COMMUNICATION CONFLICTS AMONG MOBILITY STUDENTS AT THE INTERNATIONAL DIVISION UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA
(KONFLIK BERKOMUNIKASI DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR MOBILITI DI BAHAGIAN ANTARABANGSA, UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA)

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Abstract: This study focuses on the conflict in communication among mobility students at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). The objectives of the study were to identify and discuss the conflict in communication by using Stubbs's (1983) discourse analysis theory. 10 subjects from China participated in the study. The subjects were interviewed based on their experience in dealing with the staffs at the International Division, Universiti Putra Malaysia. Six characteristics of discourse analysis were found and analyzed. The results revealed that all ten subjects were having conflict in communication during their stay at UPM. They faced conflict in understanding accent and choice of words. They also experienced confusion and misunderstanding. It is hoped that the findings from this research will serve as a comparison to compare the conflicts with other students from other countries in a future study.

Keywords: Conflict in communication, mobility students, discourse analysis.

Abstrak: Kajian ini memfokuskan tentang konflik dalam komunikasi yang dihadapi oleh pelajar mobiliti di Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti dan membincangkan konflik dalam komunikasi dengan menggunakan teori analisis wacana oleh Stubbs's (1983). 10 subjek dari China telah dipilih dan mereka ditemu duga berdasarkan pengalaman mereka berhubung dengan staf di Bahagian Antarabangsa, UPM. Enam (6) ciri-ciri analisis wacana telah dikenal pasti dan dianalisa. Hasil kajian mendapati 10 subjek mengalami konflik dalam komunikasi semasa berada di UPM. Mereka mengalami konflik dalam memahami dialek dan pilihan perkataan yang digunakan. Mereka juga mengalami kekeliruan dan salah faham semasa berkomunikasi. Adalah diharapkan kajian akan datang dapat memberi fokus kepada komunikasi pelajar dari negara yang lain.

Kata kunci: Konflik berkomunikasi, pelajar mobiliti, analisis wacana.

Introduction

Most universities in the world have mobility programs that involve students' opportunities at other universities. Besides having exploring the new universities, they will also be given the chance to attend classes, culture activities and visit places of interest. This will also enhance their learning in the new environment. Other than that, the students will be given the chance to share their own culture with their new friends. They will bring their knowledge to be shared and learning new ways in pertaining to their activities at home or university. Mobility programs are programs that involved the exchange of students from the particular university to another university in the world. Usually, this program is offered to students who are interested to join and the program could be the minimum of two weeks to a maximum of a year stay in the new university.

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) has started with the mobility programs since 2002. It was clearly stated that UPM participated in the program in order to give opportunities to students in learning at new universities throughout the world. The mobility programs at UPM seemed to be a success since a large number of students participated in the program.

A large number of universities also have signed the memorandum of understanding (MOU) with UPM in order to have a smoother program involving universities. So far, it was documented more than 100 universities from all over the world signed the MOU with UPM. In spite of activities been organized by UPM, the other universities have also prepared with various types of activities in order to cater the need of the incoming students. In all these activities, communication plays a crucial part to enhance the learning experience for the students, and to smoothen their knowledge in communication. It is not only for the students, it also involves the officers and lecturers at UPM too.

Communication has played a major role in students' everyday lives (Normaliza Abd Rahim *et al.*, 2012; Chun Tai-Hyun & Normaliza Abd Rahim, 2012; Normaliza Abd Rahim, 2013). They have to communicate in order to understand the other party's intention and vice versa. It is crucial to understand a person interaction especially when he/she is in a different country (LeBaron, 2003; LeBaron & Pillay, 2006; DeVito, 2009). Students at the university face a lot of problem dealing with new environment (Normaliza Abd Rahim, 2014). It can be said that these students will have conflicts in understand especially with the new accent or slang from the new country. They will have trouble in understanding the new sound and trying to figure out the sound with the background knowledge. Thus, this situation will make them having conflicts and therefore, they will end up not saying anything or be silent instead (Devito, 2009).

Consequently, Hart (2000) and Bell (2002) proposed eight causes of conflict in communication. The eight causes are conflicting resources, styles, perceptions, goals, pressures, roles, different in personal values and unpredictable policies. As compared to the normal conflicts among mobility students from UPM, it can be seen that the eight causes were used. Hill (2015) suggested that the eight causes will only reflect to the person who involved in

different types of activities. The activities were mainly involved with interactions between two or more parties. DeVito (2009) added that there are reasons that make a person speak and usually it is important for the other person to understand. Knapp and Vangesliti (2009) agreed and state that the interaction involves relationship either formal or informal, you know the person whom you interact with or not at all but still there is communication taking place.

Subsequently, in relation to mobility programs, when the students involved having conflicts in communication, they will consider the interaction that they heard as noise. Noise is not the only factor that can compromise communication. Krauss and Morsella (2000) claim that communication can be transmitted and received messages that are identical or the retrieved proposition may differ significantly from the original intention. Speaker and listener may be employing codes that differ subtly, and this may lead to misunderstanding (Krauss & Morsella, 2000). For example, lexical choice often reflects a speaker's implicit attitude towards the subject of the utterance.

