

# Representation of Rape Victims and Perpetrators in Thai News Articles and its Implications for Rape Myths

Natjapak Suebklin

Sompatu Vungthong

King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Thailand

Corresponding author's email: sompatu.vun@mail.kmutt.ac.th

Received September 15, 2021; revised December 10, 2022;

Accepted December 10, 2022; online December 14, 2022

## Abstract

In this paper, we explore how perpetrators and victims are represented in Thai online news articles where the topic is rape. The articles were written in English and we analysed them through Halliday's view on Transitivity and van Leeuwen's approach to participant roles via his Social Actor Framework (i.e., we used a text linguistics approach to analyse clausal- and phrasal-level features of discourse based on Systemic Functional Linguistics). Our data consisted of thirty online news articles (10 each) from three popular Thai news outlets: *Bangkok Post*, *The Nation*, and *Khaosod English*. Findings revealed specific linguistic patterns were used to represent victims and perpetrators in news stories where rape was the topic. Namely, material processes were most frequently used to represent perpetrators as active agents and victims as being passive. It was also found that perpetrators and victims were mainly described through the category of Functionalization; in other words, in terms of an activity or something they do as well as classification in terms of age, gender, and race. The main difference in the representation between these two social groups was the use of Nomination and Physical Identification. Based on our findings, we shed light on the implications for certain rape myths and ideologies, especially the myth of blaming victims for a rape.

**Keywords:** Rape news, rape myths, Transitivity analysis, Social Actor Analysis

## Introduction

News media has played an important role in shaping audiences' attitudes toward certain topics or social groups. The representation of rape in the news can affect the perspectives of readers toward rape, rapists, and rape victims (Heath et al., 1981; Soothill, 1991). When it comes to a sensitive issue such as rape, news reporters are required to carefully use an effective way to report it. For news articles, some of them portray female rape victims in the way of victim blaming; for example, "the 27-year-old woman who drank several bottles of lager was on the way home alone" (Tosh & Phillips, 2009, p. 6). Writing about the dresses and lifestyle of the victims or the sexual history of the perpetrators and victims can help perpetuate this concept (Byerly, 1994). It should be noted that this kind of evaluative language is typically politically motivated with an inclination to form the audiences' attitudes toward women.

In light of such issues, our study was motivated by two main themes that have emerged in previous research into news stories concerning rape. The first one is that for news articles in Thailand, where rape is a serious issue and quite prevalent (Mahavongtrakul, 2019), previous research (Piangbunta, 2013) reveals that although there is use of sensational Thai language to represent perpetrators and victims—analyses of the language used in English news articles about rape in Thailand has never been conducted before. The second one is that findings from various studies show that rape myths are prevalent in rape news (e.g., Gutsche & Salkin, 2015; Nilsson, 2018; O'Hara, 2012; Schwark, 2017; Tosh & Phillips, 2009). Rape myths perpetuate the blaming of rape victims for their own ordeals and this has been linked to rape crimes and negative attitudes towards rape victims (Edward & MacLeod, 1999). It is thus worth exploring the use of English when reporting about rape and to compare such an investigation with those of previous studies on Thai news reports and whether rape myths exist in the Thai rape news articles.

More specifically, we focus on how victims and perpetrators are represented in Thai online rape news articles through Transitivity and Social Actor Analysis. Based on the website <https://best-pr-agency.com/blog/top-20-newspapers-thailand/>, we chose the most

popular news agencies in Thailand that provide both print and online versions. We selected news articles containing stories of rape that were written in English by Thai reporters. This was so we could investigate Thai perspectives and ideologies. Accordingly, this study addresses one research question through the use of Transitivity and Social Actor Analysis which is “How are rape victims and perpetrators represented in online articles in Thai newspapers?”. Transitivity analysis enabled us to analyze the representation of the participant(s), process types, and circumstances in a clause. We will show that such an analysis can reveal how rape victims and perpetrators are represented in a select sample of news articles (e.g., who a passive participant is, what type of action is described, or the characteristics of participants). By using van Leeuwen’s (2008) Social Actor Framework, we will also show the benefits of a more fine-grained analysis of participants in terms of their social representations (e.g., the representation of rapists through their role and occupation).

