



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATIONS OF
BILATERAL ISSUES CONCERNING MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE IN
MAINSTREAM NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS**

NG SIEW HUA

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BILATERAL ISSUES CONCERNING MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE IN
MAINSTREAM NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS**

By

NG SIEW HUA

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy**

DECEMBER 2008



DEDICATION

To my parents, my two brothers, sister-in-law, my two sisters, my nieces and nephews, I would like to dedicate this study for their unceasing support and encouragement without whose understanding writing this thesis would not have progressed smoothly. To all my spiritual teachers and friends, close friends, relatives and colleagues who have in one way or another provided some form of encouragement, support and inspiration in the course of writing, may I also dedicate this study.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATIONS OF
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NG SIEW HUA

DECEMBER 2008

Chair: Wong Bee Eng, PhD

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The newspaper's main role is to transmit news and it is often regarded as a source of ideological significance. One of the modes of transmitting the ideologies in the newspapers is through the editorials. The mainstream newspaper editorial uses diverse styles and discursive strategies to express the voice of the institution's opinions and often the beliefs of any dominant group the institution represents. This study seeks to explore the ideological similarities and differences within the structure of editorials in the two widely regarded major means of providing news to the public in Malaysia and Singapore: the *News Straits Times* (NST) and *Straits Times* (ST) respectively using an analytical paradigm adapted from Wodak's Discourse-historical approach theoretical framework and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. A qualitative historical research design was employed in this study to corroborate the



findings. The findings were obtained from macro-structural and micro-linguistic analysis of selected editorials from both newspapers and intertextual and interdiscursive analysis of the historical background of events and bilateral issues involving both countries at different time frames from 1965 to 2005. A purposive sampling of one hundred and twenty (120) NST and ST editorials related to the bilateral relations between Malaysia and Singapore identified twenty nine (29) NST and twenty five (25) ST editorials written on the outstanding bilateral issues between 1973 to 2005. The results indicate that recontextualization of the outstanding bilateral issues involving both countries were evident in both mainstream newspaper editorials at certain time frames. Varied patterns of argumentation and linguistic representations particularly in-group and out-group deictics of “we”, “us”, “them”, “they” or “their”, emotive verbs and negative lexis were used implicitly and explicitly in the two mainstream newspaper editorials at different time frames to voice each newspaper institution’s ideological stance. The findings showed that each institution’s stance related to the historical bilateral issues were representative of the voices of the dominant group or the government of each respective country. Both the NST and ST institutions played mediator roles between the government and public readers. As a result, only newsworthy events related to the bilateral issues were reported through selective choices of words. In this respect, it was found that language was a powerful and influential tool in both mainstream editorials. This adapted CDA theoretical framework used in the study has therefore brought about some levels of critical awareness and insights into the outstanding bilateral issues involving Malaysia and Singapore at different time frames from 1965 to 2005.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**ANALISIS WACANA KRITIKAL TERHADAP REPRESENTASI ISU-ISU
BILATERAL BERKENAAN DENGAN MALAYSIA DAN SINGAPURA
DALAM EDITORIAL AKHBAR ALIRAN PERDANA**

OLEH

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Peranan utama akhbar ialah penyiaran berita-berita dan sering dianggap sebagai asas penting ideologi. Salah satu cara menyiarkan ideologi dalam akhbar adalah melalui editorial. Dasar penerbitan yang digunakan oleh editorial akhbar aliran perdana ialah gaya kepelbagaian dan strategi rumbu (*discursive strategies*) untuk menyuarakan pendapat-pendapat institusi serta kepercayaan dari mana-mana kumpulan dominan yang biasa diwakili oleh institusi. Kajian ini cuba menjelajahi persamaan dan perbezaan ideologi dalam struktur editorial antara *New Straits Times* (NST) dan *Straits Times* (ST), kedua-duanya merupakan penyebar berita utama kepada awam secara meluas di Malaysia dan Singapura yang masing-masing menggunakan paradigma analisis yang diubahsuaikan daripada Rangka Teori Pendekatan Wacana Bersejarah



