The Creativity of Malaysian Netizens in using Curse Words

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Abstract – *English, as the language of the colonial masters, never ceases to be in operation in Malaysia despite its independence in 1957. English continues to be used in both formal and informal contexts, in and outside of schools and even on social platforms such as Facebook, Messenger, What's App, SMS and emails. Although English is taught from the primary to secondary schools in Malaysia for a total of 11 years, not many Malaysians, especially the younger generation, are able to use it in the way purists expect. Noting its unusual variety, some linguists note that this variety of Malaysian English is a sign of weak proficiency. Others maintain that it is a feature of the Malaysian variety where there are mixed languages occurring simultaneously. This paper examines the use of English in Facebook as it is a common platform used by many Malaysians for social interactions. Focussing only on how Malaysians used the words to curse, data were linguistically categorised and analysed. Findings suggest several outcomes. It is argued that Facebook is extremely influential in impacting language use. The outcome of this paper will, thus, serve as a window to understand how English is used for the purpose of cursing via the social media.* **Copyright © 2016 Penerbit Akademia Baru - All rights reserved.**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The concept of education as an important bearing, for many people in Malaysia, needs no further introduction as education is deemed the stepping stone to changing one's life and future. Malaysia, as a young country, places a lot of investment into its educational needs. Endorsing this finding, [1] notes that a lot of money has been invested into developing the various educational programmes in Malaysia and in particular, for the purpose of developing the use of the English language. Although not given an official status, English is considered a very important medium of communication in this country. It is pervasive throughout the society - from schools to shopping complexes, hotels, banks, canteens, courts, offices, lecture halls and playgrounds to individual homes. Nonetheless, the spoken variety one hears in the Malaysian context ranges, as [2] notes, from acrolects to mesolects to basilects. Although these three levels of English may have been observed by studies, they are slowly diminishing in use as Malaysia becomes inundated by technology and globalisation. Presently, most Malaysians use a particular spoken variety. To a small extent, there are still some Malaysian speakers who speak with some accent and proficiency similar to the levels observed by [2], especially the first two levels which are closer to standard English. It would be fair to say that where acrolect may seem to be fading in use among Malaysian speakers of English in the Malaysian society,

there is still a big circle of Malaysians who are likely to be using the mesolectal kind of spoken English (see [3]).

Asmah [4] mentions that as a multicultural and multilingual society, the spoken English one hears in the Malaysian context is very 'mixed' as in "batik-like" or even "mosaic-like", suggesting that the spoken variety is a combination of many features of other languages and dialects. This variety has been described as Malaysian English.

Many studies looking at Malaysian English notes that it carries a number of characteristics (see [4, 5]). The way Malaysians use English has been studied over the years and of these, several studies have covered a number of domains like home (see [5, 3]), education domain (see [6, 7]), workplace domain [5, 8], friendship domain (see [9]), kindergartens [10] and emails. The concept of Malaysians using English to curse on social media like Facebook, however, has not been explored, a gap which this paper aims to fill. Specifically, it examines how Malaysian netizens, use English in their interactions with each other for the purpose of cursing at others.

Malaysian English- All Malaysians go through a total of 11 years of education learning English. Yet many often do not have a good command of the language, unlike the era of the 1960s where English served as the main medium of instruction in schools. Studies note that the younger generation of Malaysians are no longer using standard English, unlike their grandparents who used to have a register of spoken English that was good, grammatical and pure, almost like the native speakers of the colonial master. Perhaps, it is because Malay had served as the medium of instruction by the 1970s and it is also possible that this happened because Malaysians like to have their own variety. Consequently, more and more younger speakers of English in Malaysia have been described by purists as 'poor in English'. The education system could be a factor causing this, as noted by [11]. Due to the many changes and the various implementations of language policies, many younger Malaysian speakers tend to use a local variety described by many as Malaysian English.

