

Power Distance and Collectivism in Political News Discourse: A Qualitative Analysis of Malaysian Newspapers through Hofstede's Cultural Dimension

Nurateela Atasya Roziky Effendy., Sharifah Nadia Syed Nasharudin*

Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how Hofstede's two cultural dimensions of Power Distance and Collectivism are represented through linguistic features and framing devices used in political news articles in Malaysian English-language newspapers. The study is informed by Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory and Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework for Analysing Discourses. The specific research aims are to examine the linguistic features that represent Power Distance and Collectivism values and to explore how framing devices are used to represent these two cultural dimensions in Malaysian English-language political news articles. A qualitative research design was used to obtain the required data through the process of purposive sampling of five political news articles published in the Malaysian English newspapers between January 2024 and June 2025. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was employed as the method of content analysis. The CDA was based on two theoretical notions: linguistic features and framing practices. Linguistic features include honorifics, modality, pronouns, and the passive voice. While framing practices include headlines, themes, sources, and perspectives. A theoretical coding system was used to organise and analyse the data. The results are expected to contribute to a better understanding of how culture influences media discourse in Malaysia and contribute to a better understanding of cultural linguistics in media communication. This study is important to media studies, sociolinguistics, intercultural communication, and journalists who want to incorporate culture into their work.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Power Distance, Collectivism, Malaysian Political News, GE15 Coverage

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

Malaysia is generally known as a country with a high Power Distance score and a low Individualism score within Hofstede's cultural framework. It is observed that Malaysians place strong emphasis on respect for hierarchy and authority figures, while placing less emphasis on individual interests than on collective harmony (Tehseen et al., 2021). It is also found that Power Distance remains persistently high across ethnic groups, which shows that hierarchical social structures are generally accepted (Lim, 2001). Similarly, cooperative communication based on beliefs held by collectivist individuals and hierarchical expectations in Malaysian organisations was said to promote social cohesion, as reported by Bakar (2017).

Political news reporting is one important avenue through which societal norms and values are expressed within the Malaysian media landscape. Defiance or respect for authority is commonly promoted. Public perceptions of political power and social order are also shaped by this reporting. As a country with a high Power Distance score, Malaysia's socio-political context places considerable emphasis on respect for hierarchical authority.

This is largely evident when it comes to the portrayal of political leaders and institutions in the mainstream media. For example, media articles tend to emphasise political leaders' decisions, display government interventions as legitimate, and even employ rhetoric that legitimises political elite positions. Further, the collectivistic nature of Malaysian society tends to encourage media discourses that emphasise harmony, stability, and social order over individual protests. A shared national identity is frequently constructed by political news through inclusive language such as "we," "our nation," or "Malaysians," thereby stressing collective responsibility and harmony, even during periods of political conflict or crisis (Bakar, 2017).

In the past few years, the significance of the role of political news reporting in Malaysia can be seen, particularly during the period of major political developments such as the change of government in the country in 2018, followed by the subsequent period of political unrest (Rosli & Sani, 2021). Media outlets are accused of being close to the political elite, and there are also issues related to biased reporting, selective framing, and a lack of representation from public sources. Research has found that mainstream newspapers in Malaysia tend to give more prominence to the views of the government, while simultaneously playing down dissident views or alternative views. This is a news environment where hierarchical authority is never challenged. This is due to the Power Distance culture of Malaysia, where it is a social norm to show respect to political leaders, and group harmony is given more importance than individual criticism.

Moreover, political news in Malaysia has been identified to have a major role in promoting the unity of the nation or social cohesion especially when political conflict is involved (Yi et al., 2024). Although social cohesion is a positive outcome, it is worth mentioning that social cohesion may also mask political inequalities or repress the voices of marginalised groups by giving priority to social cohesion over political discourse. This leads to questions about the role of language and framing practices in political news in normalising hierarchical power relations and collective ideologies.

Despite the recognition of Malaysia's large Power Distance and Collectivist culture, there is a lack of qualitative studies on the role of these dimensions in political news discourse. The majority of the existing literature has been on consumer behaviour, organisational culture, or cross-cultural studies, employing quantitative approaches or survey models (Lim, 2001; Bakar, 2017; Tehseen et al., 2021). While it is recognised that Malaysian newspapers are a tool used to perpetuate government and elite power, little work has been done to analyse the linguistic and framing strategies used. Most studies have been done on media ideology in general, or have used a quantitative approach, rather than a qualitative approach that examines language use and framing.

Specifically, two main research gaps are evident: (1) Linguistic aspects of Power Distance and Collectivism, such as honorific usage, modal verbs, pronoun choice, and passive structures, in political news discourse have not been analysed in detail using CDA frameworks. (2) Framing strategies, including headlines, source attribution, thematic focus, and narrative angle, that reflect hierarchical or group-oriented values are under-examined in Malaysian English-language media.

Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by investigating how Power Distance and Collectivism are reflected in linguistic choices and framing strategies in Malaysian English-language political news coverage of GE15. It argues that Power Distance is more overtly constructed than Collectivism, and that routine journalistic practices contribute to the naturalisation of hierarchical authority in political discourse. This study is guided by the following questions:

1. To identify the linguistic features that reflect Power Distance and Collectivist values in Malaysian political news articles.
2. To examine the framing techniques used in Malaysian political news articles that convey Power Distance and Collectivist cultural dimensions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory

The theory focuses on the cultural dimensions of Power Distance and Collectivism. These dimensions help to conceptualise how societies accept hierarchical structures and emphasise group harmony and loyalty (Country Comparison Tool, n.d.).

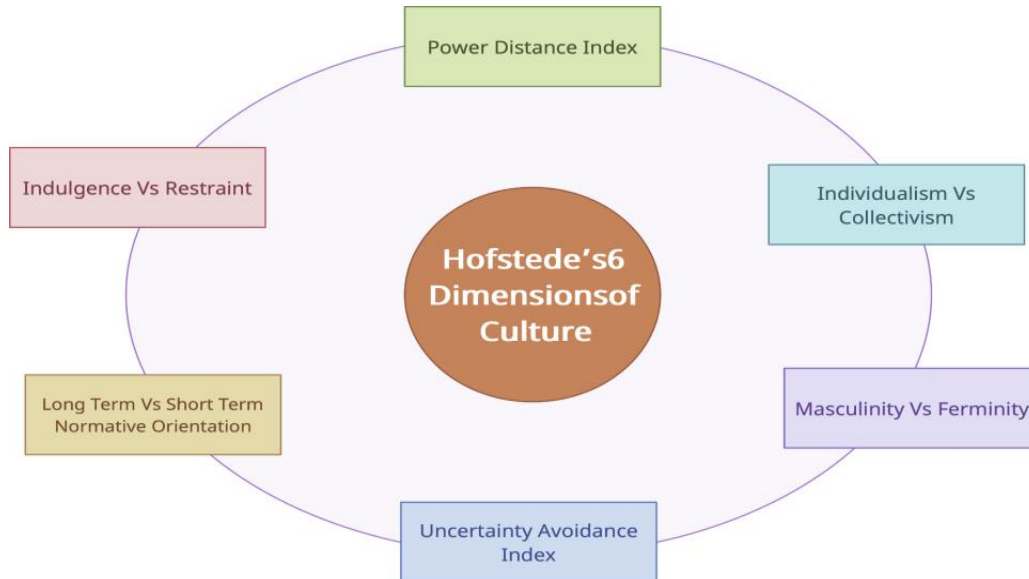


Figure 1: Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Model

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as theorised by Fairclough and van Dijk. This assists in viewing language as a form of social practice embedded within power relations and ideological structures (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998).

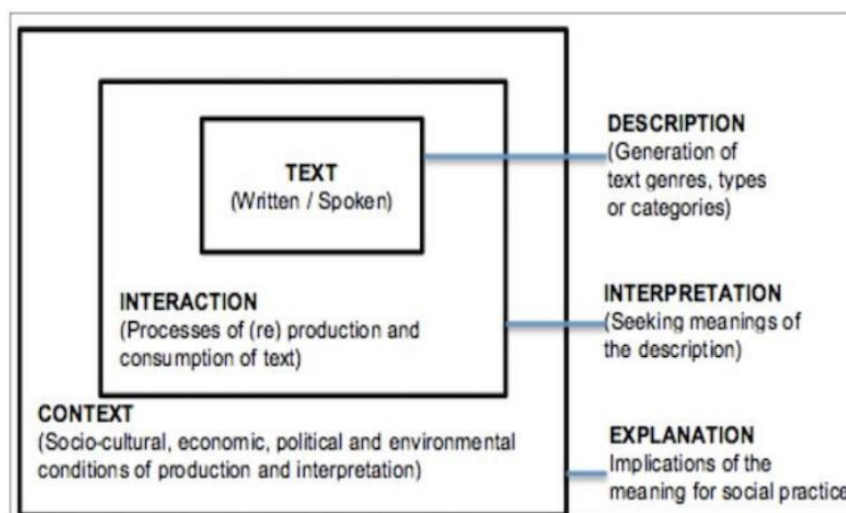


Figure 2: Fairclough's (1992) Three-Dimensional Framework

Relevant Past Studies on Malaysian Media

In Malaysia, various studies have focused on the exploration of media discourse and framing. A study by Rosli & Sani (2021) examines how mainstream media like "The Star" and "New Straits Times" focused more on

framing government-aligned party messages with more support for the ruling elite, as reflected in the newspaper headlines, during the GE-14 campaign. Yet another study by Yi et al. (2024) compares the framing of mainstream media and independent media following the GE15 campaign in Malaysia. In this case, it was observed that moral and responsibility framing were dominant in mainstream media as well as independent media. Conflict framing was an exception: it was less in mainstream media following the campaign. Moreover, another important aspect is that the study by Ahmad et al. (2021) analysed the framing pattern of the 1MDB scandal from mainstream newspaper articles, and it was identified that the framing pattern by political actors was largely affected by media institutions of the authority, as well as by domestic narratives that were seen through the dismissal of opinions presented by the minority. This creates discussions that favour authority and moral legitimisation.

