

**A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
ON THE REPRESENTATION OF
THE ORANG ASLI IN THE MEDIA:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA	Aboriginal Peoples Act
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
JAKOA	Department of <i>Orang Asli</i> Development
SFL	Systemic Functional Linguistics
SUHAKAM	Human Rights Commission of Malaysia
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration of Rights of the Indigenous Peoples

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**ANALISIS WACANA KRITIS TENTANG REPRESENTASI ORANG
ASLI DI MEDIA: SATU KAJIAN PERBANDINGAN**

ABSTRAK

Kajian yang berkaitan dengan penggambaran masyarakat *Orang Asli* dalam media telah menunjukkan penggambaran yang bersifat stereotaip dan merendahkan. Kebanyakan kajian yang sedia ada telahpun memberikan fokus kepada penggambaran masyarakat *Orang Asli* dalam sumber media arus perdana manakala kajian berkaitan dengan sumber media arus alternatif masih berkurangan. Oleh itu, fokus kajian ini bertumpu kepada perbandingan penggambaran *Orang Asli* dalam keratan akhbar sumber media arus perdana (*The Star*) dan sumber media alternatif (*Malaysiakini*) melalui pendekatan Analisis Wacana Kritis (CDA). Kajian ini dijalankan dengan penggunaan Kerangka Teori Tiga Dimensi Fairclough (1995b) yang digabungkan bersama Kaedah Linguistik Berfungsi Halliday dan Matthiessen (2014) serta Teori Ideologi van Dijk (1998a). Sebanyak 12 keratan akhbar dipilih daripada *The Star* and *Malaysiakini* dan dicerakinkan berdasarkan tiga peringkat analisis mengikut kerangka teori Fairclough (1995) yang merangkumi peringkat mikro (leksikal dan transitiviti), peringkat meso (intertekstualiti) dan peringkat makro (analisis sosiobudaya dan ideologi). Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa kedua-dua sumber media menggambarkan masyarakat *Orang Asli* sebagai sebuah masyarakat yang tundur, tradisional, dan bermasalah serta bergantung kepada bantuan pihak berkuasa. Tambahan pula, hasil kajian turut menunjukkan bahawa ciri-ciri positif pihak berkuasa dititikberatkan manakala ciri-ciri negatif masyarakat *Orang Asli* ditekankan. Hal ini menyebabkan penggambaran yang bertentangan antara pihak berkuasa dan masyarakat *Orang Asli* di mana pihak berkuasa disifatkan sebagai

“Sendiri” dan masyarakat *Orang Asli* sebagai “Lain”. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan peranan *Malaysiakini* dalam memberikan ruang yang banyak kepada masyarakat *Orang Asli* untuk menyuarakan pendapat dan pandangan mereka berbanding dengan *The Star*. Oleh itu, walaupun hasil kajian menunjukkan beberapa nuansa antara *The Star* dan *Malaysiakini*, kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa kedua-dua sumber media masih berpegang kepada ideologi serta amalan dalam menggambarkan masyarakat *Orang Asli* melalui persepsi yang negatif dan stereotaip. Secara amnya, hasil kajian yang didapati boleh menjadi titik rujukan kepada pihak media untuk menjadi lebih terangkum dan tidak berat sebelah dalam penggambaran masyarakat *Orang Asli*.

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON THE REPRESENTATION OF THE ORANG ASLI IN THE MEDIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

ABSTRACT

Research concerning the representation of the *Orang Asli* in the media has generally revealed representational patterns that revolve around pejorative and stereotypical depictions. Most of the existing research has mainly examined the community's representation in mainstream news outlets whereas studies concerning alternative news outlets have received little attention. Thus, this study focuses on examining the representation of the *Orang Asli* by a comparison between the country's most frequented mainstream (*The Star*) and alternative (*Malaysiakini*) news outlets from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. The news reports were examined using Fairclough's (1995b) Three-Dimensional Framework together with the integration of Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and van Dijk's (1998a) Theory of Ideology. A total of 12 news reports were selected from *The Star* and *Malaysiakini* respectively and were examined according to the three levels of analysis namely the micro (lexical and transitivity structures), meso (intertextuality), and macro levels (sociocultural practices and ideology) as outlined in Fairclough's (1995b) framework. The findings at the micro and meso level show that the *Orang Asli* were portrayed to be traditional, dependent, problematic, and underdeveloped by both news outlets. This study also found that the positive actions of the authorities were emphasised whereas the negative characteristics of the *Orang Asli* were accentuated thus resulting in the ideological polarisation of "Us versus Them". However, the findings also revealed that *Malaysiakini* did represent the voices of the *Orang Asli* more frequently as compared to *The Star*. Despite the nuances

identified between *The Star* and *Malaysiakini*, this study concludes that the ideological practices of the media still prevail in constructing the *Orang Asli* in a negative and stereotypical manner. On the whole, the findings of this study could serve as a reference point for news outlets to be more inclusive and impartial in representing the *Orang Asli*.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a general account on the comparative study on the portrayal of the *Orang Asli* in the media between a local mainstream and alternative news outlets. The researcher begins the chapter by providing an overview of the background of the study, followed by the problem statement, the research aims, the research objectives and the research questions of the study. The chapter then proceeds to a discussion on the study's limitations and the contextualised definition of several key terms that are relevant to the study. The researcher concludes this chapter by outlining the organisation of the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

