CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents conclusions of the overall findings to answer the research questions in Chapter 1. The conclusions are categorized into four subheadings according to the research questions:

i.   What emoticon and typographic features do Internet Relay Chat (IRC) users employ in an IRC setting in Malaysia?

ii.   What are the code-switching patterns present in Malaysian IRC?

iii. What are the communicative purposes of code-switching in Malaysian IRC?

iv.   Are strategies employed in face-to-face conversations in the opening and closing phases transferred to the IRC context?

This chapter also presents recommendations to improve the current IRC and suggestions for further research.

5.2 What Emoticon and Typographic Features Do Internet Relay Chat (IRC) Users Employ in an IRC Setting in Malaysia?

The analysis of language convention features is limited to emoticon and typographic features. The participants used various emoticon and typographic features in their chat, which will be summarized in this section. The results in this study indicate that typographic features generally are used more frequently than the emoticon features. Findings from the questionnaire show that both experienced users (64.9%) and newbies (31.8%) were able to understand this feature.

5.2.1 Emoticon Features Employed by the IRC Users

The emoticon features employed by the participants are very limited and these are used probably to denote feeling of pleasure as listed below. Refer to Appendix A for the meanings.

i.   :P

ii.   =)

iii.   =}

iv.   :)

Findings from the questionnaire reveal that only 48.6% of experienced users and 27.3% of newbies able to understand this feature.

The participants seem to use the emoticons to compensate missing paralinguistic features in the IRC. Moreover, these features were employed in two ways:

i.   after messages (u make me feel good **:)**)

ii.   without any message (=})

Rintel and Pittam (1997) suggest that the types of users influence the ways emoticon features are employed. The results in this study show that the experienced users, who are more confident, typed the emoticons without inserting any message. But, the newbies, who are less confident, typed the emoticon features in between or after the messages.

The results also indicate that the emoticon features employed by the participants are very limited, which could probably indicate that the participants – both experienced users and newbies – are unfamiliar with the features which they could use. This assumption is substantiated by the findings from the questionnaire which show that not only the newbies (72.7%) did not understand the language convention features, but also the experienced users (51.4%). Results also indicate that newbies tried to use the emoticon features in their chat, maybe to add life into their on-line chat.

5.2.2 Typographic Features Employed by the IRC Users

The participants in this study employed three typographic features. The capitalization typographies occurred the most (73.7%), while the spelling (17.9%) and punctuation (8.4%) typographies took up a small percentage of the typographic features. The participants employed the following typographic features:

i. missing capitalization at the:

    a. first letter of the first word in a sentence

    b. pronoun *I*

    c. nicknames

ii. simplified spelling

    simplifying spelling based on:

    a. pronunciation: e.g alo (hello): (extract 2, line 11, 12)

    b. one letter: e.g c (see): (extract 4, line 5)

    c. abbreviation: e.g oic (oh, I see) (extract 1, line 15)

    d. truncation at the initial letter: e.g nyone (anyone) (extract 2, line59)

    e. truncation at the end letter: e.g goin (going) (extract 2, line 52)

    f. truncation based on pronunciation: e.g fren (friend) (extract 3, line 21)

iii. extended spelling based on:

    a. eccentric spelling: e.g oooo (extract 1, line 40)

    b. pronunciation: e.g izzit (is it) (extract 2, line 107)

iv.   missing punctuation:

    a. question marks

    b. apostrophe marks

v.   repeating punctuation:

    a. question marks

    b. exclamation marks

The typographic features used in this study prove right two of Reid's (1991) statements that participants chatting via IRC tend to break the standard language and resort to eccentric spelling and non-standard grammar.

5.3 What are the Code-Switching Patterns Present in Malaysian IRC?

According to Heller (1992), code-switching is a natural phenomenon in biinguality and provides important communicative purposes for the language users. The results in this study are entirely consistent with Heller's (1992) view because code-switching in this study had yielded two main patterns which were carried out in Cantonese or Bahasa Melayu.

i.   the lexical shifts

    a. nouns: e.g hobbes... u going *mamak*? (hobbes... u going to night
       hawker?) (extract 5, line 17)

b. verbs:

Bahasa Melayu: e.g so *kacau* (so disturb) (extract 2, line 77)

Cantonese: e.g every time *kow lui* (every time courting girls) (extract 3, line 23)

c. adjectives:

Bahasa Melayu: e.g honkan *bodoh* (honkan stupid) (extract 2, line 117)

Cantonese: e.g me very *ham sap* 1 …(me very cheeky one…) (extract 2, line 154)

II. the ending particles: *ah , meh, hah, ler, kan, mah, lah*

The findings also showed that Cantonese was mostly used among the participants to code-switch the adjective items. This could suggest that the participants are mostly Chinese speakers.

5.4 What are the Communicative Purposes of Code-Switching in Malaysian IRC?

In this study, the communicative purposes for the two patterns could possibly refute Gibbon (1998) and Chana's (1994) communicative purposes found in their studies. In their study, code-switching was regarded as having negative communicative purposes. However, in this study, the communicative purposes seem to reveal positive communicative purposes. First, the participants code-switched

certain lexical items probably to show solidarity among them by engaging in *teenage talk* or using terms which are often used by teenagers. This is exemplified by the noun *mamak* and the verb *kow lui* used by the participants.

i.   noun: e.g hobbes… u going *mamak*? (hobbes… u going to night hawker?) (extract 5, line 17)

ii.   verb: every time e.g *kow lui*(every time courting girls) (extract 3, line 23)

Second, the participants code-switched certain lexical items probably to be more expressive in their chat. For example:

i.   me very *ham sap* 1 …(me very cheeky one…) (extract 2, line 154)

ii.   so *cam* (so pitiful) (extract 2, line 98)

Third, the communicative purposes of code-switching the ending particles can possibly represent:

i.   question markers: e.g u old already *ah* …(extract 1, line 17)

ii.   emphatic markers: e.g go America and play *la* (extract 6, line 15)

5.5 Are Strategies Employed in Face-to-Face Conversations in the Opening and Closing Phases Transferred to the IRC Context?

