

Chapter 11

Exploring Malaysia's 2021 Budget through Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies: (De)legitimation in Online News



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Abstract This chapter examines how a particular social event, Malaysia's 2021 budget is reported in *The Star Online*. It aims to analyse the discourse surrounding the budget through use of corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS). Using corpus linguistic techniques, a specialised corpus is firstly compiled of the phrase 'Budget 2021' in *The Star Online* from one month before and after Parliament passed the budget on 26 November 2020. A total of 889 articles ranging from a number of sections (e.g. Nation, Letters, and Business) were identified from the website that resulted in 339,651 words. Standard corpus methods were employed namely, the investigation of frequency lists, collocational patterns as well as examining the corpus in more detail via concordance. Findings from the Budget 2021 corpus show patterns of how language is used to describe, explain as well as oppose a political issue like the national budget, which may influence how governance achieves legitimacy in the eyes of the public. It also reveals how discursive meanings can be viewed in a more systematic way.

Keywords Economy · Budget · Corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) · Corpus linguistics · Online news

11.1 Political Discourse of Digital Texts

Investigating 'discourse' is usually discussed in terms of the structural point of view of institutions and power within a particular social context. As Nordquist notes:

[d]iscourse studies look at the form and function of language in conversation beyond its small grammatical pieces such as phonemes and morphemes. This field of study, which Dutch linguist Teun van Dijk is largely responsible for developing, is interested in how larger units of language—including lexemes, syntax, and context—contribute meaning to conversations (27 August 2020).

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Within the specific political context of a discourse, there are mainly two types as described by Ädel (2010): the first is to focus on the political genre as the main criterion—by ‘political discourse’ here, any forms of communication or speech event, which takes place in a political context, and/or involving political agents. Other definitions of what ‘political discourse’ may mean could either be viewed from a broader scope (referring to any discourse on a topic which is political) or from an extended scope; the idea that power and control are (often or always) enacted through discourse, which makes it possible to consider any discourse as ‘political’. In the present chapter, we shall use the latter view, investigating how a political topic is discussed in an online social setting as a form of analysing ‘political discourse’ using corpus techniques. More specifically, the chapter sets out to investigate how talk about Malaysia’s 2021 Budget in a selected online news portal can be carried out via a corpus approach, revealing discursive tendencies that shape the forms of journalism. In addition, findings from this chapter emphasises on instances of (de)legitimation as a result of intertextual features in the news.

As Ädel further points out, “[p]olitical discourse is frequently represented in corpora, in part because many political genres are not only public but also widely publicised, which makes them more easily accessible than many other types of discourse” (2020, p. 592). Echoing from this, digital texts that demonstrate political discourse are therefore rich in meaning as readers now transition to obtaining news and information online. Although digital texts comprise a vast repository of different genres and text-type, the present chapter focuses on online written texts or articles systematically chosen (via the corpus linguistic approach) for political discourse in context.

11.2 Online News and Corpus Discourse Studies

Many academics have written about the democratising impact of digital media practises regarding news reporting and journalism. Hartley (2008) argues that the convergence of digital media and news contributes to a community of citizen journalists (McNair, 2006; Terry, 2009). This is attributed to the growth in user-generated content that decentralises and distributes the ability of netizens to produce content on their own (Bruns, 2008). This participatory media society creates an atmosphere in which media producers and users are increasingly interested in engaging with each other, where consumers are becoming increasingly stronger in relation to media producers (Jenkins, 2006). This provides people a more collective voice; the Internet has now broadened the conventional limits of debate, whilst also offering a range of resources for immersive, asynchronous, and multi-directional modes of discussion that could lead to more comprehensive dialogue on public concerns (Zamith & Lewis, 2014).

McNair (2006) suggests that since the advent of digital media and the Internet, journalism has seen a rise in democracy and transparency in the public sphere. This is mainly because opportunities to produce and distribute media have become more accessible to a wider range of people and in turn, this puts more critical scrutiny of

political elites and the way governance is presented. Dahlgren and Sparks (2005) also assert the positive contribution of the Internet in facilitating democratic discourse and civic culture to the public that promotes civic engagement and interaction (Papacharissi, 2008). The result of this is the break-up of a singular, integrated public sphere into multiple, heterogeneous communicative forums and practises (Terry, 2009).

Online discourse is not only seen as a platform for democratising the way in which news were reported but is also felt like a means to express feelings or responses to everyday scenarios in the country. Apart from the accessibility, writers are said to contribute to the multiple viewpoints found in the readership, where both writer/readers views and voices are incorporated into the journalistic work (Collins & Nerlich, 2015). News reporting can be seen from different angles, either through the lens of the professional or the citizen journalist, and this new form of journalism encourages or stimulates for more “conversations” rather than receiving information from a single authoritative source (Collins & Nerlich, 2015).

One way to investigate political discourse is through corpus-assisted discourse studies, also known as CADS. This, according to Partington (2018: p. 2) is “a field of study in its own right” as more discourse studies have incorporated the use of corpora over the years (Partington et al., 2013: p. 10). Unsurprisingly so, studies that adopt CADS are often productive in that they are never exclusive nor intended to replace other approaches but “frequently marry well with, provide sustenance to, blend into and lead out of other types of approaches, and ways of collecting data [...], which is why CADS is both particularly interdisciplinary and can be adopted in and adapted to so many other fields of study” (Partington, 2018: p. 2). He further argues that research using corpus linguistics and CADS “decontextualises in order to recontextualise and reconstruct the object of study, the discourse type under investigation” (2018: p. 4), which allows researchers to analyse language use at different levels of abstraction via machine interventions (e.g. corpus linguistic techniques and tools) that support the overall intuitive process.

