

Look Beyond The Facts: Evaluative Language Use In Malaysia's Six-State Election News Coverage

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Abstract: *The 12 August 2023 six-states elections is the first test of the Perpaduan Government led by Anwar Ibrahim, who became the tenth prime minister of Malaysia on 26 November 2022. The election narrative in the newspapers is intriguing because his political background is not clear-cut as he had been with the ruling government and the opposition at different junctures of his political career. The study examined the evaluative aspects of language in newspaper articles on six-states elections in Malaysia published in Harian Metro, a leading Malay daily. Altogether 71 Harian Metro articles between 1 January and 31 August 2023 (18,381 words) were analysed using Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory. Out of 1,408 instances of evaluative language, 61.58% were in the graduation category, 23.58% were in the engagement category, and only 14.84% were in the attitudes category. The graduation category was dominated by the number sub-category, to provide precise facts about the elections, including a time-stamp on events. The engagement category features frequent acknowledgement of information sources to lend authenticity to views. Within the attitudes category, judgement words were frequently used to assess the attitudes and behaviours of politicians. The minimal presence of the affect and appreciation sub-categories shows avoidance of emotive expressions. The inclination towards a fact-focussed reporting maintains impartiality in the election narrative involving political parties aligned to important past and present political figures.*

Keywords: Election, News Coverage, Appraisal Theory, Evaluative Language, Interpersonal Meanings

1. Introduction

In democratic societies, election is an important avenue for societal change when citizens vote preferred candidates and political parties. Election is also an avenue for political expression by political candidates when they declare their manifestos and plans for public good, and also for voters when they make their requests and dissatisfaction known. Of late, the social media has become a platform for the exchange of political views. However, the portrayal of electoral events in the mass media still influences perceptions, attitudes, and, ultimately, voting behaviours. The influence of newspapers on vote choices cannot be brushed aside. In the United Kingdom, Simpson and Startin (2023) concluded from their analysis of five tabloid newspapers that the newspapers influenced the outcome of the referendum in favour of Brexit.

During elections, newspapers often report campaign speeches and events. Political candidates who are good at rhetoric can win over the audience. Tukswasibwe and Musungu (2021) states that it is vital to examine the language strategies used by politicians to position themselves as a worthy candidate. Along the same line, it is crucial to examine the language used by journalists to report the campaign speeches of political candidates and other electoral events.

One aspect of language in newspaper articles is evaluative language, which goes beyond the content of the news. Based on Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory, evaluative language is used to convey subjective judgments and attitudes within news articles, and reveals the writer's stance towards the news content and the readers.

The application of the appraisal theory to analyse newspaper coverage indicates that use of evaluative language resources varies with topic. Interestingly, newspaper reports on wars usually have attitudinal language, whether the coverage is by newspapers published in another country (Khoo et al., 2012) or in the same country (Asad et al., 2021). For instance, the coverage of the Iraq war in the New York Times, the Times of London, and the Sydney Morning Herald is dominated by expression of attitudes, particularly dissatisfaction and propriety or ethical behaviour (Khoo et al., 2012). Asad et al. (2021) also found frequent expressions of attitudes rather than engagement or graduation in the coverage of the Kashmir conflict by two newspapers published in Pakistan.

However, news reports about international conventions showed that local newspapers adopt a different evaluative stance from international newspapers. In the Washington Post articles on the APEC Summit in Papua New Guinea, Engagement/Heterogloss/Contract is frequently used to show stance, particularly concurring with expressed views and denying or negating ideas (Huang, 2020). There is minimal acknowledgement and entertaining of alternative views (minimal Engagement/Heterogloss/Expand). However, coverage of international events by local newspapers has dominant attitudinal language (Arunsirot, 2012). When the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) 2009 Summit was cancelled, Thailand newspapers across the board carried news that expressed negative beliefs and opinions about the incident (Attitudes/Appreciation/Composition/Valuation-) (Arunsirot, 2012). The newspapers expressed the public's judgmental views on the disastrous consequences of the Summit cancellation on the economy, tourist industry and reputation of the country. They questioned their leader's sense of ethics (Attitudes/Judgement/Social Sanction/Propriety-) and capability (Attitudes/Judgement/Social Esteem/Capacity-).

