

National identity: Prediction model of relationship between language decency and language character

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Aug 17, 2021

Revised Mar 5, 2022

Accepted Apr 10, 2022

Keywords:

Decency

Language character

Language decency

Malay language education

National identity

ABSTRACT

The expression of decency in communication triggers individual character in formation of national identity. Language decency always applies in Malay language education context during learning session. But, how far it can shape the generation's identity is still vague. Aim of this research was to thorough the relationship of language education decency with language character among students in public and private universities. A survey was conducted on 380 students of several universities in Malaysia. The data were collected by using Google Form with cooperation from university representatives. The quantitative data was analyzed by using SPSS and AMOS software through correlation and regression analysis by structural equation modelling (SEM). Findings showed that the most decency form used by students was words with value $\beta=.67$, $p=.000$. Language decency education had contributed 80% of R2 value for language character among students. The prediction model of relationship between decency language and character language had achieved equivalence value which RMSEA=.067, GFI=.977, CFI=.995, TLI=.991 and Chisq/df=2.682. Therefore, factor of decency language that applies among students in Malay language course can contribute on generation with nice language character and strong national identity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Decency is related to language and education [1]. It always being practiced especially in Malay language education. The implementation of National Education Policy has a goal to unite all races in Malaya through one language which is Malay language and one syllabus which is national syllabus. This is important for the direction of education towards the goal to produce human capital with national image and identity, united citizen and live in harmony [2], [3]. Education in Malaysia should be purposeful and bring all children of different races under one umbrella of national education by gradually makes the national language becomes the main intermediate language [4].

Nowadays, the young generations seem to have low national identity by ignoring the decency aspect which should be the core in defending Malay language especially through education. This new generation are too ego and tends to defend more on their rights to speak without realizing that they have degenerated their own national identity. This worrisome behavior can be seen through previous studies which stated that there is trace of impolite language usage in the forms of mockery and harsh words [5], direct criticism, spread of hatred and attack others' personality [6], shifts and deficiencies of politeness in students' language usage [7]

and dysphemism usage in social media [8]. Decent communication, impolite words, unsuitable language usage and lack of manners [6], [9] arise the concern of public on national identity among youngster today.

Language decency is a communication behavior that must be practiced continuously [1], [10], [11]. It also can be defined as methods which language is used in communication to show consideration towards feeling and desire of someone who is talking to create and develop interpersonal relationship and to comply rules among society or one's culture [12]. Decency in language is a very important aspect in communication. This can be called as wisdom [7]. Politeness in language decency is an effective communication strategy to avoid conflicts between individuals in communication [13] and connects the words, manners and language usage that are suitable with situation and environment [14]. There are fifth teen forms of positive decency education among students, such as: desire to accept good wish from friends; desire to gain sympathy; get attention from lecturer; use identity markers; get permission; avoid misunderstanding; show similarities; use jokes in communication; show comprehension during communication; show optimistic attitude; involve speech partner in communication activity; asking with reason; offering or promising; states the reciprocity of the relationship; and give gifts [15].

Meanwhile, language character is language as knowledge about rules and principles and way to pronounce and do something with sounds, words, and sentences from only knowledge about certain sounds, words, and sentences [16]. Language character give full description of some language characteristics that show language as basic effective tools in communication. This is reinforced when language user has a common meaning that goes beyond the literal meaning of the word and expresses the language in the form of character, social perception, personal identity and social interaction [17].

The concept of identity is based on positive attributes of language decency and language character. Identity is an unique and special characteristics (from the aspects of custom, language, religion) which become the core and symbol of personality for individual, race and so on [18]. Identity also can be defined as nature, characteristic or personal positive attributes which permanent and stable, unchanged or hard to change (such as honesty, trustworthy, conveying information wisely, clean, truthfulness, civilized, courteous, and other character, ethical and aesthetic commendable values) [19], [20]. Usually individual identity can be symbolized as racial identity [18], because it reflects the individual identity (and vice versa). The similarity of an individual is contained in the similarity of its mind essence which has been carried from child until adult remain unchanged and continue as self-memory and become the essence of identity [21]. Thereby, identity is individual characteristic which is hidden and pure, but can be born in behavioral form [3], [22]. In the context of Malaysia, same Malay language usage, decent communication, practices of nice words and common mind understanding that shared together becomes the basic of Malaysia's racial identity [23], [24].

