

## How Much Difference Can One 'Word' Make? Changing Perceptions of Disability in Malaysia

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**Abstract** Earlier research into the linguistic construction of disability in English language newspapers in Malaysia found that, in general, discourse related to disability perpetuated the stereotype that a person with a disability was either less than normal, an object of charity, or else a brave and exceptional fighter against the odds. (Norazit & Awab 2007). Later research using Malay language newspapers confirmed these findings but also suggested that the emerging use of OKU (a more positive sounding acronym for the negative '*orang kurang upaya*' or 'less abled person') could bring about a change in the Malaysian perception of disability in the future (Norazit (a), unpublished paper). Further research into the use of the term OKU in Malay language newspapers indicated that there did indeed appear to be the beginnings of a positive OKU identity, particularly as the term was used more and more without an explanatory note and the discourse was no longer focussed on the stereotype described above (Norazit (b), unpublished paper). However, the term OKU (to refer to a person with a disability) has not been well received by members of the disabled community, who argue that the acronym still represents the words '*orang kurang upaya*' or the 'less abled', and thus remains offensive/unacceptable. On the other hand, it has been argued that the use of the term OKU can be seen in a positive light as it is also an acronym for '*orang kelainan upaya*' (differently abled) or even '*orang kelebihan upaya*' (more abled). This paper reports on research into how the term OKU is currently used in the print media in Malaysia and whether the accompanying discourse indicates that there has indeed been a positive change in perception from '*orang kurang upaya*' to '*orang kelainan upaya/orang kelebihan upaya*' or whether the term OKU has itself taken on the negative connotations previously associated with disability in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** social construction of disability, disability discourse, *orang kurang upaya* (OKU)

## Introduction

According to UN world population estimates, 10% of any population would have some kind of disability. Given that the population of Malaysia in 2007 was approximately 27.73 million, this would suggest that some 2.773 million Malaysians could be disabled in some way. In comparison, the number of people with disabilities registered with the Department of Social Welfare in 2007 was 220,250 (<http://www.jkm.gov.my/statistik.doc>). Even if only a modest 1% of the population

(277,300) is considered to be disabled there is still a discrepancy between the estimated figures and the number of those registered. The reasons for this are not the main focus of this paper but may include the differing definitions given to disability, lack of knowledge about what help is available and perhaps more significantly for this study, the stigma which is attached to being labelled 'disabled' or '*orang kurang upaya*' and/or the perception that there is nothing to gain from registering with the department, However, as will become apparent in the following section Malaysia has done much at the policy level to ensure the rights and quality of life of persons with disabilities.

## **Policies regarding people with disabilities**

Malaysia is a Signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (as of 8 April 2008) but is yet to ratify it or to sign the optional protocol. Prior to this, the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 (also known Akta OKU 2008) was passed in Parliament on December 24, 2007 and gazetted on January 24, 2008 coming into force on July 7, 2008. What is significant about this Act is that it "acknowledges the rights of disabled people and moves away from a welfare-based concept to the rights-based concept". It covers rights to:

- a) Access
- b) Education
- c) Employment
- d) Cultural life
- e) Recreational life
- f) Health

all of which are codified within the framework "have the right to.. on equal basis with persons without disabilities".

The Ministries and Department directly involved in implementing the Act include:

- a) Ministry of Health for initial assessment, any treatment and referral to the respective state Education Departments or Department of Social Welfare
- b) Social Welfare Department- registration and provision of identity card and other welfare services
- c) Education – special and integrated schools, primary, secondary, tech and vocational
- d) Labour – promotes employment , assists in obtaining employment, receives and deals with complaints

Other Codes/Policies/Initiatives which have been introduced include:

- a. Amendment to the Building By-Laws 1984 under Street, Drainage and Building Acts 1974
  - i. MS 1184:1991, Code of Practice for Access for Disabled Persons to Public Buildings

- ii. MS 1183:1990, Code of Practice for Means of Escape for Disabled Persons
  - iii. MS 1331:1993, Code of Practice for Access for Disabled Persons Outside Buildings
- b. Nov 9 2001 - Code of Practice of Employment of Disabled Persons in Private Sector (Min Human Resources)
  - c. Skim Bantuan Galakan Perniagaan Orang Kurang Upaya (Business Aid Scheme for PWD) - RM22 million over next 5 years (9<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan)

## **The Reality for Persons with Disabilities**

Sadly there is a significant gap between policy and practice. Even the Minister for the Development of Women, Children and the Community has been known to severely criticize other bodies for their failure to provide appropriate infrastructure in accordance with the policies and regulations set out by the government:

*Pihak berkuasa tempatan (PBT) ... gagal menyediakan infrastruktur yang terbaik untuk golongan orang kurang upaya (OKU) di negara ini*

Local authorities ... have failed to provide the best infrastructure for those with disabilities in our country.

