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## **Identities Reflected in the Discourses of Male Speakers - A Malaysian Chinese Perspective**

**Kuang Ching Hei, Ph.D. & Maya Khemlani David, Ph.D.**

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses the spoken discourses of five male speakers whose ages ranged from 6 years to 56 years of age. Using Discourse Analysis the study hopes to unravel the identities of the male speakers as identified in their spoken discourses whether among themselves, with friends, close relatives or with their parents. The findings disclose that the younger male speakers use very direct modes of speaking which illustrates that today's young people are less aware of what politeness or attending to face is about. This can cause misunderstanding across generations. On the other hand, the older speaker's attempts to conform to the younger speakers' ways may not meet with success.

## **Introduction**

A difference in opinion or a miscommunication in understanding can create conflicts and problems. While national or international conflicts are the result of the leaders not being able to see eye to eye over specific issues, it is also true that conflicts arise due to what is sensed as the struggle for power. People want power and their quest for power is seen in their use of language. While language helps in conveying messages, it must be understood that the interpretation of a message is performed through the 'ears' of the hearer who would interpret the message through his own cultural experiences. Communication is effective if interlocutors are able to understand the intended message. However, should one party fail to decipher the message appropriately or as intended by the other party, the entire communication process would be ineffective particularly when it creates misunderstanding. Conflicts, no matter how small, can lead to problems ranging from depression, abuse, violence to that of death.

## **Aim of the Study**

This paper aims to illustrate that the participants involved in this particular study are not only of two different generations who differ in their values but also in the way they perceive themselves. This study focuses on the younger generation of Malaysian Chinese males who do not appear to conform to their parents' values which advocate respect and deference to the elders. Instead, they display more distinctive features of individuality. At the same time the older generation appears to be reaching out to meet the younger generation halfway as this study demonstrates.

## **Background of Study**

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This study focuses on 5 male participants. They are all Male Chinese who reside in the urban area of the Klang Valley, Selangor, Malaysia. Their ages range from the oldest, WK, being 56 who is in the legal profession, SH (22) who is a university student, PH (16) who is a secondary Chinese school student, LH (7) and M (6) who are both in their first year of school. They are related as (WK) is the father and whilst the others are his sons and (M) is his nephew.

## **Methodology**

Participants were observed as they were engrossed in their interactions. Spontaneous data was then recorded into a journal. Utterances are transcribed with normal roman alphabets. Where there are pauses and repetitions these are indicated. Non-English utterances are provided with translations in parentheses ( ).

## **Identity**

The term *identity* generally means “one’s distinctiveness” but identity can be individual or communal or national. In other words, one may look at it as belonging to an individual person because of his peculiarities or one may associate those peculiarities with his culture and community, or the region where he comes from as well as his country. Stereotyped descriptions have been derived due to this association. However, while stereotyping is one general way of labelling an individual’s identity, there are other ways a person’s identity may evolve.

Identities can be constructed through a number of ways. For instance, a person’s identity may be associated with his physical looks, his choice of clothes, his behaviour, his speech styles, his habits, his professional status as well as other factors. A person’s identity is often revealed and perceived by others based on his spoken discourses. A person’s spoken data encompasses not only the language he uses to communicate with others but also the variety of language or dialect he uses, the particular choice of words, the peculiar accents, the kind of voices, the pace of talk, and also the kind of non-verbals employed. Studies have shown that Italians use more body gestures while Japanese appreciate moments of silence in between talk.

In the context of this paper, ‘identity’ is a term used to describe a speaker’s personality based on talk. Thus identity refers to whether or not the speaker is direct, and so perceived to be rude, sarcastic and impolite. On the other hand it may also refer to whether or not the speaker is indirect, thus perceived to be polite and respectful.

