DISAGREEMENT STRATEGIES IN THE ONLINE COMMENTS OF *THE MALAYSIAN INSIDER*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the disagreement strategies and ways to mitigate disagreement in *The Malaysian Insider*'s comments. This study is limited to the topic of disagreement and mitigating disagreement in an online news portal, *The Malaysian Insider (TMI)*. For the purpose of this study, Shum and Lee's disagreement strategies (2013) and Locher's mitigating strategies (2004) were used as the framework. The qualitative method was employed in this study. The findings showed that disagreements were expressed by giving an opposite opinion, raising a rhetorical question, giving a negative comment, making a personal stance, reprimanding, making an ironic statement, rewording and the use of insulting words. The analysis showed that hedges, shifting responsibility, modal auxiliaries, *but*, giving personal or emotional reasons and token agreement were employed to mitigate disagreement.

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ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji strategi perbezaan pendapat dan strategi mitigasi di komen berita *The Malaysian Insider*. Kajian ini hanya merangkumi topik memberi perbezaan pendapat dan cara mengurangkan perbezaan pendapat di portal berita atas talian, *The Malaysian Insider (TMI)*.Saya menggunakan rangka kerja Shum dan Lee (2013) bagi strategi memberi perbezaan pendapat dan rangka kerja Locher (2004) bagi strategi mitigasi. Kaedah penyelidikan kualitatif telah digunakan dalam kajian ini. Berdasarkan dapatan kajian ini, strategi memberi perbezaan pendapat yang digunakan ialah memberi pendapat bertentangan, menimbulkan persoalan retorik, memberi komen negative, mengemukakan pendirian peribadi, memberi teguran, menggunakan penyataan ironi, penyusunan semula perkataan dan penggunaan kata-kata menghina. Berdasarkan analisa, perbezaan pendapat dikurangkan dengan menggunakan strategi seperti menggunakan perkataan lindung nilai, mengalihkan tanggungjawab, kata bantu modal, kata hubung ‘tetapi’, memberi sebab peribadi atau beremosi dan penggunaan kata setuju.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AOIR	:	Association of Internet Research
BN	:	Barisan Nasional
CMC	:	Computer-mediated communication
DAP	:	Democratic Action Party
ESL	:	English as second language
FTA	:	Face threatening act
GE	:	General election
GOM	:	Government of Malaysia
HKC	:	Hong Kong Chinese
HOTS	:	Higher order thinking skill
IC	:	Identity Card
ISA	:	Internal Security Act
MDA	:	Media Digital Association
MILF	:	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MST	:	Manila Standard Today
NRD	:	National Registration Department
NSE	:	Native Speaker of English
PA	:	Professional academics
PM	:	Prime Minister/ Perdana Menteri
PR	:	Pakatan Rakyat
PRU13	:	Pilihan Raya Umum 13
RCI	:	Royal Comission of Inquiry
SBCSAE	:	Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English

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SCoSE	:	Saarbruckan Corpus of Spoken English
TDM	:	Tun Dr. Mahathir
TMI	:	*The Malaysia Insider*
UMNO	:	United Malays National Organisation
WSC	:	Wellington Spoken Corpus

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Language is used to express thoughts, feelings, emotions as well as beliefs. In order to understand each other, people need to communicate to each other to accomplish things. In any social interaction, there are other reasons such as the establishment of an atmosphere of sociability and solidarity to consider. English Language has been taught as second language in many Malaysian schools, colleges and universities. In fact, English is also widely used as a medium of instruction in private schools and other private learning institutions in Malaysia.

In English education field, the use of news portal in teaching and learning is one of the effective methods to encourage students to practice their reading skill in English. In primary and secondary schools, for example, some English teachers ask their students to join online forum or chat-room as a medium of communication with their peers. Whereas in pre-university and university level, the instructor or lecturer uses a more interesting medium such as blog as an online forum to encourage students to share thoughts and ideas as well as to maximize the use of English.

An effective English class is seen as a communicative classroom where active participation from students who involved. Active participation in English classroom does not only depend on the teachers but the learners as well. According to Pang, Wah, Keong and Mohamed (2005 p. 15), online learning does not only help to supplement the quality of teaching and learning, but also enjoyable and exciting. Nowadays, the education system in Malaysia is heading towards 21st-Century Education which is also known as *Pembelajaran Abad Ke-21 (PAK21)*. Thus, students and teachers have access to one another through online discussion, email, chat and social networking. In this instance, one of the strategies that can be used for the teacher to expose the students to

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participate in the 21st Century classroom activities is via communicating and giving comments online.

The use of Computer mediated communication (CMC) has become extensive worldwide over the past decades. With the advent of CMC platforms such as *Facebook, Skype, Twitter,* online forums and online portal, communication has become easier with a touch of the finger these centuries. CMC is seen to take over the role of face-to-face interaction nowadays. CMC is lack of intonation and gestures, thus disagreement is discourteous by nature. In this instance, mitigation is important to soften disagreement, maintain and develop relationships.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The use of computer and the Internet in the twenty-first century has been a revolution to the social environment. Vast development in this century leads to the fast and active lifestyle among Malaysian regardless of gender, age group, and socioeconomic status background. It is undeniable that the generation nowadays is more interested in seeking news and current issues online than getting them in a printed version. It is inevitable that social media has become more favourable for Malaysian to keep in touch as well as spreading news and information.

The social media and CMC platforms such as *Facebook, twitters,* online forums, blogs, and online portal, have encouraged people to search for information with just a touch on the screen. Useful and speculated information could be hardly differentiated due to unlimited information. Different views and disagreement regarding certain issues raised have become inevitable. Some interlocutors facilitate various strategies wisely to

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disagree, while some may be rough towards unacceptable ideas by reprimanding, giving negative comments and opinions, and even cursing (Shum and Lee, 2013 p. 71).

1.2 Significance of the Study

The Malaysian Insider (TMI) was among the leading online news portal available in Malaysia. In October 2014, *TMI* was rated by the Media Digital Association (MDA) and comScore Inc as the second most-read English news portal after *The Star Online*. *TMI* was an independent online news portal, which wrote about issues, events, politics, lifestyle, and sports in Malaysia. *TMI* was mobile-friendly and easily accessible. The readers are among the Internet users, who are looking for 'unvarnished' reports. *TMI* labeled their news reports as 'unvarnished' because some of the online news portals are more biased to a certain political party either government or opposition. Thus *TMI* claimed that they offered news which was not biased and factual. Unlike other online news portals such as *'Utusan Online'* and *'The Star Online'*, *TMI* has a comment section at the bottom of each article. This 'built-in' feature has given the opportunity for readers to discuss and respond directly towards any issues or reports published in *TMI*.

TMI readers may not know each other personally, live in different places, and do not meet in person. Messages are conveyed through texts, thus disagreements are unavoidable when readers express their ideas, opinions, and stances. This study aims to provide guidelines and add-on literature in disagreement for Internet users, online readers, and policy makers. The findings from the analysis of naturally occurring data in this study could shed light and add to the literature in the area of disagreement and mitigation in computer-mediated communication specifically in the Malaysian context. This study could also be useful for educators, linguists and those who are interested in the area of pragmatics and CMC.

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As mentioned earlier, the current curriculum aims for 21s-Century Education. Classroom activities focus more on students as participants and teachers as facilitators. Electronic sources and media are often "on demand" allowing students to return to content when they'd like. The news article is among the electronic resources to teach English as second language (henceforth ESL). Online sources such as online portal and blogs are inevitable among the ESL students as they are easily used. As a teacher, I encourage my students to read news article or magazine during free time. It could be a warm-up activity and/or manipulated in the ESL classes.

Moreover, studies in news portal are used to help students to implement the higher-order thinking skill (HOTS). HOTS is essential to help students to solve problems not only in school but also in real life situation. Nowadays, students are exposed to various types of reading material. Whether it is on events, sports or politics, a different view or opinion is unavoidable. Thus, this study could guide me as a teacher in helping the ESL students understand and apply disagreement strategies via CMC simultaneously mitigate when disagreement takes place.

1.3 Objectives and Research Questions of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate disagreement strategies in computer-mediated communication (CMC) medium via *The Malaysian Insider*'s online comments. First, this study is based on the disagreement strategies framework proposed by Shum and Lee (2013). Second, disagreement occurs in either two expressions which are mitigated or unmitigated. Thus, in order to analyse mitigated disagreement strategies in this study, the mitigating strategies by Locher (2004) is used as a reference. These disagreement strategies and mitigating strategies frameworks are further elaborated in Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2.

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This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the disagreement strategies used in the comments section of *The Malaysian Insider*?
2. How is disagreement mitigated in the comments section of *The Malaysian Insider*?

1.4 Limitation of the Study

This study is limited to the topic of disagreement and mitigating disagreement in a Malaysian online news portal, namely *The Malaysian Insider* (henceforth *TMI*). In this study, I only analyse the commentary section on the article related to the key search "Lahad Datu Invasion" in *TMI* (See Section 3.2.1). It is impossible to generalize the findings of this study to other CMC tools such as blogs, online forums and related social network sites within Malaysia or abroad. Those who article comments might be using their nicknames and remain anonymous. Thus, I will not emphasize their background, age, and gender.

1.5 Definition of Terms

According to Sifianou (2012, p. 1), "disagreement" is 'the expression of a view that differs from that expressed by another speaker'. In this study, the disagreement definition by Sifianou is used because it is more relevant to identify disagreement as "a view that differs" than another commentator in the data. Therefore, based on the disagreement definition by Sifianou, in this study, disagreement is defined as an "expression of view" by a commentator which "differs" from another commentator.

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"Mitigation" according to Fraser (1980, p. 1) is 'the reduction of certain unwelcomed effects'. With reference to the definition proposed by Fraser (1980), mitigation is defined as an expression by a commentator which functions to reduce 'the unwelcome effects' in his disagreement with another commentator. Fraser's definition is used as a starting point to identify mitigation in disagreement because in the present study, as long as the 'unwelcomed effects' such as face threats, uncomfortable situations and dispreferred reactions are reduced, the disagreement is mitigated.

A commentator in this study is defined as the interlocutor who types his statement or opinion in the comment sections provided at the bottom of each news posts and expresses disagreement and/or use mitigating strategies in the commentary section of *The Malaysian Insider*. A commentator could express the disagreement and/or mitigating strategies in the reply thread of the previous commentator or in his new comment. When a commentator expresses disagreement in a new comment, he can mention the previous commentator as an indication that the disagreement is directed to that commentator (see section 3.2 for further elaboration).

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CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I review the speech act of disagreement by providing elaboration on disagreement strategies found in previous studies. I also elaborate on previous research carried out related to disagreement in computer-mediated communication. Moreover, in this chapter, I review related studies on the mitigation of disagreement. This chapter also includes an overview of the theoretical framework that I am using in this study.

2.1 Disagreement

According to Baym (1996 p. 330) disagreement is defined as "the voicing of an incompatible viewpoint which is explicitly directed at another party". Meanwhile, Edstrom's (2004 p. 1) definition of disagreement is an expression of "an opinion or belief contrary to the view expressed by another speaker, may involve actively defending one's opinion, attacking another's position, or quietly withholding approval." According to Rees-Miller (2000 p. 1088), disagreement occurs when "a speaker S disagrees when s/he considers untrue some Proposition P uttered or presumed to be espoused by an Addressee A and reacts with an utterance the propositional content or implicature of which is Not P (Proposition)". Of all the definition, I am adopting the definition proposed by Sifianou (2012 p. 1) which says disagreement is "the expression of a view that differs from that expressed by another speaker". I will explain further on the disagreement definition that I am using in the current study in Section 3.1.

2.1.1 Studies on Disagreement in Spoken Discourse

Past research in the area of disagreement was taken from the spoken disagreement data. Studies conducted in spoken disagreement were pioneered by Pomerantz (1984) in

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her study of preferred/ dispreferred features in agreeing and disagreeing. Her conversational analysis in agreement and disagreement found that silences, hesitation, partial repeats and request clarification indicate disagreement.

Power may influence the way a disagreement is expressed. Rees-Miller (2000) investigated linguistic markers in disagreement. The data was taken from spoken American academic classes and academic talks. She adopted the Brown and Levinson's model (1987) as a reference in her study. Based on the corpus study, the professors used more positive politeness markers such as humour, positive comments, and inclusive pronouns than students and interlocutors of equal power in disagreement.

Angouri (2012) conducted a study in spoken disagreement via recorded meeting talk. The data was taken from a consortium of 3 multinational companies (Pengasus) and a small-medium retail firm (Orion). In her paper, she focused on face-to-face disagreement in English. The data was a corpus of 45 hours recording on two meeting talk. An interactional sociolinguistics informed approach was adopted in her study. The approach included the recordings, ethnographic observations, and interviews. The findings indicated that a strong argumentation practice in Orion was unmarked. On the other hand, personal attacks and confrontation such as labeling/ name-calling, irony or sarcasm, and accusation was avoided.

Meanwhile, Marra (2012) investigated disagreement among the skilled migrant interns entering the New Zealand workplace. The data was taken from audio and video recordings of naturally occurring workplace talk. Based on the findings, disagreements were reinterpreted as unintentional errors. Moreover, the skilled migrants were restricted in their access to their new communities.

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Cheng and Tsui (2009) conducted a corpus study to investigate spoken disagreement among the Hong Kong Chinese (HKC) and the Native Speaker of English (NSE). The data was taken from the audio-recorded conversation of the participants who were friends or colleagues. Cheng and Tsui (2009) adopted the politeness strategies framework by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), the bald-on-record disagreement without any use of redressive language and the on-record disagreement with the use of redressive language. Based on the empirical data, Cheng and Tsui (2009) proposed that the HKC were not shy to disagree with NSE compared to NSE. In addition, HKC's disagreements were more likely to be heavily redressed in order to mitigate the imposition of the disagreement on their NSE interlocutors.

Georgakopoulou (2001) conducted an ethnography study on spoken disagreement in Greek. She recorded the interaction between members of a female 'best' friend group during their outdoor and leisure activities. The recorded interactions between the four participants of this group were in educational matters and relationship with boys. The disagreements found in the data were highly conventionalized that fundamentally involved prefacing markers, storytelling, and questions. Prefacing markers based on the data are particle re, turn-initial markers 'listen' and 'look', a subjunctive interrogative phrase such as 'shall I tell you something?' and 'let me tell you something', and formal metalinguistic markers such as 'allow me to say something', 'if I could say something' and 'I'd like to pose some questions'. Another feature of disagreement found in Georgakopoulou (2001) was storytelling in which Georgakopoulou regarded as 'a narrative segment consisting of one or more short episodes presented as an analogy'. In this instance, the speaker disagreed by using the personal or indirect experience to compare or as a guideline. The third feature of disagreement proposed in her work was questions. This feature involved questioning repeats such as partial or paraphrases which functioned as rhetorical questions that challenged the current speaker's view.

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Meanwhile, Kakava (2002) conducted a study of three spoken discourse types in a Greek speech community. This community referred to the interlocutors who were born Greeks in Greece, Greek-Americans and bilingual in Greek and English. In her study, she investigated opposition strategies among family members, friends and a classroom discourse of a university class. The first two were carried out in Greek, while the latter was in English. Her paper aimed to investigate what she referred as strong yet mitigated disagreement. Based on her work, two strategies were found in the family and friends data which were partial or total repetition marked by negative affect and 'aggravated' questions with or without endearment terms. The first strategy functioned as opposition in which the interlocutor repeated his utterances ('we'll see") in a sarcastic tone. The second strategy involved questions expressed with a contrastive tone which found in the data when a younger speaker expressed a question to disagree followed by the figurative kinship term "my little child". Other strategies found in all contexts were 'initial disagreement followed by accounts', 'personal analogies', 'unprefaced disagreement for a second turn' and 'sustained disagreement'.

Edstrom (2004) carried out an exploratory study on disagreement among three groups of female participants. The participants were Venezuelans who were native speakers of Spanish and American who lived in Caracas, Venezuela for at least seven years. However, Edstrom did not consider the conversation of the American participants for her study. The data was taken from six "natural" recording conversations, one was in English, while the other five were in Spanish. The groups were organized in which the participants were university-educated and ranged from 32 to 50 years of age. However, the conversations were spontaneous with no topic or task given. According to Edstrom (2004), the findings revealed that Venezuelan women used many indirect disagreements and more diplomatic approach. Based on the findings, they expressed disagreement directly with phrases like "forget it" and "Don't even think it". Moreover, these

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Venezuelans employed questions, examples, and phrases like "well, but" and "yes, but" to introduce their opinion.

Meanwhile, a local study on disagreement is scarce. Mohd Noor and Hashim (2011) investigated disagreement strategies among Malaysian speakers in radio discourse. The data were audio-recorded from a popular Malaysian English radio station. The topics of the radio talk were selected on discussions about the current issues appealed to the radio audience. The focus was on hedging devices used in disagreements such as *well, I think, I mean* and *you know*. Findings showed that 'you know' and 'I mean' were used as prefaces to disagreement sequences, 'I think' was used in a disagreement sequence, and 'well' was used before expressing a disagreement. Their study also suggested that, Malaysian English speakers in radio talks frequently hedged rather than expressed their disagreement directly.

