

A SIMPLE STUDY ON THE COMPARISON OF MALAYSIAN AND AMERICAN TRANSGENDER SLANG

Nadiah Binti Zubbir¹, Mohd Farez Bin Mohamad Taib²

University of Selangor

ABSTRACT

Transgender and homosexuality have been a much debated topic recently as people begin to feel that they deserve to have rights just like any heterosexual couples. It is undeniable that Malaysia too felt the impact of such movement. This paper will briefly discuss the slangs used by transgender in Malaysia and comparing them with American transgender slang terms. A male transgender Malaysian had been interview and 12 words were recorded along with their meanings. These words were then compared with synonym words in American transgender slang in a table using 3 websites. The finding shows that there are 3 types of transgender slang; words with semantic changes, words with different structure or form and new words. For Malaysian slangs, 7 out of 12 are new words while the other 5 have gone through semantic changes. American slang have a larger vocabulary where most of them are words with semantic changes and a small number of them are new words and have different word structure.

Keywords: *lexicology, slang, transgender, semantic change*

1.0 A BRIEF HISTORY OF HOMOSEXUALITY AND TRANSGENDER

Throughout history, sexual orientation has constantly been a taboo topic of discussion. This is especially on the topic of same sex orientation or homosexual. From the early existence of Ancient Greece and Roman Empire to the twenty first century, there are always a trace of homosexuality in the society. In fact, in Ancient Greece, free boys can be courted and wed by other adult man (Marrou, 1956). However, the ideas of homosexual and transgender have always been frowned upon as most religious teaching recognised such sexual orientation as sin. Such of the cases in Roman Empire after the Christian Rule and the Middle East in during Islamic Era.

However, in the beginning of 20th century, the idea of homosexuality and transgender was gradually been introduced despite the fact that there were huge rejections from society in terms of legal rights especially the western world. Despite all the rejection, in 1924, the first documented organization that supported gay rights called The Society for Human Rights was founded by Henry Gerber in Chicago (CNN, 2017). One of the most prominent date for gay liberation was on 28 June 1969, when customers of the Stonewall Inn, a popular gay bar in New York, fought back and defended their neighbourhood bar against an ongoing police raids (Morrison, n/a). Ever since the 1970s, this incident has been celebrated throughout the United States in pride marches on every month of June each year.

Along with the rise of homosexual awareness, came the ‘coming out’ of transgender into the western society. Just like homosexuality, the liberation of transgender right also significantly began in the mid twentieth century with Christine Jorgensen who was a famous transgender in America at that time. He publicized sex reassignment surgery in 1952 (Mcquiston, 1989). Meanwhile, Loise Lawrence (a transgender person in San Francisco) established an extensive correspondence system with transgender community all over Europe and the United States in the 1950s, and together with Alfred Kinsey, they bring forward the needs of transgender people to social scientists and sex reformers (Stryker, 2015). His mentee, Virginia Prince initiated the first peer support and advocacy groups for male cross-dressers in the United States in the early 1960s.

Nowadays, the concepts and rights of the homosexual and transgender are openly accepted by large community of the world. In fact, these ideas of sexual orientation is celebrated and supported by many government and organization. They are even been given the right of matrimonial like any heterosexual couples in certain places. For instance, in the year 2000, Vermont State of the USA had recognized same-sex civil union while, in the year 2003, Massachusetts had become the first state in USA to allow and perform same-sex marriages (Morris, n/a). Other countries like, Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, and Canada, have also legalized same-sex marriage and the law is supported by the churches in their country.

Malaysia still to this day oppose and rejected the right for homosexual and transgender. This is due largely to the Islamic religious teaching, which is the official religion in Malaysia that opposed harshly on homosexuality and transgender. Malaysia also has laws against homosexual and transgender under the Syariah Law (Islamic law) and indecent conduct in Civil Law. One of the most significant cases of homosexuality in Malaysia is the case of former Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim who was claimed to have perform sodomy with his 19 year driver in 2000. He then was released after serving 4 years in jail.

Despite the rejection of legal law in Malaysia, there are individuals and organizationa that begin to support and fight for the rights of homosexual and transgender in Malaysia. *Sekualiti Merdeka* is one of the prominent festivals founded by Pang Khee Teik and Jerome Kugan in 2008. Established to generally fight for the human right holistically, *Sekualiti Merdeka* organises workshops, theatres, musical performances and much more, and their first activities was to fight for homosexuality right.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT & RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The 21st century has seen that global community has slowly begun to be exposed almost holistically on the homosexual community. This is not only in term of their sexual practice, but also their way of living, the psychology, the biology, the sociology and many more aspects that the global community have begun to see as either a problem or a new sexual platform. Despite the debate on whether their existence is a negative issue or not, we cannot deny the academic value it contributes (in this case linguistically) in understanding the moral and standing of today’s society.

