

MH370 and MH17 Airplane Catastrophes: Reporting Verbs in Malaysian Online Newspaper Articles

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ABSTRACT

Reporting verbs are important in news articles on controversial events or issues because of the need to present the attitude of news sources towards the topic or even to indicate the journalist's attitudes towards information cited in the articles. The study investigated the use of reporting verbs in news articles on MH370 and MH17 airplane catastrophes in online English newspapers published in Malaysia. A total of 80 news articles on MH370 and MH17 from two online English-language, New Straits Time and The Star, were analysed for the author's stance and writer's stance using Thompson and Ye's (1991) framework on reporting verbs. The analysis identified 931 instances of reporting verbs (91.75%, author's stance; 8.25%, writer's stance). For the author's stance, 91.75% of the articles on MH370 and MH17 were reported positively using mainly the verb "said", and the various news sources were stated clearly. New Straits Time reported MH17 more positively than MH370 but the pattern was the opposite for The Star. The neutral author's stance was hardly used. There was no negative author's stance for MH370 articles in both newspapers. As for the writer's stance, counter-factive (42.51%) and non-factive (47.90%) reporting dominated. Articles on the disappearance of MH370 had more non-factive reporting verbs than counter-factive reporting verbs in both newspapers but for the MH17 articles, New Straits Time leaned towards a counter-factive writer's stance, suggesting more critical reporting. The study showed that the articles on airplane catastrophes reflected safe reporting, often affirming the validity of statements from news sources.

Keywords: Airplane catastrophe, MH370, MH17, online newspapers, reporting verbs

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INTRODUCTION

The newspaper serves as an important tool for shaping thoughts, providing a platform for public debates and forum, and a channel to inform the public of wrongdoings (Martin & Copeland, 2003). Generally, news found in the newspapers consist of local and international news, business and entertainment, sports, politics and health. Sensational news includes reports on tragedies, catastrophes, crises and disasters that occur locally and internationally. In reporting tragedies, journalists inform readers of the current and updated version of news and in the process influence how readers think and feel about the event or issue. The act of reporting requires journalists to use language to achieve intended meanings.

A linguistic element that can be skilfully used to convey intended meanings is verbs or action words, in particular reporting verbs. Reporting verbs do not only describe actions but they can be used to convey the journalist's perspective without being obvious about it. Reporting verbs refers to lexical devices which allow writers to present their stance, build a connection with readers (Hyland, 2005), and express evaluations towards what is being reported (Thompson & Ye, 1991). Reporting verbs can be used to either report on the writer's own ideas or to represent the writer's take towards the claims of others (Bloch, 2010). Although there are other reporting signals such as reporting nouns and reporting adjectives, reporting verbs have been found to be the most important feature of a reporting clause and they occur in most reporting sentences (Nkansah, 2013). Reporting verbs occur in up to 90% of sentences in news articles (Bergler, 1992).

Research on the use of reporting verbs have been largely in academic and research writing because of the need for citations (Hyland, 2002; Jafarigohar & Mohammadkhani, 2015; Loan & Pramoolsook, 2015; Manan & Mohd Noor, 2014; Shaw, 1992; Swales, 1990; Thompson & Ye, 1991). In non-academic writing, reporting verbs are