Our literature search identified two studies on the 2018 14th general election in Malaysia. This election is of particular interest because before the election, the government was the Barisan Nasional coalition but after the election, the government was the Pakatan Harapan coalition. Only one of the studies using the appraisal theory for newspaper articles on elections in Malaysia. Kazmi et al. (2023) found that Malaysiakini and New Straits Time were similar in relying on attitudinal language in news articles on the 14th Malaysian General Election. New Straits Time highlighted the determination, resolution, and authority of the then prime minister Mahathir Mohamad (Attitudes/Judgement/Social Esteem/Tenacity+) and referred to him as "a man of many capabilities" (Attitudes/Appreciation/Composition/Valuation+). In addition, New Straits Time used the attribute sub-category (Engagement/Heterogloss/Expand/Attributes) more than Malaysiakini, that is, citing authoritative sources to show the objectivity of their hard news coverage. Rosli and Mohd Sani (2021) also analysed newspaper coverage of the 2018 14th General Election in newspapers but they did not use the appraisal theory. Their findings showed positive pro-government

sentiments in newspapers published in four languages: Malay (Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian, Sinar Harian), English (New Straits Time, The Star), Chinese (Nanyang Siang Pau, Sin Chew Daily), and Tamil (Nanban, Osai). However, as Rosli and Mohd Sani (2021) did not use the appraisal theory, their findings did not indicate what is being presented negatively or positively.

Little is known about how newspapers represent Anwar Ibrahim, the current and tenth prime minister of Malaysia. He had a colourful political history – a former deputy prime minister, twice-imprisoned politician, opposition leader, and finally selected by the King to be the prime minister after some unprecedented political changes from 2018 to 2022 (see Background section). The 12 August 2023 state elections in six states (Pilihan Raya 6 Negeri, PRN6 henceforth) is an important event in Malaysia because it was the first test of the Perpaduan Government led by Anwar Ibrahim since he became prime minister on 26 November 2022. The positive and negative nuances related to events and issues are not clear-cut because of his political history where he was with the ruling government and the opposition at different junctures of his political career.

The study examined the evaluative aspects of language in newspaper articles on six-states elections in Malaysia published in Harian Metro, a leading Malay daily.

2. Background

Malaysia was ruled by the Barisan Nasional coalition for six decades since independence in 1957. In the 14th General Election on 9 May 2018, the Barisan Nasional coalition lost to the Pakatan Harapan coalition. Before the turning point in the political history of Malaysia, the situation was stable, and political parties which were aligned and not aligned with the Barisan Nasional coalition was clear.

Anwar Ibrahim was with the Barisan Nasional coalition, and he was a deputy prime minister from 1993 to 1998. On September 1998, the then prime minister Mahathir Mohamad removed Anwar Ibrahim from the government and party (UMNO). Anwar Ibrahim was charged with sodomy and served a jail sentence from 1999 to 2004. During this time, his wife Wan Azizah Wan Ismail founded Parti Keadilan Rakyat on 3 August 2003 through a merger of the party's predecessor, Parti Keadilan Nasional with Parti Rakyat Malaysia. This is the time when Anwar Ibrahim became an opposition to the government helmed by the Barisan Nasional coalition.

After his release from prison, Anwar Ibrahim went on to consolidate the opposition. Anwar Ibrahim won the Permatang Pau constituency in the 12th General Election on 8 March 2008. On 1 April 2008, Anwar Ibrahim, Abdul Hadi Awang and Lim Kit Siang (heading Parti Keadilan Rakyat, Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, and Democratic Action Party respectively) founded Pakatan Rakyat to strengthen the opposition to Barisan Nasional.

In 2015, Anwar Ibrahim was sent to prison again. Pakatan Rakyat ceased to exist on 16 June 2015 after Parti Islam Se-Malaysia left the alliance. In 2016, Mahathir Mohamad founded Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia, and joined forces with Parti Amanah Negara and Democratic Action Party to form Pakatan Harapan. At this time, Najib Abdul Razak was the prime minister, and Mahathir Mohamad's party was in the opposition.

The 14th General Election on 9 May 2018 saw Anwar Ibrahim returning to the folds of the ruling coalition, but it was no longer Barisan Nasional led by Najib Abdul Razak. The following chronology of events is based on AnwarIbrahim.com (2019). Barisan Nasional lost

to Pakatan Harapan, which formed the government at the federal level, and state level (Perak, Kedah, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Johor, and Sabah). Mahathir Mohamad became the prime minister although Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia did not have the highest number of seats among the parties in the Pakatan Harapan coalition.

On 16 May 2018, Anwar Ibrahim was pardoned by the King and released from prison. A Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) member of parliament, Danyal Balagopal Abdullah, resigned to allow Anwar Ibrahim to stand as a candidate in the by-election (Malaysiakini, 2018). On 13 October 2018, Anwar Ibrahim won the by-election in the Port Dickson constituency and returned to the parliament. Anwar Ibrahim was promised that he would succeed Mahathir Mohamad as the prime minister but an unexpected political move caused a change of government. Mahathir Mohamad resigned as the prime minister. With Pakatan Harapan no longer the ruling government, the promise could not materialise and Anwar Ibrahim lost the opportunity to become prime minister.

