

Chapter 13

Conceptualizing Money Laundering in the 1MDB Scandal: An Analysis of Metaphors in *The Sarawak Report*



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Abstract The 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal is one of the most complex and widely reported scandals in the world as it involves a complicated web of financial transactions, business deals and other forms of transactions. The complexities of this scandal were first exposed by an online news portal called *The Sarawak Report*. Metaphors were extensively used by the primary writer, Clair Rewcastle Brown, to describe the scandal, which helps readers comprehend the magnitude of the scandal. The data used in this chapter come from 1MDB-related articles in *The Sarawak Report* blog. Critical metaphor analysis is used to identify, interpret, and explain the primary orientation of the conceptual metaphors found in the blog posts. This approach unpacks the metaphors used in context and reveals underlying meanings and motivations of surface level metaphors, helping readers to make connections between the subject matter and the concepts that are used to describe it. The analysis shows that the mixing of different concepts and analogies enable readers to understand the actions of the culprits, the act of money laundering, and the severity of the crime of corruption. This chapter demonstrates how metaphors can be used to make a complex and challenging issue easier to comprehend.

Keywords 1MDB · Scandal · Money · Conceptual metaphors · Blog

13.1 Introduction

The Sarawak Report (TSR) on 28th February 2015 first revealed the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal, which amassed a massive debt of US\$11.73 billion for Malaysia. The extent of this scandal was so significant that US Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, remarked in 2017 that 1MDB was “kleptocracy at its worst.” 1MDB’s dealings involved a complex web of activities and money trails that are difficult to follow due to secrecy in its national and international transactions, as

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well as the data being shrouded in technical financial-business language. Preliminary analysis suggests that TSR made the technical information of the clandestine money laundering details more accessible to the public using conceptual metaphors. Consider the following excerpt.

Extract 1: An Example from TSR (Brown, 2016f)

World's Biggest Money Laundering Investigation Goes Up Another Gear [a car changing gear to speed up]

Malaysia could find fame for triggering [a human entity/celebrity discharging a weapon] a new, more effective level of regulatory cooperation between the financial centres of the world—one positive development from landing at the centre of the world's biggest money laundering investigation [arriving at a destination].

Today's events have been an indicator of how closely investigators are working to trace the US\$7 billion, which Malaysia's Auditor General now calculates to have gone missing from the 1MDB development fund into a network of obscure off-shore "treasure island" companies [pirate buried treasures], before emerging once again in the bank accounts and asset portfolios of politically connected Malaysians.

There is extensive literature that examines how metaphors are employed in the news (e.g. Kennedy, 2009; Shie, 2010), and there is research that has focussed on how metaphors are used by alleged wrongdoers to deflect blame (Dryll, 2017; Hansson, 2018; Richard, 2014). Arguably, the choice of metaphors is also idiosyncratic because it reflects a writer's creativity in expressing ideas and educating his/her audience, as seen in Farrah Diebaa and Su'ad (Chap 4). For this reason, it is worthwhile examining how author and editor, Claire Rewcastle Brown of TSR used conceptual metaphors to narrate the 1MDB saga creatively and to help the public comprehend the significant events that took place. To explore this phenomenon further, we pursued the following line of enquiry in this research: What metaphors were used in TSR to describe the 1MDB scandal, specifically when describing money, the main perpetrators, Najib Razak and Jho Low as well as the scandal as a whole?

We used *Sketch Engine* to identify the different collocations used with the search term '1MDB' in TSR's published blog posts. Following that, a list of concordances was used to recognise other contextual metaphors. Charteris-Black's (2004) critical metaphor analysis (CMA), which consists of metaphor identification, interpretation, and explanation, was used to determine the deployed metaphors. Additionally, the study uses the Merriam-Webster dictionary (*Merriam*), Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (*Longman*), Collin's Cobuild Dictionary (*Collin*), and the Online Etymology Dictionary (*Etymology*) to confirm the original uses and origins of the metaphors found to verify their use and meaning in context. Besides that, these

dictionaries also display examples of how the conceptual metaphors were used in similar contexts.