In terms of access, new buildings have been designed with little thought to what access really means. Lifts may be wide enough for wheelchair access but the controls are inaccessible. There are often steps and corners to be negotiated if one wants to use the toilet, while the stalls may not be able to accommodate a wheelchair. Parking lots are set aside for persons with disabilities but in one case while a parking lot has been allocated directly opposite the entrance to the supermarket, the lot itself is standard size, which in Malaysia means it has been designed for a small compact car, and there are pillars on the driver's side. So not only is it extremely difficult to manoeuvre a wheelchair to the passenger's side of the car, it would be impossible for a driver with a disability to get out of the car at all. In the words of Sara, who has an acquired disability:

*Tempat meletak kenderaan untuk OKU terlalu sempit ... Sudahnya rakan terpaksa mengendong saya. Itu belum dikira orang biasa yang dengan sengaja meletakkan kereta di tempat khas.*

The parking spaces are too narrow.. So my friends have to carry me. This doesn't include ordinary people who just park in the allocated spaces anyway.

Using public transport is also problematic as, while there have been moves for greater access, including specially designated buses, there are still problems in terms of lack of hydraulic lifting mechanisms, the fact that the buses cannot be lowered and the uneven roads and pavements preventing access to these 'accessible' buses. In addition the

connectivity between the different modes of transport in the city is poor and not all stations are equipped for access

Work opportunities are also limited for example there is significant vocational stereotyping – e.g. the blind trained as masseurs and telephonists and a shortage of ‘real’ work opportunities. Here again the Minister has been vocal in her criticism of employers who do not employ persons with disabilities:

*Keenggangan majikan menerima golongan orang kurang upaya(OKU) menyebabkan ramai di antara mereka gagal mendapat pekerjaan sekalipun mempunyai kemahiran yang relevan*

Employers refusal to accept PWD has resulted in many failing to get work even though they have the relevant skills.

In the words of one interviewee:

*seolah-olah kami tidak ada tempat dalam masyarakat atau kami hanya dipandang sebagai sampah masyarakat*

it’s as if we don’t have a place in society or that we are only viewed as society’s rubbish

This sense of ‘otherness’ or alienation is reflected in the way Sara, and more particularly her friends, feel:

*Sikap masyarakat yang asyik memandangnya juga menimbulkan rasa kurang senang di hati rakan –rakan*

The attitude of people who just stare at her has upset her friends

In other words, people with disabilities are still marginalized.

This lack of understanding has been perpetuated by the stereotypes portrayed in the media of those with disabilities as being in need of ‘our’ help with only the exceptional being able to lead full and independent lives.

## **Construction of Disability**

The medical model of disability locates ‘disability/impairment’ squarely within the individual as something to be treated (by the ‘doctor’) or something to be overcome (by the ‘patient’). In other words, people with disabilities lack ‘agency’ in determining their own affairs. The socio-medical model, although acknowledging the social aspect of disability, also locates within the individual and, by implication, maintains the idea that disability is an abnormality.

The social model of disability, on the other hand, locates disability within the society and /or in the environment. This social model of disability, according to Mairian Corker, 'separates disability from impairment and then attributes the creation of disability to the dominant socio-cultural environment' (Corker 1998:221). Thus, disability is a result of the " external constraints which prevent them from living their life in the way that they would want" (Fawcett 2000: 22).

## **Language and the Construction of Disability**

According to Brisenden, "the language used and the situation in which it is expressed will determine the message that goes out to those listening" (1998: 21). Using the term 'cripple' suggest that persons with disabilities are "weak, pathetic and in need of sympathy" while to refer to a person with cerebral palsy as a 'spastic' implies being "a raving, dribbling idiot". He also argues that using the term 'the disabled' robs persons with disabilities of their individual identity while juxtaposing the term 'normal' with the term 'the disabled' implies 'the disabled' now become 'the abnormal' (1998:23). Other disabling ways of ways of 'disabling' persons with disabilities is to portray them as being 'tragic victims' (Watson,1998:145) or as being 'weak' 'pitiful' 'dependent' 'passive' (1998:150). Similarly, Darke refers to the representation of persons with disabilities as being the 'noble warrior', charity cripple', 'curio', 'freak' or 'Pollyanna' (1998:181). However, is not just the terms which can be disabling but also the discourse in which they occur, so while even though more 'politically correct' terms may be used the portrayal and subsequent perception of disability i.e being 'abnormal', deviant' 'dependent', 'helpless', 'people with special needs', 'people who need care' and either people who 'suffer tragically' or people who 'bravely overcome disability' and 'struggle to be normal' will still be determined by the situation in which these other more neutral terms occur.

## **Language of Disability in Malaysia**

The most commonly used term in Bahasa Malaysia (a standardized variety of Malay which is the national and official language of Malaysia) for a person with a disability has been '*orang kurang upaya*', (this would be the equivalent of 'disabled person'). Previously the term used was '*orang cacat*' (the equivalent of 'handicapped person'), although now the acronym OKU, first used in Utusan on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2001, is the one most frequently used in official discourse .

The term '*orang kurang upaya*' has been defined by the government as follows:

*Orang kurang upaya dikasifikasikan sebagai seseorang yang tidak berkemampuan memenuhi keperluan normal bagi seorang individu secara keseluruhan/sebahagian dan/atau tidak berkemampuan menyertai masyarakat sepenuhnya disebabkan*

*kekurangan dalam bentuk fizikal atau mental sama ada dimiliki sejak kelahiran atau setelah dilahirkan (Portal rasmi kerajaan Malaysia)*

[Translation: A disabled person is classified as one who is not capable of fulfilling his/her normal needs as an individual either totally or in part and/or is not capable of participating in society fully because of a physical or a mental lack whether from birth or acquired (Official portal of Malaysian government)]

In other words the definition of disability is firmly planted in the medical model.

The meaning of '*kurang upaya*' can be broken down in the following way. '*Kurang*' can have the meaning of either 'less', 'not enough' or 'lack'. Hence '*kurang adat*' means a lack of culture (as in not knowing/abiding by society's rules), in other words 'impolite' and '*kurang ajar*' means a lack of education (as in not having been brought up properly) in other words 'rude'. Both expressions can be quite pejorative. '*Upaya*' can mean ability but it can also mean, effort or intelligence. Hence, '*kurang upaya*' does not just mean disabled but could also imply a lack of effort and/or intelligence.

The term OKU, on the other hand, could have a more positive connotation. The first part of the acronym, OK, is self explanatory, this expression has been borrowed into Malay and is used quite frequently in conversation. 'U' is homophonous with the second person pronoun in English and this has also been borrowed into Malay. It is used in conversations to avoid using the status/politeness markers embedded in the Malay pronoun system. It can also be used at the end of an utterance to indicate some form of emphasis. For example, in complimenting someone on their appearance a speaker might say "*Wah! Cantik (lah), you, hari ini!*" or in response to a negative comment on what one is wearing the speaker might say "*Eh! Mahal, you!*". Hence, one possible interpretation of OKU is a very affirmative "I'm telling you, I'm ok!"

The other Bahasa Malaysia term used in reference to disability is '*cacat*'. This is often used to mean 'blemish', 'defect' or 'flaw', but it can also be paraphrased as '*kurang sempurna*' – 'less than perfect' and '*kekurangan yang terdapat pada sesuatu*' - a lack in something. When conjugated as a verb, the resulting word '*mencacat*' means to abuse or vilify.

## **Previous Research on Disability Terminology in Malaysia**

*Norazit and Awab(2007)*

The main focus of this study was on how disability is constructed linguistically in the English language media in Malaysia. It investigated the terms used to refer to disability in relation to the preferred English language terminologies outlined above. It also

considered whether the terms currently in use did in fact reflect a change in the attitude to and perception of disability in Malaysia. The study was based on a corpus sourced mainly from newspaper reports in *The Star*, *New Straits Times*, *KL Metro* and *Malay Mail*, and some from press releases issued by certain political parties and corporate bodies. The corpus covered the period from 1992 until early 2005 and comprised 51,297 words. The Google search engine was used to source these documents, which had to include at least one of the words or their derivatives from the WHO 'impairment / disability / handicap' classification. The word 'special' was also included as this is the preferred term used by the Malaysian Ministry of Education to refer to children with disabilities.

It was found that no clear distinctions were made between 'impairment / disability and handicapped'. In fact, the term 'impaired' had limited use while 'handicapped' was used fairly infrequently. Although the term 'handicapped' was still used, it was being replaced by 'disabled' as a blanket term to refer to both disability and impairment. There were efforts to use the preferred term 'disabled <+ human noun>' or '<+human noun> with disabilities', but with half of the 'disabled' entries occurring in the phrase 'the disabled', it was clear that people with disabilities were still seen as a homogenous group to be juxtaposed with the 'normally' abled. The context in which the terms occurred reinforced this. There were some positive portrayals of persons with disabilities but this was undermined by suggestions that, in general, this view was not shared by the rest of society. Moreover, other examples maintained the fiction that people with disabilities were necessarily 'needy', 'helpless', 'dependent', 'burdens' and even 'victims' or else that they were 'exceptional' if they led 'normal' lives, and more significantly were incapable of agency in determining their lives.