Subsequently, the 15th General Election took place on 19 November 2022. This paved the way for Anwar Ibrahim to take the helm of political leadership as the prime minister on 26 November 2022. The Perpaduan government was formed because none of the coalition secured a simple majority in the parliament to form the government. The Perpaduan government comprised several coalitions, and Anwar Ibrahim was entrusted by the King to lead as the prime minister.

The 12 August 2023 election in six states was the first test of Anwar Ibrahim's ability to stand strong. Some seats became available due to the death of the member of parliament. In the six states, 245 seats were contested (36 in Kedah; 45 in Kelantan, 32 in Terengganu, 40 in Penang, 56 in Selangor, and 36 in Negri Sembilan) (Povera & Sallehuddin, 2023). Eventually, the Anwar Ibrahim-led coalition retained three states (Penang, Selangor, and Negri Sembilan). He had the status quo and the power balance to remain as the prime minister.

3. Theoretical framework of the study

The theoretical framework used in the present study is Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory, which is used as reference for the following explanation. The analysis uncovers ways used by journalists to express their attitudes, engage with their subjects, and modulate the intensity of their evaluative language.

Firstly, the attitude category focuses on emotion to deal with feelings, including affect, judgment, and appreciation. The affect sub-category consists of happiness, unhappiness, security, insecurity, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction. The happiness sub-category refers to emotions of happiness and liking (e.g., I love chocolate) while unhappiness refers to sadness and dislike (e.g., I am **sad**). The security sub-category covers the feelings of peace and confidence (e.g., the captain felt **confident**) while the insecurity sub-category covers the feelings of anxiety or threaten (e.g., the world under grave **threat**). The satisfaction sub-category is about achievement (e.g., I was very **impressed**) while the dissatisfaction sub-category expresses feelings of frustration towards unaccomplished achievements (e.g., the customer is very **angry**). Hence, the affect sub-category is relevant to portray the direct impact of the government's decisions and actions in the political sphere on people's sense of security and dissatisfaction.

The judgment sub-category focuses on the attitudes of the people and the way they behave and consists of social esteem and social sanction. The social esteem sub-category consists of normality, capacity, and tenacity. Social esteem can be expressed as normality which involves, how usual or unusual someone's behaviour or situation is, (e.g., the image and fashion consciousness more **normally** associated with a homeland), capacity deals with how capable an individual is (e.g., China's **successful** experience in fighting) and tenacity refers to how resolute an individual is (e.g., the couple began their **fight**). The social sanction sub-category consists of veracity and propriety in how to behave. The veracity sub-category refers to the truthfulness of the person (e.g., he was an **honest** player) and the propriety sub-category deals with the individual's ethical behaviour (e.g., politicians need to be **ethical**) (Martin & White, 2005).

The appreciation sub-category is divided into reaction and composition. Reaction is the readers' affective response. Reaction consists of an impact category, dealing with something that can attract attention (e.g., the **extraordinary** China-Africa Summit on solidarity), and a quality sub-category expressing what the writer/speaker likes (e.g., I consider it as **beautiful**). Composition focuses on the structural elements of the text such as organisation and language (Martin & White, 2005). Composition is sub-divided into (1) a balance sub-category that portrays the issue as hanged or balanced (e.g., The country lives in **harmony**), (2) a complexity that portrays the issue as hard or easy to follow (e.g., he gives a **clear** and **precise** direction), and (3) a valuation of whether the cognition and opinion is worthwhile (e.g., the policies made by the government was **effective**). By analysing attitudes in newspaper articles, researchers can gain insights into how media organisations frame and present information, and influence the readers' emotions.