The media plays a very important role by actively disseminating information to its consumers all around the world and is strengthening its position in being a primary source of knowledge and information in our daily lives. The media too carries an important role as a main and credible source of information in presenting accurate information to its consumers while having the power to influence people's beliefs, attitudes and perceptions (Jamal, 2015). Jackson and Nesterova (2017) point out that the media functions to facilitate its consumers in understanding a particular world while reflecting its normalised representations. However, being a primary form of discourse in mass media, Fowler (1991) states that the production of news is a practice that exerts a mediating function in the social construction of reality.

The mass media can often be subjected to "obstacles" (Anuar, 1994, p.202) especially with regard to the nature of ownership of media houses which may have

strong business, government or political affiliations (Anuar, 1994). As a result, such affiliations allow these media houses to produce a discourse that serves to empower the goals and objectives of those in power while overshadowing lower-class minorities. Therefore, in this context, the production of such discourse in news reports can be attributed to the journalistic practices which Tian (2018) highlights that news reports are produced through the journalists' viewpoint often compromising the objectivity of news reports in reflecting the truthfulness of social reality. In addition, media houses also possess the capability to "select" (Fowler, 1991; Tian, 2018; van Dijk, 1988, 2008) what needs to be included and omitted (Fairclough, 1995b; Xin Bin, 2005 as cited in Tian, 2018) in news reports. This can be correlated with Fowler's (1991, p. 222) description of news, which states, "news is not a natural phenomenon emerging straight from 'reality', but a product. It is produced by an industry, by relations between the media and other industries and, most importantly, by relations with government and with other political organisations".

Given that the media's content possesses the ability to construct the social reality, culture and identities of its consumers (Hammer, 2007), ethnic or racial topics are also subjected to the influences of the media in which Hall (1995) states that the media constructs a definition of what race is and its meanings to society in order to provide a classification of the world in terms of race. In general, race is a concept that distinguishes people according to their physical characteristics (van Dijk, 1991; Blakemore, 2021) whereas ethnicity is a concept that categorises a group of people based on their language, cultural, and religious attributes (Blakemore, 2021). In the context of this study, both terms will be interchangeably used as van Dijk (2000) consider racial and ethnic inequalities as a part of racism. Likewise, Blakemore (2021) states that both concepts are interchangeably used in distinguishing different groups of

people, however, it is arguable that both concepts have been intertwined to associate both physical and cultural attributes (van Dijk, 1991). Hence, in view of the terms race and ethnicity, the media possesses the power to construct and frame their discourses that favour the dominant groups in power. van Dijk (2016) labels these dominant entities as “symbolic elites” that are entitled to special access to their discourse. The dominant is often perceived as an individual or group who has access to power and is able to construct and shape their discourses to portray themselves positively while possessing the upper hand to marginalise the weak. Therefore, to maintain a consistent positive image in the eyes of the masses, these dominant groups are likely to continuously downplay the weak through the various use of discursive practices. One of the discursive ways is the use lexical items that carry negative connotations such as “scroungers” or “illegals” or through the use of the personal pronouns “we” and “they” or “I” and “you” which creates a dichotomous identification between the dominant and the weak (Simpson et al., 2019, p.24). This leads to van Dijk’s (1993a) ideological polarisation of “Us versus Them” that revolves between the division of the dominant and the weak. As a result, media discourse functions ideologically in the reproduction of social relations of dominance and exploitation (Fairclough, 1995b).

The media also plays a role in the dissemination of news regarding the developments or issues about the ethnic affairs of the minorities, it is also a platform for people to learn about different cultures and groups (Jackson & Nesterova, 2017). In the same manner, the media serves as a main platform where the non-indigenous community gain their knowledge about indigenous peoples (Elder, 2007 as cited in Proudfoot & Habibis, 2015; Jamal & Naghmeh-Abbaspour, 2020; van Dijk, 1999, 2016). However, the information and knowledge obtained do not necessarily reflect the indigenous communities in a realistic manner as Inguanzo (2011) explains that

indigenous peoples have been marginalised and excluded from decision-making spheres in their own countries resulting in the communities' lack of representation and participation in the media. Moreover, such representation is prevalent in which people's minds are being framed to perceive them as being poor, uneducated and usually as beneficiaries or recipients of any form of aid, for instance, Ismail et al.'s (2020) study found that the *Tok Batin* or the *Orang Asli* village head is consistently positioned at the receiving end of things. As Teo (2000) posits, the representation of ethnic minorities in a marginalised manner is often carried out through the perpetuation of stereotypes that are practised by the recurring use of discursive practices by putting the blame on them. As a result, the practising of such discursive practices is then often accompanied by the narrative that the minorities are responsible for the dismay they are in.

