

Stylistic Analysis of Election Banners of Ruling and Opposition Parties in 2016 Sarawak State Election

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Abstract

This paper presents a stylistic analysis of election banners put up by the ruling and opposition parties during the 2016 state election campaign in Sarawak, Malaysia. The specific aspects analysed were the graphetic, typographical and textual features. Election banners put up during the 2016 state election in three cities in Sarawak were photographed. Using Crystal and Davy's (2006) framework, 30 election banners were analysed. The results showed different use of banner space by the ruling and opposition parties. The ruling party banners usually have the photograph of the candidate, sometimes side by side with the chief minister's photograph. The opposition parties put more text on the banners, often capitalised for emphasis. Most of the election banners conveyed clear messages using factual and literal language. In trying to fit as many words as possible into the banner to highlight pertinent issues to the electorate, the opposition parties tended to use phrases separated by commas but the ruling party banners had short sentences, mostly stating the party and candidate to vote for. The study showed that the ruling and opposition political parties use different strategies in their election banners to persuade voters because of their differential status and position in the society.

Keywords: Stylistic Analysis, Election Banner, Visual Space, Lexical Choice, Malaysia

Introduction

In election campaigns, political advertising take the form of campaign speeches, broadcast advertising, walkabouts, online media messages and campaign materials such as election posters, banners, flyers and fishtails. Despite the increase in the use of social media for election campaign (Pătruț & Monalache, 2013), election banners is still an important form of political advertising to influence voters. Election posters and banners convey the party's general campaign messages and allow the party to send unmediated messages directly to the voters (Russmann, 2012). Political parties set aside a huge budget for campaigns, inclusive of spending on election banners, up 20% of the campaign communication budget for France, Belgium, Germany and Ireland (Dumitrescu, 2009). Dumitrescu's survey (2012) revealed that in some countries, election posters play a more crucial role to show the campaign strength of a party, for example, election posters are more important for this purpose in Belgium than in France. Among the European countries, Austria has the highest density of election posters (Burkert-Dottolo, 2004 as cited in Russmann, 2012). In Malaysia, the ruling party (Barisan Nasional, BN) spent almost RM100 million in the 2013 parliamentary election on campaign materials (Kamarudin, 2015). Section 19 of the Elections Act does not allow candidates to spend more than RM200,000 in their campaigns, in reality the expenditure of candidates from the ruling party exceed this amount (Lee, 2007; Weiss, 2000). Use of election posters during campaigns is costly but it is often seen as the only means to reach voters when access to the media is restricted (Norris, 2000, as cited in Dumitrescu, 2009), particularly for opposition parties since mainstream newspapers are often affiliated to the ruling party. In this paper, opposition parties and the ruling party are alternatively referred to as the minor and major parties respectively.

Research has indicated that the posters for major and minor parties are different. Dumitrescu (2012) reported that the major parties use poster designs that attract voters and the messages signal their power whereas the posters of minor parties provide information on their party and ideology in order to increase their voter base (Dumitrescu, 2012). In the Romanian 2012 parliamentary campaign, most of the election posters of the major party transmitted information about the candidate's identity (number/position on the voting paper), photograph, party logo, party name, and slogan (Pătruț & Manolache, 2013). The posters made references to ideology and political values but hardly attacked the opposition parties. Using manipulated campaign posters about a fictional party, Bremmer (2012) studied the effect of visuals in European campaign posters, and concluded that effective campaign posters need to contain the candidate's image and the issue in text form in order to attract the voters' attention and help them to form a positive attitude towards the party or candidate, and remember the poster better. On the basis of Dumitrescu (2012) and Pătruț & Manolache's (2013) findings, it seems that the election posters of the major parties have the candidate's image whereas the election posters of the minor parties tend to highlight issues. The major parties' strategy in election posters appears to target increasing the voter's recognition of images and icons associated with the party (Whalen, 2012). "By studying election posters, we can better understand how propaganda has been used to influence public opinion and how messages are designed for audiences" (Seidman, 2008 p.413).

