

CHAPTER 4 : DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents three categories of representations of the social images of the disabled in the Malaysian media discourse. They are misrepresentation of the disabled self, representation of low social standing in society and representation of an objectified self in charity discourse. The descriptions of textual/linguistic and intertextual features that have enacted the respective representations will first be presented. These are followed by the interpretations and effects on text consumption and subsequently what these representations suggest about the social practices in Malaysian society.

4.1 MISREPRESENTATION OF THE DISABLED

In recent years, increased attention has been drawn to language that is deemed offensive to particular groups. Advocacy to replace these words have resulted in euphemistic or politically correct terms (*cf. Section 3.2.2.1*). In the present study on the disabled, the data exhibit a wide use of these terms (*cf. Appendices G & H for summary and detailed listings of types and frequencies of terms*). The physical, mental and social being of the disabled is observed to have been misrepresented by these terms as asserted by various disability advocacy groups (*cf. Sections 1.1.4 & 2.5.3*).

A total of 64 noun phrase types with 437 in frequency of occurrence are found in the data. These 64 types can be further reclassified under three broad categories based on the structure of the noun phrases:

- a) person-centric phrases : nouns attached to preposition phrases using the preposition ‘with’.
[*noun + preposition phrase ‘with’*]
- b) adverbs/adjectives qualifying as nouns : adverbs/adjectives attached to terms such as ‘*impaired/impairment*’, ‘*challenged/handicapped*’ and ‘*disabled/disability*’ to form and qualify as noun phrases.
[*adv/adj + ‘impaired/impairment/challenged/handicapped/disabled/disability’*]
- c) the term ‘special’ attached as an adjective to a noun.
[*adj ‘special’ + noun*]

The table below summarises the statistical findings, followed by explanations on how the disabled have been misrepresented by the structure types:

Table 4.1 Categories of euphemistic noun phrases

Category of Noun Phrases	Types	Occurrence	
	Frequency	Frequency	%
a) nouns attached to preposition phrase ‘with’	14	88	20.1
b) adverbs/adjectives qualifying as nouns	12	153	35.0
c) nouns with the word ‘special’ attached as an adjective.	38	196	44.9
TOTAL	64	437	100

4.1.1 Nouns Attached to Preposition Phrase ‘With’

In this first category, the noun phrase structure consists of a noun followed by a preposition phrase ‘with’. There are 14 types of such terms noted, with a total frequency of occurrence of 88 or almost one fifth (20.1%) of the total number of noun phrases found. Some examples are ‘*adult with disability*’, ‘*children with autism*’, ‘*children with cerebral palsy*’, ‘*children with dyslexia*’ and ‘*students with intellectual disabilities*’.

By fronting the nouns or persons such as *'adult, 'children' and 'students'* and proceeded with the disabilities via the use of the preposition phrase *'with'* (e.g. *'with disability', 'with autism', 'with dyslexia' and 'with learning disabilities'*), this construction puts the person first before his disability. This type of construction which is person-centric is hoped to de-emphasise the disabilities by focusing on the person or the self first. This suggests a polite view of the disabled as a person first and his disability second.

Furthermore, this structure type describes what a person has and not what a person is (Kaplan, 2000). By using the preposition phrase *'with'* to add information to the main noun *'person'*, this supposedly helps *'normalise'* a disabled, and is comparable to ideas like *'a person with a car'* and *'a person with good values'*. This appears to advocate that a disabled is normal like others and that he has an extra feature, character or possession which is the disability.

Davis (2004), East Carolina University (1993) and Beninghof (1993) claim that when we recognise that people with disabilities as *'people'* first, then we can begin to see how people with disabilities are more like people without disabilities. However, how far does this kind of affirmation through the use of polite language improve the public perception of the disabled? The researcher here feels that this *'person first'* type of noun phrase construction does not seem to reflect an accurate representation of the physiological or biological disability of a disabled. Any mental or physical disability may not be as simplistic as another possession or characteristic that can be acquired or disowned. This structure type seems to have oversimplified and reduced disability to as

a lack of a particular mental, biological or physiological feature and thus, mocking disability as normalcy. Perhaps, the various social actors may want to avoid from being perceived as offensive or seen championing for the cause of the disabled by supposedly representing the disabled as equals. However, as mentioned by Corbett (1996), many people with impairments prefer to be known as ‘disabled’ (*cf. Section 2.5.3*). Zola (1993) further adds that the disabled do not deny their pain and discomfort but disability is also about self-respect and self-pride and having the right to control their own lives. Thus, as argued by Shakespeare (1996 & 1997), Oliver (1996) and Corbett (1994 & 1996), this politeness form appears to be another ‘labeling’ process in the social construction of a society that may result in more harm than good (*cf. Section 2.5.3*).

4.1.2 Adverbs/Adjectives Qualifying as Nouns

In the second category (adverbs/adjectives qualifying as nouns), there are 12 types observed with a total frequency of 153 or 35% of the total number of terms found in the data. These adverbs/adjectives are attached to the words ‘*impaired/impairment*’, ‘*challenged/handicapped*’ and ‘*disabled/disability*’ to form the noun phrases. Here, the ‘*intellectually challenged*’ is used in place of the ‘unintelligent’, ‘*learning disabled*’ and ‘*mentally handicapped/challenged*’ instead of ‘moron’ or ‘spastics’, ‘*visually handicapped/impaired*’ instead of ‘blind’, ‘*hearing impaired*’ instead of ‘deaf’, ‘mute’ or ‘dumb’ as well as ‘*physically challenged/disabled/disadvantaged*’ instead of ‘crippled’ or ‘handicapped’.

Some writers have argued that these phrases could accommodate the various spectrum or severity of disabilities; in short, more encompassing and inclusive (Corbett, 1994). For example, 'visually impaired' would accommodate total or partial blindness; 'hearing impaired' could include the mute and dumb, or the less severely disabled who could be assisted by hearing aids or cochlear implants. However, this has been criticised for being 'too inclusive' (Corbett, 1996:58). These general labels have concealed the subtypes of impairments in broad vague terms and do not represent the various distinctive pathological conditions accurately.

As argued by the medical model of disability (*cf. Section 2.5.1*), accurate terms are needed for the right diagnosis and prescriptions for the disabled. This phenomenon is also reflected in the interview findings with the Deputy Chief Co-ordinator of the Chinese Disabled Society, where she has called for more awareness of the types and sub-types of disabilities rather than lumping them under generic labels. This will enable more specific intervention methods to be extended [*cf. Appendix N(iv)*].

As also indicated by Rich (2003), using a phrase such as 'visually impaired' instead of 'blind' has not changed the way a blind is viewed in society. It appears that many euphemistic phrases have been predominantly utilised in social contexts for politeness purpose. This accords with Greenbaum's (1996) claim that this would be less objectionable, and more neutral to tone down the extremity of a particular condition. It appears to be a tactful face saving sociolinguistic choice but it may not be an apt representation of the physical state of the disabled people.

4.1.3 *'Special' Attached as an Adjective*

The third and most popular way of creating euphemistic labels for the disabled is by forming noun phrases with the adjective *'special'* (cf. Table 4.1 and Appendices G & H). It has the most number of types of noun phrase construction; there are 38 terms found with a total occurrence of 196 or 44.9%, almost half of the total number among the three categories found. Some of the examples are *'special needs'*, *'special lanes'*, *'special children'*, *'special class'*, *'special ramp'*, *'special home'*, *'special education'*, *'special merit'* and *'special teaching materials'*. One main concern here is the prevalence of the term *'special'*. From the statistics generated, this construction type seems to have been very widely used or perhaps even overused (cf. Table 4.1). It appears to be an easy, simple and convenient linguistic construction by attaching or preceding any noun at all with the adjective *'special'* to form new euphemistic noun phrases.

The focal question is what the term *'special'* actually means. How special is *'special'* or what is so special about *'special'* (cf. Section 2.5.3)? Lexicographers of corpus-based dictionaries such as Collins Cobuild Dictionary (2006) and Cambridge Dictionary (2005) are strongly suggesting that *'special'* in the context of disability is deemed unusual, measured against 'normality'. The online version dictionaries such as Dictionary.com (2008) and Urban Dictionary.com (a wiki dictionary) (2008) seem to also share a similar perspective. In studies related to disabilities, the connotations of *'special'* are skewed towards negativity, and thus less desirable and to a certain extent demeaning (Fawcett, 2000; Corbett, 1996). The term *'special'* is not equivalent to being desirable, nor it is a specialty or special skill possessed by a disabled (cf. Section 2.5.3).

