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## Language Use among Malaysian Bloggers

**ABSTRACT:** Blogs are now marking a new mode of communication, making impact on domains such as virtual formation of speech communities, knowledge-sharing, pedagogical implication as well as formation of virtual identity. It is estimated that more than three billion websites in the world today and more than 70 million are blogs. In Malaysia, it is estimated that half a million blogs existed. Language used by bloggers could reflect the unique pattern of discourse within the blogosphere where the combination of both monologue and dialogue in a space-bound, digital environment is observed. Some studies show that a strong sense of identity is seen within the literacy practices in blogosphere where bloggers tend to use code-switching and code mixing in their blogs. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the dynamics of English language use among top-ranked Malaysian bloggers from the perception of final-year TESL (Teaching English as Second Language) undergraduate students. The study reveals that there are various linguistic features found in blogs and also in the interaction with one another in meaning-making process. Several implications are discussed.

**KEY WORD:** Blogs, communication, virtual identity, language use, code mixing, and TESL students in Malaysia.

**IKHTISAR:** Blog merupakan mod komunikasi baru yang memberi impak kepada domain seperti komuniti maya, perkongsian maklumat, implikasi pedagogi, dan pembentukan jatidiri maya. Dianggarkan lebih dari tiga bilion laman web sekarang dan lebih dari 70 juta adalah blog. Dianggarkan setengah juta blog wujud di Malaysia. Bahasa yang digunakan oleh pemblog melambangkan keunikan pola dalam sfera blog dengan gabungan monolog dan dialog dalam persekitaran digital. Beberapa kajian mendapati identiti yang tersendiri dalam amalan literasi blog di mana pemblog mempunyai kecenderungan untuk menggunakan pertukaran kod dan pencampuran kod dalam blog mereka. Tujuan kajian ini untuk mengenalpasti dinamika penggunaan Bahasa Inggeris dalam blog oleh pemblog Malaysia dari perspektif pelajar tahun akhir dalam bidang TESL. Kajian ini mendapati beberapa ciri-ciri linguistik dalam blog dalam pembinaan makna hasil dari interaksi di antara pemblog dan pembaca blog. Beberapa implikasi dibincangkan.

**KATA KUNCI:** Blog, komunikasi, jatidiri maya, penggunaan bahasa, percampuran kod, dan pelajar TESL di Malaysia.

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## INTRODUCTION

Blog is a relatively new medium and yet, it has become a social phenomenon. An increasing number of people are jumping into the personal (individual) or corporate “blogwagon” (Mercado, 2006). Weblogs or blogs are defined as frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence (Herring *et al.*, 2004). Weblogs are becoming an increasingly popular form of communication on the World Wide Web (WWW). Millions of people around the world maintain weblogs, also known as the internet journal covering a huge range of topics and interests. Blogs are particularly popular in sectors such as technology, marketing, media, law, and politics. In general, people used them to write about virtually anything from gardening to world news. While some are very personal, others use them as a springboard to express their views on the current issues. Blog has become an effective platform for people to express their ideas, publish one’s thought online, influence society, engage in global discussion, or even promote oneself as a leader.

In 2008, it was estimated that more than three billion websites in the world and more than 70 million were blogs. In Malaysia, it is estimated that half a million blogs existed (Jaafar, 2008). According to the survey conducted in 2005 by Pew Internet and American Life Project, a new weblog is being created every 5.8 second (Rainie, 2005). Meanwhile, the blog analysis firm, *Technorati*, tracked 23.1 million blogs and 1.8 million links as of 13<sup>th</sup> of December, 2005 (Mercado, 2006). Since its establishment in the mid 1999, blogging as an online activity has increased exponentially. With the popularity and population of the blogosphere, blogs are emerging as a powerful organizing tool, giving momentum to ideas that shape public opinion and influence their behaviors. For example, Malaysian bloggers have recently become quite effective in confronting perceived corruption in the government, despite state’s powerful control of the mainstream media.

In addition, language used by bloggers could reflect the unique patterns of discourse within the blogosphere, where the combination of both monologue and dialogue in a space-bound, electronic environment is observed. Some studies show that a strong sense of identity is seen within the literacy practices in blogosphere where bloggers tend to use code-switching and code mixing in their blogs. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the dynamics of language use among top-ranked Malaysian bloggers from the perception of final-year TESL (Teaching English as Second Language) students.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There has been growing interest among people to read and write blogs among Malaysians. As a type of web document, blogs are related to – and some claim, replacing – personal home pages; both are typically created and maintained by individuals, and their content tends to focus on the bloggers' interests (Herring *et al.*, 2004). However, due to the changing status of English in Malaysia, particularly since the 1960s, when Malay language, renamed “*Bahasa Malaysia*”, became Malaysia's sole official language that replaced English as the predominant medium of instruction in schools for several decades, the command of English among students especially in rural areas has thus “deteriorated”. As a result, the emergence of *Manglish*, code-switching and other variations are greatly seen in this country (Cheshire, 1998).

Due to the sub-standard usage of English, a number of our bloggers too fall into this category. As blogs are very influential tool in our society today, it is high time we look into their language use in order to get a better view of what kind of English are Malaysians exposed to in the cyberspace. Influential blogs get a daily hit of 8,000 or more and this is a tremendous amount that we cannot just simply ignore it.

