

# Symbols and Labels in War Reporting: A Study on the Nature of Prejudice from the Perspectives of General Semantics

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## ABSTRACT

*The September 11<sup>th</sup> incident has further reinforced the already existing two-value perception between the Western and the Muslim world. Violence, atrocities, uncivilised and cruelties have been equated with the Muslim world. After the incident, Muslims are labelled as terrorists. These ill-conceived and misconstrued meanings of Islam are due to the prejudiced nature of human beings. What is prejudice? A prejudiced mind is inclined to do everything in its power to prevent its world from changing. The prejudiced soul is unwilling to consider any viewpoint other than its own. It is the nature of prejudice that has led many nations engaged in labels and using symbols to associate meanings. Such is the case of the Muslim and the Western societies where prejudiced words are rampantly used to accuse one another. Central to these accusations is the media that used words to impart information and meanings. These meanings are often distorted at the level of reader's sub-conscious mind. This article tries to explore the nature of prejudice which is manifested in the daily news content particularly war and terrorism news. Issues on the use and misuse of words that are prejudice in nature and have ethical implications on the journalistic practice will also be addressed. In summary, the article will provide insights on alternatives to view the nature of prejudice that are reflected in the use of language, symbols and terms that sometimes dominate most news stories, from the perspectives of general semantics and philosophy of ethics.*

**Keywords:** *Prejudice, Ethics, Symbols, Labels, General Semantics*

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## **Introduction**

Prejudice and discrimination are detrimental to societies and world peace. A prejudiced soul has immense effects on the minds and actions of people. Whether intended or not, a prejudiced mind is inclined to look at others in a myopic perspective and do everything within its power to safeguard its well-being and protects its world from changing. A prejudiced mind would indeed create disparities and animosities if not checked at the early stage.

What is the root cause of prejudice? Why does the human mind harbour prejudice? In the long years of study on prejudice, scholars have concluded that there appears to be no clear acceptance of any theory of causation. However, scholars do agree that prejudice and discrimination are not universally considered as something that humans are inherently born with. But on the other hand, a renowned scholar in prejudice, Gordon Allport (1954) pointed out that there is considerable evidence that prejudice is absent in young children's mind.

Allport's contention is worth noting. Perhaps we could start investigating all the children's mind and behaviour and find out why prejudice is so alien to them. Children as we all know pay less attention to the larger world outside but pay more attention to the immediate surrounding that could make them happy such as playing with friends and dining out with their families.

Evidence shows that scholars seldom reach an agreement on the "cause" of prejudice and discrimination but there is a consensus that it is a learned behaviour and that prejudice and discrimination are so rampant in the adult mind. Such a statement may open up a new dimension of study about the origin and root of prejudice and discrimination.

## **Symbolization Behaviour**

Looking at the world today with so much happening, human triumphs, tragedies and sufferings, one should re-evaluate and investigate the development of adult behaviour as to why prejudice and discrimination has thickened in their hearts and soul. Let's look at the root cause. The internalization of prejudice starts with parents and teachers and friends etc. Of course, one could not deny that institutions such as government and even non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the media are sometimes responsible in unconsciously inculcating the solid value

of prejudice and discrimination among society, telling them to accept whatever that has been preached and imparted. Hence, the portrayal of “one’s race is superior than the other” is becoming a legitimate practice in the media and other institutions. Thus, since prejudice is learned, no one in this world could cure all this ill behaviour.

If Allport’s findings are true and acceptable to most scholars around the globe, saying that prejudice is a learned behaviour, then we could easily agree that language behaviour is partly to be blamed. People learned through languages. Parents, teachers, friends and many other groups teach and persuade many others including children through symbols (language being the most sophisticated symbol is the most highly developed, most subtle and most complicated). It has been pointed out that human beings by agreement can make everything stands for anything.

From time to time, humans think to improve, create and invent for the betterment of the society. This so-called cultural programming system has worked well in the human brain. Language and symbols are used to connote the principle of good and bad, right and wrong etc. which is manifested in the moral and ethical philosophies of human beings. Our ancestors had bequeathed us with those cultural values so that we are more in control of our lives. We add and subtract values which are respectively congruent or incongruent to our life systems.

