

## **An analysis of word formation process in everyday communication on Facebook**

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### **Abstract**

This study aimed at looking the most common word formation process among Malaysian Facebook users. The main objectives are to describe the common features of word formation process used by Malaysian young adult Facebook users and identify the causes for employing these features on Facebook communication. The result showed that the participants used three most common word formation processes; abbreviation (clipping, acronyms and combination of letters), blending and the use of emoticons in everyday communication on Facebook. Abbreviation found as the most common word formation process among the three features with 73%. There are several reasons of this occurrence identified through online interview of the participants. Almost all the participants provided similar reasons for employing these features. Mainly, the participants intend to save time, fill the communication gap or barrier among the users, indicate the group membership and show some excitements that represent the emotions and feelings through communicating on Facebook.

Keywords: Word Formation Process, Netspeak, Facebook, Abbreviation, Clipping, Acronyms, Blending, Emoticons

### **1.1 Introduction**

The existence of Internet has opened up a new platform of communication that fulfils the social life of the people nowadays. People communicate more through the social networking such as Facebook (FB), Twitter, Instagram, Instant Messaging (IM) Skype, E-mail and Chat-room. The communication chose via online as the process becomes faster, easier and more convenient. The mode of social networking communication provides 24 hour access for the people to interact with each other. Greenfield and Subrahmanyam (2003) called Netspeak as a form of language that shares the common features of both written and spoken genres.

The youngsters feel more comfortable with this new pattern of language. Baron (2008) perceives the current situation as the beginning to a new set of language rules, cultures and norms of interactions. The arrival of Netspeak such as FB is remarks as positive phenomenon and “one remarkable diversity and creativity”, (Crystal, 2006: 275). Therefore, the language evolved a new variety.

FB has become the main attraction and medium of interaction among young generations of Malaysia. Due to the influenced of their native languages, Malaysians have their reasons and rationale in using those common features when it comes to put down their thought into words.

People use linguistic modes and features appropriate to their particular context which is similar to spoken and written language. It has some of the spontaneity of spoken language in which the users have been reported to spend little time in planning and revising their messages. This spontaneity could result authentic and genuine communication and at the same time the users have the chance to prepare some extend which is still in the timeframe of real communication.

The research intends to focus on common word formation process used by Malaysian young generations who are active users of FB when communicating online. Therefore, in this research project, an analysis will be carried out to describe the most common word formation process used on FB and to identify the causes for employing these features.

The online communication such as FB has greatly impacted in people live especially the young adults. The people who frequently used the FB have a greater impact on their styles in online spoken written text. The major issue lies in the fact that the widespread use of Netspeak among Malaysian young adult users of FB may create a communication gap between the younger generation and older generations who are not even expose to the online networking communication. Language inconsistency may lead to the problems such as miscommunication and communication breakdown. The parents often complained the way youngsters speak which is uncommon to hear. According to David, "This group of English-speaking Malaysia Youth, like teenagers everywhere, will create terminology for group identity and as a secret language, (2000: 65).

The young adult users may use different word formation process when communicating on FB. The differences of language used may lead to misinterpretation and confusion among users of different generations who are not familiar with Netspeak which contains new vocabulary, spelling modifications, symbols and emoticons.

Therefore, the main objectives are to describe the most common word formation process used by the Malaysian young adult users on FB and the causes of these features were employed. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the research questions are as follows:

1. What are the common word formation processes used by Malaysian young adult Facebook users?
2. Why do the Facebook users employ these features?

## **2.0 Literature Review**

Social networking allows people to communicate in any language. Most of Malay young adult users used word formation process when dealing with formation of the words in their conversation on FB. It is interesting to find out why they used these features in their interaction on the FB. In order to understand this phenomenon, this section will discuss a few relevant theories and models. Hence, it will present a briefing about the discourse of language features of the social network sites, and the FB.

Social network theory is a social science concept that discusses the connection and relationship in a social structure (Kadushin, 2004). According to Brass (1992), a social network is a generic way by a set of nodes (individuals or organizations) or actors who are connected by a set of social relationships, ties, or a specified type of ties by one or more specific types of interdependency, such as friendship, kinship, financial exchange, dislike, or relationships of beliefs,

knowledge or prestige. Social network focuses on understanding how patterns of relationship connect individuals, people, groups or organizations generate opportunities and contexts for human behaviour.