According to S. Nilsson (2005), weblogs are almost always written in the first person and fairly informal. This is further exemplified in the text when the blog posts were found to be written mostly in short sentences. Further, there are certain jargons used in the blogs. Due to the evolution of blogosphere, jargons specific to blogging are also emerging. Due to this feature, blogging brings in a new community, where those outside of the blogging community would not be likely to understand certain words or meanings used by bloggers.

Another issue in blogosphere is code switching and code mixing. Code switching is the ability of an individual to switch from one language or language variety to another, within the same utterance (in conversation), or in a sentence (in written form). Y.L. Koo (2005) states that it is a common phenomenon that occurs in a multicultural and multilingual nation, which sees people changing the language they speak or write from one variety or code to another, and this implies the multiple identities of the speaker.

Code switching in blogosphere can be seen in F.P. Smedley's research (2006) on blogs written by Filipinos demonstrated a strong sense of identity seen within the literacy practices used in blogosphere. The study was focused on code switching in Filipino blogs and the association between the two languages (English and local language). Code switching seems to

show a sense of identity of the bloggers. In addition, the study examined the narrative structure of the blogs — how blog writers wrote their blogs and applied code switching as a means of textual communication in a monologist manner. Since there is little research conducted regarding the language use by Malaysian bloggers, it is critical to conduct this study. The purpose of this study was to examine the dynamics of language use among top-ranked Malaysian bloggers from the perception of final-year TESL (Teaching English as Second Language) students.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A weblog (blog) is a simplified form of web publishing that allows anyone with a computer and internet connection to post content online (Gurzick & Lutters, 2006). A blog is actually a short form of weblog. Blogs are websites or homepages, frequently updated with almost daily new entries in a reversed chronological order consisting of the most recent post and offer many links to related information (Mercado, 2006). For instance, blogs can contain commentary or news on a particular topic such as food, politics, or local news. Unlike websites, blogs are written in an informal style that reflects the interest, view, and personality of the bloggers.

According to S. Mercado (2006), blogs usually allow room for readers' comments; and because they often contain numerous links to other blogs and websites, they each act as a unit in a dynamic community. Together they form an interconnected whole of the intellectual cyberspace which bloggers called the "blogosphere". Information flow in the blogosphere has its own way: personal, fast, connected, and networked.

The term "web log" may have been coined by John Barger in December 1997 (Mercado, 2006). The term "web log" was initially coined referring to a server's log file and then expanded to include the meaning of online personal journaling. Later on, to avoid confusion, the word "blog" was adopted to refer to personal journaling (Mercado, 2006). The first weblog was the first website, <http://info.cern.ch/>, the site built by Tim Berners-Lee at CERN. Since mid 1999, blogging as an online activity has been increasing exponentially, enabled by the release of the first free blogging software (Pitas), and fueled by reports from the mainstream media of the grassroots power of blogs as alternative news sources (Herring et al., 2004).

**On the Characteristics and Types of Blog.** The *Webopedia* defines blog as a web page that serves as a publicly accessible personal journal for an individual ([www.webopedia.com/TERM/b/blog.html](http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/b/blog.html), 24/8/2011). In 2005, the word "blog" was included for the first time in the USA (United States

of America) *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* although it has entered the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2004 (Mercado, 2006). Typically updated daily, blog often reflects the personality of the author. According to S. Mercado (2006), blogs are characterized by the following: (1) Weblogs are intended for general public consumption; (2) Weblogs allow readers to enter their own comments to individual posts; (3) Weblogs links generously, allowing readers to follow conversations between weblogs; (4) Weblogs are serial; and (5) Weblogs are like a short public lecture.

A blog that contains video clips is called a video blog, or *vblog*. In its simplest form, a video blog (*vblog* or *vlog*) is the posting of serial videos to a website, with an audience response encouraged. Even though this new form of web communication is in its infancy, video bloggers have already started making regular postings online (<http://ezinearticles.com>, 12/9/2011). The term “blogosphere” refers to the worldwide collection of blogs, and the *vlogosphere* refers to all the *vlogs* worldwide. A *vlog* author is referred to as *vlogger* (Gary, Thomas & Misty, 2008).

Other than that, blogs with shorter posts and mixed media types are called the *tumblelogs*. The ones comprising links are called a *linklog*, a site containing a portfolio of sketches is called a *sketchblog*; while one comprising photos is called a *photoblog* ([www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/blog](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/blog), 24/8/2011). Blog can also be defined by the type of device used to create them. A blog written through a mobile device, such as mobile phone or a PDA is called a *moblog* (Teh, 2008).

Some blogs focus on a particular subject such as political blogs, fashion blogs, project blogs, or legal blogs (often referred to as *blawags*). And last but not least, we have a *slog* (site or website log) which is a section or “slice” of a regular business website, and seamlessly integrated within the regular website structure but is produced with blogging software ([www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/blog](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/blog), 24/8/2011). Irrespective of what their type and name of blogs, just like what was mention earlier, most of the blogs allow comments to be placed by the readers to reflect their views as a form of feedback towards blog entries.

Based on Jupiter Research (2006) on American adults, about 54% of bloggers are under the age of 30, much like the internet population in general. The research signifies that the *raison d’être* behind this most probably is because users under the age of 30 have less commitment to the family or perhaps most of them are still single or students that spend a higher number of hours in front of computer, as compared to the people from higher age ranges who most probably need to spend more time with their family, career, etc. In addition, the majority of the bloggers cited that

their main interest is to share stories and to express creativity. Most of the bloggers also stated that the reason for blogging does not involve making money. Whereas almost half of the respondents said that they are trying to influence the way other people think. But the main reason for all these bloggers activities' is to document their own personal experience and to share them with others. This has resulted in a huge obsession and fascination in the blogosphere.

