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## Verbal processes in the Covid-19 news discourses: An analysis of 'aswaqpress.com' coverage on Malaysia

### *[Proses verbal dalam wacana berita Covid-19: Analisis portal 'aswaqpress.com' berkaitan Malaysia]*

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#### Keywords:

Covid-19; Arabic Online News; Critical Discourse Analysis; Corpus Linguistics; Verbal Process

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#### ABSTRACT

December 2019 marked the emergence of a deadly virus known as Covid-19. Since then, we have been battling the virus, which has infected more than 250 million people and killed 4.5 million globally. The pandemic has become the headline of almost every media outlet, local and international news agency. Hence, this article aims to examine the Arabic online news discourse of the event by focusing on the verbal processes strategically utilised in reporting the pandemic in Malaysia. This study's data consists of Modern Standard Arabic online news published by *Aswaq* (*aswaqpress.com*) news portal between January and July 2021. *Aswaq* provides Arabic news and information on Malaysia to the Arab world. Hence, the information provided by the portal is vital in portraying Malaysia to Arab audiences, particularly in framing the way Malaysia deals with the Covid-19. The study employs corpus linguistics analytical tools using corpus software *AntConc 3.5.8 (2019)*. Then, the quantitative result will be analysed using a qualitative approach based on the textual-oriented Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Fairclough (1992). It is shown that *Aswaq* has strategically utilised various verbal processes to report on the word said and articulated around the pandemic. The diversity of verbal processes usage indicates different connotations that hint at different strategic approaches in reporting the news. Hence, it may lead to uncovering the outlet stance of the event. Finally, the study will present suggestions for other related studies in the future.

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#### Kata Kunci:

*Covid-19; Berita atas Talian; Analisis Wacana Kritis; Korpus Linguistik; Proses Verbal.*

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#### ABSTRAK

*Pada Disember 2019 munculnya virus yang dikenali umum sebagai Covid-19. Sejak itu, virus tersebut yang telah menjangkiti lebih dari 250 juta orang dan membunuh 4.5 juta di seluruh dunia. Ketika Covid-19 telah distiharkan sebagai pandemik, ia menjadi tajuk utama saluran media, tempatan mahupun antarabangsa. Justeru, artikel ini menganalisa wacana berita dalam talian berbahasa Arab mengenai Covid-19 di Malaysia dengan tumpuan kepada proses verbal yang digunakan secara strategik dalam laporan berita. Data kajian terdiri daripada artikel berita dalam talian yang diterbitkan oleh portal berita 'Aswaq' (*aswaqpress.com*)*

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*antara Januari dan Julai 2021. Aswaq menyampaikan berita dan maklumat dalam Bahasa Arab mengenai Malaysia ke dunia Arab. Maka, ia memberi gambaran tentang cara Malaysia menangani Covid-19. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan analisis linguistik korpus menerusi perisian korpus 'AntConc 3.5.8 (2019)'. Kemudian, hasil dapatan kuantitatif akan dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berdasarkan Analisis Wacana Kritikal (CDA) berorientasikan teks Fairclough (1992). Didapati Aswaq telah menggunakan pelbagai proses verbal secara strategik untuk melaporkan kata-kata yang telah diucapkan mengenai Covid-19. Kepelbagaian penggunaan proses verbal ini memberikan konotasi yang berbeza, selain mendedahkan pendekatan berbeza dalam melaporkan sesuatu berita.*

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## 1. Introduction

Halliday (1994), in his Functional Grammar, states that different processes within the transitivity system represent experiential meanings. Halliday's transitivity system involves six process types: material process, behavioural process, mental process, verbal process, relational process, an existential process. Thus, transitivity is a comprehensive meaning that distinguishes between verbs according to whether they have an object. Besides, transitivity is associated with a verb's quest, which relates to whether a verb can take a direct thing and how many such objects a verb can take. Hence, "transitivity is a system that construes the world of experience into a manageable set of process types" (Halliday, 1994: p. 106).

Hence, the verbal process is concerned with saying or symbolically signaling. It is intermediate between mental and material processes within Halliday's transitivity system. Thus, he argues that saying something involves a physical action that reflects mental operation. Halliday (1994, p. 140) states that "verbal processes are processes of saying" in a rather broad sense. The process of saying covers any kind of symbolic exchange. These processes can project both direct and indirect in all contexts. Two distinct clauses often realise these: the projecting clause encodes a signal source (sayer) and signaling (verbal process). The projected clauses realise what was said, and each of these clauses is analysed in its own right.