In the context of representing the indigenous peoples as minority groups, Loh (2011) opined that media houses possess the social responsibility in reporting news in a fair manner regardless of race, social class and being a minority in a group. Similarly, Chu and Huang (2019) also expressed that it is important for the media to present a fair and balanced representation of the indigenous peoples. The discrimination against indigenous communities in the global context can be found in countries such as Australia (Meadows, 2001; Mesikämnen, 2016; Proudfoot & Habibis, 2015), Canada (Caddell, 2014; Campbell, 2016) and Taiwan (Chu & Huang, 2019; Ho, 2018) whereas past studies conducted in the local context tend to correlate with those of the global context in which the *Orang Asli*, Malaysia's indigenous peoples, are also subjected to these discriminatory and negative portrayals in the media (Alagappar et al., 2010; Baharun & Ismail, 2022; Ismail et al., 2020; Jamal & Manan, 2016; Loh, 2011; Jamal & Ganapathy, 2021; Jamal & Ganasan, 2021). Ismail et al. (2020) highlight that till

the present time, the *Orang Asli* are still consistently projected negatively as “primitive, traditional, uncivilised, backward and dependent” (p.52).

In order to examine the ways indigenous communities are represented in the media from a more critical perspective, the rich and readily available source of media texts (Bell & Garrett, 1998) and the online availability of recorded sources (O’Keeffe, 2012) paves the way for discourse analysts to uncover numerous amounts of social meanings and stereotypes projected through language and communication (Bell & Garrett, 1998). From a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) viewpoint, Tian (2018) points out that media discourse has gained much attention among discourse analysts and is solely targeted as a research subject for its “manifestly pivotal role as discourse-bearing institutions” (Bell & Garrett, 1998, p.6).

The present study is situated with Malaysia’s multicultural and multi-ethnic society whereby the *Orang Asli* are recognised as one of the *Bumiputera* communities of Malaysia together with the natives of Sabah and Sarawak and the dominant Malay-Muslim community (Jegatesen, 2020). As of the fourth quarter of 2022, Malaysia’s estimated population of 33 million consists of the Malay-Muslim community (57.8%) followed by the Chinese (22.7%), Indians (6.6%) together with other *Bumiputera* communities (12.2%) and other minorities (0.7%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). In this study, the researcher aims to conduct a comparative study on selected news reports published on the *Orang Asli* in *The Star*, a mainstream news outlet, and in *Malaysiakini*, an alternative news outlet to determine the recurrence of both existing negative and stereotypical representations as shown and highlighted by both global (e.g. Campbell, 2016; Chu & Huang, 2019; Mesikämnen, 2016) and local studies (Alagappan. et al, 2010; Baharun & Ismail, 2022; Ismail et al, 2020; Jamal & Manan, 2016; Jamal & Ganapathy, 2021; Jamal & Ganasan, 2021). Through this comparative

study, the researcher intends to examine the differences and similarities in the linguistic features and discursive practices used that surface while identifying both recurring and emerging themes from these selected news reports.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The domain of language and media is still subjected to numerous studies especially those that deal with the portrayal of indigenous communities around the world. According to van Dijk (2001, 2016), it is an undeniable fact that the media continues to exert varying degrees of power that influences and shapes the social cognition and perceptions of its readers through discourse which has prompted for more critical approaches to media discourse (Fairclough, 1995b) and the roles of discourse in the reproduction of racial inequality and discrimination in the media (van Dijk, 2001).

From a global perspective, the studies conducted on the representation of indigenous communities by the mainstream media in their respective countries have clearly indicated that they are represented negatively and stereotypically through various discriminatory practices in media discourse (Campbell, 2016; Chu & Huang, 2019; Leavitt et al., 2015; Mesikämnen, 2016; Proudfoot & Habibis, 2015; van Dijk, 2001). Even in academic contexts, a study conducted by Ho (2018) which examined the representation of Taiwan indigenous communities in language textbooks by applying the critical discourse analysis approach revealed that the textbooks projected the indigenous communities in a pejorative and stereotypical manner as well.

