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The Representation of Social Actors in the Graduate Employability Issue: Online News and the Government Document

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Abstract

This paper presents the first part of a larger study on the issue of graduate employability in Malaysia as construed in public discourse in English, a language of power in Malaysia. The term employability itself has many definitions depending on the requirements of government and industry, and in the case of Malaysia, the English-language ability of graduates is inseparable from graduate employability. Data were collected from three socially significant English-language publications: a mainstream newspaper, an alternative newspaper, and a government document outlining the national approach to improving graduate employability in universities. The data were collected between 2012 and 2013, a significant two-year period of time due to the publication of the *Graduate Employability Blueprint* in 2012, and the five-yearly Malaysian General Election in 2013. Applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study also employs Transitivity Analysis (TA) from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The analysis looks at the grammatical roles and evaluation of important social actor groups in the graduate employability issue.

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1. Introduction

The discourse of graduate employability in the society has been widely discussed especially in the media and involves many global and local stakeholders and actors, including governments, employers, businesses, students and academic associations, professional governing bodies, and the media. Studies on graduate employability are varied but the discursive practice of graduate employability is still lacking except for a few who focus on government's document applying critical discourse analysis (CDA) including Taylor (2004) and Bridgstock (2009). On the other hand, studies on the representations of graduate employability applying CDA approach of the media encourages this study to be undertaken. To strengthen the choice, a study by Atai and Mozaheb (2013) confirmed that their findings are parallel with van Dijk' (1991) of US and THEM where US is linked to United States and THEM refers to Iran and its allies. In Malaysia, particularly, the discussion of employability now revolves around higher education institutions' strategic partnerships with industry, collaborations across institutions, and government funding to improve the marketability of unemployed graduates and future graduates. The Economic Planning Unit (EPU) (2006) in planning for the Ninth Malaysia Plan had also envisioned that human capital would be the most critical element in achieving the national mission. Thus, the unemployed-graduates issue would affect the nation's growth toward Vision 2020, so graduate employability was seen not only as an issue affecting unemployed university graduates but the society and nation as well. One of the ways to facilitate the graduates was by appointing government-linked companies to conduct specific courses - especially soft-skills courses- and on-the-job training for unemployed graduates.

Therefore, it is crucial to present a better understanding of the public discourses in the media and government documents, of graduate employability in Malaysia, including a stronger understanding of whose interests are represented and/or endorsed, and whose interests silenced and/or criticised. Such an understanding of the framing of government policy, and public expectations of universities

and graduates, is a necessary first step in a move toward a productive and inclusive approach to graduate employability that takes account of the interests of all parties in this important social issue.

This paper aims to expose the social actors related to the issue of graduate employability applying the CDA framework of Fairclough (1995) and Transitivity Analysis (Halliday, 1985) The data selected for the study also focuses on the graduate employability and their English language ability as discussed in the public discourse in Malaysia and as represented by the New Straits Times (NST) as the mainstream newspaper and The Malaysian Insider (The MI) representing the alternative media. The government document is represented by the Graduate Employability Blueprint (GEB).

The research questions for the study are as follows:

1. How are the key social groups with an interest in graduate employability represented in the public discourse on this issue?
2. Which groups are represented as powerful and powerless and which are unrepresented in this discourse?
3. On the basis of the previous two questions, which groups are construed favourably in the public discourse on graduate employability, and which groups are not?
4. Whose interests are served by these representations?

2. Theoretical Framework

2. 1. Graduate Employability Issue

The graduate employability discursive practice in Malaysia involves a range of social actors and the relations among them. For example, this issue goes to the social roles, social status, and social mobility of the graduates and their relations to employers, the universities and their relation to employers, and to the government and their relation to everyone. If graduates are not employable, there is a significant personal cost on an individual and family level (of lost income and potential related social problems), and also a significant social and economic cost to employers and the nation. Research into