When ‘*special*’ is seen generally and inherently as ‘bad special’ rather than ‘good special’, this reflects the common negative view of the word by the general public i.e. the social practice in society.

As mentioned in Section 2.5.3, there is an analogy between the powerless status of women and that of disabled people (Theweleit, 1994). Being ‘special’ does not equal with ‘desirable’ when it is accompanied by social or personal weakness. As claimed by Corbett (1996:56) this image of niceness keeps the disabled ‘harmless and passive’ and this innocence is retained at the ‘cost’ of their experience (*cf. Section 2.5.3*). ‘*Special*’ denotes an overarching paternalistic power that emphasises the relative powerlessness rather than one that confers honour and dignity. Clearly, the term ‘*special*’ has misrepresented the social self of the disabled in society. ‘*Special*’ has been skilfully overused to disguise the power of naming (*cf. Section. 2.5.3*). Perhaps, ‘*special*’ should not be used in this context since semantically and ideologically, it is both demeaning and confining.

4.1.4 Who Have Misrepresented the Disabled?

In the data analysed, non-euphemistic terms are also found to be used in naming the disabled people (*cf. Appendix I for the types and frequencies of occurrence of non-euphemistic terms and Appendix J for a detailed breakdown*). It is worthwhile comparing the voices that have employed both euphemistic and non-euphemistic phrases to further illustrate who have generally misrepresented the disabled self. See Table 4.2:

Table 4.2 Euphemistic and non-euphemistic terms : Comparison of frequency of occurrence

	<i>Frequency of occurrence</i>		<i>% of occurrence</i>		
	<i>Euphemistic</i>	<i>Non-euphemistic</i>	<i>Euphemistic</i>	<i>Comparison</i>	<i>Non-euphemistic</i>
Authority	29	18	6.6%	>	2.4%
Caregiver	73	60	16.7%	>	7.9%
Journalist	156	144	35.7%	>	18.9%
Sponsor	61	0	14.0%	>	0.00%
Advocacy	39	185	9.0%	<	24.3%
Disabled	75	340	17.1%	<	44.8%
Public	4	13	0.9%	<	1.7%
Total	437	760	100.0%		100.0%

The table above suggests a trend where the voices of the authorities, caregivers, journalists and sponsors are generally associated with the preference for more euphemistic terms compared to voices of advocacy groups, disabled people and the public.

The journalists have employed the most euphemistic terms with a total 153 in frequency or 35% of the total number. In journalistic writing, journalists are taught to use ‘people with disabilities’ and avoid the word ‘handicapped’, ‘crippled’ or ‘deformed’, unless the person uses it to describe himself (Rich, 2003). Otherwise, it would be considered condescending (Rich, 2003). This perhaps explains the preference of journalists for using euphemistic terms. Further, it is also observed in the data that journalists would use the term ‘*handicap/handicapped*’ only to describe an advantage given to a person who has a disadvantageous standing in ability, particularly in the area of sports and games. Otherwise, most text writers would be more conscientious.

When voices of the authorities, caregivers and sponsors are foregrounded, these voices are also observed to favour euphemistic terms; perhaps these actors want to be seen respectful towards the disabled, sensitive and careful in describing or naming disabilities. Another interesting finding is sponsors of charity, in this case, those who are promoting their business entities through charity and sponsorship activities (*cf. Section 4.3*) will only use euphemistic terms (*cf. Table 4.2*). Generally, indirect, socialite-friendly and often vague expressions are used to gloss over or disguise what they are saying in order not to be offensive (Allan & Burrige, 1991). By avoiding politically incorrect terms, this can construct their roles as caring caregivers of the disabled.

The advocacy groups, the disabled themselves and a small percentage of the public are more inclined to be direct in representing the actual pathological disabilities without being politically correct. The disabled and disability advocacy groups have at large, overtly called themselves the ‘*autistic*’, ‘*blind*’, ‘*deaf*’, ‘*disabled*’, ‘*dyslexic*’, ‘*handicapped*’ and ‘*spastics*’. This shows that they have come to terms with their disabilities without seeing their disabilities as hindrances. There is nothing to be concealed or politically correct about. This is consistent with arguments by the disabled and advocacy groups that handicap has become more of a social-environmental issue rather than a pathological problem (*cf. Section 1.1.4*).

In short, there is an observable pattern that euphemistic terms are often employed by voices of the third parties. The attachment of particular niceness, fondness or uniqueness to euphemistic terms (although these could be well-intended), has indirectly contributed to the misrepresentation of the disabled self. It has not changed the way the disabled is viewed in society but continues to reinforce and divide the ‘normal’ able-bodied versus the ‘abnormal’ disabled. Progress for the disabled community should be about changing what it means to be a disabled, not changing the word for it (*cf. Section 5.2.1*).

4.2 REPRESENTATION OF LOW SOCIAL STANDING IN SOCIETY

This section focuses on how the disabled are represented as members of the society with low social standing. This prejudiced status is seen enacted through lexical choices (evaluative terms and metaphorical expressions) and discourse representation (speech reportage) (*cf. Section 3.2.2.1*).

4.2.1 Lexical Choices

It is observed that there is a sporadic spread of negative words and phrases to ascribe or characterise the social self of the disabled. The table below lists the evaluative words and phrases found in the data studied.

Table 4.3 List of evaluative words and phrases

ARTICLE NO.	EVALUATIVE WORDS AND PHRASES
49	living in poverty, alienation and deprivation ... compounded by the absence of support and intervention from the authorities.
52	stereotyped ...as inefficient workers
57	retarded, misfits, social outcast , violent , threat, unthinkable, tragic , second-class citizens ..provision of special education sorely lacking ... disadvantaged ...Tough path to basic right... bleak future, penalized , vain , unhappy, disappointment , very difficult , not easy, disheartened.
60	parents do not want their children to be in the same class as a special needs child, not to be taught by teachers who have disabilities... narrow-mindedness and discrimination .
64	marginalised ... many hurdles ... prejudices
68	devastated
70	objects of charity and handouts..intentional or unintentional discrimination against us
76	the lowest rung
77	discouragement becomes infectious ... inferiority complex .. stereotyped
84	societal oppression and discrimination based on biological differences.
89	desperation and the hopelessness that these parents feel
90	abandoned at a young age
95	derogatory remarks
96	patronised..thoughtlessly and needlessly subject such people to suffer the indignity .. unexpected slap to our faces ..
110	stared at by people as if I were an alien from outer space just because I moved around in a wheelchair...suffering indignity
112	unashamed pride ... 'Two miserable goldfish in a bowl'
115	devastated ... stupid and crazy .. hard and bitter environment
116	helpless and strapped to wheelchairs...heart-wrenching
125	grounded
126	discrimination
134	trials and tribulations she has gone through... face ridicule.. neighbours used to shun her.. feared that their disorder was 'contagious' and...a 'curse' ... rejected ...many sad , desperate people crawling around on their hands and knees...succumbed to self-condemnation and inferiority complex .
142	paint a completely bleak picture for the deaf
146	rough treatment
147	lost in his own world (autistic)..hyperactive
158	profoundly deaf .
160	death sentence
162	indifferent attitude.. our cries for a little respect and indignity ... prejudices
170	ignorance and prejudice
171	ashamed... as if dogs on the street ... treat him like a dog you've to feed
172	the sad state of affairs of the learning disabled...that is alienated and impoverished ... marginalised and disempowered .
181	struggles
184	toilets (for the disabled) are deplorable..
198	feel stigmatised .. . The statistics are startling... a bleak future... no hope ... tragedy
200	tremendous difficulties .. abandoned because their families think they are a burden..
208	an uphill battle ... like being lost in and endless maze of wrong turns, back-tracking, dead

	ends and wasted time.
212	so helpless
228	isolated
233	regarded stupid, lazy or 'special'... disruptive.. live with frustration
246	body and mind still like a baby's , in dire need of nourishment and care...poverty
249	a totally unsupportive environment of the disabled... rejection
254	miserable and depressed about themselves
267	deserves to be happy
273	abnormal communication.. abnormal social development...seem aloof.. anxious behaviour
275	slow

As seen from Table 4.3, adjectives are extensively used to illustrate and typify the social being of the disabled. Some examples are *stereotyped, stigmatised, marginalised, disempowered, stupid, crazy, abnormal, penalized, helpless, rejected, depressed, vain, desperate, miserable, isolated, tragic, sad,* and *slow*. In line with the tone of negativity and extremity, some forceful nouns have also been deployed such as *alienation, deprivation, discrimination, tragedy, oppression, disappointment, discouragement, ignorance, narrow-mindedness, desperation, indignity, frustration, self-condemnation, inferiority complex* and *prejudice*. Intensifiers have also been deployed to add to the tone and degree of severity, intensity and exaggeration such as *no hope, very difficult, tremendous difficulties, many hurdles, so helpless, a totally unsupportive environment, sorely lacking* and *profoundly deaf*.

The listed words/phrases have enacted the identity of a disabled as one who has no legitimate position or significance in society. These evaluative words construct a prejudiced image of a dependent, helpless, useless, incapable, uncared for and rejected self who is treated like a *second class citizen* and positioned in *the lowest rung*. Generally, the connotations of lacking and negativity seem to envelope the social existence of the disabled. Writers have constantly and efficaciously insinuated these

representations through repeated exaggeration and extremity in expressions. This linguistic style, termed ‘overlexicalisation’ (cf. *Section 3.2.2.1*) seems to be a typical strategy employed by many writers to represent people who are oppressed, powerless and underprivileged (Lean, 2005).

Metaphorical expressions which reflect a sense of hopelessness have also been observed in the data studied. These include expressions such as *unexpected slap to our faces*, *paint a completely bleak future*, *lost in his own world*, *body and mind still like a baby’s*, *uphill battle* and *like being lost in an endless maze of wrong turns*, *back-tracking*, *dead ends* and *death sentence*. What comes to mind immediately is that a person is considered doomed if he possesses any form of disability. There is no turning back and he continues to suffer for the rest of his life. Worse still, the disabled have been compared if not made equivalent to foreign objects and animals as seen in *an alien from outer space*, *two miserable goldfish in a bowl*, *as if dogs on the street* and *treat him like a dog you’ve to feed*. It fails to recognise the disabled as human beings. Disability has also been likened to a disease which is *infectious* and *contagious*. In brief, from the use of metaphorical expressions highlighted here, being disabled is represented as being lost, doomed, an animal and an infectious disease that is to be avoided, feared or be very wary of. These terms orchestrate a social being who continues to suffer indignity.

Metaphors make readers equate and apply the figure of speech (which may not be literally applicable) to something or a situation to project a resemblance. They may configure ‘the way we think and the way we act and our systems of knowledge and

belief in a pervasive and fundamental way' (Fairclough, 1992a:194). Metaphors may create realities, especially social realities (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). They can shape our perceptions and actions on the disabled, without us ever noticing them (ibid). The effects of these biased representations by metaphors have to be cautioned too.

Words have semantic relationships i.e. collocations where words have associations with other words; this will result in strings of effects in the minds of text consumers. The nature of these 'descriptors' (i.e. evaluative terms and metaphorical expressions) and how they are used often 'infer negative implications' about persons with disabilities should be a concern (Kailes, 1986:69). Defining persons by their disability, as if the disability comprises the entirety of the person, often isolates or segregates people. These non-positive words ultimately construct the image of a social subject with low social standing.

4.2.2 Discourse Representation

The representation of a disabled self as one with low social standing is also seen enacted through speech reportage or 'discourse representation' in Fairclough's term (*cf. Section 3.2.2.1*). The analysis of the techniques in the interplay of voices of the represented and representing discourse would exude how the various social actors in society perceive disability from a socio-cultural point of view.

Even among family members, the disabled are not regarded well. See Extracts 1-4 below :

Extract 1 from Article No.171

An aunt whispered : "Your brother has a hole in the heart and there is something wrong with his brain. Don't tell anyone!"... Another said : "Your mother had done something wrong in her past life , so she is punished with a bad baby,"...

... Whenever any visitor came to our house, Noo-Noo and I were shut inside my parents' room by my mother... Noo-noo brought shame on the family, especially the elders. I felt ashamed too because I was his sister. My mother was even more ashamed because she was his mother...

During the visit (to the home), they saw the caretakers beating the children for peeing, and splashing bath water on them as if they were washing dogs on the street... "Look at his fat tummy. You don't love him, you treat him like a dog you've to feed."...

I tried to explain to my parents about the chromosomes and told them that we should let Noo-Noo go out of the house to see things to liven him up. But they refused because the shame was too much, especially for my mother.

Through direct and reported speech, the writer cum persona has craftily used the voices of the 'aunt', 'another' aunt and first person 'I' to convey society's perception of the disabled child. It suggests that it is a taboo for a disabled to be seen or physically visible in society; no one must know about the existence of the child and who should be hidden from society. The disabled child has also been discursively silenced by the writer, not given any space to speak up even if he could speak. He has also been constructed to be silenced by the belief and culture of the society he lives in, metaphorically seen as a dog on the street because he '*brought shame on the family*' '*especially the elders*'. The entire family is also mortified by the existence of this disabled family member.

Disability is a social stigma, culturally seen as curse and punishment on the ‘mother’. The disabled is seen as the product of a ‘bad’ mother who ‘*had done something wrong in her past life*’; a judgemental religious belief being imposed upon the mother as represented by the voice of an aunt. The mother, constructed as the ‘sinner’ is now paying for her debt and should be more ashamed about herself than about her disabled child. Interestingly too, the writer here has also not given any space for the mum’s voice to defend herself, perhaps she is supposed to be silent and succumb to that social practice.

The persona in the extract has also tried to bring in some scientific explanations of disability on chromosomes but appeared to be shunned by the overarching cultural shaming by the public on the affected family as seen reported by the persona in the last paragraph of extract.

The writer has also successfully brought in the dramatisation effect in the above extract through an intermittent mix of direct and indirect speech of voices of the social actors and narration. This will exude a vivid picture in the mental faculty of a reader. Through this, the ideas propounded will appear more realistic and believable.

Another similar representation from a cultural point of view is seen enacted below :

Extract 2 from Article No. 200

“My husband has never stopped blaming me for having bad genes because there was another family member who was disabled. He drowned due to negligence. So my husband did not allow our two normal sons to have any physical recreation because he feared they would end up disabled. I complied because I couldn’t stand being blamed anymore.”

The subject here, who is a sister to a disabled, is represented as being deplored by her husband. Through her voice in the form of direct speech, the writer of text is able to put forward the perception of her husband who seems to believe that disability could be genetically inherited. Being accused of carrying disability genes, this woman's two sons had also been refrained from any physical activities to protect them from ending up being disabled. She had succumbed to this belief to stop further blames from her husband. This is reflected in the last sentence of extract. The situation here again reveals that a mother is generally blamed for producing a disabled child. The writer has used quoted speech in this instance to depict that these words come from the horse's mouth thus making it a valid, true and believable claim. Direct quotes function as a way of constructing the authenticity of a statement (Zuraidah & Lean, 2002).

Extract 3 from Article No. 200

*Some readers told me that I would be blessed by God for taking care of my Down's Syndrome brother, while others believed that I **am repaying a debt** to my brother for what I did in my last life...*

In the above reported speech, the author cum caregiver and sister of a Down's Syndrome child has been subjected to public judgement (i.e. readers of the newspaper). Some have offered blessings for her good deeds while others have pre-supposed an idea of her bad treatment or debts towards her brother in her previous life. This gives an impression of a religious belief in society that there is a karma or punishment the author now has to serve. Through this reported speech, the judgmental voice has also expressed that the author would continue to serve this punishment for some time in her life. This is reflected through the use of the present continuous tense in '***I am repaying***

my debt...' within the reported speech itself which would have commonly been reported in the past tense. Again, this depicts that there is a societal belief that the existence of a disabled family member is a sign of curse and punishment on another bad family member by the Almighty.

Extracts 1-4 have illustrated the *moral model* (cf. Section 2.5.1) in the construction of disability. As propagated by Kaplan (2000), Shakespeare (1996) & Chong (2005), there is a cultural belief that disability is an outcome of a family member's sin. It also questions the morality of the mother of a disabled child. Disability is viewed as a curse and a shame on both the disabled and their family members. For this, a disabled is expected to be crippled for life and must not be seen by others. This kind of societal belief will result in general social ostracism against the disabled and self-hatred especially on the part of any mother who has given birth to a disabled child (Kaplan, 2000).

Other than in a family setting, the disabled have also been negatively viewed in social status by the wider members of the society. See the Extracts 4-8 below :

Extract 4 from Article No.253

The disabled deserves empathy and also respect as an individual - more so with their ability to find a way of surviving and taking care of themselves even though they are handicapped.

*These were the words **echoed** by artist, photographer and writer Victor Chin, who is exhibiting 40 black and white photographs on the disabled...*

*"The general belief of people is that these photos are perceived to be a **society's taboo.**"*

The writer of the above extract has put forward the idea that the topic of disability is forbidden in society as represented in the exhibited photographs and by the voice of the photographer himself. The writer here starts by feeding his own assumption that a disabled '*deserves empathy*' and '*respect*'. In other words, he is suggesting that the disabled have not been getting respect from other members of society. This claim is actually based on the writer's own interpretation of the 40 exhibited photos in which is seen conveyed by the reporting verb - '*echoed*'. This construction disguises the writer's assumption to appear as words from the photos, not the writer's own. The writer then reinforces and validates this idea with an assertion from the photographer himself in the form of direct speech that those images of the disabled '*are perceived to be a society's taboo*' and '*the general belief of people*'.

Another representation of an inferior social self can be seen enacted through a double reporting technique below :

Extract 5 from Article No.200

*A friend who volunteers in a disabled children's home **observes that** the children are abandoned because their families **think** they are a burden, not because they are orphans.*

Here, the disabled are represented as '*a burden*' and the '*abandoned*' '*not because they are orphans*' but due to their disabilities. This is enacted through a third party's voice in a reported form, who is '*a friend*' to the writer (not any stranger) who further reports what the families of the disabled think. This '*friend*' is portrayed as one who '*volunteers in a disabled children's home*', thus supposedly a trustworthy and believable source of opinion. The credibility and validity of the source of opinion are

further enhanced by the reporting verb ‘*observes*’, suggesting that the negative perception of the disabled is not based on hearsay but through this friend’s actual observation. This reiterates the myth that the disabled are ‘*a burden*.’

On the other hand, this reported voice would hedge a little when it comes to claiming the voices of the families as reflected in the reporting verb ‘*think*’. This suggests that it is an opinion of general belief, not a scientific nor researched opinion but has been constituted by cultural beliefs that a disabled is commonly equated with being a ‘*burden*’ and to be ‘*abandoned*’.

Indirect speech without reporting verbs are also common in newspapers as the texts are presented in a report form (Swan, 2005:253) (*cf. Section 3.2.2.1*). Fairclough (1992b:282) has cautioned that his ‘indirect discourse representation’ may not reproduce the exact words used in the represented discourse. This will allow writers to recontextualise and append their personal opinions in their discursive construction as observed in the extract below :

Extract 6 from Article No.198

*It was recently revealed that about 3000 disabled children in the scheme did not avail themselves of rehabilitation facilities. The statistics are **startling**. Of 6229 children with special needs enrolled in Community Rehabilitation Centres, only **671 were from Felda schemes**. **That means more than 89% of Felda’s disabled children face a bleak future, no hope of acquiring simple living skills or ever becoming independent adult**. The **real tragedy** is that the rehabilitation facilities are there, but they lie idle.*

In reporting the above situation, the voice of the writer starts with a statistics of 3000 disabled from an unidentified source seen through the use the passive form with the agency deleted in '*It was recently revealed*'. He then describes the statistics as '*startling*' and proceeds with another set of statistics ('*671 were from the Felda schemes*') from an unidentified source. The writer further makes an assumption using the phrase '*that means*' and substantiates it with his own approximate statistical calculation that '*more than 89%*' of the disabled children are facing '*a bleak future*', '*no hope of acquiring simple living skills or ever becoming independent adult*'. This paints a social image of a disabled in rural Felda areas as one with no future, unable to become independent because he is unskilled.

What appears to be more ironical is according to the writer, the '*real tragedy*' is that the available facilities '*lie idle*', not the concern for the possibility of uncertain future of 89% of the disabled. The writer indirectly rebukes that the disabled only have themselves to be blamed as they '*did not avail themselves of the rehabilitation facilities*', not that society does not provide care for them. This representation bequeaths power in the hand of the writer as the authoritative voice representing the society while further polarising the disabled as the recipients of aids and thus, secondary in social status.

The next three extracts demonstrate how the perception of a disabled's low social standing is enacted by pre-establishing expectations within the reporting oral interviews. Fairclough (1992b) posits that an intertextual view of presupposed propositions can be adopted as it is a way of incorporating the texts of others.

Extract 7 from Article No.172

*How then does Malaysia fit into the United Nations' **ideal** of an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society as envisioned in the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action?*

*Aiko Akiyama, UN Economic and Social Commission for **Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)** project expert on disability, says Malaysia is not alone when it comes to **hindrances to learning disabled's well-being**. In most developing countries, misconception, discrimination, ignorance, lack of political will and the absence of policies as well as budgets are mutually reinforcing factors that lead to a learning disabled community that is **alienated and impoverished**.*

The above extract starts with the reporting of an interview question. The voice of the writer cum interviewer entices an expectation of an '*ideal*' disabled inclusive Malaysian society that meets the United Nations' (UN) specifications. However, in the next paragraph, the discourse representation reports an anti-climax by texturing a reported speech in response to the interview question and the set-up expectation.

The expert voice of a UN project on disability is foregrounded to reveal a local social setting where there is '*a learning disabled community that is alienated and impoverished*'. She claims that the learning disabled have been positioned in such a way by the '*absence*' of efficient social and political '*policies*'. Thus, to have '*misconception, discrimination [and] ignorance*' on the disabled is a common social phenomenon in '*most developing countries*'. The emphasis on the persistence of this negative situation has also been enacted via the adoption of the present tense (realis statement) used within in a reported speech throughout the extract. In most news reports, this would have been commonly written in the past tense.

Extract 8 from Article No.160

*When asked **if** PD (Parkinson's disease) was a death sentence to the sufferer, the good doctor gives an emphatic 'No' as a reply.*

The author of the above extract has metaphorically pre-established the physical or neurological disability caused by Parkinson's Disease as a '*death sentence*', an end of a sufferer's life. This pre-conceived idea is indirectly forwarded to the interviewee (i.e. the doctor) by manipulating the interrogative in a reported form as seen in the phrase '*when asked*'. The fabrication is then hedged using the conditional 'if' to appear less explicit or obtrusive. Although the doctor has declined the propagation, nonetheless the impression of the neurological disability as a form of punishment to the sufferer had already been left in the minds of text consumers. On the whole, the propositions are presupposed rather than asserted and therefore will be taken as 'given' (Levinson, 1983). In principle, the '*death sentence*' can become attributable, logical and believable.

Extract 9 from Article No.76

*What are some of their pressing concerns, and how have they overcome the numerous **hurdles** that **have prevented them from being fully accepted and recognised as equals to other Malaysians?***

I spoke with Peter Young...championing the causes of PLDs....

In Extract 9, in reporting an interview question, the writer/interviewer has also incorporated an expectation in the form of an interrogative. This linguistic structure has allowed the interviewer to pre-establish that people with learning disabilities (PLDs) have '*hurdles*' to '*overcome*' as society prevents '*them from being accepted and recognised as equals*'. Should there be no objection from the interviewee in this

context, then the presumed ideas would naturally turn valid through common sense in the minds of the readers.

According to Fairclough (1992b:283), this type of pre-established 'nebulous text' (seen in Extracts 7-9) often corresponds to general opinion, what people tend to say based on 'accumulated textual experience'. Thus, this discourse representation suggests a common view in society who looks down on the disabled. It also suggests an existing phenomenon of an unequal social relationship between the able-bodied versus disabled Malaysians as dictated by the social forces.

On the whole, in this subsection, we have observed that names can confer status and identity (Corbett, 1996) (*cf. Section 2.5.3*). The disabled in the selected data studied have been lexically constructed as the socially marginalised, metaphorically seen as an animal, a curse and a shame to be hidden from society. In the analysis of discourse representation, this labelling phenomenon is also observed instituted by the voices of the various social actors. Disability has been equated with personal tragedy, misery, suffering and weakness (Zola, 1993).

The above is also consistent with revelations from two of the four interviews carried out (*cf. Section 3.1.2*). The Treasurer of *Beautiful Gate Foundation* claims that the disabled are seen as 'useless', urging society to allow and help them to integrate well in society and the media to help them fight for better rights [*cf. Appendix N(i)*]. The Vice President of the *Dyslexia Society of Malaysia* similarly asserts that the disabled are

often seen as ‘unuseful(sic) and to be pitied’, particularly the dyslexic [*cf. Appendix N(iii)*]. Both have also attributed the problem to the lack of political will, where the government is seen to be slow in extending assistance in areas such as public amenities, education and awareness raising.

In general, both the textual and intertextual analyses have unfolded how the discursive patterns in lexical choice and discourse representation have constituted the disabled as social subjects with low standing in social hierarchy. We have also heard the representations of the opinions of their family members and how other members of the community regard the disabled. Extract 7 in particular, has shown how this negative social positioning of the disabled has even been officially confirmed by the United Nations as a common phenomenon in developing nations, Malaysia included in this case.