In order to bridge the existing gaps in the representation of indigenous communities in the media, both van Dijk (2001) and Bednarek (2006) share a similar stance in which they highlighted that more linguistic-oriented studies are needed to be

conducted by examining the relationship between text and talk, and social processes in “challenging traditional assumptions on the objectivity of news discourse” (Bednarek, 2006, p.5). O’Keeffe (2012) opines that more planned and collective research in analysing news discourse needs to be done given the online availability of texts. Subsequently, van Dijk (1993a) asserts that a critical analysis and in-depth discourse analysis on ethnic affairs are also required to reveal the existing myths on the roles of elites in these matters. Thus, Proudfoot and Habibis (2015, p.184) strongly call for “the need to challenge such media stereotypes” due to the significant contrasts in representing indigenous peoples as van Dijk (2008, p.199) argues that “the press continues to be a part of the problem in racism”.

In the Malaysian context, there had been numerous studies that were conducted on the *Orang Asli* which focused on topics such as history (Andaya, 2001; Harper, 1997; Lye, 2011), sociopolitics (Gomes, 2015; Idrus, 2011; Nordin et al., 2016; Subramaniam, 2015; Wook, 2016), sociology (Abu Hassan, 2005; Kamaruddin, 2006), socioeconomic (Aiken & Leigh, 2011; Endicott et al., 2016; Masron et al., 2013; Musa, 2011), sociolinguistic (Abd Ghani, 2015; Abd Ghani & Che Lah, 2015; Abd Ghani et al., 2011) and more recently on the pedagogical approaches in EFL teaching (Ganapathy et al., 2022a, 2022b; Phan & Ganapathy, 2020). However, these studies did not examine the representation of the *Orang Asli* in the local media from a linguistic perspective.

To the best knowledge of the researcher, a review of past literature showed that the number of studies conducted on the representation of the *Orang Asli* in the media are still limited in number. The earlier studies that were conducted only focused on the extent of coverage of the community by the media (Anuar, 1994) and the recurring themes that surfaced from the content analysis of news reports (Alagappan et al., 2010;

Loh, 2011). These studies did not examine both language and ideological aspects of the selected news reports. However, these studies did reveal a general trend whereby the *Orang Asli* are represented and positioned in a negative and marginalised manner.

Furthermore, Jamal and Manan's (2016) study was the first study to utilise van Dijk's CDA framework in examining both linguistic and ideological aspects of the selected news reports from only one mainstream news outlet (*The Star*) and the present study aims to further address and extend this research by conducting a comparative analysis on both linguistic and ideological aspects between news reports published by *The Star* and *Malaysiakini*. Subsequently, recent studies that were conducted by Ismail et al. (2020) and Baharun and Ismail (2022) have demonstrated the integration of both corpus linguistics and discourse analysis approaches. Both studies opted for a so-called "critical approach" which was based on the assumption that language can construct a certain discourse that represents the social world (Baharun & Ismail, 2022; Ismail et al., 2020). Both studies did not adopt a particular CDA framework such as those by Fairclough, van Dijk, and Wodak.

In terms of a comparative study on news reports about the *Orang Asli*, the earliest comparative study was by Anuar (1994) which only compared the representation of the *Orang Asli* between two mainstream news outlets, namely *The Star* and the *New Straits Times*. The next comparative study to date was done by Loh (2011). Loh's (2011) study, once again, focused on the extent of coverage and comprehensiveness of the news reports but instead compared the mainstream (*The Star*) and alternative media (*The Malaysian Insider*). The study did not focus on the language and ideological aspects but rather on the headlines and the length of the news articles.

A sampling gap was also discovered from the past studies whereby only a single corpus source was chosen with the exception for Anuar (1994) and Loh (2011) which examined news reports from two news outlets. These existing studies have examined news reports from mainstream news outlets such as *The Star* (Baharun & Ismail, 2022; Ismail et al., 2020; Jamal & Manan, 2016; Jamal & Ganapathy, 2021; Jamal & Ganasan, 2021) and *New Straits Times* (Alagappar et al., 2010). Hence, the *Orang Asli*'s representation in the alternative news paradigm has remained relatively unexplored despite the abundance of existing studies which have examined the coverage and representation of asylum seekers and refugees (Bolte & Yuen, 2014; Mohd Don & Lee, 2014) and political entities during the Malaysian general elections (Asad et al., 2019; Kasmani, 2016; Lumsden, 2013; Manan, 2019).

Despite the findings from past studies depicting a general trend that the *Orang Asli* are negatively portrayed as weak, powerless, and always positioned as beneficiaries or recipients, calls for more extensive studies to be conducted on the methods of portrayal of the community by the media were prompted by scholars (Alagappar et al., 2010; Ismail et al., 2020; Jamal & Ganapathy, 2021; Jamal & Ganasan, 2021; Jamal & Manan, 2016; Jamal & Naghmeh-Abbaspour, 2020) due to the limited number of studies that were conducted (Ismail et al., 2020). In addition, Jamal and Naghmeh-Abbaspour (2020) suggested that future studies should examine the recent themes pertaining to the community which the researcher aims to do. More research should be done by focusing on the media's behaviour as well as news reports while advocating for an equal representation of the *Orang Asli* in the media (Loh, 2011; Jamal & Ganasan, 2021; Jamal & Ganapathy, 2021; Jamal & Manan, 2016). Ismail et al. (2020) stressed that the continuous biased ideological construction of the community will eventually tarnish their pride and power as Asmi (2017) also pointed

out that such the persisting under-representations by the media will continuously perpetuate the notion that the indigenous communities are “vanishing” from history.