A news outlet in general strategically utilised various verbal processes to report on the word that has been said and articulated around the event reported in the news (Fairclough, 1995b). The journalist opts to use various types of verbal processes and uses his word or selects part of the spoken words which may indicate his stand to the news's event (Ismail, 2019). The diversity of verbal processes usage indicates different connotations, hinting at different strategic approaches in reporting the news (Chilton, 2005). Hence, it may lead to uncovering the journalist's attitude and subsequently the outlet stance of the event. CDA offers comprehensive analytical tools to uncover these hidden strategic approaches, which seem to be among most people as a commanding sense (Richardson, 2007).

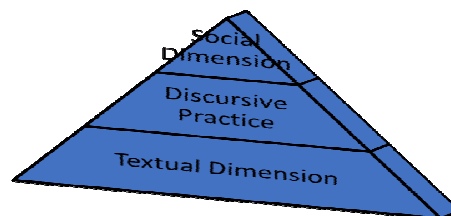
Focusing on the pandemic Covid-19 news reports, it is found that the verbal processes have been utilised by the journalists strategically and widely. The verbal processes are mainly used to report on the sayer's words related to the pandemic. The pandemic Covid-19 has become the world's major concern since the emerge of the vital virus (Ismail & Harun, 2021). Hence it has become the major headline for almost every news provider globally. Therefore, the news agencies have provided every detail about the pandemic to their readers. With the availability of the global internet network, the reader can access almost instant news and information about the pandemic via their smartphones.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Fairclough (1995a) proposes three dimensions textual analysis, as illustrated in Diagram 1. Fairclough's framework connects the micro-analysis of texts with the macro-level of discourses through the three dimensions

textual analysis of text, discursive practice, and social practice (Fairclough, 2001). Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis is being accomplished with the concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity, which link between text and discourse (Ismail, 2019). The first dimension of Fairclough's framework is discourse-as-text which focuses on the linguistic features of discourse such as choices in vocabulary (e.g., wording, metaphor), grammar (e.g., transitivity and modality), cohesion (e.g., conjunction, schemata), and text structure (e.g., episode marking, turn-taking system).

In the second layer, discourse is viewed as produced, circulated, distributed, consumed in society (Ismail, 2019). Hence, this second layer of analysis indicates that after analyzing vocabulary, grammar, and text structure of the first layer analysis, attention should be given to speech acts, coherence, and intertextuality. The third dimension meanwhile treats discourse-as-social-practice. In this final layer of analysis, the ideological effects and hegemonic processes in which discourse is seen to operate are given the main focus. Antonio Gramsci introduced the concept of Hegemony which concerns power and control. This notion of power is achieved through constructing alliances and integrating classes and groups through consent (Ismail et al., 2021) so that 'the articulation and re-articulation of orders of discourse is correspondingly one stake in hegemonic struggle' (Fairclough, 1992: 93).



**Diagram 1:** Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Analytical Framework

Examining the literature on media and power shows that previous literature (Eilders 2000; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy 1999) has reviewed the use of media to encourage political participation, which is the primary source of gaining power. Among the most significant findings in these studies is that the newspaper readership received a substantial impact on institutionalised participation. Other studies are concerned about revealing that political institutions have used the media to serve their ideas, stands, and promote their ideology and propaganda (Harun, Ismail, Daoudi, & Thompson, 2018; Harun & Ismail, 2020; Ismail & Harun, 2021; Ismail et al., 2018, Ismail, 2019; Mellor, 2011).