Discourse as defined by Partington (2018) is “language in use as a vehicle of communication, as language doing things, as speakers and writers attempting to influence the beliefs and actions of their interlocutors using language” (p. 2) and some well-known corpus-based or CADS type of studies include the representations of Islam in the British media (Baker et al., 2013), the portrait of immigrants in the British and Italian press (Taylor, 2014), and media reporting surrounding the London Olympics 2012 (Jaworska, 2016). Typically, these studies begin with a quantitative analysis of a statistical output of some sort, followed by a close reading of concordance lines to investigate contextualised language use in more detail. As noted in Jaworska (2016: p. 9), “The CADS approach utilises the quantitative tools offered by corpus linguistics, but it extends the methodological paradigm by integrating techniques commonly associated with qualitative discourse analysis in order to understand the discourse in question and its context as much as possible”. In addition, comparison is often made between texts within two separate time frames (usually before and after a particular event) so as to evaluate the impact of certain events and how they are discursively constructed.

Whilst Rajandran (Chap. 3) and Farrah Diebaa and Su'ad (Chap. 4) study budget speeches, this chapter follows Perumal, Govaichelvan, Sinayah, Ramalingam, and Maruthai (Chap. 5) in studying media reporting of the 2021 Malaysian Budget. More specifically, it provides a snapshot of how *The Star Online* reports about the budget via an empirical (corpus linguistic techniques), and in-depth analysis, grounded in CADS.

11.3 The 2021 Malaysian Budget

The 2021 Malaysian national budget was tabled in Parliament on 6 November 2020. It was regarded as the largest budget in the country's history with an increase of RM7.8 billion in expenditure (from RM314.7 billion in 2020 to RM322.5 billion in 2021). Named "Resilient as One, Together We Triumph", the allocation of the budget was seen as contentious as it occurred during a global pandemic as well as a political crisis in the country (Tan, 2020a, 2020b).

At the time when the budget was tabled, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin was facing political uncertainty as the Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim claimed that he managed to garner enough support from parliamentarians to topple the Perikatan Nasional (PN) government. There was, therefore, a high political stake for the Finance Minister Tengku Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz to table a strong and effective budget that met everyone's needs. Most importantly for the government, the budget should be able to get the support of the Members of Parliament (MPs), given the government's slim parliamentary majority. To ensure that the MPs supported the budget, the Opposition bloc was consulted in the run-up to the budget presentation. The finance minister was reported to have made additional allocations based on feedback from both sides of the aisle, mostly with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The main highlights of the budget included the increase of the COVID-19 fund allocation from RM20 billion to RM65 billion. The main purpose was to fund aid packages and benefits for frontliners as well as to procure vaccines (Tan & Yusuf, 2020). The second important measure of the 2021 Budget was to protect livelihood due to the loss of jobs as a result of the pandemic and underemployment. This included various approaches such as RM6.5 billion for a cash aid programme, RM28 billion for subsidies, aid and incentives, and RM1.5 billion to extend wage subsidy programmes. The budget also announced a targeted EPF Account 1 withdrawal facility of RM500 per month, up to RM6,000 for 12 months, with total withdrawal from EPF Account 1 amounting to RM4 billion (Ministry of Finance, n.d.). To sustain economic recovery, the 2021 Budget also provided relief for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) grappling with survival and recovery during the pandemic. This included another set of allocation ranging from RM510 million to finance SMEs and micro-SMEs, RM800 million through capacity-building programme and RM95 million for special micro-credit fund to empower women entrepreneurs.

On 26 November 2020, Parliament declared that the 2021 Budget passed with a voice vote (Anand, 2020; Lee & Goh, 2020). Several refinements were made taking

into account viewpoints from various parties. These include an increase of withdrawal limits of the Employees Provident Fund (EPF), an auto-approval mechanism for those in the B40 group as well as SMEs, rebranding of the government's Special Affairs Department (JASA) to become the Community Communications Department (J-KOM) to justify the budget allocated at RM85.5 million and extending a one-off payment to frontliners battling COVID-19 (Yusuf, 2020; Palanasamy, 2020).

The 2021 Budget passed its third reading in the Lower House with a division vote on 15 December 2020 (The Edge Market, 2020). The ratification of the 2021 Budget was seen as a victory for Muhyiddin Yassin who returned with renewed doubts regarding his majority in the week preceding the final budget vote (Shukry, 2020). The Prime Minister, however, still faced strong opposition from Anwar Ibrahim who claimed to secure the backing of several government MPs from UMNO to undo Muhyiddin's majority. His predecessor, Mahathir Mohamad, also announced that he was teaming up with a senior government MPs to form a government (Shukry, 2020), and this too seemed to create a sense of uneasiness. Amongst speculations surrounding the news were the rejection of the bill and involvement of a declaration of state emergency should Parliament not be able to reach a consensus. One of the reasons for this disagreement between parties can be traced to reporting on social media about proposals (mainly from the Opposition) that were not met and other criticisms of the budget, such as unrealistic projected earnings for 2021 and a dissolved BN department that was proposed to be given RM85 million (Ng, 2020).

Digital texts including online news that are publicly and widely publicised on the web provide a wealth of data for corpus linguists. More specifically, we aim to analyse talk about the Malaysian 2021 Budget in a popular national English online news portal, *The Star Online*. According to Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2020, “[o]nline and social media remain the predominant sources of news for our online sample of Malaysian news users” (p. 98). *The Star Online* in particular was chosen because of its wide readability in the country. Using corpus linguistics techniques, a specialised corpus was firstly compiled of articles from *The Star Online* based on the topic (Budget 2021) as a search phrase. These include the various sections like Nation, Business News, and so on that also appeared as a result of the search between a specified timeline of when the bill was tabled and passed in Parliament.