graduate employability in education in the Malaysian setting has provided recommendations for improving graduate employability. According to UNESCO (2012), the issue of employability in Asia fluctuates according to the characteristics of graduates, which may or may not make them employable. Based on this report also, graduate employability in Malaysia depends on academic qualifications, skills, and competences that include communication skills and problem-solving skills. The Graduate Employability Blueprint (GEB) (2012) also depicts employers' complaints about graduates lacking interpersonal and communication skills. The government further extends the research on graduate employability with the assistance of the National Higher Education Research Institute (NAHERI) based in University Sains Malaysia (USM). The institute also liaise with the Ministry of Higher Education to design and implement new policies for higher learning institutions (NAHERI, 2015). Bridgstock (2009) admits that, due to the growing demand of a global economy, universities have been pressured to produce employable graduates. In a study focused on the Australian context, Bridgstock (2009) proposes that graduate employability programs that emphasize individual skills and knowledge need to be complemented by targeted geographical and industry development, continuing (lifelong) education programs beyond university, and social inclusion initiatives, in order to be effective. In the case of graduate employability in Malaysia, the issue of graduate unemployment, according to the literature, has been concerned with communication skills as the prime factor, which reflects the recommendations by Bridgstock (2009). Furthermore, the discourse on graduate unemployment, marketability, and employability in Malaysia has become a significant part of the government's agenda since the early 2000s. There are two important elements in the construction of social actors in the discourse of the graduate employability issue. Firstly, there is the role of the Ministry of Education in the attempt to ensure that all graduates are employable after graduation. Problems of unemployed graduates occurs when graduates are unemployed 6 months to two years after graduation (Shakir, 2009). Therefore, in ensuring that graduates are employable, various government intervention

programs have been organized to retrain unemployed graduates. The retraining of the graduates promotes the government's positive reaction in enhancing graduates' employability.

Secondly, the media in Malaysia began publishing news on the issue of employability regularly when the Graduate Tracer Study, conducted by the Ministry of Higher Education, revealed that more than 40,000 graduates remained jobless 6 months after graduation in 2006 ("70% of grads from public institutions jobless", 2006). In this case, the role of the media in Malaysia – especially on the graduate employability issue – affected the perceptions and reactions of the nation in the treatment of the issue. The events pertaining to the graduate employability issue shall, therefore, be studied through the government's Graduate Employability Blueprint document, and media reports from two prominent online newspapers.

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Studies employing the CDA approach and utilizing Fairclough's (1995) which focusses on transitivity analysis approach (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) revealed how events, situations, relationships and people are represented in media texts. Through the production of text by news institutions, choices are made as to what is included and what is excluded, what is made explicit or left implicit, and what is foregrounded and what is backgrounded. He probed the linguistic elements of media texts, and investigated the structuring of propositions and their combination and sequencing. Transitivity analysis (TA) in CDA has been used as a tool to better understand public discourse on a wide range of social issues (Fairclough, 1995). Furthermore, according to Fairclough (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis concentrates on inequality in society and the ways in which texts are structured, to explore both power and ideologies. Haig (2012), for example, studied the radio news bulletins on youth crime on the BBC, on the 23rd of August 2007. He particularly focussed on 2007 due to the problem of youth crime, which had been very high on the political and media agendas in the UK, and which had been sensationalized by the media. He also proposed a participant power hierarchy in his TA, building on the previous work of Goatly (2002), and ranking

grammatical participants according to the extent to which social actors are “construed grammatically as powerful and of those which are construed as less powerful or even powerless” (Haig, 2012, p. 52).

The present study applying CDA framework is also related to Teo’s (2000) work in terms of the attempt through TA to identify patterns in the participants’ ‘voices’ as represented in the discourse about the graduate employability issue, including the relative prominence of the different voices as presented by the news institutions and the government. A related study in finding voices was conducted by Moore (2004) in his representations of the voices of the Cambodian leaders in *The Economist* magazine. His study explored how *The Economist* makes meaning about Cambodia through representations of the country in its regular reporting of world events. A study conducted by Garcia-Marrugo (2013) examined the representation of Marxist guerrillas and right-wing paramilitaries in the reporting in the Colombian press in 2009. The study aimed to find at least a partial explanation of the disparity between public perceptions about the conflict and the statistical evidence in four major Colombian newspaper. According to Garcia-Marrugo (2013), the examination of participant roles revealed that guerrillas are in general construed as more dynamic, or capable of affecting the world, than the paramilitaries are.