## **Man-Woman Talk**

Literature suggests that there are differences in man and women talk. Holmes (1992) looks at work place talk and shows that when men talk they often display ‘manliness’ through lots of interruptions, swear words and condescending terms when speaking to women whereas the women respondents tend to maintain their feminine ways by agreeing more than the men, giving suggestions rather than dominating and interrupting less often. Such sexual identity is socially and linguistically constructed. Of course, no one maintains the same identity for all the people

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they meet in their lives. We maintain a range of identities depending on who we are talking to where and why. Fairclough (1992) uses the term *ethos* (rather than *identity*) as a general term for a person's identity as conceived and constructed in the context of world view and social practices. Therefore, a person may be positioned in a discourse in a variety of dimensions so that a sense of multiplicity and fluidity in the identities constructed result.

## **Power and Talk**

From studies of dyads between two people with one in authority, it has been shown that the latter often tends to display more directives (see David and Kuang 1999). Gibbons (2007) also demonstrates how police in Australia manipulate their words to make a person seem guilty. Likewise, in another court room event, an aboriginal boy was made to appear as the culprit of a crime as he was made to look silly and this was also manipulated by the police who were interrogating him (Eades ...).

Even in the talk of children, Olson (1978) says that children who talk to their parents use request forms because they know that they are talking to the 'higher authority' but when they talk to those below them, they make demands such as a child 'ordering an Indonesian maid to make her milk' (see Kuang, David and Don 2006). Olson also says that when they talk to their peers like their school friends, the same children will converge to using equal terms. However, in a recent paper Kuang (2007) shows that despite being parents and in authority, Malaysian Chinese children were seen to assume the role of the one in power while talking to their parents.

## **Hierarchy in Chinese Family**

Hierarchy in the Chinese family is a system where ranks are given priorities instead of age. Thus, a person may be young but he/she is addressed by the appropriate kinship terms that not only serve as his 'name' but will also highlight his position within the family system.

Lee (2002) discusses the various maternal and paternal kinship terms employed by Chinese families to differentiate the family line and status. He states that it is impossible for Chinese elders to be addressed by their juniors in any other way but through such kinship terms.

Kuang (2007) explains that this practice is important in the Malaysian Chinese context for not doing so intrudes into the violation of the family system and hierarchy. Consequently, such behaviour would be perceived as rude and may be seen as a cause of poor upbringing. Chinese family members both in mainland China (see Huang and Jia, 2000, Cao, 2006) and Malaysia (see Kuang, 2009) not only address relatives but also outsiders with these kinship terms. Like address forms, kinship terms, when used on others, depending on age and gender, are seen as acts indicating good upbringing, politeness and respect.

In the context of communication, Giles and Smith (1979) have shown in the accommodation theory how speakers conform to their personal needs of seeking solidarity or distance when they speak in certain ways. At other times, speakers are also influenced by how others around them

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speak. Speakers also speak in a particular way due to the psychological state of mind they are in at the time of interacting. This therefore implies that many factors can affect the speech and utterances of speakers. Joseph (2004:13) explains that language and identity are ultimately inseparable for it is through language that the speaker (who assumes the role) accomplishes his needs at the time of speaking.

### **Framework for Analysis**

This study uses discourse analysis to determine how male speakers project their various identities through talk. The use of appropriate kinship terms on respective elders by younger male speakers is seen as an indicator of respect while its absence would demonstrate insolence and is perceived as being individualistic and bold. While it is rude to be direct, indirectness is perceived as being less upfront, and as being polite. It is suggested that as part of the Chinese culture of avoiding a confrontation, indirectness illustrates a speaker's cultural value. In addition, the specific use of workplace jargon is indicative of power which may be seen as illustrating one 'upmanship' or arrogance.

The analysis is viewed from two perspectives so as to see how power and identities emerge in spoken discourse. First it will focus on spoken discourses of older to younger speakers and then younger to older speakers.

### **A. Younger Speakers to Older Speakers**

In Chinese culture when younger speakers talk to older speakers, they should assume their role as one with less power. They would thus be expected to display more signs of respect in their speech with their elders as it is a part of the Asian culture. However, data indicates that this does not always occur.