11.4 Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS)

This chapter incorporates corpus techniques in a study of Budget 2021 as a political topic. We follow Partington's (2010) description of corpus study of political language that examines texts on political issues (like the budget), emanating from main sites of public experience of political issues, in our case, *The Star Online*. The study starts with a simple description of the list of words that may tell us how the topic of interest is talked about in the corpus. Whilst it may be argued that identification of keywords, i.e. words that are “statistically significantly more frequent” (Baker et al., 2013, p. 27) in one corpus than in another would be the typical starting point of a corpus study, in this

chapter, it was not the intention to compare two corpora. Rather, it is possible to create a specialised corpus and investigate the use of language via online corpus analysis tools like Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2014). Following this, further analysis is carried out using salient keywords identified as the starting point for qualitative analysis in CADS, as “corpus linguistics (CL) techniques provide a ‘map’ of the corpus, pinpointing areas of interest for a subsequent close analysis” (Baker et al. 2008, p. 284). In other words, by adopting the CADS approach, political discourse of online news surrounding the budget is investigated using corpus linguistic techniques to demonstrate how “[l]arge collections of tokens of a discourse type would seem to be a valid, appropriate, and rigorous way of reflecting the intertextuality of political discourses” (Partington, 2013, p. 4).

11.5 Corpus Building

As mentioned earlier, Budget 2021 was tabled in the Malaysian Parliament by the Finance Minister on 6 November 2020. Given this, it is useful to collect data four weeks prior to this event (6 October 2020) as well as another four weeks after the bill was tabled (6 December 2020) in order to potentially see differences in the way the budget was talked about leading up to the decision of passing the bill on 15 December 2020. The decision to compile a specialised corpus was found to be more suitable for this type of study as research has shown that there is equal wealth in examining smaller sized corpora for a more specific/focussed discourse (Flowerdew, 2004; Lee, 2008). A specialised corpus provides a snapshot of the language used to describe a particular occurrence in time and since findings have been sufficient for ample discussions, the duration for which the corpus was built was considered reasonable.

It should be noted that a full comparison of newspapers was not the aim of this study, for reasons of focus as much as space, instead we focussed on *The Star Online* as a popular and widely read mainstream online English newspaper in Malaysia, with 56% of online readers trusting the brand (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2020). In this study, the specific search term ‘Budget 2021’ was keyed in on the website (www.thestar.com.my) that generated 889 related articles (ranging from those under sections like Nation, Letters, Business and so on) acting as a starting point in which the phrase was found. This amounted to 339,651 words to be analysed and in turn, enabled findings to be mostly specialised or discourse specific as to how Budget 2021 was described and discussed in *The Star Online*.

The first part of corpus analysis is quantitative in nature where statistical measures are used to determine salient words/phrases as the starting point of analysis whereas subsequent steps require qualitative analyses. This is a typical integration quality of CADS that “requires constant oscillation between quantitative and qualitative viewpoints, moving back and forth between computer-based discovery procedures and traditional, human hermeneutics” (Mautner, 2019, p. 8). Table 11.1 shows a list of frequent words found in the corpus. The statistical measure employed to determine

the significance of difference is Average Reduced Frequency where ARF “is a variant on a frequency list that ‘discounts’ multiple occurrences of a word that occur close to each other, e.g. in the same document”, available on Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2014). This enables us to consider the frequency of words in relation to the word's distribution in the corpus that may otherwise be misleading on simple frequency of occurrence alone (Tranchese, 2019). In other words, this meant that the words are not only frequent, but they are distributed quite evenly across texts.

Table 11.1 compares the two different measures when counting for frequent words in a corpus (words in red are those not found in the corresponding frequency measure). For ease of readability, Table 11.1 shows first 30 and last 30 in the rank of 100 top frequent words according to absolute frequency and ARF.¹ Since there is no cut-off point for using ARF and all words with an ARF score close to their absolute frequencies should be analysed, only the top 100 keywords (as identified in descending order by ARF scores) were considered following Tranchese (2019, p. 7).

These words were then categorised into semantic macro-categories, as shown in Table 11.2 that may identify the topics that dominated the discussion of Budget 2021 in the corpus using the free UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS) English semantic tagger available online. This web-based semantic tagger developed by Rayson (2002) is used to show semantic fields of words that are generated automatically online, which are then referenced following the USAS category system (Archer et al., 2002) to avoid risk of inconsistencies and bias. However, the list of semantically tagged words were manually inspected to ascertain more meaningful associations based on contextual information (for example, ‘will’ was labelled as a word depicting volition or relating to law and order by the software but is contextually grouped as showing effort/resolution in the case of ‘political will’). Other more generic terms (often grammatical) like ‘has/have’ were categorised under grammatical words. In short, despite the automatic tagging of top 100 frequently distributed words, they were also (partially) manually categorised to meet the context of the Budget 2021 corpus.

Grouping the wordlist (based on ARF measures) into semantic categories was the first step for analysis and it provided a sense of the context on how the budget was viewed in terms of dominant themes. Table 11.2 presents macro-categorisations of the top 100 words³ in the corpus, using the online free USAS semantic tagger. However, as mentioned earlier, certain words had to be reclassified upon realising the more suitable meaning that would be represented in the context of the corpus.

