

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to uncover the discursive structures and argumentative moves employed by Mahathir in his speeches against the ‘war on terror’ post 9/11. This includes an examination of how Mahathir goes about defining terrorism, the 9/11 attack and his role in it whilst challenging the dominant elite and offering a solution to the problems of war and terrorism. Taking a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective the analysis of the speeches not only examined the discursive structures and argumentative moves employed by Mahathir, but also his lexical and semantic selections, style and his use of negative and positive presentation of ‘us’ and ‘them’. This chapter is a summary of the findings of the study. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of this research.

5.2 A Summary from the Perspective of CDA

From the perspective of CDA, Mahathir Mohamad speaks as a member of the elite mainly because of his position as Prime Minister of Malaysia, and because he has control of the communicative events where he presents his speeches against the military action taken by the U.S. on Afghanistan and Iraq under the pretext of ‘war on terror’. It is important to note also that Mahathir is assumed to have written the speeches himself which means that his power and authority are asserted by his controlled access to the topic, content, title and arguments in his speeches. What this also means, from the perspective of CDA, is that Mahathir uses his power to define and view events

according to his own ideology. By viewing and defining things (like the word ‘terrorist’ and the 9/11 attack), and putting the ‘war on terror’ within his own perspective, it allows Mahathir the opportunity to make proposals or recommended actions. Mahathir therefore is seen as a person who is struggling for power himself, amidst challenging the dominant power represented by American President George W. Bush.

The analysis of Mahathir’s ten speeches also reveals that his arguments fall within the framework of human rights rhetoric. He does this by calling on general norms and universal values of freedom, human rights and justice, in particular for the Muslims and the Middle East. This is seen when he gives descriptive analogies of the plight of the Palestinians and Afghans. Whilst championing the rights of what he considers are the oppressed, Mahathir makes direct accusations against the West by employing a ‘critical of them’ move which is sometimes supported with anti-imperialist remarks. Sometimes he makes accusations against the West with a ‘critical of us’ move where he blames the Western elites using pronouns like ‘we’ and ‘us’. Perhaps this indirect strategy is employed so that he does not appear to be insensitive to the tragedy of 9/11 that was inflicted upon U.S. citizens. These strategies are interpreted as Mahathir’s attempts to show that the 9/11 attack on the U.S. is the West’s own fault—for the sufferings they inflicted on the Muslims in the Middle East.

Van Dijk’s ‘ideological square’ concept has been a useful tool to uncover another argumentative strategy in Mahathir’s discourse of resistance. Not only is there an argument of ‘us versus them’, Mahathir also presents two different types of ‘us’ and two different types of ‘them’ as in the following:-

- 1) ‘Us’ as in Malaysia and the rest of the world who is against Bush.
- 2) ‘Us’ who agrees with Bush that the terror attacks are a tragedy.
- 3) ‘Them’ to mean Bush and his allies.
- 4) ‘Them’ to mean the terrorists.

In the case of 1) and 2), he describes these groups positively as people who are civilized and just; groups that he is a part of. In the case of 3) and 4) he presents them negatively and distances his identity from them. This is another strategy used by Mahathir to imply that Bush and the perpetrators of 9/11 are the same. CDA has proven in this case that speakers can manipulate their identity and their knowledge of language to persuade people to listen to them, therefore making their ideology implicit.

In a move called positive self-presentation, Mahathir activates many of his political identities to counter argue against the need for war. This strategy is employed to put Mahathir and his country in a positive light, so that Malaysia is seen as a country to be emulated and he, a leader to be revered.

A CDA perspective may question Mahathir's vested interest in his demand for peace. The answer provided by critics (see Chapter 1) is that self-interest explains his position. Based on this study, self-interest may indeed be the answer, but so too is Mahathir's realization that his powerful position and his reputation as spokesman for the Muslim nations and the Third World should be used to bring about a positive change to the world. Mahathir is therefore conscious of the need to exercise his power and calls on the people to empower themselves. He also needed to present himself positively to appear credible and authoritative, even to the point of derogating the opposition party (PAS) in the hope to prove his credibility as a leader who has the best interest of his country and the world at heart. Whether this leads him to pull the biggest electoral victory in his two decades of power is not the issue. What should be emphasized is his desire and courage to make an effective change that is in the spirit of CDA.

5.3 Implications of the Research

This study has proven how CDA has provided a useful tool to uncovering the discursive and argumentative moves and the linguistic features that characterise Mahathir's resistance speeches meant to empower the people. This is done through the use of national rhetoric, self-glorification, comparison move, reference to history, shared presuppositions, critical of *us* and critical of *them*, supportive of *others* and positive self-presentation.

It is hoped that this study has contributed to a greater understanding of the enigmatic personality of the former Prime Minister, who was either heavily supported or heavily criticised for his frank rhetoric. It may lend another view that Mahathir used his power and his ability to speak eloquently to promote a better world outside of Malaysian politics. At the time when this study was undertaken, Mahathir, now a retired politician, still speaks passionately against wars. This means that this issue is close to his heart and it is not about winning elections.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Research

A look at language of resistance suggests that this type of discourse is not always defensive, critical or negative. It may reveal traces of diplomacy and coalition building as when Mahathir still desires to appear a caring leader. Hopefully this study can contribute to further studies on national rhetoric and resistance speeches from the perspective of CDA and discourse analysis. More studies should be conducted to explore other linguistic devices used accompanied by an examination from the cognitive and/or socio-historical dimensions.