## IMPACT OF BLOGS AND LANGUAGE USED IN BLOGS

Blogging is a new opportunity for people to express their thoughts. In the process of blogging, bloggers become involved in commenting and reflecting on diverse topics and ideas. Blogging is a practice which requires a weblog author to be connected to processes, discourses, and communities. A large spectrum of research has been conducted regarding the effect of blogging (Johnson, 2004) which indicated the remarkably positive impact of weblogs on students' critical and creative thinking, their analytical writing skills, and their intellectual confidence and independence. S. Fiedler (2003) defines weblog as a reflective conversational tool for self-organized learning which best captures the constructivist spirit used for fostering autonomous, self-directed learning approaches. Other than becoming a meaningful medium to improve social interaction, a weblog also helps to promote creative and reflective writing.

In a study conducted by B.A. Nardi *et al.* (2004), the social aspect of the blogosphere was analyzed from the angle of how blogging becomes a social activity. The study found that bloggers tend to relate to the known audience of their personal social networks as well as the wider, unknown audience in the blogosphere. In other words, blogs are regarded as a social activity because blogs create the audience just as the audience creates the blogs. The social communication in which bloggers and audience are "socially" related is through the writing and reading of blogs, as well as the commenting that is essential for two-way communication modes, via blogging activities.

S. Nilsson (2005) studied the function of language to facilitate and maintain social networking in weblog. She examined the structure of the weblogging community and its network strength. The study found that a certain type of network suggests a particular language norm. Every environment within the internet has its own format, and within each format evolves a specific "dialect" native to that space. Blogs are generally accepted as having a form over function relationship in that a blog is often defined singularly by its form. Within the blogosphere, a

certain variety of language has developed, one that rationalized the human need to communicate with the constraints of the medium. This makes weblog group into tight social networks that consists of varying degree of community. Each community is anchored around a topic, whether it is job-related, interest-related, age, gender, etc. Because of the closeness of the blogging network, communicative practices can be standardized, strengthening further the sense of group identity.

F.P. Smedley's research (2006) on blogs written by Filipinos demonstrated a strong sense of identity seen within the literacy practices employed via blogosphere. The study was focused on code switching in Filipino blogs, and how the association between the two languages shows a sense of identity for the bloggers. He studied the narrative structure of the blog – how blog writers wrote their blogs and applied code switching as a means of textual communication. F.P. Smedley (2006) also studied the issue of style shifting in relation to motivation for code switching, thus resulting in the enactment of identity via blogging. B. Rampton (1995) asserts that language switching is a common characteristic of the linguistic repertoire of the world's population, and represents those who use the practice extensively and purposefully.

Another study is by M. Bosire (2006) which uncovered that code switching contributed to the identity of Kenyan-Americans. The purposeful exercise of code switching was seen as a way for the community to strengthen their ties with one another in maintaining their identity as migrants and also as a way to promote their linguistic legacy (by speaking Swahili and other Kenyan dialects). According to M. Bosire (2006), the practice of code switching was seen to be the group's way of retaining their identity as it is seen as a "marker of membership" among the Kenyanese. From this research, it is clearly seen that language plays an important role in retaining kinship ties and promoting linguistic legacy.

## PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was two folds. *First*, to investigate the perceived effectiveness of Malaysian blogs in general. *Second*, to determine the dynamics use of English among four most influential Malaysian blogs based on their respective genres.

Specifically, the objectives of this study are as follows: (1) to examine the perceived effects of blogs on respondents' lives; (2) to determine the dynamics of English language use in Malaysian blogs; and (3) to study the effectiveness of the blogs in delivering their intended message.

This study has several limitations. For the first part, the study was confined only to the blog entries that existed in the blogosphere during the research period. For the second part, only four Malaysian blogs were selected from a list of “50 Most Influential Malaysian Blogs” as listed by Gaman (2007). Finally, the respondents (to view the blogs) were selected from the final-year TESL (Teaching English as Second Language) undergraduate students in one public university only. Thus, the results of this study have a limited generalization.

## METHODOLOGY

**On the Research Design.** This research utilized a survey method. According to M.D. Gall, W.R. Borg and J.P. Gall (1996), survey research involves providing careful descriptions of a phenomenon. Its purpose is to generate an accurate description of an event, attitude, or behavior.

**On the Selection of Blogs.** This study was conducted to examine the influence and language used by Malaysian bloggers. Gaman (2007) listed the “50 Most Influential Blogs in Malaysia” in 2007 based on the ranking made by *Technorati*. The list of the four most influential Malaysian blogs are as listed in table 1. The selection of blogs was based on the following criteria: (1) included in Malaysian Most Influential Blog as listed by Gaman in 2007 based on the highest ranking blogs of their respective category; and (2) these blogs have a readership and audience who leave comments in their comment boxes found at the end of every blog post.