The studies reviewed above show that the transitivity system construes the world of experience into a manageable set of processes and participant types, providing language users with grammatical options for categorizing and evaluating propositions of the world (Fairclough, 1995). Through a focus on the transitivity system, the construal of participants and social actors in texts can be analysed and related to social practice.

Transitivity enables the representation of a particular event or situation in different ways. For example:

- *He was hit.* (One participant, 'done-to'; one action, process)
- *I saw her hit him.* (Same event: three participants, one 'done-to', one 'do-er', one

'see-er'; one sensing process and one action process).

Thus, TA is a widely-used tool in the analysis of representation because it not only recognizes lexical categorization but can help uncover ideology, or the naturalized distribution of roles and actions in texts, by identifying patterns of choices in representation (e.g., which groups are typically represented as 'do-ers' or as 'see-ers'? What kind of events are typically represented without 'do-ers' by using, for example, passive voice or nominalisation?) (Fairclough, 1995; Van Leeuwen, 2008). As an analytical tool, transitivity enables the researcher to identify the participant who plays an important role in a particular clause, and the one who receives the consequences of the former’s action. Thus, it is the clause structure (viewed from the perspective of Halliday’s (1985) ideational metafunction) that reveals who is the subject (agent/doer) or object (affected/patient).

Specifically, the configuration of the clause as representation is realized by Transitivity structures, which are processes, participants and circumstances. Although TA has been employed in many studies across the world especially in CDA applying SFL as tools (Luke, 2002; Young & Harrison, 2004; Pietikainen & Dufva, 2006) but there have been few studies of this type in the Malaysian setting. A study by Gill, Keong, Bolte, and Ramiah (2012) employed TA in a study of Malaysian newspapers and the issue of English as the medium of instruction in the teaching of mathematics and science. The study did not apply TA in depth, but they managed to identify how the media shaped public opinion by providing a version of reality for a specific issue.

On the other hand, in this study clause as representation in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) comprises the process, participants and circumstances is employed. The subject matter is represented through:

1. Participants: People, things, places, and ideas typically realized by nominal groups
 - a. Attributes: (qualities of participants), typically realized by adjectival and nominal groups.

2. Processes: Actions and relations, typically realized by verbal groups (doing, behaving, saying, thinking, feeling, being).
3. Circumstances: The 'how', 'when', 'where' and 'why' of a clause, typically realized by adverbial groups, prepositional phrases.

Each process type is associated with a specific set of grammatical participants, whereas circumstances are optional; and the different types can freely associate with any process type. Transitivity processes in English, as specified by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), consist of material, mental, behavioural, verbal, relational, and existential processes. Fairclough (1995) believes that discourse can be realized in the vocabulary and grammar of texts, and he applies Halliday's SFL, which has the virtue of being a functional theory of language. Textual analysis sees and analyses language as shaped (even in its grammar) by the social functions it has come to serve (Fairclough, 2001). Richardson (2007) augmented this with the view of textual analysis. These types, and their respective participants, are discussed in the methodology section.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus

3.1.1. *The New Straits Times (NST)*

NST, Malaysia's oldest newspaper, began its first publication in Singapore in July, 1845, as the *Straits Times*. In 1972, the paper's then owner formed the *New Straits Times Press* (Malaysia) Pte. Ltd. (NSTP), in a desire to meet the aspirations of Malaysians to have a majority shareholding in the company that produced their largest mass-circulation organ in the English language. An agreement was reached on 17 September 1972 between the directors of the *Straits Times* group and Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (former Minister of Finance) for the disposal of 80% of the stock of the *New Straits Times Press* (Malaysia) Pte. Ltd. to be submitted to the Malaysian government. Since then it has become a leading media powerhouse in Malaysia. Listed on Bursa Malaysia in 1973 and in 2010, the acquisition of NSTP by Media Prima Berhad (MPB) was completed in 2011. MPB owns more than 98% equity interest in NSTP. Since its inception, NSTP delivers a

broad range of newspapers that collectively reach across the nation's demographic profile.

