

Portraying Economic Competence in Malaysian Federal Budget Speeches

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ABSTRACT

Budget speeches are a fixed political event in Malaysia. Their content involves the whole country and a variety of domains. Despite the cornucopia of research on speeches, budget speeches are rarely selected and speeches from Malaysia have not been examined in detail. The discourse in these speeches can display how a developing country tackles economic decision-making. The article explores the portrayal of economic competence in Malaysian federal budget speeches. It conducts a linguistic analysis grounded in critical discourse studies. The analysis employs frequency, concordance and the representation of social actors to decipher monetary amount, politonyms, ethnonyms and toponyms. The discourse in budget speeches can portray economic competence, which has three characteristics. First, the government can claim to be financially solvent and propose significant initiatives. Second, the government introduces desirable initiatives because it intervenes to ensure economic growth. Third, the government helps citizens of several ethnicities and regions although Bumiputeras, Sabah and Sarawak are prioritized. The portrayal entails an ideological government-citizen binary because the government is the source of initiatives while citizens are the target of initiatives. The portrayal was reproduced in other texts and was repeated in the media. The portrayal became the endorsed way to think about the former Barisan Nasional (BN) government but other parties questioned it. The article argues that BN sought to legitimize its political power but its legitimacy became compromised, and it was defeated in the 2018 general elections.

Keywords: political discourse; economy; budget; speech; portrayal; critical discourse studies

INTRODUCTION

The first mention of “budget speech” is traced to 1797 in Britain (Google Ngram Viewer, 2019). The speech remains a British tradition, which Commonwealth countries, such as Australia, Canada, Guyana, Kenya and Malaysia inherited and continue to practice. In Malaysia, budget speeches are a fixed political event and their content is eagerly anticipated by various sectors of society (Ferry, Zakaria & Eckersley, 2014). These speeches are an instance of political discourse (van Dijk, 1997) because the government shares its perspective about the economy. Studies on political discourse regularly analyze speeches but budget speeches are rarely selected.

Budget speeches are archetypal texts portraying economic competence, as they describe public initiatives, and enable the government to anticipate revenues, expenditures and achievements (Lukin, 2015). These speeches become the central economic speech in the government’s repertoire of speeches because their content involves the whole country and a variety of domains (e.g. defense, education, health, transport, tourism). Budget speeches garner substantial interest among a national and international audience because the prediction of revenues and expenditures, and the declaration of initiatives can determine economic growth for several years. Moreover, these speeches influence the lives of citizens and can shape their perception about a political party (Thompson, 2015).

Budget speeches are a linguistic exposition of discourse, and the discourse is ideological because it can structure power relations between the government and citizens (van Dijk, 1997). Yet, the previous Prime Minister, Najib Razak said that Barisan Nasional (BN), the party that formed the federal government, did not deploy discourse to maintain the confidence of citizens (Utusan Online, 2017). His claim was countered, primarily on social media sites because the government did actually deploy discourse to persuade citizens of its capability to govern Malaysia (Ferry, Zakaria & Eckersley, 2014). Presently, BN does not form the federal government but the party was the longest-serving elected government in Malaysia (1957-2018). Political discourse could have helped to maintain the party's hegemony by portraying economic competence, which is defined as the ability to identify, expand and exploit policies and activities (Carlsson & Eliasson, 1994). The portrayal of economic competence by political agents can garner distinction or prestige, termed symbolic capital by Bourdieu (1997).

The article intends to examine the qualitative character of the discourse in Malaysian federal budget speeches from 1999 to 2018. It is grounded in critical discourse studies (CDS) because CDS is interested in discursive power domination (van Dijk, 1997, 2016). The discourse in budget speeches is an exercise of power, where the government tries to convince citizens of its economic competence. CDS favors a close reading of discourse (Fairclough, 2003) and the article conducts a linguistic analysis by focusing on monetary amount, the government and citizens. The analysis can reveal how the discourse in budget speeches portrays the economic competence of BN, which legitimizes its political power. The endeavor to understand these speeches does not mean complicity with BN or any political party. Instead, it enriches research on political discourse and may encourage critical thinking about speeches (Rajandran, 2013).

GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC AGENCY

Malaysia is a middle-income country located in Southeast Asia. It has the 37th highest GDP in the world and records solid growth rates (Lafaye de Micheaux, 2017). Growth is fueled by a diversified economy of agriculture, mining, oil and gas, industry and services. Although agriculture and mining dominated the 1960s and 1970s, oil and gas and industry dominated the 1980s until the present. The products of these areas stimulate trade, and Malaysian exports and imports mainly target Asian countries (Lafaye de Micheaux, 2017). The government manages these areas but since the 1980s, it has reduced its intervention because the neoliberal formula of deregulation, liberalization and privatization was implemented (Felker, 2015; Steger & Roy, 2010).

Malaysia adopts the neoliberal economic system but as in other Asian countries, the government maintains a strong presence (Steger & Roy, 2010). The government established a developmental state and its intervention ensured economic growth (Nasrudin, Kim & Suh, 2013; Pant, 2002). The government launched the cyclical five-year Malaysia Plan (now in its 11th cycle), New Economic Policy (NEP, 1970-1990), National Development Plan (NDP, 1991-2000), National Vision Policy (NVP, 2001-2010) and New Economic Model (NEM, 2010-2020). These policies and their relevant activities generated numerous income-generating corporations, infrastructure and projects in Malaysia, which improved living standards. The government aided or (directly or indirectly) sponsored these policies and activities, demonstrating the function of government economic agency. It transformed Malaysia from an agricultural to an industrial country (Felker, 2015; Hasan & Yussof, 2009).

The impact of transformation was unequal among the country's ethnicities (Bumiputeras [Malays and other natives], Chinese and Indians) and regions (West Malaysia [comprising 11 states and 2 territories] and East Malaysia [comprising 2 states and 1

territory]). Bumiputeras tended to have lower education, wages and purchasing power in comparison to the Chinese and Indians, and West Malaysia was more populated and urbanized than East Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017; Hasan & Yussof, 2009). Since independence, constitutional privileges existed for Bumiputeras (Article 153) and East Malaysia (Article 161) to defend their interests. Yet, ethnic and regional grievances remain and penetrate political discourse (Jarrett, 2016). Since the 1970s, the government has deployed economic initiatives to pursue resource distribution among the ethnicities and regions (Hasan & Yussof, 2009; Lafaye de Micheaux, 2017).

