A Critical Discourse Analysis of The Use of Modal Verbs in Former Prime Minister Speech During Covid-19

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Abstract
This article is an effort at looking at critical discourse analysis strategies and modality use in a speech text by Tan Sri Dato' Muhyiddin Yassin, the eighth Prime Minister of Malaysia. This research hopes to explain how discourse is part of a social process, and to show that the social process can be explained with a systematic and critical discourse analysis approach. A nation leader's speech can be meaningful and highlight his actions to the public. In the Malaysian context, a leader's speech transcript is usually used as a main reference to better understand how the discourse is used by leaders to influence or deliver their ideologies to the people. This research will study the use of modality to identify or highlight the speaker's intentions that is contained within the discourse. Modality helps in identifying discourse functions and illustrates how power is hidden within discourse. In this case, the critical discourse analysis theoretical framework is used to explore complex social issues in a leader's discourse in order to examine power relationships and how it is applied within the economical, sociological and political context. The critical discourse analysis introduced by Norman Fairclough (1995) will be applied in this research. The analysis will follow the three dimensional framework which is the text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice analyses. This research will use the Covid 19 Special Address by YAB Tan Sri Dato Muhyiddin Yassin, Prime Minister of Malaysia, as data in examining a nation leader's discourse practices. Findings showed that the new government utilizes the power of language or discourse by using modality in delivering messages, fulfilling intentions, and gathering support to reinforce political power.
Keywords: Speech, Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse Strategy, Modality, Leadership

Introduction

Language is used in discourse to effect social change and can be related to power and ideology. It can also be used to influence perception through the production of discourse. Through critical discourse analysis, we can investigate how power and ideology is transmitted through discourse (Paltridge, 2006).

Discourse, put simply, is the use of spoken, written, and multimodal/multimedia forms of communication. Abdul Hamid et al (2007) said that discourse 'provides a rich source of data for analyzing, assessing and evaluating human behaviors and social realities, as when language is used, meanings are constructed and created via a set of systematic statements that not only generate and perpetuate, but are also constrained by the social conventions and processes that form the very life that we live in.

Following that, discourse analysis is the process of employing the use of various theories and framework to draw meaning from a particular discourse. In addition to meaning, discourse analysis also investigates the relations between language, structure and agency.

Van Dijk (2011) said that access to or control over public discourse and communication is seen as having access to 'symbolic' important resources. Those who hold power over more discourse, or more influential discourse, are then more powerful. Furthermore, "recipients tend to accept beliefs, knowledge, and opinions (unless they are inconsistent with their personal beliefs and experiences) through discourse from what they see as authoritative, trustworthy, or credible sources, such as scholars, experts, professionals, or reliable media".

Among the discourse genres that can influence public opinion and perception, a speech by a nation leader plays a prominent role. A speech is a type of discourse that is a collection of carefully constructed ideas or for the transmission of information to the public (Ji & Smith, 2017). A speech is also considered as text, as defined by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), since "…any instance of language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language" is considered as text. Text can both be looked at either as an object that contains its own meaning, or as an instrument that reveals the system of the language in which it is spoken.

Looking at textual discourse as a form of social practice, therefore, allows people to understand organizational phenomena, it is thus important to see how it takes on certain perspectives of positions assigned by certain actors in an attempt to disseminate what is considered justified and legitimate in specific contexts. As such, discourse can be used to support, challenge or undermine particular conceptions of issues by mediating the relationship between concrete linguistic aspects of texts such as the use of certain vocabularies and the effect of texts in wider social or political contexts (Breit, 2009).

According to Idris Aman (2006), leadership is one of the most important aspects of social life and is always commended by others. Rationally, there exists two clusters with differing social functions, one of which are leaders as a small select segment and a bigger segment of those being led. A nation leader, thus, is a small group of people that has been elected and wields influence over the rest of the population.