Therefore, the objectives of this research were to identify and discuss the communication among mobility students at Universiti Putra Malaysia.

Research Methods

The subjects involved in this study consist of ten (10) mobility students from China. The students have to deal with the International Division (ID) at UPM from the first day they leave for their country. They are from the Kunming University of Science and Technology, China. The students age between 19-22 years old. The students attended the two-week program which was set up by the ID, UPM for short term mobility that involved classes, culture and visiting the places of interest. The subjects were interviewed at the end of their stay in UPM. The interview questions were based on the activities at UPM. The interviews were taken

place at the ID, Universiti Putra Malaysia. They were videotaped and the conversations were transcribed. The transcriptions were analyzed by using Stubbs (1983) discourse analysis theory. This study used 6 characteristics as suggested by Stubbs (1983). According to Stubbs (1983) the characteristics are predictability, phonotactics, grammaticality, intuitions, analogies and conclusions.

Results and Discussion

The results below are discussed according to Stubbs (1983) discourse analysis theory: predictability, phonotactics, grammaticality, intuitions, analogies and conclusions.

Predictability

In this research predictability refers to listeners comprehending the intention of the speaker. It is found the predictability of the subjects in this research were mainly due to the fact that their utterances were followed by certain gestures to accentuate their meanings. For example, from Table 1 above shows utterances that can be predicted its meaning. S1 seemed to prefer uttering short phrase as in 'Too hot''. It can be said that S1 utterance meant to be 'It is too hot here in Malaysia'. S1 was showing gestures of fanning herself with her hand. On the other hand, S9 preferred to utter short phrase to express her dissatisfaction. S9 was seen showing hand gestures to show that she is waiting for a long time. S9 uttered 'Long time' and it can be predicted that she wanted to say 'We are waiting for a long time'. As for S2, he was showing his current feeling of being hungry and asking 'Where food?' while rubbing his stomach to show that he was hungry and said 'I hungry want eat' to which can be predicted to actually mean 'Where is the food for lunch?' and 'I am hungry and I want to eat'. Nevertheless, the results above by S1, S2 and S9 showed that the utterances were based on repetition of a state, course of action, behavior and making it possible to know in advance what to a person is trying to say. Stubbs (1983) claimed that predictability

will help listeners to comprehend the intention of the speaker. Hence, communication will take place with better understanding and without any confusion.

Table 1: Traces of predictability from the subjects' utterances

Subject	Actual sentence	Meaning
S1	Too hot	It is too hot here
S9	Long time	We are waiting for a long time
S2	Where food?	Where is the food for lunch?
S2	I hungry want eat	I am hungry and I want to eat

Phonotactics

In this research phonotactics refers to the willingness to help the listener in understanding what the speaker is trying to say and making it into an actual correct sentence that make sense (Stubbs, 1983). Table 2 below shows the ability for S2 to describe what she wanted to say to explain her background of study back home when she said 'I *en-neer* in China university'. The ability to say the exact word with the correct pronunciation is the main trouble that S2 was facing, though she tried to make it sound as close as possible and the actual sentence was 'I am from the Faculty of Engineering at my home university in China'.

Table 2: Traces of phonotactics from the subjects' utterances

Subject	Actual sentence	Meaning
S2	I *en-neer* in China university	I am from the Faculty of Engineering at my home university in China
S6	Me *wan* eat out	I want to eat outside of campus

From Table 2, it is observed that S6 on the other hand was trying to explain his intention on what he wanted to do when he said 'me want eat out' while pointing his finger towards the

road. He was having trouble in making a good sentence but he sounded out the important words to give out hints to which means 'I want to eat outside of campus'. However, the results above by S2 and S6 show the ability for the subject to describe their feeling in words with very minimum knowledge of making a word or a sentence which is the set of allowed arrangements or sequences of speech sounds in a given language. The utterances above have clearly shown that phonotactics taken place among the students.

Grammaticality

In this research, grammaticality refers to linguistics, the conformity of a sentence to the rules defined by a specific grammar of a language (Stubbs, 1983). Table 3 below showed some of the subjects' utterances which were grammatically conflicted:

Table 3: Traces of grammaticality from the subjects' utterances

Subject	Actual sentence	Meaning
S3	I learn business at home	I am a business major at my home university
S1	Thank you for taking us here	Thank you for having us at UPM
S5	UPM golf very good	The golf driving range at UPM is very good

Table 3 above shows the grammar mistake made by S3 when trying to explain his program of study at his home university when he said 'I learn business at home'. Even though there are grammatical errors in the sentence itself, the listener was trying to put together what he actually meant into a correct sentence which is 'I am a business major at my home university'.