Malaysia practices a parliamentary democracy, and political parties mostly represent one ethnicity (Bumiputeras, Chinese, Indians) or one region (Sabah or Sarawak in East Malaysia). Other parties are multiethnic but one ethnicity often forms a majority. These parties have never formed the federal government alone, and consecutive governments from 1957 to 2018 have been formed by Barisan Nasional (BN), a coalition of ethnoregional parties. BN centralized the federation and the government received almost 90% of revenues (Hutchinson, 2014). It managed national finances, and decided who and where to invest in (Loh, 2015). BN tried to mitigate ethnic and regional grievances, and positioned itself as indispensable to economic growth (Felker, 2015). Its claim to economic competence helped it retain political power for 62 years.

BUDGET SPEECHES

In Malaysia, the budget speech for a year is tabled before that particular year begins. For example, the 1999 budget speech is tabled in 1998. The speech is considered a genre because there is general consensus about its purposes, structures and conventions (Lukin, 2015; Thompson, 2015). From 1999 to 2018, the Minister of Finance, who was often the Prime Minister, tabled the speech. The Minister delivered the speech in Malay to Members of Parliament in the House of Representatives but technological advancement has enabled almost anyone to hear it. The speech was first recontextualized in live television and online streaming on Facebook and YouTube, and was later recontextualized in other formats (e.g. articles, interviews, news, tweets). However, the speech presented a fraction of the actual budget because the Economic Report, Estimated Federal Expenditure and Estimates of Federal Government Revenue contained details not mentioned in the budget speech.

POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN SPEECHES

Politics is mostly discursive (van Dijk, 1997) because discourse enables various political functions (e.g. campaigning, governing) to gain, maintain or lose public influence (Windt, 1986). Political discourse is observed in numerous genres (e.g. debates, election manifestos) but research has a proclivity for speeches because speeches are produced often and display how politicians expound their ideas. A sampling of the cornucopia of research is reviewed, and their analysis divulges the presence of themes, representation or evaluation to favorably portray political agents.

Published studies explore inauguration speeches, which personalize the ruling government (Cheng, 2006; Chung & Park, 2010; Ghazali, 2003; Lim, 2002). American Presidents create familiarity through a confident but emotional personality to inspire Americans (Lim, 2002). Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad covertly talks about bribery to avoid shaming party members (Ghazali, 2003). In South Korea, President Roh desires peace in the Korean Peninsula while President Lee targets an advanced nation status (Chung & Park, 2010). In Taiwan, President Chen placates a national and international audience to unite the Taiwanese and to preserve peace in the Taiwan Strait (Cheng, 2006).

Other studies explore public holiday speeches (Karaliova, 2016; Slavíčková, 2013). These speeches emphasize a country among other countries. During Memorial Day speeches, American Presidents create public remembrance because peace was not easily acquired and should be cherished (Slavíčková, 2013). During New Year's Day speeches, the President of Poland emphasizes democracy and modernization while the Presidents of Belarus and Russia emphasize patriotism and stability (Karaliova, 2016). The Polish President also mentions the relations between Poland and other countries. In contrast, the Belarussian and Russian Presidents avoid mentioning other countries, disclosing their opinion of foreign relations.

The economy is the concern in budget speeches, and economic concerns have garnered some research interest (Don, Knowles & Fatt, 2010; Gregor & Macková, 2015; Rajandran, 2013). President Klaus of Czechia does not favor the European Union (EU) and he criticizes different EU aspects during his tenure (Gregor & Macková, 2015). Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad proposes development through nationalism to unite Malaysians (Don, Knowles & Fatt, 2010). Later, Prime Minister Najib Razak introduces the Economic Transformation Program to justify government intervention in the economy (Rajandran, 2013).

Ferry, Zakaria and Eckersley (2014), Lukin (2015) and Thompson (2015) are among the few studies examining budget speeches. In Australia, Treasurer Costello criticizes the previous government and promotes his government while Treasurer Swan conceals his government's achievements (Lukin, 2015). Costello credits the government while Swan credits strong economic principles for growth. In the United Kingdom, Chancellors Asquith and Lloyd George introduce New Liberalism (Thompson, 2015). It envisions an egalitarian society of consumers through a reformist state. In Malaysia, Ferry, Zakaria and Eckersley (2014) ascertain governance during the 2008 financial crisis. The government claims credit for development although the economy is unpredictable. These studies analyze how language features (e.g. nouns, pronouns, verbs, tenses, aspects, adjectives, adverbs, modals, nominalization) convey the economic roles of the government and citizens. Because the analysis involves numerous speeches, Lukin (2015) and Thompson (2015) propose the use of frequency and concordance to focus on relevant parts of budget speeches before conducting a close reading.

From previous research, the speeches idealize the government (Don, Knowles & Fatt, 2010; Ghazali, 2003; Lim, 2002; Rajandran, 2013) because it helps citizens flourish (Cheng, 2006; Slavíčková, 2013) or overcome problems (Gregor & Macková, 2015; Karaliova, 2016). Their discourse is ideological (van Dijk, 1997) and it can generate symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1997) to legitimize the political power of governments. The research reviewed until now selected speeches from various domains (economy, holiday, inauguration), countries (Australia, Belarus, Czechia, Malaysia, Poland, Russia, South Korea, Taiwan, United Kingdom, United States) and periods (almost or more than a decade). The diversity exemplifies the fecund tradition of studying political discourse in speeches.

Despite these studies, budget speeches from Malaysia have not been examined in detail. The discourse in these speeches can display how a developing country tackles economic decision-making. The economy can cause a government to gain or lose power (Thompson, 2015) because economic growth is a major government responsibility. Considering the prominence of money in budget speeches, and the developmental state in Malaysia, the article poses this research question: How are monetary amount, the government and citizens portrayed in budget speeches? Grounded in critical discourse studies (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2016), this question is answered by adopting approaches in corpus linguistics (frequency, concordance) (Baker, 2006) and discourse studies (representation of social actors) (van Leeuwen, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

The yearly budget speeches are tabled in Malay and are quickly transcribed. The transcription preserves linguistic content but does not have non-linguistic content (e.g. body language, laughter, pauses, voice pitch/tone/volume). It is not a concern because the article only analyzes the language of the speeches. Although a speech writer may prepare and can influence the speeches, their content reflects the government's perspective (Lukin, 2015; Thompson, 2015). The actual writer is perhaps unimportant because these speeches are considered an authentic and authoritative portrayal of the economy (Rajandran, 2013).