In Malaysia, little is known about differences in election campaign materials of minor and major parties. Most studies have focussed on voter perceptions and behaviour (e.g., Besar, Fauzi, Ghazali, & Ghani, 2014; Besar, Ghani, Jali, & Lyndon, 2015) and the impact of online media in the 2008 and 2013 parliamentary elections (e.g., Gomez, 2013; Lim & Ong, 2006; Rajaratnam, 2009). Despite the rise of Internet as an alternative medium for campaigning, Sualman, Salleh and Firdaus's (2008) survey of 1,049 registered voters in Permatang Pau constituency has shown that election poster is the third most trusted media during elections in Malaysia, after candidate's photograph and television coverage. Sualman et al. also found that poster is the second most effective media, after campaign speeches, in determining whether a candidate wins the election. A study in Malaysia (Aman, 2014) focused on manifestos of the main political parties in the 13th Malaysian parliamentary elections but not election posters. The language analysis revealed that the ruling party used a lot of colours, photographs, and font colours and sizes to highlight their leader compared to the opposition party, concurring with Dumitrescu (2012) and Pătruț & Manolache's (2013) findings. Aman (2014) also found that the ruling party used clauses whereas the opposition party used phrases in their manifestos. The ruling party also used more personal pronouns (exclusive-we, inclusive-we, I) to manipulate the social relationship with the electorate. More studies are needed to examine the strategies used by the political parties to influence voters because political advertisements use vague and ambiguous language to misinform and strike fear among the electorate (Kaid, 2000).

This study examined the election banners of ruling and opposition parties during the 2016 state election campaign in Sarawak, Malaysia using stylistic analysis. The specific aspects analysed were the graphetic, typographical and textual features. The ruling party refers to Barisan Nasional (BN) which has been in power whereas the term "opposition parties" refers to political parties other than BN; inclusive of independent candidates. Although the opposition parties have different ideological positions, they are grouped as one because they challenge the ruling power in the election.

Method

Research site

Sarawak is located on the Borneo Island, and is one of the 14 states in Malaysia. The population of Sarawak is 2.6 million, 8.3% of the Malaysian population of 31.7 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016). Sarawak is divided into 11 administrative divisions and for election purpose, the state is divided into 82 constituencies comprising 1,113,522 registered voters (The Star, 2016).

The current Chief Minister of Sarawak is Datuk Amar Abang Johari Abang Openg who took office on 13 January 2017 after the late Datuk Adenan Satem (28 February 2014-11 January 2017). The previous Chief Minister Tun Pehin Sri Haji Abdul Taib bin Mahmud stepped down after 33 years in office. The 2016 state election was the first time for Adenan Satem to lead the ruling party (Barisan Nasional, BN). It was also a test of his popularity as a new chief minister. His election machinery created the "Team Adenan" concept, which encompasses BN and its component parties, to show the unity of the ruling party. To the opponents, the "Team Adenan" concept is used to dissociate BN with Najib Abdul Razak, the Prime Minister of Malaysia who is the national president of BN. This is because of controversies surrounding

him such as 1MDB issue which involves misappropriation of funds and the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). Some of these issues also appear on election banners.

In Sarawak, BN comprises Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB), Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP), and Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS). In the 2016 state election, United People's Party (UPP) was direct candidate under BN. The opposition parties include Democratic Action Party (DAP), Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), Parti Se-Islam Malaysia (PAS), Parti Amanah Negara (PAN), State Reform Party (STAR), Parti Bangsa Dayak Sarawak Baru (New PBDS). Besides political parties, independent candidates can also contest in the state election.

Corpus of the study

For this study, 30 election banners during the 2016 state election in Sarawak, Malaysia photographed in three major cities of Sarawak (Kuching, Sibu and Miri) were analysed. These urban areas are considered the hotly contested seats by the minor and major parties in both state and national level elections compared to the electorate in the rural areas who usually support the ruling party. The election banners are pieces of cloth or plastic material tied to wooden posts, and usually measure 3 feet by 12 feet. They do not include wooden boards. The election banners were put up on roadsides by the contesting parties after the announcement of the voting date by the Election Commission on 25 April 2016. In Malaysia, election banners, fishtails and posters can only be put up in the two weeks between the announcement of the candidate nomination date and election date.

