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Domain Changes in Defining *Darah (Blood)*: An Analysis of Communication Style in Malay Proverbs

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Abstract

This study focuses on proverbs derived from the keyword for the lexis *darah (blood)*. Data for the study were obtained from sub-corpus data base. The analysis showed that changes have occurred in defining the domain of the keyword for the lexis *darah (blood)*. From the initial [liquid] domain which defines “blood as blood” and “blood symbolizing diseases and colours”, the meanings have expanded to include meanings in [feeling] and [attitude] domains. The changes in the domain provide evidence of refinement and preciseness of the character and mind of the Malays in defining their communication style.

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1. Introduction

In language and linguistics, communication is perceived as an information processing field. According to Loose (1996), belief, meaning, or intent are important terms which are useful when processing information. These terms will help shape the information that would facilitate the understanding of the meaning of the communication that has taken place. One of the major obstacles in understanding the meaning in communication with regard to the concepts of knowledge, belief, meaning, or intent is cultural differences, in particular the different cultures between the speaker and the listener (Nordby, 2008). For example, the proverb is a form of communication that is associated

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with the culture of a race. Malay proverbs for instance, are the communication hallmarks of the Malay community in expressing their thoughts, values, and the philosophy of life of the Malay culture itself (Zaitul Azma & Ahmad Fuad, 2011). However, the present generation often misinterprets the meaning of the proverbs when they fail to understand the culture that underlies the creation of a particular proverb. Hence, this study attempts to understand the meaning of the keyword for the lexis *darah* (blood) which is often used as a symbol in Malay proverbs.

2. Literature review

2.1. Malay proverbs and *darah* (blood)

Winstedt (1950), borrowing the words of Aristotle, defines a proverb as a fraction or a part of the wisdom of the ancients that prevent damage and destruction to summarize tranquility and intelligence, while Za'ba (2002) defines a proverb as "a sequence of short talks which have become people words for a long time since the words are beautiful, wise, broad and truthful in its purpose and have been used as comparison, example and lesson" (p.165). The definitions proposed by the two prominent scholars (local and abroad) clearly show that proverbs reveal the intelligent mind of the authors in expressing their thoughts prudently and diplomatically (Ariffin, 1971; Darus, 1974; Edward, 1985; Indrawati, 1998; Koh, 1992; Mohamad Radzi, 1999; Izani, 2001; Tenas, 2003; Abdullah, 2006; Ding, 2009; Ahmad Fuad & Zaitul Azma Zainon, 2010; Hamidah & Siti Marina, 2012).

Similar to other cultures, the Malays also have their own unique collection of idioms, which record examples, comparisons and lessons which become guidelines in social life. According to Abdullah (2006), Malay proverbs, which have been listed as a point of Malay genius, are created based on three main sources; the experience of the people, the wise sayings of learned persons who produce the expressions as a result of their reflections and the holy book. Likewise, Asmah Omar (2008) adds that proverbs, which encompass the philosophy, beliefs, and norms of the Malay race, are the result of how the Malays see the world around them. The experience obtained from daily life which has been passed from their ancestors and the rules of their lives which are guided by the teachings of religion and cultural practices form the pillar of the creation of the proverbs. The four processes involved in the creation of these proverbs indicate the presence of embodiment (Ibarretxe-Antunano, 2008) or physical elements (a process created by past experiences) that relate the understanding of a word with the meanings, values and culture of a language of a society.

According to Tenas (2003), the importance of proverbs can only be understood when we understand both the meaning of the proverb as well as the symbol which is the essence of the proverbs being studied. The keyword for the lexis *darah* (blood) is an example of a symbol in a Malay proverb which can easily cause confusion that leads to misinterpretation of its meaning. *Darah* (blood), a word that has its own unique meaning (i.e. *darah* which means blood), can actually be broken into a number of phrases which generate new meanings that deviate from its original meaning. The following proverbs illustrate the variation of meaning related to the keyword for the lexis *darah* (blood): *bakar darah* (burned blood meaning getting angry), *berdarah bali* (bali-blooded meaning coward), *berdarah dingin* (cold-blooded meaning cowardice), *cekik darah* (blood sucker meaning extortion), and *berdarah merah* (red-blooded meaning brave). It is interesting to examine this change in meaning in the process of understanding the communication style of the Malays as expressed through proverbs.

