CHAPTER 3

Data and Analytical Approaches

Abstract This chapter presents the data and integrated approach to discourse analysis used in this study. It begins with an account of the women’s media examined. It then explains how the key principles of feminist critical discourse analysis, critical stylistics and feminist conversation analysis inform the present work and are put to action in the analysis. It also outlines the theoretical and methodological differences between critical discourse analysis and conversation analysis that have traditionally caused the two to be regarded as incompatible, and argues that it is precisely these differences that make combining the approaches productive. Lastly, the chapter describes the main linguistic features that are examined in the data and how these can help to uncover ideological representations of professional women and their occupational lives.

Keywords Feminist critical discourse analysis · Critical stylistics · Feminist conversation analysis · Professional discourses · Media discourse

The majority of this chapter focuses on the analytical approaches adopted in this study, but first, I describe each of the media examined, namely Clove, a newspaper pullout for women; Her World, a women’s lifestyle magazine; and Capital FM 88.9, a radio station aimed at urban women.

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I also explain my decisions for the media and data selection, before discussing how the articles and radio shows are analysed.

**Data and Method**

The written data for this study consists of 288 and 395 articles published between October 2012 and September 2013 in forty-eight issues of *Clove* and twelve issues of *Her World* respectively. As stated in Chapter 1, this study’s secondary aim is to gain a better understanding of how media text producers establish a synthesised sisterhood with their readers. Hence, the dataset only includes articles written by women listed as editors, writers or contributors by the publications.

By choosing to analyse texts produced across these twelve months, I am examining discourses at ‘a particular historical moment’ (Hall 1992, 291). More specifically, these articles were published around the same time as Slaughter and Sandberg’s manifestos (see Chapter 2) as well as several studies and reports linking Malaysia’s low women’s LFPR with unequal family care responsibilities. At that point of time, women’s LFPR in the country had stagnated at around 47% for two decades. The longitudinal data collection also provides a representative sample of the types of articles and professional discourses that the audience would encounter over a full year.

I selected *Clove* and *Her World* for their relatively high popularity and reach and, therefore, their possible influence in sustaining the status quo and perpetuating gender ideologies. *Clove* was a Sunday pullout in *The Star*, the most widely read English-language newspaper in the country. During the data collection period, the readership for its Sunday edition, *Sunday Star*, was 1.175 million (*The Star Online* 2012), and a 2014 newspaper readership survey estimated that 42% of its readers were women (Sukumaran 2015). The demographic of *Clove* readers was not available, but *The Star* mainly circulates in English-speaking urban areas and among higher income households (*The Star Online* 2014). *Clove* was published in the format of the typical women’s lifestyle magazine. Each issue had a cover page featuring a female celebrity as well as cover lines indicating the main articles. Its initial pages contained the editor’s note, a contents page, letters to the editor as well as the names of the editor and writers, which may function to position them as experts on women’s interests and issues. Articles discussing highly accomplished women, beauty and fashion, celebrities, home products, travel and cars were interspersed with advertisements. The final issue of the *Clove* pullout was published on
13 October 2013, after which *Clove* became a section within the paper’s lifestyle pullout, *Star2*. From January 2014, *The Star* ceased publishing this section, and the various topics that had been previously covered in *Clove* were subsumed into other sections of *Star2*. Although *Clove* no longer exists as a pullout, its articles are still worth examining as the professional discourses that it produced may continue to be propagated within *Star2*.

*Her World*, with a readership of 148,000 in 2012, was the third most widely read English-language women’s magazine in the country after *Cleo* and *Female Malaysia* (*adQRate* 2012). It was chosen over *Cleo* and *Female* for its higher number of articles by local women writers on a wider range of topics beyond fashion and beauty. In Malaysia, the three shared the same publisher, *BluInc*. In 2014, 76% of *Her World* readers were married and 64% were PMEBs (Professionals, Managers, Executives and Businesspersons). Its readers were relatively affluent, where 62% had a monthly household income of above MYR6,000 (approximately €1270) (*BluInc* 2014). The national monthly household income in 2012 was MYR5,000 (approximately €1060) (Siah and Lee 2015). Hence, like *Clove*, *Her World* had a middle-class audience, and it was likely that the two publications targeted their articles at middle-class women. On 30 April 2020, *BluInc* announced that it was ceasing operations of its print and digital publications due to the uncertainties following the Covid-19 pandemic (*New Straits Times* 2020).