Another study in Malaysia was conducted by Tengku Sharif and Mohamad Noor (2011). Their study investigated disagreement politeness between L1 and L2. They adopted a discourse completion test method to collect the spoken data from 49 Malay adolescents aged 19 to 21. The data was based on the self-role play of five situational sets in the discourse completion test. They adopted Muntigl and Turnbull's disagreement taxonomy (1998) to identify the types of disagreement and Rees-Miller's politeness strategy for disagreement taxonomy. The finding showed that the participants used more disagreement politeness when addressing a friend in a formal situation while arguing a formal topic compared to disagreement made to a friend in an informal situation on an informal topic. They found that greater social distance led to the greater application of self-denigration (p. 371).

Hei, Ling and David (2011) examined how Malay, Chinese and Indian Malaysians responded to disagreements. Their study focused on disagreement in the family

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(parents, siblings, spouses/ partners), friendship (friends), and workplace (bosses). A questionnaire was used to obtain data. Data was taken from 655 respondents who were randomly picked based on their availability. The majority of the respondents were undergraduates and staff from public universities in the Klang Valley. The respondents were categorized according to gender (male/female), academic qualifications, profession, ethnic group, age, and location. Respondents tended to be vocal with siblings, spouses/ partners, close friends, and colleagues. However, being verbal did not indicate that the respondents were rude or disrespectful. Malaysian respondents preferred to be direct in disagreement to seek a redress or a solution. However, findings also showed that the respondents preferred to resort to silence during a disagreement with their bosses.

2.1.2 Studies on Disagreement in Computer-mediated Communication

Baym (1996) was a pioneer in investigating agreement and disagreement in computer-mediated communication. Her ethnographic analysis investigated agreement and disagreement in a computer-mediated discussion group. She examined these two speech acts in one of the oldest Usenet newsgroups called rec.arts.tv.soap. According to Baym (1996), newsgroups are electronic letters which are also known as articles. Meanwhile, the readers who read an article in the discussion group are known as newsreaders. Unlike face-to-face communication, this medium of communication does not require the participants to be online simultaneously in order to participate in the discussion group. In her work, she collected articles to rec.arts.tv.soap within ten-months, interviewed the newsgroup members, collected open-ended survey questions' responses commented to the group and collected statistical information on macro-level about events and participants. Based on her findings, several features were found in

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disagreements which were *quotation with reference, reference to previous talk, explicit indicants of disagreement* (word "disagree", "however" and disagreement token "but"), *assessment, partial agreements* (followed by disagreement tokens "but" and "though"), *naming, acknowledge the perspective of the other, provision of reasoning, qualifications* and *framing as non-offensive*.

Langlotz and Locher (2012) used the data from a commentary section of an online newspaper to investigate emotional stance in online disagreement of UK's MailOnline. The findings showed a notable presence of emotional stance through conceptual implication, explicit expression, and emotional description. Like them, I am using the data from a commentary section of an online news portal. However, I am focusing on the disagreement strategies employed in the commentary section.

Bolander (2012) published research on personal blogs' comments sections. She found that most of disagreements and agreements were written in response to the blogger posts. Based on the findings, there were six ways of responsiveness in disagreements and agreements. These ways were 'quoting', 'naming', 'pro/noun use', 'format tying', 'inside other discourse move clues' and 'order and participant roles'.

Angouri and Tseliga (2010) conducted a corpus analysis on disagreement in CMC via two online forums. The data was taken among Greek students and professional academics (PA). Based on the finding, the discourse particle [re] in combination with unconventional spelling and punctuation was more frequently used in the students' forum compared to the PA forum.

Meanwhile, Shum and Lee (2013) in their study of disagreement in two Hong Kong online forums found eleven strategies. These strategies were 'giving negative comments', 'using short vulgar phrases', 'raising rhetorical questions', 'making a

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personal stance', 'making an ironic statement', 'cursing', 'giving opposite opinion', 'rewording', 'giving personal experience', 'giving facts' and 'reprimanding'. For the purpose of this study, I am using the eleven disagreement strategies as the disagreement framework (See section 3.1.1).

2.2 Mitigation

According to Fraser (1980 p. 1), mitigation is defined as "the reduction of certain unwelcome effects which a speech act has on the addressee". Meanwhile, Martinovski (2006 p. 1) defined mitigation as "a pragmatic, cognitive, and linguistic behaviour whose main purpose is to reduce vulnerability". Flores-Ferran (2010 p. 1) and Flores-Ferran and Lovejoy (2012 p. 1), adopted Fraser's definition of mitigation in their work which proposed mitigation as "a medication of a statement that softens the message for its hearer". Thaler (2012 p. 1) also used Fraser's mitigation definition. For the purpose of this study, I adopted the mitigation definition proposed by Fraser (1980 p. 1) as my working definition to identify mitigation in disagreement (see section 3.1). I used the definition by Fraser because, as I mentioned earlier, Flores-Ferran (2010), Thaler (2012), and Flores-Ferran and Lovejoy (2012) used Fraser's mitigation definition in their studies. Therefore, I chose to use Fraser's mitigation definition to identify mitigation in this study.

2.2.1 Studies on Mitigation of Disagreement

Fraser (1980) in his work on Conversational Mitigation investigated mitigation characteristics and linguistics devices used to mitigate. Fraser (1980) proposed several strategies used by speakers to mitigate such as the use of justification, an immediacy to imply a close relationship, disclaimers, parenthetical verbs, tag questions, and hedges.

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According to Fraser (1980), justification is used as an indirect method to mitigate a directive to become more palatable. The second linguistic device proposed by him is immediacy. This immediacy associated with positive feelings towards the hearer thus implies a close relationship. The disclaimer is used to mitigate in which the speaker initiates his statement with the possibility that he may be incorrect about the statement he is going to make. Meanwhile, the use of parenthetical verbs to mitigate reduced the strength and modified a statement made by a speaker. Tag questions according to Fraser (1980) functioned to soften a statement made previously by the speaker such as in "You were there, weren't you?". Another linguistic device mentioned in his paper is hedge which functioned to move the face threat from the speaker to the hearer.

Locher (2004) investigated power and politeness in disagreement. The data were taken in three settings; a sociable argument during a dinner conversation among family and friends, a business meeting in a physics research institution and a political interview and one extract from a presidential debate and a US Supreme Court hearing. Locher (2004) listed seven mitigating strategies which I am using as a framework. The strategies are hedges, giving personal or emotional reasons for disagreeing, the use of modal auxiliaries, shifting responsibilities, the objection in a form of question, the use of 'but' and repetition of an utterance by a next or the same speaker (See section 3.1.2).

Norrick and Spitz (2008) conducted a study based on audio, transcription, and video recordings of free conversation and conversational interviews. The data were taken from Saarbruckan Corpus of Spoken English (SCoSE) - US and Britain, the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SBCSAE) – from Linguistic Data Consortium and Wellington Spoken Corpus (WSC) – from Victoria University. According to Norrick and Spitz (2008), the effectiveness of humour for mitigating conflict depends

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on the seriousness of the conflict, the social power relationship between the participants, the kind of humour, the reactions of the participants and who initiates the humour.

Meanwhile, Czerwionka (2012) recorded role plays interaction to investigate the degree to which linguistic mitigation is motivated by levels of imposition and speaker certitude in interaction. The recordings were taken from native Spanish speaking university students. According to Czerwionka (2012), role play was used to gather as many examples of interaction focusing on the intended levels of imposition and certitude, unlike naturally occurring data which she regarded as insufficient for her investigation. Based on the findings, severe imposition and speaker uncertainty motivated mitigation. The combined effect of severe imposition and speaker uncertainty motivated the highest degree of mitigation. The use of hedges, the use of modal auxiliaries and giving personal or emotional reason indicated the uncertainty of the commentator. Most commentators tended to make an uncertain stance to mitigate the disagreement made.

Flores-Ferran and Lovejoy (2015) investigated mitigation and indirectness in second language and Native Spanish speakers' arguments. The spoken data was taken from two groups of speakers, second language (L2) Spanish speakers and native speaker (NS) of Spanish. The corpus study utilized the Conversation Analysis (CA) method in order to contemplate different levels of discourse in the data. Based on the findings, Flores-Ferran and Lovejoy (2015) identified several mitigating devices used, parenthetical verbs ("I Believe", "I think", "you think"), hedges ("how do you say", "I don't know", "and all that", "maybe", "like it says where?", "which is it?"), pauses ("well"), tag questions ("right?", "no?", "isn't that right?"), challenge questions ("Didn't you say there should be a balance?"), conditional verb ("I would put", "I would prefer"),

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mitigating discourse markers ("that is", "that is to say") and token agreement ("yes", "yes, of course", "I agree").

Meanwhile, Caffi (1999) examined the spoken data which was recorded between doctor-patient and psychotherapeutic conversation in Italian. Based on the investigation, Caffi (1999) proposed that mitigators were used to mitigate because they manage the responsibility of speech act in different ways.

Martinovski (2006), studied mitigation framework in a public environment. The data was taken from audio-recordings of inquisitorial examinations in court trials from Goteborg Spoken Language Corpus (www.ling.gu.se/projekt/tal). Six of the audio-recordings were in Swedish and five were in Bulgarian. She distinguished the mitigation discourse moves into three types which were concession (agreement and admission), prolepsis (anticipation or prevention) and counter-attack (rebuttals and denials). Based on her findings, concessions were realized by admissions and involve mitigation strategies by examiners and witness, modal changes, lower tone of voice and pauses. Meanwhile, prolepsis was realized by mitigation in the utterance, evasive answers, and confirmation by implication. The latter basic move according to Martinovski (2006) contained indirect denials, corrections, positive feedback and declarative sentences.

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2.3 Research Gap

Some previous research done on disagreement, focused on spoken disagreement such as Rees-Miller (2000), Georgakopaolou (2001), Kakava (2002), Edstrom (2004). Meanwhile, previous studies on disagreement and CMC were conducted on Usenet (Baym, 1996), personal blogs' comments (Bolander, 2012) and online internet forum (Shum and Lee, 2013). Research carried out on online news portal focused on the

emotional stance in online disagreement (Langlotz and Locher, 2012). However, very few investigated mitigating strategies in online news portal comments.

Local studies on disagreement focused on spoken disagreement. Siti Nurbaya and Azirah (2011) investigated disagreement strategies among Malaysian speakers in radio discourse and Tengku Intan Suzila and Mohd Yusri (2011), disagreement politeness between L1 and L2. Another local study examined how Malay, Chinese and Indian Malaysians respond to disagreements in the family (parents, siblings, spouses/ partners), friendship (friends), and workplace (bosses) (Kuang et al., 2011).

Unlike these researchers, I intend to look at the disagreement strategies on a local online news portal's comments, *The Malaysian Insider (TMI)*. I feel that there is a need to investigate the disagreement strategies and mitigating patterns in the online comments section because there is limited literature on the Malaysian context investigating disagreement and mitigation in online news comments. I will also look at the mitigating strategies employed during the disagreement.

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CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate the disagreement and mitigation strategies present in *The Malaysian Insider*'s *(TMI)* news comments, both the quantitative and qualitative approaches are used. The former is practiced to summarize the frequency count of the disagreement and mitigation strategies while the latter, to describe and explain patterns of disagreement and how disagreement is mitigated in *The Malaysian Insider*'s commentary section. This chapter provides a clear description of the disagreement and mitigation frameworks, procedures on data collections, and data analysis procedures.

3.1 Theoretical Frameworks

As mentioned in section 1.5, Sifianou (2012, p. 1) defines disagreement as 'the expression of a view that differs from that expressed by another speaker'. In this study, the disagreement definition by Sifianou is used because it is more relevant to identify disagreement as "a view that differs" than another commentator in the data. Then, the disagreement strategies employed by the commentator to disagree in the data is dwelled in deeper in this study. For the purpose of this study, the framework by Shum and Lee (2013) is adopted to identify the disagreement strategies employed. In addition, how these disagreement strategies are realized with reference to the Shum and Lee's Disagreement framework is also discussed.

Mitigation according to Fraser (1980, p. 1) is 'the reduction of certain unwelcomed effects' (c.f section 1.5). In this study, the mitigation based on the definition given by Fraser is identified. Mitigation may or may not occur during the course of disagreement. Fraser's definition is used as a starting point to identify mitigation in disagreement because in the present study, as long as the unwelcomed effects such as face

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threatening, uncomfortable situation, and dispreferred reaction are reduced, the disagreement is mitigated. When a disagreement is mitigated, there are several strategies employed to mitigate disagreement. In this study, the mitigating framework by Locher (2004) is practiced to investigate the mitigating strategies employed by the commentators in *TMI*'s commentary section.

3.1.1 Shum and Lee's Disagreement Framework (2013)

According to Shum and Lee (2013), there are eleven types of disagreement strategies employed in the online discussion forum. Shum and Lee's (2013) disagreement framework was chosen for this study because these strategies are employed in CMC in the Internet forums. The present study uses data from *The Malaysian Insider's* news commentary section which is also a type of CMC medium. Unlike disagreement strategies framed in the verbal interaction, disagreement in CMC lacks verbal cues and gestures. Thus, Shum and Lee's framework is more suitable as a reference to start with.

Table 3.1 summarizes Shum and Lee's eleven disagreement strategies. The phrases/ words underlined in Table 3.1 are the examples of disagreement strategies from Shum and Lee's (2013) disagreement framework.

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Table 3.1: Shum and Lee's (2013) disagreement strategies

No.	Disagreement strategies and definition	Examples from Shum & Lee (2013)
1.	**Giving negative comments** - Comments in a negative tone. - Personalize or the use of pronoun 'I' and/or 'you'. - Sometimes made in the form of a metaphor to describe the user's attitude or behaviour. - Explicitly associates addressee to a negative aspect (Culpeper, 1996: 358).	B: It's good to have fewer persons to compete with. C: (I) could not imagine that someone would say in this way. I believe your mum has many competitors. B: Perhaps your mum is… C: A dog's mouth cannot grow ivory.
2.	**Using short vulgar phrases** - Uses taboo words, swear words and abusive or profane language.	F: Don't jerk off (the implied meaning in Cantonese is "don't be too self-obsessed"), D** is tougher than you.
3.	**Raising rhetorical questions** - Disagrees in the form of a question which leaves an obvious answer to the public. - Displays a very clear opposite view.	F: You call that pretty…? Aren't there any pretty girls in Hong Kong… K: Do you possess the four virtues (benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom)?
4.	**Making a personal stance** - Denies association or common ground. - Gives an explicit phrase to show an opposite view such as "I don't agree", "I am not" and "so my understanding is…".	B: I don't agree on one point: eating in Country A makes me want to dies…
5.	**Making an ironic statement** - Says something insincerely which remains as a realization on the surface, with the use of an inappropriate identity marker. - Manipulates respectable honorific terms of address.	L: Assessing someone who has already died, the Earth is not the right place for your highness.
6.	**Cursing** - Warns, threatens or tries to frighten the recipient that a certain consequence or detrimental event will occur to the addressee within a definite period of time.	P: Heaven is watching us as we live, my dear brother, you need to be cautious during the last two years of life.

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7.	**Giving opposite opinions** - Gives an opinion that is contrary to what is said. - Not accompanied with any standard phrases such as "I don't agree with you" or "I don't think/ believe so" - No intention of giving negative comments on people or an issue.	A: This young girl who sacrificed her life for her sister was commended by her classmates for being both beautiful and smart. D: Pretty or not is not that important…
8	**Rewording** - Makes minor changes to the message expressed or reconstructing original comments by another interlocutor.	A: … First, students who are studying in Country A really come from different countries. My good friends include Mainland Chinese, Koreans and Japanese… J: If you want to study abroad, Country B is the first choice because students really come from different countries… If you want to study abroad, Country D is the first choice because students really come from… If you want to study in other countries, Country E is the first choice because students really come from different provinces…
9.	**Giving personal experience** - Refers to his or her previous experience to substantiate disagreement. - States an opposite previous experience. - The use of 'I' to indicate the commenter's own experience	E: I'm in place B… I can say.. The food from B, from B**Chinatown… can only maintain your life. F: Perhaps my requirements aren't high. I've been roaming around B for 16 years, the food in B**Chinatown is acceptable.
10.	**Giving facts** - Uses quotations, statistical information, pictures, videos, etc. to show a completely opposite view. - Gives a link to the related sources	E: http://www.webometrics.info/top12000.asp?offset=250 Look! It ranks 285.
11.	**Reprimanding** - Tells action/behaviour/ attitude is not approved - Usually in a form of interrogatory question to point out wrong doings without any further comment - The message may involve emotion	F: Do you call that pretty? Aren't there any pretty girls in Hong Kong? M: Do you have any humanity? She's dead now, and are **you** still talking about whether or not she is pretty here? Please have a heart, can't **you**?