The 30 election banners analysed comprised 15 BN, 11 DAP, 2 PAS, and 2 independent candidates' banners. There were also banners put up by independent candidates who did not belong to any political party. In this paper, the text in the election banners in Malay and Iban are presented in the original language and a translation is given but if the text is in Mandarin characters, a literal translation is given right away.

Data Analysis Procedures




The stylistic features of election banners were analysed using the stylistic framework of Crystal and Davy (1969). This framework has been extensively used until now for the analysis of political advertisements. For example, election political posters and slogans in Nigeria (Gbelekale, 2014; Robert, 2013; Sharndama & Mohamed, 2013). This framework has also been used for other forms of stylistic analysis such as magazine advertisements in recent years (Li, 2009; Zhu, 2006). Van Leewen (2005), a prominent scholar in social semiotics stated that Crystal and Davy's (1969) view of style has influenced social semiotics, particularly in the media and the law. Applied to political messages on election banners of minor and major parties, the stylistic features reveal identities and allegiance.

Crystal and Davy's (1969) stylistic framework approaches the analysis from three levels (Table 1). The first level deals with speech versus writing, and graphetic features (e.g., type size and colour). The second level of stylistic analysis deals with typographical features which include punctuation, capitalisation and spacing. The third level examines textual features which include choice of lexical items, syntax and semantics. Crystal and Davy (1969) defines semantics to encompass meaning of stretches of text longer than the single lexical item, and breaks down the analysis into denotation versus connotation, clear versus ambiguous messages as well as positive versus negative messages. The semantic analysis only covered clarity of messages on election banners. As the scope of this paper is a quantitative

comparison of the stylistic features of the election banners of ruling and opposition parties, the other aspects of semantic analysis are not reported. The valence or tone of the messages as well as connotative meanings depend on the political viewpoint of the receivers of the message, whether they are supporters of the opposition or ruling party, and are better dealt with in a qualitative paper.

Table 1

Framework of stylistic analysis for election banners

| Level of stylistic analysis | Elements | Definition | Examples |
|------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Level 1 Graphetic features | colour | The usage of any colours besides Black and White in the text and background of the banner is considered as coloured. |  |
| | size | The usage of photo and logo that fill up from top to bottom of the banner is considered big. This does not mean they cover the whole page of the banner. Proportionately, the size can be said using 30%-40% of the whole page. |  |
| | artistic | The usage of effects such as shadow, outline and emboss in the text, photo and logo is considered as artistic. The same goes for the usage of different types of fonts and sizes of the text, combined with colours is also considered as artistic. |  |
| Level 2 Typo-graphical features | Capitalisation | The whole message is capitalised. | TAK NAK GST (DON'T WANT GST) |
| | Punctuation | The usage of punctuation marks such as question mark, exclamation mark and ellipses. | Mana RM2.6 Billion? (Where is RM2.6 Billion?) |
| Level 3 Textual features | Syntactic features: Emotive vs factual | Emotive words appeal to emotions. | Emotive – Menteri Kaya, Rakyat Miskin? Ubah! (Rich Ministers, Poor People? Change!) |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| | | Factual words present facts that appeal to logic. | Factual - BN betrays Sarawak Autonomy by importing West Malaysian Army Votes |
| | Syntactic features: Figurative vs literal | Figurative language refers to figure of speech that uses a word or phrase which does not have its usual or literal meaning. | Figurative- Reject the escaped losing General (Literal translation from Mandarin) |
| | | Literal language means exactly what it says. | Literal – We Support Adenan Team, Vote BN candidate |
| | Syntactic features: Phrasal vs full sentence | A phrase is a group of words that does not express a complete thought and does not have a subject and predicate pair. | Phrasal – <i>Tak Nak GST. Undi DAP</i> (Don't want GST. Vote DAP) |
| | | A complete sentence always contains a verb, express a complete idea and makes sense standing alone. This encompasses simple, compound and complex sentences. | Complete – Sarawak BN allows the erosion of Sarawak's rights Simple sentence - <i>Kekalkan Dr Annuar Rapae. Undilah DUN N.55 Nangka</i> (Maintain Dr Annuar Rapae. Vote for DUN N.55 Nangka) Compound sentence- With you, for you and for Batu Kawah Complex sentence - BN betrays Sarawak Autonomy by Importing West Malaysian Army Votes |
| | Syntactic features: Declarative vs question | Declaratives are sentences in which it is normal for the subject to be present and to precede the verb and includes imperatives. | Declarative – <i>Ya Allah, Kurniakanlah Kemenangan Kepada PAS di DUN Samariang</i> (Oh God, give victory to PAS at DUN Samariang) |
| | | Interrogatives are sentences, which are normally marked by question mark. | Interrogative - Three years no fly over I resign! Do you dare? (Literal translation from Mandarin) |
| | Semantic features: Clear vs ambiguous | Clear message has only one meaning. | Clear - <i>Bersama anda, demi anda dan demi Batu Kawah</i> (With you, For you and For Batu Kawah) |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| | | Ambiguous messages are open for interpretations. | Ambiguous - The only Sibu people's connection. Raging fire cannot be put out. (Literal translation from Mandarin) |
|--|--|--|---|

