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Levels of Politeness in Malaysian Parliamentary Discourse

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Introduction

In any setting and situation where communication takes place, it is important that interlocutors maintain decorum and politeness to avoid unpleasantness and confrontation. This is particularly significant in Asian settings where politeness and indirectness is deemed important to save “face”. However does the same practice apply to language use in formal domains like the august house of Parliament, the highest legislative branch of the government? This paper addresses the politeness strategies utilized in parliamentary debates in Malaysia.

The issue here is not merely the identification of politeness or impoliteness but ascertaining whether or not the permeating cultural features associated with politeness is more telling of the strategies used by Malaysian Parliamentarians than the bipartisan nature of the political divides in the country. The discourse between two groups, the opposition, in this case the Democratic Action Party (hereafter DAP) and the ruling government, comprising members of the *Barisan Nasional* (BN) or National Front, and the use of politeness or lack of politeness between these parties is the focus of this study. Prior to that, some background on the Malaysian Parliament is necessary.

The Malaysian Parliament

The Malaysian Parliament consists of the King, the Senate (*Dewan Negara*) and the House of Representatives (HOR or otherwise known as the *Dewan Rakyat*). The HOR is chaired by the Speaker, who has authority over HOR members. Members of the HOR are elected every five years or earlier if the King dissolves Parliament before the end of the 5-year period. Proposed legislative acts must pass through the HOR before proceeding to the upper house of the Senate thereafter, passing the bill and having it approved by the King (Wikipedia, 2006). To be a member of the HOR, individuals must compete in open state elections during the general elections. They must be at least 21 years of age and must not be:

- cognitively impaired;

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9 : 9 September 2009

Maya Khemlani David, Subramaniam Govindasamy and Mohana Nambiar
Levels of Politeness in Malaysian Parliamentary Discourse

- bankrupt;
- guilty of crime in any Federal court and imprisoned not more than 1 year or fined not more than RM2,000 and had not received pardon;
- one who has failed to submit statement of expenditure for Parliament in a given time (33 days) after taking part in the elections; and
- one who has received foreign nationality voluntarily or made a pledge to a foreign country.

(Abas, 1984: 32-33)

The Standing Orders – Parliament Procedures

The HOR developed their own procedures through Standing Orders (otherwise known as *Peraturan Mesyuarat*) which use the United Kingdom Parliament's (the Westminster system) procedures as reference (Abdullah, 1969). Regarding norms of etiquette in debate sessions, the Standing Orders (1986) mention some of the protocols that have to be adhered to during debates (Appendix 1).

Linguistically, these Standing Orders serve to function as face savers (Goffman, 1967; Brown and Levinson, 1987) and in the case of "Time and Manner of Speaking" and "interruptions" (Appendix 1), the Standing Order serves to manage discourse between floor-competing interlocutors, as well as maintain respect and integrity of the Parliament and its members. Should these Standing Orders be violated, 'guilty' members of HOR can face repercussions, as stated in the Standing Orders (Appendix 2).

The Speaker has the prerogative to punish a member who violates the Standing Orders. According to the practices of Parliamentary debates, if the Speaker were to name a member (rather than use his/her Honorary title), it indicates that the member is stripped of his/her membership in the House (Abdullah, 1969: 69). Abdullah (1969) writes:

If a member who is speaking insists on straying from the subject matter under discussion or continually repeating what has already been said by him or other members in the course of the debate, the Speaker, after giving him due warning, can order him to discontinue his speech. If a member misbehaves and his conduct appears to the Speaker to be "grossly disorderly", he will be ordered to withdraw from the Chamber for the remainder of the day's sitting and the Sergeant-at-Arms is always there to ensure that the member concerned withdraws accordingly (p. 68).

More severely, the Speaker may impose restrictions on a 'misbehaving' named member from attending the sittings of the House for the rest of the current meeting. However, if the member puts up resistance, he/she is suspended from the services of the House for the remainder of the session (for more information, see Abdullah, 1967).

The Purpose of This Article

Notwithstanding the level of censure imposed on the members during parliamentary debates, the purpose of this article is to explore the levels of politeness actually practised by the members of the highest legislative body in the country and to also examine if there is some intention on the part of the members of the “ingroup” to impose their views on those from the “outgroup”.

The Ruling Government

The ruling government, a coalition (BN) comprises three main ethnic-based political groups - the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO); the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) as well as the non-communal parties such as the Gerakan and the People’s Progressive Party and parties representing other groups. Ideologies of the BN reveal that the establishment of the group is to counteract the opposition groups¹, to remind the people of the struggle for independence and the need to maintain harmony and political stability and to create a strong majority group².

BN is extremely committed to strategies of social engineering so that the Malays and other indigenous people of the country achieve a measure of wealth of the country (David and Govindasamy, 2005). The series of national policies to help upgrade this group of people is drawn in the National Economic Policy (NEP). The resulting affirmative action has been largely responsible for placing the Malays and the indigenous groups, collectively called the *bumiputera* (sons of the soil), in an enviable position in education, finance, police, defence and civil service sectors. Such great strides were made possible by BN’s overwhelming control of both the legislative and senate assemblies. In fact, after the 2004 elections, BN obtained 91% of the seats in the Malaysian Parliament, enabling it to enact and legislate laws favouring the majority group.

Although, there are a few opposition parties in Malaysia, their numerical strength in the Parliament has been decimated, particularly after the 2004 elections. The main opposition parties are the Democratic Action Party (DAP), the Pan Islamic Party (PAS) and Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of Parliamentary seats among political parties (Year: 2005)*

Parties	Role	N	%
Barisan Nasional (BN)	Ruling party	198	91.2
Democratic Action Party (DAP)	Opposition	12	5.5
Pan Islamic Party (PAS)		6	2.8
Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR)		-	-

Independent	parties	1	0.5
Total		217	100

*(Based on information from “Sitting positions”, 2008:N6)

The Opposition Parties

Among the opposition parties, the DAP secured the most number of representatives in the Lower House. Its manifesto is based on the “commitment to the struggle for a free, democratic socialist Malaysian Malaysia, based on the principles of human rights, equality, social and economic justice, and founded on the institution of parliamentary democracy”³, and to challenge and critically evaluate the ruling government’s policy and actions.

The parties often maintain bipartisan views that are in sharp contrast and each party has an elected “Whip” - a representative who ensures that party members maintain compliance with specified norms of discourse. These Whips also make sure that their members are present at any particular sitting of either House to support any item of business, as well as to maintain unity and discipline among party members in Parliament. Speaking in support of the ‘Other’ often results in instant rebuke by colleagues in Parliament and the need to face disciplinary action at the party level.

Data for the Present Study

In order to study the discourse between the ruling government party and the opposition, data was obtained from the Malaysian Parliament website (<http://www.parlimen.gov.my/>). Transcript records, otherwise known as “Official Reports” or the Hansards are maintained by the Clerk of the House of Representatives, who is elected by the King or *Yang Di-Pertuan Agong*. These transcripts of the speeches, questions and answers, motions and bills are in the Malay language. Five sets of transcripts form the data for this study. They have been translated into English and both versions are presented in the findings.

Literature Review

The literature review will cover key concepts, such as “ingroup” vs “outgroup” which will provide the reasons behind group dynamics and conflicts between members of the House of Representatives. Discourse analysis theory that concerns itself with not only the texts but also the context of the discourse, provides a basis for investigating parliamentary discourse; hence both text and context are examined to draw implicatures. The concept of politeness and some of the many theories accruing it are also reviewed.

Political divide: Ingroup vs Outgroup

Generally, the creation of groups results in distinct group identities. These identities are usually opposing polars: i.e. “we” vs. “them” (David and Zuraidah, 2004). The “we” can be classified as an ingroup, and according to Macionis (2001: 169), an ingroup is “a social group commanding a member’s esteem and loyalty,” whilst an outgroup (“them”) is “a social group toward which one feels competition or opposition.”

According to Tajfel (1982) in Macionis (2001: 169-170), members of an ingroup usually have positive views of themselves but hold negative views of the outgroup. Politicians and political groups are known to have used this “we-they” dichotomy to garner support (see David and Zuraidah 2004).