Specifically, in the Arab world, the Arabic media plays a vital role in the democratisation and political change in the Arab region (Daoudi & Thompson, 2018; Harun, Ismail, Ismail, Harun & Daoudi, 2018; Ismail, 2019). With the emergence of Arabic unity discourse and Arab national identity in the 1950s, further enhanced in the 1990s with Arab transnational television broadcasting, Arab media has been exploited to serve this political purpose (Lahlali, 2011). In addition, previous literature on the Arab media has highlighted the features of Arabic transnational media outlets by focusing on bias and independence of various media institutions (Harun, Ismail, Daoudi, & Thompson, 2018; Harun & Ismail, 2020; Ismail & Harun, 2021; Ismail et al., 2018; Ismail, 2019; Mellor, 2011; Miladi, 2006; Zayani & Ayish, 2006). Despite the claim of impartial, independence, objectivity, and privately-owned, these Arabic media outlets have been used as political tools and controlled by people close to the government (Ismail et al., 2018; Ismail, 2019; Harun, Ismail, Daoudi, & Thompson, 2018). Not much literature focuses on verbal processes in Arabic compared to English (Zakaria & Nordin, 2021). One of the studies highlighted that the verbal process is one of the strategic approaches in Arabic news reporting and can be used to uncover the journalist's attitude towards the sayer of the words which have been reported (Ismail, 2019).

Thus, in this article, the analysis of verbal processes, which is a part of the grammar linguistics features (first layer in Fairclough's framework), will help depict the way *Aswaq*'s reporters produced their news stories regarding selecting what to report and whom they considered newsworthy. It would also reveal which group they identified as the in-group by referring to its members as authoritative social actors and identified as the out-group using marginalisation and delegitimation. Moreover, even if news reports appear "balanced" and "objective" in the sense that they include both sides of the conflict, "it is often easy to divide voices into protagonists and antagonists" (Fairclough, 2003: p. 82). More precisely, this article will explain how *Aswaq* reported on the two sides of the leading social actors of the pandemic Covid-19, namely the government and the antagonists, with an attitude. This is done by providing a comprehensive answer to how *Aswaq* employed positive, neutral, and negative verbal processes differently.

The notion of verbal process in this article is based on the idea of Halliday's (1994) Functional Grammar, which proposes that different processes within the transitivity system represent experiential meanings. According to Halliday's view, the verbal process concerns the process of saying or symbolically signaling. Relevant to this article is a verbal process related to "any kind of symbolic exchange of meaning" (Halliday, 1994: p. 129). There are three participants in a verbal process: the Sayer, the Receiver, and the Verbiage. For example, *Aswaq* reported: "Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yasin said, we need to work together the government and the opposition to win the battle against the pandemic." (*Aswaq*, 26th July 2021). Based on Halliday's suggestion, the three participants in this news extract are:

- a) Sayer: Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yasin
- b) Verbal Process: Said
- c) Verbiage: we need ... the pandemic.

The importance of examining verbal processes in media discourse is that it shows how journalists use specific verbal processes to emphasise meanings and marginalise others and push readers' understanding of verbiage in a particular direction. Hence, verbal processes introduce what is said by the sayer and reveal the reporter's attitude toward what is said and what is being reported in the news in general (Ismail, 2019). Chen (2004, 2005) developed a comprehensive analytic tool of verbal processes. She classified verbal processes into three sub-types: positive, negative, and neutral. The examples of positive verbal processes: announced, explained, declared, and urged. While the negative verbal processes; denied, claimed, admitted, and complained. Finally, the neutral; said, told, described, and commented.

Thus, this study examines how different verbal processes of positive, negative, and neutral played out in the discourse of the *Aswaq* surrounding the pandemic Covid-19 in Malaysia. The online news published by *Aswaq* were analysed, and the three types of verbal processes, positive, negative, and neutral verbal processes used in the texts, were recorded. The analysis focuses more on the two kinds of verbal processes, the positive and negative verbal process, compared to the neutral. The neutral carries no significant indication of the author's attitude towards the speaker whose words are being reported. In contrast, both positive and negative verbal processes somehow promote in the reader a specific impression (either good or bad) on the person whose word is being reported. Hence, the positive and negative verbal process will be the center of the analysis to reveal the portal's attitudes towards the speaker of the word being reported.

Concerning this, individual instances of the positive, negative and neutral verbal process were then qualitatively analysed in detail by looking at the context of the online news article in which they occurred (Thompson, 1996). It aims to tease out what they revealed about the journalist's attitude towards those whose words were being reported. Besides, it looks at how the journalist might be trying to push the reader's perception of a text and the participants whose words are reported in that text in a certain direction. In addition, the analysis shed light on how social actors on both sides of the pandemic (the antagonist and protagonist) were reported using the verbal processes – neutral, positive, and hostile.