#### **1. Sarcasm Displaying Insolence**

Sarcasm comes into play when one speaker is trying to bring down the other person but in an indirect manner which is manipulated by the careful use of words. Sarcasm, choice of words and tone may be highlighted to emphasize a point.

Extract 1: SH is reprimanded by his mother for being rude to his younger brother at a restaurant. He is not happy.

SH to his mother:	<i>Oh, gua beh kee liau....your favourite son, hoh?</i> (Oh, I have forgotten...your favourite son, right?) <i>Pai seh, pai seh, pai seh!</i> (My apologies ! My apologies!)
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Extract 1 shows that the respect for his mother is lost, probably because SH has assumed the role of an individualist who wants to have his say. In fact data shows that the younger speaker, SH lost no time in being sarcastic with his mother immediately after his mother's reprimand. Instead of just saying sorry, the son SH pursues the matter by first claiming 'to have forgotten that the

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mother has a favourite' and following that, he makes the accusation, 'your favourite son, isn't it?'. This appears to imply that his mother has a favourite son.

Extract 2: PH has just come home from school. He is joking with his mother who has not got up to open the door for him. When PH comes in, he says:

PH	<i>Wah, wor hwei lai ni yeh pu yoong kai mern hor?</i> (Wah, I am back already you don't need to open the door for me?)
----	--

In this extract, PH who has just arrived home talks through a closed door as if he is the mother's equal. This is sensed by his initial utterance of being sarcastic articulated through the surprise exclamation of [wah]. This was meant to alert his mother that he was already home. Next, PH posed an accusative question, [I am back already you don't need to open the door for me?] which was meant for a particular purpose.

In addition to being sarcastic, the discourse of younger speakers may also take on the form of directives.

## 2. Directives Personifying Instructions

Directives are instructions given by the one holding the power to the one who is subordinate (Kuang 2007). Directives are used by employers to employees and by parents to children to get something done. The extract presented here shows some aspect of this kind of directive. In Asian culture, this is not very well accepted as it signifies rudeness.

Extract 3: A son (SH-22) admonishing his father indirectly when he was not able to understand the directions given by his father.

SH to WK:	<i>Tau liau <u>Jaya</u>, chai kern wor Chiang!</i> (Tell me only when we reach Jaya!.) <i>Sian chai</i> which floor, which floor <i>wor tou pu toong</i> . (You tell me which floor now, is of no use, I don't know where it is yet!)
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Extract 3 illustrates a lack of respect shown by the son, SH to his father. This is evidenced in two ways. First there is an absence of kinship term which should have been used by the son when talking to his father in order to illustrate the family hierarchy as well as his cultural upbringing. Further, instead of gently telling his father how confused he is by the directions given by the latter, SH assumes the role of an equal, by issuing a directive, {tell me only when we reach Jaya!) which is interpreted as [don't tell me now!].

Further complaints of [you tell me which floor now is of no use...] clearly provides reasons to support his directive. Perhaps SH realised his rudeness and is now trying to compensate for it with a reason. Thus we see the attempt to be rude and direct but subsequently to also repair the damage so as to pre-empt a potential conflict which could have arisen due to his directness.

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Extract 4: LH (7) usually needs a bottle of Milo before he retires to bed. He is asking for this. PH (16) is downstairs and LH wants him to prepare the drink for him.

LH to PH	<i>Pau nen-nen. Wore r liao!</i> (Make milk for me. I am hungry!)
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In Extract 4 a directive is given by the younger brother to the older brother. The younger speaker has assumed the role of the one in authority, giving directives to the older brother, PH. It is highly possible that LH assumed his role as the youngest in the family and in doing so, he was expecting certain privileges which would not get him into trouble even if he was making a demand and issuing a directive.

### 3. Respect Displayed by the Use of Kinship Terms

It is an Asian value to show respect to people who are older by using kinship terms. Such address forms can be formal or informal. Formal would focus on specific terms advocated by Chinese culture and informal may take on the neutral terms of [aunty or uncle] for both females and males respectively. Even if there is no blood relationship, Malaysian children are expected to use terms of address.

