

GLOCALISATION OF PERSONAL ADS - GENDER IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF MALAYSIAN ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

Globalisation and glocalisation of ads are observed to operate at two textual levels. The first level concerns the schematic genre while the second concerns the syntactic structure of personal ads. This article examines the process of homogenisation via conformity to the schematic structure of personal ads. Through a quantitative and qualitative analyses of adolescents' ads, findings demonstrate how adolescent advertisers stretch the boundaries of the personal ad genre, negotiate normative constraints on their communicative task. The findings of this study showed that Malaysian adolescents are not constantly confused and ambivalent of their personal identity.

Glokalisasi Iklan Peribadi – Identiti Gender dalam Konstruksi Remaja di Malaysia

Abstrak

Proses globalisasi dan glokalisasi iklan dikatakan beroperasi dalam dua tahap tekstual. Tahap pertama pemaknaan iklan peribadi menyentuh mengenai genre skematik manakala tahap kedua berkaitan struktur sintaktik. Makalah ini mengkaji proses homogenisasi melalui keakuran kepada struktur skematik dalam iklan peribadi. Hasil analisis iklan peribadi remaja secara kuantitatif dan kualitatif menunjukkan sejauh mana pengiklan remaja ini berusaha merentasi sempadan genre iklan peribadi, untuk merundingkan kekangan normatif terhadap kesan komunikasinya. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa remaja di Malaysia tidak sentiasa keliru dan merasa tidak yakin dengan identiti sendiri mereka.

Keywords: *Personal ads, schematic structure, normative constraints, globalisation, glocalisation*

Introduction

Globalisation can be understood and discussed within a variety of terms, none of which may stand discussed in isolation. These terms understood and discussed may be of economic practices, more specifically the world capitalist economy; institutional practices, namely the

nation - state system and military power as well as cultural practices, namely media and the global information system. Robertson (1992) defines globalisation as a process where the expansion of international connections, the organisation of social life on a global scale and the raised awareness of the world as one holistic entity has led to the compression and consolidation of world society. The concept of “globalisation” is a much maligned concept only for those who choose to see the problems and limitations particularly with regard to culture and identity within a narrow sense of interpretation - specifically, equating globalisation as cultural imperialism. In the context of Malaysia, although both leaders may not necessarily support globalisation as cultural imperialism wholeheartedly, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Razali Ismail nevertheless addressed the issue of globalisation with regard to its implications to culture and identity. In 2000, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi although acknowledging that globalisation has made diverse cultures and communities accessible, it has also as he acknowledges, “bred cultural insecurity among non - western societies...” (in Bahiyah & Jamilah 2000: 5). Elsewhere, Razali Ismail (2000 in Bahiyah & Jamilah 2000: 5) asserts that with the rise of society that is borderless, there is fear not only that “people will be engaged and committed to their local communities and the correspondent shared values”, but also more importantly the “western culture revisited in a globalize world, as a global culture system” may introduce and ultimately enforce cultural and identity homogenization.

Scholars and researchers (see for example Bahiyah & Jamilah 2000; Razali Ismail 2000; Zawiah Yahya 2000; Barker 1999 and Robertson 1992 amongst others) have increasingly asserted three central difficulties with the idea of globalisation as cultural imperialism. Barker (1999:38) aptly summarized these difficulties as follows:

- Evidence shows that it is not necessarily the case that the global flow of cultural discourse is constituted from the ‘west-to-the rest’, i.e. as one – way linear traffic.
- In so far as the predominant flow of cultural discourse is from the west to east and north and south, this should not be necessarily be understood as domination.
- It is unclear that globalisation is simply a process of homogenization since the forces of fragmentation and hybridisms are equally as strong.

Increasingly, there are scholars who see beyond the surface level of the argument and who advocate others to be malleable, knowledgeable of the issues and to rise to the challenges of globalization because as Giddens (1990) puts it “...we are all part of a global society in the sense that no one can escape its consequence”. Razali Ismail (2000: 3-4) argues that Asians should not fear Western cultural influences. He advocates Asians to be resilient, to be firmly rooted in their own traditions, to have strong and positive attitudes towards their own cultures and to be able to withstand the culture of materialism in order to preserve culture so that the result will not be a loss of culture but rather the amalgamation of the culture of Asians to more global forms, resulting in a rich transformation of cultures. Zawiah Yahya (2000: 27) identifies the great paradox of globalization and states that “it is as much homogenizing as it is a differentiating process”. Quoting Waters (1995: 136), she acknowledges that globalization pluralizes the world by recognizing the value of cultural niches and local abilities. According to her, globalization in its nature “celebrates cultural pluralism by acknowledging cultural particularism” (Zawiah Yahya 2000: 27). In all, Zawiah advocates that we be active rather than passive participants in

the pluralisation of the globalize world by making our contributions “bear the stamp of our own particular identity”.

