

The Proclamation of Pandemic Covid-19 Emergency: An Analysis of Verbal Processes in Aswaq News Report

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Received: 14 December 2024 | Accepted: 13 March 2025 | Published: 1 April 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55057/ajress.2025.7.3.26>

Abstract: *The pandemic Covid-19 which emerged in late 2019 has grab a lot of attention and up until now we still face the impact of this deadly widely spread disease. Mass media, online news providers in particular, have played a significant role in providing information associated with the pandemic to the audience almost instantly. This paper aims to examine the news reports surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic by the Arabic-language news portal 'Aswaq' (aswaqpress.com) from January to August 2021. Aswaq news portal, acts as a bridge of news and information between Malaysia and the Arab world, hence provides news on Malaysia to the Arab audience globally. The focus of the study is on the verbal processes which concern on the process of saying. This study will also dissect the strategies used by the Aswaq in processing and reporting using verbal processes in their news reports. Next, the analysis gives an overview of the narrative of news related to the Covid-19 served to the targeted readers. The research method is qualitative by using the textual-oriented Critical Discourse Analysis approach advocated by Norman Fairclough (1992). The results of the qualitative analysis will be backed by the statistical data generated by the Corpus Linguistic analysis software 'AntConc' for the Windows 11 system version 4.3.1 (2024). The result shows that Aswaq strategically used the verbal processes in the news report surrounding the pandemic Covid-19 in Malaysia. Although the data indicated that there is no 'clear cut' or 'a consistent' approach of taking side with any of the sayer group either the antagonist (opposition) or the protagonist (government), it is revealed that the positive verbal processes were more frequently associated with the sayer from the protagonist group. While the negative verbal processes were more frequently attached to the antagonist. At the end of the paper, suggestions and solutions will be presented for related studies in the future.*

Keywords: Covid-19, Corpus linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, Online News, Verbal Process

1. Introduction

Beginning from December 2019, the new type of deadly virus known as SARS-CoV-2 which caused Covid-19 has turns the world upside down as many nations suffered from serious health crisis. More than four years later, up until April 2024, the Covid-19 has infected almost 705 million people and caused almost 7.1 million death world-wide. The virus was firstly discovered in Wuhan of Hubei in the Central China and spread rapidly into other countries, and Malaysia is not excluded. When the Covid-19 has been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) less than three month later after it first emerged in December

2019, the pandemic Covid-19 has become the headline of every media outlet, local or international news agency.

Looking at the enormous impact of the pandemic, this study aims to analyse the Arabic online news discourse of the event by focusing on the verbal processes strategically utilised in presenting the news of the pandemic in Malaysia to the target audience. This study analysed data which consists of specific purpose corpus data of Modern Standard Arabic online news published by 'Aswaq' (aswaqpress.com) news portal between January and August 2021. Aswaq, which has been operating in Kuala Lumpur for more than 15 years, aims to provide Arabic news and information on Malaysia to the audience of Arab world. Thus, the information provided by the portal is vital in portraying Malaysia to Arab audiences, particularly in framing the way Malaysia deals with the Covid-19. The study employs corpus linguistics analytical tools using corpus data mining software 'AntConc 4.3.1 (2024)' which have been proved by previous studies works very well with the Arabic texts (Ismail, 2019, Ismail et. al, 2018, Harun et. al, 2019, Ismail et. al, 2021, Harun et. al, 2018). Next, the quantitative result of corpus data will be analysed using a qualitative approach based on the textual-oriented Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Fairclough (1992) and some vital improvement inputs to the original Fairclough's framework by Wodak (2001).

In general, the news outlet strategically utilised various verbal processes to report on the word that has been said and articulated around the event reported in the news. The journalist has the choice of using various type of verbal process and use his own word or select part of the speech words which may indicate his stand to the news's event. The diversity of verbal processes usage may indicate different connotations that hint at different strategic approaches in reporting the news. Hence, it may lead to uncovering the journalist attitude and the outlet stance of the event. In this occasion, CDA offers a comprehensive analytical tool to uncover these hidden strategic approaches which is among vast majority of people as a command sense.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pandemic Covid-19

The origin of Covid-19 virus is believed to be from animal as it was first discovered in the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market. By 20th December 2019, 60 cases have been recorded from this Chinese district before reached almost three hundred cases on 31st December 2019. Less than two weeks later, the virus has reached other Chinese districts which eventually led WHO to declare an International Public Health Emergency by 31 January 2020. 18 months later, the world has recorded 198,010,967 cases and the virus has caused 4,224,124 deaths globally, which indicated how serious the pandemic was and how fast it spread outside China to every part of the world.