The cultural programming system is best described by a contemporary anthropologist, Marvin Harris (1986) regarding the formation of language. He says, speakers in preliterate societies often lacked specific words for colours. They lacked control over dyes and paints. But now, because of the advent in technology and the world becomes more civilised and sophisticated, all of the three thousand or so different languages spoken in the world today possess a common fundamental structure and need only minor adjustments and changes in vocabulary to be equally efficient in restoring, retrieving and transmitting information and organising social behaviour. Hence, the inculcation of values, symbols and verbal language in our brain is basically a learned process.

We may say that prejudice is learned and influenced by external forces without giving much thought that the underlying factors lies on our improper habits of evaluation about things outside us. That is why Allport says there is little evidence of prejudiced minds present in young children. This is because children could not easily symbolize the world around them and they don’t even have words to say about things and don’t even have any preconceived ideas about people around them until their parents tell them to do so. In the process of teaching, parents could

easily pass along their values and feelings of prejudice and discrimination to their children.

## **Maps and Territories: The Principle of General Semantics**

We may not realise that we live in two worlds. First, we live in the world of events or happenings which we know first hand. This is an internal world and relatively small consisting only of that continuum of the things that we have actually seen, felt and heard. This means, the world outside us such as the remotest of Africa, Papua New Guinea and the like, may not exist in our mind if we have never been to the place or seen it on television. If somebody ask us how much we know first hand, we discovered that we know so little about these countries.

Again, if somebody ask us about U.S president Barack Obama and his popular foreign policy on global engagement, we may say we know but actually we know nothing. We know him by name only. If someone asks us about Islam or Judaism, the answer would be an immediate “Yes”. Yes, we may say that we know based on our readings of books and newspapers. But, actually we do not know. We should not claim that we know if we do not have the experience in Judaism or Moslem or Hinduism or Christianity.

The second world we live in is the extensional world. This is the world of reality or the world of events or happenings. To use the famous metaphor introduced by Alfred Korzybski in his *Science and Sanity* (1933), this verbal world or intensional world ought to stand in relation with the map or external world as a map does to the territory it is supposed to represent.

Let’s look at a simple case. A man who was brought up in a remote area with the verbal world in his head correspond to his limited experience of his childhood through adolescence, may face little danger if he encounters with another person of the same kind. If, however, he encounters people who do not correspond with his verbal head or people acting differently from him, then his mind and action may be crammed with errors and prejudice.

According to a renowned journalism scholar John C. Merrill (1983) stereotyping and prejudices are recurrent themes in explaining the public’s image of its government; a man’s image of his friends; people’s image of people of other nations; the journalist’s image of foreign people and

leaders. Distrust and misunderstanding among people on a global scale is a common phenomenon today.

Leaders and experts of many nations get together in worldwide conventions and in international organisations such as UNESCO to discuss this problem for so many years. But within the minds of these men and women leaders, the feelings of suspicions and prejudices towards one another still prevail. Scholars have cited various reasons and these include the extent of likenesses and differences in frames of references, value systems, social norms, and worldview of the cultures involved.

In the last decades, there have been numerous studies on the nature of prejudices, stereotypes, slants or biases from the perspectives of journalism and communication, social psychology, sociology and sociolinguistics. Here, we are standing on ground that has been well-researched, but nevertheless, needs to be continued and pursued further in every possible dimension for greater understanding among mankind.

One area of prejudice that has long been overlooked and needs re-emphasis is the use of language and words. And central to the usage of language and words is the media where their day-to-day activities and daily offerings involved the use of words to impart information in the forms of news. Language and words according to a neurologist and general semanticist, Alfred Korzybski, are only maps of reality. They are not the actual territories. And that the very nature of words could lead human beings astray. In other words he and his followers such as S.I. Hayakawa and Wendell Johnson believed that words are the source of human misunderstandings.

By looking at the general semantics point of view, we may conclude that human mind can be manipulated by symbols (i.e, the most sophisticated symbol is language). Symbols can be interpreted according to one's own needs and wants.

Citizens of modern society need more than ordinary common sense as not to trust symbols especially language and they need to be systematically aware of the powers and limitation of symbols especially words. If they think that language and symbols cannot do harm to society, they may already be trapped into the nature of prejudice. According to S.I. Hayakawa (1964) the first principle of governing symbols is this: The symbol is not the thing symbolized; the word is not the thing; the map is not the territory it stands for.