4.3 OBJECTIFICATION OF THE DISABLED

Shakespeare (1997:221) uses the term ‘objectification’ to refer to the disabled being represented as objects of pity and handouts in charity (*cf. Sections 2.5.3 and 3.2.2.1 e*). With this image of objects that need welfare provisions, many business establishments have taken on the role of benefactors (Bourke & Worthington, 2000; Brown, 1997). They perform charitable activities or any act of kindness under the pretext of cheering up the disabled (*cf. Appendix K*) and in the name of fulfilling their corporate social responsibility (CSR) or simplistically known as giving back to the community (Wood, 1991) (*cf. Appendix L*). This opportunity has been criticised as a form of social

investment that indirectly promotes brand names, strengthens business positions in the market and draws approvals from consumers and investors (Gomez, 2009 & Banarjee, 2006).

For this, it is observed in the data studied that the disabled not only have been made objects that need welfare provision in charity discourse but have been simultaneously objectified for the sponsors or proprietors' business gains. This can be seen through the *activity types* (Fairclough, 1992b:235) in charity discourse which are textured with business intent. Thus, some texts on charity discourse discussed here may exhibit some elements of sales (*cf. Section 3.2.2.1*). Hence, the interdiscursive analysis here will be concerned with the representation of this 'dual' objectification of the disabled in charity discourse which is mediated within the news discourse.

Of the 179 texts studied, 29 or 16.2% of texts have business intent embedded in the charity discourse. See Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4 List of texts on charity discourse with business intent embedded

No.	Article No.	Establishment Promoted / Nature of Business	No. of paragraphs with business intent vs total no of paragraphs in texts	Percentage of paragraphs with business intent
1.	58	ExxonMobil (Petroleum company)	5/7	71.43%
2.	67	The Mangotree Restaurant (Restaurant)	3/6	50.00%
3.	79	8TV Malaysian Idol (Entertainment programme)	6/12	50.00%
4.	83	Rumah Charis Community Point (Private therapy centre for the disabled)	12/14	85.71%
5.	93	American biomedical companies (Supplements for autistic children)	4/4	100.00%
6.	97	ExxonMobil (Petroleum company)	9/12	75.00%
7.	99	McDonald's (Fast food chain)	5/8	62.50%
8.	104	Celcom (Telecommunication provider)	8/9	88.89%
9.	119	HSBC (Foreign / international bank)	4/7	57.14%

10.	121	Pan Pacific (Hotel)	5/9	55.56%
11.	122	BB Plaza & Metrojaya (Shopping complex)	8/10	80.00%
12.	124	Canadian Association of Malaysia (Association for wives of Canadian expatriates in Malaysia)	5/10	50.00%
13.	131	Vision Palm (Producer of handheld PC for the blind)	11/11	100.00%
14.	132	GSK (Pharmaceutical company)	4/6	66.67%
15.	137	Carrefour (Hypermarket)	7/12	58.33%
16.	157	SEGi College (Private institution of higher learning)	19/32	59.38%
17.	165	HSBC (Foreign / international bank)	2/14	14.29%
18.	169	Philip Morris Asia Ltd (Tobacco manufacturer)	2/14	14.29%
19.	176	HSBC (Foreign / international bank)	4/15	26.67%
20.	188	GSK (pharmaceutical company) & Vanaja Dhanan (author/publisher of book)	9/10	90.00%
21.	221	All in Play (Online gaming company)	2/8	25.00%
22.	233	HSBC (Foreign / international bank)	3/25	12.00%
23.	235	The Blueprint for A Better Brain (Conference for therapy for the disabled))	1/11	9.09%
24.	237	MK Land (Construction company)	1/16	6.25%
25.	238	Eu Yan Sang (Chinese traditional herbs & remedies)	8/18	44.44%
26.	260	Novartis Corporation (Pharmaceutical company)	8/11	72.73%
27.	263	Tanjong Public Limited (Investor in gaming/power generation etc)	6/10	60.00%
28.	271	Nestle (Food and beverage manufacturer)	9/12	75.00%
29.	272	Golden Screen Cinema (Cinema)	13/13	100.00%
TOTAL			183/346	52.89%

Table 4.4 shows that the texturing of business intent in charitable acts is extensive. Within the 29 texts identified, 3 texts have all paragraphs and 20 texts have at least half of their contents associating the disabled with business reputation. Overall, slightly more than half (183 paragraphs or 52.89%) out of a total of 346 paragraphs in the 29 texts appear to be loaded with this notion. The following extracts will illustrate how the disabled have been objectified in charity discourse embedded with vested business interest.

Extract 10 from Article No.238

Chinese radio station *ai.fm* threw a celebration recently at Little Vietnam restaurant...for 15 disabled children from the Beautiful Gate home in Petaling Jaya and their parents..celebration was the pinnacle of a month-long campaign organised by the radio station...

Eu Yan Sang **sponsored 28 hampers** for the night, consisting of goodies like **bird's nest and essence of chicken** which were given away to the disabled and also the public who were the lucky draw contest winners.

"We are looking forward to a long-term collaboration with *Ai.Fm*...This event is **a way of giving back to the society and the less unfortunate** [sic] in particular ...," Loh said.

Extract 10 is taken from a news report on a charity dinner for the handicapped and their parents organised by a local Chinese radio station *Ai.fm*. As a gift sponsor, *Eu Yan Sang*, a renowned producer of Chinese herbs and medicinal products has the opportunity to promote and highlight their trademark products, the '*bird's nest and essence of chicken*' and even had quantified the number of hampers it had sponsored which was 28. Is sponsoring 28 hampers a significant '*way of giving back to the society and the less unfortunate* [sic]' as claimed by its Managing Director, Loh Eng Hock? It may be a 'yes' or 'no' but ultimately in this context, the disabled and this charity dinner have been used as a platform for publicity and advertisement for *Eu Yan Sang* and its products, which has cleverly textured within the news discourse.

Extract 11 from Article No.188

The youngsters at the Special Children Society of Ampang (SCA) received **some cheer** when a team from GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare (GSK) paid a visit to the society's headquarters recently.

The visitors donated **200 copies** of the children's story book, '*BenO Comes Home!*' to the society.

Also present was the book's author and publisher, Vanaja Dhanan. "**I looked for corporate organisations which were interested in buying the book for charity purposes** and contacted GSK, and we joined up to deliver the books to the special children here," said Vanaja...

"I'm deeply touched by GSK's commitment and **Vanaja's kindness**," said SCA president Christine Wong.

In the above extract, the charity discourse reveals ‘*some cheer*’ for a group of disabled children when GSK, a pharmaceutical company donated 200 copies of books entitled ‘*BenO Comes Home!*’ to the Special Children Society of Ampang (SCA). The author cum publisher of the book, *Vanaja Dhanan* was also reported to be present to jointly deliver the books. Although the President of SCA has expressed gratitude to ‘*Vanaja’s kindness*’, one could still possibly question the sincerity behind this kindness. Perhaps, the ‘*kindness*’ is referred to the nature of the story which could lift the spirits of the disabled children. However, it would be naive to forget the income that had already been secured by the writer prior to the visit to the home. Seen through *Vanaja’s* own words in the active voice, ‘*I looked for corporate organisations which were interested in buying the book for charity purpose*’, she has advanced herself in the name of charity for the sales of her published books. The disabled children here have been represented as objects that need kindness and simultaneously been made an object for an individual’s monetary gain.

Extract 12 from Article No.137

*Carrefour teamed up with KTM to play host to 30 underprivileged and disabled children...**Before lunch was served**, the children had a fun time at the bakery section trying their hands at croissant-making and cake decorations.*

*Carrefour’s corporate communications and public relations manager Zalin Raja Safran said : “Carrefour has always believed in **giving back to the community** and school holidays and festive seasons seem a good time to **spread some cheer** to the underprivileged.” For example, the activities organised at the bakery section were meant to let them **have some fun while at the same time pick up some baking skills**, she said... “Our objective is not only to **enhance their awareness about Carrefour** but also to **make the learning process much more interesting.**”*

The above is extracted from a report on the charity activity type for disabled children who had been taken on a train trip to Carrefour, a French hypermarket chain in Malaysia. Under the notion of ‘*giving back to the community*’ and ‘*spread some cheer to the underprivileged*’, Carrefour had treated the disabled children to lunch and let them ‘*have some fun while at the same time pick up some baking skills*’ to make ‘*make the learning process much more interesting*’. In return, the organiser seems to have something to gain. One would wonder how much baking skills would be acquired by playing at the bakery section and most of all, why a disabled would need to ‘*enhance their awareness about Carrefour*’ and the kind of awareness there is to be raised. Here, it appears that the disabled children have been made part of Carrefour’s promotional and branding activities. Such charitable activities could enhance an image of a caring establishment and invite endorsements from its patrons and further attract potential customers to Carrefour.