Somehow even with this extreme phase of history of the homosexual community, there are still little to be known about their language. Homosexual community is a small community in the world even today. And within this small community, there is another group of people called transgender. Hord (2016) defined transgender generally as

“...movement away from an initially defined gender position, usually the gender that one is assigned at birth.”

While according to American Psychological Association (2014), transgender is defined as,

“...an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression, or behaviour does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth.”

As a minor community, it is necessary for them to communicate through their own language or slang as their view on society is different from norm. In addition, homosexuality has always been an issue talked about secretly, therefore, it is important for them to speak in ‘codes’.

In addition, there are still too little of research about their language in Malaysia. It seems that despite the boom of sexual freedom movement in the western, the easterns (including Malaysia) are still afraid to discuss such matter openly and academically. Therefore, this paper was written for the purpose of introducing and briefly discussing the comparison between American and Malaysia transgender (male to female) slang.

2.0 SLANG IN LINGUISTIC: ABBREVIATION, INTIALISM AND NEW WORDS

2.0.1 DEFINITION OF SLANG TERMS

Slang terms are set of colloquial whether in a form of words or phrases, that are constantly changing and used with a trend or fashion by the speakers to ascertain or to emphasize social identity within a community in society at large (Eble, 2012). She further stated that these words had existed within a language and it is possible that these vocabularies are as old as language itself. This is because slang terms are considered to be a part of any languages that are used in daily communication whether verbal or non-verbal interactions by a community that is large and diverse enough to have particular subgroups.

Partridge, (1970) as cited by Eble (2012) stated that it is uncertain where does the word slang came to originate. The word slang somehow similar in sound and figurative meaning to the verb *sling* and the occurrence of apparently the same root in the Scandinavian expressions referring to language suggest that the term slang is an enlargement of a Germanic root from which the English *sling* is taken from. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, most slang begins at the stage of human culture when human beings were still practicing animism as a religion. Civilised cultures still retains some of these elements of animism in their languages. In English language, slangs are unique according to places and group of people are using them. For example words like *chuffed*, is a unique slang used only by people in Britain that simply means to be quite happy or to be proud of something. In short, slang had been a part of human language for a very long time and some slang are acceptable to some but others would consider slangs to be rude and inappropriate.

2.0.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF SLANG

There are a lot of researchers had put forth ideas on how to identify the characteristics of slangs. Writers like Partridge (1970) stated that one of the criteria of slang is that to see the degree of dignity or the degree of familiarity, casualness and impertinence of the word.

According to Nay (2011), a word or phrase are considered to be a slang if they fulfil one or more of these criteria;

Slang terms are creative, according to Nay (2011) slang terms are created from a new terms. For example teenagers’ creativity in creating slang terms from the existing words. In this case, teenagers still use the original words, but acquire a new meaning, which is different from its original meaning. For example the slang term, *Pishang* in Bahasa Malaysia that simply means boring. This slang term is created by Malaysian teenagers from existing word *pisang* (the tropical fruit banana).

Slang terms are flippant, which is according to Nay (2011) slang that had been produced has unrelated meaning with the context. This is for example the expression *son of a gun* which simply means a humorous or friendly way of addressing or referring to someone.

Slang terms are fresh; this refers to slang words that are created by new words. For example words like *homie* which simply means close-friend.

Slang terms are onomatopoeic, which means slang terms that are created by imitating certain sounds, for example words like boohoo, buzz, icky or yucky.

Slang terms are short lived. This means that slang terms are only used by that indicates that slang only used when everybody do not know the meaning. After having already been known, that language is not used anymore.

2.0.3 ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS, INITIALISM AND NEW WORDS

Abbreviations, acronyms, initialism are examples of lexico-semantic change. According to Baskaran (2005), lexico-semantic change is the most rapid area in which inter as well as intralingual adaptation occurs whether lexically (with new words or borrowed words) or semantically (with changes in meaning). Baskaran (2005) further stated:

“...The use of newly coined words by various types of people coupled with conspicuous as well as surreptitious borrowings or infiltrations from other languages result in profusion of new words in language dictionaries every year...”

