

LANGUAGE AND ATTITUDES OF INVISIBLE MINDS: AN APPRAISAL ANALYSIS OF CYBER DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This study examines the interactions of different participants on *Yahoo Singapore* and *Yahoo Philippines* using the Martin and Rose (2011) *Appraisal Theory*, focusing on the interpersonal aspects of discourse, ATTITUDE is used as the framework for a *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA). Blogging in the *cyberworld*, as a different channel of communication, allows the people of a society to discuss issues that matter most to them. The method used to foreground the underlying discourse is an attempt to understand the influence of various elements of the environment surrounding the respondents and participants.

This study is an attempt to identify how the discourse employed in the *cyber community* is influenced by different elements in society, to provide some understanding of how blogging can be used as a potential tool for learning and education. Blogging, as part of social networking is not only about self expression but also provides a broader perspective in terms of teaching and learning that can be insightful. This is because understanding how choice shapes language, and how language shapes choice, is important in the learning process.

Since education is regarded as one of the main phases for change, learning to be aware of what is going on in the world is just one of the aspects of the ‘cyber world’ that can be taught to students, and also can have a big part in changing how teachers and students view education, specifically regarding *English Language Teaching* (ELT).

Keywords: Appraisal, Blogging, interpersonal discourse, collaborative learning, cyber discourse

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Understanding the role of blogging in the ‘cyberworld’ as a different channel of communication, can be important to promote interaction and maintain communication between individuals who share thoughts and feelings on issues that matter to them. The *Yahoo! News* journalistic blogs were chosen as the source of data for this study as this platform offers authentic language from different respondents. Consequently, understanding discourse in the *Yahoo! News* journalistic blogs might provide a further explanation of how language is being shaped by different elements in society.

One of the benefits offered by the *cyberworld* is the ability for people to ‘voice’ their opinions regardless of their own personal status. This is made possible through blogging, as people engaged in this cyber ‘community’ have a choice on how they would like to express themselves. The *cyberworld* or *virtual community* not only provides a place, but also control over the real meaning of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Accordingly, part of blogging, offers a considerable potential to promote openness, autonomy and collaborative learning, in English classrooms, nurturing the learner community while promoting creativity and reflective learning.

Blogging

One factor the internet offers in society is the willingness to communicate, exchange information and create ties with strangers. Many social networking sites like *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Blog*, have something in common, providing a sense of being in touch (Hunt,

2009). These weblogs are managed by their writers, existing as the private and personal property of an individual within a public sphere. The author has control and ownership of their discourse. Blogs are made up of the text that people choose to post on their personal web sites each day. These postings are the writer’s digital diary, common features that can be observed in *Twitter*, *Facebook* and different *Blog* sites.

However, there are other platforms created by other sources, such as online newspapers, where the comment sections are allocated to different readers to express their own opinion on different issues, these are also regarded as *journalistic blogs*.

According to McIntosh (2005, p. 2):

Historically, a weblog or blog for short is recognized by its regularly updated, time and date stamped posts, running down the computer screen in chronologically reverse order (i.e. the most recent post comes first). Crucially there is an Add Comment feature so that readers of posts can leave their opinions, questions or thoughts. Finally, there is a writing style element: blogs are written by one individual who gives his/her thoughts in a generally relaxed, spoken style.

A particular characteristic that makes blogs distinctive from other types of writing ‘genre’ is the combination of the spoken and written form of discourse. This illustrates the authenticity of how humans communicate by, “convenience rather than design” (Williams and Jakobs, 2004, p. 232).

Also highlighted by Scoble and Israel (2006), “blogs are supposed to be written from the heart, to be produced passionately rather than dispassionately, to be off the cuff rather than planned...offer a corrective to the

bland and not always frank word of communication". This channel of communication can change people's views about human connections and the way they communicate (quoted in Harper, 2010, p. 24).

Normally, comments posted express appreciation or anger about something, to convey moral judgment. In this virtual world where people interact, react and sometimes enjoy topics, is called the *blogosphere*. There is no subscriber limit in the blogosphere. "Blogs are read as a web of interrelated objects connected through systems of RSS" (Harper, 2010, p.26).

Presently, the popularity of this form of communication is increasing rapidly and blogs tend to change the way in which people in society engage and communicate with each other. Saying all that, not everyone in the blogosphere is equally and continually engaged in discussion. Some may interact with others only occasionally, but this sporadic interaction still creates a sense of human reflection and a feeling of connection to other bloggers.

At heart, blogging is very personal, intensely so. After all, this is all about writing: deciding what you want to write about, organizing your thoughts on the chosen subject, and finally, finding the needed 'quality time' to put your thoughts down 'on paper.' ... At the same time, blogging is all about community ... You share what you have to say with other people and hearing from them is very much part of the enjoyment of blogging. It is this balance between the personal and the collaborative that gives blogging its unique flavor (Wladawsky-Berger, 2015).