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Based on the disagreement strategies proposed by Shum and Lee (2013), I identified the disagreement strategies in the commentary section of *The Malaysian Insiders'*. First, I listed down the eleven disagreement strategies for Shum and Lee's disagreement framework. Then, I identified the disagreement strategies found in my data based on these definitions and characteristics outlined by Shum and Lee (2013) in Table 3.1. However, not all of these eleven disagreement strategies were found in this study. I will discuss the disagreement strategies found in the data in Section 4.1.

3.1.2 Locher's Mitigation Framework (2004)

According to Locher (2004), there are seven mitigating strategies listed through which disagreement is expressed. Locher's (2004) mitigating framework is chosen because these strategies mitigate disagreements in the data. Relevant linguistic devices framed by Locher are adopted to the online comments of *TMI* in order to investigate the realization of the mitigating strategies expressed.

The following Table 3.2 summarizes Locher's mitigating strategies (2004). The words in bold are the examples of linguistic devices provided by Locher (2004).

Table 3.2: Locher's (2004) mitigating strategies

No.	Locher's strategies	Examples
1.	**Hedges** The use of hedges to mitigate disagreement such as: - *well, just, uhm, uh, I think, I don't know, about, let me, kind of, let's, of course, I mean, little, or?, say* and *stuff*	Steven: but that's the key, **just** because they're genetically the same does not mean they have equal, potential. Kate: people are willing to pay and and **I think** it's wrong Roy: as long as those people are willing to pay it why should we reduce the price? Kate: uh it just makes me mad **I don't know** why.

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2.	**Giving personal or emotional reasons for disagreeing** - Personal statement is based on feelings which cannot be easily disputed. - The addressees' face is saved because they might have valid and better reasons which the speakers have not denied upon.	Roy: as long as those people are willing to pay it why should we reduce the price? Kate: uh it just makes me **mad** I don't know why.
3.	**The use of the modal auxiliaries** - Can be used to soften FTAs. -*May, might, could, would* and *should*	Roy: Steven would tell us nothing. It means nothing. I presented- Steven: it **might** mean something but it **would** be very hard to draw a conclusion.
4.	**Shifting responsibilities** - a strategy that allows interactants to portray themselves as not responsible for what they are reporting. -the use of pronouns *they* or *you* to exclude oneself or one is unavoidably included, to use *we*, in order to spread responsibility. - softens tone when the content of the utterance implies disagreement with a previous statement.	Miriam: but Roy what was the aim of the study was it to look at the twins development in, Roy: to look and see whether, .. the aim of the study as as suggested the study, but **Steven** has found incredible flaws in this,
5.	**Objection in the form of a question** - The question mitigates a disagreement when it opens for the next position to answer.	Anne: well excuse me. In behalf of Steven I have to say something though. Steven: please. Anne: ***can it be, the prejudice of the, uhm how do you say job giver.*** Roy: mh Steven: the employer. That's why I'm saying you have to ask the employer to answer this question. Anne: The employer.
6.	**The use of but** - Word 'but' is used at the beginning of a turn intended with less mitigation than when it occurred within turn. - Word 'but' appears together with other mitigation such as hedges or questions. - When mitigation precedes the word 'but', it is in a form of an agreement or partial agreement.	Steven: the study can't be done. Miriam: **but** Roy what was the aim of the study was it to look at the twins development in Roy: to look and see whether, Steven: it might mean something **but** it would be very hard to draw a conclusion.

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7.	**Repetition of an utterance by a next or the same speaker** - The repetition of words, phrases or an entire sentence uttered by the previous speaker. - Functions as a "take up" when a speaker agrees on the importance of an aspect brought up by a previous speaker and decides to continue it. - Functions as an "agreement"	Steven: and, so that's that**'s a poor study.** Roy: so then I won't tell you the result. Steven: but I know the result because we uh Roy: this is this **is a poor study** there is no point reporting results. Steven: you can report it just won't publish it.

As Table 3.2 shown, there are seven mitigating strategies proposed by Locher (2004). First, based on the disagreement strategies found, I identify mitigation based on the definition proposed by Fraser (1980 p.1). Then, I listed the mitigating strategies as shown in Table 3.2. With reference to these mitigating strategies listed and the mitigation found, I identified the mitigating strategies in the disagreement strategies found in my data. Not all of these mitigating strategies proposed by Locher (2004) were found in my data. The mitigating strategies found in this study will be discussed in Section 4.2.

3.2 Research Site: *The Malaysian Insider (TMI)*

The Malaysian Insider (TMI) was one of the "news portal" in Malaysia. *TMI* began publishing on the 25th February 2008. It was edited and led by Jahabar Sadiq, a former journalist. The news portal aimed to report "an unvarnished take on events and personalities in Malaysia". *TMI* was mobile friendly and easily accessible. In contrast to the hard copy versions of available newspapers on market, *TMI* offered short and comprehensive news to the readers. Unlike other alternative online news portals such as MalaysiaKini, which focuses more on political issues, *TMI* wrote about issues, events, lifestyles, businesses, opinions, food, books, travels and sports in Malaysia as shown in

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Figure 3.1. Meanwhile, Figure 3.2 shows the screenshot of a news article published in *TMI*.

Figure 3.1: Main page of *The Malaysia Insider (TMI)*

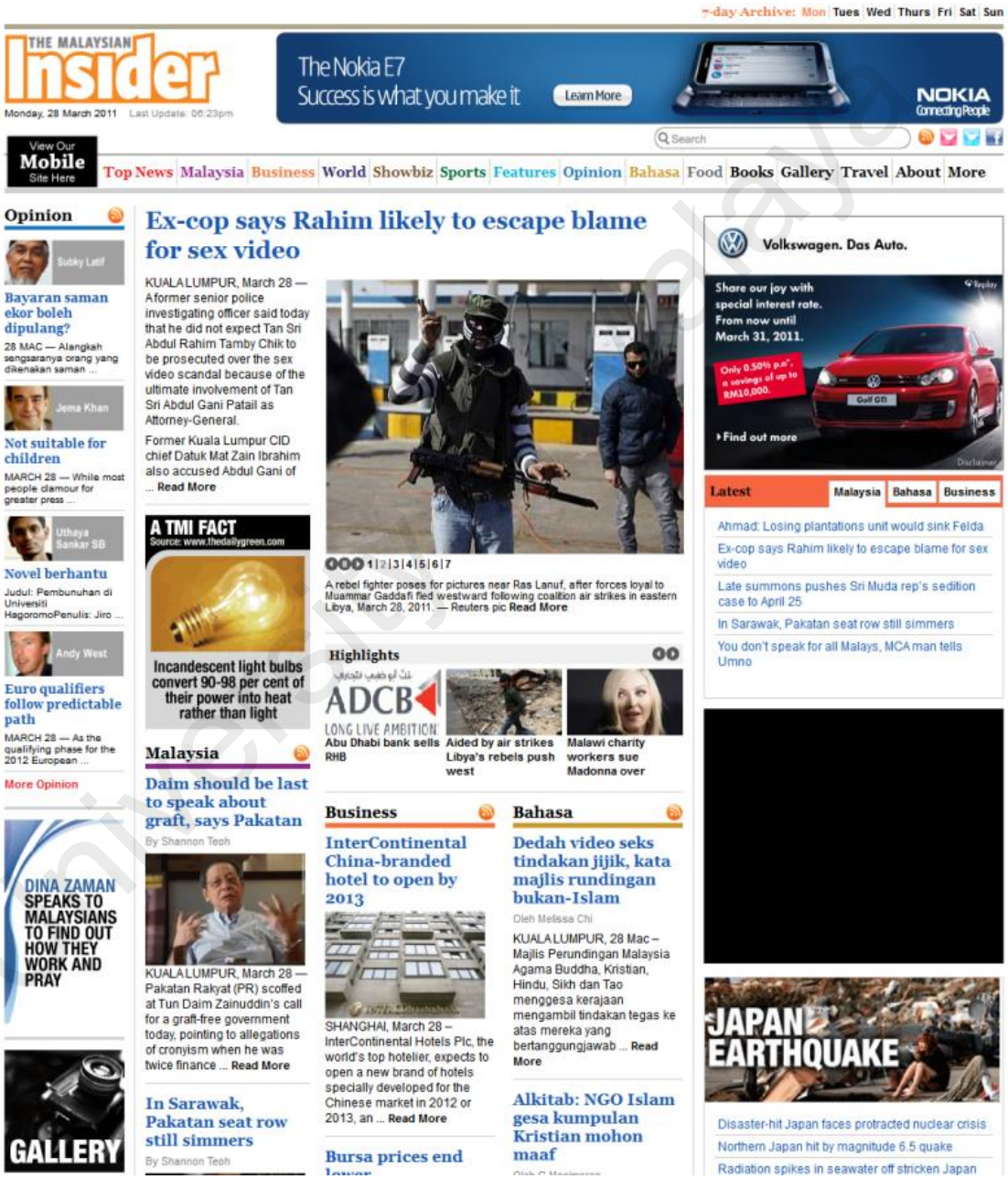
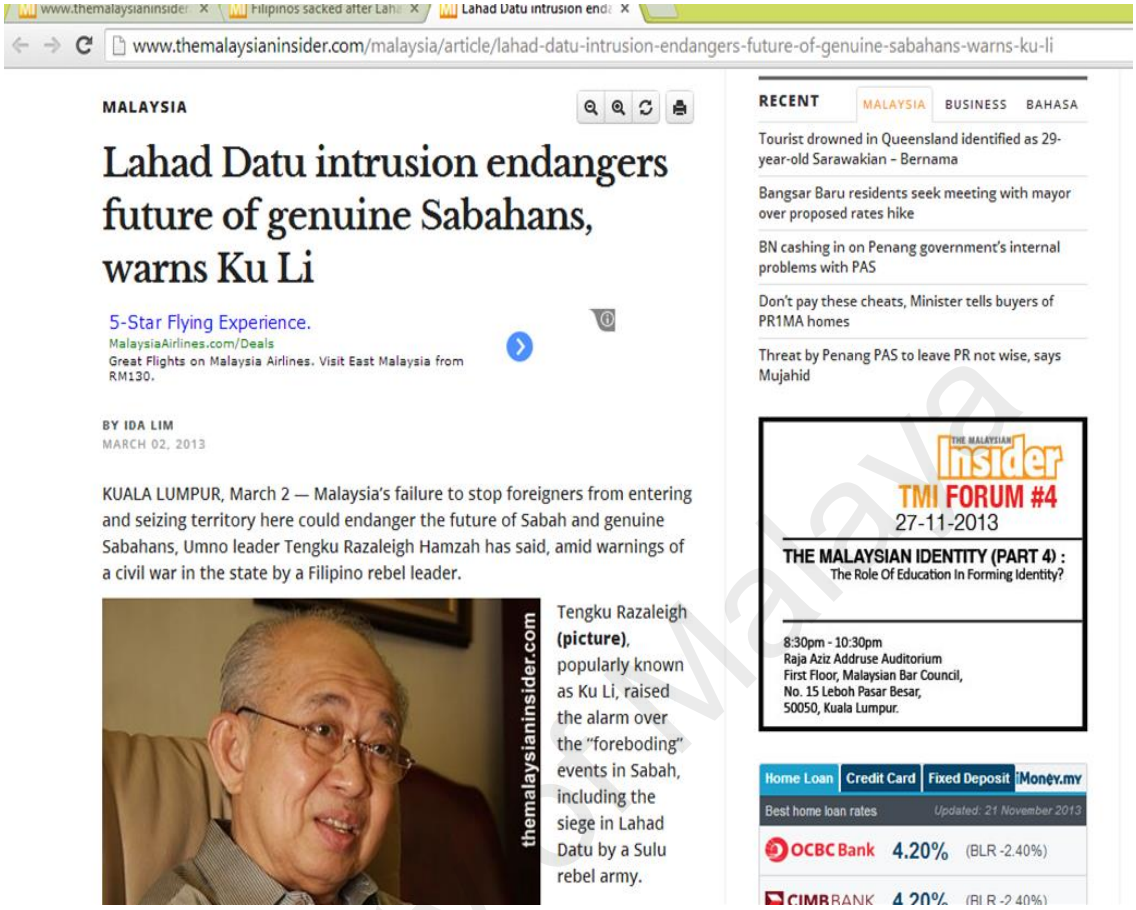


Figure 3.2: Example of a news article in *TMI*.



TMI shut down its site on the 14th March 2016 at midnight. According to *theguardian* (*theguardian.com*, 15 March 2016), *TMI* shut down its site because it had been blocked by the government since February 2016 due to several reports published by *TMI* about 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB). Although *TMI* was no longer available online for reading, it is analysed in this study because it was rated as the second most-read English news portal after *The Star Online* in October 2014 (*The Star Online*, 22 December 2014) by the Media Digital Association (MDA). Unlike The Star Online, *TMI* had a commentary section at the bottom of every news article. The commentary section allowed readers to post comments in response to the news article they had read. In the commentary section, there was also a built-in feature which enabled their readers to post comments to another commentator.

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The readers were among the Internet users, who were looking for truthful and straightforward reports. There were two types of *TMI* readers; silent readers and commentators. A silent reader reads the news article and news comments but does not participate in posting comments on the commentary section of *TMI* news articles. Meanwhile, a commentator is a reader who reads the news article or/and the news article's comments and posts comments in the commentary section. A commentator could choose either to comment on the news post or directly to another commentator (c.f Section 1.5).

3. 2. 1 Lahad Datu Invasion

Sabah is a state in Malaysia and was previously a part of the territory of the Sulu Sultanate. It was surrendered to the British North Borneo Company by the Sulu Sultanate in 1878. In 1915, The Sulu Sultanate was finally taken over as part of the Philippines by the American colonial government. North Borneo joined Malaysia in 1963 and it was then renamed as 'Sabah'. On 11 February 2013, the so-called Royal Security Forces of the Sultanate of Sulu and North Borneo broke through the borders of Sabah and landed in Lahad Datu.

I chose the topic 'Lahad Datu Invasion' because the issue of security and sovereignty is controversial not only among the readers and commentators of *The Malaysia Insider* but also Malaysians. The Lahad Datu incident happened due to the claim made by the 'so-called' Sultan of Sulu that Sabah is a part of his kingdom. The 'so called' Sultan Sulu claimed that North Borneo is a part of the Sulu Sultanate unresolved territorial rights. The incident caused nine Malaysian servicemen and six civilians killed. As a result, the whole nation was shocked and debated about the issue of Malaysian security. This issue had also been debated in *The Malaysian Insiders'* commentary sections.

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Therefore, the topic 'Lahad Datu Invasion' was selected in this study in order to identify the disagreement strategies and mitigating strategies employed on *The Malaysian Insider's* commentary section.

3. 2. 2 Instrument

TMI was available in both Malay and English. For the purpose of this study, only the English version of *TMI*'s news comments is analysed. Data from the 21st of November 2013 until 13th January 2014 is collected. Data collection is based on the key search 'Lahad Datu invasion' which was debated in 2013. The word 'invasion' is used in the key search due to the impact of the incident towards Malaysia as well as the claim made by the attackers, the so-called 'Sulu Sultanate'. All relevant articles to the key search 'Lahad Datu invasion' are downloaded. There are two types of articles found under the key search 'Lahad Datu invasion'. The two types are 'side views' and 'news'. There are 42 related articles with 632 comments in total. However, only 30 news articles labelled under the news category with comments were selected. From these news articles, only 11 were selected based on the participant framework of the online commentary section proposed by Locher and Langlotz (2012) which will be explained in section 3.6.

Based on Table 3.3, there are 11 articles under the key-search 'Lahad Datu invasion' which consists of disagreements. The article with the most disagreements is the article reports on 'Sulu incursion fuels Sabah native anger against Projek IC, BN' (42.42%). Meanwhile, the articles which consist the least disagreements are 'Philippines intrigue could be behind Sulu incursion, says sources', 'RCI on Sulu invasion to be announced Monday, says Hishamuddin', 'Sarawak DAP chief under fire for "absurb" statement on crime spree' and 'Self-styled Sulu sultan who led Sabah invasion dies' (3.03% each).

