



Discourse, Politeness and Ethnic Sensitivities in Malaysian Parliament

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**This is a revised version of Chapter 13 in Ethnic Relations and Nation Building. Petaling Jaya: SIRD 2010.*

by M. K. David, J. McLellan, Y.M. Ngeow, M.L. Lean & M.T. Yee (eds.)

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Introduction

The Malaysian Parliament comprises the King (Yang Di-Pertuan Agung), the Senate (Dewan Negara) and the House of Representatives (Dewan Rakyat). The Parliament is the highest legislative authority that formulates laws applicable to the nation as a whole. It is responsible for drafting bills, passing federal laws, making amendments to the constitution, examining the government's policies and, approving federal government expenditure and new taxes. Participation in parliamentary debates is exclusively meant for Members of Parliament (MPs) who have competed and won in the general elections at their respective parliamentary constituencies. The Parliament serves as a forum to debate and discuss issues pertaining to national interests. Besides the MPs, top ranking government officials, politicians and the media practitioners meet to discuss and report specific issues concerning public interest and national affairs of importance to the people. This important role of parliamentary sitting has made it a significant area of studies in the analysis of political discourse.

Political discourse appears in the form of spoken discourse and written text. Between the two, spoken discourse reflects the more spontaneous response of the speaker, hence is perceived as being more apt for providing revelations of the speaker's feelings and thoughts. In that regard, it is possible that political discourse analysis in parliamentary sittings can provide the stimulus for the study of speaker's attitude towards specific issues and persons. More importantly, spoken discourse and its analysis enable the uncovering of the underlying feelings and prejudice of the speaker towards other MPs with different viewpoints or political ideologies.

With the exception of MPs who choose to give official speeches based on written texts, MPs who come from a multiethnic background generally possess oratory skills in the national language- Malay. As the MPs speak to gain support, they too create tension and attract attention, by means of dominating, controlling, challenging, competing, criticizing and threatening others. MPs that possess a high level of sociolinguistic competence are those who are more alert and sensitive to the language environment. The highly competent MPs would select only the most appropriate choice of words to deliver specific message/s to their target audience, with the awareness that others are also present and listening in the Parliament.

Literature review

Language is a complex and creative instrument that offers a wide range of tools for subtle discrimination between individuals who believe in different political ideologies. This study sets out to examine the tendency and the extent of ethnic stereotyping in political discourse in Malaysia. The primary aim of this study is to provide some practical input to reflect on ethnic stereotyping among the Members of Parliament (MPs) as seen in their discourse in parliamentary debates. Such discourse provides evidence of a speaker's attitude. Their performance as eloquent speakers can be further refined through public speaking skills such as mixing formal and informal styles, combining markers of authority and familiarity, using colloquial words and jokes to impress an intended audience.

One speech act is slander. Slander is a false and damaging statement about a person and is often performed through name calling and bad mouthing with the aim of causing others to lose confidence in the person being slandered. Malaysian MPs too, use derogatory language to undermine each other in parliament, with the general and deep-rooted belief that they are protected by parliamentary privileges. Parliamentary privileges are perceived as essential and fundamental to the professionalism of elected MPs. In Malaysia this privilege is based on Article 63 of the Federal Constitution and section 3 of the Houses of Parliament (Privileges and Powers) Act 1952 (Act 347). According to Article 63, "No person shall be liable to any proceedings in any court in respect of anything said or any vote given by him when taking part in any proceedings of either House of Parliament or any committee thereof." Given such a prerogative, Malaysian MPs are well aware that they are free from being called to account, either in civil or criminal courts, for their parliamentary words or actions. From the legal perspective, the law of defamation, official secrets, obscenity, blasphemy, and of all other criminal offences do not apply to parliamentary proceedings (Shaq Faruqi, 2007).

Previous research (Ngeow et al. 2009; David, 2006:68; Asmah, 2004) on discourse or content analyses of Malaysian parliamentary debate reveal that such parliamentary prerogatives and privileges have resulted in a number of MPs ignoring the consequences of their utterances. David (2006), discussing face-threatening speech acts and lack of civility in political discourse, used the Accommodation Theory in her analysis of politeness strategies used among Malaysian MPs in parliamentary debates. It was found that MPs establish their in-group relationship (we/us) with MPs who either represent the same political party or coalition, or who adopt the same ideology and practice. On the other hand, MPs from opposing political parties (they/them) tend to attack and use social distancing markers to show rivalry towards one another.

David (2006) also observes that MPs of Malaysia perform face-threatening acts against opposing bipartisan political groups. Through distancing strategies MPs use speech acts ranging from directives, insults, derisions, amusement, disapproval and warnings to threaten each other's face and not accommodate to each other's face wants. Power is exhibited through the use of face-threatening acts. Politicians of opposing parties have a tendency to hurl verbal abuse at each other, whilst some male MPs have used sexist language to humiliate their female political rivals when debating about non-gender issues in Parliament (Ngeow, David & Yoong, 2009).

A study by Asmah Omar (1998) extensively described the various facets of non-physical conflict in the Malay language. She has identified 24 categories of non-physical verbal conflict which include teasing, kindling, calling names, expressing malice, accusing, being rude, distrusting, being jealous, breaking the law, non-fulfillment of promise/s, being partial, causing confusion, cheating and lying, putting pressure, stabbing behind the back, being a traitor and hypocrite, exhibiting prejudice, looking askance, causing embarrassment and desire to have an upper hand. While the cause of impolite language and verbal conflicts may initially appear harmless, it may spark off an argument and develop into serious conflicts. For example, teasing with or without humour may seem harmless, but the party who is the target of the teasing may feel that he is being made fun of (Asmah, 1998:15). Hence, speakers should be concerned with the feelings of the target when using impolite language.

MPs engaging in parliamentary debates are aware that their speech will be documented as the content of their speech has the potential to attract public attention. The presupposition is that, the more controversial the issue, the more likely the speakers gain publicity and mileage. Gaining political mileage by saying the wrong thing seems to be low-risk strategy for some politicians as their voices can be heard and their faces will appear in the local media. In other words, there is potential for MPs to instigate and prolong conflicts (c.f. Baron, Byrne and Branscombe, 2006).

