CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0   Introduction to Metrosexuals

The term **Metrosexual** was first coined by Simpson (1994), a British journalist for *The Independent* magazine. In an article entitled "Here Come the Mirror Men" published in *The Independent* magazine dated on 15th of November 1994, Simpson stated that:

> Metrosexual man, the single young man with a high disposable income, living or working in the city (because that's where all the best shops are), is perhaps the most promising consumer market of the decade. The typical Metrosexual is a young man with money to spend, living in or within easy reach of a metropolis – because that's where all the best shops, clubs, gyms and hairdressers are. He might be officially gay, straight or bisexual, but this is utterly immaterial because he has clearly taken himself as his own love object and pleasure as his sexual preference. Particular professions, such as modelling, waiting tables, media, pop music and, nowadays, sport, seem to attract them but, truth be told, like male vanity products and herpes, they're pretty much everywhere (p.1).

The above definition of a metrosexual by Simpson denotes a sophisticated lifestyle practice of a man who is very much concerned with his appearance and lifestyle in keeping up with the latest trends and fads including fashion, music, entertainment, physical fitness and beauty. The metrosexual tends to pay more attention to these areas compared to the ordinary man in defining his own sense of personal style. Some of the most commonly labelled metrosexuals today include English soccer star David Beckham, American Idol singer Adam Lambert and Hollywood actors Orlando Bloom, Rob Pattinson and Tom Cruise. All these men are as much models as they are sports stars or actors, being the 'walking billboards' (for their well-groomed appearance and impeccable conscience about fashion) in the eyes of the public.

Simpson also claimed that the promotion of 'metrosexuality' was vigorously spread by men's lifestyle magazines such as *The Face*, *GQ* (with 10,000 new readers every month), *Esquire*, *Arena* and *FHM*, the new media which took off in the Eighties and is still growing. They (the new media) filled their magazines with images of 'narcissistic' young men sporting fashionable clothes and accessories and lifestyle. Meanwhile, *Details* magazine, which was considered as the guidebook for metrosexuals ran 37% more advertisements in 2000 compared to the previous year, mostly featuring fashion and male grooming products (Cardona, 2000). In addition, two new magazines, namely Vitals and Cargo, dedicated solely to fashion and shopping were criticized when they began publication in 2004. These magazines competed with each other to attract metrosexual readers who want shopping information (Carr, 2003).

Figure 1.1: Cover page of men's lifestyle magazines

Figure 1.1: Cover page of men's lifestyle magazines (Continued)

The existence and image of metrosexuals in Malaysia's urban area have been projected in several printed magazines such as *FHM*, *Men's Health* and *Maskulin*. In addition, the Malaysian metrosexuals are also portrayed in *Cleo*'s magazine (one of the top women's magazines in Malaysia) with its annual "Fifty Most Eligible Bachelors" contest whereby male contestants compete to win the title. All of the fifty chosen male contestants are usually single, mostly local young urban men, involved in either professional or semi-professional industries mainly as executives, engineers, businessmen or business consultants and even flight stewards. Most of these contestants are also highly educated, having completed at least diploma or bachelor degree level. These contestants are good-looking, well-groomed, and have an impeccable sense of style and fashion. The contestants are judged in terms of their looks and awareness pertaining to fashion, arts and culture and grooming by *Cleo*'s magazine readers.

As a result of the emergence of metrosexuals in magazines, interest in research began to emerge in the field of language and gender. Simpson and Mayr (2010) state that women's and men's magazines are a part of the 'sites' for studies in language and gender, particularly on gender performativity (see Section 1.6 for Definition of Terms). However, Simpson and Mayr (ibid.) further claim that studies examining the genre of women's magazines and femininity have started way earlier than studies on textual and visual representations of men in popular men's lifestyle magazines. They describe this new research enterprise on men's representations in magazines as just beginning. Men's magazines also play an important role in the emergence of metrosexuals as they (the men's magazines) propagate an alternative form of masculinity or the 'new' man (Edward, 1997).

On the other hand, there has been no attempt by previous researches to study metrosexual's language. Nevertheless, Anderson (2008) mentions that metrosexual "has basic etiquette, has learned … interpersonal skill. He boasts a basic knowledge of art, music and other cultures" (p. 3). Hence, we can assume that metrosexuals are linguistically competent and may develop certain kinds of styles in their language usage. This is evident in that the metrosexual's group is part of the global Communities of Practice (CofP) whereby their existence has created a major impact in our society and particularly in the study of language and gender.

