

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 gives an overview of the related literature that has shaped the theoretical and conceptual background of the current study. It comprises of five main sections. Section 2.1 gives the background of weblogs (blogs) with sub-sections 2.1.1 History of Weblogs and 2.1.2 Why People Blog?. Section 2.2 outlines the research conducted on weblogs. Following this, Section 2.3 showcases the origins of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and explains the theoretical framework of the System of Transitivity. Section 2.4 encapsulates synopsis of studies conducted using SFL's System of Transitivity in various genre types with sub-sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 dealing with research conducted on non-literary and literary texts. Section 2.5 then concludes the chapter.

2.1 WEBLOGS

Weblogs (blogs) have become a popular means of communication linking people throughout the world. Even though blogs have become a part of people's lives, the history of blogging and its importance is often taken for granted. The following sub-sections will explain the history of blogs and why blogs have become an important part of people's lives.

2.1.1 History Of Weblogs

Weblogs or commonly known as blogs, is defined as ‘a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first’ by blogger, Jill Walker and later adopted by the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (Rettberg, 1988: 19; J.-E. Tan & Ibrahim, 2008: 2 - 3). Its history began at about the same time as the emergence of the World Wide Web in 1990 and is said to have evolved from personal home pages. Justin Hall is one of the pioneers who started online diaries in 1994 which was more of an autobiography of his life organized chronologically from childhood to the present day. Jorn Barger came up with the term ‘weblog’, which was shortened to ‘blog’ by Peter Merholz (Blood, 2000). Merholz had jokingly separated the word to ‘we blog’ and now it is accepted as a noun and verb meaning to edit or post a blog (Ankit, 2007; Blood, 2000).

The advances in technology and blogging software saw a phenomenal increase in the numbers of blogs from just a mere handful at the end of the twentieth century to an estimate of 103 million blogs and 175,000 new blogs created every day according to Technorati, a company that tracks blogs and offers a blog search engine (J.-E. Tan & Ibrahim, 2008). This phenomenon brought about the term ‘blogosphere’ which refers to the ‘imaginary community of bloggers that exists in cyberspace’ (Yee, 2006:13). Apart from the advances in technology and blogging software, the proliferation of blogs in the blogosphere is also due to the low barriers in setting up a blog. It takes less than ten minutes to set up a blog and the cost is minimal.

There are various types of blogs which are classified according to its’ content; the media type, devise type, genre type or the legal status of publishers (Ankit, 2007). Hence the media type blog is a blog comprising of videos also known as a vlog, links called a linklog or photos or photolog . The devise type blog is defined by the type of

device used to compose it. A blog written by a mobile device such as a mobile phone or PDA is known as a moblog. The genre of the blogs is categorized according to the content of the blogs. According to the (We)blog Research on Genre (BROG) project based in Indiana University there are five classification of the genre in blogs; personal journals, filter, k-log, mixed and other (J.-E. Tan & Ibrahim, 2008). Personal journals are online diaries. Filters are commentaries about external links basically on current events and issues while K-logs where 'K' is short for knowledge are information based blogs normally technical in nature. Mixed blogs are a combination of all the other classification and 'other' are for other miscellaneous functions.

2.1.2 Why People Blog?

Blogs began as avenues for self expression and for keeping an online personal diary. Therefore it is undisputable that most bloggers are online diarists. According to Tan and Ibrahim (2008) the main reason why people blog is to document their life and share their experiences with others and the second being to express themselves creatively. The other minor reasons are to stay in touch with family and friends, to share information and knowledge, to store resources or information, to influence or motivate other people, to network or meet new people and to make money.

According to Jarvis, weblogs give "people in the audience a printing press, and thus access to their own audience" (Ankit, 2007: 239). Many socio-political bloggers have resorted to blogging because their voices are not heard or not allowed to be heard in the mainstream media (J.-E. Tan & Ibrahim, 2008). Among these bloggers are marginalised voices of those who oppose the government of the day and are critical of the government. In Malaysia, a former Prime Minister (PM), Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad has resorted to blogging after he became critical of the United Malay

National Organization (UMNO) party, a component political party of the ruling government, of which he was the leader during his tenure as PM of Malaysia. He was highly critical of UMNO's performance at the 2008 General Elections in Malaysia. His vocal criticism prompted the mainstream media to either not publish his comments or misquote his remarks (Mohamad, 2008).