On the topic of media discourse in Malaysia, other Malaysian CDA studies provide a useful background. For example, Jamal (2024) examined how the Orang Asli are portrayed. His work showed that dominant institutional discursive strategies sidelined indigenous voices and reinforced elite power structures. Correspondingly, Murugaiah et al. (2020) looked into how language is used in coverage of mental illness. They showed that the choices of words and structure revealed societal stigma and ideological views in mainstream online news. In terms of political news and ideology, Asad et al. (2021) in their study compared ideological dispositions in online news about Pakatan Harapan in "Malaysiakini" and "New Straits Times" using transitivity analysis. "New Straits Times" shifted to normative support of the ruling party while Malaysiakini remained neutral. Rajandran and Lee (2023) explore elite political discourse in Malaysian elections, demonstrating how race and religion are used to construct legitimacy through framing and elite dominance. In terms of cultural values and language, Tehseen et al. (2021) compared the cultural values of entrepreneurs from different ethnic groups in Malaysia. The authors revealed that collectivism and low power distance are linked to a positive relationship with innovativeness. Although it doesn't focus on the media, this study highlights how cultural values show up differently across Malaysia.

Despite the established literature on media framing, identity politics, and representation, there is a scarcity of literature that specifically links Power Distance and Collectivism to linguistic aspects such as language and framing in Malaysian political news media. Most studies have been based on the macro-level organisational or cultural level, without specifically examining the language features of political media reporting. There is a lack of qualitative CDA-based studies that systematically explore how Malaysian newspapers' language choices, like honorifics, modality, and pronouns, along with framing methods like headlines, source attribution, and thematic emphasis, reflect Power Distance and Collectivism values.

This gap shows the need for the current study to carry out a focused, interpretive analysis of political news discourse in Malaysian English-language media. It will link textual elements to cultural elements. It will offer both results and methodology for a field that has not been explored extensively.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research is based on a qualitative research approach, grounded on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodological framework, to examine the construction of Power Distance and Collectivism cultural values by Malaysian newspapers' political reporting. CDA is pertinent because it is "a critical study of language as a social practice in which social practices are seen as shaped by, and so embedded in, power relations". The methodological approach is interpretive, which allows the researcher to examine the construction of meaning in the selected newspapers' political reporting. The study is based on the qualitative research approach, which values depth over breadth, prioritising meaning-making over quantification.

Research Sample

The sample includes political news articles from both mainstream and non-mainstream Malaysian English newspapers, such as News Straits Times (NST), The Borneo Post, and Free Malaysia Today (FMT), to include a diverse and balanced range of the Malaysian media scene. The news articles have been selected for their

popularity and political nature. Mainstream news sources such as New Straits Times are chosen as they are known to have strong institutional affiliations and influence mainstream political discourse in the country. The views of the Malaysian government are usually represented by mainstream news sources, and thus, it is important to study how hierarchical cultural values are represented in political news articles. On the other hand, non-mainstream media such as FMT provide a range of ideological perspectives. Although The Borneo Post, a major media outlet in East Malaysia, provides alternative perspectives.

In selecting the articles, a purposive sampling method was applied to select 18 articles from November 2022 to April 2023. The period was selected because it coincides with the 15th general election of Malaysia (GE-15) and the government formation period. This period is extremely significant in the political history of Malaysia. This is because GE15 resulted in high levels of political uncertainty, media attention, and various narratives across different outlets. In addition, the discourse of Malaysian election coverage is rich, especially during election seasons, when news actors use more strategies of persuading through linguistics and framing to create political legitimacy. Therefore, the sampling of the articles from this period will provide more data on the linguistic level that can be analysed, given the increased occurrences of the Power Distance and Collectivism values. Purposive sampling was used because it is the best method for obtaining the most appropriate texts relevant to the Power Distance and Collectivism values.

Data Collection

Data collection methods rely on manually gathered news articles, which are then indexed in NVivo. The primary data collection method employed is a coding scheme developed based on theoretical categories of linguistic features. The data collection checklist includes a range of factors such as modal verbs, use of honorifics, pronoun use, use of passive voice, headline use, source use, thematic orientation, and use of narrative structures. The tool is meant for manual coding, with each element defined and examples provided for consistency.