Given the above, this paper seeks to address Malaysian adolescents increasing accessibility to, participation in and representation of self within a globalize discursive site, within personal advertisement (personal ads henceforth) pages in the media. In this paper, we assert that personal ads written by Malaysian adolescents complicate the idea of loss of cultural autonomy and diversity, i.e. cultural imperialism. Given this scenario, this paper seeks to answer the question “How are Malaysian adolescents gendering themselves in personal ads?” especially amidst challenges of globalisation brought about by the media and global information systems and amidst globalize pressures, on one hand, to conform to peer group values and culture and on the other, pressured to assert and to maintain their individualities.

In examining Malaysian adolescent constructions of gender identities in a corpus of adolescent personal ads compiled in 3 annual publications of *Galaxie* magazines in Malaysia, this paper aims to highlight how Malaysian adolescents in the corpus make sense of themselves within the social world in which they live especially where gender is grounding for identity. This paper takes into account first person evidence, i.e., definitions from within/everyday defined articulations of self from individual actors themselves (Malaysian adolescents) rather than authority defined evidence (observation and interpretation by those in authority, i.e., usually adults in mainstream discourse) of adolescents’ self perception (Abdul Rahman Embong, July 1999:10) through empirical data to discuss the linguistic means/criteria Malaysian adolescents use in which to identify themselves as male or female and to distinguish between masculine and feminine behaviour.

Hence, in this paper, we take a stance that is unlike many mainstream discourses that treat Malaysian adolescents (or otherwise) as liability, rather we treat Malaysian adolescents as capital, gaining understanding of their identity construction and other affected dimensions of identity when we care to study the diversity as well as the similarities that resonate in their voices. In revealing the relationship between textual structure and the construction of gender identity, this paper will also highlight other dimensions of identity (the 4 most frequent attributes of Malaysian adolescents’ self categorization/perception) which might shape the sense of who Malaysian adolescents are, that are deemed immediate and that have high resonance in the textual analysis of 1000 personal ads written by Malaysian adolescents. Globalisation, Glocalisation and Personal Advertisements

In agreement with Barker (1999:68), one fact about globalisation that cannot be denied is that it has increased and made easily accessible the range of sources and resources available for identity construction. Such is the case within the context of personal ads. Globalisation has not only allowed for easy accessibility to discursive sites, i.e., in the case of this paper, personal ads pages in the media (although increasingly of late, personal ad pages are also available in the global information system as well) but also easy participation and representation within these sites because of homogenization of the genre and the structural elements of personal ads. In these discursive sites, representations of self are proliferated within the personal ad genre. Shalom (1997) further adds seeing to the popularity and accessibility of personal ads pages in the media that they are “a kind of supermarket where people are trading what they have for they want”.

The concept of “glocalisation” used in the context of this paper is in accordance with Robertson’s (1992:175), specifically to express the global production of the local and the localisation of the global. Razali Ismail (2000: 4) aptly describes glocalisation as a product of globalisation that “offers us an opportunity to engage in cultural interaction that will not result in the loss of our culture, but rather the amalgamation of our culture to more global forms”. This concept as well as the concept of globalisation in this paper when used in the context of Malaysian adolescent personal ads are linked to the personal ads genre and discourse analysis at two textual levels. The first being at the level of schematic genre whereas the second, being at the level of syntactic structure of personal ads so that there could be an exploration of the perpetuation of globalisation resulting in homogenization through the schematic structure of the personal ads and at the same time, the perpetuation of heterogeneity through intertextuality and code mixing resulting in the hybridization or glocalisation of the genre by Malaysian adolescents. In this paper, with regard to the analysis of Malaysian adolescent ads as discussed above, we agree with Robertson (1995:27) that “it is not a question of either homogenization or hetrogenisation, but rather of the ways in which both of these two tendencies have become features of life across much of the late-twentieth century world”.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough (1989, 1992, 1995) defines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often obscure relationships between discursive practices, texts, and events and wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes. By focusing on how social relations, identity, knowledge, and power are constructed through written and spoken texts in communities, schools, the media, and the political arena (McGregor 2003), CDA strives to explore how these non-transparent relationships are a factor in securing power and hegemony and it draws attention to power imbalances and social inequities in the hope of creating linguistic and social awareness in people.