S1 on the other hand was trying to show his gratitude to the listener by saying 'Thank you for taking us here' for a few times. This shows that he was grateful to be at UPM during the visit even though he knew that his grammar was not fully correct. The actual sentence he was trying to say is 'Thank you for having us at UPM'. S5 on the other hand, is happy when she was brought to play golf and excitely said 'UPM golf very good' while smiling happily. Even with such short and minor grammatical error, the listener was still able to understand her actual meaning was actually 'The golf driving range at UPM is very good.' S1, S3 and S5 affection towards wanting to say something nice even with very minimum knowledge of English language is still acceptable to the listener even though the listener will have to translate the actual sentence him or herself.

Intuitions

According to Stubbs (1983), intuition is the ability to understand something instinctively, without the need for conscious reasoning. In this study, intuition was mainly due to facial expression and aided materials to further strengthen the meanings.

Table 4: Traces of intuitions from the subjects' utterances

Subject	Actual sentence	Meaning
S8	You talk slow I no understand	You have to talk slowly or else I cannot understand
S7	I like horse at UPM	I like the horse riding activity at UPM

Table 4 above shows the ability of S8 trying to explain her situation in having a hard time understanding what the listener is saying to her when she said 'you talk slow I no understand'. With a worry face S8 is trying hard to absorb what the listener is explaining to her. It is in a way showing her facial expression. The listener understood her expression when she actually meant 'you have to talk slowly or else I cannot understand' and started to talk slowly so that it will be easier for her to acknowledge what is being said to her.

In contrast, S7 mentioned 'I like horse at UPM' when she explained to the listener about a visit to the Equine Park she had earlier. She

was smiling happily while showing photos of her horse riding to the listener. From her expression and the photos she showed to the listener, her actual sentence can be assumed to be 'I like the horse riding activity at UPM'. S7 and S8 are trying to explain their current feeling towards what has happened to them earlier in the day even with a very minimal ability to say it out perfectly in English. With the expression they gave made it easier for the listener to make assumption and translate their actual meaning of the sentence.

Analogies

Stubbs (1983) mentioned that analogies are a comparison between one thing and another, typically for the purpose of explanation or clarification. Table 5 shows the effort of S4 trying to explain and differentiate the difference between the beach in Malaysia and China when she said 'China beach far and no swimming cold'. During a short visit to one of the beach in Malaysia, she managed to make a comparison between the beaches in Malaysia and China. The listener can assume she actually meant 'The beach in China is far away and you cannot swim there because it is too cold'.

Table 5: Traces of intuitions from the subjects' utterances

Subject	Actual sentence	Meaning
S4	China beach far and no swimming cold	The beach in China is far away and you cannot swim there because it's too cold
S5	Very busy traffic	The traffic is very busy here in Malaysia

S5 in another topic mentioned about the traffic situation that she sees everyday during her stay in Malaysia when she said 'very busy traffic' and the listener can predict what she actually meant was 'the traffic is very busy here in Malaysia'. S4 and S5 are in a way of comparing the situation between how it was

back home in China and how it was going on in Malaysia. The differences can be seen by themselves and expressed towards the listener.

Conclusion

Stubbs (1983) defined that conclusion is a judgment or decision reached by reasoning. In this study, conclusion referred to overall sum-up by comparing the initial situation the subjects were attuned to. Table 6 below shows the amazed expression by S9 when he said 'UPM big place' while pointing his finger all around him. By that the listener can understand what he is trying to say it 'UPM has a very big space'. S10 on the other hand, told the listener about her experience about the food varieties and mentioned that 'Malaysia a lot food' while taking foods at the buffet corner during the farewell dinner. The listener can assume that she meant 'Malaysia has a lot of food varieties' because the buffet sets up a lot of different kind of foods.

Table 6: Traces of conclusion from the subjects' utterances

Subject	Actual sentence	Meaning
S9	UPM big place	UPM has a very big space
S10	Malaysia a lot food	Malaysia has a lot of food varieties
S4	Beach very nice	The beach is very nice here

The same goes with S4 who mentioned about her amazing moment when they visited the beach the weekend before and said that 'beach very nice' with full happiness. She even mentioned that she wanted to go again if there is a chance to do so. From there, the listener understood what she actually meant was 'the beach is very nice here'. When it comes to something good or better in a person's life experience, they will keep mentioning and comparing their expression towards the situation. S4, S9 and S10 made a direct conclusion based on the situation that they faced during their visit to certain places

in Malaysia summed up their judgment on Malaysia overall. Their main reason for doing so is because of the comparison between Malaysia itself and their home country which may have differentiated in many ways.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the conflicts in communication among mobility students in Universiti Putra Malaysia by using Stubb's (1983) sociolinguistics analysis on discourse. The findings of this study revealed that Stubbs (1983) criteria's of conflicts in communication have taken place. Students seem to have conflict in communication and the ways to avoid the conflict will be having the utterances being analyzed. The results of the study were parallel to the findings of Normaliza Abd Rahim (2014) and DeVito (2009) where conflicts in discussion reached by reasoning. Students seem to have their reasons to utter the way they did, hence, it will be understood by listeners related to the environment. This study helps in the process of understanding the flow of the communication barriers that occur among the international students play a major role in understanding them in a more appropriate way. The communication patterns that will be categorized according the theory suggested will help a lot of people in having better communication with understanding for both parties.

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