In the early 1990s, Kachru [12] began noticing that different nationalities use variations of English and this led to him proposing the idea of World Englishes. In much the same process, Malaysian English was evolved over the years and soon it comprises peculiarities of its own. Among these is the occurrence of combination of words from different languages in its spoken forms which has been explained by researchers as code switching. Other instances noted in spoken Malaysian English are the insertion of particles used by other ethnic groups such as 'lah', 'ah', 'hah' (see [5]) and 'mah'. Since Malaysia comprises three dominant ethnic groups of Malay, Chinese and Indian, the dominant languages currently in use would also comprise Malay, Chinese (Mandarin and its sub-dialects) and Tamil. In addition, English pervades within the spoken and written forms because it is deemed as an important language in this country although it is not documented anywhere in the constitution as the second official language.

Malaysian English (ME) may be categorized as a variety of New English under the term "World Englishes". The study of World Englishes includes categorizing the varieties of English used in various sociolinguistic contexts throughout the world and analysing how sociolinguistic histories, multicultural backgrounds and functions influence the use of English in different regions of the world. Kachru and Smith [13] emphasise that effectual communication in the context in which different varieties of World Englishes are used entails awareness of the varieties in use and their cultural, social, and ideational functions. Although English is considered as an important second language in Malaysia, there are different levels of proficiency existing among local speakers. However, there are increasing numbers of L1 speakers of English, either working expatriates or visiting foreigners, in urban parts of Malaysia

who contribute to the dynamic speech context. As a result of their interactions with local users, the language is also going through some changes; inadvertently contributing to how English in Malaysia has evolved, mostly through the process of appropriation - "the process of capturing and remolding the language to new usages" [14] mainly as a way to mark the expression of local identities. According to Schneider's Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes, Malaysian English (ME) is in the nativisation phase where its constant usage becomes an accepted form although the usage may also be influenced by other local languages such as Malay, Chinese or Tamil. Baskaran [2] puts ME into three lectal variations: acrolectal (native like variety), mesolectal (local variety with good linguistic forms and structures but primarily local accent) and basilectal (the variety spoken for communicative purposes and is linguistically inadequate in form and structure). Others like [15] argue that local variety and, in this case, also termed as nativised, is a socially acceptable form as it provides speakers with their respective national identity. This variety is substantiated by the distinct phonology and unique vocabulary which were derived from their respective social interactions with each other. Malaysian English has undergone structural nativisation on all levels of language organisation, therefore, studying the different aspects of ME as this research aims to do, can help to determine the extent of its nativisation. This process includes looking at the word formation processes, an essential factor which can show both its distinct and similar features as compared to other varieties of English. With the speed with which communication technologies including the internet and social media are developing, it appears that language varieties and language use have simultaneously, faced dramatic changes. Among this is the use of curse words which are undergoing several innovative changes on Facebook. This study aims to address this change.

Computer-mediated communication via Facebook is a context in which language exchange is prolific and among the speech acts used is the use of curse words. It appears that cursing is liberal in this context and this could be because individuals assume that it is cyberspace where one can freely express one's emotions as identity is often concealed under pseudonyms. Language use in this domain or setting may be different from formal written text. The study of cursing as a feature of language, which reveals emotions and motivations, may reveal the creativity of individuals in using this speech act, thus, the development of the variety of English used.

As a feature of language use, cursing has not been included in the theories of language developed by linguists and psychologists. Scholars are undoubtedly aware of the frequent presence and occurrence of cursing in colloquial speech. However, Jay [16] believes that it is not a matter of the topic's awareness but rather it is the taboo nature of cursing that prevents this feature of language from being regarded as a legitimate topic for scholarly examination. The creation and existence of new and fashionable curse words, for example, curse words whose characters are different from the normal and ordinary curse words, cannot be ignored. By excluding human emotions and motivations seen in curse words from being studied, theories of language would remain incomplete as cursing is an essential part of language use.

Curse words can be seen to be a part of offensive language since it is used for the purpose of expressing one's emotions which are normally expressed through strong language use. Every language has its own form of cursing although each category and each group of these offensive speeches possesses its own distinctive set of defining features [16]. Every speaker of a language, whether as a first language (L1) or second language (L2), has his/her own way of cursing. Additionally, speakers who are bilingual or trilingual may also curse by embedding one language in another, depending on what the setting, topic or emotion is like. In the context of this study, the term, cursing, is used to refer to several categories of offensive speech used by Malaysians who come from different ethnic backgrounds and this variety includes