In any social community, the relationship between two persons is indispensable and multi-faceted. However, by establishing a new relationship with another person or single node is based on three major reasons: personal (curiosity, belief, motivation), professional, (work related, incentive related), and communal (neighbourhood, common interests). The individual nodes can be linked to several nodes, which later may become a cluster of nodes. The cluster may turn into subset within a bigger circle of the nodes and clusters. In other words, in online social network, a relationship is established for some reasons that are only known to the individuals. The application of social network theory to the current study is vital to understand the relationship between one individual with other people on FB. According to Baron, Language and Communication Technology (CMC) is defined as “any natural language messaging that is transmitted and or received via a computer connection” (Wardhaugh in Baron, 2003: 10).

FB has become one of the most social network sites among the people. FB allows people especially teenagers, stay in contact with one another and communicate through a new medium of communication. Furthermore, the application on FB is more users friendly where the interaction is often used as the super ordinate concept that includes any type of two-way exchanges. Such exchanges might be enacted through the use of linguistic or non-linguistic means. FB was created in 2004. It has emerged as the most popular social network in 2009 (Kazeniak, 2009) with a high rising of 400 million active users.

FB recently announced that its number of users has reached the 900 millionth milestone (except for China, Vietnam and a few other countries that block access to FB), with 50% active users (Facebook, 2012). FB is well reported 10.4 million FB users of which 3.5 million are youth aged between 18 and 24 (The Star Online: January 2014), making it the most popular social networking site among Malaysians. As a site that started its humble beginnings in a university campus, it is not surprising that it appeals to university students across the sphere and Malaysian undergraduates additionally. Facebook is an extension of language, and as we participate in the dynamic, ongoing social process” (Cronk in Ellis, 2010: 40-41).

The structure of the spoken-written language is actually lies in the sphere and now world of writing interface especially on online interaction. Spoken-written language is in fact the premeditated talking thought, where people write what they think (Herring 2001: 614). They speak out their mind via writing or in this scenario, typing. This is a form of communication where spoken form has adapted into written form. The spoken-written communication eventually derived from CMC where the communication takes most place in emails, FB, chat rooms, social-networking sites and so on (Crystal, 2001). Social-networkers are keen to use spoken language when communicating and interacting online; typing the messages they intend to convey. This leads to the form of spoken written language, especially on the social-networking area.

Word formation is dealing with the formation of words. The word feature is described as “a small, the most basic units... or a basic block” (O’Grady & Archibald, 2008: 83) that creates a piece or element of a complete and organize structure. In phonology for instance, they define feature as “the smallest units of phonology and as such are the basic building blocks of human speech sounds”

(2008: 83). In online communicative language, the word feature is used to describe the basic parts of a sentence such as the lexical components, spelling modifications, symbols and many more. Baron (2008) for instance, classifies “emoticons, lexical shortenings, acronyms, abbreviations, contractions” as among the lexical patterning of Netspeak (Baron, 2008: 158). The most common word formation processes, or the creation of new words, in English including abbreviation (clipping, acronyms, combination of letters), blending and use of the emoticons.

Greenfield and Subrahmanyam (2003) study on the lexical and syntactic patterning of the language used in chat rooms. They found “the presence of shorter, and often incomplete, grammatical simple sentences” (2003: 727). The users make use of repetitions, visual cues and abbreviations to increase the speed of conversations.

Norizah Hassan and Azirah Hashim (2009) found that many characteristics of Netspeak similar with the spoken language of Malaysian English. These characteristics included blending, abbreviations and also acronyms. They observed “how the interlocutors use creative ways to overcome the temporal and contextual constraints which the medium imposes on them to established interpersonal relationships and to convey a common identity”, (Norizah Hassan & Azirah Hashim 2009: 41).

Derks, Bos and von Grumbkow believes that “Emoticons may be used to emphasize or clarify one’s feelings but also to soften a negative tone and to regulate the interaction, just as smiles and frowns do in daily life” (2008: 379). Emoticons serve as another alternative for the Netspeak users to convey various feelings and emotions in one message.

### **3.0 Methodology**

Data in the form of online spoken written texts was drawn from FB. Facebook is well reported 10.4 million FB users of which 3.5 million are youth aged between 18 and 24, (The Star Online: January 2014). The primary source of this study was taken from participants’ profile pages on Facebook where participants can share information by posting status updates and comments their friends.

