



'New Kids on the Block': The Discursive Construction of two New Premiers by the Mass Media

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Abstract

The study focuses on news reports relating to Malaysia's Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi and Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who were given extensive media coverage during the handover period. The transition of both premiers was considered an event as Abdullah's leadership style is viewed as different from his predecessor, while Lee's ascension is expected since he is the son of the first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew. The investigation of the present study is undertaken using the analytic paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) employed by van Dijk (1996, 1998), Fairclough (1992a, 1995a, 1995b, 2003) and Fowler (1991). The analysis looks at a general characterization of the newspaper discourse, with a focus on particular discursive strategies (i.e. newspaper headlines, leads, captions under photographs; quotation patterns; over-lexicalisation) employed to conceal ideological meanings. A corpus of newspaper articles of a local daily, The Star, is examined on 100 days after Abdullah took office, and the three months leading to Lee's premiership. Results from the analyses illustrate how the representation of Abdullah and Lee as 'Mr Nice Guy' and 'Mr Mysterious Guy' respectively, are reinforced using the various discursive strategies mentioned above.

Key words: critical discourse analysis, politics, mass media

1. Introduction

This study looks into the discursive construction of two South-east Asian political leaders, Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi (fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia), and Lee Hsien Loong (third Prime Minister of Singapore).

The transition of both premiers was considered an event as Abdullah is seen as 'rather different in style from the acerbic Dr Mahathir' (Abdullah's predecessor) (Abdullah takes over in Malaysia, 2003), while Lee is the son of Singapore's first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew. The construction of the two new premiers by the mass media is considered ideological as the mass media constructs the subjects in a way they want the readers to view something. Since texts are said to contain ideological properties, texts are therefore non-neutral (Simpson 1993: 106). Hartley (1993: 80) supports this view by asserting that news values are ideological in nature as they see the world in a particular way. Although journalists claim their reporting is objective, media research has shown otherwise; news is a form of social practice representing

the world with a 'structure of values, social and economic in origin' (Fowler 1999: 1, 2, 4, 10). Even if it can be said that ideologies are not to be equated with views or beliefs (Fairclough 1995a: 42), ideologies can be understood in terms of 'propositions that generally figure as implicit assumptions in texts, which contribute to producing or reproducing unequal relations of power, relations of domination' (Fairclough 1995b: 14). Ideologies as argued by many (cf. Foucault 1972; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Fairclough 1992a, 1992b, 1995a, 1995b) are penetrated by the mechanisms of discourse. Seitz (1997) posits that the individual and its will and consciousness do not exist apart from the discourse in which they occur. After all, language is not a transparent medium through which already formed ideologies, identities and attitudes are expressed, but rather actively construct socially shared representations of the world and constructs individuals as subjects (Phillips 1998).

The focus of this paper is on how Abdullah and Lee are discursively constructed by a local daily: 100 days after helming the post (Abdullah) and three months before the transition of power from one Prime Minister to another (Lee).

2. Background

A little bit of background information on Abdullah and Lee will provide a better insight on the great interest in the transition of the two premiers.

Yang Amat Berhormat Dato' Seri Abdullah bin Haji Ahmad Badawi was born in 26 November 1939 to a prominent family in Kepala Batas, Penang (Profile: Abdullah Ahmad Badawi 2003; Abdullah Ahmad Badawi 2005). He left the civil service after fourteen years to become the Member of Parliament for his constituency of his hometown (Abdullah Ahmad Badawi 2005). However, Abdullah was in political wilderness after the leader he was supporting was expelled following a power struggle that erupted within the ruling UMNO party (Abdullah Ahmad Badawi 2005). Nevertheless, Abdullah made a comeback and was later appointed as deputy prime minister following the dismissal of Anwar Ibrahim (Profile: Abdullah Ahmad Badawi 2003; Abdullah Ahmad Badawi 2005). He took office on 31 October 2003. The world and the mass media have been watching his leadership very closely as evident in the highly-publicised 100-days of Abdullah's tenure as Malaysia's prime minister. This follows the belief of many who regarded him as 'a stop-gap premier who cannot last the distance' (Netto 2003b).