Extract 13 from Article No.272

The newly-opened Golden Screen Cinema multiplex in 1-Utama shopping centre, Petaling Jaya will be equipped with disabled-friendly facilities.

*“We have **allocated space for two wheelchairs in all halls, except in the Gold Class.**”*

*“Special ramps for their easy access and a hydraulic lift for wheelchairs **will be added soon,**” said GSC chairman Gen (Rtd) Tan Sri Mohd Ghazali Seth. He was **speaking at the opening** of the 13-screen multiplex on Thursday.*

The above are the first three paragraphs of a 13-paragraph report on the latest opening of the new cinema Golden Screen Cinema (GSC) in a popular shopping complex, 1 Utama in Petaling Jaya. Entitled “*Disabled can now go to the cinema*’, one would expect the entire piece to centre on how and what the proprietor of the cinema have

added to the infrastructural facilities for the disabled in the cinema. Unfortunately, only the first three paragraphs meet this expectation whilst the remaining 9 paragraphs of the news report promote other latest features of the cinema (*cf. Appendix M*). There is no mention of the disabled at all here. In other words, the report is more interested in highlighting the latest additions to the cinema for the majority of its able-bodied patrons.

Furthermore, it is clear that GSC cannot or has no plan to accommodate more than 2 persons in wheelchairs in each hall at any one time because it has only '*allotted space for two wheelchairs*'. Worse still, it appears that the proprietor possibly do not think that the disabled are deemed fit nor welcomed at the Gold Class as there are no facilities made available there. This is seen from the phrase '*except in the Gold Class*'. Moreover, if at the opening of the cinema, special ramps and hydraulic lift for wheelchairs were yet to be installed (seen through the modality '*will be*'), does this not further suggest that GSC only welcomes those in wheelchairs later? Again, despite this clear indication that the disabled are not welcomed that soon, why are the disabled highlighted in the title of the report? Here, the care and concern for the welfare of the disabled at the said cinema have been used to draw the attention and sympathy of readers, and inadvertently they are urged to read on, only to discover that it is about the latest features in GSC cinemas and the shopping complex. The disabled here have been made objects that need welfare and care; simultaneously they have been made the springboard to enhance and promote the new features of GSC.

Extract 14 from Article No.79

Seven out of the 12 finalists in the **popular talent competition series Malaysian Idol** paid the children a visit together with the show's television crew.

A number of the children were followers of the show and **got excited** as they recognised each finalist, and got acquainted with them first-hand...

After getting a tour of the association's headquarters in Petaling Jaya, the **finalists, television crew and a few of the children were whisked to Holiday Villa Subang** where they were **treated to lunch**. The children got to know the finalists a little better over lunch. **Several finalists even helped to feed some of the children...**

8TV's executive for public relations for Urban Areas Department Azwar Nazli Md Shuiab said **the event was the community-drive aspect of Malaysian Idol** which **gave more depth and scope to the series...Footage for the visit to the association and the lunch will be aired in a future episode...**

In the extract above, in return for the kind visit and luncheon for the Spastic Children's Association of Selangor and Federal Territory, 8TV (a local private television station) has something to gain. The visit by some of the finalists from *Malaysian Idol*, a 'popular talent competition series' as part of 'the community-drive aspect' of the programme is first highlighted in the introduction of the news report. The children, represented as objects of charity, are enacted as being elated to see these visitors reported through the phrase 'got excited'. Later however, only 'a few of the children', together with 'the finalists' and 'television crew' 'were whisked' to a renowned hotel to be 'treated to lunch'. The name of the hotel has also been specified here – Holiday Villa Subang, which is owned by an international hotel group, perhaps to highlight the generosity of the sponsor. The extract then reports that 'several finalists even helped to feed some of the children'. Through these activity types, the disabled children have been enacted as objects that need care, sympathy, easily pleased and should be compensated for the pitiful state they are in.

The news also reports that ‘*footage for the visit to the association and the lunch*’ ‘*will be aired in a future episode*’. This scenario is comparable to beauty pageant programmes where there would be shots of beauties seen with their tears, showing pity and sympathy and that they care for the less fortunate in a typical charity discourse. This exaggerated kindness and care are perhaps put on for a show. Even if it is a sincere act, it does not stop dividing, emphasising and further reinforcing the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ i.e. ‘the giver/carer’ versus ‘the receiver/the objects of pity’. Obviously, the ‘*community-drive[n]*’ activity of *Malaysian Idol* was performed to draw attention and increase viewing for the show, generate more income for the television station. This charity is not merely performed for the benefit of the spastic children alone. This hidden agenda is seen represented through the voice of 8TV’s public relations officer who has been quoted to admit that this footage would give ‘*more depth and scope to the series*’. Charity, in this sense, is packaged by a business-orientated giver, by simultaneously objectifying the disabled children as objects of pity and objects to generate more income for a business entity.

Extract 15 from Article No.157

“Since 2003, Systematic PJ has been **providing vocational training and skills-based courses to one sector usually overlooked by many private institutions – disabled students**.”... “One of the management’s mission is play a definitive role in fulfilling its **social responsibility towards local communities**,” she explains.

“Jenab joined the Selangor & Federal Territory Spastic Children’s Association at age seven. After completing Form Tree, Jenab received vocational training and learnt living skills such as **domestic chores, cooking and cleaning**.” “She **had almost completely given up** the idea of continuing with her education until she read about Systematic’s PJ’s MLVK courses.”..”She was absolutely delighted when she heard that Systematic gave opportunities to disabled students to train for **careers in Information Systems, Computer Technician and Multimedia Artist**.”

*“Systematic also looks into the physical needs of disabled students.”“These include the provisions for **wheel-chair ramps, disabled friendly restrooms and a multimedia laboratory and a resource centre** that are situated on the ground floor for easy access to wheelchairs. In addition Pinky stresses that disabled students at Systematic can fall back on their fairly good study experience **without fear of being patronised by others** or getting sympathy just because they are in wheelchair...**a true joy to notice the caring and sharing spirit** in our college!”... Systematic PJ’s five-block campus was recognised by the **Petaling Jaya Municipal Council (MPPJ)** for having the **“The Most Disabled Friendly Building in the SS2 residential community..”***

The above extract is taken from an article by a disabled columnist who quoted Pinky, the media editor and PR liaison for *Segi*, a leading education group in Malaysia which owns *Systematic* (a private higher institution of learning). In the name of ‘*fulfilling...social responsibility towards local communities*’, *Systematic* promotes itself in ‘*providing vocational training and skills-based courses to one sector usually overlooked by many private institutions – disabled students*’. *Systematic* portrays itself as the solution to the pre-supposed issue of discrimination against the disabled in tertiary education. It also constructs itself as the ‘saviour’ of Jenab (a disabled) who ‘*had almost completely given up*’ hope to be educated at a higher level. She could have ended up doing ‘*domestic chores, cooking and cleaning*’. The college also claims to be a caring and disabled-friendly place ‘*without fear of being patronised*’ and ‘*getting sympathy just because they are in wheelchair*’. This is another representation of the interplay of social values in a charity discourse through the texturing of activity types and events whereby *Systematic* has indirectly portrayed the disabled as the pitiful discriminated objects that require kindness. With this image enacted, *Systematic* then accords itself with the role of a caring and socially responsible education provider.

The article further highlights the courses offered for the disabled i.e. *'Information Systems, Computer Technician and Multimedia Artist'*. The provisions offered are also listed such as their *'wheelchair ramps', 'disabled friendly restrooms', 'multimedia lab'* and *'resource centre'*. These facilities are further constructed as recognised by the Petaling Jaya Municipal Council as *'The Most Disabled Friendly Building in the SS2 residential community'*. It would be natural for Pinky, the media editor for *Systematic* to write in this manner as part of her responsibilities. However, at the same time, these provisions for the disabled do not seem to be done out of pure act of kindness but a form of business investment. In the name of giving, the disabled have been objectified to advertise for *Systematic* to attract more students to the college, specifically those from the disabled community itself, who appear to be the main target clients here.

