

# Inspecting the Language of Exclusion: Transitivity Analysis of the *Orang Asli* Community in Selected Malaysian Print Media

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**Purpose of the study:** This study deals with the examination of micro structures (transitivity structures) in chosen news articles regarding the *Orang Asli* community published in *The Star*. The primary aim of this research is to scrutinise the portrayal of the community in the aforementioned newspaper. **Methodology:** Analysis was conducted on a total of 12 news articles which appeared in *The Star*. The study utilised Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistic and van Dijk's Theory of Ideology and the community's portrayal is reviewed through transitivity analysis of the selected news articles. The linguistic analysis was complemented with van Dijk's Theory of Ideology in order to discover the 'self' versus the 'other' polarisation in the news reports chosen for this study. **Main Findings:** Findings revealed that similarities and consistencies in terms of findings can be clearly observed whereby the community is labelled as being dependent and traditional, as well as being protestors and liable toward their own pitiful state of life. **Applications of this study:** The method proposed in this study is replicable in studying elements of discrimination in media texts and other discourses. **Novelty/Originality of this study:** The findings of this study are important in bringing to the surface the need to diminish discrimination towards the community, and the study advocates for media to practice fair portrayal of the *Orang Asli* community.

**Key words:** *transitivity, ideology, systemic functional linguistics, indigenous community, Orang Asli, The Star*

## INTRODUCTION

The media portray the central images of multiple societies and projects life as it is in those societies (Turow, 1997). Therefore, it projects the capability of being the dynamic conveyer of principal beliefs in society. Scholars (van Dijk, 2000; Denis, 1997) claim that the dominant and overarching



culture of a society is most of the time reinforced as the norm, while the minority groups are frequently excluded and ostracised (Fleras and Kunz, 2001). The media in general has become a powerful practice for deconstruction and reconstruction of the collective understanding on marginalised, oppressed and discursive matters (Liu & Park, 2019). Contemporary media possess the capability to effect public view worldwide and produce meaning for the society (Muhammad Junaid, 2019; Jamal, 2015).

By systematically manipulating the creation of prevailing consensus, the media profit on the race element within their reporting. They help structure racial practises that give the powerful and the privileged significant positions, while restricting the non-privileged in subordinate or non-essential positions in the context. The relentless, ceaseless, and divisive representation of minority communities by the media has been examined by uncountable reams of newsprint, hours of airtime and hundreds of specialised articles (Fischhoff et al., 1999). In addition to influencing the manner in which these minorities see themselves, the portrayals present a significant role in increasing prior undesirable views about minorities commonly assumed by the dominant communities. According to Tajfel's (1982) Social Identity Theory, individuals are classified as social group members and pursue a meaningful sense of identity by similarities between their own as well as other groups.

Cultural researchers (Wilson II and Gutierrez, 1995; Gergen, 1985) hypothesise the ways minorities are represented by diverse outlets of mainstream mass media; through disparaging assumptions, repeated and deceiving depictions that serve to mould social perceptions in minority groups. Allan and Seaton (1999) conclude that minority media coverage carries a pivotal role in the image-building phase of minorities and, as a consequence, influence the tendency the mainstream assume towards them. As negative portrayals are generally associated with pessimistic characteristics and constructive depictions are typically related to favourable qualities of the minority affected, media coverage has the potential to influence the expectations of different audiences. Simply put, common media outlets, such as newspapers, radio and television programmes, carry a vital part in determining public opinion regarding minority groups (van Dijk, 2000). In this sense, news articles are important because of the social role they carry; the reconstruction of truth for those absent on the site of a news incident (Schlesinger, 1988). This shows the importance of news media on constructing public opinion, and the media tends to play a key role in how minorities are perceived by the mainstream individuals (Jones et al., 2015).

