Students' Sensemaking of Self-Other Relations in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how Malaysian university students relate to the culture of others on campus based on sensemaking. More specifically, it articulates the sensemaking idea of self-other relations in which the individuals make sense of their experiences as they interact with others, how they view others around them and the others' responses through socialising and their reflections of such acts. The paper is driven by the idea that to be effective global citizens, students should acquire intercultural competence by understanding their own social acts through interacting with others. Such competence is witnessed and enacted during interactions with culturally diverse others. The interactions are often taken for granted given that these acts are observable only among the interlocutors. The self-other understanding in interpersonal interaction requires people to understand not only what is said and meant in the process but also how to display proper conduct in performing the acts. Drawing from a series of focus group interviews with students in three Malaysian universities, the findings reveal that these students comprehended interaction with others using the language that reflects mindful acts, varied accommodating moves and appropriate cultural mannerisms. Such findings reflect the students' meaning making of the interactions. It reveals the ways in which the students make sense of how the interactions influenced them and the conversant partners. The paper provides some implications including the need to embrace proper communication competencies in intercultural interactions in the campus and in other social or public spheres.

Keywords: *Sensemaking, self-other relations, mindful language, intercultural competence, Malaysia.*

INTRODUCTION

Making sense of interaction between self and other involves essentially learning about intercultural skills. To be effective global citizens in this 21st century, everyone should acquire intercultural competence (Rawal & Deardorff, 2021) by rationalising appropriate social acts. Given the diverse cultures and contexts, how the self relates to others in the social world needs further understanding (Catmur, Cross & Over, 2016). Interpersonal interaction requires people to understand not only what is said and meant in the process but also how to display proper conduct. It involves employing particular and negotiated strategies in dealing with the interpersonal interethnic relationships (Harun, 2007). The self-concept can be viewed as one unique or separate identity and within the context of relationships with or related to others given the relational or behavioural actions (Baxter, 1987; Wilmot, 1995). Making sense of ourselves and others thus involves understanding behaviour (Stangor & Walinga, 2014) which intertwines with attitude, mind, sense, emotions, knowledge and skills (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). The 'sensemaking' act generally involves understanding complex things such as behaviour and events (Klein, Moon & Hoffman, 2006). The cognitive process is often taken for granted given the culturally unique individuals. Much of the thinking about how to react and converse is personalised and contextualised depending on the interlocutors.

Sensemaking concerns the acts of making something sensible in organising or organisation (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliff & Obstfeld, 2005). Sensemaking provides insights into how 'individuals and organizations give meanings to events' (Mills, Thurlow & Mills, 2010, p. 182). It concerns the process where individuals assign meanings to their experiences and what such experiences mean to them (Kramer, 2017).

Evidently, relating to others has become a necessity given that virtual contact has become increasingly powerful with the use of sophisticated technology such as Instagram, Telegram, Facebook and Twitter. This needs institutional readiness especially among the journalists in equipping themselves for the digital world (Hamzah & Esa, 2020). The social networking in the world today emphasises the use of language (of all types) as the medium to 'engage with cultural others' (MacDonald, 2019, p. 448) which requires everyone to embrace cultural and language resonance; to be fully equipped with cultural knowledge of the other to ensure that messages are appropriately conveyed, not misconstrued. Sensemaking thus helps people to not only 'care about how good their lives are but also about meaning' (Chater & Loewenstein, 2016, p. 152). It emphasises the need for everyone to embrace the 'other' with cultural and religious sensitivities in interaction given that meanings are in people (Berlo, 1960). Being mindful (or mindless) about language use has become the determinant in enacting social acts between different people or nations (Hall, 1959). This paper discusses sensemaking in the context of self-other relations, that is, how individuals view their encounters with others as something sensible in the Malaysian campus.

EMBRACING RESONANCE IN THE GLOBAL CHALLENGING WORLD

Unsuccessful communication domestically or internationally might have been caused by the lack of resonance among people, lack of appropriateness and effectiveness (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Appropriateness and effectiveness are two communication standards (Spitzberg, 2000) that determine whether the communication achieves what it should achieve. While people can be ethnocentric, the idea of embracing unity in diversity due to the advancement in technology that draws them together might be considered attractive. Thus, there arises the need for individuals to learn to interact wisely and appropriately with culturally diverse others (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012) whether as leaders or ordinary members of the society. Given the many hidden dimensions and the different accents (Hall, 1959), making sense of how people relate to others demands that they inculcate not only cultural awareness but also knowledge of the other including language and the contextual factors (Mills, Thurlow & Mills, 2010; Murray, 2014). Intercultural interactions demand sensitivity of many interwoven elements; the cultural mindset of the speaker/hearer, accent, manner of speaking, behaviour of the interactants, the context in situ, the dynamics of culture and ethnic identity (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012) to be culturally competent.