obscenity, swearing, profanity, epithets, name-calling, blasphemy, insult, slurs, slang, scatology, vulgarity, verbal aggression, and taboo words. The Neuro-Psycho-Social (NPS) theory defines cursing as a kind of language which encompasses all these aforementioned categories. Jay [16] says that cursing is an essential feature of language and Pinker [17], focussing on several taboo words including 'fucking', 'assholes' and 'mother fuckers' says they are language windows to emotions. Since language is prominently featured in human communication, it is very likely that human beings need it as a tool to convey their meanings as well as express their emotions. Hence, when language becomes utilized as a means to curse, the act of cursing becomes the channel for people to verbalize extreme emotions such as anger, disgust, frustration as well as surprise. Both normal, unique and peculiar properties of curse words are incorporated in the NPS theory of language.

An overview of curse words and swearing can only be accessed by putting together other studies on curse words and swearing into context. However, such studies of curse words used by Malaysians who are also L2 users of English in the Malaysian context do not exist although internet sources do provide a list of swear words used by Malaysians. This study will fill in that gap by highlighting what Malaysian netizens, hereby encompassing those using computer mediated media like the Facebook, who use English in their daily interactions would employ as curse words on the social media.

2.0 AN OVERVIEW OF CURSING AND SWEARING

To delve into this aspect of the language, it is apt to trace the historical development of cursing and swearing.

2.1 Historical Perspective

Research discussing cursing and swearing dates back to the 1960s with the emergence of the first studies by publications such as [18] The Anatomy of Dirty Words, and [19] The Anatomy of Swearing. Subsequently, in 1998, (cited in [20]; cited in [21]) wrote a book entitled, Swearing: A Social History of Foul, Oath, and Profanity. Jay [16] and Ljung [22] conducted different studies on swearing and cursing. The aim of their studies was to establish the universality of swearing. One of the first few studies focusing on language use on the social media was developed by Tan and Richardson [23] who studied how Malaysian students used a mixture of 'Penang English' and 'Net English' in their informal written communication and short messages. A master's thesis written by Fernandez [24] looked at the kind of swearing words used by Malaysian Indian undergraduates. Other studies looking at social media followed but in particular, this chapter will provide literature which will focus on two subcategories, one of which concentrates on social network sites and the other on research dealing with the psychological and social aspect of cursing.

2.2 Use of Social Network Sites for Cursing

The number of Facebook users is soaring around the world and Malaysia is not an exception. Based on Malaysia Facebook Statistics, there are currently 13,154,060 Facebook users. This study determines if Malaysian Facebook users, henceforth referred to as netizens, use cursing as a form of expression on the social media and if so whether or not these lexical items have been created. The study will also analyze how these curse words are created. Fernandez [24] examined swearing words by Malaysian Indian undergraduates. He found that they swear in their interactions with each other because swearing was seen as informal and trendy. The swear words, although related to private parts of the human body, were not perceived as offensive

and played the role of solidarity. Thelwall [25], a pioneer and leading researcher in the use of corpus-based methods in online context, states that swearing is normally regarded as an implicit strategy when it is inspired by the use of clever language such as moving the letters inside a bad term used, using homophones, and substituting bad terms with innocent ones. He also adds that when pseudo swear words are used, it is also seen as being implicit. Thelwall [25] analyzed and compared swearing engaged by American (US) and British (UK) MySpace users and his variables include nationality, gender and age of the respondents.

2.3 Function and Form

Understanding the psychological aspects of cursing will help researchers explain the appearance of new curse words especially within social media networks. Crystal [26] says that in our daily lives, people use many illustrations of taboo speech and this is usually in the form of profanities or obscenities, which help users, express strong emotions of hatred, antagonism, frustration, and surprise. The most common utterance is the use of single words or short phrases (though lengthy sequences may occur among more seasoned swearers) and they help to convey different levels of intensity and different degrees of social sanctions. For Jay [16] cursing is both an essential aspect of language and an essential component for stabilizing one's emotion as the act of expressing a curse word denotes the emotional state or condition of the user at the time of cursing. According to Jay the language used displays the emotional identity of the user and fulfills two main purposes. The first is to fulfill what [16] terms as 'hostile aggression', which is aimed at hurting or damaging someone. The other purpose, says Jay [16], is to serve as an 'instrumental aggression' which is aimed at achieving a reward, a satisfaction which peers admire or respect.