This study focuses on word formation process as portrayed by the Malaysian users on FB. This data is measured by numbers (quantitative) and it is essentially developed within a qualitative framework through an analysis of the status updates posted by the Malaysian young generations. This study critically focuses on examining and determining the common features in words formation of FB user as a document analysis.

The participants are limited to only Malay young adults with the age range 20 to 40 years old. This is because this age group is those who are active users as they update their profiles frequently compared to the older generations. Besides that, the researchers also take into account the availability and convenience of the users for their profile status to be derived and used as data in this research.

A total of 20 status updates are analyzed in this study. They are chosen based on their portrayed identity as Malaysians and their status updates on FB contains elements of common features in word formation process. Participants are chosen using convenience sampling and their consent is very much needed in order to use their data for the analysis of this project.

As this is a document analysis, the data in the form of online written texts was collected from a social networking website, FB. The primary source of this study is taken from participants' profile pages on FB, focusing only on Malaysians aged between 20 to 40 years old who actively involved in posting their status updates in the news feed column (one of the features in FB).

These status updates are visible for those who under the users friends list to reply and comment on. Similar to asynchronous CMC, there is no limit in responding to the postings as they can post whenever they wish. Due to FB's privacy settings and users' individual customization that they can set up their account for certain features unavailable to users who are not in a person's network or friends circle, convenience sampling method is employed by researcher in selecting the participants in order to derive the access to the posted messages.

### 3.1 Data Collection Procedures

The following procedures are used to achieve the research objectives of this study.

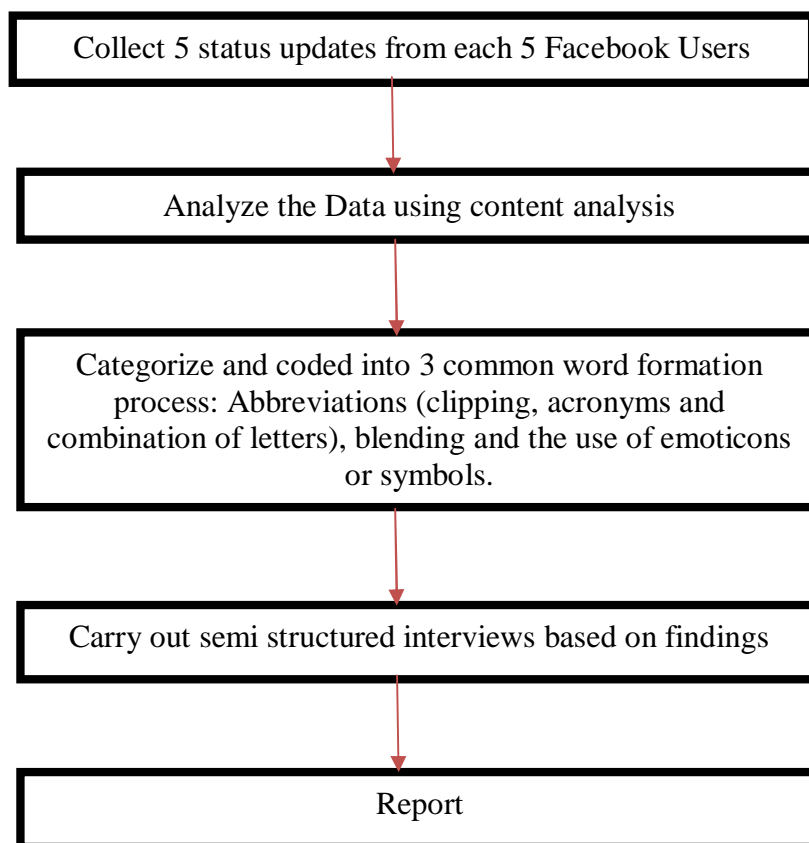


Figure 3.1 Overall research procedures

FB has become one of the favoured modes of communication on the internet, has influenced language in terms of its usage and practices. Prior to data collection, a name list was first created by researcher in FB containing only English-Malay bilingual users to filter and narrow them down from the list of other users. The data collections were collected from the status updates that has been posted and commented by the participants. Each message was coded for 3 common features: abbreviation (clipping, acronyms and combination of letters), blending and the use of emoticons or symbols. Online interviews involved questions pertaining to the word formation process of the English language used on FB such as the reasons behind the use of certain abbreviations, blending and the meaning of specific emoticons or symbols.