Results

In this section, extracts from the data are presented to illustrate the discursive strategies employed in the campaign advertisements.

Graphetic features of election banners of ruling and opposition parties

The analysis of graphetic features of election banners constitutes Level 1 of stylistic analysis (see Table 1, Column 3 for parameters of analysis). The election banners were divided into 10 spaces (2 horizontal panels x 5 vertical columns) to calculate the space occupied by images and text (results presented in Table 2) and the percentages were estimated in multiples of ten (e.g., 10%, 20%).

Graphetic features refer to the use of colour, size of images and text, artistic effects of text, photographs and logos in the election banners. The visual space of the election banners comprises three elements: photograph of candidate, party logo, and text. The banners of the opposition parties used more text (average of 72%) than photographs compared to the ruling party banners (average of 48%) but the allocation of space for party logo is similar for the opposition and ruling parties. Figure 1 shows an example of a DAP banner where the text occupied 80 percent of the election banner, compared to the BN banner (Figure 1) where the text occupied 60 percent of the space.

Table 2

Percentage of visual space on election banners of ruling and opposition parties

| Election banner | | Photograph of candidate | Party logo | Text |
|---------------------------|---------|-------------------------|------------|--------|
| Ruling party (n=15) | Range | 0-70% | 0-30% | 0-100% |
| | Average | 31% | 15% | 48% |
| Opposition parties (n=15) | Range | 0-40% | 10-20% | 40-90% |
| | Average | 22% | 13% | 72% |



Figure 1. DAP banner with text occupying 80% of the space

The ruling party tended to use photographs in the election banners: 13 out of 15 BN banners included photographs. Eight banners had single photographs - either the candidate or the

Chief Minister who is the president of the PPB, a component party of BN. Five banners had both the photograph of the candidate and the Chief Minister. The use of the Chief Minister's photograph on the BN banners reinforced the "Team Adenan" campaign strategy (Figure 2). During the 2016 state election, "Team Adenan" is the war cry of the BN political campaign to show the unity of the BN team because of the popularity of the Chief Minister who took office for the first time in 2014, and this was his first state election as the Chief Minister of Sarawak. The "Team Adenan" concept also tapped into the sentiments of the people of Sarawak who wanted to give him a chance to form the next ruling government in the state. In contrast, only two out of 15 opposition banners included the candidate's photograph (1 DAP and 1 independent candidate). The opposition parties put the photographs of candidates on large posters (which are not part of the data for the present study) and they used their banners to convey their messages on issues. They needed the space to inform the electorate of controversial handling of issues by the ruling power in order to win support – unlike the ruling party whose message is quite simple, essentially Vote BN.



Figure 2. Election banner with photographs of Chief Minister (left) and candidate (right)

The graphics on the election banners did not show much artistic flair. The most common is using shadow and outline of the text and photographs, which appeared in 13 out of 30 election banners. Figure 2 shows the candidates' photograph with a shadow.