Secondly, the engagement category reveals how journalists show their posture, establish a relationship with readers, and widen or close the gap with readers. Engagement is categorised into monogloss and heterogloss. The monogloss sub-category presents the writer with a singular point of view without incorporating alternative perspectives or voices (Martin & White, 2005), such as "**Thailand is the country which has only one official language, Thai**". On the other hand, the heterogloss sub-category involves the incorporation of different points of view (Martin & White, 2005), and is sub-divided into dialogical contraction and dialogical expansion. The dialogical contraction sub-category is further divided into disclaim (voice against the issue) and proclaim (voice agreeing with the issue). Disclaim consists of a deny sub-category, the writer was against the addressee, beliefs, and supplied argumentative materials, (e.g., You **don't** need to give up potatoes to lose weight), and a counter sub-category that includes the formulations that supplants the current proposition (e.g., **although** he ate potatoes, he did not lose weight). Proclaim consists of a concur sub-category, involving agreeing with the issue (e.g., **of course**, he broke the rules), a pronounce sub-category that covers explicit authorial interventions (e.g., **there can be no doubt that** global warming is due to human activities), and an endorsement sub-category that refers to the authorial voice endorsing correctness of propositions from external sources (e.g., a report which **shows that** the dependence is associated with greater inequality). The dialogical expansion sub-category is further divided into entertainment (consider alternative voices) and attribution (acknowledgement and distance from external voice). The expansion consists of an entertain sub-category, presenting the proposition as grounded in its contingent, individual subjectivity, the authorial voice represents the propositions as a range of possible positions (e.g., the organ screen in the stables was **possibly** designed by Thomas). The expansion also consists of an attribute sub-category, refers to the subjectivity of the external voice, and the textual voice represents the propositions and the possible position and consists of acknowledge and

distances. Finally, expansion consists of the acknowledgement sub-category to strengthen validity by citing the source of information using the direct or indirect quote (e.g., Ticker **said**, regardless of the result, the commission was a waste of money), and the distance sub-category attributing the information to the source by presenting it as a direct assentation and neutrally (e.g., **according to** the latest polls, the incumbent candidate is leading in the race). In short, analysis of the engagement language reveals the relationship between the author, the reader, and the news (Huang, 2020).

Thirdly, graduation is used for strengthening and softening the evaluative meaning (Martin & White, 2005). Graduation is categorised into focus and force. Focus pertains to the specificity or generality of the language used while focus delves into the strength of the speaker's commitment to the expressed evaluation that gauges the degree of certainty or conviction conveyed, influencing how forcefully the speaker stands behind the expressed opinions (Martin & White, 2005). The focus category consists of sharpen and soften sub-categories. Adjectives are usually used to intensify the force of an appraisal in the sharpen sub-category (e.g., a **genuine** hero) and to downplay the force of an appraisal in the soften sub-category (e.g., I'm feeling **kind of** upset). Within the graduation category, journalists deftly employ language to convey the intensity of their message, aiming to persuade and engage with their audience to foster trust in the media as a reliable source.

4. Method of study

On 12 August 2023, state elections were held concurrently in six states (Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Pulau Pinang, Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu). The data for evaluative language analysis was from 71 articles published in a Malay newspaper, *Harian Metro*. The word count of 18,381 is more than other studies (Huang, 2020 with 1,154 words; Asad et al., 2021 with 5,013 words, and Kazmi et al., 2023 with 1,739 words).

The articles were collected using the search term "PRN6 negeri" (Pilihan Raya Negeri or State Elections) in the online portals of *Harian Metro* (<https://www.hmetro.com.my/>). To obtain insights into the lead-up to the 12 August 2023 elections and the aftermath of the elections, the articles were collected from 1st January 2023 to 31st August 2023. This period covered the dissolution of the respective state assemblies between 22 June and 1 July 2023. The articles were downloaded and printed for analysis using Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory.

5. Results

The analysis identified 1,408 instances of evaluative language use in *Harian Metro*'s PRN6 articles. The election news articles were characterised by graduation language (61.58% or 867 instances) more than engagement (23.58% or 332 instances) and attitudes (14.84% or 209 instances). In this results section, the sub-categories are indicated in this manner for systematicity. For example, the number is under quantity, which is under force and graduation: Graduation/Force/Quantity/Number.

5.1 Graduation

Table 1 shows the resources for the graduation category (N=867) in Harian Metro articles. To change intensity and sharpness, the main graduation resources used was number (67.50%), followed by time (25.60%) but mass or presence was hardly used (6.90%).

Firstly, in an election, number represents tangible and quantifiable information. The number of voters and contested seats has implications on the strength of political parties and their chances of winning. Other numerical information that are of interest are states involved, campaign expenses, and the number of polling stations. Numerical information are asserted with force like “1.12 juta pengundi” (1.12 million voters) as shown in Excerpt (1).

