

ICERD in Malaysian online news reports: A cross-linguistic comparative corpus analysis

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Abstract:

The International Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which was not ratified in Malaysia, created a heated public discourse in the media. This cross-linguistic comparative study investigates the representation of ICERD in Malaysian news reports of two online sources in Malaysia – the widely read English portal: The Star Online, and its Malay equivalent: Berita Harian. A corpus-assisted discourse analysis was conducted to examine how news on ‘ICERD’ were reported in both English and Malay online newspapers. Initial comparative analysis of both newspapers revealed that the search term co-occurs statistically more frequently with the verb ‘ratify’ and its equivalent: ‘meratifikasi’. Patterns indicate that ‘ICERD’ was mostly referring to the act of sanctioning the agreement – particularly to ‘not ratify’ or ‘tidak akan meratifikasi’, which is concurrent with the timeframe of events. Interestingly, different patterns can be found in Berita Harian (e.g. the expression of ‘thanks’ or gratitude of not ratifying ICERD) that are not as revealing in The Star Online reports. Some inconsistencies were also reported between the two newspapers, e.g. referring to different ministers’ speech about the initial plan to ratify ICERD alongside five (The Star Online) or six (Berita Harian) other treaties in the following year.

Keywords: ICERD, corpus analysis, Malaysian online news, rhetoric, cross-linguistic comparative analysis

1. Introduction

Dialogues pertaining to the International Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) are nothing new in Malaysia. ICERD, which is a United Nations convention (or treaty) that calls for the end of racial discrimination, criminalizing the spread of ideas based on racial supremacy [...] (Harris, 2008) among other things, has to date: 181 state parties; 4 signatories (Angola, Bhutan, Nauru, and Palau); and 12 no-action states including Malaysia¹. The topic has been discussed by the previous Malaysian government (Barisan Nasional) in 2011 and 2015, while continuously being raised by the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) since 2009. Throughout the debates in Malaysia, various meetings known as Technical (Sub-)Committee(s) or ‘Jawatankuasa Teknikal’ have taken place between these two main parties that discussed possibilities to accede ICERD (SUHAKAM annual report, 2011; 2013; 2016). In the then government’s response to SUHAKAM’s annual report 2011², emphasis was made to the Federal Constitution that already stipulates fairness and preservation of ethnic rights, in which also functions as a guide for the building of a harmonious nation.

During the recurrence of another attempt to ratify last year, ICERD has seen various responses from both politicians and Malaysian citizens. The topic was raised during the United Nations Annual Assembly in New York last October 2018 by the newly reappointed Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad. Since then, the media caught on this issue like rapid fire, which created a much talked about public discourse; leading up to the demonstration that took place on December 8th, 2018.

Even though the idea of ratifying ICERD was turned down by the government, people were still talking about it in the media. More importantly, how was ICERD talked about in the media? In an interdisciplinary study that investigated portrayals of ICERD in four (4) online English news portals, it was found that respondents, who perceived ICERD news on these four media outlets as reliable, were found to be less supportive of the treaty (Nurrianti & Siti Aeisha, 2019). Mainly, it was found that ICERD was negatively associated with undermining the Malay's heritage rights and that of Islam as the main religion of the country. The study however, only looked at the representation of ICERD in English-based online sources and thus, requires another observation from Malay language-based ones. The present study thus offers new insight into the representation of ICERD in online media by looking at two different languages (English and Malay). This is imperative to see the role in which media has over viewers' responses to news that are not specific to one language. Indirectly, media plays an important part in selecting, ordering, and producing news stories based on what they believe viewers find newsworthy (Bednarek, 2016) – such as controversial issues like ICERD. Thus, this study aims to examine vis-à-vis a cross-linguistic analysis of ICERD portrayals in two leading news sources in the country: The Star Online and Berita Harian.

