

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.0 Background of The Study

1.1 Media Bias and Language

News media plays an essential role in a society by providing the members of the society to form information to the public for both individual and collective decisions. Unfortunately, news media is widely viewed as biased. A survey conducted by the American Society of Newspaper Editions (ASNE, 1999) revealed that 78 percent of the American citizens believed that there were elements of bias in news reporting (Baron 2004: 10). News media bias may indeed affect both the content of the stories and also of how the stories are framed and reported in the news. Besides that, it is also important to understand the nature of media bias. Media bias comes in variety of forms. Bias is the result of the absence of balance, where one side of the story receives more attention than the other. This could be ideological. This is because newspapers receive identical signals of the truth, but yet, the news that they deliver may be slanted in different ways like through omission or addition (Mullainathan and Shleifer 2003: 50). This mainly has to do with the abstract values that may be proposed with the use of language. The use of language involves a level of abstraction that refers to a process of selecting some details and eliminating the others. Language is perceived as a system that constitutes meaningfulness. In Critical Discourse Analysis, an offshoot of applied linguistics, language is described as a form of representation that has specific signification (Fowler 1979: 22) . It shapes or constitutes the objects denoted. In relation to this, bias is said to be created in news stories through the fabrication of information as the common practice. This is due to the

fact that media plays a “mediating role between objective social reality and personal experience” through the use of language (Hidayat, 2001: 22)

1.2 Stereotyping

When the characteristics and appearance of few group members are being simplified and applied to the whole group, it is a form of stereotyping. Stereotyping is one form of cognitive activities, which help to distinguish and categorize people based on their physical or biological differences. As also claims by Fowler (1979: 37), “a stereotype is a socially-constructed mental pigeon hole into which events and individuals can be sorted, thereby making such events and individuals comprehensible.” In loose terms, it means that people work with tacit mental categories for the sorting of experience. Stereotypes are often exaggerated, composite pictures that share many of the qualities of caricature. This form of mental organization is essential because it assists in simplifying, predicting and organizing the world. The effects of stereotyping can fluctuate, but for the most part they are negative. This claim is supported by Goddard and Patterson who claim that stereotyping “is very much about process of applying a simplified model to a real, complex individual, often to negative and derogatory effect”(2000 : 44) . This is mainly due to the fact that people become selective about the information gets processed and how far it gets processed (Goddard and Patterson, 2000).The negativity may perhaps refer to the bias and misjudgment of certain individuals or certain groups of people on different groups or people who so happen to be viewed as different or to be more socially precise, deviant (Pennington 2008, 98). It may then be concluded that stereotyping is a form of conclusion that people make based on dispositional values rather than situational factors. Quoting from the claim made by Baron and Byrne (1997: 19), people simplify, predict and control their social world by looking at the dispositional values of things, rather than the external factors. It is hard to

disregard stereotyping as it is constantly rooted and penetrated through the wide use in every day talk and texts. As claimed by Lakoff(1987: 77) , stereotyping is a belief adopted by people in their every day communication, not because of the truth but mainly because it is easier to be understood or easy to be perceived. It definitely does not happen in vacuum, but it is bounded to the social and political structure.

1.3 Gender Stereotyping

Gender stereotyping signifies the mental representation of people, based on their sex. This mental representation that one has is mainly based on the physical and biological differences which one acknowledges and applies in segregating the two genders. It signifies the belief or attitude that one gender or sex is inferior to, less competent , or even less valuable than the opposite gender or sex (Goddard and Patterson, 2000). It is not the beliefs of individual people, but the generalized opinions shared by people as group members (Tajfel, 1981). Hence, it is presupposed that it is acquired, used or changed in social situations, and as a function of structures of social dominance. Society expects males and females to adopt, believe in, and fulfill specific gender roles and stereotypes that have been established. Males are expected to be strong, independent, and athletic, whereas females are expected to be quiet, obedient, attractive and nurturers (Wilde, 2000). It has to be made clear that the stereotypical attitudes referred are not learned, nor are they concrete and finite. They represent the identity of both genders in the eyes of society. Up to this part, it is clear that both genders are constructed as separated and possessing different characteristics. Prototypically, men are expected to behave, dress or even speak differently from women. This is known as gender roles which have been pre assigned to both gender, which are socially bound. Gender roles are "socially and culturally defined prescriptions and beliefs about the behavior and emotions of men and women" (Goodard and

Patterson 2000, 102). The tendency to segregate and to categorize both genders signifies how the society presses on the importance of differentiating the two genders. The two genders have been assigned to specific social roles and characteristics, which are stereotypical. The roles and characteristics are stereotypical as men and women are supposed to adhere to the social perception created, despite that fact of possessing personal traits. Males are expected to demonstrate certain characteristics and behaviours that are “masculine”, while females are held accountable for being ‘feminine’. To conclude, the knowledge on the differences between both genders is a shared system or known as social knowledge. It is not knowledge in the sense of facts or truth. But it is more of the pragmatic awareness.