#### Norazit (2005)

The aim of this study was to investigate the portrayal of disability in the Bahasa Malaysia media and to determine whether the language used to describe disability and those with disabilities could help explain the discrepancy between policy and practice.

In this study a search of the Utusan Malaysia Online archives was carried out using the search phrase '*orang kurang upaya*' (disabled person). 85 texts dating from 31/08/2003 to 31/08/2005 were retrieved and examined. This time the corpus was run through the Simple Concordance Program 4.08 (build17) using the search phrase '*orang kurang upaya*' and the search word '*cacat*' (impaired).

First of all, most of the texts were to be found in non-prominent sections of the newspaper, that is in the family section and the letters section.

In terms of front page news, people with disabilities were only highlighted through their educational achievements – exam results, university entrance and convocation – and then as extraordinary cases, or as charity recipients during festive seasons. The only other time they were mentioned was as a means of highlighting related Ministries or

government policy. The home news section also highlighted disability in terms of the policy but generally in relation to the budget, i.e. welfare allocation, discounts/tax relief and distribution of aid.

In the forum or letters to the editor section the focus was on the difficulties faced by people with disabilities, for example access to Welfare Department offices situated on the second floor of buildings with no lifts, and to specially provided facilities - broken toilets, toilets used as stores. There were also complaints about red tape – over a year to process a grant - and lack of respect. This lack of respect took the form of parking spots being taken and comments like “*kalau awak orang kurang upaya kenapa awak boleh memandu kereta*” (if you are disabled why are you driving a car) which implies no belief in the capability of a person with a disability, while the use of ‘*awak*’ is either too familiar or implies disrespect and the existence of an unequal power relation. One letter pointed out that people with disabilities were ‘needy’ not for handouts but for due consideration.

The family section focussed on human interest stories, highlighting facilities/NGOs (requests for aid) individuals/parents (requests for aid) exceptional individuals, recipients of projects, and company donations/charity projects. Within the stories there was mention of the lack of opportunity/facilities etc, but also the stereotyping, sentimentalism and clichés were often just below the surface.

In the sports section again there were requests for support, but this was one section of the newspaper that highlighted capability, providing a very positive image of Malaysian para-athletes as world ranking sportsmen and women recognised by the International Paralympic Council. While in the entertainment section the only mention of disability is in relation to disabled media personality Ras Adiba, whose high profile is a result of the fact that she was well known before her accident.

In terms of terminology, the term ‘*orang kurang upaya*’ was used more than ‘*cacat*’. ‘*Orang kurang upaya*’ were not only treated as a homogenous group, they were frequently grouped together with *kanak-kanak* (children) and *warga tua/emas* (the elderly) as objects of sympathy/care ‘*mereka yang memerlukan perhatian khususnya orang kurang upaya dan anak-anak yatim*’ (they need attention especially the disabled and the orphans), unfortunate ‘*yang kurang bernasib baik*’ (who don’t have such good luck) and marginalised. The term was frequently contrasted with ‘*sempurna*’ (perfect) in expressions such as ‘*Seperti mereka yang sempurna*’ (like those who are perfect), ‘*lahir tidak sempurna*’ (born not perfect) and normal in expressions such as ‘*Hidup seperti orang biasa dibandingkan dengan pelajar normal*’ (live like ordinary people compared with normal students).

The term ‘*cacat*’ was used mainly with ‘*kanak-kanak*’ (although children could be aged up to 32), for type of disability – ‘*cacat anggota pendengaran, penglihatan, mental, fizikal*’ (hearing, sight, mentally and physically impaired; in names of institutions – ‘*sekolah khas kanak-kanak cacat*’ (special school for handicapped children) and

'Persatuan *Kanak-Kanak Cacat Akal Selangor dan Wilayah*' (Society for mentally handicapped children in Selangor and the Federal Territory), although some inmates in children's homes were aged up to 55 and '*Kenderaan orang cacat*' (handicapped person's vehicle).

Overall it was found that the discourse perpetuated the idea of the disabled person as being less than normal, an object of charity, or brave fighter against the odds. The terminology used also perpetuated the negative image as even '*orang kurang upaya*' implies being less abled and not differently abled, although this term was a marked improvement on '*cacat*'.