13.2 The 1Malaysia Development Berhad Scandal

Launched to increase foreign investment into Malaysia, 1MDB was founded by Najib Razak when he took office in 2009 as the Prime Minister of Malaysia. On its now-defunct website, the company's vision was to be "a strategic enabler for new ideas and sources of growth." Its mission was "to drive sustainable economic development by forging strategic global partnerships and promoting foreign direct investment (FDI)". Besides being the founder of the investment fund, Najib also led the advisory board and was heavily involved in overseeing all operations in the company. Initially, the company was set up to buy privately-owned power plants in Malaysia and even the Middle East. Other plans include the development of a new financial district called the Tun Razak Exchange (TRX) in Kuala Lumpur. In 2014, rather than earning extra revenue, 1MDB generated a debt of US\$11 billion, and this drew condemnation from various opposition groups (Adam et al., 2018).

Whilst she was investigating the illegal logging trade by then Chief Minister of Sarawak and now Yang di-Pertua Negeri of Sarawak, Abdul Taib Mahmud, Clair Rewcastle Brown was handed a total of 227,000 leaked documents with in-depth details of the 1MDB fraud in 2015. The leaked data revealed money laundering trails and elaborate scams. They disclosed the different perpetrators involved in the scandal, which included Najib Razak, his wife Rosmah Mansor, and Jho Low. The scandal gained greater infamy in July 2015 when the *Wall Street Journal* published documents indicating that Najib Razak had accepted at least US\$681 million as payment into his private bank account (Channel News Asia, 2018).

In 2017, the United States Department of Justice (US DOJ) released a press statement regarding the scandal. According to the DOJ, funds of US\$4.5 billion belonging to 1MDB were allegedly embezzled by high-ranking officials of 1MDB and their partners. The DOJ mobilised to recover approximately US\$540 million in assets stolen from 1MDB (US DOJ, 2017). From the years 2009–2015, money was allegedly used to finance extravagant shopping sprees of designer bags, real estate, and luxurious jewellery. Besides that, Jho Low also misappropriated the funds from 1MDB and spent the money lavishly on luxury yachts, alcohol, and expensive parties as well as fund the production of the movie *The Wolf of Wall Street*.

13.3 Conceptual Metaphors

Metaphors are powerful tools that enable communicators to persuade and convince people to believe a version of the truth, to evoke certain emotions for specific reasons or it may be a heuristic, to summarise a concept or story in the most straightforward

and more relatable way possible. As Charteris-Black and Musolff (2003, p. 158) put it, metaphors enable the communicator to:

...achieve particular rhetorical goals such as establishing a relationship with the reader and making judgements by selecting particular words and phrases to refer to important topics when these words or phrases usually refer to other topics.

Conceptual metaphors are a formal statement of an idea by using some imagery or figure of speech to describe a particular scenario or even a character. According to the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) formalised by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), conceptual metaphors highlight the role of cognition in the interpretation of discourse. Metaphors cannot be deciphered just by finding its meaning in the dictionary without considering the context. Koller (2004, p. 3) states that “by favouring particular metaphors in discourse, journalists can reinforce, or even create, particular mental models in their readers’ cognition.”

Mapping is a core concept in the conceptual metaphor approach. The mappings between basic and abstract domains can be described using conceptual metaphors and conceptual keys. Charteris-Black (2004, p. 15) says that conceptual metaphors are “formal statements of any idea that is hidden in a figure of speech that can be inferred from several metaphorical expressions and helps to resolve their semantic tension.” He adds that conceptual keys are “inferred from a number of conceptual metaphors and is a higher level of metaphor that explains how several conceptual metaphors are related” (ibid.). When combined, conceptual metaphors and conceptual keys show the motivation of surface level metaphors. They are a “valuable notion of describing and classifying figurative language.” Besides that, they also explain which ideas are associated with the source (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 16).

In examining conceptual metaphors, we need to consider three stages: Identification, interpretation, and explanation. Cameron and Low (1999, p. 34) construe that the three stages “typically proceeds by collecting examples of linguistic metaphors used to talk about the topic... generalising from them to the conceptual metaphors they exemplify and using the results to suggest understandings or thought patterns which construct or constrain people’s beliefs and actions.”

The following describes how CMA is carried out. It begins with metaphor identification. Metaphor identification consists of two stages. In the first stage, the analyst manually goes through the selected texts from the chosen corpus to identify words, phrases or sentences that may be identified as possible candidate metaphors. In the second stage, the analyst decides whether the metaphors found are used in a literal or metaphorical sense. During this stage, concordance software can be used to support the analysis to observe the different contexts the keywords have been used in to make precise comparisons.