oleh Wodak dan Rangka Analisis Wacana Kritis (CDA) oleh Fairclough. Suatu penyelidikan reka bentuk sejarah kualitatif telah diambil dalam kajian ini untuk menyokong dapatan. Hasil dapatan diperoleh melalui kedua-dua analisis struktur makro dan linguistik mikro daripada kedua-dua editorial akhbar yang dipilih serta analisis antara tekstur dan antara rumbu ke atas latar belakang sejarah peristiwa-peristiwa dan isu-isu bilateral yang membabitkan kedua-dua negara pada jangka masa tertentu antara tahun 1965 hingga 2005. Suatu persampelan bertujuan editorial NST dan ST sebanyak seratus dua puluh (120) yang berkenaan perhubungan bilateral antara Malaysia dan Singapura telah mengenalpastikan dua puluh sembilan (29) NST dan dua puluh lima (25) ST editorial tertulis berdasarkan isu-isu bilateral yang menyerlah antara 1973 dan 2005. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bukti penganalisan semula konteks daripada isu-isu bilateral yang menyerlah membabitkan kedua-dua buah negara oleh editorial akhbar aliran perdana pada jangka masa yang tertentu. Kepelbagaian pola penghujahan dan representasi linguistik terutamanya kumpulan-dalam dan kumpulan-luaran *deictic* seperti “we”, “us” (kami/kita), “they” atau “their” (mereka), kata-kata kerja emotif serta lexis negatif secara implisit dan eksplisit yang digunakan dalam penerbitan kedua-dua editorial akhbar perdana pada jangka masa yang berbeza untuk menyuarakan pendirian ideologi institusi masing-masing. Hasil dapatan ini menunjukkan setiap institusi yang mengaitkan isu-isu bilateral bersejarah adalah perwakilan suara kepada kumpulan dominan atau kerajaan negara masing-masing. Kedua-dua institusi NST dan ST memainkan peranan sebagai pengantara antara kerajaan dan pembaca awam. Akibatnya, hanya peristiwa-peristiwa yang bernilai dan berkenaan isu-isu bilateral sahaja dilaporkan dengan pilihan perkataan yang tertentu. Dalam hal ini, didapati

bahasa merupakan suatu alat yang berkesan dan berkuasa dalam kedua-dua editorial aliran perdana. Dengan itu, rangka teori CDA yang disesuaikan dan telah digunakan dalam kajian ini telah dapat mencapai sesuatu tahap kesedaran yang kritikal dan pemahaman dalam terhadap isu-isu bilateral yang menyerlah membabitkan Malaysia dan Singapura pada jangka masa yang berbeza dari 1965 hingga ke 2005.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 12 December 2008 to conduct the final examination of Ng Siew Hua on her thesis entitled “A Critical Discourse Analysis of Representations of Bilateral Issues Concerning Malaysia and Singapore in Mainstream Newspaper Editorials” in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

NG SIEW HUA

Date: 2 February 2009



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NST	New Straits Times
ST	Straits Times
<i>SPH</i>	Singapore Press Holdings
<i>NSTP</i>	New Straits Times Press
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
PM	Prime Minister
ICJ	International Court of Justice
CPF	Central Provident Fund
KTM	Keretapi Tanah Melayu (Malaysian Railway)
POA	Points of Agreement
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association of Malaysia
MRT	Mass Rapid Transit
sn	Superscripted Number
Contd.	Continuation



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The two neighbouring sovereign nations, Malaysia and Singapore, had been one nation before separation in 1965. Both nations share the same history, geography, culture and family ties. Similarly, the two mainstream English newspapers, *New Straits Times* (NST) and *Straits Times* (ST), serving Malaysia and Singapore respectively, were once known as the *Straits Times* (ST). Then it (ST) served the public readers of the Federation of Malaya before it became two independent nations due to ideological differences. This study, therefore, focuses on one of the media discourses, the editorials of the two mainstream newspapers in Malaysia and Singapore. Chapter 1 of this study begins with the background to the study, that is on how this research on the selected media discourse came about, the statement of the problem, the purpose of study, research questions, scope of study, the theoretical framework, the significance and limitations of the study and the definitions of pertinent terms. The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis.

1.1 Background to the Study

This section of the study introduces the characteristics of media texts with particular reference to the editorials of newspapers which exist in media discourse. Extensive research has been done on media discourse to investigate the presence of ideological processes in media texts and elements of social control of these ideological processes through linguistic means.



1.1.1 Media Discourse

Media discourse is complex. Complexity in media discourse is interpreted through the presence of influential linguistic elements with underlying meanings apart from just literal information which portray a great impact on the public. Fowler (1991:8) and Fairclough (2002:47) regard this complexity of media discourse as due to the presence of contradictory ideological processes. Such ideological processes function in social control through linguistic manifestation of discourses in media texts (Fairclough, 2002:47). These texts provide traces of social production or cues to the interpretation of related discourses. Such texts have a signifying power to represent things and influence knowledge, beliefs and values in readers (Fairclough, 2002:47; Reah, 2002).

In the representation of things, language acts a powerful communicative tool which could shape the perception of an individual and groups of people in society. Language theorists contend that language is persuasive and that it reinforces power relations in a culture (Borchers, 2002). Through language, people communicate about what they think of themselves and the world they live in. The fact that people think and behave differently in groups, a mass consciousness which M.C. McGee (1980, in Borchers, 2002) calls “ideologies” are present in the words used in communication. He calls this ideology “a political language” embedded in rhetorical documents with which certain groups of people in power have the ability to make decisions and control public behaviours and beliefs.



1.1.2 The Newspaper

The daily newspaper is one type of media texts which acts as a rhetorical document for an institution in modern civilization to transmit news of daily events. It is read not just for the informative content but it is also used to reflect the thinking of the corridors of power. Ideologies are embedded in this rhetorical document. MacDougall (1973), Fowler (1991) and Reah (2002) point out that the content of the rhetorical document, newspaper, is presented in a particular way not only to arouse interest and curiosity in readers but also to influence the readers' views and speak for the institution's point of view through analysis and comments on the news. This form of media is an artefact of the commercial and political world and freedom of the press is often regarded to have ideological importance in Western democracies (Reah, 2002). Fowler (1991) points out that a particular ideological position about the world is articulated and represented through language in any oral or written form. Language is therefore used as a tool in different newspapers to articulate each newspaper institution's ideological stance (Fowler, 1991).