In addition to written articles, this study also examines radio broadcasts. With the tagline ‘Women—The New Capital’, the radio station *Capital FM 88.9* had an explicitly feminist agenda, which was to be ‘a platform for women’s issues’ and to empower women. It was launched in 2011 by the radio arm of Star Media Group, which publishes *The Star*. *Capital FM* was originally targeted at urban women aged 25–35 in the Kuala Lumpur Metropolitan Area (Chan 2011) and expanded to other states in the country. It had an estimated 121,000 listeners per week in 2012, with a weekly Time Spent Listening of 7 h (*Marketing Magazine* 2012). It grew to become the third most popular English-language radio station website in 2013, with a 1341% annual increase in terms of online listenership (*The Star Online* 2013). Eighty-six per cent of its listeners belonged to the PMEBs or OWC (Other White Collar) categories (*Marketing Magazine* 2012) and 72% had a personal income of at least MYR3,000 (approximately €630) (*The Star Online* 2013). *Capital FM* ceased broadcasting in January 2016, and was acquired by Astro Malaysia in December 2016 (*The Malaysian Reserve* 2017). It has not returned to the airwaves.
The radio dataset consists of recordings from sixty-one shows aired on Capital FM, amounting to 14 h and 6 min of talk time, excluding commercials. These recordings were obtained in two ways. Firstly, using a voice recorder, I recorded thirty-seven programmes randomly on weekday mornings and evenings from October 2012 to September 2013. Since this study examines how media producers and listeners are synthesised in a sisterly relationship, only radio shows with at least one woman presenter or regular guest were recorded for analysis. From June 2013, the station began uploading podcasts of some of their programmes on the station’s website. Twenty-four shows with women radio announcers or regular guests that were posted online between June and September 2013 were randomly downloaded, providing a balanced total talk time for the audio-recordings and podcasts at 6 h 55 min and 7 h 11 min respectively. The shows covered a range of topics including work, health, beauty and fashion, violence against women, celebrities and relationships. The audio-recordings and podcasts were transcribed according to the conventions provided in this book.

The articles and transcripts were examined for linguistic traces of professional discourses. A guiding principle in my approach to identifying the discourses was the view that a discourse does not exist in and of itself, but ‘produces something else (an utterance, a concept, and effect)’ (Mills 2004, 15). Discourses have effects on the ways we behave or think about ourselves and others, and can be detected due to ‘the systematicity of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving’ (ibid.), which may be manifested in language (Sunderland 2004). I focused on systems of statements and practices that structure our sense of who women are or should be. In doing so, I looked at a wide range of linguistic features that suggest the presence of particular discourses. These features are described in the final section of this chapter. However, we cannot assume that the discourses identified in this study is the finite set produced in the texts since discourses ‘are not simply “out there” waiting for identification’ (ibid., 45). The way in which I have interpretively identified these discourses is both enabled and constrained by how the society that I live in thinks about women, work and care as well as my feminist perspective. Other researchers, readers and listeners may detect a different array of discourses from the same linguistic features. Since the discourses uncovered are interpretive, they will be verified through their linguistic traces in Chapters 4 and 5 so as to make the identification process explicit.
The data are examined using a combination of feminist critical
discourse analysis, critical stylistics and feminist conversation analysis to
reveal the positionings of professional women and the discourses that
produce them. This chapter will now discuss each analytical approach in
turn.

**Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an approach to language study
that aims to expose ideological bias within texts and call into question
commonsensical ideas that sustain unequal power relations. Feminist crit-
ical discourse analysis (FCDA), a paradigm that can be attributed to
Michelle Lazar (2005), brings CDA and feminist studies together ‘to
show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in
which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic
power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and chal-
lenged in different contexts and communities’ (Lazar 2007, 142). While
CDA is concerned with showing how ideology and power are manifested
in discourse, Lazar argues that we need to draw on feminist prin-
ciples and insights when conducting CDA research on gender given that
gender operates in more pervasive and complex ways from other systems
of oppression. As we have seen in Chapter 1, power relations between
women and men play out across multiple arenas, including in intimate
family settings.

FCDA is founded on five key principles, all of which have greatly
informed the present work. Firstly, it regards discourse as key in the
(de)construction of gender. As socially constitutive signifying practices
(i.e. practices that are both constituted by and constitutive of social
situations, institutions and structures), discourse contributes to the repro-
duction and transformation of the gender order (Lazar 2005). The
socially constitutive role of discourse gives great impetus to this study to
interrogate professional discourses in the media as they have the poten-
tial to regulate workplace norms, identities, relationships and behaviour
as well as perceptions of career women, which could reinforce or reduce
barriers to gender equality.

The second tenet of FCDA relates to feminist analytical activism.
FCDA is primarily concerned with analysing and critiquing discourses
that uphold patriarchal social relations, with the ultimate goal of bringing
social emancipation and transformation (ibid.). Evidently, FCDA is not a
neutral approach and, therefore, requires the transparency of the position and research interests of the analyst. As such, I have made my feminist position and the emancipatory aim of this study explicit at the beginning of this book. However, the political commitment of researchers in CDA, and by extension FCDA, is problematic for some scholars such as Widdowson (1995), who charges that it produces analyses that are ideologically biased. Widdowson asserts that, because of their political motivations, critical discourse analysts often select features of texts that confirm their hypotheses. Thus, it is worth stating here that this study began as an inductive project to examine the role of media discourse in the (re)production of gender imbalances in the Malaysian labour market. The possible discourses invoked in the texts and the ideologies they carry remained open to question. To avoid the issue of circularity, I examined articles that were collected over a year through a representative sampling method, taking all prevalent discourses into account, including those that could be perceived as promoting gender equality. It was in the course of the data analysis that it became clear that the discursive repertoires identified are indicative of neoliberal feminism and postfeminism.

The third principle conceptualises gender as an ideological structure that categorises people as ‘women’ and ‘men’ within a hierarchical relation that privileges the latter. However, rather than appearing as domination, gender ideology often appears as consensual and acceptable to most in a society. The winning of consent, or hegemony (Gramsci 1971), is largely achieved through discursive means, particularly ‘in the ways ideological assumptions are constantly re-enacted and circulated through discourse as commonsensical and natural’. Through the hegemonically complicit practices of both women and men, patriarchal gender ideology is ‘enacted and renewed in a society’s institutions’ (Lazar 2005, 7–8). In this study, I examine the various femininities that are discursively constructed by women participating in media institutions and the ways in which these subjectivities participate within, or resist, gender hierarchies that affect career women. Since hegemony is based on consent, every status quo is temporary and open to being challenged and transformed, though within the constraints of particular social structures (ibid.). This view that the exercise of power is contestable is significant for feminist discourse analysis research aiming to bring about social change, such as the present work.

The fourth principle stresses the importance of critical reflexivity in the practice of FCDA, both in terms of the reflexivity of institutions as well
as the need for feminist scholars to be self-reflexive of their theoretical positions and practices. This study explores ‘institutional reflexive practices that recuperate feminist values of egalitarianism and empowerment for non-feminist ends’. In doing so, it adopts the position that women’s empowerment cannot be measured using ‘the yardstick that is already set by men’ (Lazar 2005, 15–16). Instead, it attempts to throw open to question the prevailing androcentric social structures that underlie the issues faced by career women.