Lee Hsien Loong, born in Singapore on 10 February 1952 is also from a prominent family: the eldest child of former-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Kwa Geok Choo (Lee Hsien Loong 2005; The Cabinet 2005). Lee excelled academically and also in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), where he retired as brigadier general in 1984 and he was subsequently elected as a Member of Parliament (Kraar 2004: 38; Lee Hsien Loong: The Early Years 2004; Lee Hsien Loong 2005; The Cabinet 2005). He held a couple of positions before becoming the Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore when Goh Chok Tong became the Prime Minister of Singapore on 28 November 1990 (Lee Hsien Loong 2005; The Cabinet 2005). Lee's meteoric rise in politics has not gone unquestioned as allegations of nepotism hung over his head (Kraar 2004: 41;

Wain 2004: 15; Lee Hsien Loong 2005). Ironically in Singapore's case, the former Premier (i.e. Goh Chok Tong) was seen as the seat-warmer (Kraar 2004: 42; Abbugao 2004: B21; Lee Hsien Loong 2005) as opposed to Malaysia's new Premier (i.e. Abdullah Badawi). The allegations remained for six to seven years until Goh proved his mettle by increasing his party's vote share in the 1997 elections (Lee Hsien Loong 2005). Similarly, many political analysts have come to the opinion that Lee will not be where he is today if not for his proven leadership ability during his political journey (Lee Hsien Loong: *The Early Years* 2004). On 12 August 2004, Lee was officially sworn in as Singapore's third Prime Minister.

3. Data and Methodology

3.1 Data

The aim of this study is to bring to light how the discursive strategies of the local daily in Malaysia work to ideologically construct the political subjects, Abdullah and Lee. Thus, the local daily – The Star – has been selected because it has the largest circulation in terms of local English dailies in Malaysia and is also considered a quality newspaper in Malaysia. The data collected are the various newspaper articles published in a special on-line edition of The Star, called 'A Star Special: The PM's first 100 days', on Feb 8, 2004 for Abdullah when he has assumed the role of premiership for 100-days. As for Lee, the newspaper articles are taken between the months of June and August 2004; the 3 months leading to his appointment. The time frame was chosen for both premiers as for their own reasons. There was more attention given to the predecessor, Mahathir, during the month of handover. Thus, the spotlight only turned on to Abdullah after the handover, especially during the 100-days period; something which can be seen as the probation period for Abdullah. As for Lee, there was more attention given to him prior to the handover as opposed to Abdullah's case. As such, the newspaper articles chosen are three months prior to Lee's appointment as Prime Minister (Lee Hsien Loong 2005).

3.2 Methodology

The investigation of the present study is undertaken using the analytic paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as employed by van Dijk (1988, 1993, 1996, 1998), Fairclough (1992a, 1995a, 2003), and Fowler (1991). The analysis looks at the general categorisation of the newspaper discourse, with a focus on particular discursive strategies employed (i.e. newspaper headlines, leads, captions under photographs; quotation patterns; over-lexicalisation) to harbour ideological meanings.

One of the most comprehensive works on media discourse has been published by van Dijk (Bell 1995). His main contribution is a framework for analysing the discourse structure of news stories (Bell 1995). The analysis of this study involves the use of van Dijk's framework on 'news schemata' where the formal categories of the newspaper are examined. News schemata are the syntax of news stories, the formal categories into which news can be analysed, and their

relations to each other. The categories include summary (headline and lead), main events, background, and consequences.

According to Fairclough (1992a), texts (including media texts) are essentially intertextual whereby they are composed by elements of other texts. Although there are three aspects of intertextual analysis, this paper will only look into the first aspect of intertextual analysis (i.e. the analysis of 'discourse representation'). Discourse representation is a 'form of intertextuality in which parts of other texts are incorporated into a text, and usually explicitly marked as such, with devices such as quotation marks and reporting clauses' (Fairclough 1992a: 107). Accounts usually draw a basic distinction between 'direct' and 'indirect' discourse representation. In the case of direct discourse (DD), the words represented are in quotation marks, and there is an explicit boundary between the 'voice' of the person being reported and the 'voice' of the reporter. As for 'indirect' discourse (ID), the quotation marks disappear and the represented discourse takes the form of a clause grammatically subordinated to the reporting clause. In this case, the voices of the reporter and the reported are less clearly demarcated, and the words used to represent the latter's discourse may have been paraphrased by the reporter (Fairclough 1992a).

In the critical linguistics' theoretical framework, a method of linguistic text analysis is synthesised with a social theory of the functions of language in political and ideological processes, drawing upon the functionalist linguistic theory associated with Halliday (1978, 1994), and known as 'systemic linguistics'. Fowler et al.'s (1979) analyses concentrate on vocabulary rather than linguistic or discourse structure. Hence their concern is with how groups and individuals are labelled in the media. The term used to describe this tool of analysis is 'over-lexicalisation,' in which society – including the media – applies an excess of labels to a particular kind of person. Thus, the analysis involved in this study employs the use of Fowler et al.'s (1979) notion of 'over-lexicalisation' to examine the vocabulary used to label Abdullah and Lee.