CDA works around three central tenets - that discourse is shaped and constrained by (a) social structure (class, status, age, ethnic identity and gender) and by (b) culture and that (c) discourse helps shape and constrain our identities, relationships, and systems of knowledge and beliefs. CDA aims at making transparent the connections between discourse practices, social practices, and social structures, connections that might be opaque to the layperson via a three-level analysis: (a) the description of text (analysis of formal textual features) (b) the interpretation of

the relationship between text and social interaction (that is the norms, and mental standards of socially acceptable behaviour in specific roles/relationships used to produce, receive, and interpret a text) and (c) the explanation of the relationship between social context (that is the settings where discourse occurs, each with a set of conventions that determine what each is allowed and expected to do in a particular social context) (Fairclough 1989) .

Discussion of Major Findings

Malaysian Adolescents’ Self-categorisation/Perception

In our corpus of personal ads, the advertisers have identified and described themselves through a range of attributes that belong to several criteria. These criteria have been divided into the following 6 classifications for self-categorization: (1) social-relational characteristics/affective behaviour/psychological traits (2) ethnicity (3) gender (4) interests/hobbies (5) physical appearance, and (6) religion e.g. *Good-looking, simple, understanding Chinese guy from Ipoh, studying in K.L.* The frequencies and percentages of occurrence for the above attributes are presented in Table 1 below.

Table1: Frequency count of Self-Attributes

| Coding of Attributes | Descriptors | Percentage of occurrence |
|----------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Gender | Girl Gurl Gal Guy Boy | 78% |
| First person pronoun | I/I am/I'm | 65% |
| Interest | I like/love/enjoy; loves/luv/luvs; hobby/ies | 67% |
| Race | Chinese Malay Indian | 62% |
| Social-relational | Open-minded Simple Friendly Happy Happy-go-lucky Crazy Easygoing Funny Sincere Cool Understanding Lonely Caring Nice Funky Cheerful Honest | 45% 7% 5% |

| | | |
|---------------------|---|-------|
| | Bored Loving Shy Loyal Humorous Naughty | |
| Physical | Cute Pretty Handsome Sweet Sexy Slim | 4% |
| Age | Young | 2% |
| Marital status | Single | 1% |
| Academic background | Student e. I'm a UiTM Shah Alam student/ I'm a Maldivian studying in Malaysia/ Teenage guy currently studying in Cochrane Road School/ Cute, charming, mature Chinese guy studying in college | 2.20% |
| Religion | | 2% |

Gender and Ethnicity

Gender and ethnicity/racial background are two elements that are frequently stated in the advertisements, highlighting the importance of these dimensions in our corpus of ads.

Gender Identity

What is gender identity? What are the elements that go into the construction of gender identity? And how salient is gender in the formation and construction of adolescent identity?

Gender identity is a subjective, but continuous and persistent, sense of ourselves as male or female. It is shaped by many different factors: individual and collective: biological and social (Woodward 2004). This awareness normally begins in infancy and is reinforced during adolescence (www.hyperdictionary.com). Sometimes, gender identity can be revealed through our names. For example, Malaysian Muslim names are gender-indexed via the particle ‘bin’ (indicating a male person) or ‘binti’ (a female person) conjoining the first and the surname e.g. Roslin *binti* Musa or Musa *bin* Mohamad. Awareness of gender differences comes early and since birth we have been taught how significant gender is in determining which codes of cultural and social conducts one should adhere to. Therefore, when we interact, either orally or in written form, with others, gender stereotypes are often activated which in turn shape and guide the way we perceive and behave towards.

Despite the fact that the names of the advertisers are displayed at the end of every ad, gender is found to be a key attribute articulated in 78% of the ads highlighting the pervasiveness of gender as a social, differentiating dimension in categorizing these adolescents. This means that gender, which is a basic-level and highly naturalised category, is perceived to be more important than any other attributes e.g. ethnicity 62% and social-relational 57% that define what and who the adolescents are. This finding reveals how gender is seen as an anchor for identity even in a context when the advertisers can depart from their physical characteristics.