The colour in the election banners shows the colour of the political parties and the colours of the Sarawak flag. Green is associated with PAS. The ruling party banners were mostly blue in colour because the BN colour is blue (Figure 2). SUPP, one of the component parties of BN, included some yellow colour on some of the banners to show the colour of their own political party. On the other hand, one of the opposition parties DAP used their party colour red on all their banners, and contrasted it with white colour for the text and background (Figure 1). The use of yellow may appear ambiguous because both the ruling and opposition parties used it but the meaning is obvious to us and Malaysians who have sociocultural knowledge of the party colours. When the ruling party used yellow as the background or text, it was to signify SUPP but when DAP used yellow, it was to signify the Sarawak flag colours (red, yellow, black). The three colours were used in the DAP mascot created to arouse feelings of patriotism towards the Sarawak state. The mascot is a hornbill named *Pahlawan Ubah* (meaning "Change Warrior Sarawak" and can be seen in the bottom right hand corner of the banner in Figure 1.

Typographical features of election banners of ruling and opposition parties

Level 2 of stylistic analysis according to Crystal and Davy (1969) consists of an analysis of the use of typographical features of text which include capitalisation and punctuation – excluding commas which were extensively to join sentences instead of conjunctions. Out of 30 election

banners, 14 used capital letters for the text (5 ruling party; 9 opposition parties). The opposition party banners used more capitalisation than the ruling party banners. For example, "*TAK NAK GST*" (meaning "Don't want GST"); GST refers to Goods and Services Tax. Capital letters are more difficult to read because the letters appear in square blocks but apparently served the purpose of emphasising the importance of the message for the opposition parties.

The use of exclamation and question marks on the ruling and opposition party banners was similar. Nine out of 30 election banners used exclamation and question marks (4 ruling party, 5 opposition parties). For example, "*Mana RM2.6 Bilion?*" (Meaning "Where is RM2.6 Billion?"). The issue of 2.6 billion has been hotly debated which involves the crediting of this amount into the prime minister Najib Razak's personal account. The amount is claimed to be donated by a Saudi prince but the issue is misappropriation of funds. The following examples show the use of rhetorical questions to engage the electorate and exclamation marks to make a strong statement:

Excerpts 1-3:

1. Three years no flyover, I resign! Do you dare? (literal translation from Mandarin)
2. *Menteri kaya, rakyat miskin? Ubah!* (Meaning "Rich ministers, poor people? Change!")
3. Adenan bans DAP leaders, but welcomes UNMO ministers!

The exclamation marks add affective meaning to the text by making the message sound angry and accusative. It is almost as if the candidates were talking to the voters and pointing out hypocrisy and challenging the voters to take action through the casting of their votes.

Textual Choices in Election Banners of ruling and Opposition Parties

Level 3 of the stylistic analysis in Crystal and Davy's (1969) framework involves an analysis of textual choices which encompass syntax and semantics. For lexical choice in sentences, the analysis focused on emotive versus factual language, and figurative versus literal language. For syntax, the analysed focussed on phrases versus sentences and declaratives versus questions.

Emotive and factual language

The banners of the ruling and opposition parties were similar in their use of emotive and factual language. Out of 15 banners each, six used emotive language and nine used factual language. Examples of language used to appeal to the emotions of the electorate are:

Excerpts 4-6:

4. *Ya Allah, Kurniakanlah kemenangan kepada PAS di DUN Samariang* (Oh God, Give victory to PAS at DUN Samariang) – PAS banner
5. *Menteri Kaya, Rakyat Miskin? Ubah!* (Rich Ministers, Poor People? Change!) – DAP banner
6. *Perintah Teguh Pegari, Rakyat Miri Tegap Berdiri* (Strong government shines, Miri people stand strong) – BN banner in Iban

The PAS banner (Excerpt 4) appeals to the Malay and Muslim electorate by using "Ya Allah" as a form of prayer for victory in the Samariang constituency. PAS is a Muslim-based party originating from West Malaysia. PAS has been contesting in the Sarawak state election but has not won any seats. Although PAS does not have the majority electoral support, they seek divine intervention to win a seat. None of their banners use negative words. Excerpt 5 shows an example of a banner that provokes anger among the electorate when they know that the

ministers are getting rich at their expense, and the ministers are from the ruling party. Underlying issues referred to include corruption, abuse of power and cronyism. Therefore, the banner urges the electorate to change and vote for DAP. Excerpt 6 is a BN banner written in Iban, asking the Miri people to stand strong by supporting a strong party.