A clear example is the manner in which the U.S. President George W. Bush used the “we-they” pronouns to garner support from the American populace before declaring war on Iraq and Afghanistan. Post September 11, 2001, Bush used words which constructed the social identity, ‘we’ vs. ‘them’ to construct the reality of America being a victim, and the ‘terrorists’ as ‘evil beings’ with ‘barbaric animalistic’ tendencies. Merskin (2004: 169-170) provides the following examples:

“Our very freedom came under attack...America was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world...thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror.”

“Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms...”

“...my administration is determined to find, to get ‘em running, and to haunt [sic] ‘em down, those who did this to America.”

“The terrorists may burrow deeper into caves and other entrenched hiding places.”

We-Them Dichotomy

In most democracies in the world, Parliament is constituted along the “we-them” dichotomy. Malaysia is no exception. In Malaysian parliamentary debates, it is expected that opposing parties would have also built such ingroup and outgroup memberships based on different ideologies and practices. If it exists, it can usually be noted in the use of social distancing markers as well as non-accommodation features in the discourse of both groups.

Beyond examining this dichotomy, the study also explores possible variation within the ingroup itself, in this case the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, as it consists of various ethnically-constructed affiliations, each with its own communal agenda.

Text and Context

Discourse is essentially an intrinsic amalgamation – text and context joined together. Text is all language; context, on the other hand, is the setting that allows the production of a discourse (Cook, 2001). In creating texts, word meaning is the guide that prompts its use and it also provides the direction to constructing textual meaning (or more appropriately, textual message) (Reid, 1991; Tobin, 1990). The maximalist contention is that words are “conduits” or “containers” of meaning and inter-textuality has a minimal role. Discourse theory rejects such “conduit” and “container” metaphors on the basis that word meanings merely provide linguistic clues to the creation of meaning, not the entire message.

If meaning does not totally reside in words, then one has to explore how meaning is constructed. Several linguists believe that it is the readers’ expert knowledge of the inter-discursive and inter-textual reference that helps in reconstructing textual message, that is, the context (Govindasamy 2005, Govindasamy and Khan 2007, Reid 1991, Tobin 1990, Ruhl 1989).

This knowledge is embedded in social norms, and ideological and cultural values inherent in a community. Among these norms and values, the ideological component is mainly responsible for creating ingroups and outgroups.

Since political discourse is much more ideological in nature, it is expected that the level of intentionality or the illocutionary force in accomplishing a communicative purpose (e.g. assertions, promises, warnings) would be higher (Khan and Govindasamy 2006).

Parliamentary Discourse

Parliamentary discourse, a sub-genre of political discourse, promises to be a rich arena for studying the forces of illocution and intentionality. If an ingroup political assemblage, steeped in its own ideological values and cultural norms, has power, it can rely on different kinds of rhetorical and linguistic strategies, particularly politeness and impoliteness strategies, to assert itself.

This will be apparent in the manner this group responds linguistically to the message of the Other. Generally, it is expected that an ingroup member would use expressions that empowers his colleagues but would respond less politely to the others as measure of social distancing and imposition of power.

The study also looks into whether such a strategy is indeed exhibited in Malaysian parliamentary discourse.

Politeness

Because there is always potential for conflict to take place in this setting, interlocutors use various politeness strategies to mitigate conflicts (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

There are three concepts to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) model of politeness: ‘face,’ ‘face-threatening acts’ (FTAs) and ‘politeness strategies.’

The notion of ‘face,’ which has been borrowed from Goffman (1967), refers to “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” (in Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61).

The model is limited to two individuals (or groups): the speaker(s) and the listener(s). Both speaker and addressee(s) are labelled as “model persons” who possess positive and negative face. When people converge their speech to build rapport with their listeners, they choose certain strategies which save their faces, as well as the faces of their listeners. On the other hand, if they would like to distance themselves, or to assert power, they practise face-threatening acts (see David 2006 on threatening faces in parliament). A person in power has the choice of threatening the faces of those not so empowered. In contrast, those without power cannot directly threaten the faces of those with power, without facing serious repercussion.

More recent theorists examining politeness theory have also realised that they have to move away from merely describing the semiotic characteristics of a society to a critical base. Many have reworked earlier tools provided by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Goffman (1967) which viewed politeness as binary sets: positive and negative face; politeness and impoliteness. The table below outlines the developmental nature of the concept of politeness:

Table 2: The emerging complexity of politeness as a communicative behaviour

Research work	Conceptual framework	Levels of politeness		
		Polite		Impolite (FTAs)
Goffman (1967)	Positive and negative face: Enhancement or damage to perceived face	Polite (discernment - centered)		Impolite (FTAs)
Brown and Levinson (1987); O’Driscoll (1996)	Assumed universality of construct of positive and negative face	Polite		Impolite (FTAs)
Janny and Arndt (1993)	Shift from universality to that of	Polite		Impolite (FTAs)

	<u>cultural idiosyncrasies</u>			
Meier (1995)	<u>Appropriateness</u> as a universal feature of politeness	Polite (discernment)		Impolite (FTAs)
Mao (1994)	Discourse behaviour centered on <u>group identity</u>	Homogeneity solidarity & individual autonomy (<i>Lian</i> and <i>Mianzi</i>)		Impolite (FTAs)
Asmah (1996)	<u>Group identity</u> supercedes individual self	Communal solidarity (<i>Air Muka</i>)		Impolite (FTAs)
Culpeper (1996)	To see politeness and impoliteness in <u>context</u>	Polite	Absolute impoliteness (FTAs); and mitigated impoliteness (i.e. repair work done immediately)	
Haverkate (1988)	Categories of politeness	Polite (thanking, apologizing...)	Nonimpolite: neutral (directive and assertive)	Impolite (threatening and insulting)
Kasper (1990)	a. universal FTAs b. some <u>variation across cultures</u>	Politeness: social indexing	Politeness: strategic decisions	Impolite (FTAs)
Lakoff (1989),	Politeness associated with different <u>discourse types</u>	Polite (independent of discourse type)	Non-impolite (related to discourse type)	Rude (related to discourse type)
Hill et al (1986)	Dependent on <u>sociolinguistic system and cultural variation</u>	Politeness (discernment; automatically)	Politeness (volition)	Impoliteness
Watts (1989)	Politic behaviour <u>determined socio-culturally</u>	Politic (expected; norm)	Polite verbal behaviour	Impoliteness
Kallia (2004)	Expectations dependent on <u>context (culture-based)</u>	Politic (expected/ norm)	Polite (not expected) (some message)	Rudeness (communicates some message)

Early theorists (Brown and Levinson 1987; Goffman 1967) conceived politeness/impoliteness as a binary set and as universal features that are used as means to smooth interaction and to avoid FTAs. Janny and Arndt (1993) and Meier (1995), while Language in India www.languageinindia.com

maintaining that politeness is an interaction strategy, argued against applying it as a prescriptive norm across cultures. Mao (1994) and Asmah (1996) added that politeness in non Anglo-Eurocentric cultures is very much a communal perception in addition to individual face. Culpeper (1996) added to the complexity surrounding politeness suggesting that theorists should consider impoliteness as absolute (where much damage is done to the self-esteem of the other) and mitigated when impoliteness is immediately accompanied by repair work (less damage is done to face).

If Culpeper added a certain measure of complexity to impoliteness, Haverkate (1988) felt that politeness itself has to be seen as strategies. He considers communicative acts such as thanking, as polite; assertiveness as being merely not polite (i.e. neutral in terms of politeness), and threatening and insulting as impolite. He can be honoured as the theorist who initiated the threefold dimension as opposed to the twofold of Brown and Levinson (1987). However, his perception of the “not impolite” category needs further discussion and modification.

A Mine Field

While directives and assertiveness in fields such as education and management seems acceptable as neutral in terms of politeness, in the political arena, especially in multiethnic societies, such communicative acts can turn out to be a minefield. A power-vested ingroup member’s assertive suggestion can be a face threatening act to those from the outgroup. In fact, even a condescending act by the former can pose an FTA to the latter!