Gender Identity Descriptions – Via Nouns

Gender identity in our data is a sociopsychological quality that is described by the individual through the use of common nouns, phrases and sentences that (1) clearly categorise themselves as male or female and (2) may or may not conform to gender stereotypes.

About 78% of the advertisers demonstrate gender identity through the use of complex noun phrase (NP) within a declarative sentence structure (please refer to the examples below) - with gender-indexed common noun as the Head Noun (HN) of the phrase– preceded by several pre-modifiers (PreM) (the most prominent and frequent being the ethnic Origin e.g. Chinese, Malay, Indian, followed by social-relational attribute e.g. simple, friendly, coolest etc) and post-modifiers (PostM) such as prepositional phrase and relative clause e.g. from Penang and who is now a Muslim.

- e.g.
- 1) I'm a Chinese (PreM) **girl** (HN) seeking friends (PostM)...
 - 2) I'm a Malay (PreM) **girl** (HN) looking for pen pals (PostM)...
 - 3) Hi! I am an Indian (PreM) **guy** (HN) who is now a Muslim (PostM).
 - 4) I'm the coolest (PreM) **gurl** (HN) in the hope of seeking friends (PostM)...

The nouns used by the adolescents strongly suggest an understanding and acceptance of the differentiation of gender as a binary system of male and female. Genetic force are clearly at work here in the perception of their gender, and this biologically evolving factor forms the unconscious i.e. gender-typical behavior, and also shape the conscious perception of gender identity e.g. the labelling of oneself as guy or girl. Interestingly, while gender takes precedence in these adolescents' articulation of identity, there is however, an unmarked preference for specific gender characteristic by both male and female advertisers when it comes to their target readers, preferring instead to write 'Any age/sex/race...from all over the world'. This is highly due to the nature of relationship i.e. platonic and purely friendship that these adolescents are seeking for.

Gender in our corpus of personal ads is indicated via common nouns 'girl', 'gurl', 'gal', 'guy', 'man', and 'boy'. Out of the total number of ads by female adolescents (486), 68% of the advertisers present themselves as 'girl'. While 25% prefer the word 'gal', another 4% described themselves as 'gurl'. Male advertisers (514) on the other hand show a clear preference for presenting themselves as 'guy' (79 %), as opposed to only 62 (12%) who describes themselves as 'boy'.

While 'girl' may emphasize the qualities of being female, young and lively, 'gal', which is an American colloquial word, besides indicating the idea of youth, it also portrays sociability, playfulness and carries a certain level of negative connotation in the West. 'Gurl' is a phonetic rendering of American pronunciation. In light of the observation made by Asmah Hj. Omar (2000) that language choice is triggered by an effort to conform, this usage may indicate a linguistic differentiation strategy at work. It is an effort made to contrast user vis-à-vis others through an Americanised version of the common noun 'girl'.

As for the word 'guy', it is colloquial (Maalej 1997; Leech 1981) and does not have the connotations of 'age, maturity, and responsibility' associated with 'man', which may be taken as an appropriate gender description for our male adolescent advertisers. The word 'boy' on the other hand, suggests a male with youthful qualities. However, it also conveys a sense of

immaturity which can be the reason why only 62 out of 514 male advertisers have chosen the word as a gender-descriptor.

It was earlier stated that gender identity is constructed via common nouns functioning as the Head of a complex noun phrase. Most of the times, these nouns are not used independently, but rather are intricately linked with other attributes resulting in heavily pre and post modified noun phrases by means of adjectives and a variety of clauses. We are only going to focus on the pre-modifiers as its positioning and categorisation render it a vital tool for revealing attitudes and perceptions in self-categorisation (Fowler and Kress 1979; Quirk 1985; Maalej 1997).

Quirk et. al. (1985) have classified premodifying adjectives into the categories of pre-central, central, post central and prehead.

1. Pre central – peripheral, non-gradable adjectives e.g. Intensifier i.e. Very, two
2. Central – emotive, evaluative or subjective adjectives e.g. simple, friendly, cool, kind etc.
3. Post central – includes participles e.g. ‘retired’, ‘sleeping’ and colours e.g. Red, blue
4. Pre head – denominal adjectives denoting nationality, ethnic background e.g. Malay, Chinese, Indian etc.