Therefore, this study aims to utilise the CDA approach to conduct a comparative study on how the *Orang Asli* are represented by both mainstream and alternative news outlets in their news reports while providing an in-depth analysis of the linguistic structures that are used in enacting and reproducing these ideological practices. This is in accordance to Jamal and Ganasan’s (2021) suggestion that future studies can opt for a comparative approach involving different news outlets. Additionally, since Loh’s (2011) study was conducted more than a decade ago, the present study attempts to re-evaluate the findings of the study from a CDA approach. More importantly, Alkaff and McLellan (2017) point out that in the Malaysian context, comparative studies using CDA are still lacking in number. The researcher hopes that this study will be able to inculcate a better understanding of the community’s predicament as Khor and Mohd Shariff (2019) stressed that researchers have a crucial role to play in accentuating the people’s plight in the academia. Likewise, there is also a need to create a better level of understanding and sensitivity towards representing indigenous cultures and history to prevent such practices in representing the community in a controversial manner (Chu & Huang, 2019).

1.4 Research Objectives

This section presents the research objectives of the study undertaken in conducting this comparative study. Since there had been several existing studies conducted in the global context which examined the representation of indigenous communities in the media, these studies have shown that indigenous communities are portrayed in a stereotypical and unfavourable manner (e.g. Campbell, 2016; Chu &

Huang, 2019; Mesikämmen, 2016; Proudfoot & Habibis, 2015). Therefore, a comparative study on the representation of the *Orang Asli* by the local media from a critical perspective is required by adopting Fairclough's (1995b) Three-Dimensional CDA Framework in analysing the micro, meso, and macro levels of the selected news reports. This study aims to meet the research objectives as outlined:

1. To identify the lexical items (micro level) that are used in the selected news reports from *The Star* and *Malaysiakini* in representing the *Orang Asli*.
2. To identify the transitivity structures (micro level) used in the selected news reports from *The Star* and *Malaysiakini* in representing the *Orang Asli*.
3. To identify the discourse practices – intertextuality – and discourse strategies (meso level) used in the selected news reports from *The Star* and *Malaysiakini* in representing the *Orang Asli*.
4. To reveal the sociocultural practices (macro level) that reinforce the ideology via the use of these linguistic features (micro and meso level) in the selected news reports from *The Star* and *Malaysiakini* in representing the *Orang Asli*.

1.5 Research Questions

In relation to the research objectives presented in the previous section, the study aims to answer these research questions upon the completion of this study:

1. What are the lexical items (micro level) used in the selected news reports from *The Star* and *Malaysiakini* in representing the *Orang Asli*?

2. What are the types of transitivity structures (micro level) used in the selected news reports from *The Star* and *Malaysiakini* in representing the *Orang Asli*?
3. What are the discourse practices – intertextuality – and discourse strategies (meso level) used in the selected news reports from *The Star* and *Malaysiakini* in representing the *Orang Asli*?
4. How does the use of the linguistic features at the micro and meso level reveal the sociocultural practices (macro level) that reinforce the ideology in the selected news reports from *The Star* and *Malaysiakini* in representing the *Orang Asli*?

1.6 Aims of the Study

The study aims to continue the past researches that had been done by Alagappar et al. (2010), Baharun and Ismail (2022), Loh (2011), Jamal and Manan (2016), Ismail et al. (2020), Jamal and Ganasan (2021), and Jamal and Ganapathy (2021) in order to delve deeper into how news outlets represent the *Orang Asli* in news articles with a focus on their social issues as the major theme.

The comparative study in this domain aims to further discover and reveal any differences or similarities that surface in terms of the use of linguistic features as well as the discursive practices that give rise to the ideological practices that prevail in both news outlets. Hence, it is crucial to determine if any elements of manipulation or power imbalance are embedded in the discourse of news reports that serve to reinforce the ideological practices exerted on the consumers of the news reports.

Furthermore, this study also intends to provide further input into this growing research pool so that more attention and awareness can be given to this community in order to show how they are characterised and constructed by Malaysian news outlets.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The significance of this comparative study is that it aims to further identify the various linguistic features that were applied by the different news outlets while determining any recurring or emerging discursive practices that are practised in the production of news reports on the *Orang Asli*. It is in the imperative that the negative and stereotypical representations projected by the media needs to be further researched and reinforced (Lin, 2013) given the disparate constructions of indigenous peoples as a community who are resistant to change, backward-looking, emotional, primitive, problematic and often seeking aid from those in power (Campbell, 2016; Ismail et al., 2020; Proudfoot & Habibis, 2015).

In order to analyse such disparate constructions of the *Orang Asli*, the use of CDA is useful in examining both linguistic structures and discursive practices (Proudfoot & Habibis, 2015; Tian, 2018) that are embedded with various dominating ideologies that suppress the weak (Ramanathan & Tan, 2015). Such critical analysis is needed to reveal how the *Orang Asli* are constructed in the eyes of news readers by the news outlets as Cotter (2001) states that an analysis of this calibre reveals how social powers are operationalised resulting in calls for greater social responsibility especially in representing the *Orang Asli* fairly.

The researcher hopes that the application of CDA in this comparative study will be able to further unearth new trends and themes while supporting and contributing to the existing research pool on the representation of *Orang Asli* in the

media in relation to the paucity of existing studies conducted. Furthermore, Halliday and Matthysen's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is indeed useful in analysing texts due to its systematic nature that draws the analyst's attention to the connection between text and context.

A systematic analysis of the selected news reports as texts is needed to determine the ongoing changes in terms of the reformation of different social practices as well as the reorganisation of different sets of knowledge and ideology of society. Such analysis is needed because texts themselves function as a sensitive barometer that measures the changes of social processes, movement, and diversity that result in the output of the above ongoing changes (Fairclough, 1995a). Hence, the results of this study is expected to provide readers a detailed insight while fostering their understanding on how the *Orang Asli* are portrayed in the media based on the linguistic analyses that will be undertaken in this study. This is in line with Fairclough's (1995b) call for the need of critical media literacy that advocates the importance for readers to be critically cognisant on the dynamics of language and discourse within the wider sociocultural context.

It is also hoped that the outcomes of the study will be able to prompt relevant parties to take further action by pushing for a change in the Malaysian media paradigm in order to reduce the discriminatory practices (Jamal & Naghmeh-Abbaspour, 2020) that are practised by news outlets in constructing the *Orang Asli* in a marginalised, negative, and stereotypical manner. Any changes in representing the *Orang Asli* positively and frequently lies within the hands of media practitioners in deciding whether to include or exclude the presence of the *Orang Asli* by providing them with an opportunity to speak for themselves (Ismail et al., 2020). It is also hoped that these outcomes will also prompt more changes to be done in treating the *Orang Asli* by

conferring them access to their proper rights as the righteous *bumiputera* of Malaysia (Nicholas, 2003) through proper recognition and allowing them to manage their own well-being.

Lastly, the researcher believes that the analytical framework designed for this study will be useful for researchers to emulate or adapt in future studies which require a CDA framework in examining the portrayal of different social actors or groups in media discourse.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The study itself contains several limitations whereby the analysis does not opt for a multimodal discourse analysis approach in which features such as images, graphics, size and layout of news reports, captions, and graphological features such as fonts, colours and punctuation are considered. The analysis will solely utilise the discourse analysis approach in analysing the linguistic features of the news reports. In addition, only news reports will be used in the analysis without considering other genres such as letters to the editor, columns, editorials, and opinions as these genres reflect the writer's personal attitudes and ideologies (van Dijk, 1988) which may influence the overall discourse structure (van Dijk, 1998b). Additionally, these genres also do not reflect the ideological stance of the news outlet (Kiew, 2012).

It is important to note that the results and conclusions obtained from the study do not directly correlate to the other news topics or genres that are published by the selected news outlets and are solely correlated with the selected news reports.

The study also focuses on the general *Orang Asli* population as a whole and does not scale down to any specific ethnic or sub-ethnic *Orang Asli* groups. Moreover,

the selection of news reports will only take into account news reports published in the Malaysian context and not those published in global contexts.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework applied in this study will only be focusing on the tenets of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework (1995b) together with Halliday and Matthysen's (2014) transitivity analysis under the ideational metafunction of SFL as well as van Dijk's (1998a) "Ideological Square" of "Us versus Them".