The media representation of aboriginal people has seen little improvement, as aboriginals are subjected to stereotyping, abuse and removed from decision-making domains for decades in their native lands (Inguanzo, 2011). In addition, Meadows (2001) postulates how aboriginal people's representation in media has always revolved around generic, blatantly racist images. A similar pattern of depiction is hypothesised on the treatment and projection of *Orang Asli* in Malaysian media. Investigating this issue is vital as the topic of adverse and biased treatment towards *Orang Asli* and its related issues is yet to be addressed in detail. During the late 1990s, only few analyses arose, and this was due to the lack of their inclusion in any centralised information transporter,

such as the newspapers (Nobuta, 2009). The reasons were attributed to the issues concerning timing, economy, lack of involvement of scholars and even the *Orang Asli*'s refusal to speak up. Considering the lack of studies reported on studying aspects of representation of the *Orang Asli* in Malaysian media, David et al. (2010) and Jamal & Naghmeh-Abbaspour (2020) urged for more comprehensive research to be carried out. As such, the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyse transitivity structures (material, mental, verbal and relational) appearing in the selected news articles on *Orang Asli*.
2. To divulge the ideology being reinforced through the transitivity structures.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview of *Orang Asli*

The word *Orang Asli* translates to Peninsular Malaysia's indigenous minorities. Before the formation of the Malay Kingdoms, they were historically regarded as the first descendants or settlers of the peninsula. Approximately 150,000 people form the *Orang Asli* group, comprising below 1% of Malaysia's total populace. The *Orang Asli* are defined more by their cultural characteristics rather than by genetic inheritance (Nicholas et al., 2010). Scholars (Nicholas et al., 2010; Jamal & Manan, 2016) agree that the *Orang Asli* at the moment have been demoted to become the poorest in terms of living status reports. While improvements in the provision of facilities have been made in recent times, they continue to be left behind as compared to Malaysia's major residents in terms of access to necessary facilities (including access to electricity, clean water and adequate roads). They evidently have lost their independence and no longer possess the autonomy they had through the times of the Malay sultanates (Erni, 2009). The *Orang Asli* consider themselves as the most marginalised ethnic group in Malaysia currently – having the highest levels of poverty and overwhelmingly poor health, tolerating issues relating to access to basic amenities, and denied associations into politics (Lim, 1998; Jamal & Manan, 2016).

The *Orang Asli* are portrayed as beneficiaries, namely when they welcomed various aids from the authorities, which supposedly presented them as a dependant community (David et al., 2010). The study further suggests that since a majority of Malaysians have only minimal knowledge about the *Orang Asli* and would have to depend on the newspapers as a source of information, thus the misrepresentation of the *Orang Asli* community may have resulted in the cultivation of negative perceptions among the general community toward the *Orang Asli*.

Studies have suggested, in addition to the racist coverage of the *Orang Asli*, that similar portrayal is seen in other minorities. Dunn (2001) scrutinised media representations of minorities in Canada and Australia and the findings of this study show that prior to 1990, racial minorities were noticeably absent from media exposure, and that very condition reinforces thoughts of reluctance, belittles their efforts and devaluates their identity in those countries. The voices of these minorities

were also seldom projected in the media; hence their marginalisation proscribed their rights to speak out, undermining national and local belonging. Another research by Proudfoot and Habibis (2015) reveals a racialised disparity in descriptions of the problems faced by Australian Aboriginal populations in media. In addition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices have been overwhelmingly absent in the media, resulting in biased and inaccurate portrayal of the community (Narragunawali News, 2018).

The construction of ‘us’ (referring to the mainstream population) versus ‘others’ (indigenous community), a dichotomy practised by the media has also been a pivotal aspect in the creation of imaginings of the community (Wetzel, 2012; Rankine, et al., 2014). Researchers came to a conclusion, after vigorously studying the subject of representation that in the perspective of the colonising power, two especially common strategies include: regular framing of news and determining the reasonableness of reports from that viewpoint (Due & Riggs, 2011; Moewaka Barnes, et al., 2013; Lang, 2015).

### **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**

SFL promotes that by presenting meaning in context, people use and interpret language as a way of achieving their goals. One of the most fundamental aspects of this theory is that language exists in and must be studied from various contexts, for example, the classroom setting and the professional setting (Halliday, 1985). Halliday’s SFL theory flourished in response to Chomsky’s formalist theory and this theory has contributed enormously to the development of critical discourse analysis (CDA). SFL is different from other kinds of approach in the sense that it has been constructed specifically for the purposes of textual analysis to enable us to say useful things about spoken and written texts (Halliday, 1994). Halliday argued that in all texts there are three language roles, namely "ideational, interpersonal and textual".