**Table 1:**  
List of Four Most Influential Malaysian Blogs

| No | Blog   | Technorati Rank                             | Category   |
|----|--|---|------------|
| 1. | <a href="http://www.kennysia.com">www.kennysia.com</a>         | Rank: 234<br>(4,828 links from 2,406 blogs) | Personal   |
| 2. | <a href="http://www.sapiensbryan.com">www.sapiensbryan.com</a> | Rank: 604<br>(2,676 links from 1,577 blogs) | Technology |
| 3. | <a href="http://www.paultan.org">www.paultan.org</a>           | Rank: 7,360<br>(863 links from 369 blogs)   | Auto       |
| 4. | <a href="http://www.chedet.com">www.chedet.com</a>             | Rank: 8,402<br>(1,015 links from 344 blogs) | Politics   |

Source: Gaman (2007)

**On the Blogosphere.** The blog site for the context of blogging is termed as the “blogosphere”. It is an invisible space where blog writing, reading, and commenting (or talking about the text) were carried out between blog

writers and blog readers. The study examined the blogosphere as a whole, in relation to the norms of communication which were observed by all bloggers alike. This study was designed to examine how blogs are influential towards individual and society in general. Then, specific focus was given to the Malaysian blogosphere, with the purposeful selection of four blogs in the study to examine dynamics of the language use in those blogs.

**On the Selection of Final-Year TESL Students.** Participants in the research were selected among final-year trainee teachers majoring in TESL (Teaching English as Second Language) at a public university in Malaysia. Because this was an initial study, a small group ( $n = 30$ ) of TESL fourth-year students was selected. The respondents were asked to surf the four selected blogs prior to filling in the questionnaires.

**On the Instrument.** The instrument used in this study was a set of questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises three parts. First part (part I) consists of Demographic Section; second part (part II) is the General Perception Regarding Blogs; and the last part (part III) is the Specific Perception on the Top Four Malaysian Blogs. Part II used 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = not sure; 2 = disagree; and 1 = strongly disagree). Several drafts of the instrument were reviewed by experts in the field. Revisions were made based on their comments and recommendations.

## RESULTS

**Part I: Respondents' Personal Background.** A total of 30 final-year TESL (Teaching English as Second Language) students responded to the survey question at a return rate of 100%. These students were fourth-year TESL students in a premier public university in Malaysia who have already gone through a 10-week teaching practice in selected Malaysian secondary schools. The students should have sufficient knowledge and experience to judge one's proficiency in using English language. Table 2 shows the demographic information of the respondents based on their gender, perception of their language proficiency, and their ability to assess English written text.

The respondents consist of 66.67% ( $n = 20$ ) female students and 33.33% ( $n = 10$ ) male students. The data show that there are more female TESL students as compared to male students in the fourth-year TESL class. The respondents were asked to rate their proficiency of the English language, where 6.67% ( $n = 2$ ) stated their level of English was excellent while the majority (93.33%) stated that their level of English proficiency was good. Respondents were also asked to rate their ability to assess English written text and all of the respondents stated that they were good at appraising English text.

**Table 2:**  
Demographic Information of Respondents

|  | Category  | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) |
|--|-----------|---------------|----------------|
| Gender   | Male      | 10            | 33.33          |
|  | Female    | 20            | 66.67          |
| Respondents' rating of their proficiency of the English language | Excellent | 2             | 6.67           |
|  | Good      | 28            | 93.33          |
|  | Poor      | -             | 0              |
| Respondents' ability in assessing English written text           | Excellent | -             | 0              |
|  | Good      | 30            | 100            |
|  | Poor      | -             | 0              |

**On the Experience in Surfing Blogs.** Respondents' background knowledge was examined to find out if respondents are familiar with blogging or the blogosphere. In addition, the respondents' frequency of visiting blogs are being assessed so as to make sure this survey is valid. Based on the results in table 3, all of the respondents read blogs. As of the regularity in reading blogs, one-half (50%) of the respondents read blogs everyday, 33.33% (n = 10) read blogs every 2 to 3 days, and only 16.67% (n = 5) of the respondents read blogs on a weekly basis. Based on the data, the respondents seem to be well experienced in reading blogs where the majority of the respondents, 93.33% (n = 28) has at least a year and above experience in reading blogs.

**Table 3:**  
Frequency in Reading Blogs

|                              | Category            | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Respondent who read blogs    | Yes                 | 30            | 100%           |
|                              | No                  | -             | -              |
| Regularity in reading blogs  | Everyday            | 15            | 50%            |
|                              | Every 2 to 3 days   | 10            | 33.33%         |
|                              | Every week          | 5             | 16.67%         |
|                              | Rarely              | -             | -              |
| Experiences in reading blogs | 1-6 months          | -             | -              |
|                              | >6 months to 1 year | 2             | 6.67%          |
|                              | 1 year to 3 years   | 18            | 60%            |
|                              | 3 years and above   | 10            | 33.33%         |

A descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyze the data collected from the survey questionnaires. The statistics from the survey questionnaire were described based on these variables: respondents'

background on reading blog, respondents' attitude towards the influence from the blogosphere, respondents' perception regarding the language of the blog, and the effectiveness of the blog. Data on the variables collected from the survey questionnaires were described using frequency counts, percentage, and means. To facilitate the interpretation of the results, the mean ranges were set as tabulated in table 4. A mean score of 1.00 to 2.33 indicates a low level, 2.34 to 3.66 shows a moderate level, and 3.67 to 5.00 indicates a high level. The levels were analyzed in relation to each of the variable discussed.

