Diverse Voices 2
Selected Readings in Language

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UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIAN
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Constructing Masculinities: The Advertorial

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Abstract
This paper analyses the language of advertising and magazines in order to establish and consolidate particular kinds of identity for men. It will also focus on how men’s magazines contribute to the construction of masculinity. The study will take into account the changes currently taking place in the Malaysian society, for example, to reflect the impact that feminism has made and also that men are beginning to be addressed in ways which previously only women were. For the purpose of analysis, two local men’s magazines are examined. The linguistic devices, which enable the advertisements as well as whole passages from magazines to work in meaningful ways, and the way language features work across the boundaries of single sentences to form whole texts are explored. The study suggests that an examination of these kinds of genre in relation to transitivity often show that women are, as a matter of “common sense”, presented as passive, the natural opposite to men’s activity which in turn permeates elements of dominance and power.

Introduction
The broader concern of this paper is with how sociocultural ideologies are constructed, maintained and perpetuated in the mass media, which include newspapers, magazines, television, cinema and radio. The wide range of messages that the media transmit is not neutral but perceived as an instrument for the promotion and perpetuation of sociological ideologies. These messages, according to Renzetti and Curan (1992, p. 102), are rather “infused with particular values and norms, including many about gender. In other words, the media serve as gender socializers.” The language used in the media shapes our thoughts about men and women.

Language and the Media
The media presently have a tremendous impact on the public at large, as pointed out by Davidon and Gordon (1976, p. 168):

The media are apparently used primarily as sources of entertainment and only to a lesser extent as sources of information. Depending on the medium and the sample, in terms of mere existence, studies find males outnumbering females by at least two-to-one. Activities in which males are engaged embrace a wide range, including activities that are stereotypically masculine and those that are not linked to gender. Females are shown in a narrow range of settings and activities; they are restricted basically to activity stereotyped as uniquely feminine and do little that is not sex-typed.
Davidson and Gordon’s (1979) observation suggests that gender practices do take place in the mass media and it is women who are portrayed unfairly by the media. The widespread existence of gender practices in the mass media is a reflection of the acceptance of sexism by a particular society. Therefore, the assumption in the present study is that any use of gendered language in the Malaysian mass media is, to a certain extent, a reflection of Malaysian readers’ expectation towards such language.

Men and Masculinity: The Ideal Man?

Masculinity is about the values, expectatious and interpretations which men have attached to the idea of being a man. Traditionally, masculinity is seen as valid if it depends on physical strength and aggression. Such men are not meant to be emotionally sensitive or expressive and are not meant to be vulnerable or weak in any way. However, anger is tolerated, a traditional paradox within male roles.

The modern man is seen as masculine more through economic achievement and the power he exerts at work. His intelligence may be an important factor and he may be seen as masculine if he is able to be sensitive and expressive in romantic relationships with women. However, control over the emotions is crucial to modern masculinity and emotional expression must be confined to relationships with women. Anger is not encouraged as control is so important.

Gentleness, patience and kindness all figure as virtues of the ideal man even though many of these characteristics would be considered feminine. At lower levels, there are the more typical and more readily identifiable masculine stereotypes. These are essentially competitive or sports orientated. Xavier (1998) looked at four factors that make up the sex role norm:

- No Sissy Stuff: the stigma of anything even vaguely feminine;
- The Big Wheel: success, status, and the need to be looked up to;
- The Sturdy Oak: manly air of toughness, confidence, and self-reliance;
- Give ‘em Hell: the aura of aggression, violence, and daring.

The perception of most men is that it is important to score highly in at least one of these factors in order to be considered a “real man.”

In the modern world, many men believe that being the breadwinner is enough. If a man has a family, of course he must provide for it, but to see this as the end of his nurturing roles reduces men to an instrumental role in their children’s upbringing. Men can nurture and love their children, friends, and wives directly. They do not need to hide behind the masking nature of provision, valuable and necessary though it is.

Masculinity is something that is external to men. It is a social construction of something that has to be achieved by boys in order to prove themselves as men or something which has to be put on, like a suit of clothes, in order for men to be seen as masculine. It is the external nature of masculinity, as presented in images, expectations and conventional wisdom that...
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Is enough. If a man has out of his nurturing reduces great nature and love they under the masking nature of construction of something about something which his auteline. It is the external emotional wisdom that is one of the reasons behind the constant comparisons men make between their inner self and their knowledge of what masculinity consists of within their own culture. It is this externality that has also led to masculinity being portrayed in many recent books as the wearing of masks.

Purpose of Study

In this study, I analysed the language of advertising in the local magazines, particularly, the advertisements and editorials in order to establish and consolidate particular kinds of identity for men. It focuses on how men’s magazines contribute to the construction of masculinity. The gender identities constructed in these magazines contribute “indirectly in [the] identity building and maintenance” (Hermes, 1995, p. 27) of the readers. Such constructions are often ideals which “may be understood as gender prescriptions” (Renzetti & Curran, 1992, p. 123). These prescriptions are argued to be consistent with the local patriarchal structure, which promotes male dominance and female passivity.

Patriarchy can be defined as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1990, p. 20). In a patriarchal society, men control the structure and distribution of power, frequently through his authority over the women of the society and how they are disposed of to the men. In other words, men are at the centre as the master class and women are at the periphery as the subordinate class. This relationship between the sexes can be thought of as one of control: the men control the women. However, one important point that needs to be highlighted here which is frequently lost or ignored in discussion is that in traditional patriarchies, power is not shared equally by all men in the group.

An overtly patriarchal society would have institutionalised legal means to enforce male domination. In contrast, Malaysia is, what I call, a covertly patriarchal society because Malay women do not face significant legal enforcement that are patriarchal in nature. However, underlying the façade of equality is a patriarchal ideology which keeps male domination alive. My concern in this study is how this underlying patriarchal ideology is maintained in local men’s magazines.

There have been several studies done in this area, but such studies have predominantly focused on the use of the English language in countries where English is the native language. Today, the English language plays a crucial role in many countries throughout the world where English is not the native language. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the greater understanding of the impact the English language has in a country where English is the second language.

Why Men’s Magazines?

Magazines provide a fertile ground for studying how gender identities are portrayed. Much research has been done on the construction of female identities in women’s magazines. In contrast, there seem to be little research on men’s magazines. Men’s magazines are read by a large number of readers, both male and female. Although these magazines are often dismissed as frivolous, McCracken (1993, p. 9) points out that they are: