

Sexuality Keywords Project
Domain: Sexuality Keywords in Partnering and Relationships

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Introduction

The specific domain that we tackled delved into the sexuality keywords on partnering and relationships. Words on relationships were obtained, spanning the premarital to the marital stage. Terms for divorce, extramarital or illicit relationships were included. Also part of the research was terms used to call men and women who are unserious in a relationship. Aside from that, homosexual relationships were included and also the words used to call the people who have participation in the sexual relationships in prostitution. It was also differentiated in some terms, what was the acceptable and ruder version of the word.

The sexuality keywords we searched for in Bahasa Melayu were words used by native and non-native speakers of the language. Fieldwork was conducted in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah and informants from Kuala Lumpur were also interviewed through the internet. Our informants told us that the Bahasa Melayu of Sabah is different from the language in peninsular Malaysia, so the words they use are not always the same. One further explained that the language of Sabah was a mix of Indonesian and Philippine language. Even each state in peninsular Malaysia has different slang words.

Thus, by having interviewed speakers of Bahasa Melayu of different ethnicities and geographic locations we were able to obtain and view the different and similar keywords that they used.

Scope and Limitation

The study for the sexuality keywords was conducted in Kota Kinabalu and also by interacting with people in Kuala Lumpur, through chat rooms on the internet, specifically Yahoo Malaysia chat rooms.

Since we are not native speakers of Bahasa Melayu, we were only able to obtain the keywords by asking the informants the words they used in different situations. Not knowing the language, we didn't know how frequently the keywords really were used.

There were also instances when we asked them to translate certain words and they would answer giving a long phrase, this only meant that there was no keyword for that concept or situation since they needed many words to explain it. Our informants also had different interpretations of the words. There were many instances that the dictionary meaning wasn't similar to the informants' interpretation of the word.

Methodology

Data was gathered through interviews in person and online, using the English language. We would ask our informants to translate a concept or word from English to Bahasa Melayu. We would also ask of words and concepts they associate with the terms we mentioned. Some would immediately offer both formal and casual usage of a term.

The Malay-English and English-Malay dictionary was constantly referred to, to see if all the words given by the informants had the same or similar meaning in the dictionary. There were also many important terms taken from the dictionary that we didn't get from any of the informants.

KEYWORDS and TERMS LISTING

Premarital Relationship Terms

Awek: a casual term for girlfriend that is used in Kuala Lumpur.

Balak: a casual term for boyfriend that is used in Kuala Lumpur.

Bersektu/ Bersatu: literally means united; used in referring to people with a relationship.

Boyfriend: a borrowed English term usually used by the younger generation.

Bf: diminutive for boyfriend that is used informally though not verbally

Cewih: a word loosely used; it can mean girlfriend and also mean “chicks” in the Filipino sense of the term; a man’s lady/ ladies.

Cinta: love

“Aku cinta pada mu.”: “I Love You.”

Bercinta-cintaan: means to be in love with each other

Cinta pertama: first love; *pertama* meaning first.

Jatuh cinta: fall in love; *jatuh* meaning fall.

Pencinta: lover, admirer or fan

Couple: a borrowed English term

Cowoh: male counterpart of the **cewih**.

Date/Dating: a borrowed English term that is more often used than the local term *temu*.

Girlfriend: a borrowed English term used by the younger generation.

Gf: diminutive for girlfriend that is used informally though not verbally

Hubungan: relationships in general; *hubungan* also means connection

Hubung/Berhubung: means to get in touch or communicate.

Menghubungi: to keep in touch

Jujur: literally means honest, if the term is used to describe a relationship it means
'serious relationship'

Kejujuran: means honesty

“Saya jujur dia.”: “I’m serious about her/him.”

Kasih: love; affection; passion.

Berkasih: in love, full of passion

Kasihani: means pity or sorrow

Kekasih: a person in love or in a relationship; sweetheart or lover

Kekasih lelaki: boyfriend, *lelaki* means male

Kekasih perempuan: girlfriend, *perempuan* means female

Mengasihi: means loving

Pengasih: means lover

“Saya punya kekasih.”: “My darling”

Kawan: literally means friend, but the term can also be used to conceal a sexual
relationship between two people

Minat: interest, desire.

Berminat: interested

Meminati: like, interested in; fan, admirer

Peminat: secret admirer; fan.

Pakwek: another casual term for boyfriend.

Pasang: means pair or set; attach

Pasangan: couple but not yet married.

Memasang: make into pairs, couples

Terpasang: attached, assembled

Sama-sama memahami: *memahami* means to understand and *sama* means same; both have understanding about their “relationship.” The two parties involved do not fight since they understand or try to understand each other.

Suka: like, crush; happy; wish

Kesukaan: enjoyment; hobby or favorite

Menyukai: like, love

“Saya suka dia”: I like her/him, I have a crush on her/him

Sukacita: glad, joy

Teman: partner, associate, companion.

Teman lelaki: formal term for boyfriend; *teman* is partner and *lelaki* is man

Teman wanita: formal term for girlfriend; *teman* is partner and *wanita* is woman

Temu: meet

Temu janji: date; *temu* means meet, *janji* means promise and *perjanjian* means agreement.

Temu can also refer to an ordinary meeting or also a romantic date but *temu janji* has a deeper meaning since it is two people, significant to each other, who made a promise to meet each other.

Marital Relationship Terms

Bini: wife

Berbini: married (for a man)

Bini pertama: first wife in a Muslim marriage; *pertama* means first.

Bini kedua: second wife in a Muslim marriage; *kedua* means second.

Bini ketiga: third wife in a Muslim marriage; *ketiga* means third.

Bini keempat: fourth wife in a Muslim marriage; *keempat* means fourth.

Isteri: wife

isteri muda: second wife

isteri tua: first wife; *tua* means old; senior wife; there is an implied superiority and ascribed power to this category of wife.

beristeri: to be married (of a man)

memperisteri: to take a wife

memperisterikan: to give in marriage

Kahwin: to marry

Perkahwinan: marriage or wedding

Laki: husband

Lakibini: married couple.

“Lakibini mereka.”: “They are married.”

Nikah: marriage

bernikah: married

menikahi: to marry

menikahkan: to give in marriage

pernikahan: marriage, wedding

Pasang: means pair or set; attach

Pasangan suami-isteri: married couple, *pasangan* means in couples or in set

Suami: husband

Suami-isteri: married couple

Terms on Previously Married and Unmarried Individuals

Andartu: a spinster; a woman who didn't marry.

Balu: a widow/widower.

Bujang: bachelor, single; a man that didn't marry.

Bujang telanjang: bachelor.

Cerai: divorce.

Bercerai: divorced; no longer as husband and wife.

Bercerai-berai: separated, divided

Dara: maiden, virgin/ity, spinster.

Duda: single, divorced man; widower

Gadis: girl, maiden, unmarried girl, spinster.

Janda: single, divorced woman; divorcee; widow.

Third Party, Extramarital, and Illicit Relationship

Anak gampang: bastard; *anak* means child, *gampang* means easy.

In this situation, the child seems easily conceived without the parents having to go through marriage rites. It can also mean that the mother was "easily" gotten by the man.

Anak luar nikah: bastard; *anak* means child, *luar* means outside, *nikah* means marriage.

Cinta tiga segi: love triangle; *cinta* means love, *tiga* means three, *segi tiga* means triangle; love that is three sided.

Gundik: concubine, mistress.

Guru Perempuan: mistress.

Haram: unlawful, illicit, forbidden

Anak haram: bastard, child conceived outside of wedlock. *Anak* means child.

Hubung: contact, get in touch; communicate.

Hubungan: connection, communication.

Hubungan sulit: secret relationship, same as *jelingan sulit*; *hubungan* means relationship and *sulit* means secret.

Jelingan sulit: illicit relationship; *jelingan* was defined by the informant as the term relationship; *jeling* means to look sideways or at the corner of the eye. The combined meaning of the root *jeling* and the word *sulit* can be accounted for the secrecy of the relationship because one cannot look straight in the eye, since it is forbidden.

Lelaki gatal: men who like to be with women other than their wives; *lelaki* means man and *gatal* means itch.

*Gatal is a very descriptive term that tells of a man itching for other women or many women.

Madu: mistress or second wife; also defined as honey.

Orang ketiga: third person in a relationship; *orang* means person and *tiga* means third.

Pasangan haram: “Illegal pair”; an illicit affair.

Perempuan Simpanan: mistress; a woman with secret relationship with a married man; *perempuan* is a woman, *simpanan* means saving, and *simpan* means to store up.

*The mistress or perempuan simpanan from the word “simpanan,” seemingly shows that the woman is reserved by a married man to be with him

aside from his wife. Saving or simpanan also shows the woman as an object being collected.

