

Chapter 1

Politics in Malaysia: A Discourse Perspective



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Abstract Our chapter introduces *Discursive Approaches to Politics in Malaysia: Legitimising Governance*. Grounded in Discourse Studies, this edited volume is designed to enrich research on Malaysian political discourse. It examines how political actors employ language to legitimise their governance in distinct contexts. The chapter briefly reviews political parties in Malaysia, which establishes the contours of political culture. Subsequently, it presents an overview of linguistic research in political discourse in the last two decades in Malaysia, which establishes the diversity of studies in linguistic analysis. The chapter describes the other chapters in this volume that research spoken, print and digital texts in English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil. These chapters pursue an empirical study of language features and strategies about contemporary concerns in Malaysia. Our chapter ends by offering the future directions of research, where potential avenues could be explored.

Keywords Politics · Legitimation · Discourse · Language · Research

1.1 Introduction

Discursive Approaches to Politics in Malaysia: Legitimising Governance brings together linguistic analyses of Malaysian political discourse. Politics involves the governance of society at different levels (e.g. local, state, country). It is often competitive because individuals/institutions compete for finite resources (Bourdieu, 1993), reflecting specific purposes and situations (Chilton, 2004). We recognise the diversity of scholarly disciplines studying politics but being grounded in Discourse Studies, this edited volume examines politics using a linguistic perspective. Following van Dijk (1997), politics is mostly discursive because individual/institutional political actors employ discourse in their exercise of politics. Their political discourse is

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K. Rajandran and C. Lee (eds.), *Discursive Approaches to Politics in Malaysia*, Asia in Transition 18, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-5334-7_1

contextual, manifested in events or practices with primarily political functions by professional or non-professional elected or non-elected individuals or institutions (van Dijk, 1997).

Politics in Malaysia has engaged discourse to construct reality, garnering symbolic power for political actors (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 164). Their symbolic power may influence citizens to favour or disfavour the government, a party, other citizens and their actions and decisions. The use of symbolic power helps established actors because it sustains a nexus of relations for their benefit, while newcomer actors, although denouncing symbolic power, would require it. Any venture in political discourse should understand and decipher the articulation of symbolic power. Clearly, symbolic power does not exist in lacuna and is concomitant on economic, social and cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1993).

The analysis of political discourse is scarcely new (Chilton, 2004), and it can be traced to Chinese, Greco-Roman and Indian traditions. It has garnered multidisciplinary interest, particularly in the Humanities. Among its branches, Linguistics has had a crucial contribution (Berrocal & Salamurović, 2019). It is the basis for the transdisciplinary field of Discourse Studies, which recognises the constitutive character of discourse for social realities, structures and subjectivities (Angermuller, 2015). Discourse Studies is enhanced by numerous theoretical and methodological approaches (Angermuller, 2015). Despite the diversity, the focus remains the tripartite study of text, context and meaning (Trappes-Lomax, 2004).

This edited volume is centred on political discourse in Malaysia from 2008 to 2020. It examines how political actors legitimise their governance through discursive means. The concepts termed 'governance' and 'legitimation' are complex and are explored in several scholarly disciplines. A variety of definitions abounds, which may or may not be harmonious among one another. Following Bevir (2012), governance covers the processes of governing, and although it is undertaken by many actors, our emphasis is on governance by government, political parties and citizens. Legitimation gives the reasons why these processes should happen, or happen in a certain way (van Leeuwen, 2008). Practising discursive approaches means considering how discourse is employed by political actors in Malaysia to (de) legitimise a certain process of governing. Legitimation is inherent in political discourse (Cap, 2008) but it is dynamic, experiencing changes in relation to the purposes and situations of governance.

Political discourse shapes the governance of a country and can become orthodox or the official way of speaking and thinking about the world (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 168). Research on political discourse explains the language features and strategies that facilitate orthodox discourse. But heterodox discourse should also be considered, as it recognises and provides alternatives (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 164). The discourse is heterodox because it questions conventional beliefs and practices. Political discourse, either orthodox or heterodox, endeavours to legitimise or delegitimise a process of governance. Because governance impacts almost every aspect of the lives of the population, Malaysian political discourse about (de)legitimising governance deserves scholarly reflection. The aim is realised by this edited volume. The original research-based chapters select spoken, print and digital texts in English, Malay, Mandarin and

Tamil and examine the discursive representation and evaluation of contemporary concerns in Malaysia.

