

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

#### 8.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion of the study. It revisits the four research questions mentioned in Chapter One and gives an overview of the findings. The final part of the chapter presents the implications of the findings and gives suggestions for future research work.

#### 8.1 Research Questions Revisited

The research questions given in Chapter One are listed as a guide to sum up the findings of this study.

##### *Question 1: What role does social presence play in the selection of blogging strategies?*

To answer this question, there is a need to look at social presence theory that formed the basis for the analysis of social presence among the participants in the blog (see Chapter Three). According to Short et al. (1976), when social presence is high, interactivity among online users increases. In this study it was found that the participants experienced social presence through the various social networking strategies and tactics. For example, the fact that participants in this study greeted each other and addressed each other by nicknames is due to social presence.

Social presence, in this study, influenced interactivity in blog forums as blog participants adjusted their interactive practices in the context of blogging. It was reported in Questionnaire II that the participants were conscious about stating their views because they thought others were observing them. In addition, the participants indicated that they checked on their words so that they did not offend others and they did not bring up issues that were deemed sensitive to others in blog forums. The participants also reported that they needed to be diplomatic and be extra polite in the manner they interacted in the blog.

It was also reported in the interview that they consciously refrained from using improper language because there were people reading their comments. In addition, the participants were aware that they could be chided and squabbles could occur if they used inappropriate interactive practices in the discourse community. This too is a reflection of social presence. Additionally, the fact participants controlled the use of bald language in blog posts is due to social presence. This is seen in the following example as discussed in Chapter Five.

well, if in Latin America, they call **this kind of people as STUPIDO...Upps, I'm sorry for** that . . .

(FK23 B29:71-72)

The influence of social presence can be discussed in terms of Lakoff's (1973) rule of camaraderie and Grice's conversational conventions or maxims in the linguistic choices blog participants make in blog interactive practices.

Firstly, the findings showed that social presence brought about interactive practices that promoted camaraderie among blog members. For example, they used informal language features, marked blog members as people sharing similar a social background and protected

one another's face needs. In addition the findings showed that social presence influenced blog participants to violate the maxims of quality because blog participants avoided bringing up sensitive issues and brought about social networking practices appropriate in the blog forums of different ethnic groups.

***Question 2: What are the interactive strategies and tactics used by the participants when they blog?***

The language in this study was analyzed on the basis of speech act theory for the linguistic forms and functions in blog forums. In this study, it was found that the participants in this study used the following strategies to achieve their interactive goals:

- (a) to set blogging grounds
- (b) to introduce blog issues
- (c) to elicit responses on views
- (d) to give opinions
- (e) to defend opinions
- (f) to persuade others
- (g) to criticize views
- (h) to seek confirmation
- (i) to make concluding remarks

In order to achieve the above interactive goals the participants employed various tactics. The linguistic devices of the tactics enabled the participants to achieve their intention and purpose in the discussion of the blog issues. Nevertheless, this study **does not** intend to claim that the strategies as listed above form a complete list of strategies in the data.

This study found that the overall interactive strategies are used mainly 'to set blogging ground' 'to give opinion' 'to defend opinion' and 'to persuade others'. The study recorded as little as 2.7% of the strategy '*to criticize view*'. The little use of this strategy aided harmonious interaction when participants blogged.

The analysis of data from the interview and questionnaire revealed that the participants in this study perceived blogging as a social, informative, interactive and speaking activity. Therefore, it is believed that participants' the perception of blogs, in this study, influenced the manner they blogged.

In Chapter Four, it was proposed that bloggers are members of a discourse community. As members of the discourse community, the basic knowledge of appropriacy of interactive strategies is applied by blog participants in this study. It was found in the study that the participants used interactive strategies that fostered pro-relationship interactive practices that were appropriate in the blog discourse community.

***Question 3: What are the social networking strategies and tactics used to promote camaraderie among the different ethnic groups in this study?***

This study found that blog participants fostered camaraderie and intercultural interaction through the use of different sets of social networking strategies and tactics. This study found that when the participants social network they fostered camaraderie by marking each other as members who shared common background by using expressions such as 'us Malaysian', (*as opposed to 'illegal immigrants' 'Filipinos' and 'Indonesians'*). Blog participants also used informal linguistic features such as those found in spoken language that reflected friendly chats and stress free environment in the blog.

Additionally, the participants accommodated the different ethnic groups in blog forums by translating words, phrases and using alternative linguistic forms that facilitated understanding in blog forums. This study also revealed that, the participants supported each other's view and they were concerned about saving each other's face which brought about camaraderie among the participants. The analysis of data showed that blogging fostered intercultural interaction through the use of the following social networking strategies:

- (a) Avoidance Strategy;
- (b) Inter-cultural Strategy; and
- (c) Politeness Strategy.

In view that identity is not stable in online interaction; this study regards intercultural interaction between people from different social, political and cultural groups. The social networking strategies that promoted intercultural interaction covered different functions. In the use of avoidance strategy, blog participants did not raise sensitive issues and were indirect in their comments. In an inter-cultural strategy, the blog participants promoted understanding among the various ethnic groups in this study. For example, they informed why Muslims do not touch dogs and in doing so, they were able to explain some practices in their religious beliefs and cultures. This enabled blog participants to understand the messages posted by them, in addition to enriching each other with knowledge of cultural practices of other ethnic groups.

In using a politeness strategy, the participants were found to maintain both the negative and positive face of others that encouraged intercultural interaction. In the use of positive politeness, the participants expressed their knowledge and awareness of the cultural needs of

others. For example, they expressed their knowledge on o sensitivity in some cultures such as food, in addition to explaining their views when they were criticized.