Upon first inspection, Table 11.2 shows that salient words in the corpus are mainly grouped as grammatical words and this is not unusual as most English texts display more functional words than lexical ones. Categories of ‘Movement, location, travel, and transport’ and ‘Numbers and measurement’ are equally striking in that despite their function as prepositions, suggest that the Budget 2021 corpus involves a lot of talk about quantities (e.g. *some profit-taking activity, All MPs should support Budget 2021*) and location/direction (e.g. *exemption from July 1 to Dec 31 for this year, incentives under the campaign*). This is not surprising as the articles collected were written during the time of tabling the budget and it could be argued that financial issues (depicted by words ‘budget’, ‘economy’ and ‘economic’ in the ‘Money and

Table 11.1 Top 100 frequent words in absolute frequency compared with ARF scores

No.	Word	Absolute Freq.	No.	Word	ARF	No.	Word	Absolute Freq.	No.	Word	ARF
1	The	25,017	1	The	17,035.30	71	Should	632	71	Economic	315.3
2	To	12,690	2	To	8285.40	72	Year	621	72	Should	309.7
3	And	8658	3	And	5753.90	73	But	620	73	Such	304.8
4	Of	8367	4	Of	5386.70	74	They	596	74	Year	304.5
5	In	6748	5	In	4314.70	75	I	593	75	They	296.8
6	For	5399	6	For	3380.90	76	Economy	576	76	When	292.5
7	A	4957	7	A	3009.60	77	If	570	77	Economy	288.1
8	Is	4119	8	Is	2553	78	People	550	78	If	280.7
9	Said	3870	9	Said	2374.60	79	Tax	550	79	Seri	278.4
10	That	3650	10	On	2293.20	80	Allocation	549	80	During	277.1
11	On	3595	11	That	2183	81	State	544	81	People	273.2
12	Be	2901	12	Be	1707.90	82	Support	534	82	Added	269.5
13	As	2761	13	As	1551.70	83	Such	518	83	Support	255.9
14	He	2616	14	Budget	1400.60	84	Seri	516	84	Related	253.9
15	Budget	2516	15	He	1370.60	85	Nov	484	85	Time	252.3
16	Will	2056	16	With	1166.60	86	When	481	86	While	249.1
17	It	2011	17	It	1151.40	87	Mps	480	87	Other	246.8
18	With	1914	18	Will	1136.20	88	During	480	88	Nov	245.6
19	Was	1867	19	By	1026.80	89	Help	475	89	I	241.8
20	Government	1849	20	Government	1014.30	90	Added	469	90	Only	239.8
21	By	1704	21	Was	1011.80	91	Parliament	458	91	Well	235.4

(continued)

Table 11.1 (continued)

No.	Word	Absolute Freq.	No.	Word	ARF	No.	Word	Absolute Freq.	No.	Word	ARF
22	This	1672	22	This	989.1	92	Time	454	92	Help	235
23	From	1671	23	From	969.2	93	Could	445	93	Could	234.8
24	Are	1664	24	Are	928.2	94	Only	435	94	Allocation	230.2
25	Also	1492	25	Also	889.4	95	While	432	95	Need	221.6
26	Not	1452	26	Our	822.4	96	His	430	96	After	219.1
27	At	1403	27	Out	804	97	Development	428	97	Some	216.7
28	Enjoy	1396	28	At	790.4	98	Business	422	98	So	212.9
29	We	1321	29	Not	769.1	99	Other	419	99	Into	211.1
30	Would	1241	30	Enjoy	732.1	100	Need	416	100	Business	208.2

Table 11.2 Broad categorisation of highly frequent and well-dispersed words in the Budget 2021 corpus

Category	Description	Examples
<i>Names & Grammatical words</i>	Closed class words such as prepositions and proper nouns	The, to, and, of, for, a, on, that, is, be, as, with, by, was, from, are, at, has, have, which, an, or, had, been, were, such, but, when, during, while, after, so, into
	Negative	Not
	Conditional	If
	Pronouns, Personal/Proper names	He, it, our, you, their, we, its, they, I, Datuk, Malaysia, Seri
	Discourse markers	Well ²
<i>General & Abstract terms</i>	Affect: cause/connected	Related
	Affect: modify, change	Up, added
	Definite (+ modals)—abstract terms of modality (possibility, necessity, certainty, etc.)	Would, should, could
	Getting and giving; possession (relating to allocating/relinquishing/acquiring/receiving, etc.)	Allocation
	Degree: boosters—intensifiers that amplify to a high degree (but not the upper extreme)	More
	Exclusivisers/particularisers—focussing subjuncts that draw attention to/focus upon X	Only
	General comparative terms	Other
<i>Body & individual</i>	Health and disease	COVID-19, pandemic
<i>Government & the public domain</i>	Government (terms relating to government and governmental activities)	Government, minister
<i>Linguistic actions, states & processes</i>	Communication in general; Speech acts (communicative—relating to spoken communication)	Said
<i>Psychological actions, states & processes</i>	Wanting, planning, choosing (volition)	Will
<i>Money & commerce in industry</i>	Terms relating to money generally (also relating to cost/worth/value)	Budget
	Terms relating to business generally (also relating to cost/worth/value)	Economy, economic
<i>Numbers & measurement</i>	Quantities	Also, up, some
	Terms depicting maximal/ maximum quantities	All, added

(continued)

Table 11.2 (continued)

Category	Description	Examples
<i>Movement, location, travel & transport</i>	Location and direction—depicting position of/point of reference for X (deictic markers)	Out, this, there, under, in
<i>Social actions, states & processes</i>	Obligation and necessity	Need
	Helping/hindering	Support, help
<i>Time</i>	Relating to a specific period of time	Year, time

commerce in industry' category), which are more topical were as noticeable as words describing senses that are measurable as well as in motion. Other initial findings from Table 11.2 point to the discussion around the COVID-19 pandemic, words related to the government or governmental activities (*government, minister*), spoken communication depicted by the reporting verb 'said', sense of volition (*will*) as well as words referring to obligation (*need*), help (*support; help*) and time (*year; time*).