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Table 3.3: Articles and Number of Disagreement in *TMI* Online Comments

No.	Articles with Disagreement	Number of Disagreement	Percentage (%)	Date Retrieved
1.	Lahad Datu invaders say will 'never surrender'	2	6.06	21st November 2013
2.	Philippines intrigue could be behind Sulu incursion, says sources	1	3.03	21st November 2013
3.	Manila wants Putrajaya to explain alleged abuse of Filipinos	2	6.06	22nd November 2013
4.	Stop defending Malaysia's attack on Sulu invaders, local daily tells Aquino	2	6.06	22nd November 2013
5.	RCI on Sulu invasion to be announced Monday, says Hishamuddin	1	3.03	1st January 2014
6.	Sulu incursion fuels Sabah native anger against Projek IC, BN	**14**	**42.42**	13th January 2014
7.	Obedience to country's leaders an obligation, Muslims told	2	6.06	13th January 2014
8.	Tian Chua barred from entering Sabah	2	6.06	13th January 2014
9.	Sarawak DAP chief under fire for "absurb" statement on crime spree	1	3.03	13th January 2014
10.	Self-styled Sulu sultan who led Sabah invasion dies	1	3.03	13th January 2014
11.	Sabah security zone failed, so seek UN's help, Putrajaya told	5	15.15	13th January 2014
Total Number of Disagreements		**33**	**99.99**	

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3.3 Ethics and Internet Research

The Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR) proposed three major considerations to support a researcher in making a decision regarding the ethics of internet research: Human subjects, private/ public and data/ persons. In the present study, the human subjects involved are *TMI* commentators. Their identity remains anonymous while the majority of the readers used usernames of their choice to participate in the commentary section. In terms of the private/ public consideration, *TMI* was publicly accessible and anyone was able to read the news portal online. The readers were not required to register any membership or subscription. Meanwhile, in terms of the data/ persons considerations, this study is text-based which does not emphasize on the individual in the commentary section.

3.4 Reliability and Validity

In order to ensure the reliability and the validity of the data in this study, a senior lecturer from the Languages and Linguistics Faculty, University of Malaya was consulted. A list of disagreement and mitigating strategies had been prepared based on the frameworks used (c.f Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2). Each strategy is provided with an example taken by the data from this study and the inter-rater approved the data coding of this paper.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

In this section, an explanation of the steps taken for data collection in this study is provided. Figure 3.3 illustrates the procedures involved in obtaining the data in this study.

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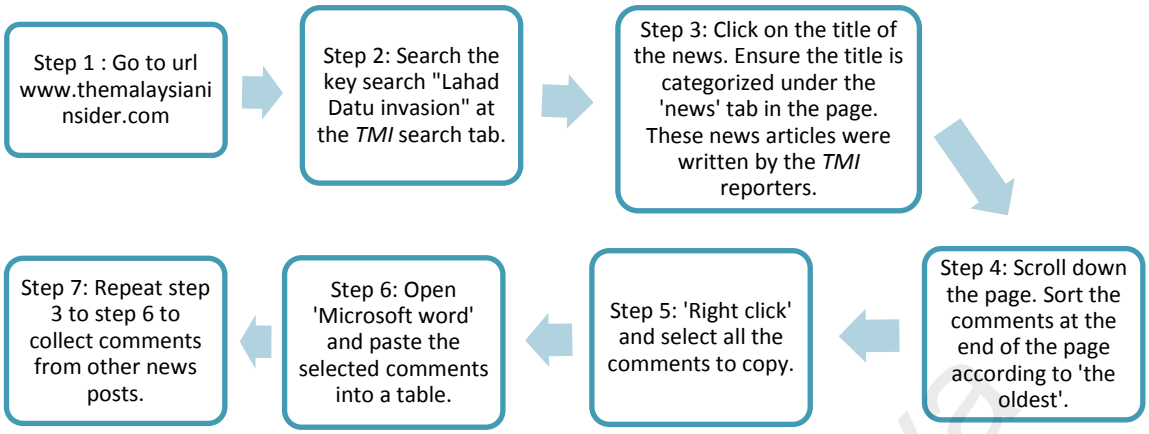
Figure 3.3: Data Collection Procedures



In order to collect the data for this study, it was obliged of the writer to go to *The Malaysian insider*'s site: www.themalaysianinsider.com. Then, the search tab in *TMI*'s site was used to search on the key search 'Lahad Datu invasion'. The key search was practiced to gather all relevant articles published on *TMI* related to Lahad Datu's invasion. There were two categories of articles shown based on the key search 'Lahad Datu invasion'. They were the 'news' and 'side views' category (c.f. Section 3.2.1).

However, for the purpose of this study, only the articles labelled under the 'news' category are selected. There were two types of news articles found under *TMI*'s 'news' category which were news articles with and without comments. The news articles selected in this study are only the articles with comments which are found at the bottom of the news articles. Next, I scrolled down the page towards the end of the news articles to see the comment section of each news article. The news comments were then sorted from the 'oldest' to the 'most recent' in order to see the sequence of the comments. Finally, all the comments were copied and put on a table to be analysed.

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3.6 Data Analysis Procedures

In this section, the participation framework of the online commentary section (Langlotz and Locher, 2012) was adopted to my data.

Figure 3.4: Locher and Langlotz (2012) participant framework of online commentary section.

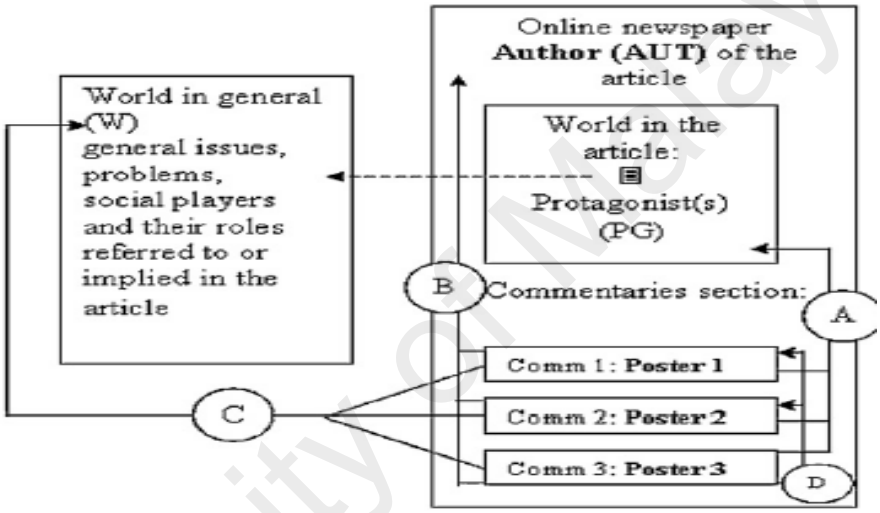

Figure 3.4 shows the order of participant framework proposed by Langlotz and Locher (2012). Based on the participant framework, a commentator has several 'butts of disagreement' (Langlotz and Locher, 2012 p. 1598) towards whom his disagreement can direct to. The 'butt of disagreements' in Figure 3.4 are labelled as A, B, C and D. A is when a commentator direct the disagreement to the protagonist(s) in the world of the article. B is when the commentator addresses the disagreement to the author of the online newspaper. Meanwhile, C is when a commentator refers the disagreement to the world in general which is triggered through the article's content. Then, D is when the commentator aims his disagreement at another commentator.

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However, for the purpose of this study, I only selected 'D' based on the participant framework to analyse my data. Thus, in this study, I will only look at the disagreement made by a commentator to another commentator in the comments section. This is also parallel with the definition of disagreement chosen for this study (see Section 3.1). Table 3.4 shows a sample of a data from this study.

Table 3.4: Example of data adapted to the participant Framework of online commentary section.

Protagonist (PG) Author (AUT)	Lahad Datu invaders say will 'never surrender' 1 March 2013 Boo Su-Lyn
Commentator B (CB) **D** Commentator A (CA)	Umno just give them blue I.Cs and let them vote in PRU 13 like what you did in project I.C for illegals. Or its[sic] another UMNO wayang kulit like what happen in Sauk, Kuala Kangsar by a certain army group For the benefit of *[Commentator B's name]*, while I may agree with you the unconstitutionality of Project IC in Sabah, I absolutely disagree with you that the Sauk incident was a wayang kulit. A very dedicated policeman valiantly sacrificed in the discharge of his duties.

Based on Locher and Langlotz's participant framework, 'D' is the comment made by Commentator A in response to Commentator B. In this study, 'D' refers to 'disagreement' made by the interlocutor directed to a previous commentator. Based on the comments' format in *TMI*'s news post, there are two types of 'D' identified in this study:

1) Interlocutor mentions the name to whom a comment is directed at (see example in Appendix A).

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2) Interlocutor replies specifically to the person who commented earlier (see example in Appendix B).

The first type of disagreement in 'D' is when the second commentator directly mentions the name of the previous commentator in his comment. This type of 'D' is shown in Table 3.4. Based on Table 3.4, Commentator A directly mentions the previous commentator's name to indicate that the disagreement made in his comment is dedicated to Commentator B. Meanwhile, the second type of 'D' is when the interlocutor directly replies to the previous commentator. This type of 'D' requires the interlocutor to click on the reply tab of a specific commentator he wants to disagree with.

The following figure illustrates the procedures used for the data analysis. These procedures are done after the completion of data collection procedures (see Figure 3.5 for Data Collection Procedures)

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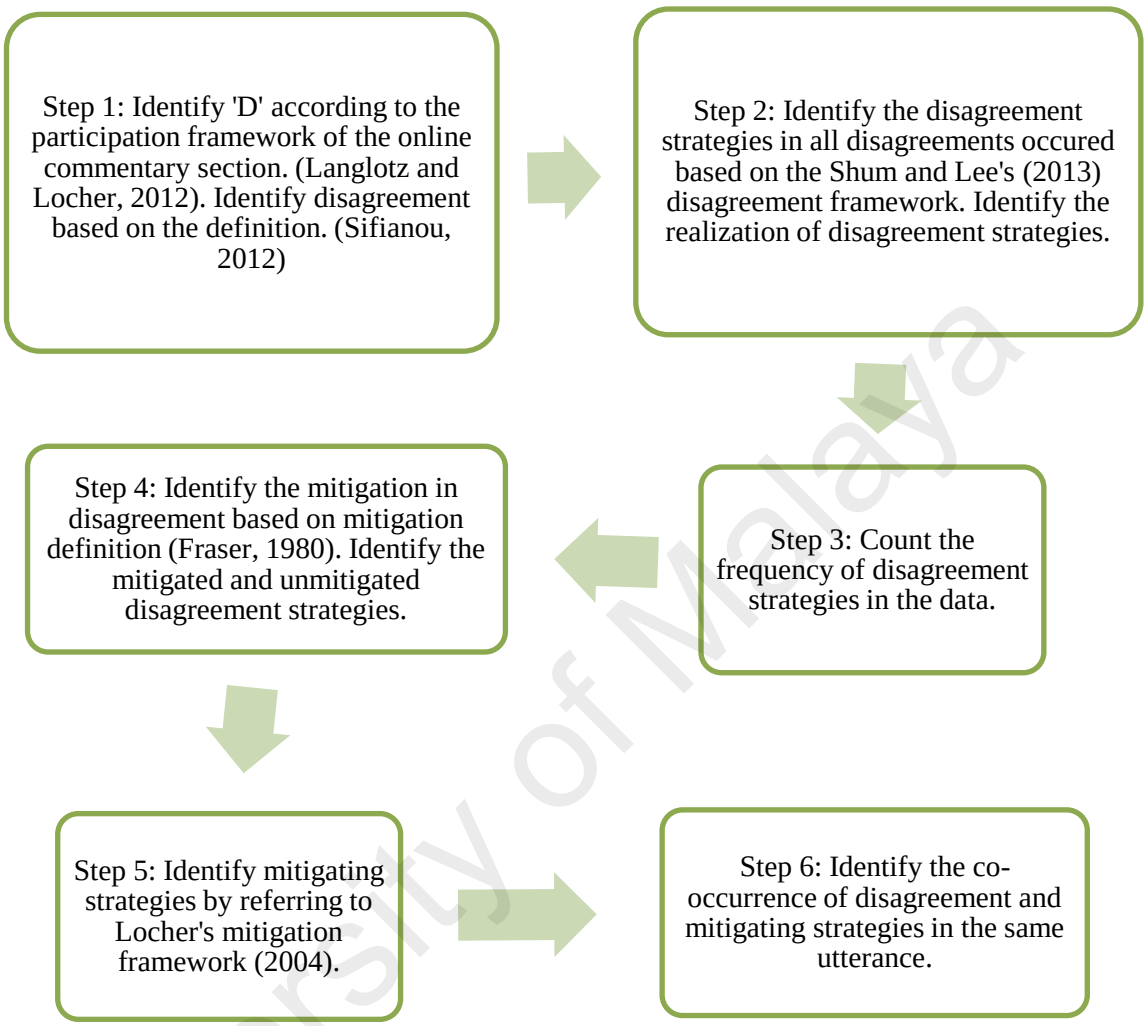
Figure 3.5: Data Analysis Procedure



Based on Figure 3.5, two types of responses are identified in the commentary section. These responses are labelled as 'D' in Figure 3.4. In order to identify 'D', the definition of 'disagreement' adopted by Sifianou (2012) is referred to. The disagreement strategies employed in all disagreements found in Step 1 are identified. Step 2 is done based on the disagreement framework by Shum and Lee (2013) in section 3.1.1. In Step 3, the frequency of disagreement strategies is counted in order to find out which disagreement strategy occurs most frequently and vice versa. In Step 4, the mitigation based on the definition taken from Fraser (1980) are identified. Based on this definition,

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the disagreement strategies are sorted into two categories which are the mitigated disagreement strategies and the unmitigated disagreement strategies. This step is important to see which disagreement strategies contain mitigation and which does not. In Step 5, the strategies employed to mitigate the disagreement according to the Locher's mitigating framework (2004) are identified in section 3.1.2. Finally, in Step 6, the co-occurrences of disagreement strategies and mitigating strategies are identified to investigate the realization of the mitigating strategies in order to mitigate the disagreement strategies.

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CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will investigate disagreement strategies and mitigating strategies occurred in the online comments of *The Malaysian Insider (TMI).* I will analyse and discuss examples of each disagreement strategies identified followed by examples on how these disagreement strategies are mitigated in the context of *TMI*'s news comments. Moreover, I will investigate how the disagreement strategies are realized in the data and the mitigating strategies patterns employed to mitigate the disagreement strategies.

4.1 Disagreement Strategies

Based on the data, seven out of eleven Shum and Lee's disagreement strategies were found. They are giving opposite opinion, raising rhetorical questions, giving negative comments, making a personal stance, reprimanding, rewording and making an ironic statement. The strategies which were not found in the data are cursing, using short vulgar phrases, giving facts and giving personal experience. However, I found a new disagreement strategy which I adapted from Shum and Lee's disagreement strategy i.e. 'the use of short vulgar phrases'. Due to the absence of vulgar words and profane language in the data, I called the strategy 'the use of insulting words'. This new strategy indicated the occurrences of insulting words which could be abusive and offensive to the commentator.

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Table 4.1: Disagreement strategies and frequency counts in *TMI* news comments

Disagreement strategies	Number of occurrence	Percentage (%)
Giving opposite opinion	26	36.6
Raising rhetorical question	14	19.7
Giving negative comment	10	14.1
Making a personal stance	7	9.9
Reprimanding	6	8.5
Making an ironic statement	3	4.2
Using 'insulting' words	3	4.2
Rewording	2	2.8
Cursing	0	0
Giving fact	0	0
Giving personal experience	0	0
Using short vulgar phrase	0	0
Total	71	100

Table 4.1 summarizes disagreement strategies found in the data. Analysis of the data indicates that 'Giving opposite opinion' is the most frequent disagreement strategies occurred with 26 occurrences (36.6%) while 'rewording' is the least occurred strategy with 2 occurrences (2.8%) in the data. Other disagreement strategies found are 'raising rhetorical question' with 14 occurrences (19.7%), 'giving negative comment' with 10 occurrences (14.1%), 'making a personal stance' with 7 occurrences (9.9%), 'reprimanding' with 6 occurrences (8.5%), 'making an ironic statement' with 3 occurrences (4.2%) and 'using insulting words' with 3 occurrences (4.2%).

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4.1.1 Giving an Opposite Opinion

Giving opposite opinion occurs when Commentator A disagrees by giving an opinion that is contrary to what is said by the previous Commentator B. This strategy occurs without any intention of giving negative comments on people or an issue. The following extracts show the occurrences of opposite opinion.

Example 1	
C3	Here you have a bunch of foreign armed pirates, invading the country, calling themselves law-abiding citizens and for almost 3 weeks now, the GOM is still pussy-footing around taking decisive and definitive military actions against them. This event is only the beginning of payback for a failed GOM policy to harbour and sustain a foreign secessionist group.
C4	I actually admire the Malaysian armed forces for holding back. It's a really silly thing to kill for and as long as a peaceful solution existed they should have considered it.

In Example 1, C3 indirectly expresses his dissatisfaction about the action taken by the GOM [Government of Malaysia]. The phrase "pussy-footing around" in C3's comments refers to the GOM's inability to take drastic action in handling the "Lahad Datu incident". In response to that, C4 gives an opposite opinion by saying that he admires GOM's decision for taking a careful and decisive action. The statement "I actually admire the Malaysian armed forces for holding back" indicates C4's contrary view towards C3's comment. Next, C3 points out that he disagrees with GOM decision earlier on helping Philippine's refugees during the conflict in the Philippines. Then, C4 points out his disagreement by stating that "It's a really silly thing to kill for". In another word, C4 is saying that C3 shows lack of sense or judgement in giving his opinion about the GOM policy in helping the Philippine refugees. In response to the same statement made by C3 regarding the "failed GOM policy", C4 strengthen his disagreement by saying that in the case of 'Lahad Datu incident', 'a peaceful solution'

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is the most suitable action that the GOM should consider most. This statement indicates his disagreement towards C3.

