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Preface

Bridging the Gap of Cross-Cultural Communication

This book explores the various issues surrounding cross-cultural communication. It consists of a compilation of recent studies conducted by multiple researchers in various fields of expertise, but with a common theme: cross-cultural communication.

The book is divided into 3 broad themes: communicative strategies and speech acts, cross-cultural challenges and media power.

1. Communicative strategies

The first chapter by Elham Shahban and Maya Khemlani David is concerned with the types of communicative strategies that Arab and Iranian students use in order to communicate with each other in English. Their study investigates the type and frequency of the communication strategies used by Arab and Iranian students with differing mother tongues (Arabic and Persian) when speaking in English with each other. To achieve the objective of their study, twelve Arab and Iranian subjects were selected and divided into three groups (high-high, high-low and low-low proficiency in English). Each group included 4 subjects whose conversations were audio-recorded for 6 hours in real time interaction in an informal setting. The research will help educators understand the nature and type of communication strategies used by students with differing target language proficiency.

In the next chapter, Mohsen Shahrokhi and Jariah Mohd Jan investigate the speech act of requests. In order for a request to be fulfilled successfully, it has to be realised appropriately so as to obtain an addressee’s cooperation. The data was collected from Persian male speakers through a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) consisting of various situations. It was found that appropriateness of this speech act can be obtained by employing appropriate external modifications so as to reduce the face-threatening nature of requests.

Kuang Ching Hei in Chapter 3 focuses on the various forms of address used by Malaysian Chinese over time. Factors like age, gender, and profession are seen as possible determining factors that affect address forms used. The forms of address are categorised as traditional and non-traditional types. Kuang finds that only thirty-two of the thirty-six traditional forms of address listed are actively used within the home domain. Kuang also finds that the Malaysian Chinese also use address forms which have been influenced by the Malay community.

The following chapter by Richard Powell touches on how despite the perception of joking as a key area of sociopragmatic competence in authentic L1 speech and has a capacity to motivate learners, it is not well represented in teaching materials. Therefore, Powell devised a limited sample of material based on a university entrance examination genre. He also reviews the importance of joking in both linguistic debate and everyday speech, and provides some background for the type of material chosen for his study. Powell suggests some pedagogical uses
for the target material in this study and discusses theoretical questions about the value of joking as a subject for pragmatics.

In the final chapter in this first section Ngeow Yeok Meng and Maya Khemlani David explore the discourse of Members of Parliament (MPs) in Malaysia. They explain that parliamentary debates often consist of spontaneous, spoken language that reveals the thoughts of the speaker. The speaker’s choice of words often reveals his or her attitude towards the interlocutor, in particular, their political rivals. Their study examines the act of name calling that can be associated with stereotype, prejudice, bias, and discrimination. The findings reveal that MPs by being impolite in how they address or refer to others have created a conflicting and chaotic environment in the Malaysian Parliament.

2. Cross-cultural challenges

The second issue that this book focuses on is the challenges faced when different cultures meet. Francisco Perlas Dumanig investigates the occurrence of miscommunication in interactions between Filipinos and Malaysians who speak different varieties of Southeast Asian Englishes: Philippine English and Malaysian English. He examines the lexical, syntactic, phonological and pragmatic features in intercultural communication between Filipino and Malaysian interlocutors by examining twenty conversations between Filipinos and Malaysians.

The next chapter shifts its focus to the challenges faced by international postgraduates when learning English as a foreign language. Thilagavathi Shanmuganathan explains that English is taught by non-native speakers of English in multilingual and multicultural Malaysia to a range of multilingual and multicultural postgraduates. This raises the question of whether it is necessary to discuss aspects of multiculturalism in the hope of getting students to understand their reactions towards each other. The respondents in her study are mainly Iranians with a few Iraqis and the spirit and sentiments of ethnocentrism is strongly prevalent in their discussions. Her case study traces the journey of multicultural and multilingual postgraduates as they struggle to assimilate into a target culture in their pursuit of academic achievement.

In another study focusing on students, Wendy Yee Mei Tien and Maya Khemlani David identify their respondents’ inter-cultural communication sensitivity, ethnocentrism, perception of self-identity and their preferences and perceptions towards other ethnic groups. A questionnaire was administered to 310 undergraduates. The results of the study indicated that there is indeed a certain level of ethnocentrism among the different ethnic groups. Although the majority of the respondents trusted friends from other ethnic groups they still believed that people from their own ethnic group are the kindest. In sharp contrast, when it came to work and extra-curricular activities, ethnic grouping was not deemed important. The undergraduates were willing to work with peers from other ethnicities. This study suggests that in redesigning a suitable pedagogy to improve inter-ethnic relations, it is necessary to allow more opportunity for students to work together in multiple ethnic group task-based activities.