Cursing can be explicit where words of intense meanings are used to express one's emotion or implicit where the action is expressed more subtly (see [25]). Although most societies do not condone this speech act, many people do use this speech act. Individuals may curse and use bad language for a variety of reasons to fulfill their needs in communicating their emotions (see [24]).

Cursing and swearing are fascinating social behaviors due to their linguistic nature, inherent variability and corresponding subjectivity [27]. In addition, due to the fact that the action can develop new curse words which are mostly referred to as pseudo swearing, an attempt to understand how they are used in social media networks such as Facebook is beneficial. People use a variety of curse words in different contexts and situations. Sometimes they pick on the curse words that are culturally prescribed for them. At other times, they may invent their own curse words, which could be the result of word play. It is natural that when people want to curse or swear, they would make reference to the terms they already possess in their linguistic repertoire. However, if their linguistic repertoire is deficient, they may create their own words as a way of expressing themselves.

Thelwall [25] argues that though the language of network sites such as MySpace and Facebook is in the written form, it is very informal and is probably closer to the spoken variety. Internet language, like the languages used by Facebook users, is an oral variety but it is expressed in the form of written discourse. In other words, it is the users' way of expressing their daily expressions even though their thoughts are expressed in the written form [28]. The creativity of these Facebook users comes about when they deviate from the norm of using established language and start developing their own. Yu [29] says that innovation has influenced today's world, becoming a strong medium for others to express themselves. Thus, when there is a need to express intense emotions, users can create curse words within such an innovative

environment. It is this creativity on the social media of Facebook which contributes to the characteristic of Malaysian English, a variety of New English under the umbrella term of World Englishes. The term creativity used here, thus, refers to new instances of usage.

In a study looking at the innovation of new language on the network, [29] focused on innovative words created by internet users. His study discussed the process in which new words evolved and he introduced a model which could be applied to the current study. [29] listed six categories of innovative words. The first of this is harmonic or homophonic terms such as "jam". In Chinese, "jam" means "Guojiang", the homophonic term of "praise" [29]. The second category is metaphor or metonymy which was explained as a novel perspective of looking at meanings which, when used in the network communication, may appear to be concealed by different semantic masks. In the context of his study, Yu mentioned that the word "Yu Mi" for example was used as a reference to "Super Girl". In his context of study, Li Yuchun's speed fame was referred to by users as "Yu Mi" which means sweetcorn in Chinese [29]. Metaphoric neologism, as a linguistic phenomenon, has a significant role in social media Li & Feng, 2011).

The term was further defined as a structure through which concise linguistic features as well as novelty and social changes are reflected via techniques such as jokes which can serve as a vivid mirror for the use of language. Yu's [29] third category is termed as borrowing. He defines borrowed words as those words used as a result of multicultural exchanges particularly, when foreign words are used proficiently in order to escape from having to rely on using the original meaning in the spoken language. To illustrate, Yu gave the example, "Royal sister" which means one's known sister in Japanese but on the internet, it was used as a reference to a mature woman with a strong will ([29], p. 719).

The fourth category is symbols and in his study, Yu [29] provided the example of the colon ":" symbol which is used by social network users to symbolize the eyes and the closed bracket ")" symbol to represent the mouth and so on. Yu defines symbols as opulent expressions, which are acted out through keyboard inputs by the internet and network users. In addition, the "*" symbol could be used to represent many letters particularly, within curse words as a way of refraining from writing out the curse word in a complete form. The fifth category is termed as new words. Yu proposed that this is a derivation from the prevailing and present dialects and it typically arises from innovative expressions. The sixth category signifies abbreviations where abbreviated words used may vary from just being simple words or symbols.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a corpora of data which were collected from Facebook. For the purpose of this study, a Facebook page called "Only in Malaysia", a page where Malaysians express themselves and share their ideas on events, news, photos and issues pertaining to Malaysia were selected. Responses of Malaysian netizens from June 2013 to September 2014 were extracted. Attention was focused on the page's daily topics and the comments related to them. In total, 20 topics which had aroused the feelings of Malaysians and had caused them to respond by using the speech act of cursing were identified. The topics causing this response are not discussed within the scope of this study. Data were then extracted based on what was deemed as cursing which in the context of this study, refers to the use of strong language to express anger, frustration, insult, or surprise. These were then analyzed based on Yu's [29] model of the six categories of innovative words described earlier. The responses provided by Malaysian to twenty-three different pictures and videos shared by members in "Only in Malaysia"

Facebook page were extracted for investigation and a total of 643 utterances served as data which encompass curse words and curse phrases. These were then coded and then manually counted and presented as percentages to show relative comparisons.