Articles were obtained from the online archives of Malaysian English-language newspapers. The keywords used to filter the search results are "Prime Minister," "government," "election," "leadership," "policy," or "GE15". Only the articles that specifically talk about political actors, government, political statements, or political issues are considered. A screening procedure is used for each article gathered to assess its appropriateness for use. Articles that are opinion pieces, editorials, letters to the editor, or commentaries are filtered out since they are not relevant to the study's focus, which centres on straight news reporting.

After ensuring that all articles meet the criteria, the articles were downloaded and arranged systematically. The information of each article, including the title, date of publication, URL, and brief description, was documented. After the articles are stored and recorded, they are read at least twice to get familiar with the content. The first reading was centred on understanding the context and key political events, while the second reading focused on recording initial observations of linguistic patterns and collectivist expressions. Next, the articles are imported into NVivo for systematic coding. Coding involves descriptive categorisation of surface-level features before moving on to more interpretive coding, with the goal of discovering how hierarchical values and group ideologies are reproduced. Coding is an iterative process in which, after initial coding, the code scheme is refined and recoded.

Data Analysis

The study employed qualitative content analysis as an overall method to examine the emergence of Power Distance and Collectivist values in political news discourse in Malaysia. Content analysis has been conceptualised as "a systematic study of the interpretation of verbal and/or textual communication to discover patterns, meanings, and relationships within messages". The current method is particularly useful in addressing the current research problems since it allows researchers to analyse the content, both implicit and revealed, within newspaper discourse, emphasising its relation to linguistic and presentational elements.

The analysis process has two interconnected steps. First, descriptive coding was carried out by applying a specific checklist on the basis of the coding scheme used in this study. Each article was then analysed for

linguistic features (e.g., honorifics, modality, pronouns, and passive voice) and framing techniques (e.g., headline design, thematic selection, source selection, and narrative slants). Second, an interpretive analysis was conducted using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), in which patterns were analysed to reveal underlying cultural values associated with Hofstede's dimensions. Themes are inductively derived with room for flexibility to allow for the emergence of new insights.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses findings in relation to the two research questions that explore the representation of Power Distance and Collectivism in Malaysian political news discourse during the 15th General Election (GE15). Utilising qualitative content analysis with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this section will interpret the linguistic features and framing strategies that have been identified from the selected English-language newspaper articles. The results are divided into two major sections: linguistic features and framing strategies, and finally, a summary section where the key findings are synthesised.

RO1: To identify the linguistic features that reflect Power Distance and Collectivist values in Malaysian political news articles.

The analysis focuses on five linguistic features: Honorifics and Titles (L1), Formal Lexis (L2), Passive Constructions (L3), Inclusive Pronouns (L4), and Shared Values Lexics (L5). The findings are grouped into thematic patterns that reflect general cultural orientations.

Emphasis on Hierarchical Authority through Honorifics, Titles, and Institutional References

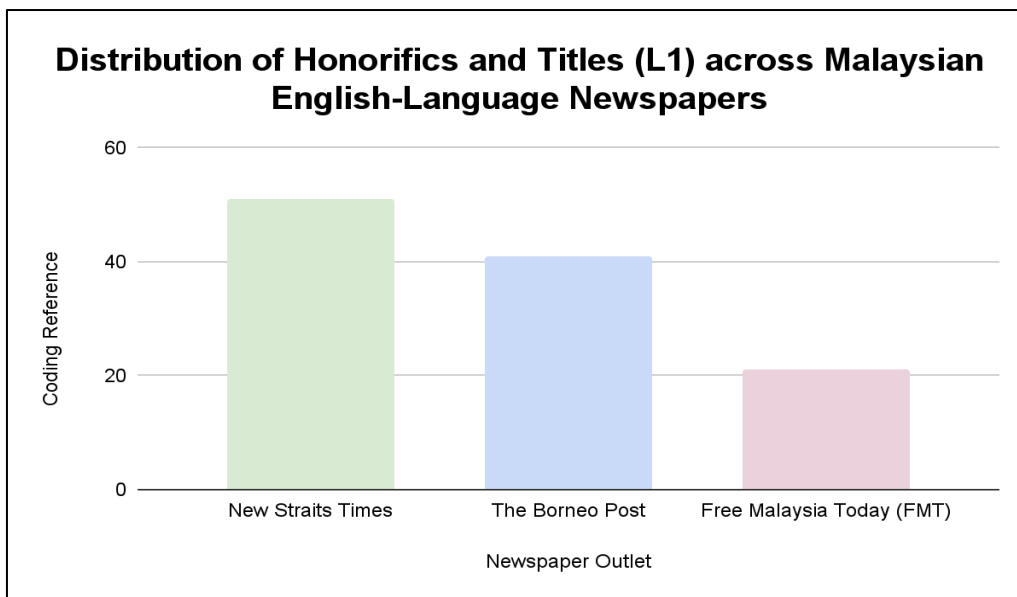


Figure 3: Distribution of Honorifics and Titles (L1) across Malaysian-English language Newspaper