The table below illustrates the definition of each lexico-semantic changes and examples of words:

	ABBREVIATION	ACRONYMS	INITIALISM
EXPLANATION	A shortened form of a word or phrase which consists of some of the letters in related the word or phrase.	A process of taking the initial letter of a set of words or phrase to shape one single word which mostly spelled with capital letters and is uttered as one word.	A process of taking the initial letters of a set of words or phrase and compounding them and is uttered as individual letters.
EXAMPLES	Mr. (Mister) Ms. (Miss) St. (Saint)	ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian)	WWF (World Wildlife Federation)

		Nations) UNICEF (United Nations Children's Education Fund)	USA (United State of America) CV (Curriculum Vitae)
--	--	----------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------

2.1 SEMANTIC CHANGE

Semantic change is the changes happened in a word's meaning. According to Traugott (2006), semantic change refers to both proses and product of semantic change. He explained that semantic change is used to identify the changes in meaning that refers to the external world, such as object, culture etc., or linguistic aspects, like pragmatic implication etc. Ullman (1062) had discussed the 4 main factors that caused semantic changes are:

- a. Linguistic causes
- b. Historical causes
- c. Social causes (slang)
- d. Psychological causes

Ullman (1962) finds that the psychology causes of a semantic change can be divided into 2 categories:

- i. Emotive causes
- ii. Taboo

Early studies like Bréal (1900), Stern (1968) and Ullman (1957), had categories semantic changes into 6 types (Traugott, 2006):

- a. Semantic Broadening: The meaning of a word become wider
- b. Semantic Narrowing: The meaning of a word become more specific
- c. Amelioration: A negative meaning of a word turn into positive.
- d. Pejoration: A positive meaning of a word turn into negative
- e. Metaphor: A proses where one aspect of an object is transferred into other object and the later object could delivered an equal meaning of the latter (Hawke, 1972).
- f. Metonymy: Traugott (2006: 125) explains metonymy as *one word is associated with another along the lines of already existing connections.*

3.0 METHODOLOGY

A simple interview had been done to a Malaysian transgender (male to female) on 11 common words used within the Malaysian transgender community. The short interview was done for around 15 minutes and the lexical given was listed down together with their meaning in a table.

Using these 3 websites,

- a) http://rupaulsdragrace.wikia.com/wiki/RuPaul%27s_Drag_Race_Dictionary#R
- b) <http://enterthequeendom.com/glossary/>

c) <http://www.tsroadmap.com/start/tgterms.html>

The researchers identified the synonym in American transgender slang for the words given by the interviewee. Their meaning were also been recorded to see whether there are any semantic changes. The data had been compared and discussed in both aspect of lexicology and semantic. Original definition of the words for Malaysian slang had been looked through *Persuratan Melayu* website (prpm.dbp.gov.my) with the American slang through Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.

4.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Below are the list of words researchers had collected from interviewing a Malaysian transgender male and their synonym words in American slang.

No.	Malaysian Slang	Definition	American Slang	Definition
1.	<i>Jes</i>	(<i>adj.</i>) Beautiful	Fish	(<i>noun.</i>) To describe a transgender male who looks very feminine or one who really looks like a biological woman.
2.	<i>Mak/Ham</i>	(<i>pronoun.</i>) To refer to one transgender self	She	(<i>pronoun.</i>) To refer to one transgender self
3.	<i>Mencarut</i>	(<i>verb.</i>) To expose or talk a person's flaws	Read	(<i>verb./noun.</i>) To expose or talk a person's flaws
4.	<i>Carut</i>	(<i>noun</i>) To insult or bluntly point out a person's flaws or faults.	Shade	(<i>noun</i>) To insult or bluntly point out a person's flaws or faults.
5.	<i>Loy</i>	(<i>noun.</i>) Oral sexual conduct	BJ/Head	(<i>noun.</i>) Oral sexual conduct
6.	<i>Rensuk/Apom</i>	(<i>verb.</i>) The circumstance in which two transgender male engage in sexual activity.	Kai kai	(<i>verb.</i>) The circumstance in which two drag queens engage in sexual activity in drag.