An example of a banner that presents factual information is “BN betrays Sarawak Autonomy by importing West Malaysian Army Votes.” This claim by DAP implies that some army personnel from West Malaysia serving in Sarawak were actually listed in the electoral roll in West Malaysia but for the state election, their names were transferred onto the Sarawak electoral roll. This action betrays Sarawak autonomy, a reference to the 18-point agreement signed before the formation of Malaysia in July 1963 to protect the interests, rights and autonomy of the people of Sarawak. The mention of Sarawak autonomy alludes to the immigration point of the 18-point agreement. DAP highlighted the issue of West Malaysians who enter Sarawak without proper immigration procedures – although Malaysians residing in West Malaysia are Malaysian citizens, like Malaysians residing in Sarawak, they are required to use passports for social visits and apply for a work or study permit, a condition in the 18-point agreement. The reliance on election banners based on facts served to raise the electorate’s awareness of issues affecting them.

Figurative and literal language

The election banners made greater use of literal language (11 ruling party banners and 10 banners of opposition parties). An example of a banner that used literal language is “We Support Adenan Team, Vote BN candidate”. The voters were directed to vote the candidate. An example of a banner using figurative language is “Reject the escaped losing General” (literal translation from Mandarin). The general referred to was Dr Sim Kui Hian, a BN candidate for Batu Kawah who is the president of the SUPP party. He lost in the previous state election in the Padungan constituency but for the 2016 state election, he stood in the Batu Kawah constituency. The meanings of the individual words in banners with figurative language are not obvious without contextual information. In contrast, the BN banner “We Support Adenan Team, Vote BN candidate” is clear in its meaning.

Phrases and Full Sentences

Besides lexical choice, the third level of the stylistic analysis in Crystal and Davy’s (1969) framework also includes analysis of the syntax of messages. The opposition parties used more phrases (11 banners) while the ruling party banners used more full sentences (10 banners) but they were short. An example of phrases used on a DAP banner is “*Tak nak GST*” (“Don’t want GST”). When the issue is straightforward like the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST), phrases are adequate to convey the meaning in a telegraphic manner but when the issue is complex like the Sarawak autonomy and rights that are related to the 18-point agreement, then full sentences are needed to express the complete idea. For example, “Sarawak BN allows the erosion of Sarawak’s rights”. Although the ruling party banners used more full sentences (e.g., “we support Team Adenan”), they were very short sentences.

The analysis revealed that the banners were mostly formulated using simple sentences: 28 out of 30 banners. This could be due to several reasons. The space on the banner is limited, and there is insufficient time to read the banner if there is too much text, considering that the banners were put on the road side and roundabouts. There was only one compound sentence in a banner put up an independent candidate Liu Thian Leong, “*Bersama anda, Demi anda*”.

dan Demi Batu Kawah”, meaning “With you, for you and for Batu Kawah.” Commas are used in the place of conjunctions, which explain why the majority of the banners do not use compound sentences. The only example of a complex sentence is from the DAP banner, which reads as “BN betrays Sarawak Autonomy by Importing West Malaysian Army Votes.” There were two clauses in this banner. The use of phrases (opposition parties) and short full sentences (ruling party) in the 2016 Sarawak state election banners resembled oral or verbal communication. Earlier it was shown that use of punctuations made it look as if the candidates were talking to the voters, and the next part of the results on the use of declaratives and questions point to the same conclusion.

Declaratives and Questions

Most of the election banners used declaratives (26 banners) compared to four banners which used questions. There was no difference between the ruling and opposition parties as in their use of declaratives and questions: 13 declaratives and two questions each. The four questions are as follows:

Excerpts 7-10:

7. 2.6 Billion? BN,UMNO,SUPP, PRS & SPDP – DAP banner
8. *Menteri Kaya, Rakyat Miskin? Ubah!* – DAP banner
9. Three years no flyovers I resign! Do you dare? (Literal translation from Mandarin) – BN banner
10. West Msia DAP, Cleansing for autonomy? The fox is coming to get rid of chicken nest – BN banner

The two DAP banners used questions (Excerpts 7 and 8) to make the electorate question the credibility of the ruling government. In Excerpt 9, the candidate challenged the voters to give him their support so that he could deliver his promise within three years. In Excerpt 10, the rhetorical question ridiculed the ability of DAP to uphold Sarawak autonomy, suggesting that DAP preyed on the innocent people. A direct attack takes the form of putting the names of parties whereas an indirect attack highlights issues such as GST and Sarawak autonomy by implicating that the ruling party failed to look after the welfare of the people. In fact, to make sure that the message gets across to the electorate, the political parties sometimes repeat the message in different languages (Malay, English, Mandarin and Iban). The attack strategies create negative publicity which makes the voters distrust political institutions, that is the ruling party (Pătruț & Manolache, 2013).