This need is felt more in formal educational institutions where students as future generations are prepared for the complex intercultural world (face-to-face or virtually); they are bound to encounter communication challenges with people holding different values, cultures and mindsets (Deardorff, 2006, 2015; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Liu, 2009; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Ting-Toomey, 2015). Young people in particular, ought to be taught not only how to relate to others politely and effectively but also to (re)learn to live together with others (Deardorff, 2014, 2015). This enhances the role of higher learning institutions in equipping students with relevant competencies in the multilingual and multicultural society (Dalib, Harun, Yusof & Ahmad, 2019a; 2019b). Having a deeper understanding of intercultural communication can provide better understanding of self-other interaction. Intercultural

competence is a complex yet important skill to be embraced in this 21st century (Deardorff, 2014, 2015; Rawal & Deardorff, 2021). Given the diversity of the Malaysian campus community, the students' (minimal/personal) experience and knowledge of intercultural competence, cultural awareness and sensitivity of the other would demand further interrogation (Dalib, Harun & Yusof, 2017; Sarwari & Abdul Wahab, 2017).

Much has been written about intercultural competence (Collier, 2015; Hammer, 2015; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009) and how it relates to appropriateness and effectiveness of people's behaviour (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Yet, in Malaysia, the ordinary citizens might be unaware of how Malaysians make sense of intercultural factors; the language they use and the wisdom of knowing how to be adaptable which inevitably reflect their fluid identities (Harun, 2007). Meaningful explorations on intercultural communication and intercultural competence are much needed for critical understanding of the existing perspectives. In view of this, intercultural communication and language competence can be interrogated by viewing the process within which people attach meaning to how they relate to others. In so doing, both parties will put more effort in the interaction by being more sensitive and alert to possible communication failure. The paper offers contributions to the sensemaking acts among the non-native speakers of English including their varied intercultural communication competence in an intercultural context such as Malaysia.

MAKING SENSE OF COMPETENCE IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION
Competence is conceived as a social evaluation of behaviour that constitutes two primary criteria of effectiveness and appropriateness (Spitzberg, 2000). In interaction, individuals rationalise the ways of performing with others through language and understanding of the other given that 'sensemaking is never solitary' (Weick, 1995, p. 40). Competence is 'considered very broadly as an impression that [behaviour] is appropriate and effective in a given context' (Spitzberg, 2000, p. 379). Deardorff's (2004, 2006) intercultural competence which is the first research-based definition that documented intercultural experts' consensus is emphasised. Intercultural competence is viewed as 'the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes' (Deardorff, 2004, p. 194). The notions of effectiveness and appropriateness are central to the conception of intercultural competence. Appropriateness is viewed as 'the avoidance of violating valued rules' whilst effectiveness is 'the achievement of valued objectives' (Deardorff, 2006, p. 256). The effectiveness can be determined by the individual whilst the appropriateness can be determined by the other with cultural sensitivity and cultural norms.

Deardorff's model or framework of intercultural competence consists of several elements including attitudes, knowledge, skills, internal outcomes and external outcomes. The attitudes of openness, respect, curiosity and discovery are considered the critical starting point for one's development of intercultural competence. Comprehension of knowledge is acquired through cultural self-awareness and in-depth understanding of other worldviews. The internal and external outcomes represent the model's distinctive element. Both outcomes are the results of the individual's attitude, knowledge/comprehension and skills. These outcomes are expressed based on the individual's ability to acquire flexibility, adaptability, ethno-relative view and empathy which makes the person behave effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations. The specific skills required are for acquiring and processing knowledge about culture. The degree of intercultural competence depends on the

degree of attitudes, knowledge/comprehension and skills achieved given the on-going process of intercultural competence development (Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff, 2011).