2. Literature Review

Media discourse has been researched by various scholars in many fields, particularly within the humanities and social sciences. Studies related to media and news reporting are extensive including those investigating news values and evaluation in the media (Bednarek & Caple, 2014; Chiluba & Ifukor, 2015); refugees and asylum seekers (Zuraidah & Charity, 2014; Bolte & Yuen Chee Kong, 2014); and representations of Islam (Baker, et al., 2013; Ahmed & Matthes, 2017). While news is predominantly examined by media scholars, linguists have provided insight into how “linguistically-informed discourse analysis [can] explore the construction of newsworthiness in news texts” (Bednarek, 2016: p27). In her paper, Bednarek argues for a synergy of both news values and attribution analysis that may discern how journalists organize news in discourse. Similarly, the examination of evaluation can also be referred to when examining ‘stance’. Studies like Chiluba and Ifukor (2015) adopt the appraisal framework from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and focus on how language is used in media texts to construct a social function. Linguistic studies of online media discourse have identified “people’s expression of affect in online texts and interactions plays significant roles in social processes” and that “emotional discourses in the media or politics have greater influence on hearers/readers” (Chiluba & Ifukor, 2015: p273).

Corpus linguistics studies have mushroomed since more media texts are becoming digitized. Studies usually examine media representations of controversial social issues such as those related to refugee/asylum seekers and Islam. For example, both Zuraidah and Charity (2014), and Bolte and Yuen Chee Kong (2014), observed how the media and news portrayed refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia. The former study found that there are two con-trasting representations of refugees and asylum seekers in the news – as a threat and as victims, whereas in the latter study, findings suggest that there are more direct/indirect quotations in the New Straits Times and The Star from Malaysian government officials. This was in strong contrast with Malaysiakini, which had very few quotations from Malaysian government leaders, but instead chose to extensively quote Australian government leaders. Baker et al. (2013) investigated the word ‘Muslim’ in British newspapers and discovered that the term is connected to conflict as well as being negatively represented. Although they contend to remain as unbiased when interpreting the results (they consulted other Muslim colleagues), Baker et al. (2013) argued that external factors such as readers’ internalization of prosodies in newspapers (or newsworthiness), online medium of news circulation, and a legitimation strategy involving influential columnists, could potentially skew the view/stance of news reporting in Britain. Ahmed and Matthes (2017) however, argue that much of existing research on media portrayals of Islam or Muslims cover mainly Western countries rather than Muslim media and/or non-Western countries. Their meta-analysis of 345 published studies on media discourse of Islam also revealed possible future areas of research that may help bridge this gap, namely to examine visuals and online media, conduct more comparative research, and a focus on the minority perspective.

3. Methodology

This is a cross-linguistic comparative study that investigates the representation of ICERD in two Malaysian online news portals: The Star Online, and its Malay equivalent: Berita Harian. According to Reuters Institute, Digital News Report 2018³, The Star Online was ranked second highest mostly used (32% weekly) followed by Berita Harian (24% weekly usage). Due to its wide readership, the two online sources of news are chosen for this study. It is important to note here that online news portals The Star Online and Berita Harian (online) are referred to as the online edition of their typical broadsheets. As Rogers (2019) rightfully points out, “[t]he online versions of these broadsheets, however, are more tabloid-like in format; they have flashier headlines, attention-grabbing color, and more graphics than the print editions”. And therefore, the caveat here is to not treat the online portals as their original broadsheet equivalents since it is undeniable that “[t]he push seems to be to capture readers’ attention with tabloid techniques instead of relying on a more in-depth, broadsheet-like, serious tone” (Rogers, 2019). It must also be borne in mind that the corpora are not parallel in nature but is comparable nonetheless due to its shared topic ‘ICERD’.

A corpus-assisted discourse analysis was conducted to examine how news portrayed ‘ICERD’ during the midst of ICERD ratification (between 15 November 2018 and 15 December 2018) in both English and Malay online news portals. The corpora, i.e. collection of texts, which totaled to 390 news articles, contain approximately 80,000 and 60,000 words respectively. Using corpus techniques, separate word lists are firstly generated using WordSmith tools 6.0 (Scott, 2012). This simply means that a list of frequent words in both corpora is extracted along with their occurrences in each article, as shown in Table 1.

Subsequently, this was followed by a collocational analysis that was conducted by the same corpus software. This corpus technique is used to discover and identify characteristic lexical patterns by discerning the company in which words keep. These co-occurring words surrounding the target word ‘ICERD’ or also known as “collocates”, are useful to analyse in order to see common lexical and grammatical patterns of co-occurrence. For the purpose of this study, collocates are identified based on 5 words (span) to the right and left of the node word (‘ICERD’), with a minimum occurrence of 5 in the total texts. In addition to this, t-score values are used to examine collocational strength in terms of how often words co-occur than would happen by chance. As Hunston (2002: p70) notes, “t-score uses a calculation of standard deviation” and gives measures for evidence or confidence that words are associated with each other, usually indicating significance if scores are 2 or higher (Hunston, 2002: p72). In the presentation of findings, significantly more frequent collocates of ICERD (above t-score values of 3) will be further analysed. Then, a sample of concordance lines are further investigated for how ICERD was described in the two separate news portals.

4. Findings

Table 1 shows how many times the term ‘ICERD’ is used in both online portals. In The Star Online, ICERD occurs 610 times and 79% out of the total 186 articles or texts collected. Meanwhile, ICERD is found to occur 756 times in Berita Harian; 99.5% out of 206 texts (only 2 articles did not mention this term). Other similar words that recur consistently in lots of texts in the corpora include function or grammatical words like conjunctions (*and/dan, also/juga*), spatial deictics/demonstratives (*this/ini, that/itu*), modal verbs (*will/akan, would, perlu*), reporting verbs (*said/berkata*), prepositions (*in/dalam, for/untuk*), first person pronouns (*I/saya, kita*), and others.

Table 1: Frequency word lists for each corpus

N	Word	Freq.	%	Texts	Word	Freq.	%	Texts
1	the	5564	6.98	185	dan	1294	2.22	202
2	to	2476	3.11	185	yang	1157	1.99	202
3	of	1932	2.42	184	di	872	1.50	201
4	and	1816	2.28	185	ini	859	1.47	199
5	in	1150	1.44	178	ICERD	756	1.30	204
6	a	1103	1.38	181	itu	690	1.18	184
7	that	1053	1.32	176	tidak	667	1.14	183
8	on	1014	1.27	185	kerajaan	504	0.86	164
9	said	938	1.18	167	akan	476	0.82	154
10	is	869	1.09	167	berkata	476	0.82	182
11	it	698	0.88	156	dalam	473	0.81	160
12	he	690	0.87	155	katanya	465	0.80	183
13	not	666	0.84	159	negara	465	0.80	158
14	be	635	0.80	166	kita	449	0.77	131
15	for	629	0.79	159	untuk	431	0.74	159
16	ICERD	610	0.77	146	perhimpunan	426	0.73	107
17	as	579	0.73	146	kaum	394	0.68	197
18	was	573	0.72	153	dengan	363	0.62	149
19	by	552	0.69	171	menteri	362	0.62	138
20	we	466	0.58	129	pada	346	0.59	156
21	rally	451	0.57	103	oleh	308	0.53	196
22	will	432	0.54	138	mengenai	306	0.53	193
23	government	417	0.52	119	UMNO	297	0.51	91
24	are	391	0.49	126	kepada	276	0.47	133
25	at	383	0.48	139	datuk	275	0.47	148
26	with	382	0.48	139	hari	266	0.46	164
27	have	357	0.45	135	konvensyen	266	0.46	194
28	this	322	0.40	123	PAS	260	0.45	84
29	all	312	0.39	158	beliau	250	0.43	137
30	racial	310	0.39	160	Malaysia	247	0.42	115
31	s	306	0.38	98	isu	244	0.42	99
32	from	299	0.38	132	antarabangsa	232	0.40	190
33	would	294	0.37	122	diskriminasi	230	0.39	196
34	Dec	280	0.35	130	perlembagaan	230	0.39	76
35	Dr	278	0.35	95	kerana	227	0.39	119
36	Malaysia	271	0.34	108	pihak	222	0.38	112
37	minister	270	0.34	120	rakyat	218	0.37	107
38	has	268	0.34	117	juga	216	0.37	119
39	rights	267	0.34	83	orang	215	0.37	100
40	I	264	0.33	76	polis	215	0.37	63
41	they	262	0.33	106	ada	213	0.37	115
42	also	258	0.32	119	Islam	209	0.36	74