Extract 16 from Article No.122

*Several decorated Christmas trees are now glittering at the atrium of BB Plaza. However, one of them is 'special.' ...it carries the wishes of 50 underprivileged children...They asked for only small gifts priced below RM50, like a **shirt, watch, toy or cap**. They **also want to be happy this Christmas...** Those who are interested can just buy the **gifts at Metrojaya from now until Dec 19.**'*

*'BB Plaza is also throwing a party for these children...The gifts will be presented to them individually...We name this programme 'Wish Upon A Shooting Star' because our Bukit Bintang carries the meaning of star and we are inviting two superstars to **bring joy to the children...**'*

*She said the shopping mall tried its best to **serve the community**, adding that it was a norm for the mall to **host parties** for underprivileged children during festive season.'*

...Specially-designed postcards of the two superstars... will be on sale at BB Plaza on Dec 20, from 11am at RM10 each..proceeds will be donated to..charity concert [at the said party].. For details, call 03-2148 7411.'

In this article, the charity discourse describes the activity type of a renowned shopping mall, *BB Plaza*. *BB Plaza* has set up a *'special'* Christmas tree supposedly to help fulfil

the wishes of 50 underprivileged children and *'serv[ing] the community'*. It will also *'host parties'* with *'two superstars'* invited *'to bring joy to the children'* during this *'festive season'*. Again, by saying that the children also *'want to be happy this Christmas'*, these children have been depicted as sad objects and thus they deserve some gifts and party to cheer them up.

Simultaneously, the children have also been objectified for business gains under the pretext of charity. This is reflected in the organisation of the charity function. The charity organiser has suggested the items for its customers to purchase – *'shirt, watch, toy or cap'* and urged donors to purchase those *'gifts at Metrojaya'*, one of the retailers at *BB Plaza*. A specific time frame and deadline of purchase has also been given - *'from now until Dec 19.'* Thus, *Metrojaya* would be able to secure some sales and gain some revenue during that period of time. This charitable event is then further used to introduce their next promotion of *'specially-designed postcards'* where proceeds will be used to fund the charity concert at the hosted party. Details of date, venue, time, price and telephone number are included to make sure that it would be convenient for their potential customers to know when to visit the place or call for enquiries.

Another interesting observation in the reporting of the charity activity type here is it appears that the organiser of the charity party has also made others help in the sponsoring their *Wish Upon A Star* programme. This is done by making customers buy products as gifts from one of the shops within the shopping complex itself and purchase the specially-designed postcards to help support expenses for the charity party. This

perhaps could help reduce the overhead cost for the charity programme but credit would still go to *BB Plaza*. Thus, a double objectification is again seen in this context i.e. objects of pity that need cheering up and as objects to increase business revenue and enhance the reputation of a business set up.

Extract 17 from Article No.104

Special children at the Selangor and Federal Territory Spastic Centre in Petaling Jaya recently met Elmo and the Cookie Monster, two of the characters from the upcoming Sesame Street Live musical production to be staged from Dec 7 to 12 at Putra Stadium in Bukit Jalil.

*The visit was made possible by Celcom, which is the presenter of the musical show....Celcom customer service division vice-president Chew Su Fong said **the company was concerned with the underprivileged who might be left out in the festivities...In conjunction with festivals like Deepavali and Hari Raya Aidilfitri, we want to bring some joy to them,***” she said.

*“Sesame Street is such a well known show and the characters are loved by children from all around the world. It is our hope that this visit will **liven up their spirits and bring excitement and joy to them,***” she added.

*“The 90-minute Sesame Street Live production will feature **lavish sets, colourful costumes and riveting song** and dance performances by the muppets including Big Bird, Bert, Ernie, Elmo, Cookie Monster, Count von Count and Oscar the Grouch... the show is based on the television series, which has garnered the **largest worldwide audience** of any children’s shows and **won a record 85 Emmy Awards.**” ...*

Tickets are priced at RM40, RM70, RM120, RM200 and RM300. For bookings, call Ticketcharge hotline at 03-77262002 or visit www.ticketcharge.com.my

The above is taken from an article that reports the activities in a charity discourse where the sponsor had brought two characters from an upcoming musical production it was promoting, to make a charitable visit to a spastic center. From the charity discourse extracted above, the sponsor, *Celcom*, seems to portray the spastic children as gloomy objects of pity and handouts that could possibly be left out during the festive season had it been without the generosity or kindness of the sponsor. This is reflected in the phrase ‘*bring some joy to them*’ which is mentioned twice in the text and ‘*to liven up their*

spirits and excitement'. Celcom claims to be 'concerned with the underprivileged who might be left out in the festivities'.

The said children are reported to have met only two characters i.e. 'Elmo and the Cookie Monster' out of 7 characters (including Big Bird, Bert, Ernie, Elmo, Cookie Monster, Count von Count and Oscar the Grouch) to appear in the said musical production. This activity report can be assumed used as appetizers to lure fans of Sesame Street to read on. The news report seems to be more interested in providing details of the programmes rather than the charity done. These include the schedule and duration of performance (i.e. Dec 7 to 12 at Putra Stadium in Bukit Jalil) and its sponsor (i.e. 'Celcom'). The set of the production is also described using adjectives such as 'lavish', 'colourful' and has 'riveting' songs. Such descriptions are used to lure fans of the American cum world famous children programme to see the characters live in Malaysia. Readers are further reassured satisfaction with the status and recognition given to the programme - 'the show is based on the television series, which has garnered the largest worldwide audience of any children's shows and won a record 85 Emmy Awards.' Hence, it is evident, that the spastic children have been objectified for the promotional purpose of a musical production within the charity discourse.

On the whole, in this subsection, analyses have shown that there is a hybrid of charity and news discourse that is textured with business intent in the published texts. This has resulted in the 'dual' objectification of the disabled. The disabled are firstly represented as objects of pity in the charity discourse that deserve generosity and acts of kindness from others. Secondly, it is with the manipulation of this demeaning image of being

objects of pity, they have been simultaneously objectified for business gains of the do-gooders.

It can be argued that charity or any gestures of kindness for the community is a win-win situation for both givers and recipients. However, from the above extracts on charity discourse, many appear to be short term or one-off events that only do 'patch work', specifically during festive seasons. They do not appear to be in partnership nor meant to liberate the disabled from the status as objects of pity; the disabled remain as passive recipients of charity, handouts and services. Fernandez (2009) reiterates that genuine charity and particularly CSR, must be a long term assistance that empower and return the dignity of the marginalised. In the present study, we have observed this is not the case but it has actually further reinforced the representation of the objectification of the disabled.

4.4 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

According to Shakespeare (1997), disability is a social construct; it is not just about having a physical impairment. Disability is seen as a cultural stigma as constructed by the norms or social practices in society. Further discussions below will revisit significant observable patterns in the discursive construction of the disabled, and will relate the effects of these representations to the social practice in society.

4.4.1. Discursive Construction of Disability

The construction and projection of the social image of the disabled has been observed enacted through interactional practices in news reports and articles through textual and intertextual means. Fairclough's framework has enabled the study to depict how these interactional practices can draw out texts as identification of the disabled and how their social identities are set up in discourse (*cf. Section 2.2*). The discursive practices including the production and consumption of texts via deliberate linguistic, discursual and discursive choices and decisions seem to have resulted in the 'tribulations of self' of the disabled (Giddens, 1991:181).

As seen in Sections 4.1 - 4.3, the discursive construction of the disabled has socially constituted the disabled as different from the norm, seem 'devalued' by the presence of disabilities and thus, differently positioned in society. The creations of politically correct terms have adversely resulted in the misrepresentation the disabled in terms of their physical, mental and social beings. Evaluative terms, metaphorical expressions and discourse representations have also positioned them as a group with low social standing in society. In Section 4.3, the linguistic choices have painted an image of the 'deserving poor', dependent on charity and grateful for whatever handouts they receive (Shakespeare, 1996). This is a traditional interpretation of disability which is related to 'passivity, dependency, neediness and pathos' (Corbett, 1996:56). These practices of 'labelling' have further accentuated the 'power of naming' (Corbett, 1996:47) (*cf. Section 2.5.3*). It gives power to those who are in the position to name others, to assign

different semantic roles in society, and produce asymmetrical power relations (Fowler, 1985).

The discursive construction has allowed texts as a means to maintain power and legitimacy or to disempower the social actors and subjects through an interplay of voices. In Section 4.1, we generally observe that the third parties rather than the disabled and advocacy groups themselves would generally opt for euphemistic terms and thus leading to the implications of misrepresentation of the disabled self. In the second category, the media discourse has presented attitudes and voices of family members and wider members of the society but generally very little space is given to the disabled themselves. This perhaps suggests that the disabled should be silent or seen as incapable of speaking up for themselves. Where space is given, these silent voices generally have been audible only through voices of others.