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

### 3. *Aswaq* Arabic News Portal

A specific corpus of data has been compiled for this study, consisting of a compilation of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) online news reports on Pandemic Covid-19 in Malaysia published by an Arabic online news portal, '*Aswaq*' ([www.aswaqpress.com](http://www.aswaqpress.com)). *Aswaq* literally means markets, and in Arab history, a market is a place for trading and where people gather to exchange news and information. *Aswaq* has operated in Kuala Lumpur since 2009 and became the first outlet to produce bilanguage news magazine English and Arabic in Malaysia. Moreover, with the advancement of the internet revolution, *Aswaq* takes the internet to launch its news portal ([www.aswaqpress.com](http://www.aswaqpress.com)) to reach global audiences.

When the pandemic Covid-19 hit the world, including Malaysia, *Aswaq* has started to report on the pandemic in Malaysia by dedicating a special section on its news portal (<https://aswaqpress.com/category/covid-19>). *Aswaq* news coverage on the pandemic in Malaysia covers all the aspects related to the pandemic. Almost all major events and phases in dealing with pandemics have been included in *Aswaq*'s comprehensive news report. The portal not only reports from the government's side but extends its coverage to carry the voice of oppositions and the general public of Malaysia. Based on the *Aswaq*'s outstanding reputation among its

audiences, this study has selected the outlets' news articles to become the data of this study. Moreover, news provided by *Aswaq* is vital in portraying Malaysia to the Arab and Muslim world, particularly in framing the way Malaysia handles the pandemic (Aswaq, 2021). Hence, it is essential to examine how *Aswaq* reported on the issue of Covid-19 in Malaysia.

The corpora data consists of 232 online news articles (129,991 words) surrounding pandemic Covid-19 in Malaysia published by *Aswaq* between January and July 2021. This time frame was selected because it represents one of the most crucial times during the pandemic, which recorded the highest struggles in balancing the threat of virus and the social and economic needs. Furthermore, several important events had happened during these dates, namely: the proclamation of emergency order on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and the implementation of Movement Control Order (MCO) version 2.0 in January 2021 and version 3.0 on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021 (Ministry of Health Malaysia KKM, 2021).

Then, the news articles were compiled and converted to electronic articles (UTH-8) to meet the corpus analysis software AntConc (Antony, 2019). Specific corpus analytical tools have been deployed: keyword, keyword in contact (KWIC), word frequency, and concordance (Baker & McEnery, 2005). The quantitative analysis results produced by the software then provide a handy insight for the analysis of verbal processes in the news texts, which mainly depend on the qualitative approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Ismail, 2019, 2021).

#### 4. Verbal Processes in Aswaq News

The analysis found that *Aswaq* strategically utilised the verbal processes to report on the pandemic in Malaysia. Although the data indicated that there is no 'clear cut' or 'a consistent' approach of taking side with either the antagonist or the protagonist (government), it is revealed that the positive verbal processes were more frequently associated with the protagonist group. One of the reasons for that is, *Aswaq* reported more regularly from the sources of the authority compared to the antagonist groups (mainly the Malaysian oppositions). However, that does not mean *Aswaq* marginalised the voice of antagonists and treated them as the 'out-group.' In fact, on many occasions, the antagonist's voice was reported in very positive tones and utilised positive verbal processes (Ismail, 2021). Nevertheless, the reports on the protagonist's voices in the corpus data outnumber the antagonist's voices by a considerable gap (Ismail, 2019).

The corpus data indicated that *Aswaq* had utilised all three sub-categories of the verbal process. Table 1 below provides the total number of occurrences for each verbal process sub-category and the total percentage of every sub-category of the verbal process in the corpora.

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

Sub-category	Occurrences	Percentage
Neutral	908	64.2
Positive	371	26.2
Negative	135	9.6
Total	1414	100

The neutral sub-category recorded the most occurrences in the corpus data at 64% of total verbal processes that occurred in the data. The negative verbal process recorded the least with almost 10% of the entire verbal process. Meanwhile, the positive verbal process managed to record 26% of the total verbal processes in the corpora. Table 2 below lists the ten most occurred verbal processes for each of the verbal process sub-categories and the number of occurrences for each verbal process. Again, the neutral verbal process of 'said' recorded the highest number of occurrences, while the negative verbal process of 'blamed' only occurred in the corpora five times. The most positive verbal process is 'emphasised,' 'announced,' and 'explained.' In contrast, the verbs 'warned,' 'refused,' and 'denied' were the most frequent negative verbal processes.

