of the self-mention is imposing contribution of the study (Example 5). This role is unique to AL writers. It seems that AL writers use the self-mention in such a way to sell their ideas and increase the readership of the accompanying RA as the contributions of their studies are clearly stated.

Example 5: *We* conclude with some implications of these findings for EAP practitioners and their “customers”. (AL 24)

According to the results presented in Table 3, the self-mention was used greater in method section of the Eco and Bio RA abstracts. This suggests that in the Eco and Bio RA abstracts the contributions and novelty of the study is the method of conducting the study. Thus, the writers show their ownership of the method procedure, steps, and techniques. The writers prefer to show their authority of selecting from the available instruments, techniques, and procedure, those that are suitable for conducting the studies. The little inclination and neglecting to use the self-mention in the method section of the ME and AL RA abstracts respectively might suggest that the writers of these RA abstracts do not feel the necessity to own the novelty presented in this section.

The only role, which the self-mention performs in the method section of the RA abstracts, is to describe a process or a step of procedure (example 6-8). This role was not found in the AL RA abstracts. This might suggest that the Eco, Bio, and ME writers authorize their contributions in the method section. The role could help writers to further their vigorous, direct, clear and concise communication with their community members (Lim, 2006).

Example 6: We use four conventionally accepted proxies for financial development, namely money supply (M2), liquid liabilities (M3), domestic bank credit to the private sector and total domestic credit provided by the banking sector (all percent of GDP) (Eco 8)

Example 7: Here *we* monitored asparagine deamidation from a recombinant human antibody in humans and found that among the conserved sites, only Asn 384 deamidated at an appreciable rate. (Bio 9)

Example 8: We carry out asymptotic analyses of the linear stability behaviour in two regimes: that of small wavenumbers at intermediate times, and that of large times. (ME 13)

The results presented in Table 3 indicate that the nature of the disciplinary difference in the use of the self-mention in the results and discussion section is different from those differences reported in introduction and method sections. In the RA abstracts analyzed, writers of the four disciplines at least used one third of the self-mentions in the results and discussion sections. This might indicate that writers, without having their disciplinary background in mind, use the self-mention to claim the responsibility for the results and discussion. This use indicates the writers' confidence in suggesting their

findings as solutions for the problems stated in the introduction section of RA abstracts and in the introduction section of the accompanying RAs.

As the Eco writers used 34% of the self-mentions in the result and discussion section, the ME writers showed the highest inclination by using 60% of the self-mentions in this section. This could suggest that writers of ME RA abstracts communicate their results and discussion louder than their counterparts in other disciplines.

The self-mention was used in the results and discussion section of the RA abstracts analyzed to display the role of full ownership of findings or claims (Example 9-12). This use could assist writers to convince the reader that they are competent and knowledgeable in relation to the under investigation topic. Through this role, the writers practice the highest degree of authorship and presence. It also shows the confidence of the writers in relation to findings and claims.

Example 9: **Our** findings suggest that strong, local, durable networks are crucial to enabling scholars' participation in transnational networks, which support their publishing in both English and local languages. (AL14)

Example 10: In contrast to the linear model, **we** find strong evidence of cointegration in a nonlinear Taylor rule with threshold effects. (Eco 12)

Example 11: **We** show that marketed rhGH products from several different manufacturers exhibit differences in conformational stability when compared directly. (Bio14)

Example 12: **We** find that the type II (streamline curvature) mode becomes increasingly amplified with respect to the type I (cross flow) mode and is therefore likely to be selected in practice for sufficiently high axial flow rates. (ME 4)

### Empty theme

The four sets of RA abstracts were analyzed for the realization of the empty theme and the results are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5. Frequency and percentage of the empty theme

	AL	Eco	Bio	ME
Empty theme	6 (3%)	8 (5%)	6 (3%)	9 (4%)

A quick glance at Table 5 indicates the little attention of the four groups of writer towards the use of the empty theme. One possible justification is that there is a limitation in word count dedicated for RA abstract writing, which is imposed by the journals' editors. Thus, the writers prefer not to use the empty theme while writing the RA abstracts. The little attention to the use of the empty theme could result in RA abstracts, which are less subjective and personal as the application of the empty theme could help in deflecting the attention from the people engaged in the research activities and shifted the focus on to the outcomes.

The four sets of RA abstracts were analyzed for the realizations and roles of the empty theme in the rhetorical sections of RA abstracts across the four disciplines and the results are illustrated in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6. Realizations of the empty theme in the rhetorical sections of RA abstracts

	AL	Eco	Bio	ME
Introduction	-	3 (37%)	-	3 (33%)
Method	-	-	-	-
Result and Discussion	6 (100%)	5 (63%)	6 (100%)	6 (64%)
Conclusion	-	-	-	-
Total	6 (100%)	8 (100%)	6 (100%)	9 (100%)

Table 7. Roles of the empty theme in the rhetorical sections of RA abstracts

Rhetorical Section	Roles	AL	Eco	Bio	ME
Introduction	Present earlier findings	✓	✓	★	✓
	Implication of a study	✓	★	✓	★
Result and Discussion	Postpone the results and outcomes	✓	✓	✓	✓

According to the results in Table 6, the empty theme was realized in the introduction section of Eco and ME RA abstracts. They mostly used the empty theme just to post pone the long subject. The AL and Bio writers did not use the empty theme in the introduction section of RA abstracts. This might suggest that in the introduction section, writers only report a summary of earlier literatures and create research spaces for their researches. Thus, they feel no need for being invisible by the use of the empty theme.

The results in Table 7 indicate the empty theme enacted two roles in the introduction section of the RA abstracts. The first role is to present earlier findings (Example 13-15). This role was mostly found at the begging of the RA abstracts. This could suggest that the writers prefer to give a full image of the existing literature in order to link his/her study to it and show the contributions and point of departure of his/her study. A plausible reason for such a use might be claiming the centrality of the topic under investigation. The results indicated that such an application of the empty theme is not a norm in writing Bio RA abstracts. It might indicate that in Bio RA abstracts, providing such a link and claiming the centrality of a topic is not considered as an obligatory step or the Bio writers realize this step by the use of another sentence initial element. One initial element, which could help in the realization of such a step, is the time element. The time initial element could show the up to date nature of the study and claim the centrality.

Example 13: *It* is argued that in the needs analysis process, the present situation analysis (PSA), that is, personal information about the learners and factors which may affect their learning, is just as if not more important than, the target situation analysis (TSA), that is, professional information about the learners in terms of their future language requirements. (AL 15)

Example 14: *It* is argued that ignoring statistical misspecification, and focusing exclusively on the evaluation of the statistical results – taken at face value – on substantive grounds, has proved a disastrous strategy for learning from data. (Eco 13)

Example 15: *It* is established that the instability is almost purely a phenomenon due to buoyancy coupled with the conservation of nanoparticles. (ME 3)

The second role is to state implication of a study (Example 16-17). Such a use could be justified based on two of main roles of writing RA abstract. One of the main roles of writing RA abstract is to sell the RA. Stating the implication could help realizing this role. Another role is saving time of the reader. By stating implication of a study, the writer could help the readers to decide to read the accompanying RA or not.

Example 16: *It* argues that this approach need not be restricted to small groups of well-resourced students, but can be implemented in mainstream EAP classes. (AL 23)

Example 17: Given that the antioxidant properties of bilirubin are well established, *it* is possible that bilirubin helps protect albumin from oxidation during the pasteurisation step. (Bio 7)

In the result and discussion section of RA abstract analyzed, writers from the four disciplines used the empty theme to postpone the results and outcomes (Example 18-21). Such an application can tentatively suggest that writers preferred to be less visible while reporting some of the research outcomes and claims. It can be justified based on the “information principle” (Hasselgard, Johansson & Lysvag, 1998). In this principle, the writer presents, relatively, longer elements that carry a high load of information towards the end of the sentence. It seems that the writer use the empty theme along with the reporting verb to remain neutral about the research findings and claims.

Example 18: From our data, *it* seemed that the contextualisation practices that students drew upon to facilitate intended interpretations of their design distinguished successful from less successful presentations. (AL/N/6)

Example 19: *It* is shown that unions' strategy generates employment, raises the ratio of skilled to unskilled workers and raises national income. (Eco 9)

Example 20: It is proposed that for some chromatography steps, the combination of lab-scale cycling studies confirming consistent performance throughout the resin lifetime and monitoring of cGMP manufacturing preclude the need for virus clearance studies on maximally cycled resin. (Bio/N/4)

Example 21: In particular, *it* is shown that increasing the flap width has the beneficial effect of broadening the bandwidth of the capture factor curve. (ME 24)

## CONCLUSION

This study intended to shed the light on the writers' authority and invisibility in the genre of RA abstracts from four disciplines of AL, Eco, Bio, and ME. Concerning the writers' authority, frequency and roles of the self-mention was examined. In regards to the writers' invisibility, frequency and roles of the empty theme was examined. This study aimed to guide novice writers, especially novice non-native writers, in writing RA abstracts concerning the use of self-mention and the empty theme to show the writers' invisibility and authority.

The results showed that the frequency of the self-mention was different across the four disciplines suggesting that in some disciplines due to their nature, the writers present themselves in a clearer manner. The self-mention was used in almost all the sections of RA abstracts in the four corpora analyzed. Based on the results gained, the self-mention was used to serve five roles. The disciplinary variations were mostly in the realizations of the optional steps of writing RA abstracts. The results could suggest that the writers of the disciplines studied can use the results of this study as a guide in relation to the use of the self-mention in writing RA abstracts.

The results showed that the four groups of writers showed little inclination in regards to the use of the empty theme. This was not unusual as the genre of RA abstracts is where the authors claim their authority, which play a great role in convincing the readers to read the accompanying RA. Based on the results gained, the empty theme was used mostly in the results and discussion section of the RA abstracts analyzed. This could suggest that novice writers can use the empty theme while presenting the findings of their studies while remaining neutral and taking no responsibility. In relation to the roles enacted by the use of the empty theme, it seems that the empty theme was used for realizing the obligatory and optional steps in writing RA abstracts.

This study, through shedding the light on the writers' authority and invisibility in four disciplines, could equip novice RA abstract writers in general and those from the disciplines in focus in particular, with the knowledge of how authority and invisibility are practiced and served different roles in the sections of RA abstract. In addition, the results gained in this study increase writers' awareness concerning the effect of disciplinary nature and sections of RA abstracts on the selection of the linguistic features such as those focused in this study. This study could suggest further studies carried out on more disciplines and bigger corpus to yield more representative and generalizable findings.

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## **IMPACT OF COMPOSING MEDIUM ON THE QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF WRITING**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This exploratory study aimed to analyze the effects of word processing on students' writing performance in terms of quality and quantity. The subjects in this study were twenty-five first year Bachelor students. Two writing sessions were carried out in this study. For each session, the students were divided into two groups, with one group wrote an essay in class while the other group used the computer to type their essay. They switched the writing medium in the second session. Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level were used to measure the quality of the essays; while the number of words, number of sentence, and words per sentence were used to determine if there was any improvement in the quantity of writing. Statistical analysis was conducted to determine any significant differences between the two media.

Keywords: composing medium, essay writing, Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level, Flesch Reading Ease, word processing

### **INTRODUCTION**

Traditional writing tests have been limited to paper-and-pencil tasks; yet, given the dominance of computers in everyday life, it is impossible to ignore the increasing role of technology in assessing writing (Chen, White, McClosley, Soroui & Chun, 2011). In language testing, the use of computer nowadays is quite common especially for multiple-choice questions. Previous research on the effects of computer administered testing has focused on multiple-choice tests, and has generally found no or small differences due to mode of administration (Horkay, Bennet, Allen, Kaplan & Yan, 2006). In contrast, for open-ended writing, two variables may influence students' writing scores, which are the mode of composition and the mode of presentation. Mode of composition refers to how students produce their essays, for example keyboard composition or paper/pencil composition. Mode of presentation refers to essay formats presented to the readers as handwritten or computer text (Russell & Tao, 2004).

### **Research purpose**

The essay test has become more common in large-scale standardized testing as it is thought to be the best method of assessing writing ability and ability to measure complex reasoning and problem solving. Despite these benefits, essay tests also have potential limitation as the response mode may affect examinees' scores. In other words, composing an essay using a computer may lead to a different score than handwritten essay (Lovett,

Lewandouski, Berger & Gathje, 2010). Motivated by a question whether or not performance on an extended writing task might be better if students were allowed to write on computer rather than on paper, the study aims to investigate the effects of medium on students writing performance.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section presents a review of literature associated with the influence of medium on writing, especially on the use of paper and computer. This is followed by a review of related studies on the effects of composing medium on writing performance.

### **Influence of medium on writing**

The physical appearance of a text plays an important role. The chunking of paragraphs into black and white areas on the page facilitates the grasp of the content and structure. Therefore, it is important that the external representation of the document, as carried through by the writing medium, enables an overall view of the text that supports the mental formation of a global text representation and thereby guides the continued writing process (Eklundh, 1992).

The pen or pencil is the most intimate of writing implements. When writers write with a pencil it is no longer a separate object, but a conduit for ideas. For the person engaged in writing, the pen or pencil does not exist as a separate entity as it may be just the right tool for expressing a writer's mood or intentions. There is no ideal mood for writing, just the one most suited to the writer and current situation. The writer carves out each word on the page and the style of the handwriting indicates the speed and care of the writer (Sharples, 1999).

Pen and paper are also highly adaptable. They can accommodate many types of writing, from a hurried scribble to a carefully crafted manuscript. However, the pen does not provide the means for text to be easily revised. The writer fixes an impression on the page. Paper is flexible but the marks on paper are hard to move or delete. By contrast the computer word processor allows words to be shifted or revised at will (Sharples, 1999).

Computers also have the capability to facilitate the transition among novice writers from knowledge tellers to knowledge transformers. As knowledge tellers, novice writers are restricted in sorting the information they retrieve and as a result most of the things recalled appear in the text. As opposed, knowledge transformers make more sentence- and theme-level changes based on incongruities between their text and intentions which results in more content generated by writers than what actually appears in the text. This transition can be facilitated by computers as they have the ability to receive, store, process and manage information that enable them to construct representations and to perform procedures that students may be unable to do for themselves (Kozma, 1991).

With a word processor on a standard 20-24 line text display, however, there are a number of difficulties in acquiring a global perspective of the text. First, only a small part of a lengthy text can be displayed. During the composition and reviewing of a long text in a word processor, the writer usually needs to move back and forth several times in order to review what has been written so far. Secondly, this very way of moving the text by 'scrolling' in an often imprecise manner, in combination with the lack of a fixed position of the text on the page, makes it difficult for the writer to use spatial information as cues to the content and structure of the text (Eklundh, 1992).

Knowing the benefits and limitations of writing using pen and paper as well as computer provides a better understanding on how they shape the writing process. Generally, the paper offers advantages for its availability, flexibility and viewing ability as the writer can see the whole text while composing. However, it restricts writers in doing editing, which on the other hand proves to be the main advantage of computer. However, the computer screen limits the ability of the writers to see the whole text. Nevertheless, all these factors play important roles in shaping the writing process.

### **Empirical studies**

A review of empirical studies indicates that instructional uses of computers for writing are having a positive impact on student writing. This positive impact was found in terms of quantity of writing as well as quality of writing. For quantity, several studies have indicated that students who write with word processors tend to produce longer passages than students who write with paper-and-pencil (for example: Goldberg, Russell & Cook, 2003). As for quality, the writing process becomes more collaborative and includes more peer-editing and peer-mediate work. Writing becomes a more social process in which students share their work with each other. Students also tend to make revisions while producing, rather than after producing, text when using computers. Between initial and final drafts, students also tend to make more revision when they write with computers. The teacher's role has shifted from activity leader in the 'pens classroom' to that of facilitator and 'proof-reader' in the 'computers classroom'. This is a result of the students' increased motivation, engagement and independence when writing with computers (Goldberg, Russell & Cook, 2003).

Haas (1988) examined the effect of word processing on the amount and kind of planning writers do. The subjects were 10 experienced writers and 10 student writers who were all second-semester freshmen, all of whom were asked to write essays with paper, word processing alone, and a combination of word processing and paper. The results indicated that there was less planning with word processing and writers begin writing sooner when using word processing as making changes is easier with word processing.

In another study, the use of writing software called 'Systeme-D' influenced the writing process of the students as they mostly used the grammar and phrase sections in their writing (New, 1999). The students viewed the software as being very helpful but the researcher felt that it constrained the written expression and writing process of the students as they relied on the grammar and phrases provided in the software.

The studies above suggest that the computer has both positive and negative effects on the students' writing process. Computer helps to unblock flow of ideas as well as increases students' motivation to write. Besides that, it helps to create a collaborative writing environment among the students. However, there are concerns on the negative effects that it has on inexperienced writers, as well as the lack of planning and global revision while composing through computer.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The subjects in this study were 25 first year students who were pursuing their Bachelor of Engineering degree in Electrical Engineering at a private university in Kuala Lumpur. The instruments used in determining the effects of word processing on students' writing performance in terms of quality were statistical analysis of Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. The number of words, number of sentences and words per sentence were used to determine differences in quantity of essays produced using both media.

**Data collection**

Data collection was carried out during the students’ class session. There were two writing sessions involved in this study. For each session, the students were divided into two groups, with one group wrote an essay in a classroom while the other group used computers in a computer lab to type their essays. They switched the task in the second session. This is to eliminate the effects of sequence on the students’ writing performance. The gap between the sessions was one week.

The question papers for both tests were only available in hardcopy as any slight changes in the appearance of an item such as changing the font in which a question is written and the order of items presented can affect performance on that item (Russell, 1999). To minimize such effects, students received the same form of question papers in all the tests.

Upon completion of the writing tasks, students were required to submit the hardcopy of the essay if it was written on paper. As for the computer essay, they were required to save their writing in a Microsoft Word file.

**Data analysis**

Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level were used to gauge differences in quality of essays while number of words, number of sentences and words per sentence were used to determine differences in quantity of both groups of essays.

The Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level were calculated using grammar checker in Microsoft Word tools. Flesch Reading Ease is a Reading Ease Scale that was developed by Rudolf Flesh, which uses ASL (average sentence length), and ASW (average syllables per word) to determine reading ease. The formula is  $206.835 - (1.015 \times ASL) - (84.6 \times ASW)$ . Total scores can range from 0 to 100. The difficulties of reading are ranked from “Very Difficult” to “Very Easy” in terms of Flesch Reading Ease. Texts that are easy to read have high scores and texts with scores below 30 are similar to legal contract (Saadiyah, Kemboja & Mohamed Bashir, 2008). The range is as shown in Table 1.

The Flesch-Kincaid grade level formula is derived from two aspects; average sentence length (ASL) and average number of syllables per word (ASW). The Flesch-Kincaid grade level is calculated by using the formula:  $(0.39 \times ASL) + (11.8 \times ASW) - 15.59$ .

Table 1. Readability analyses

Average	Description
0 - 29	Very Difficult
30 - 49	Difficult
50 -59	Fairly Difficult
60 -69	Standard
70 -79	Fairly Easy
80 -89	Easy
90 -100	Very Easy

**RESULTS**

This section reports the results of a study that examines the effects of word processing on students’ writing quality and quantity.

**Effects on writing quality**

The results on the effects of composing medium on writing quality are obtained through the Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch Kincaid Grade Level.

*Flesch Reading Ease*

Table 2 shows the results of the quality of essays written in both modes: hand written and word-processed represented by Flesch Reading Ease (FRE). It is the readability score formula that rates text on a 100-point scale based on the average number of syllables per word and words per sentence. The higher the FRE score, the easier it is to understand the document. For most standard documents, the FRE score is approximately 60 to 70.

Table 2. Flesch Reading Ease of students' essays

Student No	Handwritten Essays (HW)	Computer Essays (CE)	Difference (CE – HW)
1	57.95	51.42	-6.53
2	59.18	54.05	-5.13
3	52.6	53.95	1.35
4	65.86	53.39	-12.47
5	53.26	53.6	0.34
6	62.82	53.95	-8.87
7	50	47.6	-2.4
8	50.52	45.88	-4.64
9	60.89	50.7	-10.19
10	49.09	62.01	12.92
11	46.14	59.62	13.48
12	36.18	51.97	15.79
13	50.89	52.59	1.7
14	59.03	54.65	-4.38
15	48.87	57.64	8.77
16	58.11	55.4	-2.71
17	59.32	40.44	-18.88
18	54.53	52.14	-2.39
19	57.66	55.83	-1.83
20	46.74	49.61	2.87
21	50.28	59.24	8.96
22	45.02	51.7	6.68
23	55.6	63.44	7.84
24	47.48	55.54	8.06
25	49.04	61.95	12.91
Average	53.08	53.93	0.85

In general, only 12 (48%) word-processed essays received lower scores, which indicate that the essays are almost similar in terms of reading difficulty. To confirm whether the difference is significant, a t-test is conducted and the results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Paired samples test for Flesch Reading Ease

	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Handwritten- Computer Essays	-.476	24	0.638

Table 3 shows a negative relationship in which computer essays receive higher FRE score than handwritten essays. This means that it is slightly easier to understand the computer essays. There is no statistically significant difference in the FRE for both essays.

*Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level*

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (FKGL) readability score analyzes and rates texts on a U.S grade-school level based on the average number of syllables per word and words per sentence. A score of 8.0, for instance, means that an eighth-grader would understand the text. Table 4 shows the FKGL of handwritten and word-processed essays.

Table 4. Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of students' essays

Student No	Handwritten Essays (HW)	Computer Essays (CE)	Difference (CE-HW)
1	9.64	10.62	0.98
2	10.32	9.83	-0.49
3	11.79	10.57	-1.22
4	8.43	11.2	2.77
5	10.51	10.42	-0.09
6	7.77	10.17	2.4
7	12.54	11.95	-0.59
8	11.59	13.41	1.82
9	9.28	10.2	0.92
10	9.95	9.46	-0.49
11	11.12	9.02	-2.1
12	13.9	10.6	-3.3
13	10.54	11.01	0.47
14	9.86	11.46	1.6
15	9.96	9.28	-0.68
16	9.82	9.86	0.04
17	9.02	12.34	3.32
18	9.42	10.19	0.77
19	9.75	10.47	0.72
20	12.03	11.26	-0.77
21	10.91	10.12	-0.79
22	12.33	11.47	-0.86
23	9.88	8.71	-1.17
24	11.45	10.99	-0.46
25	10.9	9.21	-1.69
Average	10.51	10.55	0.04

Table 4 shows that on average, the grade level for computer essays is slightly higher by 0.04 as compared to handwritten essays with only 11 (44%) word-processed essays received higher grade level. A t-test is conducted to determine whether the difference is significant and the results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Paired samples test for Flesch Kincaid Grade Level

	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Handwritten- Computer Essays	-.143	24	0.888

Table 5 also shows a negative relationship which indicates that the computer essays receive higher grade level score than handwritten essays. It also confirms that the difference between the two essays is not significant.

Slightly more than half of the respondents, with 14 (56%) of them, score higher FKGL for handwritten essays. The results also show that ten out of eleven students who obtain higher FKGL scores in computer essays receive lower FRE scores. This means that there is a strong correlation between the FKGL and the FRE as when the essay becomes more difficult to read, the grade level increases. It can be concluded that based on the FRE and FKGL, there is no statistically significant difference between essays that are

handwritten and composed using computer. Thus, the quality of writing is not affected by the writing medium.

### Effects on writing quantity

In terms of writing quantity, the effects of composing medium are determined through the number of words, number of sentences and number of words per sentence.

#### *Number of words*

Table 6 illustrates the total number of words found in essays composed through both media.

Table 6. Average total number of words in handwritten and computer essays

Student No	Handwritten Essays (HW)	Computer Essays (CE)	Difference (CE – HW)
1	485	529	44
2	514	596	82
3	567	603	36
4	474	325	-149
5	565	579	14
6	474	572	98
7	453	536	83
8	563	633	70
9	345	339	-6
10	441	605	164
11	623	591	-32
12	664	887	223
13	652	450	-202
14	409	516	107
15	410	409	-1
16	488	592	104
17	585	494	-91
18	409	406	-3
19	529	644	115
20	490	475	-15
21	507	640	133
22	495	633	138
23	564	519	-45
24	407	441	34
25	541	554	13
Average	506	543	37

Table 6 shows that the average number of words identified in the handwritten essays is 506, while for computer essays the average is 543 words. This reveals that computer essays are generally longer than computer essays with an average difference of 37 words.

A t-test is conducted to evaluate the impact of computer on the students' essays in terms of number of words. There is no statistically significant increase in number of words for computer essays when compared to handwritten essays, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Paired samples test for number of words

	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Handwritten- Computer Essays	-1.897	24	0.070

Even though there is no significant difference, 16 (64%) respondents write more words when composing using computer, with a minimum difference of 13 words and a maximum of 223 words.

*Number of sentences*

Table 8 illustrates the number of sentences composed in the handwritten and computer essays.

Table 8. Total number of sentences in handwritten and computer essays

Student No	Handwritten Essays (HW)	Computer Essays (CE)	Difference (CE-HW)
1	27	29	2
2	24	36	12
3	24	31	7
4	27	15	-12
5	30	31	1
6	36	32	-4
7	18	25	7
8	26	24	-2
9	19	21	2
10	31	31	0
11	36	36	0
12	29	48	19
13	37	22	-15
14	21	22	1
15	29	25	-4
16	26	34	8
17	36	26	-10
18	27	24	-3
19	29	32	3
20	23	24	1
21	27	31	4
22	23	29	6
23	32	30	-2
24	21	20	-1
25	30	30	0
Average	27.52	28.32	0.8

As shown in Table 8, the total number of sentences for computer essays is slightly higher with 28.32 sentences as compared to 27.52 for handwritten essays. Out of 25 students, 3 students (12%) compose the same number of paragraphs in the two media; 13 students (52%) compose more sentences using the computer, and 9 students (36%) compose less number of sentences when composing using the computer.

A paired-sample test reveals no significant difference in the increase of the number of sentences in handwritten and word-processed essays, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Paired samples test for number of sentences

	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Handwritten- Computer Essays	-.556	24	.583

However, when looking into individual respondents, 13 (52%) respondents write more sentences when composing using the computer. For the other 3 respondents, there is no difference in the number of sentences in essays composed in both media.

*Number of words per sentence*

The number of words in each sentence for essays composed in both media is shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Total number of words per sentence in handwritten and computer essays

Student No	Handwritten Essays (HW)	Computer Essays (CE)	Difference (CE-HW)
1	17.96	18.24	0.28
2	21.42	16.56	-4.86
3	23.62	19.45	-4.17
4	17.56	21.67	4.11
5	18.83	18.68	-0.15
6	13.17	17.88	4.71
7	25.17	21.44	-3.73
8	21.65	26.38	4.73
9	18.16	16.14	-2.02
10	14.23	19.52	5.29
11	17.31	16.42	-0.89
12	22.9	18.48	-4.42
13	17.62	20.45	2.83
14	19.48	23.45	3.97
15	14.14	16.36	2.22
16	18.77	17.41	-1.36
17	16.25	19	2.75
18	15.15	16.92	1.77
19	18.24	20.12	1.88
20	21.3	19.79	-1.51
21	18.78	20.65	1.87
22	21.52	21.83	0.31
23	17.62	17.3	-0.32
24	19.38	22.05	2.67
25	18.03	18.47	0.44
Average	18.73	19.39	0.66

The results show that the number of words per sentence for computer essays is generally more than the number of words per sentence for handwritten essays. 15 out of 25 students write more words per sentence using the computer. This indicates that more students prefer to use the word processor to develop their sentence.

Table 11 shows that even though there is an increase in the number of words per sentence for the computer essays compared to handwritten essays, the increase is not statistically significant.

Table 11. Paired samples test for number of words per sentence

	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Handwritten- Computer Essays	-1.093	24	.285

Despite the insignificant results shown statistically, 15 (60%) respondents write more words in a sentence when composing using the computer.

## DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of the present study is to investigate the effects of composing medium (handwritten versus word-processed) on writing quantity and quality of undergraduates.

The results reveal that there is no significant difference between the essays composed using computers or handwritten in terms of quality as analyzed by The Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch Kincaid Grade Level. The analyses of individual respondents also shows no difference with almost equal percentage receive higher scores for handwritten and computer essays.

The Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch Kincaid Grade Level readability tests may be inadequate to measure the respondents' writing quality. While the tests are useful for publish-quality writing, they may not be particularly pertinent to student writing, where errors in grammar, punctuation, syntax, and spelling may exist. Thus, different results might be obtained if the writing quality is evaluated by human raters.

The results obtained in this study do not support a very similar study by Saadiyah, Kemboja, & Mohamed Bashir in 2008 which also measured writing quality through the Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch- Kincaid Grade Level, while the quantity of writing was analyzed based on the number of words, paragraphs, sentences, sentences per paragraph and words per sentence. Their results showed that there was obvious difference between the quality and quantity of writing with essays composed using word processor were longer and exhibited improvement in quality and quantity. The findings are inconsistent with the findings in the present study because the subjects in the previous study were Arab postgraduate students who had different type of writing in their mother tongue. For the Arabs, it may be an advantage for them to type Latin letters than to write them.

It is recommended that the quality of writing is measured through human rating as it may yield different results due to the 'presentation' results. The effects of 'presentation' were elaborated in a study by Russell & Tao (2004). The results showed that higher scores were awarded to handwritten essays which resulted in computer printed responses receiving 1.3 points lower, out of a maximum 6, than scores received by the same response presented in handwritten form. However, this presentation effect seemed to disappear when computer printed responses were formatted with a scripted font that resembled cursive handwriting. This is because raters found it difficult to read which resulted in them reading responses less carefully and awarding scores based on a quick rather than careful read of the response.

The difference in terms of writing quantity is also not statistically significant. However, closer analysis on the individual respondents shows that more respondents write more words, sentences and words per sentence when composing through computer. This is contributed by the fact that all the respondents have the experience of using computers for more than 4 years, with more than two-third (68%) of them have been using it for more than 10 years. Specifically, on the use of word processing programme for writing, the majority of the respondents use it on moderate extent (44%) and large extent (40%). More than half of them sometimes use the computer to write a paper from the beginning. Thus, the familiarity may cause the students to produce longer essays when using the computer.

The findings in this study are consistent with the meta-analyses performed by Goldberg, Russell and Cook in 2003. In terms of quantity, meta-analysis of across fourteen studies indicates that students who write with word processors tend to produce longer passages than students who write with paper-and-pencil. The effect is larger when students have more time to write. According to Lovett et al. (2010), increasing the time

allotment has no effect when students are hand writing essays, but the same increase in time allotment has a greater effect when essays are completed using a word processor.

### CONCLUSION

The results show that there is no statistical significant difference in the quality of computer and handwritten essays based on Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch Kincaid Grade Level. As for quantity, more respondents wrote longer essays when using the pen and paper. However, the differences in length between the essays composed using two different media are also not significant. This implies that the composing mode does not affect the quality and quantity of students' writing. In a test situation, it can be assumed that students' performance is not affected when asked to compose either by using computer or by hand, even though the students are more familiar with the use of computer. However, this conclusion is only confined to the scope of this study and it is interesting to note a review by Leeson (2009) who has summed up that empirical evidence regarding the actual impact of computer familiarity on computer based testing performance is largely conflicting.

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## **HEDGES USED BY ESL STUDENTS IN SINGLE-SEX AND MIXED-SEX INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Hedges are linguistic devices that largely diminish the force of an utterance and soften the impact of a statement. As such, they are useful pragmatic devices that speakers use to achieve their desired communicative goals. Motivated by Lakoff's (2004) study which reveals that women are more inclined to use hedges than men, this exploratory study attempts to verify this notion by comparing the use of hedges in informal conversations between female and male ESL students in the light of Politeness Theory. The comparison is made between both genders by examining the pattern of frequency and the linguistic realizations of hedges used in the spoken discourse. To realize the objectives, a mixed method was employed in this study. Voice recordings of both single-sex and mixed-sex groups were transcribed and the hedges were analysed based on an adapted framework of categorization of hedges by Riekkinen (2009) and Svarova (2008). The findings revealed that in single-sex groups, the frequency of use of hedges used were similar for both genders. However, in a mixed-sex group, females hedged more than males. This study confirms the claim of Lakoff (2004) in which females are seen to be more sensitive to the use of hedges when compared with male speakers.