Extract 5: At a Chinese restaurant where the waitress is an Indonesian

PH	<i>Kak, nasi satu. *</i> (Elder sister, one rice, please.) * Malay
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Extract 6: At a Chinese stall where the waitress is a middle aged Chinese woman.

SH	<i>Aunty, pei ngoh luong kor suit char.</i> (Aunty, give me two glasses of ice tea.)
----	---

In both Extracts 5 and 6, PH and SH use considerably more polite terms to address two working females, who are not related but in this sense, people on the lower socio-economic scale. In calling them [kak] and [aunty], the younger male speakers demonstrate their cultural upbringing by showing respect to the female workers.

Extract 7: At a Chinese restaurant where the waiters are Sabahans

PH	Excuse me, ice please.
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In this sample, PH was also considered polite when he attempted to catch the attention of the male Sabahans through 'excuse me' and 'please'.

Extract 8: At a Chinese restaurant with Myanmar waiters.

SH	Eh brother, water melon big ah (shows hand signals), more ice, less sugar, <i>hah!</i>
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Likewise, SH also demonstrated respect to the Myanmar waiter in Extract 8. SH uses the trendy term, [brother] which is an acceptable term used by youth today.

## Peer Talk

In this study, peer talk refers to the situation where the speakers are of the same generation and almost in the same age group.

Extract 9: Husband calls the wife.

Wife:	<i>Eh, lou-koong, tong kim balu kah call gua niah ah?</i> (Only now are you calling me?)
WK:	<i>Tong kim balu kah uu eng tam poh niah.</i> (Only now I am free a little bit.) <i>Gua balu siaau teik lu ma chai uu viva..</i> (I just remembered you have your viva tomorrow.) <i>Hor lu tam puk confidence....</i> (To give you some confidence...) <i>Kah teng boh.. chiew chun....</i> (If not...afterwards, you get nervous...)
Wife:	Hmmm (giggles)
	<i>Gua eh bor maina eh sai chun...</i> (My wife cannot be nervous...) <i>Chun tou mm see gua bor lia loh!</i> (Nervous is not my wife!)

Where the husband called the wife to provide moral support, we see the husband's attempt to display some kind of patronizing behaviour which appears to suggest that he expects his wife to be like him i.e. never nervous. It is clear that he was just trying to make his wife less jittery although on the surface, the husband's words appear to be condescending.

Extract 10: At eating stall.

Wife to husband:	<i>Lou koong, you didn't order the moi ah?</i> (Honey, have you ordered the porridge?)
WK to wife:	<i>I asked for the prawn moi already lah!</i> (I have ordered the prawn porridge!)

Here, the husband displays an emphatic display of irritation, signifying the displeasure of the one who is in authority (ordering and paying of food). However, the data does not denote condescending remarks. Thus, it may be assumed that between equals, there is less power struggle as both are on equal grounds.

Extract 11: WK is speaking to his elder sister

WK to sister:	<i>Wei, nei tei mou hwi pin tou hoh?</i> (Heh, are you guys going anywhere?) <i>Yee kor mou, ngoh tei kor lei lah.</i> (If not, we are coming over.)
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In Extract 11 the speaker, WK, did not use an appropriate address form when talking to his elder sister. Instead, he uses the rude address of [*wei*] which indicates solidarity. This extract also shows that WK uses the pronoun term, [*nei tei*] –you all and [*ngoh tei*] [we all] to make references to [you and family] and [me and family]. There is no display of authority or power although some choices of words may appear less respectful.

Extract 12: At the restaurant

WK to waitress:	Mai tan! (Bill please.) <i>Siew cheh, uumm kois, ha, pau siong lei.</i> (Miss, please wrap this!)
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The data indicates that when speaking to a female, the male speakers tend to use more polite terms. In Extract 12, WK uses the formal term [*siew cheh*] – miss to address the waitress.

Extract 13: M (6) and LH (7) are both cousins. M is playing with some toys.