43	UMNO	252	0.32	90	meratifikasi	198	0.34	98
44	but	237	0.30	104	Melayu	197	0.34	78
45	nation	230	0.29	183	saya	197	0.34	94
46	there	226	0.28	98	ia	196	0.34	115
47	discrimination	225	0.28	156	mereka	196	0.34	92
48	had	224	0.28	114	bentuk	195	0.33	177
49	convention	220	0.28	153	perlu	192	0.33	102
50	2018	219	0.27	181	bagi	191	0.33	116

Interestingly, there are frequent words that are not shared or different in the top 50 lists and this is interesting to be investigated further. For instance, in The Star Online, the modal verb *would* (ranked 33) is used more frequently compared to *perlu* (ranked 49 in Berita Harian), which is not equivalently the same modal verb in Malay for *would*. Consider the two examples below:

On Nov 28, he said the party would decide if disciplinary action **would** be taken against members who attend the anti-ICERD rally

(Pakatan leaders face rally dilemma_The Star Online).

Timbalan Pengerusi Badan Perhubungan UMNO negeri, Datuk Seri Mohamad Ali Mohamad, berkata pihak berkuasa **perlu** mengambil tindakan segera terhadap Pengerusi Barisan Bertindak Hak Asasi Hindu (HINDRAF) itu kerana tindakan keterlaluannya yang dibimbangi boleh mengakibatkan perpecahan kaum dan pergaduhan di negara ini

(UMNO, PAS, NGO Melaka mahu Waytha Moorthy dikenakan tindakan_Berita Harian).

While both excerpts make mention of a causative action to be taken against someone/body, use of the two modal verbs *would* and *perlu* do not suggest the same meaning. In The Star Online, *would* indicates the disciplinary action that will be taken (in the future), whereas in the latter example, *perlu* signals for a suggestive action to be taken or an equivalent for the modal verb *should*. This first observation indicates different use of modal verbs in the two separate online portals that could be interesting for further analysis.

Another different word that is frequent in Berita Harian but is not found in the top 50-word list in The Star Online is *perlembagaan* (ranked 34th) or ‘constitution’. Similarly, the first-person plural pronoun *kita* was more frequent (ranked 14th) compared to use of *we* in The Star Online, which did not make the top 50 frequent word list. In both online portals, UMNO was mentioned quite frequently (ranked 43rd in The Star Online, and 23rd in Berita Harian), but only the latter news portal made frequent mentions of the political party PAS.

ICERD and its neighboring words/phrases

Initial collocational analysis of both news portals revealed that the search term (ICERD) co-occurs statistically more frequently with the verb *ratify* (7.74) and its equivalent in Malay: *meratifikasi* (8.24). This can be seen in Table 2 where both collocates ranked number seven after words that refer to the full term for ‘ICERD’. Other similar collocates shared in both corpora include the negated *not/tidak/bukan*, nouns related to the topic such as *issue/isu; government/kerajaan; decision/keputusan*, performative verbs like *against/(mem)bantah; said/berkata*, modal verbs *would/will/akan*, and the passive form *by/oleh*. It can also be seen that some significant Malay collocates were not shared in the English corpus, namely words/dates related to the rally (*perhimpunan/himpunan, Sabtu, 8*), reference to the Federal Constitution (*Perlembagaan*), the act of defending (*mempertahankan*), words related to people (*kita, rakyat*) and the modal verb *mahu* (or ‘want’).