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

Positive	Neutral	Negative
announced (68)	said (134)	warned (27)
emphasised (61)	called upon (86)	refused (18)
decided (39)	pointed out (49)	denied (16)
explained (35)	described (33)	accused (13)
ordered (33)	mentioned (31)	criticised (12)
promised (32)	commented (26)	admitted (8)
reminded (25)	told (25)	condemned (7)



urged (21)	asked (23)	denounced (7)
pledged (20)	requested (15)	threatened (5)
echoed (18)	indicated (14)	blamed (5)

Based on the result in Table 2, which sorts the most frequent verbal processes that occurred in the corpus data according to each of the verbal process sub-categories, the analysis will detail the two sub-categories of the positive and negative verbal processes, which indicate much helpful insight for the critical discourse analysis. To provide a clear picture of how the verbal process had been utilised in the *Aswaq* news coverage of the pandemic in Malaysia, the discussion will be divided into two sections based on the sayer's group of the government side (protagonist) and the opposition side (antagonist). Then, the discussion will highlight how the two verbal process sub-categories were strategically utilised in reporting the sayer's words.

#### 4.1 Verbal Processes in the Protagonist's Side

Most of the time, the positive verbal processes were used to report on the government's representatives. Among these government officials (who hold the positions during the corpus data time frame of January up until July 2021) are the Prime Minister, Senior Ministers, Ministers, directors, and heads of government agencies such as Inspector General of Police, Chief of Arm Force, Director General of Health Ministry and many more. The use of positive verbal processes to report on these figures was in line with their position as the source of authority in dealing with the pandemic. For instance, *Aswaq* reported on 1/3/2021 about the then Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin's (He was the 8<sup>th</sup> Malaysian Prime Minister and served from 2020 until 2021) words using the positive verbal process of 'emphasised' أكد :

كما أكد محيي الدين، الذي أصبح ثامن رئيس وزراء لماليزيا في 1 مارس 2020 إنه أدى واجباته ومسؤولياته من أجل الشعب والأمة.

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

The use of the verb 'emphasised' أكد in this news extract to report on the then Prime Minister's words indicates very good connotations on the sayer, which hold the highest authority in the Malaysian government. It also showed that the Prime Minister was determined and serious about doing his job. A similar example can be seen in another news extract on the same date (1/3/2021):

وأضاف: أنا أفعل ما هو أفضل للشعب، أعلم أنني أحمل ثقة، ولا بد لي من الوفاء لهذه الثقة .

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

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

وأضاف محيي الدين: من خلال هذا النظام ، تتم المراقبة كل يوم لتحديد المواقع العامة عالية الخطورة.

*Muhyiddin explained: "Through this system, monitoring is carried out every day to identify high-risk public sites.*

It is found that the positive verbal process is not only used to report on the 8<sup>th</sup> Malaysian Prime Minister's word but also being widely used to report on other ministers' words. For instance, the words of the then Senior Minister Ismail Sabri (served as the Senior Minister in 2020 and 2021, before becoming the 9<sup>th</sup> Malaysian Prime Minister in 2021), who hold the main task of leading the government efforts in fighting the pandemic, have been reported using positive verbal processes. *Aswaq*, for example, reported on 2/3/2021 about the spread of virus Covid-19 in several Malaysian states by saying:

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

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

In this news extract, Ismail Sabri has been portrayed positively as someone who holds the determination on his job and can handle the enormous task by using the positive verbal process of 'emphasised' أكد. However, the connotations of 'determination' and 'capability' cannot be achieved if the verbs 'said' or 'told' have been used to replace the verb 'emphasised' أكد. A similar example can be noticed in another news report dated 16/3/2021. The same positive verbal process of 'emphasised' has been used to cast a favorable light on Ismail Sabri as one of the most crucial persons in dealing with the pandemic in Malaysia.

وأكد إسماعيل صبري إن السفر بين الولايات لا يزال ممنوعًا إلا لأغراض السياحة بين ولايات التعافي.