**Table 4:**  
Range and Interpretation for the Mean Scores

| Mean Score   | Level    |
|--------------|----------|
| 1.00 to 2.33 | Low      |
| 2.34 to 3.66 | Moderate |
| 3.67 to 5.00 | High     |

**Part II: Dynamics of Language Use among Malaysian Bloggers.** This section reports the respondents' perception regarding blogs in general. The mean scores are shown in tables 5, 6, and 7. To get a better understanding of the whole picture of the findings, this section is divided into: (1) Influence from the blogosphere; (2) Language of the blog; and (3) Effectiveness in conveying the message.

**First, Influence from the blogosphere.** Respondents' attitude towards the influences from the blogosphere looked into how blogs influence them individually and the society at large. These views are personally guided by personal past experiences and expectations of the respondents. The attitudes are measured by the degree of agreement towards the sub-construct using the 5-point Likert scale.

Table 5 illustrates the results of the statistical analysis of respondents' perception regarding the influences from the blogosphere. The data were collected to answer the first research question: "How weblogs influence an individual or society?" The data were interpreted by referring to the mean ranges set earlier in table 4. The overall mean score for this sub-construct was 3.63. This shows that the respondents agree that the influence of blogs on their lives was at moderate level.

Table 5 also shows that the highest mean is 4.30 which signifies that the respondents believe that blogs are a form of new media. This is followed by the second highest mean which is 4.23. The respondents agree with the statement that blogs play an important role in society. Among the highest

means was the belief that there should be a freedom of speech in blogs (m = 3.80). However, the lowest mean in table 5 is 3.03 which the respondents seem uncertain whether reading blogs can influence their thinking.

**Table 5:**  
Influence from the Blogosphere

|   | Strongly Disagree | Disagree     | Undecided     | Agree         | Strongly Agree | Mean |
|---|-------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|------|
| I believe blogs play an important role in my life.      | 1<br>(3.33)       | 5<br>(16.67) | 5<br>(16.67)  | 14<br>(46.67) | 5<br>(16.67)   | 3.57 |
| I believe blogs play an important role in the society.  | -                 | 1<br>(3.33)  | -             | 20<br>(66.67) | 9<br>(30)      | 4.23 |
| I believe most of the things said in the blogs.         | 4<br>(13.33)      | 2<br>(6.67)  | 6<br>(20)     | 18<br>(60)    | -              | 3.27 |
| I believe blogs are the new media.                      | -                 | 3<br>(10)    | 5<br>(16.67)  | 12<br>(40)    | 15<br>(50)     | 4.30 |
| I believe reading blogs influences our language usage.  | -                 | 2<br>(6.67)  | 21<br>(70)    | 4<br>(13.33)  | 3<br>(10)      | 3.27 |
| I believe reading blogs influences our thinking.        | -                 | 7<br>(23.33) | 15<br>(33.33) | 8<br>(26.67)  | -              | 3.03 |
| I believe there should be a freedom of speech in blogs. | -                 | 4<br>(13.33) | 6<br>(20)     | 12<br>(40)    | 8<br>(26.67)   | 3.80 |

Overall mean score = 3.63

**Second, Language of the blog.** Respondents’ perception towards the language use of the blogs in general are analyzed. The view of language use in the blogs are personally guided by personal past experiences and expectations of the respondents. Table 6 presents the results of the statistical analysis of respondents’ perceptions towards the language of the blogs. The data, therefore, answer this research question: “*What is the English language proficiency level of Malaysian bloggers?*”

The overall mean score for this sub-construct is 3.61. This shows that, on average, the accuracy of language usage by the bloggers is at moderate level as perceived by the fourth-year TESL (Teaching English as Second Language) students. The highest mean is 4.23 which means that the respondents have agreed that the bloggers use code switching most of the time. The lowest mean is 2.90 which signifies that grammatical errors committed by bloggers in their blogs are still prevalent. The item

states that “I believe the bloggers has little to no error in their grammatical structure”. And the respondents seem to disagree with the statement (m = 2.90). Other items are rather well distributed on the medium range, ranging between 3.80 to 3.57.

**Table 6:**  
Language of the Blog

|  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree     | Undecided    | Agree         | Strongly Agree | Mean |
|--|-------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|------|
| I believe that Malaysian blogs are easy to understand.                                 | 1<br>(3.33)       | 5<br>(16.67) | 5<br>(16.67) | 14<br>(46.67) | 5<br>(16.67)   | 3.57 |
| I believe that Malaysian blogs use code switching most of the time.                    | -                 | 1<br>(3.33)  | -            | 20<br>(66.67) | 9<br>(30)      | 4.23 |
| I believe that Malaysian blogs use a variety of sentence structure in their entries.   | -                 | 2<br>(6.67)  | 6<br>(20)    | 18<br>(60)    | 4<br>(13.33)   | 3.80 |
| I believe that Malaysian blogs have little to no error in their grammatical structure. | -                 | 7<br>(23.33) | 5<br>(16.67) | 18<br>(60)    | -              | 2.90 |
| I believe Malaysian blogs use accurate punctuation and spelling.                       | -                 | 4<br>(13.33) | 5<br>(16.67) | 18<br>(60)    | 3<br>(10)      | 3.57 |
| I believe Malaysian blogs use appropriate style and tone.                              | -                 | 7<br>(23.33) | 3<br>(10)    | 15<br>(33.33) | 5<br>(16.67)   | 3.60 |

Overall mean score = 3.61

**Third, Effectiveness in conveying the message.** Next, the respondents assessed the effectiveness of the blogs in delivering their intended message to their readers. Table 7 shows the results of the statistical analysis of respondents’ perception towards the effectiveness of bloggers in delivering their intended message to their readers. The data therefore answer this research question: “How effective did the bloggers deliver their intended message to their readers using English as their medium?”