Terms for Individuals in an Unserious Relationship

Buaya daik: playboy. Same meaning as buaya darat, land crocodile.

Buaya darat: playboy; *buaya* means crocodile and *darat* means land –land crocodile;

“Far dangerous than the original crocodile!”

*In our informant’s pun about the keyword buaya daik, he was referring to the promiscuous man or land crocodile as more dangerous than a crocodile.

Buru: hunt; hasten, hurry.

Pemburu-seks: (rude word), a term used for male; *pemburu* literally means hunter, *seks* is the adapted Melayu term for the English word sex. Our informant explained that men who are *pemburu-seks* “only want to have sex, they don’t care about the woman’s feelings”

*The term *pemburu* or hunter and *seks* illustrate the male hunting for sexual encounters with women.

Maybe, it can also be viewed as a man who is in a hurry to have sex because of the other meaning of the word *buru*.

Curang: act of cheating specifically in a romantic relationship; literal meanings:

dishonest, deceitful.

Main: a general term for play or playing. They do not use *pemain* or player to describe a person who is not serious in relationships but use the verb *main* or *bermain* for that situation.

“Saya main-main dia.”: “I’m just playing around with her.”

Penipu: cheater or liar inclusive to different kinds of cheating, term used for both sexes;

menipu means to cheat.

Pisau cukur: literally means razor, women who shave all the money from a guy and

jump from one guy to another.

Playboy: a borrowed English term; man who sleeps with a lot of women.

Terms about Prostitution

Ayam: female prostitute; *ayam* literally means chicken in Bahasa Melayu. They are

selling women like chickens.

*The chicken meat is more easily sold since Sabah is dominated by Islam.

This may be the root of the term ayam, as they associate selling chicken meat with selling “meat”. It was also said by an informant that when someone has some food in his hands and offers it to the chicken, the chicken would just go near the person to receive the offer- this implying that the chicken just grabs the opportunity when someone has something to offer like an easy-to-get.

Bapa Ayam: middleman/ the one who negotiates with the “customer” to sell the

ayam; equivalent of male *bugaw* in Tagalog; *Bapa* is father in Bahasa Melayu.

Mama Ayam: female counterpart of *Bapa Ayam*.

Bohsia: young teenage girls who give sex for free.

Customer: the one who buys the “service” of the prostitute

***Askar** is the word for soldier, they known as the usual customers of gigolos

Gigolo: a borrowed English term; male homosexual; *pondan* selling their bodies, counterpart of *pelacur*.

Lelaki murahan: male counterpart of *perempuan murahan*; cheap man.

Main: a general term for play or playing.

Main pantat: a prostitute; *main* means play and *pantat* means external genitalia or 'pussy' -slang term for the vagina.

Maksiat: term used to refer to prostitution; literally means vice.

*Since prostitution is synonymous to the word vice, it is seen that the sex service is frowned upon by the society.

Jenayah maksiat: term used to refer to *Mama/Bapa ayam*; *jenayah* means crime and *maksiat* refers to prostitution.

Pelacur: female prostitute; "They just sell their bodies to men. They just want to get paid."

Pelacuran: prostitution.

Rumah pelacuran: a house that fosters prostitution; *rumah* is house in Bahasa Melayu.

Pelanggan: literally means customer of any kind of service but also used in specifying a customer of prostitutes.

Perempuan jalang: prostitute; this is used as a cuss word used to insult a female when someone is angry with her.

Perempuan murahan: cheap woman; a woman who sleeps around with different guys; sometimes used to refer to prostitute, used to lighten the word *pelacur*.

Perempuan means female, *murah* means cheap.

Pimp: middleman in prostitution, borrowed English term.

Prostitut: male or female prostitute. Melayu term adapted from the English word prostitute.

Salon: some hair salons are identified as *rumah pelacuran*. These places in the outside look like salons but inside there sex services offered.

*In Kota Kinabalu and Kota Belud, hair salons have tinted windows or no windows at all. This may be because Muslim women must not show their hair in public. Many hair salons we saw in Kota Kinabalu already had glass windows but some were still concealed from walkers on the street. These enclosed salons could possibly be the *rumah pelacuran* mentioned by our informants.

Sugar daddy: a borrowed English term; synonym for *Bapa ayam*.

Sugar mommy: a borrowed English term; synonym for *Mama ayam*.

Web lucah: cybersex, illegal since many of those who participate are under 18; *lucah* means illegal in general.