7.	<i>Kimpa</i>	(<i>adj.</i>) Body meaning possessing a substantial size or physicality.	Cheesecake/ Fatass/ Chunky	(<i>noun/adj.</i>) Body meaning possessing a substantial size or physicality.
8.	<i>Barang Kemas</i>	(<i>noun.</i>) Genital	Box/ Cherry Pie/ Hoocha/ Hoo-hoo/ Kitty/ Minj/ Seafood Platter/ Snatch	(<i>noun.</i>) Female Genital
9.	<i>Kiki</i>	(<i>noun.</i>) Biological girl or woman	Bio girl/ GG (Genetic Girl)/ GW (Genatic Woman)/Fifi	(<i>noun.</i>) Biological girl or woman
10.	<i>Pondan</i>	(<i>noun.</i>) Transgender male	Trans/clock/ Drag/Sissy	(<i>noun.</i>) Transgender male

Table 3.1: Collected Transgender Slang

From the table above, we can categorized these words into 3 type:

- a) Words with semantic changes
- b) Words with different structure or form (abbreviated or initialism)
- c) New words

Malaysian Transgender Slang

Based from the finding, we found out that 7 out of 12 words from the Malaysian transgender slang above are new words that originally have no meaning in *Bahasa Malaysia* dictionary with total different spelling. Words like *loy*, *kiki*, *kimpa*, *renasuk*, *apom*, *ham* and *jes* could not be found in *Bahasa Malaysia* vocabulary and have no similarity to any words in *Bahasa Malaysia*. Somehow, these words were built on the context or situation related to homosexual and transgender and are spoken in purpose of ‘codes’ (slang) as these words meant to be referred on taboo matters like sex and body. For instance, *renasuk* or *apom* refer to sexual activities while *mak* or *ham* are pronoun in third person point of view used by transgender speaker.

There are 3 words that shows semantic changes which are *mencarut*, *carut* and *barangkemas*. Originally, in *Bahasa Malaysia*, *mencarut* is defined as cussing or swearing while *caru tis* the action of cussing or swearing. However, the transgender community use *mencarut* to refer to talking bad about someone or badmouthing (especially among transgender) while *carut* refers to the action of talking bad about someone or the action of badmouthing. *Barang kemas* has the most change in terms of semantic. The pejoration happened as in *Bahasa Malaysia*, it

refers to golden jewellery but transgender in Malaysia use it to refer to genital for both male and female.

However, there are no shortening or abbreviation of words in the list above for Malaysian transgender slang.

American Transgender Slang

Unlike Malaysian transgender slang, American transgender slang have a wider lexical with 27 synonym words to Malaysian slang and most of them are words originally found in English vocabulary but have changed in terms of semantic and structure. Structural changes in these slangs are divided into 2 which are abbreviation and initialism. Below are list of word that was abbreviated and shortened into initialism:

Abbreviation	Original Word(s)
Trans	<u>T</u> ransgender
Drag	<u>D</u> rag Queen
Sissy	<u>S</u> ister (+ [sy])
Bio girl	<u>B</u> iological girl

Table 3.2: Abbreviated American Transgender Slang

Initialism	Original Words
BJ	<u>B</u> low <u>J</u> ob
GG	<u>G</u> enetic <u>G</u> irl
GW	<u>G</u> enetic <u>W</u> oman

Table 3.3: Initialism American Transgender Slang

In addition, there are words in table 3.1 that had more than one function as part of speech. For example, *cheesecake* and *fatass* are originally noun. However, when they are used as a slang, they can be both noun and adjective.

Below are the list of words the faced semantic changes with their original meaning:

American Slang	Definition	Dictionary Definition
Fish	(<i>noun.</i>) To describe a transgender male who looks very feminine or one who really looks like a biological woman.	(<i>noun.</i>) A creature that lives in water, breath through gills and uses fins and a tail for swimming
She	(<i>pronoun.</i>) To refer to one male transgender self	(<i>pronoun.</i>) a female person or animal that has already been mentioned or is easily identified.
Read	(<i>verb./noun.</i>) To expose or talk a person's flaws	(<i>verb.</i>) to look at and understand the meaning of written or printed words or

		symbols.
Shade	(<i>noun.</i>) To insult or bluntly point out a person's flaws or faults.	(<i>noun.</i>) an area that is dark and cool under or behind something.
Head	(<i>noun.</i>) Oral sexual conduct	(<i>noun.</i>) the part of body on top of the neck containing the eyes, nose, mouth and brain.
Cheesecake	(noun/adj.) Body meaning possessing a substantial size or physicality.	(<i>noun.</i>) a sweet dish made from a soft mixture of cream cheese, sugar, eggs etc. on a base of cake or crushed biscuits.
Fatass		Fat (<i>noun.</i>) (of a person's, or an animal's body) having too much flesh on it and weighing too much. Ass (<i>noun.</i>) a stupid people.
Chunky		(<i>adj.</i>) thick and heavy
Box	(noun.) Female Genital	(<i>noun.</i>) a container made of wood, cardboard, metal etc. with a flat stiff base and sides and often a lid, used especially for holding solid things.
Cherry Pie		Cherry (<i>noun.</i>) a soft small fruit with shiny red or black skin and a large seed inside. Pie (<i>noun.</i>) a fruit baked in a dish with pastry on the bottom, sides and top.
Kitty		(<i>noun.</i>) a way of referring a cat.