In negative politeness strategy, the participants apologized to one another and used hedging devices, in addition to explaining why certain points raised in the blog forums were not suitable in their cultural context. For example, by explaining why being ‘a *house husband*’ was not suitable for the Muslims, they got others to understand them in blog forums. In off record politeness strategy, the participants did not point out any clear meaning of their views on blog issues and therefore, the participants had to interpret blog messages according to their background knowledge.

This study found that the ethnic groups in this study have equally used avoidance strategy, inter-cultural strategy and politeness strategy that could promote intercultural interaction in blog forums. This could be due to the fact that more than 80% of the participants indicated in Questionnaire II that they were conscious of the different cultures in blog forums. This shows that the social networking strategies identified in this study are common ways that encouraged intercultural interaction in the Malaysian setting.

***Question 4: What are the choice of strategies and tactics used by genders when blogging?***

This study found that the male and the female participants have used stereotyping strategy, rapport building strategy, solidarity strategies and direct strategy in blog forums. This study found that in stereotyping strategy, the participants stated, defended and quoted each other’s stereotypical view. In doing so, the participants reinforced each other’s stereotypical view.

In rapport building strategy the participants brought about collaborative features in the discussion of gender topics. For example, they apologized to each other and showed by expressing sensitivity to the feeling of others in blog forums, in addition to asking questions that could promote rapport and understanding among the participants. In a solidarity strategy the participants shared similar viewpoints and quoted each others' viewpoints in the discussion of the blog issues. In using a direct strategy, the participants used overt and blunt statements such as making sexist remarks.

This study found that the gender based strategies were almost equally distributed among the male and female participants. The finding of this study concurs with the view of Herring (1994) that in online interaction the choice of interactive strategies is not exclusively used by women or men. As, this study found that the female participants to be more direct than their males counterparts, one can expect girls to use more direct strategy in blog forums. This was possible as the female participants in this study need not conform to what is expected of them in society or adhere to community norms (Lakoff, 1975; Holmes, 1995).

## **8.2 Overview of the Findings**

The present study looked into how participants social network in blog forums. The use of the different types of social networking strategies shows that interaction in the blog forums is made possible just like in face-to-face interaction. The present study found that blog social networking practices can foster positive intercultural communication. The participants observed appropriate social networking practices such as those practiced in friendship and building of relationship. Therefore, the participants appear to be in agreement with one another or do not overtly disagree with the use of hedging devices, and avoidance strategies.

This suggests that the participants make adjustments to their language use in view that the blog forums are visited by others.

Though some of the strategies and tactics found in this study could be universal, they could be peculiar to the Malaysian way of blogging. For example, the use of localized English (*e.g. lepakng, racing-racing, rempeting*) could characterise some of the Malaysian way of using English when they blog. Furthermore, the use of the 'bah' particle could be more prevalent among participants from Sabah. Nevertheless, since all the participants in this study were Malaysians, the study may produce different results when the participants come from different countries and socio-cultural background.

### **8.3 Implication of the study**

The research findings suggest that it would be necessary for people to be engaged in blog interaction to have a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. This refers to the knowledge and skills of using linguistic forms and pro-relationship interactive practices. This must be accompanied with an attitude of readiness to engage in an interaction in a sensitive manner and to accept blog members on the basis of friendship.

The present study shows that, in a language classroom, blogs could be used to build a sense of membership that supports teamwork among students. This can happen when students share what they find important with others. In such cases, the focus of language teaching would be on learners' interactive practices that fostered camaraderie in an intercultural context.

## 8.4 Future Work and Consideration

The most obvious direction for future work is due to the limitation imposed by this that that is confined to an academic setting. Since internet usage in Malaysia has increased manifold from 3.7 million in 2000 to 14.9 million in 2008 (Internet World Stats, [internetworldstats.com/asia/my.htm](http://internetworldstats.com/asia/my.htm)), this means more Malaysians are drawn to the Internet as source of information and communication. This opens up opportunities for future researchers to collect larger data pool on blogging and recruit participants beyond the scope of academia. This would also allow for a better understanding of the circumstances that influence the social networking practices of bloggers in Malaysia.

Since this study is limited to the semantic or functional moves level of analysis, examining blog postings at the structural level of analysis such as word frequencies, sentence or 'utterance' length, message length, and vocabulary size would be another area of interest.

Another potential area of investigation is drawn from the work carried out by Nowson (2005). Nowson investigated the personality of bloggers as introvert, extrovert and neurotic using the collocation analysis (e.g. the use of words, phrases) and word count in a quantitative research method. It would, therefore, be interesting to investigate the personality of the respondents using a qualitative research method and note the differences of their personalities in the real-world. Other potential areas of research are listed as follows:

1. Are there any difference in the use of interactive strategies in real life and in social networking among the ethnic groups? If that is so, on what condition does an ethnic groups use certain social networking strategies more than others? Is there a correlation between culture and social networking practices?

2. Will this study produce a different set results of blog participants consisted of a single ethnic group or gender?
3. What are the differences in the interactive practices among genders in this study and in real life? Are certain social networking strategies natural to a community or gender in blog forums? Why did the Bajau produce minimal social networking strategies in the discussion of gender topics?
4. Are there any difference in the manner people blog in the Western cultures compared to Asian cultures? If so what are the differences?
5. What are the social networking strategies that promote reflective writing? If so, what are the pedagogical approaches?

### **8.5 Summary**

The research acknowledges the past research done on blogs but what seem missing in other researches are the rudimentary aspects of interaction. Unlike other studies, this study undertakes a qualitative-quantitative research design to unveil the theoretical and linguistic aspects that links bloggers as discourse community. By adopting the proposed principles of blog interactions presented in this study, it may enlighten people interested in blog forums into seeing the basic aspects that helped bloggers to maintain a blog discourse community.