#### Norazit (2007)

The main objectives of this study were to investigate the use of the term OKU in the Bahasa Malaysia media, to determine whether the frequency of its use had increased and to examine whether this possible increase had been accompanied by a change in the portrayal of disability identity in Malaysia

In the study a search of the Utusan Online Archives was carried out using the search wordk "OKU". A total of 73 texts were retrieved dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2006 until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 2007. A search using the keywords "*orang kurang upaya*" yielded the same texts. These texts were then run through a Web Concordancer to establish the relative frequencies of the two terms and to see whether the term "OKU" could stand alone without immediate reference to the words the acronym stands for. In other words is OKU instantly recognisable as a term of reference for person with a disability?

A total of 424 instances of the term OKU were found in the data. 65 of these instances occurred contiguously with '*orang kurang upaya*' - 64 as '*orang kurang upaya (OKU)*' and one as '*OKU (orang kurang upaya)*'. There were only 18 instances of '*orang kurang upaya*' without the term OKU. In a number of headlines OKU was used on its own, but this was followed by one explanatory mention of '*orang kurang upaya*' while all other mentions were of OKU only. This suggested that OKU was now seen as the accepted term but that it might still need clarification for some. OKU also appeared in phrases such as *Akta OKU* , *Badan Berkhidmat OKU*. One interesting observation was that the term OKU was generally restricted to those with physical disabilities and rarely collocated with intellectual disabilities, while '*cacat*' was used to a specific disability such as '*cacat penglihatan*' - 'vision impaired'

The texts were also analysed manually to determine which part of the newspaper they came from, i.e. were articles relating to disability given prominence, what types of theme were commonly discussed, and how were people with disabilities portrayed. In other words, what kind of identity was being created and/or attributed to a person with a disability.

Although the number of mentions in terms of front page news was small there had been a change from the earlier study in that now not only educational achievements were highlighted, the fact that education is a right and should be encouraged at all levels was also being stressed. There was also less emphasis on people with disabilities as charity recipients during festive seasons, and more on the fact that they were a section of the community which also had equal rights to participate in society.

Similarly, in the home news section the move was away from highlighting disability in terms of welfare allocation, discounts/tax relief or aid. Now the emphasis was on providing opportunities through encouraging entrepreneurship and the provision of jobs. There was also more advocacy for the rights of people with disabilities, not just from human rights workers and NGOs but also from senior members of the government themselves.

Even the articles in the Keluarga section of the newspaper indicated a move towards highlighting the successes rather than the plight of individuals with disabilities. For example, stories of business success, inclusion and self advocacy had begun to appear. This was not to say that the days of the heart-wrenching stories of pain and struggle we had come to expect in this section of the newspaper were completely over. The notion of '*masyarakat penyayang*' and '*kasihan*' still continued to influence disability discourse as it is part of the official notion of being Malaysian.

As in the previous study, perhaps the most positive portrayal of disability was found in the sports section of the newspapers. Malaysia's para-athletes were particularly strong, in fact they consistently outdid other Malaysian athletes at international sports events. In the past their successes had not been equally rewarded, but now they were being treated equally. In fact it was reported that more money was distributed to the para-athletes under the cash incentive scheme than to non-disabled athletes because of their higher success rates.

However, on a negative note, the forum or letters to the editor section still focussed on the difficulties faced by people with disabilities, and yet these difficulties had been brought to the attention of the general public and the powers that be many times. For example, there were still issues concerning access to and misuse of facilities - broken toilets, toilets being used by the non-disabled, problems of access to public transport, even though specially designed buses were now in use and what seemed to be a never-ending problem in relation to the misuse of disabled parking spots. Nevertheless, there was some change in that letters advocating for rights and equal opportunities were becoming more frequent, both from the disabled and non-disabled perspective.

Overall, then, there did appear to be the beginnings of a positive OKU identity, as evidenced in the change of focus in news items and reporting and in the comments made by the country's leaders. OKU was the preferred term for people with disabilities

according to the Minister for Women, Family and Community Development and it had also begun to appear in English language media

It was also suggested that the fact that the term OKU could equally be an acronym for *orang kelainan upaya* (differently abled) or even *orang kelebihan upaya* (more abled), as suggested by one politician, may encourage this. It was argued that the term perhaps could become a symbol of pride and identity for those with disabilities much in the way that the term 'deaf' has been embraced as a symbol of identity by the deaf community.

However, it was also pointed out that changing the terminology alone would not be enough to change an identity or the perceptions of that identity. If the discourse remained the same and the environment that produced that discourse remained the same then a change in terminology would only make a small difference. However, if the discourse did change and the new terminology was associated with that change, then using the new terminology would strengthen the discourse and hence reinforce any new identity thus created.