The creation of a conflicting discourse in the parliament can be analysed using the concept of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Politeness is defined broadly as repressive action taken to counter-balance the disruptive effect of face-threatening acts (FTAs). On the other hand, 'face' is defined as 'the public self-image that every member (of society) wants to claim for himself/herself'. Politeness is essential in all forms of verbal communication as men and women use words to express themselves, as well as to hurt each other's feelings. The FTA approach explains both the "positive" and "negative" face of the speaker and the interlocutor. The positive face refers to the positive and

consistent self-image that people have or wish to have; whilst the negative face refers to the lack of appreciation of someone. Intensified political rivalry and heated debates have caused some MPs to use impolite language that is potentially dangerous, offensive, and hurtful to the other party, infringing on the principles of righteousness, freedom of speech as well as mutual respect.

Significance of the study

The ruling coalition, Barisan Nasional (BN) with United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) as the major component parties dominated the political arena and held majority power over Malaysian Parliament until March 8 2008. The aftermath of General Elections 2008 saw the number of opposition MPs increasing from 21 out of 219 seats (merely 9.6%) for the 2004-2008 term to 82 out of 222 seats (30.7%) for the 2008-2010 term beginning in April 2008. The unexpected victory of the opposition party has boosted the confidence level of the opposition MPs in the parliament. Opposition leaders have become more vocal and a possible reason for the opposition's solidarity and strength is the emergence of young and professional politicians in the multiethnic opposition camp. In particular, educated and outspoken MPs have significantly intensified the debates in parliament since April 2008, creating more opportunities for verbal conflicts. In addition, live telecasting of parliament meetings on a weekly basis, and the uploading of video clips by some bloggers may have profound impact on the form and content of the debates.

Research objectives

It is the objective of this paper to explore the use of words and lexical items by parliament members during debates. The Hansard is used to collect the data and the following research questions are asked:

- How frequently do MPs of the ruling party and the opposition party “attack” one another?
- To what extent do MPs observe politeness in the Malaysian Parliament?
- How are comments relating to ethnic sensitivities articulated?

Methodology and data collection

A corpus is a collection of naturally-occurring language text, chosen to characterize a state or variety of language (Channell, 1994:217). Content analysis serves as a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts. The method of conventional content analysis is used to provide in-depth and critical

analysis of the contents of parliamentary news with emphasis on both the structure of texts, and the social context.

This study is based on content analysis of the Hansard, i.e. verbatim recording of each Malaysian parliamentary debate since the commencement of the first parliamentary sitting in April 2008. It is concerned about power struggle in the Parliament, such as the verbal strategies and language choice of the MPs in exhibiting the verbal prowess that they have.

The Hansard records all verbal discourses including statement, debate, disagreement, dispute and verbal conflict during parliamentary sittings. Non-verbal communication such as coughs, laughs, cheering and jeering are also recorded. In addition, the Hansard also documents physical movements of speakers and audience such as clapping of hands, thumping of fists on the table, switching off microphones, staging a walk out, and interruptions.

Hansards of the April and May parliamentary sittings in 2008 were downloaded. The content analysis begins with identification of incidents where MPs of the ruling and opposition parties challenged one another in the debates. Categorization based on the types of impolite language and ethnic insensitivity includes negative stereotyping, name-calling and personal attacks. Such elements are coded and analyzed. Selected texts in Malay are translated into English. Such translations may not always reflect the real language situation, actual meaning or accurate innuendos as intended by the respective speakers because of the culture that is attached to the Malay language. Nevertheless, a triangulation between coders can ensure reliability. The translation in the analysis is also counter-checked by language experts of both Malay and English to ensure accuracy and precision of the intent of the respective speakers.

Data Analysis

This study is based on Hansard of 10 parliamentary sittings dated April 30, and 9 parliamentary sittings on May 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 15, 21 and 22. It was found that there were altogether 31 occurrences of MPs creating conflicts where they directly or indirectly attacked members of the opposition party.

On the first parliamentary sitting after the March 8 General Elections dated April 30, both the BN and the opposition were found to be picking on one another, calling each other names such as “big foot”, “big monkey” and “under creature”. A veteran opposition leader, Lim Kit Siang called the first parliamentary sitting “A very bad start, a terrible start and an atrocious start” (April 30 Hansard, p. 1020). In this context, the frequency of

attack made by MPs from both the ruling and the opposition party was coded. The section below discusses the frequency of attacks made by the respective political parties.

Differences in political ideology for the ruling government (BN) and the opponent parties (PKR/DAP/PAS) resulted in rigorous shouting, name calling and other face-threatening acts that could easily create, solidify and reproduce racism. Racist discourse in the parliamentary sitting consists of a repertoire of words, images and texts. The debate was telecast live on television and reported widely in the local daily newspapers for about a week. The event drew condemnation from the public. Based on ten parliamentary sittings dated from April 30 to May 22, the following data present some of the preliminary findings on the creation of a conflicting environment in the parliament. Table 1 illustrates which political party launched the attack and which political party was under attack and what strategies were used.

Table 1 shows a total of 31 attacks took place between the ruling and the opposition parties in 10 parliamentary sittings. The ruling parties led by UMNO, initiated 23 attacks and this comprises 74.19% of total attacks during the sittings. The MPs of DAP were most frequently under attack (16 times), followed by PKR (4 times), the opposition in general (twice) and PAS (once). The opposition, on the other hand, initiated 8 attacks with UMNO being the main target of attack.

From the 10 parliamentary sittings, our preliminary findings suggest a pattern where political discourse often take place between two camps, i.e. the ruling coalition (National Front or BN) and the opposition parties (People's Coalition). Both camps uphold different political ideologies and represent different groups of people. This dichotomy is intensified when rigorous shouting, name calling and other face-threatening acts are used to create, solidify and reproduce verbal conflict in the Parliament. The repertoire of words, images and texts that are threaded together were made public when the debate was telecasted live on television and reported widely in the local daily newspapers for every sitting. The event drew the attention of the people as news about the MPs' statements was further circulated in the Internet, creating public awareness about what happened within the four walls of Parliament.

The analyses show that only a small number of MPs (about 5% of the total number of 222 elected MPs) had acted and/or reacted aggressively using racist language to attack or to defend themselves in the exchange of words between opposing parties. Clearly, more members of the ruling party (BN) attacked their opponents with 23 attacks coming from the BN and UMNO component. Only 8 were from the opposition. Parallel to this, statistics show that 22 of the opposition were attacked with only 8 from the ruling party

being attacked. Such a phenomenon suggests that the ruling party demonstrated more aggression, as compared to the opposition that had just come into power in the 2008 General Elections. Moreover, the MPs from the ruling party used both direct and indirect strategies to attack with 13 being direct and 9 being indirect ones, whereas the opposition used mainly indirect strategies.