2.2 RESEARCH ON WEBLOGS

Blogs have triggered much interest among researchers as they are a new form of interaction in the electronic media. Tremayne in his introduction to his book *Blogging, Citizenship and the Future of the Media* notes that the blogosphere has become a 'classic social network with special qualities that make it ideal for research' (Tremayne, 2007: x). One of the special qualities that he referred to is the fact that all communications are in written form and archived which helps in the accurate reconstruction of the flow of ideas in the network.

Research done on blogs include research based on content analysis, the use of blogs in education and politics, the credibility of blogs and blogs as an emerging news media. The research based on content analysis of blogs by Papacharissi (2007) concurs with Herring et. al. (Herring, L. A. Bonus, & Wright, 2005) where they found most blogs were single authored, more textual and acted as personal online diaries focusing on events in the blogger's life with limited number of links to other blogs and archives. They were also moderately interactive and the use of informal language was a common feature in the blogs. In another study conducted by Herring et al. (Herring, Scheidt, Kouper, & Wright, 2007) it was noted that a higher number of filter blogs were created when there was an important issue or event, for example, the Iraqi war. During this time most of the bloggers were adult males. At other times bloggers

came from the younger age group namely students and there were almost an equal number of male and female bloggers. Teenagers in particular use blogs for self expression as blogs provide a venue for identity exploration in a relationship with readers of blogs that are flexible and anonymous (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005).

In view of the explosion of blogs in the blogosphere and the subsequent rise in popularity of blogs among readers, political parties and politicians also jumped on the bandwagon and created websites and blogs. The Internet has offered a new public sphere, a concept introduced by Habermas, who defines it as ‘an ideal democratic space for rational debate among informed and engaged citizens, a space that would thus be an arena mediating between state and society’ (Rettberg, 1988: 46). According to Green (2002), free speech is an important component of the public sphere but absolute right to free speech is non-existent as it has to be qualified by national interest and social harmony leading to a public sphere that is compromised. To recreate the diminishing public sphere many are turning to computer mediated communication and more specifically to blogs.

The interactive nature of blogs which encourages readers to leave their comments on the blog postings also makes it a public sphere for discussion and social networking. Research carried out suggest that individuals are more likely to participate in political discussions if they can remain anonymous and their views are accepted and reported without any editing (Eveland & Dylko, 2007; Norris, 2002; Stromer-Galley, 2002). In this sense, political blogs have the potential to become a public sphere where individuals can exercise their rights as citizens by voicing their opinions on political issues.

However, Meraz’s (2007) study on the U.S. presidential contender, Howard Dean’s interactive political blog revealed that it was more a place where supporters of

the candidate left their comments supporting the candidate and discussing the candidates' image. Rarely did non-supporters leave comments on the blogs. Even if they did, the creator of the blog and the supporters' commenting on the blog glossed over the issues raised and made it insignificant.

Even though the findings show a downside to blogs, studies done by Johnson & Kaye (2004) on the credibility of blogs and traditional media show that blogs are still a viable alternative media compared to traditional news media. A survey posted online from 23 April to 22 May, 2003 show the heavy reliance on blog posts for news on the Iraqi war (T. Johnson & Kaye, 2007). They quoted Smolkin (2004), Palser (2003) and Seipp (2002) who concurred that the Iraqi war tremendously boosted the popularity of blogs as soldiers sought to remain connected with families and others were hungry for news on the war. But they cautioned that the results of the study cannot be generalised as only 4% of the population visited war blogs and many of the respondents also relied on online newspapers and online broadcasts for information which concurred with studies conducted by Eveland and Deylko (2007).

Eveland and Deylko (2007) conducted studies on the hyperlinks in blogs and found that popular blogs have moved away from the true sense of blogging and have linked themselves to mainstream media. While the bloggers depend on mainstream media for their blog posts, the media also depend on blogs to increased traffic to its own sites. Therefore seasoned bloggers like Kevin Drum, had his political news blog, *Calpundit.com* incorporated into the *Washington Post* and renamed *Political Animal* (Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Scott, 2007). Scott (2007) analysed blog postings and found that the majority of blog postings were not first hand news but news reports and surveillance of stories and information published in other sources. Blogs have now therefore become an extension of the mainstream media rather than an alternative

media. The main stream media have in turn begun to report on and refer to blogs for posted information on issues. Blog readers are now exposed to both mainstream media and blogs for information.

