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Orderly and Disorderly Practices of Personal Pronouns during Question Time in the Malaysian House of Representatives

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Abstract

It is common practice in parliaments around the world for Members of Parliament (MPs) to address each other indirectly through the Speaker of the House while parliament is in session. Indeed, this practice is enforced in written law. Theoretically, failing to take heed of this rule can result in negative repercussions for the offending MP. This paper which incorporates the dimensions of orderliness and disorderliness of interaction, analyses the ways MPs and the Chair practise personal pronouns during Question Time in the Malaysian House of Representatives. Data which date from August to December 2006 are comprised of 43 Hansard transcripts and 54.5 hours of video recordings of Question Time. It is discovered that the majority type of personal pronouns is in first person, followed by third person pronouns. In stark contrast, second person pronouns occur very rarely. These findings indicate that MPs generally understand the expected norms of behaviour. Analysis also reveals that second person pronouns are sometimes used to deliberately flaunt parliamentary regulations to achieve specific objectives.

Keywords: Personal Pronouns, Parliamentary practices, Question Time, Orderly and disorderly practices, Standing Orders, interactional norms

1. Introduction

Parliamentary talk is a type of political language that represents its most formal and institutionalised variety (Bayley, 2004, p. 1). Because the mode of interaction is highly ritualised and rule-bound, MPs are required to respect its tradition, rules and regulations. As an example, in the UK House of Representatives, MPs are not permitted to directly address their colleagues, but only the Chair. As Bayley (p. 14) notes, this inevitably results high frequency of first person pronouns, and very low frequency of second person pronouns. Indeed, pronouns signal the relationship between the participants in the interaction especially in parliamentary settings (Bevitori, 2004, pp. 104-106). The way in which interactants make reference to each other can provide a valuable understanding of MPs’ identities and attitudes and their relationship with the Chair in British parliamentary systems (p. 106). The Malaysian House of Representatives (Dewan Rakyat) adopted this practice from the UK.

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