## **Prejudice from the Perspective of General Semantics**

Prejudice refers to a cultural attitude based on negative stereotypes about people or groups because of their cultural, religious, racial or ethnic background. It is roughly synonymous to bias, discrimination, or bigotry. A dictionary definition shows that prejudice refers to an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race or their supposed characteristics (*Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary*: 928). According to Allport (1954), there is a simple evidence that prejudice and discriminations are social constructions. Human beings, says he, are not born with prejudice and stereotypical inclinations.

To general semanticists, prejudice develops out of a two-value orientation that human beings nurtured. Words and language cement human beings into an unhealthy two-valued system. Words, according to Korzybski, promote categorical thinking. They lead us to set up false distinctions between body and mind, rational and emotional. Time and space, us and them, good and bad. Think how easily these either-or judgements roll out of our lips. The infamous declaration made by US President George Bush after the September 11th attack give us some clear examples of this two-valued thinking: "Either you're with us or you're against us". "You're either part of the problem or part of the solution". General semanticists like Korzybski and Hayakawa say that such inclination is a rigid way of looking at issues, perceptions and life experiences.

Mighty words from mighty leaders and mighty nations such as the US and several of the world superpowers have managed to trigger some aura of helplessness among leaders and people from "weaker" nations. And to complicate matters further, those mighty words are printed and aired in every nations' mass media all over the world. Unfortunately, many nations and people seem to evaluate in a reverse order, placing prejudices, wishes, and conclusions as more important than the empirical data or ignoring data that do not support their prejudices. People tend to act based on symbols and labels. As we have witnessed via CNN and our nations' satellite televisions those words uttered by the US President were symbols of patriotism and we have seen what "patriotism" has done to Afghanistan.

No one in this world wants to admit that he or she has a prejudiced mind. But the question of prejudice is inevitable. Any individual or citizens of a country tend to have a strong sense of belonging to one's country and people. Whatever terms tend to be used be it patriotism,

nationalism or jingoism, they are only symbols, that are considered the most sophisticated kind of language. In the case of patriotism, we can see that the strong feelings that one has for one's country automatically place other country as less superior than one's own country. At one point, the spirit of jingoism and patriotism provide strength to one's own belief and love for one's country, but on the other hand, it creates prejudicial feelings that one holds towards other countries and other people.

Let's look at the nature of prejudice towards the word "patriotism". Looking from the perspectives of general semantics, the following statements are loaded with two-value orientation. Patriotism in the following case is considered a nuisance and hence it is perceived as bad. To quote George Bernard Shaw: Patriotism is your conviction that this country is superior to all other countries because you were born in it. And he went on saying: You'll never have a quiet world till you knock the patriotism out of the human race. (<http://www.geocities.com/quotegarden/patriot.html>)

But there are individuals who see things from a multi-value orientation. In this case, the word "patriotism" is evaluated from a multi-value perspective. For instance, former Finance Minister of Malaysia, Daim Zainuddin once said: "It was patriotism that has largely helped keep Malaysia intact through years of communist insurgency, external threats to our sovereignty and the numerous attempts at destabilising us". However, he added, "We do not want patriots who indulge in xenophobia and are possessed with a consuming hatred for anything and everything foreign. Our patriotism must be a positive force for our good and the good of humankind" (<http://www.ukec.com/economy/tundaim.html>). Along the multi-value understanding of "patriotism" we illustrated another example by Montesquieu who says: "If I knew something that would serve my country but would harm mankind, I would never reveal it; for I am a citizen of humanity first and by necessity, and a citizen of France second, and only by accident". (<http://www.geocities.com/quotegarden/patriot.html>).

In propagating the theory of general semantics, Alfred Korzybski and his followers have chosen to call their field of study "non-Aristotelian" instead of "anti-Aristotelian" orientation. For the general semanticists, the Aristotelian concept of language was found to be inadequate in contributing human progress. According to S.I Hayakawa (1964) the Aristotelian concept of language is non-evaluative; the words that are normally used do not always give an accurate picture of reality, resulting in unresolved human problems.

While the Aristotelian orientation looks at intentional meanings which are generalisations of the external reality, the non-Aristotelian looks at extensional meanings which are based on ordering observations, investigations, etc. (Lee, 1941: 123). The use of extensional orientation in everyday language could possibly avoid the bias inherent in writing and speaking. Because one would of course have fewer tendencies to take what is said for granted and would question the meanings of words, there would be less tendency for one to infer, prejudge and harbour a prejudicial behaviour towards others.

