CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The current study is an investigation into the *Transitivity Choices in the Malaysian Prime Minister's 2009 National Day Blog Posting*. It attempts to uncover the inherent experiential meaning in the Prime Minister's (PM) Address and the Comment Writers' (CWs) responses in the area of unity, identity and nation building through the lexico-grammatical resources. The study is grounded in the Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) theory to explore how meaning is manifested in the genre of weblogs (blogs). Chapter 1 will introduce this study beginning with Section1.1 Statement of the Research Area, followed by Section 1.2 Aims of the Study, Section 1.3 Research Questions, Section 1.4 Theoretical Framework and Section 1.5 Methodology. The Rationale is stated in Section 1.6 followed by Section 1.7 Significance of the Study, Section 1.8 Delimitations of the Study and Section 1.9 Outline of the Study. The chapter concludes with Section 1.10 Chapter Summary.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH AREA

In the past decade weblogs or blogs became a popular medium of communication. In 1999 only 50 blogs existed in America (T. J. Johnson, Kaye, Bichard, & Wong, 2007). This, however, changed when by 2004, blog readership shot up to 58% in America with 7% of the 120 million U.S. adults saying they have created a blog based diary (Rainie, 2005). This is close to 8 million people in the U.S. alone. The surveys carried out by Pew Internet & American Life Project also revealed about

32 million Americans were blog readers by the end of 2004. Part of the overall increase in blog readership is attributed to political blogs. The survey revealed that 9% of Internet users frequently read political blogs during the political campaigns. According to Mayfield (2004) political blog readership and authorship have exceeded printed political magazines and columns. The increase in blogging activities may be due to the freedom of expression allowed in blogs where the writers are free to express themselves without fear of censorship which is common with traditional media such as newspapers and television. The interactive feature in blogs where readers can post comments on the blog posts is also an added appeal in blogs.

Due to the popularity of blogs, many politicians both in the government and opposition parties have also created blogs with the aim of sharing their visions for the country and to gain grass root support. Many politicians, especially those who are in the opposition parties rarely have the opportunity to share their visions for the country in the traditional media. These traditional media such as the newspaper, television and radio are mainly government owned and are pro-government in their reports. These blogs also allow others to leave their comments or respond to blogs posted by the politician blogger. The uncurbed interaction between politicians and the citizenry gives rich data for studies on national unity, identity and nation building. The exchange between politicians and the citizenry offers rich data to uncover inherent experiential meanings on the aforementioned issue.

The current study seeks to uncover the inherent experiential meaning by utilizing Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and specifically the System of Transitivity. System of Transitivity which is a component of SFL has been used to analyse various genre types such as essays (Coffin, 2003; Couture, 1985; L. L. Tan, 1993), discourses (Sinar, 2002), narratives (Halliday, 1971; Hasan, 1989; Osisanwo,

2009; S. L. Tan, 2008) and songs (John, 2004). Although blogs have been used in various studies, very few studies utilize SFL to analyse the data in blogs. Previous Transitivity studies on blogs include blogs as an educational aid (Dickey, 2004; Ferdig & Trammell, 2004; Williams & Jacobs, 2004), using blogs for reflective learning (Foo, 2007; Shaheed & Dong, 2006) and on teachers' discourse in blogs (Santiago & Meurer, 2008). These studies will be elaborated on in Chapter 2.

The site for data collection in the current study is from the Malaysian PM's blog in the 1Malaysia website specifically the blog posted by the PM on 30 August 2009 in conjunction with Malaysia's Independence Day and the comments received on the posting for 11 days from 30 August 2009 to 10 September 2009 (refer to Appendix A & B).

1.2 AIMS OF THE STUDY

The System of Transitivity, expounded by Halliday, reveals the experiential meaning through the lexico-grammar of language. Transitivity is specified through the different processes employed in language structures. The process types, participants and the circumstantial elements in clauses aids in representing these processes (Halliday, 1985). The aim of this study is to uncover the experiential meaning inherent in the PM's National Day Address and the Comments posted in response to the Address. The data includes various themes related to national unity, identity and nation building. The lexico-grammar used in deploying these themes reveals the innate experiential meaning in the data. By comparing the process types, participants and circumstantial elements found in the data, this study attempts to uncover the different experiential meanings of the PM and the Comment Writers (CWs) which concerns national unity, identity and nation building and their implications.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the stated aims this study seeks to answer the following questions:

Research Question 1:

What are the process types, participants and circumstantial elements found in the themes identified in the Prime Minister's Address and in the Comments?

Research Question 2:

How are the process types, participants and circumstantial elements similar or different in relation to the themes identified in the Prime Minister's Address and in the Comments?