3.2 Data Analysis

Results indicate that of the 643 comments which included curse words, a total of 876 words were identified as curse words. Some responses also contained more than one curse word and these were also included. There were a total of 93 instances where new curse words were identified based on the context of the cursing. Due to the fact that these words have not been identified as curse words in other studies, they were thus, considered as new creations in the context of this study. Previous studies of bad language had also considered curse words as swear words or taboo words and of the studies focusing on curse, swear or taboo words used by Malaysians, evidence can only be traced to the thesis done by Fernandez [24] who focused on the use of 'swear words' by Malaysian Indian undergraduates. However, as mentioned earlier, these swear words were mainly Indian terms related to the body anatomy. Other sources of curse words which had been used by Malaysians can be found on www.youswear.com/index.asp?language=Malaysian. In the context of this study, by new curse words, it is meant those curse words not previously seen in the mass media such as newspapers or local internet sources and they have not been mentioned in any scientific papers focusing on Malaysia, to date.

Analysis indicates that the new curse words include profanity, blasphemy, taboo, obscenity, vulgarity, slang, epithets, insult, and slurs. The new curse words identified were classified into the six categories mentioned by Yu [29]: harmonic tones or homophones, metaphor or metonymy, borrowings, symbols, new words and abbreviations (see Table 1).

3.2.1 Homophones or Harmonic Terms

The term homophone suggests that one word is substituted with another word that carries the same sound but bears a different meaning. For example, the word "bitch" is perceived to be derogatory when used on a much disliked woman hence it could be replaced with the word "beach" which refers to the seaside. In order to make reference to bitch, a word not encouraged because it is impolite, people might use another word with a similar sound like 'beech' too although this sound does not exist in the dictionary. This instance is thus referred to as harmonic.

For the purpose of this study, the term harmonic is used because it seems more appropriate as the writer of the posts were striving to get a sound rather than a word with the same sound that also exist in the dictionary. Yu [29] states that "harmonic tone is derived from existing dialects for example pinyin input served as the method to clear any ambiguity in sounds and homonyms." These two terms were introduced by Yu who might have seen them in a different light as she was looking at the innovation of Chinese words. Yu had provided examples to illustrate his point. As was mentioned above, the word "jam" was used to portray as "praise" because jam pronounced in Chinese had the same sound as praise.

Table 1: Categories of new curse words identified from Facebook

Category	Number of Instances	Percentage
1 Homophones or Harmonic tones	23	24.7%
2 Metaphor or Metonymy	22	23.6%
3 Borrowing	18	19.4%
4 Symbols	8	8.6%
5 New words	18	19.4%
6 Abbreviations	4	4.3%
Total	93	100%

From this study, analysis indicates that the creation of the curse words extracted from the data was based on harmonic similarities. Data which comprised 23 instances of new words indicate that 24.72% of them were created based on harmonic tones. This is illustrated in Table 1. The curse words created by netizens were based on the similarity of phonemes and substitution was therefore made via another word which was phonetically close to the curse word. This substitution was performed by netizens for various purposes such as to create euphemistic expressions and pseudo swearing. Examples in italics are shown below:

- #3:   Ugly biatch
- #13:   This stupid fool shud shut the fark up
- #15:   Full.
- #37:   EFFFING LULLLLZLZLZLZ why she perlu duduk tengah (need to sit in centre)???
- #25:   Dear Miss X Zebra, ooops i meant Zohra, probably i purposely said Zebra because of your affection towards animals.