2.2. *Darah* (blood) from the biological perspective

Generally, blood is the red fluid in the blood vessels. In biology, the blood is the connective tissue that is found in all living things that have souls (like humans and animals) that acts as an agent of the transportation system (the fluid that circulates and floats, or also known as plasma) in the body (biology-online.org, *Definition of blood*, 2012). On average, the human body contains a volume of blood equivalent to one-twelfth of the body weight, i.e. approximately five liters. According to Wigley (2008), among the functions of the blood in the body are: (a) to transport gases, nutrients, and hormones throughout the body, (b) to carry carbon dioxide and metabolic by-products

for excretion, (c) as a defense system (immune system) against dangerous pathogenic antigen and (d) as a PH control system (body temperature).

This indicates that blood is very important in the human body system. Lack or absence of blood will result in the body system not being able to function properly, and the most serious impact will cause the entire body system to paralyze. Hence, even without empirical and scientific research, Malay thinkers who were very sensitive to the environment and who realized the importance of blood and its relationship with human beings have created a large number of wise and smart Malay expressions associated with blood. This is evident by the discovery of so many of these proverbs.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus linguistics

Corpus linguistics is a linguistic analysis method that uses data from the language materials collected in a resource called the corpus or corpora (language bank). These materials are derived from the use of language in a variety of genres, modes, and oral as well as written materials that could be considered as reflecting a real phenomenon of the language used by language users (Gries, 2009).

This is an empirical method since it is based on three important aspects: a large collection of data, systematic text samples which have face-validity as a representation of the language, as well as easily accessed and generated data, and recognized credibility of research findings (Kennedy, 1998). Through the expertise and sophistication of the science of computing, large linguistic data can be generated more quickly, and the data management is also safer, more secure and reliable in terms of the methods to acquire and analyze data (Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin & Harith Ahmad Shah, 2009). Linguists such as Harris and Hill, who are very much influenced by scientific positivism and behaviorism, see corpus as a major source of linguistics data for a language phenomenon (Leech, 1997). They define corpus as a naturally occurring data of a language in large quantities which are necessary and sufficient for the purposes of language study and research.

3.2. Data collection method

In this study, data on proverbs (i.e. blood) were obtained from the proverb sub-corpus data-base www.malaycivilization.com/ (Malay Literary Reference Center, 2013). This large-size corpus (up to the end of 2003, the sub-corpus of Malay proverbs has more than 22,000 proverb, idiom, figurative and sayings entries) is the first digital dictionary of Malay proverbs developed by combining all categories of Malay expressions such as proverbs, idiomatic and figurative expressions collected from 20 different dictionaries of Malay proverbs which are considered comprehensive. Among them are *Sambaan Cakap dan Pepatah Adat Melayu* (1956), *Kitab Kiliran Budi* (1961), and *Mestika Bahasa* (1965) (as cited in Hanafi Atan, Ding Choo Ming, Afendi & Arba'eyah, 2004). Each proverb downloaded was analyzed based on the corpus linguistics method.

3.3. Analysis procedure

The analytical procedure to examine domain changes in defining the meaning of *darah* (blood) was conducted by classifying all 116 proverbs related to blood in the categories based on cognitive principles (Taylor, 1995). Under this principle, the formation of categories is conceptualized as motivated rather than arbitrary. Two factors emphasized in the determination of categories according to cognitive principles are:

- Features of common forms of use, i.e. examining similarities in shapes, sizes and materials.
- Attributes of an object, i.e. examining the function or purpose of a lexis used (for example who directs the lexis, and to whom is it directed, and the similarity of meaning through the presence of other lexis, i.e. collocations).

4. Discussion

In the Malay proverb, the keyword for the lexis *darah* (blood) is generally patented in the [liquid] domain, which translates as blood types. The word *darah*(blood) can be classified under the general category of blood type, and some can be classified in the category of specific blood type. For example, two (2) common blood types are as listed below:

1. *Dadih* (curd)****darah* (blood). Subject: **darah (blood)** Meaning: Congealed blood.
2. ****darah* (blood) ****mati* (dead). Subject: **darah (blood)** Meaning: Blood clot.