Keywords: gender comparison, lexical hedges, politeness theory, spoken discourse

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is a fundamental need for humans to participate in social interactions where verbal speech plays an important role. Verbal speech does not only serve to convey and exchange information, it is also connected to interaction between people whereby our words carry interpersonal messages. This interaction is supposed to be polite, facilitating and mitigating. One dynamic way of delivering interpersonal messages in verbal speech is through the use of hedging. According to Nikula (1997), hedging is an excellent communicative strategy which allows speakers to soften the force of their utterances so that they will be more acceptable to the interlocutors.

The use of hedges is closely linked to Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of 'face'. According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, the notion of face is "something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in an interaction" (p.61). In other words, to achieve a successful spoken discourse, both the speaker and hearer must maintain each other's 'face'. Brown and Levinson (1987) further divide the notion of face into positive and negative face. Positive face refers to a positive self-image and a desire that this self-image is approved of by others. On the other hand, negative face refers to the freedom of action and freedom from imposition. As stated earlier, interlocutors' hedge to attend to the face wants of others and themselves. Certain speech acts, for example criticisms, are often hedged to enable it to sound less threatening to the hearer, and therefore unlikely to be

rejected. If criticism is not hedged, it may cause distress to the hearers. Such situation, as Brown and Levinson (1987, p.65) points out ‘run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker’ and they are known as face-threatening acts (FTAs). Speech acts that are face-threatening are definitely damaging to the positive self-image of the speaker or hearer.

Addressed by various terms such as “downgraders” by Holmes (1995), “compromisers” by James (1983), “downtoners” by Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985), “weakeners” by Brown and Levinson (1987) and “softeners” by Crystal and Davy (1995), the importance of hedges in spoken and written discourse has been subject to a plethora of research ranging from investigation on hedges used between genders (Holmes, 1995; Crosby & Nyquist, 1977; McElhinny, 2003) to cultural differences (Hyland, 1996; Hyland & Milton, 1997; Samaie, Khosravian & Boghayeri, 2014) and in written discourse (Hyland, 1994; Crompton, 1997; Lewin, 2005). As this study attempts to explore the use of hedges between ESL male and female speakers, studies on gender differences in the use of hedges are reviewed.

McElhinny (2003) stated that “gender often becomes a key tool for signalling differentiation” (p.2). This notion is reflected in Lakoff’s (1975) study where it was revealed that women used more hedges and polite forms than men. The use of such devices was interpreted by Lakoff (1975) as a sign of social insecurity, indecisiveness and lack of confidence. For instance, hedges are particularly used to dilute an assertion (e.g.: *sort of, kind of, I suppose* and *you know* while epistemic modal forms signal the speaker’s feeling towards their utterance (e.g.: *may, might, should* and *must*) where a degree of certainty or otherwise is shown. The reason given for this is that women are timid and too nervous to assert anything too strongly (Sheridan, 2007). Another justification proposed is that women prefer to stay away from conflict and therefore use speech patterns which permit disagreements to happen without explicit confrontation (Nadler & Nadler, 1987).

On the contrary, Holmes’ (1995) study discovered that women use hedges to state their point of views with confidence or as a positive politeness device signalling solidarity with the addressee, rather than as a device that expresses a lack of certainty (Holmes, 1995, p.202). This discovery opposes the findings of Lakoff (1975). Fishman (1980) also conducted a study not only on *hedges* but also on the use of questions in conversations. After listening to 52 hours of recorded conversations between 3 middle-aged American couples, she found that women used the hedge “*you know*” five times more frequently than men. Fishman (1980) concluded that the reason as to why women utilise both the *questions* and *hedges* devices is to have conversational power to facilitate the conversation in order for it to continue. In addition to this, a study on the spoken discourse by Preisler (1986) supported Fishman’s (1980) findings. In the study, conversations on controversial topics between both genders from three occupational groups were recorded and the results were evident that women did use more hedges than men.

In investigating the use of hedges between genders, researchers, such as Wareing, Thomas, Singh, Peccei, Thornborrow and Jones (2004) and Fishman (1980), have offered two potential theories to explain this phenomenon. First is the ‘dominance theory’ which speaks of the difference in power amidst men and women as the primary cause of gender variation in spoken language. It is obvious that in most societies “men tend to have more power than women, physically, financially and in workplace hierarchies” (Wareing et al., 2004, p.90). Another theory is the ‘difference theory’. This theory emerged as a comeback to plug the loopholes of the dominance theory, which postulates that women were powerless. Moreover, this theory depicts men as undermining the power of women and yet the former seems to act as the redeemer of women. Wareing et al. (2009) claim

that the ‘difference theory’ which proposed that “men and women acquire dissimilar styles of talking is because they are segregated at vital stages of their life” (p.90). The ‘difference theory’ always takes Tannen’s (1990) research as an illustration of its claims. This theory believes that it is during the pertinent development stages in life that the variations in language emerge, thus the preferences for certain linguistic expressions such as the use of hedges were merely differences of linguistic preferences between genders (Bilous & Krauss, 1988; Gal, 1995). Crosby and Nyquist (1977) reported a tendency for women to use more hedges with other women, while a male to male exchange of hedges were the fewest. This was followed by McMillan, Clifton, McGrath and Gale (1977) who noted that women used more hedges when men were present in their discussion groups; while Brown (1980), who studied politeness devices in a different language and culture, discovered that women used more politeness devices (hedges) than men. This evidence supports the claims that women use excessive hedges in interactive discussions.

Although the studies above were primarily conducted on native English speakers, studies on hedges in the Malaysian context are also not entirely new. Over the past two decades, studies on hedges have been carried out in different domains such as for classroom practices (Chan & Tan, 2002), and in the writing of research articles (Tan, 2002; Tan & Chan, 2008) and complaint letters (Hooi & Shuib, 2014). Interestingly, research on hedges has also attracted the interest of Malaysian mathematicians as evidenced in the study by Chandramohan and Rao (2006).

However, these studies were mainly on written discourse and there is yet to be a study that is conducted on the variety of hedges spoken among Malaysian students within the same-sex and different-sex groups in an informal context. As Malaysia is a multi-racial country, it is all the more important that the use of hedges be investigated as its use as a pragmatic device in the spoken discourse may effect a successful or unsuccessful communication. Therefore, this study aims to compare the frequency of hedges used and their linguistic realizations between a group of ESL female and male speakers. Below are two research questions which were framed to guide this study:

1. To what extent is the pattern of use of hedges different in:
  - a) same-sex conversations
  - b) mixed-sex conversations
2. What are the dominant linguistic realizations of hedges used by the male and female participants?

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a mixed method approach. The quantitative analysis investigated the pattern of frequency use of hedges in single and mixed gender conversations. The qualitative analysis, on the other hand, examined the linguistic realizations of the variation of hedges used in single and mixed-sex conversations.

### **Research subjects**

Twelve participants from the English department of the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication volunteered to participate in the study. They were undergraduates who were completing their final year of study in Universiti Putra Malaysia. Six of them were majoring in English language, and the other six in English Literature. Coming from different linguistic backgrounds, English to these participants was their second language (ESL). Based on their results in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), these participants were proficient users of the English language with above average to high ability to function in the language. Three of them scored a Band Five and the remaining

nine students scored a Band Four. These bands were given based on their MUET performance in the four language skills of the English language; listening, speaking, reading and writing with band six as the highest level attainable.

**Research instrument**

Voice recordings of the group conversations were audio recorded in Windows Media Player and Media Player Classic files using the MP3 format. The duration of voice recording per group was from nine to 12 minutes. These voice recordings were then manually transcribed into the written form. The text length per transcription was between 970 to 1430 words. A calculation of the number of instances of hedges per 1000 words was conducted to draw accurate results for this study.

**Framework of analysis**

The analysis of hedges used was based on the adapted taxonomy of Riekkinen’s (2009) and Svarova’s (2008) use of hedges. A pilot study of the two taxonomies indicated that some of the categories of hedges in Riekkinen’s (2009) framework were not found in the current data and therefore they were not included in the framework of analysis. The categories that were left out were “metadiscourse” and “others”. The former category was deemed too broad to be considered as a linguistic category while the latter was rather vague. A summary of the categories of hedges, their functions and linguistic realizations is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Category and purpose of hedges used in informal conversations

Categorization of hedge	Purpose	Example
Personal evaluations	Subjectivity markers that allows speakers to soften their opinions in a less threatening way	<i>I think, I guess, I suppose, I feel, I mean, I believe, I thought</i>
Expressions of approximation	Markers of vagueness that allows speakers to express uncertainty	<i>Kind off, sort off, you know</i>
Expressions of limitation	Down graders that function to minimize the size of imposition of the speakers utterance	<i>Just, quite</i>
Modal verbs	To apply a need in a situational context; request, seek permission, giving advise	<i>Would, could, might, should</i>
Expressions of hesitation	The need of time for the speaker to formulate their words or thoughts leads to the usage of hesitation markers, vague expressions	<i>Maybe, probably, perhaps, well</i>
Lexical verbs	To express a personal evaluation or a suggestion to put into practice for a current situation	<i>Seem, suggest, propose</i>
Politeness maxim	To apply politeness in requesting the attention of the hearer	<i>Please, may</i>

### Research procedure

Twelve participants were divided into four groups of the same-sex. Two groups were an all-female group with three participants in each group. The other two groups were an all-male group with three participants in each group. Each group was timed and the conversations ranged from nine to 12 minutes with the topic given, “In your opinion, discuss the best career for a BA English graduate.” Each member of the group was asked to choose a career of their choice so that they can express their opinion on the pros and cons of their chosen careers. Before closing the discussion, each group had to conclude the discussion by reaching an agreement of one chosen career. The nature of the conversations was informal and relaxed where the participants knew each other and they were at a comfortable state to converse. After the first session, each single-sex group sent a representative to form a mixed-sex group comprising of two female and two male participants. A similar topic was given to them to discuss. All the conversations were audio taped and they were transcribed verbatim. After that, the data were analysed based on the framework mentioned above.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Frequency of hedges

Figure 1 depicts the number of hedges used by each gender in separate group conversations.

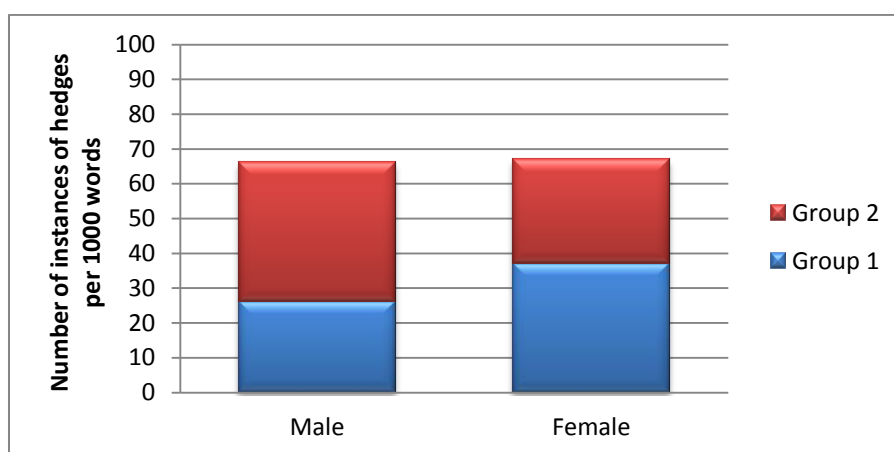


Figure 1. Instances of hedges per 1000 words (single-sex conversation)

In total, the male groups had a total of 66 hedges and the female groups a total of 67 hedges. On the whole, the difference in the number of hedges used between the genders was not significant. However, when the comparison was made between each gender group, some differences in the use of hedges were observed. The first male group had a usage of 26 hedges per 1000 words while the first female group had a usage of 37 hedges per 1000 words. Both groups differed by a significant number of 11 hedges. The second male group had a usage of 40 hedges, whereas the second female group had a usage of 30 hedges in a 1000 words. A stark difference of ten hedges was noticed. The overall results therefore indicate that males used approximately one more hedge than females per 1000 words.

This finding stands contrary to Holmes' (1984) statement that females are excessive users of hedging in interactive communication. It also refutes Crosby and Nyquist's (1977) claim that women had a greater tendency to use more hedges when conversing with other women, while a male to male exchange involving the use of hedges

is much fewer. With a minimum difference of one hedge between the male and female group, it shows that women are moderate users of hedges compared to the men. A prominent factor that might have led to these results is the change that has emerged from 1970s to the current time. Over 44 years, the social status of women in society has reformed for the better. Lakoff's (1975) claim that women use hedges because of their meek position in society compared to men is likely to have eroded by the women's liberation movement that began to demand for similar gender rights and less tolerance of gender discrimination (Hassan & Taha, 2002). This movement has resulted in an effort to eliminate societal inequalities based on gender (Freeman & McElhinny, 1996). Consequently, the social status that women have gained today may have influenced their way of speech that eliminates excessive words of inferiority such as the use of hedges. This reason justifies why both female groups in this study has almost similar numbers of hedges as the male group.

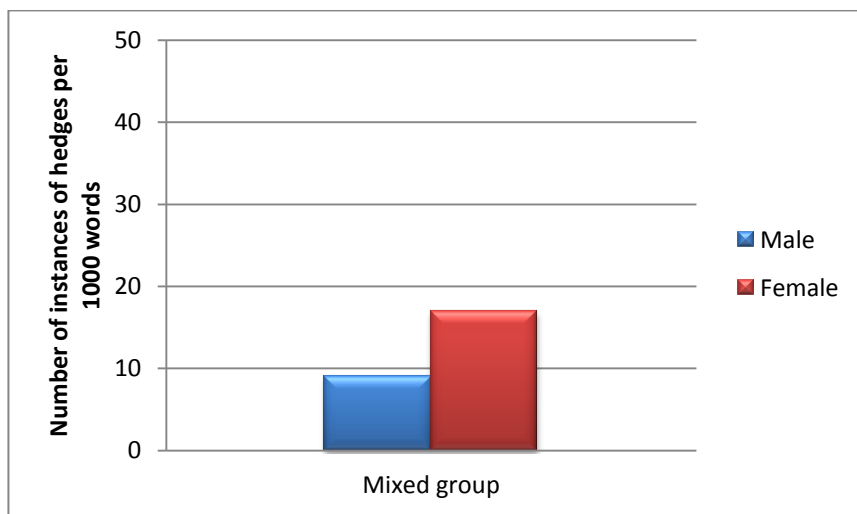


Figure 2. Instances of hedges per 1000 words (mixed-sex conversation)

In the mixed-sex group which consisted of two male and two female participants, the results showed that in 1000 words, a total of 26 hedges were used (see Figure 2 above). Of 26 hedges, 17 hedges were uttered by the females while the remaining nine hedges were used by males. A total difference of eight hedges was observed and it was found that females used approximately eight more hedges than males in a mixed conversation group.

This finding is congruent with Holmes's (1984) claim that while females are excessive users of hedges, males on the contrary are less assertive users particularly in mixed gender interactions. Additionally, Lakoff (1990) claimed that women employ more hedges than men because they are less confident and feel nervous about asserting anything too strongly. However, Holmes (1990) taking the context of the conversations into account stated that women use hedges "to assert their views with confidence, or as positive politeness devices signalling solidarity with the addressee, rather than as devices for expressing uncertainty" (Holmes, 1990, p.202). Previously, McMillan et al. (1977) noted that women used more hedges when men were present in their discussion groups. This evidence justifies the claims on why women use hedges in interactive discussions.

This is evident in the various claims made by researchers such as Holmes (1995) who claimed that women use hedges because it is facilitative and cooperative. Lakoff (1975) also believed that 'women's language' in regard to hedges is non-assertive and polite; and finally, Tannen (1990) was of the view that females use hedges and other

pragmatic particles for their supportive and rapport building roles. Another explanation put forth is that women prefer to avoid conflict and so utilise hedges which allows disagreement to take place without explicit confrontation (Nadler & Nadler, 1987). The statement by Nadler and Nadler (1987) justifies the result obtained by the mixed-sex group, whereby per 1000 words, females hedged eight times more compared to the males. Therefore, it is evident that the speech styles for both male and female varies from one to another in a mixed gender conversation. Based on this finding in the study and findings of previous studies, gender does influence the style of communication and in particular the preference for the use of hedges between genders (Hannah & Murachver, 2007).

### **Linguistic realization of hedges**

Based on the data collected, the hedges were identified according to the taxonomy of Riekkinen's (2009) and Svarova's (2008) Category of Hedges.

#### *Same-sex groups*

For the male groups, the highest frequency of hedges used fell under the category of *personal evaluation* (*I think/I don't think, I thought/I haven't thought, I guess, I feel, I mean*) at 31.3%. This finding shows that *personal evaluations* were found to dominate a male's verbal speech. *I think/I don't think* which was mentioned more regularly than the others (n=16) is an expression of a personal evaluation. It is a subjectivity marker that permits speakers to soften their opinions in a less threatening way (Riekkinen, 2009). This is followed by *expressions of limitation* at 30.1%. From the data transcribed, *just* which belongs to this category, was dominantly used. It is known as a down grader that functions to minimize the size of imposition from a speaker's utterance (Riekkinen, 2009). This is followed by *expressions of approximation* (*you know, sort off and kind off*) at 27.7%. Expressions such as *you know, sort off and kind off* are commonly known as markers of vagueness that allows speakers to express uncertainty. Among these three, *you know* was most dominantly used (n=17).

However, the lowest usages of hedges were from the *expressions of hesitation and modal verbs* category. Hedges from these two categories were at 8.4% for the prior, and 7.2% for the latter. A closer look reveals that no hedges from the *politeness maxim and lexical verbs* category were used. On the other hand, the female groups scored a high frequency of hedges from the *personal evaluations (I think/I don't think)* category at 29.2%. This was followed by *expressions of approximation (you know, kind of)* category at 27.7%. The popular hedge used from this category is *you know*.

A previous study by Holmes (1990, p.186) which examined gender differences in verbal discourse pertaining to *kind of, you know* and *I think*, commonly known as pragmatic particles, revealed that women use these pragmatic particles "to assert their views with confidence, or as positive politeness devices signalling solidarity with the addressee, rather than as devices for expressing uncertainty" (Holmes, 1990, p.202). Although it may to a certain extent express uncertainty, it may also act as a turn-yielding device, as a linguistic imprecision signal, as a reassuring feedback, or as a signal that a speaker uses to attribute understanding to the listener (Holmes, 1986). This is followed by the *modal verbs (would/would not)* category at 16.9% and *expression of limitation (just, quite)* at 10.8%. The modal verbs *would/would not* are used in a situational context to request, seek permission or give advice. This was followed by the *lexical verbs (seem, suggest, propose)* and *expressions of hesitation (maybe, perhaps)* at 6.2% each and finally, the *politeness maxim (may, please)* at 4.6%. A summary of the results is found in Figure 3.

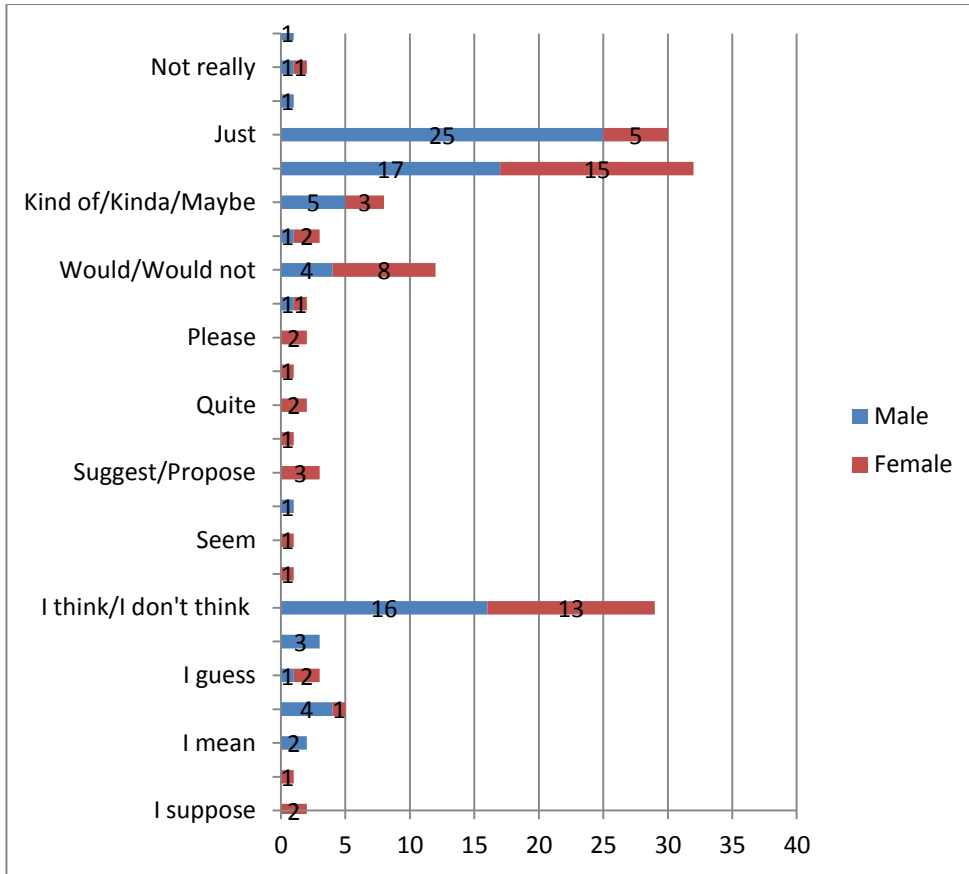


Figure 3. Variety of hedges used in same-sex conversation

It can be concluded then that females have a wider range of hedge vocabulary and therefore are less repetitive with certain hedges in conversations. The following excerpts illustrate the types of linguistic realizations of hedges taken from the single-sex female group discussion.

F1: So yea... Hi! **I think** we can begin the discussion now?

F2: Yes... Haha! **Just** to remind all of you that we have only 20 minutes to end this discussion... **May I propose** a **suggestion** to help us with that?

Haha...

F3: Yeah sure then, **please** go ahead.

[Single-sex (female) Group 1, line 1-5]

F2: Yeah, thanks! So in short, it **seems** to me that TESL is a field that... A field that an English graduate **should** venture into for it is the most efficient way of educating people... **You know?**

[Single-sex (female) Group 1, line 13-15]

F3: Haha, okay okay... So where was I? Yeah... I agree with everything that she has said. But I **would** like to add **just** 1 more point. **Maybe** my perception is not **quite** right but, to me, teaching requires passion. I repeat, teaching requires passion okay!

[Single-sex (female) Group 1, line 40-43]

In contrast, results from the current study demonstrated that males have a smaller range of hedge vocabulary. Consequently, the linguistic realizations of hedges used by the males were more repetitive. This in turn affected the high frequency of use of these linguistic realizations. The following excerpts are linguistic realizations of hedges taken from the single-sex male group. As shown in the excerpts below, it is clear that the linguistic realizations such as 'I think...', 'you know' and 'just' were repetitive in the male discussions.

M3: So, **I'm thinking** about teaching what I have learned for professional writing especially, because ah... I used to get... Used to get offer from Petronas to teach them for technical and scientific writing... And also... Mostly on writing... And also presentation. So I'll... **I think** that I'll consider that lah.

M1: But (name of M3), **don't you think** that all this things can be learned in like, **you know**... Ermm, academic institutions? **You know**? Because tuition nowadays are like... **You know**, something on the side line. Extra. Macam lebih.

[Single-sex (male) Group 2, line 28-36]

M2: So my recommendation is, to all of you listening... To all broadcast... Is to take on Masters and PhD. **Just** further your studies. **Just** don't... **Just** don't...

M1: Waste your life away, **you know**? Competing against the other source pool out there...

M2: **Just** don't be fulfilled with **just** having a Bachelor... **Just** don't be... Don't be...

M1: Be contented.

M2: **Just** don't be contented.

[Single-sex (male) Group 2, line 129-136]

#### *Mixed-sex group*

In general, the data transcribed shows that the females were dominant users of hedges compared to the males in mixed-sex conversations. The highest category of hedges employed by females is from *personal evaluation* at 50%. The most popular hedge from this category was *I think/I don't think*. Whereas, the most popular hedge for the males which belongs to *expressions of approximation* category *you know* at 50%. On the contrary, the second most popular hedge used by the females and males participants was *you know* and *I think/I don't think* at 25% each. As discussed in the earlier findings of the single-sex groups, *I think* is an expression of a *personal evaluation* that allows speakers to

soften the imposition in their utterances. *You know* on the other hand, is an *expression of approximation* that allows speakers to express uncertainty. Subsequently, at 12.5%, *well* which belongs to the *expression of hesitation* category, was the third least popular hedge used by the females followed by the second least used hedge at 8.3%; *should/might*. *Should* and *might* are from the *modal verbs* category that are dependent on the situational context. Lastly, *just* from the *expression of limitation* category was at 4.2%. Hedges from the *lexical verbs* and *politeness maxim* categories were absent from the conversation. As for the males, the third popular hedge used were *just* and *quite* at 25%. *Quite* and *just* are *expressions of limitation* that functions to minimize the impact of a strong utterance. Hedges from the *modal verbs*, *expression of hesitation*, *lexical verbs* and *politeness maxim* categories were absent from the conversation. A summary of the findings is found in Figure 4.

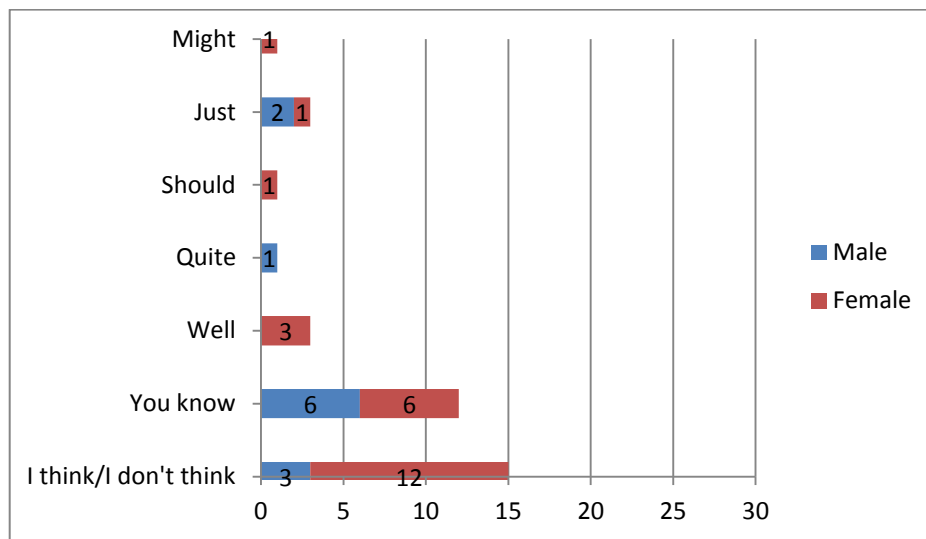


Figure 4. Variety of hedges used in mixed-sex conversations

Figure 4 illuminates that the females use a slightly larger vocabulary of hedges compared to the males. This is because unlike the males, the females employed the hedge *well*, *should* and *might* in their conversation. The males, on the other hand, were comfortable with the hedge *like* and *you know*. The following excerpts were taken from the mixed-group discussion.

F2: **Well, I think** that... **You know**, as for me... A girl, being a girl... Being a woman... Being a more delicate person, **I think** I will go for secretarial work. I don't know? How about you (name of M1)?

M1: I choose, ermm... PR. Public Relation, **you know**? It's closely related with our course.

(Mixed-sex group, line 5-9)

M2: For English language teacher in university or IPT... IPT... K, IPTS or IPTA... There's not much of a work. You **just**, like lecturers work not so much. Not so much... Not so much... **You know**, working hours? So, we can relax... **You know**, stress?

F2: Ermm... **I think**, ermm... Won't you feel restricted if you work at the university area? For example, we... We... All three of us have like a chance to go out...

M1: To go out... Meet new people.

F1: (Says to M2 about F2) She **might** go overseas with her boss or employee...

(Mixed-sex group, line 87-95)

#### *Comparison of Hedges Used between Single-sex and Mixed-sex Groups.*

Derived from the earlier findings of the single-sex group, the pattern of the first dominant category for both gender groups was similar. Both male and female participant were dominant users of hedges from the *personal evaluation* category. In the mixed-sex group, *personal evaluation* hedges were also the dominant category used by the females. Another obvious finding was that the second most dominant hedge category used by females from both single-sex and mixed-sex groups was the *expression of approximation*. On the other hand, the males from both the single-sex and mixed-sex groups did not use any hedges from the *lexical verbs* and *politeness maxim* categories.

### CONCLUSION

To conclude, the results confirmed that women do hedge more than men, but only in mixed-sex conversations. Otherwise, in single-sex conversations, women hedge as equally as men. Based on this result, the research concludes that gender dominance does influence one's manner of speech. Therefore, gender does influence communication as it is evident that the speech styles for both male and female varies from one to another (Hannah & Murachver, 2007). The results of this study has evidently deferred from the theories that supported the notion of "women employ hedges more than men". This notion however stands true based on the results of the mixed-sex group only. The results of the single-sex groups were not significant in the difference of hedging frequency; therefore, it does not support the claim that women use hedges more than men.

Although the study had generated interesting results, it was unfortunate that the sample size was small due to time constraints. It is hoped that future studies could expand on the sample size so that the findings could be generalised. Furthermore, since previous studies mostly concentrated on L1 speakers, the findings of this study may be a catalyst for more studies on the use of hedges by ESL speakers. This is important as ESL speakers would usually be interested to communicate successfully in the target language. Therefore, knowing the pragmatic devices such as the use of hedges would further enhance their communicative competence and may help to bridge the breakdown of communication in social interactions such as between spouses, peers and in parent-child, teacher-student, and employer-employee relationships.

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## APPENDIX

### Transcription Glossary

The transcription glossary is based on the system developed by Jefferson (2004) and it is used in the majority of conversation and analytic publication.

#### WHY DOES WHAT

- 1,2 All lines are numbered so that they are easily can be referred in the context.
- A: Name of the speaker or is usually abbreviated.
- A? When the name of the speaker is unclear, it is followed by question mark.