4. Analysis

The analysis of the newspaper discourse entails the discursive strategies employed in the three areas of general characterisation of the newspaper discourse: headline, lead, photograph caption; quotation patterns; and 'over-lexicalisation'.

4.1 Newspaper Headline, Lead, Photograph Caption

The use of headline and lead in news reports is a definitive feature of news reporting to form the 'crux of the news event and to orient the reader to process the text in a pre-determined direction' (Teo 2000: 13). Bell (1991: 174) has referred to the lead as the 'story in microcosm'. Teo (2000: 13-14) posits that the 'function of the headline or lead, then is to form a cognitive macro-structure that serves as an important strategic cue to control the way readers process and make sense of the report'.

The following headlines serve to give an idea on what sort of leaders both Abdullah and Lee are:

Extract 1

a. Abdullah

Endearing gestures of a thoughtful PM (*The Star*, Feb 8, 2004)

A kinder and gentler approach (*The Star*, Feb 8, 2004)

Anti-graft war declared (*The Star*, Feb 8, 2004)

Crusade against corruption (*The Star*, Feb 8, 2004)

b. Lee

‘Hsien Loong a more committed leader’ (single quotation marks are from the newspaper) (*The Star*, June 23, 2004: B21)

Singapore’s next PM may need to win people’s hearts (*The Star*, July 21, 2004: B21)

What sort of PM will Lee be? (*The Star*, July 25, 2004: 26-27)

Lee vows a freer society (*The Star*, Aug 14, 2004: 34)

Lee eases rules on free speech (*The Star*, Aug 23, 2004: 41)

Abdullah is portrayed as a warm, kind and gentle leader as seen in the first two headlines. In the first headline, Abdullah is reported to be an ‘endearing’ premier as befitting his label of ‘Mr Nice Guy’ (Wariya 2005: 200). This is in line with the identity that is often associated with Abdullah, ‘someone who always cares and shows concern for the well-being of the poor and needy’ (Wariya 2005: 98). The second headline serves to contrast Abdullah’s ‘approach’ with another person, perhaps that of his predecessor, Tun Dr Mahathir? Note that the person Abdullah is being contrasted with is deleted. This brings about a sense of ambivalence as to whom Abdullah is being compared with. Furthermore, what is absent is also deemed significant as this is an important feature of CDA: ‘to be sensitive to absences from the text, to things which might have been ‘there’, but aren’t’ (Fairclough 1995b: 106). In this case, the newspaper has chosen to omit the object probably to avoid creating any unnecessary misunderstanding.

The first three headlines for Lee are somehow a mixed representation of him as a leader. In the first headline, Lee is commended as a ‘more committed leader’. Just like Abdullah’s case, there is an absence of the object Lee is being compared with. The newspaper most likely does not want to name the other leader as it might get into trouble. After all, there is the presupposition in the headline that Lee is a more dedicated premier as compared to his predecessor(s). In the second headline, Lee is being urged to ‘win people’s hearts’. The headline presupposes that Lee is a cold and distant person. Thus, in order for him to win the affections of the Singapore citizens, Lee must be a warmer and friendlier person. This headline reflects the general sentiment towards (Elegant 2004). As for the third headline, it is somewhat of a puzzle as it suggests that no one knows for sure how Lee will turn out as a premier. Will he be like his father, who was the first Prime Minister? Or will Lee be like his predecessor? Or will Lee be a distinct leader from his predecessors? The third headline certainly reinforces Lee as an enigma (Lee Hsien Loong: The early years 2004; Wain 2004: 15).

The final four headlines under Abdullah and the final two headlines under Lee are about the policies that the two premiers are focussing on. Analysing the policies that the two premiers have spelt out in their maiden year is significant as it can also reflect what sort of leaders they are. For Abdullah, his constant concern for corruption (Netto 2003a) serves to reinforce his label as 'Mr Nice Guy', who is 'clean, efficient and trustworthy' (Wariya 2005: 200). The words 'war' and 'crusade' indicate a battle that Abdullah is fighting for. And given his religious background (Wariya 2005: 98), the fight against graft can also be seen as a religious battle, hence the use of the word 'crusade' in the headline. On the other hand, Lee's policies are on freedom for his subjects. This presents Lee as a leader, who is concerned about human rights, especially their right to freedom of speech and freedom in other areas (Jones 2004; Kraar 2004: 38, 41; Wain 2004: 15), although these areas are not clearly spelt out. In addition, the activation of Lee as the social actor is also noteworthy. By putting Lee in the frontal position, the reporter is highlighting the idea of Lee as an active agent in the two headlines and that he is fully aware of the stand he is making. Therefore, the newspaper is attributing the statements to Lee as an active agent who is going to or has acted on his 'vows'.