In the context of a nation leader's speech, a critical discourse analysis can shed light on how the 'actors' (the leader) 'spin' certain information to produce certain meanings regarding certain issues (Fairclough, 1995). As a result, this study aims to comprehend a part of the leadership mechanism that Perikatan Nasional uses during the spread of the Covid 19 pandemic through the use of discourse in the form of the Covid 19 Special Address by YAB Tan Sri Dato Muhyiddin Yassin, former Prime Minister of Malaysia speech text. By studying the speech, we will be able to figure out how a nation leader's speech can form and affect the ideological framework of a country, whether it's to sway people away from ideological positions or to cement their loyalty to them more strongly.
The speech was given on 6 October 2020, when the number of positive cases were starting to rise especially in Sabah and Kedah.

Tan Sri Dato Muhyiddin Yassin was appointed Prime Minister by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Abdullah in February 2020 after Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad resigned as Prime Minister. He resigned in August 2021. During his premiership, he was responsible for steering the nation through an unprecedented crisis which was the Covid-19 pandemic. He initiated the Movement Control Order (MCO) in March 2020 as well as introducing an economic stimulus package to ease some of the financial hardships faced by the people during the MCO. As a result of the MCO, the number of Covid-19 cases in Malaysia was low and by September 2020, Tan Sri Dato Muhyiddin Yassin received a 69% approval rating in a survey run by independent pollster Merdeka Center (Sipalan, 2020). However, the number of cases began to rise again due to the Sabah State Election in 26 September 2020. According to Yeo (2020), during the campaigning period in September before the election date, the number of cases recorded the highest jump in Sabah with the Rt figure recorded at 3.72 on September 8, in addition to politicians not complying with standard operating procedures.

The speech given by Tan Sri Dato Muhyiddin Yassin on 6 October 2020, thus, came at a time when the government has been criticized for the way they have mismanaged the election which has been blamed as the cause of the rise in cases in Sabah. It provides an insight into the leadership practices of the former Prime Minister in how he addresses public dissatisfaction in the current government as well as cement his position as the leader of the nation and inspiring loyalty.

Modality
Simpson (1993) explained that modality in general refers to the attitude or opinions of the speaker on the truth of the utterance. Halliday (2014), meanwhile, said that "modality means the speaker's judgement of probabilities or the obligations, involved in what he is saying". Palmer (2007) also said that modality is related to the "status of the proposition that describes the event" and is a "valid cross-language grammatical category" since all languages expresses modality.

According to Palmer (2007), there are two types of modality; epistemic modality and deontic modality. Epistemic modality refers to the speaker or writer's judgment of the truth in what is being spoken or uttered. In other words, epistemic modality is being used to make a judgment on the possibility or necessity of an entire proposition. However, epistemic modals do not require that the speaker or writer produce evidence and thus weakens the commitment to the truth of the word used.

Deontic modality, meanwhile, is concerned with the necessity, possibility, or desirability of future events. It is the "expression of the judgment of possibility including permissibility or necessity including obligation of an action, state, or event by a speaker" and is "dependent on some kind of authority, often the speaker" (Palmer, 2007: 70). In other words, for the event to be carried out, the speaker or writer must grant permission.

In a research that proved the role of language in displaying a leader's power, Aman (2005) used a speech by Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad to investigate the process in which a leader builds, produces and uses discourse as an influential medium in the socialization process. The study focused on lexical choices and it found that the prime minister used varying lexical choices in order to display his meaning and ideology about Malay pride that has been one of his leadership idealisms.

In a PhD thesis by Sopha (2006) titled "Aksi dan Reaksi dalam Pidato Presiden Soekarno dan Soeharto", the author attempted to investigate the difference in action and reaction displayed in speech texts between Presidents Soekarno and Soeharto. The research used Systemic Functional Linguistics, specifically textual investigation to examine both presidents' social practices. The findings explained that both leaders were more inclined to use euphemisms and connotation. This is because of their status as nation leaders and politicians whose speeches were based on their own ideologies in order to influence the public through action and reactions.