The overall mean score is 3.68 indicating a modest effectiveness of the blogs in conveying their message to their intended audience. However, the respondents rated rather highly on blogs' simplicity ( $m = 3.93$ ) and relevancy ( $m = 3.93$ ). Other items in this sub-domain were rated moderately with the means ranged from 3.67 to 3.36.

**Table 7:**  
Effectiveness of the Blogs

|  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree     | Undecided     | Agree         | Strongly Agree | Mean |
|--|-------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|------|
| I believe that Malaysian blogs are easy to understand.                                     | -                 | 1<br>(3.33)  | 5<br>(16.67)  | 19<br>(63.33) | 5<br>(16.67)   | 3.93 |
| I believe that Malaysian blogs talk about topics that are interesting and relevant.        | -                 | 1<br>(3.33)  | 4<br>(13.33)  | 20<br>(66.67) | 5<br>(16.67)   | 3.93 |
| I am always excited and anxious to know the ending of the entry.                           | -                 | 2<br>(6.67)  | 10<br>(33.33) | 18<br>(60)    | -              | 3.53 |
| I believe that the message the blogger is trying to convey is being delivered effectively. | -                 | 7<br>(23.33) | 5<br>(16.67)  | 18<br>(60)    | -              | 3.36 |
| I can often relate the blogger message towards myself and the society.                     | -                 | 4<br>(13.33) | 5<br>(16.67)  | 18<br>(60)    | 3<br>(10)      | 3.67 |
| Overall mean score = 3.68  |                   |              |               |               |                |      |

**Part III: Dynamics of Language Used in Specific Blogs.** This section discusses about the influence and the language used in four specific Malaysian blogs. As mentioned earlier, the four Malaysian blogs were conveniently selected from a list of “50 Most Influential Malaysian Blogs” (MIMB) as listed by Gaman (2007) based on rating by *Technorati*. The blogs include: (1) [www.kennysia.com](http://www.kennysia.com) – Personal blog; (2) [www.sapiensbryan.com](http://www.sapiensbryan.com) – Technology blog; (3) [www.paultan.org](http://www.paultan.org) – Auto blog; and (4) [www.chedet.com](http://www.chedet.com) – Political blog. Based on these blogs, we focused on their language use and content in delivering the intended message accordingly.

**On the Accuracy and Effectiveness of the Specific Blogs.** The selected final-year TESL (Teaching English as Second Language) students were asked to view critically the four selected Malaysian blogs for 30 minutes each blog. They were also asked to fill in the questionnaire after viewing each blog. The two main parts for the assessment are: (1) accuracy of language use; and (2) the effectiveness of the blog. For each part, there are several elements studied. For example, accuracy of language use has five elements: (1) varied sentence structure, (2) accurate vocabulary, (3) correct grammatical structure, (4) correct spelling and punctuation, and (5) use appropriate style and tone. The respondents just needed to tick [Yes] if the element studied is present in the blog, or [No] if the element is not present. The percentage in each cell in table 8 was calculated based on how many tick [Yes] in the cell.

Table 8 shows overwhelming majority (97%) of the respondents agreed that the bloggers used varied sentence structure. Almost 80% of respondents agreed that these bloggers used accurate punctuation and spelling while another 85% believe that the style and tone used are appropriate. However, only 69% of the respondents concurred that the bloggers used accurate grammatical structures.

**Table 8:**  
Accurate Language Use in the Blogs

|   | Kennysia | Paultan | Sapiensbryan | Chedet | Average |
|---|----------|---------|--------------|--------|---------|
| Varied sentence structure.                                  | 100%     | 88%     | 100%         | 100%   | 97%     |
| Vocabulary shows sophistication and is used with precision. | 72%      | 88%     | 72%          | 88%    | 80%     |
| Accurate grammatical structure.                             | 72%      | 72%     | 60%          | 72%    | 69%     |
| Punctuation and spelling are accurate.                      | 78%      | 83%     | 72%          | 83%    | 79%     |
| The style and tone used are appropriate.                    | 83%      | 100%    | 72%          | 83%    | 85%     |

**On the Effectiveness of Specific Blogs.** Table 9 shows, on an average, 83% of the respondents agreed that topics reported in these blogs are consistent and relevant. Similarly, majority of the respondents believe that the content of the blog is easy to understand (82%) and the message that they deliver across was done effectively (81%). However, only 66% of the respondents believe that the readers' interest is arouse and sustained

throughout a blog entry. Based on the four blogs mentioned, it seems that these blogs are chosen to be in the list of Malaysian most influential blogs because of their well published blogs and of their loyal readers. In addition, through the analysis, these bloggers are perceived to be able to deliver their message across to their readers rather effectively.