The following excerpts are provided to show the use of racist language by the MPs. The excerpts demonstrate the choice of words of some MPs, focusing particularly on their lack of politeness. Names of these MPs are indicated in parentheses in the data. The following excerpts illustrate how MPs from the ruling coalition and the opposition parties made offensive remarks and used racist language. The explanations that follow each excerpt describe the context.

Excerpt 1. Accusing another MP for taking advantage of the OKU (the handicapped people)

Original	Translation
20080522 p. 44	20080522 p. 44
Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri bin Abdul Aziz: Sebelum ratifikasi dapat dilaksanakan seperti mana yang dikehendaki dalam artikel 32 UNCAC. Inilah sebabnya mengapa kita terlambat sedikit.	Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri bin Abdul Aziz: Before ractification can be carried out as required by Article 32 UNCAC. This is why we are a little bit late.
Tuan N. Gobalakrishnan [Padang Serai]: <i>[Bangun]</i>	Mr. N. Gobalakrishnan [Padang Serai]: <i>[Stand]</i>
Dr. Haji Mohd. Puad Zarkashi [Batu Pahat]: <i>[Bangun]</i>	Dr. Haji Mohd. Puad Zarkashi [Batu Pahat]: <i>[Stand]</i>
Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri bin Abdul Aziz: Berkaitan dengan Yang Berhormat Padang Serai tadi Yang Berhormat, jangan ingat OKU ini dia tidak kuat, sebenarnya OKU kuat. Dia bukan 'Orang Kurang Upaya' tetapi 'Orang Kuat Upaya' sebenarnya sebab itu kita kena berhati-hati. Saya pun juga takut setiap kali kalau Yang Berhormat Bukit Gelugor tanya, saya bimbang takut tersilap cakap nanti dia akan panggil OKU untuk menyerang saya. Namun...	Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri bin Abdul Aziz: Regarding to Your Honourable Padang Serai just now, Your Honourable, do not assume that a handicapped person (OKU) is not strong. He is not handicapped (OKU) but he is actually 'Strong and Capable', that's why we have to be careful. I am also afraid that every time when Your Honourable Bukit Gelugor asks me, I'm worried and afraid that if I say it wrongly he will ask the OKU to attack me. Nevertheless...
Tuan N. Gobalakrishnan [Padang Serai]: <i>[Bangun]</i>	Mr N. Gobalakrishnan [Padang Serai]: <i>[Stand]</i>
Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri bin Abdul Aziz: Yang Berhormat Padang Serai duduklah, nanti dulu. Namun kita akan sentiasa memberi layanan yang baik kepada mereka dan kita tidak perlu merasa terganggu. Ini kerana Parlimen pada hari ini sudah pun menjadi satu tempat yang merupakan tumpuan orang ramai, dia suka. Berbeza dengan Parlimen Yang Berhormat mula-mula menganggotai dulu tahun 1982. Tidak siapa kisah Parlimen.	Dato' Seri Mohamed Nazri bin Abdul Aziz: Your Honourable Padang Serai sit, wait first. No matter what we will always give the best treatment to them and we do not have to feel threatened. This is because today's Parliament has become a place that attracts attention of the public, he likes it. It is different from the time when Your Honourable joined in 1982. Nobody knew about the Parliament.
Datuk Bung Moktar bin Radin [Kinabatangan]: Boleh minta penjelasan Yang Berhormat Menteri?	Datuk Bung Moktar bin Radin [Kinabatangan]: May I seek explanation Your Honourable Minister?

Before we analyse the above excerpt, it is necessary to discuss the concept of handicap or disability in Malaysia. The disabled people in Malaysia are a special category of people with special needs, and the Malaysian government has made every effort to give them recognition by being sensitive to their needs. Handicapped people are seen as an underprivileged community who deserve attention and help from the government and society. The handicapped community is widely known as OKU (Orang Kurang Upaya) which means the disabled. In the above mentioned debate, ‘OKU’ which is a Malay expression for the disabled (Orang Kurang Upaya) was deliberately reframed as strong (Orang Kuat Upaya). By distorting the acronym OKU from its original meaning ‘disabled’ to mean exactly the opposite, the Minister further suggested and implied that he was afraid of a possible attack by the wheelchair-bound MP as the latter may call upon other handicapped people to attack him, or mobilise other handicapped people to come to his rescue. Such innuendo seems to imply that handicapped people could easily provoke and be provoked. The minister’s statement could be interpreted as a personal attack against the MP for Gelugor, or a disrespectful statement deemed insensitive and impolite of the disabled community.

Excerpt 2. Calling other MPs ‘liar’ and ‘twister’

Original	Translation
20080506 p.101	20080506 p.101
Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Yang Berhormat, sila duduk.	Deputy Speaker [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Your Honourable, please sit.
Tuan Lim Kit Siang [Ipoh Timur]: Adakah mahu... [<i>Dewan riuh</i>]	Mr Lim Kit Siang [Ipoh Timur]: Do you want to... [<i>Roars in the Hall</i>]
Dato’ Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: <i>The biggest twister</i> , pembelit, penipu, pembelit.	Dato’ Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: <i>The biggest twister, twister, liar, twister.</i>
Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Ahli-ahli Yang Berhormat, Ahli-ahli Yang Berhormat.	Deputy Speaker [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Members of the Honourable. Members of the Honourable.

Excerpt 2 shows a chaotic situation during the third parliamentary sitting for the term beginning in 2008. It appears that the heated debate went out of control when one MP shouted at another MP calling him ‘the biggest twister’ and ‘liar’. This accusation is serious because such statements were not supported with facts or evidence. Following this, there was instant show of dissatisfaction and uproar in the hall and this was when MPs from the ruling and the opposition camps stood and shouted at each other. Despite warnings given by the Deputy Speaker to quieten the uproar, the final outcome was that no MP was penalized.

In the following excerpt, the speaker attacked his opposition by suggesting that the latter was impolite.