The article selected budget speeches from 1999 to 2018 and compiled a corpus containing 228587 words. The speeches in the corpus start in 1999 because 1999 marked the financial crisis in Asia, and the conflation of the roles of Minister of Finance and Prime Minister in Malaysia. The speeches end in 2018 because Barisan Nasional (BN) no longer formed the federal government after Pakatan Harapan (PH) defeated BN in the 2018 general elections. During this 20-year period, the budget speeches were tabled by the Ministers of Finance, Mahathir Mohamad (1999, 2002-2003), Daim Zainuddin (2000-2001), Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (2004-2009) and Najib Razak (2010-2018).

The analysis of the speeches is grounded in critical discourse studies (CDS). It studies structures, meanings and the potential impact of linguistic choices in their context (Halliday, 2003) to understand their ideology (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2016). The article pursued a qualitative study of frequency, concordance (Baker, 2006) and the representation of social actors (van Leeuwen, 2008). Following Lukin (2015) and Thompson (2015), the analysis began by selecting certain words. The selection of these words were driven by their frequent mention in the literature (e.g. Lafaye de Micheaux, 2017; Loh, 2015; Ooi, 2014) and the researcher's schema of political discourse in Malaysia.

These words were about money, politonyms, ethnonyms and toponyms. Words about money mean the mention of the national currency, indicating the monetary amount available for initiatives. The politonyms are nouns and pronouns about the government and their selection could study whether the government's economic agency in reality (Nasrudin, Kim & Suh, 2013; Pant, 2002) is reflected in discourse. While ethnonyms are nouns to refer to the ethnicities in Malaysia, toponyms are nouns to refer to the regions in Malaysia, which can display how citizens are characterized.

Using WordSmith 6 (Scott, 2012), the frequency (See Tables 1-4) and concordance (See examples in Extracts 1-9) for these words were produced. These methods direct the analysis to stretches of discourse which can answer the research question (Baker, 2006). Frequency counts the absolute quantity of a word (Baker, 2006). Concordance means the lines where a selected word is utilized with an amount of co-text (adjoining words) (Baker, 2006). Certain words named collocates are commonly employed with a selected word in the phraseology of the concordance lines. The structures and meanings of these lines were examined through the representation of social actors (van Leeuwen, 2008).

Social actors depict how entities (often realized as nouns) and events (often realized as verbs) are represented. Among the representations of social actors are Activation/Passivation (entities are a dynamic force in events or are undergoing events) and Appraisal (entities are positively or negatively valued in events) (van Leeuwen, 2008). The events involve 'doing', 'being', 'sensing' and 'saying' (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). While 'doing' encodes action, 'being' encodes description, 'sensing' encodes cognition, desideration, emotion and perception, and 'saying' encodes communication (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Lastly, the significance of words about money, politonyms, ethnonyms and toponyms was interpreted in relation to Malaysia's context because their use in budget speeches may

disclose an ideology or socially shared beliefs that define the social identity of groups (van Dijk, 1997, 2016). The interpretation required an understanding of the matrix of Malaysian history, culture, economy and politics (Rajandran & Fauziah, 2014) to describe the distribution of money, and to organize the source and target of initiatives. The article analyzed budget speeches in Malay and Extracts 1-9 reproduce the Malay original. The extracts were then translated from Malay into English, and a native Malay user with experience in bilingual translation verified the translation.

ANALYSIS

Budget speeches disclose large amounts of money for economic initiatives. The source and target of these initiatives are respectively the government, and citizens of various ethnicities and regions.

MONETARY AMOUNT

The frequency of monetary amount throughout the corpus is seen in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Frequency of monetary amount

Word	N
Ringgit	3200
RM	109

The national currency is introduced by 'ringgit' or its acronym 'RM' ('Ringgit Malaysia' [Malaysian Ringgit]). The frequency of 'ringgit' vastly outnumbers 'RM' because budget speeches are spoken, and the spoken convention prefers 'X ringgit' over 'RM X'. The national currency is utilized because the initiatives in the speeches are realized in Malaysia. The currency shows the monetary amount available for initiatives. The cumulative amount does not equal the spending estimate for a year because the speeches only list salient initiatives.

The national currency has four frequent collocates: amount + 'juta' [million] (N = 1347), amount + 'bilion' [billion] (N = 994), amount only (N = 524) and amount + 'ribu' [thousand] (N = 319), as seen in some examples in Extract 1. The collocation specifies the monetary amount available. The predominance of amounts with 'million' and 'billion' can imply that the government is ready to spend large amounts of money. The government can claim to be financially solvent and propose significant initiatives (Ferry, Zakaria & Eckersley, 2014).

Extract 1

ini, Kerajaan menyediakan 20 juta **ringgit** pemberian bantuan khas
II dengan dana sebanyak 300 juta **ringgit** untuk membantu
. Kerajaan turut menyediakan 1.6 bilion **ringgit** pada 2014 bagi pembangunan
awal tahun 2010, dengan kos 1.3 bilion **ringgit**. Dengan langkah-langkah ini,
bahawa peruntukan lebih 9 bilion **ringgit** disediakan untuk membiayai
rumah kini ditingkatkan daripada 400 **ringgit** sebulan kepada 720 ringgit
bayaran hasil jualan sebanyak 5,760 **ringgit**. Bukan itu sahaja, petani
Bajet 2006, geran sebanyak 50 ribu **ringgit** telah diberi bagi setiap bas
pinjaman berjumlah sehingga 300 ribu **ringgit** untuk perumahan, kenderaan