## **Present study**

The present study revisits the current use of the term OKU in the Malay media for the period January to March 2010 and examines the contexts within which the term is used. A similar review of the English print media for the same period showed that the term OKU had only gained currency in terms such as OKU card, OKU parking sticker, OKU committee i.e. where there had been a direct translation from a Malay term. The comparable term in English still remains 'the disabled'.

## **Methodology**

A search of the Utusan Online Archives was carried out using the search word 'OKU'. A total of 134 texts were retrieved dating from the 1st of January 2010 until the 31st of March 2010. However, only those texts with 'OKU' in the title were selected for analysis to ensure that the texts were specifically about or highlighted person(s) with disabilities.

The texts were first analysed manually to determine:

- a. what types of theme were commonly discussed, and
- b. how people with disabilities were portrayed.
- c. had there been a positive change in perception from '*orang kurang upaya*' to '*orang kelainan upaya/orang kelebihan upaya*' or
- d. had the term OKU has itself taken on the negative connotations previously associated with disability in Malaysia?

The second part of the research was to analyse the texts using a concordancer, in this case AntConc Version 3.2.1, a text analysis tool designed by Lawrence Anthony to be used as freeware. This allowed closer analysis of the immediate linguistic context in which the term OKU occurred.

## Results

A total of 29 texts were finally selected for analysis. Of these, four were actually general news items but the fact that being OKU was highlighted is significant in terms of this analysis so will be included in the discussion later.

Of the 29 texts, 28 appeared in the news section of the newspaper while only one appeared as a feature article in the family section of the newspaper. This indicates a notable shift to the more salient sections of the newspaper, which reach a more general readership, than the specialised sections towards the back of the newspaper. Moreover, if we compare the number of texts originally retrieved (134 texts) over a period of 3 months with those analysed in the previous study (73 texts) over a period of fifteen months, there has been an obvious and significant increase in the number of texts that mention disability in some way. In other words issues dealing with disability are now being given considerably more importance.

In terms of theme there is also a significant move from the 'object of pity/charity' or 'exceptional person fighting against the odds' types of discourse to those that are predominately based on advocacy and/or highlight the need for inclusion. Table 1 highlights the number of instances for each type of discourse.

No	Type of discourse	No of instances	Percentage
1	Advocacy/Inclusion	15	51.7
2	Charity/Aid recipient	4	13.8
3	Against the odds/Exceptional	3	10.3
4	Pity	2	6.9
5	Blame	1	3.5
6	OKU highlighted	4	13.8
	TOTAL	29	100

Table 1: Types of Discourse

However, it should be noted that in the four texts where the disability is actually incidental to the main story, it does raise the question of why it was necessary to mention the disability. In fact in the case of the *'khalwat'* (close proximity) issue much attention is given to the type of disability of the woman accused, as is also given to the scanty clothing she was wearing. It does suggest that these details are there to sensationalize the news item in the manner of "Isn't it extraordinary that a woman with a disability should have a partner?". Similarly, in the case of the mother rescuing her children, it could be implied that because her children have disabilities her act is more remarkable.

## Results of Concordancing

The results of text analysis yielded 156 instances of the term OKU. This is also a noticeable increase from the earlier study (424 instances from 73 texts retrieved over a period of 15 months compared with 156 instances from 29 texts over a period of three months). Only 28 instances of OKU collocated with the term "*orang kurang upaya*", while there was no collocation with "*orang kelainan upaya*". One interesting finding compared with the earlier study was that OKU now collocated with "*buta*" or blind and with "*terencat akal*" or 'intellectually challenged' so is no longer restricted to obvious physical disabilities.

The remaining 128 instances of OKU were then analysed in terms of part of speech. The term appeared equally with Nouns (63 instances) and with Adjectives (65 instances). As an Adjective, OKU collocated with "*golongan*" (group) as in "*golongan OKU*" or 'disabled persons group' 23 times. It collocated 31 times with nouns that already had the specific semantic feature <+person> so semantically speaking there is actually no need to include the 'O' or 'orang' ("person") of OKU. For example '*wanita OKU*' would be directly translated as "less abled person woman" or if the acronym was spelled out '*wanita orang kurang upaya*', which would be ungrammatical in Malay. OKU collocated with inanimate and/or abstract nouns such as '*hak*' (right) 11 times.