Excerpt 3. Accusing other MP for having bad manners

Original	Translation
20080521 p.170-171	20080521 p.170-171
Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: Tuan Yang di-Pertua, <i>point of order</i> . Siapa yang duduk di tempat Yang Berhormat Ipoh Timur ini? Dia datang masuk ke dalam tidak ada bagi tunduk kepada Tuan Yang di-Pertua...	Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: Your Honourable Speaker, <i>point of order</i> . Who is sitting in the place of Your Honourable Ipoh Timur here? He came in without bowing to Your Honourable Speaker...
Tuan Yang di-Pertua: Ya Yang Berhormat Pasir Salak. Terima kasih.	Speaker: Yes Your Honourable Pasir Salak. Thank you.
Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: ...Kurang ajar ini. Tidak hormat kepada Tuan Yang di-Pertua yang mengiringi pula daripada...	Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: ...Impertinent. No respect for Your Honourable Speaker and the person who comes with him is from...
Tuan Yang di-Pertua: Yang Berhormat Pasir Salak sudah saya tahu.	Speaker: Your Honourable Pasir Salak I already know.
Tuan Lim Guan Eng [Bagan]: <i>Point of order</i> .	Mr. Lim Guan Eng [Bagan]: Point of order.
Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: Cakap bagi <i>warning</i> dekat dia. Tiada hormat, dia ingat dia sudah memerintah...	Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: Say you want to give him warning, without respect, he thinks he has the power to rule...
Tuan Yang di-Pertua: Yang Berhormat Pasir Salak, sudah, sudah.	Speaker: Your Honourable Pasir Salak, enough, enough.
Puan Chong Eng [Bukit Mertajam]: Yang Berhormat Pasir Salak ini sangat hormat kepada Tuan yang di-Pertua.	Madam Chong Eng [Bukit Mertajam]: Your Honourable Speaker Pasir Salak respects the Your Honourable Speaker very much.
Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: <i>You</i> diam, itu tiada hormat kepada Tuan Yang di-Pertua.	Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: You shut up, that is no respect for the Honourable Speaker.
Puan Fong Po Kuan [Batu Gajah]: [<i>Menyampuk</i>]	Madam Fong Po Kuan [Batu Gajah]: [<i>Interrupted</i>]
Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: <i>You need to be told</i> , dengan izin.	Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: You need to be told, with permission.
Tuan Yang di-Pertua: Yang Berhormat Pasir Salak, duduklah Pasir Salak. Sudah saya.	Speaker: Your Honourable Pasir Salak, sit down Pasir Salak. Enough for me.
Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: Tuan Yang di-Pertua lembut sangat. <i>Don't be soft</i> .	Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: Your Honourable Speaker is too soft. Don't be soft.
Tuan Chow Kon Yeow [Tanjong]: Kita lantik Yang Berhormat Pasir Salak menjadi <i>seatwatcher lah</i> .	Mr Chow Kon Yeow [Tanjong]: We shall appoint Your Honourable Pasir Salak to be the <i>seatwatcher</i> .
Tuan Yang di-Pertua: Yang Berhormat Pasir Salak saya tahu tugas saya.	Speaker: Your Honourable Pasir Salak I know my responsibility.
Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: Ini bukan	Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: This is not the State Assembly of Pulau Pinang.

<p>dewan di Pulau Pinang.</p> <p>Tuan Yang di-Pertua: Yang Berhormat Pasir Salak, tolong duduk. Ahli-ahli Yang Berhormat tolong duduk. Saya tahu tugas saya apabila tarik perhatian saya, saya tahu. Ahli Yang Berhormat Bagan, yang tempat duduk itu Yang Berhormat Ipoh Timur. Jadi kalau bolehlah minta dia supaya keluar pasal dalam peraturan mesyuarat kita apabila dalam waktu sesi mesyuarat ini cuma Ahli-ahli Yang Berhormat yang berkenaan boleh duduk. Kalau di galeri boleh, kalau boleh Yang Berhormat Bagan...</p>	<p>Speaker: Your Honourable Pasir Salak, please sit. All Your Honourables please sit. I know my responsibility when something attracts my attention, I know it. Your Honourable Bagan, your seat belongs to Your Honourable Ipoh Timur. So if possible please ask him to take out our Point of Order during the meeting session as only the respective Members of Parliament are allowed to sit. If it is in the Gallery you may do so, if possible Your Honourable Bagan...</p>
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In the above excerpt, an MP of the ruling party constantly interrupted the Speaker by offering him some hint and/or reminder of how the Speaker should react to certain situation. This same MP also attempted to tell a female opposition MP to ‘shut up’, adding that, ‘...you need to be told’. He later criticised another MP for being ‘impertinent’. He even commented and gave instructions to the speaker, “Your Honourable Speaker is too soft. Don’t be soft.” The Speaker then retaliated by saying that the MP had ‘crossed the line’ and this was clearly a complaint. Thus when the Speaker ordered the MP to sit, the MP appeared agitated, and the Speaker says, “I know my responsibility.”

The above incident clearly demonstrates that the abovementioned MP had not been tactful and was not ashamed to use terms like ‘impertinent’ (‘kurang ajar’) on a fellow MP. Additionally, he took the opportunity to tell an opposition MP to ‘shut up’ quoting the reason that the setting was not the MP’s ground, ‘this is not the state assembly of Pulau Pinang’, a state where the opposition party had taken over in 2008. The lack of politeness and sensitivity offended the Speaker, who reacted to his impoliteness by ordering him to sit down after indicating that the MP had ‘crossed the line’. The Speaker, when his autonomy was challenged, demonstrated a high level of tolerance and only issued a warning.

Positive face threatening acts such as saving face and being polite when making requests were strategies used by the Speaker to calm the situation. Avoidance of negative face threatening acts resulted in face saving behavior of the Speaker of the House. However, even though the Speaker was able to handle the conflict in the parliament in a diplomatic way, he was not in control of the power struggle amongst the MPs as shown in Excerpt 4.

Transforming Research

June 2011

Excerpt 4. Accusing other MPs for not having a brain

Original	Translation
20080512 p.57	20080512 p.57
Datuk Haji Yussof bin Haji Mahal [Labuan]: Songkok sahaja ada tapi tak ada otak.	Datuk Haji Yussof bin Haji Mahal [Labuan]: There is only <i>songkok</i> but there is no brain.
Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Yang Berhormat Rembau sila habiskan.	Deputy Speaker [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Your Honourable Rembau please finish it.
Tuan N. Gobalakrishnan [Padang Serai]: Dia cakap kita tidak ada otak, mahu penjelasan.	Mr N. Gobalakrishnan [Padang Serai]: He said we do not have any brain, I demand explanation.
Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Tidak apa. Duduklah. Yang Berhormat Padang Serai, duduk Padang Serai.	Deputy Speaker [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Never mind. Sit Your Honourable Padang Serai, sit Padang Serai.