Examples 1 and 2 are examples of proverbs that explain the keyword for the lexis *darah* (blood) as blood type in the general category, such as congealed blood (example 1) and blood clot (example 2). There are also lexis blood keywords that describe blood type in a specific category, such as blood to describe [diseases], and [colour]. The following five proverbs illustrate such category:

3. ****darah* (blood) ****rendah* (low). Subject: **Disease**. Meaning: Health problem due to blood pressure – low blood pressure.
4. ****darah* (blood) *** *tinggi* (High). Subject: **Disease** Meaning: Health problem due to blood pressure - high blood pressure (hypertension).
5. *Kurang* (lack of)****darah* (blood). Subject: **Disease**. Meaning; Health problem due to lack of blood.
6. ****darah* (blood) ****ikan* (fish). Subject: **Colour**. Meaning: Dark red; the mangosteen is half ripe.
7. ****darah* (blood)****darah ikan* (blood of a fish). Subject: **Colour** . Meaning: Crimson; the shade of colour which is similar to the colour of fish blood (crimson).

Examples 3 to 7 illustrate the proverbs that describe the meaning of the lexis *darah* (blood) keywords as a specific type of blood that reflects the various types of blood-related [diseases] such as low blood pressure (example 3), hypertension (example 4) and lack of blood (example 5). Examples 6 and 7 are proverbs that describe the details of [colours] which are seen as similar to the colour of blood (example 6) and the red color which is similar to the color of fish blood (example 7). The seven examples serve as illustrations of the meaning of blood in the [liquid] domain category, which is the core meaning of blood.

In addition to the description of the lexis *darah* (blood) keywords in the domain of [liquid], there are also blood keywords in Malay proverbs which are symbols used to express the meaning that can be generalized in the [feeling] domain. The origin can be explained based on the assumption proposed by our daily physical embodiment experience. Its occurrence is certainly due to biological factors, that is the existence of blood in the human body. Since blood functions as a connective tissue found in all living animates (such as humans and animals) which acts as an agent of the transportation system in the body system, blood certainly also plays a role in shaping a person's feelings. The following three (3) proverbs illustrate this situation.

8. *Ber-*(has) ****darah* (blood)*** bali. Subject: **Feeling**. Meaning: Coward.
9. *Menaikkan* (Rising)****darah* (Blood). Subject: **Feeling**. Meaning: Getting angry.
10. *Men-* (become) ****darah* (blood)****daging* (body system). Subject: **Feeling**. Meaning: Something has become part of our body system, i.e. it has become a habit.

Examples 8 to 10 are proverbs which emphasize the meaning in [feeling] domain category based on the keyword for the lexis *darah* (blood). The combination of verbs *ber-* (has) –*darah* (blood) (example 8), shows that the existence of feeling in the human body. Likewise example 9 combines the verb *menaik* (rise) with *darah* (blood), and the prefix of *men-* with –*darah* (blood) (example 10). The proverbs analyzed draw attention to the meaning in [feeling] domain category to explain the types of feelings which are certainly related to blood factor in the human body. Interestingly, the feelings uncovered are inclined towards negative feeling i.e. [anger], [fear], [furious], [surprised] and [revenge].

11. *Bakar* (burn) *** *darah*(blood). Subject: **Anger**. Meaning: Causing anger.
12. ****darah* (blood)****gemuruh* (agitated). Subject: **Fear**. Meaning: Agitated; mixed feelings of shame and fear.
13. ****darah* (blood)****hati* (liver). Subject: **Furious**. Meaning: Enrage.
14. *Kering* (Dried) ****darah* (blood). Subject: **Surprised**. Meaning: Shocked.

15. Tebus (Redemption)***darah (blood). Subject: **Revenge**. Meaning: Vengeance.

Examples 11 to 15 are proverbs detailing the meaning of the [feeling] domain under the category of a specific sense of feelings with negative connotation. Example 11 conveys the feeling of [anger] by referring to the blood as being burned, i.e. a person's rage is compared to his/her blood boiling with anger. Other examples also highlight blood meanings which describe a variety of feelings such as [agitation] (example 12), [rage] (example 13), [surprise] (example 14), and [revenge] (example 15).

Although most of the meanings in the category of the [feeling] domain analyzed through the use of the keyword for the lexis *darah* (blood) expressed negative connotations, there are also examples of proverbs that use this keyword which describe the meaning of [feeling] with positive connotations. The proverbs are listed below:

16. *Turun* (drop)****darah* (blood). Subject: **Calm**. Meaning: Anger subsided.

17. *Surutkan* (subside)****darah* (blood). Subject: **Pacify**. Meaning: To pacify the anger.