In other words what was originally clearly an acronym for '*orang kurang upaya*' has become a term which can stand alone as a term in its own right, with little or no reference to the individual components that provided the initial acronym. An additional argument for this is reflected in the phrase found in the data "*OKU yang tidak berupaya*" ( a disabled person who is disabled ) which suggests that even the U does not seem to immediately refer to "*upaya*". This would suggest that any discussion as to whether the 'K' stands for '*kurang*', '*kelainan*' or '*kelebihan*' has now become irrelevant, what is important now is the meaning given to the acronym and not that of its component parts and that meaning is reflected in and influenced by the discourse in which the term OKU is used.

## **Positive features of the discourse**

There were a number of instances where the capacity of OKU to be fully or almost fully independent was mentioned. In the words of two students who classify themselves as OKU:

*Dia mampu menguruskan kehidupan sendiri walaupun sesekali dibantu oleh keluarga dan guru*

He was capable of managing his life himself even though once in a while he was helped by his family or teacher

and

*kami juga ingin ... dapat menjalani kehidupan seperti mana orang lain tanpa bergantung kepada ibubapa dan keluarga'*

Like other people we also desire to become excellent and to lead our lives like other people without depending on our parents and family

In relation to work, those involved with training and working with OKU have this to say:

*OKU mampu laksana tugas dengan baik*

OKU are capable of working well

and

*pekerja OKU....adalah golongan yang mudah menerima arahan , rajin dan setia kepada majikan atau pekerjaan mereka*

OKU workers are a group which readily receive instructions, are industrious and are loyal to their employers or their work

Meanwhile in an address to FAMA, the Federal Agriculture Marketing Authority, the Chief Minister of Negeri Sembilan, one of the states in Malaysia, exhorted the authorities to provide opportunities for OKU to be involved in Pasar Tani (Farmer's Market) activities because:

*Golongan ini berkemampuan untuk bergiat aktif secara langsung dalam bidang perniagaan.*

This group have the ability to be directly involved in the field of business

Other discourses stressed the "sameness" of OKU in relation to the rest of the community rather than "otherness". This was expressed in general terms:

*seperti orang yang lain kami juga ingin menjadi golongan yang cemerlang*

like other people we also strive for excellence

and in more specific terms in relation to education:

*Kalau pelajar normal boleh berjaya dalam pelajaran, mengapa kami tidak. Mereka ada keistimewahan, begitu juga kami*

If normal students can be successful in their studies, why can't we? They can be exceptional, so can we

sport:

*Penyertaan mereka dalam kejohanan seperti itu membangkitkan keyakinan dalam menjalani kehidupan seperti orang lain*

Their participation in championships like this increases their confidence in leading their lives just like everyone else

and community celebrations. In the following case, this was the first time that residents from a welfare home had had the opportunity to:

*keluar dan menyambut tahun baru dengan meriah sekali seperti orang lain*  
go out and celebrate new year with great cheer like other people

As indicated in table 1 more than 50% of the texts were classified as providing some form of advocacy for the rights of OKU. The following quotes attest to this:

*Sebagai OKU mereka juga berhak untuk menerima pendidikan asas serta latihan-latihan tertentu bagi membolehkan mengurus diri demi masa depan mereka*

As OKU mereka they also have the right to receive a basic education and training to enable them to manage themselves for the sake of their future

The following quote also reflects one of Malaysia's cultural beliefs about OKU and their rights within the community:

*OKU adalah anugerah dari tuhan dan hak-hak mereka dalam masyarakat tidak boleh diabaikan*

OKU are a gift from God and their rights within society should not be ignored

Community responsibility in ensuring that these rights are upheld and that OKU are included within the community is also stressed:

*Masyarakat perlu menyelami hati dan perasaan golongan orang kurang upaya (OKU) dan menjadikan mereka sebahagian daripada kehidupan mereka*

The community should consider the feelings of people with disabilities (OKU) and include them in their lives

*Sebagai masyarakat, kita juga bertanggungjawab untuk sama-sama membantu pihak kerajaan bagi memastikan golongan seperti itu tidak terabai disebabkan kecacatan atau masalah yang dihadapi*

As members of the community we are also responsible to aid the government in ensuring that this group is not neglected because of their impairment or the problems they face

## **Negative features of the discourse**

However, there are also elements within these discourses that tend to undermine what might otherwise be a positive portrayal of disability. One way to undermine the discourse is to contrast being OKU with being normal. This is done not only by the writers of the articles concerned but also by those who are OKU themselves. For example:

*seperti insan normal*

like normal human beings

*Pelajar normal dan OKU*

Normal students and OKU students

*Kejayaan Katijah sepatutnya menjadi cerminan kepada guru normal*

Katijah's success should be an example for normal teachers

Another way to undermine the discourse is to contrast being OKU with being perfect or complete '*sempurna*' or describing being OKU in terms of some kind of lack '*kekurangan*'

