CHAPTER 5 : CONCLUSION

5.0   INTRODUCTION

This final chapter summarises the representations of the disabled in the selected data from *The Star*. Caveats will also be presented, for any study will have its limitations. Some recommendations and suggestions on the future directions of CDA studies on the disability site will also be put forward as the conclusion.

5.1   MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF THE DISABLED

5.1.1   Summary

Disability is indeed a relationship between people with impairment and a discriminatory society (*cf. Sections 2.5.2 & 4.4.2*). The interpretation of the 'language of special needs' or 'special language' (Corbett, 1996:25) demands that we recognise that sentimentality, arrogance and fear are rooted in society's suppression of disabled people (*cf. Section 4.4.2*). This ideological discourse appears to have its roots in the class structure of society *(cf. Section 4.4.2)* through a calculated manipulation of images and linguistic representations which Corbett (1996:1) termed as 'bad-mouthing'. Both the textual and intertextual analyses done have shown how the disabled self can be misrepresented by euphemistic terms, treated as inferior and low in social status and 'doubly' objectified in charitable activities and as part of social investment packages of business corporations. This has positioned the disabled in a limited way, socially conditioning and subjecting them as the 'others'. This implies an oppressive social practice based on biological differences (*cf. Sections 2.5.2 & 4.4.2*). Thus, the focus should now be on the

possibilities for changing society, empowering the disabled people and promoting a different self-understanding as advocated by Shakespeare (1996) & Kaplan (2000) (*cf. Section 2.5.2*). One possible contribution from CDA is to propagate for a deconstruction of these disabling social practices through the reconstruction the 'special language' that has been used to represent or misrepresent the disabled and their disabilities (*cf. Section 5.2*).

5.1.2   Evaluation of Fairclough's Framework

Fairclough's 3-dimensional framework (*cf. Section 2.2*) has been an effective tool in approaching the media representation of the social images of the disabled. It has enabled this study to draw out texts as identification of persons and how the social identities of the disabled are set up in discourse. The framework also acknowledges the scale and complexity of the dialectic, where society affects journalism and journalism affects society, as has also been proposed by Richardson (2007). It enables the newspaper discourse to be broken down into smaller subdivisions - 'a complex of three elements' of social practice, discursive practice and the text itself and their 'interrelations' (Fairclough, 1995a:74).

Fairclough's framework has also brought out the wider-sociocultural processes which a text is part of and what it can affect. As said by Fowler (1991:222), 'news is not a natural phenomenon emerging straight from reality but a product. It is produced by industry, shaped by the bureaucratic and economic structure of that industry, by the relations between the media and other industries'. There is always a purpose for a news-

text being the way it is. The critical aspect of the framework has enabled us to draw out the possibility of obscure ideological consequences of the media discourse.

However, it has also been observed that Fairclough's framework seems very much text bound. This may be a limitation in itself. Triangulation in any CDA study should then be encouraged.

5.2   FUTURE DIRECTIONS

5.2.1   Reconstructing special language

The discursive practices in journalism (both language choice and texturing of voices) must be done with more responsibility to re-construct special language. The disabled must be given empowerment through language to increase their visibility in society, thus giving them a more vocal and assertive identity to be an integral part of society.

The analysis and findings in Section 4.1 suggest that there must be an understanding that speaking the 'right' language, especially through euphemism which is not about agonising over delicate sensibilities. Political correctness is still a paternalistic practice used as an avenue to label people, bracketing the disabled into defined sectors. It has also blurred distinctions between the various subtypes within each broad type of disability as claimed by the *medical model* (*cf. Sections 2.5.1 & 4.1*). There is a need for direct, exact and explicit terminology that indicates each specific pathological disability. Only then, the specific social, welfare or infrastructural provisions could be extended. For example, being named 'handicapped' or 'crippled' rather than 'physically

challenged' will conjure an understanding for the needs of wheelchair-accessible buildings, grab bars in the public washrooms and parking for the disabled to help ease their mobility. This will enable the disabled to be independent and fit into the daily functions of society.

New voices of disabled theorists are challenging and criticising the non-disabled voices (*cf. Section 2.5.3 & 1.1.4*). Language, metaphor and imagery should pave way to new words and 'new ownership of language of disability' (Corbett, 1996:26). The notions of 'special needs' and 'disability' should be taken out of their restricted areas and brought into contact with a diverse range of experiences as seen in the 'defensive subculture' (Corbett, 1996:55) (*cf. Section 2.5.3*). This need for an inclusion of divergent voices in disability discourse will postulate new ways of seeing and celebrating differences and counteract conservative concepts of 'normality' (*cf. Section 2.5.3*).

