

Identity Construction and Code Switching in English Newspaper Advertisements

Deborah Ashabai Fredericks John
Taylor's University

Francisco Perlas Dumanig
University of Malaya

ABSTRACT

This study examined identity construction through the use of code switching in English language newspaper advertisements in Malaysia. Specifically, this study investigated how code switching is used to construct identity and determine the types of identities constructed. One hundred and twenty one (121) food, finance, motoring, energy and telecommunications English advertisements with Malay, Tamil and Chinese code switching occurrences were selected from the three local English newspapers with the highest circulation over a period of six months from 1 August, 2011 to 31 January, 2012. The data was analysed using Bhatia's (1992) four structural components of advertisements, Piller's (2001) identity theory of similarity and difference and Woodward's (1997) theory of difference and representation. The findings reveal that during festivals, advertisers construct identity through code switching in the headline and body copy components of their advertisements. The types of identities constructed include Islamic identity, ethnic identities and national (Malaysian) identity. The findings are consistent with previous studies on language choice and advertising.

Keywords: Advertising, code switching, identity construction, language choice

1. INTRODUCTION

The growing phenomenon of code switching occurrences in advertisements has led to a rise in the study of identity construction through code switching advertisements (Piller, 2001). The current study follows in this vein by focusing on the construction of identity through the use of code switching in print advertisements in the Malaysian context, an area that has not been fully explored thus far.

There have been many differing views on identity and how it is constructed through language. Labelle (2011:174) stated that identity is "one's conception of self in the world". This is representative of the essentialist view, which holds that identity is relatively fixed and stable. Romaine (2010:1), on the other hand, explained that identity concerns how people relate to their surroundings as well as their own place in it. This is representative of

Correspondence email: Deborah Ashabai Fredericks John: deborahashabai@gmail.com

the non-essentialist view which holds that identity is fluid, and changes with time, context and relationships (Woodward, 1997:11).

Identity can be marked through similarity, difference and representation (Piller, 2001; Woodward, 1997). In other words, our concept of who we are can be derived through our similarities with others, our differences from others and through symbols that are representative of who we think we are. Language use is one way of marking those similarities, differences and representation. Thomas and Wareing (2000:136) observed that “one of the most fundamental ways of establishing our identity is through our use of language”. Therefore, language choice and code switching are seen as expressions of identity (Hajar Abdul Rahim 2006; Myers-Scotton 2006:9) and advertising is one field where identity construction through the use of code switching has been examined.

Piller (2001) examined how advertisers construct identities through the use of English in German advertisements. She argued that “contemporary social identities are hybrid and complex, and the media plays a crucial role in their construction” (Piller, 2001:153). She found that English is used in advertisements to construct global, successful and economic-oriented identities (Piller, 2001:167). Similar findings were revealed in other studies which investigated the use of English in non-English advertisements. Those findings argued that English is used because it is linked with success, modernity, global economy and progress (Gao, 2005; Chen, 2006; Ruellot, 2011). However, studies relating to code switching and identity in the Malaysian context are slightly different.

One such study was by Hajar Abdul Rahim (2006) who explained that the use of local lexis in Malaysian English is seen as important linguistic, cultural as well as identity indicators of the users which are not used to merely fill in the lexical gaps to account for local culture but rather for connotative reasons (Hajar Abdul Rahim, 2006: 7). She argued that the “choice of using a particular lexical form over another goes beyond linguistic needs” to an expression of political, cultural and religious identities (Hajar Abdul Rahim, 2006: 15).

Code switching has also been observed in local English newspaper advertisements (Azirah Hashim, 2010; Dumanig and David, 2011). Studies which examined code switching in newspaper advertisements in Malaysia were conducted by Dumanig and David (2011), Shanmuganathan and Ramasamy (2009) and Azirah Hashim (2010) but they did not put much emphasis on identity construction. However, we observed that identity construction could be evident in the choice of language in advertising which can offer valuable insights into the cultural, ethnic and religious pluralism of Malaysia.

This study examined the use of local or native code switches in English advertisements and described the identities constructed in such context. More specifically, this study aimed to explore identity construction through the use of code switching in English newspaper advertisements in Malaysia. Code switching in this study was defined as “the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence or constituent” (Poplack, 1980: 583).

The findings of this study may be used to provide new insights on identity construction in the Malaysian context and in the domain of newspaper advertisements by advancing the knowledge on how code switching is used to construct identity in newspaper advertisements. The perspective adopted in this study also contributes to theories on code switching in

newspaper advertisements. Since most studies on code switching in advertisements have been in the context of English codes switched into local languages, this study can be beneficial to sociolinguists. Furthermore, the study can be useful to those who are studying the impact of local languages on the English language as the study focused on code switching from the local languages into the English language in print advertisements.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study was derived from Bhatia (1992), Piller (2001), and Woodward (1997). Bhatia (1992:196) describes print advertisement as a “single discourse unit” with four structural components, namely, the Headlines, the Body Copy, the Signature Line, and The Slogan. This framework was adopted as it treats the whole advertisement as a single discourse, which allows the overall intent and purpose to be discerned and it provides a systematic approach to analysing advertisements through the analysis of the four components.