The next stage of CMA is metaphor interpretation. It “involves establishing a relationship between metaphors and the cognitive and pragmatic factors that determine them” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 37). At this stage, conceptual metaphors and conceptual keys are identified and mapped. Analysts need to take into consideration the extent of metaphor choices in “constructing socially important representation”

(p. 38) to determine whether or not the word choices used were rhetorically successful in showcasing the writer's evaluations of the subject matter.

The final stage of CMA is metaphor explanation. In this stage, the analyst focuses on distinguishing the social agencies involved in the discourse production and their "social role in persuasion" (p. 39). The analyst would have to identify the functions of the conceptual metaphors and conceptual keys found in the corpus to propose the writer's ideological and rhetorical motivation. The evidence of said motivations is not found in the writer's intuition but in the context in which the metaphors occur. This stage can also be supported by using corpus concordance to compare uses in context.

13.4 Text Analysis Research Methods

One hundred ninety-nine blog posts were extracted from TSR's official website. These articles were found using the search term '1MDB.' The articles were then saved as *.txt files and compiled into a corpus using the Corpus Building Tool in an online lexicology software called *Sketch Engine* (Kilgariff et al., 2014). The articles date between 2010 and 2017 when the scandal first began to be investigated by TSR.

The study applies the empirical method of critical metaphor analysis based on Charteris-Black's (2004) three-steps of identification, interpretation, and explanation. Firstly, metaphorical expressions and metaphor keywords are manually identified and classified according to their source domain (linguistic content) and the target domain (what they describe). The definition of a metaphor is based on the primary orientation of metaphors, as suggested by Charteris-Black (2004). Then, cognitive semantics are employed to infer the assumptions that underlie metaphor use and to explain the relationship between its linguistic choices and metaphorical meanings.

In past corpus-based studies of metaphors, Krennmayr (2014) conducted a quantitative analysis of metaphors in a set of British newspapers to explore whether metaphors were truly ubiquitous in news writing. Su'ad and Norazit (2013) compared the metaphors used to describe and report the 2008 global economic crisis in major newspapers in Malaysia and Singapore using corpus linguistics tools.

Corpus concordance methods were used because they provide "a set of procedures, or methods, for studying language" (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). It enables us to carry out "rapid searches of patterns that can be investigated qualitatively and quantitatively" (Krennmayr, 2014, p. 532). To perform metaphor identification, a manual reading of all 199 blog posts was replaced using *Sketch Engine*. The 'Word Sketch Function' narrows down the collocations of '1MDB.' Then, the concordance tool which lists the 'Keywords In Context' (KWIC) are manually checked for the most salient metaphors used in describing the 1MDB scandal. A metaphor becomes salient when a word or group of words come from different conceptual domains, e.g. 'Look east policy.' 'Look east' is a visual direction-orientation focus action that is connected to 'policy,' which is an abstract idea of governance. The dashboard interface of *Sketch Engine* is shown in Fig. 13.1.