The cross-cultural challenges include changes in languages as a result of language contact. Devikamani Menon examines how in Malaysian English there are instances of semantic transfer
from the mother tongue and the emergence of local compound coinage. Semantic Transfer consists of English words and expressions that are a translation of idiomatic concepts from the Malay language to English. ‘Catching two fish with one hook’ is a translation-equivalent of the English proverb ‘Killing two birds with one stone’. The change in the expression may reflect an aspect of cross-cultural communication in Malaysian English whereby the English language has been used to translate Malay or local concepts into Malaysian English.

In another study focusing on language choice accommodation and assimilation Caesar Dealwis examines the various codes used by the younger generation of Bi-Jagoi Bidayuh in Sarawak. His study investigates the language choices of 77 Bi-Jagoi undergraduates in the home domain. Fishman’s (1972) domain concept was used to investigate their choices with different generations and Scotton’s (1993) Matrix Language Frame Model was utilised to analyse the conversations based on different categories of language used. To avoid communication breakdown, Bahasa Malaysia, English or even Sarawak Malay are used rather than stand-alone Bidayuh. This leads to a linguistic confluence in order to create closer rapport with family members. However, there are differences in the range of code choices of the urban Bi-Jagoi undergraduates as compared to those from the rural areas.

3. **Media power**

The power of the mass media cannot be dismissed as a mere tool to disseminate information. Lean Mei Li, Prasana Rosaline Fernandez and Jenny Wong Fei Mun illustrate how the new media has become an increasingly popular tool for many to post their views on various issues. Their study centres on the postings that discuss politics in blogs. Using an extension of Lazarsfeld’s Two-Step Flow Theory (1955), they analyse how the new media has moved to a different level the way how opinion leaders reach out to opinion followers. Opinion leaders here refer to politicians and people who are in a position to express political views. The opinion followers are those who choose to read about the views of these opinion leaders and leave a comment if desired. Their findings indicate that the weblogs of the three factions in Malaysia (i.e. *Barisan Nasional* [Ruling Party], *Pakatan Rakyat* [Opposition Party], and Public [members of the public]) show how cross-cultural communication occurs between the bloggers and viewers.

In a study on advertising in the media, Fauziah Taib explains that despite media becoming global, marketing literature advertising products in the local market can be assumed to be local in terms of form and content. Using the grammar of visual analysis by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), she analyses the visuals in Malaysian business-to-business (b2b) brochures to describe the represented participants in the images and investigates whether they are communicating across cultures. She discusses the interaction between the brochures and the viewers of the images and hopes that the information obtained would provide insights into the visual elements that make up Malaysian advertising materials used by local text designers for the local business market.

Another study on advertising in the media looks at how occurrence of code switching is used as a marketing strategy in multilingual Malaysia. Francisco Perlas Dumanig and Maya Khemlani
David specifically examine the patterns of code switching and its impact on bilingual consumers. The data comes from 15 print advertisements collected in Malaysian English dailies; *The Star* and *The Sun*. Advertisements which use two or more languages are selected and analysed to depict how switching from one language to the other helps in marketing a product.

The final chapter looks at the media representation of a sensitive issue. Gan Kah Hui and Maya Khemlani David discuss how a controversial issue is reported by three local dailies in three languages. They explain that each community has different interests and this is normally depicted by how a particular news story is reported. The objective of their research is to examine how a particular topic, in this case the controversial issue of undergraduate intake in a public university, the first Apex university in Malaysia, is discussed in Malay, English and Chinese language newspapers. Their findings confirm that the three dailies focus on different aspects of the issue to cater to the interest of their respective readers.

This collection of papers is diverse in its interest and should attract the attention of a wide array of people who share a common interest in cross-cultural issues. We hope that you will enjoy reading the various works on cross-cultural issues and have a better understanding on how these issues affect our everyday life in many ways.