Excerpt 4 shows that a Malay Muslim MP was being impolite and arrogant when he commented, “There is only songkok but there is no brain.” Songkok refers to a head covering for Muslim men. In official installation and formal functions in the Malaysian Parliament, it is a custom for both Muslim and non-Muslim MPs (men) to wear songkok. In this excerpt, upon hearing the comment by a Malay Muslim MP, the non-Muslim MP was unhappy with the remark and demanded an explanation. However, again we see the weakness of the Speaker who said, ‘never mind’ (tidak apa) and asked the MP to sit down and ended the argument, instead of reprimanding the other MP for being rude and insensitive.

Excerpt 5. Accusing other MPs of having a small brain

Original	Translation
20080512 p. 54	20080512 p. 54
Tuan Karpal Singh [Bukit Gelugor]: Tuan Yang di-Pertua ada menyatakan saya menghina institusi Raja-raja.	Mr Karpal Singh [Bukit Gelugor]: Your Honourable Speaker once said I humiliated the institution of the Malay Rulers.
Tuan Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar [Rembau]: Kalau otak kecil memang kelirulah. Okey. Kami di sebelah sini pun tidak sempurna, ada kelemahannya. Yalah siapa tidak ada kelemahan, namun selagi Barisan Nasional memegang Kerajaan Persekutuan, kontrak sosial yang termaktub dalam Perlembagaan yang menjadi asas kepada negara kita akan kita pertahankan tanpa segan silu walau perlu berkalang leher.	Mr Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar [Rembau]: If you have tiny brain no wonder you are confused. Okay. We on this side are also not perfect, we have weaknesses. That’s right who does not have weaknesses, but as long as Barisan Nasional rules the Federal Government, social contract that was stipulated in the Constitution will become the basis and we will defend it without any reservation even if we have to be hung for defending it.

In Excerpt 5, a young Malay MP said to his opponent, “... you have tiny brain no wonder you are confused.” This MP clearly wanted an upper hand over the debate, by belittling his target interlocutor in the heated debate pertaining to the dignity of the institution of the Council of Malay Rulers. In the Malaysian context, Article 38 of the Federal Constitution stipulates that no one is allowed to question and/or to discuss the status of

Malay Rulers in this country for their previous and current contribution to the nation. From this perspective, even though parliamentary privileges protects an MP from being taken to court for bringing up sensitive issues, it is improper or rather insensitive for a non-Malay opposition leader like Karpal Singh, a prominent Sikh lawyer to question the legitimacy of the Council of Malay Rulers in the House of Representatives.

On the other hand, it is noted that the Malay youth leader who defended the Council of Malay Rulers deviates from social norms by saying, "... you have tiny brain no wonder you are confused." This expression must be seen in the Malaysian context where in general, the young generation is expected to show respect to the elderly and be extra careful in choosing lexical when dealing with the elderly, particularly in the public sphere. When a young MP insults an elderly MP, this is impolite. The young MP has violated the social norms and value systems of society in his eagerness to demonstrate his power.

The following analyses and discussion further shed light on ethnic sensitivity portrayed in verbal conflict of some MPs to show ethnic-related stereotyping, prejudices and ethnocentrism. Malaysia has often been depicted as a multiethnic country but despite plurality in culture and religion, Malay hegemony has been portrayed and experienced as a socio-political reality. This has been made possible through years of enforcement of affirmative action since Independence such as the New Economic Policy (1971-1990) and New Development Policy (1991-2000). In these policies to re-structure society, special positions and privileges have been and are given to the indigenous people called the Bumiputras (sons of the soil) in an effort to restructure society by uplifting their status in the country. The Bumiputras comprise the indigenous people and Malays residing in Peninsular Malaysia, Dayaks in Sarawak, Kadazandusuns in Sabah and other minority groups. The New Economic Policy and the subsequent national policies have strengthened the Bumiputras, enabling the Malays and other Bumiputras to enjoy special status and allocation of quota in a wide range of areas, particularly public services, education, scholarship, job opportunity, promotion, loan, leasing, welfare, investment, availability of public fund, access to government-funded project, quota system in the distribution of shares, ownership and control of corporate sector, as well as tender in almost all sectors (Article 153, Federal Constitution, 2007:111-114). Under such circumstances, it would appear that Malay MPs who are the majority and dominant in political power would have an upper hand when discussing ethnic-related issues. Below are some excerpts that show how some MPs, when debating certain issue, display prejudice to demonstrate power in order to achieve their own political agenda.

Excerpt 6. In defense of rejection of Malay rights and hegemony

Original	Translation
20080513 p. 190-191	20080513 p. 190-191
Dr. Tan Seng Giaw [Kepong]: Sekarang kita menggunakan ketuhar gelombang mikro dan lain-lain yang lebih canggih, apa berlaku lagi kita bercita-cita mencapai tahap negara maju pada 2010. Tuan Yang di-Pertua, kita mestilah mengelakkan amalan untuk melayang-layang keris semasa perhimpunan parti dan kita nampak...	Dr. Tan Seng Giaw [Kepong]: Now we are using microwaves etc. to achieve the standard of an advanced nation in 2010. Your Honourable Speaker, we must avoid the practice of waving keris during party assembly and we see...
Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: Itu hak kita, orang Melayu punya <i>You</i> gaduh pasal apa. Keris itu, <i>you</i> punya barang kita tidak kacau pun.	Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: That is our right, it belongs to the Malays. What are you making a fuss for? That keris, your own thing (business) we also never disturb.
Dr. Tan Seng Giaw [Kepong]: Datuk-datuk, mujurnya Yang Berhormat...	Dr. Tan Seng Giaw [Kepong]: <i>Datuk-datuk</i> , fortunately Your Honourable...
Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Dr. Haji Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar]: Yang Berhormat.	Deputy Speaker [Datuk Dr. Haji Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar]: Your Honourable...
Dr. Tan Seng Giaw [Kepong]: ...Menteri Pelajaran sudah insafilah mengenai hal ini. Semua kaum mempunyai hak di dalam politik, ekonomi...	Dr. Tan Seng Giaw [Kepong]: ...the Education Minister already realised this. All ethnic groups have rights in politics, economy...
Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: Jangan pertikaikan hak orang Melayu.	Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: Don't question the rights of the Malays.
Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Dr. Haji Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar]: Yang Berhormat.	Deputy Speaker [Datuk Dr. Haji Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar]: Your Honourable.
Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: ...pertikai hak orang Melayu.	Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [Pasir Salak]: ... question the rights of the Malays.
Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Dr. Haji Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar]: Yang Berhormat, jangan ganggu Yang Berhormat. Dengar saja lah.	Deputy Speaker [Datuk Dr. Haji Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar]: Your Honourable, don't disturb Your Honourable. Just listen.