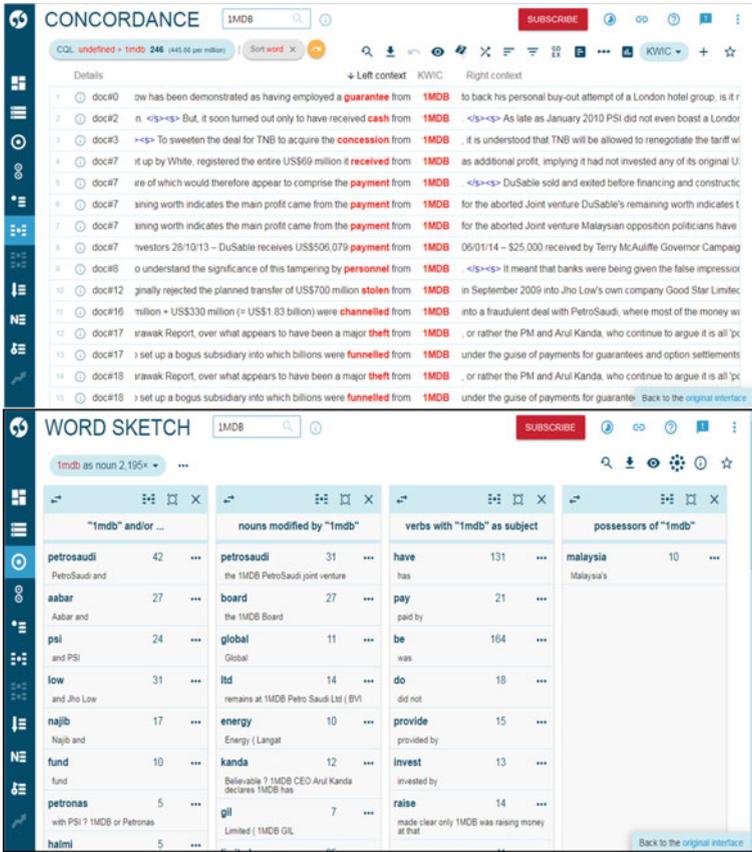


Fig. 13.1 The dashboard of Sketch Engine

The data are presented in the form of bar charts and tables to identify and process the metaphors used in the corpus. Next, the metaphor interpretation is supported using Merriam, Longman, Collin, and Etymology is also used to understand the etymological meanings or the original meanings of the metaphors. Finally, the interpreted data are explained by comparing the conceptual metaphors with their original definitions, based on the contexts found in the text. Context refers to the surrounding words that contribute towards meaning accuracy.

13.5 Analysis

In this section, we discuss how conceptual metaphors were used in the texts to provide a description and comparison of the powerful culprits, simplify the act of money laundering and intensify the severity of the crime of corruption.

13.5.1 *Metaphors Used to Describe the Culprits*

The personification of 1MDB was very evident in the collocation of the search terms ‘1MDB + has.’ The verb ‘has’ indicates possession or ownership, i.e. it represents the actions and experiences of a person in the perfect tense and the conditional mood of that individual at a particular time. 130 appearances of this keyword were noted (Extract 2).

Extract 2: ‘1MDB + has’ (Brown, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c)

So 1MDB has now suddenly admitted it has ‘documents’ for the Aabar BVI company after all, even though it had refused to produce them to the PAC or Auditor General (Brown, 2016a).

It also dissolved its board of advisers, which Mr. Najib chaired. 1MDB has said it would cooperate with investigations but hasn’t been contacted yet by any outside agency (Brown, 2016b).

1MDB had claimed this money was being ‘invested’ by its subsidiary 1MDB Global, however it has already been queried why so much government cash was passed to the small, private BSI Bank after the bond issue by Goldman Sachs?” (Brown, 2016c).

In these examples, we see how 1MDB exist as an agent who can speak, admit something, and make claims. Rewcastle Brown has also described Jho Low as the Jay Gatsby of the twenty-first century. She did so 11 times in the 199 articles. Jay Gatsby is a fictional character from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s literary masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*. He is a mysterious millionaire with shady business connections who amassed great wealth by illegal means. Whilst he usually does not want to be acknowledged when throwing lavish parties for his wealthy and famous friends, he did try to win the heart of a lady he fell in love with, trying to impress her with his riches and possessions.

Extract 3: Examples of ‘Jay Gatsby’ (Brown, 2015a)

‘Jay Low’ acting out for real the role of his best Hollywood pal Leo DiCaprio as Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby*?

Close up—follow the trail showing the first payments into Jho Low’s company Good Star, followed by the pay offs for his co-conspirators! *Secret ‘Jay Lho’ Gatsby of the twenty-first century party scene* It is clear that Jho Low was immediately desperate to wallow in his fabulous sudden riches from 1MDB and keen to impress new collaborators for future scams, such as the then Chairman of Abu Dhabi’s Aabar fund and the Hakkasan chain, Khadem Al Qubaisi, who became a key pal and business partner

Like the fictitious conman Jay Gatsby of the iconic American novel *The Great Gatsby*, Jho Low has attempted to keep to the background of the enormous parties he has funded

By comparing Low to Gatsby, Brown presents Low as a swindler who obtained a substantial amount of money for himself, his family, personal friends, ex-lovers, associates, and especially for Najib Razak and Rosmah Mansor. Jho Low has also been known to have played a part in the production of the Hollywood movie, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, which was a project by Riza Aziz, the step-son of Najib Razak. Jho Low also organised expensive and alcohol-filled parties for celebrities such as Jamie Foxx, Paris Hilton, and Leonardo DiCaprio. It was also reported that Low had purchased expensive jewellery for his ex-lovers, including a diamond necklace for Australian supermodel Miranda Kerr (Malaysiakini, 2018), a wedding ring for a proposal to Taiwanese singer Elva Hsiao, and for the socialite, Paris Hilton (Chen et al., 2019). Moreover, he also used the usurped money to acquire precious stones and jewellery for his family.