Malaysia also badly hit by the pandemic and the battle against the virus is still on going in the phase of post-pandemic era. The first case of Covid-19 was traced in Malaysia a month since it was started to spread in China. On 25 January 2020, the first case was detected from a Chinese tourist who visited this country entering from Singapore (MOH, 2021). Most of the early cases detected in Malaysia are imported cases, which have been traced to origin from foreigners who entered Malaysia, or Malaysian who just return from abroad. By the end of March 2020, Malaysia has recorded more than two thousand active cases of Covid-19 infection. Ultimately by Mid-2024, Malaysia recorded a total of 5.3 million infection cases and 37,348 of fatality (ibid). These numbers have placed Malaysia as the third country in the Southeast Asia badly hit by

the pandemic behind Indonesia and Philippine which also have a much higher number of populations compared to Malaysia.

In the continuous efforts in dealing with the pandemic, the government of Malaysia, particularly the Ministry of Health (MOH) have done all their best to deal with the most crucial event of modern Malaysian history. Many efforts, policies, laws, rules, procedures, orders, campaigns, promotions, preventions, and interventions have been conducted by various government and non-government bodies to deal with the pandemic. Retired doctors, nurses, and pharmacists as well as other volunteers had come forward to share their efforts in dealing with the pandemic. The pandemic not only led to a health crisis but also caused a stall in economic, social, and political activities. Thus, the government has implemented several strategies to battle the pandemic and steer the country out of the pandemic. One of the main efforts to battle the pandemic is the implementation of Movement Control Order (MCO) which has been implemented at least three times all over the country.

The first MCO was in 18 Mac 2020 to face the first wave of the pandemic, while the second MCO came into effect in January 2021 in which the country faced another wave of Covid-19 widespread. When Malaysia has started to show a sign of recovery between Mac and April 2021, the new variant of virus emerged, and the lack of prevention has led towards fresh implementation of MCO for the third time in June 2021. At the same time, The Yang Dipertuan Agong has agreed to declare the state of emergency in Malaysia starting from 12 January 2021 until 1 August 2021 for the government to focus entirely on overcoming the pandemic. This proclamation of emergency which is a remarkable event in Malaysian modern history and one of the most vital steps taken by the Malaysian government in combating the pandemic is the focus of the current study. No doubt that this vital event has grab a lot of attention by the mass media due to the huge significant of the event at that time in dealing with the pandemic.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Compared to other Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approaches, Fairclough (1995) proposes a more systematic analytical framework which is based on the text. His framework connects micro-analysis of texts with the macro-level of discourses through three dimensions textual analysis namely: text, discursive practice and social practice. Then, this three-dimensional analysis is being accomplished with the concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity which link between text and discourse (Ismail, 2019).

The first dimension of Fairclough's analytical framework sees discourse as a text and focuses on the linguistic features of discourse. Among these linguistics features are choices and patterns in vocabulary (such as naming, wording, metaphor), grammar such as transitivity and modality, the use of passive or active verb forms, cohesion (like the conjunction, schemata) and text structure (such as episode marking, turn-taking system). These linguistics features should be systematically analysed at the first stage before moving into another two dimensions (Fairclough, 1995).

Moving into Fairclough's second dimension which concentrates on the notion of discourse-as-discursive-practice; hence, discourse is viewed as something which is produced, circulated, distributed, consumed in society (Ismail, 2019). Fairclough (1995) sees these processes in terms of the circulation of concrete linguistic objects. Therefore, this second layer of analysis indicates that after the analysis of vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and text structure of the first dimension, attention should be given to speech acts, coherence and intertextuality which among the most prominent features of the discourse looked after by the researchers in their analysis.

Ultimately, the third-dimension treats discourse-as-social-practice which looks at the ideological effects and hegemonic processes in which discourse is seen to operate. The concept of Hegemony which was introduced by Antonio Gramsci in short concerns about power and control over. This notion of power is achieved through constructing alliances and integrating classes and groups through consent (Ismail et al., 2021), so that ‘the articulation and rearticulation of orders of discourse is correspondingly one stake in hegemonic struggle’ (Fairclough, 1992).

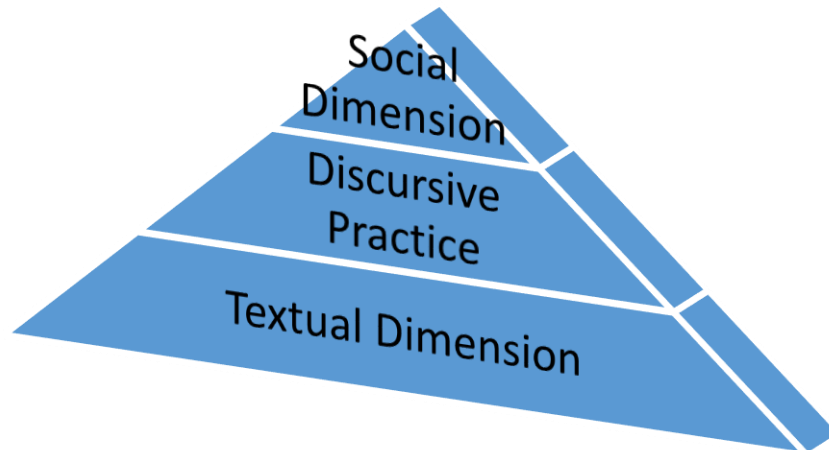


Figure 1: Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Analytical Framework