Lead paragraphs usually give a more specific idea of the article as compared to headlines. For example,

Extract 2

'Hsien Loong a more committed leader'

Singapore, Tues. – Singapore's founding father Lee Kuan Yew said his son is being appointed prime minister because he is more committed and passionate about the city-state's future than other potential leaders, a newspaper reported today. (*The Star*, June 23, 2004:B21)

With this lead paragraph, the uncertainty over whom Lee is being compared with is cleared to a certain extent. His predecessor, Goh Chok Tong, is not in the list of contenders for being a committed leader. Instead, Lee is being compared with 'other potential leaders' in Singapore. However, a sense of vagueness as to who the other prospective leaders are is still evident in the lead paragraph.

Similarly, the lead paragraph below on Abdullah gives a deeper insight into the headline:

Extract 3

Moving forward for the nation

The new Prime Minister's style has become evident in the first 100 days, if somewhat discreetly. But BUNN NAGARA finds that what matters more are the months and years ahead, and all that they bring. (*The Star*, February 8, 2004)

The headline presupposes that there is someone who is 'Moving forward for the nation' and the lead paragraph confirms that the subject is the prime minister. And what the writer, Nagara, means by the headline is that the prime minister's leadership manner is slowly becoming apparent.

Photo captions help to describe the photos, rather than the news article. However, photo captions play a definitive role in defining the subject of the news article. Bignell (1997: 81) suggests that 'news is not just facts, but representations produced in language and other signs like photographs. Some newspaper articles have pictures attached as to add emphasis on the topic or issue being discussed'. For example, there are three photo captions in one news article on Lee ('What sort of PM will Lee be?'). In the photo caption FAMILY MAN: Lee with his parents during Lee Sr's 80th birthday celebrations and, at right, the father of four with wife Ho Ching and two of his children, Hongyi, 16 (next to him) and Haoyi, 14. There are two photos here. One shows his parents cutting a cake while Lee looks on clapping his hands. The other photo is of Lee with his two sons and wife looking out at the horizon. The two photos present Lee as very much a filial son, and a devoted father and husband to his parents, sons and wife respectively. This helps to portray Lee in a positive light where his personal life is concerned. As for the third photo caption, POSITIVE CHANGES: The youthful-looking Lee now smiles more readily and is exceptionally confident of himself. The photo illustrates Lee smiling with both his hands in a clasp; a picture of confidence (leadership qualities) and humility (ready to serve the country and her people). The photo caption describes Lee as a capable leader who will bring 'positive changes' to the country's administration. The photo also does him justice as it illustrates a positive image of Lee who looks healthy and is able to take on the challenging task ahead of him. This positive presentation of Lee is very important as Lee was diagnosed and treated for cancer in 1992 (Elegant 2004; Kraar 2004: 38; Wain 2004: 18). Thus, this photo is very significant as 'we must not discount the power of the photograph and its tremendous influence on society. The image that we see first stays with us the longest' (Rees 2004).

In conclusion, all these meanings expressed in the news reports and the choices made over which discursive strategies to employ, all serve to impose some ideological perceptions and interpretations of the readers towards Abdullah and Lee as both a politician and a man at the same time.

4.2 Quotation Patterns

The second characteristic of the newspaper discourse under analysis is the use of various sources of information to construct the news articles. These quotes, either 'direct discourse' (DD) or 'indirect discourse' (ID), are often imbued within the news report to give it a sense of 'facticity' and authenticity (Tuchman 1978). Additionally, these quotes are often attributed to people who are deemed important or an authority in that particular area. Thus, the use of quotation becomes 'a gate-keeping device that admits only those in positions of power and influence while shutting out the opinions and perspectives of those deemed by society to be powerless' (Teo 2000: 18).

The findings from the analysis of this study reveal some interesting insights into the 'voices' heard or suppressed in the news articles written about Abdullah and Lee during the period of analysis. The analysis will first look into Abdullah before moving on to Lee.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of the various 'Voices' (Abdullah)

												Total	
Voice	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	12
Frequency	13	4	10	5	11	15	4	6	1	3	16	4	92
%	14	4	11	6	12	16	4	7	1	3	18	4	100

- A – Reporters (mainstream paper)
- B – Abdullah's wife
- C – Abdullah
- D – Religious leaders
- E – Opposition leaders
- F – Foreign media
- G – Foreign public
- H – *Barisan Nasional* politicians
- I – Foreign leaders
- J – Foreign / Local investors
- K – Industry leaders
- L – Malaysian public