Biatch was created as a personal insult instead of bitch. Fark up was used by netizens instead of fuck up which is an unpleasant form. Full was used as an expletive to substitute for fool. The word effing was also used by netizens as an alternative for the 'f' word as in fucking. The personal insult in example 25 is an instance of using a homophone where the curse word used by the netizen was an animal (zebra vs Zohra which is a name). This strategy was used by the netizen who chose an animal name which had almost similar phonemes to the name of the person being insulted.

Harmonic examples were also found to be used in profane expressions as in "oh gawd" illustrated in the following example. This too is another instance of employing a harmonic tone to create a profane expression.

- #51: not even the sultan if he was the VIP/Guest of honor! oh gawd.

The substitution gawd was created as a harmonic term to replace God and the user may have various purposes for using this term.

In another instance, the netizen implied the meaning of 'sucks' which means 'horrible' by substituting it with suk.

The use of harmonic tone is also evident in #85: WAT THE FOX, where fox, as an animal term, was used to substitute for the word 'fuck'. Thus, overtly, the word would not be regarded as offensive.

3.2.2 Metaphor or Metonymy

It should be noted that metaphoric expansion is of two types: one is elevation or amelioration whereby the meaning of a word grows stronger, more agreeable, or more respectable, that is to

say, words yield a more pleasant or positive meaning. The other type is a degeneration or pejorative change whereby the meaning of a word becomes weaker, and less agreeable. That is, the words yield a more negative or unpleasant meaning. In looking at Iranian morphology, Shaghaghi [30] says that the word xâki 'dusty/soiled' is used as an adjective to describe a humble person while the word tâblo 'portrait/tableau' is used as an adjective to mean 'notorious' ([30], p. 112).

Both metaphor and metonymy bear some similarities in that they are both figures of speech. A metaphor works as a substitution for a particular concept whereas a metonymy associates one concept with another. A metaphor can be seen as an expression used to illustrate a similarity between two things, defining a relationship based on continuity. Thus a metaphor is a conceptual view which presents ideas as objects. A metonymy, in comparison, is a figure of speech that is used to refer to something and this is accomplished through an associated word and not by name. A metonymy presents a salient connection between two concepts. For example, when a building is used metonymically to stand for the people who work in it, "The White House is worried about ...". In this context, it is not the building that is worried about something, but the people in it. In this study the two terms metaphor and metonymy will be used synonymously.

Data show that metaphorical neologism or metonymy seems to be the second most favored way of creating curse words. Analysis indicates that there were a total of 22 instances where metaphorical neologism was depicted in new curse words and phrases. Most of them were used on the basis of physical appearance and personal characteristics as perceived by the netizen. For instance, in the following examples all the words used by netizens have similar semantic reference in the real world but in context, they were used for the purpose of cursing or swearing under different semantic masks.

  #8:   Born this way - Lady gaga (syaitan)
  #25: COW IS MOOOOIIIIIIINNNNGG~
  #33: Hippopotamus!!

In example #8, Lady gaga which is the name of a singer with unusual looks and weird characteristics was used to refer to a person. On the surface the word or phrase does not appear offensive as it is merely the name of a singer. However, the netizen had also added a Malay term syaitan which means devil to reveal his/her perception of the person being referred to. Thus, the phrase, Lady gaga was used metaphorically to describe the person being insulted and the term syaitan was used to make this difference in semantic intent.

In example #25, the phrase COW IS MOOOOIIIIIIINNNNGG was used to refer to a person who had stopped a student from discussing students' problems in a forum. Apparently, the netizen was trying to associate the person being criticised as animal-like as the speaker in that situation had caused anger among netizens in the social media and social network sites. The word cow was metaphorically used to refer to that person as if she was in the act of 'mooing' which was related to her manner of giving a speech. Using animal themes seems to be a common strategy of cursing among Malaysian netizens. The animals used in metaphorical curse words tend to make reference to those animals considered as disgusting or forbidden especially among Malaysian Muslims such as pig and sow.

In example #69, the word sow was used as a personal insult and slur. Sow is perceived by the interlocutor to be harmful and dangerous as it was followed by the adjective bloodsucking. Hence, the combination of both terms become offensive when used to

refer to an individual. The interlocutor here also seems to convey sow as an insult and in order to intensify her feelings, she adds the phrase "in fancy clothes".