Secondly, this study also drew on Piller’s (2001) identity theories of similarity and difference in examining the use of English in German advertisements. The theory posits that group as well as individual identity can be marked by similarities as well as differences. These identity theories of similarity and difference have been extensively used by other studies in categorising various identity constructs in advertisements through the use of code switching (Gao, 2005).

Thirdly, the current study was also anchored from Woodward’s (1997) theory of identity and representation which posits that identity is constructed through symbolic systems which carry meaning such as certain words and language systems that carry particular meaning for an individual or group and so, express identity. Thus, code switching can be used to construct identities through representation as well as differences (Blomquist, 2009:12). This notion is of relevance to the current study as it delved into various identities in a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual context.

Using this derived framework, the headlines, body text, signature line and slogan of advertisements collected were analysed to determine where the code switches occurred. Then identity theories of similarity, difference and representation were used to determine the identities constructed in the advertisements.

3. METHODOLOGY

The data for this study comprised of a corpus of 121 advertisements published in three local English newspapers namely, *The Star*, *The Sun*, and *The New Straits Times*. These were chosen as they have the highest readership and circulation for English newspapers in the country (Nielsen Media Research, 2010). The newspapers were scanned daily for a period of six months from 1 August, 2011 to 31 January, 2012. Advertisements that were selected were extracted from the newspapers and categorised as food, finance, motoring, telecommunications and energy advertisements. In each category, advertisements were indexed and checked. Duplications and repetitions of advertisements were discarded. The advertisements were also listed, coded, labeled and filed according to category, so that they

could be retrieved as needed. A master list of all the advertisements according to their categories was drawn up to keep track of the advertisements.

The data was limited to food, financial, motoring and energy and telecommunications advertisements in the local English dailies. Advertisements in other forms of print media such as magazines were not taken into account as the focus of the research was on advertisements in newspapers. Only advertisements with code switching occurrences in the local languages were chosen. Although advertising relies on both linguistic and non-linguistic (graphic) elements to get the message across, this study focused on code switching, a purely linguistic element. As such, the study adopted a textual approach to the analysis and did not analyse the visuals in the advertisements. Due to the limited scope of this study, the findings may not be generalised across other print advertisements, categories, domains and time frames.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Code Switching in Temporal and Spatial Contexts

In order to answer the first research question, the data was first analysed to note *when* they occurred (temporal context) in relation to major festivals and celebrations. Then, using Bhatia’s (1992) four structural component framework, the data was analysed to note *where* in the advertisements, these code switches occurred (spatial context).

4.1.1 Proximity to Celebrations and Festivals

In terms of temporal context, the data revealed that most code switching occurred during festivals and special occasions as shown in Figure 1.

The findings revealed that code switching occurrences were higher during the period of August 22 – 31, 2011 (*Hari Raya & Merdeka*), October 15 – 31, 2011 (*Deepavali*), and from January 8 – 31, 2012 (Chinese New Year). However, there were almost no code switching occurrences from December 22 – 31, 2011 (Christmas).

It is also evident from Figure 1 that code switching into a particular language was higher nearer to the festival related to a particular ethnic group. For example, Malay code

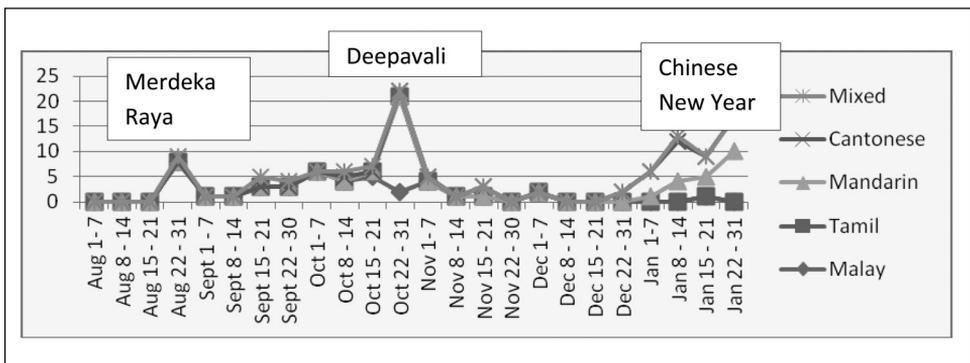


Figure 1. Temporal context of code switching occurrences

switches were more prevalent during *Hari Raya* from August 22 - 31, Tamil code switches were so on Deepavali day (October 25) while code switching into Cantonese and Mandarin were most often found during the Chinese New Year period (January 8 – 31, 2012). The findings are consistent with earlier studies (Dumanig and David, 2011). The lack of code switching occurrences during Christmas could be explained by the festival itself being most closely identified with English.

Extract 1 illustrates how the choice of language was influenced by the proximity of various festivals in Malaysia.