To answer the research questions, qualitative data was collected and analyzed based on the occurrence of the common features in words formations and how users utilize it that are being evident in the online written discourse. Data was analyzed qualitatively because this is completely a document analysis research.

The compilation of data involves from daily status updates on FB being displayed on participants' walls in a period one 1 month. The content analysis has been used in analyzing and categorizing the content of reading texts and materials. It is used to identify the occurrences of certain words, phrases, characters or sentences contained by texts. The analysis of the data was carried out through categorization the findings into the features of Netspeak produced by the users as follows:

1. Abbreviations
  - 1.1 Clipping
  - 1.2 Acronyms
  - 1.3 Combination of Letters
2. Blending
3. The use of Emoticons.

The quantitative data, categorized and analyzed using content analysis, were discussed hand-in-hand with the qualitative data gathered from the online interviews.

#### **4.0 Results and Discussion**

This study attempts to find the common word formation process in 'status' on Facebook, written by Malaysian young adult users. Daily conversations engaged in by 5 participants on FB were documented in gathering a set of authentic data representing participants' online communication activities. Therefore, the data that have been collected from the observation of five Malaysian young adult users of FB were analyzed. The results will show the common word formation process used by young adult users of FB.

Table 4.1 Framework: Word formation process use among Malaysian young adult users on Facebook.

<b>Word formation process use among Malaysian young adult users on Facebook.</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1. Abbreviation	
1.1 Clipping	21
1.2 Acronyms	31
1.3 Combination of Letters	21
2. Blending	10
3. The use of Emoticons	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Abbreviation is found the most frequent used by the participants with 31% (acronyms), 21% (clipping) and 21% (combination of letters). The occurrence of this phenomenon is because of the participants' habitual behaviour in their spoken written style on FB. Besides, the participants utilize blending (10%) in their formation of words on FB and they used emoticons a lot. The participants used the emoticons to support the ideas of express their feelings and emotions as in face-to-face communications. Next, the findings are discussed according to each research questions. This section provides extensive data on the word formation process utilize by the research participants on FB.

#### **4.1 Analysis of the word formation process on Facebook**

The data taken from the FB based on the common word formation process by Malaysian young adult users from FB and why they used these word formation processes. The data analysis seeks to answer the first research question: "What are the common word formation processes used by Malaysian young adult Facebook users?" and also to answer the second research question "Why do the Facebook users employ these features?" This section presents the data showing the common word formation process used on FB. There are five processes that will be explained which is abbreviation; clipping, acronyms and combination of letters, blending and the use of symbols. Furthermore, some evidence from each category will be presented in the next section to give a better understanding of this study.

#### **4.2 Analysis of Abbreviation**

The development of Netspeak with the popularity and rise in real-time text-based communications, such as FB came the emergence of a new text language tailored to the immediacy and compactness of these new communication media. Although abbreviation is largely a convention of written language, sometimes abbreviations carry over into spoken language. The main feature of word formation found on FB is abbreviation that describes under subcategories: clipping, acronyms and the combination of letters.

##### **4.2.1 Clipping**

Clipping is the word formation process in which a word is reduced or shortened without changing the meaning of the word. Clipping is the word formation process which consists in the reduction of a word to one of its parts (Marchand,1969 in Fandrych, 2008). Clippings are, also, known as shortenings. It is also observed that most discussions occurring on FB consisted of simplified words, phrases and sentences. Therefore, the finding shows some examples of distorted phrases and reductions of vowels in spelling, in naturally occurring on FB. The result further shows that there

are good reasons to differentiate these various word-formation devices, as they do not partake of the same phenomena. Clipping is generally considered a linguistic phenomenon consisting in cutting up, trimming, or “mincing” a word, so as to produce a shorter version of this word by loss of material.

Table 4.2 The use of clipping on Facebook

<b>Word</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Type of Clipping</b>
1. conf	conference	Back clipping
2. reps	representatives	Back clipping
3. max	maximum	Back clipping
4. coz	because	Front and back clipping
5. iolls	I and all	Phrase clipping
6. uolls	u and all	Phrase clipping

The result shows that the participant users of FB frequently used clipping in the formation of the words when communicating on Netspeak. Back clipping is the most common type, in which the beginning is retained. The unclipped original may be either a simple or a composite. Clipping is the term for the formation of a new word-form, with the same meaning as the original lexical term, by lopping off a portion and reducing it to a monosyllabic or disyllabic rump, (Katamba, 2005: 180). Besides, the shortening is not only on word alone but also on phrases. As for Stockwell and Minkova 2003: 10], they add a syntactic element by noting that clipping is not restricted to a single existing word, but can also apply to a whole phrase: ‘iolls’ for ‘I and all’ and ‘uolls’ for ‘u and all’.