Fairclough (1995: p.17) mentions: “representations, relations, and identities simultaneously emerge in a text, the ideal function of language in generating representations of the world; the interpersonal function includes the function of language in the constitution of relations, and of identities; the textual function relates to the constitution of texts out of individual sentences.” CDA researchers base their SFL analysis through five elements, which are “the grammar of transitivity, the grammar of modality, transformation, classification and coherence, order and unity” (Fowler et al., 1979: p.179). These elements study linguistics structures exclusively and possess the potential to unearth hidden meanings concealed under common texts. Utilisation of these elements also, is advantageous in studying aspects of representation, owing to their effectiveness in exposing elements of biasness and discrimination in a text.

### **Grammar of Transitivity**

Transitivity blossomed in response to Halliday’s (1970) belief that language is used to reflect one’s understanding of the world. He further adds that the expression of that experience takes into

account the configuration of “semantic roles” (p.146) in verbalising the happenings (processes), people and objects involved (participants) and the diverse features of those happenings (circumstances). These processes are associated with verbal groups and verb phrases, participants in nominal groups or noun phrases and circumstances via adverbials. Transitivity is defined as “the part of grammar of the clause which is relevant to conceptualisation, the representation of the world” (Goatly, 2000: 59). Shakila (2001) defines transitivity as an important tool of analysis for “one to identify the participant who plays an important role in a particular clause and, the one who receives the consequence of the former’s action” (p.38). Verb processes can be divided into four basic categories: relational, material, mental and verbal.

Relational processes describe existence, states and also relationships; realised by the *token* and the *value*. Tokens and values are used in the relational process in defining the meaning in a clause. This is done by employing the verbs *to-be*, *to have*, *remain*, *stay*, *equal*, *comprise*, *constitute*, *include*, *contain*, *stand*, *surround* and also *occupy*. Relational clauses have the function of describing and categorising the participants in a particular text (Goatly, 2000). In undertaking a critical analysis of a text, two questions to consider relate to what the relational descriptions that the participants attract are and the kind of qualities that are given to them.

Verbs under the rubric of material process describes events, and provides the answer to ‘what happened’ (Bloor and Bloor, 1995). These are called prototypical verbs or ‘doing words.’ The element responsible for causing an event or action is referred to as the *actor*. Some of the verbs may have an *object* accompanying them, of which the object is defined as the thing that the action or event affects (also known as the *affected*). The most important aim to studying material processes is to unearth who is represented as the most important participant in a particular text (Goatly, 2000). In most analyses where there is an actor and an affected, the actor will be presented as the one with power and who is responsible for the action, while the affected is commonly regarded as less powerful. If the affected is absent, then the actor comes across as less powerful.

The mental process refers to the events best characterised as thought patterns or cognitive processes in the mind (Bloor and Bloor, 1995). Verbs under mental processes are divided into three; perception, emotion and cognition (Goatly, 2000). The person who experiences these emotions and thoughts can be referred to as the *experiencer*. The aim of analysing mental processes is to indicate the presence of internal processes, which are strictly accessible only to the experiencer. This analysis questions the stereotypical all-knowing narrator, by asking who the experiencers are and whether the narrator is familiar with the experiences projected.

Another dimension in the transitivity structure is the verbal process verb, which refers to the act of saying or writing. The person discharging the act of writing or saying is referred to as the *sayer*, while the person being addressed becomes the receiver. The point of studying verbal processes is to determine “who gets to hold the floor, to have their words (verbiage) reported” (Goatly, 2000: p.70). Another reason is to verify the effects the sayers might pose on the listeners and whether

the sayers are actually in the dominant position. Anything the sayers say reflect their mental processes as well.

The transitivity analysis is a powerful semantic concept and is part of the ideational function of the language in mention. It is therefore essential in the study of representation where Kress (1976) posits that transitivity is the depiction of processes in language, members and the conditional aspects related to the individuals. Transitivity also possesses the facility to analyse the same event in a multitude of ways, a skill which, as Fowler (1991) illustrates, is of great importance in the analysis of newspaper articles. The analysis of transitivity is utilised into this study to assist the researcher in identifying the ideational context of the texts which is usually expressed by the patterns of processes, participants and circumstances (Halliday, 1994). Is it also crucial for the researcher to identify the roles that are possessed by the 'self' and the 'other' in order to reveal the ideology behind the assignation of these roles towards the *Orang Asli* community?

### **Theory of Ideology**

Fleraz and Elliot (1992) proposed that ideology provides a framework for “organising, maintaining and transforming relations of power and dominance in society” (p.54). The concept of ideology is vital to the understanding of how the more elusive forms of discrimination function underneath individual levels and shared awareness of central culture. The way people define social, cultural and political systems and structures is influenced by ideology. According to Hall (1973) and Hebdige (1993), ideological formations are not fixed but naturally and continuously evolving and this is usually a result of conflicting experiences.

