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<td>Title</td>
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ABSTRACT

Singapore rose from a Third World country to a First World Nation within one generation. Given the many constraints that the country faced when it obtained its independence in 1965, it is undeniable that such a quick turnaround of its fate could only be made possible with very strong leadership from the government. As Singapore becomes more affluent and its people become more educated, the government has recognized the need to devolve more autonomy to the people in running their own lives. But having a highly efficient and effective government has inevitably resulted in many Singaporeans growing dependent on the government to help them plan and execute many issues that are pertinent to them. To wean the people off from this dependence, the government is encouraging the people to be self-reliant. This message of wanting Singaporeans to be self-reliant was first raised by PM Goh Chok Tong in his 2002 National Day Rally speech. He stated that Singaporeans needed to develop a self-reliant attitude as it “is an essential step in our efforts to promote entrepreneurship. If we have too many safety nets, people will have no incentive to go forth and achieve great things by themselves” (Goh 2002). To the government, having the people develop this self-reliant attitude is important as it can help ensure that Singapore continues to thrive in this ever changing global landscape.

One of the best ways to socialize people into developing a certain outlook and attitude towards life is through education. Since the upper secondary Social Studies syllabus states that one of its learning outcomes is for students to “appreciate the importance of self-reliance in the pursuit of a nation’s survival and success”, its
textbooks can serve as rich empirical evidence for studying how strongly the message of self-reliance is put across to the students. Further, the Social Studies textbooks, being official government documents, can also provide insight into how the government would like to shape the students’ perceptions of how they should think and act as Singaporeans.

To uncover the dominant messages in the textbooks, this research does not take the conventional approach of doing content analysis. Rather, the dominant messages will be unveiled through analyzing language use in the textbooks. Critical discourse analysts such as Fairclough and van Dijk argue that language, being the most common form of social behaviour is ingrained with certain conventions and norms that serve to shape people’s mindsets of how the world is organized (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 1993, 1997). Further, Fairclough states that ideologies are “‘common sense’ assumptions which are implicit in the conventions according to which people interact linguistically, and of which people are generally not consciously aware” (Fairclough 1989:2). Hence, the conventional approach of doing content analysis without analysis of language use would not be able to reveal how the textbooks are able to influence the thinking and consequently the actions of students.

To surface the conventions and norms or ideologies embedded in language use in the textbooks, this research uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its framework. CDA seeks to encourage self-reflection and the consciousness of language use, i.e., a deeper human capability, and thereby enables one to gain greater cognizance of the reality coded in the discourse and to exercise one’s judgement to accept or reject the
‘portrayed’ reality. To achieve the aims of CDA, this research uses tools of Systemic Functional Linguistics, namely transitivity and appraisal, to analyze the roles of key participants in the texts as well as to reveal how the writers appraise these participants through language use. The key participants in the textbooks are the government, the people and Singapore. The study of language use in the textbooks will surface the taken-for-granted assumptions embedded within the texts. This forms the micro-analysis for this research. The assumptions from the micro-analysis are mapped to the behaviour and actions of the government and the people within the political, economic and socio-cultural contexts in Singapore. This forms the macro-analysis of this study and it serves to surface the ‘truth effects’ of the assumptions on the roles of the government and the people in the discourse of citizenship. In other words, the analysis should show how these assumptions control the power relations between the government, the people and the country, and show how these dynamics support or hamper the development of a self-reliant attitude in the people.

Through the micro- and macro-analysis on the Social Studies textbooks, the following nine ideologies are revealed:

i. the government is capable;

ii. the government is caring and fair;

iii. PAP is the government;

iv. the people are resources;

v. the people are compliant;

vi. the people are passive;
vii. the people are living in racial harmony;
viii. Singapore is a vulnerable country; and
ix. Singapore is a successful country.

This researcher believes that out of these nine ideologies, five of them, namely, ‘the
government is capable’, ‘the government is caring and fair’, ‘the people are resources’,
‘the people are compliant’ and ‘the people are passive’ work together to undermine the
government’s call for the students to be risk-takers and to develop a self-reliant attitude.
Overwhelmingly, the textbooks portrayed the government as being capable, able to
tackle most of the challenges facing Singapore and the key to the success of the
country. The government is also presented as a benevolent authority that takes care of
its people. The researcher argues that the ideologies that ‘the government is capable’
and ‘the government is caring and fair’ serve to create the assumption in the people that
they can leave the running of the country and national issues affecting their lives in the
hands of the government. Similarly, to further perpetuate the assumption that
Singaporeans can be dependent on the government, the textbooks portrayed the people
as resources that can be mobilized and allocated for use by the country, but at the same
time, as submissive actors who take little or no initiatives where national issues are
concerned.

If the contrasting roles played by the pro-active government and the passive
people are complementary and the interactions between the two have worked in the
past, i.e., the government-people relationship is harmonious, is there a need to change
it? The government obviously thinks that this change must occur and this is evident
from the NDR speech given by PM Goh in 2002. But is giving speeches and urging the people to be self-reliant enough to change how the people perceive their roles in the country vis-à-vis the government? From the findings in this research, the researcher argues that, in order for people to develop a self-reliant attitude, there is a need to change people’s assumptions and perceptions about their roles in the country vis-à-vis the government. One way to bring about this change is to ensure that official documents such as textbooks provide a balanced representation of the government and people through language use. If the government continues to be portrayed as the dominant and most capable player in transitivity processes or the ‘going-ons’, i.e., doing, saying and thinking, in Singapore, the government might find itself running on the same spot trying to encourage Singaporeans to take greater ownership of their lives and to take on active citizenship roles.