In understanding information and interpreting the messages, the individuals use the language they know to communicate. The language enactments include listening, observing, interpreting, analysing, evaluating and relating information. Evidently, those participating in the conversation will relay the understanding of any information into utterances which might witness the presence of varied accents and linguistic accommodation. As such, mindfulness (*prihatin* in Malay language) should be considered at all levels. It requires individuals to be aware of the learning that takes place at each level and the necessary process skills needed for acquisition of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). It is viewed as being in the *alert state of mind*, making people more engaged with the surrounding and become sensitive to context (Langer, 1989). Understanding people requires sensemaking of why they act the way they do (Grimm, 2016) which might lead to behaving and conversing in a way that is more subjective and socially acceptable depending on the societal norm and the interlocutors' lens.

Thus, the notion of intercultural competence should be viewed as the ability to situate individuals in a multicultural context where communication skills are essential intermediary of self-other relationships. Evidently, (intercultural) communication skills (knowledge about relating to diverse others through verbal and non-verbal language) serve as the significant factor of intercultural competence within the Malaysian context (Dalib et al., 2019a, 2019b; Harun et al., 2018). More interestingly, the self and the other need to mutually develop language skills and acknowledge pre-conceived ideas, religious, ideological positions in attempting to relate well (Dalib, Harun & Yusof, 2014, 2017).

CRITICALLY REFLECTIVE LENS ON SENSEMAKING APPROACH IN SELF-OTHER RELATIONS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES

Weick's (1995) sensemaking approach suggests that making something sensible is never done alone. The meaning-making process can be disrupted, interrupted and ambiguous in an organisation. Similarly, this further reinforces the argument that the way an individual rationalises interaction with others depends much on their own understanding of the other. The self can choose to ignore or not be engaged with the other (be non-conversant) which leads to minimal interaction and draws attention to the individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim & Heyman, 1996). Individuals in the collectivist culture can still be individualistic while those in the individualist society can remain as collectivistic (Gudykunst et al., 1996). Sensemaking in this sense relates to the individual's background, environment and identity. It concerns how the individual engages with others in diverse contexts.

To illustrate, sensemaking is an ongoing process which includes seven elements; identity, retrospect, enactment, social, ongoing, extracted cues and plausibility (Weick, 1995). The process requires the individual to not only know him/herself in the social interaction but also to rationalise, make sense of, or size-up, be aware of and have some knowledge of the context with the other. In so doing, the self and the other engage in the social acts consciously by attempting to understand each other to make the interaction meaningful for the interactants. Whilst identity can be fluid (Kim, 2009), so is the nature of social interaction. A fully conversant individual might have many words stored but might not have the ways of knowing how to interact appropriately. The interlocutors might end up engaging in plausible reasoning of all the actions that they are partaking in the encounters. Hence, with that in mind, two research objectives guide the inquiry in understanding the undergraduates'

interactional relationships: (i) To make sense of interaction between self and the other in the campus in relation to language use and intercultural competence and (ii) To make sense of the particular components of self-other relations between the individuals that contribute to the realms of intercultural communication and intercultural competence.

METHODOLOGY

The Study Context
The study involved three multicultural public universities in Northern Malaysia. Three focus group interviews were conducted to encourage students to share their insights with the presence of their peers. The focus groups were considered to help validate the 'shared' experience as the participants were brought together to discuss and elaborate points raised by other members (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook & Irvine, 2008; Hollander, 2010). This collaborative process of meaning construction provides the means for adding richer descriptions on the complexity of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2012). The diverse individuals made sense of experiences through their narratives and excitement. They were asked to reveal the details of their experience with the other. It was observed that the group interview made them comfortable sharing such experiences. The method was able to exploit the group effect where people reflected on their shared experiences (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011).

Participants
The study employed a purposive sampling comprising Malaysian undergraduates from various programmes who had been in the campus for at least two semesters. This criterion indicates a reasonable duration of experience within the campus where the students might have developed social networks, have had some form of experience engaging with the others, particularly, the international students and could speak English. The students were able to provide their actual experiences and narrate their encounters.

Approximately, fifteen participants narrated their experiences in the focus group interviews. Most participants were in their senior year while others were in the fourth and fifth year of study. Several students reported their encounters as volunteers who had provided some form of assistance to the newly arrived international students. A few discussed their experience interacting with the international students comprising those from the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Europe continents with whom they identified as their classmates and working with the latter in the group assignments. Table 1 indicates the background information including gender, year and discipline of study and ethnicity of the participants (Table 1).