These general semantic categories show that frequent words in the corpus were mainly from categories of 'Movement', 'Numbers/Measurement', followed by 'Money'. These show that economic issues were prominent in the corpus as well as the description about them, signalled mostly by deictic markers, both temporal (e.g. *out; in*) and spatial (e.g. *some; all*) as well as prepositions like *under*. Whilst closed class words may not appear to show much, pronouns and proper nouns reveal interesting themes that may suggest the agentive role of certain people in the talk about Budget 2021 (e.g. *we, Datuk, Malaysia*). On the basis of this preliminary inspection of salient words in the corpus, it can be argued that recurring themes involving the health crisis, economy and the government are indeed part of what the budget was about. Although grouping salient words semantically may not show much definitive results, it was a helpful tool to highlight topics that were prominent in the corpus that can provide further insight into the next part of the research.

Since it would not have been possible to analyse all 100 top ranking words in the corpus, the key term 'budget' (ranked number 14 in the list) was used as our focal point in the next part of the study: collocation analysis. Through use of WordSketch, a tool available on SketchEngine, the word 'budget' was searched for its grammatical and collocational behaviour (i.e. collocates or co-occurring words) with a minimum frequency of five, using LogDice as the default statistic. This measure describes the typicality score indicating strength of association between the target/node word with its collocates—the higher the score, the stronger the collocation. Typical collocation of 'budget' is thus helpful to see how the word is used or referred to with other words in the corpus and then analysed in context through concordance analysis.

11.6 Collocation and Concordance Analysis

Having provided an overview of the main themes that characterised the Budget 2021 corpus, this section focuses on the collocation and concordance analysis of ‘budget’ more closely. Table 11.3 presents the most typical collocates of ‘budget’ using WordSketch. More specifically, the table shows how the budget is mostly referred to as a ‘budget deficit’. Although instances can also be found where the term ‘deficit budget’ was used, this only points to the same thing and therefore, adds to the number of how ‘budget’ typically occurs with ‘deficit’ (freq. = 24) in the corpus. As can be seen, ‘budget’ usually occurs as a subject (e.g. *budget is; budget has*), occurring with possessives (e.g. *next year’s budget; facilitate the Government’s Budget; its budget*); mostly collocating with verbs and adjectives (e.g. *pass the budget; approve a partial budget; an expansionary budget; the national budget*), as well as functioning as adjective (e.g. *budget deficit; his maiden budget speech; 2021 Budget debate*).

Generally, ‘budget deficit’ occurs when spending exceeds income. As Amadeo (2020) explains, deficit must be paid. If it is not, then it creates debt. This was found to be one of the concerns in the Budget 2021 corpus (lines 5, 13, and 22; see Fig. 11.1) and these may be argued as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (lines 6, 10, 17, 20, and 21), where reports show “economic fallout [were] inflicted by the pandemic crisis” (Lee Heng Guie, 2020). This echoed the findings of the semantic grouping of frequently distributed words, indicating how the budget is described in relation to health and disease, particularly from the impact of COVID-19. The last two occurrences in Fig. 11.1 refer to descriptions of the budget deficit in other countries like Indonesia (lines 23 and 24), which may seem to normalise the idea of a budget deficit. This first look at the occurrences of ‘budget’ and ‘deficit’ demonstrates the first instance of intertextuality at play where information about the budget deficit is shared in detail across different sections of *The Star Online*, namely, Nation, Metro News, and Business News. Arguably a specific term within the business discourse, ‘budget’ and ‘deficit’ can also be seen in close proximity in Nation and Metro News, reporting how the budget creates an excess of allocation compared to an increase in debt as reported in Business News.

Next, most verbs patterning strongly with ‘budget’ as object had meanings associated with either approving it (e.g. *pass, approve, support*) or rejecting it (e.g. *reject, oppose*). This exemplification of two differing views offers the reader both positive and negative viewpoints of the budget in the corpus. Although the budget eventually was passed (supported by a majority vote in Parliament), it was found that there were speculations of whether the bill will “be defeated by the Opposition” and how the government was preparing for “possible scenarios”. Reasons for why this was the case was unfortunately missing from the reports. Other collocates that functioned as a verb with ‘budget’ as an object were described as neutral actions in relation to the process of debating, tabling, drafting, and presenting the budget (to name a few), whilst ‘defeat’ was found to occur with expressions of how the budget was “defeated” at the time, largely in part to the Opposition (see Fig. 11.2). This occurrence, mostly

Table 11.3 WordSketch of 'budget' in corpus, minimum frequency = 5

Modifiers of 'budget'	Nouns modifiers of 'budget'		Verbs with 'budget' as object		Verbs with 'budget' as subject		Score	
	Freq	Score	Freq	Score	Freq	Score		
	227	28.41	96	12.02	300	37.55	160	20.03
Expansionary	17	11.08	16	11.6	22	10.88	105	9.31
National	19	10.88	9	10.98	16	10.47	12	7.75
Federal	12	10.54	7	10.82	11	10.1		
Previous	10	10.07	5	10.17	17	10.08		
5bil	8	10.07	10	9.61	11	10.04		
Deficit	8	10.06			13	10.03		
Annual	8	9.94			10	9.87		
State	16	9.91			6	9.26		
Partial	6	9.7			6	9.26		
Large	8	9.62			5	8.88		
Health	8	9.61			7	8.74		
Unity	5	9.4			6	8.66		
Big	5	8.96			6	8.63		
First	5	8.65			22	8.6		
					26	8.45		
					5	8.45		
					6	7.74		
Prepositional phrases	Freq	Score	Possessors of 'budget'	Freq	Score	Pronominal possessors of 'budget'	Freq	Score
	303	0		35	4.38		16	2