Translation

1. this, the Government provides 20 million **ringgit** to give special assistance
2. It with a fund of 300 million **ringgit** to help
3. the Government also provides 1.6 billion **ringgit** in 2014 for development
4. early 2010, with a cost of 1.3 billion **ringgit**. With these steps,
5. that an allocation of over 9 billion **ringgit** is provided to finance
6. house is now increased from 400 **ringgit** a month to 720 **ringgit**
7. payment of sales revenue worth 5,760 **ringgit**. Not only that, the farmers
8. 2006 Budget, a grant of 50 thousand **ringgit** has been given to every bus
9. loans amounting to 300 thousand **ringgit** for housing, automobile

These initiatives are justified by mentioning their purpose or recipient. The purpose is indicated by collocates of **ringgit**: 'bagi' [to] + noun/verb or 'untuk' [to] + verb. In lines 1-4 in Extract 2, 'RM825 million', 'RM100 million', 'RM3.08 billion' and 'RM1.8 billion' can 'supply', 'implement' or 'increase' certain initiatives. Similarly, the recipient is indicated by collocates of **ringgit**: 'bagi' [for] + noun, 'kepada' [to] + noun or 'untuk' [for] + noun. In lines 5-9, the money is received by selected stakeholders, who are institutions ('programs', 'Services') or individuals ('them', 'disabled', 'patient'). The money is distributed either indirectly through institutions to individuals, or directly to individuals. From lines 1-9, the monetary amount is not arbitrarily distributed because it is linked to a purpose or recipient. The government does not seem wasteful and is transparent about spending. This characteristic can portray its economic competence.

Extract 2

rumah, manakala sebanyak 825 juta **ringgit** bagi membekal elektrik kepada akan memperuntukkan 100 juta **ringgit** bagi pelaksanaan programnya peruntukan sejumlah 3.08 bilion **ringgit** untuk melaksanakan menyediakan peruntukan 1.8 bilion **ringgit** untuk menambah kemudahan peruntukan sebanyak 19 juta **ringgit** bagi program latihan penilai memberi sumbangan sebanyak 1 ribu **ringgit** secara one-off kepada mereka. **ringgit** bagi meneruskan pemberian 350 **ringgit** sebulan kepada OKU bekerja aktiviti pencegahan dan 5 juta **ringgit** untuk rawatan pesakit dari adalah untuk Emolumen, 7.56 bilion **ringgit** untuk Perkhidmatan dan

Translation

1. houses, while 825 million **ringgit** to supply electricity to
2. will allocate 100 million **ringgit** for the implementation of its program
3. an allocation of 3.08 billion **ringgit** to implement
4. provides an allocation of 1.8 billion **ringgit** to increase facilities
5. an allocation of 19 million **ringgit** for appraisal training programs
6. give a contribution of 1 thousand **ringgit** as a one-off to them
7. **ringgit** to continue the provision of 350 **ringgit** a month to the working disabled
8. prevention activities and 5 million **ringgit** for patient treatment from
9. is for Emoluments, 7.56 billion **ringgit** for Services and

GOVERNMENT AS SOURCE OF INITIATIVES

The frequency of politonyms throughout the corpus is listed in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Frequency of politonyms

Word	N
Kerajaan	2916
Kita	1300
Saya	611

Budget speeches mention ‘kerajaan’ [government] and ‘kita’ [inclusive we], and these words are the highest frequency noun and pronoun respectively. The prominence of ‘kerajaan’ and ‘kita’ emphasizes the government and its contribution. Throughout the corpus, ‘kerajaan’ [government] is involved in ‘doing’, ‘being’, ‘sensing’ and ‘saying’ events (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The events are signaled by the adjectives (underlined) and verbs (*italicized*) listed in Table 3, which are the most frequent collocates of ‘kerajaan’.

TABLE 3. Government-centered events throughout the corpus

Event	Word	N
Doing	<i>menyediakan</i>	188
	[prepares]	
	<i>memberi</i>	136
	[gives]	
	<i>memperuntukkan</i>	116
	[allocates]	
	<i>melaksanakan</i>	109
	[implements]	
	<i>mengambil</i>	80
	[takes]	
Saying	<i>menubuhkan</i>	55
	[establishes]	
	<i>menambah</i>	42
	[adds]	
Saying	<i>mencadangkan</i>	203
	[proposes]	
Saying	<i>bersetuju</i>	71
	[agrees]	
Sensing	<u>prihatin</u>	56
	[concerned]	
Being	<u>komited</u>	54
	[committed]	

From Table 3, the government mostly performs actions through ‘doing’ because it takes steps for the economy. These steps involve the distribution of money, using the verbs ‘menyediakan’ [prepares], ‘memberi’ [gives], ‘memperuntukkan’ [allocates] or ‘melaksanakan’ [implements]. In lines 1-4 in Extract 3, the government is the agent who provides money (‘800 million’) and launches programs (‘subsidies’, ‘e-Visa’). These initiatives would not exist if the government did not perform certain actions. The government also utilizes ‘saying’ to reveal initiatives. These initiatives can begin after the government declares their purpose or recipient. In lines 5-6, communication is relayed by the verbs ‘mencadangkan’ [proposes] and ‘bersetuju’ [agrees]. While ‘proposes’ implies a non-finalized initiative, ‘agrees’ implies an initiative decided after consultation. Both events conceal the government’s power because it does not seem to impose initiatives. However, the

initiatives are already finalized and decided, or they would not be revealed in budget speeches.

The government discloses values through ‘sensing’ and ‘being’. In lines 7-9, ‘prihatin’ [concerned] and ‘komited’ [committed] motivate the performance of initiatives. The two adjectives signal the government having positive values. The evaluation is an explicit praise of the government. Moreover, the initiatives in lines 1-6 are desirable, and the government radiates positive values because it developed these initiatives. The evaluation is an implicit praise of the government. Budget speeches may employ implicit evaluation more than explicit evaluation to minimize claims of boasting (Rajandran & Fauziah, 2014). The speeches provide evidence for economic development, which ultimately depicts the government positively. From lines 1-9, the government is activated because it formulates and executes initiatives. The government has agency in reality (Nasrudin, Kim & Suh, 2013; Pant, 2002) and the agency is reproduced in discourse. Real-life agency is probably obscured by bureaucracy and day-to-day routines but discursive agency emphasizes the government’s endeavor in developing the economy.

