

## A Pragmatic Analysis of Responses in Malaysian Parliamentary Discourse

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### ABSTRACT

*This study employs the framework of responses proposed by Harris (1991), the notion of implicature as defined by Thomas (1995), and the dimensions of resistance introduced by Clayman (2001) to examine the types of responses in Malaysian Parliamentary Question Time. Analysis revealed the tendency of using direct, indirect, and evasive responses to specific questions for various reasons. Direct answers were observed in questions that could reflect positively on the government's image. On the contrary, indirect answers were employed in questions that suggest clashing of goals between responders and questioners that could subsequently threaten the image of the government whereas negative presuppositions and the way questions are structured in parliament influence the production of evasion.*

**Keywords:** *direct answer, evasive response, indirect answer, parliamentary discourse, political discourse*

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## INTRODUCTION

Questions and replies, also known as responses, have for so long been an area of concern amongst scholars (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1983; Heritage, 1985; Bull 1994). According to Harris (1991), it is imperative for researchers to differentiate between what constitutes a response and an answer. She further argued that a response may not be an answer as a response may be considered as a

production that follows a question (Harris, 1991). Nevertheless, research on responses generally explores the notion of evasion in political discourse in various settings such as parliament with an emphasis on the topic of Iraq War (e.g., Rasiah, 2007), courtroom (e.g., Gnisci & Bonaiuto, 2003; Gnisci, 2021), political interviews (Bull, 2000; Hanafe & Thani, 2016) and Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) (e.g., Bull & Strawson, 2020; Ilie, 2021). Further, most of this research was conducted in the context of Western countries, with the exception of a few (e.g., Feldman et al., 2016; Hanafe & Thani, 2016).

Prior studies on responses, primarily in interviews, discovered that responders' reply rate are influenced by the structure of a question (Alfahad, 2016) and that participants' evasive responses contain implicit meanings (Simon-Vandenberg, 2008). Indirect responses have also been shown to be a preferred method of response in interviews, particularly in politically risky topics and issues that could threaten their face (Obeng, 1997). They are also used in political speeches to justify the legitimacy of the politician's government and role as a party leader (Van Dijk, 2005). However, interviews and speeches differ from parliamentary discourse as parliament is a platform for both government and opposition to present their justification and criticism pertaining to legislative issues (Bayley, 2004) and parliamentary questions are used in scrutinizing government members, exposing wrongdoings, and ventilating public grievances. Parliamentary questions are also one of the most visible procedures used by MPs for position taking and credit claiming while making public the opponents' shortcomings and misdeeds (Ilie, 2021, p.42).

Subsequently, the field of parliamentary discourse has mostly centered around thematic issues discussed in parliament (Ilie, 2015) such as racism in parliament and immigration discourse (e.g., Van Der Valk, 2003; Lem Atanga, 2018). However, there is a lack of attention being given to the linguistic aspects (Bayley, 2004; Chilton, 2004). Responses in parliamentary discourse is particularly an area of importance as studies have shown how politicians commonly employ moderate and politically correct language in a public sphere (e.g., Chovanec, 2020). Further, institutional-constraints and contexts have been examined to affect questions and responses (e.g., Heritage & Drew, 1992; Heritage & Clayman, 2011).

Based on the reviewed literature, several gaps have been identified. Whilst responses such as evasion and indirect answers have been explored in political discourse, they are mostly constrained within interviews and specific genres in parliamentary discourse, such as during PMQs. In addition, most studies of parliamentary discourse are thematic-based. Further, Tanaka (2021) pointed out that most studies of political discourse are conducted within the context of Western democracy. As such, there is a limited literature of political discourse within Asian countries, where the notion of politeness and face play a major role in "situations where they are openly criticized, challenged and attacked" (Tanaka, 2021, p. 72). Thus, this study aims to examine the types of responses used by members in Malaysian Parliamentary Question Time.

### ***Direct Answer***

Direct answers in this study must address both topical and action agendas of a question as proposed by Clayman (2012). In relation to that, responses that are explicitly expressed such as “‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘of course’, ‘right’, others and also ‘copy’ type answer involving deletion in response to question requesting polarity choice or the selection of one disjunct” (Harris, 1991, p. 83) are considered as a form of direct answer. Additionally, direct answers also include “responses which supply a value for missing variables in response to a ‘wh’ question (Harris, 1991, p. 84). Harris’s notion of the answer is similar to Wilson’s (1990) continuum of what constitutes an answer.

