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NON-MUSLIM RELIGIOUS PRACTICE AND MUSLIM RESPONSE IN MALAYSIAN INTER-RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

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Abstract

Malaysia is a multi-religious country. Apart from Islam as the religion of the Federation, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and other religions are freely practised by their believers. However, in some circumstances, a small number of religious practices created misunderstandings among the believers which became inter-religious issues at the national level. This paper discusses non-Muslim religious practices which are unaccepted by Muslims in the Malaysian inter-religious discourse, with the objectives of (1) analysing Muslim linguistic disagreement over non-Muslim religious practice, and (2) explaining the reasons behind the disagreement. The discussion is based on the pragmatic approach proposed by Crystal (1999): the language from its users' point of view, especially the choices they make, the constraints they face when using the language in social interaction, and the effect of the use of the language on other users. The data in the discussion are four religious issues from 2006 to 2011, published in a local newspaper, which are the translation of the Bible into the Malay language, shopping with dog, religious insult and Christianisation. Interviews with religious authorities are also conducted. The discussion shows that the disagreement linguistically can be traced from the keywords, such as disappointment, discomfort, anger, insensitivity, misunderstanding, disrespect, unhappiness, provocation, tragedy, violent stream, prejudice, doubtful, and hidden agenda. All words denote negative meaning. The results also show that the reasons behind the disagreement are connected with non-linguistic factors, such as media role, extreme NGOs, religious history, lack of understanding, lack of information, lack of education about religious tolerance, negligence, individual attitudes, politicisation and prejudice. The findings reveal that religious understanding and tolerance in Malaysia still needs to be strengthened. Mutual religious understanding must be cultivated by introducing comparative religious studies at the tertiary level, and by encouraging inter-religious dialogue in dealing with human and social issues like poverty, corruption, good values and others.

Keywords: Religious Discourse Analysis, Language and Religion, Religious Language.