Based on scientific observation, general semantics have identified four basic problems that inhibit factual communication. These include two value orientations, dead-level abstracting, undue – identification and unconscious projection (see Hayakawa, 1964).

*Two-value orientation:* What does this term implies? To the general semanticist, this term is also known as “either-or”. Thinking. We sometimes become unconscious of our evaluation of things, which are oftentimes prejudicial in nature. For instance, in news writing, journalists sometimes are confused between facts that can be verified and interpretations, judgements and opinions that are exclusively their own. From the general semanticist’s point of view, journalist should differentiate between what is going on and what they feel or understand is going on. This is termed as a multi-value system of judgement. Reports by international news agencies, for instance, are oftentimes found to present news based on a two-value orientation. News about their home countries is given positive coverage while other countries are negatively portrayed. In the case of “patriotism”, such declaration from their country’s leaders is considered an act of loyalty and a show of love for one’s country. However, “patriotism” from another country would be interpreted as “patriotism at a gunpoint” or jingoism. For the general semanticists, the two-value orientation is obsolete and multi-value orientation is considered more humanly acceptable.

*Dead level abstraction.* Another basic problem that inhabits factual communication and human understanding is the process of abstracting that can occur at either a high or low level of abstraction. Much of the international political rhetoric gets stuck on the high level of abstraction. At the high level of abstraction are words frequently used by the media like “liberalism”, “chauvinism”, “racism”, “terrorism”, “democracy”, “dictatorship” etc. These terms do not contain words at the lower levels of abstraction. Journalists in Malaysia, following their counterparts in other countries widely used these words as if people clearly understand their



meanings. These words are difficult to comprehend, because we are given high levels of abstraction but not the translation of a concrete level to go with them. As we can see, following the September 11 incident, leaders from various parts of the world began using the word “terrorism” and “terrorists”, “suicide bombers” and “Islamic fundamentalist” etc, while many others try to reduce the abstract level of the word by pressurising the United Nations to spell out clearly the meaning of “terrorism”. One might ask under what circumstances does the term “terrorism” apply? On the other hand, language can also become stuck at the low level of abstraction. This is also considered another type of dead-level abstracting. An example is someone describing in great detail everything that he has witnessed in an accident. Such a description without a high regard for the universal inverted pyramid structure and lacking in news value, will only be discarded. In this case the use of precise journalistic language in straight news reporting is one good way of reducing abstraction.

*Undue-Identification:* This category is yet another critical criterion for the breakdown in human communication. In this type of breakdown, communicators fail to see the distinctions between “things”. All things are seen as identical. As a result “over-generalisation” occur. Examples are: a) Women cannot be leaders because they are weak and emotional. b) Statistics are boring and don’t prove anything. c) Vitamin A is good for your health. d) Moslems are terrorists. These statements are generalisation. In the case of vitamin A is essential for a person’s health but too much dosage can cause harm on that person. The notion “What makes a poison is the dosage” exemplifies Korzybski’s principle of non-identity.

According to Lewis (<http://www.kcmetro.cc.mo.uc/penvalley/biology/lewis/vitamin.htm>) no two situations, parts of situations, individuals, stages of processes, orders of abstractions are the same in all details. If we incorporate this principle into our evaluation habits, we will be more alert to differences, including the potential harmful effects of large doses of nutrients. To avoid undue-identification and prejudices, general semanticists have suggested the use of indices. If we are to attach an idea to a word like “woman”, we would avoid direct or indirect over-generalisation, and hence we would say: Woman 1 is not woman 2, and woman 2 is not woman 3.

*Unconscious projection:* This is a lack of awareness that one’s statements are to a degree statements about oneself. For example: a) “He is a weak leader”. b) “He is clever”. c) “She is beautiful”. These statements are not factual; they involved a great deal of personal

feelings. The statements are oftentimes reflections of one's opinions and past experiences. In order to avoid unconscious projection, general semanticists have suggested the addition of "to me" at the beginning or end of any statement. Examples are: "It appears to me that...". "She looks beautiful to me..." etc.

## **Review of Literature**

Issues of prejudice in the media have been widely studied both at the local and international level. At the local level, the major focus is on news directions and slants; news sources, directions of issues in the newspapers. At the international levels issues of prejudice are researched under the bias category and areas focussed were on unbalanced presentation of controversial issues, directions of news sources, reliance and subsidising of information by partisan sources, orientations of news themes and the like (Peh and Malkote, 1991).