Politeness with Three Levels

Despite this ambiguity, Haverkate’s threefold dimension was the beginning of more critical assessments that followed. Hill et al (1986), Kasper (1990), Lakoff (1989) and Watts (1989) analysed politeness with three levels of politeness rather than two and furthermore, their theoretical consideration certainly hinged on the fact that politeness is socially-situated. At this stage, politeness study became instituted not just as pragmatics, but established as a field in semiotics. Kallia’s (2004) assertion that there is implicature when a communicative act borders on either “not impolite” or “impolite” firmed up this notion. The message arising from such an act based on the socio-cultural context provides a further dimension for politeness study. It is in this context that the present study has been undertaken.

Politeness in Malay Culture

In Malaysia, a multiracial, multilingual and multicultural country, the dominant ethnic group is Malay and the macroculture of the nation is also Malay (David and Govindasamy 2005). In Malay culture, interdependence and reciprocity are highly valued

and stressed (Khadijah 1993). Politeness is prescribed to express solidarity (Halimah 2002). Any form of disagreement is abhorred (Mahathir 1970, cited in Lim, 2005). Good manners (*adab*), patience (*sabar*) and respect (*hormat*) are extremely important and quick admonishments of *kurang ajar* or not cultured (a very serious social rebuke) follows if one does not adhere to cultural norms (Lim 2005).

Proper decorum and courtesy is so much part of the society that Lim adds that within the society, “the important thing is not the sincerity of action, but the successful concealment of all dissonant aspects of the relationship” (2005:76). If a situation warrants it, a superficial accord is maintained so as not to disturb social harmony. Speaking of the Malay population, Asmah (1995), Jamaliah (2002) and Geertz (1961) says that indirectness is appreciated and the art of social finesse is in not making the final point of what one is going to say. Bluntness, if any intended, is averted - this brings relief to all concerned.

The Eurocentric view of indirectness cannot be fairly applied to that in the Southeast Asian societies. Indirectness is considered hypocritical and dishonest. Qualities that are desirable in the West include directness and honesty. Malays prefer not to tell the truth if the truth can hurt or is harsh (Jamaliah 2002). In the Malay eye, rapport is not achieved when harsh truth is revealed; it merely leads to confrontation. In the region, indirectness is actually a desirable form of communication and, as a strategy, it helps fathom “the interest of the interlocutor before talking more openly about an issue. In case a meeting of the mind does not occur between the two, further conversation and embarrassment can be avoided by tapering off the conversation” (Govindasamy and Nambiar 2006). Face-threats can be averted!

Because Malay society had an established feudal setup for many centuries before egalitarian thoughts reached its shores, remnants of feudalism – people’s strong faith and dependence on the aristocracy and the nobility of its leadership and actions as well as maintenance of the social order – are still visible features. Titled people and leaders are held in very high esteem by the commoners. The former’s face is seldom threatened.

In crosscultural interaction, Lim (2005) says that to maintain social harmony, a Malay is seldom frank with members of another community; so his verbal behaviour cannot be taken at face value. His frankness is more apparent with members whose loyalty can be counted on absolutely and he “can rely absolutely only on his own people” (Lim 2005:72). However, Zainul Ariffin (2008:18) says when people have no recourse to what is happening around them, especially if they feel that the interlocutor is not listening or listening to someone else, people “have vengeance in their mind and a desire to punish someone.” Hence, a Malay can be confrontational if he perceives a threat to his identity or the identity of his community (Asmah 1996).

Data Analyses and Findings

The source of data is mainly from Hansards and recorded transcripts of parliamentary discourses. The first four sets are from the Hansards for the eleventh Parliament Session (2005) covering 545 pages of texts. The second set is from the transcript that was recorded on June 21, 2005 and contains 42,636 words (131 pages). The details are summarised in Table 3:

Table 3: Distribution of politeness (non-confrontational) and impolite (confrontational) moves in Malaysian parliamentary discourse

Parliamentary session	Source of data	Date	Printed pages (n)	Turn takings	
				Non-confrontational discourse (n)	Confrontational discourse (n)
11 th Parliament; Second session	Hansards	22-3-2005	141	486	2
		23-3-2005	130	271	0
		24-3-2005	123	269	1
		28-3-2005	151	471	0
	Hansards + transcripts of tape recording	21-6-2005	131	492	63
Total (percentage)			676	1989 (96.8%)	66 (3.2%)

An enormous number of turn-takings form the data for this study. All in all, the researchers pored through 676 pages of transcripts to trace incidents of politeness, not impoliteness and impoliteness. It dawned on us that after reviewing all the 1989 moves (turn takings) for the days mentioned in Table 4, there were instances of polite and impolite moves. But there were hardly any cases of ‘not impolite’ moves as described by Haverkate (1988).

The incidence of politeness was overwhelming (96.8%) as most of the spoken texts were information-related and even the questioning slots were marked by polite questions with little critical follow up. Light-hearted interjections that drew laughter from all the representatives were plentiful but none of them were in any way offensive or face threatening and were therefore not qualified to be considered ‘not impolite’ and certainly not as impolite. There were examples of content that could have been construed as belittling the government as well as members of the ingroup but the manner of saying it – with courtesy – removes the face threat it poses.

Politeness and Irony

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

9 : 9 September 2009

Maya Khemlani David, Subramaniam Govindasamy and Mohana Nambiar
Levels of Politeness in Malaysian Parliamentary Discourse

In the following interaction, the Parliament Member from Jasin gives detailed information about a brand new government hospital that was opened in March 2005. He profusely thanks the Health Ministry for the hospital. Then comes the sad news; since its opening 11 days ago, exactly 11 patients receiving treatment at the hospital have died, i.e. one per day. That was not all - the Ministry had handed six IVECO ambulances to the said hospital and in the last three months, five of them have been under disrepair. He points out that each ambulance costs a whopping RM300,000 and that the procurement department at the Ministry could have been more careful in choosing sturdier ambulances than the present ones.

Although the Parliament Member from Jasin did not complete the last piece of his message, one can draw an implication that he is accusing the purchasing department of some impropriety in buying such poor makes. However, he has couched his accusation very well by merely giving the information and letting his listeners make the necessary inference (of corruption) in the acquisition of supplies for the hospital.

Bluntness, as mentioned earlier, is abhorred and is not the norm for a cultured person (*halus*) to make his point. Sensing no immediate face threats, the House takes it in its stride and moves on to other issues of the day. No one, including the Minister of Health whose job is overseeing viable investments, loses face!

Figure 1: Incriminating content (voiced by an ingroup member) laced with extreme courtesy and jest

Turn		
1	Representative from Jasin:	<p><i>...Saya hendak mengucapkan ribuan terimakasih kepada Kementerian Kesihatan kerana telah membuka Hospital Jasin yang selalu saya laungkan. 17 Mac hari itu, Hospital Jasin telah dibuka. Hari ini, 28 hari bulan – 11 hari. 11 hari dibuka, 11 orang sudah mati di hospital itu. (Ketawa).</i></p> <p>I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Ministry of Health for opening the Jasin Hospital as I had wished. The day was the 17th of March that the Jasin Hospital was opened. Today is the 28th – 11 days ago. 11 days open, 11 people have died in the hospital.(Laughter)</p>
2	Timbalan Yang di Pertua (Deputy Speaker):	<p><i>Tidak boleh pakai ,YB?</i> (Hospital) cannot be used, Your Honourable?</p>
3	Jasin:	<p><i>(Ketawa) 11 hari dibuka, sudah boleh dipakai; 11 orang mati Tuan Yang di Pertua, satu hari satu.</i> (Laughter) 11 days open; it is being used. 11 people died, Sir Speaker; one a day.</p>
4	Timbalan Yang di Pertua:	<p><i>Tetapi yang sihat lebih ramai Yang Berhormat ya?</i> But those recovering are more, Your Honourable, yes?</p>