This new domain of collaborative journalism allows a certain degree of

anonymity to the participants (bloggers), and thus provides people with a voice, allowing them to realize a degree of freedom of speech and a sense of empowerment through expressing their emotions freely as a *form of self expression*. As writers spontaneously share their opinions, discourse is becoming permeable and transient as multiple resources and references become linked. This is where ENGAGEMENT (Martin and White, 2007) materialized and INTERTEXTUALITY (Bakhtin, 1981a, 1986b; Fairclough, 1992; Kress, 2000 and Hartman, 1992) transpired.

In Singapore, the anonymity being employed in online discourse has, for the first time, allowed citizens to make their voices heard and express views which may be contrary to government policy.

As found in *Yahoo News* sites' 'open source platform', readers blog by sharing their views and reactions concerning the news. Although they come from different walks of life, age, gender and different geographical locations, the interactions illustrate that participants tend to participate in discussions and give opinions based on the topics they know well.

These interactions which flourish in digital media create a form of human self-correction while constructing the story of their lives. This certain characteristic of blogging changes the landscape of communication. Understanding the participants' language influenced by feelings and behavior might help to understand the overall importance of individual narratives.

In this digital era, emotions play an important role in various types of interaction, which tends to lead to ideas including a 'we' or 'they' concept. These beliefs have potential to generate a driving force within a message and thus can lead to action. Human emotions

can be contagious and often hidden within individual discourse; it can be seen as an essential component of such discourse. Writers and readers often bring their feelings and emotions together producing the 'we' concept. Harper (2010) describes it as "analogous to the touching of a heartbeat-the human reflection of the topic of the moment. No person owns this heartbeat or produces it: it's a collaborative affair" as it creates "a sense of intimacy between those who are involved" (p. 26). This is what inspires 'bloggers', a sense of togetherness or the 'tie that binds' that leads these groups of people to be one (Domingo and Heinonen, 2008)

As Harper (2010, p. 234) says,

In allowing us to express ourselves, make us what we are, what we are seen to be and who we are seen to be connected to.

The view that language functions at both descriptive and evaluative levels is long-standing. In focusing on the interpersonal and social function of language, through stance and role taking, (Butt et al, 2000), the interest should go beyond the analytic mode from a classification of appraisal tokens to exploring their dynamic trajectories in building up and sustaining communities of practice. This is where the evaluation of language, using Martin and Rose (2011) APPRAISAL can be essential in terms of finding the referential meaning beyond discourse. This is where Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) brings to light a pattern of meaning encoded in the language.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Appraisal System

The most important task of conceptual

tools which integrate sociological and linguistic positions is to mediate between the text and the institution, between discourse and society. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) takes a particular interest in the relationship between language and power (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1995). The notion of ideology, power, hierarchy, gender and other sociological variables can be seen as relevant for an interpretation or explanation of text. CDA sees discourse as language use in speech and writing- as a form of 'social practice'. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectal relationship between the discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it.

Martin and Rose (2007) explain how speakers of a language share an equal range of meaning making resources but meanings are unequally distributed. Thus, CDA brings to light a pattern of meaning encoded in a language.

CDA employs the tools of linguists to identify the role of 'wordings' in passages of text, and employs the tools of the social theorists to explain why they make the meanings they do. However, cultures are not just a combination of texts, and likewise texts are not just a combination of the lexis and grammar. Social activity, discourse and the lexis and grammar are different kinds of phenomena, operating at different levels of abstraction. A culture is more than a text, and the meanings that make up a text are in turn more abstract than the wordings that express them. The relation between them is described in SFL as realizations; social contexts are realized as texts which are realized as sequences of clauses with the grammatical system. (Martin and Rose, 2007, p. 4)

APPRAISAL is one of the grammatical components of Halliday's (1985) systemic functional theory that focuses on the interpersonal aspect of language. These kinds of meanings realize variations in the tenor of social interactions enacted in a text (Martin and Rose, 2007). It is concerned with "attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and the readers aligned" (Martin and Rose, 2007, p. 2)

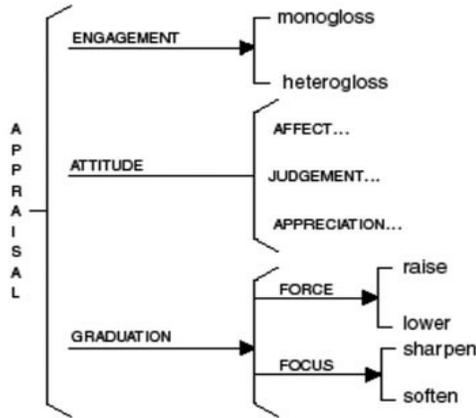
Appraisal is involved with how speakers and writers express their appreciation of the text. This includes expressing their **attitude** towards the content of their messages, **engaging** with the messages of the text in various ways, and **graduation** in terms of the force and focus in our grading of meaning. By these expressions, the speaker or writer tries to subtly persuade the hearer or reader to adopt the same point of view, i.e. the same attitude towards the content of the text. ATTITUDE refers to the language resources we use to make either a positive or negative evaluation of something or someone. In this way, they build relationships with the readers or listeners.

