

Examining Fun Experiences between Two Cultures, English and Malay, to Supporting Diverse User Communities

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Abstract

Irrespective to the globalisation that hits the world today, the diversity of user communities is still very clear. By relating this directly with 'funology' and enjoyable experiences, this paper investigates how and in what way the emotions when we experienced fun is different between cultures. We examined how two different cultures, English and Malay, as expressed in the words they use, perceive fun and in what way they show or express fun. These examples of sentences and situations allow us to explore the emotional landscape and uncover subtle differences and nuances of 'fun' experiences.

Keywords

Fun, enjoyable, experience, emotions, cultures, domestic

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation hit us hard. The world we live in today is totally different with the world we once knew. The world today knows no border, yet this does not mean that people are all the same. In the work setting convergence seems the norm; if you walk into an office in Cambridge, Kuala Lumpur or Canberra it will look very similar. However, in domestic settings, at home, with friends, having fun, the differences become apparent; the colours, the food, the sense of humour, the social relationships. Even back in the office look at the attitudes and the social structures within the work environment; the diversity of user communities is clear.

There are many examples that prove the existence of diverse backgrounds in the computing world. Nearly every usability study requires the investigators to identify participants' background. We use the information to tell us whether the results of the experiments or studies may be influenced by the diversity affects. Whilst in other work the differences are the focus of the design or experiments, for example long standing work on internationalisation and national culture (Del Galdo et al. 1996), or Desmet et al. (2000) who acknowledge between-culture differences by measuring emotional responses to products.

This emotional response is critical. Both in work-oriented products, where individual efficiency is closely linked to personal motivation, and even more in domestic, entertainment and e-commerce areas, the importance of the user experience is becoming important if not paramount. For some this sort of issue has been a long term interest (Fogg, 2003) but it has increasingly become 'mainstream' in HCI textbooks and the launch of the ACM ACE conference. In particular, the term 'funology' has recently been coined in response to this new perspective that tries to move usability to enjoyment, or fun (Blythe et al., 2003b).

So whilst we acknowledge the existence of diversity amongst the user communities, we would like to relate this directly with funology and enjoyable experiences. This paper attempts to discover in what way (if any) the emotions when we experienced fun is different between cultures. To address this, we focus on the terminology of 'fun', by comparing its definitions with the closest words in the Malay language that give similar meaning. We have chosen Malay language partly due to the conspicuous differences of eastern and western culture. This makes it interesting to identify and understand the context of fun from the English and Malay points of view: do the definitions correspond to one another, and what are the contexts that only exist in one culture that cannot be described in another? In addition, one of the authors is herself Malay. It is difficult, or perhaps impossible, to study these issues of felt experience without some direct knowledge of cultures involved.

It is important this to understand these differences for two reasons. On the one hand it highlights a problem: we need to be able to design 'fun' interfaces that can support diverse user communities. On the other hand it offers us an opportunity: by seeing the words in the different languages take a different 'cut' through the conceptual landscape of 'fun' and help us to understand finer details and distinctions. The difficulty with studying common felt experience is that it is just too common, too tacit. The differences between languages foreground otherwise hidden issues.

WHAT IS FUN?

For many years, usability has focused on efficiency and robustness, concepts such as tasks, efficiency, ease-of-use, and ease-of-learning. However, new ideas of usability include issues of aesthetics, enjoyment, play and, user experience (e.g. Blythe et al., 2003b). These ideas are valuable as they won't just make the designs better but would also create a more exciting interaction with the technology compared to the days where the ultimate aim is to get the operation and precision correct.

Increasingly research in software application, games, learning and even consumer devices is paying attention to enjoyment in user experience: for example, improving eLearning by making the online course fun and engaging (Neal et al., 2004), investigating playful characteristics of the World Wide Web (Atkinson et al., 1997), the role of competition as enjoyment in video games (Vordener et al., 2003), and fun and enjoyable experience in consumer electronics by adding animated characters (Diederiks, 2003).

So, what is fun anyway? From Cambridge online dictionary (Cambridge, 2004), 'fun' as a noun form is defined as pleasure, enjoyment and amusement, whilst 'fun' as an adjective is defined as enjoyable. If we observe our daily conversation, fun sometimes is used interchangeably with pleasure, enjoyment and playfulness, and is very much about emotion. Whilst the broad issues of adopting fun are entering HCI, little work has attempted to differentiate one concept from another, with exceptions (Blythe et al., 2003a) distinguishing fun and pleasure.