1.2 Trajectory of Political Parties in Malaysia

Malaysia is a multicultural country in Southeast Asia. Although its multiculturalism is traceable to pre-colonial times, Portuguese, Dutch and particularly British colonialism moulded its present multicultural demography (Zawawi, 2004). Before independence, the Chinese, Indians and Malays were mostly economically segregated (Hirschman, 1986). The colonial state reified ethnic economic structures, which precipitated the establishment of political parties and the resulting ethno-religious political culture (Yaakop, 2014; Zawawi, 2004).

The British co-operated with, encouraged and prepared the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the Malayan (later Malaysian) Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malayan (later Malaysian) Indian Congress (MIC) for government (Hirschman, 1986). The three parties formed the Alliance coalition and garnered victory in the 1955 general elections in Malaya. The Alliance was influenced by and with several geopolitical developments, notably inter-state rivalries in Malaya, Communist insurgencies in Asia and the Japanese occupation during World War II (Yaakop, 2014). The Alliance led Malaya to independence in 1957 and to merger in 1963 as Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore formed Malaysia. Singapore's intransigence to comply with unequal ethnic rights precipitated its separation from Malaysia in 1965 (Liu et al., 2002).

The Alliance later expanded to become the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition in 1973, comprising ethnic and regional political parties. BN was formed after interethnic riots and an emergency in 1969. UMNO remained *primus inter pares* in the Alliance and BN, its President becoming Prime Minister and its Members of Parliament handling key cabinet posts (Nadzri, 2018). Over time, UMNO became more dominant and power sharing happened more on its terms rather than equitable negotiation (Weiss, 2020). BN solidified its position from election to election, until the government seemed to be an iteration of BN. As BN acquired and retained symbolic power, it seemed invulnerable. Its discourse was entrenched using several methods, such as control of the media, establishment of repressive legislation and influence on judiciary and religious institutions (Nadzri, 2018).

BN always maintained two-thirds control of Parliament until the 2008 general elections. This loss was a culmination of grassroots activism, the Reformasi (Reform) movement and Internet politics. The resentment among citizens towards BN stimulated public participation in non-electoral politics (Weiss, 2000). Anwar Ibrahim's sacking as deputy Prime Minister in 1998 and his subsequent treatment birthed the Reformasi movement. It exposed the government's corruption, cronyism, nepotism and oppression to the public. These developments were predicated on participatory democracy, where citizens were emboldened to be autonomously involved in politics (Weiss, 2000). It coincided with augmented Internet usage, a cheap, easy and

fast medium that opposition parties adopted much earlier than BN. The Democratic Action Party (DAP), Parti Islam se-Malaysia (PAS) and Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) had a first mover advantage and capitalised on the Internet, in terms on webpages, blogs and social media sites, to champion citizens' grievances and criticisms of BN.

Consequently, BN could not retain its electoral clout post-2008, which shifted towards opposition parties, who formed short-lived coalitions, such as Barisan Alternatif (BA) from 1998 to 2001 and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) from 2008 to 2015. The culmination of the shift was the 2018 general elections, where BN conceded the federal government to Pakatan Harapan (PH). Public discontent about cost of living was compounded following revelations about 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB). BN ended its 60-year tenure, and UMNO could not claim to be the sole champion of Malay-Muslims, the majority demographic group. BN did not garner adequate Malay-Muslim votes, and most young voters favoured opposition parties (Waikar, 2020).

The 2018 general elections heralded hopes for a 'New Malaysia' after a peaceful transition of power from BN to PH. PH involved DAP and PKR, two established parties, and Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah) and Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Bersatu), new parties splintered from PAS and UMNO, respectively. Simultaneously, BN was diminished because several parties departed the coalition, notably those in Sarawak forming a state-based coalition, Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) in 2018. However, PH faced internal and external existential threats. Besides incorporating BN defectors, PH had a disjointed voter block and frequent infighting among party leaders. PAS and UMNO, banded together as the new opposition in the Muafakat Nasional coalition, worked to solidify their Malay-Muslim base by questioning the importance of Malay-Muslims to PH (Ostwald, 2020).