*Ismail Sabri confirmed that travel between the states is still prohibited, except for tourism between recovery states.*

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

أعلنت الحكومة الماليزية اليوم عن تمديد تقييد الحركة المشروط (CMCO) في كوالالمبور وسيلانجور وجوهور وبينانج وكلانتان وسرواك.

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

The government of Malaysia is the only authorised body that has the power to declare such big order as Movement Control Order or Conditional Movement Control Order, which involve a great deal of monitoring and implementing the order (Ministry of Health Malaysia KKM, 2021). Hence, the verb 'declared' or 'announced' أعلنت in this news report promotes positive government connotations. However, if the verb 'said' or 'called upon' has been used, it will not provide strong connotations to the government as provided by the verb 'declared' or 'announced.' A similar example can be observed in the following news report dated 9/5/2021.

وبعد يوم واحد، أعلنت الحكومة أن تقييد الحركة سيطبق أيضا على كوالالمبور، بعد حذفها المحير من الإغلاق الجزئي المفروض.

*The government announced that the movement restriction would also apply to Kuala Lumpur after its baffling removal from the imposed partial closure.*

Despite the finding, which indicated that most of the time, verbal processes had been used to report on the government's side, there are several occasions; negative verbal processes have been used with the government officials. Most of these occasions are linked to the critics pointing to the government to show the disagreement on specific rules or decisions made by the authorities. For example, *Aswaq*, on 3/3/2021, reported that Ismail Sabri dismissed the general assumption that the politicians were responsible for the widespread of the virus due to holding state election in Sabah.

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

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

It is noticed that the verb 'ignored' تجاهل in this news report negatively connotes Ismail Sabri, who dismissed the public opinion on the widespread of the virus. If the verb 'ignored' has been substituted with another verb such as 'emphasised' or 'explained,' it will not cast the sayer with negative connotations but give an advantage to him. The same also applies in news extract (dated 11/5/2021), in which the verb 'denied' نفت promotes negative connotations of undermining the possibility of implementing another MCO in the coming days.

نفت الحكومة الماليزية على لسان وزير أمنها داتوك سيري إسماعيل صبري يعقوب ما نشره موقع The Star الإخباري، حول قرار الحكومة بفرض تقييد حركة ثالث (MCO) في عدة ولايات خلال الأيام القادمة.

*In the words of its Minister of Security, the Malaysian government has denied that Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaqoub, what was published by the news site Star The, about the government's decision to impose a third (MCO) in several states in the coming days.*

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

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

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

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

On different occasions, neutral verbal processes قال have been used to report on the government's side. When the neutral verbal process is used, it promotes no significant meaning to the sayer whose words are being reported in the news. One of the occasions, the neutral verbal process has been used to report on the government side is during the police investigation on the then Federal Territory Minister Annuar Musa (served the post in 2020 and 2021 before the change to the Ministry of Communication and Multimedia in September 2021) for the allegation of breaking the standard operating procedure (SOP) during the MCO as being reported by Aswaq on 18/2/2021.

وفي 17 فبراير، قال قائد الشرطة إن القضية ستحال إلى غرف المدعي العام بعد أن أخذ رجال الشرطة أقوال أنور لمدة ساعتين.  
*On 17th February, the police chief said the case would be referred to the prosecutor's chambers after the police took Annuar's statement for two hours,*

In another example of a news extract dated 28/2/2021, the verb 'said' has been used to report on the Ministry of Education's words. However, if the verb 'announced' or 'emphasised' or 'explained' has been used, it will portray the ministry much better way than the use of the verb 'said.'

قالت الوزارة إن التعلم الوجاهي والإلكتروني سيكونان متوافقين تماما مع إجراءات التشغيل القياسية لمجلس الأمن القومي للحد من إصابات كوفيد-19.

*The ministry said that face-to-face and e-learning would be fully compliant with the National Security Council's standard operating procedures to reduce COVID-19 infections.*



#### 4.2 Verbal Processes in the Antagonist's Side

The sayers in this second group are dominated by the opposition members of parliament and the state legislative assembly. *Aswaq* treated the opposition voices with respect by providing them with ample space to be included in the news report. For instance, *Aswaq* reported on the words of two opposition parties of the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and People Justice Party (PKR) using the positive verbal process of 'announced,' which is generally associated with the authority. *Aswaq* reported on 16/3/2021:

أعلن حزبان ماليزيان معارضان وهما حزب عدالة الشعب وحزب العمل الديمقراطي أنهما سيقدمان المساعدة القانونية للأفراد الذين صدر بحقهم غرامة مضاعفة قدرها 10 آلاف رنجيت ماليزي.