Therefore, the formation of identity based on Malay language education is a foundation and become the main agenda in every country with aims to build genuine and pure identity that can be the core and symbol of supreme and outstanding country [19]. The activity of nurturing identity can be done through embedded in few subjects which taught at primary or secondary school [23]. The usage of polite words, and correct language techniques will arouse curiosity among students and form the strong identity through language character. Speech is a pragmatic rule that emphasized on suitable language usage with purpose of communication [25] and related to the polite and effective language usage [26]. Knowledge related to pragmatic rule that is called rhetoric [27] will allow the teacher and student to achieve communication purpose and preserve language decency. The formation of language decency through Malay language education can manifest language character which enables the establishment of strong national identity.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was a descriptive quantitative study. It was conducted to identify the relationship between three elements of language decency which were manners aspect, words and good language usage with student language character. Quantitative method was used through survey form by using set of questionnaires. This research was carried out on 380 students at five public and private universities which were International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), University Putra Malaysia (UPM), Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI), Tunku Abdul Rahman University and Sultan Azlan Shah University. The data was collected by using questionnaire form that had been distributed to students involved through Google Form. Sample selection was random. All question and answer were using Malay language. University that has been chosen as sample is university that has field of language and literature studies. The location of respondents are two public and private universities each at Perak, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. The respondents were among last year students who enrolled in Malay Language of language and literature programs. Duration for respondents to answer the questionnaire at least 40 minutes per person. Data that had been collected was analyzed by using SPSS and AMOS software. The instruments for decency language questionnaire [28] and character language questionnaire [29] were fully adapted.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research used two approaches. They were descriptive and correlation analysis by using SPSS statistical tools. The purpose of analysis was to get statistically significant value before regression analysis through the approach of structural equation modelling (SEM) by using AMOS software.

3.1. Results

The outcome of correlation analysis between variables of language decency education from aspects manners, words, and language usage with language character of students of language course in public and private universities showed that there was significant relationship between all measured variables as presented in Table 1. The first factor which was language decency from manners aspect showed significant relationship with students' language character ($r=.796$, $p=.000$). The relationship direction for both variables were positive which means the more civilized the students in their relationship, the better language character shown by them. The second aspect of language decency was measured through good words aspect also showed significant relationship ($r=.835$, $p=.000$) and positive relationship direction. The polite words describe the extent of language character shown by students. The better and beautiful words used, the more brilliant the language character. While the last one also showed significant relationship between students' language usage in conversation with language character ($r=.836$, $p=.000$). This means the better or decent language usage will give indication on good language character on students. The outcome of the correlation analysis showed the compliance towards the conditions to conduct regression analysis through SEM.

Table 1. Correlation analysis of manners, words, language usage and language character

Variables	Manners	Words	Language usage	Language character
Manners	1			
Words	.860***	1		
Language usage	.837***	.877***	1	
Language character	.796***	.835***	.836***	1

N=380

The next analysis was to analyze the relationship between variables of language decency from the aspects of manners, words, and language usage with language character. For this analysis, 29 items were used to measure the variables of language decency. However, after CFA analysis and structural model were being performed, only 24 items were retained while five items were dropped out. All factor loadings showed value more than .50 [30]. Meanwhile, 40 items and four sub constructs for language character were measured which character change, social perception, personal identity and social interaction. After CFA analysis was done, the variables of language character were merged by using item parceling method to produce better model. All factor loadings for language character variable were exceeds the value .50. However, factor loadings more than .85 showed there was correlation between items [31], therefore the structural model had been improved.

The outcome of structural model analysis from Figure 1 shows the structural model following by sub constructs which displayed all measured items to identify direct effect relationship between all aspects measured. This structural model was done before it being improved by item parceling method which will form a better model [31]. The outcome of analysis showed equivalence values which were RMSEA=.088, IFI=.924, CFI=.924, TLI=.912 and Chisq/df=3.764. This finding also answered the hypotheses tested which: i) There is significant direct effect between manners factor with students' language character (H_{a1}); ii) There is significant direct effect between words factor with students' language character (H_{a2}); iii) There is significant direct effect between language usage factor with students' language character (H_{a3}).

The direct effect relationship that was measured directly on language character in this structural model showed words sub construct had the highest beta value, $\beta=0.67$, $p=.000$. Hypothesis H_{a2} is accepted. For direct effect relationship between manners factor and students' language character also shows significant result which $\beta=0.10$, $p=.000$. While the direct effect relationship between language usage factor with students' character language also showed significant result which $\beta=0.11$, $p=.000$. Therefore, this can be concluded that words factor plays importance role in forming good language character among students. Words measured such as sorry, low voice intonation during interaction with lecturer, and always say thank you when get helps from anyone are related with the formation of students' language character. This element is essential to determine the direction of identity among young generation today. Language decency which is used in their daily life through polite Malay language usage, word with manners and civilized can produce students with strong identity.