Extract 1

- a. *Selamat Hari Raya Aidilfitri & Happy Merdeka Day to all Malaysians.* (Honda, *The Star*, 29 August 2011).
- b. Warm wishes from the hearts of all 42,000 Maybankers, here and abroad. *Deepavali Vazhthukal* (Maybank, *New Straits Times*, 25 October 2011).
- c. Usher in a prosperous year by tossing *Yee Sang* with family, friends and business associates! It may be the Chinese year of the dragon, but our Thai style plum sauce exudes a truly Au-thai-tic flavor. *Gong Xi Fa Cai!* (Sri Ayutthaya, *New Straits Times*, 21 January 2012).

Extract 1a uses the Malay greeting *Selamat Hari Raya Aidilfitri*. *Selamat Hari Raya* literally means “Happy Celebration Day”, and is used by the Malays to refer to two major Muslim festivals in the country, *Hari Raya Haji* and *Hari Raya Aidilfitri*. *Aidilfitri* is borrowed from Arabic, *‘Īdu l-Fimr*, often abbreviated to *Eid*, marking the end of the fasting month. Azirah Hashim (2010) reports that the Malays are most closely linked with Islam. Hence, the celebration of *Hari Raya* is most closely identified with Malay culture and language.

Similarly, Extract 1b has code switches from English to Tamil. The Tamil greeting *Deepavali Vazhtukal* (Deepavali Greetings) is in the Romanised form. This style of code switching would appeal to many urban and younger generation Tamils who may not be able to read the Tamil script. The greeting is one that is commonly used during *Deepavali* among Tamil speakers rather than the English equivalent, “Happy *Deepavali*.” Since the Tamils are the majority Indian ethnic group in Malaysia, the main language linked with the celebration of *Deepavali* is Tamil.

Extract 1c shows the use of the Cantonese word *Yee Sang*, and also the addition of the Mandarin Chinese New Year greeting, *Gong Xi Fa Cai*, which loosely translates as “Congratulations and be prosperous”. The tossing of *Yee Sang* is closely identified with the Chinese New Year celebrations, and has special meaning for the Chinese community. The switching of these phrases, *Yee Sang* and *Gong Xi Fa Cai*, would therefore appeal to the Chinese community, especially during the Chinese New Year period.

It can be clearly seen from the examples how the context, in terms of *when* the code switching occurs, plays a role in determining the choice of language of the advertisers. It is

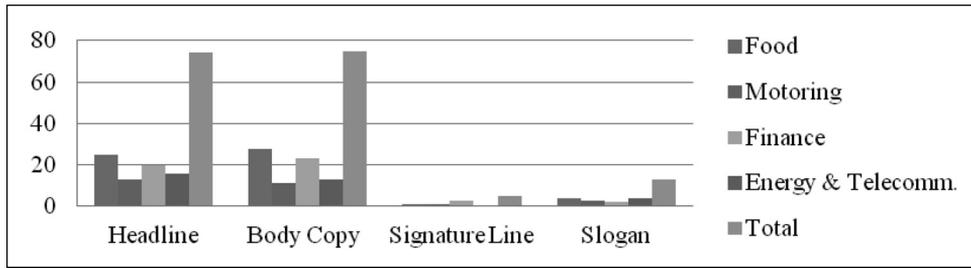


Figure 2. Spatial context of code switching occurrences

evident that the advertisers code switch into a particular language to construct differing identities in order to establish rapport with the target group, for example, using Malay for the Malays during *Hari Raya* to make them “feel they are the target audience so they feel a sense of ownership” by conveying the message that “they are the right group of people” for whom the advertisement was intended (Dumanig and David, 2011: 221).

4.1.2 Code Switching and Structural Components of Advertisements

In order to construct a comprehensive context of the code switching occurrences, the data was also analysed against the four structural components of print advertisements (Bhatia, 1992) as detailed above. The results of the analysis are summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows that code switches occur in the headline (44.3%) and body copy (44.9%) of the advertisements. This is similar with Bhatia’s findings (1992: 204) who, in his study of the use of English in Hindi, Chinese, Japanese, French, Italian and Spanish advertisements, found that most of the code switches (90%) occurred in the headlines as an attention-grabbing method. Moreover, in certain ‘open’ languages like Hindi, code switches also occur in the body text. Some examples are presented in Extract 2.

Extract 2

- a. (Headline): *Jom generasiku!* (Body Copy): A chance to win these prizes when you save with SSP. (BSN, *New Sunday Times*, 16 Oct. 2011).
- b. (Headline): *Loh Sang* & celebrate the dragon year at the Oriental group of restaurants. (Oriental, *The Star*, 17 January 2012).
- c. (Headline): (Chinese Characters) *Wishing good health and may everything go well with you this New Year.* (Body Copy): Refreshing and delicious, made with real fruit juice. Feel the fruity goodness from F& N Fruit Tree. (Fruit Tree, *The Star*, 21 January, 2012).