### ***Rape Victims, Perpetrators, and Myths in Rape News***

Rape myths can be defined as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (Burt, 1980, p. 217). They have been found to cause rape inclination and biased perceptions towards rape victims (Edward & MacLeod, 1999); they can also cause additional suffering for the victims through blaming reactions (Anderson & Overby, 2020). Such myths have been perpetuated through various types of discourse (e.g., public and political discourse), and are especially prevalent in news discourse—the focus of this study. News has long been considered as noteworthy material for an analysis of the issue of rape myths (Franiuk et al., 2008; Gutsche & Salkin, 2015; Nilsson, 2018; O’Hara, 2012; Schwark, 2017).

The first type of rape myth revolves around the stereotype of perpetrators being active and aggressive creatures and victims being passive without a sense of agency (Nilsson, 2018; O’Hara, 2012; Schwark, 2017). Rapists tend to be negatively represented by words such as ‘beast’ and ‘monster’ whereas victims are mostly represented by words that refer to their physical and psychological trauma after an attack (e.g., O’Hara [2012], who analyzed lexical items from 124

British and American rape news articles). In a similar way, Nilsson's analysis of rape news in Swedish newspapers (2018) shows that rapists are mostly represented as wolves while women are positioned as sheep or victims. These findings suggest that in news about rape, such representations are at the core of rape. In other words, blame is rarely placed upon men because, in rape-related news, the problem of rape and the solution to rape were not mentioned (Nilsson, 2018). It is interesting to note that an analysis of visual representation of sexual violence in online news also reveals a similar stereotype: That is the portrayal of victimhood and passivity of the victims (Schwark, 2017).

The second aspect of rape myths is the concept of victim blaming, which is often embedded in news coverage. In a study of news articles on the rape of a girl in Ohio, for example, Gutsche and Salkin (2015) analysed 169 news articles from nine local, national, and regional newspapers. Their results showed that three types of newspaper conveyed a sense of victim blaming. For the national newspaper, it defined the raped girl as a 'victim' or being 'innocent', but it also mentioned that she had lost control, fallen down drunk on the street, and that she had never said no. Similar to the national newspaper, the regional newspaper also represented the girl by using the word 'victimhood' and pointed out that the girl went out to a party without permission from her parents. Likewise, the local newspaper reported the girl had lost consciousness and vomited. The way these three types of newspapers reported the rape cases is in the same way as shaming the victims. Such representations seem to put all the fault on a girl who is positioned as a victim and the news audiences may judge her through the newspapers' presentation of the news (Gutsche & Salkin, 2015). Another study by Tosh and Phillip (2009) showed, through a Foucauldian discourse analysis of three online news articles from *The Sun* newspaper, that the newspaper represented female victims in a negative way, which was once again through victim blaming due to the influence of rape myths. In a similar way, O'Hara (2012) reveals that some news articles discuss how the victims dress or act, which further implies the concept of victim blaming.

The third aspect is the myth pertaining to women's tendency to lie about rapes. An example is the work of Franiuk, Seefelt and

Vandello (2008) which explored the headlines of news articles on a famous basketball player's alleged sexual assault. Some headlines such as "she is lying" and "she asked for it" conveyed that the perpetrator was not guilty and this perpetuates the rape myth of women lying about rape.

Different types of rape myths can be realized through the use of linguistic description of perpetrators and victims. For example, the description of a victim's clothing (e.g., being too exposed), a victim's behavior before the rape (e.g., being flirty, staying out late at a bar), or a victim's alcohol consumption (Al-Zaman, 2022; Gutsche & Salkin, 2015; Layman, 2020; O'Hara, 2012) can imply that it is the victim's fault for the rape. These observations and others motivated our exploration of rape myths in Thai news articles. In particular, we were motivated to explore such representations through Transitivity and Social Actor Analysis, so as to reveal how Thai news agencies represent rape victims and perpetrators and whether rape myths exist in Thai rape news.