Table 1: Focus Group Interviews – Participants' Information

Focus Group (FG)	Participant	Ethnicity	Year of study	Gender
FG1	P1	Malay	4	Male
	P1	Malay	4	Male
	P2	Malay	4	Male
	P3	Chinese	3	Female
	P4	Chinese	4	Female
	P5	Malay	3	Female
	P6	Chinese	3	Male
FG2	P1	Malay	3	Male
	P2	Chinese	5	Male
	P3	Malay	5	Female

	P4	Indian	2	Female
	P5	Malay	2	Female
FG3	P1	Malay	3	Female
	P2	Malay	3	Female
	P3	Malay	3	Female
	P4	Malay	2	Male

Source: Authors' Research Data (2018).

Procedure and Instrumentation

The participants were recruited through the assistance of instructors/intermediaries who either taught the undergraduate students or knew them. Prior to the group interviews, participants were informed about the place where they could prepare for the actual focus group discussion. We distributed informed consent forms through intermediaries before the students attended the sessions. During the actual sessions, we briefed the participants on the research intentions and procedure of the interview.

Each focus group consisted of four to six participants who were ethnically diverse. Two moderators conducted each focus group and recorded all the responses with participants' consent. Each focus group interview lasted approximately one hour to one-hour-and-a-half. The participants responded actively to the open-ended questions posited by the moderators. English was used as the primary language for the focus group interviews. However, in situations where some participants felt comfortable to narrate their experiences in the Malay language (the official language), the preferred language of the participants was used for smoother interaction. Several questions were probed to enable the students to share their full insights as research collaborators. They were asked to reflect on the experiences encountered with others, whether they interacted with non-Malaysians in the campus, whether they felt necessary to communicate in a good way with others and whether they shared any common values with the persons they were interacting with.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed and transcribed using the thematic analysis technique proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) which enabled the exploration of the narratives based on the emerging themes. Initially, the recording was played multiple times. Brief field notes were written and reviewed on the non-verbal communication such as facial expressions during the focus group sessions as the participants narrated their experiences; that is on how the respondents reacted to the questions and with each other. The communicative event was then transcribed as is. Following the aims of the study, a conceptual thematic analysis was employed by providing the description of the relationship between the themes identified. The sequence of sentences or a complete dialogue related to feelings, attitudes and reactions of the participants' experiences as the unit of analysis was carefully observed. Then, the words of the participants were categorised; how they felt and how they adapted to the other. Based on the findings, the sensemaking of what the participants considered to be the appropriate behaviour and successful conduct was analysed. The NVivo 11 qualitative data software assisted in sorting out the narratives. The repeated keywords related to the research questions were drawn and extracted. Two themes emerged from the data, namely, (i) making sense of self-other accommodating ways and (ii) the self-other mindful coping mechanism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

(i)   Making Sense of Self-Other Accommodating Ways
a- Increased Awareness Among Participants'
Making sense of self-other accommodating ways heightens participants' awareness of the right and wrong communicative behaviour across different cultures. It was through the ongoing process of observing how the other and the participants behaved towards others that enabled the latter to understand the expected behaviour that could be manifested in various ways. Participants felt that it was important to avoid using their own cultural standpoints as the benchmark for interpreting the behaviour. This relates much to the identity of the interlocutors, of who they were in not only the setting but also the enactments. As such, the sensemaking process made the participants more mindful and learn to become accommodative in the encounters such as learning some basic phrases of the other's native language.

They were much aware of who they were, what they could (culturally) share (or not) to sustain the interaction. They saw the need to adapt based on the context of the situation, to rationalise and accept any (de)limitations. P1FG3 felt the need to be open-minded for instance whilst P3FG3 viewed openness as crucial in relating to others. The former had joined the mobility programme in Thailand and had experience interacting with students from Korea and Egypt. The latter participated in the mobility programme in Indonesia, interacted using an online blog and had friends from Korea, Holland, Japan and New Zealand. The other partners also adapted to their ways by respecting the religious beliefs; for instance, when P1FG3 (being a Muslim) wanted to pray, her non-Malaysian (non-Muslim) friend asked if she had to leave the room but she told her, 'it's okay, you can stay if you want to watch how I pray'.