Although blogs have metamorphose into a part of the media they still have the power to create news and draw attention to insignificant issues which may evolve into major news. Such was the case with Trent Lott who resigned his position as Senate Majority Leader after bloggers reported on his inflammatory remarks at the Strom Thurman's 100th birthday party. The mainstream media only picked up on this two weeks later after bloggers posted blogs on the issue (Drezner & Farrell, 2004). The study by Drezner and Farrel revealed that blogs can act as debate initiators and provide expertise on issues the bloggers are knowledgeable about.

Dickey's research (2004) in the area of education suggests that blogs can be used as a discourse tool for marginalised learners in a web-based learning setting . Using blogs to respond to assignments, report on activity and events show elements of socialization and signs of support which helped to bridge or prevent the feeling of isolation.

Williams and Jacobs (2004) conducted an online questionnaire of students enrolled in two course units in a MBA blog set up by Brisbane Graduate School of Business at Queensland University of Technology. The questionnaire documented that most students were in favour of using blogs as a teaching and learning aid.

Fredig and Trammel (2004) uncovered that blogging aids in reflection and analysis by the students on what is learnt and their learning is contextualised through the hyperlinks to other materials and thus making the learning an enriching experience. The interactive nature of blogs also improves student – teacher interaction and therefore adds a more personal element to the teaching and learning process. Their

study also concurs with a study done by Foo (2007) among pre-service teachers which showed that blogs can be used as a technology to facilitate reflective learning as blogs provide a constructive learning environment.

Although many studies have been conducted on various aspects of blogs, not many studies are conducted on blogs using SFL apart from the two studies discussed below. Research conducted on Design Students' Blogs disclose their learning styles (Shaheed & Dong, 2006). According to Shaheed and Dong, the analysis of students' blogs show that they can learn reflectively or analytically. A group of design students were asked to record their thoughts as they orientated themselves towards design and how they came up with their designs. The reflective students use themselves as participants as the proper noun 'I' is frequently used in their blogs. The analytical student uses the product or design as the participant. Thus their language choices show their learning preferences which will be of tremendous use to those teaching them as they will be able to cater for their learning styles.

Another study carried out using data from blogs is by Santiago and Meurer (2008) on EFL teachers' discourse online. The discussion was on 'bad students' and through the discussion, the role of the teacher and the student was further emphasised. The teachers cast themselves in the participant role and thus accentuating the role of the teacher who is doing the action and the student who is at the receiving end of the action.

The studies carried out on blogs show the potential of using blogs in everyday life. Recognising the potential of blogs and access to this latest public sphere many politicians, socio political writers, political observers as well as governmental bodies have set up websites which also include a blog where the creators of the blogs can post blogs and others can comment on the posted blogs. This in turn helps the creator of

these blogs to disseminate information as well as gather information and opinions of their readers.

Malaysia's current PM set up the 1Malaysia website where he posts blogs, uploads his speeches, creates links to online newspapers and uploads pictures. His blogs attract many comments from Malaysians and non-Malaysians. Many issues in the blog posts and the comments deal with national unity, identity and nation building and ways to achieve it. This is a rich data site to uncover the experiential meanings and perceptions of the PM and the citizens of the country on national unity, identity and nation building using SFL's System of Transitivity.

2.3 THE THEORY OF SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

Michael Halliday developed Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in the 1960's which analyses the functional use of language. The theory of SFL by Halliday was first described using the Chinese language which was the first language Halliday studied in detail (Martin, et al., 1997). He later expanded his work to the English language and eventually inspired others to do the same for a wide range of other languages, among them, French, German, Tagalog and Japanese. Halliday's aim in describing language is to explain the choices made in the language in terms of the lexico-grammar and relate it to the function of the language. His purpose "is to specify the functions which language has in society and then to establish what reflection these functions find in the structure of the language itself" (Kress, 1976: vii). Halliday's first publication, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (Halliday, 1985) was followed by a second publication in 1994 (Halliday, 1994). The third edition was published in 2004 in collaboration with Matthiessen (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

Although SFL is distinct and unique from other grammars, Halliday developed it based on earlier studies on language, linguistics and grammars of language. According to Bloor and Bloor (2004) the beginnings of studies on grammar can be traced to the ancient Greeks. But, Western traditions on grammar have been greatly influenced by the Arabs and Indians. The father of modern linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 – 1913) argued that the language system should be the subject of linguistic enquiry rather than its use (Bloor & Bloor, 2004). This idea was taken up later by Noam Chomsky (born 1928) who developed the Universal Grammar model where language is viewed as something that is biologically inherent in everyone and not a by-product of social phenomenon. Although Halliday was a contemporary of Chomsky, his ideas about language differed greatly as Halliday was more interested in the social aspect of language.