#### 4.2.2 Acronyms

Acronyms are words formed by the word formation process in which the initialism is pronounced as a word. Acronyms are among the key features in most studies concerning the word formation process of Netspeak (Johnova 2004; Baron 2004; Tagliamonte & Dennis 2008; Norizah Hassan & Azirah Hashim 2009). As supported by many researchers mentioned above, this research study found some of acronyms employed by the five participants on FB. The Table 4.3 shows the overall results:

Table 4.3 The use of Acronyms on Facebook

<b>Word</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
1. FB	Facebook
2. SEA	South East Asia
3. BFF	Best Friend Forever
4. BFFs	Best Friends Forever
5. TQ	Thank you
6. LOL	Laugh out loud
7. ASEAN	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
8. ASAP	As soon as possible
9. PM	Private Message

The results show that there are similar with the acronyms found by many early researchers such as Squires (2010) and Denis (2008) who found the popular acronym such as ‘LOL’ (laught out



loud). The uses of acronyms are seen as quite popular among the research participants. This result also found in previous study by Squires (2010) and Lewin and Donner (2002).

#### **4.2.3 Combination of letters**

The third feature is the combination of letters that produce certain sounds and meaningful words. The loss of vowels in spelling perceived as a normal feature of Netspeak, (Crystal, 2006; Ross, 2006; Thurlow, 2003). Some of the words categorized under this feature are universal in terms of its usage and some are only intelligible with online users of the same virtual community, involved in this research. This research had recorded 6 words, made up of a combination of letters in respondents' conversation. This feature is perceived as a universal pattern as they also appeared in the framework of the systematic descriptions of Netspeak given by Crystal (2006). 'Msg' (message) appeared to be very common among the research participant. Combinations of letter are seen as a normal feature in the language being used in an online communication environment such as Facebook.

This type of feature basically involves daily words such as 'thanks' and 'between' being reduced to 'thx' and 'btwn'. Even though the examples given by Ross (2006) are hardly found in the data, findings recorded one common word mentioned in other research studies (Thurlow 2003; Crystal 2006) concerning the same feature. The word is 'msg' for 'message'. Thus it is found similar with Thurlow (2003) as well as Crystal (2006) in their results. However, there are also other words that are not given in any of the above studies. Words like 'abt' for 'about', 'lvl' for 'level', 'std's' for 'students', 'fr' for 'from' and 'u' for 'you'.

#### **4.3 Blending**

Another word formation process which can be found in the result of the research is blending. Blending involves the coinage of a new lexeme by fusing parts of at least two other source words of which either one is shortened in the fusion and/or where there is some form of phonemic or graphemic overlap of the source words, (Gries 2004:639). The word formation process of blending is important concept when creating words. Blending is the word formation process in which parts of two or more words combines to create a new word whose meaning is often a combination of the original words. The result shows that in the formation of blends, the first part of the first element is added to the second part of the second element. Blending is the formation of new words by combining parts of two words or a word plus a part of another word such as 'brunch' (breakfast+lunch), 'wefie' (we+selfie) and 'shopaholic' (shop+alcoholic). These words were used by the participant users on Facebook.

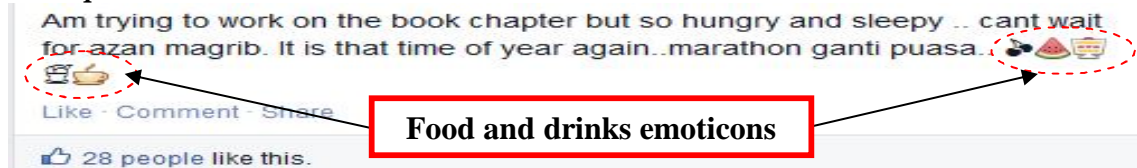
#### **4.4 The use of Emoticons**

The final Netspeak feature merged in users' communication practices are the symbols and emoticons. As emoticons are among the inseparable features of Netspeak that display one's motives, emotions and feelings in online communication, finding conforms to ideas proposed by many early researchers such as Ross (2006) and Baron (2008). Derk, Bos and von Grumbkow (2007) for instance, believe that emoticons represent some facial expressions and provide similar functions as nonverbal behaviour shown in one's face-to-face communication.