NST, a well-known product for its prestige, influence and credibility, is widely perceived as a market leader among the corporate players. It is "... owned by companies linked to Malaysia's ruling party" (Kenyon, 2010, p. 448), and therefore claimed to be an "... UMNO-controlled newspaper" (O'Shannassy, 2013, p. 438). NST and *Berita Harian* (the Malay version of NST) are published by the same publisher.

All newspapers published by the *New Straits Times Press* (NSTP) are pro-government, and the former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed has stated that the local media has a vital role to play to positively project the government's development plans so as to woo international capital flows and foreign investment as well as keeping the country safe (Kim, 2001). Furthermore, according to Othman and Nayan (2013), NST rather sees itself as a newspaper affiliated with the government in power, and reports developmental news as a form of performing its social responsibility to the readers, presenting news based on what they want to campaign about. It matches the concept of a mainstream newspaper, a transmitter of positive news about government policies and projects, and discourages unnecessary political bickering and criticism from the opposition that might jeopardise the national interest (Manan, 2001).

3.1.2. *The Malaysian Insider (MI)*

MI was first published on February 25, 2008, by a former Reuter's journalist Jahabar Sadiq, as a news portal that offers a direct perspective on events and personalities in Malaysia. According to Lumsden (2013), *The Malaysian Insider's* website appeared just weeks before the 2008 elections, to reportedly counter another online alternative newspaper, *Malaysiakini*, owned by the opposition party (Gng, 2014).

MI was financed by a group of businessmen and journalists close to the then Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Badawi. After the stepping down of Tun Abdullah as the Prime Minister, a Penang-born businessperson with close ties to the current National Front leadership helped to fund the website. *The Malaysian Insider* continued to bring events from both the

government and the opposition party perspectives (Lumsden, 2013). (Note: The Malaysian Insider was suspended by the government due to financial issues and was closed down in March 2016).

The content of MI covered the issues of the day, politics, business, lifestyle, sports, and entertainment, and could be accessed for free. According to one of the journalists of MI, the news site was trying to be mainstream but fairer in our dimension, in a way that Malaysians have never seen (Othman & Nayan, 2013). While this approach may not have been something Malaysians were accustomed to, MI believed the market for this type of news was expanding (Tapsell, 2013). The choice to use MI for the collection of data was due to its popularity as a free online newspaper. Furthermore, this online news website offered political perspectives from both the ruling coalition BN and, to a lesser extent, the opposition coalition PKR. MI also drew on syndicated sources such as Bernama (National Press Agency), Associated Press and the Agence France-Presse (AFP). Thus, MI was positioned as a relatively new and balanced media institution in the Malaysian online news space, which helps to explain its popularity and inclusion in the present study.

3.1.3. The Graduate Employability Blueprint (GEB)

GEB published at the end of 2012, serves as part of a government initiative to enhance graduate employability, and was funded in the 2013 budget by the Prime Minister Najib Razak to the amount of RM200 million (Razak, 2012). According to the previous Minister of Higher Education, the publication of the document was due to complaints from prospective employers, while the Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) blamed employers for their reluctance to invest money and time in staff training and development (The National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017, 2012). The formation of the blueprint came through a collaboration among industry, higher education institutions, and the Department of Higher Education. Ball (1993) states that there are two effects of policy as imposed by the government: changes in practice or structure; and the impact of these changes on patterns of social access and opportunity and social justice. The graduate employability blueprint serves as a guideline

for IHL in Malaysia to enhance the employability of future graduates. It also contains the vision and mission of the government in enhancing graduate employability, expecting that all higher institutions in Malaysia will abide by it to meet the needs of graduates and industry. While other texts and practices (curricula, contracts, negotiations, teaching, and meetings) are the means by which the GEB impacts on employability, this text is an important instrument by which the government acts on the issue and by which further social action is generated.