The findings from Table 1 above show some surprising results. The industrial key leaders are accorded the biggest amount of space at 18%. Furthermore, most of the quotes are direct quotation (DD). This is unanticipated as Abdullah is seen more as a political figure with a 'progressive religious background' (Wariya, 2005: 79) than with the industry. However, if one was to observe closely, these industrial key leaders are the ones directly and/or indirectly linked with the policies that Abdullah is strongly advocating for, such as 'economic development, balanced development, education, religion, development of civic, moral and ethical values, laws and order as well as public services and foreign policy' (Wariya 2005: 178). Among the industrial key leaders given space are Datuk Abdul Wahid Omar (PLUS Expressways Bhd executive vice-chairman), Dr Mohd Talha Alithamby (National Association of Private Higher Educational Institutions (Napei) president), and Tan Sri Dr Ahmad Tajuddin Ali (Gas Malaysia Sdn Bhd chairman). The next group whose 'voice' is heard a lot is the foreign media. This is surprising as most often than not, foreign media have a reputation for taking 'pot shots' at the Malaysian leadership, especially Tun Dr. Mahathir (Hamzah, 2004). Thus, it may not seem to be a good idea to allocate so much space to the critical 'voice' of foreign media as Abdullah is new and it is like sending a lamb to the slaughter house. Nevertheless, the foreign media gave commendable reviews of Abdullah. For example, veteran journalist Philip Bowering who is known for writing critical commentaries about Southeast Asian leaders, wrote a flattering article on Abdullah. Similarly, other foreign media were also supportive of Abdullah even before he completed his first 100 days. It is hardly surprising that the local mainstream media is next accorded the biggest amount of space at 14%. The 'voice' of opposition leaders is heard quite a lot at 12%. Many of the opposition leaders heard are from various opposition parties, such as Ustaz Wan Ismail Wan Jusoh (Kelantan PAS¹ liaison committee secretary and Melor assemblyman), Kerk Kim Hock (DAP² secretary-general), and Mustapha Kamil Ayub (secretary-general of the yet to

be registered Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR). In spite of some criticisms, the opposition find that Abdullah has been ‘hitting all the right spots since taking over the premiership of the country on Oct 31’ (Leong 2004). Subsequently, Abdullah himself is heard about 11% of the total space. His ‘voice’ is heard on issues pertaining to governing the country to his hopes for the country. The other ‘voices’ heard are Abdullah’s wife (4%), religious leaders (6%), foreign public (4%), *Barisan Nasional*³ politicians (7%), foreign leaders (1%), foreign/local investors (3%), and Malaysian public (4%). The small amount of space accorded to these groups of people (i.e. Abdullah’s wife, religious leaders, Barisan Nasional politicians) is surprising as they can be considered to be people closest to Abdullah. On the other hand, by highlighting or giving more space to ‘voices’ of people from the unconventional groups, the paper has managed to present Abdullah in a more favourable light as an able leader.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of the various ‘Voices’ (Lee)

													Total
Voice	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	12
Frequency	6	13	11	1	10	10	31	8	6	6	2	30	134
%	5	10	8	1	7	7	23	6	5	5	1	22	100

- A – Lee Kuan Yew
- B – Goh Chok Tong
- C – Lee Hsien Loong
- D – Lee Hsien Loong’s wife
- E – People’s Action Party politicians
- F – Opposition leaders
- G – Political Analysts
- H – Reporters (Mainstream newspaper)
- I – Foreign government
- J – Foreign Media
- K – Singapore’s President
- L – Singaporean public

The results of analysis in Table 2 above are very interesting. Political analysts’ ‘voice’ is heard most often, with 23% of space accorded to them. Some of the political analysts heard are Seah Chiang Nee, Garry Rodan, Karim Raslan, and K. Kesavapany. These political analysts come from various backgrounds, ranging from former politicians to political researchers. Some of the quotes are in the form of Direct Discourse (DD) and some are in Indirect Discourse (ID). When DD is used, the newspaper is making a clear distinction between the views of the political analyst than that of the newspaper. It is only when DD is interspersed in ID that the reader cannot be sure whose views are being heard; is it that of the political analyst or that of the newspaper. This creates a sense of ambivalence as one cannot be certain whose ‘voice’ is being heard. The next ‘voice’ heard most often is the Singaporean public (22%). This is significant as the public is often not seen as belonging to a group with power or is newsworthy. Thus, the newspaper has actually given a form of status conferral to the Singaporean public when it decided to air their views. Furthermore, they are accorded the second biggest space after the political

analysts. The figures for these two groups indicate two things. One is that Lee is considered a mystery by many and therefore, the need for political analysts to give their views about Lee's leadership capabilities based on their analyses. The other assumption that the public is given so much space is in line with Lee's call for greater freedom of speech (Jones 2004: Kraar 2004: 38). The other 'voices' heard are not given much space as compared to the political analysts and the Singaporean public. This serves to emphasise the notion that no one knows for sure what sort of political leader Lee will turn out to be but he wants to be seen as a forward-looking leader who is keen to show his 'softer side'.