Research Question 3:

What are the implications of the findings in terms of experiential meaning on national unity, identity and nation building in relation to the themes identified in the Prime Minister's Address and the Comments?

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for the current study is Halliday's SFL theory and specifically the experiential metafunction (see Eggins, 1994; 2004; Halliday, 1985, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Thompson, 1996, 2004). The experiential metafunction is the third metafunction in Halliday's SFL. The other two metafunctions are the interpersonal metafunction and the textual metafunction. The experiential metafunction deals with the "flow of events" or "goings-on" in a clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004:170). Our experience or concept of reality consists of these "flow of events" or "goings-on" in a clause which include doing, happening,

sensing, saying, having or being (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004:170). These "goings-on" are organised through the semantic system of the language and realised through the grammar of the clause (Halliday, 1985:101). Thus the experiential meaning in a clause is realised through the grammatical system of transitivity. In traditional grammar, transitivity refers to whether the verb in a clause carries an object or not (Thompson, 1996:78). According to Halliday, transitivity in the System of Transitivity refers to a system that describes the whole clause through the lexico-grammatical choice. Halliday divides the System of Transitivity into three components, the process types, the participants associated with the process and the circumstantial elements (Halliday, 1985, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The theoretical framework for this study will be elaborated on in Chapter 3.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The data for the study is collected from the PM's blog in the 1Malaysia website in http://www.1malaysia.com.my (refer to Appendix A & B). The blog posting and the comments analysed are the English translation of the Malaysian PM, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's National Day Address posted on 30 August 2009 and the Comments written in response to the Address from 30 August to 10 September 2009.

The clauses in the PM's Address and the Comments are separated into themes, enumerated and coded (see Appendix C, D, E & F). Compound and complex clauses will be broken down into basic clauses for the purposes of analysis. They are divided into basic clauses and the parts are coded as (a) and (b) as shown in the example below.

C1S5a	It is a beautiful concept

C1S5b	but	are the leaders sincere to make it happen?

Linking words such as, 'hence', 'but' and 'and' in clause complexes will not be analysed as linking words do not contribute to the experiential metafunction. They are a part of the textual and interpersonal metafunction. Each clause will be analysed for the process types, the participant elements and the circumstantial elements (see Appendix G & H). The frequency of the various types of processes, participants and circumstantial elements used in the clauses will be tabulated and calculated as percentage to enable comparison and conclusions to be drawn. The methodology will be described in detail in Chapter 3.

1.6 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The rationale for this study is to reveal the expectations of the PM as the head of the ruling government of the day and the citizens of the country with regards to national unity, identity and nation building. The PM's blog in the 1Malaysia website provides a suitable site to analyse the interaction between the PM and the citizens via the blog posting and the comments received on the posting.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is hoped that this study will complement previous studies carried out on the analysis of texts of different genres in terms of transitivity choices. The present research analyses data from one blog entry and the responses to it. Through this study one can determine the undercurrents in the interaction between the blog writer and the comment writers with regards to expectations and perceptions on national unity, identity and nation building. It is hoped that this study will reveal deeper levels of meaning through the analysis of the clauses.

1.8 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study limits itself to only one blog entry which is the PM's English translation of his Independence Day Address posted on 30 August 2009 and the Comments written in response to the Address. The study can be extended to a larger corpus of data as well as analyzing the data by using different metafunctions associated with SFL.

1.9 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

A brief overview of the contents of each chapter is laid out beginning with Chapter 1 establishing the study with the statement of the research area, the aims, research questions, theoretical framework and methodology of the study. The rationale of the study is specified followed by the significance, the delimitations of the study and the outline of the study. Chapter 2 deals with the related literature and research on weblogs, the origin of SFL and the System of Transitivity and the synopsis of studies that use SFL's System of Transitivity. Chapter 3 details the integrated theoretical framework of Halliday's System of Transitivity (Eggins, 1994; Halliday, 1985: 1994; Martin, Matthiessen, & Painter, 1997; Thompson, 1996: 2004). It explains the various process types, the corresponding participants and circumstantial elements. A description of the research methodology, data selection, data description and the research design follows with a sample analysis on the current data. Chapter 4 presents the analysis, findings and discussion of the transitivity analysis. Chapter 5 concludes the study with a summary of the main findings in relation to the three research questions presented in Section 1.3. Suggestions for future research are also given followed by a conclusion.

1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This introductory chapter to the current study has imparted information pertaining to the study of the research area, aims of the study, the research questions, theoretical framework and the methodology employed in the study. It has also shown the significance of the study in revealing the undercurrents found in interaction between the head of the ruling government and the citizens of a nation. Therefore the chapter serves as a foundation for the later chapters which will examine the idea in greater detail. The following chapter will review the related literature on the current study.