Wilson (1990) argued that what constitutes an answer “is not constrained in the way an answer to a yes/no question might be” (p. 146). Since wh-questions can have a variety of presuppositions, the answers given may have certain values to accommodate the needs of the said questions. Apart from understanding answers to questions semantically, he further argued the importance of understanding a question pragmatically. In simpler words, a question may sometimes require a further explanation that is beyond the yes/no continuum.

### ***Indirect Answer***

Indirect answers in this study include responses that address the topical and action agendas of a question and a selection from a continuum of yes/no or a value for a missing variable. In contrast to direct answers, indirect answers are implicit and can be inferred from the responses. Furthermore, indirect answers also include “responses which neither ‘yes’ nor ‘no’ (nor a value for a missing variable) can be inferred but which maintain cohesion, topic coherence, pre-suppositional framework, and illocutionary coherence” (Harris, 1991, p. 85).

In the same vein, Thomas (1995) discussed the notion of implied meanings due to the flouting of maxims. When a “speaker wishes to prompt the hearer to look for a meaning which is different from, or in addition to, the expressed meaning” (Thomas, 1995, p. 65). This meaning that is inferred from the expressed meaning is known as ‘conversational implicature’ (Thomas, 1995). In other words, conversational implicature occurs when an additional meaning is encoded from what is verbally said (Cruse, 2000).

### ***Evasive Response***

As opposed to direct and indirect answers, evasion occurs when a speaker fails to address one or both the topical and action agendas of a question. Dillon (1990) referred to evasion as a “routine strategy for responding to a question without answering it” (p. 54), which include vague, inconsistent statements and subject switches (Bavelas et al., 1988). Politicians, for instance, may resist answering questions, performing a specific type of resistance, which is related to the degree of the interviewees’ inadequate answers to the questions asked that includes providing partial and

incomplete answers (Clayman, 2001). Clayman's (2001) 'dimensions of resistance' is also known as 'levels of evasion' by other scholars (e.g., Rasiah, 2007, 2010; Hanafe & Thani, 2016).

Clayman (2001) also identified four other degrees of resistance. Firstly, the politician moves away from the objective of the question. The most extreme degree is when the topic of the question is significantly changed. Another degree of positive resistance includes subtle changes of terms in replies given while the final degree is related to the agenda shift. This resistance is performed by subtly adding new issues that will indirectly move the original question from its main agenda. Politicians employ these different degrees of evasion in order to avoid the consequence of answering the question directly, particularly in instances where the consequence of avoiding a question is less dire than providing an honest controversial answer to the question itself (Clayman, 2001).

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

By employing a qualitative method, this study selected four parliamentary hansards as a sample of the data to examine the different types of responses that occurred during Question Time in the Malaysian Parliament. Since parliamentary hansards are readily accessible online and an open source of data, all MPs names will be referred to as the names of their constituency.

Hansard, according to May (2004) "leaves out nothing that adds to the meaning of the speech or illustrates the argument" (p. 260). As such, they were selected as the data of this study. Altogether, a total of 179 question-response adjacency pairs were extracted from the hansards for the purpose of this study.

The data were then analyzed based on Harris' (1991) Framework of Direct and Indirect Responses and Clayman's (2001) Levels of Evasion. Since this study relies on textual documents (hansards), a content analysis method was also used to analyze the data. As pointed out by Insch et al., (2007), "content analysis possesses some advantages generally associated with qualitative methods such as richer detail, preservation of greater context information, and the potential for grounded theory development" (p. 1). Further, to ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis, an interrater test was conducted that resulted in 90.0% similarity.

## **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

In this study, the 'reply rate' of question-and-answer sessions in Malaysian parliament adheres to the highest form of question-response adjacency pair coherence and cohesiveness. Three different types of responses; namely, direct, indirect and evasive responses were observed in the data. Whilst instances of direct answers as commonly employed by MPs, were found to occur in questions that elicit positive outcomes, indirect answers were employed in questions that elicit negative repercussions to the questioners.

However, evasive responses were preferred over the use of indirect answers due to the way questions are structured in the parliament. According to Bavelas et al., (1990), evasion is employed

when “all of the possible replies to a question have potentially negative consequences but nevertheless a reply is still expected” (as cited in Bull, 2008, p. 327), which could be the case with the data analyzed in the study. Examples of direct, indirect and evasive responses observed in the data are further discussed in the following subsections.