(continued)

Table 11.3 (continued)

Prepositional phrases	Freq	Score	Possessors of 'budget'	Freq	Score	Pronominal possessors of 'budget'	Freq	Score
... of "%w"	47	5.88	Year	21	13.14	Its	6	8.41
... in "%w"	45	5.63	Government	5	9.24			
"%w" for ...	29	3.63						
... for "%w"	23	2.88						
... on "%w"	19	2.38						
... under "%w"	17	2.13						
"%w" in ...	15	1.88						
... from "%w"	12	1.5						
... to "%w"	11	1.38						
"%w" of ...	8	1						
"%w" at ...	8	1						
... against "%w"	6	0.75						
... if "%w"	6	0.75						
"%w" with ...	5	0.63						
"%w" on ...	5	0.63						
"%w" as ...	5	0.63						

				Source
1	The government, Lin said, then would be able to recoup despite a deficit	budget	,"This is the time I will say go for a deficit budget, and the time for the government to borrow,	Nation
2	"This is the time I will say go for a deficit	budget	,and the time for the government to borrow, then help the smaller spendings to expand and	Nation
3	a slow process to regain what the government spends after the deficit	budget	as investors are also cautious. "We need a fiscal policy (with more spending by government	Nation
4	titled Berdaya Tahan Demi Kemakmuran, Hani said the state would face a deficit	budget	of RM248.14mil next year. "This is based on our income projections of RM1.60bil while our	Metro News
5	the nation's annual budget, and for many years now, Malaysia has been running on a deficit	budget	, resulting in an increasing national debt, although there are a number of factors that	Business News
6	pandemic have caused the state government to dig more into its coffers to present a deficit	budget	to help steer the state out of the present situation. Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Hasni Mohammad	Nation
7	In his maiden budget speech, he said that the state would face a deficit	budget	of RM248.14mil in 2021. "This is based on our income projections of RM1.60bil, while our	Nation
8	For 2021, the state is expected to have a deficit	budget	of RM248.14mil. "This is based on our income projections of RM1.60bil while our spending is	Nation
9	additional RM55bil or 3.7% of GDP pushing the	budget	deficit to GDP ratio to hit estimated between 6.0% and 6.5% this year, to arrest the sharp	Business News
10	pandemic crisis. We expect the Finance Ministry to calibrate a targeted expansionary	budget	deficit estimated 5.5-6% of GDP in 2021, increase spending, provide selective tax relief and	Business News
11	pressure on the current self-imposed 60% debt-to-gross domestic product ceiling, while the	budget	deficit will be down by another few notches. With less than a month to go before the	Business News
12	"There will be some relative pullback, however, from the 5.8% to 6%	budget	deficit to gross domestic product (GDP) expected this year to around 5.5% in 2021, to give a	Business News
13	be just profit-driven. An endless string of unnecessarily large	budget	deficits in the past has saddled us with too big a debt to step up spending now. We	Business News
14	Bear in mind, the Malaysian government is not alone in having enlarged	budget	deficit in 2020 and 2021, as countries worldwide are doing the same to kick-start their stalled	Business News
15	a "neutral" outlook of the MGS this year, said based on the official forecast of RM86.5bil in	budget	, he is revising down gross MGS-Gill issuance forecast this year to RM148.8bil from	Business News
16	alleviate the financial burden of Malaysians and at the same time keep close tabs on	budget	deficits . He added that the sizeable allocation would translate into a larger impact to the	Nation
17	create new opportunities for businesses. Unfortunately, this means we must operate on a	budget	deficit. Whether or not we can handle this is dependent on how much longer this Covid-19	Nation
18	the vaccines in IQ 2021. Over the medium term, the government is committed to lower	budget	deficit to 4% of GDP by 2023. Key strategy will be on revenue enhancing given the limited scope	Business News
19	in the first quarter of 2021. Over the medium term, the government was committed to cut its	budget	deficit to 4% of GDP by 2023. A key strategy would be on revenue enhancing given the limited	Business News
20	allocated RM17bil for the Covid-19 Fund as containing the pandemic is crucial to reduce the	budget	deficit . The uneven state of economic recovery from the pandemic-inflated slump gets a strong	Business News
21	subsidy programme is one-off under the Covid-19 Fund in 2021. Hence, it helps to reduce the	budget	deficit if the Covid-19 pandemic is contained. We believe that global rating agencies will give	Business News
22	may be sustained. Such a scenario points to various vulnerabilities arising from record	budget	deficits , rising debt levels, geopolitical risks and uncontrollable virus infections. Malaysia's	Business News
23	stimulate growth. With so much additional spending, most countries already have record	budget	deficits , and to stimulate spending, they would also have record low interest rates. Indonesia	Business News
24	they would also have record low interest rates. Indonesia has forecast a fiscal deficit (budget	deficit including borrowing and other liabilities) of 6.34% of gross domestic product (GDP) for	Business News

Fig. 11.1 Concordance lines for 'budget' with 'deficit' in the corpus

referring to the act of the Opposition curtailing the bill (depicted by the collocate 'defeated') was reported in the Nation sub-section. During this time, news about the possibility of the budget not being received in Parliament by a majority vote created a sense of spectacle over predictions of another general election (lines 7 and 8) and whether the Prime Minister should step down (lines 8, 10, and 11). Nation is one of the sub-sections of the newspaper that caters to local news and is updated throughout the day. By associating the budget with predictions of it being defeated, shows an example of delegitimising governance.