Prior to the publication of GEB, in June 2011, the government launched the SL1M (1Malaysia Training Scheme) for unemployed graduates in collaboration with government-linked companies. However, with increasing unemployment among graduates, the government made the decision to form the Graduate Employability Taskforce in order to formulate GEB to help students develop soft skills and improve their marketability (Lee, 2013). This blueprint represents the government's position and proposed action on graduate employability, and it is also important as a guideline for Malaysian institutions of higher learning, hence its inclusion in the present study. Therefore, this study aims to discover how the social actors are represented and evaluated by the government document in the graduate employability issue.

It is important to repeat that, even though alternative newspapers in Malaysia are published online, they are also confined to restrictions on the publication of political news due to the Communication and Multimedia Act 1998. The act requires Internet providers to obtain a license, and also regulates what is permitted to be posted on or transmitted over the Internet. This requirement also restricts and limits the news reported by these alternative newspapers so as not to propagate the opposition parties (Tapsell, 2013). The word counts for each of the texts were different, but each document has a large enough number of words and texts to enable the analysis to identify the distinctive patterns of meaning in each dataset.

In short, the online news selected for the study of graduate employability issue in Malaysia was based on several criteria. Firstly, the newspapers were selected based on their

credibility and influence, and their different stances and status as 'mainstream' and 'alternative' newspapers, notwithstanding the legal restrictions mentioned above. The timing of the news was related to significant events related to graduate employability, and the genre of news was based on getting a consistent 'voice' of each news institution through their hard news stories. For reasons of practicality, the news stories were also selected based on news accessibility, and being free, and easily accessed on the web.

3.2. Procedure

The dataset comprised 24,698 words from three publications, and these data were analyzed using tools from SFL and the analysis of text and discourse comprises:

- the linguistic description of the formal properties of the text;
- the interpretation of the relationship between the discursive processes/ interaction and the text, where text is the end product of a process text production and a resource in the process of text interpretation;
- the explanation of the relationship between discourse and social and cultural reality.

Texts were downloaded and then copied and pasted into a widely available word processing software package (WORD). They were then divided into clauses, and embedded clauses. Then, the clauses were pasted into a widely available spreadsheet software package for each specific analysis (EXCEL) -the transitivity analysis (one file) and the appraisal analysis (a separate file)- where each publication was given its own specific spreadsheet or 'book'.

4. Results

4.1. Grammatical Roles of Social Actors: Ideology in Grammar

Based on the analysis utilizing the framework of CDA and Transitivity of the online news and the government document, it was found that there are a few categories of social actors revolving around the issue of graduate employability which are:

a) *The Government, Government-Linked Companies (GLCs), and Employers*

Based on the findings of the study, the government and employers in the graduate employability issue in Malaysia, in NST and the MI, are frequently represented in the powerful grammatical roles of the sayer and then actor. In the GEB, they are represented most frequently as actor, and seldom or not at all as sayer. Actor is the most powerful grammatical role in Haig's (2012) hierarchy of power, and is an activated grammatical role in van Leeuwen's (2008) framework. Actors are construed as the 'do-ers', the agents of social action. As sayer, social actors are represented as having authority, and as those who disseminate public information such as policy, statistics, or new plans for the graduates, which becomes the news. Van Dijk (1988) suggests that readers are likely to believe experts on a particular topic, and the quoted voices are assigned authority that legitimizes a journalist's claims in the news story. Sayers have the discursive role to project thought, actions, and evaluations. Some of the samples with these social actors as the sayer is given in Table 1:

Table 1
Government as the Sayer in Online News

NST:892	<u>Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop said yesterday</u>
NST:916	<u>The long term plan of the government, <<Nor Mohamed said>>, was to integrate the curriculum [[taught in higher education institutions]] to match the demands of the industries.</u>
NST:1016	<u>He told reporters at the Graduate Career Accelerated Programme (GCAP) Convocation here today.</u>

NST:1063	<u>"Following the success of the programme, the government agreed to expand the programme with the cooperation of My-Partners and TalentCorp to train 2,700 more graduates."</u>
MI:70	<u>Deputy Minister of Higher Education Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah</u> told Dewan Negara yesterday
MI:170	<u>He</u> told reporters at the Graduate Career Accelerated Programme (GCAP) Convocation here today.
MI:325	<u>He</u> also announced an additional RM440 million to be allocated for the Skills Development Fund Corporation (PTPK), to provide loans for trainees to undergo skills training.