Example 2	
C7	Pinoy refugees fled to Sabah to escape from the long civil war in the Philipines, and your idea of solving the problem is to send them right back to their country to get stuck and possibly, massacred in the civil war there?
C6	Their civil war had ended last year. So it is right for the Philipines refugies [sic] to be back.

In Example 2, C7 begins his comment by stating that the Philippines refugees escape to Sabah due to the 'civil war' in their country. The conflict caused the Filipinos to run and fled Sabah. C6 disagrees with the statement made by C7 by giving an opposite opinion that the 'civil war' C7 is referring to 'had ended' the previous year. C6 emphasizes his disagreement by adding another opposite opinion that the Philippines refugees should be doing well if Malaysia send them back to their country and of course they will not get trapped and massacred in the civil war that C7 is talking about.

Example 3	
C8	There is nothing wrong with Aquino's handling of the rebels. Landing in other people's land illegally and claiming the land to be yours are two different issues, that should not be mixed up. Aquino is just against the illegality of the rebels' action, that's all. It doesnt mean he does not support the claim on Sabah.
C9	Support the Sulu claim and risk attacks by the MILF [Moro Islamic Liberation Front] again. Remember that MILF was set-up with the assistance of Malaysia, because Marcos was training troops to seize Sabah by force.

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In Example 3, C9 states that Malaysia has actually helped the Muslim rebel to set up an Islamic organization to fight against the former president Marcos. According to C9, Marcos has the intention to seize Sabah by training troops of army during his time as the President of the Philippines. Thus, C9 disagrees when C8 says that landing illegally on other people's land and the act of claiming the land to be yours are two different things. To C9, Aquino is thankful to Malaysia for helping the country to end the civil war years ago. Thus, when C8 view that Aquino maybe has his own agenda in which C8 thought that Aquino may support the claim of Sabah, C9 expresses his contrary view.

Example 4	
C10	Even the Philippines have more press freedom than Bolehland [Malaysia].
C11	Yeah, but too bad they are writing rubbish.

In Example 4, C10 expresses his comparison about the press freedom in Philippines and Malaysia. In the news' post that they were commenting, the news post reports that a local daily newspaper, Manila Standard Today (MST) critics on The Philippines' president, Aquino's action to defend Malaysia against the Sulu invaders. The term 'Bolehland' in Example 4 refers to Malaysia. "Boleh" in Bahasa Melayu means "can". The government devised the slogan "*Malaysia Boleh*" to celebrate Malaysians achievements in various fields especially sports. Here, C10 uses the term sarcastically. When it comes to news, the phrase "Malaysia Boleh" does not apply ie. there is no press freedom. The disagreement takes place when C11 expresses his opposite opinion that though the Philippines has more press freedom compared to Malaysia, but he regards that the report made by the Philippines press as 'rubbish'. In this example, C11 does not directly express his disagreement towards the first commentator, but by expressing a contrary point of view to counter the first commentator.

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Example 5	
C14	[…] Anyway the person who introduce this Project is still around, no charge has been made and no Cabinet approval at that time. As if as nothing happen.
C15	[…] If you followed the RCI, you will see that the issuing of Ics [sic] were done by greedy and opportunistic people who were out to make money. Most of these people were even sent to jail under the ISA and some of them are state opposition leaders.

In Example 5, C14 states in his comment that the person who is responsible for initiating the controversial citizenship-for-votes or also well known as "Projek IC" is still free and there are no changes made in the Cabinet. In other words, C14 is trying to say that the responsible person is the member of Cabinet. In response to the statement made by C14, C15 gives an opposite opinion by saying that "some of them are state opposition leaders" as to disagree with C14 that the person responsible is the member of Cabinet.

Second, C14 did mention in his comment that "no charge has been made" which refers to the failure of taking action by the authorities regarding the issue. C14 emphasizes with a phrase "as if nothing happen" to indicate that he does not see any legal action taken to the person who is responsible for initiating the 'Projek IC' which he believes the main cause of the 'Lahad Datu invasion'. In response to C14's statement, C15 states in his comment that, the person who is in-charge in issuing the ICs to the Philippines refugees who is believed to make money should be "sent to jail". This statement is a contrast to C14 to indicate C15's disagreement.

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Example 6	
C15	[…] If you followed the RCI, you will see that the issuing of Ics were done by greedy and opportunistic people who were out to make money. Most of these people were even sent to jail under the ISA and some of them are state opposition leaders. […]
C18	Mahahthir had admitted he was the mastermind of "Project IC", so why he is still rooming on the street?

In Example 6, C15 states that some of the people involved in giving out the IC to the Philippines refugees are "state opposition leaders". In response to the statement, C18 expresses his opposite opinion with C15 by stating that it was the former Prime Minister "Mahahthir" [Mahathir] mastermind the "Project IC". This statement is contrary to C15's comment about the "state opposition leaders" because Tun Dr. Mahathir (TDM) worked with the government as the Prime Minister.

Example 7	
C28	It is quite well known among Sabahans that the practice of giving expedited (not instant) Malaysian citizenship to Musilim Filipinos was started by the former Sabah Chief Minister,Tun Datu Mustapha back in the1970s,long before Mahathir was PM… So please stop claiming that Mahathir was the one who initiated the "project IC",although he may have been guilty of not stopping the practice & benefited from it.
C23	It might had started in the 70's by Mustapha but witnesses in the RCI, including NRD officials have testified that IC's were given for votes in the 80's and 90's with Mahathir's approval. Mahathir himself admitted it.

Example 7 shows that C28 commented that the previous commentator (C23) should not be accusing the former Prime Minister, "Mahathir" was responsible to initiate the "project IC". C23 responded to C28 with a contrary view to C28. In his comment, C23

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states that the "IC's were given for votes", "with Mahathir's approval". The statement made by C23 indicates his disagreement that the former Prime Minister is not guilty of initiating the "project IC". C23 continues with another opposite opinion to support his first contrary point of view by saying that the former Prime Minister admitted that he initiates the "project IC" himself. The second opposite opinion emphasizes C23's disagreement towards C28.

Example 8	
C31	Imam Nawawi is in the wrong profession. He should join UMNO and become a politician.
C32	Do not incriminate imam nawawi. A well respected Islamic scholar […] Imam nawawi would have never supported any racial based politics which is prohibited in islam. Moreover the imam lived many centuries ago during the islamic golden age.

There are three opposite opinions expressed in Example 8. C32 disagrees with C31's comment regarding "Imam Nawawi" whom C31 pointed out "should join UMNO and become a politician". First, C32 oppose the addressee by referring the Imam Nawawi as "a well respect Islamic Scholar" which is contrary to C31's earlier statement. Next, he expresses his opposite opinion towards C31 that "Imam Nawawi never supported any racial based politics which is prohibited in Islam". He then further disagrees with another opposite opinion as he refers the Imam Nawawi who had "lived many centuries ago during the Islamic golden age", In this instance, C32 acknowledged C31 that it is impossible that the Imam Nawawi could be a part of the 'UMNO' member, because the Imam Nawawi lives hundred years ago before 'UMNO' exist.

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Example 9	
C33	What the BN administration did to Tian Chua will one day in weeks to come fly back on their face. Should PR win the next GE it should make sure that none of the BN leaders set foot in Sabah and Sarawak. They need to taste their own bitter medicine to learn bitter lessons.
C34	No I don't believe 'vendetta thinking' is the right way...
C35	I agree with Isa Rahim. Vendetta is not going to teach them a lesson. I think PR is kind enough to say that when they win, they wouldn't go for a witch hunt. Frankly, I wish they would. […]

In Example 9, the opposite opinion is expressed by the third commentator. As shown in the example, the third commentator, C35 expresses his opposite opinion towards the first commentator, C33 by agreeing with the second commentator, C34. In this example, C34 explicitly disagrees with C33, while C35 expresses his agreement with C34 which is also contrary to C33. Second, C35 expresses his opinion that 'vendetta is not going to teach them a lesson' to counter the comment made by C32 that the PR (*Pakatan Rakyat*) should teach the BN (*Barisan Nasional*) leaders lessons for a revenge. Lastly, C35 emphasizes his disagreement with another opposite opinion that 'PR is kind enough' to do the revenge.

Based on the examples shown, opposite opinion is mostly expressed by giving an opinion which is contrary to the previous commentator's. This strategy could be expressed by the second commentator or the third commentator. Based on the data, there are no obvious patterns shown to realize this strategy. In this instance, giving opposite opinion is similar to the strategy making a personal stance in that commentator A expresses a contrary view to commentator B or/and C. However, making personal stance occurs when commentator A employs the phrases such as 'No', 'I don't

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believe...', 'I absolutely disagree…' or 'I don't expect…', while giving opposite opinion occurs without these phrases in the comments.

4.1.2 Raising a rhetorical question

Raising a rhetorical question occurs when Commentator A disagrees with another commentator in the form of a question without the intention of getting the answer of the question from Commentator B. In this instance, Commentator A already knows and is aware of the answer to his question but uses the question as a point to disagree. The question used in this strategy indicates a clear contrast opinion from the previous statement made by commentator B. This strategy was employed by posting a yes-no question or WH-question. This strategy is shown in the following examples.

Example 10	
C6	We should mop out every illegal Philipinos and refugees and sent them back
C7	Pinoy refugees fled to Sabah to escape from the long civil war in the Philipines , and <u>your idea of solving the problem is to send them right back to their country to get stuck and possibly, massacred in the civil war there?</u>

In Example 10, C6 states in his comment that the Malaysian authority should "mop out" the Philippines refugees and "sent them back" to their home country. The word "mop out" emphasizes that the Philippines refugees should be cleared from Malaysia as according to C6. This word comes from the noun 'mop' which functions to clean the floor from dust and dirt. Thus, the word 'mop out' is used in this example to indicate that the Philippines refugees should be cleansed from Malaysia to avoid any immoral activities occur. In response to C6's comment, C7 raises a yes-no rhetorical question to indicate his disagreement. C7 repeats C6's "idea of solving the problem" which is to

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"send them right back to their country" and rephrase it in a form of question to disagree. The phrase "get stuck and possibly, massacred in the civil war there?" emphasizes C7's disagreement because in this question he includes the possibilities of these refugees being killed if Malaysia sends them all back to their home country.

Example 6 (discussed earlier on page 43)	
C15	[…] If you followed the RCI, you will see that the issuing of Ics were done by greedy and opportunistic people who were out to make money. Most of these people were even sent to jail under the ISA and some of them are state opposition leaders.Perhaps it was for this reasons that the opposition was so keen to have the ISA abolished.
C18	Mahahthir [sic] had admitted he was the mastermind of "Project IC", so <u>why he is still rooming on the street?</u>

In Example 6, C15 comments that most of the people who are responsible for initiating the "projek IC" were sent to jail. C18 disagrees with C15's statement with a WH-rhetorical question. This strategy is realized with the use of the word 'why'. In this example, C18 expressed the WH-question without having the intention to get the answer from C15 but to disagree. According to C18, the former Prime Minister "Mahahthir" has already admitted that he is responsible as "the mastermind" for initiating "Projek IC". He further his comment by raising a question "why he is still rooming on the street?" which indicates his opposite opinion towards C15. This question refers to his disagreement that if it is true what C15 states that the GOM has sent the guilty people to jail, but why the mastermind of the "Projek IC" is not sent to jail.

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Example 11	
C15	[…] the issuing of Ics were done by greedy and opportunistic people who were out to make money. Most of these people were even sent to jail under the ISA and some of them are state opposition leaders.
C21	Dear Idiot, under whose orders? Are you telling us the home minister back then did not know about project IC, when many Malaysians [sic] back then were already hearing rumours? […]

As shown in Example 11, C15 makes a provocative statement that 'some of' the people who were sent to jail for issuing the ICs 'are state opposition leaders'. C21 employs three rhetorical questions to disagree with C15. First, C21 expresses his disagreement in a form of rhetorical question to indicate his strong disagreement towards C15. C21 asked a WH-question "under whose order?" when he already aware that the answer to his question to C15. This type of question is realized with the use of the word 'whose'. Also in this example, C21 continues his disagreement with a yes-no rhetorical question ("Are you telling us the home minister back then did not know about project IC, when many Malaysians [sic] back then were already hearing rumours?"). These two questions indicate that C21 aware that 'the home minister' is responsible about the 'project IC' but he raised the questions to point out his disagreement towards C15. In this example, C21 employed multiple of rhetorical questions to disagree with C15 in the same comment.

Example 12	
C15	[…] Most of these people were even sent to jail under the ISA and some of them are state opposition leaders. Perhaps it was for this reasons that the opposition was so keen to have the ISA abolished.
C22	The question is, why are they detain under ISA WITHOUT BEING CHARGE IN COURT? The answer is obvious, if they were to be charged in an open court, they will spill the beans that Mahathir [sic] kutti [sic] gave the instruction.

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In Example 12, C15 states in his comments that the people who are responsible in the "projek IC" are already sent to jail. However, C22 disagrees with C15 and raises a question to disagree with C15 with regards action to be taken by the GOM towards the responsible people in "projek IC". In this example, C22 expresses a WH-question by using the words 'why'. The question raises by C22 indicates his opposite opinion that the GOM actually only sent people to jail for the sake of taking legal action to the people involved but not towards the person who was the mastermind of the "projek IC". This question is followed by an answer in C22's comment to indicate that the question is meant to be rhetoric and does not require an answer from C15.

Example 13	
C15	[…] Most of these people were even sent to jail under the ISA and some of them are state opposition leaders. Perhaps it was for this reasons that the opposition was so keen to have the ISA abolished.
C23	[…] You wrote "[…] some of them are state opposition leader." […] do you mean that issuance of IC is under the jurisdiction of state opposition leaders instead of federal government's NRD. […] you expect people to believe that? [...]

In Example 13, C15 states that some of the people who are responsible in the "projek IC" who were sent to jail are the state opposition leaders. C23 repeats what C15 states earlier in his comments before he disagrees with C15 with a rhetorical question. Although C23's question does not have a question mark in it, the expression is in the form of a yes-no question which indicates a clear opposite view towards C15. C23 continues his comment with another rhetorical question to disagree with C15's statement about "the opposition leaders" whom C15 claimed to be responsible for the 'issuance of IC'. In this instance, C23 expresses multiple rhetorical questions in yes-no forms ("do you mean that issuance of IC is under the jurisdiction of state opposition

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leaders instead of federal government's NRD." and "you expect people to believe that?") to show his opposite view to C15 in a comment.

Example 14	
C29	[...] My muslim brothers and sisters are smarter now than to obey this crap. They know a corrupt useless government when they see one!
C30	sxavier, <u>are you so sure that your muslim brothers & sisters are that smart?</u>

In Example 14, C29 and C30 commented based on the news article which reported that the Muslims nationwide were told in the official Friday sermons prepared by the federal government that "Based on Imam Nawawi, rebelling against leaders is forbidden". Moreover, the news post reported that "The patriotism spirit this country demands us to obey and be loyal to our leaders completely". C29 states in his comments that his Muslim's friends are smarter to believe what is reported in the news post. C30 then disagrees by raising a rhetorical question to C29. In the comment, C30 expresses his disagreement by using a yes-no question. The use of a yes-no question in this comment challenges C29 to accept the content of the question, while he has a favour whether to accept or to reject it. The words 'are you sure…' in Example 14 does not only indicate C30's contrary view but he is also trying to challenge C29 with a yes-no rhetorical question.

Example 15	
C38	Much to the dismay of PR supporters who wanted to de-stabilise Sabah/Sarawak.
C39	<u>Do you have any evidence for this?</u> No, of course you don't.

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In Example 15, C38 commented that the PR (*Pakatan Rakyat*) supporters intend to destabilise Sabah/ Sarawak. C39 begins his comments by raising a rhetorical question to disagree with C38. He does not raise the question to ask for clarification, but to indicate a clear opposite view towards C38's accusation that most of the people who "dismay" on the death of the 'self-styled sultan who led Sabah invasion' are the "PR *(Pakatan Rakyat)* supporters who intended to destabilise Sabah/Sarawak. *Pakatan Rakyat* is the opposition party in Malaysia which consists of the *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR), Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS). Since Sabah and Sarawak are ruled by the government, thus C38 accused that the PR supporters intend to destabilise Sabah/ Sarawak. As shown in Example 15, C39's disagreement is expressed due to C38's statement by raising a yes-no question directly to disagree with C38. In addition, C39 purposely answers the question with "No, of course you don't" right after his question to indicate that he did not intend to require for C38's answer to his question and the question is meant for rhetoric.