The power possessed by the elite group extends to control the productions of symbols. For example, the media plays an important part in the formation of the ideologies of the general public. (Chomsky, 1989; Golding et al., 1986). The word "other" is widely used to refer to people who are viewed by "self" as distinct and different from them (Bakhtin, 1981). In the analysis of ethnic ideologies, prejudice against other groups is not considered as personal opinion, but rather as a group-based mutual attitude toward another group, thus recreating the concept of power and dominance (van Dijk, 1987). The *Orang Asli*, in this study, is assumed to be part of 'others' while the 'self' group includes authorities. The analysis of transitivity structures will be scanned through the lens of ideology in determining how these structures reproduce and reaffirm the concept of power, discrimination and bias.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs an individual text analysis approach that consists of the manual examination of 12 (coded S1 to S12) news articles extracted from The Star. The Star was chosen due to the fact that it marked the highest readership among the English dailies in Malaysia according to Malaysian Audit Bureau of Circulation in 2014. A purposive sampling method is utilised in collecting the data whereby “elements selected for the sample are chosen by the judgment of the researcher, and

researchers often believe that they can obtain a representative sample by using sound judgment, which will result in saving time and money” (Black, 2010:17). In terms of the necessary sample size, Guest et al. (2006) propose that for a completely qualitative study, 12 articles should be considered the smallest appropriate sample. Data will be analysed based on the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach advocated by Halliday (1970) focusing on the grammar of transitivity. The findings are then analysed to reveal ideological projections through van Dijk’s Theory of Ideology. The table below displays the procedures for data analysis:

**Table 1:** Data Analysis Procedure

<b>Transitivity Analysis</b>	Analysis of Material Process
	Analysis of Mental Process
	Analysis of Verbal Process
	Analysis of Relational Process
<b>Ideology Analysis</b>	Analysis of Ideology in Transitivity Processes

## FINDINGS

Under the grammar of transitivity, four categories will be examined: relational, material, mental and also verbal processes. Kress (1976) has posited that the analysis of transitivity is fundamental to the study of representation and it illustrates the language in process, the participants therein, and the conditional features associated with them.

### Material Process

The material process is analysed to discover the individual being embodied in the utmost authoritative members in a text. A text with both an Actor and Affected elevates the actor to being superior, and if the Affected is absent, the Actor is deemed less powerful. In cases where there are two Affected participants, either one of them will be the Beneficiary.

**Table 2.** Authorities as Token

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Material Process</b>	<b>Affected</b>	<b>Beneficiary</b>
1. ... the department	had implemented	programs to reduce school dropout rates and increase the number of <i>Orang Asli</i> entrants into universities.	
2. ... the department	is now working	towards developing	the <i>Orang Asli</i> community.

In all the examples above, the authorities (the department) is accredited the position of Actor and assigned with positive values, uplifting it to positive representation of ‘self.’ The authorities here assigned with the duties of implementing various program to reduce the rate of *Orang Asli* children dropping from school. On the contrary, the *Orang Asli* is placed in the beneficiary position, and is shown to be receiving assistance from the governmental department to develop their community. Such projection reinforces the point that the community depend largely on the government to assist them and are incapable of transforming their lives, thus living deplorable lives.

**Table 3.** The *Orang Asli* as Actors

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Material Process</b>	<b>Affected</b>
1. About 200 families there	had been living	without running water for over a year.
2. They	had to go deep	into the nearby jungle to a small waterfall to do their washing and to collect water for cooking.

Example 1 and 2 place the *Orang Asli* in the position of actor. However, the processes involved relates to the community as having to live in without basic amenities such as clean water. They are shown to be depending on the jungle as the source of water. The material processes here reinforce the poor living conditions of the community, where they are shown to be lacking access to basic resources such as water, which is vital for survival. It is to be noted that mainstream Malaysian communities; comprising of the Malay, Chinese and Indians generally, live in conditions where full access to amenities such as water, electricity, health services exist. As such, a binary opposition between the living conditions of the mainstream community and the *Orang Asli* is present, accentuating the point that the *Orang Asli* is shown in a negative light in these examples analysed.