Seafood Platter		Seafood (<i>noun.</i>) fish and sea creatures that can be eaten.
Snatch		Platter (<i>noun.</i>) a large plate that is used for serving food. (<i>verb.</i>) to take something quickly and often rudely or roughly

Table 3.2: American Transgender Slang with Semantic Change

Majority of the words above when through pejoration where their original meaning denotes a positive definition but changes into a negative meaning when used as a transgender slang. As you can see above, the words that faced semantic changes were redefined in a more taboo context such as sex, genital and body. It shows that due to the society's negative perspective on topic of sex, genital and body, transgender communicates secretly to talk about their sexual orientation and experience just like in Malaysian transgender slang.

There are also new words that such as Kai kai, Hooha, Hoo-hoo, Minj and Fifi. Just like Malaysian transgender slang, these words do not exist in the English vocabulary.

Comparison and Conclusion

From the analysis above, Malaysian and American transgender slang have different tendency in building lexicology. Malaysian prefer building new words while American prefer pejoration of English vocabulary. Each slang does has both pejoration and new words in their lexical. However, only American slang has abbreviation and initialism.

Despite that, this paper has only focused in a very limited lexical. For future research, it is highly recommended that a larger database is build and analysed. Specification of research can either be in lexical structure, semantic or sociolinguistic. It is better to have more than one transgender interviewee to build up a better database. Corpus is encourage to use in building the data base.

REFERENCES

n/a. (2017 June 11). Retrieved on 2017 June 17 from http://rupaulsdragrace.wikia.com/wiki/RuPaul%27s_Drag_Race_Dictionary#R

Maurer D. W (1998 July 20th) Retrieved on 2017 June 20 from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/slang>

American Psychiatric Association. (2014). *Answers to Your Questions about Transgender People, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression (3rd ed.)*. Washington, DC: the APA Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns Office and APA Public and Member Communications.

Baskaran, M. L. (2005) *A Linguistic Primer For Malaysians*, Kuala Lumpur; University Malay Press

CNN. (2017 May 16). *LGBT Rights Milestones Fast Facts*. Retrieved on 2017 June 17 from <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/06/19/us/lgbt-rights-milestones-fast-facts/index.html>

Eble, Connie. *Slang and Sociability: In-Group Language Among College Students*. UNC Press Books, 2012.

Hord, Levi C. R. (2016). Bucking the Linguistic Binary: Gender Neutral Language in English, Swedish, French, and German. *Western Papers in Linguistics / Cahiers linguistiques de Western: Vol. 3 (Iss. 1)*. Article 4.

Huba, J. (n/a). *Glossary Of Drag Terms*. Retrieved on 2017 June 17 from <http://enterthequeendom.com/glossary/>

James, A. (2017). Glossary of transgender terms. Retrieved from on 2017 June 17 <http://www.tsroadmap.com/start/tgterms.html>

Mcquiston, J.T. (1989 May 4). Christine Jorgensen, 62, Is Dead; Was First to Have a Sex Change. *New York Times*. Retrieved on 2017 June 17 from <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/5/04/obituaries/christine-jorgensen-62-is-dead-was-first-to-have-a-sex-change.html>

Morris, J.B. (n/a). *History of Lesbian, Gay, & Bisexual Social Movements*. Retrieved on 2017 June 17 from <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/history.aspx>.

Marrou, H.I. (1956). *History of Education in Antiquity* (George Lamb Trans.). Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press. (Original work published 1948)

Nay (2011 June 9) retrieved from Retrieved on 2017 June 20 from <http://linguasphereus.blogspot.my/search/label/Sociolinguistics>

Partridge, E. (2015). *Slang: To-day and yesterday*. New York; Routledge Taylors and Francis Groups

Stryker, S. (2015). *Transgender Activism*. Retrieved on 2017 June 17 from http://www.glbqtarchive.com/ssh/transgender_activism_S.pdf

Traugott, E.C. (2006). Semantic Change: Bleaching, Strengthening, Narrowing, Extension. Dalam *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics Second Edition* 11, 124- 130. Oxford: Elsevier Ltd.

Ullman, S. (1962). *Semantics: An Introduction to The Science of Meaning*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell and Mott Ltd.

Wehmeier, S. et al (Ed.). (2005). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary International Student's Edition*. New York: Oxford.