These threats hastened the undoing of PH. Ultimately, Bersatu and 11 Members of Parliament from PKR left PH to form a new coalition with UMNO and PAS in March 2020, named Perikatan Nasional (PN). PN began administering the country as COVID-19 began spreading. New cooperation was minted during the pandemic, such as parties in Sabah forming a state-based coalition, Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS) in 2020. The PN-led government was short-lived because UMNO could not work with Bersatu, and the two jostled for supremacy. Ironically, UMNO and the parties in the previous government endorsed an UMNO-led government in August 2021.

The new government and PH signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in September 2021, promising bipartisan reforms and not holding elections before July 2022. As of June 2022, the MOU is upheld although other opposition parties are not always in favour of it. Until 2018, Malaysia had a consistent government coalition in BN and a few opposition coalitions (BA, PR, PH). After 2018, coalitions in government and opposition experience fragmentation and realignment, in response to shifting purposes and situations.

These political parties subscribe to a hegemonic understanding of the postcolonial Malaysian state, which is built on ethno-religious exclusivism and privileges (Hamayotsu, 2013). It embeds Malay-Muslim dominance in various aspects, and Malaysian political culture clearly manifests the institutionalisation of ethnicity and religion

(Ahmad Fauzi, 2018; Hamayotsu, 2013; Weiss, 2020; Zawawi, 2004). Malaysia inherited and has exercised a Westminster system of parliamentary democracy since independence in 1957. But its political culture is hybridised because the Constitution of Malaysia and norms of beliefs and practices entrench and perpetuate the primacy of the Bumiputeras (Malays and other natives), Islam and the Malay Monarchs.

Malay-Muslim dominance, often encapsulated as 3R (Race, Religion, Royalty), constitutes the basis of legitimacy to governance in Malaysia. 3R informs the consociational state, where power sharing has characterised politics since independence. It endorses Malay-Muslim dominance but tries to cater to socio-demographic cleavages, namely ethnic, linguistic, regional or religious. The consociational state has provided political stability, which facilitates economic growth (Abeyratne, 2008). The distributive impact of growth mitigated socio-demographic problems (Abeyratne, 2008), but slower growth after the 1998 economic crisis has meant their re-emergence along the parallel tracks of race and religion.

Although race has remained a permanent feature since the 1950s, religion has gained prominence since the 1980s (Ahmad Fauzi, 2018). The two are conflated because race is linked to religion in Malaysia. Indeed, to be Malay is to be Muslim, following the Constitution (Article 160). Political parties, particularly UMNO and PAS, engage in 'Islamising' their actions and decisions to convince their Malay-Muslim electorate (Zawawi, 2004). In addition, deferment and reference to royalty are conveniently employed in the pursuit of political power. Although Malaysia has a constitutional monarchy, the influence of royal institutions may permeate politics. Hence, 3R forms a nexus and is fundamental to politics. Its three components are intimately coupled, and the (perceived) advantage or disadvantage given to one can impact the other two.

The entrenchment of 3R bolsters ethnic and religious collective identities (Hamayotsu, 2013). It has normalised notions of ethno-religious exclusivism and privileges in politics. Although periodically questioned, from Singapore's 'Malaysian Malaysia' in the 1960s to civil society movements in the 2000s, political elites rarely consider reducing Malay-Muslim dominance (Hamayotsu, 2013). They have been defensive and incorporate non-elites in the defence of their power. 3R polarises Malaysians, creating an us-them division that is partisan or ethno-religious (Weiss, 2020).

