

Vagueness in Mental Health, Illness, Disorders, and Disease: A Corpus-assisted Analysis of the News Media's Choice of Mental Health Terminologies in Three Southeast Asia Regions

Keywords: *mental health, corpus linguistics, discourse studies, vagueness, Southeast Asia Regions*

Abstract

In most of the Mental health-related investigations, the terminologies under 'mental health' (MH) were employed interchangeably, lacking a discernible differentiation, particularly within the Asian contexts (e.g., Ng, 1997; Lauber & Rössler, 2007; Kudva et al., 2023). Linguists and philosophers call the absence of clear boundaries between concepts 'vague' (Keil et al., 2017). While blurred boundaries between MH-related terms have been discussed by numerous scholars (e.g. Jackson & Haslam, 2022; Tse & Haslam, 2023), linguistic approaches that systematically consider the vagueness inherent in the meanings and usages of these terminologies across various contexts are rare. In examining the choice of MH terminologies, it is essential to consider the influence of news media. News media is understood as the channels that carry messages to numerous audiences (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013), and it has the power to frame social groups based on their preference and influence over its audiences, shaping public ideas and behaviours (Bednarek & Caple, 2012). Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that news media coverage of MH-related issues has been extensively investigated in Western contexts (Ramsay, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to explore the vagueness issue under the news media discourse to show the meaning of terms on MH in the Southeast Asia. Methodologically, we plan to utilize Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS), to uncover nuanced meanings within specific discourses (Partington et al., 2013). This approach serves as a tool for assessing the precision of terms used in selected Asian English newspapers regarding MH. Data for this study was sourced from Nexis, an online news repository. News stories were selected if they contained the terms 'mental health,' 'mental illness,' 'mental disease,' or 'mental disorder' in both the title and body, published between January 1st, 2014, and November 31st, 2023. The four generic terms were selected in accordance with the discourse on vagueness in psychiatry as presented by Keil et al. (2017). The chosen newspapers—*News Straits Times*, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, and *The Straits Times*—are widely circulated broadsheet format publications in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore. This ensures that the inclusion of these four MH-related terms in media discourses has the potential to reach and influence a diverse audience's cognitive perception. The project is genuinely interdisciplinary and spans the fields of both CADS and the Epistemic Theory of Vagueness. The results of the study will be relevant to corpus linguists in terms of the methodological refinement of instruments to investigate the language of MH and cultural diversity.

(401 words)

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