The final tenet of FCDA acknowledges the complexity of gender and power relations. In many modern societies, power operates in subtle and seemingly innocuous ways and substantively through discourse. The task of FCDA, then, is to examine how invisible power is discursively produced ‘through textual representations of gendered social practices, and through interactional strategies of talk’ (Lazar 2005, 10), which is precisely the objective of this book. Lazar also emphasises the possibility of resistance. This study recognises that consumers are not passive dupes of the media industry. There is no doubt that they can resist the ideological force of the texts and talk. As Fairclough (2003) tells us, the effects of discursive practices depend on the prevalence of the representations in the particular text genre and how successfully alternatives have been excluded. This should not, however, prevent us from being able to make some conclusions about social attitudes and issues based on what is encoded in discourses. Part of the goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of the contemporary attitudes towards women and work in Malaysia that are, to some extent, reflected in the professional discourses manifested in women’s media.

Not only do mechanisms of power operate in complex ways, but relations of asymmetry are ‘produced and experienced in complexly different ways for and by different groups of women’. While women do continue to experience systematic discrimination, the intersection of gender with other axes of inequality, such as sexual orientation and social class, means that this discrimination is neither experienced nor discursively enacted in the same way by and for all women (Lazar 2005, 10). Women with economic, racial or national privilege hold power not only over other groups of women, but also over some groups of men. Hence, in exploring the particular set of challenges and discrimination that Malaysian women face in the professional domain, this study will illustrate how the combined politics of gender and class play out in women’s lives. It does not assume that the partial experiences of middle-class women
is universally shared by all women in Malaysia, and will attend to the material conditions and needs of poorer and less educated women in the country.

As CDA interrogates complex social phenomena, it requires a multi-disciplinary and multi-methodical approach (Wodak and Meyer 2009), and CDA scholars have utilised a wide range of analytical techniques. To identify the discourses manifested within the media texts and talk, this study takes a micro-level approach informed by Lesley Jeffries’s (2010) critical stylistics model and feminist conversation analysis.

**Critical Stylistics**

Critical stylistics contributes to the theoretical and methodological development of CDA. Jeffries (2015, 4) argues that the methods used in CDA studies ‘are often lacking in the kind of detail that would enable [other researchers] to see how ... conclusions are reached’. To build rigour and replicability into the qualitative textual analysis process in CDA research, Jeffries developed a systematic model of analysis that integrates tools from critical linguistics and stylistics, which she termed ‘critical stylistics’. Central to the framework is the notion that ‘there is a level of meaning which sits somewhere between the systematic (coded) meaning of what Saussure called the “langue” and the contextual and relatively variable meaning of language in use, which Saussure called “parole”’. At this level, the text uses the resources of language to present a particular worldview, and the task of the analyst is to work out ‘what the text is doing - how it is presenting the text world’ (Jeffries 2014, 409).

The main tools of analysis within this framework are known as ‘textual-conceptual functions’, a combination of textual triggers and ideational functions that attempt ‘to capture what a text is doing conceptually in presenting the world ... in a particular way [and] explain how the resources of the linguistic system are being used to produce this conceptual meaning’. Examples of textual-conceptual functions include naming and describing, representing actions/events/states, equating and contrasting, and implying and assuming. Many of the functions have prototypical linguistic forms that always carry the conceptual effect as well as peripheral forms that also carry the conceptual effect, though less consistently. For example, the prototypical forms of the function of negating are ‘no’ and ‘not’, whereas lexical items with incidental semantic negativity such as ‘lack’ are more peripheral (ibid.). This, however, does
not suggest that we can straightforwardly map meaning onto form. As Jeffries (2007) reminds us, formal categories are multifunctional and do not have clear boundaries in relation to meaning. Likewise, certain meanings can be delivered through an open-ended range of language forms. Therefore, a careful consideration of context is needed before meaning can attributed to the linguistic form. This requires relying on the inferential resources of the researcher, which is impossible to completely remove from textual analysis.

This study draws on Jeffries’s work on the conceptual effects carried by particular language features in order to relate linguistic form and ideological meaning. While much of CDA research includes fine-grained analyses of texts, applying Jeffries’s linguistically grounded analytical tools can counteract overconfident conclusions from the data investigation. Nevertheless, this work does not make critical stylistics its central approach. In line with Jeffries (2014, 411), it is used here to add to, not replace, ‘the insights into contextual features of ideological meaning arising from critical discourse analysis’.