For Anderson (2006, p. 7), a nation is an imagined community because despite any actual inequality and exploitation, a deep, horizontal comradeship is believed to exist. In Malaysia, the comradeship is constantly contested, and a political culture nurturing 3R has not helped cohesion among the various ethnic, linguistic, regional or religious groups. Malaysia has experienced four coalitions in government (Alliance, BN, PH, PN) from 1957 to 2022. Whatever the ruling coalition, their political discourse may (re) negotiate multiple concerns. Yet, 3R is always retained because it constitutes their basis of legitimacy to governance.

1.3 Researching Malaysian Political Discourse

In an overview of Discourse Studies, Huan and Guan (2020) observe political discourse being a relatively stable area of research from 1978 to 2018. Research is consistent perhaps because the texts produced in politics never cease, which provides a constant stream of data. It demonstrates the varied themes, topics, methods, frameworks and approaches in political discourse analysis. Research is dominated by Anglo-American scholars (Huan & Guan, 2020) or continental European scholars who moved to the United Kingdom (UK) or the United States of America (USA).

The articles and books on political discourse prove the preponderance of certain countries. While research about the USA used to dominate article publishing, research about Australia, China and the UK is now growing (Huan & Guan, 2020). The trend establishes the shift from unipolarity to multipolarity because several countries are inspiring the study of political discourse. Book publishing is heterogeneous, and research about several countries is available. Among these books, their research is centred on countries in Europe and North America (Bayley, 2004; Berrocal & Salamurović, 2019; Hatzidaki & Goutsos, 2017; Ilie, 2010; Lockhart, 2019; Šarić & Stanojević, 2019) although other countries in Africa (Egypt in Dunne, 2003), Asia (China in Cao et al., 2014; Li et al., 2020) and South America (Venezuela in Bolívar, 2018) have received some interest.

Research on Malaysian political discourse is grounded in Discourse Studies, notably Critical Discourse Studies because it provides useful concepts for a detailed and systematic analysis. These concepts are operationalised as part of frameworks developed from Anglophone material (Berrocal & Salamurović, 2019) but are now employed on Malaysian texts. Typical frameworks are Fairclough's dialectical relational approach, van Leeuwen's socio-semantic approach and Wodak's discourse historical approach. These frameworks are mobilised in their entirety, partly or even complemented by other concepts in Discourse Studies, or concepts in Cognitive Linguistics, Ethnomethodology, Pragmatics or Sociolinguistics (Angermuller, 2015). The eclectic mix gives research the ability to unearth language features and strategies contributing to the social production of meaning. Research performs a close analysis of texts through a manual or automated procedure. Although a manual procedure is favoured, an automated procedure using software (e.g. NVivo, WordSmith) is common.

We review research on Malaysian political discourse along Halliday's field, tenor and mode. Broadly put, field involves what is going on in context, tenor involves the role of interactants in context, and mode is about the role of text in context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 33). These contextual configurations guide an overview of research in the last two decades. While the majority is conducted on non-fiction texts, Jeniri (2005) and Zabidin (2010) reveal the presence of politics in novels, explaining how the political context may impact characters and scenes.

Regarding field, concerns of national importance are prominent. For Randour et al. (2020), studies on political discourse prefer themes on international relations, elections and justice. Research in Malaysia does consider elections and justice but

international relations are not a major focus. Studies about justice contemplate ethnic or economic development. During UMNO General Assemblies, Mahathir Mohamad argues for his leadership enhancing UMNO, Islam and the economy (Idris, 2006; Kamila, 2010), while Najib Razak solidifies UMNO and Malay identity (Rohaidah, 2016; Rohaidah et al., 2019).

Continuing the trend, Harshita et al., (2020) monitor how Ahmad Zahid Hamidi's speech acts change from 2017 to 2018, in relation to UMNO's position in power. Yoong (2019) identifies the conditions for orderly and disorderly conduct in Parliament during question time. Humour is perceived as disorderly conduct but certain conditions make it acceptable or unacceptable. Dayang Sariah et al. (2020) compare modality in Parliament during a budget speech debate. While the government prefers modals that motivate action, the opposition prefers modals that inform, reflecting a variance in power.