Very few studies have focused on the use and misuse of languages in the media that may result in prejudicial coverage. However, there are several local journalism studies that have focused on the theory of general semantics (see Chau Pau Ling, 1997; Rajib and Faridah, 1999; 1998; 1997; Faridah and Rahmah, 1996; Rajib, 1984; Faridah, 1984).

In a content analysis study on the images of superpowers as reflected in two Malaysian national dailies, *Utusan Malaysia* (UM) and *New Straits Times* (NST), Faridah Ibrahim (1984) found that the five superpowers chosen for the study were given dual images. Out of the 459 news items analysed from both newspapers, the result shows that both newspapers placed the United States, Great Britain and U.S.S.R in the unfavourable/neutral category; while the Republic of China and Japan were placed in the favourable/neutral category. Such a situation has illustrated the unconscious projection of a two-value orientations in news reporting.

Mohd Rajib (1984) used Hayakawa's Trichotomy to study the coverage of political news from the perspective of semantics objectivity in two Malaysian national dailies. His results indicated that the use of "non-objective" sentences comprising of the inference, judgement and label categories was less frequent. Each of the categories of non-objective sentences studied showed percentages of below 7 percent out of a total of 2564 sentences analysed.

Barranco and Shyles (1988) studied bias from the perspective of unbalanced representation of facts and opinions by comparing the

coverage of Israel and the Arabs in the *New York Times*. The findings indicated that Israel, its issues, events, leaders received significantly more coverage than the Arabs. Said (1981) in a qualitative examination of news coverage in the region of Israel and Arabs found that the U.S press in their coverage of the Iranian hostage crisis, tended to simplify complex cultural-political issues by resorting to a pre-conceived superficial understanding of Islam and its value.

Peh and Malkote (1991) study news reporting bias on the coverage of Korean Airlines and Iran airbus shootings in the U.S elite press. Their results indicated that bias existed in the press coverage of the two events. The results indicated that KAL incident received more than double the coverage than the Iran incident. The act of shooting the KAL, and the involvement of Soviets in the KAL incident were portrayed negatively, whereas their counterparts in the Iran Air incident were depicted positively.

Mohd Rajib and Faridah (1996) found in their study on human rights coverage of five Malaysian leading dailies that about 74.6 percent of the 2250 news sentences analysed used facts and objective sentences comprising of “report sentences attributed” and “report sentence unattributed” which contain verbs such as “say/says”, “according to” and “tell/told”, “added” and “informed”. According to general semanticists the word “say/says” is objective because it is not value-laden or judgemental. While about 25.4 percent of the news sentences analysed contained biased statements and labels which are considered non-objective. The study concluded that having 25.4 percent of non-objective sentences in the total news hole is cause for concern and needs immediate attention from news editors.

## **Methodology**

War news published in the month of June 2009 in four mainstream newspapers were chosen as the unit of analysis. The newspapers included in the samples were English language dailies, *New Straits Times* (NST) and *The Star* (TS), and two Malay language dailies, *Utusan Malaysia* (UM) and *Berita Harian* (BH). Since the issue to be studied is the nature of prejudice in the Malaysian media as manifested by the news content, the main focus of analysis would be the choice of words used by newspapers in covering war stories be it in the form of straight news, features, editorials, and letters to editors or opinion pieces. Besides the

utilisation of basic quantitative content analysis approach, to provide data on direction of coverage and sources used, the analysis of words is done qualitatively to extricate rich data. Analysis and explanations of the findings were based on four levels of communication inhibitors identified by general semanticists namely two-value orientation, dead-level abstracting, undue-identification and unconscious projection. It is the nature of analysis and issues studied that warrant the usage of both quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

## **Research Findings**

This article provided findings based on the four selected newspapers namely NST, TS, UM and BH. An intercoder reliability measured at 0.80 was recorded indicating the validity and appropriateness of the categories used. For the one-month period, the numbers of news used as samples are as follows: A total of 261 samples was analysed of which 27.2 percent (71) *Utusan Malaysia*, 21.5 percent (56) *Berita Harian*, 23.0 percent (60) *New Straits Times* and 28.4 percent (74) *The Star*.