**Feminist Conversation Analysis**

This study adopts feminist conversation analysis (FCA) as an additional approach for analysing the radio interactions. Conversation analysis (CA) is one of the most systematic approaches to the study of talk-in-interaction. Viewing talk as a form of action, CA studies attempt to uncover what people do with talk. It examines the sequential unfolding of conversations using the key empirical discoveries of CA such as turn-taking and turn design, sequence organisation and preference structure (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 2011). These tools, Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2008, 555) argue, are helpful for analysing the ‘micro-inequalities’ of everyday social life, ‘offering a powerful and rigorous method for examining how mundane, routine, forms of oppression (e.g. sexism, heterosexism, racism, ageism) are woven into the fabric of social interaction’. As such, they have been used by many feminists and other critical researchers in gender and sexuality scholarship (e.g. Kitzinger 2007; Weatherall 2015), leading to the emergence of FCA. Like CA, FCA examines the organising principles and structures of conversation and the practices that accomplish action, but further interrogates these structures and practices for how they may be implicated in gender inequalities (Weatherall et al. 2010).
In contrast to CDA, which focuses on discourses in the Foucauldian sense and moves back and forth between the macro and the micro, CA takes a ‘bottom-up’ approach, using microanalytic techniques to analyse discourse in the traditional linguistic sense, that is, as a stretch of spoken text (Weatherall et al. 2010). This study draws on elements of both in the examination of the spoken data, as other linguists have fruitfully done in their research (e.g. Thornborrow 2014). Through FCDA, this analysis identifies the linguistic traces of wider societal discourses produced in the radio talk and the identities that these discourses form. It also closely examines the interactional structures and sequences using FCA’s empirical framework ‘to provide directly observable evidence of how members orient to and construct certain … identities’. Within this dual approach, FCDA ‘shines the spotlight on the workings of power’ whereas FCA ‘enhances our understanding of [the participants’] agency’ (Weatherall et al. 2010, 235–36).

One key difference between the approaches is that CA is epistemologically opposed to the countable notion of discourse that is characteristic of CDA since such discourses are provisionally analyst-derived, rather than speaker-derived (Weatherall et al. 2010). For CA, because ‘any utterance can be interpreted in numerous ways by analysts … it is important to find evidence in the interaction of which of these possible interpretations have been taken by the participants’ (Stubbe et al. 2003, 354). Given that discourses tend to be detected through ‘a combination of socially informed intuition, critical judgement and supporting textual analysis’, for some conversation analysts, CDA can seem to identify discourses to suit the researcher’s ideological purposes (Baxter 2008). However, I contend that the radio talk cannot be fully understood without an appreciation of the underlying professional discourses that supply the taken-for-granted discursive backcloth organising the participants’ orientations and sense-making. I have, nonetheless, attempted to make the process of discourse identification more rigorous through a closer attention to the micro-structures in the talk. Using detailed transcripts that capture features of speech delivery such as hesitations, overlaps, pauses and repairs, the interactions are examined turn-by-turn to uncover how professional discourses are reinforced or subverted at a very local level in the unfolding talk. In other words, this study employs FCA to ‘strengthen empirical work by pointing to micro-structures in the talk … that dovetail with a macro analysis’ (Weatherall et al. 2010, 221).
Examining how patterns of dominance pervade our talk does not imply that we are victims of an all-powerful social order. This study shares CA’s view that people are ‘agents actively engaged in methodical and sanctioned procedures for producing or resisting, colluding with or transgressing, the taken-for-granted social world’ (Kitzinger 2000, 168). However, it is important to recognise that wider social-structural forces are at work in conversations, alongside the context invoked by the participants, constraining and shaping behaviour. For example, as the analysis will show, a deeper discussion of gender discrimination is almost absent in the radio talk, leaving ideological beliefs unchallenged. Glossing over gender issues after they surface in talk codes the text producers’ ideological position, but in order to make any claims about the political relevance of such instances, I need to move beyond the interactants’ displayed concerns. Kitzinger (2000, 171) makes a similar argument:

Feminists … have been quite concerned about the relationship between their (feminist) analysis of their participants’ actions and the (generally non-feminist) way in which participants themselves interpret the same behaviours… it would be unbearably limiting to use CA if it meant that I could only describe as ‘sexist’ or ‘heterosexist’ or ‘racist’ those forms of talk to which actors orient as such. Indeed, it is precisely the fact that sexist, heterosexist and racist assumptions are routinely incorporated into everyday conversations without anyone noticing or responding to them that way which is of interest to me.

Therefore, in order to ensure covert mechanisms of power are not precluded from the interpretation of the data, this study adopts Stokoe and Smithson (2001) and ten Have’s (1999) recommendation that analysts, with their own interpretative resources, should also be regarded as ‘participants’ in the interactions. By expanding the notion of ‘participant’ to include the researcher, this study is consistent with FCA’s more flexible position, which ‘enables a focus on interactional practices that, from a researcher’s perspective, may be implicated in the accomplishment of a gendered social order’ (Weatherall 2015, 423).

Despite the risk of misinterpretation, the inferential resources of analysts must be taken into account to produce an analytic study rather than a descriptive one (Stokoe and Smithson 2001). FCDA can aid analysts to go beyond ‘the obviousness of everyday experience, the naturalness of … ways of representing people’ (Talbot 2010, 135) since its
emancipatory aim requires the researcher to present other possible interpretations of the interaction and expose the power relations that may have been previously unnoticed (Bucholtz 2003). What is crucial here is for researchers to think reflexively about whether their interpretations of the talk could be biased by their experiences, attitudes and beliefs, and to make their assumptions explicit.

Overall, FCA and FCDA may seem in conflict with one another, but as Wetherell (1998) argues, analysts should not have to choose between micro- and macro-analysis since each inform and lend meaning to the other. A complete linguistic investigation should involve a combination of technical and critical analysis. Hence, this study draws on the analytical tools of FCA to understand how women on the radio jointly construct their interactions ‘and at the same time constitute the context, including participants’ identities, utterance by utterance’ (Stubbe et al. 2003, 358). The value of FCDA, on the other hand, lies in the fact that it provides an analytic frame to go beyond the talk-based context and investigate the impact of larger covert systems of institutionalised power on the interactants’ micro-linguistic practices. In short, FCDA provides the sociohistorical and institutional framing in examining the emergent character of the gender order in interactions.

**LINGUISTIC FEATURES FOR IDENTIFYING DISCOURSES**

CDA has been accused of being ‘short on detailed, systematic analysis of text or talk, as carried out in CA’ (van Dijk 1999, 459). However, as Stubbe et al. (2003) argue, ‘this is not a necessary consequence of adopting a CDA approach … The description of the text can be just as detailed as the analyst judges appropriate and necessary to expose the underlying ideological assumptions and power relationships of the participants’. Given that the discourses detected in this study are provisional and perspectival, I have made my identification process as transparent as possible in my microanalytic investigation of the data in Chapters 4 and 5. This section introduces the main textual features examined and the ways in which they are helpful in showing up the representations of professional women that evidence the operation of certain discourses. These linguistic features are discussed according to four textual-conceptual functions in Jeffries’s critical stylistics model.
**Naming and Describing**

Firstly, this study investigates what professional discourses are realised through the ways in which career women, the various entities in their occupational and domestic lives (people, organisations and so forth), and their relations with these entities are named and described. Jeffries (2007, 63) argues that ‘one of the potentially most influential choices any writer makes is the names s/he uses to make reference’. Naming an entity can shape worldviews. Examining how professional women are named and described can reveal how they are seen to be and what forms of ‘in vogue’ femaleness and femininity they are encouraged to adopt. The depictions of women’s ‘old’ self, which they are urged to leave behind, as well as the ‘new woman’ that they required to be (Genz 2010) have the potential to perpetuate or challenge negative feminine stereotypes and the androcentric view of professionalism that contribute to gender gaps and discrimination in the labour market.