ATTITUDE has three sub-categories; *judgment*, *affect* and *appreciation* (Martin 2000; Martin & Rose 2011; Martin & White 2005). *Judgment* is an assessment of a person's behaviour or character negotiated in a text. *Affect* is something to do with emotions or feelings towards a person, situation or even a place. *Appreciation* deals with the value of things, or certain situations (Martin and White, 2005). Saying all that, there are some cases of ATTITUDE where the expression used would normally indicate something quite different. For example, the word 'wicked' normally has an association with a negative

moral judgement. However, nowadays, it is also used by young people to positively *appraise* something. This may also be because assessments can be influenced by what is being spoken or written about. Also, one's interpretation of a text from the speaker's or reader's point of view might be influenced by various factors such as; politics, ideology, culture, class, education, age, gender and so on. That is why the interpretation of the text is not always straightforward. For example, attitude can be described as implicit and explicit. *Implicit* refers to instances where *feelings*, *judgements* and *assessments* are not clear cut for the readers or listeners. There are some occasions where figurative language is used to describe a person, thing or situation. While *explicit* refers to a direct or overt evaluation or assessment of characters, feelings or value of things.

ENGAGEMENT, on the other hand, deals with how speakers or writers position themselves in relation to the content of their message and how they negotiate positions (Martin and Rose, 2011). In other words, it deals with sourcing other voices around opinions in discourse. This can be 'monoglossic' or 'heteroglossic'. According to White (2001), this system covers all the resources that the language offers for speakers to express their interpersonal positioning in the texts they produce. The third component is GRADUATION which adjusts the strength of attitude and engagement. In other words, it has something to do with how speakers/writers positioned their language, "adjusting the volume" whether to strengthen or weaken it (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 41). Graduation is subdivided into *force*, which intensifies the language and *focus* which sharpens or blurs the category of meaning.

Below is an overview of APPRAISAL system.



**Figure I. APPRAISAL SYSTEM
(Martin & White, 2005)**

As APPRAISAL deals with the interpersonal aspect of language, this system therefore would seem a suitable framework to be used when analyzing the initiating moves and responses of different respondents' interactions in *Yahoo News* journalistic blogs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study answers the following questions:

1. What are the different attitudinal elements manifested in the data being studied?
2. What is the relevance of blogging for teaching and learning (education)?

Participants and Procedure

The news articles were collected over a period of three months focusing on the topic

'foreigners' in the Singapore news blog, and 'government reform' for the Philippines, using a random sampling technique. A total of 710 comments were collected which served as the data for this study.

As this study deals with cyber discourse as its data, *Yahoo* was selected as it has an open source form of blogging for the readers to write comments. The participants were respondents on *yahoo.ph* and *yahoo.sg* who exchanged opinions regarding issues involving the Philippines and Singapore. These two countries were chosen due to certain similarities: both countries were colonized by the West. Consequently, English is widely used in the media in both countries. Perhaps, more significantly, the Philippines is known for the degree of freedom which the people have regarding what they say and do in the public domain. The people of Singapore, on the other hand are subject to considerable control in terms of the allowed freedom to publicly express their views.

This study employs the Martin and Rose (2011) *Appraisal Theory* as a framework for *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) focusing on the interpersonal aspect of language in order to answer the research questions.

The classifications of attitudinal properties are as follows: the *evaluative text* or comments containing evaluation come first, followed by a bracket containing the *types of evaluation*, the *attitudinal evaluation*, its *contextual value* and its *sub-types*, the *graduation or degree* of the evaluation and the *evaluated entity* or the target of the evaluation. These are of considerable importance in terms of evaluation as they explain how readers or participants demonstrate their attitude.

The evaluative language that represents ATTITUDE is presented as follows:

- The letters 'judg' underlined indicate 'judgment'
- The letters '**aff**' in **bold** indicate 'affect'
- The letters 'app' underlined and italicized signify 'appreciation'
- *Explicit* attitudes are identified with the letters 'exp'
- An indirectly evoked or *implicit* evaluation is indicated with the letters 'imp'
- Positive attitudes are marked with a plus sign (+), while negative attitudes are marked with a negative sign (-).
- Graduation properties which signify the 'force' or 'focus' of the evaluation are identified as follows:
 - A higher degree is marked with an upward arrow ('!')
 - A lower degree is marked with a downward arrow ("!")
 - The neutral evaluations are marked with the 'approximately equal to' sign (H").