Fairclough’s framework can be complimented with the Wodak’s discourse-historical version of CDA. Wodak’s approach is interdisciplinary framework which takes multiple methods and types of different ‘empirical data’ as well as ‘background information’ into the analysis framework. Moreover, Wodak lists various discursive strategies which include referential and predication strategies aimed to construct social actors, either positively or negatively (Wodak, 2001: 35). This discursive strategy is closely linked to the current study of verbal process in news portal of Aswaq pertaining the proclamation of Covid-19 emergency.

Examining previous studies surrounding the notion of media and power shows that previous studies (McLeod et al., 1999; Eilders, 2000; Mutz, 2001) have analysed the use of mass media as a means of encouraging active political participation which is the main source toward gaining power. Among the most significant findings in these studies is it argued that the newspaper readership received a substantial impact on institutionalised political participation. Other previous studies opted to reveal that political institutions have used the media as a tool to serve their ideas, stands, and promote their ideology and propaganda to the wide audience. Schudson (2002) and Leeson (2008) for instance, have examined how the media can become powerful political tools to achieve their aim and serve their interest.

Focusing more specifically on the Arab world, the Arabic media plays a vital role towards the process of democratisation and political change in the Middle East (Lahlali, 2011; Ismail, 2019; Harun et al., 2018; Ismail et al., 2018). With the emergence of Arabic unity discourse and Arab national identity in 1950s, Arab media has been exploited to serve this political purpose, then the effort was further enhanced in the 1990s with the emergence of Arab transnational television broadcasting (Aldawood, 2004; Amin, 2001; Sakr, 2007; Lahlali, 2011). Previous literatures on the Arab media have highlighted the features of Arabic transnational media outlets by focusing on bias and independence of these various media outlets (Zayani & Ayish, 2006; Miladi, 2006; Fandy, 2007; Volkmer, 2008; Mellor, 2011; Ismail et al., 2018; Ismail,

2019; Harun et al., 2019; Harun et al., 2020; Ismail & Harun, 2021). Despite the claim of impartial, independence, objectivity, and privately-owned, these Arabic media outlets have been used as political tools and controlled by people strongly associated with the government (Ismail et al., 2018; Ismail, 2019; Harun et al., 2019).

Thus, in this study, the analysis of verbal processes which is a part of the transitivity analysis within the linguistics features of the first layer in Fairclough's framework, will help depict the way reporters of Aswaq produced their news stories regarding selecting what to report and whom they considered newsworthy. It would also reveal which group they identified as the in-group by referring to its members as authoritative social actors and which group they identified as the out-group using the strategy of marginalisation and delegitimation. Moreover, even if news reports appear "balanced" and "objective" in the sense that they include both sides of the conflict, "it is often easy to divide voices into protagonists and antagonists" (Fairclough, 2003: 82).

More precisely, the article will explain how the Aswaq reported on the two sides of main social actors during the Proclamation of Emergency of pandemic Covid-19: namely the government and the antagonists with an attitude. This is done by providing a comprehensive answer to the question of how the Aswaq news portal employed positive, neutral, and negative verbal processes differently. Halliday (1994) in his Functional Grammar states that experiential meanings are represented by different processes within the transitivity system, which involves six process types: material process, behavioural process, mental process, verbal process, relational process, and existential process.

2.3 Verbal process

Verbal process is concern with process of saying. It is intermediate between the process of mental and material process within Halliday's system of transitivity. Hence, he argues that the process of saying something is involving a physical action which reflects mental operation (Halliday, 1985). Relevant to this study is a verbal process which relates to "any kind of symbolic exchange of meaning" (Halliday, 1985:129). Furthermore, Halliday (1994: 140) identifies three participants in a verbal process namely: the Sayer, the Receiver, and finally the Verbiage which is in this case is the function that corresponds to what is said. For instance, Aswaq reported: "Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yasin said, we need to work together the government and the opposition to win the battle against the pandemic." (Aswaq, Jul. 26, 2021). Based on the Halliday's suggestion, the three participants in a verbal process in this news extract is:

- a) Sayer: Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yasin
- b) Verbal Process: Said
- c) Verbiage: we need to work together the government and the opposition to win the battle against the pandemic.