#### TIMING

- (.)(1.5) A pause is usually indicated by a dot inside a bracket.
- = It shows when a talk is in a continuance without any gaps or stops in it.
- He[llo]  
[Hi] Square brackets indicates an overlapping talk among people
- >text< Arrow brackets which points towards the text indicates that a person's pace of talking is fast.
- >>text<< Double arrow brackets which points towards the text indicates that a person's pace of talking is extremely fast
- <text> Arrow brackets which move out from the text indicates that a person is talking at a slow pace

#### DOUBTS AND COMMENTS

- (What) It cannot be heard whether "what" is being heard or not
- ( ) It cannot be heard what is being said

#### SOUNDS

- So- A dash indicates that there is sharp cut-off of the prior word or sound
- Hh Indicating that the speaker is breathing
- Heh heh Laughter is often written down less than it sounds
- \*yeah\* It indicates that the words in between are pronounced in a creaky voice
- £smile£ Pound signs indicates that the words pronounced are followed by a smile

#### INTONATIONS, STRESS, VOLUMES

- Emphasis Underlining indicates speaker emphasis
- High↑ Arrow pointing upward indicates a rising intonational shift
- Low↓ Arrow pointing downward indicates a falling intonational shift
- LOUD Capital letters indicate a high volume

#### PUNCTUATION INDICATES INTONATIONS APPROXIMATELY IN THE FOLLOWING WAY

- . Falls to low
- ? Raise to high
- ; Fall to mid low
- , Continuing or maybe slightly upward

## **SNAPSHOTS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHOTO, CAPTION AND HEADLINE IN NEWS ARTICLES ON FOOD**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper is motivated by investigations on how visuals interplay with text to create meaning. Today in news reporting, written text alone would not suffice to attract the attention of readers. Photos play a major role in depicting a theme and also to create mental representations that would help to bring out the message in the text. The current study focuses on examination of the relationship between photo, caption and headlines as the initial elements of a news article that set the scene for further reading. A qualitative approach is used to analyse the content of the photos as well as the captions and the headlines. Each of the elements is discussed and the elements are then linked together to provide coherence of response to the effects that are created. The analysis also points to the techniques used by news writers in the evocation of emotions and attitude towards a universal concern of food and its critical shortages through the manipulation of the interrelationship between photo, caption and headline.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, news articles, pictorial semiotic approach

### **INTRODUCTION**

This study analyzed the relations between some initial elements that focus on the use of photo, photo caption and the headline in the writing of news articles. The theme of the selected news articles was "food" and its related concepts, such as starvation, nutrition, and agriculture. These cases (a term used to refer to the sample) were selected from some of the world famous news portals such as Reuters and reputable national newspapers which are identified together with the cases.

In almost all news portals, the articles appear with one or more photos with a short text under them which technically are called 'captions'. These pictures as Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) argued, these elements are very significant for readers to understand news and are particularly essential in the evocation of feelings reactive to stimulus. Thus, visual meaning is shaped through the way images are structured, their context of presentation, and viewers' temporally and spatially situated knowledge (Edwards, 1992; Fiske, 1990; Helmers and Hill, 2004; Mendelson, 2007). The unique power of images derives largely from an ability that is 'unavailable to the verbal version' (Barthes, 1981; Freedberg, 1989) to evoke an immediate and involuntary response within the viewer. Images are often more efficient than texts that come alone (Popp & Mendelson, 2010). By definition, visual texts encompass text in the form of images that convey the intended message, for example, words, a drawing, or a figure.

The term caption, as used here, refers to a short description about the photo. Captions are also known as cut lines and they are used to explain or elaborate on published photographs (Evans, 2004). As pictures do not operate under the same set of interpretative rules as verbal statements (Worth, 1981), it is not possible for them to make

propositional statements explicitly. These propositions must be inferred (Popp & Mendelson, 2010). Thus, the caption which includes some basic information and description accompanying the photo can be linked to an explicit propositional statement and it is an inseparable part of that proposition. However, caption is an example of the interaction between photo and text and scholars claim that they interact in ways to create new forms of understanding (Bryant, 1996; Darling-Wolf & Mendelson, 2008). In other words, the link between the two can be rather oblique and thus the meaning is less direct. More often than not, the photos have more denotative power and the reader's emotive frames are more tapped on. As Huxford (2001) claims, photographs convey concepts and events to readers in multiple ways that go well beyond mere surface representation or denotation.

The headline is the second part of the text examined in each case in this study. It is another meaning-making component in the semiotic analysis. As Rolnicki, Tate and Taylor (2007) argue, "the headline is important because it names or summarizes the important facts of the story. The headline makes it simple for readers to glance quickly through the newspaper, yearbook or magazine to select which stories to read" (p.236).

### **Aim of the study**

The aim of this study was to analyze the relationships between the photo, photo caption and the headline in the selected news articles. The subject in the news articles has been food and they were selected from various popular world news portals. From the definitions of the three salient terms used in the study, it is clear that the study focused on inter-relationships between the elements in meaning-making in news reporting. The context for analysis in these news articles is "food" and its shortage and the articles were selected from various popular world news portals. The common proposition is the concern about food shortage which often is discussed in news articles as it is a worrying global phenomenon, especially in view of climate change.

### **Sources of data**

In almost all news portals, the articles appear with one or more photos with a short caption under or around them. As for the analysis of the initial constructing elements of news articles including photo, photo caption and the headline, news excerpts were selected from popular news websites, such as those maintained by Reuters, Bloomberg, Associated Press, BBC and the Star. Around 250 news articles were initially checked based on the availability of the all 3 elements, and finally ten news articles were selected based on the criteria that their focus is on "food", "food crisis" and related concepts such as starvation, poverty and agriculture to provide the specific context for analysis. These excerpts are called "cases" throughout the analysis.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The pictorial semiotic approach and discourse analysis were the main investigative tools used for analyzing the inter-relationships between the elements in the visual text. Semiotic analysis attempts to qualitatively place content in a larger, cultural context (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, 1977; Hall, 1973). Rose (2001) argues that semiotic analysis requires 'taking an image apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning' (2001, p.69). The images provide rich content which read together with the captions and headlines, would lead the reader into the full article.

In this investigation, content analysis is also used to elucidate conceptual and semantic meanings (as provided by the caption and headline) that go hand in hand with the semiotics (the images) at work. Much reference is also made to stylistic techniques used to convey meaning such as metonymy, metaphors and irony. Every single case is studied in depth following the principle that a qualitative approach to content analysis demands an examination to the point of saturation. The discussion moves from case to case and the cases are then pulled together to give a coherent sense of the semiotic interpretation of the signs used.

### Case 1

*News headline: Uzbekistan wrestles with maternal and child mortality*



Photo 1. Rukhniya Ibodova buys bread in Tashkent December 28. Bread is one of her family's most common foods, she says. The Cabinet of Ministers decided that beginning January 1, industry must enrich all domestically produced grade-A flour and salt with micronutrients.

(source: [http://centralasiaonline.com/cocoon/caii/xhtml/en\\_GB/features/caii/features/main/2010/12/29/feature-01](http://centralasiaonline.com/cocoon/caii/xhtml/en_GB/features/caii/features/main/2010/12/29/feature-01))

The headline for Case 1 is centered on "maternal and child mortality" as revealed in the headline. The context provides two people of which the woman is more highlighted in the photo', and a prominent display of bread which is a common food in Central Asia and Uzbekistan. Central to the semantic description is "the role of the government" conveyed through expression such as "Cabinet of Ministers" and the name of the country. The Cabinet ministers represent the government located specifically in a country. Thus it is the responsibility of the government to look after the welfare of its people. The headline leads the reader to the issue of maternal and child mortality.

From the headline, the reader is led to the woman in the photo who is expected to be a mother, and instead of the image of a child to complete the maternal image, what is fore-fronted in bread as an essential food. In the caption, the woman is quoted as saying that bread is one of her family's common foods. Bread "as one of most common food" is related to the whole story in two ways. First, the word "bread" indirectly is stated in the caption. It is mentioned that the Cabinet of Ministers decided that "industry must enrich all produced grade-A flour and salt with micronutrients". The word "flour" is associated with bread as it is the main product of the bread. Second, enriching the flour with nutrients and salt is seen as a way to prevent malnutrition as one of the main causes of mother and child mortality. The photo in turn gives prominence to bread thus speaking to the readers, as a symbol of sustenance. The photo focuses on common people with a common concern, which is having enough food on the table.

The seriousness of the issue is furthered conveyed by the use of the verb "wrestle" to refer to the government's difficult task of providing the needed nutrition for its

populace. It is apparent that "wrestling" is alluded to connote on the event that just like the sport of wrestling, it would require tremendous energy and force. The contrast of colour of the bread placed on a white cloth further could evoke a reaction that children are innocent and precious. The interplay between the photo, the caption and the headline gives emphasis on the moral responsibility of the government to ensure that the common people are able to avail themselves to basic nutrition which appears to be a difficult task, and thus a cause for much concern.

## Case 2

*News headline: Pakistani flood victims await winter relief*



Photo 2. Internally displaced flood victims in Nowshera, Pakistan carry items donated by passing motorists December 4. As winter approaches in, millions still need shelter and food aid.

(source: [http://centralasiaonline.com/cocoon/caii/xhtml/en\\_GB/features/caii/features/main/2010/12/29/feature-03](http://centralasiaonline.com/cocoon/caii/xhtml/en_GB/features/caii/features/main/2010/12/29/feature-03))

The headline for Case 2 refers to the dire status of the flood victims in Pakistan. People in the photo are seemed to be walking aimlessly as they are displaced and they are in wintry conditions which add to the hardship suffered. The caption "millions still need shelter and food aid" broadens the dimension of the photo which illustrates sufferers, encompassing both the young and the old. The depth of the calamity is further captured by the description, the people were seen to "carry the items donated by passing motorists" conveying the lack of shelter and food.

The photo together with the caption appeals to readers for help, especially for the helpless children depicted in the image of vulnerable young girls. Youth associated again with innocence tugged at heartstrings of people who are likely to react strongly to the picture of homelessness and despair. Such sufferings would evoke a sense of responsibility of wanting to help victims of natural calamities by contributing to the relief. While the message is clear, the semiotic effect is rather subdued. Thus it could be said that the relationship between the three elements are more conveyed through the word expression rather than the photo which seeks to enhance the wintry conditions rather than acute suffering from a disaster.

### Case 3

*News headline: Soaring food prices a threat across Asia*



Photo 3. The ADB report says the price of rice, the staple cereal for 3.3 billion people in Asia, will likely keep rising as bad weather cuts yields, pushing millions into poverty. (source: <http://biz.thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2011/4/27/business/8554790&sec=business>)

Case 3 and almost the rest of the cases which follow are about the effects of the global food crisis on Asian countries. Asian Development Bank (ADB) in April 2011 reported that food crisis is imminent in the Asian countries and the news appeared in world news portals with different photos and texts.

Case 3 has the caption that emphasizes rice as a staple food and farmers who are the backbones of rice production, are portrayed as hungry. It becomes an irony that the farmers are now the hungry because of bad weather and there is a hint of a vicious cycle whereby a poor crop will lead to an increase of food prices which would then have dire consequences on income and poverty. Coupled with the severity is the figure in the caption referring to *3.3 billion people in Asia* who would be affected. An integrated use of photo, headline and caption of a related text aptly conveys the message of a world crisis anchored on agricultural shortfalls. The threat of soaring food prices hangs heavily over Asia which is a massive continent underscored often by poverty and blights. Just like the previous case, the young (especially the weaker sex) and the old are fronted. In this photo the young girl symbolizes the future generation which is facing an extremely bleak future.

#### Case 4

*News headline: Food crisis: It's a moral issue for all of us*



Photo 4. While farmers plant food, countries must plant the idea in their citizens that having enough of it is everyone's responsibility.

(source: <http://www.nst.com.my/nst/articles/19fd-2/Article/>)

Case 4 is selected from a mainstream Malaysian newspaper. The story is also about the food crisis. In this photo an old woman is hard at work in a field. The semiotic interpretation revolves around rice as a staple diet which gives life to the Malaysian citizenry. As highlighted earlier, rice is the main staple food for half of the Asian population thus making it a strategic crop. An old lone lady who is bent attending to the rice field epitomizes the classical method of earning a hard living among the rural folks which seems to showcase the danger of being obliterated. By extension, preserving this important source for sustenance is a moral issue for all concerned. This responsibility is to be 'planted' and nourished in people who care as suggested in the photo caption. The double meaning of "plant" represents the need to grow up in a way that carries with it the ingraining of an assigned universal value. Thus, it is everybody's duty to ensure the human race survives. The idea is ancient yet relevant as captured in a Persian proverb: "Others planted and we ate, we plant and others will eat".

#### Case 5

*News headline: Asia price rises imperil growth*



Photo 5. A food market in Jakarta, Indonesia. An Asian Development Bank report warned inflation could trim up to 1.5 percentage points off GDP in some of Asia's economies this year and next.

(source: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703778104576286603895770490.html>)

The writer of Case 5 succinctly uses an illustration that shows plenty instead of want as seen in some of the earlier cases. The photo reveals a picture that shows an abundance of a variety of food. Thus the idea of shortage is sublime. Antonyms and irony

are useful devices to construct mental representations. In this case, the photo that shows a plentiful supply of food as a preamble is ‘sabotaged’ by price increase, inflation, leading to a decrease in "GDP" and "growth". The image of plenty is depleted by economic realities as reported by the authoritative Asian Development Bank and published by an equally heavy weight institution – the Wall Street Journal (WSJ).

The abundance of fruits while attractive, are in fact fragile, subject to weather changes, poor yield, market trends and so on, which could affect the price of food. If uncontrolled, inflation eats away income and creates an unstable and unsustainable economy. The national significance of inflation extends beyond to a worst case scenario where mass unrests can take place as in the 2010–2011 Tunisian revolution (Jeancourt-Galignani, 2011) which is caused in part by inflation.

Decrease in “GDP” and "growth” are considered as the results of “inflation” resulting in increases in the prices. Like the previous cases, it is stressed that price hiking is a threat and the writer has used a strong word, “imperil” to deliver this meaning.

### Case 6

*News headline: Asia faces ‘serious setback’ on rising food costs, ADB says*



Photo 6. A rice vendor checks that his rice is clean at the Klong Toei fresh food market in Bangkok, Thailand.

(source: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-04-26/asia-faces-serious-setback-on-rising-food-costs-adb-says.html>)

Thailand as one of the biggest rice producers in the world is selected as the platform for a news article (Case 6) on the rising cost of food by the Bloomberg Business Magazine. Again, there is a ‘serious setback’ in the cost of the staple food. The photo caption mentions the check on clean rice but the underlying message is that the cost of rice is under siege. Far from the idea of “clean”, the message is dark, as there will be gloomy days ahead when cost of living increases. While the words in the text are not as strong as the previous case, the juxtaposition technique involving the image in the photo and the underlying message is also used. The photo shows a plentiful supply but the message conveyed is a shortage.

### Case 7

*News headline: ADB: Rising food prices could increase poverty in Asia*



Photo 7. A vegetable vendor carries his child at a stall in Beijing. China's consumer prices rose 5.4 percent over a year ago, driven by 11.7 percent surge in food costs.

(source: <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/africa/pan/Rising-Food-Prices-Could-Increase-Poverty-in-Asia-120692199.html>)

Again the image of plenty and the future is depicted by a full face of a child who is fronted for the message of rising food prices and impending poverty. Instead of using rice as an image, the food material highlighted is vegetables or greens. Such freshness and innocence are about to be contaminated by a ‘surge in food costs’ that forebodes suffering. The phrase “this year and next” along with the word “could” which are also repeated conveys a predicted situation that is imminent. The interplay of semiotics and word expression is again relying on juxtaposition.

### Case 8

*News headline: Food prices could push millions into poverty – ADB*



Photo 8. Labourers prepare to carry a basket containing wholesale vegetables weighing 400 kg to a market in Kolkata May 6, 2008. Surging food prices could push millions of people in Asia into extreme poverty and threaten the durability of the region's world-leading economic recovery, the Asian Development Bank said on Tuesday.

(source: [http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2011/4/26/worldupdates/2011-04-26t112647z\\_01\\_nootr\\_rtrmdnc\\_0\\_india-565663-1&sec=worldupdates](http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2011/4/26/worldupdates/2011-04-26t112647z_01_nootr_rtrmdnc_0_india-565663-1&sec=worldupdates))

The Malaysian Star continued the story of the ‘predicted’ food crisis with another article focusing on “extreme poverty” as a result of rising costs of food prices. The photo shows a crowd who is intent on taking something and without the caption, it would have been hard to know that the people are workers helping to transport vegetables.

The photo suggests people rushing for something and appears to be deliberately used to convey the idea of a food crisis when people would have to rush for food. The hidden message is supported by the word ‘millions’ to describe the extremity of poverty especially for the teeming population of India. The writer specifically mentions in the caption that the "durability" of the recovery of the Indian economy as the "region's world-leading economic recovery" is “threatened”. This will make the downturn even more painful as people were just about to enjoy some benefits. Thus, whether it is India, China or Bangkok, news on food seemed to concentrate on a possible crisis that carries serious repercussions. The current situation where there seems to be ‘enough’ is soon to be eroded and news are written to warn people to heed the signs. The photo depicts an ominous event of an epic dimension.

### Case 9

*News headline: 12 charts explaining the food crisis that could push 200 million Asians into poverty*



Photo 9. When food prices reached this level in 2008, many called it an aberration. Now it's seems the rise in food prices is a long term trend, which can't be chalked up simply to liquidity or weather.

(source: <http://www.financialpost.com/news/business-insider/charts+explaining+food+crisis+that+could+push+million+Asians+into+poverty/4675591/story.html>)

In Case 9, the Financial Post cleverly shows a photo of wheat being dehusked to convey a message. The wind is strong and is blowing away the heap reducing the amount slowly but surely. In fact, the word ‘aberration’ used in the caption can be linked to the photo which is enhanced to depict an ghostly aberration as the heap of wheat seemed to be placed on a mat that is floating in the air and disappearing. As the caption elaborates, the aberration is just an excuse, rather, the downturn is a ‘long term trend’, thus impressing readers of the reality. The reality is not to push the blame on economics (liquidity) or the weather. Concrete actions must be taken if the trend is to be resolved. The aberration should not happen.

## Case 10

*News headline: UN sets up food crisis task force*



Photo 10. Global rice prices have risen by more than 90% in the past year  
(source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7372393.stm>)

Case 10 captures an image of a laborer carrying a bag of rice and climbing up a ramp. This powerful depiction mimics a graph that shows a steady rising trend which supports “global rice prices have risen by more than 90% in the past year” in the caption. Mankind could be faced with a difficult uphill task as shown by the man climbing up against a rising trend, although in the background there are ample bags of rice compactly stacked in an orderly manner. The statistics of “90%” also shows a surge and big increase in the prices. As a proactive action, the United Nations have decided to “set up food crisis task force”. The world organizations are the main donors when the problem or calamity hits millions of people. This calls for a concerted effort of a magnitude that transcends individual nations to create order that must be shown in the undertaking to counter the threat. Such orderliness is projected in the meticulously arranged stacks of rice.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude the paper, some dominant lexical forms found in the captions, and headlines are highlighted as they give the coherence to the theme investigated. As mentioned earlier, the pictures had captured the theme of food in several ways. Some depict stark reality while others are stylized to give symbolic meanings. The common proposition that runs through the interplay of photo, caption and headline has been dealt with by the use of a diversity of strategies. While the central theme is food in relation to shortages, these shortages can be in terms of lack of nutrients or short supply created by rising costs. These news reports are written to highlight a global concern as food shortages can come about due to natural disasters, inadequate policies or poor management. Whatever the reasons, the main point is that often the common people have to suffer because of a disastrous phenomenon. The future generation that bears the brunt of the consequences is often depicted by highlighting the young and innocent as the victims. To be without food is to be without hope if no action is taken.

Captions which relate to the pictures directly or in an oblique manner are reinforced largely by way of juxtaposition or use of imagery that depicts a picture of want or representations of an unhealthy food trend. The photos provide the visual stimulus in meaning-making and this is supported by the captions and headlines. Often the images are built on the concept of vulnerability with children as innocent victims and female as the weaker sex. The future forward as implied could indeed be bleak if no action is taken.

In the ten cases, the semantics have added to the description of the condition. The term “food crisis” is mentioned four times with rice shown to be a staple (four tokens)

and vegetable (three tokens). The word “price” occurs ten times which collocated with "cost", "economy", and "market". Threat is worked into words like rise (6 tokens) that is aligned to *push*, *imperial*, *surge*, and *set back* which together build up the central idea of poverty suffered by millions. In addition, the discussion is located within the specifics of time like “last/this/next year”, or “long term”. References are also made to the news portal that ground the repute of the evidence and such news are then difficult to ignore.

Thus, it could be said that the interplay between caption, headline and photo has been manipulated to convey the common proposition of food shortage as one of the premier social concerns in the world. However it must be noted the link between photo and caption is often not obvious as the photos may create a mental representation that extends beyond words. In trying to capture the attention of readers, writers captured imageries that portrayed semiotic values while the semantics provides further impact through complementation or by evoking reaction to a surface disharmony that brings forth specific emotions and responses from the readers. These notions are further conveyed through techniques that called upon interpretation by way of techniques used, such as metonymy, metaphors, irony and juxtaposition, that help project the interplay of the elements aforementioned to convey the salient message.

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## **INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES USED BY FRONTLINE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF WHEN INTERACTING WITH FOREIGN STUDENTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Intercultural communication strategies are used to overcome language barriers across cultures (Berardo, 2008). The strategies are important for frontline administrative staff when interacting with foreign students in a local university. This qualitative study was carried out in three centres in a public university. The study used Gallois and Giles' communication adaptation theory (2015) and Hall's theory of intercultural communication (1959). Data were collected from observations and semi-structured interviews with six Malaysian administrative officers and six foreign students. The findings revealed that although the Malaysian administrative staff members have good command of English and communication skills, they still encountered problems when dealing with foreign students. Most of the foreign students reacted positively towards the intercultural communication strategies, but a few reacted negatively because they did not understand the differences between cultures. High-context communication and low-context communication were essential in interactions across cultures. This study provides insights into the use of intercultural communication strategies when communicating with foreign students. This enables them to foster norms that could reduce conflict from miscommunication or cross-cultural differences.

Keywords: foreign students, high-context communication, intercultural communication strategies, low-context communication

### **INTRODUCTION**

Intercultural communication strategies are often used when interacting with people from other cultures (Berardo, 2008). Normally, communication could be transmitted in two ways, namely high-context communication and low-context communication. Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim and Heyman (1996) identify high-context communication to be indirect, ambiguous, harmony maintained, reserved, and understated. In contrast, low-context communication is identified as direct, precise, dramatic, open, and based on feelings or true intentions.

In a public university in Malaysia, English is used as a medium of communication between the frontline administrative staff and foreign students. However, language barriers exist due to cultural differences. This causes problems between the frontline administrative staff and foreign students. Being a minority culture, language barriers, socialisation and non-verbal form of communication not having the same meanings, and racism are the problems that foreign students face (Hall, 1959). Communication, understanding and learning may also be inhibited by the cultural value gap. Therefore, intercultural communication strategies should be used across cultures in order to fulfil the purpose of communication.

The theoretical framework of this study was based on Gallois and Giles' communication adaptation theory (2015). This theory focuses on linguistic strategies to decrease or increase communicative distances. It also argues that when people interact, they adjust their speeches, their vocal patterns and their gestures to accommodate to others of different cultures. It explores the various reasons why individuals emphasise or minimise social differences between themselves and their interlocutors through verbal and nonverbal communication. This theory is concerned with the links between language, context and identity. There are two main intercultural communication strategies: convergence and divergence. Convergence refers to the strategies through which individuals adapt to each other's communicative behaviours in order to reduce the social differences. Sometimes when individuals engage in convergence, they could become over-accommodating and their convergence would be perceived as condescending. Meanwhile, divergence refers to instances in which individuals accentuate the speech and non-verbal differences between themselves and their interlocutors.

Hall's theory of intercultural communication (1959) was also used in this study. In intercultural communication, ignorance of contexts usually leads to misunderstanding and conflicts. This theory generalises the basic distinctive characteristics of two contexts by analysing the actual cases in daily communication. Context is important in all communication, but it is relatively more important in some situations than others. There are also significant differences across cultures. Hall (1959) has described cultural differences in the use of language and context in communication. High-context transactions transmit minimal message to the receiver. A low-context communication is the opposite whereby mass information is vested explicitly. Low-context transaction transmits maximum message to the receiver.

Literature on intercultural communication reveals that intercultural communication and context are inherently difficult. Culture differences could cause communication problems (Begley, 2000; Irwin, 1996; Kim & Paulk, 1994). Culture shock could also be affected by a change in the cultural environment (McKinlay, Pattison, & Gross, 1996; Begley, 2000). Lustig and Koester (1993) pointed out that the difference in culturally-based expectations about the interpersonal communication caused difficulty in interpersonal relationships between people from different cultural backgrounds. Intercultural communication is not always successful and often represents a stressful event (Lustig & Koester, 1993).

Phang (2002) carried out a study on communication problems and difficulties, as well as factors and ways on how to overcome communication problems experienced by African graduate students in their interaction with Malaysians in a local university. The findings showed that communication problems were reservation towards foreigners, issue of greetings, indirectness, interrogations, and gender issues. The factors that contributed to the problems were cultural differences, language, prejudice and stereotypes, as well as limited exposure to Africans. The Africans used problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies to regulate the psychological discomfort and stress when encountering these difficulties.

Along this line, the present study is conducted to investigate intercultural communication strategies used by Malaysian frontline administrative staff when interacting with foreign students to add to the pool of knowledge on the use of intercultural communication strategies. This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the intercultural communication strategies used by frontline administrative staff when interacting with foreign students in three centres at a local university?
2. How do the foreign students react to the intercultural communication strategies used by the frontline administrative staff?
3. How do high-context communication and low-context communication affect the information transmitted to the foreign students?

## METHODOLOGY

### Setting

The qualitative study was conducted in three centres (Centre A, Centre B and Centre C) in a Malaysian public university. Centre A is in charge of visa and passports processing for foreign students. Centre B is an entity that offers short and long term programmes in line with current market needs. Centre C offers students a unique experience to learn English in a friendly environment. The functions of these centres are:

- a) To manage and administer the University's strategic agenda for internationalisation.
- b) To plan, implement, and monitor support service activities for international scholars and students.
- c) To plan the centre's international marketing and promotional strategies to sustain its image in the international arena.

### Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select six frontline administrative officers. Two administrative officers were selected from each centre. They were chosen because they were stationed there for the entire week during the observation period. All the administrative staff members had considerable international experience, and they were deliberately chosen to work in an international setting. Therefore, they have good understanding about foreign students' needs. The background of the frontline administrative staff is shown in Table 1. They were given a code for the referencing purpose.

Table 1. Background of frontline administrative staff

Staff	Code	Centre	Gender	Position	Working experience (years)
1	M1	A	Female	Head	>10
2	M2	A	Female	Administrative assistant	6
3	M3	B	Male	Administrative assistant	4
4	M4	B	Male	Administrative assistant	5
5	M5	C	Female	Administrative assistant	5
6	M6	C	Female	Administrative assistant	1

Six foreign students were selected using purposive sampling. Two foreign students were selected from each centre. They were chosen because they visited the centre at least three times a week. Table 2 shows the background of the foreign students. The coding is assigned to each student as in the table.

Table 2. Background of foreign students

Student	Code	Centre	Gender	Duration of stay in Malaysia (years)
1	S1	A	Female	5
2	S2	A	Female	4
3	S3	B	Male	4
4	S4	B	Male	4
5	S5	C	Female	7
6	S6	C	Female	3

### Data collection

The study employed a qualitative case study design. Data were collected from observations and semi-structured interviews. The observation took place in three centres over three weeks. Each centre was observed five days from 10 am until 1 pm because these were the busiest hours where most foreign students would go to the centres to ask for information. In a week of observation at a centre, various scenarios could be captured.

A semi-structured interview was carried out on the last day of observation in each centre. Two frontline administrative staff members from each centre were interviewed to get their feedback on the intercultural communication strategies they used. The interviews were conducted individually. A different set of semi-structured interview was also conducted with the six foreign students individually. The twelve interviews, recorded and transcribed verbatim, were used to complement the findings from the observations.

Member checks were done to solicit feedback on the findings from all the frontline administrative staff and foreign students who were interviewed. Member checks are used to assess the accuracy of the interpretation of data through consistent checking with the participants (Koelsch, 2013; Maxwell, 2005). Studies have shown that member checks are the single most important way to rule out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what the frontline administrative staff and foreign students said and did, as well as the views about what was going on.

### Data analysis

Qualitative data from observation field notes and semi-structured interview responses were classified into common categories. There were altogether 15 sets of observation field notes and 12 interview transcripts which were collected from two frontline administrative officers and two foreign students at the centres. The first set of observation field notes was assigned marginal codes. Then the notes and marginal codes were looked through again and regrouped. The process of regrouping these open codes is sometimes called axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) or analytical coding. Analytical coding goes beyond descriptive coding because it is “coding that comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning” (Richards, 2005, p.94). A running list of these axial codes was attached to the field notes. Dozens of tentative categories were generated. The first set of interview transcript was also analysed the same way as the observation field notes.

The second set of observation field notes and interview transcripts was coded and grouped exactly the same way as the first set of qualitative data. A second running list of codes was generated. Then the two lists were merged into one master list of concepts. This master list constituted a classification system reflecting the recurring patterns of the study. These patterns became the themes. The same procedure for analysis was repeated for the remaining sets of observation field notes and interview transcripts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The observations and semi-structured interviews at the three centres were analysed collectively as the findings were similar. To answer the first research question about intercultural communication strategy used by frontline administrative staff, data from observation field notes and interview responses were collected. Excerpts from the interview responses were transcribed verbatim. Data were organised according to common themes.

### **Intercultural communication strategies**

Berardo (2008) proposed 10 intercultural communication strategies to overcome language barriers. The strategies are: 1) speak slowly and clearly, 2) ask for clarification, 3) frequently check for understanding, 4) avoid idioms, 5) be careful of jargons, 6) define the basics of communication, 7) be specific, 8) choose your medium of communication effectively, 9) provide information via multiple channels, and 10) be patient.

From the 10 intercultural communication strategies proposed by Berardo (2008), the staff used only seven of the strategies when they interacted with the foreign students. These strategies were categorised under the main group of convergence approach.

#### *Showing friendly behaviour*

The frontline administrative staff showed friendly behaviour as an intercultural communication strategy. It means showing kind interest and goodwill. The administrative staff greeted the foreign students politely, smiled, joked with foreign students or apologised if they could not help the students. They displayed friendliness by greeting the foreign students politely to make them feel at ease and to establish rapport before formal communication transaction takes place. M2 mentioned in the interview:

If you want to know them, greet them politely and make friends with them. This will enable us to share knowledge with each other and we can become close friends.

Opposite the service counter, a chair was placed for students to sit while asking for information. M6 was often heard telling the foreign students: "Please be seated". This was because after a long day attending classes, foreign students might be tired, thus, the female administrative officer was friendly to them by asking them to have a seat. This is another way of making the foreign students comfortable.

#### *Exercising patience*

Another intercultural communication strategy that the administrative staff used was exercising patience. It means being tolerant and having even-tempered perseverance. This strategy includes providing information via multiple channels, repeating information, as well as speaking slowly and clearly.

Many foreign students felt lost when they first enrolled in the university. Therefore, they had many queries regarding the forms they had to fill up and kept referring to M2 at Centre A. M2 had to repeat herself several times when giving instructions because the foreign students were confused on what they needed to do. Some instances of repeated instruction are as follows:

Complete the forms, then only I give you the number.  
Complete the requirements and come back to me.  
Write your name here.  
Check your website. Check your insurance first.  
Two dependents. You need two copies for those dependents.  
You receive a notification to come and collect?

Most of the foreign undergraduate and postgraduate students did not complete the requirements and she needed to repeat the information. For example, they did not know which forms to be downloaded from the website because there were different forms and requirements for different applications. There was a case regarding visa termination because the foreign student received an offer letter to further her studies at another university. Therefore, M2 repeated the instruction to inform her that she had to write a formal letter to terminate the visa.

There were also times when foreign students crowded the help desk counter, and it was difficult for M2 to attend to everyone. Thus, she exercised patience by asking them to line up. Problems also occurred due to difficulties in understanding pronunciation and accent. Hence, M2 had to repeat instructions. For instance, the foreign students did not understand the pronunciation of “approval” and “results”, thus M2 pronounced these words repeatedly and slowly. There were also instances where some foreign students were quite demanding and did not listen to M4; therefore, she had to ask the students to calm down and listen to her in order to help them.