Extract 2a is an example of code switching used in the headline as an attention grabber. The Malay sentence, *Jom generasiku!* (Come, my generation!) is more than an invitation, it is a stirring call to action. The colloquial Malay expression *Jom* could be translated as

'Come!' or 'Let's Go!' The use of this informal term reduces the gap with the consumers and grabs their attention, persuading them to go on reading the rest of the advertisement. Myers-Scotton (2006), in her Markedness model, speaks of how the use of code switching can be considered 'marked' and thereby alerts the conversation partner that something different is to follow. Similarly, the use of code switching in the headline alerts the reader that something different is happening and so attracts the attention of the reader (Ruellot, 2011).

In Extract 2b, the code switched term *Loh Sang* is used to attract the attention of the Chinese community who celebrate Chinese New Year. *Loh Sang* is a term that refers very specifically to the act of tossing *Yee Sang* in the Chinese New Year period. Thus, the use of *Loh Sang* specifically acts as an attention grabber. Once the reader's attention is caught, then the rest of the details are explained in the body text.

In Extract 2c, the whole headline is code switched into Cantonese. This means that the advertisement is meant for a specific audience, those who can read Chinese. The headline is used to grab attention, while the body copy is in English, explaining and describing the product.

Unlike the findings of Piller (2001), this study found that code switching occurrences are mostly in the body copy, with very few in the signature line and slogan component. This implies that, firstly, the identity of the reader in this study is that of a competent bilingual who reads and understands information in code switched words and phrases in the body copy. This indicates that readers in the Malaysian context are competent, familiar and also comfortable with Malay, English and their own ethnic dialects and languages (Tan, 2009). Unlike the German reader, Malaysians have shown themselves to be very comfortable in switching back and forth between different languages for reasons other than proficiency or lexical gap (Dumanig and David, 2011). Thus the advertisers were able to code switch in the headline and body copy and be certain that the Malaysian readers would not only understand, but identify with the words and phrases used.

Secondly, since the readers of English newspapers could be assumed to be reasonably competent in the English language, there was no real need to translate either slogan or signature lines into another language. The preference of the advertisers was to render their business names and labels in English for an English-speaking readership. This is evident as the number of advertisements with code switching occurrences in the signature line is only five, whereas the number of advertisements with code switching occurrences in the headline and body copy is 74 and 75 respectively.

It can be seen that code switches, both in terms of proximity to festivals and celebrations, as well as placement in the advertisement, is with respect to choice of language to affect the meaning carried in the copy. It is also evident that the use of code switches is purposeful with the intent of creating specific identities that build solidarity with the consumers and enable them to have affective feelings toward the product or brand. Hajar Abdul Rahim (2006: 12) stated that "The choice to use a particular form, motivated by the semantic, and more importantly ideological effects of the use, undeniably impacts upon the message that the use intends to convey." In other words, the use of code switching impacts the message of the advertisement and consequently, leaves an impression on the reader. This finding is consistent with previous studies of Dumanig and David (2011) and Gao (2005).

4.2 Identities Constructed through Code Switching

The findings show that multiple identities are constructed by the advertisers in their advertisements. The identities constructed include the Islamic identity, other ethnic identities and Malaysian identity.

4.2.1 Code Switching and Islamic Identity

One of the most prevalent identities constructed in the advertisements is the Islamic identity, which is constructed through the use of Malay religious terms. This finding is supported by Azirah Hashim (2010) who observes that one of the most obvious examples of code switching in print advertisements in Malaysia is the use of religious terms, particularly the use of Islamic terms. She explains, “in a country where the Malays make up the biggest ethnic group and Islam the dominant religion, issues of *halal* food (food that can be eaten) and *haram* food (food that is prohibited) are of crucial importance” (Azirah Hashim, 2010 : 382). As such, certain terms such as *halal* and *haram* are used to establish credentials and assure Muslims that certain foods are acceptable to them.

The current study does not find any such food-related religious terms. However, religious terms are evident in Islamic banking and financial-related advertisements which convey specific ideological meanings which are related to Islam. This can be seen in finance-related advertisements as exemplified in Extract 3.

Extract 3

- a. *Amanah Hartanah Bumiputra* (AHB) is an initiative to encourage *bumiputra* participation in property investment that is *Syariah*-compliant. (Maybank AHB, *The Star*, 15 Oct. 2011).
- b. Grow your investments with *Shariah*-compliant Stocks and *Sukuk*. (Public Mutual, *New Straits Times*, 12 Oct. 2011).
- c. You can now pay your *zakat*, utility bills and many more payments. (Agro Bank, 26 Sept. 2011).

Extract 3a uses an Islamic term, *syariah* (Islamic Law), to establish credentials and gain the attention of a particular religious group: the Muslims. The term *syariah* is used to indicate compliance with Islamic law, and in this context, Islamic banking principles. This is a religious term which only Muslims would readily identify with. Although other religious groups might know of it, they are not the target of this advertisement. The use of the Malay word *bumiputra* (*lit.* sons of the soil), precludes all other races from the information in this advertisement, as it refers particularly to the Malays and the indigenous groups in Malaysia.