- (1) “Selangor menjadi negeri yang mempunyai jumlah pengundi muda tertinggi iaitu seramai **1.12 juta** pengundi yang membabitkan **274,194** pengundi yang berusia 18 tahun sehingga 20 tahun, manakala berusia 21 tahun hingga 29 tahun pula seramai **851,180** pengundi” (10 August 2023, Harian Metro)
 (Selangor has become the state with the highest number of young voters, with a total of **1.12 million** voters, involving **274,194** voters aged between 18 and 20 years old, while those aged 21 to 29 years old amount to **851,180** voters)

Table 1: The resources of graduation category in PRN6 articles in Harian Metro (N=867)

Category	Sub-category	Sub-category	Sub-category	Sub-category	Frequency	%	
Focus	Sharpen				0	0	
					0	0	
	Intensification	Quality			0	0	
		Process			0	0	
Force	Quantification	Number			585	67.50	
		Mass or presence			60	6.64	
		Extent	Proximity	Time		222	25.60
				Space		0	0
	Distribution		Time		0	0	
			Space		0	0	
Total					867	100	

Secondly, time reference in news articles on election clearly distinguishes between past, present, and future events. Time accounts for 25.60% of 867 instances of graduation resource use. Election events have a time-line from the dissolution of the parliament to the voting day. Hence, the graduation resource mostly shows force in the form of quantifying the extent of proximity (Graduation/Force/Quantification/Extent/Proximity/Time). Excerpt (2) mentions “hari ini” (today) to announce the dissolution of the Selangor state assembly on that day, that is, 23 June 2023.

- (2) “Dewan Undangan Negeri (DUN) Selangor bagi penggal ke-14 secara rasminya dibubarkan **hari ini**” (23 June 2023)
 (The Selangor State Legislative Assembly (Dewan Undangan Negeri Selangor) for the 14th term has been officially dissolved **today**)

Thirdly, the mass or presence sub-category refers to the quantitative representation of the force using words such as “large” and “tiny”. Mass or presence only accounts for 6.64% of graduation resources (Graduation/Force/Quantification/Mass or presence). In Excerpt (3), the

word “*besar*” (big) signifies the huge challenge posed by the upcoming election, particularly in the aspect of earning trust of young voters.

- (3) “*PRN kali ini memberikan cabaran besar terutama untuk mendapat kepercayaan pengundi muda yang mewakili 55%*” (25 July 2023)
 (This upcoming general election (PRN) presents a **big** challenge, particularly in gaining the trust of young voters who represent 55%)

The abundance of numbers in the PRN6 articles shows reliance on graduation resources, using quantification of force. Besides numbers, time and mass or presence also grade the attributes. Graduation resources using intensification of focus was not used as it is unusual for news articles on elections to use adjectives like “real” and “true” for sharpening of meaning or “kind of” for softening of meaning because these are hard news articles and not feature articles or opinion pieces.

5.2 Engagement

Table 2 shows the resources for the engagement category in Harian Metro articles (N=332) relied on the heterogloss sub-category but did not use monogloss. The heterogloss language takes the form of acknowledgement (79.52% of 332 instances), counter (19.28%) and concur (1.20%).

Table 2: The resources of engagement category in PRN6 articles in Harian Metro (N=332)

Category	Sub-category	Sub-category	Frequency	%
Monogloss			0	0
	Disclaim	Deny	0	0
		Counter	64	19.28
Heterogloss	Proclaim	Concur	4	1.20
		Pronounce	0	0
		Endorse		
	Entertain		0	0
Attribute	Acknowledge	264	79.52	
	Distance	0	0	
Total			332	100

Heterogloss language comprises mainly acknowledgment using direct and indirect quotations of information sources (Engagement/Heterogloss/Expand/Attribute/Acknowledge). Citing sources shows authenticity of views. This reflects dialogical expansion. In Excerpt (4), the word “*katanya*” (she said) attributes the source of the information to Nuraini Yusof, the Chief Minister of UMNO Kedah. She expressed her desire for the best possible preparations to be made in order to ensure that Barisan Nasional wins the elections.

- (4) “*Saya berharap kita dapat mempersiapkan jentera dengan sebaik mungkin demi kemenangan BN, banyak lagi agenda yang perlu kita teruskan, katanya*” (25 July 2023)
 (I hope we can prepare our machinery as best as possible for the victory of BN. There are many more agendas that we need to continue, **she said**)

The second sub-category of heterogloss is counter (Engagement/Heterogloss/Expand/Disclaim/Counter) using conjunctions, connectives and adjuncts. Excerpt (5) uses the words “*Selain itu*” (Besides) to inform readers that there are other states holding their state election for the first time on 12 August 2023.

- (5) “*Selain itu, Melaka dan Johor juga menjadi antara negeri yang turut pertama kali mengadakan PRN masing-masing...*” (15 July 2023, Harian Metro)
(**Besides**, Melaka and Johor are also among the states that are holding their respective PRN for the first time...)