Extract 3

dan persekitaran pembelajaran pula, Kerajaan akan menyediakan 800 juta oleh Malaysia Debt Ventures. Kerajaan akan memberi subsidi kadar bagi mendapatkan rawatan. Justeru, Kerajaan akan memperuntukkan 20 pelawat untuk berkunjung ke Malaysia, Kerajaan akan melaksanakan e-Visa dan penjimatan tenaga. Ke arah ini, Kerajaan mencadangkan pengecualian maklumbalas para penjawat awam, Kerajaan bersetuju untuk di Sarawak. Tuan Yang Dipertua, Kerajaan tetap prihatin terhadap Orang Asli. Tuan Yang diPertua, Kerajaan amat prihatin terhadap rakyat Tuan Yang di-Pertua, Sesungguhnya, Kerajaan komited dalam memastikan

Translation

1. and learning environment, the Government will provide 800 million
2. by Malaysian Debt Ventures. The Government will give rate subsidies
3. to acquire treatment. Therefore, the Government will allocate 20
4. visitors to visit Malaysia, the Government will implement e-Visa
5. and energy savings. In this direction, the Government proposes exemptions
6. feedback from civil servants, the Government agrees to
7. in Sarawak. Mr. Speaker Sir, the Government remains concerned about
8. Natives. Mr. Speaker Sir, the Government is very concerned about citizens
9. Mr. Speaker Sir, indeed, the Government is committed to ensure

‘Kita’ [inclusive we] personalizes the initiatives because it implies shared government-citizen involvement (Don, Knowles & Fatt, 2010). The government is elected by citizens and it represents their interests. The government is mandated to decide on initiatives and citizens would welcome their decisions. ‘Kita’ involves the government and citizens, and economic development can be achieved because the two parties cooperate. Their cooperation establishes a group, which can reminisce past events and project future events. The temporal orientation is signaled by modal auxiliaries, as in Extract 4. The modal auxiliary (*italicized*) ‘telah’ [have] (N = 97) marks past events while the modal auxiliaries (*italicized*) ‘akan’ [will]

(N = 96), ‘perlu’ [should] (N = 85) and ‘dapat’ [can] (N = 40) can indicate future events. The modal auxiliaries convey a continuity, where the government performs initiatives from past to future. Past events enable contemplation and future events enable prediction. The two strands are complementary because future decision is informed by past decision. Yet, future events outnumber past events as budget speeches record promises of initiatives in upcoming years.

Extract 4

, monorel dan keretapi komuter elektrik. Kita juga telah membina pelabuhan acuan kita sendiri. Bukan sahaja kita telah berjaya melaksanakan kira-kira 8 ribu dolar Amerika hari ini. Kita telah berjaya mengurangkan buah sekolah. Apabila projek ini siap, kita akan mencapai liputan sepenuhnya : Konsep Pertama: Melalui NBOS lagi, kita akan menyediakan tanah Kerajaan kita adalah dagangan produk kita. Kita perlu menggalakkan inisiatif sektor dan People Economy. Disamping itu, kita perlu mencapai pertumbuhan yang warga kecil dalam masyarakat global, kita tidak dapat mengelak dari kesan daripada membuat kesilapan tetapi kita dapat menangani

Translation

1. monorail and electric commuter trains. We have also built ports
2. our own mold. Not only have we successfully implemented
3. about 8 thousand American dollars today. We have successfully reduced
4. schools. When this project is complete, we will achieve full coverage
5. First Concept: Through NBOS again, we will provide Government land
6. we are our trade products. We should encourage sector initiatives
7. and People Economy. Besides that, we should achieve growth that
8. small players in the global community, we cannot avoid the effects
9. from making mistakes but we can overcome

‘Saya’ [I] is the second most frequent pronoun after ‘kita’ [inclusive we]. It is said by the Minister of Finance but it means himself or the government. The pronoun designates himself if it collocates with the verb (*italicized*) ‘mohon’ [beg] (N = 40), as in lines 1-4 in Extract 5. The verb signifies ‘saying’ and the Minister proposes his motion. He performs his legislative function as a Member of Parliament and has to seek permission from the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The permission is an expected ritual to enable the budget speech to start or end. The pronoun also designates the government if it collocates with the verbs (*italicized*) ‘mencadangkan’ [propose] (N = 206) or ‘mengumumkan’/‘umumkan’ [announce] (N = 99), as in lines 5-9. The verbs signify ‘saying’ and the Minister reveals which initiatives are going to exist. He performs his executive function as a member of government and is a metonymic spokesperson. He shows how the government views the initiatives and ‘saya’ can be replaced by ‘kerajaan’. But since ‘saya’ is utilized, he can further personalize the views through the adjective ‘sukacita’ [pleased] or the verb ‘suka’ [like], as in lines 6, 8 and 9. These adjectives establish an expectation of positive evaluation (van Leeuwen, 2008) and the initiatives seem to be desirable. Hence, ‘saya’ can identify the Minister’s legislative or executive functions.

Extract 5

bersatu dan maju. Tuan Yang di-Pertua, *Saya* mohon mencadangkan.
Tuan Yang di-Pertua, *saya* mohon mencadangkan supaya
Allah kita berserah. Tuan Yang di-Pertua, *Saya* mohon mencadangkan.
beroleh keberkatan. Tuan Yang di-Pertua, *Saya* mohon mencadangkan.
membimbangkan. Menyedari hakikat ini, *saya* mencadangkan duti import bagi
awam kumpulan sokongan. Sukacita *saya* ingin mengumumkan bayaran khas
Dalam Rancangan Malaysia Kesembilan, *saya* telah mengumumkan beberapa
Kerajaan yang mengenang budi, suka *saya* mengumumkan pemberian bonus
Kerajaan Barisan Nasional juga, sukacita *saya* umumkan, jumlah BR1M untuk tahun

Translation

1. united and developed. Mr. Speaker Sir, *I beg* to propose.
2. Mr. Speaker Sir, *I beg* to propose that
3. God we surrender. Mr. Speaker Sir, *I beg* to propose.
4. acquire blessing. Mr. Speaker Sir, *I beg* to propose.
5. worrying. Realizing this fact, *I propose* import duties for
6. public support group. *I am pleased to announce* a special payment
7. In the Ninth Malaysia Plan, *I have announced* several
8. appreciative Government, *I would like to announce* a bonus
9. the Barisan Nasional government also, *I am pleased to announce*, the BR1M amount for

From Extracts 3-5, budget speeches establish government pre-eminence in economic agency (Ferry, Zakaria & Eckersley, 2014). The discourse makes the federal government the source of initiatives because the government makes an active and beneficial contribution to the Malaysian economy. The government dominates economic decision-making (Don, Knowles & Fatt, 2010; Ghazali, 2003; Rajandran, 2013). It continuously manages the economy to improve the lives of citizens and the management is symptomatic of the developmental state (Steger & Roy, 2010).

CITIZENS AS TARGET OF INITIATIVES

Citizens are often treated homogeneously (Don, Knowles & Fatt, 2010; Ferry, Zakaria & Eckersley, 2014) although they comprise a diverse group, particularly in Malaysia. The frequency of ethnonyms and toponyms confirms the mention of diversity throughout the corpus, as listed in Table 4.

TABLE 4. Frequency of ethnonyms and toponyms

Word	N
<i>Ethnonyms</i>	
Bumiputera [Bumiputeras]	193
India [Indians]	42
Cina [Chinese]	32
<i>Toponyms</i>	
Sabah	185
Sarawak	169
Kuala Lumpur	73
Johor	47
Terengganu	36
Labuan	26
Putrajaya	26
Kedah	25
Pahang	25
Pulau Pinang	24
Kelantan	22
Melaka	19
Perlis	19
Perak	17
Selangor	17
Negeri Sembilan	12

From Table 4, it is seen that Bumiputeras enjoy the majority of initiatives. Throughout the corpus, ‘Bumiputera’ most frequently collocates with the nouns ‘usahawan’ [entrepreneur] (N = 44), ‘hartanah’ [real estate] (N = 26), ‘syarikat’ [company] (N = 23), ‘kontraktor’ [contractor] (N = 19) and ‘perniagaan’ [business] (N = 11). The government helps Bumiputera enterprise and property because these areas are the economic focus for Bumiputeras and may enhance their economic security (Hasan & Yussof, 2009).

In Extract 6, the government is activated (van Leeuwen, 2008) because it stimulates Bumiputera enterprise and property. The stimulation is positively valued in lines 1-9 by nouns, such as ‘inisiatif’ [initiatives] ‘program’ [programs], ‘penyertaan’ [participation], ‘pengukuhan’ [strengthening], and ‘penubuhan’ [establishment], and verbs, such as ‘melahirkan’ [create], ‘membantu’ [help], ‘memperkuhkan’ [strengthen] and ‘meningkatkan’ [increase]. The government champions their interests and creates desirable initiatives for Bumiputeras.

Bumiputeras are passivated (van Leeuwen, 2008) through ‘bagi’ [to], ‘kepada’ [to] or ‘untuk’ [to]. Initial stimulation should be provided and Bumiputeras subsequently ‘expand’, ‘implement’ or ‘run’ their own initiatives, as in lines 2, 4 and 6. Bumiputeras seem to have to depend on the government to participate in enterprise and property. Their participation can improve income, as Bumiputeras record the lowest household income in Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017). Bumiputera income generation became part of initiatives after the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1970-1990). The NEP prioritized Bumiputera participation in enterprise and property, and the priority is considered the manifestation of their constitutional privileges (Ooi, 2014). The government confirms the priority in budget speeches by empowering Bumiputeras in modern economic activities (Hasan & Yussof, 2009; Lafaye de Micheaux, 2017).

Extract 6

. Bagi melahirkan usahawan-usahawan Bumiputera, beberapa inisiatif telah TERAJU untuk membantu syarikat-syarikat bumiputera untuk mengembangkan program pre-eksport untuk syarikat Bumiputera Berprestasi Tinggi atau pun bermula, dilaksanakan oleh kontraktor Bumiputera tempatan kelas F. Kerajaan memperkukuhkan penyertaan masyarakat Bumiputera dalam perniagaan. Untuk ini, dibeli dan disewakan kepada usahawan bumiputera untuk menjalankan perniagaan. 2 dan pengukuh institusi hartanah Bumiputera. Untuk meningkatkan untuk terus meningkatkan penyertaan Bumiputera dalam sektor hartanah. Untuk penubuh Yayasan Amanah Hartanah Bumiputera bertujuan meningkatkan

Translation

1. To create Bumiputera entrepreneurs, several initiatives have
2. TERAJU to help bumiputera companies expand
3. pre-export programs for High Performance Bumiputera companies or
4. also started, implemented by grade F local Bumiputera contractors. The Government
5. to strengthen the participation of Bumiputera society in business. For this,
6. is purchased and leased to bumiputera entrepreneurs to run business.
7. 2 and the strengthening of Bumiputera real estate institutions. To increase
8. to further increase Bumiputera participation in the real estate sector. For
9. the establishment of Yayasan Amanah Hartanah Bumiputera is meant to increase

The other ethnicities in Table 4 are the Chinese and Indians. 'Cina' [Chinese] has these nouns as its most frequent collocates: 'sekolah' [schools] (N = 17), 'bahasa' [language] (N = 3) and 'kampung' [villages] (N = 3), as observed in Extract 7. Mandarin is a medium of instruction or an optional course in public education. Chinese education has become a signal of ethnic identity, and 'sekolah' and 'bahasa' are related because the language is taught in school. A large population of the Chinese inhabits 450 new villages that originated during the communist emergency in the 1950s. The 'kampung' are old and require refurbishing. Chinese education and the villages are passivated (van Leeuwen, 2008) through 'bagi' [for] or 'kepada' [to]. Funding Chinese education and villages preserves these institutions for the future. The government may provide funding because it does not want to alienate the Chinese, who constitute 23.3% of Malaysians (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017).