The part of a sentence that typically ‘names’ an entity is the noun phrase or nominal group (Jeffries 2007). Thus, the analysis pays close attention to the choice of noun, or head noun in a phrase, as well as the connotative features of these labels that may construct the referent positively or negatively. While not all noun choices have ideological potential, different nouns can draw upon and evoke different ways of structuring our sense of working women and their experiences in the professional domain, which are associated with particular discourses. A text can represent social actors by name or in terms of category (Fairclough 2003), and where social actors are classified, the categories that are referenced are taken into consideration. In addition to the choice of noun, the adjective is one of the most typical linguistic means for characterising a referent (Jeffries 2007). Therefore, it makes sense to examine patterns of adjectival modification of nouns, both as the premodifier within a noun phrase as well as the complement of an intensive verb. Following Fairclough (2003), the analysis also takes into account the semantic relationships between the adjectives used, including new presupposed semantic relations that represent working women and their experiences in a way that is specific to a particular discourse. Metaphors are another resource for creating distinct representations of the world, so discourses are also distinguished by the lexical metaphors used.


Representing Actions and Events

This study also interrogates how actions and events are represented. To do this, it examines the verbs or verb phrases selected to describe processes. It also analyses the use of nominalisation and transitivity to address the question of agency. This is an important aspect to examine within neoliberal and postfeminist culture which ‘exculpates social, political, economic, cultural and corporate institutions for their role in maintaining and reproducing inequality and injustice’ while apportioning blame to women (Gill and Orgad 2015, 340). For example, according significant autonomy and agency to women with regards to their career progression could mask the structural barriers that they continue to face, and reinforce the postfeminist myth that gender equality has been achieved. Conversely, the exclusion of an agentive participant could invite a reading in which the status quo is given the force of a natural phenomenon that has to be accepted. Thus, the analysis interrogates processes without an intentional actor or an agent, such as ‘passive structures with no specified agent, supervention processes, where the subject of the verb is … not in control of the process, and event processes, where the Actor is an inanimate object or force’ (Jeffries 2007, 180).

Nevertheless, Jeffries (2007) warns us that in CDA, there tends to be an underlying assumption that the text producer selects a verb with a particular transitivity in order to naturalise an ideology or because that ideology is already naturalised and has become common sense. However, certain processes may be so commonly presented in metaphorical or other ways that the reader may ‘read’ the meaning as literal, which undermines any sense of an ideological purpose at work. Similarly, we cannot automatically assume that all instances of nominalisation are ideologically manipulative. In certain cases, the identities of participants may be left unmentioned because they are unknown. Nominalisations are also used as a way to be more economical with our language.

Equating and Contrasting

Another aspect that is analysed is the construction of equivalents and differences as this can help to distinguish professional discourses that reify or undermine dualisms. This is particularly interesting to examine as the new ‘postfeminist woman’ is often represented in contemporary media as wanting to ‘have it all’ and refusing to ‘dichotomize and choose
between her public and private’ (Genz 2010, 98). Likewise, the ‘balanced woman’ ideal of neoliberal feminism encourages women to be both hands-on mothers and professionals (Rottenberg 2018). Furthermore, earlier studies in Western settings have found that female sexuality has been conflated with professional empowerment within postfeminist rhetoric (see Hammers 2005). Therefore, by examining what notions are subsumed as markers of success in the Malaysian context, we can uncover what new demands employed women are now expected to meet in order to occupy the subject position of successful femininity, and what discourses are operationalised in this process.