Concerns over the budget can also be seen in relation to the stock market index; Kuala Lumpur Composite Index (KLCI) that was found to have “retreated in early trade Thursday in line with the pause at regional markets, and ahead of the Budget 2021 vote in Parliament” (Murugiah, 2020). Figure 11.3 shows a screenshot of the local market overview for the year. As can be seen, three specific dates were marked as significant to the time of news reporting (in the corpus). The dip (circled in red) was identified during the time which the news reported on possibility of the budget being defeated (end of October 2020) and hence, could have triggered the stock market to ‘retreat’.

Another reason for the dip in the stock market was the mentioning of the King and his decision to declare a state of emergency, which was reported in proximity to

				Source
1	the special Cabinet meeting had included, among other things, possible scenarios should the Budget	be	defeated by the opposition. However, besides the special meeting – held for the second time	Nation
2	themselves," said the source, adding that they also discussed the possible scenarios should the Budget	be	defeated . "For now, we want to remain optimistic that it will be passed but we are	Nation
3	a special Cabinet had taken into account, among other things, possible scenarios, should the Budget	be	defeated by the Opposition. However, the King then decided against declaring a state of	Nation
4	insists on not having a CSA Bill with the official Opposition, then he must resign if his Budget	is	defeated. "Malaysia will not have to go for a snap poll or risk not having a Budget, as the	Nation
5	the budget may be defeated following Najib's expressing conditional support for it. "Even if the budget	is	defeated, it may not necessarily lead to a general election. "If the King does not want to	Nation
6	to helm the government," he said. "It is unlikely that a general election will be called if the budget	is	defeated owing to Covid-19. "If the budget is defeated, the King may still have the option of	Nation
7	unlikely that a general election will be called if the budget is defeated owing to Covid-19. "If the budget	is	defeated, the King may still have the option of appointing a new prime minister based on the	Nation
8	before it is just to vote, pointing out that there would be huge implications if the budget	was	defeated. "It would mean that the government cannot use the allocated funds to	Nation
9	Assoc Prof Khairil Azmin Mokhtar from IILM said there could be several outcomes if the budget	was	defeated. He said that although convention dictates that the prime minister should resign	Nation
10	He said that although convention dictates that the prime minister should resign if a budget	is	defeated under Article 43(4) of the Federal Constitution, he need not necessarily do so but	Nation
11				Nation

Fig. 11.2 Concordance lines for 'budget' with 'defeat' in the corpus



Fig. 11.3 KLCI stock market (Bursa Malaysia)

the speculation of the budget to be defeated as shown in the examples below. As can be seen, these two separate reports show a similar style of reporting, which indicate forms of intertextuality as well as news being discursive.

PUTRAJAYA: It is back to preparing for Budget 2021 and finding more effective measures to combat COVID-19 for the government after the King decided against declaring a state of emergency for the country. Sources said the special Cabinet meeting had included, amongst other things, possible scenarios should the Budget be defeated by the Opposition. However, besides the special meeting – held for the second time in four days – other political meetings on the sidelines are equally sparking intrigue amongst observers (*Nation*, 27 Oct 2020).

Budget 2021 will see debates at the policy stage for almost two weeks and three days of ministerial replies, followed by voting by MPs on Nov 23 in Parliament. Previously, the government sought to declare a state of emergency after a special Cabinet had taken into account, amongst other things, possible scenarios, should the Budget be defeated by the Opposition. However, the King then decided against declaring a state of emergency, whilst reminding politicians to stop all forms of politicking that could disrupt the stability of the country amid the COVID-19 pandemic (*Nation*, 29 Oct 2020).

Nevertheless, the index rose on 15 December when news reported of a more optimistic view of the budget after it was passed in Parliament (Bernama, 2020). Another dip found before 15 December could be explained for in an article dated 14 December 2020 in *Nation*, where speculations of the budget to be defeated by a bloc vote was reported. However, since experts described the event as slim (*Nation*, 15 December 2020), the stock market rose again the following day.

Budget 2021, which is now in the second reading, was passed at policy stage. It is currently being debated at the committee stage. The budget has to be passed at the end of these debates on Tuesday where it could still be defeated by a bloc vote (*Nation*, 14 December 2020).

Close examination of the KLCI along with patterns from the concordance lines reveal a possible relationship between what was reported in the news as well as how this has potential impact on the stock market. Language choice on how the budget was argued for or against in the local news shows ways in which language patterns exhibit forms of (de)legitimising governance through use of intertextual features, arguably affecting economic activities like the stock market.

Other verbs related to 'budget' that may be of interest is how the bill was represented as a subject or having an agentive role. This is primarily seen where 'budget' occurs preceding the be-verb (*is, are, was*) and is discussed further here compared to occurrences of the phrasal 'budget + has' that were less frequent. Whilst most instances (68 out of 105 occurrences) showed 'budget' occurring with verbs that referred to the process of ratifying the bill (e.g. budget *is rejected/passed/defeated*), it was found that 37 other instances described the budget in terms of existential meanings (see Fig. 11.4). These include representations of the budget as being big/large and expansionary (lines 6, 11, 22, 33, 34, and 36). This resonates with other typical collocations that modified 'budget' in terms of size, i.e. an *expansionary* budget; the *largest* budget; and the *biggest* budget. This, as Cindy Yeap reports "is the biggest federal government budget announced to date in absolute (ringgit) terms, pipping even the outsized RM317.5 billion Budget 2019 that benefitted from a RM30 billion-special dividend from Petroliaam Nasional Bhd (Petronas) used to return excess taxes to taxpayers" (The Edge Malaysia, 2020). At RM322.54 billion, or more than one-fifth of the economy, she further argues that the government may have to "raise its self-imposed statutory debt ceiling of 60% of GDP if it intends to borrow more money to spend on the people and bolster economic recovery" (The Edge Malaysia, 2020). In turn, this relates back to how Budget 2021 was typically discussed in terms of the budget deficit, pointing to more forms of intertextuality that demonstrate how political discourse in the newspaper is suggestive of ideologies, in this case, connecting the large amount of sum to an anticipated national debt.