One of the most notable linguistic features that can be observed in the analysis is the significant use of honorifics, titles, and institutions. This linguistic feature is classified as Honorifics and Titles under L1. In terms of frequency, this feature recorded a high total of 113 coding references. Words such as prime minister, Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Datuk Seri, Tan Sri, Menteri Besar, Member of Parliament (MP), and Minister of Finance are examples of some of the frequently used words in the news articles. These are normally included even if the context of the information is already established, which means that the theme of formal status and/or rank is emphasised at all times. The frequency of L1 in the publications indicates that NST had the highest frequency, followed by The Borneo Post, and then FMT, which had the lowest frequency. This implies that mainstream publications emphasise hierarchical representation more than others. From a cultural perspective, it is evident that Malaysian society is highly oriented towards Power Distance, where linguistic representations of authority figures are emphasised in line with cultural norms of respect for these figures.

Formal Lexis as a Marker of Institutional Legitimacy and Authority

Table 1: Examples of Formal Lexis Identified under L2

Excerpt	Interpretation
<p>The <u>campaigning period</u> saw the <u>emergence</u> of racially insensitive social media postings, besides the colourful yet fierce competition for <u>parliamentary seats</u>. (NST_Dec2022)</p>	<p>The use of abstract and formal terminology frames political events as institutional processes rather than individual actions. This linguistic distancing reinforces Power Distance by positioning political competition within formal political structures.</p>
<p>Last week, Terengganu Barisan Nasional <u>urged the authorities</u> to immediately investigate the PAS state government over <u>allegations</u> that the latter distributed money to voters during the <u>GE15 campaign period</u>. (BP_Jan2023)</p>	<p>Legalistic and bureaucratic vocabulary constructs authority as residing with formal institutions. This reinforces Power Distance by emphasising hierarchical governance and institutional control over political conduct.</p>
<p>It ended days later, when the Yang diPertuan Agong <u>declared</u> Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim the nation's 10th prime minister on Nov 24, ending his two decade wait to hold <u>Putrajaya's top post</u>. (NST__Dec2022)</p>	<p>References to official titles and ceremonial authority foreground hierarchical power relations. Political legitimacy is presented as institutionally conferred, reflecting a high Power Distance orientation.</p>

As illustrated in table 1, Formal Lexis (L2) was found to be the most prevalent linguistic feature, with approximately 202 coding references to this feature within the dataset. Although individual words may not be repeated, there is a consistent formal, bureaucratic, and legalistic tone within the excerpts, with words such as "undesirable", "public statements", "defamation", "allegations", "approved", and references to "GE15". These lexical features cumulatively create a discourse that presents political events as procedural, regulated, and institutionally ratified. NST had the most instances of L2 references, followed by The Borneo Post and FMT. This trend further confirms the finding that mainstream media use more formal linguistic variants in reporting political issues. In relation to cultural interpretation, the prevalence of formal lexis again reinforces Power Distance, where power is institutionalised in formal systems and formalised procedures. This formalised linguistic distance further locates political decision-making in the realm of institutions and not in the public sphere.

Backgrounding of Political Agency through Passive Constructions

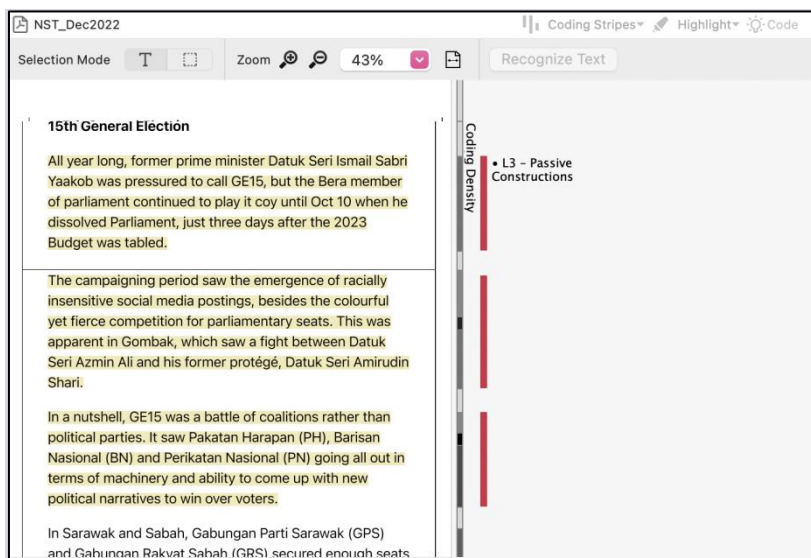


Figure 4: NVivo Coding Stripes Showing Passive Constructions

Passive Constructions (L3) recorded a total of 55 coding references, with relatively even distribution across NST, The Borneo Post, and FMT. Typical constructions include "were banned", "was pressured", "was approved", and "had been announced". The consistent grammatical pattern serves a clear discursive function. This construction of passive voice often conceals or backgrounds the responsible agents of political decisions, moving focus away from individuals towards processes and outcomes. This linguistic tactic resonates with Power Distance, as it removes personal accountability and discourages any critical evaluation of individuals in power. Decisions are presented as institutional actions rather than as inherently political decisions.