Equivalence can be achieved between two or more theoretically different phenomena through various means such as apposition, combining noun phrases with a conjunction, or positioning them on either side of an intensive verb. Fairclough (2003, 125) demonstrates how lists can work together ‘into a relation of equivalence expressions which emanate from and evoke different discourses’, effectively combining these discourses to constitute a new one. Entities can also be placed in opposition to each other, such as through parallel structures as well as antithetical relational structures and expressions that are formally marked by coordinating conjunctions like ‘yet’ and sentence adverbials such as ‘however’. This study is especially interested in the creation of new contrasts that ‘have no prior existence in our conceptual apparatus’ (Jeffries 2007, 103), which could reinforce distinctions that reflect prevailing ideologies. This can be achieved through the positioning of words and phrases that are not conventional opposites within the types of syntactic frame mentioned above.

The data analysis also explores how differences are set up through evaluations. In Jeffries’s (2007, 109) critical analysis of advice in women’s magazines, she notes that the constructed oppositions identified ‘can be categorized under the superordinate heading of good versus bad’, with the advice given being ‘very clear about what is or is not desirable, to the extent of indicating that some actions or approaches are right, where others are wrong’. Following Fairclough (2003), the analysis examines four categories of evaluations: statements with deontic modalities, statements with affective mental process verbs, evaluative statements and value assumptions. This present study also examines evaluative statements where something is implied to be desirable or undesirable relative to a particular discourse that is being drawn on, and those where the evaluations are embedded as presuppositions within phrases.
Implying and Assuming

Lastly, professional discourses can emerge from the implicit meanings that are conveyed through the texts’ implications and assumptions. The implications and assumptions that the analysis investigates include those about the ideal or supposed professional woman as well as the types of challenges that she faces in relation to having a career and why. These underlying meanings are important matters of ideological interest as they may communicate themselves to the reader at a relatively subconscious level, and if reading texts of a similar nature repeatedly delivers the same ideological assumptions, the reader is vulnerable to the conceptual influences that such repetition could have on world view or perceptions. (Jeffries 2007, 129)

The typical way in which texts assume meanings is via the mechanism of presupposition (Jeffries 2007). The analysis interrogates the professional discourses that are reinforced by existential presuppositions (i.e. ‘assumptions about what exists’) and propositional presuppositions (i.e. ‘assumptions about what is or can be or will be the case’) (Fairclough 2003, 55). These can be triggered by various linguistic features, such as markers of definite reference, factive verbs and cleft constructions. Presuppositions can also be embedded in imperatives and questions, both of which are commonly used in women’s print media to simulate two-way interaction between the text producers and the audience (Talbot 1995).

Implied meanings can also be achieved via the linguistic process of implicature. The analysis examines the discourses that are drawn upon by conventional and conversational implicatures. According to Grice (1975), the former are implied meanings that are textually triggered by particular lexical items or features of language. The latter, on the other hand, cannot be logically inferred from linguistic features; these implicit meanings arise as the consequence of the flouting of Grice’s conversational maxims. Like Jeffries’s (2007, 131) critical analysis of women’s magazines, the context of this study’s data differs from the original conversational context that Grice envisaged, given the physical distance between the producers and audience as well as a lack of genuine exchange between them that is ‘analogous to the interaction that takes place in face-to-face conversation’. However, in current scholarship, implicature is viewed as a potential carrier of indirect meaning not only in speech, but also in written
language. In her work, Jeffries demonstrates how the notion of implicature can be fruitfully applied to expose how magazines attempt to regulate women’s behaviour. For example, in certain imperatives that reference the imagined reader’s emotional state of mind, the implicatures that arise contribute to the negative stereotyping of women. Therefore, investigating the implicatures in the media data can provide insights into the reproduction as well as subversion of ideological norms.

In summary, this chapter has discussed the integrated analytical approach taken in this study as well as the main linguistic features that are examined to identify professional discourses in the media texts and talk. As Weatherall et al. (2010, 238) have argued, ‘because of the complexity of the relationship between language and the ways in which gender is represented and constructed, there is much to be gained from taking multiple perspectives, and from viewing the different approaches to language and gender … as complementary rather than as competing perspectives’. We shall see in the next two chapters how each of the micro- and macro-analytic approaches generates useful insights into the media discourse.

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