The discursive practice in journalism should also move towards deconstructing the power of dominant discourses, particularly the business and charity discourses in this case. Perhaps, by giving more space for the disabled to speak for themselves could contribute towards reducing and eliminating dominant discourses on disability. However, it has to be cautioned that the disabled will not stop being excluded from dominant discourses unless society is prepared to 'listen' to these silent spaces. New languages have to be accorded status and listened to with respect (Corbett, 1996). Only then powerlessness could be replaced by language empowerment.

The Star newspaper has since 2004 advocated a column on the disabled called "Wheel Power' by Anthony Thanasayan, a disability activist and writer who is also a paraplegic. This is a progressive movement towards giving voices to the disabled. However, it is observed in recent years that the appearance of the column has been reduced in terms of frequency and size. It used to be a half page publication but has been reduced to a quarter now. In 2004-2006, it appeared weekly or fortnightly, but its frequency is now described as random. This editorial decision needs to be redressed.

The disability rights movements are working towards a society in which the physical and mental differences among people are accepted as normal and expected. We have a wide range of methods and tools at our disposal to accommodate human differences should we choose to. The growth of technology has provided us with the ability to detect more human differences than ever before, but we need to make these differences meaningful in practical terms. How we react to human differences is a social and a policy choice. We should advocate for a social structure that focuses on including all people in the social fabric, rather than drawing an artificial line that separates "disabled people" from others (Kaplan, 2000). This could start with us speaking the 'right' language that would help inculcate the right attitudes.

5.2.2. Limitations of study

The findings here are derived from the analysis of 179 news reports and articles published by *The Star* from the time frame of 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005 and a set of secondary data of interviews with only 4 NGOs. A study beyond these sources of data

and chosen time frame could reveal a different dimension to the construction of social images of the disabled people. With the availability of more texts through a corpus study, a comparative study with other media as well as interviews with more disability NGOs would further concretise the validity of interpretations made and thus make the analyses better triangulated.

The researcher here is a sole investigator, and this in itself could entail biasness. This piece of dissertation itself could have over-sensationalised or overstated the issue of the construction of social images of the disabled community. The researcher here could also have misinterpreted any sincere intentions of the editors or journalists. As cautioned by Fairclough (1995b), a text may be sincere and manipulative at the same time. Thus, any disapproving tone adopted is meant to caution potential manipulations or detrimental effects that may arise in text consumption. This is hoped to be able to raise an awareness for us to evaluate and read texts critically.

In addition, jargon have been employed, particularly in the theoretical discussions in Chapter 2 which could have impeded comprehension. However, this could not be avoided as CDA requires the use of accurate terminology to bring out specific ideas or techniques used in discourse constructions. The researcher here is aware that this kind of complex theorising could be ideological in itself. It could distinct those who have 'the eye' for CDA versus those who do not although this is not the intention of the researcher here. To compensate for this, where analysis and discussions are concerned, particularly in Chapter 4, jargon have been kept to a minimum to ease understanding.

5.2.3. Future studies

Based on the data studied, it is observed that there are three prominent text structures to be further incorporated and explored in the disability site which have not been analysed in this study. These are the inquiries into the headlines, subheadings and snippets spread across texts (linguistic analysis) and the texturing of the narrative genre within news reporting as well as multi-modal feature of texts (intertextual analysis).

The linguistic analysis should further investigate the inclusion of headlines, subheadings and snippets spread across texts. These should include the purposes and effects of particular choices of words, structures, meanings they denote and connote and the whereabout they have been strategically placed in the published texts. This so far has been observed to result in depressing and disapproving undertone across those texts in the current data studied.

Many journalists have structured their contexts of articles by deploying the narrative genre to start and end their texts. A narrative is considered one verbal technique for recapitulating experience. It is often light reading and draw on the emotive and affective aspects of readers, enticing them to read on. Readers will be able to relate it to their knowledge, experience and opinions. With real life or authentic stories being quoted, the effects of text consumption will be enhanced. It will be worth examining the manipulation and texturing of this genre within the news text to enact another 'social conditioning' and reflection of the local social practices.

This study here does not include the many pictures of the disabled showing happy smiles and arms lifted. A semiotic study in the multi-modal texts could be considered to see how these could add to the interpretation of texts in terms of what they represent through facial expressions, colours, sizes and positioning of pictures.

5.3   CONCLUSION

Linguistic forms have the capacity to encode views, perceptions and assumptions about the world of the disabled and disability. We have seen how the relationships between text producers and readers contribute to who we are and how we construct others. CDA can bring out the reality hidden in texts where it would be not so visible at the surface level. With this, it is hoped that CDA can significantly contribute towards a more equal or equitable Malaysian society where the disabled can become an integral part of society and hence, gear towards the national aspiration of a caring society (*cf. Section 1.1.3*).