The above excerpt shows that an MP of Chinese descent, Dr Tan Seng Giaw, questioned the rationale of the Youth Chief of UMNO, a Malay dominant ruling party, when he waved a keris, a Malay dagger at the Annual General Assembly of the party to call for unity of all Malays. Tan commented that “we must avoid the practice of waving keris during party assembly”. He used lexical ‘kita’ (we) which is inclusive of all who are listening, instead of ‘kami’ (we) which refers to the speaker’s party members. However, before he could elaborate further, a Malay MP interrupted and said “That (waving of keris) is our right, it belongs to the Malays. What are you making a fuss for? That keris, your own thing (business) we also never disturb.” The Malay MP used lexical ‘kita’ which is inclusive of the listening audience, instead of ‘kami’ (‘we’ exclusive of audience).

The use of ‘kita’ instead ‘kami’ indicates that the gesture of waving a keris is the right of every Malaysian, and hence this right must not be questioned. However the context of the sentence shows otherwise. The connotation of the Malay MP’s words is that, the Malays (‘we’) have the right to wave the keris, and the non-Malays (‘you’) have no right to make a fuss. The underlying reason given here is, the Malays (‘we’) never disturb ‘your’ (non-Malays) right, hence the non-Malays (‘you’) cannot interfere with the right of the Malays (‘ours’). Tan argued, “...the Education Minister already realised this. All ethnic groups have rights in politics, economy...” but the Malay MP’s response was, “Don’t question the rights of the Malays.” Debates in the parliament shows that emphasis on ethnicity, rather than the issue per se has made some MPs lose the argument. In this incident, instead of discussing whether it was appropriate to raise a keris in the party’s general assembly, the MPs debated on the rights of the Malays.

Debate in the following excerpt reflects conflict of political and religious ideology deemed sensitive to the Malay Muslim community. Being the dominant group in the parliament, not all Malay Muslims share the same political ideology. Here we see how Malay Muslims debated over issues of attire. Impolite language was constantly used to debase Muslims of other political parties, in an effort to demonise MPs from a different political camp (see Excerpt 7).

Excerpt 7. Attacking an Malay-Muslim MP on his ‘Islamic’ appearance

Original	Translation
20080513 p.101	20080513 p.101
Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Yang Berhormat.	Deputy Speaker [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Your Honourable
Dato' Haji Abd. Rahman bin Dahlan [Kota Belud]: Atau mungkinkah Pakatan Rakyat akan memberi peluang kepada Presiden PAS Yang Berhormat Marang untuk menjadi Perdana Menteri, tetapi dengan cara berpakaian serban dan jubah Yang Berhormat Marang mungkin akan kempunan.	Dato' Haji Abd. Rahman bin Dahlan [Kota Belud]: Or is it possible that the People’s Alliance (Pakatan Rakyat) will give the President of Islamic Party (PAS) Your Honourable Marang an opportunity to be the Prime Minister, but with the attire of turban and robe, Your Honourable for Marang may feel miserable.
Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Yang Berhormat cukup <i>time</i> Yang Berhormat.	Deputy Speaker [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Your Honourable time is up Your Honourable.
Dato' Haji Abd. Rahman bin Dahlan [Kota Belud]: Kerana beliau mempunyai masalah dengan imejnya.	Dato' Haji Abd. Rahman bin Dahlan [Kota Belud]: Because he has problems with his image.
Dr. Mohd Hatta bin Md. Ramli [Kuala Krai]: Ini sudah melampau. Tuan Yang di-Pertua, ini sudah melampau.	Dr. Mohd Hatta bin Md. Ramli [Kuala Krai]: This has crossed the line. Your Honourable Speaker, this has crossed the line.
Dato' Haji Abd. Rahman bin Dahlan [Kota Belud]: Dengan berpakaian serban, jubah ala Taliban beliau dikatakan tidak sesuai. [<i>Dewan riuh</i>]	Dato' Haji Abd. Rahman bin Dahlan [Kota Belud]: With his turban and robe that is ala Taliban he is said to be inappropriate. [<i>Roars in the Hall</i>]

Tuan Chua Tian Chang [Batu]: Ini telah melampaui batas.	Mr Chua Tian Chang [Batu]: This has crossed the line.
Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Yang Berhormat cukup masa Yang Berhormat.	Deputy Speaker [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Your Honourable time is up Your Honourable.

Excerpt 7 is also drawn from the discourses of an MP from the ruling party. In this excerpt, the argument started when the House discussed what an MP should wear in Parliament. One MP of the ruling coalition commented that the opposition MP for Marang, who represented the Islamic Party (PAS), should not wear “turban and robe”. He also made references to the latter’s looks and attire, associating them to the Taliban regime based in Afghanistan, “With his turban and robe that is ala Taliban he is said to be inappropriate”. It appears that the speaker was making a fallacy attack where instead of ‘attacking’ the opposition for his action, ad hominem was performed. In this argument, one can see how fallacious the speaker is.

The above statement was rebutted by two opposition MPs, i.e. Dr. Mohd Hatta bin Md Ramli, a Muslim and Chua Tian Chang, a non-Muslim. The two MPs representing different political ideologies reacted, defended and echoed one another by saying, “This has crossed the line.” The non-Muslim MP stated his stand even though the person under attack comes from the Islamic Party. An ethnic sensitive issue about the attire of Muslims came to an end when the Deputy Speaker finally disallowed any further debate on the topic.