The classification of attitudinal properties is illustrated in the following order:

- The evaluative text or comments containing evaluation come first
- In the bracket: []
- The attitudinal evaluation
- Contextual value and its sub-types
- The graduation or degree of the evaluation
- The evaluated entity or the target of the evaluation

THE ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The analyses of the data collected show that the data is generally infused with various

attitudes regarding the issues being discussed. Participants tend to express different tones displaying a continuum of polite to impolite expressions on the topic. Various comments reflect the attitude being portrayed and which may indicate attitudes such as, sarcasm, dislike, prejudice, or racial discrimination throughout the exchanges made. The intertextuality is foregrounded by linking the views of the writers as well as other sources that support the evaluations given. Several intertextual references are found in different comments such as, projections or direct references. In these intertextual references, the participants tend to project sources in many ways, sometimes 'quoting' or 'reporting' what other people have said or written, thus bringing other voices to support their own views and reinforce their argument.

The following are excerpts from the study:

Extract1.ph

It's not about credibility...it's all about reason and prudence. [imp: + judg: propriety ≈: person] Keep all your emotions down and you can think properly don't be overcome by prejudice [imp: - aff: unhappiness ≈: person] ...that blinds a good man's heart. [imp:- app: impact ↑: prejudice] if things don't go your way...you may change course...but always find the path to righteousness. [exp: + judg: veracity ≈: person]Let me remind you that Penoy does not have the monopoly of patriotism, [imp: - judg: impropriety ↑: Pnoy] he has no monopoly of being righteous, [imp: -judg: impropriety ↑: Pnoy] he has no monopoly of good intentions. [imp: - judg: impropriety ↑: Pnoy] To the contrary,

Penoy is blinded by his vengeance and arrogance [imp: - judg: impropriety ↑: Pnoy] as reflected in his behavior at the recent SC Criminal Forum. Bad childish behavior is an indicator that something wrong to that person. [imp: - judg: impropriety ↑: Pnoy] Everybody has the love for country, for it's destiny. [exp: + aff: security ≈: everybody] Not only Penoy and his Party, to think otherwise is insane [exp: - aff: insecurity ↑: feeling]!

(Porcalla & Sy, 2011)

The statement starts by defining in general terms the meaning of being righteous. The respondent's remarks had an underlying connotation in reference to the president and other members of his party, the Liberal party. The respondent used implicit evaluations, judging President Aquino's attitude. The President was described as an unpatriotic, unrighteous, vengeful and arrogant person. These evaluative items connote negative judgment. The respondent was fairly direct in criticism of the president and his party and ridiculed him personally by calling him 'childish'. The overall effect is very negative and underlined at the end; stating "to think otherwise would be insane."

Extract2.ph

Ambrucio... "bakit pa kelangan ng LAw?" **are you kidding me?** [imp: - aff: dissatisfaction/wonder ≈: eh] of course kelangan kasi they **need** the approval and support of the government? [imp: - aff: dissatisfaction ↑: people] in order to implement this. "condom nakaksira ng organ ng babae?" The world health organization said that, condoms are

the number one protection, aside from abstinence, against AIDS and STDS. [imp: + app: impact ↑: condoms] paano nakaka sira ang condom sa reproductive health ng babae? GET you facts straight! **Holy cow...are you serious?** [imp: - aff: dissatisfaction/dismay ↑: eh] "yung pills my side effect?" BABAIE KA BA? are you a scientist or something? You do not even know what you are talking about. [imp: - judg: capacity ↑: Ambrucio] Give me a document supporting this. A study that is peer-reviewed [imp: + app: quality H": study] okay? Reproductive health Bill is not only about promoting condoms and pills, [imp: + app: impact ↑: RH Bill] IT is also about educating women and telling them that they have RIGHTS with their own body. [imp: - app: social significance ↑: RH Bill] Why don't you learn from other countries? Look at them? the lesser the population=Good quality of Life. [imp: + app: impact ↑: other countries] KAYA hindi uma-asenso ang bansa natin [imp: - app: impact ↑: Philippines] because we are NOT TAKING Risk to change! [imp: - judg: incapacity ↑: Filipinos] Also, sabi ng Catholic Church that the government should focus on providing education instead and providing more jobs. [imp: - judg: capacity ↑: government] **what a joke!!!** kaya nga nila pinapasa ang RH bill **eh!** For instance, the MAJORITY of the school in the PHILIPPINES are Catholic schools, WHICH REALLY drains your bank account. [imp: - app: impact ↑: Catholic schools] They are so expensive! [imp: - app: quality ↑: Catholic schools] They are more

expensive than the tuition fee for a community college student in the states. [*imp: - app: quality*↑: Catholic schools] So if you do not support the RH bill, then what is your solution for the starving children? [*exp: - judg: abnormality* ↑: children] for the mothers dying [*exp: - app: social significance*↑: mother] because of birth complications? [*exp: - app: impact* ↑: birth] for teenagers dying because of unsafe abortion? [*exp: - app: social significance* ↑: abortion] what is your solution to control the population in the PHILIPPINES? ABSTINENCE? **Oh gosh...** you are so narrow minded.. [*exp: - judg: incapacity*↑: Ambrucio]

(Porcalla & Sy, 2011)

An *attitudinal classification* exists within the text to allow the reader to understand the whole situation and the flow of the discourse.