The findings in terms of the government's representation as sayer in the two newspapers are consistent with studies conducted by Knox and Patpong (2008) of Thai-language and English-language newspapers in Thailand, by Vo (2013) of a Vietnamese English newspaper, and by Seo (2013) of a Chinese English newspaper. It is noteworthy that this finding held for both the mainstream NST and alternative publication, the MI.

In relation to the government-linked companies (GLCs) and graduate employability, the GLCs are taking over some of the responsibilities traditionally held by the universities/IHL, by retraining unemployed graduates. The GLCs are represented as powerful in the two newspapers, yet were not represented at all in the GEB (Fairclough, 1995). This reflects the social power of the GLCs in the graduate employability issue as implementers of the government programs (as represented in the newspapers), yet at the same time it reflects the agenda of the government in controlling the actions of the universities but completely excluding the GLCs and their role in delivering government programs from direction or regulation (in the GEB).

The government in the GEB was represented as an actor in 67% of the instances, though the total occurrences are less than 10, so any claims made with regard to this finding have to be made with caution.

Bearing this in mind, we can observe that the distribution of grammatical roles for the government in the GEB is different from the distribution in the two newspapers even with the small number of instances. The GEB is represented as an action taker, and there are no instances of the government as sayer in the GEB.

This identified pattern is consistent with the fact that the blueprint is stipulated by the Higher Ministry of Education as the means by which the government is intervening in the universities' curricula. The GEB does not construe the government as sayer at all, which is also consistent with the role of the GEB (which is an instrument of the government) as opposed to the social reality of the media's role (reporting what the government says and does). Returning again to van Leeuwen's (2008) framework and Haig's (2012) power hierarchy of grammatical participant roles, despite the small number of instances and the qualifications that go with that, the GEB represents the government in the majority of instances in an activating, powerful grammatical role.

In the GEB, the government is construed as the entity that is responsible for implementing and developing any plan or programs for the unemployed graduates and students, and where it is construed as an Actor in the newspapers similar meanings can be found. Examples are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
The Government as Actor in the Material Process

News; line	Actor	Process	Goal
NST:1103	The government	has launched	the National Graduate Employability Blueprint (GEB) 2012-2017, [[which will serve as a guide]]
NST:1085	The government	established	the Educational Performance and Delivery Unit (PADU) on March 19

MI:66	The Higher Education Ministry	has implemented	the Student Marketability Programme,
GEB:372	MOHE	has already developed and implemented	several GE enhancement programmes [[based on the GE framework]].
GEB:510	the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE)	has developed	a reliable and credible plan

In short, both NST and the MI represented the government most often as Sayer, and then as actor. On the other hand, the GEB represented the government most often as actor, and never as sayer. This is consistent with the social role of the media and of the GEB in relation to the government.

b) IHLs, Industry and Government Programs

These social actors representing different groups had similarities in how they were represented in the discourse on graduate employability. In particular, industry and the universities, or IHLs, were represented in similar ways across all three publications.

Industry and the IHLs were represented in the powerful roles of sayer and Actor in the mainstream NST, like the government, employers, and GLCs as discussed above. However, both had very little representation at all in the alternative publication, the MI (Fairclough, 1995). Both had mixed representation in the GEB, IHLs slightly more powerful, and industry slightly less.

Accounting for these representations in the mainstream NST (as powerful social actors in the graduate employability issue) and in the government's GEB (represented in diverse ways which would be consistent with their complex relations with government as receivers and enactors of government policy) is less difficult than accounting for their relative exclusion from the MI. Why the alternative newspaper would tend not to include the IHLs or industry in much of their representation of graduate employability is unclear. What it does demonstrate, though, is that each publication has its own institutional perspective on, and approach to graduate employability, what actors are relevant, and what does and does not matter.