   #69: No disrespect to any culture.... when u wrap a sow in Chanel, it is still a sow, Case in point: all i see is a bloodsucking sow in fancy clothes.
   #52: can't u see a fat roasted pork in the middle?

Beside the term sow, another expression, pork was also used as a metaphorical curse word to refer to a high ranking Malay government officer. Pork is non-halal meat among Muslims and pig is an animal considered to be dirty by Muslims. Here, the netizen was expressing his disgust or anger by using two pre-modifying negative adjectives "fat" and "roasted" with the taboo word pork as a way of expressing his intense disgust with the officer concerned. There were also instances of using other animal terms which held special physical characteristics. For instance, the curse word shown in #33 above was used with reference to the physical characteristics of a   person who was intensely disliked and he/she was compared to a hippopotamus, a fat animal. By the word hippopotamus, the writer or netizen was clearly making a reference to the size or shape of the person who was being referred to. No one likes being labelled as a hippopotamus because even a picture of the animal can create negative images such as huge, fat, clumsy and even ugly. The netizen in this instance was attempting to humiliate the person being referred to.

3.2.3 Borrowings

Borrowed words had occurred 19 out of 93 times (20.43%). Zhiwei [31] argues that multicultural exchanges can result in the appearance of borrowed words especially when the borrowed words are used in order to conceal the original meaning of a curse word. Examples from the data follow:

   #55: WhatTheAhAh
   #91: mother of tiang (lampost) (._.)
   #94: I also do hellsflush.but This is what they call stupid ass

In example #55, the netizen borrowed the structure what the fuck structure and substituted the original curse word 'fuck' by replacing it with WhattheAhAh. In example #91, the netizen used the English phrase mother of next to a Malay word tiang (post/pole) as a way to insult the appearance of a person. In the last example, hellsflush was used as a compound curse word and it was created by borrowing two words from English: 'hell' which was also deemed as impolite and combined it with 'flush'.

3.2.4 Symbols

There were 8 (8.6%) instances of using symbols for creating curse words. The following are some of the examples of creative curse phrases using symbols.

   #32: ????? WTxxxx???
   #46: s2pid ppl blocking wedding
   #63: what the #u#k is happening in Malaysia

In example #32, the phrase what the is used but the curse word was substituted with first initials of the word W and T followed by the symbols xxxx. In the second example, the personal insult stupid was replaced by the first letter of the word, 's' and it was then continued with the symbol '2' which created the required sound and the same word was completed with 'pid'. In the other example, the word fuck as commonly used in the phrase what the fuck was replaced by the symbol # before and after 'u'.

3.2.5 Abbreviations

There were only three instances of the use of abbreviations. In example #9 the original English word fucking was abbreviated cleverly in the form of fking. Another netizen abbreviated the word fuck as fck. (see #29)

#9:   fking cunt
#29: this writer sure high as fck. kena ganja (got drugs) while writing

3.2.6 Innovative Words

Data also reveal that Malaysian netizens were creative in using the name of famous places as cursing expressions and this clearly revealed the emotion they experienced. In example #86, the interlocutor borrowed the name of a famous brand in the beverage industry and creatively substituted the letter "b" with the letter "f" as a way of conveying the emotion felt by him/her when he/she saw the picture of a Starbucks branch floating after heavy rain.

#86: Star fucks
#78: hahahaha...horny siaaaalllll

In example #78, the interlocutor borrowed the premodifying negative adjective horny from English and used the word to intensify sial (unlucky in Malay) to make a personal insult. Other examples of new words include:

#9:   Dafuq. Wasted 7minutes of my time to this utterly nonsense.
#20: Go home Mrs .X. U r drunk.
#54: FAIL!!
#60: Burn!

In the examples provided here, it is noted that Dafuq in example #9 is the internet term for what the fuck. In example #20, Go home you are drunk the user was clearly using the entire sentence as a curse phrase which appears to link the person being referred to as being 'intoxicated', as drinking alcohol is deemed haram (taboo) by Muslims. In example #54, the netizen was trying to curse someone by linking it to 'failure' which was depicted in the word FAIL. In example #60, the netizen used Burn to curse.