M3 also mentioned that he had to repeat instructions due to language barrier which is a recurring problem. This could lead to miscommunication. He mentioned that he had to exercise more patience to help the foreign students solve their issues. M3, who is an even-tempered person remained calm and lowered his voice to listen to the students before meeting their demands. In the interview, he mentioned:

If they do not understand certain terms, something is wrong with them. This is due to language barrier. For example, if we use “you might get...”, the foreign students will understand by seeing it as “you will get...”, then they will say that we do not fulfil our promises. Besides that, we will try to remain calm, lower down our voice although the foreign students are aggressive, be friendly, and listen to them first then only say “no”.

#### *Frequently checking for understanding*

Besides that, the frontline administrative staff also regularly checked with the foreign students to find out if they understood the information that was conveyed. The administrative staff would seek clarification from students to understand their problems and concerns better, gave advice, gave explanation or passed the more complicated student cases to more experienced colleagues to solve the problems.

There was a situation whereby a foreign student came to the centre with a passport issue. This meant that he overstayed in Malaysia because he did not realise that his passport expired a few days ago. He referred to M2 on what he had to do. M2 requested more clarification about his problem, but he could not explain it well. Therefore, she referred the case to her superior. In another situation, a female student hastily rushed to the centre to collect her passport, but she did not bring relevant documents. M5 persistently asked her for information before handing her the passport.

In another example, S4 needed to fill in the documents for the whole family and he had many forms to fill. The documents were very thick. M6 called him from afar because he came in without filling certain sections of the forms. He looked lost and spent almost the whole morning at Centre C. Therefore, M6 frequently checked on S4 to see what she could help him with. Although M6 did not use Standard English, S4 could still understand her question. An instance of their conversation is shown below:

M6: Sir, is your family done?

S4: Yeah

M6: Okay, let me check.

A website has been created for foreign students recently. Previously, the frontline administrative staff had to spend a lot of time on advising the students on what they needed to do for passport and visa application before the website was developed. There was insufficient information for the foreign students to refer to. In the interview, M5 stated:

I will give them advice because last time, there was no website and the students do not have sufficient information on the things that they needed to do. However, now there is website, so if they don't understand we will refer them to the website although it's very new.

#### *Dealing with language difficulties*

The administrative staff also used several methods to deal with the foreign students' language barriers. For instance, they would ask the foreign students' friends to translate English to their mother tongue or refer them to their seniors. Sometimes when the students could not understand the information they wanted to convey, they would use alternatives to fulfil the purpose of the communication. An example of such was M4 who referred the foreign students to the website or requested the student to bring a friend who understands English for translation purpose. She explained in the interview:

I will ask another student, who can speak Arabic to translate for the foreign students. I will ask them to bring their friends, who can speak English, so we can interact with them better. This is due to the language barrier that we have. They always misunderstand what we said to them. For example, "Applicant's name" does not mean "dependent's name". I will also ask them to refer to the websites, which is another source of information.

It was observed that the frontline administrative staff used several intercultural communication strategies to interact with the foreign students. Sometimes those strategies did not fulfil the purpose of communication. Then they shifted their speech patterns to accommodate the needs for each situation.

The following section discusses the findings about the foreign students' reaction towards the intercultural communication strategies.

#### **Reaction of foreign students towards the intercultural communication strategies**

##### *Showing friendly behaviour*

There was a situation when M6 gave S2 a waiting number which students normally have to take on their own. She thanked M6 in a friendly manner because of the kind gesture

shown to her. In situations when frontline administrative staff could not provide the assistance needed, the students would reply politely. They appreciated the administrative staff's effort to help them. Sometimes, the administrative staff also asked if students needed help, but they would answer "No" politely with a smile as they knew what they were supposed to do. Most of the time, the foreign students reciprocated the frontline administrative staff's friendliness by greeting them politely and replying in the national language. Such a conversation is shown below:

S2: Terima kasih banyak-banyak (Thank you very much)

M6: Sama banyak-banyak (You are most welcomed)

### *Obeying instructions*

Instruction was given to foreign students that they were not allowed to leave the country during the first year of their study to avoid the termination of their student visa. The foreign students were expected to follow the stipulated regulation. There was an incident when M2 confirmed with S3 whether he had gone out of Malaysia during the first semester. The conversation below shows that S3 obeyed the regulation:

M2: Course that you register. This is your first semester?

S3: Yes, this is my first semester

M2: Did you go out of Malaysia?

S3: No

### *Showing happiness*

The foreign students also reacted by showing happiness. This reaction includes showing a sign of relief, showing appreciation, showing satisfaction towards the frontline administrative staff, repeating the statements of the administrative staff happily or completing the statement made by the administrative staff happily because they understood what was asked by the administrative staff.

The foreign students showed a sign of relief after receiving their passports. All of them had to go to the centre at least three times: to apply, to submit application forms and to collect their passports. After receiving the help given by the administrative staff, they felt really relieved to receive their passports. The foreign students also felt relieved because they did not have time to keep coming to the centre due to transportation problem, family or work commitments. There was a situation when S5 expressed her relief of getting her visa after going to the centre back and forth. In the interview, she stated:

I feel so relieved. I could not come on time because I have work to do, but finally, I have my visa.

### *Remaining calm*

The foreign students reacted by remaining calm. This reaction included not feeling angry but trying to interpret the messages conveyed by the administrative staff. S1 stated that she would not feel angry because she could not understand the culture in Malaysia. However, she knew that the frontline administrative staff had tried their best to help her. In the interview, she said:

I feel it is okay because I understand they don't understand our cultures. Different culture means different manner of respecting each other. I will not be angry, but become calm and not being panicked or stressed because they tried to understand me. I think they are very good. It is hard for them to treat each other politely.

### *Feeling confused*

Normally, two administrative officers were positioned at the frontline desk in each centre. Sometimes when they used too many intercultural communication strategies at the same time such as speaking slowly and clearly, asking for clarification, and frequently checking for understanding, the foreign students reacted by showing a confused look. The foreign students, who had difficulty in understanding information, sought clarifications from another administrative officer. In another instance, students would show the messages they received on their mobile devices to the administrative officer because they did not understand the meaning. They also displayed agitated behaviour because they were confused.

An example of a situation happened after M5 gave S6 specific instructions to get to Centre A. S6 wanted to confirm whether he received the information correctly; hence, he asked M6 for more clarifications. Another foreign student, who heard the conversation, helped M6 to give S6 specific directions.

In another scenario, S3 mentioned that because of miscommunication, he could not understand what was mentioned by M3; hence, he asked further questions. There was confusion because high-context communication transacted between M3 and S3. Initially, M3 did not employ any intercultural communication strategies in the conversation. Then M3 tried to speak slowly and clearly, but when S3 kept asking questions persistently, he refused to entertain. This was mentioned in S3 interview response.

Frankly speaking, foreign students in general face many communication problems because of their inability to understand the staff in their dealing. The staff speak in a fast way which is different from that of a native speaker of English either because of the lack of grammar or the overuse of abbreviations. The other problem is related to their reaction of misunderstanding; most of them lose his/her temper or refuse to speak especially when you try to ask a question.

Most foreign students reacted positively towards the intercultural communication strategies used by the frontline administrative staff. They tried to cooperate with the administrative staff to understand the information conveyed by them. Although the strategies and the foreign students' reaction did not resonate at times, the foreign students tried to accommodate to the strategies. However, there were a few of them, who reacted negatively because they did not try to understand that the problem of misunderstanding was due to cultural differences. Therefore, the encounters were not very pleasant at times.

The next section discusses the findings about the effects of high-context communication towards the foreign students. High-context communication causes the foreign students either to understand the information transmitted or not to understand at an acceptable level.

### **Effects of high-context communication**

#### *Understanding the information transmitted at an acceptable level*

High-context communication is important for the foreign students to reduce annoyance or irritation. Some of the students could understand when high-context communication was addressed pertaining to certain issues. Most of the senior students already knew the procedures; thus, if high-context communication was used, they would not feel lost. This was observed when the senior students came to settle their forms that they had to fill up for every year of study.

High-context communication was only used in certain contexts. In a situation, M1 mentioned that only relevant details were given to the students who already knew what to do. This was stated in the interview. According to her:

The information is transmitted little by little using high-context communication, so students, who are interested to know can contact who and who.

#### *Not understanding the information transmitted*

From the observation, high-context communication was too indirect and ambiguous that most of the time the foreign students would not understand what was conveyed to them. Students also felt confused when information given was vague. Students would not understand the information if high-context communication was used. One example of such situation was when a supervisor of a student came to help his student to interact with the frontline administrative officer regarding the certification of passport before she could be registered as a postgraduate student. The information given by the centre was not direct; therefore, she had to bring her supervisor to confirm what was needed for passport certification.

S4 stated that foreign students usually do not have good command of English; thus, they would get confused most of the time when information was transmitted to them. This was stated in his interview response:

Foreign students are weak in grammar and vocabularies, therefore, it is difficult for them to understand or communicate directly without help.

The last section discusses the findings about the effects of low-context communication towards the foreign students. Low-context communication causes the foreign students either to fully understand the information transmitted or understand the information transmitted at an acceptable level.

### **Effects of low-context communication**

#### *Fully understanding the information transmitted*

Low-context communication is direct and precise. Most of the time, low-context communication is needed because students refer to detailed information to avoid confusion. M3 mentioned that the information given should be specific to enable the foreign students to understand what they needed to do. Their English is not that good and they only understand very basic words in English. The frontline administrative staff also requested for a mobile phone to ease the communication with the students for passport collection. He explained in the interview:

Their English is very limited and not that good. This is due to their culture and behaviour. I will use simple and not complicated words and be straightforward. We actually requested for a small mobile phone, so that it is easier for us to send notifications to the foreign students to collect their passports.

*Understanding the information transmitted at an acceptable level*

Although low-context communication was used many times, some students did not fully understand the information transmitted. Foreign students should understand basic terms such as registration slips, applicant's name and dependent's name, and the frontline administrative staff had to explain to them most of the time. This might be due to language barrier because they did not understand the information given in English. Sometimes the foreign students refused to follow proper procedures because they wanted their visas and passports as soon as possible.

Although low-context communication was used, some of the foreign students only understood the information in an acceptable level. M2 illustrated that even when the information was clearly given to them, they still did not understand it. She stated this in the interview:

They don't understand what I said. Even if the checklist is provided, they still can't follow instructions well. Even after the third time, they will ask the same question again and again.

High-context communication and low-context communication are essential for foreign students. This means that if urgent information needs to be conveyed, low-context communication which is precise and direct is used. However, if the information is about matters that are clear-cut to the foreign students, high-context communication is used.

## CONCLUSION

The findings provide useful insights into the strategies that could be used to ensure good service by frontline administrative staff when dealing with foreign students. The study may shed light on the importance of cultural awareness for service providers. It was observed that the frontline administrative staff used convergence strategy to interact effectively with the foreign students to reduce social differences. Most of the foreign students reacted positively towards the intercultural communication strategies used by the staff. The findings on the foreign students' reactions are similar to Phang's (2002) study where the students used emotion-focused strategies, namely acceptance and self-control, to overcome communication difficulties. High-context and low-context communications are normally used to enable the message to be transmitted successfully.

Further steps could be taken to heighten the awareness of intercultural communication strategies. University authorities could design cultural awareness training programmes to provide frontline administrative staff with skills such as flexibility and openness towards new situations (Osland & Bird, 2000). These skills can then be used to turn a previously weak situation, such as having no clues about the behaviour of others into a strong situation like overcoming individuals' cultural differences. Integrated language-culture training could be offered to enhance intercultural communication skills of frontline professionals. This can reduce misunderstandings and positively influence team performance.

Based on the findings of the study, a few suggestions for future studies are provided. More case studies could be conducted at centres to find out the importance of integrating culturally experienced individuals in a team to improve intercultural communication (Hubbard, 2004). Emphasis on the role of language in cross-cultural behaviour warrants further investigation. Future researchers could also develop specific communication strategies for practitioners who have to deal with foreigners and also for culturally-experienced practitioners who encounter unpredictable intercultural communication situations to minimise communication problems.

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## LINGUISTIC SEXISM AND GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE WRITING OF SELECTED MALAY MALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

Despite all efforts made to identify, address and remedy gender inequality, sexism in modern-day society is still prevalent, particularly those against women. This study aims to investigate the occurrences of linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes against women in essays written by Malay male university students. Linguistic sexism was analysed using Umera-Okeke's (2012) and Amare's (2006) framework while Brannon (2004) was used for the analysis of gender stereotypes. Fairclough's (1989, 1995) critical discourse analysis framework was used to approach the study. The findings from the study indicate that linguistic sexism is evident, particularly in terms of students' semantic choices. Gender stereotyping in the form of psychological traits and activities associated with women were also noted. The findings show that Malay males display the normative gender role stereotypes of a woman as polite, modest, understanding, supportive and adept at homemaking. However, the study also indicates that women were beginning to be viewed in a new light as intelligent and educated with professional careers of their own. This study falls back on Malay culture to explain sexism and gender stereotyping of women by Malay males.

Keywords: essay writing, gender stereotypes, language and gender, linguistic sexism, Malay culture, Malaysian university students

### INTRODUCTION

There is a lot more to language than merely as a tool for communication and information transfer. According to Catalán and María (2005, as cited in Umera-Okeke, 2012) people use language to construct their views of society, organize knowledge and new information that is acquired as well as incorporate the norms and social patterns of their community into their daily lives. The aforementioned norms and social patterns unfortunately imply that through the use of language itself, some social groups are at risk of being marginalised, subjugated and trivialised by the society, often without its members realising it.

When it comes to the mistreatment that these social groups are subjected to, one of the most obvious examples of such phenomenon can be observed in gender inequality. Sexism is typically defined as anything that places one sex at a higher ladder of the society than the other. Sexism is a recurring issue in various societies around the world, regardless of the fact that these societies are of Western or Eastern origins. Religious and

cultural values, combined with perceived biological distinctions that render one gender superior than the other are often cited as the reasons why this phenomenon persists. This issue is further aggravated by people's assumption that sexism is merely a thing of the past (Swim & Cohen, 1997, as cited in Smith & Craig-Henderson, 2010; Umera-Okeke, 2012).

Sexism does not only materialise through people's actions and behaviours. The language that is widely used in everyday discourse carries different instances of sexism, and the English language is a prime example of such language. Several forms of linguistic sexism have appeared in a number of instances in the English language, and feminists have been striving to address these traces of linguistic sexism for decades (Amare, 2006). Irrespective of the forms, language components and the levels in which linguistic sexism surfaces, attempts to address and remedy gender stereotypes in language should be taken seriously to bring about changes in the society to one that affords both genders an equal playing field. This study is therefore intended to investigate if linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes are evident in Malaysian university students' written language.

### RESEARCH PROBLEM

Since Lakoff's work was published in 1975, a number of research studies have been done on language and gender, and these studies have delved into this pertinent issue in various instances such as in the use of nouns (Cralley & Ruscher, 2005), texts (Schmader, Whitehead & Wysocki, 2007; Dako, 2013), visual images (Mohamad Subakir Mohd Yasin, Bahiyah Abdul Hamid, Zarina Othman, Kesumawati Abu Bakar, Fuzirah Hashim & Azmah Mohti, 2012), indexing system (Amare, 2006), mock job interviews (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011) and nature of a particular language (Githinji, 2008). Linguistic sexism is observed at the levels of semantics, morphology, and syntax, and in the use of honorific and non-parallel terms (Umera-Okeke, 2012). In addition, it also appears in several forms such as 'firstness' (*men and women, he or she, Mr. and Mrs. Smith*), the use of generic *man* and *he*, sexist labels and suffixes, stereotypes and omission, in which these forms are commonly discussed in guidelines and books (Amare, 2006). However, much exploration still needs to be done in the area of linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes.

There is a scarcity of studies on linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes in the local Malaysian context. A search of the found a study by Bahiyah Hamid, Mohd Subakir Mohd Yasin, Kesumawati Abu Bakar, Yuen Chee Keong and Azhar Jalaluddin (2008) who found gender bias and linguistic sexism in selected Malaysian primary and secondary school English language textbooks. Males were projected as successful, powerful and occupying higher positions in society while females were portrayed as playing supporting roles to males for instance as mothers, wives and nurturers in the social domain and nurses in the professional domain. The study found that the language used in Malaysian English textbooks foreground and reinforce men as the standard and portray women as second-place to men. Mohamad Subakir et al. (2012) investigated how visual images in English language school textbooks reflect gender biasness and stereotyping especially of women and they too found an imbalance that favoured men who were represented in public spaces while women were portrayed in the private sphere as wives, mothers and nurturers. Images of women were generally absent in the workplace and in unconventional professions although in reality Malaysian women are in the professional workforce in large numbers.

Findings were made by Lee (2015) who studied gender representation in Japanese EFL textbooks and found gender disparities in the form of male firstness, female invisibility and stereotypical images still prevalent in the textbooks examined. Lee (2014)

investigated linguistic discrimination in teachers' language amongst Chinese EFL teachers and found that gender-biased language is still widely used; their choice of generic pronouns co-varied with factors such as meaning, word structure and gender stereotypes associated with particular occupations. While it is true that sexism in language can be observed in various media such as language textbooks and teachers' language use, writing is another area that reflects the thoughts of people about emotional, cultural and societal values. The thoughts that are mirrored in writing can be picked up and studied to find out the extent to which linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes are rooted within the unconscious minds of the writers. Therefore, this study attempts to look into this specific issue in order to gain a better understanding of how sexism and gender stereotypes materialise in students' written work in the Malaysian context. In so doing, the study adds to existing literature on gender bias and linguistic sexism in Malaysia.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The specific research questions of this study are:

1. What gender stereotypes of women are evident in the written essays of Malaysian male university students?
2. How do these gender stereotypes reflect the Malay culture?

### **RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **Linguistic sexism**

Sexist language can be generally defined as language that consciously or subconsciously leaves a particular gender at a disadvantage. Atkinson (1993) defines linguistic sexism as involving a wide range of linguistic practices that silence and depreciate women, including how women are labelled and referred to in interaction and communication.

#### **Theoretical perspectives of language and gender**

There are four schools of thought on studies in language and gender: deficit, dominance, difference and social constructionist. The deficit theory (Lakoff, 1973, 1975) sees women's language as intrinsically inferior to men's: women's language is weak, lacking, deviant and deficient to men's language. The dominance theory (West & Zimmerman, 1983) sees men as physically and socially more powerful and dominant than women resulting in different speech styles between them. The difference approach (Tannen, 1990; Holmes, 1995; Coates, 1996) reclaimed women's place as different but equal to men. Differences in speech styles are as a result of men and women being socialised or brought up differently; boys are encouraged to speak up and be dominant while girls are expected to be obedient and cooperative. The social constructionist approach (Cameron, 1997; Baxter, 2003; Holmes, 2007) views gender as identity. Men and women use language differently because they are constructing their own identity. As a result, language use is socially and culturally determined. Men and women all over the world do not speak in the same way because people come from different cultural, religious, regional, ethnic and sexual orientation backgrounds and they may change the way they speak according to the context or situation they are in (Holmes, 2007).

Saci (2014) notes that the chronological order of the four schools of thought above does not mean that the recent ones invalidate the earlier ones. The theories, in fact, complement one another "because each one of them tackles the problem from a different angle enabling us to have a better broader understanding" (Saci, 2014, p.8) of the issues in language and gender. The paper therefore takes on a complementary view of the

theories in language and gender in its approach to the study of linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes of a group of Malaysian male university students.

### **Forms of linguistic sexism**

Linguistic sexism takes many forms such as sexism in semantics, syntax, morphology etc and these are visible in various instances across the wide usage of everyday discourse. Sexism in semantics as noted by Amare (2006) and Umera-Okeke (2012) is discussed below as this was the linguistic practice that largely emerged in the data of the present study.

#### *Sexism in semantics*

There are several words in English that carry different connotations when they are used to describe men and women. More often than not, these words can have negative, derogatory and sexual connotations when they are used to illustrate women. For example, the word *professional* can be used to describe men as being members of respected professions or being very skilful at the things that they do. However, when the same word is used to describe women, it potentially carries a different interpretation of these women as being either prostitutes or promiscuous. The same can also be said of other seemingly 'harmless' words in English vocabulary. A *tramp* can either mean a person who is jobless, homeless and wanders from one place to another or a sexually immoral woman. Next, the description of a man being *loose* means that he is simply a casual person, whereas the same word when used to describe a woman implies that she is sexually 'active'. Other examples can also be found in pairs of words for males and females such as *master* and *mistress*, *governor* and *governess*, and *bachelor* and *spinster* in which these sets of words tend to have positive-masculine and negative-feminine nuances.

In addition, sexism can also be observed in personification of inanimate objects. For example, the sun is seen as male while the moon, which receives light from the sun is seen as female. This distinction is made as objects that are strong or superior are often personified as masculine and objects that are weak, passive and receptive are typically feminine. Apart from personification, animal imagery also tends to trivialise women, which explains why a man is a *tiger* or a *bull* while a woman is characteristically referred to as a *chick* or a *cougar*.

### **Gender stereotypes**

In defining gender stereotypes, a clear distinction between sex and gender needs to be established to avoid any confusion. Brugeilles and Cromer (2009, p.27) define sex as the "biological differences between males and females" which relate to "the observable difference between their genitals and to their physiological functions in procreation". On the other hand, gender refers to the culture and social division between men and women in which terms such as masculinity and femininity are used to differentiate one sex from the other. Specifically, gender deals with the qualities, tastes, aptitudes, roles and responsibilities associated with men and women in a society (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009). In comparison, sex is based on the distinction between the biologically different male and female while gender is based on the distinction between the socially different man and woman.

The distinction between sex and gender as provided above is crucial in order to gain a better understanding of what gender stereotypes entail. According to Brannon (2004) a gender stereotype refers to beliefs about psychological traits and characteristics of men or women which also include specific activities that are fitting for each gender. As opposed to gender roles, which are dictated by behaviours, gender stereotypes revolve

around the beliefs and attitudes about masculinity and femininity. Therefore, as gender is governed by the concepts of masculinity and femininity, it is inevitable that characteristics of both genders become generalised and expectations are imposed by society upon men and women in terms of how they are to conduct themselves in society. Failure to adhere to these expectations can potentially result in an individual being subjected to prejudice and discrimination. Two of the most common examples of gender stereotypes imposed on men and women are that men are sole breadwinners of their families while women are homemakers who are expected to take care of household-related matters.

Stereotypes evoke certain feelings and beliefs towards the groups that are being stereotyped. Several studies then ensued to capture the contents of gender stereotypes by explaining them according to the aforementioned feelings and beliefs associated with each stereotype. This eventually led to research by Eckes (2002) and Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu, (2002, as cited in Brannon, 2004) who suggest that the combination of competence and warmth is a comprehensive measurement tool to examine stereotypes further. These two dimensions, which form the stereotype content model, indicate that lower-status groups in society such as ethnic minority groups, older people, disabled people and women are perceived as less competent but kind and warm, leading these groups of people to be rated positively (Eckes, 2002 & Fiske et al. 2002, as cited in Brannon, 2004). On the other hand, those who are of the high-status groups are respected for their competence but not adjudged to be kind and warm. These values between low competence-high warmth and high competence-low warmth are chartered in Figure 1, along with feelings and examples associated with each combination. In addition, combinations such as high competence-high warmth and low competence-low warmth are also included to gain a better understanding of the different values across the continuum of competence and warmth.

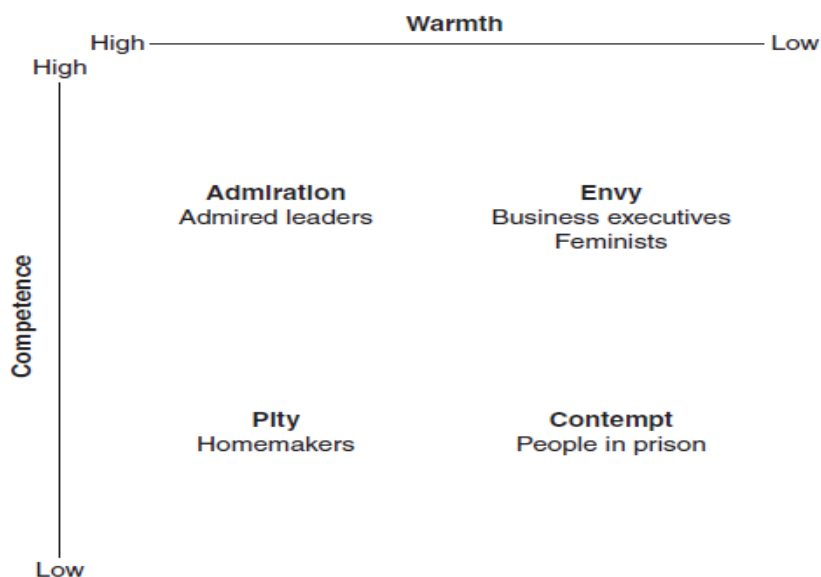


Figure 1: Stereotype Content Model (Brannon, 2004)

### Gender and Malay culture

The Malay gender system is strongly influenced by the history of religions, customs and cultures (Rahimah & Shaipul, 2014). The Malay culture and belief system is governed by two main elements which are the Islamic faith and Malay norms. The former is explicitly

outlined in Article 160 of the Constitution of Malaysia which defines Malay as, among others, a person who professes the religion of Islam, speaks the Malay language and adheres to the Malay norms and customs. This definition cements the role of Islam and its teachings in dictating the whole of cultural and social norms among Malays in Malaysia (Effendy, 2006, as cited in Rumaya Juhari, Siti Nor Yaacob, & Mansor Abu Talib, 2013). Specifically, the Malays in Malaysia are followers of the *sunni* tradition who live their lives according to the teachings of the Holy Quran and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad and abide by *syariah* law.

The gender system of the traditional Malay culture reflects a binary opposition of roles and responsibilities of men and women in the Malay community (Phelps & Austin, 1975, as cited in Rahimah & Shaiful, 2014). Rahimah and Shaiful (2014) analyse the gender perspective in Malay proverbs and they note that in the Malay culture, although men and women are viewed as mutually complementary and need each other, men hold a dominant position over women. For instance women are dependent on men for leadership and decision-making. Wazir Jahan Karim (1992) also argues that Malay policies lead men to be empowered, especially in decision making in both, domestic or public spaces, endorsing men as more rational in making judgements than women. Men work in public spaces and traditionally engage in heavy work while women are out of the public eye and are in domestic spaces (Wazir Jahan Karim, 1992). In the context of domestic spaces, women are seen as determinants in upholding the self-esteem and dignity of the family and household and in maintaining the love of their husbands and preserving the harmony and well-being of family and society (Ruzy Suliza Hashim, 2006; Rahimah & Shaiful, 2014). Women who are active in public spaces are discredited as less sweet, aggressive and shameless. Lim (2003) also comments that emotions of male-chauvinism prevail in the Malay culture and that this sentiment discriminates stereotyping against women for instance in male and female attitudes towards sex and romance. Similar findings were made by Jerome (2013) who analysed Malay songs and found gender stereotypes in the songs that reinforce men's and women's roles in romantic relationships. Women were lyrically depicted as being emotionally dependent on men and vulnerable in romantic relationships despite the evidence of female emotional strength in the songs. In short, in the Malay worldview, although women are viewed as complementary to men, they are subordinate to men, with supportive roles and responsibilities to perform particularly in the domain of family and household.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

This research is qualitative in nature and it adopts Fairclough's (1989, 1995) critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach as the analytical framework. Thirty essays gathered from thirty male students from a Malaysian university were used as data for this study. The sampling was deemed sufficient to establish the linguistic patterns of interest since the study is discourse-analytic in nature for which "smaller selections of material, written or oral, which is handled 'manually' by the researcher" is a feature of the inquiry (Angermuller, 2015, p.512). The students were Malays from various diploma programmes ranging from Business Studies to Office Management and Administrative Science and Policy Studies. The selection of these students was based on convenient random sampling technique in which the students were taught the English language by the researcher (first author) in the previous semesters. In addition, since the focus of this study was on linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes, variables such as academic background and language proficiency were not taken into consideration.

### Data collection

The writing task required the students to write an essay of between 150 and 200 words entitled *The Perfect Woman*. The purpose of this essay was to gather the students' thoughts and perspectives on the criteria and characteristics of a perfect woman. The students were first briefed about the task that they would be asked to do before being given the assurance that their language proficiency and use of formal structures in their essays would not be assessed. Furthermore, since the task was conducted in a language laboratory fully equipped with computers, the students were given the choice to either write the essays or type them out on a computer. The task lasted for an hour.

### Data analysis

The collected data was analysed using Fairclough's (1989, 1995) framework for CDA. This three-part model consists of three dimensions of discourse which are namely; a) the object of analysis (the texts), b) the processes by which the object is produced (written, spoken, designed) and received (read/listened to/ viewed) by human subjects, and c) the socio-historical conditions that govern these processes. In turn, three different kinds of analysis were employed for these three dimensions of discourse, which include; a) text analysis (description), b) processing analysis (interpretation), and c) social analysis (explanation).

Text analysis was conducted to identify occurrences of linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes in the data. The study focused on sexism in semantics as this was the aspect of linguistic sexism that emerged in the data. Meaning relations between words (Fairclough, 1989) and lexical repetition (Halliday, 1994) served as analytical devices to locate the way in which the respondents' experience of the social world with regard to the idea of a perfect woman was represented. Meaning relations between words that were investigated include "synonymy" (sameness of meaning), "antonymy" (oppositeness of meaning), and "hyponymy" (inclusion of meaning) to locate ideological themes (Fairclough 1989, p.116). Fairclough (1989, p.115) notes that ideological themes, which are usually implied rather than stated explicitly, can be explored in discourse through "wording" which involves analysis of vocabulary. In addition to meaning relations, gender stereotypes were also determined based on lexical repetition (Halliday, 1994). According to Halliday (1994) lexical repetition may be used as a device for studying ideological implications in discourse. Other than its textual function for coherence, lexical repetition can have a didactic and emotional effect on readers. It is employed by writers to emphasize a certain attitude, value, belief or fact. In the context of the present study, lexical repetition can be a useful device to reveal the embedded ideological themes in the students' essays.

Next, processing analysis which deals with the processes by which the object (i.e. the text) is produced and received by human subjects was done. For this type of analysis, the stereotype content model (Brannon, 2004) was used to chart the gender stereotypes towards women that were found in the texts (see Figure 1). The gender stereotypes from the findings of the text analysis were placed on the chart to identify the most commonly recurring stereotypes about women in the data and were interpreted according to the dimensions of competence and warmth.

Lastly, social analysis was conducted by explaining the reasons behind the depiction of these gender stereotypes in the data. This explanation was done based on the Malay culture and beliefs which form the value system of the students in this study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Text analysis

#### *Meaning relations*

The data showed that an ideal woman is viewed as being mentally stable, logical and not emotional. However a woman is generally seen as otherwise: she is described as emotional, argumentative, irrational and illogical. For instance in Example 1, she is described as “turn(s) coo coo”, “trust their emotions instead of their brains”, “(being) topsy turvy hormonal wrecks”, “(display) exaggerated arguments”, “(are) argumentative”, and “(want to) win war”. These words and expressions are hyponyms of the superordinate - emotional, argumentative, irrational and illogical. The words display negative, derogatory connotations of women. The preference is for mentally stable women who are described as logical and thoughtful.

#### Example 1

In my opinion, being a perfect woman is being mentally stable. No matter how hot or attractive you are, but your head must be in a logical condition. Once you turned coo-coo, things will become ‘poo-poo’.

Lots of women tend to trust more on their emotions instead of their brains. Being emotional is acceptable for once or twice but if it takes everyday of their lives (and making it into a daily routine) it would be a huge pain in the butt, not just to their spouse but to everyone around them. Emotionally unstable and topsy-turvy hormonal wrecks is generally a major root in every woman and exaggerated arguments tend to lead to another. You’re still wondering why the actual problem still can’t be solved and now they’re arguing of something way different than your actual point. Even worse, when women are not thinking logically and just cracked out anything argumentative that can ensure they will definitely win war.