### **Mental Process**

In analysing mental process, the focus will be on the internal or perpetual processes which are only accessible to the Experiencer. One issue to question is who the Experiencer is, and whether the writer claims to have access to the experiences of other Experiencers or other characters (Goatly, 2000). Evidence of mental processes found in the news report S1 is as follows:

**Table 4.** Mental Processes of the *Orang Asli*

<b>Experiencer</b>	<b>Mental Process</b>	<b>Experience</b>
1. He	hoped	that JAKOA would be able to help in this matter as soon as possible (Experience).
2. Another tribal leader form Kampung Tanah Gembor in Ledang Jengkeng Jani	hoped	that the construction of drains and roads in his village would be completed soon (Experience).



In example 1 and 2 above, the *Orang Asli* leaders have been placed as the Experiencers and the perceptive verb ‘hoped’ is placed in both sentences. It is visible that what the leaders are hoping for is the intervention of JAKOA (*Orang Asli* Development Department) in their community’s welfare. In Sentence 1, the leader is hoping that the authorities will assist them in obtaining basic amenities such as water and electricity. In the second sentence, the same pattern seems to preoccupy wherein the leader desires the construction works in his village to be completed soon. From the findings, it can be understood that the experiences that they are associated with extend to only that which regards their community. The verb assigned to illustrate their mental processes; ‘hope’ is rather weak and does not project any elements of authority. Elements of hope which is repeated twice here brings to surface the situation of the community whereby the intervention from JAKOA (self-group member) is necessary. As such, the ideological projection of the *Orang Asli* as negative out-group members is prevalent.

### Verbal Process

Verbal process is important in determining whose voice gets heard in the news report and also who gets to hold authoritative power. In addition, it is also important in analysing the effects of the verbiage of the Sayers on the readers and listeners and deciding if they seem to appear as being dominant. An analysis of verbal process on the other hand helps to reveal the main intentions or concerns of the Sayers which are actually the reflections of their mental processes. Almost half of the sentences in the news reports consist of verbiage reported by the authorities:

**Table 5.** Verbal Process of the Authorities

Sayer	Verbal Process	Verbiage
1. The department’s Director-General Datuk Mohd Sani Mistam	said	the JAKOA is now looking at further developing the <i>Orang Asli</i> community...
2. He	added	that the department is now working towards developing the <i>Orang Asli</i> community to be on par with other communities...
3. He	(said)	“In terms of education, the department had implemented programs to reduce school dropout rates and increase the number of <i>Orang Asli</i> entrants into universities.
4. He (Sayer)	said...	“We are also working hard to ensure that electricity and water is supplied to villages which were still without these amenities,”
5. Mohd Sani (Sayer)	added	that although changes have been slow, many <i>Orang Asli</i> have successfully forged professional careers for themselves...

In all the examples above, the experiencer happens to be the Director-General of JAKOA and he has been quoted quite a number of times in the report. This reaffirms the point that his sayings come across as being significant and credible pertaining to the subject or theme, which is the development projects targeted at the *Orang Asli*. The effects of the verbiage are also relatively influential in the sense that readers may accept his views due to the position he embraces in the governmental body. Besides, it also shows that highlighting the quality of the *Orang Asli*'s lives has been the central preoccupation of the association and thus, they are working hard towards realising their objective. Again, the positive acts committed by the in-group members have been highlighted positively.

However, a different pattern is observed when the *Orang Asli* manage to get their verbal sayings reported. Consider the examples below:

**Table 6.** Verbal Process of the *Orang Asli*

Sayer	Verbal Process	Verbiage
1. Kampung Sentosa Lenga Tok Batin Lanyau Kop from Muar	<i>said</i>	that JAKOA's assistance in providing school uniforms and allowances to school-going children in his village meant that more students were now attending school regularly.
2. Lanyau	<i>added</i>	that two other villages under his care have yet to receive electricity and water supply.
3. He	<i>added</i>	that the leadership seminar was fruitful one as he had learned more about his responsibilities and roles as a village headman and that he felt he was now better equipped to deal with his villagers.