Halliday's view of language was more in line with the Prague School (PS) linguists, most notable among them, Vilem Mathesius (1882 – 1945). The PS was best remembered for the “functional” approach to language. The term “functionalism” is used by PS scholars to mean “the tasks language or its components perform or the purpose which they serve” (Danes, 1987:4). Lyons (1981) reports that according to Mathesius, the function of the language determines the phonological, grammatical and semantic structures used in the language .

Bronislaw Malinowski (1884 -1942) who brought functionalism to England and Firth (1890 -1960), who developed British functionalism are also both great influences on Halliday (Bloor & Bloor, 2004). According to Kress (1976), Malinowski, a renown anthropologist and one of the co-founders of “functionalism” in the social sciences, put forward the notion that language is determined by their social functions in society. By merging these two concepts, Firth, the first Professor of

Linguistics in England, developed them into a new linguistic area. Firth combined his “view of meaning as function in context” and Malinowski’s sociolinguistic component, the “context of situation” and came up with the System Structure Theory (Kress, 1976: xi). Kress further adds that Firth did not attempt to state his theory coherently and present it in a fully worked out systematic manner. Halliday, who was Firth’s student, used Firth’s linguistic theory as a basis of his linguistic work. Halliday attempted to produce a coherent theoretical framework and presented his SFL theory and later upgraded his work in collaboration with Matthiessen (Halliday, 1985, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

Halliday’s SFL views language as a means for interaction. Hence language is viewed from a social context and it embodies three general social functions that language is used for: to enact social relationships, to represent one’s experience to others and to organize our enactments and representation of our experience in an organized text (Halliday, 1985, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Martin & Rose, 2003).

These three social functions of language are known as metafunctions of language. The three metafunctions are the interpersonal metafunction, the ideational metafunction and the textual metafunction (Halliday, 1985, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Martin & Rose, 2003). The interpersonal metafunction examines the relationship between the speaker or writer and the listener or reader. The ideational metafunction represents the patterns of our experience in the meaning conveyed by the clause. The textual metafunction examines the way clauses are strung together to form a text to convey a message.

The theoretical framework used to analyse the data in the current study is Halliday’s System of Transitivity which is a part of the ideational metafunction. The

System of Transitivity is used to analyse the goings-on in the clause by determining the process types; material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioural and existential, the participants in the process and in what circumstance the process is carried out (Halliday, 1985, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The System of Transitivity has been used in research to uncover and construct the experiential meanings in texts. The research based on the System of Transitivity is discussed in the following section.

2.4 RESEARCH ON THE SYSTEM OF TRANSITIVITY

Studies based on SFL's Systems of Transitivity can be divided into studies based on non-literary texts and literary texts. These studies will be discussed in the following sub-sections.

2.4.1 Research on Non-Literary Texts

Coffin (2003) analysed letters of complaint by students revealing that competent writers have more structural organization and widely use material, mental and relational processes to elaborate on the complaint. Her findings show that weaker students write confusing underdeveloped letters. This concurs with studies carried out by Couture (1985) and Tan (1993) who analysed students' impromptu compositions and literature compositions respectively.

Schleppegrell et. al (Schleppegrell, Achugar, & Otieza, 2004) in their research on instructional material using the System of Transitivity, found that the linguistic features in the Eight Grade California history textbooks were too difficult for most students to process. In another study conducted by Srinivass (2003), it was revealed that the author used particular types of processes in certain sections of the text, for example, the introduction has more relational processes and the experiment section has

more material process as this section has a lot of imperatives due to the use of instructional language.

In studies conducted on classroom discourse, Sinar (2002) documented the predominant use of the relational process to define and elaborate concepts in lecture discourses. This is followed by the material process which is used to explain and describe activities and the existential process is least used. However, in a comparative study of teacher talk and a 12th Grade Physics textbook discourse, the textbook was dominated by more mental and verbal processes than in the teacher talk which had more material process (Young & Nguyen, 2002). This demonstrated how in teacher talk visual unpacking of the grammatical metaphor is possible but in the textbook, the readers have to unpack it themselves.