3.3 Discussion

The main objective of this study was to examine how Malaysian netizens use English in Facebook for the purpose of cursing. A detailed analysis of the data presented in the data analysis section shows that the curse words used by Malaysian netizens correspond to Yu's [29] categories. The study also notes that the findings are compatible to the available studies on curse words used in social media networks. The similarities and differences are discussed in this section.

It is evident from the data analysed that Malaysian netizens' use of English, in Facebook for cursing purposes, is a manifestation of its local variety. Notably, data highlight that the curse words used and created by Malaysian netizens were loaded with numerous cultural and identity related features. For instance, curse words exemplified by Lady gaga (syaitan), fat roasted pork, mother of tiang (._.), fck.. kena ganja and horny siaaaalllll are instances that typify a Malaysian context since contextually, only bilinguals or multilinguals would code switch even in their cursing and here Malay words were interjected with English words. Notice also that only typical terms related to Malaysia emerged and in the context of this study expressions like 'fat roasted pork' is a delicacy of Malaysian Chinese but is a taboo word for Malaysian Muslims. The expression sial which means 'cursed' in English is typically used by Malaysians when in

extreme emotion and "mother of tiang" a code switched expression is only possible where the users have access to two languages. These findings may be described as distinct from other versions of world Englishes as the data show that in Malaysia, the formation and usage of curse words on the social media has been influenced by the acculturation process (see [32]) who stated that when people of different cultures and ethnicities live together for a long time, they assimilate each other's cultures including food and attire to make it their own. Examples of curse words in the data illustrate that curse words used by Malaysian netizens seem to be culturally loaded with animal terms such as pig, sow and hippopotamus which can be viewed as insults by certain ethnic and religious groups in Malaysia. In addition, the findings are also in line with the results mentioned by Thelwall [25] and Crystal [26] showing that Malaysians tend to use covert rather than overt forms of speech act. One way of doing this was the netizen's use of familiar words to depict their meanings under the guise of different semantic masks.

Covertness is also noted in the use of words which have similar sounds to the original curse words. These sounds can convey the meaning and intention of the speaker and seem to be the most favored way (24.73%) of creating curse words. Covertness is also seen in the use of more than one language in the use of this speech act and this reflects Malaysia's multilingual speech community. The use of such code mixing as in the example "mother of tiang" is common and was noted in the study on the English language used by Malaysian students [23].

For the purpose of comparison, the usage of curse words between Malaysian netizens and the users of other varieties of English could be made to verify the results shared by Thelwall [25]. He analysed and compared data obtained from American and British netizens. His research shows the increased amount of strong use of swear words while the data from the Malaysian netizens do not show the abundance of overt curse words. In fact, a number of strategies were used in cursing and this includes code mixing which was used to soften the curse terminology.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Yu [29] claims that the nature of the network sites caused netizens to innovate and create new words since the context allows users to break the mental barriers as it provides a stress-free and casual way for users to tease and create humor, and to show their wisdom and creativity. Cursing, as a fascinating social behavior, was studied among bilingual Malaysian netizens who used the English language to curse and express their emotions. Based on the classification of new words prevailing on the social media networks i.e. Facebook proposed by Yu, it was found that among the six categories listed, Malaysian netizens tend to create new curse words from the common categories of harmonic tones of language and metonymy.

Individuals in each culture will use curse words based on their perception of curse words as a result of their up-bringing in that specific culture. Each culture is unique and language used by them is also unique. However, in Malaysia it is clear that due to the widespread multilingualism that prevails in the country creative words emerge as a result of borrowing and code mixing resulting in the marriage of curse words in two different languages to create a new curse word. For instance, the insult, Lady Gaga may be used by others in monolingual societies but the marriage of the term with the Malay term Syaitan is an innovative strategy to create curse words. Apart from their creativity the data also revealed that Malaysian netizens tend to be more diplomatic and covert in their use of curse words by using a range of strategies. Those strategies include the use of borrowing and code switching, the use of familiar words to depict their meanings under the guise of different semantic masks and the creation of words based on

peculiarities in characteristics and appearance rather than overt forms of this speech act. The findings of this research, henceforth, indicate that Malaysian English (ME) in this regard, is not on any of Baskaran's [2] lectal variation level. The variety uncovered through the medium of Facebook may imply that it is a variety of its own with instances showing more code switching being embedded into the language use.

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