Woodward (1997) explained that identity is often constructed by marking difference, that is, by showing or recognising how one’s identity is different from others. In this advertisement, the use of certain technical religious terms precludes others from being the

intended target of the advertisement. The identity that is constructed here is Muslim *bumiputra* as set over and against other religious and ethnic identities.

Extracts 3b and 3c are two examples which illustrate the religious identity construction through the use of technical Islamic terms in banking advertisements. The words, *syariah*, *sukuk*, *zakat*, refer to Islamic terms which have a special connotation for Muslims. All these words are borrowed from Arabic. The term *syariah* refers to Islamic law. *Sukuk* literally means certificates, but in the financial sector, refers to Islamic bonds. While ‘bonds’ is a common English term in banking and financial circles, the use of the word *sukuk* specifically indicates Islamic bonds. Similarly, the word *zakat* (literally alms) carries a connotation that Muslims could easily identify with. Woodward (1997) studied the construction of identity through representation. Language, and in particular, certain words and phrases, can be seen as symbols which carry a lot of ideological meanings and so may be used to construct identity. The words mentioned in this example, that is, *sukuk*, *syariah*, and *zakat*, are symbolic values in Islam. They are loaded with religious meanings which represent an Islamic identity. By using these words, the advertisers, through both differentiation and representation, constructed a religious identity that would have reached a very specific group of people – the Muslims.

4.2.2 Code Switching and Ethnic Identity

In Malaysia, culture is closely connected with ethnic identity as each ethnic group has its own “set of values, beliefs and practices” (Azirah Hashim, 2010: 381). Thus, language choice can be seen as an expression of one’s culture as well as one’s ethnicity. This can be clearly seen in the construction of Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic identities in the data, as exemplified in Extract 4.

Extract 4

- a. **Headline:** (In Tamil script) *Inba Deepavali Vazhthukkal*. Happy Deepavali.
Body Copy: May the divine light of Diwali spread into your life peace, prosperity, happiness, and good health. Happy Diwali (Repeated In Tamil script):
Makizhzhyaana Deepavali naalil theyvika oliparagraphvatum vallamum, makizhchiyum, noyatravaazhvum perukatam. (Sports Toto, *The Sun*, 25 October, 2011).
- b. (In Chinese characters) *Once Carlsberg is open, there is an endless flow of prosperity.* (In English) Welcome the New Year with the vigour of the Dragon for an endless flow of prosperity. *Gong Xi FaCai.* (Carlsberg, *The Star*, 17 January 2012).
- c. *Maaf.* This blessed *Aidilfitri*, take some time to remember the moments when you may have hurt a loved one, offended a friend, or misjudged a stranger... DIGI wishes you a *Selamat Hari Raya. Maaf Zahir dan Batin.* (DIGI, *The Star*, 29 August 2011).

In Extract 4a, the phrase used in the headline, *Inba Deepavali Vazhthukkal* (lit. Joyous Deepavali Greetings) is followed by the English equivalent, Happy *Deepavali*. While 'Happy *Deepavali*' is used by all Malaysians to greet their Indian friends, *Inba Deepavali Vazhthukkal* (*Joyous Deepavali Greetings*) is used only by Tamils in wishing each other. The use of the Tamil script in the headline grabs the attention of those who know Tamil, at the same time, excludes those who do not, thus constructing an identity that is marked against those who are not able to read and understand Tamil. Unlike other Deepavali advertisements which tend to use the occasion as an opportunity to include all Malaysians in the greeting, this advertisement does not.

In Extract 4b, Cantonese is used to describe and connect the product (Carlsberg) to prosperity. The code switching here is used to appeal to the consumer's language (Cantonese), ideology (prosperity) and custom (the consumption of beer during such festivals). The choice of Cantonese can be explained by the fact that the Klang Valley edition of *The Star* focuses on a region where the dominant Chinese dialect is Cantonese. Thus, other dialects (other than Mandarin and Cantonese) are not used much in the advertisements. The use of the Mandarin greeting (*Gong Xi Fa Cai*) can be explained by the fact that Mandarin is the medium of instruction in Chinese schools. Thus, those who have studied in Chinese schools are fluent in Mandarin. This is also evident as greetings from other dialects during Chinese New Year (*Kung Si Fa Chai; Kong Hee Fatt Choy*) have fallen into disuse particularly in English newspaper advertisements. The use of code switching in these advertisements construct the identity of a Chinese-English bilingual who is familiar and somewhat proficient in Cantonese and Mandarin, at least enough to read Chinese characters and understand basic words and phrases related to the festival. The fact that Cantonese and Mandarin terms are mostly used in the domain of culture, particularly food and celebrations, is supported by the findings of Tan (2009) who also found that lexical borrowings from Chinese to English were highest in the domain of culture, food and festivals.