In conclusion, quotation patterns can be a powerful ideological tool to manipulate readers' perception and interpretation of people and events in news report. Abdullah's identity as 'Mr Nice Guy' is consolidated by foregrounding the 'voices' from key industry players, foreign media, and opposition leaders. On the other hand, Lee's identity is rather complex but he has been advised to show his 'softer side'. Consequently, the 'voice' of political analysts and the public are foregrounded. Thus, this establishes the belief that the media possess the power to make a choice over whose 'voice' is foregrounded or backgrounded.

4.3 'Over-lexicalisation'

The third characteristic of the newspaper discourse under analysis is the use of over-lexicalisation. Fowler et al. (1979) as cited in Teo (2000) defines over-lexicalization as a method of encoding ideology in news discourse. It is seen in a surplus of repetitious, quasi-synonymous terms, giving rise to a sense of over-completeness (Van Dijk 1991 as cited in Teo 2000).

To be more specific, Fowler (1991: 85) describes it as an 'excess of quasi-synonymous terms for entities or ideas that are a particular preoccupation or problem in the culture's discourse'. Over-lexicalization can also be identified in the repetition of a particular lexis (Fowler 1991). Though in most circumstances this strategy is used to characterize people who are oppressed, powerless or underprivileged, in this case, over-lexicalization is employed to reflect different images and characteristics of the two premiers.

In Tables 3 to 6, all the lexical items highlighted show a representation of both Abdullah and Lee. Due to space constraints, attention will be given to only two aspects of representation: leadership qualities, and personal qualities. The words in each table are repetitions, synonyms or are quasi synonymous which contribute to the positive representation of both premiers.

Table 3: Words Relating to Abdullah's Leadership Qualities

Source	Title of Article	Reference to <i>leadership</i>
08/02/05	Moving forward for the nation	Both a good communicator and a willing listener; relentless drive and pace in promoting, implementing and explaining public policy
08/02/05	Endearing gestures of a thoughtful PM	Has the bearing and personality of a cosmopolitan leader; religious leadership; a leader of the people; his administration is proactive and responsive to issues; launched a campaign against corruption,

		ordered reviews of big infrastructure contracts, made personal spot checks on government offices notorious for mismanagement and graft; determined leader pursuing his own agenda; non-confrontational style on foreign policy as a fresh approach
08/02/05	Kudos from the foreign media	A belief in the importance of public institutions and a pluralistic approach to social and religious issues
08/02/05	A kinder and gentler approach	A 'kinder and gentler' way of promoting the region and keeping it an area of relevance and growth
08/02/05	Neighbourly moves welcomed	Most Singaporeans have taken to Pak Lah's diplomacy with their country and focused leadership; emphasis on transparency and meritocracy
08/02/05	Facing up to the next test	Has brought hope and freshness to the country's leadership with his pledge to tackle a range of pressing issues – from corruption, corporate governance, transparency, efficiency in the civil service to projecting himself as a servant to the people rather than their political master
08/02/05	Pak Lah outlines his agenda	His people-oriented style, respect for the institutions of government and determination to give attention to what he calls the software part of development have by now become familiar hallmarks of his administrative priorities
08/02/05	The revolution in education	Abdullah's image as a stickler for transparency; being very strict with government departments shows his commitment to quality; 'Pak Lah impresses me as a religious and practical leader, a model of kesederhanaan (moderation)'; an effective and efficient leader
08/02/05	Anti-graft war declared	Pledged to carry out his duties with integrity, trustworthiness, efficiency and fairness; has lived up to his reputation as someone who is prepared to do what he promised to do

In Table 3, words such as *effective*, *efficient*, *proactive*, *responsive* and *focused* are similar in meaning to purposeful; indicating that Abdullah is a good leader who knows what he wants and gets things done. As for verbs such as *launched*, *ordered*, *promote*, *tackle* and *pledged*, they create the image of Abdullah as a leader who is actively involved in carrying out his duties to ensure that there is transparency and also to build an image of clean corporate governance. Furthermore, his diplomatic style of leadership is emphasised numerous times over terms such as a *good communicator* and a *willing listener*, *non-confrontational style*, *'kinder and gentler' way*, *people-oriented style*. These terms effectively reinforce the image of Abdullah as a good leader.