The important of examining verbal processes in discourse is that it shows how journalists use certain verbal processes to emphasise meanings while marginalise others and push readers' understanding of verbiage to a certain direction. Hence, verbal processes not only introduce what is said by the sayer but also reveal the reporter's attitude toward what is said and what is being reported in the news (Ismail, 2019). Fowler (1991: 231) emphasised that: "Critical analysis should pay particular attention to how what people say is transformed: there are clear conventions for rendering speech newsworthy, for bestowing significance on it."

In this regard, Chen (2004, 2005) developed a comprehensive analytic tool of verbal processes. She classified verbal processes into three sub-types: positive, negative, and neutral. Chen furthermore provides examples of positive verbal processes such as: pointed out, announced, explained, declared, indicated, and urged. The negative verbal processes in contrast include denied, claimed, admitted, insisted, and complained. Finally, the neutral verbal processes said, told, described, asked, and commented (Chen, 2004). Based on Chen's classification the current study, examines how different verbal processes of positive, negative, and neutral played out in the discourse of the Arabic news report of Aswaq surrounding the Proclamation of Emergency pandemic Covid-19 in Malaysia in 2021.

2.4 Aswaq Arabic News Portal

A specific corpus data has been compiled for this study which consists of a compilation of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) online news reports on Pandemic Covid-19 in Malaysia. These news articles were published by an Arabic online news portal known as 'Aswaq' (www.aswaqpress.com). Aswaq in Arabic means markets (plural) and in the Arab history market is a place not only for trading but also a place where people gather from different part of Arab land to exchange news and information. Aswaq which has been operated in Kuala Lumpur since 2009 become the first outlet to produce bilanguage news magazine of English and Arabic in Malaysia. Then, Aswaq takes the world wide web to launch its Arabic news portal which aims to reach global audiences through the address: www.aswaqpress.com.

Aswaq proudly utilises the motto 'Malaysia and the Arab World' *ماليزيا والعالم العربي*, to highlight itself as a bridge linking Malaysia and the Arab world. Therefore, Aswaq provides news, information and guideline about Malaysia to the readers in the Arab and Muslim world. The main aim of Aswaq is to provide high quality news and information from the authentic sources to the readers from various backgrounds. Thus, Aswaq provides to the readers a wide selection of news on Malaysia covering many topics and issues such as current issues, economic, trades, education, tourism, health and medical services, social development, culture, heritage and religion.

During the pandemic Covid-19, Aswaq has started to report on the pandemic in Malaysia since it was started. Then in January 2021, Aswaq has dedicated a special section on its news portal which provides every news and information surrounding pandemic in Malaysia (<https://aswaqpress.com/category/covid-19>). Thus, Aswaq has become one of the most accessed by the Arabic readers particularly among the Arab students, visitors, tourists, expatriates, traders and investors to get the latest information related to the pandemic in Malaysia. In particular, Aswaq has become an important source of information for many Arab students and visitors who plan to visit Malaysia during this challenging time of dealing with the pandemic. Based on the position of Aswaq and its great reputation among its audiences, this study has selected the outlet's news articles to become the data of this study. Moreover, news and information provided by Aswaq are vital in portraying Malaysia to the Arab and Muslim world particularly in framing the way Malaysia oversee the pandemic Covid-19. Hence, it is extremely essential to thoroughly examine how Aswaq reported on this issue in its comprehensive news coverage of pandemic Covid-19 in Malaysia.

3. Methodology

The specific purpose corpus data of this study consists of a total of 279 MSA online news articles (202,728 words) surrounding pandemic Covid-19 in Malaysia published by Aswaq between 12 January and 1 August 2021. By accessing the Aswaq portal news archive and using

keywords of (but not limited to) *jaaihah* (pandemic), *kufid* (Covid), *hukumah* (government), *Maliziyya* (Malaysia), *Muaaradhah* (opposition), *Raaiss* (head/leader), *Mudir* (director) and *wizarah* (ministry) a total of 279 news article have been found which meet the criteria set by the study which only reported on the pandemic in Malaysia. In addition, the time frame was selected for many reasons as it represents one of the most crucial times during the pandemic widespread, which recorded the highest struggles in balancing between the thread of virus and the social and economic needs. Many notable events have taken place during this date.

The first and foremost during these dates the proclamation of emergency order has been endorsed by the supreme ruler of Malaysia the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong, which give the government an absolute power to handle the pandemic. Moreover, Malaysian vaccination programme started to combat the virus of Covid-19 begins on 28th February 2021. As a result, in Mac and April 2021 has recorded a slight drop in case infection which gives a hope that Malaysia will be freed from the MCO order very soon. But the case rises sharply in May which forced Malaysia to implement another ‘total lock down’ (MCO 3.0) beginning 1st June 2021.