Emoticons are seen as an important feature in online conversations among young adult users of FB in Malaysia. The results show that the users used the emoticons which carry some prominent functions that convey certain messages and hidden meaning in online conversations. Emoticons are

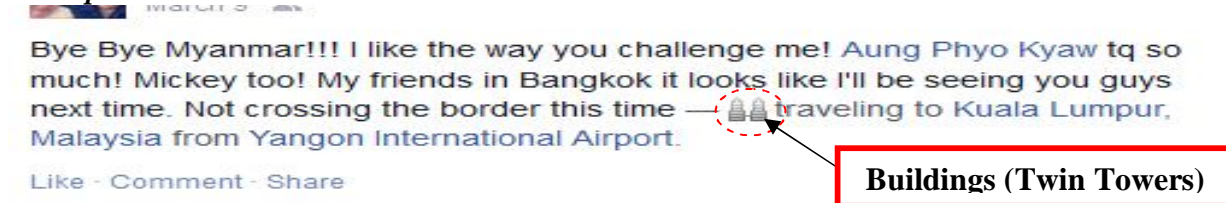
also seen as a compliment to a message as they appeared in almost every sentence being produced online. The following excerpts demonstrate the use of emoticons (red circles) in such situation:

### Example 1



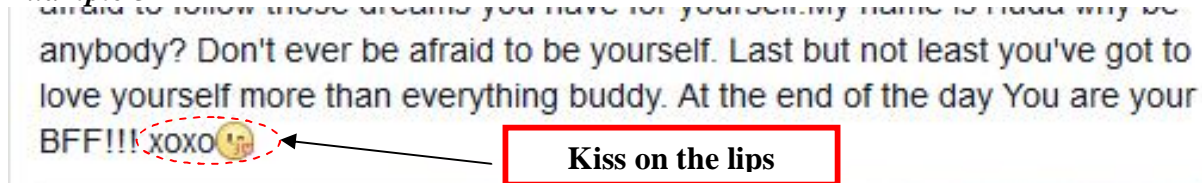
The emoticons of food and drinks were added to show some excitement that awaits her to be eaten.

### Example 2



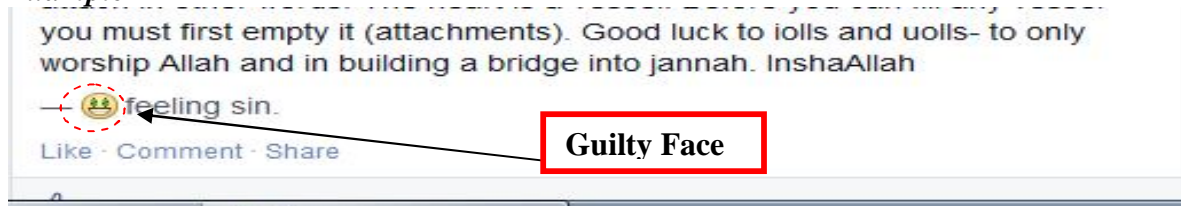
The building icon is used by the participant to travel to Kuala Lumpur. The Twin towers symbolized Kuala Lumpur city.

### Example 3

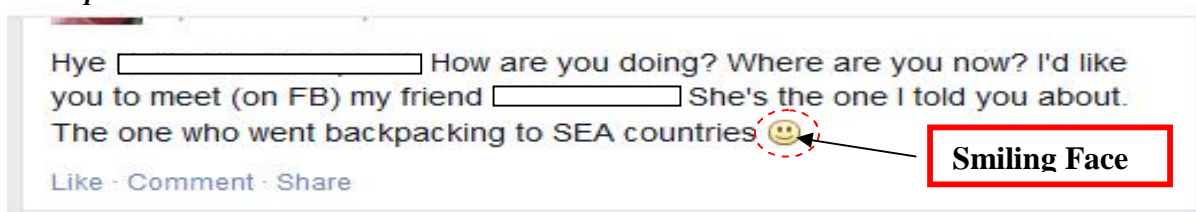


The used of smiley with kiss on the lips imply the love of friendship. This is why the intensity of the kiss emoticon is an important factor in interpreting the users' intention when conveying the message.

### Example 4



The emoticon is used by the participant to show the feeling to be forgiven for the wrong things that has been done.