In conclusion, raising rhetorical questions is a disagreement strategy which is employed by Commentator A without the intention to get the answer from Commentator B. There are four types of rhetorical questions employed in this strategy; yes-no rhetorical questions followed by answer, yes-no rhetorical questions without answer, WH-rhetorical questions followed by answer and WH-rhetorical questions without answer. The yes-no questions may be realized with the phrase "do you" or "are you". Meanwhile, the WH-rhetorical questions are expressed with the use of 'why', what' and 'whose'.

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4.1.3 Giving a Negative Comment

A negative comment is expressed when Commentator A intends to associate Commentator B with a negative aspect. Negative aspect in this strategy refers to the negative quality of a person which is mostly related to mental function or brain. This strategy may occur when Commentator A states what he thinks to be the right thing to do and accuses Commentator B. Commentator B also makes a comparison with what he thinks is the wrongdoing of the other interlocutor 'in a personalized way, using the pronouns of I and you/your' (Culpeper, 1996 p. 358; Bousfield, 2008 p. 115-118). According to Shum and Lee (2013), a negative comment is something made in the form of a metaphor to describe the user's attitude or behaviour. Most negative comments were associated with the Chinese cultural values for support (Shum and Lee, 2013).

Example 10 (discussed earlier on page 47)	
C6	We should mop out every illegal Philipinos and refugees and sent them back and not to give furtherwork permit for those to come and work in Malaysia.
C7	Not sure if you're dense or are just uninformed. Pinoy refugees fled to Sabah to escape from the long civil war in the Philipines, […]

In Example 10, C6 suggested that the "illegal Filipinos and refugees" should be sent back to their country, Philippines. The pronoun 'We' in C6's comment refers to the authority, GOM (Government of Malaysia) who should take action to send the refugees back to their native land. C7 disagrees with C6's comments that the illegal Philippines and refugees should not be "sent back" to their country because they could possibly become the victims of 'the long civil war' in the Philippines.

Also in Example 10, C7 associated C6 with the word "dense" to indicate that he is disagreeing by giving a negative comment towards the statement made by C6. The

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pronoun “you” in the utterance “you’re dense” evident that C7 directly expressed the negative comment to C6. The phrase “you’re dense” indicate that C7 is pointing out C6’s wrongdoing which is unacceptable and contrary to C7’s view. In C7’s comment, he continues to explain the right thing to do after his negative comment to emphasize his disagreement.

Example 16	
C15	[…] the issuing of Ics [sic] were done by greedy and opportunistic people who were out to make money. Most of these people were even sent to jail under the ISA and some of them are state opposition leaders. Perhaps it was for this reasons that the opposition was so keen to have the ISA abolished.
C16	You should change to C15 Sober so that <u>you</u> won’t <u>think like a moron.</u>

In Example 16, C15 commented that the ‘projek IC’ was carried out by the person who is “greedy and opportunistic” in making money and taking advantage towards the situation. C15 also adds in his comment that “[m]ost of the people” who are involved in the “projek IC” were already sentenced to jail and “some of” these people who are found to be guilty in this case “are state opposition leaders. He ends his comment with a controversial statement that sounds like he is in the state of ‘pro-government’ by saying that “the opposition was so keen to have the ISA (Internal Security Act) abolished”. In Example 16, C16 expressed his disagreement by giving a negative comment. This is evident when C16 associated C15 with the negative aspect “think like a moron”. The word “moron” indicates a deficit quality of the addressee’s brain. In other word, C16 is trying to say that C15 makes a statement as if he is in a state of having a mental deficiency. In C16’s comment, he uses the pronoun ‘you’ before he associates the addressee with the negative aspect (“think like a moron”). This is evidence that the utterance is express C16’s disagreement towards C15.

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Example 17	
C15	[…] the issuing of Ics [sic] were done by greedy and opportunistic people who were out to make money. Most of these people were even sent to jail under the ISA and some of them are state opposition leaders. Perhaps it was for this reasons that the opposition was so keen to have the ISA abolished.
C24	This bloody fool emits foul air when he opens his mouth with the mentality of a moron!

In Example 17, C15 states a controversial comment that the person who is responsible to issue the ICs were the opposition leaders and they wanted the ISA to be abolished. C24 disagrees with C15 by giving a negative comment ("he opens his mouth with the mentality of a moron!"). C24 associates C15 with a negative aspect which is "the mentality of a moron". The phrase "the mentality of a moron" refers to mental retardation or stupidity. In this example, C24 does not use the pronoun 'you' in his comment, but he uses the third person pronoun 'he' to refer to C15. In this instance, C24 does not mean that he is talking about the other third person, but he is referring to C15 and directing the negative comment to him, C15.

Example 18	
C26	[…] It would be more wrong now to take the IC's away then it was to hand them out in the first place. If you change your vote because of your views on project IC, you have been tricked because it is not something that will be fixed or ever done again, don't waste your vote about it. If you think the IC's should be taken back, you're a cold hearted jerk […]
C27	No, not ever. You are right. you are either without brains or are Ahhemm..cybertroopers.

In Example 18, C26 states in his comments that Malaysians should not change their mind to vote for the government during the general election just because of their "views

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on project IC". He continues his comment that, the controversial issue of "projek IC" is a trick by the opposition party because the "projek IC" is done to help the Philippines refugees during the civil war. C26 stated in Example 18 that the authority would not be so cruel and cold-hearted to take back the IC from the Philippines refugees. C27 disagrees with C26 by giving a negative comment "without brains" which indicates that a person is not using his brain to think before they talk. In Example 18, C27 uses the pronoun "you" to direct his association of negative aspect "without brain" to C26.

In short, based on the examples, the strategy giving negative comments occurs with the pronoun 'you' and 'he'. These pronouns indicate that the negative aspect in the comment or utterance is directly expressed by Commentator A to Commentator B. Although 'he' is the third person pronoun, in Example 17 the pronoun 'he' refers to the previous commentator (Commentator B). Giving negative comments may also occur when Commentator A downgrades the Commentator B's intelligence. This type of strategy shows that a strong disagreement takes place in a comment.

4.1.4 Making a Personal Stance

This disagreement strategy occurs when a commentator denies association or common ground with the other commentator. This strategy also takes place when Commentator A uses an explicit phrase to show an opposite view to Commentator B. Giving personal stance can be expressed by displaying one's position by using phrases like 'I don't believe that/ I don't think so' (Culpeper, 1996 p. 357; Bousfield, 2008 p. 103-104). Meanwhile, Shum and Lee (2013) proposed that making a personal stance is realized by using phrases such as "I don't agree," "I am not," "so my understanding is…". The analysis of the data is shown in the examples.

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Example 19	
C1	Umno just give them blue I.Cs and let them vote in PRU 13 like what you did in project I.C for illegals. Or its another UMNO wayang kulit like what happen in Sauk, Kuala Kangsar by a certain army group
C2	For the benefit of *C1*, while I may agree with you the unconstitutionality of Project IC in Sabah, I absolutely disagree with you that the Sauk incident was a wayang kulit.

In Example 19, C1 makes a statement that the "project I.C for illegals" is similar to the incident happened in Sauk, Kuala Kangsar. The Sauk incident happened when members of the illegal group Al-Ma'unah robbed two army camps in Gerik before fleeing to their hideout in Bukit Jenalek, Sauk, Kuala Kangsar. In his comment, C1 states that the "project I.C" is "another wayang kulit" like the Sauk incident. The phrase "another wayang kulit" indicates that C1 view both "Sauk incident" and "Lahad Datu incident" as a drama created by UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) to win for votes in PRU 13 *(Pilihan Raya Umum 13).* C2 disagrees with C1 by giving a personal stance to explicitly show his opposite point of view. In Example 19, C2 employs the phrase "I absolutely disagree with you…" to indicate that he strongly disagrees with C1. The adverb "absolutely" emphasizes his stance of disagreement for 'totally' or 'completely' disagree with C1's statement about the Sauk incident.

Example 20	
C15	[…] Most of these people were even sent to jail under the ISA and some of them are state opposition leaders. Perhaps it was for this reasons that the opposition was so keen to have the ISA abolished.
C19	[…] No most of the people are NOT sent to jail […]

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In Example 20, C15 states that most of the people who are involved in issuing the IC to the Philippines refugees were sent to jail. On the other hand, C19 disagrees by giving a personal stance. In his comment, C19 expresses his personal stance with the negative particle "No". The use of word "No" by C19 in the comment indicates that he explicitly disagree with the addressee, C15. Without any further explanation or comment, the word "No" is understood as an indication to strongly disagree.

Example 21	
C33	What the BN [Barisan Nasional] administration did to Tian Chua will one day in weeks to come fly back on their face. .. They need to taste their own bitter medicine to learn bitter lessons. […]
C34	No I don't believe 'vendetta thinking' is the right way...we must ensure that sound principles, separation of powers, independent justice and freedom of expression are in place.

In Example 21, C33 states that the current government (Barisan Nasional) need to be taught a lesson for barring one of the opposition politician, Tian Hua from entering Sabah. In C33's comment, he hopes that the opposition will pay the revenge to BN (Barisan Nasional) when the opposition wins the PRU 13 (Pilihan Raya Umum 13). However, C34 disagrees with C33's idea of paying revenge to the government. C34 expresses his disagreement by giving a personal stance. C34 employs two personal stances in his comment. He begins his comment with the negative particle "No" to explicitly disagree with C33. C34 further emphasizes his disagreement with another personal stance "I don't believe…". In this strategy, the use of pronoun "I" indicates the commentator personal stance. When the pronoun "I" is followed by the negative "don't" evident that the commentator is explicitly express his opposite view towards the addressee or another commentator. The word "believe" in the comment indicates that C34 completely disagree with the C33's idea of "vendetta thinking".

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Example 15 (discussed earlier on page 51)	
C38	Much to the dismay of PR supporters who wanted to destabilise Sabah/Sarawak.
C39	Do you have any evidence for this? No, of course you don't. I don't expect reactionary UMNObaru [sic] types such as yourself to understand the subtle nuances in "thinking" or "rationality". […]

In Example 22, C38 commented that the PR (Pakatan Rakyat) supporters intend to destabilise Sabah/ Sarawak. C39 expresses his personal stance after another disagreement strategy (raising rhetorical question as discussed earlier in p.49). The phrase "I don't expect…" indicates C39 explicit disagreement towards C38's earlier statement. The phrase "I don't expect…" also indicates that C39's point of view is completely contrary to C38's point of view.

Based on the data, making a personal stance occurs with the word or phrases like "No", "I don't believe", "I absolutely disagree with you" and "I don't expect". The word "No" could co-occur with another personal stance phrase, "I don't believe". This co-occurrence indicates that a strong disagreement takes place. This strategy is realized with the use of pronoun "I". The use of pronoun "I" in the examples shows that the commentators personally express their stance to the previous commentators. When the pronoun "I" is followed by the negative "don't", this indicates that the commentator explicitly disagrees with the previous commentator's view.

4.1.5 Reprimanding

Reprimanding occurs when a person tells another person that his action/behaviour/attitude is not approved and the message may involve emotion

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(Locher, 2004; Shum and Lee, 2013). Reprimanding is expressed to indicate disapproval towards the addressee. According to Shum and Lee (2013), reprimanding usually expressed in a form of interrogatory question to point out the wrongdoing of the addressee without any further comment. I further explain how reprimanding is realized in the data in the following examples.

Example 3 (discussed earlier on page 41-42)	
C8	There is nothing wrong with Aquino's handling of the rebels. Landing in other people's land illegally and claiming the land to be yours are two different issues, that should not be mixed up. […]
C9	Not true at all! […]

In Example 3, C8 commented on the Manila newspaper article that the Philippines' President, Aquino should stop to defend Malaysia against Sulu invaders. C8 pointed out in his comment that Aquino is making the right decision to handle the Sulu invaders. C8 emphasizes his point of view that "(L)anding in other people's land illegally and claiming the land to be yours are two different issues". C9 disagrees with C8's statements by reprimanding. In his comment, C9 begins his comment by disapproving C8's viewpoint about how Aquino's handling the Sulu "rebels". The exclamation mark in C9's expression indicates that his respond contains emotion. The phrase that C9's use to disagree "Not true at all!" shows a strong disapproval coupled with the use of interjection (!) to point out C8's viewpoint is wrong.

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Example 22	
C15	[…] Projek IC fuels Sabah native anger against BN? No […]
C20	Correction!! Projek IC fuels Sabah native anger against BN because they knew about it and did nothing to stop it, because ultimately they are the ones who benefit from it. Think before you jabber! Don't jibber if you don't know Sabahans! Just shut up lah!!

In Example 22, C15 states in his comment that "Projek IC" does not "fuel Sabah native against BN". The word "Correction!!" used by C20 indicates a disapproval of the wrong attitude or viewpoint made by C15. C20 in his comment is not only disapproved but also states his opposite view with the intention to correct C15's viewpoint. This is evident when he continues his comment with an explanation on the reason of "Projek IC fuels Sabah native anger against BN". Then, C20 further his comment with another reprimand "Think before you jabber!", "Don't jibber if you don't know Sabahan!" and "Just shut up lah!!". These three phrases which were used by C20 shows the expressions were intend to display feelings such as anger. The words "Think", "Don't jibber" and "shut up" in the phrases indicate C20's disapproval towards C15's comment. The use of exclamation mark in C20's comment indicates the emphasis of emotion (anger) in the comment. At the end of C20's comment, the use of non-standard or double exclamation marks emphasizes on the emotion that he is trying to express to the previous commentator. In this instance, C20 intended to tell C15 that he is very angry and emotional towards C15.

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Example 23	
C26	Project IC should not be an election issue. It was the wrong thing to do but it can't be undone. It would be more wrong now to take the IC's away then it was to hand them out in the first place.
C23	According to this guy, correcting something done wrong.....is wrong !. What kind of warped mentality is it ?

In Example 23, C26 makes a statement that the "Project IC" should not be an issue to vote for the election. C26 points out that, though it is wrong to give IC's to the Philippines refugees the government cannot undo it. Besides, it was done by the former Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir. Thus, to C26, it is even "wrong" to take the IC from the Philippines refugees. On the other hand, C23 disagrees with C26 by reprimanding. C23 expresses reprimanding in a form of interrogatory question to point out the wrong attitude that the previous commentator is having. The question "What kind of warped mentality is it?" indicates that C23 disapprove the way C26 view the issue of "Project IC" as one of the strategies to strongly disagree. The words 'warped mentality' shows that the earlier statement made by C26 is unacceptable as if that the comment were made by a person who is mentally retarded or ill.

Based on the examples discussed, this strategy is realized using the phrase "Not true at all!", "Correction!!", "Think before you jabber!", "Don't jibber if you don't know Sabahan!" and "Just shut up[...]!!". The use of exclamation marks in the phrases indicates the emotional disapprovals towards the previous commentator. Moreover, the use of non-standard exclamation marks emphasizes the commentator's anger in the comment. Another pattern found for this strategy suggests that reprimanding is also realized in the form of WH-questions to directly point out disapproval of the previous commentator's point of view.

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4.1.6 Using insulting words

From the findings, the use of insulting words is directly expressed by the interlocutors. This strategy is the adaptation of Shum and Lee's disagreement strategy (2013) 'Using short vulgar phrases'. I adapted Shum and Lee's disagreement because the data shows that there is no occurrence of vulgar phrases or taboo words. But, there are occurrences of insulting words such as 'idiot', 'bloody fool' and 'moron'.

Example 11 (discussed earlier on page 49)	
C15	Most of these people were even sent to jail under the ISA and some of them are state opposition leaders. Perhaps it was for this reasons that the opposition was so keen to have the ISA abolished.
C21	Dear Idiot, under whose orders?
[…]	
C24	This bloody fool emits foul air when he opens his mouth with the mentality of a moron!

As shown in Example 11, C15 makes a bias statement by stating in his comment that "the opposition was so keen to have the ISA abolished". In the statement, C15 has already created an uneasy feeling towards other commentators who are supporting the opposition party. In response to C15, C21 uses the word "idiot" to address C15. The word "idiot" in C21's comment is expressed to indicate that C21 is strongly disagreed with C15. In this instance, C21 indirectly insulting the quality of C15 mental or brain with the word "idiot". Meanwhile, C24 used the word 'bloody fool' to address C15. In this instance, the words 'bloody fool' indicates that he explicitly disagrees with C15's statement. Clearly, in these examples, C21 and C24 were the opposition supporters, *Pakatan Rakyat* who feel offended with the bias statement made by C15. Therefore,

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C21 and C24 strongly disagree with C15 by addressing C15 with insulting words such as “idiot” and “bloody fool”.

In conclusion, the strategy using the insulting word is realized when Commentator A addresses Commentator B with words such as ‘Idiot’ and ‘Bloody fool’. These words are expressed to disrespectfully address and humiliate Commentator B when disagreement takes place.