Extract 7

juta ringgit; Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina - 50 juta ringgit; Sekolah Jenis manfaat, khususnya kepada sekolah Cina dan Tamil serta sekolah agama. dan Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Cina atau conforming school yang . Mulai tahun 2007, Bahasa Cina akan diajar sebagai kepada guru yang mengajar bahasa Cina dan Tamil di sekolah kebangsaan India ke sekolah kebangsaan, Bahasa Cina dan Tamil sudahpun diajar di pembangunan Kampung-kampung Baru Cina, sebanyak 65 juta ringgit penduduk kampung- kampung baru Cina bagi pembayaran premium tanah bagi pembangunan Kampung Baru Cina, 50 juta ringgit lagi untuk

Translation

1. million ringgit; Chinese National Type Schools - 50 million ringgit; Type Schools
2. benefits, especially to Chinese and Tamil schools as well as religious schools.
3. and National Chinese Secondary Schools or conforming school that
4. Starting from 2007, the Chinese language will be taught as
5. to teachers who teach the Chinese and Tamil languages in national schools
6. Indians to national schools, the Chinese and Tamil languages are already taught in
7. development of Chinese New Villages, a total of 65 million ringgit
8. inhabitants of Chinese new villages for land premium payments
9. for the development of Chinese New Villages, 50 million ringgit more for

‘India’ [Indians] has a noun as its most frequent collocate: ‘usahawan’ [entrepreneur] (N = 12), as observed in Extract 8. An initiative exists to motivate Indian entrepreneurs under the ‘Skim Pembangunan Usahawan’ [Entrepreneur Development Scheme]. The initiative improves income because there are many poor rural and urban Indians. The Indian entrepreneurs are passivated (van Leeuwen, 2008) through ‘kepada’ [to] or ‘untuk’ [for] because the government funds the initiative. Indians constitute 7.0% of Malaysians (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017) and are believed to not be as rich as the Chinese. The Chinese are also believed to be business-oriented. These beliefs are firmly etched in Malaysian social memory (Jarrett, 2016; Lafaye de Micheaux, 2017). Consequently, the government may emphasize extra initiatives to generate income for Bumiputeras and Indians.

Extract 8

juta ringgit kepada 4,212 usahawan masyarakat India di bawah Skim Pembangunan Usahawan, dan 100 juta ringgit untuk 10 ribu usahawan India, melalui Skim Pembangunan Usahawan Skim Pembangunan Usahawan Masyarakat India. Selain itu, 50 juta ringgit disediakan oleh untuk Skim Pembiayaan Usahawan Muda India atau SPUMI di bawah TEKUN, manakala kepada Skim Pembiayaan Usahawan India, dijangka memanfaatkan 5,000 peminjam Skim Pembangunan Usahawan Masyarakat India. Bagi tahun 2013, Kerajaan menyediakan SME Bank untuk membantu usahawan kecil India; Kedua: Tambahan 200 juta ringgit juta ringgit disediakan untuk usahawan kaum India dan 100 juta ringgit lagi kepada SPUMI di bawah TEKUN, manakala usahawan India juga boleh memohon pinjaman daripada

Translation

1. million ringgit to 4,212 Indian community entrepreneurs under the Entrepreneur Development Scheme
2. and 100 million ringgit for 10 thousand Indian entrepreneurs, through the Entrepreneur Development Scheme
3. Indian Community Entrepreneur Development Scheme. Besides that, 50 million ringgit is provided by
4. for the Young Indian Entrepreneur Funding Scheme or SPUMI under TEKUN, while
5. to the Indian Entrepreneur Funding Scheme, expected to benefit 5,000 borrowers
6. Indian Community Entrepreneur Development Scheme. For 2013, the Government provides
7. SME bank to help small Indian entrepreneurs; Secondly: An additional 200 million ringgit
8. million ringgit is provided to Indian entrepreneurs and 100 million ringgit more to
9. SPUMI under TEKUN, while Indian entrepreneurs can also apply for loans from

From Table 4, the majority of initiatives are located in Sabah and Sarawak. Other initiatives are located in Kuala Lumpur because it is the capital of the country. The location of initiatives is identified by the preposition 'di' [in] and its frequent collocates are: 'di' + town, 'di' + state or 'di' + town + state. Line 1 in Extract 9 shows 'di' + town (Jempol, Kuching, Muar, Mukah), lines 1, 2, 5, 6 and 9 use 'di' + state (Perak, Perlis, Terengganu) and lines 3, 4, 7 and 8 use 'di' + town + state. The location is compulsory because initiatives require a physical location for their facilities, products or services. The government is activated because it decides which state or territory can enjoy an initiative (Hutchinson, 2014; Loh, 2015) although the reason for the decision is mostly not provided.

Extract 9

hospital-hospital baharu serta Klinik Kesihatan di Perlis, Kuching, Mukah, Jempol, Muar dan dan Johor dengan kos satu bilion ringgit. Di Perlis, dua projek RTB iaitu naik taraf Lumar, Sarawak, di Pulau Banggi, Sabah dan di Tanjung Gahai dan Chemomoi, Pahang. Jalil 1,530 unit; di Papar, Sabah 1,290 unit dan di Bukit Pinang, Kedah 960 unit. Di samping di Terengganu dan Hospital Seri Iskandar di Perak. Membina 20 Klinik Kesihatan dan 4 dua buah hospital iaitu Hospital Dungun di Terengganu dan Hospital Seri Iskandar di di Kuala Lipis, Pahang, dan Klinik Pergigian di Kluang, Johor; Kedua: Menambah 30 Klinik 4 Klinik Pergigian antaranya di Klinik Kesihatan di Kuala Lipis, Pahang, dan Klinik Pergigian di di Wakaf Che Yeh, Kelantan dan Gopeng, di Perak akan dimajukan sebagai projek

Translation

1. brand new hospitals and Health Clinics in Perlis, Kuching, Mukah, Jempol, Muar and
2. and Johor with a cost of one billion ringgit. In Perlis, two RTB projects namely the upgrading
3. Lumar, Sarawak, in Pulau Banggi, Sabah and in Tanjung Gahai and Chemomoi, Pahang.
4. Jalil 1,530 units; in Papar, Sabah 1,290 units and in Bukit Pinang, Kedah 960 units. Besides
5. in Terengganu and Seri Iskandar Hospital in Perak. Building 20 Health Clinics and 4
6. two hospitals namely Dungun Hospital in Terengganu and Seri Iskandar Hospital in
7. in Kuala Lipis, Pahang, and a Dental Clinic in Kluang, Johor; Secondly: adding 30 Clinics
8. 4 Dental Clinics among them a Health Clinic in Kuala Lipis, Pahang, and a Dental Clinic in
9. in Wakaf Che Yeh, Kelantan and Gopeng, in Perak will be developed as projects