b- Participants' Reasoning and Inclination Towards Adapting Appropriate Moves
Similarly, P5FG2 and P2FG2 articulated about using certain ways or moves (strategies); about learning some cultural norms of the other and how they viewed themselves as adapting to cultural differences. P5FG2 was actively involved in the University *Silat* team which also had international students from Nigeria. He shared about feeling awkward when the male friend held his hand 'for quite a long time' as they were heading towards their residential hall after the training. P5FG2 discovered that it was normal for the person to do so in his culture; 'holding hands means that he considers me as a close friend…he felt comfortable with me. So, it is up to our people (Malaysians) to accept differences. For me, there is nothing wrong. I accept it. I want my friend to feel comfortable.' Meanwhile, P2FG2, who was a senior student, reflected on his experience with foreigners given his active involvement with the University National Golf Academy. He acted as a student liaison between the university department and the international guests (students) including from Mainland China. He emphasised the importance of learning about others and being flexible, especially about employing proper etiquette. He cited his experience having dinner with the Chinese: 'If the Chinese treat us to dinner, we have to eat our food slowly. If we quickly finished eating all our food on the plate…the Chinese think that they have not treated us well'. These acts indicate the conversant partners' willingness to accept each other's ways of doing things.

c- Participants' Sensemaking of the Interaction
The process of sensemaking is triggered when people encounter novel situations and deliberately attempt to learn other cultures (Bird & Osland, 2005; Osland, 2010). In making sense, the participants look for 'reasons' that enable them to explain events (situations) that provide the framework for assigning meaning to situations (Osland, 2010; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). The presence of the other leads participants to engage in the process of sensemaking by recounting similarities and differences of their cultural framework with that of the other. Because culture is deeply internalised through recurrent regularities in terms of values, attitudes, beliefs and behavioural conventions that form expectations of what can be accepted within social groups (Bennet, 2009; McDaniel, Samovar & Porter, 2012), the participants begin to learn how such regularities they usually experience within the cultural groups may not be shared with the other. This supports the literature that indicates the sensemaking process occurs when it is situated within the cultural context to which it is lived by people (Bennett, 2009; Jandt, 2010). This sensemaking of culturally acceptable behaviour reflects the notion of appropriateness that forms the core conception of intercultural competence. Appropriateness is a question of rules of interaction (Deardorff, 2004, 2006). Evidently, the participants saw the importance of acknowledging varied rules of behaviour that culture prescribes when they interact with others. This finding also confirms that the judgement of appropriateness is about social coordination which helps people to establish shared communication meanings of their behaviour (Yep, 2014; Yum, 2012).

(ii)   Self-Other Mindful Coping Mechanism
a- Participants' Desire to Relate to Others Through Language
Meanwhile, the self-other mindful coping mechanism highlights the participants' desire to cope and relate with the others that most often occur through language. The relating skills necessitate participants to accept the salience of language as an important medium of (intercultural) communication and competence. Interestingly, language appears to be significant not only as a tool for interaction to take place. Rather, it is also viewed as a cultural element that needs to be fully embraced and acknowledged. This awareness leads the participants to embrace not only the 'fine-tuned' language as a useful mechanism for them to cope in comprehending the foreign partners' accents, but also their own language variety as shared by the participants. For instance, P1FG1, P3FG1 and P5FG1 made friends with those particularly from Britain, Japan, Korea, China, Nigeria, Somalia and Thailand in the campus. Their interaction with them occurred mostly at the faculty cafeteria daily or weekly. They acknowledged the importance of having a good understanding about each other's differences, in particular, the diverse accents. Understanding the (unfamiliar) individual accent can be challenging in making the interaction intelligible and successful. This requires the individuals to keep learning about each other's way of speaking or articulating the words as they participated in the communication. Most importantly, they felt the need to be mindful (and accepting) in adjusting to each other in ensuring that the interaction was successful.

b- Participants' Sensemaking of Language and Culture Through Experience
The finding indicates the participants' process of sensemaking of each other's linguistic and cultural selves. The reasoning of social conduct helped them to proceed with the interaction smoothly. This scenario indicates the fact that language is part of who the cultural person is (Baker, 2011, 2016; Gao, 2006; Han, 2020; Yu, 2015). Taken further, one's language and cultural identity seem to be very crucial for participants in establishing good relations (Dalib

et al., 2017; Dalib et al., 2019a, 2019b; Harun, 2007). Perhaps, such consciousness comes from the participants' existential experiences within the Malaysian setting where they are surrounded by ethnically diverse speakers of different languages, not necessarily English (Asmah, 1992; Harun, Dalib, Yusof & Ahmad, 2018). Situating the experiences of understanding others via a medium of communication that is English in this study offers a unique perspective. English as a second official language in Malaysia is subjected to Malay language influence. Thus, conversational English is rather different from standard English. The English language spoken by the international students is also altered as English is not their first language.