Homosexuality and Relationships

Gay: a borrowed English word; male homosexual.

Homoseks: male homosexual.

Lesbian: as borrowed English word; female homosexual.

Perempuan sejenis: same sex relationship for women; *perempuan* means female, *sama* means same and *jenis* means group or kind; *sama+jenis= sejenis* which means same kind, so *perempuan sejenis* is the relationship of woman with a person of the same gender.

Pondan: male homosexual, dictionary meaning is hermaphrodite; some are crossdressers or transvestites

Tomboy: a borrowed English term; female homosexual.

Analysis

Premarital Relationships

Since Malaysia was colonized by the British beginning the 18th century, the people have been influenced linguistically by the English. Although the government continues to give great support in promoting the Bahasa Melayu language, there are borrowed terms that have already been part of the daily speak of the Malays.

Daniel Dilliam told us that they use the word date or dating more than the Malay term *bertemu* or *temu janji*. The borrowed term boyfriend and girlfriend are also frequently used but most often by the younger generation who are exposed to western media in television and film.

Looking at the word *kasih* as a keyword would be significant because a lot of terms can be derived from it. It can be connected with love, affection, and passion like in the list of terms and it can also be connected with gratefulness like in the expression *terima kasih* which means “thank you”. But looking at the literal meaning of the words *terima*, meaning receive or accept, and *kasih*, meaning love, the expression *terima kasih* can also be understood as accepting the love that is given so as to be thankful by not rejecting it.

The term more popularly translated to English as love is *cinta*. We were given the phrase “Aku cinta pada mu” or “I love you,” by non-Native Malay speakers. It was also what was taught to us in our crash course in Bahasa Melayu. But when we asked around Kota Kinabalu, the Malays didn't use this phrase. The youth rather used “*Sayang kamu*.” *Sayang* can mean both love and affection while *cinta* is automatically understood as love.

“*Aku cinta pada mu*” is rarely used by the native speakers. Yet, the word *cinta* appears in many Malay love songs. An example of this is the song *Tiada Lagi* or Never Again. There is a line that goes, “*Sia-sia sudah, kita jalin cinta*” which can be translated as “We wove our love in vain...” Although the song has already been covered by many artists it was still a hit when it was performed in the popular singing competition in television, Akademi Fantasia. Krisdayanti, an Indonesian singer famous in Malaysia also has popular songs such as, *Makin aku cinta* and *Cinta*. The keyword *cinta*, has its niche in the vocabulary of the people, who use it in love songs and lines spoken to their significant others.

In asking the Melayu words for girlfriend and boyfriend, we were given different versions: *ceweh* and *cowoh* were given by Josielyn, a Filipino tailor already living in Sabah and *pakwek* and *makwek* were mentioned by a university graduate from Kuala Lumpur. Yet, the majority of the informants were most familiar with the formal term *teman lelaki* and *teman perempuan* for boyfriend and girlfriend; these terms literally mean a boy partner and a girl partner. Though the word *teman* is used in partnering and relationships, it can also be used in casual acquaintances like in *teman sedarjah* or classmate, with the root word *darjah* meaning standard school. *Teman dekat* is also used to describe a close (*dekat*) friend.

Relationships or *hubungan* are connected through communication between people- people who are in touch, which can be seen by looking at the root of the word *hubungan* which is *hubung* which literally means communicate.

Couples can be seen as people in pairs, in sets, or attached to each other by looking at the literal meaning of the root word of the term *pasangan*, or couple, which is

pasang. But the root word *pasang* can also be used it things that are attached, fixed, or fastened which can be seen in the word *terpasang* used to describe the state of something that is also attached, fixed, or fastened.

The term *suka* can also be seen as a keyword that frequently appears and is used loosely to refer not just for emotional or romantic fondness but also to preference for some things like food or hobbies. *Sukacita* also means happiness and in describing that a person likes someone, “*Saya suka dia*”, it shows that the person is happy because of that specific individual. The term *menyukai* whose root word is *suka*, means both love and like, yet more often it means a fondness for someone that is not as deep as love yet.

Marital Relationships

In the keywords *bini* and *isteri*, which means wife, it is seen that in adding the suffix *ber-* *berbini* and *beristeri*, its meaning becomes a married man. Muslims who are allowed to have up to four wives, simply call their spouses numerically: *bini pertama*, *bini kedua*, *bini ketiga* and *bini ketiga*. But the first wife can also be called *istri tua*, senior wife, and in being first, she has more power and responsibility than the other wives.