Sketch Engine also revealed the word *orchestrator* and *orchestrated* being used in several contexts. These words appeared 14 out of 45 times to compare Jho Low and Najib Razak with a musical orchestrator, who provided high-level directions of songs and arrangements in musical performances:

Extract 4: Examples of *orchestrator* (Brown, 2016d)

This money was also used by Low to acquire business and other assets in the US. *The Aabar/BVI Phase—Money went directly to Najib* The DOJ goes on to deal with what it describes as the second major phase of the kleptocracy scam, plainly orchestrated by the one man still in charge throughout, PM Najib Razak

“Jasmine Ai Swan Loo was originally identified by TSR as a key player in so-called Project Uganda, the operation orchestrated by Jho Low to channel money out of 1MDB and through PetroSaudi in order to buy up Taib Mahmud’s family concern UBG group.”

This PetroSaudi deal was, as we now know, the first of several sums that disappeared from 1MDB in a similar fashion over subsequent years, each of which was orchestrated by Jho Low, who has simultaneously managed the

Prime Minister's private business, right down to paying for his wife Rosmah's diamond purchases in Hong Kong

A search on the Word Sketch Function of Sketch Engine under the English Web 2015 corpus listed the word *orchestrator* as a noun that had a frequency of 6229 per million, often used alongside the word *of*. Using the Keyword in Context (KWIC), it was found that *orchestrator* was used in a few contexts. *Merriam* and *Longman* define the verb *orchestrate* as “to compose or arrange (music) for an orchestra” (*Merriam*). Similarly, *Longman* defines the verb as “written to organise an important event or a complicated plan, especially secretly.”

13.5.2 *Metaphors Used to Describe the Elaborate and Complex Process of Money Laundering*

The most significant metaphor used by Brown to simplify the process of money laundering is a liquid metaphor. The notable liquid metaphors identified in the articles are *syphon*, *channel*, *flow*, and *splash*. The following words clearly illustrate that the frequency of liquid metaphors used in the article is of a significant number and influence in the reporting of the 1MDB scandal. According to *Etymology*, the original meaning of *syphon* is in the form of a noun is defined below:

- i. A tube bent to form two legs of unequal length by which a liquid can be transferred to a lower level over an intermediate elevation by the pressure of the atmosphere in forcing the liquid up the shorter branch of the tube immersed in it whilst the excess of weight of the liquid in the longer branch when once filled causes a continuous flow; a bent tube used for getting liquid out of a container, used by holding one end of the tube at a lower level than the end in the container.
- ii. To dishonestly take money from a business, account, etc. to use it for a purpose for which it was not intended.

In TSR, the term *syphon* was used a total of 31 times throughout the 199 articles, making it the most saliently used term to refer to liquid cash. *Syphon* (verb) is a word used to describe illegal money transactions. As a metaphor, it is still synonymous with the first definition as the movement of money is described as a one-way process. The following are some examples of how it was presented in the articles:

Extract 5: Examples of *syphon* (Brown, 2016g)

TSR has obtained exclusive close-ups of documents held up by Apandi at the event, which show that investigators had traced a further RM33 million on top

of the RM42 million, which the PM has now admitted was syphoned from the KWAP public pension fund into his personal bank accounts.

Low had poured US\$300 million into PetroSaudi and paid Tarek a US\$85 million brokerage fee for acting as “a front” in the scheme to syphon a total US\$1.4 billion out of the 1MDB joint venture.

When the scandal first erupted, Najib had responded wide-eyed to suggestions that money had been syphoned out of the struggling 1MDB by his close friend Jho Low.

To this end they say Najib has orchestrated the syphoning of major chunks of Sarawak’s infrastructure and health budgets into companies controlled by Bustari Yusof, as we reported.

The word *channel* is the second most frequently used word in the 199 articles from TSR. Etymologically, it was first used as a noun in Old French, *channel* which referred to a “bed of a stream of water” and “by which something passes or is transmitted” (*Etymology*). The word is more frequently used as a verb throughout TSR. *Longman* defines the verb as: “to control and direct something such as money or energy towards a particular purpose.” In TSR, the verb channel was found to be used 32 times, most saliently in phrases such as channel money to, channel money out of and channel (money) from, as in Fig. 13.2.