The text shown, is intertwined with different attitudinal elements, some are expressed explicitly through ‘lexical items’ such as ‘serious’ and ‘narrow minded’ but others are indirectly implied and expressed through ‘grammatical items’, such as the use of the adverbial ‘so’ as an intensifier.

Adverbials are also used for graduation. For example, ‘really’ and ‘so’, are used to describe the force/intensity of the situation. These two examples have sharpened the judgment value of ‘Ambrucio’, ‘so narrow minded’ (capacity) as well as the intensity of the appreciation value of ‘Catholic schools’, ‘so expensive’ (social significance). Modality is also used. The modal verb ‘should’ is used to express obligation. The government here is the body or representative of the people who

has the obligation to take action for the benefit of the people. Otherwise, the alternative solution that could prevent further damage in terms of health and education, is to allow the RH bill to become law in order to control over-population in the Philippines.

The participants use different resources or voices (references) to strengthen their arguments or what Halliday and Matthiessen call “projection” (Martin and White, 2007, p. 51) in forms of intertextuality (Bakhtin, 1981a, 1986b; Fairclough, 1992; Kress, 2000 and Hartman, 1992). These projections or references are used to give ‘extra-vocalization’ to introduce other sources of evaluation and illustrate that the statement is not from the writer but from other sources. In this example, a direct ‘quote’ from the previous texts is used, “bakit pa kelangan ng LAW?” [Why the law is needed?] **Eh** would like to show **Ambrucio**’s naivety of not knowing the importance of law. She tried to explain the reason why the law is needed and the importance of a ‘condom’. The second direct quotation, “condom nakaksira* ng organ ng babae?” [A condom damages the female reproductive system?] was provided to challenge Ambrucio’s concept about the condom. A direct quotation from expert’s opinion is used to justify Eh’s point of view: “The world health organization said that condoms are the number one protection, aside from abstinence, against AIDS and STDS.” engaging other voices and disputing Ambrucio’s impression of ‘condoms and pills’. Eh’s strategy of bringing in or engaging other people’s voice is a strategy to reinforce her evaluation of the naivety of Ambrucio.

The use of different sources as intertextual references is commonly used during the interaction as part of a conventional strategy to illustrate and ‘assume’ legality and

representation of various statements presented in the text. In other words, the whole text shows that the inter-subjectivity of the evaluative entities involving both interpersonal and ideational positioning is at play in the text (Fairclough, 1992).

Extract 3.sg

Better watch out all the foreign students up there? Trying to snap our rice bowl and conquere/compete with our young Singaporean students [imp: - judg: incapacity↑: foreigner] e.g. our own children up there.....No way for that men!

Can the govt. do something better to improve and not letting ALL Foreigners to step in and bring their children into our society? Making it worse and create unhealthy lifestyle to our next younger generation. [imp: - judg: incapacity↑: foreigner] How and imagine half of our population are being conquered or occupied by those Foreigners [imp: - judg: incapacity↑: Singaporean] non of those are purely SINGAPOREAN.... How can we as a SINGAPORE CITIZEN vote for you PAP!!!! ...

Some Foreigners are very nuisance and frustrating (they think they are in their own country) [exp: - judg: incapacity↑: foreigner] In Singapore we have our own natural living, [exp: + judg: capacity H'': Singaporean] anywhere we go we **just feel safe and easy** (the expression is just natural very difficult to explain) [exp: + aff: satisfaction ≈: foreigner] unless you are not Singaporean.

... FT is everywhere and gives problem [imp: - judg: incapacity↑: foreigner]!!!

Smoking in the garden and park [imp: -judg: incapacity↑:foreigner] when ppl are trying to exercise and need fresh air [imp: + judg: capacity↑: Singaporean]... smoking at HDB stair cases and throwing [exp: - judg: incapacity'!: foreigner] their smoking butt everywhere... smoking and drinking even outside the kintergarten* (kindergarten) [imp: - judg: incapacity↑: foreigner] at HDB at night! Being so noisy and not queueing at paying counters [imp: -judg: incapacity↑:foreigner]

(Lur, 2011)

This extract reveals how animosity motivates partiality. The descriptions used were implicit and connote negative judgments towards foreigners. Foreign students who were likely to be innocent were accused of 'trying to snap up the Singaporeans' food and jobs'. Foreign workers were accused of 'creating an unhealthy lifestyle that could harm Singapore's younger generation', and seen as a 'nuisance and frustrating'. They were also called 'smokers and drunkards'. These accusations show that Singaporeans tend to exhibit narrow-mindedness and intolerance to society, exhibiting a xenophobic streak. What this amounts to, is an element of insecurity on the part Singaporean respondents.