11.7 Conclusion

Initial extraction of frequency lists with help from a sophisticated online corpus tool, SketchEngine has shown to be useful when directing us to important concepts in a text (in our case themes on financial issues, depicted by words 'budget', 'economy' and 'economic' as well as words describing senses that are measurable and in motion) that has helped to show how 2021 Budget was framed in *The Star Online*. More specifically, the corpus highlighted the concern for a massive budget deficit, possibility of the budget to be defeated, and descriptions of how the budget was 'expansionary'. We could also argue for how 'budget' and 'expansionary' were reproduced to create an allusion as a form of legitimising governance; the frequent collocation alludes to the intention of an economic (or political) expansion at the expense of the actual amount involved. This shows identification of meaningful links between features of texts and the context in which they were produced (or received), highlighting that

			Source
1	and the monthly public transport passes announced in the	budget	Nation
2	and existing investors. "FMM views the measures introduced in the	budget	Nation
3	administrative matters and the government's agenda, with the	Budget	Nation
4	and prevent Budget 2021 from being passed. "A failure to pass the	Budget	Nation
5	Budget 2021," she says. While a rejection of the government's	budget	Business News
6	work," he added. The RM800mil allocated in next year's	budget	Nation
7	subject to the approval of these two matters. "Our support on this	budget	Nation
8	subject to the approval of these two matters. "Our support for this	budget	Nation
9	and ways to enjoy the festivities to the fullest. Related News The	budget	Business News
10	a significant impact on businesses as well as the rakyat. The	budget	Business News
11	during this pandemic. A positive from this year's mental health	budget	Letters
12	local workforce, including wage subsidy programmes. "The	budget	Nation
13	under the Perikatan Nasional administration. He stressed that the	budget	Nation
14	packages that have been announced since February because this	budget	Business News
15	packages that have been announced since February because this	budget	Business News
16	the conditional MCOs seen in many parts of the country. No federal	budget	Nation
17	the pandemic also affects the government's revenue. "The	budget	Nation
18	MPs from performing their responsibility to ensure that the	Budget	Nation
19	the issues raised on the budget. "I know everyone is busy but the	budget	Nation
20	of the conditional MCO seen in many parts of the country. No	budget	Nation
21	of Malaysia committee chairman for SMEs Koong Lin Loong. "This	Budget	Nation
22	may expect more because when the Federal Government says this	budget	Metro News
23	as retreating and upskilling of tourism workers. "The infrastructure	budget	Nation
24	speech in Parliament. "The rationale for objecting to this	Budget	Nation
25	PETALING JAYA:The Perikatan Nasional government's maiden	budget	Nation
26	Mention of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the	budget	Letters
27	the Covid-19 pandemic. "The funding allocated under the national	Budget	Nation
28	president Datuk Tan Kok Liang said the allocation under the	Budget	Nation
29	officer Yee Wing Peng was optimistic that the expansionary	budget	Business News
30	However, Koong said one of the things he had hoped to see in the	budget	Business News
31	ACCCEM SME committee chairman Koong Lin Loong said the	Budget	Nation
32	Safe Community chairman Tan Sri Lee Lam Thee (pic) said such a	budget	Nation
33	Malaysia fellow Datuk Dr Madeline Berma said the RM322.5bil	budget	Metro News
34	Datuk Seri Yong Teck Lee. The statement said the RM322.5bil	budget	Nation
35	and give their full support to Budget 2021. The King said the	budget	Nation
36	Alliance), to discuss the Budget. Tengku Zafrul said the	Budget	Nation
37	Zerin Properties managing director Previntran Singhe said the	Budget	Nation

Fig. 11.4 Concordance lines for existential use of 'budget' in the corpus

discourse and society are mutually constitutive in that meaning is a product of social practises (Mautner, 2019, p. 4).

Inarguably, “[c]orpora, being electronic collections of authentic texts, are a valuable source of first-hand language data for the empirically minded linguist” (Lew, 2009, p. 297). And as Baker (2004) notes on ‘discourse’, citing Parker and Burman (1993, 156), that “discourses emerge as much through our work of reading as from the text” and that “[b]ringing corpus linguistic methods on board is meant to put discourse studies on a sounder empirical footing” (Mautner, 2019: p. 8). This, we have found to bring methodological synergy in investigating political discourse in an online Malaysian news portal. More specifically, representations of Budget 2021 were explored via corpus techniques and CADS, which provided empirical evidence to strengthen traditional discourse analysis. Finally, this chapter recommends examining other forms of political discourse in sections of the same (or different) newspaper(s) that could reveal more about how Malaysia’s governance are reported.

Notes

1. A number of words that seemed odd in the wordlist were those that came up as parts from the online newspaper sub-headings or tag lines like “Trending in Business”, “Stories You'll Enjoy”, “The Season Of Joy Is Here!”, “Check out our Christmas issue for ideas on gifting and ways to enjoy the festivities to the fullest”, which were discarded for further analysis.
2. Where words are polysemous, they are given an * (asterisk) mark to denote their other potential meanings (e.g. *as well as, doing well*).
3. Excluding words that were part of the online newspaper's sub-headings and tag lines (e.g. Trending News).

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