The Malay identity is also marked similarly through the use of certain Malay words and phrases, particularly during the *Hari Raya* festive period, as in the case of Extract 4c which focuses on the word *Maaf* (forgive) which is linked to the celebration of *Hari Raya Aidilfitri*, when the Malays customarily go around to their elders and ask for their forgiveness uttering the phrase *Maaf Zahir dan Batin*, which can be translated as "Forgive my physical and emotional wrongdoings." This extensive switch not only foregrounds the celebration, but also creates a rapport with and within the Muslim/Malay consumers by appealing to a specific Malay ethnic identity.

Each example shows how identity is constructed principally through differentiation, marking each ethnic identity over and against other ethnic groups. The advertisements in this instance intentionally constructed different ethnic identities in order to tap into the meanings, norms, beliefs and practices of each individual community, and in so doing, to express solidarity with that particular group over and against the others. There are times, however, when the advertisers favoured highlighting the commonalities, rather than the differences, between the cultures.

4.2.3 Code switching and National (Malaysian) Identity

The findings also reveal that a Malaysian identity is constructed through the marking of similarities among the different ethnic groups in the country. This is done through marking commonalities among Malaysians such as food, childhood games, use of familiar phrases, festive clothing, as well as through government policies.

As noted earlier, food can be the “bearer of symbolic meanings and can act as a signifier” of identity (Woodward, 1997: 31). One of the main markers of the Malaysian identity is the love for food, whichever culture it may be from. Advertisers have taken this very Malaysian aspect and applied it to the concept of unity.

Extract 5

- a. (Headline)** A salute to every Malaysian. **(Body Copy)** For the ones who mix their coffee with tea, who look for *nasi lemak* when they’re overseas; And the ones who finish their meals with an *ABC*... and the ones who can’t wake up without a ‘super *kau’kopi-O* first... For the ones who call everyone ‘bro’, who *lat-tali-lat* to decide who gets to go... (Perodua, *The Star*, 18 September 2011).
- b. (Headline)** Weaving harmony through *Baju Raya*. (There is an image of four baju raya, and under each there is a caption as follows: ‘Modern *Kurung* a la *Punjabi*’, ‘*Baba Nyonya* inspired *Kebaya*’, ‘Buttons and fabric from *Cheongsam*’, and ‘*Sari* cloth from *Indian* fashion house.’ **(Body Copy)**: As we prepare for a blessed *Syawal*, let us remind ourselves. Although from different backgrounds, we’re really all cut from the same cloth. *Selamat Hari Raya Aidilfitri* and *Selamat Hari Merdeka*. (TNB, *The Star*, 29 August 2011).

In Extract 5a, although Perodua is a car manufacturer, the advertisement uses food-related words to promote the idea of a Malaysian identity. *Nasi Lemak* (rice cooked in coconut cream) is a type of rice dish that is of Malay origin but is popular among all the races. Most Malaysians have *Nasi Lemak*, on a regular basis, particularly for breakfast. Thus, the use of *Nasi Lemak* immediately strikes a chord in every Malaysian, regardless of race. On the other hand, *ABC*, an acronym for *Ais Batu Campur* is a dessert of shaved ice, nuts and other little bits which again connect with all the races. Even the coffee is spelled “*kopi*”, which is in Malay, and refers to the Malaysian version of coffee – dark, and roasted with margarine and sugar. The word *kau* (Hokkien for ‘thick’) refers to thick coffee, not just strong coffee. ‘Super *kau*’ would refer to extra thick coffee associated with breakfast at the old Chinese coffee shops or *Kopi Tiam*. Taken together, *kopi* super ‘*kau*’, is a mix of three languages, that is, Malay, English and Hokkien. Such a phrase carries the connotation of the Malaysian variety of coffee.

The advertiser also evokes the shared memory of childhood games through the use of the phrase *lat-tali-lat*, which refers to a game that almost all Malaysians would have played

in their childhood, and becomes another common experience for Malaysians. Perodua uses these markers of the Malaysian identity – things that the general public link to what being Malaysian is all about – to bring good feelings of nostalgia and warmth to the reader.

Similarly, Extract 5b builds the idea of a Malaysian identity through the use of lexical items referring to clothing in the local languages. One of the main characteristics of any celebration in Malaysia is that families would go out to buy new clothes to wear for the celebration. These are *Baju Raya* (festive clothes) which are usually worn on the first day of the festival. This happens across ethnic lines, as each community shares this common practice. Tenaga Nasional, in this advertisement, takes the idea of *Baju Raya* and shows how, in this case, the clothes for the Muslim (mainly Malay) celebration of *Hari Raya* has elements from the other races and their cultures woven in. The code switched words in Extract 5b are ‘*kurung*’ and ‘*kebaya*’ (Malay), while ‘*Punjabi*’ and ‘*sari*’ (Indian). ‘*Cheongsam*’ is Chinese and the ‘*Baba Nyonya*’ refers to yet another ethnic Chinese group. Although the celebration is basically a Malay celebration, the advertisement appeals to the larger Malaysian identity by weaving together elements from every culture. The last line of the advertisement asserts in English, ‘Although from different backgrounds, we’re really all cut from the same cloth.’ In this advertisement, it can be seen how code switching to the different main language groups in Malaysia (Malay, Chinese and Indian languages) is used to construct a Malaysian identity, especially by appealing to a shared cultural norm – that of *baju raya*.