**Example 5**

A happy smiley face is used by the user to convey the feeling of happiness to introduce someone to the friend. This is a very common emoticon found almost everywhere. It can be used to express joy and happiness with something or someone. It is most likely the most used smiley of all time, and one of the first ever emotes to be created on the Internet in 1982.

**4.5 Reasons to utilize the Word Formation Process on Facebook**

From the data that has been extracted, it can be seen that the word formation process were present in the “status” of the five FB users although some of the post contain little evidence of it. From here, we can conclude that the users used these features to help them communicate via FB. The data gathered from online interview helped to answer the second research question “Why do the Facebook users employ these features?”

Therefore, it is highly believed that combination of letters or shortening on FB has become a habitual writing behaviour among the participants of this research. Baron’s (2008) and Ross’s (2006) found that the need for speed normally emerges in conversations that involved impromptu feedback. People require to live on the clock in modern lifestyle. Thus, they need to speed up including the way they write which is called express writing. Baron stated that, “current writing patterns reflect the haste with which ‘finished’ writing is now often produced”, (2008; 170).

People are becoming more obsessed with the time. They use of various short forms and reduction of spelling would be an outcome of this hectic and rushing lifestyle. According to Ross, “Speedy communication allows less time for careful, organize thought”, (2006: 41). Minimizing and dropping number of characters and words is one of the strategies to accelerate the production of text on FB.

Besides, acronyms (31%) are the most common features of Netspeak that are popular among the Malaysian young FB users than other word formation process. Squires stated that, “The construct of Internet language glosses over many different patterns of variation in an extremely large sphere of discourse with many different types of speakers, the heterogeneity of which is typically erased”, (2010: 483). Thus, the pattern of language used on FB are basically not related to certain group of users or influenced by the features of the FB itself.

Furthermore, they required to use different patterns of language to fill the gap or communication barrier among these users of FB. They need to imply certain popular images or characters that can maintain their friendship. Norizah Hassan and Azirah Hashim) state that, “another reason for abbreviations and acronyms is socially motivated in that by using them; the users are indicating their membership in a particular group”, (2009: 43).

Moreover, the emoticons were added to show some excitement that represents someone feelings or emotions. The emoticons represent some facial expressions and provide similar

functions as nonverbal behaviour shown in one's face to face communication, (Derks, Bos and von Grumbkow: 2007, 2008). The use of emoticons signifies the Malaysian young adult users' creativity in playing with the features displayed on the keyboard in expressing their feelings and emotions. Some of the emoticons are used to strengthen the message, while others represent certain tones of voice such as excitement, irritation, disappointment, sadness and astonishment.

Ross (2006) highlights that emoticons are normally internationally intelligible, regardless of the language used in the online communication settings. As emoticons are internationally acceptable, it somehow indicates the development of symbols in communication, in situations where language alone stands as a barrier in expressing certain emotions, feelings or messages. Moreover, Derks, Bos and von Grumbkow's found that there are more functions of emoticons such as "emoticons may be used to emphasize or clarify one's feelings but also to soften a negative tone and to regulate the interaction, just as smiles and frowns do in daily life", (2008: 379).

## 5.0 Conclusion

Malaysians can get very creative with our word choices. Besides, there is a need to portray different linguistic identity in order to be accepted certain virtual communities. Since there are wide aspects to research on FB, in this research study the researcher only look into the status updates by the Malay young adults and the comments and feedbacks given by Malay, not the other races. This study is important to Malaysians who write and communicate in English in FB. By analyzing the texts, we will have an idea on the common features of words formation used by the Malay young adult users and why they utilize it in everyday communication. This study scrutinizes the linguistic choices made by the FB users. More specifically, it explores the language features of Cyber Language (FB) such as new word formation. The young generation used their creativity, dynamic and vivid in communicating via FB. The used of the new word formation are more forceful, colourful and original than their equivalents in full spelling. The finding of this study shows the modification in spelling by the research participants on Facebook. Those people employ abbreviation (clipping, acronyms and combination of letters), blending and use emoticons or symbols which proven that the language used on FB among Malaysian adult users is informal. This reflects the nature of spoken genre in a written form that is casual, colloquial and close to the society. According to Crystal (2006), the language used by the users established another sub-variety of Malaysian English through the Netspeak. However, Baron (2008) illuminates the FB as a great platform for non-native English users to practice and use the language without fear of being corrected or being judged.

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