In relation to the emergence of metrosexuals in our own society, this study is carried out to examine the styles of language and patterns of speech among young Malaysian men who are in their mid-twenties to late thirties. They live and work in Kuala Lumpur and its surrounding urban areas. In the Malaysian context, the emergence

of metrosexuals especially in Kuala Lumpur is pertinent as the city is a mecca for shopping and fashion, which caters to their needs for a metrosexual lifestyle. On the other hand, they are young metrosexuals with a high disposable income who spend their money for services, goods and products which they deem beneficial to enhance their appearance and to cater to their modern lifestyle; hence, they can be easily identified through their groomed physical appearance and up-to-date and branded clothing to look their best. They are also very much in touch with their feminine side such as enjoying shopping for clothing and spending their money on beauty products in keeping abreast with current trends (Flocker, 2003; Kaye, 2009; O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2005; and Simpson, 1994).

To date, studies on men's language are relatively scarce compared to studies on women's language. The following excerpt taken from the blurb of *Language and Masculinity* by Johnson and Meinhof (1997) supports the previous statement:

> Feminist linguistics has come of age. Yet, in more than two decades of research, male speaking patterns have largely been taken for granted. So, what have we learned specifically about men's language and masculinity? Is it right to assume that men's use of language is the mirror image of what have been considered typically female patterns of interaction? In what ways does the language and masculinity throw new light on traditional assumptions about language and gender? (p.1)

Having read this quote, the researcher has been inspired to explore men's language as it is indeed an area that is not widely explored as most previous studies concentrated on women's language. Further, most studies on language and masculinities have been carried out by female researchers such as Johnson's book on *Theorizing Language and Masculinity: A Feminist Perspective* (1997), Cameron's article on *Performing Gender Identity: Young Men's Talk and Construction of Heterosexual Masculinity* (1997) and Pujolar's book on *Masculinities in a Multilingual Setting* (1997). Though, it is not the researcher's intention to contend their noble contributions to the development of

knowledge in the field of sociolinguistics, particularly on language and gender, it is crucial to understand the behavioural nature of men's language from men's perspective as studies on this subject have been researched mostly by female theorists. With the development of different types of Communities of Practice especially in urban areas, the researcher was driven to look into speech patterns and language styles of metrosexuals in the Malaysian context.

1.1   Statement of the Problem

The notion of gender as performance has been explored by gender theorists especially in works on masculinity and language (e.g. Johnson and Meinhof, 1997). Ever since the term metrosexual was coined the first time in 1994 by Simpson, it created a massive controversy among social science theorists especially those who were avid followers of masculinity theory such as Beynon (2002), Connell (1995) and Nixon (1996). However, metrosexuals are different from ordinary heterosexual men as they adopt certain practices which are normally associated with women. Their obsessions of choosing to follow a metrosexual lifestyle is seen by others as being 'feminine' as they practice and do things which are normally done by women. As a result, they may have adopted common feminine practices and beliefs. Consequently, these practices have compromised their masculinity as men. According to Anderson (2008), metrosexual promotes the 'feminization' of men. Therefore, it can be inferred that metrosexuals may have established their own linguistic forms and behaviours as a result of the existence of this internal variable.

However, the main concern of this study is to analyse the language used by the metrosexuals at a discursive level. Therefore, the researcher would like to examine the

styles of language used by the Malaysian metrosexuals in their discussions and the possible contributing factors that may influence the use of language of the metrosexuals.

1.2   Research Objectives and Research Questions

This study is conducted to analyse the style of language, especially speech patterns and vocabulary items used by young professional metrosexuals in Kuala Lumpur. These subjects are young professional executives, and the researcher has concentrated on the use of certain speech forms in their conversations, as well as the contexts in which they are normally used. The study thus aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are the common topics discussed among metrosexuals in their discussions?

RQ 2: What are the linguistic features and speech patterns used by metrosexuals in their discussions?

RQ 3: What are the contributing factors that influence the language used and style by metrosexuals?

RQ1 and RQ2 are answered through the use of audio transcriptions from ten 30-minutes conversations, complemented by an interview session with the subjects involved in this study and the researcher's personal observation. RQ3 is answered through a survey conducted by the researcher on twenty metrosexuals. In addition, the researcher also uses field notes as a supplementary tool to answer all of the RQs above.