A woman who can control herself, there may be only 10% of the global women population that have this ability, 95% may slap your brains out and the 5% have the poison sting that will turn your life upside down. In conclusion, the most perfect woman is because they are logical, professional, tolerable, independent, thoughtful and trustworthy.

In Example 2, a woman is described as needing education and knowledge although not necessarily needing specialist knowledge. Antonyms are used when she is described as not needing “a certification to scale (her) knowledge”; instead she would be better if she knew more “general knowledge”. Although education and knowledge are valued, it appears that she need not be too knowledgeable.

#### Example 2

Education and knowledge is very important, however, it doesn't mean that a certification to scale their knowledge, but how much they know about general knowledge is more important.

In Example 3, a woman is described as needing to be “cool”, “can accept man the way they are”, and “...must understand...men...” This view conveys the meaning that she has to be tolerant, understanding and acceptable of men’s idiosyncrasies such as watching sports on television even if this activity irks her.

### Example 3

Woman has to be cool so that they can accept man the way they are. Some of the biggest fights couple have are over watching sports. The woman must understand that men need to watch sports because it cannot be separated from them. She must accept that no matter what.

In Example 4, sexism is apparent in the use of the word “tidy”. A non-ideal woman has “papers and files all over the place”, is “disorganised and untidy” although she may “wear smart” clothes and “spray [herself] with perfume every single day”. Sexism is also evident in the use of the word “high heels” to refer to shoes and how a woman’s car cluttered with shoes can make it difficult for passengers to sit in.

### Example 4

Ideal woman are tidy. If they wear tidy clothes, and they smell good and keep their cars, houses and workplace clean. Non ideal women’s car is filled with high heels all over the place, making it difficult for passengers to sit and rest their feet. Non ideal women’s workplace is filled with papers and files all over the place. These show how disorganised and untidy they are, even though they wear smart and spray themselves with perfume every single day.

Likewise in Example 5, the term “modest” entails a woman not “(having) physical contact with men, say(ing) vulgar words, brag(ging) and post(ing) whatever and wherever (she) eats, whatever (she is) wearing, and whoever (she networks with)”. Such activities when performed by men however may not be described as “conceit” or seen as immodest. The term modest takes on different meanings when used with men and women. The word “nursing” also displays sexism as the word “nurse” is often associated with women.

### Example 5

Ideal women are modest when it comes to physical appearance and social interaction. Why do they like to have physical contacts with men and say vulgar words? Why do they need to brag and post whatever and wherever they eat, whatever they are wearing, and whoever they are nursing in every social networking site? They do not show modesty, they show conceit.

Other words such as “voluptuous with curves in all the right places”, “lovely”, “beautiful”, “have a beauty inside and outside”, “gorgeous”, “pretty”, “body shape”, “attractive”, “asset”, “wear size 2 and look like Emma Watson” are also deemed as sexist as they assume feminine connotations for women which are not commonly used to describe men. Words such as “body shape”, “asset” and “voluptuous” are patronizing towards women’s physical appearances. For instance, describing a perfect woman as possessing a good body shape and being voluptuous implies that her physical appearance is more important than her personality. The word “asset”, in particular, is sexually charged. While describing a man as possessing a valuable asset refers to his wealth, telling a woman that she possesses valuable assets might refer to her shapely figure or her intimate parts.

In sum, the analysis of meaning relations shows that the traits of a perfect woman from the respondents’ perspective is that she must be physically beautiful, modest in speech and dressing, mentally stable, logical, tolerant, understanding, acceptable of men’s

temperaments, tidy, organised, knowledgeable, and she should not be argumentative and emotional.

### Lexical repetition

Lexical repetition of vocabulary items in the essays were grouped as stereotypes in terms of two categories: a) psychological traits associated with women, and b) specific activities that women are associated with. The traits of a perfect woman that were discovered from the analysis of meaning relations were incorporated into the analysis that involved lexical repetition in order to establish a broader view of the gender stereotypes of the respondents of the study.

### Stereotypes in terms of psychological traits

From the essays gathered, a number of recurring psychological traits that the students deem to characterise a perfect woman were found. These traits, along with the frequencies of these traits across the data are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Psychological traits associated with women

Psychological traits associated with women	Frequency
Polite, Well-mannered, Modest	33
Understanding, Obedient, Loyal, Supportive	21
Confident	18
Intelligent, Logical, Educated	15
Religious, God-fearing	9

Table 1 outlines five of the recurring psychological traits that the students deemed to be fitting of an ideal woman. One of the most sought after characteristic of a woman is politeness. This trait includes good mannerism, modesty and other qualities like upholding her dignity and knowing how to carry her own self in public. Another popular trait desired of an ideal woman is she has to be understanding, obedient, loyal and supportive. Being confident is also a common trait of a perfect woman across the data. Next, a perfect woman is someone who is intelligent or well-educated. Lastly, being religious and God-fearing is also part of the make-up of the perfect woman.

### Stereotypes in terms of activities associated with women

Based on the data, an ideal woman is associated with two main categories of activities. These categories are namely homemaking and having own career, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Activities associated with women

Activities associated with women	Frequency
Homemaking	
Cooking	18
Taking care of family	15
Taking care of household	12
Having own career	18

It is clear from Table 2 that according to the respondents, a perfect woman is someone who is married and has children, along with being a career woman. In the category of homemaking, women are expected to be excellent cooks. They are also expected to be adept at taking care of their husbands and children. Similarly, they are also in charge of household-related matters such as tidying the house, washing the clothes and washing the dishes. Apart from homemaking, a woman's success in her career is also seen as part of being a perfect woman.

### Processing analysis

The second type of analysis in Fairclough's (1989, 1995) model, i.e. processing analysis, was carried out to examine the processes that underlie the gender stereotypes found in the data.

In terms of the placement of gender stereotypes with regard to psychological traits in the stereotype content model (Brannon, 2004), the traits that describe perfection in terms of the behaviours women are expected to display are determined to be less competent but warm (low competence-high warmth). Therefore, this evaluation applies to characteristics such as being polite, well-mannered and modest, understanding, obedient, loyal, and supportive, and religious or God-fearing. On the other hand, the remaining two labels, which are being confident and intelligent, and being educated are characteristics of successful women belonging to respected professions, which ultimately mean that they are evaluated to be competent but less warm (high competence-low warmth). Consequently, these five traits would appear in the stereotype content model as illustrated by Figure 2.

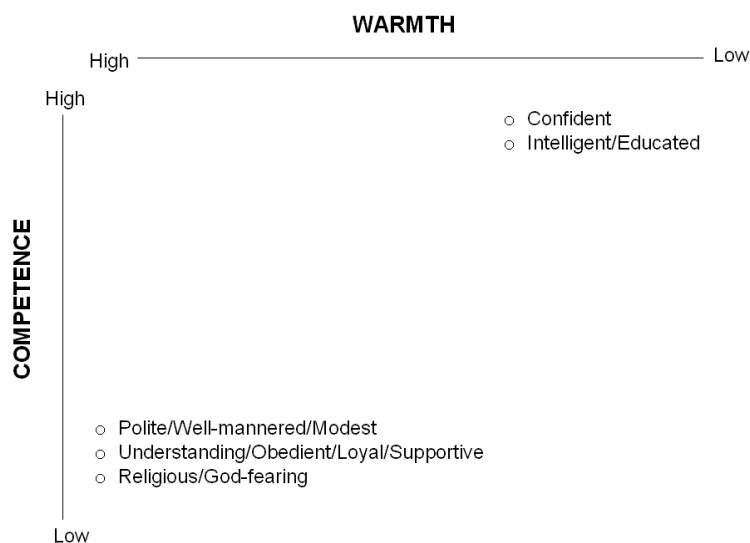


Figure 2. Stereotype content model for psychological traits associated with women

The two categories of activities associated with women that were extracted from the data were Homemaking and Having Own Career. Based on Brannon's (2004) stereotype content model, the role of women as homemakers is evaluated as incompetent but warm and caring (low competence-high warmth) across the two dimensions of 'competence' and 'warmth'. On the other hand, the assessment for career women is judged as competent but less kind and caring (high competence-low warmth). The positioning of these two types of activities associated with women in the model is illustrated in Figure 3.

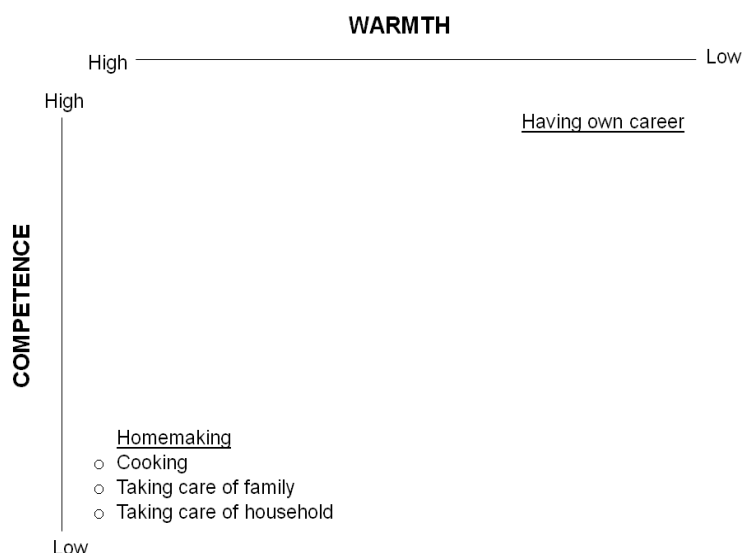


Figure 3. Stereotype content model for activities associated with women

The analysis shows that the respondents of the study exhibit gender stereotypes of women that largely reflect women as being of high warmth and low competence. In the context of education and career, however, women are viewed as having high competence but low warmth.

### Social analysis

In order to gain a better understanding of the gender stereotypes from the respondents' perspective, a social analysis needs to be conducted by explaining these stereotypes according to the Malay culture and beliefs that the students identify themselves with.

As noted by Rahimah and Shaiful (2014), the Malay gender system is strongly influenced by the Islamic religion. Hegemonic and singular interpretation of Islam and of female morality and piety as stipulated in the Holy Quran and Prophet Muhammad's traditions ensure that the Malay society has an unwavering stance on the traits that its women are expected to display. This explains the psychological traits that were found in the data which postulate that an ideal woman is someone who is polite, well-mannered, modest, understanding, obedient, loyal, supportive and ultimately religious. The aforementioned traits are highly valued and institutionalised by the society as they epitomise feminine perfection from the religious point of view.

Next, the study showed that a perfect woman is also defined by her adeptness in homemaking, which is gauged by her status as a wife and mother to her husband and children respectively. Similarly, this quality has its roots in the Islamic faith as marriage is the only acknowledged legal form of procreation (Ruzy Suliza Hashim, 2006; Rumaya Juhari, Siti Nor Yaacob & Mansor Abu Talib, 2013). Moreover, following the tradition of Prophet Muhammad that marriage completes one's Islamic faith, Muslims generally place marriage as an utmost priority in their lives. Therefore, it is through marriage that Malay women can put themselves in the position of living together legally with men and producing off-springs. Once women subscribe to the institution of marriage, their worth as a wife and as a mother will be judged mainly based on matters related to domestic management such as cooking, and taking care of the family and the household. These are precisely the values that were found to be valued in the image of a perfect woman.

However, the emergence of traits such as confidence and intelligence and the need for women to have their own careers show that in today's modern world the role of Malay women is expanding into the professional domain and is not strictly confined to being mere homemakers. Global changes, particularly in the areas of economy and education mean that women are being increasingly recognised as having control over their academic achievements and their involvement as workforce professionals. As the Malay society contends with the fact that men should not be the only breadwinners in their families, modern Malay women are expected to be well-educated and capable of securing jobs to improve the overall living status of their families. This is echoed by Md Azalanshah and Runnel (2013, p.4) who state that "the measure of a modern woman's advancement lies in literacy and education, decreased birth-rate, shared parenting/caring responsibilities, discretionary income, job opportunities, women in government and the professions, a flourishing presence in creative fields and freedom of choice".

### CONCLUSION

The findings gathered from this study support the previous literature (Bahiyah Hamid et al, 2008; Muhammad Subakir et al, 2012; Jerome 2013) that linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes still occur in modern-day Malaysia. As in these previous research studies, the present study also shows that Malay males in Malaysia today still uphold normative gender role expectations and stereotypes of a woman as subordinate with qualities of being polite, modest, well-mannered, understanding and supportive of men and being able to perform homemaking duties. Women are viewed as having to have high warmth and low competence. However, there appears to be an emerging view among Malay men of women also possessing intelligence and education as well as having professional careers of their own.

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## COMPREHENSION OF ENGLISH VOS AND VSO SENTENCES BY L1 KOREAN AND L1 MALAYSIAN MALAY SPEAKERS

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### ABSTRACT

In terms of structure, languages of the world can be either subject-verb-object (SVO) or subject-object-verb (SOV). English is an example of a SVO language while Korean is a SOV language. Such a difference between languages may have implications for second language (L2) learners learning a language with a different structure from their first language (L1). In view of this, the study investigates the interpretation of verb initial English sentences, i.e. verb-object-subject (VOS) command sentences and verb-subject-object (VSO) inverted reported speech sentences by forty-eight L1 Korean and nine L1 Malaysian Malay L2 English learners. Each group simultaneously heard and read forty randomly sequenced English sentences, each accompanied by two pictures, labeled A and B. Each picture has a girl and a boy. If picture A depicts the girl playing the role of doer and the boy, the role of receiver, then the other picture where their roles are reversed, is picture B. Upon listening to and reading each sentence, participants circled either A or B on a Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task Sheet provided. Results from independent T-tests comparing the misinterpretation means showed no significant difference between both groups, suggesting that Universal Processing Strategy exhibited by the First Noun Principle accounts for adult L2 acquisition. Furthermore, the findings of the study also revealed that both groups of L2 learners made more misinterpretations in VOS compared to VSO sentences, suggesting that L2 learners tend to (mis)interpret the first noun or pronoun of a sentence as the subject or doer of an action, regardless of its position in the sentence, thus validating VanPatten's First Noun Principle (2007).

Keywords: adult L2 sentence processing, First Noun Principle, L1 Transfer Principle, L2 English sentence interpretation, second language acquisition

### INTRODUCTION

VanPatten (2007) proposed that research was needed to determine whether the Universal Processing Strategy Position represented by the First Noun Principle or the L1 Transfer Processing Strategy Position represented by the L1 Transfer Principle (p.122) is the more acceptable strategy to explain L2 acquisition. Universal Processing Strategy Position arises from the universality hypothesis that argues that processing strategies apply to all languages as they do not depend on specific languages, but rather on cognitive universals (Kim & Choi, 2015, p.433), while the L1 Transfer Processing Strategy Position argues that L2 sentence processing strategies are influenced by L1 knowledge influences on L2 sentence processing. Heeding VanPatten's call, many researchers studied groups of adult L2 learners with different L1s to determine which internal processing strategy is responsible for L2 acquisition (Isabelli, 2008; VanPatten & Wong, 2004; Allen, 2000; MacDonald & Heilenman, 1992; Gass, 1989; Pléh, 1989; Lee, 1987; LoCoco, 1987; VanPatten, 1984). Perhaps due to the locations where initial studies were done (e.g.

America and Europe), it was natural that the past studies of those researchers tended to be fixated in the realm of working within Romance languages (such as Italian, Spanish or French) and Germanic languages (such as English or German) in the attempt to determine which internal processing strategy accounts for L2 acquisition. This trend has been evident in works of past researchers (Isabelli, 2008; VanPatten & Wong, 2004; Allen, 2000; MacDonald & Heilenman, 1992; Gass, 1989; Pléh, 1989; Lee, 1987; LoCoco, 1987; VanPatten, 1984) in terms of chosen L2 target sentences and groups of adult L2 learner participants. Therefore, in order to add on to the current literature, the present study retained the objectives and theoretical framework of past studies, while replicating the general methodology of Isabelli's study (2008) with two groups of adult L2 English learners with L1s differing from the ubiquitous Romance languages and Germanic languages, i.e. L1 Korean and L1 Malay (the standard variety that is used in Malaysia).

However, due to the fact that most languages in the world have the default SVO and SOV word order (VanPatten, 2007), all of the studies (Isabelli, 2008; VanPatten & Wong, 2004; Allen, 2000; MacDonald & Heilenman, 1992; Gass, 1989; Pléh, 1989; LoCoco, 1987; VanPatten, 1984) have revealed a gap in the lack of studies on verb-initial word order in sentence processing research. All of the studies mentioned above dealt with L2 target sentences whereby the first noun or pronoun of a sentence is located coincidentally as the first word of the sentence. This gives rise to the question: to what extent does VanPatten's First Noun Principle (2007) apply to sentences where the first noun or pronoun does not appear as the first word of a sentence? In other words, in relation to the definition of the First Noun Principle, i.e. "a learner tends to process the first noun or pronoun they encounter in a sentence as the subject" (VanPatten, 2007, p.122), it is yet to be determined whether the current definition still applies in the event that the position of the first noun or pronoun of a sentence is not at the initial position of the sentence. To date, from a search of journal databases, only Tight's study (2012) has attempted to test VanPatten's First Noun Principle (2007) by using sentences where the first noun or pronoun of a sentence is located post-verbally in the middle of a sentence. Therefore, this study in part replicates Tight's work (2012) in terms of using L2 sentences with post-verbal first noun or pronoun as target test items, i.e. English verb-object-subject (VOS) command sentences and English verb-subject-object (VSO) inverted reported speech sentences.

Thus, this study attempts to answer VanPatten's (2007) call for a study with the objective to investigate to what extent L2 sentence processing is attributed to universal processing strategy or/and L1 transfer processing strategy. In addition, it also aims to investigate if the First Noun Principle applies in the event that the first noun or pronoun is not positioned as the first word of a sentence. Based on the objective articulated here, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- i. To what extent does the Universal Processing Strategy exhibited by the First Noun Principle or the L1 Transfer Processing Strategy exhibited by the L1 Transfer Principle account for second language sentence interpretation by L2 adult learners?
- ii. To what extent does VanPatten's (2007) definition of the First Noun Principle apply to first noun or pronoun that are not placed at the initial position of a sentence?

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Similar to Isabelli's study (2008), this study adopts VanPatten's Model of Language Acquisition Processes (2004) (Figure 1) for a second language acquisition (SLA) context.

The acquisition of a language, to a significant extent, begins with and depends on the correct interpretation of a meaningful sentence made by L2 learners (White, 1987; Carroll, 2001). Therefore, the present study is limited to VanPatten's Input Processing Operation (2007) (Figure 2), which is situated in the Input stage that is the first stage of VanPatten's Model of Language Acquisition Processes (2004).

I	II	III
Input	→ Intake	→ Developing Linguistic System → Output
I	=	input processing
II	=	accommodation, restructuring
III	=	access, production procedures

Figure 1. A model of language acquisition processes (VanPatten, 2004)

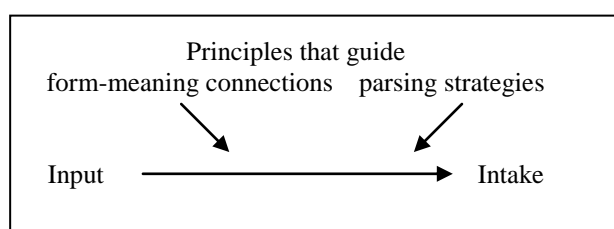


Figure 2. Input processing (VanPatten, 2007)

Input Processing itself is concerned with collecting real data related to the initial form to meaning mapping of L2 sentences by L2 learners, regardless of mapping being correct or incorrect (Isabelli, 2008) and the L2 sentence processing strategies employed by L2 learners. Three fundamental questions have been formulated by VanPatten (2007) to address the Input Processing stage and they are:

- i. When do L2 learners make the initial form to meaning mapping of L2 sentences?
- ii. Why are L2 learners able to make some, while failing to make other initial forms to meaning mapping of L2 sentences at a moment in time?
- iii. What internal processing strategies do L2 learners use in comprehending L2 sentences? How do they affect acquisition?

The interest of this paper, however, is on the first part of question (iii), i.e. what internal processing strategies L2 learners use in comprehending L2 sentences, i.e. the parsing/processing strategies of L2 learners based on the mis(interpretations) they make of the L2 sentences.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies done on VanPatten's First Noun Principle had unfortunately, built a database of tested L2 sentences skewed towards either the Romance language family, i.e. French or Spanish, or Germanic language family, i.e. German or English (Lee, 2004). VanPatten and Wong's (2004) study and Allen's (2000) study focused on French *faire*-causative sentences as targeted L2 sentences. The subject (i.e. a person) functions to make someone (i.e. indirect object of the sentence) do something (i.e. the second verb in the sentence which is not *faire*). An example of the sentence used was *Jean-Paul fait lire le journal à Henri*, which means *Jean-Paul made Henri read the newspaper*. So, Henri was the one reading the newspaper, not Jean-Paul.

However, L2 learners of Spanish tended to misinterpret this sentence to mean that Jean-Paul was the one reading the newspaper. LoCoco (1987), on the other hand, focused her study on Spanish and German L2 targeted sentences where the first noun was a direct object, an indirect object or an object of preposition. Her findings revealed that L2 Spanish and L2 German learners assigned the first noun as subject between 7% and 72% of the time. Lee (1987) and VanPatten (1984) also used Spanish sentences as L2 targeted sentences in their studies. Lee (1987) tested Spanish OV sentences while VanPatten (1984) tested Spanish OVS sentences. The former documented that L2 Spanish learners assigned the first noun of the targeted sentences as subject between 27% and 73% of the time, while the latter documented such occurrence at between 35% and 70% of the time.

Similar to previous studies, two recent studies (Isabelli, 2008; Tight, 2012) continued the focus on Romance and Germanic language families, both in terms of the learners' L1 and the tested L2 sentences. Isabelli (2008) tested object-subject-verb (OSV) and object-object-verb-subject (OOVS) L2 Spanish sentences on L1 English speakers and L1 Italian speakers, while Tight (2012) tested verb-subject (VS) and subject-verb (SV) L2 Spanish sentences on L1 English speakers. The present study replicated the general methodology of data collection of Isabelli's (2008) work but focusing on L2 learners with L1s apart from Romance and Germanic language families, i.e. native Korean speakers and native Malaysian Malay speakers.

Moreover, both of these studies (Isabelli, 2008; Tight, 2012) do not seem to support the Universal Processing Strategy position as exhibited by the First Noun Principle. The results of Isabelli's study (2008) revealed that the L1 Italian speakers misinterpreted OVS and OOVS Spanish sentences by 13.39% and 15.81% respectively while the L1 English speakers misinterpreted OVS and OOVS Spanish sentences by 80.00% and 94.30% respectively. Based on her findings, the L1 Transfer Principle is accountable for L2 sentence processing. The result of the other study (Tight, 2012) indicated that the prediction of the First Noun Principle that a "learner tends to process the first noun or pronoun they encounter in a sentence as the subject" (VanPatten, 2007) did not happen to VS Spanish sentences as the L1 English L2 Spanish learners in general interpreted the first noun as an object.

In contrast to Isabelli's (2008) and Tight's (2012) studies, VanPatten's study (1984) seemed to suggest otherwise. The findings of a study by VanPatten (1984) where fifty-nine L1 English L2 Spanish learners in the first or second semester at a university who were presented OVS type Spanish sentences that had direct or indirect object pronouns, revealed that the participants misinterpreted the object pronoun at the beginning of the sentence as the subject between 35% and 70% of the time. This indicated a strong tendency among L2 learners to process the first pronoun of OVS sentences as the subject, supporting the position of the First Noun Principle and its corresponding Universal internal processing strategy in L2 sentence processing.

Therefore, it would be interesting to see what the outcome would be with the replication of the data collection methodology. Furthermore, the finding of the current study would add to the current literature in the debate of the First Noun Principle and the L1 Transfer Principle in the field of Input Processing (IP) by comparing two groups of L2 English learners with L1s different from the ubiquitous Latin or Germanic root such as Malaysian Malay and Korean. In addition, this study tests the adequacy of the current First Noun Principle definition (VanPatten, 2007) in the event that the first noun or pronoun is not placed at the initial position of a sentence.

### Linguistic assumptions

The similarities and differences of command sentence structures and inverted reported speech sentence structure in English, Korean and Malay are illustrated through an English example sentence translated into Korean and Malay. The selection of English verbs as targeted test items in this study is based on the most basic Korean imperative sentences and the similarities found between English and Malay are discussed.

### Command sentences

With regard to the word order of command sentences, English and Malay exhibit similar word order while Korean is dissimilar from either. The different word order of command sentences in English, Korean and Malay are exemplified in the section below.

#### *English*

There are three main ways command sentences can be made in English (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 2003). They can be a VO (verb-object) type sentence, an SVO (subject-verb-object) type sentence or a VOS (verb-object-subject) type sentence. An example sentence with the verb 'bring' for each word order type is as below (as cited in Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 2003, p.827 & 829):

VO Type	:	[Verb]	[Object]	
(1)	Bring	Sam	!	
SVO Type	:	[Subject]	[Verb]	[Object]
(2)	Elise ,	bring	Sam	!
VOS Type	:	[Verb]	[Object]	[Subject]
(3)	Bring	Sam,	Elise	!

#### *Korean*

Command sentences in Korean are complex and diverse (synthesized from King, Yeon & Lee, 2002). Therefore, only the most basic and common structures taking both accusative particles (ACC), the object particle 'reul' (를) or 'eul' (을) (King & Yeon, 2000, p.105) which are of utmost relevance are discussed for the purpose of this study. A noun ending with a vowel sound (e.g. Anna) takes the object particle 'reul' (를) while a noun ending with a consonant sound (e.g. Sam) takes the object particle 'eul' (을) (from King, Yeon & Lee, 2002). In this sense, there are three main ways basic Korean command sentences are constructed, similar to English and Malay. However, in contrast to English and Malay, Korean command sentences can be an OV type sentence, an SOV type sentence or an OVS type sentence (synthesized from King, Yeon & Lee, 2002). An example sentence with the Korean verb '데려가요' (i.e. 'bring' in English) for each word order type is provided below (as cited in King, Yeon & Lee, 2002):

OV Type	:	[Object]	[ACC]	[Verb]	
(4)		쌤 을	데려가요	!	
		Sam eul	te-ryoh-ka-yeo!		
		Sam ACC	bring	!	
SOV Type	:	[Subject]	[Object]	[ACC]	[Verb]
(5)		이리스 ,	쌤 을	데려가요	!
		Elise , Sam	eul	te-ryoh-ka-yeo!	
		Elise , Sam	ACC	bring	!
OVS Type	:	[Object]	[ACC]	[Verb]	
[Object]					
(6)		쌤 을	데려가요	, 이리스	
!		Sam eul	te-ryoh-ka-yeo,	Elise !	
		Sam ACC	bring	, Elise !	

*Malay*

Similar to English, there are three main ways command sentences can be formed in Malay (see e.g. Nik Safiah Karim, Farid M. Onn, Hashim Haji Musa & Abdul Hamid Mahmood, 2002). These are the VO type sentence, SVO type sentence or VOS type sentence (see Nik Safiah Karim, Farid M. Onn, Hashim Haji Musa & Abdul Hamid Mahmood, 2002, p.429). An example sentence with the Malaysian Malay verb ‘bawa’ (‘bring’) for each word order type is provided below (as cited in Nik Safiah Karim, Farid M. Onn, Hashim Haji Musa & Abdul Hamid Mahmood, 2002, p.429):

VO Type	:	[Verb]	[Object]	
(7)		Bawa	Sam !	
		Bring	Sam !	
SVO Type	:	[Subject]	[Verb]	[Object]
(8)		Elise , bawa	Sam	!
		Elise , bring	Sam	!
VOS Type	:	[Verb]	[Object]	[Subject]
(9)		Bawa	Sam , Elise	!
		Bring	Sam , Elise	!

**Inverted reported speech sentences**

With regard to the word order of inverted reported speech sentences, English and Korean exhibit dissimilar word order while Malay is similar to English. The difference between English and Korean and similarity with Malay are further exemplified in the following section.

*English*

There are two main ways (inverted) reported speech sentences can be formed in English (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 2003). They can be an SVO (subject-verb-object) type sentence or a VSO (verb-subject-object) type sentence (see e.g. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 2003). An example sentence with the verb ‘said’ for each word order type is as below (as cited in Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 2003):

SVO Type : [Subject] [Verb] [DAT] [Object]  
 (10) Elise said to Sam

VSO Type : [Verb] [Subject] [DAT] [Object]  
 (11) Said Elise to Sam

### *Korean*

There are two ways inverted reported speech sentences can be made in Korean (see e.g. King, Yeon & Lee, 2002). They can be an SOV type sentence or an OSV type sentence. In this sense, Korean inverted reported speech is dissimilar to English and Malay. In addition, the subject and object of the sentence is not determined or identified by their placement within a sentence, but rather, by looking at the nominative particles (NOM) after a noun (King & Yeon, 2000). In the event that ‘ee’ (에) follows a noun ending with a consonant sound (e.g. Samm) and ‘ka’ (가) follows a noun ending with a vowel sound (e.g. Anna) in Korean inverted reported speech sentence, the noun then takes on the role of subject in the sentence (King, Yeon & Lee, 2002). In a similar vein, in the event that the dative particle (DAT) ‘e-ge’ (에게) appears right after the noun in a Korean inverted reported speech sentence, the noun is the object of the sentence (King, Yeon & Lee, 2002). Based on this, only the most basic and common verbs taking on the three said particles in Korean inverted reported speech sentences are discussed and used as items in the instrument for the purpose of this study. An example of a phrase with the Korean verb ‘말했어요’ (‘said’) for each word order type is provided below (as cited in King, Yeon & Lee, 2002, p.277-283):

SOV Type : [Subject][NOM] [Object] [DAT]  
 [Verb]  
 (12) 이리스 가 샘 에게 말했어요  
 Elise ka Sam e-ge mal-hess-o-yeo  
 Elise NOM Sam DAT said

OVS Type : [Object] [DAT] [Subject][NOM]  
 [Verb]  
 (13) 샘 에게 이리스 가 말했어요  
 Sam e-ge Elise ka mal-hess-o-yeo  
 Sam DAT Elise NOM said

### *Malay*

Similar to English, there are two main ways (inverted) reported speech sentences can be formed in Malay (see e.g. Nik Safiah Karim, Farid M. Onn, Hashim Haji Musa & Abdul Hamid Mahmood, 2002, p.459). They can be a SVO type sentence, or a VSO type sentence. An example sentence with the verb ‘kata’ (‘said’) for each word order type is provided below (as cited in Nik Safiah Karim, Farid M. Onn, Hashim Haji Musa & Abdul Hamid Mahmood, 2002, p.459-460):

SVO Type : [Subject] [Verb] [DAT] [Object]  
 (14) Elise kata kepada Sam  
 Elise said [DAT] Sam

VSO Type : [Verb] [Subject] [DAT] [Object]  
 (15) Kata Elise kepada Sam  
 Said Elise [DAT] Sam

### METHODOLOGY

The study investigates the comprehension of English command sentences and English inverted reported speech sentences by L1 Korean L2 English learners and L1 Malaysian Malay L2 English learners. The English command sentence was chosen because it exhibits the verb-object-subject (VOS) word order while the English inverted reported speech sentence was chosen because it exhibits a verb-subject-object (VSO) word order, both of which are available in Malay but not in Korean.

The L1 Korean L2 English learners and L1 Malaysian Malay L2 English learners formed the experimental groups of this study. L1 Korean L2 English learners were selected because Korean command sentences exhibit either subject-object-verb (SOV), object-subject-verb (OSV) or object-verb-subject (OVS) word order and Korean reported speech sentences exhibit either subject-object-verb (SOV) or object-subject-verb (OSV) word order. These are different from the English VOS type command sentence and VSO type inverted reported speech sentence that are tested in the study. L1 Malaysian Malay L2 English learners, on the other hand, were selected because Malay command sentences and inverted reported speech sentences have the same word order as their English counterparts, i.e. VOS and VSO respectively. In addition to the experimental groups, a control group of two L1 American English speakers were chosen to participate in this study to ensure that the items in the instrument, the pictorial sentence interpretation task, are valid and reliable.