In the third category of the objectification of the disabled, generally, the paternalistic voices of business power and sponsors of charity masquerade throughout the texts. Here, the disabled are totally muted as they are only represented through the descriptions of their body language where they would only cheer up upon receiving gifts. No avenue has been given to them to say what they have to say for themselves. Often, they are decided by others and they are expected to be happy and grateful with what is given and continue to remain silent. Here, parallels can be drawn with Kim's (2007) subaltern study on the disabled in South Korean media (*cf. Section 2.5.2*). The disabled in both contexts seemingly 'cannot speak' (Spivak, 1988:207) and their voices

have not been adequately represented in the discursive spaces. The othering of the disabled is continuously reinforced by enacting them with a different social status and silencing them.

As claimed by Fairclough (1992b), texts may be sincere as well as manipulative. The disabled people have been positioned in limited ways which echoes Croteau & Hoynes (2000:166) claim that the media engage in practices that 'define reality'. Social construction is a process of actively creating meaning; media images do not simply reflect the world, they represent it (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000) (*cf. Section 1.7*). Certain aspects of reality are highlighted and others neglected in the process of text creation. Hence, representations of the disabled can be incomplete and narrow. This has also been mentioned by Fairclough who views representations as choices of 'what to include and what to exclude' and 'what to foreground and what to background' (1995b:5) (*cf. Section 2.5.3*). Texts will have the power to shape and reshape the social status of the disabled community, as well as the thinking of the consumers of texts. This is a 'language of patronage' (Corbett, 1996:12) - the power of mediated language used by the media to create emotional responses to enact the social images of the disabled in the context studied here (*cf. Section 2.5.3*).

As asserted by Fairclough (1995b), the media product is also a cultural commodity that reflects the ideological beliefs and practices of those who operate news-making mechanism. They are accounts of communication in the media particularly the economy of media (*cf. Section 2.2.3*). As revealed in the interview findings [*cf. Appendices N(ii)*]

and *N(iv)*], the representatives from *NASOM* and *Chinese Disabled Society* have claimed the decision by the electronic media on whether to give publicity to the disabled depends on audience viewings; whereas for the printed media, most original texts have been modified to suit what the writers and editors want to present while some photographs have not been published due to the lack of space. This appears that for these media companies, popularity and financial profits come first. The media is open to commercial pressures; dominant voices could determine the discursive decisions i.e. what news and in what ways such news is to be published.

4.4.2. Social Practices

The above discussions lead to the question of what these discursive practices suggest about the social practices in society. This will be done with reference to the social construction theories on disability (*cf. Section 2.5*).

The three categories of representations observed in this study confirm Corbett's (1996:4) contention that disability is a 'reflection of social conditioning'. This is related to the *social model* (*cf. Section 2.5.2*) where the construction of disability is determined by societal perspective of disability. It is viewed as an outcome of impairment, a form of 'biological determinism', where the society focuses on physical difference (Shakespeare, 1996:95). A person is disabled because his body looks different or acts differently or cannot do productive work and thus not considered 'normal'. Without the ability to perform and conform according to the societal expectations, these disabled

have been put through the processes of denial and projection (Shakespeare, 1997) (*cf. Section 2.5.2*).

Shakespeare's 'social conditioning' is also a process of 'subjection' from a Foucauldian point of view (*cf. Section 2.5.2*). The disabled have been constructed and subjected to as the 'others' against the normal able-bodied persons through 'language of patronage' (Corbett, 1996). Thus, Malaysians who do not appear to fall within the 'normal' spectrum are marginalised and disempowered (Hamdan, 2005). As seen in Section 1.1.4, the disabled have been handicapped by their subjection to little social welfare provision, healthcare, education and job opportunities by the mass. There is still a lack of public amenities such as public transport, toilets, walkways, ramps and lifts that are accessible to the disabled. In terms of healthcare and education, there is a lack of expert knowledge, trained teachers and aids, quality services or one-stop centres for intervention and therapies (*cf. Appendix B*). The disabled, their caregivers and advocacy groups still lament about improving the social status and dignity of the disabled. This is also supported by the interview findings with *Beautiful Gate Foundation* [*cf. Appendix N(i)*] where the representative has pleaded for society not to see the disabled as insignificant but to give them the right infrastructural facilities and most importantly the chance to integrate in the society itself. The identity of the disabled is represented as socially conditioned and subjected by society.

The above leads to the question of ‘why so’? Psychologically, one of the ‘most basic of instincts’ of society is ‘fear of differences’ (Corbett, 1996:4-5). The identity of an individual is threatened by the isolation and rejection of anomaly or difference; difference is a provocation for it touches the fear of the unfamiliar (Corbett, 1996). This has also been purported by Shakespeare (1997:233) that the disabled are seen by the general population as ‘the ultimate non-conformists’ and as ‘perpetually threatening to the self image of the average so-called ‘normal’ population’ (*cf. Section 2.5.2*). Disability is seen as strangeness in a society which idealises human strengths and conceptualises an image of physical and intellectual perfection encapsulated in a stereotypical norm; society wants no reminders of human fragility or diversity, in ourselves or others (Corbett, 1996). Thus, the strangeness of disability is visible rather than hidden, and this fear of difference is observed to have bred hostility resulting in the general society breeding hostility towards the disabled for the fear they have towards strangeness in physicality and intellectual capacity.

Corbett (1996:4) has also observed that typically in many social structures including the Western world, ‘thrive upon hierarchies’. Our social success is measured in relation to others in the hierarchy. Corbett (*ibid*) adds that indeed society generally feel good to see some people as intrinsically inferior. This mentality has also been observed by Jambunathan (cited in Thanasayan, 2004) who alleges that Malaysian society is not ready to accept persons with disability, what more accepting them as equals. In the context studied here, social differentiation is made based on physical, biological,

physiological and mental capabilities. In short, there is a differentiation in social strata between the superior able-bodied and the inferior less-abled.

Moreover, as observed in Section 4.3 and also as purported by Shearer (1981), by performing charity, many do-gooders would render themselves superior because they are in the position to give and are thus morally upright and praiseworthy. In the social relation between benefactors and welfare recipients, there is a 'built-in power differential' as the recipients are 'never considered equals with their benefactors' (Brown, 1997:168). Sadly, the disabled are not just objects for enhancing the morality of others, but at the same time, their inferior status is repeatedly reminded and further reinforced to position the able-bodied superior in social status.

Without a pecking order, we would not feel good about our superiority to others lower in the hierarchy (Corbett, 1996). The presence of a minority group seems crucial to the self-definition of the majority group comparable to the studies on subalterns (*cf. Section 2.5.2*). Language determines which perceptions are potentially social ones and from there will impose our classifications on others and ourselves (Hodge & Kress, 1993:5).

Findings have also presented disability as an outcome of contemporary 'structuralist and materially-orientated' society (Fawcett, 2000:21). Sociologists, social theorists and political economists building on the earlier works of such as Marx, Weber, Habermas and Marcuse have cautioned on the increasing penetration of the social by the economic in societies (Banarjee, 2006). We see how the discursive formation of the economic through discourse, produces particular forms of social arrangements of various actors,

institutions and networks that constitute a particular image of the social responsibilities and power relations (Barnarjee, 2006 & 2007). Attachment to niceness persists, particularly in the charity discourse where the disabled people are neatly ‘packed’ and ‘sold’ to the public. In a culture where powerful vested interest have forged careers, wealth and reputations, caring for disabled people in this way does entrench influence and paternalism (*cf. Section 2.5.2*). Social agendas have given rise to new corporate colonialism (Grice & Humphries, 1997). The discourse of charity has been defined by narrow business interests and served to curtail interests of stakeholders (*cf. Section 4.3*). Barnarjee (2007) has cautioned that charity discourse, particularly in the name of CSR, represents an ideological movement designed to consolidate the power of transnational corporations.

To sum up, Barnes (1997) considers the social model of disability being linked to two traditions – social construction (*cf. Section 1.7*) and the ‘social creation’ of industrial capitalism (Barnes, 1997:5) (*cf. Section 2.5.2*). Corbett’s (1996) conclusion that the construction of social reality of the disabled community is a social conditioning phenomenon and Foucault’s idea that disability is a form of subjection (*cf. Section 4.4.2*) are in line with Fairclough’s claim that language is a socially conditioned process, conditioned by other non-linguistic parts of society. The two causal powers which can shape texts are the social structures in the society itself and the social agents, the people involved in social events (Fairclough, 2003). The social, economic and cultural factors seem to have determined experiences of disability, rather than handicaps arising from personal physiological difficulties.