Guest Editor
MAYA KHEMLANI DAVID, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

CONTENT

- Jariah Mohd Jan  
  Gender in Communication: Utilisation of Similar Linguistic Devices  
  3

- Chan Swee Heng, Ain Nadzimah Abdullah and Chan Mei Yuit  
  Interacting with advertisements: Making sense through text construction and deconstruction  
  23

- Dipika Mukherjee  
  Cracking the Code: Creating an Online Technical Writing Course for Corporate Clients in Southeast Asia  
  43

- Stefanie Pillai  
  The Socio-Cultural Dimension of Business Letters: Letters Written in English in Malaysia  
  59

- Kuang Ching Hei and Maya Khemlani David  
  The Power of Vocabulary: Deconstructing Images of the older woman  
  75

- Maya Khemlani David and Kuang Ching Hei  
  Requests and Cultural Norms  
  95

- Rajeswary A. Sargunan  
  Customer-supplier relationships in communications skills training: ironing out the grey areas  
  111
ABSTRACTS

Gender in Communication: Utilisation of Similar Linguistic Devices

JARIAH MOHD JAN

During the last few decades, rigid role patterns have changed and as a result, gender notions have changed as well. Men and women are increasingly becoming each other’s equals in areas of education and profession (Van Baalen, 2001). As language helps people to create their identity and their gender, it makes sense to assume that when people’s ideas of masculinity and femininity change, their language changes as well.

This paper looks at communication between men and women in public discussions in Malaysia, particularly with their use of linguistic devices. With reference to the literature on the subject, especially in studies by supporters of the “dominance approach”, the notion of hedges is used to argue that women use language in a tentative way. Male use of language is said to express authority and power whereas women, who deviate from the male norm, show their weakness through their choice of linguistic devices, such as hedges.

This study investigates whether the language of men and women are becoming more similar as a result of changing gender notions. The analysis of this study was based on several recordings of public discussions and relevant language samples are presented for the purpose of discussion. One major finding of this study shows that hedging devices are not primarily female linguistic devices because men use them as well and in ways similar to women.

Interacting with advertisements: Making sense through text construction and deconstruction

CHAN SWEE HENG

AIN NADZIMAH ABDULLAH

CHAN MEI YUIT

Linguistic, social and cognitive factors in a discourse system are tightly interwoven. This also applies to subsystems such as the
discourse of advertisement. Advertising input leading to product awareness, attitude change, and act of purchase rely on assumptions made about hierarchical sequence of effects brought about by language use. In this study, an attempt is made to explicate the concerns of advertising text input and resulting product awareness through text construction and deconstruction. An understanding of text construction is embarked through coherence analysis and a study of the text structure. Deconstruction is applied through the examination of the meaning contributed by attributes and claims found in the advertising texts. The data are obtained from selected advertisements with a focus on skin care products.

Cracking the Code: Creating an Online Technical Writing Course for Corporate Clients in Southeast Asia

DIPIKA MUKHERJEE

This paper describes the challenges involved in the creation of online self-access modules for corporate clients who require proficiency in Technical Writing. This project was started in Nanyang Technological University in 2000, and some online modules were developed based on the traditional two-day workshops conducted onsite at the client’s workplace. The focus of this paper is to examine the implications for online education beyond academic institutions and within corporate settings, where the course creation must necessarily allow a great deal of flexibility while addressing the need for specific applied knowledge required by industry practitioners.

While describing the genesis of the online course, this paper will also examine how the new technology can address the issues of meeting the specific expectations of clients, collaborative learning and the challenges of quality assurance and accountability, all within the framework of the needs of the Southeast Asian workforce.

The Socio-Cultural Dimension of Business Letters: Letters Written in English in Malaysia

STEFANIE PILLAI

Business letters written in different settings are bound to display socio-culturally related aspects. Thus, differences in the way aspects like politeness, power and distance are realized are to be expected even if the same language, such as English,
is used in different countries. This is because socio-cultural norms have been found to be present even in seemingly formulaic communication such as business letters (Vergaro, 2004). In relation to this, a total of 100 business letters written in English to and from Malaysians from three areas (legal, media and information technology) were examined. The letters were examined using the two dimensions of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory: social distance and relative power in relation to positive and negative politeness strategies employed. The results show that business letters written in English in Malaysia display particular patterns of language use that relate to these dimensions of politeness in Malaysia. Among these patterns are the way in which terms of addresses are used and the way that letters are closed. Such results have implications for the way in which business correspondence is taught in Malaysia as they show that the socio-cultural dimensions of letter-writing cannot be ignored.

The Power of Vocabulary: Deconstructing Images of the older woman

KUANG CHING HEI AND MAYA KHEMLANI DAVID

Critical analysis is the ability of a reader to respond critically to the intentions, contents and possible effects of messages and texts. Critical discourse analysis of a text can help readers become aware of the power of discourse in empowering specific groups of people like the old. Age, gender and ethnic identities can and are socially/culturally constructed at the discursive level. This research, using a framework of critical analysis, argues that new magazines focusing on a target group are ideal sites for examining changes in ideological bias. The study explores the issues of age and feminine representation and identity in a recent popular magazine published in the United Kingdom. The focus is on how age is represented and shaped in the text. Critical discourse analysis is used to scrutinize the prevailing stereotypical representations of age and help us negotiate our position in relation to age-related identities socially/culturally constructed at the discursive level. Critical language awareness will provide the means of uncovering the underlying ideological bias in discourse and helps to expose hidden forms of power through the manipulation of language.

Requests and Cultural Norms

Maya Khemlani David & Kuang Ching Hei

Requests, like other speech acts express cultural norms and values of a society. Malaysians are reputed to be aware of status and hierarchical differentials and for their indirectness in discourse. The paper assumes there are differences in the extent of indirectness by Malays, Chinese and Indians, who are the three major ethnic groups in multilingual Malaysia. The writers examine written requests by staff in a private educational institution to a person in authority i.e. the Deputy Director of the institution. These requests come from Malay, Chinese and Indian staff. This paper analyses written requests to determine if:

1. awareness of local cultural variables is reflected in the discourse of requests, and if

2. a difference in the degree of indirectness by the different ethnic groups and across gender exists.
The writers argue that teachers of English in a multilingual society must be aware of such variations in discourse styles. Research is essential so that teachers can disseminate such findings to learners.

CUSTOMER-SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS IN COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS TRAINING: IRONING OUT THE GREY AREAS

RAJESWARY A. SARGUNAN

Malaysia’s vision of attaining ‘developed-nation’ status, in accordance with its VISION 2020, is heavily dependant upon its industrialisation and globalization strategies, which in turn rely on effective communication skills. Although such courses abound, there are several glitches that prevent optimum efficiency. These include the amorphousness of the relationship between the various stakeholders involved in these courses, and their roles and responsibilities in the learning encounter. These issues have been explored, and remedies suggested, but there is still a need to research this issue. This study attempts to investigate the issues stated above with regard to two communication skills programmes, namely Technical Report Writing and Oral Presentation. Investigative tools include questionnaires and interviews; these were administered to the various stakeholders in the teaching / learning encounter, namely the students, the lecturers, administrative personnel from the institutions involved, the sponsors/paymasters, and the end-users of the learners’ skills and services.