The study employed the experimental quantitative ex post facto approach. The independent variable is the L1 Korean L2 English learners' and the L1 Malaysian Malay L2 English learners' English proficiency level. The dependent variable that is of interest in this study refers to the number of misinterpretations made by both learner groups out of the twenty heard and read of the target English test items in the Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task. In addition, information such as the age of the participants, the number of years the participants spent learning English and whether the participants had lived or stayed abroad in an English speaking environment for six months or more was elicited with a background questionnaire. Next, the Oxford Quick Placement Test (Allan, 2004) was administered to gauge the participants' current level of English proficiency.

### Materials

The physical materials needed for this study were a Participant's Consent Sheet, a Participant's Background Questionnaire, the Pen/Pencil and Paper Photocopiable UCLES 2001 Oxford Quick Placement Test (Allan, 2004), a Sentence Interpretation Task (with sentences and picture pairs) and a Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task Sheet. All the materials were designed by the researchers except for the Pen/Pencil Paper Photocopiable UCLES 2001 Oxford Quick Placement Test (Allan, 2004), a standardized test.

*Oxford Quick Placement Test*

The purpose of this pen and paper English Placement Test, the Oxford Quick Placement Test (Allan, 2004) was to gauge the participants' level of English proficiency. Based on their results in the test, participants were grouped into corresponding proficiency levels for the purpose of this study. In addition, participants of different ages, with prior English learning experience and with experience living abroad in English speaking environment for six months or more prior to this study were not excluded from this study since the standardized test would gauge the participants' proficiency level at the time of testing. This 30-minute test comprises 40 multiple-choice questions in Part 1 and 20 multiple-choice questions in Part 2.

*Sentence Interpretation Task*

The sentence interpretation task items (sentences) served as the auditory and visual input for participants to respond to on the pictorial sentence interpretation task sheet. The sentences were ten VOS target sentences (English command sentences), ten VSO target sentences (English inverted reported speech sentences) and twenty SVO distractor sentences (English command sentences and English reported speech sentences). The input sequences in the sentence interpretation task were randomized and recorded bi-modally (as cited in Isabelli, 2008). Similar to Tight (2012), the ratio of target sentences to distractor sentences is 1:1. In other words, the task comprised ten VOS type target sentences, ten VSO type target sentences and twenty SVO distractor sentences, all of the same length, each of ten syllables. The five verbs utilized for the English command sentences were *hug*, *insult*, *meet*, *reject* and *bring* while the five verbs utilized for the English (inverted) reported speech sentences were *said*, *explained*, *cried out*, *confessed* and *lied*. The verbs chosen for the English (inverted) reported speech sentences must be able to be followed by the dative preposition "to" before the object of the sentence. Two target sentences and two distractor sentences were formed with each verb. Examples of target sentences and distractor sentences with the verbs 'hug' and 'lie' are shown below:

## English Command Sentences:

Target Sentences for 'hug'

TS1a : Hug Barbara, Leonardo! We cheer you on!

TS2a : Hug Desmond, Helena! We support you!

Distractor Sentences for 'hug'

DS1a : Alice hugged Benny! They're compatible!

DS2a : Bennett hugged Carla! We like both of them!

## English (Inverted) Reported Speech Sentence:

Target Sentences for 'lied'

TS1b : Lied Alice to Benny, "It wasn't me!"

TS2b : Lied Bennett to Carla, "No, I didn't!"

Distractor Sentences for 'lied'

DS1b : Benny lied to Alice, "It wasn't me!"

DS2b : Carla lied to Bennet, "No, I didn't!"

The order of the sentences was randomized with no VOS type target sentences placed as the first sentence (sentence no. 1) as suggested by Isabelli (2008). The randomized sentences were recorded bi-modally, i.e. professionally audio-recorded by a British female native speaker who spoke with a variety close to Received Pronunciation (RP) accent. The recording was done in .mp3 format, with a ten-second pause between

sentences, based on the time allocated by Mandell (1999) in his grammaticality test, and each sentence was typed on a separate slide sheet using Microsoft PowerPoint. Each audio-recorded sentence was then placed onto the slide of the corresponding written sentence. The slide change was also set to automatic mode employing Mandell's (1999) ten-second pause between sentences. The bi-modal approach was preferred to a uni-modal approach because it appeals to two of the participants' senses – both ocular and auditory – enhancing its effectiveness in grammaticality judgment tasks (Murphy, 1997).

Besides a typed sentence and a corresponding .mp3 recorded sentence embedded on a slide, a pair of similar pictures are placed side by side, immediately below each sentence on each PowerPoint slide. The picture on the left is always labeled A, while the picture on the right is always labeled B. Each picture has a boy and a girl. However, the role played by the boy or the girl is not the same in both pictures. If the girl takes on the role of the 'agent' of the sentence in picture A, the boy will automatically assume the role of 'patient' of the sentence in picture A. Therefore, in picture B, their roles would be reversed. In other words, the role of the girl in picture B would now be the 'patient' of the sentence, while the role of the boy in picture B would now be the 'agent' of the sentence. The pictures were drawn by a professional artist specifically for the purpose of this study (see Appendix A for sample slides).

#### *Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task Sheet*

The Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task Sheet served as an answer sheet where participants mark their responses when they listen to and read the sentences on the PowerPoint slide by circling either A or B for each sentence. The letter A or B corresponds to one of the two pictures placed under each sentence on each PowerPoint slide.

The default language of the Pictorial Sentence Task Sheet is English. The participation of the control group (L1 American English speakers) in this study was to ensure that the instructions and items contained in the task sheet for the Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task are valid and reliable. The task instruction also served as a template for translators to translate the sentences into Korean and Malay respectively for the benefit of the experimental groups and back translated into English to ensure that the translations were accurate and consistent in meaning. The Korean and Malay versions of the instruction in the Pictorial Interpretation Sentence Task Sheet helped to facilitate the L1 Korean and L1 Malaysian Malay participants' understanding of the task.

#### **Participants**

Two L1 American English speakers served as the control group while forty-eight L1 Korean L2 English learners and nine L1 Malay Speaker L2 English learners served as the experimental groups. The control group's responses to the Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task and Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task Sheet ensured that they had appropriate, clear, unambiguous and comprehensible instructions, sentences, audio, timing and pictures.

The responses provided by the experimental groups, on the other hand, investigated which Input Processing Principle and its corresponding internal processing strategy is responsible for the comprehension of L2 sentences: First Noun Principle and its corresponding Universal Internal Processing Strategy or L1 Transfer Principle and its corresponding L1 Transfer Internal Processing Strategy.

### **Data collection and data analysis procedures**

The data collection procedure lasted sixty minutes. Both control and experimental groups were distributed a booklet with all task instructions in their L1, i.e. either English, Korean or Malay, respectively. The booklet contained a Consent Sheet on page 2, a Participant's Background Questionnaire on page 3, a Photocopiable UCLES 2001 Oxford Quick Placement Test (Allan, 2004) from page 4 to page 14 and a Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task Sheet on page 15.

They were given ten minutes to read, comprehend, ask questions and respond to all requirements and questions contained in the Participant's Consent Sheet and the Participant's Background Questionnaire. Then, ten minutes were allocated for a briefing session, question and answer session and a practice session of four sample sentences for the participants on the Pictorial Interpretation Sentence Task Sheet. After that, another ten minutes were given to the participants to listen to, read, and comprehend the forty Sentence Interpretation Task Sentences and to circle their responses, A or B, on the Pictorial Interpretation Task Sheet. For the following thirty minutes, the participants completed the Photocopiable UCLES 2001 Oxford Quick Placement Test (Allan, 2004). At the end of the session, the booklets were collected for data analysis.

The Oxford Quick Placement Test was graded first according to the marking scheme provided by the test (Allan, 2004) and the participants were grouped based on their nationality according to Common European Framework Reference for Languages (CEFRL) levels A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. A1 and A2 are elementary levels, B1 and B2 are intermediate levels and C1 and C2 are advanced levels (Allan, 2004). Then, the Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task of each participant was graded.

The total number of misinterpretations made by each participant group for each VOS target sentence (i.e. sentences 30, 28, 35, 29, 07, 22, 38, 11, 13 and 05) and for each VSO target sentence (i.e. sentences 10, 21, 37, 24, 31, 18, 06, 12, 15 and 33) in the Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task Sheet were manually calculated and individually tabulated based on the participant's nationality and their assigned level as determined by the Oxford Quick Placement Test result. The results from the Oxford Quick Placement Test for L1 English Speakers, L1 Korean L2 English learners and L1 Malaysian Malay L2 English learners were then categorized according to the respective L1 groups in frequencies and the number of misinterpretation made in the Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task by both L1 Korean L2 English learners and L1 Malaysian Malay L2 English learners were tabulated in percentages and analysed.

Two two-tailed independent T-tests were done to compare the mean of misinterpretations made on English VOS Command Sentences and English VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences by L1 Korean L2 English learners and L1 Malaysian Malay L2 English learners. The results of the T-tests were then analysed and discussed.

## **RESULTS**

### **Oxford Quick Placement Test results**

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) global scale levels were used as a benchmark to group the participants according to their current English language proficiency levels. A range of scores out of a total score of 60 in the Oxford Quick Placement Test (Allan, 2004) determines the participant's current level of English language proficiency based on the CEFRL global scale levels. The equivalence of the Quick Oxford Placement Test (Allan, 2004) scores to the CEFRL global scale levels are tabulated as follows:

Table 1. Equivalence of the Quick Oxford Placement Test scores to the CEFR global scale levels

Quick Oxford Placement Test scores (out of 60)	CEFR Global Scale levels
0 – 17	A1 (Basic User)
18 – 29	A2 (Basic User)
30 – 39	B1 (Independent User)
40 – 47	B2 (Independent User)
48 – 54	C1 (Proficient User)
55 – 60	C2 (Proficient User)

Two American English speakers sat for the Oxford Quick Placement Test. The results of the test placed one of them in CEFR Level C1 and the other in CEFR Level C2. Both CEFR Level C1 and CEFR Level C2 refer to Proficient Users (See Council of Europe, 2001, p.5). On the other hand, seven of the forty-eight L1 Korean speakers were placed in CEFR Level A1, twenty-eight in CEFR Level A2, eleven in CEFR Level B1 and two in CEFR Level B2. As shown in table 1, CEFR A1 and CEFR A2 refer to Basic Users, CEFR Level B1 and CEFR Level B2 refer to Independent Users, and CEFR Level C1 and CEFR Level C2 refer to Proficient Users (See Council of Europe, 2001, p.5). Meanwhile, one L1 Malay speaker was placed on the CEFR Level A1 and the other eight were placed in CEFR Level A2, i.e. they are basic users. Table 2 below summarized the information on the participants and their proficiency scores in the Oxford Quick Place Test and their levels in the CEFR.

Table 2. English level placement based on Oxford Quick Placement Test for L1 American English speakers, L1 Korean L2 English learners and L1 Malay L2 English learners

Quick Oxford Placement Test scores (out of 60)	CEFR levels	No. of L1 American English speakers	No. of L1 Korean L2 English learners	No. of L1 Malay L2 English learners
0 – 17	A1 (Basic User)	0	7	1
18 – 29	A2 (Basic User)	0	28	8
30 – 39	B1 (Independent User)	0	11	0
40 – 47	B2 (Independent User)	0	2	0
48 – 54	C1 (Proficient User)	1	0	0
55 – 60	C2 (Proficient User)	1	0	0
Total number of participants		2	48	9

In sum, the participants from the experimental groups in this study were largely basic users of English at CEFR level A2 with twenty-eight out of forty-eight L1 Korean L2 English learners and eight out of nine L1 Malay L2 English learners. This adds up to a

total of thirty-six participants out of fifty-seven, i.e. the total number of participants from the experimental groups, i.e. 63.16% of the total experimental group population. This is followed by eleven, all L1 Korean L2 English learners making up 19.30% of the total experimental group population being independent users of English at CEFRL level B1. Basic users of English at CEFRL level A1 make up 14.03% of the total experimental group population, with seven L1 Korean L2 English learners and one L1 Malay L2 English learners. Independent users at CEFRL level B2 had the lowest number of participants who were both L1 Korean L2 English learners, making up 3.51% of the total experimental group population of fifty-seven participants. This information is summarized in Figure 3 below.

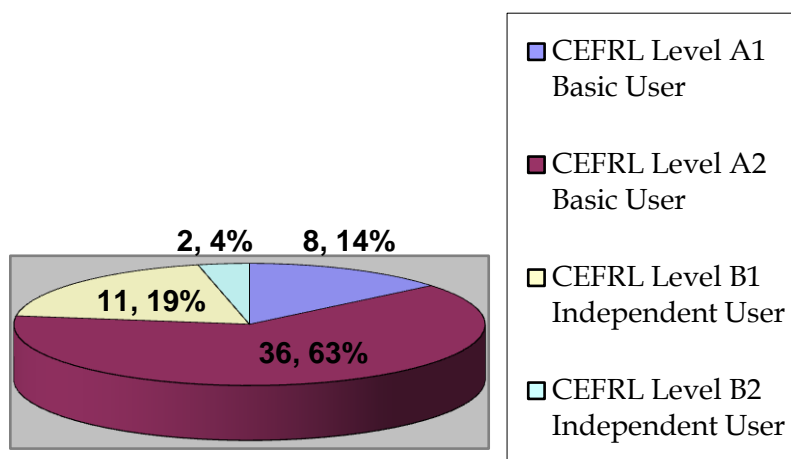


Figure 3. Number in percentages of L1 Korean L2 English learners and L1 Malay L2 English learners in current English Language proficiency CEFRL levels based on Oxford Quick Placement Test results

### Pictorial Sentences Interpretation Task results

The L1 American English speaker who was placed in the CEFRL Level C1 according to the Oxford Quick Placement Test score was the first person to attempt the Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task. She had misinterpreted only one of the VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences, i.e. sentence 21 (see Appendix B), out of the total of twenty target sentences in the Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task. The misinterpretation of sentence 21 is attributed to a pictorial labeling mistake when both characters in picture B were labeled with character names not found in Sentence 21.

After correcting the mistake in the character names for sentence 21, the other L1 American English speaker who was placed in the CEFRL Level C2 according to the Oxford Quick Placement Test result correctly interpreted all twenty target sentences – ten VOS Command Sentences and ten VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences – in the Pictorial Sentences Interpretation Task. This verifies the task as error free and ready to be used by the experimental groups.

Both of the experimental groups attempted the Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task. For the VOS Command Sentences, the forty-eight L1 Korean L2 English learners placed in CEFRL levels A1, A2, B1 and B2 misinterpreted 54.29% out of 70 responses given, 60.00% out of 280 responses given, 72.73% out of 110 responses given and 35.00% out of 20 responses given, respectively (refer to Figure 4). The nine L1 Malay L2 English learners who were placed in CEFRL levels A1 and A2, misinterpreted 60.00%

out of 10 responses and 51.25% out of 80 responses. On a similar note, in the misinterpretations of VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences, the L1 Korean L2 English learners placed in CEFR levels A1, A2, B1 and B2, scored 50.00% out of 70 responses given, 25.71% out of 280 responses given, 10.00% out of 110 responses given, and 30.00% out of 20 responses given respectively. The L1 Malay L2 English learners who were placed in CEFR levels A1 and A2, respectively, misinterpreted 30.00% out of 10 responses graded and 16.25% out of 80 responses graded for VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences (refer to Figure 4).

The findings reveal that L1 Korean L2 English learners from CEFR level A1 to CEFR level B1 tended to assign the first noun encountered in VOS Command Sentences and VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences as the subject of a sentence more than 50% of the time. The only exception to the trend of misinterpretation lies in the responses of participants placed in the CEFR level B2, whereby they were able to correctly assign the first noun encountered in VOS Command Sentences as objects and VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences as subjects at 65% and 70% of the time, respectively. This indicates that L1 Korean L2 English learners at CEFR level B2, have somewhat acquired the English word order to be able to correctly interpret the VOS Command Sentences and VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences more than 65% of the time, while L1 Korean Speakers L2 English learners below the CEFR level B2, i.e. CEFR level A1, CEFR A2, and CEFR level B1 have not acquired the English word order adequately since they made misinterpretations more than 50% of the time. Similarly, L1 Malay L2 English learners from CEFR level A1 to CEFR level A2 tended to assign the first noun encountered in VOS Command Sentences and VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences as subjects at 51.25% and 83.75% of the time, respectively.

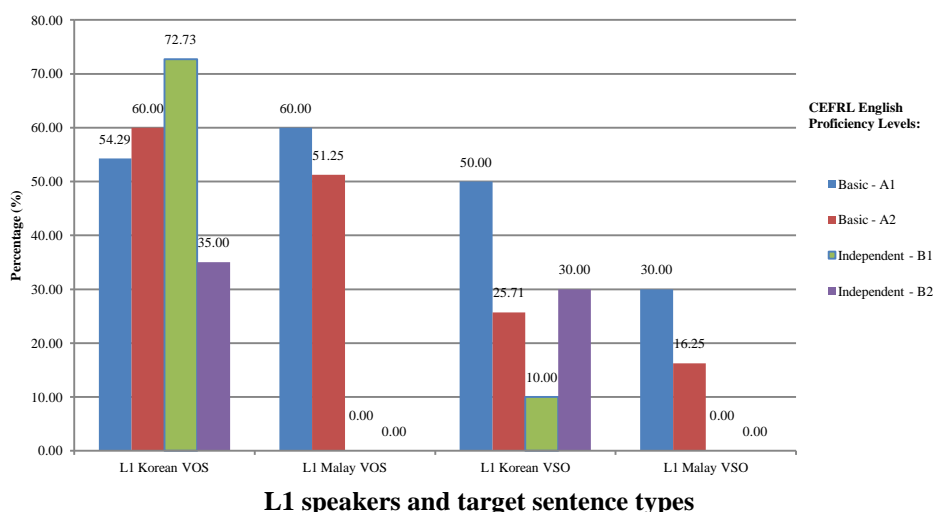


Figure 4. Percentage of misinterpreted sentences in English VOS command sentences and English VSO inverted reported speech sentences by L1 Korean L2 English learners and L1 Malaysian Malay speaker L2 English learners.

### DISCUSSION

In an attempt to gain valuable insights into the data collected through a comparison of the results of both experimental groups in this study, a general overview of the sample population of each CEFR level contributed by both groups were calculated.

From the total experimental group population of fifty-seven, only CEFR level A1 and CEFR level A2, included participants from L1 Korean and L1 Malay groups. Therefore, due to the limitation of uneven distribution of participants across all available proficiency levels, a comparison of misinterpreted VOS Command Sentences and VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences can only be done between L1 Korean L2 English learners and L1 Malay L2 English learners at the basic user level, i.e. CEFR levels A1 and A2. A comparison between the misinterpretations made by L1 Korean L2 English learners and L1 Malay L2 English learners at the basic user levels shows that L1 Malaysian Malay speakers made fewer misinterpretations as compared to the L1 Korean speakers for both VOS Command Sentences (51.25% vs. 60.00%) and VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences (16.25% vs. 25.71%) at basic user level CEFR level A2. They also made fewer misinterpretations for VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences at basic user level CEFR level A1 (30.00% vs. 50.00%) and CEFR level A2 (16.25% vs. 25.71%) compared to the L1 Korean speakers. Therefore, a two-tailed independent T-test was done to the data collected from L1 Malay and L1 Korean speakers from CEFR level A2 to determine if there is a significant difference in the misinterpretation mean of both experimental groups. This would in turn tell us the extent to which the L1 accounts for the fewer misinterpretations made by L1 Malay speakers compared to the L1 Korean speakers.

However, at basic user level CEFR level A1, L1 Malay L2 English learners made more misinterpretations compared to L1 Korean L2 English learners (60.00 vs. 54.29%) for VOS Command Sentences. This could be attributed to the fact that only one L1 Malaysian Malay speaker was placed in the basic user level CEFR level A1. Therefore, the two-tailed independent T-Test was done only on L1 Malay L2 English learners and L1 Korean L2 English learners at the basic user level of CEFR level A2.

Similar to the findings of Isabelli's (2008) and Tight's (2012) studies, the differences found in the number of misinterpretations in target sentences between L1 Malay speakers and L1 Korean speakers may be explained by L1 Transfer Strategy Position represented by the L1 Transfer Principle. In other words, the fewer misinterpretations of the L1 Malay speakers in the target sentences in the Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task compared to the L1 Korean speakers may be attributed to the transfer of L1 Malay due to its similarity to L2 English. In a similar vein, the higher number of misinterpretations made by L1 Korean speakers may also be attributed to the dissimilarities between Korean and English in the target structures. Therefore, in order to rule out the L1 transfer as a main contributing factor to L2 sentence processing, two independent T-tests were conducted to compare the misinterpretation means of English VOS Command Sentences and English VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences made by two groups of L2 English learners. No significant difference was registered in the misinterpretations of English VOS Command Sentences made by L1 Korean speakers ( $M=5.96$ ,  $SD=2.03$ ) and the L1 Malay speakers ( $M=5.13$ ,  $SD=2.36$ ) groups;  $t(34)=1.00$ ,  $p=0.33$ . No significance was also registered in the misinterpretations of English VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences made by the L1 Korean speakers ( $M=2.61$ ,  $SD=2.36$ ) and the L1 Malay speakers ( $M=1.50$ ,  $SD=1.77$ ) groups;  $t(34)=1.23$ ,  $p=0.23$ . These results suggest that since having differing first languages does not have an effect on the (mis)comprehension of English VOS Command Sentences and VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences, the L1 Transfer Processing Strategy exhibited by L1 Transfer Principle to explain for second language sentence interpretation by second language adult learners does not seem to hold true.

On the other hand, the independent T-test results seem to be in favour of the Universal Processing Strategy exhibited by the First Noun Principle when it comes to the

task of accounting for second language sentence interpretation by second language adult learners. Specifically, our results suggest that the comprehension of L2 sentences by adult L2 learners is not influenced by their L1, lending further support to VanPatten's (1984) findings that the Universal Processing Strategy Position exhibited by the First Noun Principle may be an explanation for adult L2 sentence processing. The data in Table 3 shows the results of 2 two-tailed independent T-tests comparing the means of misinterpretation made by the L1 Korean and L1 Malay speakers on English VOS Command Sentences and VSO Inverted Speech Sentences (see Appendix B for detailed results).

Table 3. Two-tailed independent t-tests for misinterpretations made in English VOS Command Sentences and English VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences by CEFR Level A2 L1 Korean speakers and L1 Malaysian Malay Speakers

Outcome	Groups						95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	L1 Korean Speakers			L1 Malaysian Malay Speakers					
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n			
English VOS Command Sentences	5.96	2.03	28	5.13	2.36	8	-0.87, 2.55	1.00	34
English VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences	2.61	2.36	28	1.50	1.77	8	-0.73, 2.94	1.23	34

\* p < 0.05

As the sample size of the L1 Malay speakers is smaller than that of the L1 Korean speakers, a further treatment had to be done to the results for them to be valid and reliable for generalization to the general population (Levine, Stephan, Krehbiel & Berenson, 2008, p.269). The L1 Malaysian Malay speakers of this study, i.e. L1 Malaysian Malay speakers from the FELDA settlement nationwide were in the age range of 18-25 years. Based on the Central Limit Theorem of Statistics regarding sample size, statisticians have found that the sampling distribution of the mean is approximately normal when the sample size is at least thirty (Levine, Stephan, Krehbiel & Berenson, 2008, p.269). In the event that the sample size is below thirty, a population correction factor treatment has to be done to find out how many more participants are needed exactly for the results to be generalized to the entire population (Levine, Stephan, Krehbiel & Berenson, 2008, p.269). However, the sample of the L1 Malaysian Malay participants in this study was unattainable. As a result, the population correction factor treatment cannot be done and is not included in this study.

Yet, in general, looking at both experimental groups separately, L1 Korean L2 English learners and L1 Malay L2 English learners across all CEFR levels misinterpreted VOS Command Sentences more than VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences. This suggests that both groups tended to wrongly assign, by default, the first noun encountered in a sentence as the subject of the sentence, supporting VanPatten's First Noun Principle (2007). As the first nouns of all VOS Command Sentences and VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences in this study appear in post-verbal position, they are not the first word of the sentences. Therefore, the result of this study validates VanPatten's (2007) current definition of the First Noun Principle in that L2 learners tend to (mis)interpret the first noun or pronoun of a sentence as the subject or doer of an action, regardless of its position in the sentence.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The findings of this study concur with VanPatten's (1985) result that the Universal Processing Strategy exhibited by the First Noun Principle accounts for second language sentence interpretation by second language adult learners, i.e. L1 Korean L2 English learners and L1 Malay L2 English learners, in this case. This study also revealed that VanPatten's (2007) current definition of the First Noun Principle does apply to all first noun or pronoun of a sentence, regardless of its position within a sentence.

The findings of this study can be more valid and reliable if it is replicated with a higher number of participants, for example at least 50 for each experimental group using the same Pictorial Sentence Interpretation Task employed in this study. In addition, this study can be replicated with adult second language learners learning a Latin or a Germanic root language, but having a first language that is neither from the Latin nor the Germanic root.

On the other hand, the number of misinterpretations calculated and tabulated made for the distractor SVO Command Sentences and SVO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences allow a comparison to be made between the misinterpretations made in the SVO type sentences, VOS type sentences and VSO type sentences. Through the identification of sentence types that cause the greatest difficulty and the least difficulty to adult second language learners, we will be able to trace the word order acquisition of adult second language learners in order to come up with effective instructional methods in the classroom.

This study has provided data from speakers of languages other than languages derived from Latin such as Spanish and Italian, and Germanic languages such as English in the quest of understanding how L2 learners comprehend L2 sentences, i.e. whether the processing of L2 sentences by L2 learners depends on the First Noun Principle of a Universal Processing Strategy (VanPatten, 2007, p.122) or the L1 Transfer Principle of the L1 Transfer Processing Strategy (VanPatten, 2007, p.122). Furthermore, it allows the current definition of the First Noun Principle to be put to the test and be refined should it fail the test. In addition, the results of this study will be able to inform us on how adult L2 learners process language at the sentence level in second language acquisition in order for instructors and learners to improve teaching and learning endeavours employed in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) or the ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom.

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## APPENDIX A

### VOS Command Target Sentence Interpretation Task Slide

6. Hug Barbara, Leonardo! We cheer you on!

Panel A: Barbara is hugging Leonardo. She says, "Congratulations! You passed the test." Leonardo is smiling.

Panel B: Barbara is hugging Leonardo. She says, "Congratulations! You passed the test." Leonardo is smiling.

### VSO Inverted Reported Speech Target Sentence Interpretation Task Slide

33. Lied Alice to Benny: "It wasn't me!"

Panel A: Alice is talking to Benny. She says, "It wasn't me!" Benny is looking at her.

Panel B: Benny is talking to Alice. He says, "It wasn't me!" Alice is looking at him.

### SVO Command Distractor Sentence Interpretation Task Slide

17. Barbara, hug Leonardo! We cheer you on!

Panel A: Barbara is hugging Leonardo. She says, "Congratulations! You passed the test." Leonardo is smiling.

Panel B: Barbara is hugging Leonardo. She says, "Congratulations! You passed the test." Leonardo is smiling.

### SVO Inverted Reported Speech Target Sentence Interpretation Task Slide

26. Benny lied to Alice: "It's wasn't me!"

Panel A: Alice is talking to Benny. She says, "It wasn't me!" Benny is looking at her.

Panel B: Benny is talking to Alice. He says, "It wasn't me!" Alice is looking at him.

**APPENDIX B**

CEFR Levels	A1			A2			B1			B2			C1			C2		
	Basic User			Independent User			Proficient User			Proficient User			Proficient User					
First Language (L1)	US English	Korean	Malay	US English	Korean	Malay	US English	Korean	Malay	US English	Korean	Malay	US English	Korean	Malay	US English	Korean	Malay
Total no. of Participants (N)	0	7	1	0	28	8	0	11	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Total no. of Responses for each target sentence group (Y=N*10)	0	70	10	0	280	80	0	110	0	0	20	0	10	0	0	10	0	0
Sentence No.	<b>VOS Command Sentences</b>																	
30	-	3	1	-	14	4	-	5	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
28	-	3	0	-	14	3	-	10	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
35	-	4	0	-	12	3	-	6	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
29	-	3	0	-	15	3	-	6	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
07	-	2	0	-	17	3	-	7	-	-	2	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
22	-	6	1	-	16	5	-	9	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
38	-	4	1	-	19	2	-	7	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
11	-	4	1	-	18	5	-	8	-	-	2	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
13	-	6	1	-	22	7	-	11	-	-	1	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
05	-	3	1	-	21	6	-	11	-	-	2	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
Total no. of Misinterpretations (X <sub>total</sub> )	-	38	6	-	168	41	-	80	-	-	7	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
Percentage (%) of Misinterpretations ( $Z_{total} = X_{total}/Y*100$ )	-	<b>54.29</b>	<b>60.00</b>	-	<b>60.00</b>	<b>51.25</b>	-	<b>72.73</b>	-	-	<b>35.00</b>	-	<b>0.00</b>	-	-	<b>0.00</b>	-	-
Sentence No.	<b>VSO Inverted Reported Speech Sentences</b>																	
10	-	2	0	-	9	2	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
21	-	5	0	-	8	1	-	0	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	0	-	-
37	-	3	1	-	5	0	-	0	-	-	1	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
24	-	3	1	-	4	3	-	0	-	-	1	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
31	-	3	0	-	7	2	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
18	-	5	0	-	6	1	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
06	-	6	0	-	10	2	-	11	-	-	1	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
12	-	3	0	-	6	0	-	0	-	-	1	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
15	-	3	0	-	9	2	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
33	-	2	1	-	9	0	-	0	-	-	1	-	0	-	-	0	-	-
Total no. of Misinterpretation (X <sub>total</sub> )	-	35	3	-	72	13	-	11	-	-	6	-	1	-	-	0	-	-
Percentage (%) of Misinterpretations ( $Z_{total} = X_{total}/Y*100$ )	-	<b>50.00</b>	<b>30.00</b>	-	<b>25.71</b>	<b>16.25</b>	-	<b>10.00</b>	-	-	<b>30.00</b>	-	<b>10.00</b>	-	-	<b>0.00</b>	-	-

## EFFECTS OF TRAUMA IN DON DELILLO'S *POINT OMEGA*

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### ABSTRACT

Trauma is an unacceptable pain in the psyche of people who went through terrible events in their lives, and causes feelings of shame, humiliation, or guilt. In response to these feelings, people who experienced trauma usually embark on the tendency to dissociate and repress these emotions. On a continual basis, this dissociation and repression lead them to have unresolved conflicts within themselves. This study aims to investigate how trauma led to various kinds of death drive in Don DeLillo's *Point Omega*. It is found that the characters of the novel experienced different kinds of trauma such as war, dysfunctional relationships, and failure from separation, and then developed different kinds of death drive including psychological self-destructive, physical self-destructive, psychological destructive and physical destructive which later affected their personalities.