M to LH:	<i>Lihoong, ni wan pieh terk pokemon ker yee ma?</i> (Lihoong, you play with another <i>pokemon</i> , can or not?)
LH	<i>Pu ker yee wor!</i> (Cannot!)

Likewise, the relationship of the two children of about the same age is also equal the Extract 13 indicates. Notice how diplomatic, the younger speaker, M, is to his cousin, LH. He indirectly wants LH to play with something else when he asks his cousin to play with another game set. LH understands the question literally and rejects the option by saying [cannot].

Extract 14: At M's (6) house.

M to LH:	<i>Lihoong, ni yau kan, ni yau kan, hern koong pu terk sze ma?</i> (Lihoong, do you want, do you want, to watch a very frightening movie or not?)
LH:	<i>Cher mok yang terk sze?</i> (What kind of movie?)
M:	<i>Ker yee chou, chou chu lai terk...</i> (it can, it can, (referring to ghost) come out...)

Extract 14 also illustrates how diplomatic and gentle the speaker, M is to LH. Between young children, it would seem that diplomacy can be practiced and here without rejecting, the other speaker, LH asks, what kind of movie, thus indirectly agreeing to M's request. Thus, we see that spoken discourse between young children may be one that is indirect and yet diplomatic.

Extract 15: At grandma's home.

GM to LH:	<i>Hau chi ah, Lihoong?</i> (Good, Lihoong?)
LH:	Hmmm. (Yes.)
M:	<i>Pu ker yee chi liau!</i> (Cannot eat any more!)

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In this extract M refuses to let LH eat any more of whatever LH is enjoying probably because he likes the same food and is afraid that LH may eat it all. M's refusal is literal but it appears to be polite and indirect because he had not used the pronoun [*ni*] or [you] literally. Thus we can see that the young male speakers' utterances are less direct and are face-saving.

## B. Older Speakers to Younger Speakers

The analysis will first discuss the utterances of older speakers to younger speakers first. Due to the fact that the ethnic background of the participants are Malaysian Chinese, it is hypothesised that the Asian values of showing respect to elders when speaking is being practised by the participants. It is also hypothesised that in spoken discourses, parents and older speakers may wield more authority and thus power over the younger speakers. There should therefore be more use of directives.

### 1. Command- Issuing Power and Authority

A command is a directive displaying power. It is usually given by one in authority to one who is a subordinate. However, there is evidence to show that younger people can also issue directives at older interlocutors in order that their needs are met.

Extract 16: The mother had overheard the way her son (SH-22) talked to the younger brother. She did not like it but she showed her displeasure and irritation at SH by just staring at him. The son (SH) does not feel comfortable and he says:

SH to mother	Don't give me the <i>pandangan maut</i> * hah! (Don't give me that killing stare!)  * Malay
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In Extract 16 the younger speaker takes on the role of a peer. This utterance was meant to divert his mother's attention but in doing so, he irked her even. SH appears to be enlarging his role or position to that of his mother's peer by issuing her a directive.

Extract 17: An older brother (SH-22) is trying to make the life of the waitress serving at a restaurant easy. He is asking his younger brother (PH-15) to eat whatever that is served rather than be choosy.

SH to PH	<i>Na kerk tim sum tou mei yu chee chiao, chi lah!</i> (The tim sum does not have chicken feet, eat (whatever is there) lah!)
PH	<i>Wor pau liau!</i> (I am already full!)

Extract 17 shows a strong display of power exerted by the elder brother who assumes that he has the 'power' to tell his younger brother what to do. Although SH's identity was not clearly emphasised at the initial point of utterance, [*na kerk tim sum to mei yu liau...*], we see the manifestation of power shown by SH through the emphatic use of [*chi lah!*] depicting his irritation. Probably sensing the 'power', the younger brother, PH, edges out of this situation by not refuting but instead by claiming that he is already full [*wor pau liau!*]. In this utterance there

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is a clear display of power to assert and demand but there is also the display of withdrawal when PH subtly eases out of the conversation.