Table 4: Words Relating to Abdullah's Personal Qualities

Source	Title of Article	Reference to <i>character</i>
08/02/05	Moving forward for the nation	Agreeable demeanour; the affable Mr Nice Guy was also an avuncular Mr Clean
08/02/05	Endearing gestures of a thoughtful PM	Simple and yet thoughtful gestures; follows good values such as staying away from corruption; approachable
08/02/05	Kudos from the foreign media	Had a reputation for personal honesty; a combination of competence and modest demeanour; soft-spoken personal style; down-to-earth affability and consensual style
08/02/05	A kinder and gentler approach	Non-confrontational style and soft-spoken mannerism had already won him kudos
08/02/05	Neighbourly moves welcomed	Comes across as an honest, low-key person
08/02/05	Facing up to the next test	Populist, non-combative and clean image
08/02/05	Pak Lah outlines his agenda	Can be tactful yet firm and tough; describe Pak Lah as <i>bersih</i> (clean) as well as <i>mesra</i> (friendly); a decent, God-fearing man
08/02/05	Anti-graft war declared	'Although his demeanour appears to be mild, deep down he is a tough man and means business'

From Table 4, all the adjectives used paint an image of 'Mr Nice Guy' – one who is *agreeable, affable, simple, modest demeanour, honest, low-key, down to earth, mild*. These qualities seem surreal for a leader, or an effective but the findings from Table 3 above has shown that Abdullah possesses good leadership qualities. His 'Mr Nice Guy' image is also supported by his 'Mr Clean' image as is evident in this list of personal qualities: *good values, staying away from corruption, personal honesty, clean image, bersih (clean)*. This is in line with his crusade against corruption. However, beneath this nice guy image, there is an underlying image of someone who is firm: *firm, tough, tough man and means business*.

Table 5: Words Relating to Lee's Leadership Qualities

Source	Title of Article	Reference to <i>leadership</i>
23/06/04	'Hsien Loong a more committed leader'	'exceptional capabilities'
19/07/04	Goh: Lee wants me to remain in Cabinet	Will take Singapore to a higher level; Singapore will be in very good hands
21/07/04	Singapore's next PM may need to win people's hearts	'tested hands'; 'made his mark'; the younger Lee's public persona contrasts with the popular perception of Goh Chok Tong
25/07/04	What sort of PM will Lee be?	His reputation for being uncompromising on key issues and disdainful of populist politics although he is open to well-thought-out criticism; a formidable PM; a blunt-speaking, ultra rational leader but there

		has been a conscious effort to appear more approachable and he has begun to let his softer side shine through
25/07/04	Reaching out to Singapore's Malay community	Lee's enormous experience in the country's policies and administration
25/07/04	Goh has made his own mark	A stronger, faster thinking leader compared to Goh, who is, however, more likeable and popular
1/08/04	Daunting task ahead for the new premier	'People have all kinds of ideas about Hsien Loong but he is extremely popular in Ang Mo Kio. Over there, he is their MP, a regular guy talking to shopkeeper and taxi drivers' ; He is a genuine Singaporean at heart and well-trained for the job
1/08/04	Singaporeans confident of progress	Mr Lee Hsien Loong has been ready to adopt new ways of going about things and looking at issues and this is evident in the changes in the banking and education sectors; confidence in the ability of Mr Lee Hsien Loong to lead us with his dynamism; an able and intelligent leader; adapts well when he is with his constituents and when he is on the bigger stage
8/08/04	Poll shows strong support for Lee	He is capable
13/08/04	Challenging time ahead for Hsien Loong	'I'm my own man and people will have to accept me for who I am and look for what I can do for them'
13/08/04	Lee junior heralds new era	Has all the right credentials; known to the world outside Singapore as Kuan Yew's son
23/08/04	Lee eases rules on free speech	Outlined his vision for the city-state late yesterday, vowing to deliver on his call for a more open society by easing free-speech restrictions in the famously strait-laced country
24/08/04	Lee sees major changes ahead	Painted a vision of a Singapore brimming with promise and opportunity on Sunday night, and pledged a major overhaul of policies to get Singaporeans moving to that future; wants to go beyond economics and social bonding, to build a dynamic Singapore that challenges past thinking and encourages greater diversity.
29/08/04	Towards a more human Singapore	Called for his people to spend more time with their families, to relish home-life and the enriching pleasures of child rearing.
29/08/04	Lee's maiden speech reveals a lot about the man	A personable leader, not the harsh, unapproachable man he was made out to be; come across as a convincing speaker with a serious but positive attitude towards resolving the problems facing Singapore; knows how to link up with the younger people
5/09/04	Young eyes watching Lee	'This is the man who is going to push forward many of the changes'; 'Although PM Lee will govern in his own style, it is clear that associating himself closely with Goh will help soften the public image people have of him; many of the students feel that he is as