Economic scandals happened from the 1970s (Bumiputera Malaysia Finance Limited) to the 2000s (1MDB). Teh (2018) traces the enablers of these scandals but the discourse of these scandals is rarely analysed. Yoong (2021) is an exception, where the CEO of 1MDB reframes financial abnormalities as common practices. Economic crises happen in almost each decade but the financial crisis of 1998 was particularly bad. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad employs metaphors to conceptualise the crisis. His metaphors of colonisation and the military provoke nationalism and shift blame to personified currency manipulators (Kelly, 2001).

The government has formulated programmes for economic development. Prime Minister Najib Razak created several programmes, such as the National Transformation Programme (NTP), Government Transformation Programme (GTP) and Economic Transformation Programme (ETP). Dzulkifli (2016) queries the convergence between beliefs and practices. The ETP was crucial for improving income, and Rajandran (2013) studies speeches about the ETP. Najib Razak employs metaphors of journey, vehicle and plant, which posit economic advantages but naturalise a binary relationship between the government and citizens. Budget speeches set the direction for economic development. Rajandran's (2019) study explains how BN portrays economic competence in these speeches. The government claims to be financially solvent and can introduce desirable initiatives for citizens of several ethnicities and regions, notably Bumiputeras, Sabah and Sarawak. It entails a government-citizen binary because the government is the source of initiatives and citizens are the target of initiatives.

Elections are a popular field of study. Idris (2009) examines BN's 2004 manifesto, through which BN's positive agency is emphasised. Savaranamuttu et al. (2015) and Lim et al. (2018) deliberate the 2013 and 2018 general elections, respectively, where the consociational model of power sharing among ethnic and regional political parties continues to shape electoral results. Because these parties utilise the media to influence voter perception, Gomez, Mustafa and Lee (2018) unpack how a mix of cronyism and regulation mould a mainstream media favouring BN.

Among the studies on media is Siti Nurnadilla (2020), who notes a clear division between the Malay-Muslim 'us' and non-Malay/non-Muslim 'them' in mainstream

Malay language newspapers. The politics of fear amplifies and sensationalises insecurities, which justifies voting for BN in the 2013 general elections. Leong (2019), Lim (2017) and Tapsell (2018) analyse digital media. Leong (2019) identifies the tactics of election advertising in blogs, email, social media sites, Usenet groups and websites during the 2008, 2013 and 2018 general elections. The Internet enables the government, opposition and their respective supporters to engage in informing the public although abuse is noted, as propaganda and fake news abound. Lim (2017) studies the Bersih gatherings for clean and fair elections. The discourse of participants' online activism shows how protests are conceived. Tapsell (2018) recognises the ability of social media sites, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp. Their rampant use spread information about the corruption and nepotism of Prime Minister Najib Razak.

Regarding tenor, the individuals/institutions producing the discourse are almost always elites. For Randour et al. (2020), the elites in political discourse are Western and are members of the executive (President, Prime Minister, Minister), aspirants for the executive or political party leaders. Research in Malaysia reflects the trend because the Prime Minister is often selected, as he is the dominant member of the executive and President of UMNO and BN. The discourse of its President has garnered substantial research, as in Idris (2006), Harshita et al. (2020), Kamila (2010), Rohaidah (2016) and Rohaidah et al. (2019). Others, like Kelly (2001) and Rajandran (2013, 2019), consider the Prime Minister, in his capacity to decide on economics, which impacts the whole country. Idris (2009) transcends the individual and selects the party, BN.

The studies above examine the discourse of UMNO or BN because its President (simultaneously Prime Minister) is a metonymic spokesperson, speaking on behalf of the party, coalition or government, and represents its views. Research has analysed how the government and opposition handle a concern of national importance (Dayang Sariah et al., 2020; Yoong, 2019). Speakers with political positions are studied because their discourse conveys authority about elections and justice. Other research selects citizens, who occupy a privileged position, such as the CEO of IMDB (Yoong, 2021), journalists (Siti Nurnadilla, 2020) or ordinary citizens who are part of the public (Leong, 2019; Lim, 2017; Tapsell, 2018).