Channel often collocates with the nouns related to money such as billions (of dollars) and *funds*. The examples are listed below.

Extract 6: Examples of *channel* (Brown, 2016e)

Najib’s fighting fund was the 1MDB theft’s smoking gun. Indeed, without their ability to buy votes in Sarawak/Sabah BN would have long since lost its majority in Federal Malaysia and this was the reason why Najib has openly admitted that he used money from 1MDB to channel his bogus “Saudi royal donation” into his election fighting account at AmBank in March 2013.

Word	↓ Frequency	Frequency per million
1 channelled	16	28.99
2 channelling	6	10.87
3 channel	6	10.87
4 channeled	4	7.25

Fig. 13.2 Frequency of *channel* in TSR

Aabar is a fund known to have strong investment ties with Malaysia’s 1MDB and also the Malaysian business tycoon Jho Low, whom it backed during a bid for the Claridge’s hotel group in London Yet, Red Granite, which is owned by Najib Razak’s step-son, Riza Aziz, had earlier threatened to sue TSR for querying if the hundreds of millions channelled into the company’s various film projects could indeed be linked to Riza’s Malaysian connections and his close party friend, Jho Low.

We have detailed how US\$1 billion + US\$500 million + US\$330 million (= US\$1.83 billion) were channelled from 1MDB into a fraudulent deal with PetroSaudi, where most of the money was diverted into the Zurich account of the company Good Star Limited belonging to its official ‘Advisor’ Jho Low.

The figures show that the first \$148 million in stolen money were transferred into Jho Low’s US accounts on 21st October 2009, just a couple of weeks after the \$700 million was channelled out of 1MDB into his Good Star account in Zurich.

The first uses of the word flow were as the Old English word *flowan*, which meant “to flow, stream, issue; become liquid, melt; abound, overflow” (*Etymology*). *Longman* refers to the word in verb form and defines it as “if money flows somewhere, such as into a bank account or into a particular country, it is moved there.” In TSR, the word ‘flow’ has been used as a verb in describing the movement of cash 39 times, as in Fig. 13.3.

O’Connor (1998) states that money is usually related to the transferability and instancy of access. This refers to the immediacy of availability when it is conceptualised as a liquid. The MONEY IS A LIQUID conceptual metaphor may also show “transitoriness and instability” which are most often associated with the concept of *flow*, which relates to the process of moving or running smoothly with unbroken continuity of moving liquid (Henderson, 2000) Hence, money might flow in and out of a company, organisation or individual’s bank accounts, which in this case is

Word	↓ Frequency	Frequency per million		
flowed	16	28.99		...
flown	9	16.30		...
flow	6	10.87		...
flowing	5	9.06		...
flows	3	5.43		...

Fig. 13.3 Frequency of the word *flow* in TSR

conceptualised as a container, resting on the image schema of a CONTAINER. Here are some examples of how *flow* was used in the articles from TSR.

Extract 7: Examples of *flow* (Brown, 2016g, 2016h)

It can be seen that sums totalling RM12 million flowed on from the PM's account ending *880* into his other AmBank account ending *906* (which was also to receive some of the monies paid later from the RM42 million).

Armed with this decision making control, the Jho Low controlled Panama Investment Manager bought over UBG bank in the name of Tarek Obaid and PetroSaudi International: Li Lin Seet—answered to Jho Low and was the signatory of the two companies that controlled the money which flowed from 1MDB to the UBG buy out Li Lin Seet—answered to Jho Low and was the signatory of the two companies that controlled the money which flowed from 1MDB to the UBG buy out Delightfully for the young men involved, there was clearly plenty of money left over in the system to fund a very expensive life-style for Seet and some new found friends on the celebrity circuit.

This, BN tells them, is 'progress' and keeping the money flowing through Sarawak's "safe deposit" is Najib's priority to keep his party and himself in power.

The word *splash* originated from the noun *plash*, which was defined as "small puddle, shallow pool, wet ground." Later in 1736, it was used as a noun to refer to "water or liquid thrown upon anything" (*Etymology*). In *Sketch Engine* under the Word Sketch function in the English Web 2015 Corpus, it was found that the word was not also collocated with the natural movement of liquid such as splashed water or splashed paint. Instead, it was also found to be used with words such as money, cash, and millions. In TSR, the word *splash* was found to be used 27 times in the 199 articles in variations such as 'splash,' 'splashed' and 'splashing', as in Fig. 13.4. All of them are in the form of verbs.