	Jasin:	<i>(Ketawa) Saya juga pernah menyuarakan tentang ambulans dulu. Saya pun hendak ucapkan ribuan terima kasih kerana dekat kawasan Jasin diberi enam ambulans baru atas jenama IVECO, saya pun tidak pernah dengar, Yang di Pertua.</i> (Laughter) I have also spoken up about ambulances before. I would also like to express thanks because Jasin district has been given 6 ambulances, brand IVECO. I have never heard of them, Sir Speaker.
5	Timbalan Yang di Pertua:	<i>Ya, cukuplah, cukuplah Yang Berhormat; dia sudah faham.</i> Alright, enough, enough, Your Honourable; he understands.
6	Jasin:	<i>Sudah faham Datuk ya? Walaupun baru disupply, daripada enam – lima sudah rosak.</i> Has he understood? Even though they are new, of the 6 (ambulances) – five are already in disrepair.
7	Timbalan Yang di Pertua :	<i>Sabarlah.</i> Be patient
8	Jasin:	<i>Lima sudah rosak, satu ambulans belanja RM300,000. Kalau sudah lima, kita rugi berapa? Jadi kita minta supaya Bahagian Perolehan, jangan hendak tangkap muat sahaja, ini untuk kegunaan kerajaan. Kita pun tidak pernah dengar jenama kenderaan ini apa. Hari ini disupply, lebih kurang baru tiga bulan, daripada enam ambulans yang disupply kepada Jasin, lima sudah rosak Tuan Yang di Pertua.</i> Five are damaged; one ambulance cost RM300,000. If multiplied by five, how much does that cost us? So we ask the Procurement Department, don't just give the bare minimum, this is for government use. We have never heard of this brand of vehicle. Today it is supplied, more or less three months later, of the 6 ambulances supplied to Jasin, five are in disrepair, Sir Speaker.

It should be noted that though the issue raised is a thorny one, it is discussed in a non-confrontational manner, without any apparent loss of face as it is not on a “we-them” platform. It is all within the ingroup and hence the need to save the face of the Health Minister, who belongs to the same party as the member from Jasin.

Impolite Interactions

In terms of confrontational discourse, the data showed at least two extremely impolite interactions that included threats, derision, and insults. The first interaction is presented in Figure 2. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr Lim Kit Siang) initiates this series of moves to draw attention to the increasing rate of corruption in the country.

There is a message for the ruling government – arrest corruption or face a fate similar to that confronting the Kenya government. The latter had allowed cronyism and nepotism to grow to an alarming proportion to the point that the people were ready to revolt. Being a member of the outgroup and being an opposition Member of Parliament, Lim Kit Siang's accusation against the administration was a real threat to the face of the Minister. The

Minister in attendance, being a Malay and an UMNO member steeped in the formulaic discourse of ‘safeguarding the respect of the race, religion, and country’ (*menjaga maruah bangsa, agama dan negara*) sees the affront not only to him but also to his country (almost interchangeable with government) and his race. Mahathir (1970) quoted in Lim (2005) commented that for a Malay, courtesy can give way in the face of insults and this can result in less polite strategies being used. In fact, the Minister admonishes the DAP severely (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Incriminating content voiced by outgroup members (DAP) with no intent at courtesy

Turn		
1	Tuan Lim Kit Siang (Ipoh Timur) DAP (Mr Lim Kit Siang, Member for Ipoh Timur) DAP	<p><i>Yang di Pertua ... minta Perdana Menteri menyatakan penilaiannya mengenai usaha membateras rasuah di Malaysia sejak beliau menjadi PM dan apakah iktibar yang didapati dari kegagalan Kerajaan Kenya yang pernah menjadikan pembanterasan rasuah sebagai janji pilihan rayanya dua tahun lepas.</i></p> <p>Sir Speaker, (I am) asking the Prime Minister to state his opinion on the efforts made to combat graft in Malaysia since he became Prime Minister and what lesson could be learnt from the Government of Kenya’s failure to eradicate corruption after promising to do so during their election campaign two years ago.</p>
2	Menteri di Jabatan Perdana Menteri (Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department) BN Tuan Lim Kit Siang (Ipoh Timur) DAP	<p><i>Tuan Yang di Pertua.tekad dan keazamannya untuk meneruskan kempen memerangi rasuah secara habis-habisan adalah agenda khusus dan bukannya sekadar janji manis atau janji pilihan raya...komitmen kerajaan untuk memranggi rasuah terbukti apabila sepanjang tahun 2004, Badan Pencegah Rasuah telah membuat 497 tangkapan dan jumlah ini merupakan bilangan tangkapan tertinggi yang pernah dibuat oleh badan ini sejak penubuhannya. Jumlah tersebut merupakan peningkatan sejumlah 158 tangkapan iaitu 46.6% berbanding dengan 399 tangkapan dalam tahun 2003...</i></p> <p>Sir Speaker, his diligence in continuing the campaign against corruption is a specific agenda and is not merely an empty promise in order to garner votes... the government’s commitment to combat corruption was proven in 2004 when the Anti-Corruption Agency made 497 arrests, which is the largest number of arrests that the body has made since its inception. This total was an increase of 158 arrests, i.e. 46.6% higher than the previous year, which had only 399 arrests.</p> <p><i>Tuan Yang di Pertua ...soalan tambahan, bukankah benar bahawa suatu iktibar daripada krisis perlembagaan dan korupsi di Kenya untuk kita ialah bahawa retorik membanteras rasuah kalau tidak diikuti dan disusuli dengan tindakan yang konkrit di mana seperti di Kenya bahawa menteri2 kanan, pembesar2 dikecualikan daripada tindakan penangkapan dan pendakwaan. Akhirnya akan menuju kearah suatu kegagalan dalam usaha membanteras rasuah dan apa tidakan akan mengesahkan kempen anti rasuah termasuk mengambil tindakan terhadap pembesar2 atau ikan yu – ikan yu tidak dikecualikan daripada kempen itu dan dengan ada institut2 yang ada gigi bukan dengan sahaja dengan akademi pencegah rasuah, Institutut Integriti Malaysia yang tidak ada gigi untuk membanteras rasuah..</i></p>

Sir Speaker, an additional question; is it not true that a lesson from the constitutional crisis and corruption in Kenya for us is that if rhetoric on combating corruption is not followed up with concrete steps as in Kenya where ministers and officials are exempt from arrests and convictions, eventually there will be a failure to combat corruption and the campaign to end corruption will not be validated; only if action is taken against officials, or sharks, and if there are institutions with teeth, not just the anti corruption academy, the Malaysian Institute of Integrity, which has no teeth to combat corruption.

Menteri di Jabatan
Perdana Menteri
(Minister in the
Prime Minister's
Department)
BN

Ketua Pembangkang ini menyanyi lagu lama, sama ada dia pekak, dia buta ataupun dia tidak baca surat khabar, saya tidak tahulah. Kalau kita lihat dalam tahun yang lepas sahaja, ada orang2 yang tertentu yang disebutkan sebagai ikan yu atau ikan jerung, telah pun ditangkap...

The Opposition Chief is singing an old song. Whether he is deaf, or blind, or does not read newspapers, I do not know. If we were to look at the past year, there were certain people acknowledged as sharks who have been caught.

Tuan Tan Kok
Wai: (Cheras)
DAP
Mr Tan Kok Wai:
(Cheras) DAP

Masalah rasuah ini sememangnya bukan masalah yang lama, tetapi satu perkara yang terus menjadi isu terkini yang harus diberikan perhatian yang paling berat, kerana walaupun pada masa yang lampau – saya ingin menunjukkan satu contoh di sini bagaimana seriusnya penyalahgunaan kuasa dan rasuah yang berlaku dalam pentadbiran kerajaan misalnya di Bukit Cahaya yang berlaku baru-baru ini. Bagaimanakah simpanan hutan boleh digazet dan diagihkan begitu banyak pemaju?

Sekarang ini apabila cerun bukit dipotong dan menjadi satu isu yang menarik perhatian Negara, maka timbullah rayuan2 dan tindakan yang harus diambil. Bukankah YB Menteri boleh mengingati satu perkara di mana kerana masalah yang tidak dapat dipelajari oleh kerajaan dan tindakan tidak diambil terhadap 'Ikan Yu' yang melibatkan diri dalam perkara iaitu...(Disampuk)

Tuan Yang diPertua, saya ingin mengingatkan YB bahawa pada satu dekat yang lalu, (Dewan mula riuh) Hutan Simpanan Pasir Puteh, juga di negeri Selangor, digazet menjadikan kawasan2 perumahan telah diagihkan kepada 15 orang pemaju.