The government programs are represented in a mixed way in NST and as a relatively weak social actor in the MI. However, they are

largely excluded from the GEB, which is consistent with the representation of the GLCs in this publication and the discussion of the 'invisibility' of the GLCs in the GEB above.

c) Graduates and Students

The graduates are represented as a relatively weak social actor in all three publications. This is true also of the students, except that the students are largely excluded from the discourse of the MI. Again, it is surprising that students, like universities and industry, would be largely excluded from the discourse of graduate employability in the alternative newspaper.

The representations of graduates and students included the grammatical roles of Goal and Carrier, those who are affected and those open for evaluation by others (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). When represented as Actor, there was a tendency in some cases for negative actions (e.g., failing), for external agents (e.g., someone helping graduates to do something), or for unrealistic action (e.g., future or conditional action) to be represented.

d) Teachers and Parents

These groups were largely excluded from all three publications (and completely excluded from the alternative the MI), showing that not all social groups who have an important stake in graduate employability are represented in the public discourse on the issue.

5. Discussion

The results of the study revealed the answers to the research question as reflected in each of the questions presented.

Concerning the first and second research questions, it was revealed that the government and employers are represented as the most powerful social actors across all three

publications in the data set, particularly empowered discursively as sayers in the two newspapers, and empowered discursively as actors in all three publications. Graduates and students are represented as the least powerful groups, commonly in the roles of Goal and Carrier, and when represented as Actor they are often construed as involved in negative or unrealistic actions, or with an external agent. Teachers and parents are largely excluded from all three publications.

Concerning the third research question government and employers are construed as

powerful social actors in the dataset, and government is evaluated frequently (in comparison to the other social actor groups) and overwhelmingly positively. In terms of the representation of the graduates, they are seen as the least powerful in the three publications.

To generalize across the three publications, we can describe a 'cline of power in representation' in the public discourse on graduate employability, as shown in Figure 1. Like most generalizations, it gives a broad picture of the public discourse but misses specific details.

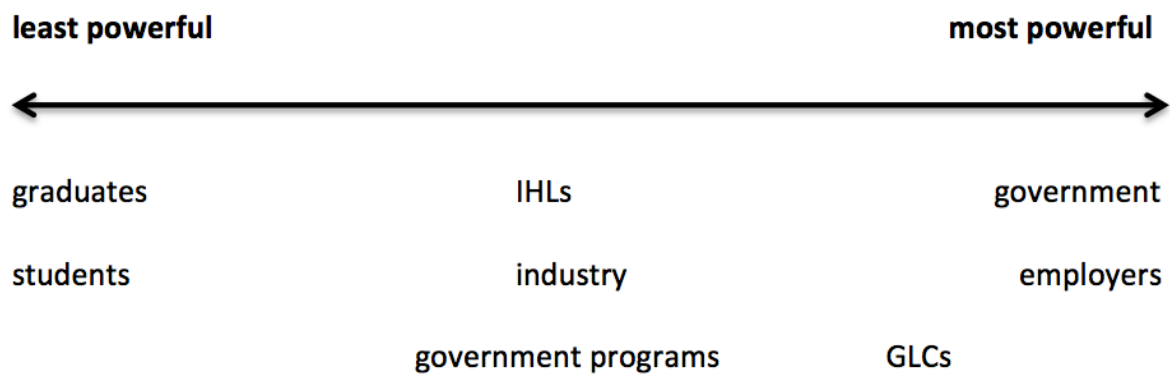


Figure 1
Cline of Power of Representation in Graduate Employability Discourse

The cline in Figure 1 does not show those groups excluded, or largely excluded, from all or some publications. Exclusions in the NST were mostly on the parents and teachers while the MI totally excluded parents and teachers. The MI also mostly excluded the IHLs, industry and students. Interestingly, the government document (GEB) mostly excluded the parents, teachers and the government programs. The GEB also totally excluded the GLCs.