Semantics of messages on election banners

The last aspect of the textual analysis was the semantics analysis which took account of clear versus ambiguous meanings in messages on the election banners of the ruling and opposition parties.

Table 3

Results of the semantic analysis of election banners of the ruling and opposition parties

| Semantic features | Ruling party | Opposition parties | Total |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------------|-------|
| Clear | 12 | 10 | 22 |
| Ambiguous | 3 | 5 | 8 |

The ruling and opposition parties were similar in the inclination towards clear messages as shown by the frequencies in Table 3. An example of a clear message is "*Bersama anda, demi anda dan demi Batu Kawah*" (With you, For you and For Batu Kawah) found on a BN banner. A DAP banner with a clear message is "*Menteri kaya, rakyat miskin*" (rich ministers, poor people). The clear messages of the ruling party banners mostly directed voters to vote for the candidate of the party whereas the opposition parties highlight issues such as the wealth disparity of ministers and the electorate. The semantic analysis of the messages on the election banners was not difficult because ambiguous messages had unclear reference such as "The only Sibu people's connection. Raging fire cannot be put out" (Literal translation from Mandarin) which appeared on a BN banner. It is not clear to people outside of Sibu who the person is and what the raging fire refers to. The meaning is not clear to people who do not know the context or the political situation in the constituency. To ensure that the meaning is captured by the voters, the candidates and parties chose to have clear messages on the election banners.

Discussion

The study provides empirical evidence to show two major stylistic differences between the banners of the ruling and opposition political parties used during the 2016 Sarawak State Election. Firstly, at the graphetic level, the opposition parties used more text in their banners compared to the ruling party which showed photographs of the candidate, often side by side with the photograph of the chief minister of Sarawak. The chief minister's photograph is always bigger than the candidate's photograph, perhaps to accord respect to the chief minister. Interestingly, those photographs are so large that they occupy almost the whole space from top to bottom of the banner. These findings concur with Aman (2014) who analysed the manifestos of the main political parties in the 13th Malaysian parliamentary elections and reported that the ruling party used more colours and photographs than the opposition party. In Belgium and France, the major parties have attractive designs in their election posters, unlike minor parties which highlight their party and ideology (Dumitrescu, 2012). Going by Whalen's (2012) assertion that the images of the candidate and party icons are important because they help voters to recognise the party, it can be deduced that the ruling party in the Sarawak state election used the banners to imprint their candidate and party icon on the minds of the electorate so that they know which party to draw the "X" sign on their ballot paper on polling day. In fact, some of the banners also showed the picture of the "X" next to the BN logo, a weighing scale. Going by this, the opposition banners which are mostly in text form may not be remembered. Rășcanu (2003) believes that "individuals and human faces are stored more easily than objects, objects more easily than actions, shape than colour, and the colour is remembered more accurately than numbers" (as cited in Pătruț & Monalache, 2013, p. 3) – and by extension, text. Therefore, the ruling party seems to make better use of visual space on election banners, similar to the major parties in Belgium and France (Dumitrescu, 2012).

It may seem that the opposition parties in Sarawak did not take advantage of the election banner to help the voters recognise the party. However, it needs to be noted that the opposition parties prioritise highlighting of issues over candidate recognition. Considering that the mainstream media is often affiliated to the ruling party, the opposition parties have a limited avenue to highlight issues to the electorate. There is the avenue of election rallies but not all their supporters and undecided voters attend the talks, which is why they have to