18. *Ber-* (with) ****darah* (blood)****merah* (red). Subject: **Bold; lust; healthy**. Meaning: a. brave b. lust c. healthy.

Examples 16, 17 and 18 are proverbs that use the keyword for the lexis *darah* (blood) with positive connotations since they describe pleasant meanings, as a result of the combination of the lexis blood and other lexis with positive connotation. Example 16 exhibits the meaning of [calm] while examples 17 and 18 represent the meaning of [anger subsiding] and [bold] respectively.

The expansion of the meaning in the [feeling] domain category has led to a more specific meaning that can describe meaning in the [attitude] domain category. The proverb in example 19 highlights the meaning in the [attitude] domain category to clarify the *darah* (blood) keyword.

19. *Ber-* (has)****darah* (blood)****dingin* (cold). Subject: **Attitude; temperamental; coward; cruel; bad tempered**. Meaning: a. cold blooded. b. impervious. c. cruel, d. coward.

Since the meanings highlighted in the [feeling] domain category have more negative connotations, the expansion of the meaning of the category of the [feelings] domain to the [attitude] domain also shows the same potential of expressing meanings with negative connotations such as [vice], [extortion], [coward], and [greed]. Examples of proverbs that describe these meanings are as follows:

20. *Penghisap* (Sucker)****darah* (blood). Subject: **Vice**. Meaning: Bribery/Corruption; always require an excessive or exorbitant charge for services.

21. *Hisap* (Suck)****darah* (blood). Subject: **Extortion**. Meaning: Extortion; to make excessive profits.

22. ****darah* (blood)****dingin* (cold). Subject: **Coward**. Meaning: Coward.

23. ****darah* (blood)****kering* (dried). Subject: **Cruel; evil**. Meaning: Cruel; evil.

24. *Lintah* (Leech)****darah* (blood). Subject: **Greed**. Meaning: A person who always aims for high profits; a person who offers loans at a very high interests.

25. *Seekor kuman kena pelantik* (a germ was hit by a catapult)***, *darah menimpa setara alam* (blood spattered across the universe). Subject: **Gossip**. Meaning: A marriage between the poor and the rich which becomes the topic of discussion among the people.

26. *Tersurut* (subsided)****darah* (blood)***Subject: **Loss of interest**. Meaning: Loss of interest.

27. *Menukik* (digging)****darah* (blood)****dialu* (from a pounder) Subject: **Futile**. Meaning: Asking for help from people who are not able to help.

28. *Lidah menghisap* (Tongue which sucks)****darah*(blood). Subject: **Swindler**. Meaning: A well-mannered person who subtly embezzles/misappropriates other people's property entrusted to him/her.

Examples 20 to 28 are proverb/figures of speech which define meanings in the [attitude] domain category. The description of the meanings in this category is characterized by negative connotation as a result of the negative feelings harboured in the human body. Negative feelings produce negative attitudes, and such attitudes will emerge in the personality of the people who personalize it. These negative attitudes are displayed in proverbs with *darah* (blood) keywords which portray the meaning in the [attitude] domain category. Example 20 is an example of the meaning in the [attitude] domain which explains the meaning of [vice], while example 21 explains the meaning of [extortion]. In addition to these two meanings, other meanings in this domain include [coward] (example 22), [cruel]

(example 23), [greed] (example 24), [gossip] (example 25), [loss of interest] (example 26), [futile] (example 27), and [swindler] (example 28).

5. Conclusion

In brief, the analysis of the examples of the proverbs focusing on meanings of the keyword for the lexis *darah* (blood) gave a clear indication that the meanings displayed by the blood keyword are not confined to the category of the [liquid] domain only. From the initial description of blood in the [liquid] domain in which blood is divided into two categories; general category (i.e. blood is the blood) and specific category (blood representing diseases and colours), the meanings have expanded to also encompass the meanings of specific domains related to the concepts of [feeling] and [attitude]. The changes from just the meanings in the [liquid] domain to the meanings in the [feeling] and the [attitude] domains demonstrate the close relationship between the position of the blood in the human body and the function of blood that ultimately expose the identity of the owner of the body. The changes in defining the keyword for the lexis *darah* (blood) in the proverbs exemplify the Malay communication style which captures the subtleties and preciseness of the Malay community's thinking when using the Malay language in their interactions.

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