In a study of how lexical choices can help promote shame through the media, Matz (2013) has discovered that the use of words with negative connotations have been used in public service announcements to 'shame' certain social groups into conforming to what is considered 'acceptable' behavior. By alluding to what is acceptable and what is not, media discourse has become a tool to create structures of power and agendas that exclude and include social norms and shape public beliefs.

Thweatt (2004) has also studied the linguistic forms that constituted the ideological function of the discourse in investigating how newspaper articles promoted stereotypes about refugees or immigrants in America. This includes topical, lexical and semantic analysis of the discourse. In her study, she has discovered that media discourse can promote negative representations on the 'New Americans' where the media has played a part in emphasizing and magnifying cultural differences and downplaying the similarities with the dominant group.

Based on previous literature, it can be seen that nation leaders has been shown to use language in order to shape the public's perception towards the ideologies favoured by the leaders.

Methodology
This research will use the Covid 19 Special Address by YAB Tan Sri Dato Muhyiddin Yassin, Prime Minister of Malaysia text as data.
Employing the three dimensional approach of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as introduced by Fairclough (1992), the researcher will look at the textual as well as contextual features of the text in order to investigate the ideology behind the text and how it is delivered through the language.

Van Dijk (2001) said that due to its theoretically and analytically diverse nature, CDA does not have a unitary theoretical framework as an analysis of a conversation can be very different from an analysis of news reports. However, CDA in general looks at how discourse is related to society and asks questions about how the structure of discourse is presented in the production of social dominance, it is then possible to find overall conceptual and theoretical frameworks that are closely related.

This research will attempt to examine how specific discourse patterns are utilized in the speech. Specifically, this research will see how concrete linguistic features such as the use of modality are used to study the leadership practices of a nation's leader.

This is due to the nature of discourse itself which, according to Breit (2009) has a "concrete and visible dimension as well as an abstract and ideological dimension" and it is through this dual relationship that this paper will attempt to analyse the way a nation leader display their ideology and power through speech.

Along the same line, Fairclough's three dimensional approach to critical discourse analysis looks at discourse first in its 'concrete' form through textual analysis of the text itself and then to the 'abstract' form through the contextual analysis of the discursive as well as sociocultural practices involved in the discourse.

The textual analysis in this research will be limited to the use of the modal verb "will" and "would" in order to investigate the degree of affinity displayed in the discourse. Fairclough (1995) said that there are four textual aspects that can be analysed which are text structure, interaction, clauses and lexical choices. However, this research will only focus on modality in order to understand the ideology behind the text.

Next, the analysis will move on to discover the discursive practices of the text and how they relate to sociocultural practices. According to Fairclough (1995), to get excellent insights about what is in a text, it is not enough to see what is in the text, but also what is absent from the text.

Finally, the analysis will go through the third dimension which is the interpretation of the interaction and social context. The interpretation of the relationships between text and social practices involves looking at the structure of the text and examining the situational context of the discourse which includes identifying the topics or purpose of the text, the actors involved, where the authority is placed though agent-patient relationships, and how language is used to make the connection. The main objective is to investigate how social practices are formed through the use of modal verbs that displays the leadership process, especially leadership practices and ideologies.

Discussion

The modal verb "will" and "would" was the most frequently used modal verb in the text. It refers to an action that has a theoretical possibility of being true or not true (Palmer, 2001). The modal expressed here is epistemic, where it indicates the likelihood of the actualization of an act but does not necessarily require evidence of it happening. The presence of this verb

in the speech shows the intention of the speaker of carrying out the act without having to actually carry it out.

1. Saya ***akan*** membuat keputusan penting untuk membendung virus ini daripada terus menular dalam masyarakat kita. Ini termasuklah melaksanakan Perintah Kawalan Pergerakan Diperketatkan Secara Bersasar atau TEMCO di kawasankawasan yang dikenalpasti sebagai zon merah.