About 62% of the total advertisers chose to highlight their ethnicity as a part of their identity construction, semantically qualifying and defining the noun and structurally functioning as the preHead modifier e.g. ‘a friendly **Indian** guy’ in the gender-indexed noun phrase. The choice and positioning of this premodifier are indicative of its ‘visually observable, and objectively recognizable’ property (Quirk 1985) and the adjective appearing on the immediate left of the head noun tend to be the most significant and meaningful for their users (Maalej 1997). The next section explains the reason behind the high preference for this particular structural construction in our corpus.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic/racial attribute provides the answer to the question of ‘where do I belong?’ in the matrix of Malaysian ethnic identities. Ethnicity seems to be a salient feature in Malaysian adolescents ads, with 62% of the advertisers describing their own race e.g. *I'm a Chinese gal, I'm an Eurasian-Indian girl and I'm a simple Malay guy*. Interestingly, there is an unspecified preference for ethnic or racial attribute when it comes to their target readers, preferring instead to write ‘Any age/sex/race...from all over the world’. In Coupland’s (1996) study of British dating advertisements however, of the eight dimensions she isolates, ethnicity is the least prominent in her corpus, used to describe the author in only 7% of the ads, and the target in only 5%.

A link has been established between positive in-group attitudes and identification with higher-self esteem, less stress and less delinquent behaviour (Mc Creary, Slavin & Berry 1996; Beale-Spencer & Cunningham 2000). Ethnic identity creates a sense of belonging to a specific group of people i.e. a sense of rootedness (Oyserman & Harrison 1989) thus reducing the feeling of isolation and of being alone.

Social-relational Characteristics/Affective Behaviour/Psychological Traits

A survey by Montemayor and Eisen (in Yavari 2002) revealed that older youths tend to use more abstract descriptions such as emotions, beliefs, motives and personal/ psychological traits e.g. when they are asked to give answer to the question, ‘who am I?’. The skill in selecting psychological attributes as self-descriptors is due to the acquisition of self-reflective capacity, the ability to reflect on their private (inner thoughts/feelings) and public selves (behaviour with others around them) which develop more fully during adolescence (Selman 1980). This seems to explain why affective/psychological attributes describing personality seem to take precedent in the majority of the ads.

The fact that they act as complement of the verb in a sentence (appearing after the first person pronoun and verb) highlight (1) their structural importance (they complete a sentence) (2) the advertisers’ awareness of traits that may attract the readers when reading and scouting for acquaintances as well as define them as individuals.

Analysis of our corpus reveals that nearly half of the advertisers from both groupings (45%) used the adjectives ‘simple’, ‘friendly’ and ‘open-minded’ in categorising and presenting themselves to the readers. As opposed to adult advertisers who tend to utilise gender-appropriate characteristics to define themselves (Shalom 1997; Thorne & Coupland 1998; Jones 2000), these 3 top traits may be considered gender neutral, in the sense that they cannot be categorised as belonging to either feminine or masculine stereotypical characteristics (Woodward 2004).

The next few adjectives high on the list of occurrence are ‘funny’ and ‘easy-going’. These adjectives create a clear favourable impression about the adolescents. They indicate a sense of enjoyment and delight, and also of being relaxed, light-hearted, untroubled and even-tempered individuals to get to know and to be with. The notions of liveliness and enthusiasm can be strongly felt in clauses such as (1) ‘I’m very friendly and I have a sense of humour’ (2) ‘Funny, open-minded, Indian guy’, (3) ‘I’m an easygoing, understanding, open-minded and friendly Chinese guy. I like to have fun and I promise I’ll be the best I can’, (4) ‘Easygoing, friendly, open-minded football fan. I love chatting, am always smiling and making friends around the world’. These findings reflect the result of a survey done by Wentzel and Erdley (in McNamara & Wigfield 2002) on 440 middle school students. They found that adolescents have a clear idea and understandings of interpersonal relation strategies and what one should and should not do when it comes to making friends. Some of the positive traits they seek in others include being considerate, cooperative and honest, showing respect for others, while those that should be avoided include being self-centred and selfish.

| Attribute | Total /1000 and Percentage |
|-------------|----------------------------|
| Friendly | 450 = 45% |
| Open-minded | |
| Simple | |

Table 2: Three most frequent attributes

(a) Friendly

Its frequency of occurrence hints at the common nature of adolescents. In a stage where friends play an important and influential role in adolescents' lives, being warm and open to others appear to be a prerequisite for attracting more acquaintances.