Of the total samples, 87.7 percent (229) were straight news items, while only 1.5 percent (4) were features, and the remaining 10.3 percent were from kicker stories (27) and columnist 0.4 percent (1). Most of the news that contained the four communication inhibitors elements are from the international news agencies and very few from local writers. A total of 37.5 percent (98) news was from Agence France Press (AFP); Associated Press (AP) accounted for 26.4 percent (69) news; 17.6 percent (46) from Reuters; 1.5 percent (4) from the Malaysian national news agency, BERNAMA; 9.2 percent (24) are from the Agency; and the remaining 7.7 percent of news, features and opinion pieces were from the newspapers' staff.

In terms of news direction, the findings showed that the newspapers have the tendency to report more negativities as compared to positive news. Table 1 illustrates the trend in frequencies. Table 2 shows direction of headlines whereby negative oriented headlines supersede positive, balanced and neutral ones.

The study used the four types of communication inhibitors identified by general semanticists namely dead level abstracting, two-value orientation versus multi-value orientation, undue identification and unconscious projection. Previous studies both at the local level and international have only looked at objective and non-objective types

Table 1: News Direction

Direction/Frequency	F	%
Positive	55	21.1
Negative	177	67.8
Neutral	16	6.1
Balanced	13	5.0
Total	261	100.0

Table 2: Direction of Headlines

Direction/Frequency	F	%
Positive	51	19.5
Negative	183	70.1
Neutral	11	4.2
Balanced	16	6.1
Total	261	100.0

of sentences (see Rajib and Faridah, 1996; Peh and Melkote, 1991; Barranco and Shyles, 1988; Rajib, 1984; Faridah, 1984; Merrill, 1965). Hence, this study that specifically looked at the four general semantics communication inhibitors can be considered an exploratory study and the usefulness of the items could be tapped further.

## Deal Level Abstraction

Although the presence of abstract word or sentences present in the news are low in the newspapers, it is important that journalists need to be aware of the use of appropriate words, since wrong choice of words which usually contain derogatory and prejudicial under tones might lead to misunderstanding, animosities, hatred and conflicts.

Some abstract words with prejudicial under tones are used in the newspapers to describe world leaders, especially controversial ones, a chaotic situation and the orientations of certain nations such as those found in the following samples for examples “a **defiant** North Korean”, “**vile-product** of the US”, “**Nuclear** North Korea”, “Sharon is a **war criminal** and Israel is a racist regime...”, “a **bitter** three-month election campaign in Ukraine”, “**troubled** Southern Province of Thailand”,

“**potential Jihadis**”, “Buddhist **infidel**”, “**tightest** security plan ever”, “to **neutralise** Palestinian leader”, “Israel need to break this **chain of terror**” says a spokesperson for Israeli Prime Minister commenting on the Palestine suicide bombers. The words in bold are abstract terms that may have prejudicial connotations.

## **Two-value versus Multi-value**

Two-value orientations according to Korzybski involved the usage of words and meanings at the extreme. Often times, such act could create animosities and tensions among conflicting individuals or groups. Even Allport, the scholar of prejudice contended that prejudice emerged out of a two categorical situation having two extreme values in conflict. The results of the analysis in this study show a minimal usage of sentences consisting of two-value orientations as compared to multi-value orientation, which is being propagated by general semanticists. It is interesting, however, for us to note several sentences that indicate two-value orientations. For instance:

“Ramallah: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is sabotaging peace efforts, the Palestinian presidency said after he called for a demilitarised Palestinian state that would recognise Israel as the home of the Jewish people...”. – Agencies (NST 16/6/2009).

The Ramallah’s news contained a two-value orientation embedded in Netanyahu’s speech, which highlighted the peace offer to Palestine on one hand and on the other he was laying a precondition to the peace negotiations, which many countries termed it as a sabotage which denies all the rights of the Palestinian people.

In another news with a headline “North Korea vows to build more nuke bombs. Pyongyang issues threats after UN tougher sanctions” highlighted a two-value orientation used by North Korea in dealing with the world. This is clearly seen in the first paragraph of the news story following this headline. In the news, North Korea takes a two-value stand: “either you are with us or you are against us” which can be detrimental to international relation in the long run.

“Seoul: **A defiant North Korea** vowed yesterday to build more nuclear bombs and to start enriching uranium for a new weapon programme after a UN Security Council imposed sanctions over last month’s nuclear test.