The Malaysian identity cuts across ethnic barriers by appealing to common or shared experiences, norms or practices, such as food, childhood games, and new clothes for festivals. This concurs with what Woodward (1997) observes about advertising and how it uses images and representation that is very much in the public consciousness. It is this very Malaysian identity which is already present in the public consciousness that is constructed by the advertisers in order to appeal to the consumers.

Extract 6

- | |
|---|
| <p>a. <i>Lagi power, lagi best.</i> (Perodua, <i>The Star</i>, 28 September 2011).</p> <p>b. Through diversity we embrace the values of respect, mutual understanding and tolerance. Together, we will progress as One nation, <i>1 Malaysia. Selamat Hari Malaysia.</i> (RHB, <i>News Straits Times</i>, 16 September 2011).</p> |
|---|

Another shared cultural norm is the use of familiar phrases as seen in Extract 6a which shows a unique combination of Malay and English words which, when taken together, represent Perodua’s marketing thrust. The company has registered this phrase as a trademark and uses it as a slogan. While the code switched word is actually the Malay intensifier *lagi* in both instances, it is used differently each time. In ‘*lagi power*’ the word *lagi* is used to denote ‘more’, to render it ‘more power’. In the second instance, however, it is used with the

English superlative, 'best' to create a familiar Malay phrase. The word 'best' has been borrowed into colloquial Malay and is used by people from various ethnicities as part of informal talk. The phrase is a familiar one to them. The phrase '*lagi best*' can be rendered as 'is even better', implying that the vehicle being advertised was the best before, but is even better now that it has more power. The familiarity of the phrase constructs a Malaysian identity and enables the consumer to identify with the brand and have a positive attitude towards it. As Woodward (1997: 15) noted, "advertisements can only 'work' in selling us things if they appeal to consumers and provide images with which they can identify". It has been observed before that Malay is the choice for inter-ethnic communication (Rajadurai, 2007). Thus, it becomes the choice of advertisers in constructing a Malaysian identity that cuts across ethnic lines.

The study also found that the construction of the Malaysian identity as a planned, intentional ideology of the Government. This is exemplified by Extract 6b above which reflects the influence of Government ideology in reflecting a united, Malaysian identity in advertisements. This is no accident, as the Malaysian Advertising Code specifically calls for advertisers to incorporate elements that reflect unity (*The Malaysian Code of Advertising Practice*, 2008). In addition, it is the Government's policy to promote Malay as the language to unite the various ethnic groups. In addition, the advertiser makes no mention of their label, company, product or service. The advertisement serves as reminder of the values of the nation, specifically unity in diversity. The values of respect, mutual understanding and tolerance are highlighted. In addition, the advertiser links progress to being 'together'. Only by being together, or being united, will the country progress. This progress will be as One nation, 1 Malaysia. The use of the English One indicates that 'One nation' is meant to be in English. Contradicting this is the use of the numerical '1' in 1 Malaysia. Since 1 Malaysia is the Malaysian government policy for unity and progress, when RHB uses '1 Malaysia' it should properly be read as '*Satu Malaysia*', rather than 'One Malaysia'. In doing this, the advertiser highlights the 1 Malaysia concept of the Government. In addition, RHB ends the advertisement with the greeting *Selamat Hari Malaysia*; whereas 'Happy Malaysia Day' would have done just as well. The implication is that the code switched greetings are purposeful and intentional. The use of Malay in these greetings indicates that not only is unity being promoted, but that the vehicle of unity is the Malay language itself. Thus, Malay is not only used to convey the message of unity, it is used to forge unity as well. This finding is evidenced by Malay as the preferred choice of language in advertisements carrying messages of unity within the *Merdeka Day* and *Malaysia Day* periods.

The revelation of the Malaysian identity is consistent with Kow (2008), who notes that Malaysians tend to embrace and use all the languages in the country, as well as the culture and ethnic practices that are behind them, even though Malay is the official language and English is a strong second language. This is especially seen in the practice of Malaysians who have embraced each other's food and cultural festivals through the concept of open house, as well as the many holidays for the major festivals of each ethnic group. It is these shared experiences and cultural elements that the advertisers exploit in order to construct the Malaysian identity.

5. CONCLUSION

In relation to *when* code switching is used to construct identity in English newspaper advertisements, it was found that code switching is used most near and during major festivals and celebrations. The choice of language for the code switches is influenced by the festival or celebration nearest in time. In relation to where these code switches occur, the study reveals that they are most prevalent in the headline and the body copy components of the advertisements.

The study revealed that there are three major types of identities constructed in the data, namely, Islamic identity, ethnic identities and a national (Malaysian) identity. The data shows that Islamic identity is marked by both representation and differentiation through the use of religious terms which only Muslims will recognise and give credence to as they read the advertisement.