### *Direct Answer*

Direct answers in the study were observed in questions that highlighted the government in a favorable way. Example 1 illustrates an example of a direct answer.

#### Example 1

AP Jerantut:

*Minta Menteri Kemajuan Luar Bandar dan Wilayah menyatakan, **berapa peratuskah pertumbuhan segmen industri kecil dan sederhana (IKS) bumiputera bagi tahun 2017 yang diterajui oleh MARA.***

MP of Jerantut:

I would like to ask the Minister of Rural and Regional Development to state **the growth percentage of the bumiputera segment in the small and medium industry (SMI) led by MARA for the year 2017.**

*Menteri Kemajuan Luar Bandar dan Wilayah:*

*Terima kasih Tuan Yang di-Pertua dan terima kasih Yang Berhormat Jerantut. **Untuk makluman** Yang Berhormat Jerantut, **pertumbuhan usahawan IKS bumiputera melalui program pembangunan usahawan korporat yang dilaksanakan oleh MARA antara tahun 2016 dan tahun 2017 adalah sebanyak 22.57 peratus.** Pertumbuhan sebanyak 22.57 peratus ini adalah melibatkan seramai 52 syarikat PKS bumiputera dengan peningkatan jumlah jualan tahunan sebanyak **RM54 juta dari tahun 2016 hingga tahun 2017.** Sekian, terima kasih.*

Minister of Rural and Regional Development:

Thank you Mr Speaker and thank you The Honorable Jerantut. **For your information** The Honorable Jerantut, **the growth of bumiputera SME entrepreneurs via the corporate entrepreneur development programme carried out by MARA between 2016 and 2017 is 22.57 percent.** This 22.57 percent growth involves 52 bumiputera SMEs in total, with the increase in **RM54 million annual sales from 2016 to 2017.** Thank you.

*(Penyata Rasmi Parlimen Dewan Rakyat 2 April 2018, p.18)*

*Note.*

*\*bumiputera* refers to the Malays and indigenous people in Malaysia.

*\*IKS* (in Malay) or *SME* (in English) refers to small medium enterprises.

*\*MARA* refers to the *Majlis Amanah Rakyat*, a governmental organization that aids in matters related to bumiputera development.

As illustrated in Example 1, when queried about the growth percentage for *bumiputera* small and medium industry (SMI) segment led by MARA in 2017, the minister of rural and regional

development responded by providing the requested information. In this instance, the minister began his prefatory statement by using the phrase “*Untuk makluman...*” (For your information...) to bring the audience and listeners’ focus to his subsequent points. In order to determine the type of response given in Example 1, the following deliberative steps were considered.

- 1 The topical agenda “*segmen industri kecil dan sederhana (IKS) bumiputera*” (the *bumiputera* segment in small medium industry) and action agenda “*berapa peratuskah pertumbuhan*” (what is the growth percentage) are extracted from the question
- 2 In the response given, the deputy minister stated that “*pertumbuhan usahawan IKS bumiputera melalui program pembangunan usahawan korporat yang dilaksanakan oleh MARA antara tahun 2016 dan tahun 2017 adalah sebanyak 22.57 peratus*” (the growth of *bumiputera* SME entrepreneurs via the corporate entrepreneur development programme carried out by MARA between 2016 and 2017 is 22.57 percent).
- 3 The topical agenda of the question is highlighted in the response “*usahawan IKS bumiputera*” (*bumiputera* SME entrepreneurs) and the action agenda of the question is indicated in the response by the phrase “*pertumbuhan..adalah sebanyak 22.57 peratus*” (the growth...is 22.57 percent).
- 4 Since the response was explicitly employed as noted in Harris (2001) and addressed both topical and action agendas based on Clayman’s (2012), it is therefore considered as a direct answer.

Further, the response observed additional elaboration from the minister “this 22.57 percent growth involves 52 *bumiputera* SMEs in total, with the increase in RM54 million annual sales from 2016 to 2017”. According to Harris (1991), “highly elaborated responses in this context are situationally appropriate and serve specific functions, since a politician is primarily concerned to use the question/answer framework to get his/ her message across to the overhearing audience rather than attempting merely to influence the questioner” (p. 82).