The Arabic news articles then been compiled and converted as an electronic text using a plain text format of UTH-8 to meet the requirement of processing software for the corpus analysis AntConc. A specific corpus analytical tools have been deployed for the analysis namely: keyword, keyword in contact (KWIC), word frequency and concordance. The quantitative analysis results produced by the software then provide an extremely useful insight for the analysis of verbal processes in the news texts which depend on the qualitative approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

The Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) online news which have been published in the news portal of Aswaq were analysed and the three types of verbal process; positive, negative and neutral verbal processes used in the online news texts were recorded. It is important to note that the analysis will be cast more light on the two types of verbal process namely the positive and negative verbal process compared to the neutral verbal process. Neutral verbal process carries no indication of the author’s attitude towards the speaker whose words being reported. In contrast, both positive and negative verbal process somehow promote in the reader certain impression (either good or bad) on the person whose word being reported. Hence, the positive and negative verbal process will be the centre of the analysis to reveal the portal news outlets’ attitudes towards the speaker of word being reported.

In relation to this, individual instances of positive, negative and neutral verbal process were then qualitatively analysed in detail by looking at the context of the online news article in which they occurred, to tease out what they revealed about the attitude of the journalist towards those whose words were being reported, and the way in which the journalist might be trying to push the reader's perception of a text and of the participants whose words are reported in that text in a certain direction. In addition, the analysis shed a light on how social actors on both sides of the pandemic (the antagonist and protagonist) were reported using the verbal processes – neutral, positive, and negative.

The claim is that the consistent use of a type of verbal process, whether positive or negative, with a particular group, is a trace of the journalist’s stance toward that group and, hence, reflected the online news outlet’s ideology about the government and the antagonists during the pandemic.

4. Result and Discussion

The analysis of corpus data has found that Aswag news portal strategically used the verbal processes in the news report surrounding the Proclamation of Emergency pandemic Covid-19 in Malaysia. Although the specific purpose corpus data indicated that there is no ‘clear cut’ or ‘a consistent’ approach of taking side with any of the sayer group; either the antagonist or the protagonist (government), it is showed that most of the time the positive verbal processes were frequently associated with the protagonist group. Among the reasons for this is, Aswag reported more frequently from the sources of the authority compared to the antagonist groups particularly from the Malaysian opposition groups (Ismail, 2021, 2024). However, that does not mean the news portal has marginalised the voice of antagonists and treated them as the ‘out-group.’ In fact, on many occasions the voice of antagonist was reported in incredibly positive tones which utilised numbers of positive verbal processes. Nevertheless, the reports on protagonist’s voices in the corpus data outnumber the antagonist’s voices by huge gap. The following paragraphs will shed more light on this crucial point.

Moving into the statistical insight, the corpus data indicated that Aswag has used all the three subcategories of verbal processes: the positive, negative and neutral. **Table 1** below provides detail information on the total number of occurrences for each verbal process subcategory and the total percentage of every subcategory of the verbal process in the corpus data under studied.

Table 1: Spread of verbal process according to its sub-category in the corpus data.

Sub-category	Occurrences	Percentage
Neutral	1308	63.94
Positive	541	26.44
Negative	197	9.62
Total	2046	100

The statical information in Table 1 indicated the following: It is found that the neutral subcategory recorded the most occurrences in the corpus data at 1308 out of 2046 total number of verbal process occurred in the data, which reflected almost two thirds of the total occurrences of verbal process in the corpus data. In contrast, negative verbal process recorded the lowest occurrence with less than 10% of the total verbal process occurred in the corpus data. The positive verbal process on the other hand managed to record 541 number of occurrences or almost 27% of verbal process occurred in the corpus data. As mentioned earlier in the section of Methodology, the analysis will go deep in detail on the two subcategories of verbal processes of the positive and negative which indicate a lot of useful insight for the critical discourse analysis. the neutral subcategory on the other hand, although it occurred the most in the corpus data, does not provide much indication on the journalist attitude toward the sayer’s words which were reported in the news.

The **Table 2** below, lists ten most occurred verbal process for each of the verbal process subcategory. The list also provides the total number of occurrences for each verbal process subcategory.

Table 2: Top Ten Verbal Processes in Corpus Data According to Verbal Process Sub-category.

Positive	Neutral	Negative
emphasised (105)	said (247)	warned (31)
announced (93)	called upon (128)	refused (27)
decided (58)	pointed out (77)	criticised (26)

explained (39)	described (49)	denied (19)
ordered (37)	mentioned (48)	accused (15)
promised (36)	commented (46)	admitted (8)
reminded (31)	told (44)	condemned (7)
urged (29)	asked (43)	denounced (7)
pledged (27)	requested (38)	threatened (5)
echoed (21)	indicated (33)	blamed (5)

It is found that the neutral verbal process of ‘said’ recorded the highest number of occurrences, while the negative verbal process of ‘blamed’ only occurred in the corpus data five times. The most occurred positive verbal process in the corpus data is ‘emphasised’ followed by ‘announced,’ ‘decided,’ ‘explained’ and ‘ordered.’ On the other side, the verbs ‘warned,’ ‘refused,’ ‘criticised’ and ‘denied’ were the most frequent negative verbal process found in the corpus data.