4.1.7 Making an Ironic Statement

Ironic statement occurs when the commentator says something insincerely (Culpeper, 1996 p. 356) with the use of an inappropriate identity marker (Culpeper, 1996 p. 357). According to Shum and Lee (2013), an ironic statement is made by manipulating respectable honorific terms of address to create a sarcastic tone. I will explain how making an ironic statement is realized in the following example.

Example 16 (discussed earlier on page 54)	
C15	[…] Perhaps it was for this reasons that the opposition was so keen to have the ISA abolished.
C16	You should change to C15 Sober so that you won’t think like a moron.

In Example 16, C15 makes an assumption that “it was for this reasons that the opposition” wanted the ISA abolished. The word “it” refers to the fact that some of the people who were sent to jail were the opposition leaders. Thus, C15’s statement is controversial. C16 explicitly disagrees with C15’s comment by insincerely says that C15 should change his name to C15 Sober. The word ‘Sober’ in C16’s comment indicates that the person is not under the influence of drug or alcohol and capable of to

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think wisely. In this instance, C16 jokes about C15's name as he pointed out that C15 think like a moron as if he is drunk therefore C15 should change his name to C15 Sober.

Example 24	
C15	[…] Perhaps it was for this reasons that the opposition was so keen to have the ISA abolished.
C17	[…] Umno is a demi-god and can do no wrong.

In Example 24, C15 makes a controversial statement about the opposition whom he accused "was so keen to have the ISA abolished". This controversial statement indicates that C15 could be one of the Umno or government supporters. As a result, C17 who could be one of the opposition supporters insincerely associates Umno to the term 'demi-god'. Umno is known as one of the government party. The term 'demi-god' indicates that Umno is very 'saint' or 'pure' as if that anything done by that party is good for the country. These terms indicate that C17 disagrees with C15's previous view in his comment.

Based on Example 16 and Example 24, the strategy making an ironic statement is realized when Commentator A insincerely makes a statement to Commentator B. These insincere statements are expressed by making fun of and using a sarcastic tone towards the previous commentator.

4.1.8 Rewording

In this strategy, the commentator makes minor changes or reconstructs the original comments made by the previous commentator. The rewording strategy indicates that commentator A disagrees with commentator B's point of view by adding words or

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phrases to commentator B's comments. The example of this strategy is shown in the following example.

Example 12 (discussed earlier on page 49-50)	
C15	[…] If you followed the RCI, you will see that the issuing of Ics [sic] were done by greedy and opportunistic people who were out to make money. Most of these people were even sent to jail under the ISA and some of them are state opposition leaders.
C22	Yes Ahmad, the indiscriminate issue of ic [sic] is done by greedy and opportunistic mahathir kutty and his cohorts so that they can remain in power n continue to plunder the wealth of this country. Those people who were detained under ISA for carrying out his instruction were guilty as well.

As shown in Example 12, C15 states that "the issuing of Ics [sic] were done by greedy and opportunistic people". In response to C15, C22 makes minor changes in the statement made by repeating the lines "done by greedy and opportunistic" and adding the name "Mahathir kutty and his cohorts" after the repetition. The name "mahathir kutty" refers to the former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir (TDM). Thus, this minor changes indicates that C22 disagrees with C15 by referring the TDM as the person who is responsible for the "indiscriminate issue of ic".

Example 25	
C15	[…] Most of these people were even sent to jail under the ISA and some of them are state opposition leaders.
C19	[…] No most of the people are NOT sent to jail coz the man behind this scam is still free […]

In Example 25, C15 states that 'Most of the people' who are responsible for the issuance of ICs to the Filipino refugees were 'sent to jail'. In response to C15, C19

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rephrase C15's comment to indicate his disagreement. C19 repeats the word "most of… people" and "sent to jail" in his comment. Meanwhile, he adds the words "are NOT" as shown in Example 25. The word 'NOT' is capitalized to also emphasize C19's contrary view.

Based on Example 12 and 25, the disagreement strategy rewording is realized when Commentator A makes minor changes in his comment by eliminating and adding words to comments made by Commentator B. These minor changes indicate a contrary view to Commentator B's.

4.2 Ways of Mitigating Disagreements

In this section, I will analyse mitigating strategies found in the data. The mitigating strategies are identified based on Locher's (2004) Mitigating Framework (see Section 3.1.2). Table 4.2 summarizes the unmitigated disagreements and the mitigated disagreements found in the data.

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Table 4.2: Mitigated and Unmitigated Disagreement

Disagreement Strategies	Number of disagreement strategies without mitigation	Percentage (%)	Number of disagreement strategies with mitigation	Percentage (%)
Giving an opposite opinion	18		8	
Raising a rhetorical question	14		0	
Giving a negative comment	8		2	
Making a personal stance	5		2	
Reprimanding	6		0	
Making an ironic statement	3		0	
Using insulting words	3		0	
Rewording	1		1	
Total	**58**	**81.69**	**13**	**18.31**

I divided the disagreement strategies found in Table 4.2 into two categories: namely mitigated and unmitigated disagreement. Based on Table 4.2, There are 13 (18.3%) out of 71 disagreement strategies contain mitigating strategies. In this instance, there are 13 co-occurrences of disagreement and mitigating strategies in the data. Meanwhile, 58 (81.7%) out of 71 disagreement strategies remain unmitigated.

Based on Table 4.2, there are four disagreement strategies which are not accompanied by any mitigating strategies. These unmitigated disagreement strategies are raising rhetorical question, reprimanding, making an ironic statement and using insulting words. On the other hand, disagreement strategies that co-occur with mitigating strategies are giving opposite opinion, giving negative comments, making a personal stance and rewording. These co-occurrences of disagreement and mitigating strategies indicate that the disagreement strategies are mitigated.

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Table 4.3: Co-occurrence of Disagreement Strategies and Mitigating Strategies

Disagreement Strategies	Mitigating Strategies							
		Token agreement	The use of 'but'	The use of hedges	Shifting responsibility	The use of modal auxiliaries	Giving personal or emotional reason	
	Giving opposite opinion	2	3	1	3	2	1	
	Giving negative comment	2	1	2	NA	NA	NA	
	Making a personal stance	2	1	NA	NA	1	NA	
	Rewording	1	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	
	Total	7	5	3	3	3	1	**22**

Table 4.3 shows 23 mitigating strategies found in the data. Each mitigating strategy co-occurs with disagreement strategy in the same utterance to function as mitigation of the disagreement strategies. There are five out of seven Locher's mitigating strategies found. There is a newly added strategy (token agreement) found in the data.

4.2.1 Token Agreement

According to Flores-Ferran and Lovejoy (2013), a token agreement 'represents statements in which a disagreement is prefaced with an agreement'. The token agreement could occur with phrases like "yes", "yes, or course" and "I agree" as I mentioned in Section 2.2.1.

Token Agreement is the new added mitigating strategy found in the data. Based on the data, token agreement occurs when the interlocutor expresses agreement to the

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addressee by using the words or phrase such as “yes/yeah”, “I agree with you”, “I am equally concerned” “No, not ever.” and “You are right.” before expressing his disagreement. This strategy usually occurs with the use of ‘but’. The examples of occurrence are shown in the excerpts below.

Example 4 (discussed earlier on page 42)	
C10	Even the Philippines have more press freedom than Bolehland [Malaysia].
C11	**Yeah**, but too bad <u>they are writing rubbish.</u>

In Example 4, C10 points out his comment towards the reporter who wrote the article 4. In article 4, the reporter raises his critics towards the President of Philippines openly in one of the newspaper articles in the Philippines. Thus, C10 comments that the reporters in the Philippines have more freedom to write compared to Malaysian reporter. In response to C10, C11 begins his comment with agreement followed by disagreement. Based on Example 4, C11 mitigates his disagreement towards C10 with the token agreement ‘yeah’ before his opposite opinion (“they are writing rubbish”) on C10’s comment “Philippines have more press freedom” than Malaysia.

Example 19 (discussed earlier on page 57)	
C1	Umno just give them blue I.Cs and let them vote in PRU 13 like what you did in project I.C for illegals. Or its another UMNO wayang kulit like what happen in Sauk, Kuala Kangsar by a certain army group
C2	For the benefit of C1, while **I** may **agree with you** the unconstitutionality of Project IC in Sabah, <u>I absolutely disagree</u> with you that the Sauk incident was a wayang kulit.

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In Example 19, C1 points out in his statement that the "project I.C" is another "wayang kulit" created by one of the government parties (UMNO) similar to the incident happened that in Sauk, Kuala Kangsar. The words "wayang kulit" refer to drama or mock incident purposely made to gain the attention of the voters during the coming general election. In response to C1, C2 in his comment employs the strategy token agreement "I may agree with you" before his expression of disagreement. The token agreement "I may agree with you" indicates that C2 partially agree with one point which is "the unconstitutionality of project IC in Sabah", but he then disagrees with the later statement made by C1 regarding the "Sauk incident". In this utterance, the token agreement is accompanied by another mitigation strategy, the modal 'may'.

Example 12 (discussed earlier on page 49-50 and 66)	
C15	[…] If you followed the RCI, you will see that the issuing of Ics [sic] were done by greedy and opportunistic people who were out to make money. Most of these people were even sent to jail under the ISA and some of them are state opposition leaders.
C22	**Yes** C15, the indiscriminate issue of ic [sic] is done by greedy and opportunistic Mahathir [sic] kutty and his cohorts so that they can remain in power n continue to plunder the wealth of this country. Those people who were detained under ISA for carrying out his instruction were guilty as well.

In Example 12, C22 begins his comment with the token agreement "Yes" before he makes minor changes on C15 comments by adding "Mahathir kutty and his cohorts" after "done by greedy and opportunistic". The token agreement "Yes" makes C22 appear to agree with C15, but C22 continues his comment with disagreement. Thus, the word 'Yes' functions to mitigate the later disagreement in C22's comments.

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Example 17 (discussed earlier on page 55)	
C26	Project IC should not be an election issue. It was the wrong thing to do but it can't be undone. It would be more wrong now to take the IC's away then it was to hand them out in the first place. […]
C27	**No, not ever. You are right.** But you are either without brains or […]

In Example 17, C27 begins his comment with two token agreements "No not ever" and "You are right". Though the token "No not ever" contains the negative particle "No", it functions as an agreement to C26's point ("Project IC should not be an election issue"). Thus, the token "No not ever" appear as an agreement that the project IC should never be an election issue in the case of Lahad Datu incident. Another token agreement "You are right" is a more direct strategy to agree with C26's comment ("It would be more wrong now to take the IC's away then it was to hand them out in the first place."). In Example 17, the token agreements are expressed at the beginning of the C27 comment and followed by the use of 'but'. This is evident that C27 intend to appear as he agrees with some points made by C26, but not all of his point. Thus, these tokens agreement function to mitigate the later disagreement in the same comment.

Example 26	
C36	Before making a rebuttal to Chong's statements, perhaps our Datuk Wan Junaidi should first kindly explain how a revolver loaded with 15 live bullets were stolen from a sleeping cop?
C37	Though **I am equally concerned**, if not more, on the rising crime and unlicensed guns in the streets, I do agree that Chong's remarks are totally unnecessary and unjustified.

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In Example 26, C37 expresses his agreement with the phrase "I am equally concerned". This token agreement indicates that C37 agree with C36's point that Datuk Wan Junaidi (Malaysian Deputy Minister of Home Affairs) should explain the incident which a revolver was stolen from a sleeping policeman. This is evident when C37 further explains that he agrees at that point due to the "rising crime and unlicensed guns in the streets". However, the use of the word 'Though' at the beginning of the comment before indicates that there is the occurrence of disagreement in the comment after the token agreement. In this instance, the token agreement expressed functions as a partial agreement to C26 which simultaneously mitigates the opposite opinion ("I do agree that Chong's remarks are totally unnecessary and unjustified."). In example 26, the word 'Though' is used and followed by the token agreement before C37 continue his comment with a disagreement.

In conclusion, the mitigating strategy token agreement is realized by using the words or phrase "yes/yeah", "I may agree with you", "I am equally concerned", "No, not ever." and "You are right." before expressing disagreement. There are three occurrences of the token agreement "yes/yeah" to mitigate disagreement while the other four ("I may agree with you", "I am equally concerned", "No, not ever." and "You are right.") occur once in the data. Based on the discussion, token agreement always co-occurs with the use of 'but'. Moreover, token agreements always occurs before disagreement rather than after Commentator A agrees with Commentator B before disagreeing.

4.2.2 'But'

The use of 'but' often occurs together with other mitigating strategies. 'But' indicates opposite point of view but the degree that it threatens the addressee's face depends on

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the utterances. Locher (2004 p. 136) proposed that the use of 'but' at the beginning of a turn 'tends to be expressed with less mitigation than when it occurred within turns'.

Example 4 (discussed earlier on page 42 and 69-70)	
C10	Even the Philippines have more press freedom than Bolehland.
C11	Yeah, **but** too bad <u>they are writing rubbish.</u>

In Example 4, C10 makes a statement that "the Philippines have more press freedom than Malaysia. In response to C10, C11 expresses his opposite opinion "they are writing rubbish". The pronoun "they" in C11's comment refers to the press in the Philippines. This instance, although the Philippines press has more freedom in reporting, unfortunately, the news report was unworthy. In Example 4, C11 mitigates his disagreement with the use of 'but'. The word 'but' occurs before the disagreement with another mitigating strategy, token agreement 'Yeah'. In this instance, the use of 'but' functions as partial agreement to mitigate the disagreement.

Example 7 (discussed earlier on page 44)	
C28	[…] It is quite well known among Sabahans that the practice of giving expedited (not instant) Malaysian citizenship to Musilim Filipinos was started by the former Sabah Chief Minister,Tun Datu Mustapha back in the1970s,long before Mahathir was PM.
C23	It might had started in the 70's by Mustapha **but** <u>witnesses in the RCI, including NRD officials have testified that IC's were given for votes in the 80's and 90's with Mahathir's approval.</u>

Similar to Example 4, 'but' in Example 7 also functions as partial agreement. C28 is actually offending the former Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir (TDM) by stating that

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the former Sabah Chief Minister, Tun Datu Mustapha was responsible "of giving expedited (not instant) Malaysian citizenship to Muslim Filipinos". C23 partially agree with C28 at one point in which "the practice of giving Malaysian citizenship to Muslim Filipino started in the 1970s" by the former Sabah Chief Minister. Based on Example 7, 'but' occurs after another mitigating strategy (the modal 'might'). The use of 'but' in this comment precedes to disagreement. The word 'but' in Example 7, mitigates the opposite opinion ("witnesses in the RCI, including NRD officials have testified that IC's were given for votes in the 80's and 90's with Mahathir's approval") in C23's comment.

Example 19 (discussed earlier on page 57)	
C1	Umno just give them blue I.Cs and let them vote in PRU 13 like what you did in project I.C for illegals. Or its another UMNO wayang kulit like what happen in Sauk, Kuala Kangsar by a certain army group
C2	[…] For the benefit of C1, **while** I may agree with you the unconstitutionality of Project IC in Sabah, I absolutely disagree with you that the Sauk incident was a wayang kulit. […]

In Example 19, the use of 'but' is realized with the word 'while'. Similar to Example 4, this mitigating strategy (the use of 'but') co-occurs with the token agreement. However, as shown in the example, C2 employs the word "while" before the token agreement "I may agree with you" and followed by disagreement. The occurrence of "while" and token agreement "I may agree with you" indicate that C2 partially agrees with C1 regarding "the unconstitutionality of Project IC in Sabah". Yet, C2 continues his comment with a personal stance "I absolutely disagree with you". Therefore, the phrase "**while** I may agree with you" functions to mitigate the personal stance in C2's comment.

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Example 26 (discussed earlier on page 72)	
C36	Before making a rebuttal to Chong's statements, perhaps our Datuk Wan Junaidi should first kindly explain how a revolver loaded with 15 live bullets were stolen from a sleeping cop?
C37	**Though** I am equally concerned, if not more, on the rising crime and unlicensed guns in the streets, I do agree that Chong's remarks are totally unnecessary and unjustified. But our home office and police must do more, no point only giving rebuttal or in a state of denial.

In Example 26, the use of 'but' is realized with the word "Though". In this example, the word "Though" also co-occurs another mitigating strategy (token agreement). As shown in the example, C37 employs the mitigating strategy "Though", followed by the token agreement "I am equally concerned" before C37 expresses his disagreement "I do agree that Chong's remarks are totally unnecessary and unjustified". Thus, the phrase "**Though** I am equally concerned, if not more, on the rising crime and unlicensed guns in the streets" functions as partial agreement to mitigate the disagreement.

There are five occurrences of the use of 'but'. This mitigating strategy is realized by the conjunctions 'but', 'while' and 'though'. Moreover, this mitigating strategy always co-occurs with token agreement. Meanwhile, there is one occurrence in the data in which this strategy co-occurs with the modal auxiliary 'might'. The mitigating strategy the use of 'but' only occurs with another mitigating strategy (token agreement and modal auxiliary) to mitigate disagreement in the same comment. The mitigating strategy 'but' is never used on its own.