**Table 9:**  
Blogs Effectiveness in Delivering their Message

|   | Kennysia | Paultan | Sapiensbryan | Chedet | Average |
|---|----------|---------|--------------|--------|---------|
| The content of the blog is easy to understand.                              | 83%      | 88%     | 72%          | 83%    | 82%     |
| The topic is addressed with consistent relevance.                           | 77%      | 83%     | 83%          | 88%    | 83%     |
| The interest of the reader is aroused and sustained throughout the writing. | 60%      | 60%     | 72%          | 72%    | 66%     |
| The message is deliver across effectively.                                  | 83%      | 83%     | 72%          | 83%    | 81%     |

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The research results are discussed in two broad areas which include: (1) General view of the blogosphere; and (2) Specific view on the selected four most influential Malaysian blogs. In the first section, we examined the respondents' response towards the influence of the blogosphere, the language of the blog, and the effectiveness of the blog as presented in the questionnaires. The second part of the discussion focuses the respondents' responses towards the accuracy of language use and the bloggers' effectiveness in conveying his/her intended message of the selected blogs.

**On the Influence of the Blogosphere.** In general, the study found that most respondents believe that blogs play an important role in their life. This result comes in tally with the report from a recent research by Abu Hassan Hasbullah (2008) that claims 70% of the recent election results in Malaysia were influenced by information in the blogs. This could be a manifestation of how influential blogs could be in a society.

However, only 60% of the respondents stated that they believe most of the things that being written in blogs. This finding shows that blog readers

are aware that the information portrays in blogs are not always accurate and can, therefore, be in doubt. Nevertheless, a large majority (90%) of the respondents agree that blog is a new tool that can be used effectively. As the popularity of blogs grew, many people started to create their own blog. This is in line with a report that states there are 500,000 active bloggers in Malaysia (Hasbullah, 2008); and blogging in Malaysia is among the highest in the world. With so much activity and popularity, blogging is indeed a powerful tool that cannot be taken lightly.

However, more than two-thirds (70%) of the respondents stated that they are uncertain regarding the blog's influence on their language usage. This is because the respondents are trained in English and, therefore, have high awareness of the different forms and function of the language. In addition, more than two-thirds of the respondents believe that bloggers should be given the freedom of speech in allowing them to write according to their hearts' content. But only one-third of the respondents believe that censorship has to play a role in blogs so as sensitive issue will not be get out of hand. This is in accordance with one of our blog participants who wrote "[...] *having to self-censor is the worst thing that can ever happen. The blog is not very personal anymore, but I give myself generous leeway*", K. Sia reflected. "And things can get out-of-hand and exaggerated online" (Sia, 2008).

**On the Language of the Blog.** The majority of the respondents believe that the four Malaysian blogs used standard of English most of the time. This is supported by what S. Nilsson (2005) says of blogging patterns, where it is observed that there is a clearly defined sense of community within blogs, which reveal an obvious on-going conversation occurring within this phenomenon. The unique pattern of discourse within the blogosphere, S. Nilsson notes, is the combination of both monologue and the dialogue in a space-bound, electronic environment.

Interestingly, the respondents believe that the blogs exercise code switching most of the time. This shows that among the speech pattern identified within the blog interaction between participants (both the writer and the readers), there are elements such as code switching or code mixing, due to the fact that the readership of the audience are made up of bilingual and multilingual speakers. In the survey too, it shows that more than two-thirds of the respondents believe that the blogs used a variety of sentence structure in their blog entries and the four Malaysian bloggers used accurate punctuation and spelling. This shows that being considered a Malaysian most influential blogger, he or she needs to have certain level of English proficiency to be able to write entries with good English and, therefore, little errors are presented in their work.

**On the Effectiveness of Blogs.** In general, the majority of respondents believe that Malaysian blogs are easy to comprehend. Besides that, majority of respondents find that the topics discussed in the blogs are interesting and relevant, where more than two-thirds of the respondents find that they can relate to the bloggers' message well. This shows that blog serves as a tool to facilitate social interaction. It can also be observed that the ability for a blogger to become "intimate" with their readers, by sharing their personal thoughts and views, is the determining factor for attracting an "audience" or a reader who will keep coming back to read more, and even share his or her own feedback.

**On the Perceptions on the Specific Blogs.** All four blogs received favorable feedback from the respondents. This can be seen from the bloggers background, where all the bloggers are fluent in English and has no problem in communicating or writing in English. However, there is a moderate use of precise vocabulary as most of the readers use specific linguistic features within the context of the blog conversation via written text. The accurate use of grammatical structure, punctuation, and spelling is also on the lower end because of the use of conversational language and also Malaysian-English. However, the style and tone used in their blogs are pretty much appropriate and acceptable.

Because both the blog writer and blog reader (the audience) are bilingual (speaker of English as well as *Bahasa Melayu*) or multilingual (speaker of English, *Bahasa Melayu*, and Mandarin) there is the inclusion of the Malay and other language in the interactions between the blog writer and the readers. This goes back to what S. Nilsson (2005) said about the conversational mode of interaction via *Blogspeak*; and within this context of communication, the bilingual bloggers include code switching (as if they were speaking in real life to one another), via the commenting and blog writing activities that they partake in.

Among the speech patterns identified within the blog interaction between the participants (both from the blog writer and readers), include short forms of spelling, emoticons (virtual "laugh" and smiles), as well as code switching. The shortened form of these elements is very much apparent in these blogs, especially on personal blogs such as [www.kennysia.com](http://www.kennysia.com). The full spelling of a word (example the word "are" become "r" and the word "you" become "u") are shorten in the form of internet language. Capitalization and punctuation do not seem to be relevant in several aspects of the blogs, especially in the commentary as it is a seemingly "spoken" language between the reader and the blogger.