To provide a clear picture how was the verbal process has been utilised in the Aswaq news coverage of the pandemic in Malaysia, the discussion will be divided into two sections based on the sayer’s group of the government side (protagonist) and the opposition side (antagonist). Then, the discussion will highlight how each of the Verbal Process Sub-category (particularly the positive and negative sub-categories) were strategically used in reporting the sayer’s words.

1- Verbal Processes in the Protagonist’s Side

It is observed that most of the time the positive verbal processes were used to report on the government’s representatives. Among these government officials are the Prime Minister, Senior Ministers, Ministers, deputies minister, director general, directors and heads of government agencies such The Government Chief Secretary, Inspector General of Police, Chief of Arm Force, Director General of Health Ministry and many more. The use of positive verbal processes to report on these prominent figures were in line with their position as the source of authority which has the power to carry the official duty in dealing with the pandemic. For instance, Aswaq reported on 1/3/2021 about Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin’s words using positive verbal process of ‘emphasised’:

إنه أدى واجباته ومسؤولياته من أجل 2020 مارس كما أكد محيي الدين، الذي أصبح ثامن رئيس وزراء لماليزيا في الشعب والأمة

Muhyiddin, who became the eighth Prime Minister of Malaysia on March 1, 2020, also emphasised that he has performed his duties and responsibilities for the sake of the people and the nation.

The use of verb ‘emphasised’ in this news extract to report on the Prime Minister’s words indicates strong positive connotations on the sayer which hold the highest authority in Malaysian government. It also showed that the Prime Minister is determine and serious in doing his job. Similarly, in another news extract Aswaq reported on (1/3/2021):

الوفاء لهذه الثقة أنا أفعل ما هو أفضل للشعب، أعلم أنني أحمل ثقة، ولا بد لي من “بأضاف

He explained: “I am doing what is best for the people, I know I have confidence, and I must honour that trust.

The verb ‘explained’ has been used to report on Muhyiddin’s words in which help to portray him as someone who has knowledge and wisdom which are the qualities needed to hold the Prime Minister post. Another example also utilised the positive verbal process of ‘explained’ can be found in the news extract dated 2/5/2021:

المواقع العامة عالية الخطورة من خلال هذا النظام، تتم المراقبة كل يوم لتحديد “وأضاف محي الدين

Muhyiddin explained: “Through this system, monitoring is conducted every day to identify high-risk public sites.

It is found that the positive verbal process not only being used to report on the Prime Minister’s word but also being widely used to report on other ministers’ words. For instance, the words of Senior Minister, Ismail Sabri who hold the main task of leading the government efforts in fighting the pandemic has been reported most of the time using positive verbal processes. Aswaq for example reported on 2/3/2021 about the spread of virus Covid-19 in several Malaysian states by saying:

الوزير الأول داتوك سيري إسماعيل صبري يعقوب أكد أن العدد الكبير من الإصابات سُجل مؤخرًا هو في ولايات مثل البلاد بأكملها، صباح وقدح وسيلانجور وليس

Senior Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaqoub confirmed that the large number of cases recorded recently is in states such as Sabah, Kedah and Selangor, and not the entire country.

In this news extract, Ismail Sabri has been portrayed positively as someone who hold the determination on his job and has the capability to handle the huge task by using positive verbal process of ‘emphasised.’ The connotations of having the qualities of ‘determination’ and ‘capability’ cannot be achieved if the verbs such as ‘said’ or ‘told’ have been used to replace the verb ‘emphasised.’

Another verbal process which usually associates with the authorities’ voices is ‘announced.’ The main reason for that is only someone has the authority has the power to make announcement and his/her announcement is valid. Thus, the verb ‘announced’ can be found in the corpus data most of the time associated with the government or its personal. For instance, Aswaq reported on 16/3/2021:

في كوالالمبور وسيلانجور وجوهو وبينانج (CMCO) أعلنت الحكومة الماليزية اليوم عن تمديد تقييد الحركة المشروط وكالانتان وسرواك،

Today, the Malaysian government announced the extension of Conditional Movement Restriction (CMCO) in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Johor, Penang, Kelantan and Sarawak.

The government of Malaysia is the only authority body has the power to declare such big order as Movement Control Order or Conditional Movement Control Order which involve great deal of monitoring and implementing the order. Hence, the verb ‘declared’ or ‘announced’ in this news report promote positive connotations on the government. However, if the verb ‘said’ or ‘called upon’ has been used, it will not provide strong connotations to the government as provided by the verb ‘declared’ or ‘announced.’