Extract 18: An older brother (PH-16) is reprimanding the younger brothers (M-6) who is playing

PH to M	<i>Chor mok cher yang? Si chi lai!</i> (Why are you like that? Pick it up!)
---------	--

The older brother, PH displays authority suggesting that he has more power than the younger brother and he does this by issuing a strong directive which appears as an accusative and this is followed by a command to the younger brother, M to do what he says.

Extract 19: Older brother (PH) is watching TV and M is blocking his view because he is standing in front of the TV.

PH:	<i>Chou kai, M!</i> (Get away, M!)
PH:	<i>CHOU KAI!</i> (Shouting) (Get away!) <i>Pu yau chuan siang ching lai!</i> (Don't turn (toy) this way!)

Like the previous extract, in Extract 19 too the older brother (PH) assumes the role of authority. First, he commands the younger boy to 'get away', and then he raises his voice shouting [*CHOU KAI*] when the younger boy did not follow his earlier directive. Subsequent to that he issues another directive to the younger speaker. This shows PH manifesting an individualistic identity.

Apart from an older speaker assuming the role of one in power other data present a nicer side of older speakers.

## 2. Appeals Illustrating Care and Affection from Older to Younger Speakers

One of the values practised by many Asians including many Malaysian Chinese is the expectation of the family for older siblings to 'care for' and 'show affection' towards younger siblings. Stories and even movies of Asian culture depict this very often. Although younger siblings or younger children are not expected to 'care for' and 'look after' their older siblings, they are encouraged to 'respect' their elders by agreeing or following the latter's advice. In Extract 20 we see manifestations of this.

Extract 20: An elder brother (SH-22) is appealing to the kindness of a younger brother (PH-16) to help him finish some food which he is unable to consume and does not want to go to waste. However, it was LH, the 6 year old who came to his aid out of love and affection.

SH to PH	<i>Pei hoong, chi cher kerk (tim sum) ee ker, please.</i> (Pei Hoong, help me eat this tim sum please.)
LH to SH:	<i>Wor pang ni!</i> (I will help you!)

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Extract 20 shows that it is not just the elder brothers who should care and ‘show affection’ for younger siblings. Even younger brothers can demonstrate this love where when SH appealed to PH, it was LH who came to the rescue and this suggests that the values imparted by Chinese culture have been acquired by the younger sibling, LH. This illustrates a sociocultural identity (see Asmah Haji Omar, 2003).

Extract 21: LH has complained to his father (WK-56) that his older brother (PH-16) is poking him (LH) on the stomach and hitting his head. The father then indicates that he would punish PH. However, when LH (7) hears this, he appeals to his father.

WK to LH	<i>Okay, tern ta hwei lai ching wan, wor chiew soot ta ta-ta lik!</i> (Okay, when he returns tonight, I will cane him real hard!)
LH:	<i>Pu young soot ta lah, kern ta Chiang hao-hao chiew ker yee liau.</i> (No need to cane him, just talk to him will do.)
WK:	<i>Ta chi fuk ni ma....</i> (But he is bullying you...)
LH	<i>Sze lah, ker sze, ta sze wor terk er ker wor...</i> (Yes lah, but he is my second brother....)

It appears that although LH complained about his brother to his father, WK when the sentence was pronounced on the culprit, PH who was absent, LH was not able to accept the judgment and wanted to avert the drastic decision taken by the higher authority. To act on this, LH, the original complainant, now takes on the role of the defender where he attempts to mitigate for the culprit, PH. When the higher authority insists, LH argues by making a claim that PH is his second brother, flesh and blood.

### 3. Jokes Attempting to Demonstrate Equality

Humour is good when talking to strangers because laughter helps to dissipate tension. When used appropriately, jokes can help to minimise imminent conflicts and avert emerging tension. In the data provided below, such attempts by the father to joke with his sons so as to be ‘one of them’ did not work out because instead of accepting this role and identity of the father, the children were rather annoyed.

Extract 22: The males were staring at some ‘trendy and fashionable’ customers at the restaurant. PH (16) noticed some of them and was talking about it with his brother (SH-22) and the father, (WK-56) overheard. He tried to assume the role of a peer but without success.