What we would like to concentrate on at this juncture is not about the differences that distinguish fun from similar English words, but the relations or associations of the word 'fun' with similar words in the Malay language. From the many Malay words listed below, the words *seronok* and *riang* are the ones that have the closest meaning to the word fun. But how far true is this? How can we be so sure that everything that fun describes can be exactly described into Malay language by a mere translation? And are there conditions where the words in Malay illustrate situations that the word fun doesn't?

English: *Fun, pleasant, enjoyable, amusement, entertaining, playfulness*

Malay: *Seronok, riang, gembira, hiburan, gaurau-senda, sukacita, ceria, bahagia*

SERONOK OR RIANG?

Rather than simply looking at the Malay 'dictionary' translation of fun – *seronok* and *riang*, we need to examine how the words are really *used* to enable us to identify the emotions involved and the conditions where the emotions are normally shown. In order to illustrate these, Tables 1 and 2 give example sentences, together with a checklist of (English) emotions that associate with the sentences.

	<i>Seronok</i>	Equivalent meaning in English	F	E	P	A	O
(a)	" <i>Seronok</i> sekali melihat semuanya berjalan dengan lancar."	"So <i>happy/glad</i> to see everything goes well according to plan."			√		√
(b)	"Saya berasa amat <i>seronok</i> berjumpa dengan rakan-rakan lama."	"I'm so <i>happy</i> to see my old friends." "It's <i>fun</i> to meet my old friends."	√		√		√
(c)	" <i>Seronoknya</i> bermain dengan permainan ini!"	"It's <i>fun</i> playing with this game."	√	√		√	
(d)	" <i>Seronoknya!</i> "	"It's so much <i>fun!</i> "	√	√			
(e)	"Keramaian semalam sungguh <i>seronok</i> ."	"Last night's party was <i>fun</i> ."		√			
(f)	"Saya <i>seronok</i> bekerja di tempat baru."	"I <i>enjoy</i> working at the new place."			√		
(g)	"Perlawanan bolasepak itu <i>seronok</i> ."	"The football match was <i>fun/great</i> ."	√				√
(h)	" <i>Seronok</i> mak ayah melihat kejayaan anaknya."	"His success in studies gave his parents much <i>pleasure</i> ."			√		

'seronok' is used to express fun, happiness, excitements, and enjoyment

F: fun, E: enjoyment, P: pleasure, A: amusement, O: others

Table 1: *Seronok* alongside the equivalent English sentences and associated emotions

	<i>Riang</i>	Equivalent meaning in English	F	E	P	A	O
(a)	"Kanak-kanak bermain dengan <i>riangnya</i> ."	"The children are playing <i>cheerfully/buoyantly</i> ."	√	√			√
(b)	"Suasana yang <i>riang-ria / riang-gembira</i> ."	"A <i>joyous/fun</i> atmosphere."	√				√
(c)	"Berjoget dengan <i>riang</i> ."	"Dances <i>joyially/cheerfully</i> ."		√			√
(d)	"Hatiku <i>riang</i> ."	"My heart is full of <i>joy</i> ."					√
(e)	"Dia tersenyum <i>riang</i> ."	"She smiles with <i>glee</i> ."					√

'riang' is used to describe fun/joy/happy atmosphere/situation, and to describe action(s)

F: fun, E: enjoyment, P: pleasure, A: amusement, O: others

Table 2: *Riang* alongside the equivalent English sentences and associated emotions

Note that although there is a lot of overlap between, for example, *seronok* and fun, there are also differences (e.g. in English one would not say that it is ‘fun’ that something is going to plan). We can think of the words as delineating areas of a conceptual emotion landscape (see Fig. 1), where the languages take different ‘cuts’ through the landscape. The points of intersection can help us to understand the fundamental attributes of the emotions, rather like the attributes of a particular experience (virtual crackers) are uncovered in Dix (2003). Although we cannot explore this in full in this paper, we can start to look at a few issues the approach uncovers.