The corruption issue is not an old one but one that is constantly an issue which needs to be given the utmost attention, because even in the olden days – I wish to show an example here on the seriousness of corruption and bribery that happens in our government, for example in Bukit Cahaya lately. How could it be that forest reserves could be gazetted and divided amongst so many developers?

Nowadays when hills are levelled, it becomes an issue that attracts the attention of the whole country, and appeals are made as to what actions be taken. Can the Honourable Minister not remember this incident where the government did not address the problem and no action was taken against the sharks that were involved in it?

Sir Speaker, I wish to remind the Minister that one decade ago (House becomes noisy), the Pasir Puteh Forest Reserve, also in Selangor, was gazetted to become housing estates and was divided

amongst 15 developers.

Tuan Yang di
Pertua:
Tuan Tan Kok
Wai: (Cheras)
DAP

Yang Berhormat, minta kemukakan soalnya, ya? (Dewan riuh)
Your Honourable, please present the question. (House is noisy)
Soalan saya ialah seperti mana yang sebutkan lebih awal tadi.
Masalah rasuah ini masih serius dan makin hari semakin serius
bukan satu isu lama, bukan lagu lama tetapi masalahnya apakah
kerajaan kekurangan political will untuk mengatasi masalah ini.
My question is what I had stated earlier. This corruption problem is getting more and more serious; it is not an old issue, it is not an old song, but the problem is that the government lacks the political will to address this problem.

Timbalan Yang di
Pertua
Menteri di Jabatan
Perdana Menteri
(Minister in the
Prime Minister's
Department)
BN

Baik-baik.
Very well.
Masalahnya dia tidak faham Bahasa Melayu. Itulah masalahnya.
Saya kata 'nyanyi lagu lama' sebab tahun lepas tanya soalan yang
sama juga. Itulah yang dimaksudkan dengan 'lagu lama' bukan
maknya rasuah it satu perkara yang sudah tidak menjadi isu lagi
sekarang, itu bezanya, YB Cheras! Pergi belajar Bahasa Melayu
sikit, ya? Biar faham!
Memang kita bersetuju bahawa di mana-mana juga soal rasuah ini
bukan boleh selesai – apa yang orang kata boleh dimatikan sekali
gus. Di Amerika Syarikat pada hari ini pun kalau kita tengok banyak
rasuah sedang berlaku di sana. Di AS, di UK, di sana pun ada lagi
rasuah! Apa yang perlu dilakukan ialah setiap kali rasuah berlaku
kita mengambil tindakan, itu yang penting.
Jadi, saya berharap supaya YB faham tentang perkara ini dan
jangan emosi, ya? Soalan yang mengatakan di negeri Selangor ada
berlaku, ya, kita akan mengambil tindakan kalau ada pengaduan
yang dibuat kepada pihak BPR..

The problem is that he does not understand the Malay language. That's the problem. I said "singing an old song" because last year the same question was asked. That's what was meant by 'old song', not that corruption is a problem that is no longer an issue. That is the difference, Cheras MP! Go learn the Malay language a little. Then you will understand.

We all agree that this problem of corruption is not going to be settled in the near future – what people say can be terminated on one fell swoop. In the US today, we can see that there is plenty of corruption. In the US, the UK, even there, there is corruption! What needs to be done is that every time corruption happens, we must take action against it; that is important.

So I hope Your Honourable understands this and do not become emotional. The issue that was raised about Selangor State did happen, yes, we will take action if complaints are made to the ACA.

Tirade in Discourse

The Minister in the Prime Minister's department goes on a tirade (last move, Fig.2) to point out that the Honourable Member of Parliament from Cheras does not understand Malay (the language); hence he misinterpreted what he (the Minister) had said about 'singing an old song' i.e. repeating the same mantra of arresting corruption. He literally yelled at him, "Go learn the Malay language a little, then you will understand." He insults the Member from Cheras by implying that being non-Malay, the latter's grasp of the Malay language is so poor that he cannot understand the true picture. He could not have used this ploy if the Other had been a native Malay. The ploy also worked well as a way of detracting from dealing with the real issue at hand - corruption.

A Tit for Tat?

What can be drawn from his refusal to address the issue raised by the opposition is the fact that the question was aimed at not so much seeking an answer as to accuse the government of condoning corruption. To this accusation, he responds by stating that action will be taken when a complaint is made. This is certainly not the answer the opposition members had expected and they had to hold their peace as on the face of it, the Minister had cut them off from further questioning and had 'invited' them to make the complaint. The opposition member, being a person who is not ranked equal to the Minister is not expected to challenge the words of the latter, a high ranking official in the government. For the lack of decorum on the part of the opposition member, the Minister wrecks his 'vengeance' and 'punishes' (Zainul Ariffin, 2008:18).

Trading of Insults

The second instance in the transcripts where such trading of insults featured was during a late afternoon session on June 21 2005. The prelude to the confrontational interaction began with the speech given by the opposition leader Mr Lim Kit Siang. He raised the issue of the suspension of recognition of medical degrees from Crimea State Medical University (CSMU) where 1,100 Malaysians were pursuing their medical degree. He was surprised that the recognition given to CSMU in 2001 was repealed four years later. The opposition leader voiced his concern for the students and especially for their parents who had already spent large sums of money from their savings to realise their children's educational goals.

According to him, the purported reasons for the derecognizing were that:

- a. the quality of CSMU's graduates cannot be assured as the teacher-student ratio has increased from 1:4 to 1:8;
- b. the quality of students given admission in CSMU leaves much to be desired; as even humanities students, i.e. without much background in the sciences, had been allowed to pursue foundation courses before matriculation.

The opposition leader pointed out that the Malaysian universities (both public and private) have limited number of seats, thus prompting a large number of students who were not successful to look for other avenues. CSMU being more affordable was the most promising destination for the students from lower-income families. His research on CSMU revealed that it is a full-fledged medical university with 68 departments, 600 professors, 12 hospitals and 12,000 beds. It has international students from 38 countries. It is rated the second best among 27 universities in Ukraine. In its 40 years of existence, it had produced 25,000 doctors. His argument was that surely CSMU is no worse than the 334 other medical schools recognized by Malaysia.

Over this issue, it was not only the DAP that expressed its concern. Prior to this debate, the ethnic Indian-based component of the ruling BN, the MIC, had also stated great concern as many of the students affected were of Indian ethnicity. By giving the ethnic distribution of the Malaysian students in CSMU (Table 4), Mr Lim Kit Siang was implicating whether the ethnic composition had a part in the derecognition.

Table 4: Ethnic distribution of Malaysian students at CSMU

Ethnic community	Number	%
Malays	231	21.8
Chinese	220	20.8
Indians	581	55.0
Others	25	2.4
Total	1057	100

Social Engineering

Having embarked on a social engineering programme which formed an important facet of the New Economic Policy (David and Govindasamy 2005), the government probably felt there had to be more Malay doctors in the country to balance the numerical imbalance that had been existent in the country as far as medical practitioners were concerned. Although the country produces more Malay doctors via the local universities, the imbalance cannot yet be corrected because of the other communities' continued investments in medical education for their children outside the country.

In fact, the disproportionate number of Indians vis-à-vis the Malays in CSMU had prompted a former Education Minister to comment, "Why are there so many Indians in this university" (2005 Bil 19-26, Discussion on 21-6-2005; p.113; Hansard, Perbahasan Parlimen, Parlimen Sebelas, Dewan Rakyat, Penggal Kedua).

According to another DAP Member, Mr Kula Segaran, the Indian Malaysian community is very aware of this 'uneasiness' among members of the BN government. Perhaps this perception made the opposition feel that the Government was not being quite honest

about the derecognition of CSMU. Despite the assurances from the Minister concerned, irate voices and outbursts were heard during this parliamentary session. It should be noted that the interaction presented in Figure 3 apart from being an instance of confrontation between the ingroup and the outgroup, is also a good example of a debate where the ingroup/outgroup dichotomy itself was challenged. A leader of the MIC (a component party of the ruling BN), Dato' S. G. Sothinathan was more supportive of the facts presented by the opposition, resulting in the ingroup solidarity taking a backseat.