Opposite to countering is concurring (Engagement/Heterogloss/Proclaim/Concur) with prior utterances expressed using words like “of course” and “actually”. In Excerpt (6), Nuraini Yusof is quoted as saying “of course” when pledging to do her best if she wins the Bandar Baharu state constituency. She said “of course” to agree with her supporters to assure them that she is committed to her promises. Both counter and counter are dialogical contractions, and make allowances for views that challenge, fend off or restrict the scope of the propositions.

- (6) “*Yang pasti, saya akan tetap melakukan yang terbaik sekiranya diberi peluang untuk berkhidmat di Dun Bandar Baharu*” (25 July 2023)
(**Of course**, I will continue to do my best if given the opportunity to serve in the Bandar Baharu State Assembly)

The PRN6 articles contained allowances for alternative viewpoints, reflected in the use of heterogloss. This can be considered reader-friendly, given that it explicitly invites readers to engage in the discourse, and makes the statement less imposing to readers (Armonrattanasirichok & Jaroongkhongdach, 2017). In comparison, there is far less use of dialogical contractions (counter, concur) than dialogical expansions (acknowledge) showing that the journalists seldom distance themselves from readers. Armonrattanasirichok and Jaroongkhongdach (2017) states that writers are often reluctant to express compelling propositions that may align with some readers or distance themselves from other readers.

5.3 Attitudes

Table 3 shows the resources of attitudes category in the Harian Metro articles on PRN6 (N=209). The judgment sub-category (72.73%) dominated, followed by the affect sub-category (26.79%) but appreciation sub-category is hardly used (0.48%).

Judgment. The first sub-category of the attitudes resources is judgment which deals with behaviour which is admired or condemned. The judgment sub-category is further divided into social esteem (135 instances) and social sanction (17 instances). In other words, the PRN6 news articles are inclined to highlight the admirable and fair behaviour of politicians rather than abnormal behaviours.

Table 3: The resources of attitudes in PRN6 articles in Harian Metro (N=209)

Type of attitude	Category	Sub-category	Sub-category	Frequency	%
Judgment	Social esteem	Normality	Positive normality	9	5.92
			Negative normality	0	0
		Capacity	Positive capacity	92	60.53
			Negative capacity	17	11.18
		Tenacity	Positive tenacity	17	11.18
			Negative tenacity	0	0
	Social sanction	Veracity	Positive veracity	0	0
			Negative veracity	0	0
		Propriety	Positive propriety	15	9.87
			Negative propriety	2	1.31
Judgment Total				152	100
Affect		Happiness		0	0
		Unhappiness		1	1.78
		Satisfaction		2	3.57
		Dissatisfaction		0	0
		Security		46	82.14
		Insecurity		7	12.50
Affect Total				56	100
Appreciation	Reaction	Impact	Positive impact	0	0
			Negative impact	0	0
		Quality	Positive quality	0	0
			Negative quality	0	0
	Balance	Positive balance	0	0	
		Negative balance	0	0	
	Composition	Complexity	Positive complexity	0	0
			Negative complexity	0	0
		Valuation	Positive valuation	1	100
			Negative valuation	0	0
Appreciation Total				1	100
Grand Total;				209	

Judgment/Social Esteem language takes the form of normality, capacity and tenacity in the PRN6 news articles. Normality language refers to how usual someone is (Attitude/Judgement/Social Esteem/Normality). There were nine instances of positive normality and no negative normality was found in Harian Metro. An example of normality is shown in Excerpt (7). Anwar Ibrahim was quoted as saying that all ethnicities are present in the state of Negeri Sembilan, that is, Malays, Indians, and Chinese.

- (7) *“Ini negeri (Negeri Sembilan), semua kaum ada. Ini negeri Melayu, India, Cina”* (24 June 2023, Harian Metro)
(This state (Negeri Sembilan), all ethnicities are present. This is a state of Malays, Indians, Chinese)

Next, the capacity language (Attitude/Judgment/Social Esteem/Capacity) in the PRN6 articles focussed on positive cognitive or physical ability of politicians. Excerpt (8) uses the term *“berjaya mempertahankan”* (successfully defended) to praise the ability of Datuk Seri Dr

Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar, in retaining his seat in the Ru Rendang State Assembly for a second term and gaining even more support from voters.

- (8) “*Menteri Besar Terengganu, Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar **berjaya mempertahankan** kerusi DUN Ru Rendang buat penggal kedua dengan majority lebih tinggi*” (13 August 2023)
(Chief Minister of Terengganu, Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar **successfully defended** the Ru Rendang State Assembly seat for the second term with a higher majority)

Next, negative capacity language was used to describe the inability of politicians to retain their seat. Excerpt (9) stressed the loss suffered by UMNO in Kelantan, Kedah, and Terengganu. The term “*kalah*” (lost) denotes a negative outcome for UMNO.