The results indicate that not all of the opening and closing strategies in the face-to-face conversations are transferred to IRC chat. This section summarizes the opening and closing strategies in the IRC context.

5.5.1 Opening Strategies

The results in this study indicate that 52.1% of the participants did not greet others. This seems to suggest that in IRC, it is unnecessary to greet everyone in the channel. The results concur with Jonnson's (1996) study which found that in face-to-face communication, it is unnecessary to greet everybody. Moreover, results in this study are also consistent with Coulthard's (1981) argument that greetings do not occur among strangers because participants in the IRC are also strangers.

The findings reveal that the participants open their conversations similar to face-to-face conversation where one greets another. This study shows that the IRC participants have used four strategies to mark their presence on-line:

i.   greetings

Here, participants greeted one another with greeting elements such as *hi* and *hello*.
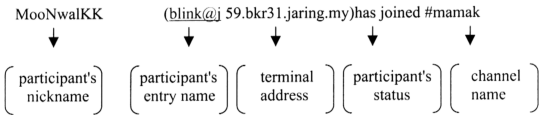
ii.   introducing oneself

Ah Niu: wo shi ah niu ooo.. (I am Ah Niu) (extract 1, line 40)

iii.   inviting others to chat

Ah Niu: who want to chat with ah niu…? (extract 1, line 41-46)

iv.   given status of participants

Please refer to Chapter I (page 14) for its definition. This appeared automatically

once the participant joined #mamak channel. It appeared as below:

MooNwalKK   (blink@j 59.bkr31.jaring.my)has joined #mamak

| participant's nickname | participant's entry name | terminal address | participant's status | channel name |

    The results which showed that the participants (ii) introduced themselves and

(iii) invited others to chat with them are strategies consistent with Sacks' (1974)

theory that greetings in face-to-face communication are noticeable even when the

participants did not greet (hi, hello). The participants who did not greet, used

strategies (ii) and (iii) to open their chat. In addition to this, results from the answer

patterns indicate that although the participants did not greet when they began their

chat, their presence was noticeable because of the given status of the participant,

which automatically appeared when the participant joined the channel.

According to Sacks (1974), greetings in face-to-face communication appeared only in the beginning of the conversation and allowed all speakers a turn, right at the openings of the conversation. However, these patterns are not transferred to IRC opening because the results in this study show that participants also greeted others in the middle of the chat even they have joined earlier. The summon-answer pair results also indicate that not all summons received answers from the participants. This probably explains why the face-to-face greetings theory by Sacks, in which greetings allow all speakers a turn, is refuted in this study. In spite of not receiving any answer to the greetings, the communication was not affected in any way. For example in Extract 2, Emy repeated her greetings but she failed to receive any reply from other participants:

Extract 2: Line 42-43

Emy (vennoe@brk-23-79.tm.net.my) has joined mamak

Emy: hello....

Emy: hello

5.5.2 Closing Strategies

SSJ's (1974) location sequential model employed in face-to-face communication, which proposes four closing levels, was not directly transferred to the closings of IRC because the results indicate that closings in the IRC employed five levels. The additional level is the given status of participant. The given status of

participant is a level that always appears in the closing of IRC because this level automatically appears on the computer screen once the participants left the channel (close the chat).

Hatch (2000) is of the opinion that closing patterns differ across languages, culture, and channels. In face-to-face conversation, most of the summons (bidding farewell) received answers. But, in the IRC, the summon-answer pair patterns indicated that not all the summons (bidding farewell) received answers from the participants. For example in Extract 3, Devil summoned *good-bye* to everyone in the channel but Devil did not receive any answer from the participants:

Extract 3: Line 34: The devil has to log out.

Summon: Devil: bye everybody!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

As high as 81.3% of the participants ended the chat without bidding farewell and it is not considered as rude. The results refute Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory that over-hasty closing is considered rude among the interlocutors and create anger among them.

In conclusion, participants have added life by using the emoticon and typographic features and local Malaysian flavor by code-switching the lexical items and adding ending particles into their chat via typing. Furthermore, the strategies the participants used to open and close the chat, have contributed to the success of the chat. The language conventions together with the opening and closing strategies have

managed to maintain and attract participants to use the IRC as a means of communication in the CMC field.

5.5 Recommendations

As IRC is subject to continuous development, many improvements to the medium are made every year. The improvements are being made so that IRC will be more accessible and affordable. Software creators have designed IRC that encourages more people to interact and which enables participants to sustain reciprocal interaction. However, they have not been able to include personal and paralinguistic features to the text-based communication. From the data, the participants, especially newbies, commented that the emoticon features were difficult to comprehend as many interpretations were given to one emoticon. Thus, for further improvement on the IRC, software creators should attach immediate references of emoticons, abbreviations, and jargon on the 'tool' icon to enable newbies to refer to and comprehend its meanings.

This study analyzed the informal discourse of local IRC that has many anonymous interlocutors. The researcher limited the study to language and non-language conventions, code-switching patterns and the communicative purposes, and the structure of opening and closing the conversation. Further research on other types of computer mediated communication such as electronic commerce (e-commerce) or electronic conferences (e-conferences) are interesting areas of research. One can

research on communication effectiveness during conferencing or selling products or services, for instance, the ability to persuade, negotiate, and solve conflicts via computer. Moreover, it would be worth considering the turn-taking system in a more formal discourse via computer-mediated communication. A broader scope of understanding the electronic communication could be obtained in both informal and formal electronic discourse.