Figure 3: Incriminating content voiced by ingroup and outgroup members, unlaced with courtesy

Turn		
1	Datuk Dr. Abdul Latiff bin Ahmad [BN] (Deputy Minister of Health)	: <i>Tuan Yang di-Pertua, yang saya hendak terangkan sebab ada orang kata yang MMC ini tidak profesional, lihat kulit. Jadi saya kena terangkan bahawa yang ditekankan oleh MMC adalah kualiti. Kalau hendak ikut kualiti, 200 pelajar, majoriti pelajar perubatan yang sudah graduate daripada unscheduled university sepatutnya mereka sudah tidak diberi peluang selepas tiga kali gagal. 200 pelajar ini, Tuan Yang di-Pertua, saya terangkan semuanya etnik India tetapi kita bagi peluang. Walaupun mereka sue kerajaan...</i> (Sir Speaker, I would like to explain the reason why individuals say that MMC is not professional- looking at skin colour. I have to explain that what is emphasised by MMC is quality. If we were to follow quality, 200 students, majority of them medical students who have graduated from an unscheduled university should not be given anymore opportunities after failing three times. These 200 students, Sir Speaker, I explain are all Indians but we have provided them opportunities, even if they sue the government...
2	Dato' S. G. Sothinathan [MIC, a member of BN]	: <i>Yang Berhormat, bukan semua pelajar India. Saya ingat jangan bangkitkan isu perkauman.</i> Your Honourable, not all are Indian students. I remind all not to raise the issue of ethnicity.
3	Dr. Rahman bin Ismail [BN]	: <i>Tuan Yang di-Pertua...</i> Sir Speaker...
4	Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Lim Si Cheng] [Speaker]	: Yang Berhormat... Your Honourable...
5	Dato' S. G. Sothinathan [BN]	: <i>Dia tarik balik visa itu saya tahu. Jangan Yang Berhormat kata semua pelajar India, please.</i> He withdrew the visa, that I know. Your Honourable must not say all students are Indians, please.
6	Tuan Lim Kit Siang [DAP]	: 80, Withdraw that.
7	Datuk Haji Mohamad bin Haji Aziz [BN]	: <i>Biarlah Timbalan Menteri Kesihatan menjawablah.</i> (Allow the Deputy Health Minister to answer.)
8	Dato' S. G.	: <i>Cakap yang benar.</i>

9	Sothinathan [BN] Timbalan Yang di- Pertua [Datuk Lim Si Cheng] [Speaker]	: Speak the truth. <i>Yang Berhormat, patuhi Peraturan Mesyuarat.</i> Your Honourable, adhere to the Standing Orders.
10	Dato' S. G. Sothinathan [BN]	: <i>Jangan kata yang tidak benar.</i> Don't say what is not true.
11		: (A number of Members stand up)
12	Timbalan Yang di- Pertua [Datuk Lim Si Cheng] [Speaker]	: <i>Yang Berhormat.</i> Your Honourable.
13	Dato' Paduka Haji Badruddin bin Amiruldin [BN]	: Point of Order.
14	Tuan M. Kula Segaran[DAP]	<i>Dia tidak cakap benar</i> He is not telling the truth
15	Dato' Paduka Haji Badruddin bin Amiruldin[BN]	<i>Teruska;, yang lain duduklah</i> <i>Proceed; the others take your seats.</i>
16	Timbalan Yang di- Pertua [Datuk Lim Si Cheng] [Speaker]	<i>Yang Berhormat, semua duduk</i> <i>Your honourable, all sit.</i>
17	Tuan M. Kula Segaran	<i>Ini semua tipu sahaja.</i> These are all lies.

The discourse shows that Datuk Dr. Abdul Latiff bin Ahmad, the Deputy Minister of Health, was trying to explain that all was not lost for those medical graduates from the unrecognised (unscheduled) universities. On their return, they will be required to pass the Medical Qualifying Examination. A pass assures them of a position in the public hospitals. These graduates were to be given a maximum of three attempts to qualify; but the Government had been generous in offering them four chances despite some of them accusing the Government of discrimination. In his answers, he inadvertently stated that there were 200 such students. Mr Lim Kit Siang held that it was only 80. It is at this point that the MIC member, Dato' Sothinathan broke rank and alleged that the Deputy Minister was not being truthful. He accused him of bringing ethnicity into the discussion. The Deputy Minister's faux pas was apparent in the following statement, "These 200 students, Sir Speaker, I explain are all Indians but we have provided them opportunities, even if they sue the government."

Saving Face

The protest from Dato' Sothinathan and Mr Kula Segaran (DAP) were rather loud and the Speaker was hardly able to contain the escalations of accusations and counter-accusations. He had to resort to the Standing Orders (see Appendix 1) to control the situation. A BN member, Dato' Paduka Haji Badruddin bin Amiruldin, hoping to bring

order to the House also appealed to the Standing Orders. The resorting to the Standing Orders serves two functions: the first is to save face (Goffman, 1967, Brown and Levinson, 1987) and the second is to warn the ‘offenders’ of possible punitive measures (Appendix 2).

Despite this measure, the debate continued with more mudslinging when others joined in the fray (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Total loss of decorum

Turn		
1	Datuk Dr. Abdul Latiff bin Ahmad [BN]	<p><i>Kita benarkan mereka menerima latihan di-hospital-hospital kerajaan, kita bagi lagi RM500 kepada mereka ini untuk mereka lulus Medical Qualifying Examination. Saya ingat tidak ada kerajaan dalam dunia yang mengamalkan system ini. We allowed them to receive training from the government hospitals; we gave them RM500 to pass the Medical Qualifying Examination. I think there is no other government in the world that practises such a system.</i> (Several moves – interjections; shoutings) <i>...Sebab itu kita hendak mereka lulus dan mempunyai mutu dan kualiti supaya rakyat sihat...</i> Because of that we want them to pass and be qualified so that the public can be healthy... (Several moves – interjections; House becomes unruly) <i>Terima kasih, sekian terima kasih.</i> Thank you, that’s all. Thank you. (Opposition members stand up; House becomes chaotic; D. Speaker appeals to the Members that it is time to end the session without much success)</p>
9	Menteri di Jabatan Perdana Menteri [Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department]	<p><i>Ya, duduk, duduk, duduk, duduk, racist, ini Ipoh Barat racist, duduk, duduk. Duduk, perkauman, perkauman, perkauman, ini perkauman, duduk, cukup...</i> Yes, sit down, sit down, sit down, racist, this Ipoh Barat (referring to Mr Kula Segaran), racist, sit down, sit down. Sit down, racist, racist, racist, this is racist, sit down, enough...</p>
10	Timbalan Yang di Pertua:	<p><i>Duduk, duduk.</i> Sit down, sit down</p>
11	Menteri di Jabatan Perdana Menteri	<p><i>Perkauman, perkauman, perkauman, saya punya meja.</i> Racist, racist, racist, my table (my turn to speak).</p>
12-16	Opposition members	<p><i>(Bangun dan Menyampuk)</i> (Rise up and interrupt)</p>
17	Menteri di Jabatan Perdana Menteri	<p><i>Perkauman Ipoh Barat, Perkauman Ipoh Barat.</i> Ipoh Barat racist, Ipoh Barat racist</p>
18	Timbalan Yang di Pertua:	<p><i>Yang Berhormat, ahli-ahli Yang Berhormat semua, cukup, cukuplah.</i> Your Honourable, all honourable members, enough, enough!</p>
19	Menteri di Jabatan Perdana Menteri	<p><i>Bloody racist, racist, racist, racist (Dengan perasaan yang marah)</i> Bloody racist, racist, racist, racist (In anger)</p>

Charges of Racism

While Datuk Dr. Abdul Latiff bin Ahmad was explaining how the Government had cared for graduates from unscheduled universities by giving them opportunities to train in hospitals and giving them an allowance of RM500, there were interruptions from the opposition block as obviously they were not happy with the explanations.