Splash is more frequently used in describing the act of overspending, giving the image of treating money as if it was a large amount of water without thorough consideration. The following are examples of how it was used in the articles from TSR.

Extract 8: Examples of *splash* (Brown, 2015b)

Najib used both a Visa and a MasterCard on the 2014 holiday splurge Najib used both a Visa and a MasterCard on the 2014 holiday splurge Prime Minister Najib Razak splashed over US\$1 million on his credit cards during the month of August in the year following the election, according to information received by TSR.

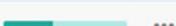
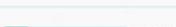
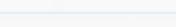
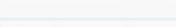
Word	↓ Frequency	Frequency per million	
1 splashing	10	18.12	
2 splash	9	16.30	
3 splashed	4	7.25	
4 Splash	2	3.62	
5 splashes	1	1.81	
6 Splashing	1	1.81	

Fig. 13.4 Frequency of the word *splash* in TSR

Two weeks beforehand Jho Low was living it up in St Tropez with Paris Hilton. Newspapers in New York had registered Jho Low when he first started splashing money in October 2009 straight after the PSI joint venture was signed.

Jho Low has been splashing out on ‘philanthropy’, e.g. US\$50million to US cancer research...but did the money come from Malaysia’s development fund?

Liquid metaphors were the most salient conceptual metaphors used to describe the process of illegal transactions through money laundering. They may have been used because liquids can easily be shaped and controlled. Furthermore, liquid also moves at rapid speed. It may indicate that the millions were very swiftly and efficiently transferred from one place to another on command. Besides that, liquid can be controlled more easily than gas, indicating that Najib and his collaborators may have had full control on where the direction of the millions go, just like the motion of water. The use of splash when describing how the money was spent showed the evaluation that the vast sums of money were mindlessly and excessively spent by Najib, Low and the other culprits of the scandal, often without any consideration or even remorse, intensifying the severity of their actions.

In an email interview with Brown (personal communication, 2nd April, 2019), she mentioned that by describing cash with words associated with a moving liquid process, it neatly suggests a continuous and regular movement of money. Therefore, if there is a system in place for the transfer of funds, words such as channel or flow would be most suitable in this context. However, if it is related to a one-off cash transaction, then words such as syphon would be more appropriate for the situation. Brown also says that people also respond to alliteration and assonance. As a journalist, she reiterates that such usage of liquid metaphors tends to be a natural process as she has only one main objective in mind whilst reporting, which is to engage with the reader instinctively.

13.5.3 *Metaphors Used to Intensify the Scandal*

The conceptual metaphor *abuse* is often used alongside the noun ‘power’ to describe the misuse of power by people in power. *Longman* defines abuse as “the use of something in a way that it should not be used.” *Etymology* says the word ‘abuse’ comes from “wicked act or practise, shameful thing, violation of decency.”

Extract 9: Examples of *abuse* (Brown, 2016g, 2016h)

But, every shred of evidence in the 1MDB case (which is what this is all about) shows only one thing, which is that the Prime Minister had been stealing billions from Malaysian public funds in a massive abuse of trust and power.

And what must their neighbours in Saudi Arabia also be thinking, given the similar set of claims 1MDB made over PetroSaudi? *Why Najib cannot escape* The ultimate problem is that all this lying and abuse of power in Malaysia, which is based on a local misconception that Najib is ‘all-powerful’ and ‘untouchable,’ cannot cover up the international money trail, which has started to emerge.

Najib has utilised the law against scores of key figures in Malaysia over the past few months, who happen to have voiced concern against his blatant abuse of the legal system and over the widespread corruption allegations relating to 1MDB and the PM’s own bank accounts.

According to *Etymology*, the word *abuse* is associated with non-consensual, forced sexual activity. Brown’s use of the conceptual metaphor in phrases such as abuse of power, abuse of trust and abuse of the legal system when describing the main perpetrators’ actions show that they consider themselves to be above the law. They can do anything they like for the purpose of gaining wealth and access. The money they stole from 1MDB was supposed to be used to benefit the people of Malaysia. However, the act of abusing the power that has been given to them can be likened to sexual abuse such as rape, not allowing the victim to make any choice or support any decision making.