(b) Open-minded

An American psychiatrist, Harry Sullivan (<http://www2.cedarcrest.edu/academic/mus/cmcanall/jbrozen/honors/people/sullivan/sull.htm>) stressed that adolescents bolster their self-concept and self-esteem by providing interactions with a variety of personalities and stimuli that expand and deepen one's knowledge of self and of the external world. We hence can observe a preoccupation with traits that suggest tolerance and objectivity to a range of issues. This concept of openness is a prerequisite to a fulfilling interaction in an interpersonal relationship with peers. The inquisitive and active nature of youth results in their involvement in various indoor and outdoor activities where new experiences are gained and acquaintances are made. It is natural hence for interaction between adolescents to centre around commonalities and differences in terms of experience. Open-mindedness can only enhance their interaction and understanding of one another, thus creating support and intimacy.

(c) Simple

'I'm just a simple guy/ I'm a simple girl/ I'm a simple, friendly and open-minded guy'. The word 'simple' is commonly used as a pre-modifier in a noun phrase, modifying and specifying the head word (guy/girl). It is a neutral word, implying neither a positive nor negative emotional state. At a glance, the word 'simple' appears deceptively easy to interpret, but when one tries to pinpoint the word to a specific attribute e.g. physical or psychological, its meaning then becomes vague and thus is open to various interpretations. A close examination reveals the all-encompassing function of the word – its ability to refer to both the personality and appearance of the advertiser. With reference to personality the word 'simple' carries the meaning of being uncomplicated, humble and unpretentious. Apart from referring to psychological characteristics, the word can also refer to the physical appearance of a person, conjuring an image of a person wearing basic, no-fuss garb such as t-shirt and jeans. What it precisely means will have to depend on the schema of the readers. Shalom (1998) in her analysis commented that this strategy is employed by authors of personals based on her analysis of gay men and women's ads. She purports that ambiguous words are unrestricted in scope and its open-endedness functions 'as a hook to draw in the reader' (1998: 197) which positively and generously interacts with its audience.

Personal Interest/Hobbies

Another dimension important to the advertisers is a description of their interests/likes and dislikes. This is present in nearly all of the ads in our corpus. It allows the readers to gauge the degree of similarity and common connections between them and the advertiser.

Researches have shown that as adolescents leave their pre-pubescent years, they spend an increasing time alone with friends than with family. Friends therefore play an important role in the lives of adolescents. During adolescence the nature of friendship is based on firstly, the concepts of mutuality, loyalty and security; and secondly, common activities/experiences. Friends are thus chosen on the basis of their personality, which is gauged in the personals

through the attributes they used as self-descriptors e.g. ‘open-minded’, ‘simple’, ‘friendly’ and their imagined contribution to a mutually rewarding friendship (based on shared interests e.g. “I’m very interested in music esp. Hitz.fm, movies and writing letters, I’m into music and motor sports”, ‘offers’ e.g. “I can be a good guy if you want, I like to have fun and I promise I’ll be the best I can. This I promise you”).

Self-representation in adolescents’ personal ads seems to adhere to several common constraints in which only respectable, fun and non-sexual (therefore, culturally and socially acceptable) qualities and goals are mentioned. The strategies for self-representation vary from ambiguously down-to-earth e.g. ‘simple’, to stereotypically positive, but modest e.g. ‘friendly and open-minded’, to ironically humorous e.g. ‘I am a handsome and macho guy; people call me handsome’ and self-deprecating e.g. ‘smiley face and a giant body’.

Globalisation and Glocalisation in the Personal Ads

Globalisation and glocalisation of the ads are observed to operate at two textual levels. The first level concerns the schematic genre while the second concerns the syntactic structure of personal ads. This section of our paper examines the process of homogenisation via conformity to the schematic structure of personals and the creation of heterogeneity through intertextuality and code-mixing resulting in the hybridization or glocalisation of the genre. Through a quantitative and qualitative analyses of adolescents’ ads, findings will demonstrate how adolescent advertisers stretch the boundaries of the personal ad genre, negotiate normative constraints on their communicative task and appropriate and manipulate other forms of discursive styles as an expression of identity as well as for the purpose of bonding with the readers.

Schematic Genre Structure of the Personal Ads

Genre is perceived as ‘a description of texts across a wide range of dimensions, including not only formal features, such as structure and tense, but also social and cultural setting, assumed knowledge, and so on’ (Laurence 2000: 1). Bathia (1993:16) affirms that each genre is “an instance of successful achievement of a specific communicative purpose using conventionalized knowledge of linguistic and discoursal resources”, exhibiting “various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content, and intended audience” (Swales, 1990: 58).

The content of the ads is guided by a form provided by the magazine consisting of a list of basic information headings i.e., ‘name’, ‘I/C no’, ‘age’, ‘sex’, ‘address’, ‘tel.no’ and ‘about myself’. There is an absence of a column for describing the target/goal. A survey of the corpora however shows that this does not prevent the advertisers from specifying their target and goals. Despite the given format, the structure of most ads conforms to the pattern observed and described by Coupland (1996) resulting in structural homogenisation i.e.:

(1) advertiser (2) seeks (3) target (4) goals (5) comment (optional) (6) reference

(1) I’m a Chinese girl (2) who is looking for (4) friends (3) aged between 15-25. I’m open-minded, friendly and (5) won’t let my friends be lonely when there is a problem. Letters in English/Malay/Mandarin/rojak. 100% replies. (6) Cheryl Leong (15), Blok 5-8-30, Lintang Pulau 1, Taman Bendera Relau, 11400 Bayan Lepas, Penang.

(1) An open-minded gal who's into 3rd Eye Blind, Savage Garden and Matchbox Twenty (2) is seeking (4) friends (3) of any age. (5) Replies guaranteed. (6) Lim Al Ling (17), No. 258, Kampung Baru 43950 Sungai Pelek, Sepang, Selangor.

Intertextuality and Hybridisation

However, there are also those who deviate from the genre and conventional structure of the personals to come up with modified versions of the schema as illustrated below.

Too free and nothing to do? Well, you can write to me. I'm a Chinese girl who likes advising those around me. So write to me and we'll be friends till the end. Lizzy (15), 32 Jln 8/149H, Tmn Sri Endah, 57000 Kuala Lumpur.

Even though the earth is wide, but to find a true friendship is real difficult. Fate is needed to bring true friends together. And now we would like to take the opportunity to make friends with every single one who lives on this globe especially between the ages 13-23. Both sexes. We won't disappoint whoever writes to us. Letters in English. Bernard /Brian/ Ee Ling/Stephanie (18,18,16,13), 7-13-7 Tkt Paya Terubong 3, Penang.

From the above examples one can see a merging of voices or discourses that are manipulated as a way to attract readers and to create distinctiveness among the other advertisers. The first example is a combination of infomercial and conversational discourse (marked by the presence of discourse marker 'well'). An adjacency pair of a persuasive rhetorical question and answer is used by the writer as an ice-breaker for initiating the 'interaction'. The second example starts with a humble assertion of her personality and followed by preconditions that support the former statement, while the third fuses a greeting card discourse with a formal spoken discourse. The adolescents' use of intertextuality, a linguistic strategy which capitalizes on the strengths of different discursive conventions signals, first, a linguistic awareness of different text types and secondly, an understanding of how language can be exploited in many ways for different purposes. In this context, the text of the ad becomes more like small talk. This creation of dialogic conversational tone, signalled by the usage of questions, first person pronouns and presupposition, is typical of much advertising discourse (Cook 1992) whereby it has the effect of directly involving the addressee by appealing to his or her knowledge, interests and emotions.

Code-Mixing

Apart from being an ethnic identity marker (via the use of Chinese and Malay codes), code mixing e.g. English+Malay+Japanese is also found to be a strategy for establishing relationship and common grounds between the writer and target readers. The use is based on the assumption that there is sufficient amount of shared knowledge to create a bond and a feeling of informality via the usage of several languages. This again highlights the adolescents' linguistic maturity, which indirectly signals a wholesome savvy attitude towards other races in the world (see examples below).

Konichiwa, kawan. Don't misunderstand. I'm not a mix blood. Just drop me a letter or email me. I'll be with you, you be with me. **Arigato**, thank you, **terima kasih**.

Hi guyz n galz out there! Gonna be my frenz. **Sesape je** mail your letter to Emilia Ryana Aizanurani.

Konichiwa, O-genki desu ka? Watashi munnie san, anyone feeling lonely, just drop in. I like fashion, crazy, fun, new stuff. If you are Chinese, just write to me. Letters in English. **Jiak nee...** Munnie San (19), 128, Jln Belibis 5, Tmn Perling, 81200 Johor Bahru, Johor.