Babaii and Ansary (2005) analysed academic book reviews which concurred with a study by Martinez (2001) as both studies found all the process types were used in the data however the behavioural process was least used in the former. According to Babaii and Ansary, the Physics journal had a high percentage of passive constructions, non-human participants and the use of relational and existential process types which contributes to the impersonality and objectivity of the text. Similar results as to the aspect of non-human participants are also recorded in studies conducted by Eggins et. al. (S. Eggins, Wignell, & Martin, 1993) in three disciplines. The majority of the participants were abstract nouns and nominalizations. Martinez (2001) who conducted a study on research articles in the physical, biological and social sciences observed a tension between presenting the findings objectively and the need to persuade readers to accept the validity of the facts in a suitable manner.

Research into data from media such as the newspaper and the Internet has also enriched the corpus of studies in SFL. Sim's (2008) study of newspaper reports on the

death of ‘Crocodile Hunter’ Steve Irving in three English dailies in Malaysia uncovered the use of different process types to relate different events. The material process was used to depict the concrete and physical action as they unfolded, the relational process, to describe Steve Irving’s personality, the verbal process to show validity and objectivity in the news reports and the mental process to show the inner world of consciousness. The behavioural and existential processes were least used as the reports were on the goings-on and not about the physiological and psychological behaviour of the participants.

Patpong (2008) in his study on talisman advertisements also found the material process dominates persuasive texts. This is followed by relational process to inform customers and create interest in the product. The next highest usage is the mental process which brings out the individual’s belief in the power of the talisman before and after using it.

Thus, for non-literary texts, the process types used depends on the information conveyed in the texts.

2.4.2 Research on Literary Texts

Research into the System of Transitivity carried out on literary texts recorded the dominance of the material process in novels (Halliday, 1971; Osisanwo, 2009) and poems (Hasan, 1989). The study by Halliday on William Golding’s *The Inheritors* showed a predominant use of the material and mental process to enable the reader to delve into a world where the external and internal experiences of struggling for survival were conveyed. This concurred with Osisanwo’s study on *The President’s Physician* written by Omobowale. The material process dominates the text to show the events and action in the story and the characters that carry out the actions.

In another study by Tan (S. L. Tan, 2008) on the genre of nursery tale based on Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* revealed the use of the material, verbal and relational process types to bring out the theme of punishment, its justification and execution. The relational process was used to uncover the justification for punishment. The execution of punishment was done with the use of the transitive and ergative systems of the material process.

Siow (2009) investigated the experiential meaning in the abridged and unabridged version of John Steinbeck's novel, "The Pearl". The study revealed that the material and relational processes dominated both versions of the novel to describe the sequence of events. However, the unabridged version used more mental, behavioural, verbal and existential processes than the abridged version. The different processes used in the abridged and unabridged versions are found to be due to the change in the lexico-grammar.

Kennedy (1982) who investigated language used to create two different personalities in the short story *Two Gallants* by James Joyce, found that the author had used two different processes in describing two different characters. The character Lenehan was described using relational process thus showing him to be a passive person while Corley who masterminded the action in the story, was described using the material process. Hence knowledge of the System of Transitivity and SFL in general helps writers in their creating of setting, character and plot.

Hasan (1989) analysed the poem "Widower in the Country" written by Les Murray and found a higher use of the material process in the poem and the participants were mentioned quite often. By using the System of Transitivity the question on 'who did what to whom, under what circumstance' helped in the understanding of the poem.

Lin (Lin, 2005) conducted a study on the poem “Old House at Ang Siang Hill”. He found that different processes are involved in describing the house and the addressee.

John (2004) conducted a study of English songs from the 1960s to the 1990s. She discovered that the songs use the material process to express love, the mental process to convey the perceptions of endearment and relational process to show attribution and identification of love. The songs, at times use non-human participants and at other time the participants are ellipsed.

Based on all the research that has been carried out on various forms of data, apart from the data of design student blogs and the classroom discourse, as far as can be seen no study or research has been carried out on interactive blog discourse. In view of this, the current study attempts to analyse an interactive blog discourse between the PM and the citizens of Malaysia on their understanding of national unity, identity and nation building.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has encapsulated the related literature on weblogs and SFL as well as the related research that has been conducted in both these areas. As reported in this chapter, not much attention is given to the textual content of the blog postings and the comments and the lexico-grammatical resources used to realise the experiential meaning in the genre of blogs. The next chapter will outline the theoretical framework and the research design utilised in this investigation.