The NST excludes the parents and teachers. It appears that these groups are seen as largely irrelevant to the issue of graduate employability across all three publications. In addition to excluding parents and teachers, the MI excludes IHLs, industry, and students from their hard news reporting on graduate employability. These exclusions are surprising, and suggest that the MI presents a limited perspective on the issue of graduate employability that focuses on

relatively few 'key players' in the issue. The GEB excludes parents and teachers like the other two publications, and also GLCs and government programs, which suggests that the authors of the GEB do not see GLCs or government programs as 'part of the problem' of graduate employability, nor do they see any need to define their roles or parameters in the Blueprint.

Fairclough (1995) states that social actors can be included (Inclusion) or excluded (Exclusion) from a text. Exclusion of social actors consists of suppression (not in the text at all) or backgrounding (mentioned somewhere in the text, but having to be inferred in one or more places). "There are many motivations for exclusion, such as redundancy or irrelevance, but exclusion may be politically or socially significant" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 149). The government and the employers are the key

players in the issue as they are also being evaluated positively. These findings reveal the general ethos of media and bureaucratic discourse in Malaysia, where the government is always powerful in determining the future of the graduates more than the universities and the industry.

In relation to the findings on the reporting of the news in the Malaysian setting, much reported and direct quotation has been found in the data with the government and other social actors as the sayer. This reflects that journalists have to select and summarize a huge amount of textual information in writing their reports, and this production process is “monitored by the models, knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies of newspapers” (van Dijk, 1991, p. 151). He further elaborates that the possible biases in news discourse “not only reside in the selection and prominence of news actors, but also in the ways they are presented as speakers who give their interpretation of, and opinion about news events” (p. 151).

On the other hand, Scollon (1999) proposes that the use of quotations is a form of writer’s control over the material s/he presents, since the reporter maintains the ‘authorship’ (the right to find the wording for the ideas) but delegates the ‘principalship’ (the responsibility for what is said) and, by this delegation, the reporter stands aside from the argument. Scollon (1999) explains that “the newsmakers are evaluated and characterized in the process of giving them a voice” (p. 217), explaining that such voice is not given neutrally since the journalist keeps the power to characterize the evaluative stance of those ideas.

White (2006) states that quotations in news reports often introduce “...all manner of accusations, criticisms, demands and contentious claims on the parts of the experts, politicians, community leaders, interested parties, eye-witness and so on” (p. 57). Jullian (2011), furthermore, stresses that journalists do have positions and do take sides. According to Jullian (2011), the inclusion of attributed comments may appear externally to be a form of objectivity of the journalist, but deep down it serves the writer as a good way to get involved. This study may serve as a starting point for further studies relating to this issue. In the Malaysian setting, this study is the first one

conducted to discover the construal of social actors in the graduate employability discourse.

Applying the CDA framework investigating the public discourse of graduate employability is quite new in the Malaysian setting. Furthermore, many studies on English language teaching and learning have been conducted in the Malaysian setting, but there is a lack of study investigating the continuation or link of English-language education between schools and the IHLs. This is crucial since the link, or its absence, between schools and the IHLs needs to be understood and where necessary addressed. Students start learning the English language in the early stages of school. However, too often, their English language ability is not at the level the graduates, teachers, employers, or government would expect after they complete their degree. Thus, research into the language skills students bring to universities is needed. Such research should explore what needs to happen in English language education in schools to ensure that the students who enter universities are more likely to graduate with the qualities that the government and the society expect, as expressed in the public discourse on GE. Apart from that, the voice of parents, teachers/academic staff should be heard in ensuring that the country is working toward achieving the goals of Vision 2020. This may help in maintaining tertiary education as a storehouse of knowledge, wisdom, and creativity, and avoid creating a tertiary education sector exclusively obsessed with markets, businesses, and the production of ‘employables’ for powerful economic interests. Students should not be reduced to consumers only concerned with getting jobs. The news, mainstream and alternative, should approach universities as dynamic and character-building social institutions, and as providers of all-round development of individuals, not simply as graduate factories geared to feed the economy.

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