Regarding mode, spoken texts dominate research, as with most research on political discourse (Randour et al., 2020). A closed set of spoken texts are analysed, covering parliament speeches (Dayang Sariah et al., 2020; Yoong, 2019), political party President speeches (Harshita et al., 2020; Idris, 2006; Kamila, 2010; Rohaidah, 2016; Rohaidah et al., 2019), Prime Minister speeches (Rajandran, 2013, 2019) and radio interviews (Yoong, 2021). Although spoken, these texts are not ephemeral because print and digital media distribute their transcription across space and time. Other research analyses spoken texts reported in the media (Kelly, 2001). Written texts are analysed, as in election manifestos (Idris, 2009), newspapers (Siti Nurnadilla, 2020) and posts on social media sites (Leong, 2019; Lim, 2017; Tapsell, 2018). These studies analyse language but Idris (2009) acknowledges the importance of image in election manifestos.

Research on Malaysian political discourse tends to analyse the oral texts of political elites on elections and justice. The analysis shows how government or opposition actors shape the representation and evaluation of national concerns, which discloses certain ideologies. Ideology is important in political discourse because discourse enables ideological socialisation (Eagleton, 2007; van Dijk, 1998). A discourse may promote a particular ideology, reiterating the government's positive agency to improve the lives of people in Malaysia. While discourse is not irredeemably ideological (Fairclough, 1992, p. 91), the use of discourse in a contextual configuration of field, tenor and mode conveys an ideological stance.

Considerable research exists on political discourse but Malaysia is understudied in comparison with other countries (Huan & Guan, 2020). *Discursive Approaches to Politics in Malaysia: Legitimising Governance* is a novel contribution because it features research from Malaysia. Particularly, contemporary developments from 2008 to 2020 are selected as this period captures a shift in politics, from BN authoritarianism to fragmentation and realignment among parties. The shift influenced how political discourse reflects national concerns. These concerns experience (de)legitimation because political actors are competing for symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1994). Legitimation being their principal discourse goal (Cap, 2008, p. 39), a linguistic analysis unearths the language features and strategies that facilitate (de)legitimation (van Leeuwen, 2008). The analysis is grounded in Discourse Studies. Its concepts are operationalised in various texts but these are often in the languages of Europe. This volume reiterates their suitability to decipher spoken, print and digital texts and further demonstrates their suitability on Malay, Mandarin and Tamil, besides English.

Concretely, this edited volume is centred on political discourse in Malaysia from 2008 to 2020 in texts in the major languages of the country. The spatiotemporal context enhances existing literature on political discourse. While political discourse across contexts has shared traits, in Malaysia, it must also engage 3R (Race, Religion, Royalty) because it constitutes the basis of legitimacy to governance. 3R has become a fundamental component of political discourse, where it makes an explicit or implicit appearance in language, regulating what should or should not be said. This appearance helps or hinders symbolic power for established and newcomer actors (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 164). Their legitimation is responsive to purposes and situations in Malaysia, making legitimation obviously context-sensitive and certainly *realpolitik*. Hence, the analysis in the chapters may shape the dialogue about legitimation in Linguistics and develop new perspectives.

Discursive Approaches to Politics in Malaysia: Legitimising Governance improves our understanding of contemporary Malaysian political discourse. It presents a broad range of studies using various texts and languages, revealing the discursive aspects of politics. This volume benefits people investigating political discourse, either in Malaysia or other countries. It is useful to Linguistics, notably Discourse Studies because several theoretical and methodological approaches are demonstrated. This volume is also of interest to Asian Studies, Communication Studies, Media Studies and Politics and International Relations, exhibiting the ability and potential of linguistic analyses in politics. It could pique the curiosity of the

general citizenry, who can comprehend how language influences their perception of national concerns. Therefore, this volume provides focused reading for anyone exploring discursive approaches in a developing Asian country.