In Malaysia, issues involving *bumiputera* have always become a heated discussion. Whilst the Malays used to mostly work in a traditional setting pre-independence, the Chinese and Indians were allocated in a modern economic sector (Lim, 2000). Consequently, affirmative actions were introduced in the 70s to benefit the *bumiputera* (Lim, 2000), almost two decades after Malaysia gained its independence. However, the economic disparity between all races in Malaysia continues to widen over the decades. Nonetheless, no political party would brave the suicidal consequences to their political careers if they decided to abolish all the affirmative actions for *bumiputera* as they are the majority race in Malaysia thus, providing a strong voter base to any political party.

The MP of Jerantut, who was also from the Government bloc, used this question as an opportunity to provide the minister an opportunity to “praise the government...and involves much information that is already known” (Ilie, 2015, p. 1117). Since the question specifically asked for “the growth of *bumiputera* SME entrepreneurs”, the minister provided a direct answer as the

response given does not reflect badly on the government as there is an increase in the growth of the number of *bumiputera* entrepreneurs thereby, producing a positive narrative. Such response implied that the government managed to introduce impactful policies that directly benefit the Malays. In doing so, they were appealing to the Malay supporters.

### *Indirect Answer*

The data revealed that ministers and deputy ministers expressed their disagreements towards certain ideas or suggestions by employing indirect answers. An instance of this is illustrated in Example 2.

#### Example 2

AP Kuala Nerus:

*Adakah kerajaan bersedia untuk jangka masa panjang menukar tabung pinjaman yang ada pada hari ini kepada tabung hibah atau pun pemberian secara hadiah bagi yuran pendidikan sahaja?*

MP of Kuala Nerus:

Is the government ready in the long term to **convert the existing loan fund today into a grant fund or even a gift giving for education fees only?**

*Timbalan Menteri Pendidikan Tinggi:*

*Terima kasih atas soalan tambahan Yang Berhormat. Di sini saya nak sampaikan kepada Yang Berhormat bahawa sebagai belia penentu masa depan negara, peminjam perlu lebih bersikap bertanggungjawab terhadap diri, agama, bangsa dan negara dan memastikan generasi akan datang terus memperoleh manfaat pinjaman sebagai mana yang pernah mereka nikmati sebelum ini. Ini memang ada berkaitan dengan satu konsep atau satu nilai universal, di mana kalau katalah berhutang, bayar balik dan ini ada berkaitan dengan satu nilai integriti.*

Deputy Minister of Higher Education:

Thank you for the additional question, the Honorable Gentleman. Here I want to convey to the Honorable Gentleman that as the youth who determine the future of the country, **borrowers need to be more responsible towards themselves, their religion, race and country and ensure the next generation continues to get loan benefits as they have previously enjoyed.** This is indeed related to a **concept or a universal value, when in debt, pay it back and this has to do with a value of integrity.**

*(Penyata Rasmi Parlimen Dewan Rakyat 4 April 2018, pp.11-12)*

The question-response pair in Example 2 discusses the government's readiness to convert existing student loans to a gift for students in debt. However, rather than directly answering the question by explicitly saying 'no', the deputy minister resorted to providing a long-winded response

and more information than the situation demands to imply his disagreement towards the question asked by the MP of *Kuala Nerus*. Thomas (1995) noted that “a speaker flouts the maxim of quantity by blatantly giving either more or less information than the situation demands” (p. 65) and the maxim of manner is flouted by providing long-winded responses. In this instance, Thomas (1995) regarded that in order for listeners to arrive at a logical conclusion, a process of informal reasoning is deduced. This process is illustrated as follows.

- 1 The deputy minister was asked whether the government has any plan to convert the existing loan into a gift fund.
- 2 Here, the deputy minister had an opposing view to the suggestion that was posed in the form of a question by the questioner. He was put in a disadvantaged position due to the clashing goals between him and the questioner as he did not want to explicitly say that the government does not have a plan to convert the loan into a gift fund as it might reflect negatively on the government due to their refusal to help the students.
- 3 Since he did not want to put on record that the government refused to convert the loan but at the same time wanted to have a desirable outcome to the question, he devised a linguistic strategy namely, implicature to draw out his point.
- 4 To further justify the government’s decision of not converting the loan to a gift fund, he further talked about the concept of paying debt as a universal value, implying their decision as a moral-based decision, a rightful thing to do.
- 5 The response addressed both topical (convert existing student loans to a gift for students in debt) and action (is the government ready) agendas of the question as proposed by Clayman (2012) and was implicitly employed as discussed in Thomas (1995). As such, it is regarded as an indirect answer.