Limited Linguistic Construction of Collectivism through Inclusive and Shared Values Lexis

	A : News Article:News- paper = NST	B : News Article:News- paper = FMT	C : News Article:News- paper = BP
1 : L4 - In...	8	1	5
2 : L5 - S...	14	1	0

Figure 5: Comparison of Inclusive Pronoun (L4) and Shared Values Lexis (L5) across Outlets

In contrast to Power Distance-related features, linguistic features associated with collectivism were comparatively limited across the dataset. L4 (Inclusive Pronouns) had 14 coding references, and L5 (Shared Values Lexis) had 15 references overall in all articles, with very limited presence in FMT and no presence in The Borneo Post. Examples of inclusive language include terms such as "voters", "young voters", and "our nation", which occasionally position the public as a collective entity. Shared values lexis, such as "unity government", "work together", and "coalitions", appeared primarily in NST articles and were largely absent from FMT and The Borneo Post. The presence of these lexis in the articles indicates that Collectivism is present but not emphasised linguistically. Collective identity and shared goals are usually selectively invoked, especially after elections, when building coalitions, rather than being a prominent strategy in political reporting.

RO2: To examine the framing techniques used in Malaysian political news articles that convey Power Distance and Collectivist cultural dimensions.

This section will discuss the findings on the framing strategies used in this study, namely: headline construction (F1), thematic focus (F2), source attribution (F3), and narrative angle (F4). The findings indicate that although some of these framing strategies are used more than others, they collectively reinforce hierarchical authority, elite dominance, and collective political consciousness in Malaysia during GE-15.

Election-Centred Institutional Framing

Thematic focus was the most dominant of the three framing strategies across all three news sources, accounting for 168 coding references (NST = 87, The Borneo Post = 61, FMT = 20). The findings of the analysis suggest a strong emphasis on the institutional and procedural aspects of the 15th General Election, such as Parliament, Dewan Rakyat, forming the government, and election outcomes. From the articles, it is apparent that political events are framed in an institutional manner rather than an experiential manner. For instance, the language used in referring to a hung parliament, coalition building, counting seats, and the results of polls serves to emphasise the role played by political institutions. This language choice is an exemplification

of one aspect of Power Distance, where the idea that political causes and effects are mediated by institutional actors and their negotiations is presented as a given. Moreover, the repeated emphasis on the significance of GE-15 as an event that "captured the nation's attention" reflects aspects of the dimension of Collectivism. By emphasising the shared experience of the national population with respect to the election, the discourse also emphasises the dimension of political participation as a collective concern.

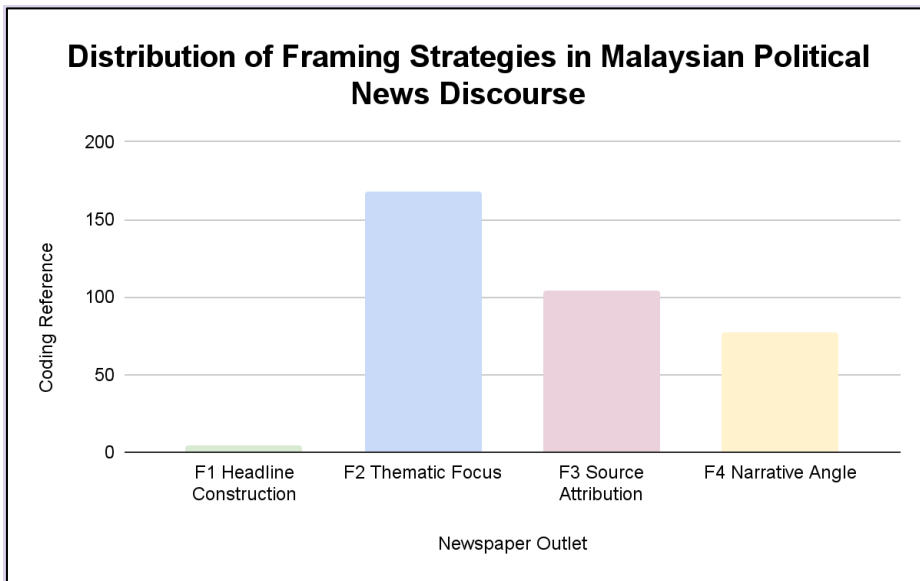


Figure 6: Distribution of Framing Strategies in Malaysian Political News Discourse