make full use of the election banner to reach out to the larger electorate. In Belgium and France, minor parties use posters with an informative purpose, that is, to provide additional information to voters in order to increase their voter base but the major parties use it to signal their power and competitiveness (Dumitrescu, 2012). The opposition parties are perhaps making better use of the space on their election banners by not putting photographs of candidates on them. Since there is always a party icon on the banner, the supporters of the opposition parties know which party to select on their ballot paper. Furthermore, no photograph is provided on the ballot paper, and in this sense it is not necessary for their voters to recognise who the candidates are. They only need to recognise the party icon. Therefore, the valuable space on election banners is used to inform the electorate of issues in order to win votes. Bremmer (2012) stated that the candidate's image and the issue in text form help voters to form a positive attitude towards the party or candidate. In the case of the opposition parties in the 2016 Sarawak state election, it seemed that it is the party logo and the issue in text form which speak to the electorate.

Secondly, at the textual level, the stylistic analysis revealed that the opposition parties tended to use phrases on their election banners compared to the ruling party banners which had short sentences telling the electorate to vote for a particular candidate or party. The limited space on the banner makes it imperative for the messages to be short. Furthermore, the election banners are put up on roadsides and roundabouts and the messages have to be short enough for people to read them as they drive past. With the constraint of space and time, it is a matter of putting across the most crucial message to the voters in as few words as possible. Commas emerged as a very useful punctuation for joining ideas and circumvent the need to use full sentences. At the same time, it makes the messages resemble oral or verbal communication which has the effect of the candidates speaking directly to the voters. There was some use of questions which gives rise to the same effect although in most banners, declarative sentences were used. For syntactic features, a comparison cannot be made with existing literature because researchers who studied political messages during election campaigns did not delve into the textual features of the messages (e.g., Aman, 2014; Bremmer, 2012; Dumitrescu, 2012; Pătruț & Manolache, 2013; Sualman, Salleh, & Firdaus, 2008; Whalen, 2012). This study offers some results which will serve as a point of comparison for researchers attempting analysis of election banners in future to draw conclusions on the syntactical features of such political messages.

Other than the use of phrases and short sentences, the textual analysis showed that the opposition and ruling parties are similar in sending clear messages using factual and literal language in their election banners. The ruling and opposition parties are similar in avoiding emotive and figurative language as well as ambiguous messages. The messages have to be presented clearly and directly to Sarawak voters to influence their decision to choose one party over another. If the messages are presented in ambiguous ways, the message may be lost on voters who are not aware of some issues affecting them. While some voters may be well-informed, others need to be provided with information about the candidates and their promises. Even for voters who are well-informed and have decided who to vote for, the election banners can still influence them through repetition. Rășcanu (2003) believes that:

the first time, the poster is overlooked, the second time, it is noticed but not read, the third time, it is read but not reflected upon, this occurs the fourth to the fifth time that people see it and start discussing with friends about it; the sixth time, we try to establish

agreement or disagreement with what is communicated and, in the seventh stage, we manage to achieve this goal. (as cited in Pătruț & Monalache, 2013, p. 3)

In the data collection for this study, the researchers found repeated use of the same election banners in the three cities, and in different locations within the same city.

Conclusion

The stylistic analysis of election banners of ruling and opposition parties during the 2016 state election campaign in Sarawak, Malaysia showed some key differences. In the use of the space on the banners, the opposition parties put more text on the banners whereas the ruling party banners contained more photographs. The allocation of space for the party icon is similar for the opposition and ruling parties, and it takes up about 15% of the space on the banner. Considering that only the party icon appears on the ballot papers, it is important to ensure that voters recognise the party icon for voting purposes. Besides the party icon, the identity of the party is conveyed through the colour of the political parties. The typographical analysis showed that the opposition party banners had more capital letters than the ruling party banners but they were similar in the use of exclamation and question marks to convey certain emotions through the text. In trying to fit as many words as possible into the banner to highlight pertinent issues to the electorate, the opposition parties tended to use phrases separated by commas but the ruling party banners had short sentences, mostly telling the electorate the party and candidate to vote for. Generally, the election banners made greater use of literal language and factual language, rather than figurative and emotive language to ensure clarity of messages. The stylistic analysis shows that the ruling and opposition political parties use different strategies in their election banners to persuade voters because of their differential status and position in the society. To add to the findings gleaned from a language analysis of election banners, voter reactions need to be studied to understand the impact of the banners on their voting patterns.

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