The data show that implicit utterances are used to express disagreements towards the suggestions made by other MPs due to clashing of goals. Members of high context-cultures prefer encoded and implicit communication (Hall, 1976) to lessen the impact of negative face while concurrently taking care of their positive face, similar to the findings of the study by Obeng (1997). As Malaysia is a high-context culture, the question and response adjacency pair in Example 2 is understood by the audience in parliament as no follow-up questions were recorded.

### ***Evasive Response***

Instances of evasive responses in the study were found to frequently address questions’ topical agendas while ignoring the action agendas required by moving away from the objectives and performing different tasks that were uncalled for as illustrated in Example 3.

#### Example 3

*AP Tanjong Piai:*

*Terima kasih Tuan Yang di-Pertua. Soalan tambahan saya adalah **adakah** kementerian telah*



***memperkenalkan satu alternatif yang berkesan untuk membantu orang berhenti merokok***

MP of Piai:

Thank you Mr. Speaker. My additional question is **whether the ministry has introduced an effective alternative to help people quit smoking**

*Timbalan Menteri Kesihatan:*

*Dalam hal ini seperti yang saya sebutkan tadi, memang pihak kementerian menawarkan pelbagai cara untuk mereka yang merokok supaya berhenti merokok. Jadi ini adalah sebenarnya kalau hendak berhenti memang senang, berhenti boleh berhenti overnight tetapi kalau ada pihak yang boleh berhenti dengan sekejap, overnight, ada pihak yang makan masa yang panjang. Apa yang telah kita buat Tuan Yang di-Pertua, kita telah menawarkan seperti yang saya sebutkan tadi, semua program mQuit di mana semua klinik kesihatan boleh memberikan perkhidmatan ini. Setakat ini Tuan Yang di-Pertua, purata success rate untuk program berhenti merokok ini untuk seluruh Malaysia, setiap negeri ada breakdownnya, tetapi saya sebut untuk seluruh Malaysia yang pergi melawat ke klinik mQuit ini daripada Julai hingga Disember 2016 dan Januari hingga Jun 2017 sebanyak 10,240, kadar kejayaan ialah 36 peratus. Akan tetapi berbeza antara negeri. Macam Perlis contohnya kejayaan 43 peratus, Penang 41 peratus kejayaan, tetapi ada lagi yang rendah seperti Melaka, rendah 32 peratus, ada yang Pahang 27 peratus. Jadi, average semua sekali lebih kurang 36 peratus kejayaan. Jadi, ini masih lagi rendah.*

Deputy Minister of Health:

In this case, as I mentioned earlier, **the ministry offers many ways for those who want to quit smoking. In fact, it is not hard for someone who plans to quit smoking, it can be done overnight but there are people who would take overnight, but there are some who would take longer time.** What we have done Mr Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, we have offered a mQuit programme, where this service is provided in all health clinics. So far Mr Speaker, **the average success rate of this smoking cessation programme throughout Malaysia, each state has its breakdown,** but I would like to mention the rate in Malaysia as a whole, those who have had their visit to the mQuit clinics from July to December 2016 and January to June 2017, there are 10,240 of them, the success rate is 36 percent. But it varies between states. Perlis, for instance, has 43 percent success, Penang has 41 percent success, but the success rate is lower in the states such as Melaka, 32 percent, and in Pahang it is only 27 percent. So, on average there is 36 percent success out of the total. So, it is still low.

*Note.*

\*mQuit refers to the integrated service provided by the Malaysian Government to help people quit smoking.

In Example 3, the MP of *Tanjong Piai* posed a question to the Deputy Minister of Health whether the ministry has introduced an effective alternative to help people quit smoking. Similar to Examples 1 and 2, informal deductive steps were taken to determine the type of response employed in Example 3.