1.9 Definition of Key Terms

a) Language and Representation

According to Fairclough (1995b, p.55), "language use in any texts is always simultaneously constitutive of three aspects namely, social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief". It was suggested that a dialectical relationship exists between language and society in which both are constitutive of each other whereby language is shaped by the social practices of society and society's social practices are shaped by language (Fairclough, 1995b; Weiss & Wodak, 2003). In relation to media discourse, Fairclough (1995b) posits that the "naturalised" way of language use is suggested to reflect the ideological representations that are embedded in media texts as language use in a text is assumed to be simultaneously representing, constructing identities and relations. These three aspects are crucial in determining the ideological work done by media discourse (Fairclough, 1995b).

b) Discourse

In linguistics, Crystal (1980) defines discourse as a continuous stretch of language that is larger than a sentence and also refers to instances of spoken

interaction and written production of a communicative event (Tenorio, 2011). From a CDA viewpoint, Fairclough (1995b) and van Dijk (2008) perceive that discourse observes the use of language that is manifested in the form of social practice as discourse is reflected through “language as a form of social practice” (Fairclough, 2001, p.16). This study adopts the aforementioned definition of discourse since it focuses on examining the manifestation of discursive practices and ideologies that are embedded in the language used instead of examining how language is used to create a unified and sensible meaning (Paltridge, 2012).

c) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

According to van Dijk (1996, 2001), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted through text and talk in the social and political context of dominant groups or institutions. In this context, this study adopts the general consensus of CDA in which it is fundamentally interested in analysing hidden, opaque, and visible structures of dominance, discrimination, power and control (Wodak & Meyer, 2015) while seeking to expose the manipulative nature of discursive practices and improve communication and well-being by removing barriers of assumed beliefs legitimised through discourse (Tenorio, 2011).

d) Media discourse

Media discourse is defined as the language of public media affairs such as news, documentary, magazine programmes that deal with topics such as politics, social sciences and sciences (Fairclough, 1995b). Fairclough (1995b) maintains that the language of mass media operates within a social system in which a system

of power relations exists which has been a focal discussion on the ways media discourse functions ideologically in the construction of social reality. Hence, in relation to this study, news reports are observed as a form of media discourse that is produced from these systems of power relations by providing an overview on “how the mass media affects and is affected by power relations within the social system” (Fairclough, 1995b, p.12).

e) Ideology

According to van Dijk (2015c), ideology is a type of belief that is shared by social groups whereby both their cognitive and discourse structures are ideologically polarised between that of Us (in-group) and Them (out-group), as well as involving the shared representation of social identities, goals, norms and discourse values, resources, and interests. In relation to discourse, van Dijk (2008) posits that biased ideological mental models serve as the foundations of ideological discourse which are usually produced and reproduced by text, talk and communication such as in news reports (van Dijk, 2015c).

f) News reports

In the context of this study, news reports are defined as a type of discourse that is presented on a newspaper which provides new information to its consumers about new events in which it is utilised, expressed or made publicly available in news outlets or public information carriers such as the newspaper (van Dijk, 1988). As a common form of mass media, news reports function as a rhetorical document (Jamal & Manan, 2016) that possesses the ability to distribute, reproduce, and strengthen or naturalise ideologies in a particular society while educating readers about the reported issues. Jamal and Naghmeh-Abbaspour (2020, p.54) explained

that “a news report possesses the capability to determine the majority’s perception and attitude toward the minorities the most since it is the most widely read and discussed genre”.

g) Orang Asli

The *Orang Asli* is one of the country’s earliest indigenous communities which established their presence in the Malay Peninsular as early as the 15th century. The term *Orang Asli* solely denotes the indigenous community that resides in Peninsular Malaysia and does not refer to the indigenous communities residing in Sabah and Sarawak who are known as natives (Nicholas, 2010).

The *Orang Asli* comprises of three main ethnic groups namely the Negrito (Semang), Senoi and Aboriginal Malay (Proto-Malay). They are then further divided into six sub-ethnic groups. According to the Department of *Orang Asli* Development (2018), there are a total of 178,197 *Orang Asli* settled in the country which constitutes less than 1% of the country’s population (Nicholas et al., 2010; Jamal & Naghmeh-Abbaspour, 2020).

1.10 Organisation of the Study

The study will be organised into five respective chapters with Chapter 1 providing a general background overview of the study by presenting the statement of the problem, and the research questions and objectives of the study followed by the significance and limitations of the study before concluding with the operational definition of relevant key terms that are relevant to the study undertaken.

In Chapter 2, the literature review is divided into four main sections. The first section provides a discussion on the *Orang Asli* by focusing on their historical background, the issue of non-recognition, and the contemporary issues that surround

the community. The second section focuses on the past studies that are conducted on the *Orang Asli* as well as studies that were conducted on indigenous communities in different contexts. The third section offers a brief discussion on the Malaysian media landscape and the differences between mainstream and alternative media. The final section provides a discussion on the theoretical concepts that serve as the foundation of the study such as discourse, media discourse, CDA, transitivity, and ideology.

In Chapter 3, the discussion focuses on the research methodology of the study beginning with a brief overview on the research design followed by a detailed discussion on the procedures of data collection and data analysis. A brief analysis of a sample news report will also be presented to illustrate the analytical procedure of the selected news reports. The chapter is then concluded with a discussion on the ethical considerations when conducting the study.