1.3   Significance of the Study

Firstly, this study aims to investigate the language styles and linguistic features of metrosexuals who live and work in Kuala Lumpur. As there have been no studies on

metrosexual's language, it should be noted that this study is the first to be carried out in the context of Malaysian men. Therefore, the results and findings in this study serve as a novel contribution in the field of sociolinguistics by providing in-depth understanding on men's language in the Malaysian context. As previously stated in the chapter, studies on men's language are limited and most of them have been carried out by female researchers. As stated by Johnson and Meinhof (1997), "In reviewing the literature on language and gender, and the ideas associated with theories of difference and dominance, ... neither of these approaches has tackled the issue of masculinity in a sufficiently rigorous manner" (p. 1). Hence, this pioneering study on language styles and linguistic features of metrosexuals in a Malaysian context will contribute towards the enrichment of literature on men's language.

1.4   Scope and Limitation of the Study

The study is carried out in the context of young Malaysian men who live and work in Kuala Lumpur. It focuses on a small group of male respondents who are randomly selected based on their identification as metrosexuals through the researcher's social networks. As stated in 1.3, this study is carried out in the context of Malaysian men and therefore, the analysis and findings available in Chapter Four and Chapter Five are only applicable to the group of young Malaysian metrosexuals who share or possess similar characteristics to the subjects involved in this study only. As metrosexuals can either be heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual (see Simpson's 1994), it is beyond the scope of this study to look at the language based on the sexual orientations of the subjects involved in this study. However, Beynon (2002) claims that gay men also establish and perform 'hyper-masculinity' (see Section 1.5) as a presentational strategy to materialize the image of heterosexual (straight) men. As the samples and data are not exhaustive, the results of the study cannot be overgeneralized.

**1.5	Definition of Terms**

These terms are used in the study following the given definitions.

1. ***Communities of Practice (CofP)*** *are* "… formed by people who are involved in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope. In a nutshell, communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger, 2006, p. 1).

2. ***Feminine*** *refers to* "The traits, behaviors and interests that a society assigns to the female gender role. A feminine trait is emotional; a feminine behavior is helping someone; and a feminine interest is cooking" (Helgeson, 2002, p. 4).

3. ***Gender*** *refers to the* "...traits that men and women are assigned and how these can vary within different classes, cultures and societies" (Simpson and Mayr, 2010, p.15).

4. ***Gender performativity*** "... is the repeated action stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory frame which congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a 'natural' kind of being" (Butler, 1999, p. 33).

5. ***Hyper-masculinity*** *means* "An exaggerated display of the overtly 'masculine', both in appearance and behaviour conveyed by, for example, shows of physicality and 'hardness' in the form of highly developed muscularity, tattoes, shaven heads, demeanour and speech" (Beynon, 2002, p. 162).

6. ***Machismo*** "… usually refers to the exaggerated public display of masculine behaviour. The content of the display and enactment can vary within and between cultures" (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003, p. 154)

7. ***Masculinity*** *means* "Ways of being and becoming a man in a given culture" (Martin *et al.*, 2003, p. 154)

8. ***A metrosexual*** *is* "Twenty-first century trendsetter; straight urban man with heightened aesthetic sense; man who spends time and money on appearance and shopping; a man willing to embrace his feminine side" (Flocker, 2003, p. 1)

9. ***Sex*** "… is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 10).

10. ***Vernacular form*** "… generally refers to a language which has not been standardized and which does not have official status" (Holmes, 2008, p.75).

1.6   Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter One introduces readers with issues pertaining to metrosexuals and studies in language and gender. In Chapter Two, the researcher presents related review of literature on previous studies and theoretical frameworks in the field of language and gender, metrosexuals and CofP. Meanwhile, Chapter Three describes the research design and methodology used by the researcher in analysing the speech patterns and styles of language of the Malaysian metrosexuals in this study. Further, Chapter Four describes thorough analysis of the topics, speech patterns and styles used by the metrosexual subjects in their discussions as well as the possible contributing factors that may influence the use of language of the metrosexuals. In Chapter Five, the researcher presents the findings of the topics, speech patterns and styles of young Malaysian metrosexuals involved in this study with reference to contemporary literature in language and gender and communities of practice. Finally,

Chapter Six consists of the summary and implication of this research for further studies in the field of metrosexual's language.