Table 2: Top 50 collocates of ICERD in each corpus.

N	Word	Relation	Texts	Word	Relation	Texts
1	Discrimination	10.32	110	Diskriminasi	13.75	195
2	Racial	10.26	110	ICERD	13.49	201
3	of	9.76	123	Kaum	13.38	189
4	Forms	9.58	94	Penghapusan	13.01	174
5	All	9.40	93	Bentuk	13.00	174
6	ICERD	9.10	92	Segala	12.85	170
7	ratify	7.74	63	meratifikasi	8.24	73
8	to	7.62	92	tidak	7.98	80
9	ICERD	6.93	57	Oleh	7.63	66
10	not	6.87	57	di	7.35	75
11	the	6.29	108	kerajaan	7.18	64
12	on	6.21	53	ini	6.97	69
13	that	5.85	49	akan	6.73	57
14	is	5.80	46	ratifikasi	6.63	48
15	issue	5.76	35	untuk	6.44	52
16	would	5.62	36	dan	6.36	70
17	be	5.38	38	yang	6.12	64
18	said	5.28	41	isu	5.56	37
19	against	5.25	30	kerana	5.51	36
20	and	5.01	49	keputusan	5.46	33
21	in	4.84	39	pada	5.25	36
22	government	4.79	29	perhimpunan	5.17	37
23	ratification	4.78	24	berkata	5.07	37
24	by	4.71	30	terus	4.99	27
25	Nation	4.65	25	membantah	4.99	27
26	a	4.59	36	Perlembagaan	4.93	30
27	have	4.56	26	Mengenai	4.85	31
28	ratifying	4.29	19	bantah	4.80	24
29	it	4.28	28	mempertahankan	4.73	24
30	was	4.24	26	bukan	4.59	25
31	will	4.22	24	himpunan	4.58	25
32	with	4.19	23	Pembasmian	4.52	21
33	had	4.09	20	Sabtu	4.46	21
34	Nov	4.08	19	menolak	4.42	22
35	decision	4.04	18	ia	4.38	24
36	over	4.01	18	negara	4.38	30
37	Malaysia	4.01	20	kita	4.19	28
38	as	3.99	24	adalah	4.10	21
39	ratified	3.90	16	8	4.06	18
40	if	3.87	18	dengan	4.06	25
41	has	3.63	17	terhadap	4.06	19
42	Elimination	3.57	15	Antarabangsa	4.05	22

43	debate	3.55	13	sudah	4.03	20
44	but	3.40	15	Himpunan	4.00	20
45	for	3.40	20	mahu	3.90	18
46	he	3.15	19	tolak	3.89	16
47	from	3.13	14	pihak	3.70	19
48	an	3.12	12	Malaysia	3.62	19
49	at	3.12	15	rakyat	3.58	18
50	are	3.10	15	Mohd	3.57	15

Closer inspection of the salient use of *ratify* and *meratifikasi* with ICERD indicates patterns mostly referring to the act of sanctioning the agreement – mostly in relation to ‘not ratify’ or ‘tidak akan meratifikasi’, which is concurrent with the time-frame of events leading up to the decision of not ratifying it. However, concordance lines for phrases ‘ratify ICERD’ and ‘meratifikasi ICERD’ show that in *Berita Harian*, it makes more reference to the upholding of the Federal Constitution (26 times) as opposed to only 7 times in *The Star Online*, as can be seen in the figures below.