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

The verb 'announced' أعلن in this news extract promotes a connotation that the opposition parties determined to help people pay the fine. The same connotation may not be achieved if the verb 'announced' has been changed to verbs such as 'said' or 'called' or 'asked.' A similar example of utilising the positive verbal process in reporting the words of opposition leaders can be observed in the following examples. For instance, when the portal reported on the words of former Health Minister Dr. Dzulkipli, the verb 'emphasised' وشدد has been used to portray his determination and his high level of confidence in his words. It also aimed to gain trust from the public to accept the sayer's words. On 17/4 2021, *Aswaq* reported:

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

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

In another news report of the same date, the positive verbal process of 'urged' has been used to positively portray the opposition's leaders in their call for the parliament to discuss the government's efforts in dealing with the pandemic.

حث عدد من نواب البرلمان الماليزي وشخصيات سياسية لعقد جلسات البرلمان مرة أخرى، للتعامل مع الموجة الرابعة المحتملة لتفشي جائحة.

*Several Malaysian parliamentarians and political figures urged to hold parliament sessions again to deal with the possible fourth wave of the pandemic.*

Finally, it is noticed that the words of Selangor (the worst state of Malaysia hit by the pandemic), Menteri Besar, Amiruddin Shaari, who has been at the post since 2018, were reported in the news portal using positive verbal processes حث. Among the reasons for that is, although Amiruddin is one of the opposition leaders, he is the head of state government who holds the highest authority at the state level of Selangor. Hence, his words were treated as one of the authority voices and were reported using positive verbal processes. For instance, the positive verbal processes of 'emphasised,' 'elaborated' and 'explained' can be seen in the following news extracts dated 20/5/2021, which reported positively on the Selangor Menteri Besar:

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

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

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

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

وأوضح أنه تماشياً مع الواقع، ترحب حكومة الولاية بأي إغلاق على أمل أن ينظر إليه بشكل شامل من حيث الجوانب المعيشية الأخرى.

*He explained that, in line with reality, the State Government would welcome any closure in the hope that it would be viewed comprehensively in terms of other aspects of living,*

The negative verbal processes were also being used to report on the oppositions' words. For instance, the verb 'denied,' 'refused' ورفض، 'accused' اتهم and 'blamed' were associated with the opposition leaders. In the news report dated 1/2/2021, *Aswaq* reported on the words of Coalition of Hope (Pakatan Harapan PH) leaders by utilising the negative verbal process of 'refused':

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

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

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

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

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

## 5. Conclusion

Mass media has provided a comprehensive report on the pandemic and become one of the primary references to get the latest information surrounding the pandemic. *Aswaq* provides detailed news on the pandemic in Malaysia to Arab readers worldwide. *Aswaq*'s news portrayed how Malaysia deals with the pandemic to its readers. The results revealed that the strategic use of the verbal process could indicate the journalist's attitude toward the sayer of the words reported in the news. It can also lead the readers into a specific direction or understand the words based on the connotation promoted in the strategic use of the verbal process.

The analysis of corpora has shown that the voices of authority were the most dominant source of words reported in the *Aswaq* news about the pandemic. To report on the government's critical personnel's comments, positive verbal processes have been used. This matches the government figures who hold the authority and qualification to handle his tasks. However, on some occasions, a negative verbal process has been used to report on the government's words, particularly in the move to discredit the government's decision on the pandemic issue.

Although the antagonist's voice is not so frequently reported in the corpora compared to the protagonist, on many occasions, the voice of opposition leaders has been reported using positive verbal processes. Therefore, treating the antagonist's voice with respect reflects the importance of these alternative narratives to the government's words. Thus, it is found that *Aswaq* has provided quite balanced news coverage of the pandemic by presenting news reports from various sources. As a result, *Aswaq* can provide to its readers much more comprehensive news reports to cater to different groups of readers globally.

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