- (9) “*Ini bermakna UMNO **kalah** 82% daripada keseluruhan jumlah kerusi terbabit, katanya*” (13 August 2023)
(This means UMNO **lost** 82% of the total number of seats involved, he said)

As for tenacity (Judgment/Social Esteem/Tenacity), the PRN6 news articles highlight the politicians’ diligence during the election campaign. In Excerpt (9), the word “*usaha*” (effort) draws attention to a former prime minister Muhyiddin’s determined efforts to protect three states throughout his rule. Muhyiddin Yassin desired to make a comeback as the prime minister but did not succeed in the PRN6 elections.

- (10) “*Muhyiddin berkata, jentera PN kini berada pada tahap tertinggi serta komited untuk menghadapi PRN terutama dalam **usaha** mempertahankan tiga negeri di bawah pentadbirannya, iaitu Kelantan, Terengganu, dan Kedah selain menawan tiga lagi*” (22 June 2023)
(Muhyiddin said, the PN machinery is now at its highest level and committed to facing the PRN, especially in the **effort** to defend three states under his administration, namely Kelantan, Terengganu, and Kedah, besides capturing three more)

In the PRN6 news articles, the only social sanction language used was propriety (Attitude/Judgement/Social Sanction/Propriety). There was more negative propriety language than positive propriety. For example, Excerpt (11) illustrates the unethical behaviour of political parties that consists of “*perbuatan khianat*” (acts of betrayal) and “*mengaibkan calon*” (disgracing candidates).

- (11) “*Satu kes cubaan membabitkan wang, lain kes banyak kepada **perbuatan khianat dan mengaibkan calon***” (8 August 2023, Harian Metro)
(One case involves attempted bribery, while another case involves **acts of betrayal and disgracing candidates**).

Journalists refrain from discussing societal consequences associated with unethical behaviour, emphasising social esteem to boost voter confidence. This is because, according to Martin and White (2005), the social sanction may result in unpleasant feelings, tension, and resentment as well as create an unfavourable atmosphere. In contrast, social esteem has a positive psychological influence that enhances an individual’s sense of self-worth and general mental health. Social esteem is more important in shaping public behaviour compared to social

sanction (Ahmad et al., 2019; Martin & White, 2005). The emphasis on the competence of politicians and political parties which indirectly raises the worth of these leaders in their voters' eyes.

Affect. The second sub-category of the attitudes resources is affect, which deals with positive and negative feelings. The affect sub-category is further divided into security (46 instances), insecurity (7 instances), satisfaction (2 instances), and unhappiness (1 instance) shown in Table 3 (N=56).

Firstly, the security sub-category of Affect (Attitude/Affect/Security) refers to feelings of peace, confidence, and security regarding the voting day, the outcome of the election, and the stability in the country. Excerpt (12) shows the word “*yakin*” (confident) used to describe how BN and PAS candidates could repeat the extraordinary victory of the 15th General Election in 2022 in the state election on 12 August 2023.

- (12) “*Beliau yakin berdasarkan kemenangan luar biasa pada PRU15 November lalu, PAS mampu mengulangi kejayaan sama pada PRN nanti*” (14 January 2023, Harian Metro)
(He is **confident** that based on the extraordinary victory in the recent General Election (PRU15) last November, PAS is capable of repeating the same success in the upcoming PRN)

Secondly, the satisfaction sub-category of Affect (Attitude/Affect/Satisfaction) refers to feelings of satisfaction resulting from successful completion of activities. In the PRN6 articles, there were only two instances of the satisfaction language and no instances of dissatisfaction language. This is because highlighting the sense of fulfilment may establish a feedback loop that inspires people to keep up their efforts. In Excerpt (13), the words “*sangat positif*” (very positive) indicates that the supporter's response has exceeded expectations, signifying a sense of contentment with the level of support received.

- (13) “... *sambutan penyokong di enam negeri sehingga kini sangat positif*” (4 August 2023, Harian Metro)
(... the supporters' response in six states up to now has been **very positive**)

In other states, there were negative emotions about Malay voters' poor turnout because it might cause the candidate to lose.

Appreciation. The third and last sub-category of the attitudes resources is appreciation which deals with evaluation of phenomena. In the PRN6 articles, only the valuation sub-category was present (Attitude/Appreciation/Composition/Valuation+, one instance). In Excerpt (14), the word “*sesuai*” (suitable) indicates the journalist's evaluation of the adequacy of 14 days for election campaigns.