N	Concordance
1	ini. Pejabat Perdana Menteri dalam satu kenyataan semalam menyatakan kerajaan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan yang mana di
2	. Pejabat Perdana Menteri dalam satu kenyataan sebelum ini menyatakan kerajaan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan yang mana di
3	di Subang Jaya, baru-baru ini. Pada 23 November lalu, kerajaan mengumumkan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD, sebaliknya akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan.
4	Menteri, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad mengeluarkan kenyataan bahawa Malaysia tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD, menyerlahkan ketegasannya. Sekali lagi, Dr Mahathir ? dilihat? senada
5	jadi patuhilah peraturan,? katanya. Pada 23 November lalu, kerajaan mengumumkan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan Persekutuan
6	Lumpur. Pada 23 November lalu, kerajaan Pakatan Harapan (PH) mengumumkan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan. Pejabat
7	. Pagi tadi, Pejabat Perdana Menteri dalam satu kenyataan, mengumumkan kerajaan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD, dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan. Keputusan
8	Perdana Menteri dalam satu kenyataan berkata, kerajaan Pakatan Harapan (PH) tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan yang di
9	23 November lalu, Pejabat Perdana Menteri dalam satu kenyataan berkata, kerajaan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan yang termaktub
10	, Pejabat Perdana Menteri dalam satu kenyataan berkata, kerajaan Pakatan Harapan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan yang di
11	, Pejabat Perdana Menteri dalam satu kenyataan berkata kerajaan Pakatan Harapan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan yang di
12	sedia maklum, kita perlu mengikutinya.? Semalam, kerajaan mengumumkan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan. Diminta
13	kuil terbabit. Pada 23 November lalu, Kerajaan Pakatan Harapan (PH) mengumumkan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan. Pejabat
14	Utara (NBCT) di sini, hari ini. Pada 23 November lalu, kerajaan mengumumkan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan. Pejabat
15	, Pejabat Perdana Menteri dalam satu kenyataan berkata Kerajaan Pakatan Harapan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD. Kerajaan juga akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan
16	, petang tadi. Pejabat Perdana Menteri dalam kenyataan semalam berkata, kerajaan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan yang mana di
17	, Pejabat Perdana Menteri dalam satu kenyataan berkata, Kabinet memutuskan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan kerajaan akan mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan yang
18	23 November lalu, Pejabat Perdana Menteri dalam satu kenyataan berkata, kerajaan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan yang termaktub
19	di sini, malam tadi. Semalam, Kerajaan Pakatan Harapan (PH) mengumumkan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan. ? Kerajaan
20	kepada kenyataan Pejabat Perdana Menteri, pagi tadi, yang mengumumkan kerajaan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD, dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan. Berdasarkan
21	23 November lalu, Pejabat Perdana Menteri dalam satu kenyataan berkata, kerajaan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan, yang
22	Pejabat Perdana Menteri, pada 23 November lalu. Menurut kenyataan itu, kerajaan tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan yang di
23	Perdana Menteri dalam satu kenyataan berkata, kerajaan Pakatan Harapan (PH) tidak akan meratifikasi ICERD dan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan yang di
24	manusia. Bagaimanapun, kerajaan pada 23 November lalu, menyatakan pendirian untuk tidak meratifikasi ICERD, sebaliknya memberi jaminan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan
25	Menteri, Datuk Seri Najib Razak. Sebelum ini, kerajaan membuat keputusan untuk tidak meratifikasi ICERD bagi mempertahankan Perlembagaan Persekutuan di mana didalamnya
26	asasi manusia. Bagaimanapun, kerajaan pada 23 November lalu, menyatakan pendirian tidak meratifikasi ICERD, sebaliknya memberi jaminan akan terus mempertahankan Perlembagaan