Keywords: death drive, psychoanalysis, trauma

### INTRODUCTION

*Point Omega* (2010) written by Don DeLillo is firstly narrated (because later on, it is narrated from the point of view of Jim Finley) from the point of view of an unknown man against a wall in the sixth floor of an art museum gallery where the *24 Hour Psycho* was projected to a screen. It is also on that day that Jim Finley, an amateur film-maker went for his second meeting with Richard Elster, who was a scholar and a retired war-planner at the Pentagon. The next day, which is written in the last part of the book 'Anonymity 2', Elster's daughter, Jessie, a jobless emotionally-detached young woman, visited the museum after hearing about it from her father the night before and talked to the man against the wall, which later on is suggested as possibly bearing the name of Dennis. The story is then forwarded to a few weeks later when Jim Finley was talking to Elster about issues that later on will be highlighted in this paper at a house in a desert. Jim went there to stay with him hoping to get his chance on filming him while Elster was in need of someone to talk to. They were later joined by Jessie who was sent there by her mother, Galina (Elster's ex-wife), to test her 'attachment' to someone who she called Dennis. The story reached its' peak when Jessie went missing with possibility of suicide. After a while, Jim and Elster went back to New York, letting the story end with an unknown phone call from an unknown person and the remaining unknown mystery as to the disappearance of Jessie.

There are six characters altogether in the novel. The man against the wall, Richard Elster, Jim Finley, Jessica (Jessie) Elster, Galina, and Dennis X. The theme of trauma and death drive will be further looked into through the perceptions and conversations of the characters in the story. There are, however, only four characters who are significant to the study.

Firstly, it is Richard Elster, who formerly worked for the Pentagon in planning the war on Iraq. He felt guilty from the deaths of the people throughout the war. He stated that “He’d exchanged all that for space and time” (DeLillo, 2010, p.17). Secondly, Jim Finley, who wished to film Elster “about his time in government, in the blat and stammer of Iraq” (DeLillo, 2010, p.18). He felt curious about the war and mostly about Elster’s feelings of war experience. Hereby, it could mean that he was curious about the impact of the war on the people who created it. Next comes Jessie who was emotionally detached and as Elster told Jim: “she wasn’t a child who needed imaginary friends. She was imaginary to herself” (DeLillo, 2010, p.48). This means she did not feel that she was real even to herself. And lastly, the man against the wall, Dennis X, who was fascinated with the slow motion version of the movie *Psycho* shown in an art gallery. He said that “the original movie was fiction, this was real” (DeLillo, 2010, p.14).

The concepts of *trauma* and *death drive* are strongly instigated throughout the story. *Trauma* originates from ancient Greek term for ‘wound’ and has made its way into common usage in psychology sense as an event of aggression and unexpectedness that later brings about disorganization of the psyche (Mijolla, 2005) whereby it can be indicated as the psychological wound on someone. According to Hashim and Babae (2015), “Undoubtedly the nature of human psyche is output of a mixture of diverse experiences a human tries out through his/her life” (p.2). Trauma usually occurs as an emotional response during terrible events such as death, accident, rape, or natural disasters that cause the victim to be dissociated, repressed, and ‘revictimized’ due to the unbearable or unacceptable psychological pain. As stated by Campbell (2006),

Trauma is an overwhelming experience that cannot be integrated into the memory system, remaining in the psyche as a literal and repetitive event, one that repeats over and over again, because it cannot be spoken or represented. Thus the traumatic event remains unassimilated as a story in someone’s life (p.149).

One of the forms of defense that the victims of trauma experience is the *death drive* (also known as *death instinct* and *thanatos*) that is when the victims find death as their protection from pain. Death instinct or death drive is the force that makes individuals long for an inorganic state and since it is connected to sex drive or life instinct (Eros) with its’ binding and unbinding, it produces the state of sadism and masochism in individuals (Mijolla, 2005). Therefore, they become fascinated with death itself since death is the ultimate abandonment. Something as terrifying as death then is turned into a fascination and libido as a defense mechanism:

Defence mechanisms arise in order to protect the ego from too much anxiety. Without them, anxiety can become a threat to mental health. Defence mechanisms are used unconsciously and, within reason, they are healthy. However, they can easily become too forceful and damaging, requiring much mental effort to sustain them, and masking issues that really need to be addressed. In this case they become merely a strategy for hiding away from anxiety (Snowden, 2013, p.84).

In order to be clear as to how the characters of the novel develop their sense of defense mechanisms by producing *death drive* from their traumatic experiences, it is more apparent to present the process in the form of a diagram as in Figure 1.

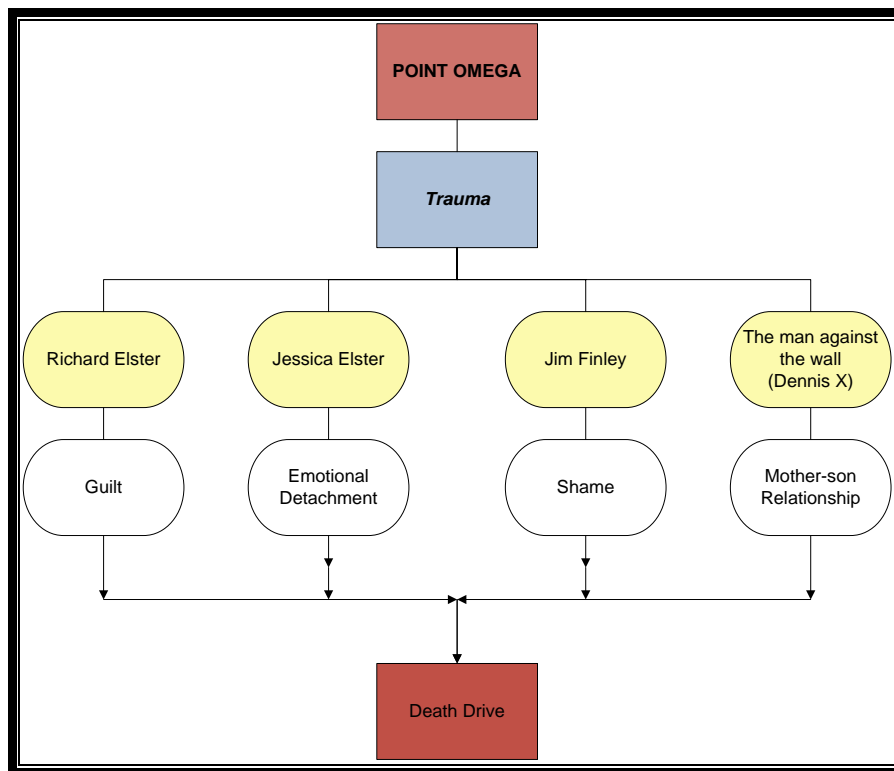


Figure 1. Death drive as the effect of trauma

Based on Figure 1, different characters reacted to trauma in different ways. This leads them to become fascinated by death. Each important character in this novel was proven to have this *death drive* but it is unique for each of them. Richard Elster experienced trauma in the terms of guilt for his direct involvement in the planning of war in Iraq that caused lots of death. Meanwhile, his daughter, Jessie, experienced trauma with her emotional detachment by the separation from her reality towards herself and towards her surroundings. Jim Finley, on the other hand, experienced trauma from shame of separating with his wife. Finally, Dennis X experienced traumatic relationship with his mother. Hereby, how death drive works in the characters as their responses to various traumatic reasons in the story will be further explored and explained as the aim of the current study.

### Trauma and death drive

In *Point Omega*, the characters are dwelled in deep thoughts and conversations which strengthen the reason to study the novel through psychoanalytical perspectives. Firstly, it is important to look into the basic part of psychoanalysis where Sigmund Freud separated the human psyche into three psychodynamic parts. The first part is called 'Id' as the unconscious part of the psyche that responds mostly to innate libido. The second part is 'Ego' as the conscious psyche. The third part is 'Superego' as a moral guardian for the psyche.

Secondly, it is crucial to highlight the importance of ego-defense mechanism. In relation to the three parts of the human's psyche, this defense mechanism explains how trauma and death drive are inseparable. Since the 'Id' is constantly demanding 'Ego' to

respond towards unacceptable feelings and desires, Freud came up with defense mechanism as the method for the psyche or the 'Superego' trying to cope with these unacceptable feelings and desires to defend the reaction of 'Ego'. In other words, it explains how the conscious psyche (Ego) performs significant transformations on unconscious material (Id). Hereby, the method of defense mechanism explains how the 'Id', 'Ego', and 'Superego' respond to trauma and later on, produce death drive.

The victims of trauma suffer from continuous repetition of their traumatic experiences through dreams or simply in their heads and they are unable to get over the experience to move forward. This leads them to 'revictimize' others or themselves since it makes the traumatic experiences less unacceptable and diminishes their feelings of shame or guilt. According to Snowden (2013):

For a long time Freud was puzzled by the tendency for patients to go on repeating and reliving unpleasant experiences. He called this 'repetition compulsion'. He found that it happens after a sudden and unexpected shock. ... This phenomenon eventually led Freud to suggest that another instinct was at work – Thanatos, or the death instinct ... When Thanatos is directed towards the self it produces self-destructive behaviour, such as addictions, in which the person is 'dicing with death'. Turned outwards, it results in aggressive behaviour (p.88-89).

In *Point Omega*, the characters went through dissociation, repression, guilt, and shame. All of those are related to trauma. According to Taghizadeh and Ghadari (2015), trauma in literary work is produced as the result of an occurrence of characters' post-traumatic events (p.132). This is because the characters tend to substitute their painful experience of trauma with a more acceptable option (Wood, 2014, p.21). One thing that all the characters shared in the novel is that by dealing with their different types of traumas, they built a strong sense of death drive as a defense mechanism. According to Campbell (2006):

For Freud the early hypnotic mimesis, the unconscious tie to the mother, is before division into ego and object; it is an arena of binding and unbinding, of love and hate, with the other. When the ego's protective shield is breached traumatically, there is a mimetic dissolution of the ego, which lapses into unconsciousness. At the same time, life and death drives become uncoupled and the death drive becomes radically unbound... As Freud's texts on the death drive reveal, the instinctual life and death drives are not separate: binding and unbinding are inseparable opposites (p.136).

Thus, death drive, for Freud, is quite the opposite to sex drive. In every person's 'Id', there is a desire towards libido, or sex drive, and it is all about finding pleasure, happiness, and everything that makes them feel alive. The traumatic events leading to these libido desires seem unachievable due to guilt, shame, and refusal to feel. Therefore, after a compromised formation with the 'Superego', the 'Ego' tends to come up with an opposite reaction towards what the 'Id' originally desires. The libido still works as a pleasure-seeking tendency but this time, it is the pleasure of inflicting pain or feeling pain since they find it is more attractive and acceptable. In this regard, Campbell (2006) noted that:

Freud poses the problem of primal repetition and compulsion. Acknowledging that traumatic dreams were not necessarily linked to the transformation of desire and wish fulfillment, Freud started to explore the defence of the ego in relation to the role of traumatic anxiety. 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' is where Freud theorises the economic role of repetition as a death drive beyond the pleasure principle. This is where large amount of stimulus threaten to breach the ego's protective shield. The ego's attempts to master and bind this stimulus also fail, so leading to a radical unbinding or dissolution of the ego as a death drive (p.115).

Thus, there are several effects on the birth of the death drive in the 'Ego' of the victims who went through trauma. The effects of death drive involve psychologically or physically self-destructive tendencies, and the tendency to destroy others. As stated by Tyson (2006):

In suggesting that human beings have a death drive, Freud's attempt was to account for the alarming degree of self-destructive behavior he saw both in individuals, who seemed bent on destroying themselves psychologically if not physically, and in whole nations, whose constant wars and internal conflicts could be viewed as little other than a form of mass suicide. He concluded that there must be something in our biological makeup as a species to explain this death work, this psychological and physical self-destruction (p.22).

In short, in *Point Omega*, as a defense mechanism to their traumatic experiences, the characters began to become fascinated with death. They found that death is attractive and took it as their libido. Some of these characters destroyed themselves and others psychologically rather than physically. However, there is an open possibility that one of the characters moved to become physically self-destructive, while another one moved with a possibility of hurting others physically.

### A REVIEW OF PAST STUDIES

*Point Omega* received many critiques due to the fragmented novel's worth of messages and issues. It is necessary, then, to look at what the previous studies discussed on the novel. There are a few issues to be noted in *Point Omega* and they include the issue of 'temporality', 'terror', 'inward turn', and 'visuality'.

According to Vermeulen (2014), *Point Omega* ventured into the relationship between the human's consciousness and the spatiotemporal dimensions that most people tend to neglect (p.2). Thus, the novel itself raises the question of temporality in human's life. Vermeulen (2014) also stated that *Point Omega* took notice of the conflict between different temporalities in human's life especially through the relationship between human and art that was constantly instigated throughout the novel. It makes people think beyond the temporality in human's life rather than just to imagine about it (p.8). Thus, the novel provokes people to think outside of the box about the temporality in human's life and that this life lapses between times.

De Marco (2012) suggested that there are three types of 'terror' that were portrayed in the novel. According to him, Elster retreated to the desert to escape his two years of living in making of the war and especially from the memory of the conflict. Moreover, the news that showed dead and wounded people on TV reminded him of the

terror that he had helped make as the war in Iraq (p.20). Thus, the first type is the terror of a man who made the war. Furthermore, De Marco (2012) explained that Jim wanted to make a film on war to acknowledge Elster's guilt in supporting the war that had caused death and destructions (p.21-22). Thus, the second type of terror is the terror of a man who is curious about the making and effect of the war. Later on, De Marco (2012) stated that losing a loved one through disappearance or death is seen as the central concern in the novel (p.26). Therefore, the last type of terror is the terror of loss. Generally, the novel brings an issue of terror through losing a loved one, by making a war, and also curiosity of the war.

Other than that, the novel suggested about the 'inward turn' of human's life. According to Whelan (2011), all of the characters in DeLillo's novels went through an 'inward turn' in their lives after going through extreme trauma or pain in accordance to the major events such as the disappearance of Elster's daughter in *Point Omega* (p.38). Hereby, it means that the major events in the novel had taken the characters to travel through an 'inward turn' in their lives. This is because, according to Whelan (2011), the characters bear the pain of love whereby in *Point Omega*, Elster lost his daughter and got depressed that he no longer thought of his mortality or talked about the war and the non-existing time in the desert (p.39). This leads the character to move backwards into their lives. As Whelan (2011) stated; their conversation about the war, timelessness, and life do not mean anything significant after the disappearance of Elster's daughter since the final evolution to human consciousness is the pain of love that only happen on an individualized level (p.40). Thus, what they found out, learnt, or discussed about have no significant meaning anymore as they are now back to zero, back to the beginning of not having anything in the first place.

'Visuality' is a theme that has been considered in the novel. According to Banash (2015); "the cinematic images produce the consciousness of the killer" (p.13). The killer is the man who is obsessed with watching the art installation. Furthermore, in relation to the visual of the art, the novel suggested that the man against the wall is the killer of Jessie and the one who caused her disappearance (Banash, 2015, p.12).

### **DEATH DRIVES IN *POINT OMEGA***

In analyzing the novel, four kinds of death drive are taken into consideration; psychological self-destructive death drive, physical self-destructive death drive, psychological destructive death drive to others, and also physical destructive death drive to others. To look at how these death drives are embedded in the novel, the actions and conversations of the characters are noted.

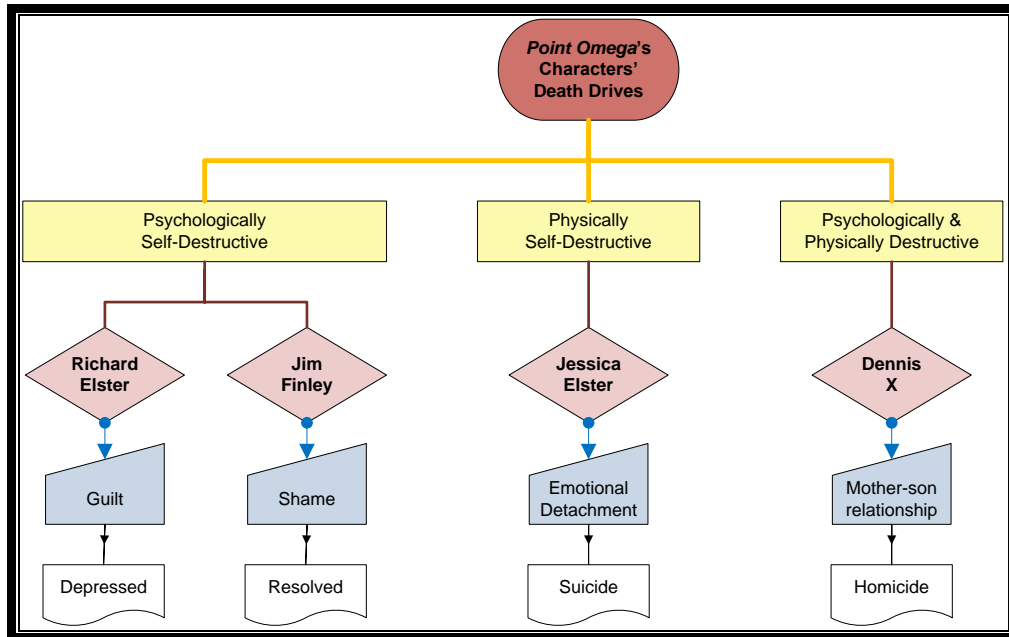


Figure 2. The work of death drives in the main characters

As depicted in Figure 2, death drive works differently to each character. The psychological self-destructive death drive was found in the characters of Richard Elster and Jim Finley. Richard Elster suffered guilt from the trauma of making the war in Iraq and losing his daughter while Jim Finley suffered shame from the trauma of separating with his wife. Next, the physical self-destructive death drive was seen in the character of Jessica Elster. She possibly committed suicide from her emotional detachment. Then, for the last death drive, the physical and psychological destructive to others are proven to exist in the character of Dennis X, the man against the wall. He went through dissociation from his homicidal tendency that could have come from a bad relationship with his mother. This various works of death drive are proven in the analysis of the texts from the novel.

Firstly, Richard Elster was found to have psychologically self-destructive death drive because of his guilt. He felt guilty because of being a part of the making of the war and also for the disappearance of his daughter. Due to this guilt, he became fascinated towards death and at the same time, towards immortality. He, however, failed to deal with his guilt from making the war and losing his daughter that it led him to depression. Richard Elster felt guilty of his role in planning the war in Iraq. This is proven through many of his conversations but one that can strongly indicate this was when he mentioned that he would exchange all his time while he was planning the war and living in the city with 'time and space'; "News and Traffic. Sports and Weather. These were his acid terms for the life he'd left behind, more than two years of living with the tight minds that made the war. He'd exchanged all that for space and time" (DeLillo, 2010, p.17). Thus, it means that he found the life he led before as an unpleasant memory:

I talked to Elster about an essay he'd written a few years earlier, called "Renditions." It appeared in a scholarly journal and soon began to stir criticism from the left. This may have been his intention but all I could find in those pages was an implied challenge to figure out what the point was.

The first sentence was, "A government is a criminal enterprise." (DeLillo, 2010, p.25).

By planning the war in Pentagon, he believed that he had helped a 'criminal enterprise'. Because of this, he felt guilty. This is proven when he accused Jim of wanting to make the film to get a 'public confession' from him:

"What you want, my friend, whether you know it or not, is a public confession."..."A deathbed conversion. This is what you want. The foolishness, the vanity of the intellectual. The blind vanity, the worship of power. Forgive me, absolve me."..."You want to film a man breaking down," he said (DeLillo, 2010, p.37).

Elster thought of his intellectual help of making the war as a foolish act and it broke him down. Due to the guilt he felt from his trauma of making the war, Elster began to become fascinated with death.

Richard Elster's fascination of death is found in several of his conversations with Jim. Elster seemed to suggest that time in the desert goes slower than time in the city:

The house is mine now and it's rotting away but let it. Time slows down when I'm here. Time becomes blind. I feel the landscape more than see it. I never know what day it is. I never know if a minute has passed or an hour. I don't get old here (DeLillo, 2010, p.20).

This indicates how much Elster wished to live in the moment and for time to slow down before he dies. Here, it seems that he was trying to imply that he wanted time to slow down so that he could still enjoy life before it meets the end. He realized that every being will go through death one day and he was fascinated with the idea that every human being would go back to an inorganic state; "... Back now to inorganic matter. This is what we want. We want to be stones in a field" (DeLillo, 2010, p.37). Other than soon being left as stones in a field, Elster regarded himself as a loose piece of dead skin:

Before I fell asleep, eventually, ... I realize I'm the same skinny kid, my life shadowed by his presence, won't step on cracks on the sidewalk, not as a superstition but as a test, a discipline, still do it. What else? Bites the skin off the edge of his thumbnail, always the right thumb, still do it, loose piece of dead skin, that's how I know who I am (DeLillo, 2010, p.30).

Here, it looks as if Elster was trying to imply that soon he would be extinct; "Extinction was a current theme of his. The landscape inspired themes. Spaciousness and claustrophobia. This would become a theme" (DeLillo, 2010, p.17). Another indicator of his fascination of death would be the fact that he could not stand watching too much violence in the news:

He said, "I hate violence. I fear the thought of it, won't watch violent movies, turn away from news reports on television that show dead or wounded people. I had a fight, I was a kid, I went into spasms," he said. "Violence freezes my blood." (DeLillo, 2010, p.35).

This is because, since death is fascinating to him, he refused to see much of it. According to Tyson (2006), death is inviting for people who are fascinated with death so they turn their head away from watching too much death as inside of them. There are already too much desires for death (p.24).

However, when Elster's daughter went missing with the possibility of suicide, the topic of time, death, and extinction no longer matter to him. He became depressed and could not resolve his trauma. Rather than thinking that the desert as his escape and 'spiritual retreat', he now started to see the desert as some kind of prison that kept him trapped:

He referred to her now as Jessica, the real name, the birth name. He spoke in fragments, opening and closing his hand. I could watch him being driven insistently inward. The desert was clairvoyant, this is what he'd always believed, that the landscape unravels and reveals, it knows future as well as past. But now it made him feel enclosed and I understood this, hemmed in, pressed tight. We stood outside and felt the desert bearing in (DeLillo, 2010, p.57).

He does not felt that time was getting older there anymore. Now, he felt like he was smothered by the desert and he became mentally unstable. He started to see things that were not there:

He began to see things out of the corner of his eye, the right eye. He'd walk into a room and catch a glimpse of something, a color, a movement. When he turned his head, nothing.... He turned and looked. Someone there but then she wasn't (DeLillo, 2010, p.56).

This means that now the disappearance of Jessie became a new kind of trauma in his life and he refused to face the reality. So he made his own reality as he unconsciously saw things that do not exist. He was also cut out from the world and beginning to experience an emotional detachment:

But there was nearly no one to talk to now. He seemed beyond memory and its skein of regret, a man drawn down to sparest outline, weightless... In the sound of my words I thought I heard a flimsy strategy for returning him to the world (DeLillo, 2010, p.62).

At the end of the novel, Elster did not come to terms with his traumatic experience, both from making the war and also losing his daughter. Therefore, he was stuck in the experience and suffered from depression.

Jim Finley, on the other hand, was also seen to have psychologically self-destructive death drive. This started with his feelings of shame from his separation from his wife. It showed that he was ashamed of this matter when he spoke about it with Elster:

"You have a life back there."

"A life. That may be too strong a word."

He sat head back, eyes shut, face to the sun. "You're not married, am I right?"

"Separated. We separated," I said (DeLillo, 2010, p.20).

He mentioned 'life' as a strong word. His film was his life now just as his wife said to him; "'Film, film, film. If you were any more intense, you'd be a black hole. A singularity," she said. "No light escapes."' (DeLillo, 2010, p.22). What his wife said gave significance to the life of Jim Finley who told his wife everything:

In the kitchen he said, "I know about your marriage. You had the kind of marriage where you tell each other everything. You told her everything. ... It's the worst thing you can do in a marriage. Tell her everything you feel, tell her everything you do. That's why she thinks you're crazy." (DeLillo, 2010, p.46).

When Jim told his wife everything about himself, losing her made him felt like he had no one else and he was ashamed of it since she knew everything about him. Because of this shameful feeling, he began to become fascinated with his film to escape the unpleasant emotion.

Jim Finley's fascination with film was seen in one instance where he talked about an idea of a film that remained as a mere idea:

I'd done one film only, an idea for a film, some people said. I did it, I finished it, people saw it but what did they see? An idea, they said, that remains an idea.

... I found something religious in it, maybe I was the only one, religious, rapturous, a man transported (DeLillo, 2010, p.21).

Jim Finley wanted to make a film about war and this was a sign of his fascination of death. He found something religious in making the film since the film will be about a man who made the war, or in other words, a man who created death itself:

A man melting into the war. A man who still believes in the righteousness of the war, his war. How would he look and sound on film, in a theater, on a screen anywhere, talking about a haiku war? Had I thought about this? I'd thought about the wall, the color and texture of the wall, and I'd thought about the man's face, the features that were strong but also collapsible in the show of whatever cruel truths might come spilling into his eyes, and then I thought about Jerry Lewis in close-up in 1952, Jerry ripping off his tie as he sang some weepy Broadway ballad (DeLillo, 2010, p.37).

Jim Finley was fascinated with the idea of a man who will spill the cruel truths about the war, death, and destruction like a dramatic scene in a Broadway drama. His

fascination with death through his obsession with the film was also obvious as he sat through credits after watching a film as if he 'didn't want it to end':

I used to sit through the credits, all of them, when I went to the movies. It was a practice that worked against intuition and common sense. ... I never left my seat until the full run of names and titles was completed. ... I felt compelled to sit and read. There was a sense that I was capitulating to some moral failing. ... It was the decline and fall, a spectacle of excess nearly equal to the movie itself, but I didn't want it to end (DeLillo, 2010, p.44).

Here, Jim also felt some sort of 'moral failing'. This added to the shame that he had previously suffered from. Out of his shame and fascination of death, he began to have sexual desires towards Jessie, Elster's daughter.

Since it helped to curb some of his unpleasant feelings within himself, Jim Finley began to sexually thought and excited over Jessie:

wide awake, can't sleep, both of us, and she is lying on her back, legs apart, and I am sitting up and smoking although I haven't had a cigarette in five years, and she is wearing whatever she wears when she goes to bed, T-shirt to the thighs (DeLillo, 2010, p.50).

It is clear here that Jim Finley was imagining himself getting involved with Jessie sexually. He was even drifted to a thought of how Jessie would sleep at night:

I thought of Jessie sleeping. She would close her eyes and disappear, this was one of her gifts, I thought, she drops into immediate sleep. Every night the same. She sleeps on her side, curled up, embryonic, barely breathing (DeLillo, 2010, p.49).

This shows that in his mind, he longed for a connection with Jessie. He wanted to see her sleeping and desired to be connected with her. It even came to a sense that he had sexual desires with Jessie. This was proven when right after the disappearance of Jessie he sexually fantasized himself with her:

That night I could not sleep. I fell into reveries one after another. The woman in the other room, on the other side of the wall, sometimes Jessie, other times not clearly and simply her, and then Jessie and I in her room, in her bed, weaving through each other, turning and arching sort of sealike, wavelike, some impossible nightlong moment of transparent sex. Her eyes are closed, face unfrozen, she is Jessie at the same time that she is too expressive to be her. She seems to be drifting outside herself even when I bring her into me. I'm there and aroused but barely see myself as I stand at the open door watching us both (DeLillo, 2010, p.61).

Jim developed his sexual desires for Jessie and also his fascination of death to curb his shameful traumatic experience of separating from his wife. The sexual fantasies and his obsession over the film about war (including death and destruction) became his escape. However, at the end of the novel, Jim Finley came to term with his traumatic experience by being able to move on. This was shown when he was no longer fascinated

with the film and was now able to leave the desert; “The story was here, not in Iraq or in Washington, and we were leaving it behind and taking it with us, both” (DeLillo, 2010, p.63). Thus, unlike Elster, Jim resolved his traumatic experience and was able to move on. However, opposing to the experiences, unresolved conflicts, or resolutions within Richard Elster and Jim Finley, Jessica Elster is a character who went through a different kind of death drives in her.

Jessica Elster experienced psychological and also physical self-destructive death drives. She separated herself as an independent ‘object’ when she was a child and it led her to become separated from reality:

When she was a child, he said,... She had to touch her arm or face to know who she was. Happened rarely but happened, he said. She'd put her hand to her face. This is Jessica. Her body was not there until she touched it. She doesn't remember this now, she was small, doctors, tests, her mother would pinch her, barest response. She wasn't a child who needed imaginary friends. She was imaginary to herself (DeLillo, 2010, p.48).

Because of this failure, she was slow to respond to other ‘objects’ or realities around her;

She said she got confused when she stepped onto an escalator that wasn't functioning. ... She stepped onto an up escalator that wasn't moving and she couldn't adjust to this, she had to self-consciously climb the steps and it was difficult because she kept expecting the steps to move and she'd sort of half walk but not seem to be going anywhere because the steps weren't moving (DeLillo, 2010, p.29).

Jessie also experienced confusion of what was real by not being able to command her body parts simultaneously; “She didn't drive a car because she couldn't do commands with her hands and feet” (DeLillo, 2010, p.29). This means that she had developed a narcissistic wound that made her emotionally detached from the people and things.

Jessie’s emotional detachment was sound in the novel through many of her actions that were nonchalant. First of all, even her father regarded her as ‘otherworldly’; “Significant news, someone else, a face and voice, called Jessie, he said, an exceptional mind, otherworldly” (DeLillo, 2010, p.27). This indicates that Jessie was out of this world. She was like living in her own world that did not co-exist with the real world. Then, Jim saw her as someone who was unaware of her surroundings and she seemed ‘deadened to anything’:

Other times she seemed deadened to anything that might bring a response. Her look had an abridged quality, it wasn't reaching the wall or window. I found it disturbing to watch her, knowing that she didn't feel watched. Where was she? She wasn't lost in thought or memory, wasn't gauging the course of the next hour or minute. She was missing, fixed tightly within (DeLillo, 2010, p.42).

Here, Jessie appeared to be ‘missing’ from the world. She was physically present, but her mind was absent despite of how much her father sometimes tried to grab her back into the reality. Another occasion that showed her indifference was the time when Jim touched her hand but she was not responsive:

I reached over and took her hand, not sure why. ... She let me do it, giving no sign that she'd noticed. It was part of her asymmetry, the limp hand, blank face, and it did not necessarily make me think the moment might be extended to include other gestures, more intimate (DeLillo, 2010, p.48).

It was as if she did not notice that Jim was holding her hand. Or more precisely, she was indifferent to the touch. The touch, the look, and the world did not mean anything to her. She was separated from her reality and was emotionally detached to everything. Due to this trauma of her failure from separating herself as an independent identity, she slowly developed a fascination of death in her.

Her fascination of death was seen through her conversation with the man against the wall (Dennis) when she talked about her desire for death; "I want to die after a long traditional illness. What about you?" (DeLillo, 2010, p.67). In fact, Jessie had put herself to a thought of death and how she was going to die. When she said that she would like to 'die after a long traditional illness', this means that she was okay about feeling pain for a long time as long as she will still die in the end. This was why she also fancied the idea of 'slowness':

She told him she was standing a million miles outside the fact of whatever's happening on the screen. She liked that. She told him she liked the idea of slowness in general. So many things go so fast, she said. We need time to lose interest in things (DeLillo, 2010, p.68).

This means that she wanted a slow death so that she could have time to 'lose interest'. Nonetheless, it still indicates that she had an interest in death. This was possibly why she ended her own life. Though it was not written in the novel whether she had really committed suicide since all that they knew was that she had gone; "When we got back to the house she was gone" (DeLillo, 2010, p.51). But she was emotionally detached and carried things around as if every place she went to would only be a short stop for her:

We shared a bathroom, she and I, but she rarely seemed to be in there. A small airline kit, the only trace of her presence, was tucked into a corner of the windowsill. She kept soap and towels in her bedroom.

She was sylphlike, her element was air. She gave the impression that nothing about this place was different from any other, this south and west, latitude and longitude. She moved through places in a soft glide, feeling the same things everywhere, this is what there was, the space within (DeLillo, 2010, p.34).