1.4 Overview of this Volume

Discursive Approaches to Politics in Malaysia: Legitimising Governance brings together relevant research in a coherent volume. It examines how language serves to (de) legitimise governance and its subsequent policies and activities in Malaysia. This volume demonstrates a variety of texts. First, it analyses spoken, print and digital texts. Second, it exemplifies texts in English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil, the major languages of the country. Third, it deploys several theoretical and methodological approaches. These texts drive the discourse-centred research in the subsequent chapters. These chapters are ‘language oriented’ (Angermuller, 2015), and their depth of linguistic analyses is determined by the specific research questions posed and the theory and method selected (Berrocal & Salamurović, 2019). Their analyses disclose how texts convey particular meanings in the Malaysian political context, placing them clearly in the ambit of Discourse Studies (Trappes-Lomax, 2004).

Rajandran and Lee (this Chapter) provide contextualisation and an overview of research and the chapters in this volume. Ahmad Fauzi and Noorulhafidzah (Chap. 2) expand the contextualisation, relating the contours of race, religion and royalty in Malaysian political culture. Rajandran (Chap. 3) investigates BN budget speeches in Malay from 2010 to 2018. Performing an intertextual analysis, the presence of economic, political and religious voices facilitates moralisation and authorisation. The voices discursively legitimise actions and decisions for the economy, which perpetuate government economic agency, making BN seems indispensable to development. Farrah Diebaa and Su’ad (Chap. 4) select BN budget speeches in Malay from 2010 to 2018 and PH budget speeches from 2019 to 2020. A conceptual metaphor analysis reveals favoured vocational roles, and BN and PH perceive their government as general/soldier and doctor. These roles conceive a hero-like authoritative government, practising their expertise for the benefit of the country. Perumal, Govaichelvan, Sinaiyah, Ramalingam and Maruthai (Chap. 5) establish the reactions to the budget allocation of Tamil schools by two Indian Malaysian politicians in interviews in Tamil. The allocation is not favourably received, and authorisation, rationalisation and moralisation are employed to delegitimise it. Representing DAP and MIC, the politicians display their capability in protecting the rights of Indian Malaysians.

Kow and Khoo (Chap. 6) describe the media, reviewing media freedom and reforms. While media freedom has experienced marginal improvements, media reforms are laborious. PH created the Malaysian Media Council (MMC), and the MMC has tried to justify its function during the PH and PN governments. Four barriers confront the MMC and its agenda of media reforms, namely the electoral authoritarian regime, censorship, proprietorship and tension between the MMC and

media reformists. Fernandez, Yang and Rajaratnam (Chap. 7) reveal the framing of the Tanjung Piai by-election in newspapers of different languages—English (*Malaysiakini*, *The Star*), Malay (*Harian Metro*) and Mandarin (*Sin Chew Daily*). While *Malaysiakini*, *The Star* and *Sin Chew Daily* are critical of PH, *Harian Metro* is neutral to PH. *Malaysiakini* and *Harian Metro* quote more PH voices but *The Star* and *Sin Chew Daily* quote more BN voices. The newspapers appear partisan, to cater to political ownership and ethnic readership.

Siti Nurnadilla (Chap. 8) inspects editorials and columns on the 13th and 14th general elections in two Malay language newspapers, *Berita Harian* and *Utusan Malaysia*. Applying the discourse historical approach, arguments create a binary of voting for the known (BN) and voting for the unknown (PR/PH). The binary frames the politics of fear (Wodak, 2021) because the newspapers argue for BN protecting and PR/PH jeopardising Malay-Muslims. Ang and Kock (Chap. 9) study articles on the International Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) in two English language newspapers, *New Straits Times* and *The Star*. Applying the dialectical relational approach, PAS, UMNO and Malay/Muslim organisations are reported to oppose ICERD. Those opposing it frame the politics of fear (Wodak, 2021) in case Malay-Muslim rights are eroded. Yoong (Chap. 10) explores English language press releases by women's rights organisations about women's employment, health and safety. The organisations employ authorisation, rationalisation, nation-building and victimhood to underscore the importance of women's rights. The rights appear instrumental but serve the pursuit of a feminist national identity.