Extract 4.sg

To Mr.Lee Hsien Loong the PM of Singapore.

Dear Mr Lee/ brother, **please help.**
[exp: - aff: plead ≈: Judah]

You are our generation, who have seen our **sufferings** in many forms

knoeking*(knocking) our doors and life. [exp: - aff: unhappiness ≈: Singaporeans] **Please sort [exp: - aff: plead ≈: Judah]** the public housing problems [exp: - app: impact ↑:housing] and tell the HDB not to abuse our lifes* (life)an living.[imp: - judg: propriety↑: HDB body] Many of us have no where to go. [imp: - judg: propriety↑: Singaporeans] The FTs come the* make their money abuse our public housings and go elsewhere. [imp: - judg: propriety↑: FT] But we are with you and you are our generation, a natural son of this soil Singapore [imp: + judg: capacity ↑: Mr. Lee]. You solved many issue with the neighbouring nations. [imp: + judg: capacity ↑:Mr. Lee] You redeemed our shame and our dependance over the water, the KTM, the economic crisis [imp: + judg: capacity ↑:Mr. Lee] we have seen your performance from the days you were the chairman*(chairman) of the MAS. [imp: + judg: capacity ↑: Mr. Lee] Brother Lee Hsien loong **dont forget us, [exp: - aff: plead ≈: Judah]** we are the poor and we have been abused by many policies [imp: - judg: capacity ↑: Singaporeans] that has been hard and harsh on us. [exp: - app: impact ↑:policy] Dear Brother, **please build [exp: - aff: plead ≈: Judah]** more rental flats [exp: + app: social significance ↑:flats] for the poors. [exp: - judg: normality ↑: singaporeans] **Please cut [exp: - aff: plead ≈: Judah]** the loans and prices of the HDB houses by half for the Singaporeans, **Please abolish [exp: -aff: plead ≈: Judah]** the GST for goods and services that are of basic needs!

We already communicated [imp: + judg: capacity ↑: Singaporeans] these to Mr.Tharma the other day in the yahoo. **Please do [exp: - aff: plead ≈: Judah]** this at least for the sake of our mother the late Ms Kwa Geok Choo, we **have not forgotten to pray for her soul that rest in peace in the paradise.... [exp: + aff: Love/respect ≈: KGC]** I ask this in the name of the Lrd God. Dear Brother **Please help! [exp: - aff: plead ≈: Judah]**

(Sim, 2011)

This comment is almost an invocation. The participant started by addressing *Mr. Lee Hsien Loong* (LHL) the *Prime Minister of Singapore*, ‘brother’. The use of ‘brother’ can mean many things. It could be, ‘spiritually’, ‘comrade’, ‘closeness or friendship’ or just simply stating ‘we are Singaporeans.’ An appeal for help, ‘**please help**’ is used as a greeting; or perhaps indicates that the writer is really in need of help. The word ‘**Please**’ is used many times maybe as an *affectual device* to plead and be noticed. He asked the Prime Minister to help ‘poor Singaporeans’ but not himself although this might be implied. The use of ‘our’, ‘us’, ‘we’ can be an indication of solidarity or inclusivity in this predicament. For example, ‘Many of us have nowhere to go’ referring to Singaporeans who do not own home. The participant also asked LHL to tell the HDB ‘not to abuse their life’, referring to Singaporeans’ lives. This statement has a negative connotation that indicates HDB made the lives of poor Singaporeans miserable. However, he applauded the prime minister for what he has done for Singapore and its people. Interpersonally, the participant’s judgment of

the Prime Minister is couched in the need for sympathy, as he illustrated with reference to LHL's mother, the late Mrs. Kwa Geok Choo (who died a few years ago). This might reflect that the blogger understands that the housing problem is not entirely LHL's fault and that he realizes it can be more effective to plead than to blame the Prime Minister.

The analysis illustrates that the different factors and elements which shape the ideas and beliefs of the respondents, are often characterized by the language they use when writing comments. Respondents' personal experiences reflect anger, frustration and unhappiness in a variety of ways. There are several possible reasons why such language is used; one of those reasons can be a lack of education and cultural awareness that might hinder their critical thinking in realizing the consequences of their actions.

DISCUSSION

The language the different respondents use illustrates how they perceive different individuals, but also exposes their different attitudes and mentalities. Many responses display *ethnocentrism*, *xenophobia*, *prejudice*, and *social intolerance*, while a few show more tolerant attitudes.