c- The Role of Language as the Impactful Medium
The finding further contributes to acknowledging language as a critical factor in intercultural competence which evidently is a noted gap in Deardorff's pyramid model. Evidently, the study reveals that the sensemaking conduct of good and mindful individuals must consider the significant role of language (English/foreign languages) in self-other relations and competence in intercultural communication. Understanding the host language or native language of the interlocutors demands more than simply knowledge about the other. Rather, it appeals to the individuals' common sense, logical reasoning of the other. Such meaning-making reflects the individuals' own which is, personalised to achieve some sort of acceptable standard for all. Thus, when the person is communicating with the other, he or she is most often aware of the language of the other when making sense of the utterances (messages conveyed). In retrospect, the intercultural encounters can become more meaningful when the interactions resonate with the interlocutors, both the self and other.

CONCLUSION
This paper has shared the sensemaking episodes of the interlocutors and how they verbalised such social acts through the act of reflecting. Sensemaking is personalised as it affects and impacts the individual who is interacting. Evidently, the themes interrelate with one another and reveal that the students develop the ability to be adaptable in interactions. They make use of knowledge transfer skill to understand the utterance of the other which exposes themselves to the need to embrace the other which also, in turn, depends on how much they know about the cultural others and how best to behave appropriately and effectively. It seems that the valued goal or effectiveness of the communication for the participants is about establishing good relations.

Meanwhile, appropriateness is about the participants' ability to make necessary adjustments and informed linguistic choices as evident in O'Neill's (2013) work on the French workers in adapting to the host language (Australian English). Admittedly, the study has its limitations in terms of the size, the background of the respondents and the method used. Future studies should focus more on the diverse linguistic background of the students (male and female), increase the number of local and foreign participants and incorporate observations of the respondents' actual interactions in their natural setting. The latter can lead to having in-depth or rich data.

The study extends the understanding of intercultural competence by offering a sensemaking perspective that considers the ways in which the Malaysian participants understand others in the Malaysian campus. Significant factors such as language, cultural identity, cultural resonance and context in situ based on plausible reasoning must be

considered. Several recommendations can be offered to future researchers. A qualitative research method such as a case study approach or detailed in situ observations in their natural setting can be extended to explore many realms of communication competence. For instance, individuals' enactment in intercultural interactional contexts where interculturality is prominent can be observed. Intercultural competence in negotiations can be pursued. It can assist students in negotiating strategies in social encounters with diverse others, especially those with good leadership talents. Students must make sense of their own language competence and cultural behaviour in performing duties effectively among contacts or peers as is the case of student leaders (Harun & Din, 2017). The skills of knowing how to manage interactions are still considered inadequate. More studies that focus on negotiation manoeuvres are needed in understanding how people make sense of their intercultural competence in this digitalised, global, multilingual and multicultural world. Understanding the ways (diverse) individuals (or political leaders) view language or cultural experience in negotiating the intercultural interactions can lead to insights on the characteristics of their related behaviour. Findings from such research will underscore the importance of cultural sensitivity, polite language, effective and appropriate communication, for instance, understanding linguistic gender accommodation (Hilte, Vandekerckhove & Daelemans, 2020) when dealing with diverse people and contexts. Future studies should also explore the perspectives of international students. The findings will enable the researchers to compare the sensemaking acts of self-other relations between the international and local students. In doing so, more input on the intercultural competence can be revealed among diverse students in Malaysian higher institutions.

With the existence of new social media and its impact on intercultural communication (Chen, 2012), future researchers are recommended to study the individuals' desire to establish relations with the other given that interactions will most likely occur without fully knowing the persons on the other part of the world. Reflections on intercultural encounters through the lens of student autobiography will be a useful research tool that can be extended (Ruest, 2020) when making sense of others and interpreting the social acts. Perhaps, such an inquiry may transform our understanding of not only intercultural competence within the virtual realms, but also the variety of English language used and intercultural norms in such contextualised interactions. Despite some limitations of Weick's sensemaking approach on factors including power, knowledge, structure and past relationships (Mills et al., 2010), arguably, the notion enables researchers to probe into the sensemaking of self-other relations in a multicultural realm. It encourages further exploration of language and cultural resonance in the public sphere such as the university environment which is culturally and individually specific. Admittedly, society needs enablers, and not constrictive social interactions to ensure effective and meaningful intercultural communication.

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