Next, Chapter 4 presents the findings from all 24 news reports that were obtained from *The Star* and *Malaysiakini*. The findings from the micro level of analysis (lexical and transitivity structures) were presented followed by the tabulation of the transitivity frequencies before concluding with the presentation of findings from the meso level of analysis (discourse representation).

The study concludes with Chapter 5 which discusses all four research questions that were highlighted in Chapter 1. Each research question was addressed by correlating the findings of the study with the past studies and literature highlighted in Chapter 2. The chapter closes with a commentary on the contributions of the study and several suggestions for future research followed by a conclusion on the overall study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a contextualisation of the study by focusing on four main sections. The first section will provide an overview of the *Orang Asli*'s historical and socio-political background followed by a discussion on the issues faced by the *Orang Asli* with a focus on their contemporary issues on health, land, education and most importantly the issue of non-recognition. The second section proceeds to discuss the past studies conducted on the *Orang Asli* and indigenous communities in the global context whereas the third section focuses on the aspects on Malaysian media ownership and the distinction between the mainstream and alternative media. Lastly, the final section presents a discussion on the theoretical concepts that serve as the groundwork for the comparative study.

2.2 The *Orang Asli* as the Original Peoples

The *Orang Asli* are commonly known as one of the country's indigenous minorities. The term *Orang Asli* itself is literally translated as the country's "Original Peoples" or "First People" (Abd Ghani, 2015; Lye, 2011; Nicholas et al., 2010; Wook, 2016). The *Orang Asli* community forms less than 1% of the country's population with a total population of 178,197 *Orang Asli* residing in Peninsular Malaysia as of 2018 (Department of *Orang Asli* Development, 2018). The entire population is mainly divided into three large ethnic groups namely the Senoi, the Aboriginal Malay or Proto-Malay and the Negrito or Semang (Nicholas et al., 2010). Each of these three large groups is then further classified into six sub-ethnic groups respectively bringing

to a total of 18 sub-ethnic groups (Nicholas et al, 2010) The following chart (Figure 2.1) depicts the ethnic distribution of the *Orang Asli*.



Figure 2.1 The Orang Asli's Ethnic Categorisation

The term *Orang Asli*, however, should not be confused with the indigenous communities residing in Sabah and Sarawak as the term solely refers to the indigenous minority Malaysians of Peninsular Malaysia (Jegatesen, 2020; Nicholas, 2010). To differentiate the indigenous communities of Peninsula Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak respectively, the term “aborigine” solely denotes the *Orang Asli* community whereas the term “native” denotes the indigenous communities of Sabah and Sarawak. Article 160(2) of the Federal Constitution clearly defines that an aborigine exclusively refers to those of Peninsula Malaysia (Federal Constitution of Malaysia, art. CLX, § 2). On the contrary, Article 161A(6) defines “native” in two ways:

in relation to Sarawak, a person who is a citizen and either belongs to one of the races specified in Clause (7) as indigenous to the State or is mixed blood deriving exclusively from those races; and

in relation to Sabah, a person who is a citizen, is the child or grandchild of a person of a race indigenous to Sabah, and was born either in Sabah or to a father domiciled in Sabah at time of the birth. (Federal Constitution of Malaysia, art. CLXIA, § 6)

From a legal perspective, the Aboriginal People’s Act 1954 (revised in 1974), hereinafter known as APA 1954 or the Act, s. 3 of the act defines the *Orang Asli* as an aborigine as follows:

any person whose male parent is or was, a member of an aboriginal ethnic group, who speaks an aboriginal language and habitually follows an aboriginal way of life and aboriginal customs and beliefs, and includes a descendant through males of such persons;

any person of any race adopted when an infant by aborigines who has been brought up as an aborigine, habitually speaks an aboriginal language,

habitually follows an aboriginal way of life and aboriginal customs and beliefs and is a member of an aboriginal community; or

the child of any union between an aboriginal female and a male of another race, provided that the child habitually follows an aboriginal way of life and aboriginal customs and beliefs and remains a member of an aboriginal community. (Aboriginal Peoples Act, 1954)

In view of the definitions stipulated above, these serve as a means of defining and contesting indigeneity in the Malaysian context given the different terms that are used to refer to the indigenous populace of the country (Jegatesen, 2020) which legally distinguishes the *Orang Asli* and the natives (Nah, 2004). The next section will explicate on the complexities in defining ‘indigenous peoples’ as stipulated by the United Nations’ and the World Bank.

2.2.1 Indigenous Peoples Internationally Defined

The earliest definition of indigenous peoples was drafted by Jose R. Martinez Cobo, a UN Special Rapporteur who examined the discriminatory issues faced by the indigenous peoples around the world. This led to the establishment of the United Nation’s Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) which eventually served as the basic foundation for the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Cobo (1986) proposed a “working definition” which defines indigenous peoples as:

Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their