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4.2.3 Hedges

According to Brown and Levinson (1987 p. 145), a 'hedge' is a particle, word, or phrase that modifies the degree of membership that is *partial*, or true only in certain respects, or that it is *more* true and complete than perhaps might be expected. Meanwhile, Flores-Ferran and Lovejoy (2015) categorize hedges as 'words and phrases that reduce the precision of an utterance' which are employed as mitigating strategies in arguments. Tannen (1993 p. 28) proposed that hedges "soften the impact of the negative statement". Thus, the use of hedges in the present study, helps the speaker to avoid fully committing to disagreement.

Example 10 (discussed earlier on page 47 and 53-54)	
C6	We should mop out every illegal Philipinos and refugees and sent them back and not to give furtherwork permit for those to come and work in Malaysia.
C7	**Not sure** if you're dense or are **just** uninformed. Pinoy refugees fled to Sabah to escape from the long civil war in the Philipines […]

In Example 10, C6 states in his comment that the "illegal Filipinos and refugees" should be sent back to their country. C6 points out that the authority should drastically stop to extend these Filipinos permit to work in Malaysia. As a result, C7 avoids to explicitly give a negative comment. In Example 10, C7 associates the addressee to the negative aspect by using the word 'dense' to refer to C6's deficit quality of being unable to hear and being blunt. In order to avoid explicit disagreement, C7 mitigate the negative tone comment with the word 'Not sure' and 'just'. The word "Not sure" saves both interlocutors and addressee face because it reduces the accuracy of the negative comment. Meanwhile, the word "just" means "only". This is aligned to Locher's (2004: 119) that 'the use of just as a hedge for disagreement could be replaced by 'only'

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without altering the overall meaning' (p. 119). Thus, in Example 10, the word 'just' reduces the impact of the word "dense" in the comment expresses by C7.

In example 10, C7 employs two hedges to mitigate his disagreement. C7 begins his comment with the hedge "Not sure" before his disagreement "you're dense" and followed by another hedge "just". This pattern evident that C7 is self-protecting himself by indicating his insufficient knowledge in his comment.

Example 9 (discussed earlier on page 46)	
C32	What the BN administration did to Tian Chua will one day in weeks to come fly back on their face. Should PR [Pakatan Rakyat] win the next GE it should make sure that none of the BN leaders set foot in Sabah and Sarawak. They need to taste their own bitter medicine to learn bitter lessons.
[…]	
C35	Vendetta is not going to teach them a lesson. **I think** PR is kind enough to say that when they win, they wouldn't go for a witch hunt. […]

In Example 9, C32 expresses his dissatisfaction towards the "BN administration" by stating that "They need to taste their own bitter medicine to learn bitter lessons". The word "they" in his statement refers to the BN leaders. The phrase "need to taste their own bitter medicine" indicates that the PR (Pakatan Rakyat) should pay revenge to the BN Leaders when the PR wins the election. C35 disagrees with C32 by saying in his comment that to pay revenge is not an appropriate action to take in order to teach the BN leaders a lesson. The word "vendetta" in C35 comment refers to the revenge that C32 mentioned in his comment.

In Example 9, C35 mitigates his opposite opinion with the hedge "I think". This strategy softens the disagreement ("Vendetta is not going to teach them a lesson"). The phrase "I think" indicates C35's lack of commitment in his disagreement. Based on

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Example 9, C35 begins his comment with a disagreement (opposite opinion) followed by the hedge "I think" and another disagreement strategy (opposite opinion).

Based on the examples, hedges are realized with the words or phrases "Not sure", "just", and "I think" .Moreover, hedges are found to mitigate negative comments, opposite opinions, and rhetorical questions. Based on the data, I can summarize that hedges are always employed after disagreements.

4.2.4 Shifting Responsibility

According to Locher (2004 p. 130), shifting responsibility occurs when 'interactants portray themselves as not responsible for what they are reporting'. In other words, the interlocutor expresses an utterance as if the utterance is not expressed by him but comes from a different source. Moreover, shifting responsibility could occur by using pronouns such as 'they', 'you' or/and 'we' in order to avoid or/and spread responsibility. This strategy allows the interlocutor to become less responsible for the disagreement expressed. This strategy softens the unwanted effect of a statement when it co-occurs with disagreement in the same utterance.

Example 7 (discussed earlier on page 44 and 74)	
C28	[…] the practice of giving expedited (not instant) Malaysian citizenship to Muslim Filipinos was started by the former Sabah Chief Minister,Tun Datu Mustapha back in the1970s,long before Mahathir was PM. […] stop claiming that Mahathir was the one who initiated the "project IC"[…]
C23	[…] **witnesses in the RCI** [Royal Commission of Inquiry], including **NRD** [National Registration Department] **officials** have testified that IC's were given for votes in the 80's and 90's with Mahathir's approval. **Mahathir** himself admitted it.

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In Example 7, C28 states that the politician who is responsible for "giving expedited Malaysian citizenship" to the Muslim refugees from the Philippines were Tun Datu Mustapha, former Sabah Chief Minister. C28 is obviously the supporter of the former Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir. This is evident in his comment "stop claiming that Mahathir was the one who initiated the "project IC". In response to C28, C23 disagrees with opposite opinions. C23 expresses his first opposite opinion in Example 7 by stating that it was the "witnesses in the RCI, including NRD officials" who "testified" that the former Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir approved that "IC's were given for votes in the 80's and 90's". C23 mitigates his disagreement by shifting the responsibility of his statement to "witnesses in the RCI, including NRD officials". In this instance, C23 is not responsible for making the opposite opinion but it was the "witnesses in the RCI, including NRD officials" who testified that Tun Dr. Mahathir was guilty. C23 emphasizes his disagreement with another opposite opinion by adding "Mahathir himself admitted it". The word "it" in C23's comment refers to the controversial incident "project IC". In his disagreement, C23 shifts the responsibility to disagree with the third person pronoun "Mahathir" who admitted "it". In this instance, C23 is not taking the responsibility in giving his opposite opinion but shifts it to the politician's responsibility.

Example 6 (discussed earlier on page 43 and 48)	
C15	[…] the issuing of Ics were done by greedy and opportunistic people who were out to make money. Most of these people were even sent to jail under the ISA and some of them are state opposition leaders.
C18	**Mahahthir** [sic] had admitted <u>he was the mastermind of "Project IC"</u> […]

In Example 6, C15 states that most of the people who were responsible for issuing the ICs were sent to jail. C15 further states that "some of them are the state opposition

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leaders". The word "state opposition leaders" is controversial, because the opposition supporters may get offended by the statement. Thus, in response to C15's statement, C18 expresses his disagreement in a form of opposite opinion. Similar to Example 6, C18 mitigates his opposite opinion by shifting responsibility to the third person pronoun "Mahahthir [sic]", the former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir. In his comment, C18 intends to be less responsible in making his opposite opinion, simultaneously mitigates his disagreement.

Based on the examples, the strategy shifting responsibility is realized with noun phrases such as "witnesses in the RCI", "NRD officials" and "Mahathir". The noun "Mahathir" which refers to the former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir is employed twice in the data. Moreover, shifting responsibility is found to mitigate opposite opinion in the data.

4.2.5 Modal Auxiliaries

According to Locher (2004 p. 129) the use of modal auxiliaries such as 'may', 'might', 'would' and 'should' in disagreement 'can be used to soften FTA'. Based on my data, there is the occurrence of modal auxiliaries 'should' and 'might'. The modal 'should' carries putative, hypothetical or tentative meaning while 'might' carries the meaning of possibility or asks for permission.

Example 1 (discussed earlier on page 40-41)	
C3	[…] a bunch of foreign armed pirates, invading the country, […], the GOM is still pussy-footing around taking decisive and definitive military actions against them. This event is only the beginning of payback for a failed GOM policy to harbour and sustain a foreign secessionist group.
C4	It's a really silly thing to kill for and as long as a peaceful solution existed they **should** have considered it.

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In Example 1, C3 expresses his dissatisfaction because the GOM (Government of Malaysia) was unable to take drastic action in handling the Lahad Datu incident. In response to C3, C4 expresses his opposite opinion by stating that "a peaceful solution" should be considered. In this instance, C4 agrees at a point that the GOM is taking a suitable action to overcome the issue of Lahad Datu. As shown in Example 1, C4 mitigates his opposite opinion with the modal "should" which carries a putative meaning and indicates that the earlier opposite opinion "peaceful solution" is supposed to put into consideration. In this example, the modal 'should' is employed after the disagreement.

Example 7 (discussed earlier on page 44, 74 and 79-80)	
C28	[…] It is quite well known among Sabahans that the practice of giving expedited (not instant) Malaysian citizenship to Musilim Filipinos was started by the former Sabah Chief Minister,Tun Datu Mustapha back in the1970s,long before Mahathir was PM.
C23	[…] It **might** had started in the 70's by Mustapha but witnesses in the RCI, including NRD officials have testified that IC's were given for votes in the 80's and 90's with Mahathir's approval.

In Example 7, C28 states that the former Sabah Chief Minister, Tun Datu Mustapha initiates in issuing the ICs to Muslim Filipinos back in 1970. He further states that the incident happened "long before Mahathir was" the Prime Minister. In other words, C28 points out that the former Prime Minister is not guilty in "giving expedited Malaysian citizenship to Muslim Filipino". On the other hand, C23 disagrees by giving an opposite opinion that "witnesses in the RCI, including NRD officials, have testified" that the former Prime Minister, TDM approved the "project IC". In his comment, C23 mitigates his disagreement with the modal "might" before he expresses his opposite opinion. The

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modal “might” in this utterance functions as partial agreement, simultaneously reduces the unwelcome effects that C28 may experience.

Based on the data, the use of modal auxiliaries is realized with the modals ‘should’ or ‘might’. The modal ‘should’ occurs twice while ‘might’ is found once to mitigate disagreement. The modal ‘should’ is used to mitigate opposite opinion in both occurrences. Moreover, ‘should’ occurs after a disagreement. Meanwhile, ‘might’ is employed before disagreement. As shown in Example 7, C23 employs the modal ‘might’, followed by the use of ‘but’ and opposite opinion.

4.2.6 Giving Personal or/ and Emotional Reasons

According to Locher (2004), giving personal or/and emotional reasons could mitigate a different point of view. Moreover, the commentator’s face is saved because he/she states the reason or opinion personally. This strategy mitigates disagreement because the Commentator A emphasizes his personal point of view which Commentator B may agree or disagree with.

Example 1(discussed earlier on page 40-41 and 81)	
C3	[…] for almost 3 weeks now, the GOM [Government of Malaysia] is still pussy-footing around taking decisive and definitive military actions against them. …a failed GOM policy to harbour and sustain a foreign secessionist group.
C4	**I actually admire** the Malaysian armed forces for holding back.

In Example 1, C3 states that the GOM is “still pussy-footing around” to take action against the “foreign secessionist group”. The word “pussy-footing” refers to the GOM’s inability to take a quick action to control the invader's attack. C4 disagrees with C3 with

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a contrary view that C4 approves the "Malaysian armed forces" decision to hold back from taking a forceful action. The phrase "I actually admire" puts the opposite opinion ("Malaysian armed forces for holding back") to the personal level. The pronoun "I" refers that the utterance is made for a personal reason. Meanwhile, the phrase "actually admire" indicates that the disagreement is made for a personal reason which is based on how C4 feels. In Example 1, C3 may or may not agree with C4's personal reason. Thus, this mitigating strategy simultaneously reduces the unwelcome effect that C3 may experience.

In conclusion, the mitigating strategy giving personal or/and emotional reason is realized with the phrase "I actually admire". This strategy only occurs with the pronoun "I" which indicate this mitigating strategy is expressed by Commentator A personally. Based on the data, this strategy occurs the least with only two occurrences.

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CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I will summarize disagreement strategies and mitigating strategies in the online comments of *The Malaysian Insider (TMI).*

5.1 Summary of Findings

Based on the data, there are eight disagreement strategies employed by the commentators in order to disagree. The most frequently used strategy is giving opposite opinion. Seven of these strategies found are from Shum and Lee's (2013) disagreement strategies which are giving an opposite opinion, raising a rhetorical question, giving a negative comment, making a personal stance, reprimanding, making an ironic statement and rewording. Based on the data, there is one new disagreement strategy found, which is using insulting words. This new strategy is adapted from Shum and Lee's (2013) disagreement strategy, using short vulgar phrases. The data had no vulgar phrases used to disagree, but had three (4.2%) occurrences of insulting words employed during disagreements.

In a nutshell, giving an opposite opinion is realized when a commentator expresses a contrary view to counter the previous commentator. There is no obvious pattern shown in giving opposite opinion from the data. The strategy raising a rhetorical question is realized when a commentator expresses a clear contrasting opinion in a form of rhetorical question which does not intend to get the answer from the other commentator. There are four types of rhetorical questions found which were the yes-no questions with an answer, the yes-no questions without an answer, the WH-questions with an answer and WH-questions without an answer. Meanwhile, the strategy giving a negative comment occurs when a commentator associates another commentator with a negative aspect by using the pronoun "I" and "he". Making a personal stance is realized with explicit disagreement words or phrases such as "no", "I absolutely disagree with you",

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"I don't believe" and "I don't expect". In this study, reprimanding is found in phrases such as "Not true at all!!", "Correction!", "Think before you jibber!", "Don't jibber if you don't know Sabahan!" and "Just shut up [...]!!". Reprimanding is also realized in a form of WH-question to point out a wrongdoing. Meanwhile, the strategy making an ironic statement is realized when a commentator says something insincerely to make fun or sarcastically to another commentator to show his clear point of view. Rewording based on the data is expressed when an interlocutor reconstructs another commentator's original comment to show a contrasting view. Finally, the new added disagreement strategy which is using insulting words is realized by using words like "idiot" and "bloody fool" to disrespectfully address and humiliate the other commentator.

Based on the findings, the commentators in the data employed both unmitigated and mitigated disagreement. There are 58 occurrences of unmitigated disagreement compared to mitigated disagreement with 13 occurrences. This mitigated disagreement occurred with the co-occurrence of mitigating strategies. There are six mitigating strategies found in the data. Five of the mitigating strategies found are found based on the mitigating framework by Locher (2004). These mitigating strategies are the use of hedges, shifting responsibility, the use of modal auxiliaries, the use of 'but' and giving personal or emotional reasons. Another mitigating strategy found in the data is adopted from the Flores-Ferran and Lovejoy (2013). The strategy is 'token agreement'.

In the data, the use of hedges is realized with the occurrences of the words "not sure", "just' and "I think" which function to soften the negative impact of the disagreement strategies. Meanwhile, shifting responsibility occurs when a commentator shifts the responsibility to disagree with another person intended. In other words, the commentator quoted the contrary view from another person to make him less responsible for the disagreement such as "witnesses in RCI, including NRD officials"

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and “Mahathir”. The use of modal auxiliaries is realized with the modal “should” and “might”. The use of ‘but’ is realized with the occurrence of another mitigating strategy and ‘but’ cannot occur alone. Based on the data, ‘but’ mitigates when it co-occurs with token agreement “yeah/yes”, “I may agree with you”, “I am equally concerned” and the modal “might” in the same utterance. Another mitigating strategy found in the data based on Locher’s (2004) Mitigating Framework is giving personal or an emotional reason. This mitigating strategy is realized with the occurrence of the phrases like “I actually admire”. As mentioned earlier, the new added mitigating strategy found in the data is token agreement. This strategy is realized by using the words/ phrases “yeah/ yes”, “I may agree with you” and “I am equally concerned”.

Disagreement may be mitigated or unmitigated in the context of *The Malaysian Insider’s* news comments. The commentators of TMI tend to express unmitigated disagreement strategies rather than mitigated strategies. This is because there are 13 mitigated disagreement compared to 58 unmitigated disagreement found in this study. The findings of this study could be useful to guide teachers in helping the ESL students to understand and apply disagreement strategies and mitigate when a disagreement takes place. This is because students nowadays are exposed to various types of reading material. Moreover, the current curriculum with the implementation of the 21st Century Education requires students to be more critical to solve problem not only in school but also in real life situation. Thus, data collected from this study, could help teachers, students and educators towards realizing the 21st Century Education.

5. 2 Recommendation for Future Research

This study only investigates disagreement strategies and mitigating strategies in *The Malaysian Insider* news comments. For the purpose of this study, I only looked at the

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comments on the article related to the key search "Lahad Datu Invasion". In order to make a study more reliable, it is recommended that the future researchers in this area to study a larger sample size on different current issues in Malaysia. Moreover, it would be interesting to pursue studies on disagreement and emotional stance during disagreement in Malaysian online news portal. This is because, disagreement in Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) lacks of gestures, intonation and stress. Thus, it would be interesting to study how the language is used to disagree in an online news comments. Furthermore, future researchers could focus on certain characteristics of the commentators such as gender, age and background to get better insight in the studies of disagreement and CMC.

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