Based on the analysis, emotions can be triggered by various factors. Personal experience plays a part in how participants view people or situations, which is reflected in the language they use. Responses and comments are also found to be other factors which might trigger participants' attitudes. The participant's ability to bring different resources in the discourse, such as **direct reference** to text, *paraphrasing* of text, and *referencing* to the text of different participants or the

evaluative statements of other participants, in the different comments demonstrates that there is no single idea that belongs to one authorship. Instead the whole concept comes from different ideas brought together and transformed into a new text (Hartman, 1992 & Kress, 2000).

Everyone can be a blogger but not everyone can be a journalist. As a blogger, a person can express his or her own interpretation of a situation or event which tends to be *interpretive* and *subjective* but as a journalist, a person needs to be *objective*. This is the reason why printed journalistic texts go through rigorous editing as they need to conform to the standards and principles of journalism. Blogs however, do not. A blog is unedited, the written-spoken voice of the blogger. It is straightforward, direct and informal. It is demarcated by the comments which draw attention from other respondents. As illustrated in the analysis, participants perceive themselves as part of a community that shares values, perspectives and language (Domingo and Heinonen, 2008:6)

What is clear from this data is that, discourse patterns are built up gradually from various sources, some direct and others indirect. It builds up and shapes the way different phenomena are perceived both in terms of the psychological and social make up of the participants given their respective environments. There is a desire to 'connect with people' as this can be a manifestation of power by establishing different alliances and forming solidarity as one 'cyber culture' (Harper, 2010). As illustrated in blogs, emotions can be considered as powerful enough to coerce or intimidate the readers.

In addition, assessments or stances are either positively or negatively articulated either

explicitly or implicitly. The language used also has denotative (surface) and connotative (underlying) meanings. There are few instances where evaluations are almost abstract; this demonstrates how participants choose the language they utilized to express their emotions. Through various forms of description, the participants illustrate how they manipulate the language to intensify the meaning of words. The opinions also demonstrate a lack of *monoglossic* commitment in the discourse; instead the multi-dimensional space in which the meanings merge or differ, illustrates the *heteroglossic* function of the text, and the widespread use of *intertextuality* (Bakhtin, 1981a, 1986b).

Society is shaped by different components in the environment, such as the language and upbringing; beliefs, and shared values of the speech community; the social norms and education. In countries such as Singapore and the Philippines, the English post colonial context, together with the multiplicities of cultures, reflects society's diverse social and cultural background which is responsible for shaping a form of 'languaging' that has given access to the attitudes and ways of thinking in these changing societies today.

Based on various interactions, it can be inferred that the participants are influenced by different ideologies. This ideology can be determined by law, culture or tradition, embedded in language, which can be a domineering factor in shaping different opinions. As respondents and bloggers become part of the system, they congregate in the space provided by *Yahoo* to build social relationships, without knowing that they are forming a multi-dimensional power which is significant in shaping their language. This is where the CDA becomes significant in

understanding the making of meaning, beyond the discourse.

As English is a 'world language', the teaching of English lessons has become an essential tool in helping to address either directly or indirectly the issues of multicultural communities in the classroom, neighborhood, or nation; in other words, it is important in developing respect for diversity. By incorporating multicultural education in English language classrooms, teachers can help students to value the significance of treating all people with self-esteem and not judging groups for the actions of a few. More importantly, teachers must model tolerance and compassion in their words and behavior. They can also encourage students to explore their feelings about prejudice and hatred. In doing this, the society might be able to secure a better chance for the next generation to learn and integrate respect and dignity for all people.

The pedagogical implication of this study

The observations made among the participants in the 'online community' illustrates that regardless of a person's status, the individual can play a role when it comes to voicing an opinion on matters concerning society. As education in general is perceived as one of the elements that generates the *bonum* or goodness in society. It teaches people valuable lessons which enhance social awareness locally and globally. The ability to participate in the public discourse of a society and its ideology, involves some degree of control of language, as an essential tool for any form of development in the future.

The use of APPRAISAL to determine different participants' attitudes towards the issues can help teachers and students to

understand the ‘culture’ of a society and adapt where necessary. Appraisal as part of the structure of a language allows breadth and depth in understanding the underlying meanings being conveyed. As illustrated in this study, the attitudes of the participants can be discerned as part of the overall prosody, negative or positive, of their discourse. Such linguistic tools avoid the danger of simply commenting on what has been written without the required linguistic evidence. A language filled with emotions can evoke different responses and is sometimes more thought provoking. Knowing how to choose the right words can create positive impact that might encourage students to see the value of the functional use of language and the way it is put together especially if a teacher is dealing with students from different backgrounds.

Multicultural and Multilingual Awareness in the Classroom

In a world in which *interracial conflicts and tensions* seem to have become an *inevitable phenomenon* of daily life, one positive aspect has been the increase in knowledge on a more global scale. As part of this process, the increase in English as a ‘world language’ together with other languages has opened opportunities to use developments in technology, especially cyber-space, to create on-line communities and consequently, a multicultural education has become crucial.