- 1 Even though the question is not adversarial in an absolute sense, the presupposition of the question indicated that there were options that did not work in helping people quit smoking, indicating the government's failure in addressing the issue (helping people quit smoking).
- 2 In his prefatory response, the Deputy Minister indicated that the ministry offered various ways for people to quit smoking "*memang pihak kementerian menawarkan pelbagai cara untuk mereka yang merokok supaya berhenti merokok*" (the ministry offers many ways for those who want to quit smoking) to negate the negative presupposition of the question.
- 3 In his subsequent statement, the Deputy Minister further talked about how easy for certain smokers to quit and how difficult it is for the rest "*tetapi kalau ada pihak yang boleh berhenti dengan sekejap, overnight, ada pihak yang makan masa yang panjang*" (there are people who would take overnight, but there are some who would take longer time) to justify his negation maneuver and distance himself from the issue by putting the responsibility on smokers.
- 4 To further defend his negation and control the narrative, the Deputy Minister highlighted the success rate of smoking cessation which differs from one state to another by providing examples of the states.
- 5 The response stayed within the parameters of the topical agenda of the question "*mereka yang merokok supaya berhenti merokok*" (help people quit smoking). However, the missing variable that was required from the action agenda of the question "adakah kementerian telah memperkenalkan satu alternatif yang berkesan" (whether the ministry has introduced an effective alternative) was not supplied.
- 6 The responder was therefore considered as committing a medium level evasion in accordance to Clayman (2001) as he addressed the topical agenda but performed a different task than what was originally required by the question.

This study found that the negative presupposition that was embedded within the question caused the responder to evade and distance himself from the issue unlike Carranza's (2016) study that discovered that the politician in his study evaded questions due to allegations cited by the interviewer. One similarity was observed between this study and Rasiah's (2007) is the use of a distancing technique, that can be "often treated and designed as dispreferred" (Ekström, 2009, p. 683). Nonetheless, Rasiah's (2007) distancing technique was employed by a politician in an 'intermediate response' by providing half an answer to a multi part question, unlike in this example where it was employed to evade answering.

It is observed that ministers and deputy ministers provided incomplete responses to questions. Instances of incomplete responses were usually observed in questions with multiple sub-questions. In this case, the Deputy Minister chose to only respond to the first question, ignoring the subsequent questions and such instance is depicted in Example 4.

#### Example 4

AP Bukit Gantang:

*Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh. Terima kasih kepada Tuan Yang di-Pertua. Terima kasih kepada Yang Berhormat Timbalan Menteri. Soalan saya ialah, **apakah perbezaan antara KRIM 2.0 dengan KRIM 1.0 sebelumnya sehingga terpaksa kita membuat jenama baru? Apakah langkah-langkah supaya kegagalan yang berlaku kepada KRIM 1.0 dahulu tidak berulang kembali untuk KRIM 2.0 ini?** Terima kasih kepada Tuan Yang di-Pertua. Terima kasih kepada Yang Berhormat Timbalan Menteri.*

MP of Bukit Gantang:

In the name of God, the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate. Thank you to the Honorable Speaker. Thank you to the Honorable Deputy Minister. Thank you to Mr Speaker. Thank you to the Honorable Minister. My question is: **what is the difference between KRIM 2.0 and the previous KRIM 1.0 that caused us to rebrand? What are the steps taken so that the failure that occurred to KRIM 1.0 before does not recur for this KRIM 2.0?** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Thank you, the Honorable Deputy Minister

*Timbalan Menteri  
Perdagangan  
Dalam Negeri,  
Koperasi dan  
Penggunaan:*

*Tuan Yang di-Pertua, terima kasih kepada Yang Berhormat Bukit Gantang. Sebagaimana yang telah dimaklumkan sebelum ini bahawa **KRIM 2.0 ialah penambahbaikan kepada KRIM** yang asal melalui kaedah kerjasama strategik kerajaan dengan syarikat-syarikat peruncitan dan pembekal yang berwibawa serta mempunyai aspirasi yang sama dengan kerajaan bagi membantu rakyat dalam kehidupan seharian. Oleh yang demikian, kalau kita lihat pada hari ini, KRIM 2.0 ini akan bertambah. Kalau dahulu seperti mana yang saya katakan tadi waktu pelancaran hanya 50 SKU yang dikenal pasti tetapi setakat ini lebih 100 SKU sudah pun berada di dalam pasaran KRIM 2.0 ini. Sekian, terima kasih.*

Deputy Minister of  
Domestic Trade and  
Consumer Affairs:

Mr Speaker, thank you The Honorable Bukit Gantang. As previously mentioned **KRIM 2.0 is an improvement to the original KRIM** through the government's strategic cooperation with reputable retail companies and suppliers with the shared aspirations to help the people in their daily lives. Therefore, if we are aware, there would be more KRIM 2.0 products today. In the past, as I stated before, there were only 50 SKU products at the time of the launch,

but now we already have more than 100 SKU products resulting from KR1M 2.0 in the market. Thank you.