Despite the finding which indicated that most of the time verbal processes have been used to report on the government’s side, there are several occasions, negative verbal processes have

been used with the government officials. Most of these occasions are linked to the critics pointed to the government to show the disagreement on certain rule or decision made by the authorities. For example, Aswaq on 3/3/2021 reported that Ismail Sabri dismissed the public assumption that the politicians were responsible for the widespread of the virus in the relation to holding state election in Sabah in the mid of battle against the pandemic.

العائدين من صباح هم المسؤولون عن الارتفاع كما تجاهل الوزير ما أثير في الرأي العام الماليزي بخصوص أن السياسيين المفاجئ لأعداد الإصابات

The minister also ignored what was raised in the Malaysian public opinion that the politicians returning from Sabah are responsible for the sudden rise in the number of injuries.

It is noticed that the verb 'ignored' in this news report provide negative connotation on Ismail Sabri who dismissed the public opinion on the wide spread of the virus. If the verb 'ignored' has been substituted with other verb such as 'emphasised' or 'explained' it will not cast the sayer with negative connotations in fact give an advantage to him.

In another news extract, the negative verbal process of 'warned' has been used to report on Health Ministry's words as being reported by Aswaq on 13/5/2021 days before the Eid celebration:

الواحدة مع الحفاظ على التباعد وزارة الصحة حذرت المواطنين من أنه يجب أن تقتصر هذه التجمعات على أفراد العائلة الاجتماعي،

The Ministry of Health has warned citizens that such gatherings should be restricted to members of the same family, while maintaining social distancing.

If the verb 'announced' has been used instead of 'warned' the news report will promote positive meanings on the Health Ministry as the government body which has the highest authority pertaining health in Malaysia.

In different occasion, neutral verbal processes have been used to report on the government's side. When the neutral verbal process has being used it does not promote any significant meaning to the sayer in which his/her words being reported in the news. One of occasions in which the neutral verbal process has been used to report on the government side is during the police investigation on The Federal Territory Minister Annuar Musa for the allegation of breaking the standard operating procedure (SOP) during the MCO as being reported in the news portal on 18/2/2021.

فبراير، قال قائد الشرطة إن القضية ستحال إلى غرف المدعي العام بعد أن أخذ رجال الشرطة أقوال أنور لمدة 17 ساعة، ساعتين،

On February 17, the police chief said the case would be referred to the prosecutor's chambers after the police took Annuar's statement for two hours,

Similar report on the same issue has emerged once again in the news portal report dated 27/3/2021:

إجراءات التشغيل القياسية لمنع انتشار وابتعد بعد أن أدرك أن المنظمين لم يتبعوا "جلس للحظة" وقد قال أنور إنه 19-كوفيد

Annur said he “sat for a moment” and walked away after realizing that the organizers were not following standard operating procedures to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

2- Verbal Processes in the Antagonist’s Side

Moving into the second group of sayer who is the opposer to the government. The sayers in this second group are dominated by the opposition members of parliament and the state legislative assembly. It is quite surprise to found that in the corpus data, Aswaq treated the opposition voices with respect by providing them an ample space to be included in the portal news report by reporting on their voices in substantial number of occurrences. Again, despite that the number of news reports which contain the antagonist voices are still outnumbered by the news reports of the government voices.

In reporting the antagonist words, Aswaq used all the three sub-categories of verbal process. For instance, the news portal reported on the words of two opposition parties of Democratic Action Party (DAP) and People Justice Party (PKR) by using the positive verbal process of ‘announced’ which normally assosiated with the authority body. The news report dated 16/3/2021 stated as follow:

أعلن حزبان ماليزيان معارضان وهما حزب عدالة الشعب وحزب العمل الديمقراطي أنهما سيقدمان المساعدة القانونية آلاف رنجيت ماليزي، ١٠ للأفراد الذين صدر بحقهم غرامة مضاعفة قدرها

Two Malaysian opposition parties, the People's Justice Party and the Democratic Action Party, announced that they will provide legal aid to individuals who have been fined a double fine of RM10,000.

The verb ‘announced’ in this news extract promotes a connotation that the opposition parties are determined to help people to pay for the fine. Besides, the announcement is made by the party official which has the authority to take the decision and implement it. The same connotation may not be achieved if the verb ‘announced’ has been change to another verb such as ‘said’ or ‘called’ or ‘asked.’ Similar example of using the positive verbal process in reporting the words of opposition leaders can be observed in the following examples. For instance, when the portal reported on the words of former Health Minister Dr Dzulkifli the verb ‘emphasised’ has been used to portray his determination and his prominent level of confidence on his words. On 17/4 2021, Aswaq reported:

انتشار الفيروس، خاصة التجمعات التي تضم وشدد نو الكفل على أن فترة الإغلاق لمدة أسبوعين لم تكن كافية حقا لوقف فرصا لانتقال العدوى

Zulkifli stressed that the two-week closure was not enough to stop the spread of the virus, especially gatherings that contain opportunities for transmission.