1.4 Statement of problem.

Studies on domestic violence, conducted by social scientists, have significantly suggested that women are mainly the victims, besides children and senior citizens (Schechter , 1982). It is a matter of fact that these studies are the derivation of social cognition which tends to privilege the victims and dismiss the perception of the perpetrators. If one had the wish to define violence objectively and detached from the social perception which has been rooted strongly in the society, one would have to start looking at violence from the opposite point of view and in a broader perspective. Up to now, not many social scientists have looked at the issue differently. This could be mainly because most of the data gathered by the social scientists are collected from police reports. A number of studies have been conducted on domestic violence or gender violence – most of these studies discuss the issues from a feminist perspective (Johnson, 1997). Hence, it is clear that there is interference of the feminists’ point of views in the new reports on wife abuse and one may encounter bias in the reports.

Wife abuse is one social issue, which has been viewed in a stereotypical manner, but it has never been acknowledged. Baumeister (1998) argues that social scientists have been analyzing wife abuse, from the conventional approach. The conventional approach that is discussed in his book, refers to the social cognition of the social issue. One of Baumeister's arguments is that the perception that women are more submissive and weak, compared to men, is rooted in the society. This perception has generated immediate sympathy towards the victims and condemn towards the perpetrators. This is the point that many could argue, as it indirectly signifies bias attitude that exists in how certain events could be perceived. Van Dijk (2001, 23) claims that people define and understand events, based on schema. Schema, which is formed based on experience and socialization, can be stereotyping and bias, yet, it is a tool for reporters to organize scattered events into proper sequence. This research is set to identify the linguistic features of the texts, which possibly trigger social bias and link the features with the bias portrayal in the reports on wife abuse.

1.5 Objectives of the study.

The purpose of this research is to find out

- 1) whether or not there are occurrences of bias in the news reports on wife abuse
- 2) how the male perpetrators in the reported news of wife abuse are being portrayed in the local English dailies
- 3) how the elements can be implicitly expressed in the written texts, through the linguistic features and the genre of the texts

1.6 Research Questions

- 1) How are the victims of domestic violence being represented in the texts, with reference to the linguistic features and the generic structure of the texts?
- 2) How are the perpetrators of domestic violence being represented in the texts, with reference to the linguistic features and generic structure of the texts?
- 3) Are there elements of gender bias involved in the representations of the victims and the perpetrators in the texts?

1.7 Significance of the study.

This study is significant as it analyses an issue, i.e., domestic violence which has been under reported in the mainstream media. The discussion on social issues like domestic violence may literally involve the social and cultural elements of the society that the journalists have to take into consideration. Plainly because, domestic violence is one issue that has always been socially and culturally viewed by people and it can easily trigger the ideological interest of different parties in defining. However, not much concern has been given in analyzing news discourse in relation to social cultural subjects like the issue of domestic violence.

The data of this study is analyzed using Van Dijk's theoretical framework, Social Cognition within the study of critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by texts and talks in social and political contexts (Van Dijk, 1998). Considering that domestic violence is a gender issue that normally happens within a patriarchal style of society and consequently established what the society perceives as the patriarchal couples. Hence, it is significantly interesting to study how the elements of

discourse are used to create a greater awareness on the issue of domestic violence.

1.8 Scope and Limitation

The data of this study are six news reports on domestic violence taken from the local English daily, *The News Straits Times*. The data are retrieved from the archive of the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs and only six data are retrieved as domestic violence is not widely reported in the mainstream local dailies. The focus of the study which is physical injuries sustained by the victims in cases of domestic violence (i.e., excluding reports on cases of incest, rape and murder) has resulted in a low occurrence of data. The focus of the study is mainly on the perpetrators and the victims who are legally married. Hence, news reports on domestic violence that involved co-habiting partners are also excluded in the study.