**The Editors:**

*Lean Mei Li*
*Maya Khemlani David*
*Ngeow Yeok Meng*
Biodata of Authors

Caesar Dealwis is a lecturer at UiTM Samarahan in Sarawak. His research interests include ELT, language choice maintenance and shift of minority groups in Sarawak. E-mail: cjerdealwis@sarawak.uitm.edu.my

Devikami Menon, Ph.D., is a Senior Lecturer in Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya. She is currently teaching Applied Linguistics and Curriculum Design and Methodology of English to postgraduate students. She heads a research team called ´Professional Skills in Law´ which is focused on preparing ESP materials for Law students.

Elham Shahban is a student at University of Malaya. She is completing her Master of English as a Second Language (MESL) in the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics. She is presently pursuing her Masters dissertation in the area of Communication Strategies. Her research interest is in multi-lingual discourse, language and ethnicity and cross-cultural communication. She can be contacted via: elhamshahban@gmail.com

Fauziah Taib is a lecturer at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya and was a visiting academic at Cardiff University, United Kingdom in 2006. She teaches courses like Semiotics, Business and Professional Communication and Linguistics. Her research interest includes sociopsycholinguistics, English for specific purposes, ethnolinguistics and is currently undertaking research in multimodality. E-mail: fauziaht@um.edu.my

Francisco Perlas Dumanig is currently the Head of English Department at UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. He has a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. He has been teaching for fifteen years in various colleges and universities in Malaysia and The Philippines. He has published and presented a number of research articles in the Philippines, U.S.A., Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand. His research interests are in Language Teaching, Language Choice, Cross-cultural Communication, World Englishes, and Discourse Analysis.

Gan Kah Hui is a research assistant at Section for Co-curricular Courses, External Faculty Electives & TITAS (SKET), University of Malaya. She is currently helping Prof Maya in research work. She is presently persuing her PhD in the area of Language Studies. Her research interest is in spoken discourse. She can be contacted via email: annagan80@yahoo.co.uk.

Jariah Mohd. Jan is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics and Deputy Executive Director at the Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociolinguistics and she teaches in the area of language and gender, pragmatics and semiotics. Her main research interests are gender and power issues in language, discourse and society, language and cognition, and literacy and literature in ESL. Her major works were published in Multilingua, Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication and Journal of Professional Communication Practices. She has also co-edited a book entitled Understanding Children’s Literature published by Sasbadi-Melta ELT Series (2007). E-mail: jariah@um.edu.my

Jenny Wong Fei Mun received a Diploma in Communication with Distinction from Taylor’s University College in 2008. She became a research assistant in University of Malaya upon her graduation. Currently, she is currently pursuing a marketing degree in UCSI University, Malaysia. Jenny’s research interests include media studies, advertising strategies, and consumer behaviour. Email: wyman988@yahoo.co.uk

Kuang Ching Hei is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya. She has an MA in ELT and her Ph.D. thesis is on Child Bilingual Acquisition. She teaches Public Speaking at the undergraduate level and Developmental Linguistics, Spoken Discourse Analysis, Intercultural Communication and Language and Human Rights at the post graduate level. Her interests are in Cross Cultural Communication, Spoken Discourse Analysis, Child Language and Discourse of the Aged. She has presented and published papers on these areas and can be contacted at kuangch@um.edu.my
Lean Mei Li, Ph.D., is a senior lecturer at University of Malaya. She currently lectures the subjects Ethnic Relations and Islamic and Asian Civilizations to undergraduates. Her areas of interest include media discourse, health, politics, ethnic studies, and unity. E-mail: meili26@hotmail.com / leanml@um.edu.my

Maya Khemlani David, Ph.D., is a Professor at Section for Co-curricular Courses, External Faculty Electives & TITAS (SKET), University of Malaya. She is an Honorary Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Linguists, U.K. and a Research Fellow with UPSI, Malaysia. As a sociolinguist, she has a special interest in the role of language in establishing and maintaining national unity. Dr. David can be contacted at: mayadavid@yahoo.com.

Mohsen Shahrokhi is an English lecturer at Shahreza Islamic Azad University, Iran. He is pursuing his Ph.D. studies in Pragmatics at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya, Malaysia. His research interests include Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). His last publication is a book entitled English for the Students of Metal Industries published by Majlesi Azad University Press, Iran (2008). E-mail: Shahrokhi1651@yahoo.com

Ngeow Yeok Meng, Ph.D., is a senior lecturer at SKET, University of Malaya. She graduated with her Ph.D. on ethnic relations and Islamisation policies in Kelantan. Her research interest is in multiculturalism, ethnic identity, political discourse and Islamisation in Malaysia. Dr. Ngeow can be contacted at: vmmgeow@yahoo.com.