The North describing Fridays sanctions resolution as a “vile product” of a US-inspired campaign, said it would never abandon nuclear weapons and would treat any attempt to blockade it as an act of war...”. (TS 14/6/2009).

## **Undue Identification**

Similar in trend with two-value orientation, another group of sentences studied concerned undue-identification where findings show a minimal amount of sentences containing undue-identification. These statements are close to over generalisations, blanket statements or over simplification of words. It is good to know that in general both local and foreign are aware of the use of generalisations. Nevertheless a qualitative analysis of the samples showed a minimal presence of sentences with undue-identification. Several examples of news under this category are cited here:

“Jakarta: Police commonly beat and torture people in custody and offer better treatment in exchange for money and sex, Amnesty International said in a report released yesterday” – AFP (NST 26/6/2009).

“Beijing: China shares the region’s ‘serious concerns’ about a nuclear North Korea and urged all parties to keep negotiating, a Chinese military said yesterday after talks with Pentagon officials” (NST – 27/6/2009).

In the Jakarta news, the journalist from AFP has made a blanket statement regarding the police who are in a habit of beating and torturing people in their custody. The generalisation made by the journalist implies that police all over the world are the same. From the general semanticist perspective, this statement is definitely bias and oversimplified because Police 1 is not the same as Police 2. Hence, the police become a victim of media’s generalisation and stereotyping which in the long run may tarnish the good image of the police force. Likewise, the Beijing news also illustrates that every country in the region seem to be supporting China, when in actuality the journalist is only generalising.

## **Unconscious Projection**

According to Gans (1990) journalists who are unable to free themselves from their ideologies and enduring values may unconsciously transmit these values while writing their news stories hence making the news slanted with a journalistic bias. General semanticists say that statements with this unconscious values are not objective because they are not telling about the reality but are reflections of one's opinions and past experiences. In this study, the presence of unconscious projections can be detected in the news particularly in the headlines which reflected the editors' orientations towards certain issues. The following headlines demonstrate some prejudicial under tones:

“Apabila tentera AS jadi ‘pengganas’”/trans: “When US army become ‘terrorists’ (UM 4/6/09); “Korea Selatan sedia tembak penceroboh/trans: South Korea ready to shoot violators” (UM 3/6/09); “Korea Utara hala peluru berpandu ke AS/trans: North Korea points missiles towards US” (UM 2/6/09); North Korea's weapon reach Alaska (TS 2/6/09); News agency claims North Korea ready to test more missiles (TS 2/6/09); Osama calls for long war against ‘infidel’ (TS 5/6/09).

## **Overcoming Prejudice: Discussion and Conclusion**

Generally the findings in this paper suggested that prejudicial words used by the four mainstream newspapers studied are those coined by the major international news agencies and their news sources. Nevertheless, the editors or page editors who created the choice of headlines which accompanied news that are prejudicial in nature, are also partly responsible. Table 1 and 2 shows that there are more negative headlines compared to negative news. In this case, it is clear that editors had written more negative headlines to accompany the news.

It is also interesting to note that out of the four types of communication inhibitors studied in the news, abstraction and unconscious projections have more occurrences as compared to the other two elements namely, two-value orientation and undue identification. In the process of reporting, journalists sometimes faced some constraints in terms of selecting the accurate words to describe events. Hence, they tend to go for intensional meaning, which is simpler, for instance, using labels and symbols familiar



to them. Labels such as “terrorism”, “chain of terror”, “racist regime”, “occasional hiccups”, “giant neighbour”, “religious extremist”, “suicide bombers”, “Defiant North Korea”, “vile product “ or evil product of the US etc only create more prejudice among nations and their people. For instance, “suicide bombers” in the English language when translated into local Malay language “serangan berani mati” (back translation: *No fear of Death attack*) or other foreign languages, Chinese, French or Spanish does not really represent the actual meaning. Such prejudicial terms highlighted in the newspapers will only widen the already existing gap of misunderstanding and animosity among nations. Hence, there is a need for world leaders to come together to have a consensus and understanding on terms used, to have international conferences for elaboration and clarification through research and development, and to look at the root cause on the nature of prejudice.

Understanding the meaning of words and languages uttered or used in the mass media would help make people or journalists aware of the presence of prejudice. If people are aware of their prejudices, they are able to gauge and evaluate the intensity and try to reduce it before they are expressed through human behaviour.

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