Women in Malaysia
Breaking Boundaries
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gender equality. We appreciate very much the chapters in time, and had deliberated the chapters. acknowledge our families whose support journey in the academia.

CONTENTS

Preface v
Editors’ Acknowledgements vii

1. Power Speech and Management of Solidarity in Inter-Gender Discourse 1
   JARIAH MOHD. JAN

2. Servicing the Global Society: Women in Science and Technology 31
   AZIZAN BAHARUDDIN

3. Women in the Media: Facing the Challenges 65
   AZIZAH HAMZAH

4. Women and Law 87
   NOOR AZIAH HAJI MOHD AWAL

5. Negotiating Their Visibility: The Lives of Educated and Married Malay Women 117
   ROZIAH OMAR

6. Muslim Women in Malaysia 143
   RAIHANAH ABDULLAH
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Health: The Malaysian Experience</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>RITA RAJ KARIM &amp; RASHIDAH ABDULLAH ET AL.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Women “Breaking Boundaries” in Linguistics</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>ZURAIDAH MOHD DON</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Investing in the Future: Women and Education in Malaysia</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>NORRIZAN RAZALI &amp; MAROHAINI YUSOFF</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Women Managers in the New Millennium: Growth Strategies</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>ONG FON SIM &amp; SIEH LEE MEI LING</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Resisting Norms: Women and University Higher Management</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>KHADIJA MUHAMED</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Indian Women, Employment and Visibility</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>K.S SUSAN OORJITHAM</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References

304
POWER SPEECH AND MANAGEMENT OF SOLIDARITY IN INTER-GENDER DISCOURSE

Jariah Mohd. Jan

INTRODUCTION

The concern with power and solidarity is prompted by the awareness that in any community, there is likely to be a contest for power through discourse. The manner in which participants take the floor, bring new perspectives to the discussion, interrupt one another and become a resource person in a conversation reveal how participants negotiate relationship roles in verbal interaction.

This chapter revolves around a major assumption that the notion of power is greater than one's institutional status, age, education, race, and gender. These factors convey rank. Nonetheless, speakers use interactional strategies to jockey for position and contest their relational role face-to-face with their counterparts. This study shows that, eventually, while institutional standing remains more or less fixed, power of relational roles fluctuates greatly. What is needed is the constructive, strategic and effective community negotiation on the part of a speaker to ensure and enhance his/her standing in a multi-interactant group. Investigating power and solidarity in an inter-gender interaction at the micro-level adds a new dimension to the existing understandings
of power and solidarity in verbal communication specifically in the Malaysian setting.

LANGUAGE AND POWER

Essentially, language is powerless on its own and that people have the power to use language in various forms or ways. In general, it is people who give discourse its form and make judgements about the status of various texts. In addition, it is the situations in which people have power and are using language to serve some potent purpose which give language a power that it lacks when it is without such precise contexts. Fairclough (1989: 46) confirms this when he stated that power in discourse has to do with powerful participants "controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants."

Constraints in this context refer to the following:

1. Contents – on what is said or done;
2. Relations – the social relations of people enter into in discourse; and
3. Subjects – the "subject positions" people can occupy.

Linguistic differences may be said to reflect and reinforce the difference in power. This is consistent with the work done by Owsley and Scotton (1984: 103):

"power language ... the aggregate of linguistic features negotiating the position of ‘taking charge’ in a talk exchange ... Such language attempts to control the overall exchange, including the addressee’s conversational contribution, in three main ways: it directs the amount and content of what gets said, it evaluates such talk by passing judgements or providing interpretations and it organises the exchange. Obvious examples of powerful linguistic features are interruptions, leading questions and challenges ..."

STATUS AND POWER

The term status implies social stratification. It refers to one’s social position or rank in relation to others that is the importance she/he has
in the eyes of others as well as the degree of respect she/he commands. Status might be determined by wealth, education, hereditary caste, occupation, marital status or by some other agreed criterion or, by some combination of criteria. Accordingly, in this study, status is attributed to an individual or a category of people to the extent that those persons possess characteristics which are highly significant for the reference-group. The characteristic that may serve as criteria for the attribution of status in this study is the possession of power over others. Status also relates to assumed conventional or consensus criteria such that professors, ministers, army generals, diplomats, foreign dignitaries, heads of organisations are regarded as having high status in our society. Worldwide, men are given higher status than women, but in certain societies or subcultures, women enjoy higher status than men. The context and status-system in this study are accepted and considered as valid by the speakers and all parties involved in the production of talk.

POWER AND SOLIDARITY: A DEFINITION

Language often encourages or forces us to define our relationship with the person we are talking to in terms of power and solidarity. The word "power" is derived from the Latin word "potere" which means, "to be able". Psycholinguists, sociologists and political scientists define "social power" as:

"... the ability or capacity of (one person or group) to produce (consciously or unconsciously) intended effects on the behaviour or emotions of another person (or group)."

Scanzoni and Scanzoni, 1981: 439

Power is a term that refers to the differential right to control another person's behaviour or to make decisions about matters concerning others. The bases of power are physical strength, age, birth, sex, wealth, profession or institutionalised role, army, state or within the family.

In social relationships involving at least two persons with deferential rights and obligations and an imbalance of power, the asymmetric, non-reciprocal forms of address are likely to be exchanged. Such
This book is a collection of twelve essays written by local women academicians/researchers who have come together from various disciplines to engage themselves in discourses about challenges confronting the Malaysian women.

The writers discuss various issues confronting Malaysian women and analyse the impact of government development agenda on women's lives.

The underlying theme of this book is the issues faced by women in Malaysia, how they have adapted to the interplaying forces of the State, Islam, tradition and modernity with negotiation rather than resistance. How they have broken through the boundaries and in spite of built-in social inequalities, have maintained their visibility in the areas of anthropology, politics, science, law, business, linguistics and communication and the media.

This publication is intended to inspire women from all walks of life, by bringing together information about the multitude of factors that have shaped the lives of other women in Malaysia. It will fill large gaps in our knowledge of women in development and modernization.