Foregrounding of the Advertisers

One thing which is strikingly similar and frequent in all the examples above but uncommon in adults personal ads is the use of the pronoun 'I' to represent the self. The use of first person pronoun 'I' instead of the more common third person pronoun e.g. A simple 'guy' seeks... leads the foregrounding of the advertisers – personalization of self creates close proximity between the advertiser and the readers as opposed to the use of third person which creates a sense of objectification (Shalom 1998) and emotional distance. This structure seems to tally with the 3 top psychological attributes i.e. friendly, open-minded and simple. The combination of both devices highlights the importance of social relationships between these adolescents.

Example 9:

I would like to have friends from all around the world aged between 13-17. I'm into Westlife, BSB, M2M and more. Letters in English. Photo/phone no. appreciated. Replies assured. Sarah Hoong (12), No. 18, Taman Raub Jaya 3, 27600 Raub, Pahang or email: S2S_13@hotmail.com

Example 10:

I'm a simple Chinese gal looking for pen pals of any race around the world aged between 20-25. I'm an LMF fan, Westlife, A1, BSB, etc. Letters in English. Replies 100%. Elaine Yap(20), No. 157, Jalan Naga, Taman Sri Hijau, 34000 Taiping, Perak.

Example 11:

I am a Chinese girl seeking friends to make a wonderful life. I hope everyone can be my pal. Hellen Tee (16), No. 1574, Bt 3 ½ Sg. Terap, 45500 Tg. Karang, Selangor or email: Hellen119@hotmail.com

Example 12:

I'm an Indian girl seeking friends from all over the world. I'm a big friend of Michael Schumacher, interested? Write to me. Letters in English. Shubashini(17), 1485, Jalan Fasah, 70300, Seremban, N. Sembilan.

Conclusion

If we care to study adolescents' own voices through their language use, i.e. the self created discourse of feeling part of and recognizing oneself as member of group (the age group, gender group, ethnic group, and so on) reflective in personal ads, we would be able to know who they actually are, their individual identities in the ways they perceive, evaluate and reflect their self image.

Firstly, Malaysian adolescents representing themselves via discursive means in personal ads understand that globalisation offers an opportunity to engage in cultural interaction and transformation that will not result in loss of culture, but rather in the amalgamation of culture to a more global form as iterated by Razali Ismail (2000:4). The ability of Malaysian adolescents to manipulate different genre types and merge different text types in personal ads to stimulate special effects thereby creating unique individual discourses about themselves show maturity and

keen awareness of language use for strategic purposes. In the case of personal ads, the motivation derives from the intention of narrowing down the gap between the “self” as adolescent advertisers and the “other” as adolescent consumers of personal ads.

What is most interesting is the use of code mixing in the personal ads. Code mixing is not used just as markers of identity but also as motivation to create a distinctive discourse that sets them apart from others. More importantly, there is a sense of a dynamic, global identity via code mixing (e.g. the use of phrases in Japanese, French, Italian, Korean and so on – using codes other than their own) that is revealed rather than a static, ethnic identity.

Secondly, while we agree that adolescence as a collective phenomenon is nearly universal in the modern world (Sebold 1968:37), we acknowledge that adolescence and adolescent behaviour should not be described or explained exclusively as a universal phenomenon as do many mainstream discourse, rather in discussing adolescence and adolescent behaviour, we must take into account the diversity of adolescent experiences being a natural outcome of social and cultural conditions of the society in question.

Rather than being passive and anti-social, the findings show that Malaysian adolescents recognize the importance of the need to belong to a group and of being accepted in it because peer group offers them security, attention and dignity. Through personal ads, they actively seek out the peer group they want to belong to and that defines their behavior, groups that share common expectations, tastes and preferences. The personal ads are reflexive of this for they reciprocally convey members’ recognition of themselves as part of a group and at the same time are recognize as such by others.

The findings of this study also showed that Malaysian adolescents are not constantly confused and ambivalent of their personal identity, i.e., being in constant search of who they are. Rather they have a healthy, down-to-earth sense of self as revealed in the self-categorization/description part of their personal ads. Among the Malaysian adolescents studied, six categories in order of importance were highlighted and deemed important to their sense of self – gender, interests/hobbies, ethnicity, positive social/relational characteristics/affective behavior/psychological traits, physical appearance and religion. Where mainstream discourses on adolescents highlight adolescents preoccupation with and acute sense of physical appearance as paramount to their sense of self because of heightened physiological and psychological changes, this study shows that more salient aspects of self such as gender (with regard to femininity and masculinity) and interests/hobbies seem to be more important in this stage of life than was otherwise known.

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