Siti Aisha and Mohd Faizal (Chap. 11) analyse articles on the 2021 budget in an English language newspaper online, *The Star*. Performing a corpus-assisted discourse analysis, the budget revolves around COVID-19, economy and government. COVID-19 impacts the economy, and government spending to mitigate it creates an expansionary budget although the expansion spurs a deficit. Lee (Chap. 12) explores the COVID-19 pandemic on Twitter. Tweets in English and Malay bearing the hashtag *KitaJagaKita* are gathered into themes and are analysed for legitimisation strategies. The themes are utilised distinctly because those supporting the PN government display authorisation, moralisation and altruism but those not supporting PN display moralisation and rationalisation, to (de) legitimise the handling of COVID-19. Lim and Yoong (Chap. 13) study the 1MDB scandal in *The Sarawak Report*. A conceptual metaphor analysis of the posts in English reveals several metaphors to describe the culprits, to simplify money laundering and to intensify corruption. These metaphors clarify the opaque operations of 1MDB, which makes the scandal comprehensible while emphasising its scale and depth.

1.5 Future Directions

This volume is a snapshot of politics in Malaysia from 2008 to 2020. As such, it captures research on BN, PH and PN. The fragmentation and realignment of

coalitions have become common but the discourse of parties and politicians should continue to be explored in future research. It enriches the literature and can trace (dis)continuities in Malaysian political discourse. A starting point for future research could be a bibliometric study, as pursued by Huan and Guan (2020) and Randour et al. (2020), but tailored to Malaysia. It can discover gaps in research and can direct research to certain areas of political discourse.

Political discourse is articulated in various languages but research disproportionately selects texts in English and Malay. English has received more interest than Malay perhaps because those in Discourse Studies are often trained in English Linguistics. While English and Malay are the two prominent languages in Malaysia, other languages remain actively utilised. These languages (e.g. Iban, Kadazan, Mandarin, Tamil, Aslian languages) voice political discourse, and their texts must be examined. It better reflects socio-demographic reality and captures the aspirations of multiple groups.

Existing research is mostly centred on the discourse of elites, articulated as oral monological speeches. Consequently, the discourse produced by non-elite individuals/organisations in other mediums is marginalised. Their discourse should be investigated as it participates in the representation and evaluation of concerns facing Malaysia. Moreover, research can compare the discourse of elites and non-elites. It could track the distribution and circulation of frames and arguments. The tracking permits an analysis of similarities and dissimilarities between elite and non-elite discourse, and the recontextualisation of frames and arguments across space and time.

The comparative focus can be extended to other countries and political systems. A comparison between Malaysia and Singapore would be desirable, considering their similar ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity, besides intertwining geography and history. Their divergent post-independence history may divulge the extent of the influence of shared traits on political discourse. Similarly, a comparison among Commonwealth countries is plausible because these countries inherited Britain's Westminster system of parliamentary democracy. It ascertains how postcolonial structures influence political discourse, despite divergent socio-demographic factors.

Research can incorporate software to generate patterns, as it easily unearths (in) consistencies in discourse. But an automated analysis should not be deployed solely to impart a veneer of technological advancement. Instead, its use should be principled and complement a manual analysis. Their synergies may enhance the study of political discourse. Indeed, no linguistic analysis is definitive or exhaustive because multiple interpretations may exist. The interpretations can be substantiated if research procures feedback from the actual producers and consumers of texts using experiments, interviews, observations or surveys.

Moreover, research should not always be fixated on language because a monomodal study would not capture the reality of political discourse, while a multimodal study recognises language in conjunction with other modes. Multimodal texts are typical, where spoken language is utilised with body language, facial expression and gesture, and written language is utilised with layout, colour and image (charts, icons, pictures). Fortunately, the popularity of Multimodal (Critical)

Discourse Studies (Ledin & Machin, 2018) has meant the incorporation of other modes in analysis. Identifying the ‘labour’ of multiple modes can explain political discourse wholistically.

Ultimately, the study of political discourse in Malaysia and other countries should extend beyond academic exercise and help to reduce or remove exploitation, inequality and oppression in society (Giddens, 1991). The aim is regularly articulated but hardly realised. Academia has popularised the study of political discourse but for the study to participate in Giddens’ (1991) ‘emancipatory politics’, we need to engage with people beyond academia. Such engagement can manifest in numerous ways but an understanding of discourse is indispensable to bring about improvements in the real world.

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