Figure 1: Concordance lines for ‘meratifikasi ICERD’ in *Berita Harian*

N	Concordance
1	a setback on Friday (Nov 23) when the Prime Minister’s Office announced that the government will not ratify ICERD and will continue to defend the Federal Constitution. Lim noted that the turn of events is a
2	had suffered a setback when the Prime Minister’s Office announced that the government would not ratify ICERD and would continue to defend the Federal Constitution. Lim added that the turn of events
3	Prime Minister’s Office issued a statement on Friday stating that the Pakatan government would not ratify ICERD and would continue to uphold the Federal Constitution, in which the social contract was
4	as it goes against the Constitution,” he said. The government on Nov 23 announced that it would not ratify ICERD, adding that it would continue to defend the Federal Constitution, which contains a social
5	,” he said. On Friday (Nov 23), the Prime Minister’s Office announced that the government would not ratify ICERD and continue to defend the Federal Constitution in which is enshrined the social contract
6	parties, the Prime Minister’s Office issued a statement on Friday to say that the government would not ratify ICERD and that it would continue to defend the Federal Constitution which included the “social
7	Nov 23, the Prime Minister’s Office, in a statement, said the Pakatan Harapan government would not ratify ICERD and would instead continue to defend the Federal Constitution which contained a social

Figure 2: Concordance lines for ‘ratify ICERD’ in *The Star Online*

Arguably, *Berita Harian* reminds readers of the constitution or ‘Perlembagaan’ and what was entailed in the social contract agreed upon by all ethnic leaders during the formation of the country. Other occurrences of this phrase indicate that the ratification of ICERD is against royal sovereignty, as well as the position of Islam and Malays specifically, regardless of political backgrounds.

Interestingly, differences can also be found with regard to other salient patterns of the use of ICERD in *Berita Harian* (e.g. the expression of ‘thanks’ or gratitude of not ratifying ICERD and the mentioning of Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department P. Waytha Moorthy) that are not as revealing in *The Star Online* reports. It was also found that some inconsistencies were reported between the two newspapers, for instance making reference to different ministers’ speech about the initial plan to ratify ICERD alongside five (reported in *The Star Online*) or six (reported in *Berita Harian*) other treaties in the following year.

5. Discussions

This study has briefly examined how ICERD was described in two comparable but different language newspapers during the month in which decisions were made on whether to ratify the treaty. Findings revealed that while both newspapers associated ICERD with the notion of not ratifying the treaty, *Berita Harian* varied from *The Star Online* by highlighting more on the discontentment because of ICERD’s contradiction to the social contract in the Federal Constitution compared to reports of displeasure over what was referred to as a form of prejudice/bias by the constitutional laws. More importantly, examination of the concordance lines and collocational analysis justify that the Malay online news portal made more mention of how the government did not ratify ICERD and the intent to defend/uphold the constitution, which was not as revealing in its English online counterpart.

Although findings reflect stylistic reporting of the two online news portals, to a greater extent, arguments for noticing these different rhetoric strategies may point to whether media discourse is shaped by the political leanings

of respective news agencies. And in a time where more computer-mediated communication is on the rise, we can see more traditional newspapers making the transition to the digital world. With this kind of ease, the spread of misinformation (fake news) can easily happen via groups that are set up specifically to discuss politics. These are common in WhatsApp, mainly in developing countries, but have also become a greater focus in Facebook itself, which recently prioritized these posts in the newsfeed (Reuters Institute, 2019). It would be interesting to examine how corpus findings described in the present study show any relevance to how social political groups are communicating in the media as a result of media discourse that is often unregulated. Finally, this study demonstrates the use of corpus-assisted discourse analysis approach, which has shown to be particularly useful in showing cross-linguistic comparisons, between comparable corpora such as the ones used in the present study.

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Footnotes

- 1 Status of ratification (Interactive Dashboard) from the United Nations Human Rights website, retrieved on 1st November at <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>. The other 11 no-action states include Brunei, Cook Islands, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Kiribati, Micronesia, Myanmar, Niue, Samoa, South Sudan, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.
- 2 Maklum balas kerajaan terhadap laporan tahunan Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia 2011 (p44). A round-table was also held on 16th July 2012 in Bangi with various stakeholders including SUHAKAM before it was presented in Wisma Putra.
- 3 The 2018 Digital News Report by Reuters Institute was referred to during this study. Changes cited in the 2019 report reveal that Berita Harian falls down to fourth position after Astro Awani online, racking up 28% of weekly usage among consumers.