In terms of code switching, the question tag "kan?" is an element taken

from BM (*Bahasa Melayu* or Malay Language) and is seen throughout the four blogs mentioned. Besides that, affixes like “*la*”, “*leh*”, and “*ho*” are also seen across the blogs giving it a feel of the Malaysian-English. Besides that code mixing, it can be seen all across the blogs where words like “*haha*” and “*lepaking*”. About the “*haha*” is deemed a universally accepted mode of internet language to indicate laughter which can also be written in other forms such as “*hehehe*” or “*LOL*”. The word “*lepaking*”, however, is an element of code mixing where the English language continuous tense “*ing*” is incooperated into the BM (*Bahasa Melayu* or Malay Language) word “*lepak*” which means loiter, thus changing the verb form of “*lepak*” into a continuous verb “*lepaking*”.

These conversational code switching and code mixing elements are usually used in spoken form among the bilingual speaking Malaysians. However, within the blogosphere, the bloggers seem to employ these strategies to communicate in more informal manner with one another. This is to, further, strengthen the camaraderie and kinship characteristics of belonging to a speech community, which in this context is the Malaysian bloggers community. Thus, it can be said that the blogosphere interactions of bilingual or multilingual bloggers are colorful spaces to explore, due to the vast array of speech patterns that exist within the discourse setting. As discussed previously, the usage of linguistic elements such as short forms of spelling, emoticons, as well as code switching and code mixing is being utilized by the bloggers in their blogs.

**On the Content of Specific Blogs.** The TESL (Teaching English as Second Language) students perceive that the four Malaysian bloggers wrote good content in their blog entries. Their blog entries are presumably easy to understand and often they address current issues which are relevant to the genre of their blogs. All the four blogs do fairly well in sustaining the interests of the readers throughout their entry. It is important to maintain the interests of the readers, as just like reading a book, readers get bored easily. Most of the blogs observed put in colorful pictures and moving animation to capture readers’ attention. And when asked if the messages of the bloggers are delivered effectively, many respondents’ agreed.

Language proficiency, topics, popularity, and acquaintance are several reasons that determine ones interest in reading a particular blog. In this context, R. Blood (2002) states that with blogging, there is an emergence of self-realization and development that perhaps had not existed before one engages in the practice. Over a period of time, this development is expected to be enhanced as more and more readers communicated with one another via blogging; thus, enabling a feeling of camaraderie

to emerge among the members of the speech community made up of participants who share similar goals and common interests. They are tied into the community based on the interests that they share, and that is the determining factor that keeps the member of the speech community reading and commenting within a particular discourse space of a selected blog. This idea of shared, common interest within a particular speech community is clearly seen in all the four blogs that would made them so popular and influential.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are several implications that have emerged from the study. The first implication is the varied linguistic features such as code switching and code mixing patterns dissected from the participants' blogs. This implies that blogs tend to have linguistic features of their own. For example, [www.kennysia.com](http://www.kennysia.com) tends to talk about events and functions that he attended and his view on several current issues in Kuching and other cities in Malaysia. He is a representative of a working adult and his literary practices and views stated in the blog imply his roles and identity.

Meanwhile, [www.chedet.com](http://www.chedet.com), on the other hand, talks about his political views on current political scenarios in Malaysia. He is a retired Prime Minister of Malaysia and, therefore, holds certain position and power to talk about what he is best at politics. In his blog, which gains popularity, he puts forward critical comments on current issues, especially regarding political scenario in Malaysia.

The findings also show that the world of blogosphere is such a complex wonderful world filled with colorful identities. This is shown in the various linguistic features presented in their blogs and also the interaction with one another (blogger-reader, reader-blogger) in their meaning-making process. The use of different media tool such as video, pictures, colors, and songs makes each blog uniquely its own right and this in turn makes the bloggers aware of who they are, their surrounding, and how issues affect their life through the discussion and interaction via the blog. For example, in code switching where it demonstrates the bilingual or multilingual identity of a speaker, when done through blogging, brings a wider impact to the world of blogging where it gives them identity when the world of internet is in fact inhabited by millions of countless faceless and nameless people.

Through this research, it also implies the importance of language used in blogs for linguists and educationists to study. The implication for linguists and language educators of blog studies will grow many folds as this new

mode of communication provides a whole new opportunity to explore. There is a new window of opportunity in blog studies, but the language of the blog often holds the key to this window.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study support the thesis that blogs play an important role in people lives. From this research, we can conclude that the blogosphere in Malaysia is quite influential and that blogs may influence some aspects of the people's lives.

The accuracy of English language used in blogs is at moderate level and the use of code-switching / code-mixing are among the speech patterns identified in Malaysian blogs. Despite the use of code switching / code mixing in some blogs, the bloggers, in general, have no problem in delivering their message across.

Analyses on the four specific Malaysian blogs found that there are the unique linguistic features such as code switching and code mixing patterns dissected from the participants' blogs. There are also the different codes and functions each individual bloggers have in terms of their own genre. This may imply that the influence of the societal and educational aspects on the bloggers' view points.

Finally, the study demonstrates that the world of blogosphere is such a complex cyber world filled with colorful identities. The results also reveal the various linguistic features presented in the blogs and also the interaction with one another (blogger-reader, reader-blogger) in their meaning-making process.

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**The Picture of Malaysian Lecturers and Students**

(Source: [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), 20/5/2012)

The TESL (Teaching English as Second Language) students perceive that the four Malaysian bloggers wrote good content in their blog entries. Their blog entries are presumably easy to understand and often they address current issues which are relevant to the genre of their blogs.