Body part metaphors were also used to portray how lavishly money was spent and stolen by the perpetrators, highlighting the intensity and seriousness of the act of money laundering and corruption. They brought about an aesthetic function whilst describing the lavishness of the money profited by the different parties described, ascribed to tangible and intangible ideas to improve the clarity or astuteness of the articulation. In the context of this paper, *handsome* is used to describe the level of lavishness in profit for the different individuals involved in 1MDB. According to Walters-York (1996), the aesthetic function of a metaphor carries meaning closer to ‘emotive or sensual experience’. For example, any attempt to reword the phrase ‘representational faithfulness’ would bring about a different meaning and would lack the impact and suggestiveness that the word ‘faithfulness’ gives in describing

accounting. (Walters-York, 1996). The following are examples of some of the body part metaphors used in TSR.

Extract 10: Examples of *handsome* (Brown, 2016i)

Bridge Partners were supposed to pay a handsome price of US\$2.3 billion for these shares, according to the ‘sale purchase agreement,’ which was advertised by 1MDB as a successful profit on its original US\$1.83 billion investment into this series of PetroSaudi related enterprises.

The Prime Minister cum Finance Minister has nevertheless persisted in maintaining that 1MDB sold out its ‘interest’ in the PetroSaudi venture for a handsome profit to a third party (who has mysteriously remained anonymous) and that the proceeds (alleged to be US\$2.3 billion) were stashed in a shadowy and anonymous Cayman Islands fund.

The adjective *handsome* was used 7 times in the 199 articles and was found to collocate with words related to monetary gain such as profit, price, remunerations, price and million (dollar fund). The adjective *fat* on the other hand was used as a conceptual metaphor 7 times throughout TSR articles. It was found to often collocate with the word profit, which refers to “a valuable return” (*Merriam*).

Brown’s choices of metaphors suggest that she was trying to not only emphasise the fact that a sizable amount of money was stolen from 1MDB, and she also reinforces the seriousness of the issue. These adjectives *handsome* and *fat* share a common characteristic: all of them were used to reiterate that huge sums of money were stolen. Instead of using basic physical adjectives such as *big* and *huge*, the body part metaphors inflicted an intense evaluation of the crime of corruption and suggests how everything related to money in this scandal is either given or taken in large amounts.

Although they were not as frequently found as compared to the other conceptual metaphors, the few examples of these metaphors found in the 199 articles are enough to show Brown’s evaluation of Najib and Low’s lavish expenditures.

13.6 Discussion and Conclusion

However, it should also be stressed that there were some difficulties that emerged throughout the process of identifying the conceptual metaphors and their contexts. Firstly, even though a framework and guideline were provided by Charteris-Black (2004) for identifying conceptual metaphors, there was a danger of over-analysing the words found and jumping to conclusions. Secondly, some of the metaphors used in the articles were not commonly used amongst people who did not learn English as a first language. In the email interview with Brown (personal communication,

2nd April 2019), she mentioned that she did write her blog posts to suit and target a certain audience. This implies that the readers would have to have a similar linguistic background or prior knowledge of the metaphors that she had chosen, or they would not get the impact of these choices.

The metaphors that Brown chose to use emphasised the seriousness of the scandal, and arguably, it aroused curiosity in people and compelled anger amongst those who read TSR. Citizens started to call for investigations into the stolen funds and the criminal wrongdoings highlighted in the alternative media also led to the downfall of the government in the 14th General Elections. On the face of it, what can be concluded from the findings and analysis is that metaphors are very useful in shaping viewpoints and helping readers to understand a subject matter in a more simplified manner through images and even concepts which they are familiar with. Further studies can be carried out to test these ideas via experimental research designs.

This research also suggests that it is important for readers to not just read at a surface level, but to delve deeper into the blog posts and decipher what message the writer intends to send across. Additionally, future research can compare how other news media describes the 1MDB scandal using metaphors. For example, another news media outlet that has covered the scandal is the *Wall Street Journal*. A comparative study can be conducted to explore the different metaphors used to describe the main perpetrators, Najib Razak and Jho Low to explore whether there are similarities between writers, the evaluation shown and the impact on readers. Besides that, future studies can also look into Brown's book, *TSR: The Inside Story of the 1MDB Exposé* that was released in 2018. The other conceptual metaphors she uses in her book should be studied and explored and future researchers might want to include the feedback from her readers to gather the impact of her choice of conceptual metaphors and how it helped them to understand the scandal better.

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