(*Penyata Rasmi Parlimen Dewan Rakyat* 4 April 2018, p. 5-7)

*Note.*

\**KRIM* refers to *Kedai Rakyat 1Malaysia*, a grocery store franchise introduced by the previous Barisan Nasional Government for the low-income citizens.

\*SKU refers to stock-keeping unit products.

Example 4 shows two questions posed to the Deputy Minister of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs. Whilst the first question (what is the difference between KR1M 2.0 and the previous KR1M 1.0 that caused us to rebrand?) was responded to by the Deputy Minister, the subsequent (second) question (what are the steps taken so that the failure that occurred to KR1M 1.0 before does not recur for this KR1M 2.0?) was not met with any response from the Deputy Minister.

- 1 The first question provided an opportunity for the responder to highlight the positive outcome of the issue (more products were introduced) thus, the employment of direct answer was examined for the first question.
- 2 The second question “*apakah langkah-langkah supaya kegagalan yang berlaku kepada KR1M 1.0 dahulu tidak berulang kembali untuk KR1M 2.0 ini?*” (What are the steps taken so that the failure that occurred to *KR1M 1.0* before does not recur for this *KR1M 2.0*?) contains a presupposition that the first *KR1M* was problematic and therefore deemed as a failure.
- 3 Since the first *KR1M* was introduced by the government, it was implied that the government had also failed.
- 4 The second question that was structured as a subsequent question provided an opportunity for the Deputy Minister to evade.
- 5 As the topical (*KR1M*) and action agendas in the question “*apakah langkah-langkah*” (What are the steps taken) were not addressed in the response, the second question and response adjacency pair was therefore regarded as a full evasion according to Clayman (2001).

It appears that the second question was not pursued by the questioner even though it was not responded to. As the responder did talk about the issue (*KR1M*) to address the first question, it can be postulated that the questioner might have assumed that the second question was also answered by the Deputy Minister. The findings of this study discovered that full evasions were usually employed in the subsequent questions by total silence. This could be due to the structure of question and answer sessions in parliament that makes it easier for MPs to be evasive, rather than providing implicatures in responses. Clayman (2001) noted that full evasions are usually indicated by verbal utterances involving phrases such as “I will not answer” (p. 412), which differs from the findings of this study. Further, evasive responses are less likely to be employed when questions are structured

in smaller proportions (Gnisci & Bonaiuto, 2003). Conversely, it could be said that questions that are asked in bigger proportions make evasions easily accessible as evident by the data of this study as they require less effort as compared to employing indirect responses.

## CONCLUSION

The data analyzed in the study show that three different types of responses were employed in the Malaysian Parliament. Direct answers were employed in questions that provide a positive outcome, highlighting their competency as the government. As a result, ministers and deputy ministers can directly appeal to a certain group of voters namely, the Malays. In addition, they were also observed to include extra information, showcasing their competency.

On the contrary, ministers and deputy ministers used indirect answers to imply their disagreements towards the issues raised by the questioner. Indirect answers were generally used in questions that could threaten the responder's image by providing a negative outcome. In order to avoid blatant rejections towards the suggestions made by the questioners due to clashing of goals, implicatures were used to conceal their disagreements. Additionally, implicatures were employed to justify their reason as a moral justification, letting the audience know that they were just trying to do the right thing.

When ministers and deputy ministers were presented with questions that have negative presuppositions, evasive responses were employed. It appears that MPs tend to distance themselves from the issues, employed negations by indicating that they had done something and putting the blame onto another group of people. The discussion shows that various action agenda shifts occurred when evasive responses were employed. The shifts that occurred in responses changed initial action agendas required by the questions. As a result, even though questioners and responders were talking about the same topic, they performed different tasks. Subsequently, ministers and deputy ministers were also found to provide incomplete or partial responses to questions with multiple sub questions due to the way questions are structured in Malaysian parliament as previously discussed.

Apart from contributing to the literature of Asian political discourse and the types of responses, this study has provided insights into the types of responses employed in Malaysian parliament, how and why they are employed. The present study has also examined how cultural influence such as *bumiputera* issues and how the structure of questions asked in Malaysian parliament could influence the production of responses, particularly making evasion the preferred strategy of response as compared to indirect answers.

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