Excerpt 8. Attacking Indian MP for drinking toddi

Original	Translation
20080522 p.36	20080522 p.36
Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Dr. Haji Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar]: Baik Yang Berhormat. Sila Yang Berhormat Menteri, yang lain duduk. Menteri jawab.	Deputy Speaker [Datuk Dr. Haji Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar]: OK Your Honourable. Please Your Honourable Minister, all the rest sit. The Minister please answer.
Dato’ Seri Mohamed Nazri bin Abdul Aziz: Sudah kena tiga botol ini pagi? [Ketawa]	Dato’ Seri Mohamed Nazri bin Abdul Aziz: Already hit by three bottles this morning? [Laughter]
Tuan N. Gopalakrishnan [Padang Serai]: [Bercakap tanpa pembesar suara]	Mr N. Gopalakrishnan [Padang Serai]: [Talked without the microphone]
Dato’ Seri Mohamed Nazri bin Abdul Aziz: Boleh-boleh, nanti-nanti kita minum dekat luar.	Dato’ Seri Mohamed Nazri bin Abdul Aziz: Can, can, after this we drink outside.
Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Dr. Haji Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar]: Tunggu tunggu Yang Berhormat bentara ada. Baik Yang Berhormat Padang Serai sila duduk. Bentara boleh pass ...	Deputy Speaker [Datuk Dr. Haji Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar]: Wait, wait Your Honourable the herald is here. It’s good for Your Honourable Padang Serai to sit. The herald can pass...

In excerpt 8, a Minister teased or probably accused an Indian MP by asking if he had been drinking three bottles of alcoholic drinks (todi) that morning. Upon hearing this, MPs who were not disturbed by the comment began laughing. Nevertheless, the Indian MP found it offensive and was certainly provoked by the statement. There was no record of what the Indian MP said, as the microphone was switched off. Realising the latter's anger, the Minister 'consoled' him by saying, "Can, can, after this we drink outside." If the statement is taken seriously, it then implies that despite being a Muslim, the Minister is willing to compromise on drinking. Insensitivity here refers to a baseless statement made by the Minister to associate todi-drinking behaviour with Indians including an Indian MP. In the Malaysian context, 'todi' is a form of intoxicant which serves as a cheap substitute for alcohol, and which is consumed by the lower income Indians. The 'drama' of MP being accused of drinking todi, by the Malay Minister, depicts the use of racist remarks.

Excerpt 9. Accusing Indian MP for drinking todi

Original	Translation
20080515 p. 115	20080515 p. 115
Datuk Mohd. Shafie bin Haji Apdal: Tuan Yang di-Pertua, apa yang Tuan Yang di-Pertua saya cukup faham apa yang Pasir Salak nak bangkitkan tadi tentang kebimbangan dan keraguan beliau.	Datuk Mohd. Shafie bin Haji Apdal: Your Honourable Speaker, what Your Honourable I can understand complete what Pasir Salak raised just now about his worry and confusion.
Seorang Ahli: You minum todikah? [<i>Dewan riuh</i>]	One member: Did you drink todi? [<i>Roars in the Hall</i>]
Tuan Zulkifli bin Noordin [Kulim Bandar Baharu]: [<i>Bangun</i>]	Mr Zulkifli bin Noordin [Kulim Bandar Baharu]: [<i>Stand</i>]
Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Yang Berhormat. [<i>Dewan riuh</i>]	Deputy Speaker [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Your Honourable. [<i>Roars in the Hall</i>]
Tuan N. Gobalakrishnan [Padang Serai]: Minta dia tarik balik. Itu Pasir Salak sukasuka cakap macam-macam.	Mr N. Gobalakrishnan [Padang Serai]: Ask him to take back. That Pasir Salak likes to talk nonsense.
Tuan Zulkifli bin Noordin [Kulim Bandar Baharu]: Point of order.	Mr Zulkifli bin Noordin [Kulim Bandar Baharu]: Point of order.
Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Ya, point of order.	Deputy Speaker [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Yes, point of order.
Tuan Zulkifli bin Noordin [Kulim Bandar Baharu]: Point of order, point of order.	Mr Zulkifli bin Noordin [Kulim Bandar Baharu]: Point of order, point of order.
Timbalan Yang di-Pertua [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Ya, sila duduk Yang Berhormat. Ada point of order. Padang Serai duduk. Ada point of order Padang Serai.	Deputy Speaker [Datuk Ronald Kiandee]: Yes, please sit Your Honourable. There is point of order. Padang Serai sit. There is point of order Padang Serai.
Tuan N. Gobalakrishnan [Padang Serai]: Dia hina saya Tuan Yang di-Pertua. Minta dia tarik balik. [<i>Dewan riuh</i>]	Mr N. Gobalakrishnan [Padang Serai]: He insulted me Your Honourable Speaker. Ask him to take back. [<i>Roars in the Hall</i>]
	Mr Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar [Rembau]: [<i>Menyampuk</i>]

<p>Tuan Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar [Rembau]: <i>[Menyampuk]</i></p>	<p>Mr N. Gobalakrishnan [Padang Serai]: This must be a gambler. A gambler addicted to Genting Highlands (casino).</p>
<p>Tuan N. Gobalakrishnan [Padang Serai]: Ini mesti kaki judi. Genting Highlands punya kaki.</p>	

In Excerpt 9, it seems clear that another Malay-Muslim MP was again trying to accuse the same Indian MP of drinking alcohol, rather than discussing the issue under debate. This attack was made without evidence. Offended, the Indian MP reacted by asking the former to retract his accusation. However, when his request was not responded to, he reciprocated by labeling the former as ‘gambler’. In his words, “This must be a gambler. A gambler addicted to Genting Highlands (a tourist spot famous for its casino).” Judging from the exchange of words, both MPs were insensitive and made use of ethnic stereotyping to demean the other.

Excerpt 10. Teasing another PKR for its acronym

Original	Translation
<p>20080512.p.40-42</p> <p>Tuan Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar [Rembau]: ... Hanya daging ayam dan daging khinzir yang melepasi kadar 100% tahap sara diri, itu pun tidak cukup bagi satu kerajaan negeri yang telah meletakkan keutamaan nombor satu pentadbirannya kelulusan Projek Khinzir Raksasa atau singkatannya PKR. <i>[Tepuk]</i></p>	<p>20080512.p.40-42</p> <p>Mr Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar [Rembau]: ... Only when poultry and pork goes up above 100% of self-sufficient level, even that is not enough for a state government which has given number one priority to the approval of Mega Pig Project, or its acronym, PKR. <i>[Clapping]</i></p>

In Excerpt 10, a Malay MP labeled the opposition party as related to ‘pig’, a taboo subject for Muslims. The Muslim youth leader of UMNO displayed his immaturity by referring to PKR, the acronym of the People’s Party of Justice (Parti Keadilan Rakyat) as Projek Khinzir Raksasa (Mega Pig Project).