From Extracts 6-9, citizens are not homogeneous but are a diverse group of ethnicities and regions. The discourse makes citizens the target of initiatives because the federal government decides who and where to invest in. Economic decision-making in budget speeches is mainly shaped by Bumiputera empowerment and regional improvement. The government controls most finances (Pant, 2002) and helps citizens flourish (Cheng, 2006; Slavičková, 2013). It does not seem to marginalize other ethnicities and regions but it prioritizes Bumiputeras, Sabah and Sarawak. The priority is perhaps predictable because Bumiputeras constitute 68.8% of Malaysian citizenry, and Sabah and Sarawak constitute 60% of Malaysian territory (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017). Bumiputeras, Sabah and Sarawak also have constitutional privileges. They constitute a sizeable votebank, which decides who forms the government. Hence, size (area, population), constitutional privileges and voting impact may motivate Bumiputera empowerment and regional improvement in budget speeches.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From Extracts 1-9, the discourse in budget speeches can portray the economic competence of the former Barisan Nasional (BN) government, which has three characteristics. First, the government can claim to be financially solvent and propose significant initiatives. Solvency is crucial because government finances remain the primary funding source for initiatives in Malaysia (Lafaye de Micheaux, 2017). These initiatives are not arbitrary but serve a purpose and recipient. Second, the government introduces desirable initiatives because it intervenes to ensure economic growth. Third, the government helps citizens of various ethnicities and regions although it prioritizes Bumiputeras, Sabah and Sarawak. The government may supervise resource distribution and placate the majority but has not overtly discriminated the minorities (Jarrett, 2016; Lafaye de Micheaux, 2017). The portrayal of economic competence indicates how BN could discursively identify, expand and exploit policies and activities (Carlsson & Eliasson, 1994).

The portrayal entails an ideological government-citizen binary. The government is the source of initiatives and citizens are the target of initiatives. The binary is perhaps generic in budget speeches (Lukin, 2015; Thompson, 2015) but the source and target change among countries because the context changes. The Malaysian context from 1999 to 2018 specifies the source as Barisan Nasional (BN), and the target as ethnoregional citizens. Although ethnic concerns dominate political discourse (Jarrett, 2016; Ooi, 2014), regional concerns should not be discounted, as budget speeches target the concerns of ethnic and regional citizens.

The binary is ideological because it substantiates the power of the government in economic decision-making (Felker, 2015). Its economic agency propels Malaysian development (Lafaye de Micheaux, 2017), and the reality is reflected in discourse. The discourse minimizes other neoliberal economic agents, such as markets, stock exchanges, countries or investors. Neoliberalism does not favor government economic agency (Steger & Roy, 2010) although in budget speeches, the government has become the agent who can develop the economy. The discourse obscures the economic system because it intends to promote the government. The promotion is unsurprising because the government prepares, prints and distributes budget speeches, and can therefore privilege its portrayal.

The discourse in budget speeches portrays economic competence but the portrayal did not exist in isolation. Instead, the portrayal was reproduced in other texts and it was also repeated in the media. The reproduction and repetition became strategies of ideological socialization (van Dijk, 1997). The former BN government, through an organization or a particular civil servant (e.g. director, minister, secretary) created other texts (e.g. articles, interviews, manifestos, press releases, speeches). These texts reproduced the portrayal and emphasized BN developing the economy. Moreover, the former BN government dominated traditional media (radio, television) and had a substantial presence in digital media (blogs, social media sites). The media repeated the portrayal and circulated stories of economic development.

Cumulatively, the reproduction and repetition of the portrayal propagated orthodox perspectives (Bourdieu, 1997) or the endorsed way to think about BN. The party pursued a developmental state (Pant, 2002), which entrenched Bumiputera empowerment and regional improvement. The portrayal discursively generated symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1997) and the capital helped BN retain the federal government from 1957 to 2018. The capital was perhaps converted to electoral advantage because citizens prefer the party that develops the economy (Thompson, 2015). Economic competence probably became one of the major reasons for voting BN because it promised to maintain the momentum of growth (Rajandran, 2013). BN positioned itself as indispensable to economic growth as it sought to legitimize its

political power. BN could consequently justify various actions and decisions because its legitimacy was partly grounded in ensuring growth (Ferry, Zakaria & Eckersley, 2014).

Budget speeches became part of the group of texts promoting the government, such as advertisements, election manifestos, interviews and press releases. These texts displayed a blend between campaigning and governing (Windt, 1986) because the government tried to maintain the confidence of citizens. BN required citizen confidence to retain the federal government during elections and to ensure that citizens participated in initiatives in other periods. This endeavor became harder because partisan and non-partisan parties (e.g. academics, non-governmental organizations, opposition parties) questioned the portrayal of economic competence (Lafaye de Micheaux, 2017; Rajandran, 2013).

These partisan and non-partisan parties generated debates about the truth of the portrayal. These debates debilitated the portrayal and presented an alternative portrayal, which articulated heterodox perspectives (Bourdieu, 1997). These perspectives voiced citizens' concerns about corruption, cronyism, rising cost of living, taxation and government financial scandals (notably 1Malaysia Development Limited). The legitimacy of BN became compromised and Pakatan Harapan (PH) defeated BN in the 2018 general elections. Clearly, the discourse about economic competence could not sustain voter confidence in BN because the reality was argued to evidence a dearth of competence.

In conclusion, the present article has examined the qualitative character of the discourse in Malaysian federal budget speeches using critical discourse studies. It enriches research on political discourse because budget speeches by BN can become a basis for comparing budget speeches by PH or political parties in other countries. Future research can expand the corpus by choosing budget speeches of earlier years. These speeches are a large historical repository, as they have been produced since 1960. Moreover, future research can track changes in the structures and meanings of politonyms, ethnonyms and toponyms in budget speeches. It should incorporate statistical significance in frequency and concordance, providing a quantitative basis for analysis (Baker, 2006). Budget speeches are common throughout the Commonwealth and a comparative study among countries can disclose how discourse is responsive to context (Halliday, 2003), notably economic and social conditions in different countries. Therefore, there are several avenues for research on budget speeches, which can develop our understanding of their ideological orientation. It may encourage critical thinking about these speeches. Citizens can compare discourse and reality, and demand transparency about the money spent and the initiatives performed by their government.

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