The Deputy Minister apparently did not clarify what was the ideal student-teacher ratio for medical colleges and whether such stringent standards were applied to all the other universities recognised by the Government. At this point, another Minister from the Prime Minister's Department joins in the fray accusing the Ipoh Barat DAP member (Mr Kula Segaran) of being racist. He repeats this incessantly until the session is adjourned at 5.30 p.m. As discussed earlier, the accusations against the Government for not being just, brought about the ire of this Minister.

All in all, he repeated the term “racist” (or its equivalent in Malay –*perkauman*) a total of 41 times. He appeared unforgiving of the Ipoh Barat Member of Parliament for insinuating that the government was telling lies. The accusation is against a ranking deputy Health Minister, which is certainly culturally not appropriate! Again the Minister became furious at the idea that a high ranking government official has been threatened to the point of total embarrassment. His vengeance (Zainul Ariffin 2008) comes in swiftly and harshly:

“*Duduk* (Sit down), *perkauman* (racist), you are racist, racist, you are racist, you have got no place in this country. Malaysia *tidak hendak* (does not want) racist, you are racist.”

He accused the opposition of practicing racism and bringing up racial issues and as such, there were no place for them in Malaysia.

He also used the phrase “*saya punya meja*”, variously interpreted as “my turn (to speak)”, “my space” or “it is within my power”. In this instance, some display of his status (as opposed to that of the opposition members) can be observed.

With such an overwhelming majority in the Parliament (91%), the Ministers feel truly empowered as true representatives of the Rakyat (citizens of the country). As such, the opposition members need to show more humility; hence, the strong admonishments.

The status game is more apparent in the interaction that followed between the opposition members and the Minister on a different topic – minimum age for voting (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Impoliteness – the status game

Turn		
1	Tuan M Kula	: Soalan tambahan saya, saya dukacita dengan pandangan kerajaan
Language in India www.languageinindia.com		23
9 : 9 September 2009		
Maya Khemlani David, Subramaniam Govindasamy and Mohana Nambiar		
Levels of Politeness in Malaysian Parliamentary Discourse		

<p>Segaran ,Ipoh Barat (Mr. M. Kula Segaran, Ipoh Barat):</p>	<p><i>bahawa ia tidak akan mengkaji balik mengenai pendaftaran seorang pemilih kalau berumur kurang 21 tahun tetapi ini suatu pandangan yang aneh kerana di seluruh dunia ini banyak negara2 umur mengundi telah di kurangkan kepada umur 18 tahun. Juga baru2 ini pendaftaran, setiap kali kerajaan kata mereka memberi peluang kepada pihak warganegara untuk mendaftarkan dengan sendiri...</i> My additional question- I am disappointed with the government's view that it will not rethink the issue of registration of voters who are less than 21 years of age. But this is an odd viewpoint because all around the world, many countries have reduced the voting age to 18. Just recently we had a voter registration drive, every time the government says they give chances to citizens to register by themselves...</p>
<p>2 Menteri di Jabatan Perdana Menteri (Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri bin Abdul Aziz)</p> <p>Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri bin Abdul Aziz)</p>	<p><i>Tuan Yang di-Pertua, pertama tidak betul YB Ipoh Barat sebut. Tidak semua Negara di dunia ini yang pengundinya dibawah umur 21 tahun. Bukan banyak pun, tidak banyak pun, itu tidak betul. Saya ada buat kajian dan itu adalah tidak betul. Bagi umur 18 tahun tidak banyak Negara, sebenarnya umur 21. Hendak jadi Ahli Parlimen kena berumur 21 tahun jadi mengundi semasa berumur 21 jugalah. Takkanlah yang berumur 18 tahun di sekolah hendak mengundi, dia sendiri tidak boleh menjadi calon, dia hendak mengundi pula itu tidak boleh. Kita kena faham. Dalam Perlembagaan hendak menjadi calon mesti berumur 21 tahun jadi pengundi mestilah berumur 21 tahun.</i> <i>Itu sebab saya kasihkan dia, walaupun dia tidak setuju dengan pandangan kerajaan tetapi dia DAP tidak boleh berbuat apa-apa pun. Walaupun dia menyalak 100 tahun lagi dia tidak boleh berbuat apa-apa. Ini pandangan kerajaan ada asasnya. Kalau DAP betul, DAP menanglah dalam pilihan raya. It sahaja jangan cakap banyak .</i></p> <p>Sir Speaker, firstly, Ipoh Barat is not correct. Not every country in the world has voters under the age of 21. It is not even many countries, not a lot, that is not correct. I have done research and that is not correct. At the age of 18, not many countries, it is actually the age of 21. If you want to be an MP you have to be 21, so for voting it is also 21. How can someone who is 18 years old and at school vote and stand for election? So he cannot vote. We must understand this. In the constitution, it states that to stand for election you must be 21, so voters must be 21.</p> <p>That is why I pity him (Ipoh Barat). Even though he disagrees with the government's viewpoint, his DAP cannot do anything. Even if he were to bark for another 100 years, he cannot do anything. The government's viewpoint does have a basis. If the DAP is right, then show it by winning the elections. That is all, don't talk too much.</p>

Choice Terms

The question put forward to the Minister was whether the voting age could be reduced to that below 21 as practiced in many countries. The Minister first admonished the Language in India www.languageinindia.com

9 : 9 September 2009

Maya Khemlani David, Subramaniam Govindasamy and Mohana Nambiar
Levels of Politeness in Malaysian Parliamentary Discourse

Opposition Member for giving incorrect information about the reduced voting age in other countries. He then referred to the Constitutional provision which states that voting is at 21, implying that the Constitution cannot be changed, which is not quite accurate. Secondly he belittled the Ipoh Barat Member and the DAP for not having any power over the issue. He more than insults the DAP member by declaring that the latter can “bark” to oblivion but things will not change.

The use of the term “bark” is especially humiliating in Asian contexts where the dog is deemed a very lowly creature and face is a highly valued social feature. The implication is that the DAP member is no more powerful than a barking dog. The Minister displayed his supreme confidence in suggesting that the BN Government cannot be unseated even if DAP tries to do so (by winning the next elections). The phrase “*jangan cakap banyak*” (don’t talk too much) is a further display of supremacy.

In terms of politeness, it is a complete loss of face; the Other’s lack of status in comparison to that of the Minister muffled any further discussion.

Conclusion

Generally, it can be summed from the findings that the debates in the Malaysian Parliament provide abundant instances of politeness. Although in a multi-ethnic country conflicts are expected more often than not, Malaysia stands out as a nation that can pride itself on its maturity in handling major issues without causing too many FTAs.

As outlined in Table 4, politeness theorists have examined several factors affecting politeness; among them are cultural (Hill, et al 1986, Janny and Arndt 1993, Kallia 2004, Kasper 1990, Watts 1989), communal identity (Asmah 1996, Mao 1994) discourse types (Lakoff, 1989), political groupings (David and Zuraidah 2004, Macionis 2001) and message/implicature (Kallia 2004).

The cultural factor plays an important role in reducing FTAs and defusing confrontational situations as observed in this study. Among Malays, the dominant ethnic group in Malaysia, politeness has to be maintained at all times. Therefore it is not surprising that an overwhelming majority of turn-takings (96%) see politeness strategies being overtly used. In the words of Lim (2005), this is a measure of the politeness strategies of the Malays where one need not actively feel calm but his/her words should be shown to be polite. However, where interactions go wrong, they can get absolutely out of control - moving effortlessly into the confrontational zone. The cultural factor especially the hierarchical factor provides the best explanations whenever there is an FTA.

Topic and issues (Lakoff 1989) can lead to differing perspectives among interlocutors leading to a breakdown in communication and creating potential FTAs. However, exchanges on issues/topics are unable to provide a satisfactory account for impoliteness

in this study. Both ingroup and outgroup members spoke at length on the issue of corruption. When the member from Jasin (BN) insinuated that there is corruption in the procurement department of the Health Ministry which is providing unheard-of types of ambulances that break down too easily, the House was actually amused; he was not ostracized. However, when an outgroup DAP member raised the issue of a state government's gazetting of the Cahaya and Pasir Puteh Forest Reserves and distributing the land among its cronies for housing development, a Minister came down hard on him. The Minister detracted from the main issue and instead belittled the member, a non-Malay, for his poor command of the Malay language!