- (1) “*Tempoh 14 hari berkempen yang ditetapkan Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya (SPR) untuk pilihanraya negeri (PRN) di enam negeri disifatkan sebagai sesuai sejajar suhu politik semasa*” (5 July 2023, Harian Metro)
(The 14-day campaign period set by the Election Commission (SPR) for state elections (PRN) in six states is described as **appropriate** in line with the current political temperature)

In the PRN6 news articles, the only type of composition language was valuation but there were no explicit attempts to signal balance in stance on issue or complexity of issue to readers. Kazmi et al.'s (2023) analysis of the 14th General Election news articles showed a much stronger preference for the positive valuation sub-category.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The study on the evaluative aspects of language in newspaper articles on six-states elections in Malaysia published in *Harian Metro* showed reliance on graduation resources and less on engagement and attitudinal resources. The graduation resources most used is numbers, while the engagement resources most used is heterogloss. Two noteworthy findings are discussed.

Firstly, the extensive use of the number sub-category of graduation (Graduation/Force/Quantification/Number) is a feature of election news to appeal to the rational minds of readers. The emphasis on quantification of force in graduation resources (as in extensive use of numbers) is suggestive of fact-focused election news reporting. By presenting numerical data related to the place of event and constituency, journalists fulfil their responsibility to educate the public with precision and specificity (Hough, 1995). This numerical precision not only informs readers but also lays the groundwork for them to perform critical scrutiny and evaluation of election outcomes.

Arunsirot (2012) also found the frequent use of graduation in coverage of the cancellation of the 2009 ASEAN Summit in 32 Thailand newspapers. The use of numbers in news articles has a profound impact on building trust among the public, a point reinforced by the findings of Koetsenruijter (2011) whose experimental study using newspaper articles with no numbers, four numbers and eight numbers showed that numerical content in articles increases perceptions of credibility. In an era of rampant misinformation, readers are more likely to rely on news that is supported by verifiable data. The numerical data presented by the journalists often express a high degree of certainty about the information provided as the use of the numbers can be seen as a linguistic force that strengthens the messages in the news. Yalch and Yalch (1984) highlighted the persuasive power of qualitative precision and qualitative context in news reporting that engenders trust in the media's role as a reliable source of information.

Secondly, engagement was the second most used category of evaluative language, after graduation, and words in the attitudes category were hardly used. In news coverage of six-states election in *Harian Metro*, the acknowledge sub-category (Engagement/Heterogloss/Expand/Attribute/Acknowledge) is the most frequently used to convince readers of the authenticity of the views and information in the news articles. The result contradicts past findings where engagement was consistently the most frequently used category (Asad et al., 2021; Huang, 2020; Kazmi et al., 2023; Khoo et al., 2012). For example, Huang (2020) and Kazmi et al. (2023) discovered the journalists use more external voice to uphold the objectivity of the news. This demonstrates how journalists offer diverse perspectives and ensure that their reporting is balanced and fair.

In the present study, *Harian Metro* was found to engage readers by presenting multiple voices in the articles on the six-states election. In the present era where readers are accustomed to a multiplicity of views, heterogloss is probably better than monogloss. The acknowledgement of external data sources reflects a consideration of various viewpoints. To attract readers, actor diversity and actor presentation in news articles are important to avoid a one-sided news environment. Buyens and van Aelst (2021) found that there was not much difference in article-

level actor diversity between alternative and mainstream news media but for external actor diversity, left-wing alternative news media present more civil society actors, while right-wing alternative news outlets cite more right-wing politicians and parties. Harian Metro is a mainstream Malay newspaper but the higher frequency of heterogloss to monogloss shows its attempt to present diverse views. This prevents perceptions of the newspaper as being bias in its reporting.

The present study has shown, using the appraisal theory, that the fact-focused election news may be a way to sidestep perceptions of the newspaper being aligned to certain political parties. This is of the essence in a situation where the leader of the Perpaduan ruling coalition has been in the government and the opposition at different points of his political career, and where the votes can swing either way. Furthermore, politicians in the opposition are aligned to important past and present political figures. This makes it particularly hard to maintain the ideal of neutrality in journalism. To counter audience distrust, mainstream journalism attempts to give “an equal voice to all political groups and views” but it is rife with difficulties at a time of heightened ideological contestation” (Ojala, 2021, p. 2042). Further investigations of audience perceptions of trust and neutrality will provide insights into the elements that can achieve a semblance of journalism impartiality, apart from linguistic resources.

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