In sentence 1, quotes from the *Orang Asli* leader is noted to verify the claim that the JAKOA has taken much effort to help the community in every way possible. Here the leader is depicted as being grateful to the deeds of JAKOA as it is through their initiatives that the children are now able to attend school regularly. In the second sentence, again the leader is portrayed as being needy and pleads in the hope that the villages under his care will receive electricity and water supply. In these two sentences, the sayer comes across as being weak and powerless and his speech does not contain any effect for those reading or listening, except evoking elements of sympathy towards his community. In sentence 3, what is being said by the leader does not relate to the topic of concern of the report. The leader is reported to be feeling grateful for attending a seminar and his verbiage does not contain any information related to the development of the *Orang Asli*. Furthermore, quoting him as being more equipped now leaves the reader to question his credibility in the past. These examples show that even if the *Orang Asli* hold power (such as being the village headman), they still appear to be in need of assistance all the time, and are projected as being powerless.

## Relational Process

Examples of relational processes found are tabulated in the table below:

**Table 7.** Relational Process of the *Orang Asli*

Token	Relational Process	Value
1. Main issue facing the villagers, who mostly work as rubber tappers in smallholdings belonging to others	is	the lack of land for farming and other economic activities.
2. The community	is	quite satisfied for now.

A number of relational processes are devoted towards describing the *Orang Asli* community and their pitiful state of living. Values assigned to the community seem like an attempt to categorise them into a group of people who are deprived of essential amenities such as water and land for farming. However, after acknowledging their cries and pleadings for basic amenities, the news report proceeds to highlight them as being contented for the time being with the aids received. This easily labels them as to be always welcoming help and assistance from others.

## DISCUSSION

The following table tabulates the findings of transitivity analysis, together with the frequency of existence of every component analysed.

**Table 8.** Transitivity Structures and Frequency of Appearance

<b>Transitivity Structures x Frequency</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Material process (12x)	Shows the agent responsible for the events reported.	Almost all the news report analysed contained examples of material processes in them. Most of the time, material process functions to describe the actions taken by the governmental organisations or the actions of the <i>Orang Asli</i> community. In few instances, the <i>Orang Asli</i> are neutrally presented, and in most cases, the ‘self’ group members are positively depicted.
Mental process (2x)	Reports feelings and thinking.	Only two examples of mental process are found in the news reports analysed. Mental processes of the actors and participants of the news report seem inaccessible to the journalists, and they maintained to report mostly facts and truths. One prominent finding here is that the mental perception of the <i>Orang Asli</i> seemed unimportant thus, is not reported.
Verbal process (11x)	Reports verbiage.	Verbal process is the second most common type of transitivity structures found in the analysis. van Dijk (1998) mentions that stumbling upon multiple instances of verbal utterances is a common finding in the analysis of news reports. In this context, most of the verbiage belonged to the ‘self’ group members such as the ministers, members of parliaments, JAKOA officers and other governmental officers. Their verbal sayings are inserted to clarify numerous ideas such as the development programmes implemented, the conditions of the <i>Orang Asli</i> community and their opinions about the community. On the other hand, only a handful of verbiages reported belonged to the <i>Orang Asli</i> . In the case of them being reported, their speech contained elements of thankfulness to be given aid, sounded weak most of the time and appeared totally unauthorised.
Relational process (5x)	States existence and facts.	In terms of relational processes, several conditions of the <i>Orang Asli</i> are presented. The many ideas reinforced through the use of relational processes are the fact that the community is lagging behind economically, the community is satisfied with what the government has been doing for them and that they are still dependent on the forest.

In the analysis of material structures, the structures used to demonstrate the projection of the *Orang Asli* community mainly as suffering due to the lack of forest resources (e.g. “...the *Orang Asli* are suffering as the forest, which feeds them, is no longer as rich as before”). Besides that, the transformation that the community encountered due to the intervention of the government is also explicitly shown (e.g. “...the number showed that the standard of living of the *Orang Asli* in the country has improved”). Few examples in the text described the improvement achieved by the community in terms of getting better amenities, their children performing better in schools and the fact that many are now employed in government sectors, however, all the advancements are credited to the Barisan Nasional coalition, JAKOA and the other governmental agencies. These agencies are presented as being responsible for all the improvements accomplished by the community.