Even political groupings (David and Zuraidah 2004, Macionis 2001) fail to explain divergent treatment of speakers from the ingroup and outgroup. Macionis suggests that a member of an ingroup commands others' esteem and loyalty. It is true that the opposing bipartisan groups with different ideologies and loyalties have constantly pitted against one another casting insults, derisions, and warnings. In an effort to save their own faces, politeness and the saving of the face of the Other is hardly taken into consideration. However, the findings showed an instance whereby an ingroup member (Mr Sothinathan) broke ranks by asking the Health Minister to speak the truth. That was a face-threatening action which challenged ingroup solidarity and eventually caused him to be suspended from the House for three months. Mr. Sothinathan despite being a member of the Indian – based MIC, a component party of the ruling BN, risked being taken to task by the BN Whip in order to show his concern for the Malaysian Indian medical students. Hence it appears that ethnic issues can challenge the solidarity expected of ingroups.

Our examination of the two factors - issues and political leanings - shows a common feature that brings about potential FTAs. When an issue has a direct bearing on an ethnic group, members of that ethnic group care little for the face of others, including that of the ingroup and very easily move to a confrontational mode. When Mr. Sothinathan perceived that the Health Minister was not sensitive to the fate of Indian medical students when the Government arbitrarily suspended recognition of CSMU, he wanted fair play and was ready to face the ire of the ruling BN government. His outbursts caused severe damage to the integrity of the government. Similarly, when DAP members, who are largely Chinese Malaysians, contested that there is corruption in the allotment of land, the Malay Minister saw it as an insinuation against his government led by UMNO, a Malay party. The perception was that the affront is not only directed towards the ruling government but also towards the particular ethnic group, especially towards high ranking officials (Ministers and Deputy Ministers); hence his belittling of the outgroup member.

This study has shown that in Malaysian parliamentary discourse, within the ingroup, FTAs are largely contained but outside the group, as expected, there appears to be little attempt to save the face of the Other. In fact, it is made very clear who has higher status and it is not a responsible act to threaten the face of those in the higher echelon of the

government as verbal punishment is easily meted out to those who seek to challenge the 'nobility'. The message to the Other is clear: "Don't talk too much".

Endnotes

1. As revealed in sentences such as:

- "the people is not prevented from forming opposition parties, although there are some of them who tend to exploit racial issues and religions to win votes. This is a mammoth obstacle for BN because racial issue and religion, which has become an opposition's source, is a time bomb that could explode at any time and destroy all the achievements of the nation till today"
- As a ruling party, there will always be obstacles. The opposition had tried numerous times to weaken the BN. Although the opposition had created quite a strong merger of component parties to present an alternative to the people, their efforts failed because BN's strength and experience is sufficient to ward away the force from outside.

2. The Barisan National's manifesto can be downloaded at this website: <http://www.bn.org.my/eng.pdf>

3. The DAP's manifesto and mission statement can be downloaded at http://www.dapmalaysia.org/newenglish/au_vm_ob.htm

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9 : 9 September 2009

Maya Khemlani David, Subramaniam Govindasamy and Mohana Nambiar
Levels of Politeness in Malaysian Parliamentary Discourse

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Appendix 1: Standing Orders

Petitions	19 (1) (a). Every application of the House shall be in the form of a petition and every
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Language in India www.languageinindia.com

29

9 : 9 September 2009

Maya Khemlani David, Subramaniam Govindasamy and Mohana Nambiar
Levels of Politeness in Malaysian Parliamentary Discourse

	petition shall be presented by a member, who shall be responsible for the petition being in respectful language.
Contents of Questions	<p>23 (1) (c). A question shall not contain any argument*, inference, opinion, imputation, epithet or misleading, ironical or offensive expression nor shall a question be frivolous or be asked seeking information on trivial matters.</p> <p>23 (1) (j). A question shall not be asked as to the character or conduct of any person except in his official or public capacity</p> <p>23 (1) (m). A question reflecting on the character or conduct of any person whose conduct can only be challenged on a substantive motion shall not be asked.</p> <p>23 (1) (o). A question making or implying a charge of a personal character shall be disallowed.</p>
Time and Manner of Speaking (Rules of Debate)	<p>35 (1). A member desiring to speak shall rise in his place and if called upon shall stand and address his observations to the Chair. No member shall speak unless called upon by the Chair.</p> <p>35 (2). If two or more members rise at the same time, the Chair shall call upon the member who first catches his eye.</p> <p>35 (4). A member who has responded to a question may again be heard to offer explanation of some material part of his speech which has been misunderstood; but he shall not introduce new matter.</p> <p>35 (5). A member who has spoken may speak again when a new question has been proposed by Tuan Yang di-Pertua, such as a proposed amendment or a motion for the adjournment of the debate.</p> <p>35 (6). A member shall not speak on any matter in which he has a direct personal pecuniary interest (other than the matter of remuneration under any provision of the Constitution) without disclosing the extent of that interest.</p> <p>35 (7). The Speaker or Chairman may, if he thinks fit, prescribe the time limit for speeches.</p>
Contents of Speeches	<p>36 (1). A member shall confine his observations to the subject under discussion and may not introduce irrelevant information thereto.</p> <p>36 (4). It shall be out of order to use offensive and insulting language about members of the House.</p> <p>36 (5). No member shall refer to any other member by name.</p> <p>36 (6). No member shall impute improper motives to any other member.</p> <p>36 (10). It shall be out of order to use---</p> <p>(a) treasonable words</p> <p>(b) seditious words</p> <p>(c) words which are likely to promote feelings of ill-will or hostility between communities in the Federation or infringe any provision of the Constitution or the Sedition Act 1948</p>
Interruptions	<p>37. No member shall interrupt another member except ---</p> <p>(a) by rising to a point of order, when the member speaking shall resume his seat and the member interrupting shall simply direct attention to the point which he desires to bring to notice and submit it to the Chair for decision; or</p> <p>(b) to elucidate some matter raised by that member in the course of his speech, provided that the member speaking is willing to give way and resumes his seat and that the member wishing to interrupt is called by the Chair.</p> <p>42. Whenever the members are called to order by the Chair, or whenever the Chair intervenes during a debate, any member then speaking, or offering to speak, shall sit down, and the House or Committee shall be silent so that the Chair may be heard without interruption.</p>

* It should be noted that 'arguments' here refer to points raised, rather than hostile verbal exchanges.

Appendix 2: Standing Orders (Continuation)

Contents of Questions	23 (2). If Tuan Yang di-Pertua is of opinion that any question of which a member has given notice to the <i>Setiausaha</i> (Secretary) or which a member has sought leave to ask without notice is an abuse of the right of questioning, or calculated to obstruct or affect prejudicially the procedure of the House or to promote feelings of ill-will or hostility between different communities in the Federation or infringes any of the provisions of the Constitution or the Sedition Act, 1948 or of this Order he may direct: (a) that it be printed or asked with such alterations as he may direct; or (b) that the member concerned be informed that the question is disallowed.
Time and Manner of Speaking	36 (11). If Tuan Yang di-Pertua is of the opinion that any motion or amendment or the continuance of the debate thereon is calculated to give rise to breaches of this Order he may disallow the motion or amendment or, as the case may be, may terminate the debate and direct that no further proceedings be taken on the motion or amendment.
Order in the House	44 (1). The Chair, after having called the attention of the House, or of the Committee, to the conduct of a member who persists in irrelevance or in tedious repetition either of his own arguments or of the arguments used by other members in debate, may direct him to discontinue his speech. 44 (2). The Chair shall order any member whose conduct is grossly disorderly to withdraw immediately from the House during the remainder of that day's sitting, and the Sergeant-at-Arms shall act on such orders as he may receive from the Chair in pursuance of this Order.

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