*Mereka berusaha untuk kelihatan sempurna di mata kita dan tidak sesekali berserah kepada kekurangan diri*

They try to look perfect/complete in our eyes and never give in to the lack in themselves

*Perasaan mereka sama seperti insan sempurna*

Their feelings are the same as perfect/complete human beings

*Membuat kerja seperti manusia yang sempurna*

Carry out their work like perfect/complete human beings

*Tidak menyesali kekurangan dirinya*

Doesn't regret the lack in himself

Similarly, using age inappropriate terms to refer to OKU, although only occurring twice in the corpus, also has a negative effect. For example the use of *kanak-kanak* to refer to older students (as evidenced by the accompanying picture):

*Jangan terkejut kika anda melihat kanak-kanak spastik sibuk menanam cili hihjau organik di Sekolah Kanak-kanak spastik Pulau Pinang di Jalan Masjid Negeri di sini.*  
Don't be surprised if you see spastic "children" busy planting organic green chillies at the Penang Spastic Children's School here in Jalan Masjid Negeri

And the use of the term '*anak-anak*' to refer to young adults in:

*Saya dapat membawa anak-anak (penghuni St Nicolas)..keluar*  
I was able to take the children (residents of St Nicolas) out

Even more obvious indications that we still have a way to go in ensuring the inclusion of OKU into the wider community can be seen in the observations made by OKU themselves and by those who advocate on their behalf about the reality of their existence. S, who became disabled following a road accident, points out:

*Kemudahan untuk orang kurang upaya (OKU) sangat terhad*  
The facilities for people with disabilities (OKU) are very limited

Her frustration is echoed in the views expressed by the Minister for the Development of Women, Children and the Community highlighted in the introductory section of the paper above.

Sadly, the response from those who should be making sure the facilities are provided is to blame the OKU themselves. Firstly, in terms of attitude towards work:

*Perasaan rendah diri dan mudah jemu terhadap kerja yang dilakukan adalah antara faktor yang menyebabkan golongan orang kurang upaya (OKU) sukar mendapat pekerjaan.*

Lack of self esteem and becoming easily bored with the work that is being done are among the factors which result in the disabled persons group (OKU) finding it difficult to get work

and secondly in terms of misinterpreting the intentions of the community:

*Golongan OKU ini salah-olah mentafsirkan masyarakat yang melihat mereka itu kerana mengejek sedangkan masyarakat sebenarnya bersimpati.*

It's as if the OKU group believes that the community is laughing at them whereas in reality they are sympathizing with them.

However, although the last few comments do show that practice is still lagging behind policy, overall the results do suggest that there is a continuing and significant change in the representation of disability in the media from one that portrayed people with disabilities as objects of concern and pity to one that stresses their capabilities and rights.

## **Conclusion**

Before presenting the final conclusions and recommendations, it should be acknowledged that there were several limitations to the research. These are as follows:

- a. only one newspaper was used as source
- b. the number of texts was restricted
- c. only the term OKU was investigated

Given that different newspapers have different editorial policies, using only one newspaper may have introduced some editorial bias in the way certain issues are presented. Increasing the number of texts and widening the search to include other terms which refer to disability may also have yielded different results in terms of the overall attitude to and perception of disability

However, what can be concluded is that OKU have become far more 'visible' in the media. Moreover, the term OKU is firmly established as THE term for persons with disabilities in Malay, even though it has not had the same impact where English is concerned. On the positive side there is far more advocacy for OKU rights and inclusion while the discourse itself attempts to portray the 'sameness' of OKU in relation to other members of the community even though this is sometimes undermined by the unwitting comparison between OKU and those who are '*sempurna*' or 'normal'. However, news stories highlight the fact that a lot still has to be done in terms of implementation of policies. From the discourse point of view much can also be done to ensure that, however good intentioned writers may be in promoting OKU, that they do not use 'disabling' discourse. This will require greater understanding and sensitivity to disability and how language can influence attitudes and perceptions.

In terms of research, given that so little work has been done in this area in Malaysia, there is still much to be done. In terms of media discourse, broadening the research to include other forms of media and not just the print media would provide even greater insight into perceptions of disability. The fact that Malaysia is multi-cultural also suggests that another way forward is to look at the different cultural perceptions of disability. However, what has not been done and what should be the next step is to carry out research into the opinions of those who are most directly affected - members of the OKU community themselves. In the words of the motto for International Day of Disabled Persons, 2004: "Nothing about Us, Without Us".

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