WK to PH:	<i>Chieh sau ee kerk ‘leng-loi’ kei ni yau pu yau?</i> (Introduce you to a girl, want or not?)
PH:	<i>Pu yau kai wan siao lah, pa !</i> (Don’t joke lah, dad!.)

Extract 22 shows the father’s attempt to be on par with his son, PH. When they were appreciating female forms, the father thought he would act like his son’s friend by joking about ‘introducing him to a girl’ and this clearly backfired because the son, PH did not expect this from his father. His response shows annoyance probably because he expected his father to maintain a

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sense of ‘respect’ and dignity.’ While older speakers are often depicted as the one in power it appears that in some instances a parent who wants to reach out to his children so as to be accepted into their circle sometimes confuses them when they try to demonstrate equality.

Extract 23: The son is driving, heading for an Indian restaurant called ‘Lotus’ for breakfast. It turned out that the restaurant is closed and the son (SH-22) was disappointed. LH (7) responded to WK’s attempt of a joke.

SH to WK:	<i>Lotus</i> – closed lah!
WK:	If lotus is closed, we go <i>Tolus</i> !
LH:	<i>Tolus</i> ? Na li yeu <i>Tolus</i> !? { <i>Tolus</i> ? Where got <i>Tolus</i> ?}

Similarly, Extract 23 illustrates the father’s (WK) attempt to diffuse a frustrating situation where the son’s expectation was frustrated as the restaurant they had planned to have a meal was closed. The father took on the role of his son’s peer and tried to make a joke of the situation by suggesting dining at a non-existing restaurant. This was perceived as a joke by the son, SH, and appeared to confuse the younger son, LH who asked [where got *Tolus*?]. This shows that the father’s attempt to appear like a peer or an equal to his children did not work and this is attributed to the possibility that his sons expected him to maintain a position of power and dignity as is typical in most Asian families.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In investigating the way language is used in family interactions we also see the emergence of specific identities of the speakers concerned. This research provides evidence of the spoken utterances of five Malaysian male speakers using English, Mandarin, Hokkien and Cantonese. The analysis shows that the identities of the speakers were revealed through their utterances and where Asian cultural values were expected, they were seen to be existing but not to the extent expected.

Cultural values emerge in spoken discourse. At times the older speaker’s attempt to conform to the level of the younger speaker did not achieve its intention for it only served to distract and confuse the younger people and this has been attributed to the fact that the younger speakers were not used to the idea that their ‘respected’ father could be their ‘friend’. Likewise, where the younger speakers appeared to be at par with their elders, it tends to lead to conflict because of two reasons. One was the expectation of social cultural norms identified in Asian lifestyles while the other is the possibility of younger speakers acquiring individualism as a result of exposure and change in society. Additionally, there is also evidence to show that younger speakers may be individualistic to some point but they may occasionally take on the role of advisors to their elders in their attempt to dissipate any conflicts which they sense arising.

Discourse between peers indicates that there was less indication of power and struggle in interactions. Younger speakers tended to be generally indirect and polite. The analysis also seems to point to the tendency of young people assuming ‘powerful roles’ and thus displaying an

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acquired identity which is not expected in Chinese families as Chinese families have often been described as being more collective than individualistic.

This research only focuses on the spoken discourses of 5 male speakers of Malaysian Chinese background. It has shown that power is emphasised when an older brother attempts to take control of a situation to suit his needs. However, it may not always be understood well by the younger participants. There is no show of power between father and sons nor is there power manifestation between spouses and siblings in the same age group (50 and above).

We argue that it is important to realise that one's use of language with specific participants can reveal the specific roles played by these participants and thus their identities are disclosed. We often assume that power is constantly being yielded by the one in power over the one not in power and that the nature of the discourse will indicate this. However, this study shows that such a phenomenon is not always the case and children have a tendency to be rude and disrespectful too but it is restricted to family members. However, the data shows that they are respectful to outsiders who may be lower in rank and in terms of power.

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