The verbal processes inserted in the news reports basically belonged to three parties, the government officers, the *Orang Asli* and a few NGOs. In instances where the verbal utterances of the ‘self’ are inserted, most of the time the content of the speeches appear powerful, authoritative and affirming (e.g. “Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob said the *Orang Asli* were intelligent but led a low-profile life and were lost in the mainstream of development”). On the contrary, only a handful of verbiages from the *Orang Asli* are inserted in the news report. Analysing further, their patterns of speech contain either elements of weakness which connotes their inability to develop their lives further without the intervention from the government, or traits of gratitude towards the aid received from the mainstream society (e.g. “The water came back after all these leaders came,” said rubber tapper Ismail Yusuf). Another pattern observed is the element of threat infused in the verbiages of the community, whereby they were warned to not participate in the voting unless the government maintains its promises in giving them appropriate and necessary assistance (Muhamad Ismail said: “For the moment we happy. But if the Government forgets us after this by-election, we will not come out to vote again”). Maslim (2002) advocates that the portrayal of aborigines is usually problematic and one preoccupation that the media holds on to is the projection of them as being irresponsible, as protestors and unhealthy, which to a certain extent, matches the outcome of the verbal analysis. The *Orang Asli* are often silenced especially on crucial issues correlating to their status in the Constitution, their rights as the sons of the soil and the status of their land issues, projecting an idea that the opinion and views of the community do not carry much importance or weightage.

Relational processes appeared five times in the analysis, and most of the time, described the conditions of the *Orang Asli* in terms of their status and welfare. Specifically, the ideas reiterated are the lack of land for farming, their satisfaction with the government, the improvement achieved by a school attended mainly by the *Orang Asli* community (e.g. “It was a significant improvement for the *Orang Asli* school”) and the dependence of the community on the forest for their survival (e.g. “The *Orang Asli* of Belum-Temenggor are still very dependent on the forests for their existence”). Based on the relational processes presented, one dominant idea involving the community is the projection of them as being comfortable in their traditional ways of earning a living and refusing to let modernisation mould them into better individuals. By depicting the



community as being contented, the readers are obliged to believe in the virtuous initiatives taken by the government in helping to develop the community further.

It is found that three types of transitivity appeared the most in all the analysis, which are the material, verbal and relational processes. Transitivity structures exposed the ideological underpinnings of the news discourse analysed, and portrayed the transition of the *Orang Asli* from bad to good, owing to the initiatives taken by the government.

In the study of ideologies, a common feature that is typically built in the polarisation of the 'self' versus the 'other', where the members of the 'self' community appear to portray themselves in a desirable manner whilst undermining the reputation of others whom relate to the 'other' community. The concealed ideology contained in the texts can well be uncovered through the study of the transitivity mechanisms, and an inference on the ideology of a specific entity can be reached from there. The polarisation between 'self' and 'other' is apparent in the news stories. Transitivity structures depict the patterns where most of the time, the 'self' gets to hold the floor while the voice of the *Orang Asli* is silenced. Certain themes introduced in the texts also help reinforce the negativity of the *Orang Asli* community, while projecting the positivity of the 'self' group members.

## CONCLUSION

The main findings of this study identified overwhelming tags and notions labelling the community as dependant, traditional and left behind. The 'self' group member on the contrary was portrayed in a positive light, and as such, the ideology manifested in the news reports analysed tended to align 'self' versus the 'other' to favour the former more than the latter.

The Star, being one of the most read English dailies in Malaysia, possesses the ability to structure, shape and change the ideology about the community presented to the mainstream public. In addition, a majority of the dominant communities do not possess first-hand knowledge about the *Orang Asli* community and depend on the media to get to know them. Thus, the media faces no competitors in terms of communicating about the ethnic group to the general public. Presenting the *Orang Asli* in an unfavourable manner might influence the minds of the readers to stereotype the community the same way it has been stereotyped in the media. More studies need to be undertaken to contest the stereotypical projection of the indigenous community in media, especially the *Orang Asli* community. This study strongly advocates for the equivalent depiction in the media, as McCausland (2004) mentions, newspapers are deemed to be impartial and unbiased in reporting events and news to the mainstream people.

## LIMITATIONS AND FORWARD STUDY

The tokens selected as the tenets of analysis are the relational, material, verbal and mental processes under transitivity structures. One important aspect that this study neglects, owing to



factors of time, is the integration of other systematic functional linguistics tenets such as grammar of modality as part of analysis. This aspect can be thoroughly investigated to expose the issue of representation in future research. Besides, future research may focus on analysing the same subject (*Orang Asli* community) by using the same methodology but selecting a different news institution or agency or by adopting a comparative study of different news agencies.

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The first author handled data collection and preliminary writings whilst the second author assisted in data analysis verifications and proofing.



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