The analysis also showed that various types of ethnic identities are built through the code switching occurrences in these advertisements. The construction of these ethnic identities has been primarily through the marking of differences from other communities. This was done by using words and phrases which have special meaning to the community celebrating at that time, such as *Hari Raya* for the Malays, *Deepavalli* for the Indian Hindus and *Gong Xi FaCai* for the Chinese. In this way, only the targeted community responds to the advertisement.

The third type of identity constructed is the Malaysian identity. It was found that advertisers used common traits and shared experiences such as food items, childhood games, familiar phrases, as well as government policies to construct a united Malaysian identity that focuses more on what is similar rather than what is different.

This study has a number of limitations in terms of domain, data selection as well as scope as detailed above. Future studies that are more comprehensive are recommended in order to fill in some of the grounds that this study did not cover.

Some recommendations for future studies include: (1) Examining other categories of advertisements where code switching occurs, as this study limits itself to food, finance, motoring and energy and telecommunications-related advertisements. Future studies such as these may be important in verifying the findings of the current study within a wider context; (2) Extending the scope of the study to other forms of print advertisements such as in magazines and other forms of advertisements such as television and radio advertisements; (3) Extending the scope of the study to identity construction through loan words found in advertisements, or even articles found in newspapers and magazines; (4) Examining the use of stereotypes in constructing identity in newspaper advertisements.

References

- Azirah Hashim. (2010). Print advertisements in Malaysia. *World Englishes*, 29(3): 378 - 393.
- Bhatia, T. K. (1992). Discourse functions and pragmatics of mixing: advertising across cultures. *World Englishes*, 11(2/3): 195 - 215.
- Blomquist, L. (2009). Language and identity: attitudes towards code-switching in the immigrant language classroom. Bachelor Degree, Universitet UMEA.
- Chen, C. W.Y. (2006). The mixing of English in magazine advertisements in Taiwan. *World Englishes* 25(3/4): 467 - 478.

- Dumanig, F. P. and David, M. K. (2011). Language use and bilingual consumers: an analysis of print advertisements in multilingual Malaysia. In: *Bridging the Gap of Cross-cultural Communicatio*., pp. 216-224. Kuala Lumpur: University Malaya.
- Gao, L. (2005). Bilinguals' creativity in the use of English in China's advertising. *4th International Symposium on Bilingualism*, Somerville.
- Hajar Abdul Rahim. (2006). The evolution of Malaysian English: Influences from within. *The Biennial Conference of the ASAA*, University of Wollongong.
- Kow, Y. C. (2008). Bilingualism, culture and identity. *BOCA - The South Florida Journal of Linguistics*, 1(2): 106-123.
- Labelle, S. (2011). Language and identity. In: Mooney A. et al.(Ed.), *Language, Society and Power: An Introduction* (3rded.). London: Routledge.
- Myers-Scotton, C. (2006). *Multiple Voices: An Introduction to Bilingualism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Nielsen Media Research. (2010). Readership/circulation of *The Star* and *Sunday Star*. Accessed 7 December 2011 from <http://thestar.com.my/info/thestar.asp>
- Piller, I. (2001). Identity constructions in multilingual advertising. *Language in Society*, 30: 153-186.
- Poplack, S. (1980). Sometimes I'll start a sentence in Spanish y termino en espanol: toward a typology of code-switching. *Linguistics*, 18: 581-618.
- Rajadurai, J. (2007). Sociolinguistic perspectives on variation in non-native varieties of English: the case of Malaysian English. *Multilingua*, 26: 409-426.
- Romaine, S. (2010). Identity and multilingualism. In: K. Potowski and J. Rothman (Eds.), *Bilingual Youth: Spanish in English-speaking Societies*, pp.1-31. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Ruellot, V. (2011). English in French print advertising from 1999 to 2007. *World Englishes*, 30(1): 5-20.
- Shanmuganathan, T. and Ramasamy, K. (2009). The social and cultural impact factors in Tamil advertisements. *Polyglossia*, 17: 41-57.
- The Malaysian Code of Advertising Practice. (2008). (3rd ed.). Petaling Jaya: Advertising Standards Authority Malaysia.
- The Star*: (2012). Accessed 29 April 2012, from <http://www.thestar.com.my/>
- The New Straits Times*. (2012). Accessed 30 April 2012, from <http://www.nstp.com.my/>
- Tan, S. I. (2009). Lexical borrowing from Chinese languages in Malaysian English. *World Englishes*, 28(4) : 451-484.
- Thomas, L. and Wareing, S. (2000). *Language, Society and Power: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Woodward, K. (1997). Identity and difference. In : K. Woodward (Ed.), *Identity and Difference*, pp. 8 - 58. London: Sage Publications.

Deborah Fredericks holds a Master of English as a Second Language degree from University of Malaya and is now a Senior Lecturer with Taylor's University. Her research interests include sociolinguistics, particularly in investigating how language choice constructs identity in a multilingual nation.

Dr. Francisco Perlas Dumanig is a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. He is currently teaching Filipino courses to the undergraduates and teaching research methodology and psychology of language learning to the postgraduates.