Our Muslim informants told us that though it is legal to have four wives, the requirement is high to have more than one wife. Another one said that he respects his girlfriend or wife-to-be that is why he chooses to marry only one woman. He added that a man should be very rich to be able to have many wives since his wealth will be divided equally among the two to four wives and their families.

Divorce is legal in Malaysia, but our informants of Muslim and Roman Catholic faith, look at it in a negative light or would rather not choose this path unless the reason is for example that a woman is being abused by her husband.

Unmarried and Previously Married Individuals

The older single woman is also respected since the use of *andartu* is not negative in the Malaysian society, compared to when hearing the derogatory English term spinster. The word *dara*, which also means spinster, is defined parallel to a maiden or virgin. Which means it is applicable to both young and old unmarried woman. In western words like spinster, it is immediately thought of that the woman is mature or old, but in *dara*, the young and older women are not differentiated.

When we asked our informants the Melayu term for divorcee, they gave us the terms *janda* (for female) and *duda* (for male). When we looked this up in the dictionary we were surprised to see that it is also the same terms for widow and widower, respectively. What came to mind is that their view of divorce could also be mean the death of a once significant relationship that it is like losing a husband or a wife.

Illicit Relationships

Basing on the terms or words collected, it can be verified that relationships that are illicit are those that are kept in the secret and prohibited by religion. It can be attributed to the words *sulit* which means secret, confidential, or private and *haram* which means forbidden, illegal, and prohibited by religion. These words are used in the terms

hubungan sulit (secret relationship), *jelingan sulit* (illicit relationship), *pasangan haram* (Illegal pair” or an illicit affair), and *anak haram* (“forbidden child” or bastard).

Main which is a general term for play or playing is used to imply insincerity in a relationship. It’s as if the person is not taking the relationship seriously.

The term for mistress or second wife is popularly known as *madu*, which is a direct translation of honey. The woman or mistress could be the honey that the bee or *lebah* frequently visits as it is lured by its sweetness.

Very illustrative terms are *lelaki gatal*, *buaya darat*, *pemburu seks* and *pisau cukur*. Clear images of a man hunting (*pemburu seks*) and “itching” or *gatal* for a woman, and vice versa, is a universal concept when talking about lust. *Buaya darat* or using the image of a reptile or crocodile is also usual in illustrating a negative person such as using the snake (in some societies) also to describe a negative person.

Pisau cukur on the other hand reaffirms a popular image of a woman who only wants riches from a man and this is visually shown in the word translated as razor.

Prostitution

When we visited the website www.hamidarshat.com, a website in Bahasa Melayu for women’s health, we saw that they used the word *pelacur* in talking about sexually transmitted diseases. This meant that *pelacur* is a word used in formal discussions, and although it can be used for insult, the ruder words are the slang terms such as *ayam* directly objectifying women as meat and *main pantat*, a blunt term that verbally illustrates playing with a woman’s vagina. The definition of *pantat* is specifically the

female external genitalia. The informant translated it to English as pussy (a vulgar slang term), but it is also a formal or medical term as it can be read in the dictionary.

Although *pelacur* is used in formal discussions, for many it is still offensive. For Noel, one of our informants, the term *perempuan murahan* is lighter than *pelacur*. Being a cheap woman does not necessarily mean you're a prostitute.

Homosexuality

The word *pondan* is a derogatory word since homosexuality is not yet that accepted especially in Sabah where people are more traditional than those in Kuala Lumpur. The dictionary meaning specifies that *pondan* is a hermaphrodite, although *pondan* can mean different levels of male homosexuality. It is also noticeable that there is no Bahasa Melayu translation for lesbian. They borrow the term lesbian and tomboy and use *perempuan sejenis* which is used to describe a relationship of two women, yet there is no specific term for the person. This is also connected to the slow acceptance of homosexuality in the society.

In looking at the terms acquired in the study, it is seen that although there are many terms borrowed from the English language, the majority of what they use are still in Bahasa Melayu. It is notable that there are very visual words such as *buaya*, *ayam*, *pisau cukur* in illustrating negative people. Yet in the keywords for relationships, we see the abundance of words giving importance to happiness and love in *kasih*, *cinta* and *suka*, and through the words of Bahasa Melayu we can take a look at the worldview and culture of the Malaysians on sexuality and on relationships of men and women.

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Informants

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Native Melayu Speaker

Daniel Dilliam
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Informants from the Internet

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