Su’ad Awab and Lynne Norazit

‘Challenging’ times or ‘turbulent’ times: A study of the choice of metaphors used to refer to the 2008 economic crisis in Malaysia and Singapore

Abstract: The choice of a metaphor used to refer to a particular concept or event can often be linked to the social, economic, political, or even physical environment in which it is used. Commonly used metaphors, for instance, seeing a political campaign in the context of a war, can be extended to a march toward capturing the seat of the government. This dynamic use of metaphors is illustrated aptly in the Asian Economic Crisis from 1997–1999, which was described in Malaysia using metaphors of colonialism, thus reflecting the political ideology of the leadership of the time (Kelly 2001). Added to these dimensions are the cross-cultural differences that manifest themselves through the choice of metaphors used to refer to the same event. Malaysia and Singapore went through the same 2008 economic crisis but internal circumstances produced different reactions from both countries. Differences in the historical traditions and cultures of Malaysia and Singapore may have led to differences in the types of metaphors that were selected to attain similar rhetorical objectives for the event. Relationships between the two countries, while cordial at most times, still carry uneasy undercurrents since their separation in 1965. This study compares the metaphors used to describe and report the 2008 global economic crisis in major newspapers in Malaysia and Singapore. Using the tools of corpus linguistics, keywords were extracted, then concordanced to identify dominant metaphorical source domains. They were then analyzed using the critical metaphor approach, which looks at how metaphors filter reality to reflect the choices made by writers to present the ideological bias of their texts. In addition, events and issues occurring during the period in question were charted to show that these elements were also instrumental in explaining the choice of particular metaphors in constructing or deconstructing reality.

Su’ad Awab: suad@um.edu.my
Lynne Norazit: lynne.norazit@gmail.com