

Editorial

Approaching Language as Human Communication System

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This themed issue is about approaching language as human communication system. It is concerned with identifying meaningful ways of understanding and investigating language as a notion of human communication system. Congruent to that, inevitably, discussion on language in this issue is seen and accounted for based on its functional perspective.

Functional approaches to language dated back to the early 20th century, and have their roots in the Prague School of Linguistics. This approach differed from the structuralist and early generative frameworks because the emphasis was on the information content of utterances and consideration of language primarily as a system of communication rather than as a set of rules (Saville-Troike 2006).

In linguistics, the term function has several meanings, including both the structural and the pragmatic function. Structural function refers to elements of language where structure is perceived as a subject or object, or as a doer or goal. Whilst, pragmatic function is about what language can accomplish, such as to convey information, control others' behaviour, or express emotion, etc. The focus of functional approach, on the other hand, is in understanding the use of language in real situations (namely performance) as well as underlying knowledge (namely competence). For that reasons, the purpose of language is communication, with scope of concern that goes beyond the sentence to include discourse structure and how language is used in interaction, and to include aspects of communication beyond language (Saville-Troike 2006).

One of the influential framework that recognizes language as a human communication system is Halliday's works. Halliday's (1973; 1994) model for instance, analyzes language in terms of the inter-related systems of choices that are available for expressing meaning. Basic to the approach is the notion that language structures cannot be idealized and studied without taking into account the circumstances of their use, including the extra linguistic or social context (Saville-Troike 2006). It is also based on the belief that the fundamental components of meaning in language are organized around two main kinds of elements, namely 'ideational' and 'interpersonal'. An ideational element is concerned with representing an 'experience'. Meanwhile, an interpersonal element is concerned with an aspect of communication, where people interact with each other. According to this notion, language is a medium for people in modelling, representing and constructing their world of experience (Halliday 1994; Jones 2012).

This seems to be an appropriate account of what we understand as language in this issue. The way that language is used in normal and real life, by all kinds of people, to accomplish all manner of goals is the subject of our attention. With this regard, this special themed issue presented nine articles related to how we should approach language.

Saran Kaur Gill, Yuen Chee Keong, Stef Bolte and Saravanan Ramiah in *Ideology in News Reports of Malaysia's English Medium of Instruction Change* investigated the complexity of our human communication system and this becomes visible in that newspapers from different socio-cultural and political contexts interpret and report an ideologically contested issue in different ways and in so doing influence their readers' thinking and opinion about the issue. The writers assert that the investigation of how ideology is presented by the different newspapers have also help readers understand how the media shape public opinion by providing *a* reality, not *the* reality. Maserah Shabudin and Idris Aman in *Wacana dan Ideologi Iklan Produk Kecantikan Berbahasa Jepun* concluded that even though Japan is among one of the most developed countries and the world's economic powerhouse, in reality it is still dependent and oriented on as well as in need of ideological intervention from the Occidental countries to communicate with its own society, renowned for its uniqueness and homogeneity.

Siti Hamin Stapa and Azianura Hani Shaari in *Understanding Online Communicative Language Features in Social Networking Environment* investigated the language features and patterns of online communicative language amongst young Malaysian Facebook users. The study suggests that language evolution is as an ongoing process and the development of online communicative language is always unpredictable even though it might have originated from a re-thinking process of some old spelling conventions in media, and not a language that has derived on its own. In addition, the writers point out that English language in Malaysia is uniquely adapted for usage in online communication settings. Tan Kim Hua, Nor Fariza Mohd Nor and Mohd Nayef Jaradat in *Oral Communication Strategies among International Students at UKM* investigated how and when oral communication strategies were used in group discussions by international students at a Malaysian public university. The findings showed that the most frequently employed communication strategy was code switching, an inter-lingual strategy and the least used strategy was word coinage, an intra-lingual strategy. Further investigation indicated that different levels of oral proficiency influenced the use of communication strategies, which also suggests that international students need to be made aware of how to use appropriate communication strategies. In addition, raising the awareness of both low proficient and also high proficient speakers to strategies that are used by speakers of different proficiency levels may well help ease communication.

Roslina Mamat, Hazlina Abdul Halim and Normaliza Abd Rahim in *Celahan dalam Perbualan Pemandu Pelancong Malaysia dan Pelancong Jepun* explored the turn-taking, overlap, *aizuchi*, insertion and politeness in Japanese conversation among local tourist guides with Japanese tourists. Findings indicated that insertion appeared to interrupt the Japanese tourists' speeches. However, insertion which helped the tourist guides to find the correct vocabulary and to provide more information to the Japanese tourists were found to be helpful. The writers concluded that although the tourist guides spoke

Japanese fluently, they failed to identify with the Japanese language characteristics and the Japanese culture, as shown in the frequent interruption which disrupted the flow of conversation.

In *Emergent Grammatical Structures of Bahasa Pasar: Based on Hakka-Malay and Cantonese-Malay Glossaries*, Wang studied how the mass migration of Chinese from China to Malaysia in the 19th century has influenced language. The Chinese developed a colloquial form of Malay, *Bahasa Pasar*, due to the contact between the Malay and the Chinese language. *Bahasa Pasar*, which is a colloquial form of Malay, i.e., a variety of Malay and Chinese language appeared to meet the needs of communication between the local residents and migrants. The analysis showed that *Bahasa Pasar* adopts many grammatical features of Chinese dialects, which indicates that language contact has induced a new variety of Malay. The new variety of Malay has syntactic features transferred from Chinese dialects.

A paper by Harishon Radzi, Fazal Mohamed Mohamed Sultan, Norhashimah Jalaluddin and Zaharani Ahmad on *Analisis Bahasa Komunikasi Bangsa Minoriti Negrito menerusi Pengimbuhan dan Peminjaman Kata* describes loanword in Malay by Mendriq as a phenomenon of sustaining minority life group. The study investigates the language phenomenon among Negritos, which has been evolusioned with the Malay language through loanword because the Negritos no longer leave in their small group. Besides, they also communicated with outsider communities especially the Malays. Therefore, the Negrito's community has been using a lot of Malay words to communicate and to sustain their social life. In *Medium Perantara Pelbagai Suku Kaum di Sarawak: Kajian Lingua Franca*, Mohammed Azlan found that Iban language and Sarawak Malay variety are chosen as the lingua franca in Sarikei, Sarawak in the domains that were investigated. Iban is used in informal settings while Sarawak Malay variety is used in formal ones.

Forough Hassanpour and Ruzy Suliza Hashim in *Reading Forough Farrokhzad's Poetry from the Perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics* study focused on the microelements of words with the aim of exploring the depiction of women in "Green Delusion" poem. Using a stylistic and lexico-grammatical method known as "transitivity", the findings revealed the poet's stance toward the situation of women in her society. The women exhibited emotions of guilt and unhappiness in their fight against the very nature of a woman's disposition.

Finally, I hope that all these articles will add another dimension on how we think about language and language use. It can also be an impetus to further explicate language as a notion of human communication system.

References

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