Elite-Centred Source Attribution

The results for source attribution (F3) indicate a significant dominance of elite voices in the political news discourse in Malaysia. In total, 104 coding references were found under this category, with 40 references from NST, 43 from The Borneo Post, and 21 from FMT. It can be seen that the majority of quotations and statements from these sources are from ministers, party presidents, secretaries-general, and other political elites. For instance, quotes from the country's cabinet ministers, political party leaders, and government representatives are employed to legitimise the interpretation of the outcome of GE-15, the electoral processes, and policy-making. The voices of the people or non-elite voices are not included. This particular framing strategy is very indicative of Power Distance because it maintains and reinforces a set of communication patterns that are hierarchical in nature. Authority figures are portrayed as the primary knowledge holders. Table 2 below summarises how each narrative perspective embodies Power Distance and Collectivism through specific discursive functions.

Table 2: Framing Strategies and Discursive Functions

Framing Strategy	Dominant pattern	Cultural Dimension Reflected	Interpretive Theme
F1 (Headline Construction)	Minimal evaluative framing	Power Distance (implicit)	Elite-centred legitimacy
F2 (Thematic Focus)	Emphasis on GE15, Parliament, institutions	Power Distance & Collectivism	Institutionalised national politics
F3 (Source Attribution)	Heavy reliance on elite voices	Power Distance	Hierarchical authority
F4 (Narrative Angle)	Crisis followed by institutional resolution	Power Distance & Collectivism	Stability through elite governance

Narratives of Stability, Crisis, and Collective Outcome

The narrative angle (F4), which was moderately prominent, comprised a total of 77 coding references (NST = 41, The Borneo Post = 21, FMT = 15). The dominant narratives established across the media outlets position GE15 as an occasion of political turbulence, uncertainty, and flux, with many stressing the crisis aspect, such as the hung parliament, along with the eventual resolution via institutional mechanisms. The instability aspect is also stressed by many narratives with references to infighting within the political sphere, historic electoral defeats, or the rise of the 'giant killers,' but with the continuity aspect being stressed via references to constitutional mechanisms and the formal declaration of leaders. For instance, while highlighting uncertainty, the narratives ultimately converge on institutional power, such as the appointment of the prime minister or the establishment of a unity government. The narrative perspectives on these lines indicate Power Distance in reiterating the validity of top-down political problem-solving, in which order is maintained through elite-level political decision-making. However, the mention of unity governments, coalition formation, and national implications indicates Collectivism in perceiving political outcomes as collective responsibilities.

DISCUSSION

The first objective of this study is to examine the way Power Distance and Collectivism are manifested in the linguistic characteristics of Malaysian political news articles. The findings have revealed that Power Distance is embedded in the linguistic creation of Malaysian political news, particularly in terms of honorification and title usage, formal vocabulary, and passive voice. These findings are consistent with earlier studies in Malaysian media discourse, which have highlighted the ways in which language is used to legitimate power and perpetuate elite dominance in news discourse.

The repeated use of honorifics and titles (L1) such as “Datuk Seri,” “Prime Minister,” “Yang di-Pertuan Agong,” etc., points to a discursive focus on power, status, and authority. This is in line with Rosli and Sani (2021) in their study on Malaysian mainstream English language newspaper discourses, such as NST and The Star, which showed a clear favouritism towards government-endorsing individuals through deferential linguistic practices. Such discursive practices have been noted in previous studies by Asad et al. (2021) on Malaysian newspaper discourses, where they found NST to have exhibited a paradigmatic shift towards supporting the ruling elites through linguistic practices, thereby promoting institutional authority. In this study, it can be noted that the repeated use of honorifics in newspaper discourses, particularly in NST, points to linguistic practices being an integral part of Malaysian culture, as can be inferred from Hofstede’s study on Power Distance in Malaysian culture, which points to a society accepting and promoting power hierarchies and authority figures. The dominance of formal lexis (L2) also supports such an argument. L2 was found to be the most dominant linguistic feature in the current study. This again reinforces the argument of a bureaucratic and procedural tone in reporting politics. The dominance of legalistic and administrative lexis constructs politics as an institutional process regulated by rules, regulations, and decisions. This again resonates with the findings of Ahmad et al. (2021) in their study on reporting politics on 1MDB. They found that governmental narratives were naturalised by using formal and official language, while other voices were ostracised. From a CDA point of view, such linguistic practices naturalise hierarchical power relations by constructing political power as orderly, legitimate, and unquestionable. Moreover, the frequent use of passive structures (L3) also played a role in the creation of hierarchical representations by downplaying agency. This result supports the study by Jamal (2024) on the representation of the Orang Asli, where the downplaying of agency in institutional discourses was used by the elite to maintain their dominance. In the context of GE-15 news reporting, passive structures enable political outcomes and decisions to be represented as neutral processes, rather than as actions performed by agents, thus further legitimising top-down governance. On the other hand, the presence of Collectivism was not very prominent through the use of inclusive pronouns (L4) and shared value lexis (L5), although the terms ‘voters’, ‘public’, and ‘unity government’ were used on occasion. This indicates that collectivism does not feature very prominently in terms of linguistic markers used in political news discourse. The above finding partially differs from the findings of Hofstede regarding Malaysia as a collectivist country, indicating that collectivist values are probably present at a cultural or ideological level but not emphasised very much in terms of news discourse.