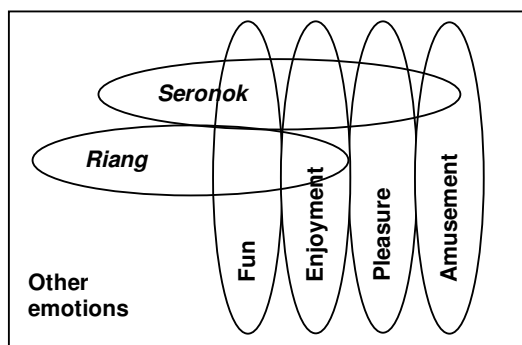


Figure 1: The emotion landscape (schematic only: the words *seronok* and *riang* overlap in meaning as do the English words with one another)

One clear point from emotional landscape is that relative to fun, and its related words, there are certain emotions of *seronok* and *riang* which do not encompass in any of the four English words. Between the two Malay words, *seronok*, is the word that comes closest to fun, as the word is used to describe or to express fun, pleasure and enjoyment. This word is also used to express or to show happiness, gladness and excitements, which apparently are not what fun is about.

Although *riang*, from the sentences given above, shows no close correspondence to the word fun, *riang* however is commonly used to describe a happy atmosphere, setting or situation or one’s expression of happiness. Another interesting remark when constructing examples for the word *riang* is the fact that it is ordinarily addresses children rather than the adults. It is uncommon to hear the word *riang* describing the happy behaviour shown by an adult. To some extent this also reflects childlike or childish connotations of the word fun in English, hence the reason why examples (a) and (h) (from Table 1) do not sound like ‘fun’.

It is also interesting to see how ‘seronok’ and ‘riang’ correspond to amusement. There is a direct translation of ‘amusement’ in Malay, the word ‘hiburan’. For example, ‘amusement park’ that is translated directly into Malay as ‘taman hiburan’. Nonetheless, when a suffix is added to the word ‘seronok’ it is changed to ‘menyeronokkan’ which also means to entertaining or amusing.

DISCUSSIONS

We have seen that emotions play such a large part in defining the application of each word. In the Malay culture, the word *seronok* is expressed when one expresses the fun that he/she is experiencing, enjoyment, happiness, and even excitements. From the investigation, in contrast to the Malay word, the word fun alone can not describe one’s emotion when *experiencing* fun. Imagine you are enjoying a ride at a theme park. To describe your ‘emotion’ in English you either say, “This ride is fantastic!” or, “I’m having so much fun!” But when it comes from a Malay, the answer would be no more than one word, which is, “Seronok!” The word *seronok per se* able to express one’s emotion, one word answer is sufficient to describe the whole emotion one is experiencing.

It is fascinating indeed to see that there is more than just a mere translation at work. Seeing what fun really means from two different horizons gives us insight into the way each culture perceives and applies ‘fun’. Although in the beginning it seemed as if *seronok* suits perfectly as fun’s description, it turns out that the Malay word is not just used to express the experience of fun, but also to express excitements, happiness and enjoyment. Furthermore, *seronok* is different from fun in a way that *seronok* itself can be used to express emotions.

The Malay culture is different to the English in many ways. East vs. west says it all. When we look deeper, the reason why the single word *seronok* has the ability to express emotion may be due to the way the Malay culture expresses itself. Unlike the English, the Malay culture expresses many things with ‘feelings’, rather than ‘thinking’. For instance, in English culture, one normally expresses things by saying, “I think...”, but in Malay culture, one says, “Saya rasa...” which translates to “I feel...” Possibly the ability to show emotions of fun in the

Malay and English *languages* is all down to how each culture expresses itself (or visa versa). Perhaps Wittgenstein's phenomenological view of language is due to an English obsession with external appearance!

Malay → 'feel' = shows *fun* as emotions

English → 'think' ≠ shows *fun* as emotions

CONCLUSION

Starting with a focus on experience in usability and 'funology' has inspired us to examine how two different cultures, English and Malay, as expressed in the words they use, perceive *fun* and in what way they show or express *fun*. We identified contexts in which the words seronok and riang appear in Malay conversation and how they compare with the English word 'fun' and related terms. These examples of sentences and situations allow us to explore the emotional landscape and uncover subtle differences and nuances of 'fun' experiences.

At one level the closest word in Malay to fun is seronok, but the differences suggest highlight the individual ways in which culture shows or express their emotions. Whereas the Malay word seronok is more about feelings the English word fun is about experiences. It is open to discussion (and coffee room argument!) whether this betrays a more fundamental difference between Malay expressing itself in feeling as compared with English in thought or appearance.

This study certainly provides us insights that tell us that fun experience cannot be accepted as something that is the same to everyone. It is part of our broader investigations into how technology in domestic settings of different culture could affect the way users want the technology to be integrated into their homes. We believe that as an analytic technique, the use of multiple languages can be a touchstone and probe to uncover subtle differences between cultures and also to help us build richer vocabularies of the felt experience.

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