Before the contents or voice of the newspaper are communicated in written form, a series of collective institutional routines is involved in the processes of production of media texts. Media institutions or organizations go through a routine of gathering news items and information of events, selecting, editing and transforming resource materials into completed texts. The first draft of a journalist has to go through several changes of the various categories of editorial and technical staff (Bell, 1991:44-46; Fairclough, 1995). The source of information gathered by the journalist is therefore dependent upon the ownership and profitability of the media institution



which constitute an inbuilt limitation (Fairclough, 1995). The consumption of the media texts is characterized by the practices and routines of its own institution. As a result, the production of media texts is seen as a series of transformation of information linking the actual source of events in public to the private consumption of the media texts.

Weiss and Wodak (2003:273) advocate that the content reported and presented by media texts, particularly the newspapers has a social, political and educational role. The reported content in the media texts, referred to as “news”, is defined by Reah (2002:4) as “information about recent events that are of interest to a sufficiently large group, or that may affect the lives of a sufficiently large group.” By making connections between the different roles in society and the events that have occurred, people try to interpret the relationships between the events reported in the media and the society. News is a recontextualization of an event (Fairclough, 1995:41; Caldas-Coulthard, 2003). Caldas-Coulthard (2003: 276) comments that in each new recontextualization, events and people are “represented according to the goals, values and priorities of the communication.” Fairclough (in Wodak & Meyer, 2002: 133) further implies that recontextualization means as “transformation to suit the new context and its discourse.” Both Fairclough (in Wodak & Meyer, 2002; 1995) and Caldas-Coulthard (2003) point out that news is not an objective representation of facts but a cultural construct whereby journalists report what is newsworthy. As a result, news media select and make decisions on what to include and exclude from the information gathered regarding events.



News media which select events and make decisions to exclude certain information from the newspaper are generally seen as editorial decisions. Reah (2002) and Fowler (1991:13) point out that selection of events may ultimately affect the readers' perspective of the world without them being aware of it. Fowler (1991:8) also highlights the power of language in the social construction of reality. This point is supported by Caldas-Coulthard (2003) who also emphasizes that the language of the media is one of the most pervasive which can reach out to a lot of people from all levels in literate societies. Language is also linked to the question of "how participants are recontextualized" (Van Leeuwen, 1996, in Caldas-Coulthard 2003: 282).

One of the modes of representation of cultural themes in media texts through written language is the newspapers. Readers of newspapers to whom the paper appears to be writing are responsible in bringing "common sense" assumptions into the process of interpretation (Fairclough, 1989:69; Reah, 2002: 35). Simpson (1996:6), Fowler (1991) and Fairclough (1989) refer to these "common sense" assumptions as ideologies which are embedded in everyday discourses and can be identified in the way texts are constructed. The constantly imposed assumptions upon the interpreters and producers of texts exist in the process of cumulative construction of texts without either party being aware of them (Fairclough, 1989). However, Kress and Hodge (1979:15) argue that readers of newspapers will look for the paper which challenges their assumptions the least even though they know the linguistic forms and linguistic choices of the paper. Therefore, most readers do realize that the truth of an event is only the form in which the writer chooses to present reality.



1.1.3 The Editorial

One section in the newspapers which presents the writer's common assumptions of an event is the editorial column. This section presents the editorial decisions and viewpoints of the newspaper institution. It is indexed as the "leading article", "editorial", "opinion", "comment", "We say" or the name of a certain newspaper "... says" (Fowler, 1991: 208; Reah, 2002). It is known as the anonymous editorial which plays a key role in communicating with the readers at large. Kress and Hodge (1979:17) highlight this editorial column as "a place where the processes of selection and assimilation of rewriting and transformation are most dense." Similarly, MacDougall (1973: 2-3), Fowler (1991: 208) and Van Dijk (1996:19) advocate that this section partitions the opinions of the institution and implicitly supports the institution's claim. It represents the voice of the paper not only to inform and lead public opinion but also to provide the public with true facts that provide a distinctive voice of the paper as a whole (MacDougall, 1973: 2-3; Fowler, 1991: 208; Van Dijk, 1996:19). Kress and Hodge (1979:17) call this section the paper's ideology. Like MacDougall (1973) and Fowler (1991), they stress that this section of the paper presents its perception of reality and speaks directly with clarity to its readership. Having this ideological role to play, editorials are therefore expected to be more linguistically complex. As such, communicative elements of structured persuasive and argumentative patterns or textual format are reflected (MacDougall, 1973: 3; Fowler, 1991:208; Van Dijk, 1996:19).

Moving on to editorial writing, one of the principles of writing is to respond and address the daily events and prominent issues openly, directly and accurately rather