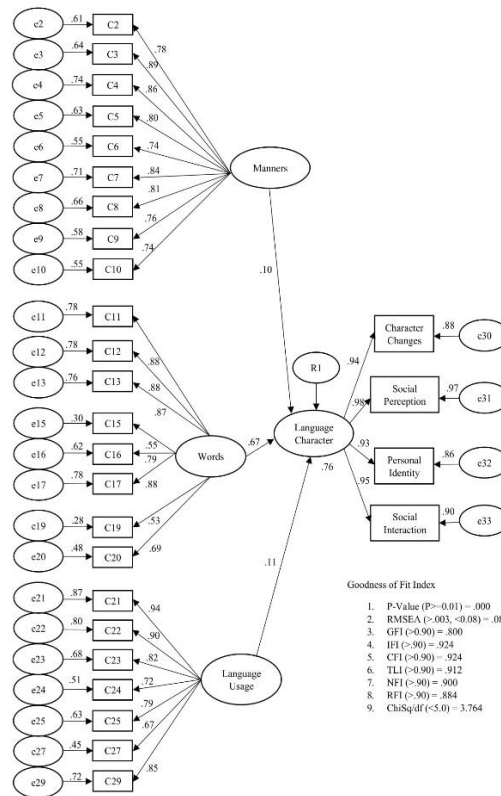


Figure 1. Structural model before being improved

Next analysis was to figure the prediction model of relationship between variables of language decency education from aspects manners, words, and language usage with language character of students of language course in public and private universities. SEM was done again to improve the previous analysis by doing item parcelling process to get good equivalence value as validation for the formation of prediction model. This analysis showed equivalence values which were RMSEA=.067, GFI=.977, CFI=.995, TLI=.991 and Chisq/df=2.682 as described in Figure 2.

Based on SEM analysis in Figure 2, good equivalence values were achieved and this showed that language decency from the aspects of manners, words and language usage had contributed on language character of students involved. There were 80% of variance value had been contributed by language decency. In this prediction model, all three dimensions that studied which factors of manners, words and language usage in the context of language decency showed higher beta value, $\beta=.89$, $p=.000$ which indicates high contributions on language character. Given that this research was obtained from students of language programs in Malay Language Studies, this proved that the use of Malay language plays a vital role in producing students with good characters, besides the other factors.

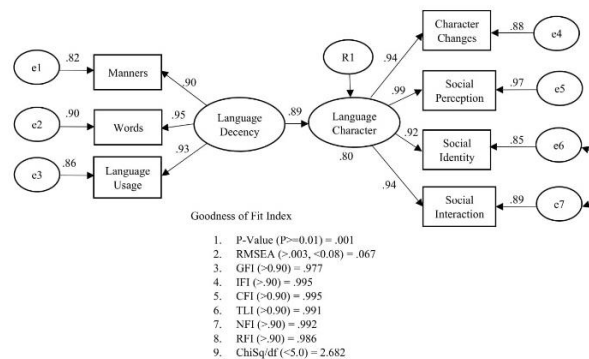


Figure 2. Structural model after being improved

3.2. Discussion

Language acts as tools for communication, deliver value and has important social function to foster a sense of group identity and solidarity. This is a method on how language can be delivered and preserved. Language also the basis for national identity. Steps for Malay language absorption among Malaysian had been initiated early since before the independence year 1957 at the top level [32]. This step had been arranged by the leaders at that time. Then, it was carried out to intermediate level which through education and lesson. Malay language also a clear indicator that represents the national identity of country [32]–[34]. Language is a sensitive issue. It is also a part of the heritage of nation and country. To understand and penetrate far into community, one must be able to talk and understand well the community language accompanied by decent elements with good manners and politeness.

Based on the reported findings in this research, it showed empirical prove that language decency which consists the aspects of manners, words and language usage had contributed to 80% of language character formation. These elements are one of the identities that must be achieved in the last aims for formation of strong national of Malaysia. Polite manners such as talk in good language, raise hands, give response, and greets the lecturers and friends outside of class show the good examples of manners. This finding explains that clear words can give big impacts towards students' language character [35].