Excerpt 11. Attacking an MP for behaving like a snake

Original	Translation
<p>20080507 p. 173-174</p> <p>Datuk Dr. Marcus Makin Mojigoh [Putatan]: Tuan Yang di-Pertua, Yang Berhormat Titiwangsa ini saya rasa hendak mempermainkan perasaan rakyat negeri Sabah. Saya mewakili rakyat negeri Sabah. Jadi janganlah diputarbelitkan hasrat saya yang murni ini Yang Berhormat. Yang Berhormat daripada pembangkang ini suka cakap putar belit seperti haiwan yang begitu <i>[Sambil menunjukkan gaya ular]</i> Tuan Yang di-Pertua. Seperti Yang Berhormat Ipoh Barat, itu saya tidak tahulah. Tak apalah Yang Berhormat.</p>	<p>20080507 p. 173-174</p> <p>Datuk Dr. Marcus Makin Mojigoh [Putatan]: Your Honorable Speaker, I feel that Your Honorable wants to play up the emotions of people of Sabah. I represent the people of Sabah. So don’t twist and turn my noble intention Your Honorable. Your Honorable from the opposition like to use pompous language just like that kind of animal <i>[While demonstrating the style of a snake]</i> Your Honorable Speaker. Like Your Honorable Ipoh Barat, that I would not know. Never mind Your Honorable.</p>

Labelling and describing others as animals or animal-like is impolite. It is even more severe to associate a person’s character by alluding to animals which have certain characteristics. In this excerpt it was clear that the ruling party speaker, from East

Malaysia and probably a non-Muslim to make such a reference to an Indian opposition member by associating the word 'snake' ('ular') to his character. Associating one with a snake symbolises a person with 'crooked' personality. In the above excerpt, an MP from Sabah used snake as an innuendo to refer to an Indian MP, associating his behavior to that of a snake. In the Malaysian context, 'snake' implies people who are dishonest and without principles, like to play up emotions of others, and often distort facts and do not tell the truth. It also means a person who is potentially dangerous. As shown, the MP refers to another MP as behaving like a snake without substantial evidence. Such name-calling was not uncommon in parliamentary debate.

Conclusion

The analyses focuses on the attacks of opposition MPs on the ruling coalition, and vice versa. Content analysis show that MPs of the ruling coalition who were found using racist, aggressive or defensive language in their speeches, with the party and the constituency they represent in parentheses are - Dato' Haji Tajuddin Abdul Rahman [UMNO-Pasir Salak], Datuk Bung Moktar bin Radin [UMNO-Kinabatangan], Dato' Haji Abd. Rahman bin Dahlan [UMNO-Kota Belud], Datuk Haji Yussof bin Haji Mahal [UMNO-Labuan], Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar [UMNO-Rembau], Datuk Dr. Marcus Makin Mojigoh [PBS-Putatan]. On the other hand, the opposition MPs who were equally aggressively and/or defensive in their speeches are Gobind Singh Deo [DAP-Puchong], Lim Kit Siang [DAP-Ipoh Timur], R. Karpal Singh [DAP-Bukit Gelugor], N. Gopalakrishnan [DAP-Padang Serai]. Coincidentally they are from ethnic minorities and all are from the DAP. Parliamentary debates allow analysis of the meaning of words, the rhetoric, the structure and vocabulary, and the interpretation of such word choice. Parliamentary debates enable discussion on politeness and impoliteness in the House of Representatives. The Malaysian Parliament has become a platform for MPs to prove that 'I/we' are more supreme than 'they'. The issues of morality seem to be debated in this manner where 'I/we' behave well and 'they' do not. By proving 'them' wrong, and 'us' right, it appears that the dichotomy between the political parties has resulted in consequence that can lead to greater diversity, exclusivity and differentiation. Dichotomy exists among MPs in various forms, such as political ideology (e.g. UMNO vs. DAP), ethnic identity (e.g. Malay vs. Indian), political affiliation (e.g. Barisan Nasional vs. Pakatan Rakyat), cultural sensitivity (e.g. keris, impertinent, alcoholism, pig, snake) and most significant of all, religion (e.g. Muslims vs. non-Muslims).

The excerpts from Hansard reveal that heated parliamentary debates are capable of disclosing the sub-conscious and true feelings between political rivals. UMNO MPs were most articulate and outspoken, particularly due to Malay hegemony and domination in

the political arena. UMNO MPs attacked using impoliteness 'biadab', sabotage ('Projek Khinzir Raksasa' for PKR), personal attack ('todi drinker'), biases ('snake'), narrow-minded view points ('sudah kena tiga botol'), stereotypes ('attire of the Taliban') and negative ideas ('stupidity') about their political rivals. Such rivalry even occurred among Muslim MPs of different camps. Since this study focuses on politeness and ethnic sensitivity of MPs its main interest is in the use of words and verbal strategies used by the MPs. In the multi-ethnic and multi-religious set up of the House of Representatives, it is unfortunate that racism and religiosity have been used to deliberately debase others. Some MPs use the House of Representatives as a convenient battlefield to attack political rivals. Even though MPs who aroused sentiments and conflicts were told repeatedly to abide by the Point of Order, no disciplinary action was taken against MPs who used negative, impolite or insensitive remarks. MPs who were racist and impolite also gained support from the floor with cheers and clapping by other MPs. MPs who utter racist remarks do so to serve their self-interest rather than the public's interest, hence taking up time allocated for debate on more serious issues. The Speaker should be impartial and be firm in upholding standing orders and reprimanding recalcitrant MPs stringently. Parliamentary debates should be monitored closely by government officials and social activists to ensure not only that important issues are discussed but that racist sentiments in multiracial, multilingual Malaysia are not fuelled by irresponsible MPs.

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**“Discourse, Politeness and Ethnic Sensitivities in
Malaysian Parliament”**

to Vol. 01, No. 02, 2011 of



International Research Journal

An International Refereed Research Journal

ISSN 1839-6518 (Australian ISSN Agency)

Opal Jain

Editor in Chief