Prasana Rosaline Fernandez is a lecturer at Taylor’s University, Malaysia. She currently lectures the subjects Ethics, Marketing and College Study Skills to undergraduates. Her areas of interest include marketing, branding, consumer behaviour and media studies. E-mail: Prasana.Fernandez@taylors.edu.my

Richard Powell is Professor of English at Nihon University in Tokyo and is a founding member of the Japan Association of Law and Language. His main areas of research are bilingualism in legal systems, language disadvantage before the law and postcolonial language planning. He has written books on courtroom code-switching and Asian Englishes and textbooks for teaching law in ESP contexts.

Thilagavathi Shanmuganathan, Ph.D. is a senior lecturer at the Department of English Language, Faculty of Languages & Linguistics, University of Malaya, Malaysia. Her research interests are Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics, Ethnic Studies and Ethnographic-related workplace communication. She has presented papers at national and international conferences and published in books and journals. Email: thilasha@um.edu.my

Wendy Yee Mei Tien, Ph.D., is a senior lecturer in the Section for Co-Curricular, External Faculty Elective and TITAS (SKET), University of Malaya. She has special interest in youth development, peace and humanities related studies especially in the field of inter ethnic relations. She has more than eight years of working experience with various institutions of higher education and nongovernmental organizations on various community projects. She has written papers in journals and also presented papers in both local and international conferences. Besides that, she is also an active leader in an NGO that promotes peace through peace activities, culture and education. E-mail: wenyee2000@yahoo.com
Biodata of Editors

**Lean, Mei Li**, Ph.D., is a senior lecturer at Section for Co-curricular Courses, External Faculty Electives & TITAS (SKET), University of Malaya. She currently lectures the subjects Ethnic Relations and Islamic and Asian Civilisations to undergraduates. Among her recent publications are “Malaysia, Truly Asia”: A critical discourse analysis of ethnic identity, 1 Malaysia: Promoting unity among the different races, Chasing Gen Y: Unlocking the reasons for buying branded clothes, Mobile phone usage: Identifying the trends and impact on human relationships, Metaphorical representations of terrorism. She can be contacted via email: meili26@hotmail.com.

**Professor Dr. Maya Khemlani David** (Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya) is an Honorary Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Linguists, United Kingdom. As a sociolinguist, Dr. David has a special interest in discourse analysis, languages in Malaysian minority communities, and the role of language in establishing and maintaining national unity. Dr. David is a Member of the Managing Board of The Social Capital Foundation and a Member of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Communication Practices. Maya David is the Linguapax Prize Winner for 2007. Her publications include The Sindhis of Malaysia: A Sociolinguistic Account (2001, London, ASEAN) and she has co-written Writing a Research Paper (2006, Serdang: Universiti Putra Malaysia). Her co-edited and edited publications are Code Switching in Malaysia (2009, Frankfurt, Peter Lang), Politeness in Malaysian Family Talk (2008, Serdang: Universiti Putra Malaysia), Language and Human Rights: Focus on Malaysia (2007, Serdang:Universiti Putra Malaysia), Language and the Power of the Media (2006, Frankfurt, Peter Lang), Language Choices and Discourse of Malaysian Families: Case Studies of Families in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2006, Petaling Jaya, Strategic International and Research Development Centre), Teaching of English in Second and Foreign Language Settings: Focus on Malaysia (2004, Frankfurt, Peter Lang) and Developing Reading Skills (2002, Kuala Lumpur: Melta/Sasbadi). Dr. David can be contacted at: mayadavid@yahoo.com

**Ngeow, Yeok Meng**, Ph.D., is a senior lecturer at Section for Co-curricular Courses, External Faculty Electives & TITAS (SKET), University of Malaya. She is the course coordinator of a university course, Introduction to Malaysia, offered to all international undergraduate students in University of Malaya. She graduated with a PhD on ethnic relations and Islamisation policies in Kelantan. Her areas of interest include multiculturalism, ethnic identity, political discourse and Islamisation policies. Her publications include Human Resource: Issues and Challenges (2000); Anthology of an undergraduate of University of Malaya (1994 – in Mandarin). Ngeow has authored and co-authored articles on general elections, the identity of ethnic minority, Malaysian parliamentary discourse with a focus on ethnic sensitivities and gender stereotypes. She can be contacted via email: ymngeow@yahoo.com.