An overview of the importance of language decency in societal life as mentioned previously is found in proverbs that has been expressed since time immemorial. Among proverbs that emphasize the importance of everyone to maintain the language decency during communication such as “The Language of the Soul Showed the Nation” (*Bahasa jiwa bangsa, Bahasa menunjukkan bangsa*), and “The Language of the Nation and the Sound of the Language Is Known To The Nation” (*Berbunyi bahasa diketahuilah bangsa*) [35]. Language is a symbol of identity and used as signal for people who speaks. Therefore, speaking the language in the form of mannerisms and jargon gives a sense of belonging to the national identity [36]. Decent education should be implemented at the early education at primary school to show the assertiveness of government to create integrated national identity. This is supported by past research that found that there is strong relationship between language with the sense of belonging of national group, identity and language character [15].

This finding is in line with previous study by Beden and Zahid [37]. There were two models that were applied in research data, in fact both model for the figure were used to submit the maximum politeness that must be comply to create free conflicts situation. There also a study about politeness in e-mails of Arab students in Malaysia [38] with purpose to learn the frequency of Arab language usage that had been directly translated into English language and ways of the students make request to their supervisor. Besides, academic staff perception towards the students' language usage also being examined. Meanwhile, there is a study about euphemism element by Zolkifli and Bakar which related to the language decency [39]. The researchers had used two novels to compare the consumption rate of euphemism element which showed the substitution of words considered rude and taboo to more decent words.

There were 80% contribution by language decency education variable such as manners, words and language usage clearly proved its importance towards students' language character. Language which is an act of speaking can be assumed as purposeful act to achieve certain goals by verbal. Usually, it is done by using utterances that can be called as speech action which can be identified in terms of its intended purpose. There also opinion that comprehension about the role of language usage will be in line with psychological factors regarding of some phenomena such as character that associated with language [12]. Apparent comprehension about the nature of situation where language is used can deepen the general understanding about principles and mechanisms which underlying the use of language. Language experts always stated that language and communication is not a similar thing [19]. People can and communicate without language on display as closing behavioral [32]. Therefore, language usage as communication tools is appropriate as disclosed through noble words but not excessive to explain social order as formed in society. Although language is not more than communication tools, language also needs social and psychological behavior through decency and its impact on the character of the speaker of the language itself.

Therefore, Institute of Language and Literature (*Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka/DBP*) had been given mandate to implement tasks of language planning at higher level to curb language pollution. To uphold the Malay language and preserve the element of decent education, the government had obliged Malay language as language in official letters between departments and government agencies. Efforts by the other higher ups also no exception. To dignify Malay language as national identity, collaboration between three countries which were Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia (MABBIM) had been established at South East Asia level for the purpose [40]. DBP Acts also had extended the authorization to take action against any party that use wrong Malay language in any public place. In fact, Malay language is a compulsory subject includes at private university as specified in Article 17 (1) of the Education Act 1996 (*Perkara 17(1) Akta Pendidikan 1996*) shall be enforced in the national education system [41].

Language decency education in forming Malaysia national identity also can be implemented through communication of mass media. At the lower level, the modus operandi of language absorption are the media, or more specifically called mass media. Mass media can play effective role right down to the roots includes cultivating language decency and usage of Higher Malay Language [35]. Although mass media communicate virtually and one way, but its importance in supporting Malay language as culture intermediate language is undeniable. Basically, there are three category of mass media which printed, electronic and internet. Printed media usually come in format of newspaper, magazine, flyers, journal and books. While electronic media can be watched through television or listened to radio. Internet media has evolved rapidly and people starts to use communication technology such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and e-mails [9]. Today technology development has made public communications can be reached just in one touch.

As mass media has become part of people's life, it can easily influence a person's thought or mind. By influencing someone's thought, then mass media can colonize the mind. Because of that, nation also get affected as an individual is the mirror of nation. How far an individual able to evaluate, give or accept value is depending on language factor because the value also sits in the language (which he/she understood). The main purpose of speaking is to deliver information to interpret and deliver means with polite verbal words. When mass media convey information and value through writing, prints or display or description (non-verbal communication), this will result reaction in the form of individual behavior. The reaction changes or individual behavior by mass media show that there are changes of value which at the end mirror the changes of attitude. The changes of attitude will change an individual identity. The changes of identity among generation today will cause the changes of Malaysia national identity.

4. CONCLUSION

This study found that the most decency form used by students was words. Language decency education had contributed for language character among students. The prediction model of relationship between decency language and character language had achieved. Language decency education must become an essential basis in continuity of forming national identity. Positive decency which are manners, words, and language usage shall be practiced efficiently among students. This can help to produce young generation with strong identity and build a glorious future through decency education that has been applied in Malay language learning. Thus, researcher suggests that further study can be conducted among students in primary and secondary schools who already received their Malay language education at early stage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researchers would like to thank the Research Management and Innovation Centre (RMIC), University Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) for funding this research (GPU SIG/2020-0147-107-01).





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