The second objective of this study was to explore the framing of Power Distance and Collectivism. Once again, the results show that Power Distance is more salient in framing than Collectivism. Thematic focus, source use, and narrative approaches all emphasise political power, elite actors, and processes in this regard. In contrast, collectivist or citizen-oriented framing is less prominent.

Thematic focus (F2), which overwhelmingly centred on institutional events such as GE15, the Dewan Rakyat, coalition-building, and the formation of the government, also supports the notion of hierarchical power relations by consistently framing the political sphere in terms of these structures. Such an emphasis on the formal structures of the political sphere is also consistent with the research by Yi et al. (2024), which indicated that the mainstream media has moved to depoliticise the framing of conflicts in the country by adopting more stabilising narrative forms after GE15. The mainstream media's framing of the political sphere in relation to these structures serves to emphasise the hierarchical nature of power relations within it. Furthermore, source attribution (F3) also reinforces hierarchical framing by relying on dominant voices of elites such as ministers, party leaders, and officials. The voices of ordinary citizens and civil society groups were completely lacking. This is similar to the findings of Ahmad et al. (2021) and Asad et al. (2021), where government/political elites were preferred as voices of authority. This not only reinforces voices of elites but also silences the voices of ordinary citizens, thus promoting Power Distance through framing. The consistent use of this framing strategy across NST, The Borneo Post, and FMT reinforces the idea that this is a systemic journalistic practice rather than a specific media house's bias. Next, the narrative angle (F4) was also evident in the way it constructed political narratives around notions of stability, crisis, and continuity, especially in the narratives around the hung parliament and unity government. This also reinforces hierarchical authority through the need for order and leadership in unstable situations. Although evaluative discourse was evident, especially in FMT, it was largely contained within an elite discourse rather than being structurally transformative. This is in line with the analysis by Rajandran and Lee (2023) on the nature of elite political discourse and the way legitimacy is constructed through elite dominance and control during electoral periods. The way GE-15 results were constructed as challenges to be addressed through elite consensus rather than public discussion reinforces hierarchical decision-making. On the other hand, there is minimal evidence of Power Distance or Collectivism in headline construction (F1), which can be explained by the restrained, information-based nature of political headlines in this time period. This would suggest that framing effects for this particular dataset are more strongly realised with respect to thematic emphasis and sourcing rather than with respect to overall rhetorical emphasis.

Overall, the framing strategies used, as evidenced by this particular study, seem more conducive to the maintenance of institutional legitimacy and elite authority rather than to the promotion of social unity and identity. Collectivist value orientations, for example, occasionally emerge as a frame with respect to references to unitary governments, but this is as a secondary frame to the hierarchical representation of power.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has several important implications for various stakeholders in the production, interpretation, and regulation of political news discourse in Malaysia. More specifically, the present study is relevant to individual news consumers, Malaysian society as a whole, as well as various institutional stakeholders such as media institutions, education sectors, and government agencies. In revealing how Power Distance and Collectivism are discursively created through linguistic means, this study has shown how cultural values are not just reflected in, but actually reproduced by, political news discourse.

Future studies could further expand the scope and depth of this study by including Malay-language newspapers, alternative forms of media, and/or social media discourses to have a more comprehensive view of political discourse in Malaysia. Furthermore, by looking at both English and Malay-language media, it would be possible to see if there are differences in the expressions of cultural values in these two different forms of media. Furthermore, it would be helpful for future studies to have a longitudinal or comparative focus by looking at political discourses over a number of election cycles or crises to see if there is continuity in the preponderance of Power Distance discourse. In addition, it would be helpful to have a larger sample size or to use a different methodology, such as interviewing journalists to gain more insight into the creation or reception of such discourses.

CONCLUSION

On the whole, this study demonstrates that Malaysian political news discourse during GE-15 prominently constructs Power Distance through hierarchical linguistic choices and elite-centric framing strategies, while Collectivist values are minimally represented linguistically. These discursive patterns normalise hierarchical authority and elite dominance. Through the application of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, the analysis reveals the manner in which the language choices and strategies in the political news reporting reinforce the notion of social hierarchy and collective ideologies. The qualitative method, especially the application of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, enables a better understanding of the manner in which culture is constructed in the media discourse, thus contributing to the theoretical discussion in the fields of cultural studies and media language, especially in the Southeast Asian region.

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Conflict Of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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