It is also observed that the words of Selangor Menteri Besar, Amiruddin (the worst state of Malaysia hit by the pandemic) were most of the time reported in the corpus data using the positive verbal processes. One of the reasons for that is, although Amiruddin is one of the opposition leaders, but he is the head of state government who hold the highest authority at the state level of Selangor. Hence, his words were treated as one of the authority voices and were reported using the positive verbal processes. For instance, the positive verbal processes of ‘emphasised,’ ‘ellobrated’ and ‘explained’ can be seen in the following news extracts dated 20/5/2021, which reported positively on the Selangor Menteri Besar:

أكد رئيس وزراء سيلانجور داتوك سيري أمير الدين شاري، أن أي شكل من أشكال تدابير الاحتواء التي تنطوي على الإعلان عن الإغلاق الكامل للحد من انتشار فيروس كورونا في الولاية

Selangor Chief Minister Datuk Seri Amiruddin Chari has confirmed that any form of containment measures that involves declaring a complete closure to curb the spread of the coronavirus in the state.

مرة أخرى، تخضع سلطة إصدار أي إعلان عن تدابير الاحتواء للاختصاص القضائي للحكومة الفيدرالية حيث “بأضاف الولايات لتقديم اقتراحاتها يتم استدعاء حكومات

He added: “Again, the power to make any announcement of containment measures is subject to the jurisdiction of the federal government as state governments are called upon to submit their proposals.

Despite these positive verbal processes and positive connotations on the antagonists, the negative verbal processes also being used to report on the oppositions’ words. For instance, the verb ‘denied,’ ‘refused’ and ‘blamed’ were mostly associated with the opposition leaders. In a news report dated 1/2/2021, Aswaq reported on the words of opposition leaders from the Coalition of Hope (Pakatan Harapan PH) by using the negative verbal process of ‘refused’:

المعارض، للأسباب التي قدمها رئيس الوزراء تان سري محي الدين ياسين ‘باكاتان هارابان’ ورفض تحالف الأمل لإعلان حالة الطوارئ،

The opposition Pakatan Harappan coalition rejected the reasons given by Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin for declaring a state of emergency.

In another news report dated 5/2/2021, the negative verbal process of ‘blamed’ has been used to report on the words of PH Presidential Council on the proclamation of emergency by the government.

كذريعة للمضي قدما في إعلان الطوارئ، بعد ، 19 كما اتهم المجلس الرئاسي للتحالف محي الدين باستخدام جائحة كوفيد الذي اعتبرته كافيا (MCO) إعلان أمر تقييد الحركة

The Presidential Council of the coalition accused Muhyiddin of using the Covid-19 pandemic, as a pretext to proceed with the declaration of emergency, after the announcement of the Movement Restriction Order (MCO), which it considered sufficient.

5. Conclusion

The pandemic Covid-19 not only brings vast damage to the health system but also harms the economic and social development in many countries. Mass media has been providing a comprehensive report on the pandemic and become one of main references among people to get the latest information and news surrounding the pandemic Covid-19. In this regard, the Arabic news portal of Aswaq which has its head operational office in Kuala Lumpur since 2009 provides news and information on the pandemic in Malaysia to the Arab readers, particularly in the Middle East. The news provided by Aswaq depicted the way Malaysia deals with the pandemic; thus, it is important to thoroughly examine how the portal has been framing Malaysia to its readers. The study opted to focus on analysing the use of verbal processes in the portal’s news coverage using the CDA framework of Fairclough and Wodak.

The analysis of corpus data specifically gathered for the purpose of the study has showed that the voices of authority were the most dominant source of words reported in the Aswaq news pertaining the pandemic during the Proclamation of Emergency. Most of the time the positive verbal processes have been used to report on the government personnel's words. This is to match the position of the government figures who hold the authority and qualification to manage his tasks in the battle against the pandemic. However, on some occasion, negative verbal process has been used to report on government's words particularly in the move to discredit the government decision on the issue pertaining pandemic.

Although the voice of antagonist is not so frequently reported in the corpus data compared to the voice of protagonist, it many occasion the voice of opposition leaders has been reported using the positive verbal processes such ask 'announced,' 'explained' and 'emphasised.' By treating the voice of antagonist with respect it reflects the important of these alternative narratives to the government's words. Thus, it is found that the news portal was providing a quite balanced news coverage of the pandemic by presenting news reports from various sources.

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