She travelled light. It was as if she was not planning on staying. This was a sign that she was contemplating suicide since a desert was also a place where people tend to go to end their life; "I called the park rangers and the sheriff. I could not forget what the sheriff had said. People come to the desert to commit suicide. ... Her airline kit was still in the bathroom we'd shared" (DeLillo, p.54). Furthermore, a knife 'free of blood' was found; "Searchers had found a knife in a deep ravine not far from an expanse of land called the Impact Area, entry prohibited, a former bombing range littered with unexploded shells. Blade seemed free of blood, the ranger had said" (DeLillo, 2010, p.59). With the discovery of the knife, there was a possibility that Jessie indeed had committed suicide but it also opened another possibility that she was murdered or

kidnapped. As to someone who would probably kidnapped or murdered her, it is important to look at the last significant character in the novel, Dennis X, who is also assumed to be the man against the wall in the art museum.

Dennis X had psychologically and physically destructive or aggressive death drives. This was firstly seen in his fascination of *24-Hour Psycho* in the art installation. He mostly talked about two scenes from the installation; the shower scene and the scene where the detective was falling down the stairs. He was obsessed with the shower scene as he kept anticipating on counting the curtain rings:

He thought he might want to time the shower scene... curtain rings, that's what he recalled most clearly, the rings on the shower curtain spinning on the rod when the curtain is torn loose, a moment lost at normal speed, four rings spinning slowly over the fallen figure of Janet Leigh, a stray poem above the hellish death, and then the bloody water curling and cresting at the shower drain, minute by minute, and eventually swirling down. He was eager to watch again. He wanted to count the curtain rings, maybe four, possibly five or more or less (DeLillo, 2010, p.2).

Dennis X enjoyed watching death in general. Blood and death fascinated him. Another scene that caught his attention was when the wounded detective was falling down the stairs; "the fall down the stairs, still a long way off, maybe hours yet before the private detective, Arbogast, goes backwards down the stairs, face badly slashed, eyes wide, arms windmilling, ...Arbogast on the stairs, falling forever" (DeLillo, 2010, p.13). He enjoyed looking at the people in their bloody dying moments and it mesmerized him even more than when they were dying in slow motion:

It takes close attention to see what is happening in front of you. It takes work, pious effort, to see what you are looking at. He was mesmerized by this, the depths that were possible in the slowing of motion, the things to see, the depths of things so easy to miss in the shallow habit of seeing (DeLillo, 2010, p.14).

This fascination with death led him to have aggressive and violent thoughts. The first time he showed this symptom of aggressive thought was when he imagined himself pinning Jessie to the wall:

He imagined turning and pinning her to the wall with the room emptied out except for the guard who is looking straight ahead, nowhere, motionless, the film still running, the woman pinned, also motionless, watching the film over his shoulder (DeLillo, 2010, p.70).

Dennis also imagined that the guard would shoot himself in the head in the art museum:

There is only him and the guard now. He imagines all motion stopping on the screen, the image beginning to shudder and fade. He imagines the guard removing the sidearm from his holster and shooting himself in the head. Then the screening ends, the museum closes down, he is alone in the dark room with the body of the guard (DeLillo, 2010, p.72).

This shows that Dennis had homicidal tendency. Moreover, by the end of the novel, he began to dissociate himself and saw himself as Norman Bates, the character of the *24-Hour Psycho*. This happened when Norman Bates, the psycho killer in the art installation, went up to his mother:

He is not responsible for these thoughts. But they're his thoughts, aren't they? He returns his attention to the screen, where everything is so intensely what it is. He watches what is happening and wants it to happen more slowly, yes, but he is also mind-racing ahead to the moment when Norman Bates will carry Mother down the stairs in her white bedgown (DeLillo, 2010, p.72).

When this occurred, Dennis placed himself in the shoes of the psycho killer:

The man separates himself from the wall and waits to be assimilated, pore by pore, to dissolve into the figure of Norman Bates, who will come into the house and walk up the stairs in subliminal time, two frames per second, and then turn toward the door of Mother's room. Sometimes he sits by her bed and says something and then looks at her and waits for an answer.

Sometimes he just looks at her.

Sometimes a wind comes before the rain and sends birds sailing past the window, spirit birds that ride the night, stranger than dreams (DeLillo, 2010, p.73).

Dennis, in real life, had issues regarding his own mother. There was no resolution for Dennis. There was a possibility that Jessie's disappearance was connected to him. But there was no actual truth as what really happened to Jessie.

## CONCLUSION

DeLillo illustrated that war had affected people both directly and indirectly. He also showed that different characters in *Point Omega* went through different kinds of trauma that led them to develop different kinds of death drive.

Overall, all four important characters of the novel had developed death drives as a consequence of various traumatic experiences in their lives. Death drives or their fascinations with death became their escape and libido in order to avoid dealing directly with their unpleasant feelings over the realities of life.

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## FOUCAULDIAN CONCEPTS OF MADNESS, POWER AND RESISTANCE IN JACK KEROAUC'S *ON THE ROAD*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper is an analysis of *On the Road* (1957) written by Jack Kerouac (1922-1962), the celebrated twentieth century American writer, utilising Foucauldian concepts of madness, power and resistance. In Foucauldian views, there is a dichotomy between sanity and madness in which the former is always regarded as superior to the latter. The objectives of this paper are to present a new positive concept of madness in contrast to society's common views of madness in order to deconstruct the dichotomy of madness and sanity, and give birth to a new strategy of resistance to the 1950s American cultural codes. In view of this, we provide a new definition of resistance to the Foucauldian concept of resistance to clarify the new strategy of the protagonists, Sal and Dean. Kerouac's protagonists select madness with its pleasures over sanity with its sadness; hence, we hypothesise that the madness presented in *On the Road* is regarded as resistance to the 1950s American cultural codes. Therefore, we have found that, in this context, the relationship between Foucauldian concepts of madness and resistance is madness as resistance to the cultural and social codes of America in the 1950s.

Keywords: 1950s America, cultural codes, madness, power, resistance, sanity

### INTRODUCTION

*On the Road* (1957) is a novel by Jack Kerouac (1922-1962) that finds its importance for creating new concepts of madness and resistance rather than for its loose plot. It evokes enthusiasm for spontaneity and madness in order to deconstruct the accepted norms of stability and conformity of the time. The narrator of the story, Sal Paradise, with his mentor, Dean Moriarty, embarks on a road adventure to evade the restraints of 1950s America that Sal believes to be a "Paper America." The novel is divided into five parts where three of them describe Sal's road trips with Dean and the rest explains Sal's relationships with his other friends, such as Carlo and Bull, and the way he encounters Dean and his lonely trips on the road.

America of the 1950s was famous for its propagation of cultural codes of consumerism and its pressure of conformity in order to homogenise all Americans. Following this, any deviance to the accepted norms was considered as crimes against the welfare and future of the Americans. As Swartz (1999) states, "America was a culture in which any deviance was considered moral deviance and was deemed a threat" (p.172). This means that any behaviour that threatens the homogeneity and conformity of the society was not left unpunished.

The idea of homogenising people through broadcasting a role model for them can be explained through Foucauldian views. Foucault (1995) states that "disciplinary power functions underneath the level of assent and correction; thus, this power inaugurates a micro-economy through which the individuals experience a constant pressure to conform

to the same model so that they might all be subjected to subordination, [and] docility...so, they might all be like one another" (p.182). Regarding this, by emphasising the conformity and homogeneity of society, America of the 1950s attempted to create docile citizens with no resistance. Here, we argue that Kerouac creates protagonists who not only resist conforming to society's established norms but that he also reconstructs new opposite concepts. We hypothesise that the cultural codes of 1950s America is deconstructed by Kerouac in *On the Road* and he presents instead new cultural codes parallel to the accepted norms.

Hence, by presenting a new concept of madness that results in delight, Kerouac gives birth to a unique way of resistance that makes the bed for the youth movements of the 1960s. In this new way of resistance, Kerouac deconstructs the dichotomy of sanity and madness and posits madness in a superior position. Thus Sal and Dean, the protagonists of the text, give in to their persuasion to prefer their madness over society's sanity and this is their unique way of resistance. Thus, we hypothesise that, in this context, we can perceive madness as resistance to America's cultural codes of conformity in the 1950s.

### **Foucauldian concept of madness**

Foucault (2006), in *History of Madness*, argues that there was always a struggle between madness and reason from the beginning of the Renaissance until the modern time. Foucault's definition of madness is of importance since he regards madness as not a state of unreason but as a state of being in opposition to society's established reason. Thus, we comprehend that, in Foucauldian terms, the definition of madness is reliant on the definition of reason in a specific time and place; which means that whatever is observed against the common sense of the society is considered madness even if it may appear more logical than the accepted norm.

In Foucauldian view, reason subjugates unreason just like what we have in dichotomy of oppositions, such as speech and writing, light and darkness, and father and son, in which the former is considered superior to the latter. Regarding this binary opposition, Foucault (1999) asserts that, in all societies, there is a system of oppositions between good and bad, allowed and forbidden; but, nowadays, all these oppositions are reduced to "the simple opposition between normal and pathological" (p.89). Consequently, it is implied that madness, as a pathological state, is in an inferior position to sanity that is a normal state. However, we hypothesise that, in this study, this dichotomy is reversed and madness finds a superior position to sanity.

### **To be or not to be a conformist**

We suggest that Kerouac, through *On the Road*, creates protagonists who not only resist conforming to society's established norms but also that they reconstruct new opposite concepts. We believe that the cultural codes of 1950s America is deconstructed by Kerouac in *On the Road* and he instead presents new cultural codes parallel to the accepted norms. In order to question the validity of the cultural codes, Kerouac depicts Sal as a strict follower of the cultural codes of the decade at the beginning of the text. Sal goes to college to pursue a better future, he has a writing career, and he shares a home with his aunt. However, he fails in his married life and he gets divorced regardless of the strong propagandas on the necessity of being married.

In America of the 1950s, marital stability is regarded an important element for happiness. More importantly, in a Cold War period with its threatening nuclear bombs and communists' invasion, conforming to the law of marriage was considered patriotism (May, 2008, p.15). Therefore, it was a matter of importance to keep up a family life for

society's welfare. Thus, it is not out of expectations to encounter a deeply depressed Sal at the opening lines of *On the Road* who is described as "just gotten over a serious illness" that "had something to do with the miserably weary split-up" and not surprisingly everything for him is "dead" (Kerouac, 1991, p.4). Sal, who is a strict follower of the rules, is now deeply depressed because he has broken one of the important norms, namely having a married life.

However, instead of striving to make a new conformed life to obtain happiness and comfort, Kerouac provides Sal with a counter choice that is experiencing another form of life far from conventionality. In his first step, Sal starts to socialise with marginalised people, such as tramps, drug users and coloured people, instead of networking with upper-middle class citizens who have more acceptable social positions. After becoming friends with Dean, Sal and Dean go on the road to look for these marginal characters who are the opposite of the majority who put their best foot forward to become homogenised with the consumer-conformed era.

Here, Saku (2009) refers to Sal's relationship with marginalised people as his quest to discover meaning for his life. On the contrary, we argue that, by selecting his friends among marginalised people, Sal, as an educated writer, declares their superiority over the socially accepted people of the 1950s. It is obvious that Sal's previous conformed life and his upper-middle class friends did not bring happiness and prosperity for him; therefore, he seeks delight in his new marginalised friends. As Sal states:

The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue center light pop and everybody goes «Awww!» (Kerouac, 1991, p.6).

Here, Sal regards his friends as "mad ones", an attribute that commonly bears a negative connotation. Yet, he defines the madness of his friends as their enthusiasm for life, desires and excitement. In Sal's view, this is the reason for the superiority of his friends over upper-middle class people, where they "never yawn or say a commonplace thing" and they "burn like fabulous yellow roman candles" (Kerouac, 1991, p.6). Sal's new mad friends are portrayed as all excitement and positivity.

In this regard, Sal presents a positive concept of madness that has no relation to destruction or mental instability. This positive view of madness can be found reflected in the whole text and its vital role in achieving happiness is strongly highlighted. In the following section, we analyse how madness finds a positive meaning and how, Sal and Dean, the protagonists of *On the Road*, reverse the dichotomy of madness and sanity by positing madness as superior than sanity.

### **Madness: A praise**

We suggest that socially accepted concepts find their opposite meanings in Sal and Dean's road trips. In *On the Road*, domesticity and sanity is sacrificed in favour of the praise for instability and madness of road life, and madmen, con-men and irresponsible men are praised over ideal American men. The way Sal adores his ex-con friends with elegance shows Sal's high regard for the asocial characters of his society. Sal depicts the visit by Dean and Carlo as follows:

Two keen minds that they are, they took to each other at the drop of a hat. Two piercing eyes glanced into two piercing eyes - the holy conman with the shining mind, and the sorrowful poetic con-man with the dark mind that is Carlo Marx (Kerouac, 1991, p.6).

In this example, Sal gives an elevated position to usually condemned conmen by calling them holy and poetic. Likewise, Sal defines Dean softly as a 'blissful' man who is "mad with a completely physical realization of the origins of life-bliss; blindly seeking to return the way he came" (Kerouac, 1991, p.78). In addition, he expresses that "only a guy who's spent five years in jail can go to such maniacal helpless extremes" (Kerouac, 1991, p.78). As we can see, Sal again presents a positive concept of madness in praising his friends and implies that only madness can clarify the value of his friends.

Sal posits madness in a superior position than sanity and he never stops praising it. Succinctly put, in *On the Road*, the dichotomy between sanity and madness is inverted and madness is depicted in a higher position than sanity. Foucault (1999) asserts that this binary opposition gives "the advantage of allowing us to believe that there exists a technique which *allows the reduction of the pathological to the normal*" (p.89, our emphasis). Here, we argue that, regarding this dichotomy, Sal and Dean have succeeded in reversing what Foucault states as the "reduction of pathological to normal" to "normal to pathological" by interchanging the meaning of normal and pathological. In this respect, what has been adored as normal, so far, is condemned as destructive and what has been regarded pathological is changed into the path of real happiness. In *On the Road*, whatever Sal intends to appreciate is defined as madness:

The bus arrived in Hollywood... I looked greedily out the window: stucco houses and palms and drive-ins, the whole *mad* thing, the ragged promised land, the fantastic end of America (Kerouac, 1991, p.50, *our emphasis*).

Here, Sal refers to his ideal land as the 'mad, ragged promised land' that is in complete opposition to society's expectations. Thus, Sal's positive concept of madness makes Hollywood conspicuous enough to be a promised land. Elsewhere, Sal states:

I felt like a million dollars; I was adventuring in the *crazy* American night (Kerouac, 1991, p.59, *our emphasis*).

Again, Sal appreciates American nights for being "crazy" because Sal views madness in a superior position to sanity. Since society's sanity of conformity brings up depression for him, now Sal prefers madness with its pleasures.

Likewise, Sal separates himself from the rest of the society and he places Dean in a superior position when he blames Southerners for their misunderstandings. Therefore, in retaliation, Dean pays "absolutely no attention to them" (Kerouac, 1991, p.66). In this context, we suggest that the sane Southerners are punished by being neglected because of their inability in appreciating Dean's madness. As Foucault (2006) states:

When morality formed the substance of the State, and public opinion was the most solid link in the chain that held society together, then scandal became the most redoubtable form of alienation. Through it, men irreparably became outsiders to all that was most essential in society, and punishment, rather than keeping the particular character of a reparation, became a universal, present in the conscience of each man and carried out by the will of all (p.448).

In this regard, since the morality of the public is different from Sal and Dean's ideals, Sal and Dean alienate the society for their inability to comprehend the meaning of their madness. Thus, the dichotomy of sanity and madness is reversed here and Sal and Dean punish Southerners by alienating them.

Sal and Dean's importance is revealed when we observe how they change the morality of the American consumer conformed culture of the 1950s into a resistant culture of the 1960s by inverting the meaning of the accepted norms and concepts of the society. In this way, instead of being victims of their differences and instead of accepting their banishment as outsiders, they elect to change the conditions of being the insider of the society's group. In this way, they are not regarded as the other outsider any more. When their friendship begins, Sal is not completely aware of Dean's madness and this can justify his uncertainty to follow him. However, after knowing him, Sal has no doubt in selecting Dean as his mentor because of his madness:

The madness of Dean had bloomed into a weird flower. I didn't realize this till he and I and Marylou and Dunkel left the house for a brief spin-the-Hudson, when for the first time we were alone and could talk about anything we wanted (Kerouac, 1991, p.66).

Having spent some time with Dean, Sal realises that Dean's madness 'bloomed into a weird flower' and it makes him certain to follow Dean because Dean's madness is not a negative or dangerous concept that must be avoided. In Sal's view, Dean's madness is a 'flower' that must be cared. Again, the concept of madness that is presented here is superior to sanity. Furthermore, Sal worships Dean and he never ascribes a negative status towards his madness. Sal even adores Dean's faults and regards him a "Holy Goof" (Kerouac, 1991, p.113). According to Sal, Dean is "an Angel" as he always knows him to be. Here, Sal believes that Dean's madness brings him salvation from the restricting cultural codes of conformity.

At this point, we argue that Kerouac emphasizes the superiority of madness over sanity when he depicts Sal's pleasure at listening to Carlo and Dean's mad discussion. In Sal's view, Carlo and Dean are 'very amazing maniacs.' Clearly, Sal shows his satisfaction of listening to them and, although he warns them that if they continue this mad talk they will go mad, he expresses his enthusiasm of seeing them go crazy, "I pointed my finger at them and said, 'If you keep this up you'll both go crazy, but let me know what happens as you go along'" (Kerouac, 1991, p.32).

Sal then introduces George Shearing, "the great jazz pianist" in his great days before "he became cool and commercial" by the consumer culture (Kerouac, 1991, p.75). Sal believes that they are spending a "mad weekend" when they are visiting Shearing's club (Kerouac, 1991, p.75). In Sal's view, what distinguishes Shearing from other pianists is his ability to turn people mad, especially Dean, through his musical talent. However, Sal regrets that Shearing is being spoiled by the consumer culture. This is how Sal explains Shearing's talent in making people mad through his playing before becoming commercialised:

Folks yelled for him to “Go!” Dean was sweating; the sweat poured down his collar. “There he is! That’s him! Old God! Old God Shearing! Yes! Yes! Yes!” and Shearing was conscious of the madman behind him, he could hear every one of Dean’s gasps and imprecations, he could sense it though he couldn’t see. “That’s right!” Dean said. “Yes!” Shearing smiled; he rocked. Shearing rose from the piano, dripping with sweat; these were his great 1949 days before he became cool and commercial (Kerouac, 1991, p.75).

In this account, Shearing, as well, comprehends madness and knows its values as Sal asserts that he is conscious of Dean’s madness although he could not see it. Thus he enjoys spreading madness in his club.

As we have stated earlier, all of Sal’s joyous moments include madness especially when he travels around with Dean, where Sal recalls spending a ‘mad day’ in New Orleans with Dean and Dunkels. According to Sal, “Dean was out of his mind that day” (Kerouac, 1991, p.91) and Stan accompanies them with a beautiful coloured girl. Sal express that “it was mad” and “a good twenty men leaned in that window, watching” them (Kerouac, 1991, p.166). Furthermore, Sal relates Dean’s madness to God and gives it divinity when he states that Dean has “got the secret that we’re all busting to find and it’s splitting his head wide open and if he goes mad don’t worry, it won’t be your fault but the fault of God” (Kerouac, 1991, p.114). It is clear that, for Sal, it is God’s decision for Dean to be mad; therefore, Dean’s madness is associated with divinity and consequently it is positive. Thus, if it appears to be wrong, it is not Dean’s fault.

### **Road sweet road**

As we have stated earlier, the dead atmosphere and Sal’s deep depression make him go on the road to follow Dean as his friend and mentor. There are different interpretations of Sal’s reason for going on the road. Richardson (2001) regards Sal and Dean’s journey as a “yes” to America while Vopat (2004) calls their journey an escape from reality. On the other hand, Larson (2009) explains that, like veterans of the Second World War, Sal and Dean are looking for a place within a nation. In contrast, Hunt (2004) describes Sal’s journey as a quest for finding both a father and an identity while Trudeau (2011) suggests that Sal and Dean, in their journeys, simultaneously search for the white father but, in turn, reject him as a figure of racial discrimination.

However, we argue that Sal and Dean, through their road trip, reconstruct a new identity for America that is shaped by a marginalised group of society who are hobos and non-whites. Kerouac, by inverting the meanings of the concepts such as madness, superiority of whites, and happiness, clearly resists accepting the American cultural codes of the 1950s that were based on sanity, white people and prosperity in consumerism. Sal openly reveals his disgust of conformity to the cultural codes when he states that “this is the story of America. Everybody’s doing what they think they’re supposed to do” (Kerouac, 1991, p.42).

There are many evidences in the text that demonstrate how Sal breaks social norms and blames the cultural codes for their inconsistency. In this respect, Sal follows the Foucauldian view on the relative nature of the concepts. As Foucault (2006) asserts, there exists no knowledge with fixed formulation:

But what form of knowledge, after all, is sufficiently singular, esoteric or regional to be given only at a single point, in a unique formulation? ... If it were not experienced in a random order, and recognized only in profile, all truth would soon fall dormant (p.163).

Given this, it could be said that every concept is provisional in its nature and there is a possibility to make changes in its meaning and definition. Foucault (2006) only refers to the change of the concept of madness when he states that:

It can happen that some concepts or a certain arrogance of knowledge mask this primary dispersion in a superficial manner; one example is the effort the modern world makes to only speak of madness in the serene, objective terms of mental illness, blotting out its pathetic values in the hybrid meanings of pathology and philanthropy. But the meaning of madness for any age, our own included, can never be covered entirely by the theoretical unity of a project: it lies instead in its torn presence (p.163-64).

However, we argue that what Foucault has limited to madness can be extended to all American cultural concepts through the portrayals of Sal and Dean's antithetic manners. Sal's disrespect for the American flag is the most climatic insolence to the norms that he has done through his narrative. Instead of feeling patriotic and honoured for the American flag as is expected of an American, especially a veteran, Sal puts up the American flag upside down in his drunkenness:

Pretty soon I was as drunk as anybody else. Come dawn, it was my duty to put up the American flag on a sixty-foot pole, and this morning I put it up upside down and went home to bed (Kerouac, 1991, p.41).

Sal emphasises his indifferent attitude towards the American flag when he confesses that he puts up the flag "every morning mechanically" (Kerouac, 1991, p.41). Moreover, he puts the blame on the authorities for giving him a job that he is not "cut out for" (Kerouac, 1991, p.42).

Another scene in which Sal and Dean's contempt for the value of American society can be found is when they arrive in Washington in time for President Truman's second term inauguration. There is a huge ceremony in the streets but Sal and Dean, instead of feeling glorious, describe the scene with negative attributes such as "great displays of war, murderous, ordinary, pitiful, and foolish" and, at the end, Dean shakes his head in awe and states that "what are these people up to? Harry's sleeping somewhere in this town.... Good old Harry" (Kerouac, 1991, p.80-81).

Hence, Sal appears to be lost in his confusion because of society's values when he finds Dean as Sal utters, "I have nothing to offer anybody except my own confusion" (Kerouac, 1991, p.74). It is after going on the road and indulging in madness that Sal feels delighted and realizes that they are "leaving confusion and nonsense behind" and he comprehends that they are "performing" their "one and noble function of the time, move." (Kerouac, 1991, p.80).

Therefore, we can suggest that movement and madness for Sal are the only way of being released of the confusion of the conformed consumer society. Sal shows his disgust of consumerism when he overtly expresses his hatred of the youths in their cars who pass him walking on the road just because they are "little high-school punks and their parents carved the roast beef on Sunday afternoon" (Kerouac, 1991, p.53). Thus, Sal despises them because they make fun of "a girl reduced to poor circumstances with a man who wanted to be loved" due to their humble appearance (Kerouac, 1991, p.53). On the cold Christmas, although Sal is settling down with his relatives in a warm house beside a Christmas tree and the presents with the smell of "the roasting turkey," he decides to get on "another spurt around the road" (Kerouac, 1991, p.68).

However, having explored the roads of North America, Sal and Dean come to a conclusion that 'IT' cannot be found in the north part of the continent as long as their madness is regarded undesirable. Hence, Sal and Dean decide to explore South America's roads where they think madness is not considered a crime. Moreover, they hope to find 'IT' in South America after they could not achieve it in the North. Dean believes that he finally can find 'IT' in Mexico because it is famous for its total freedom. As Sal recalls:

Flying down the curve of the world into other tropics and other worlds. "Man, this will finally take us to IT!" said Dean with definite faith. He tapped my arm. "Just wait and see. Hoo! Wheel" (Kerouac, 1991, p.154).

Apparently, Dean believes that he can finally find 'IT' in Mexico because it is famous for its total freedom. Every city they spot on their way to Mexico looks like heaven to Sal. When they arrive at San Antonio, Sal believes it to be a 'mad' heaven:

All around there were shacks and drooping trees and a wild cinnamon smell in the air. Frantic teenage Mexican girls came by with boys. «Hoo!» yelled Dean. «Si! Maniana!» Music was coming from all sides, and all kinds of music. Stan and I drank several bottles of beer and got high. We were already almost out of America and yet definitely in it and in the middle of where it's maddest. Hotrods blew by. San Antonio, ah-haa!" (Kerouac, 1991, p.157).

Therefore, Mexico is a dream world for them because it has no sign of conformity. Thus, Sal praises it as madness because madness is all positivity in this context. More importantly, the cops are friendlier with "no suspicion." In their view, the Mexican cops are not "like officials at all". They are "lazy and tender" (Kerouac, 1991, p.159). Sal confesses that, "I'm so excited and sweetened in this morning world. We've finally got to heaven. It couldn't be cooler, it couldn't be grander, it couldn't be anything" (Kerouac, 1991, p.161).

This is the end of the road for Sal and Dean and they believe that they have "finally found the magic land" and they have "never dreamed the extent of the magic" (Kerouac, 1991, p.160). Sal compares Mexicans to Americans when he states how Mexicans are cool and how they look at them with "such straight brown eyes" (Kerouac, 1991, p.161). Sal believes that Mexicans are "straight and kind and don't put down any bull" (Kerouac, 1991, p.161). We may complete Sal's statement with: *like Americans*.

In the end, after traveling eight thousand miles around the continent, Sal arrives at New York's Times Square to again face the reality of what he calls "Paper America" (Kerouac, 1991, p.63). Sal understands that, during the time he was away, nothing has changed in America and it still carries the burden of conformity and consumerism. This is the only place that Sal brings forward the concept of madness with negativity because it relates to the American cultural code of the decade:

I was back on Times Square; and right in the middle of a rush hour, too, seeing with my innocent road-eyes the absolute madness and fantastic hour air of New York with its millions and millions hustling forever for a buck among themselves, the *mad dream*—grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City. The high towers of the land - the other end of the land, the place where Paper America is born (Kerouac, 1991, p.63, *our emphasis*).

However, out of his disappointment, Sal comes up with a new idea of resistance. We believe that, at this moment, Sal realizes that merely going on the road is not enough to bring changes. Now Sal comprehends the important task he has as a writer and figures out that he must establish his ideals through a new form of resistance.

### **Resistance**

Thompson (2003) explains that Foucault, in the unfinished fourth volume of *History of Sexuality*, refers to two different forms of resistance that are “tactical reversal” and “aesthetics of existence” (p.114). “Tactical reversal” means the form of resistance that is spontaneous and can make a break in a power system on the spot, where street protests, breaking laws, and acting against the accepted norms can be examples of this form of resistance. On the other hand, “aesthetic of existence” refers to the resistances that utilise the power system’s strategies in order to make a breach in the totality of power system by using its weak points (Thompson, 2003, p.114).

In analyzing Dean and Sal’s resistance to the American cultural codes through Foucauldian lens, we need to provide a new definition to Foucault’s concept of resistance. The definition of resistance we intend to provide is a mixture of the two Foucauldian definitions that we coin as “strategic resistance.” In this form of resistance, Sal and Dean first accept the madness that is imposed on them by the power relations that is “tactical reversal” and then they attempt to change the negative concept of madness to positivity by way of the “aesthetics of existence” strategy. In “strategic resistance”, Sal and Dean resist the deployment of the negative concept of madness by relating positive attributes to it. Hence, when Sal reaches the end of his journey and encounters a “Paper America” again, he returns to his desk to write about his account of madness along with its freedom and pleasures because he knows that nothing like a written document can strengthen a new concept.

Cresswell (1993) believes that mobility is part of resistance, and scholars, such as Vopat (2004) and Larson (2009), regard Sal and Dean’s journey as a resistance to cultural codes. On the contrary, we argue that Sal and Dean resist accepting cultural codes by bringing a new inverted definition for the accepted norms of sanity and stability against madness and instability. When an old rule is deconstructed, a new rule must be constructed because, as stated by Foucault, it is impossible to destruct the totality of power relations. Foucault (1978) proposes that, since resistance is part of power relations, it does not have the capability to disintegrate the power relations completely but it has the ability to make an occasional cleavage in the totality of power system:

One is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds (p.96).

Thus, the significant point of Sal and Dean’s resistance is that they make an occasional cleavages in the totality of power system; however, instead of passing the opportunity to power relations to reconstruct itself, they reconstruct it with their own ideal concepts.

Therefore, by way of “strategic resistance”, Sal and Dean transfigure the dichotomy of sanity and madness and, through this, they resist the common view of madness as a destructive factor. Moreover, we suggest that Sal and Dean’s final separation is part of their resistance strategy. As we have explained, Dean is a ‘road’ man, constantly on a journey, and he cannot endure staying in one place; thus, he continues his

journeys through the continent to follow his adventures. However, Sal, as a man of letters, returns to society to immortalise their resistance through his writings.

Sal's narration of their resistance and adventures is the second part of their "strategic resistance." This is because there is no other way to enlighten people about the reality and invalidity of the cultural codes than writing about the counter adventures that bring more happiness and freedom. In this respect, Dean and Sal present their madness as resistance to the cultural codes of 1950s America that is consumerism and conformity. We argue here that Kerouac, through his protagonists, pays his portion of resistance by submitting Sal and Dean's mad adventures as the best way of relief from society's conformity. Moreover, Kerouac immortalises this new concept of madness by publishing *On the Road* with its 'mad' adventures. Regarding this point, Seyers (2012) explains how youths in their casual shirts and chinos dress up like Kerouac and, although they might not have read *On the Road*, try to imitate "Kerouac's vision of life to a T, living in cheap motels, sleeping in rental cars, crisscrossing their way around America" (p.11).

### CONCLUSION

*On the Road* was written in a decade that was filled with consumerism and conformity. Antithetically, Kerouac, by promoting a simple life against luxury and by presenting a culture of hitchhiking against fancy cars, resists accepting American cultural codes. Kerouac's protagonists select madness with its pleasures over sanity with its sadness; hence, we can conclude that the madness presented in *On the Road* is regarded as resistance to the 1950s American cultural codes. We have argued that Kerouac creates new cultural codes of a simple life against the cultural codes of conformity and consumerism, and he opened a path for the 1960s youth movements. Merely running away from conformity did not provide enough credit to give birth to the new youth culture of the 1960s. Rather, submitting a culture of a simple life and madness against consumerism and sanity has the power to establish new cultural codes for the future decade; a task that we can safely conclude that Kerouac has successfully accomplished despite all the controversies that his novel creates.

Moreover, we have demonstrated how Kerouac brings forward a new strategy of resistance that is "strategic resistance" and, through this, he establishes his ideas against consumer culture. In this way, the dichotomy of madness and sanity is reversed and madness finds a superior position to sanity. Kerouac clearly presents that following instructions and rules results in absurdity and inaccuracy; on the contrary, constructing a new opposite life-style that is based on madness can result in pure happiness and prosperity. Thus, we conclude that the relationship between Foucauldian concepts of madness, power and resistance in this context is *madness as resistance to the American cultural codes of the 1950s that are imposed by society's disciplinary power*.

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