		authoritarian and brusque as his father; ‘He has been seen kissing babies and seems to be intently listening to old aunties in the markets. He has also tried to appeal to the younger generation, as with the picture of him talking to junior college students’
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Table 5 above contains a mixed-bag of Lee’s leadership qualities. Many view him as a capable leader (Wain 2004: 15): *exceptional capabilities, in very good hands, tested hands, made his mark, enormous experience in the country’s policies and administration, a stronger, faster thinking leader, able and intelligent, capable*. He is also described as a compliant leader: *adopt new ways, adapts well*. Furthermore, he is portrayed as a visionary leader: *Outlined his vision, painted a vision of a Singapore brimming with promise and opportunity*. On the other hand, the pre-conceived ideas many have of Lee is evident in these descriptions: *People have all kinds of ideas about Hsien Loong but he is extremely popular in Ang Mo Kio, ‘I’m my own man and people will have to accept me for who I am and look for what I can do for them’, known to the world outside Singapore as Kuan Yew’s son*. Thus, there is no conclusive idea of Lee’s leadership qualities as he is being compared to both his predecessor and his father, who happened to be the first Prime Minister of Singapore (Kraar 2004: 36).

Table 6: Words Relating to Lee’s Personal Qualities

Source	Title of Article	Reference to <i>character</i>
21/07/04	Singapore’s next PM may need to win people’s hearts	Will likely have a tougher time winning the hearts and minds of the average person on the street; lacks warmth, doesn’t connect with the people
25/07/04	What sort of PM will Lee be?	The illness, some said, had a maturing effect on him, lending him a certain vulnerability to balance his exacting side; exceptionally confident of himself; now smiles more easily...quite charming, his mother’s intuition and facility with words and his father’s logical cut; tough guy image
25/07/04	Goh has made his own mark	Strong character
28/07/04	LKY to remain in Cabinet	Stern figure
13/08/04	Lee junior heralds new era	Younger days: (<i>acquaintances</i>) Brilliant academically; a tall, remote, occasionally lonely figure. Someone distant; (<i>friends</i>) a disciplined but fun-loving boy who worked hard but also had time for play; one of the boys Current days: (<i>acquaintances</i>) brilliant but distant and aloof; (<i>friends</i>) open, warm and spontaneous; (<i>general</i>) there’s always been something of a mystique surrounding the man
29/08/04	Lee’s maiden speech reveals a lot about the man	It’s evident he’s no Lee Kuan Yew; he is articulate; raw intelligence oozing out of Hsien Loong

As for Lee's personal qualities, Table 6 also illustrates some contrasting views of the premier. Many generally agree that Lee is extremely clever: *Brilliant academically, brilliant, raw intelligence*. And yet, Lee is also seen as a reserved man (Kraar 2004: 37; Wain 2004: 15): *lacks warmth, doesn't connect with the people, lonely figure, someone distant, distant and aloof, there's always been something of a mystique surrounding the man*. Some think of Lee as a copy of his father, Lee Kuan Yew (Kraar 2004: 36): *his father's logical cut; tough guy image, sterner figure*.

In conclusion, both Abdullah and Lee's leadership and personal qualities has been over-lexicalised with a wide range of quasi-synonyms.

5. Conclusion

This study has been an attempt to probe for ideological construction of identity of the two neighbouring premiers (i.e. Abdullah and Lee) diffused within the structure of newspaper reporting. With the discursive strategies employed, i.e. an examination of headlines, leads, and photograph captions, quotation patterns and 'over-lexicalisation', both Abdullah and Lee have been illustrated as 'Mr Nice Guy' and 'Mr Mysterious Guy' respectively.

Notes

¹ PAS stands for Parti Islam Se-Malaysia. It is an opposition party in Malaysia formed in 1955 and is currently the ruling government for one of the states in Malaysia, Kelantan. Its foundation is based on Islamic principles and has recently declared Kelantan to be an Islamic state in 2005.

² DAP stands for Democratic Action Party. It is an opposition party in Malaysia and was founded in 1966. The DAP is committed to the struggle for a free, democratic socialist Malaysia, based on the principles of human rights, equality, social and economic justice, and founded on the institution of parliamentary democracy.

³ *Barisan Nasional* is the ruling government in Malaysia. It comprises three main political parties: UMNO, MCA and MIC.

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