Multicultural education is an opportunity to improve race relations and to help all students gain the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to take part in cross-cultural interactions. Teaching has also become a multicultural experience. Instead of **fearing** or **ignoring** the diversity in the classroom (and

society), teachers can use diversity to enrich their instruction. As teachers and students belong to diverse groups distinguished by variables such as age, social class, gender, race, language and ethnicity; a multicultural and multilingual awareness becomes even more important in educational settings.

Providing people with the freedom to function beyond their ethnic and cultural boundaries keeps societies more open-minded. Using the dimensions of multicultural education (e.g., prejudice reduction) can help students develop more democratic values and attitudes. Discussing issues whether it be directly in the classroom or in cyber-space can help students not only develop their language skills but also their critical awareness of the world around them. In this sense, multicultural and multilingual education can be a factor in implementing intercultural exchange and help students to gain democratic values and attitudes.

Blogging as a Tool for Teaching and Learning Literacy in a non-formal Environment

21st century technology allows learning to be at the fingertips of every learner. It connects people to the world without having to change their location. It provides choices about *what*, *when* and *where*. This is the era where gaining access to everything is possible, from local to global through for example, the help of Web 2.0 providers like Wikis, RSS Feeds, blogging & social networking. Consequently, being part of this networking system through blogging has considerable potential in English classrooms:

- *Promotes openness and empowers learners.* Using blogging in teaching and learning creates a learning community where students have freedom to express their

thoughts. As students go beyond the textbooks, blogging equips them to think critically and promotes openness that empowers them.

- *Freedom to communicate and collaborative learning.* Teaching and learning in a non-formal environment has the potential to encourage students to take some responsibility for their own learning that can be motivating. Since blogging is a peer to peer network with informal rules, this promotes freedom to communicate and collaborative learning as anyone can benefit from the discussions.

- *Builds and nurtures a learning community.* To the same degree, when learning communities build and nurture connections, this facilitates learning even to those with low performing skills and handicapped learners.

- *Promotes and develops students' creativity and reinforces reflective learning.* Blogs can be used as another channel to publish students' work, such as individual writing assignments (essay, creative writing, etc) where they can receive feedback from a wider audience in addition to their teachers. Therefore, blogs can support a reflective learning process and develop learners writing and reading ability.

- *Promotes critical thinking and deeper understanding.* There are different interesting topics and issues that appeal to students to be used as a stimulus for discussion. When students actively interact in discussion this can bring the topic alive and can provoke opinions and ideas on the subject. This engagement promotes critical thinking and can lead to a deeper understanding.

However, there are certain drawbacks that blogging poses. Apart from games, and other

online activities that students can be involved with on the internet, when applied in the context of ASEAN, there may be more challenges. Not all the countries within ASEAN have the same level of opportunity with regards to technology. In this context, gaining access to the technology needed for blogging might be difficult. Facilities in more rural areas can be very limited. Apart from students who might rely on computer outlets to have access to the internet, means extra expense and time. Consequently, implementing blogging in the context of education depends on the resources available for blogging to work constructively.

CONCLUSION

Through the study of the participants' comments and interactions in the *cyberworld*, the data acquired provides information that may help to understand why Filipinos and Singaporeans' attitudes differ when it comes to addressing certain issues. Getting inside the 'heads' of the participants even at a fairly superficial level gives some indication of their prevailing attitudes through the language used. The *cyberworld* offers alternative channels of communication that helps in the understanding of the stance taken by cyber communities on specific issues. The physical being can be harmless, but the mind that dictates can be dangerous if awareness is taken for granted, as this might influence a person to do certain actions in order to satisfy his or her desires. In a world of technology, power is not gained through war anymore instead power can be gained through emotions that could be accumulated and can be used in the physical world. So, knowing the mind of different participants allows learning to prevent the

accumulation of undesirable emotions. This might be attainable though multicultural awareness and the importance of multilingualism in education. Inculcating the importance of the different society's cultures in the mind of young students might help to lessen the 21st century prejudices that cause problems in the world.

It is hoped that this study can convey the importance of blogging in education, specifically in ELT, as it fosters a learning network beyond students' and educators' immediate settings. Blogging, as one of the most effective tools of Web 2.0, can be integrated with other learning tools to accommodate different learners' abilities. Its adaptability and flexibility support knowledge building that can boost students' self-confidence, equal rights and opportunities to share their thoughts and opinions. As blogging supports collaborative and interactive learning, the interaction between teachers and students might no longer be considered as unreceptive, but can be as negotiators and communicators. Finally, blogging might encourage students to think critically and collect their thoughts about the topic in a classroom discussion. As Wladawsky-Berger (2015) pointed out, it is "Thinking out loud".

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