2. Langkah ini jika dilaksanakan sekali lagi boleh membawa kesan besar yang dikhuatiri ***akan*** meruntuhkan sistem sosial dan ekonomi negara, na'uzubillah.

3. Apa yang ***akan*** dilakukan oleh kerajaan ialah melaksanakan Perintah Kawalan Pergerakan Diperketatkan Secara Bersasar di kawasan-kawasan yang dikenalpasti mempunyai kes-kes Covid-19 yang tinggi.

4. Saya percaya kesiapsiagaan sistem kesihatan kita ***akan*** membolehkan kita menangani penularan Covid 19 tanpa perlu kita menutup sektor-sektor ekonomi yang pernah dilakukan sebelum ini.

5. Jika ada sebarang kes COVID-19 melibatkan warga sekolah, KPM ***akan*** bekerjasama rapat dengan Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia dalam menanganinya.

6. Jika perlu, keputusan mengenai penutupan sekolah di seluruh negara ***akan*** dibuat di peringkat Sidang Khas Majlis Keselamatan Negara Mengenai Pengurusan COVID-19 setelah menerima nasihat daripada Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia.

7. Sekiranya terdapat keperluan untuk menyekat pergerakan rentas negeri, Sidang Khas Majlis Keselamatan Negara ***akan*** berbincang dan membuat keputusan mengenainya.

8. Saya memberi jaminan notis yang mencukupi ***akan*** diberikan kepada orang ramai sebelum sebarang keputusan dilaksanakan supaya tidak ada sesiapa yang terkandas.

9. Walaubagaimana pun, kerajaan ***akan*** mendapatkan input dari KKM terlebih dahulu sebelum melaksanakannya termasuk cadangan mengadakan SOP tambahan jika perlu.

10. Petugas barisan hadapan dari agensi-agensi penguatkuasaan ***akan*** dikerah semula ke tempat-tempat awam untuk memastikan pematuhan.

11. Jika ada yang melanggar undang-undang, hukuman kompaun dan lain-lain ***akan*** dikenakan tanpa mengira pangkat dan darjat. Maaflah jika Abah ini mula menggunakan rotan!

Table 1.1
Frequency of modality use in leadership discourse Tan Sri Dato Muhyiddin Yassin

No	Epistemic modality	Frequency	Deontic modality	Frequency
1.	Should	8	Has/Have	28
2.	Can	8	Will	33
3.	Must	8		
4.	Might	6		
5.	Maybe	4		
	Total	**34**		**67**

Based on the examples given, it is evident that the discourse in the text uses the modal verb to show the speaker's meaning in informing the public of the government's commitment in fulfilling their role and responsibilities in ruling the country for the public's benefit.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that this text fulfills the criteria of proper discourse in that it displays the display of power and ideology behind the speaker's discourse. Through its lexical choices, the speaker shows his status as a leader. From the use of the modal verb, it supports the dissemination of information that is informative in nature. Its purpose is to be easily understood by the general public. The verb "will" and "would" show that the government is trying to acquire the public's support following the party's victory in the previous election to preserve its status as the ruling party.

From the results of the second dimensional analysis above, and through the third, which is the social analysis, it can be summarized that there were two leadership practices that were evinced in the discourse which was public-oriented and authoritarian leadership. Dialectically, the leadership practices exhibited the speaker's leadership ideology which is the 'leader that leads'.

The findings also showed that a nation leader is part of a crucial social process. In the leadership process, linguistics plays an important role. As stated by Fairclough (2000), linguistics has always been part of politics, of which leadership is part of. In addition, in order to fulfil their role in the social construct, leaders must know how to control, arrange, and observe in order to achieve the collective objectives and sociocultural values of the people they lead.

The findings of this study, indirectly, can be an approach to explore discourse that is cross - disciplinary in nature, from which the field of linguistics is not only seen, but also useful, relevant, and significant, especially for social analysis, while recognizing language as a potential medium for social life.

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