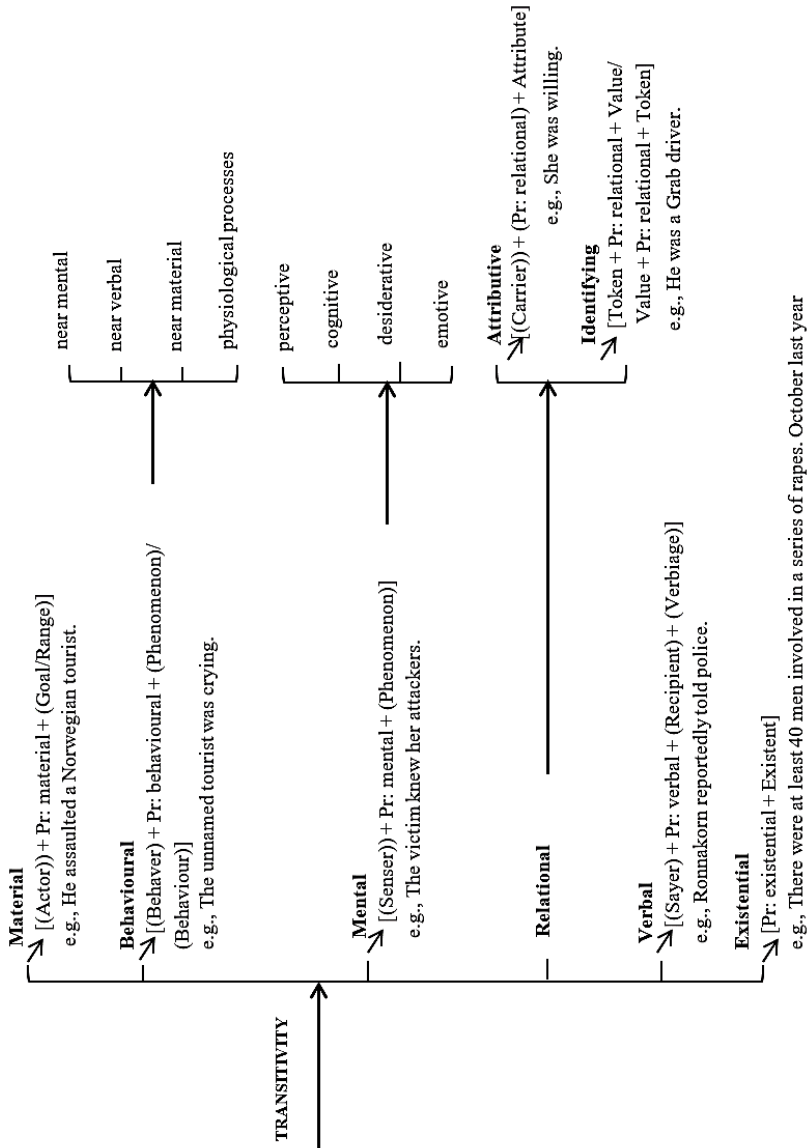
### ***Transitivity Analysis***

Through a Systemic Functional Linguistic perspective, Transitivity is the main resource for the experiential component of the ideational metafunction at the lexicogrammatical level. This system involves resources for construing our experience of the world around and inside us (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The system of Transitivity refers to choices for construing experience as configurations of process types, one or more participants, and their associated circumstances (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). From a Hallidayan perspective, there are six main process types: material, behavioural, mental, verbal, relational, and existential (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The process type dictates the relationship between participants and circumstances, and in traditional grammar terms they include main verbs or verbal groups. Participants refer to people or non-people who are involved in the process (in traditional grammar, these are the complements licensed by the main verb). Circumstances are optional elements (adjuncts in traditional grammar), and they can be categorized into enhancing (e.g., relationships of extent, location, manner, cause, and contingency), extending (e.g., accompaniment), elaborating (e.g., role), or projecting

(e.g., matter and angle) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Figure 1 shows the Transitivity system network with some examples from this study.

Research into rape news based on Transitivity analysis tends to explore the representation of and power relations between the participants represented in the news. For example, the roles of men and women as perpetrators and victims have been explored (Amir & Talaat, 2019). However, the participants who played the most active role against victims in the rape news are not necessarily the perpetrators. They can be, for example, university officials (the rector and the officials) who tried to settle a rape case out of court (Chaerunnisaha, 2020), or police who have been found to perform tangible actions of legal processes (Piangbunta, 2013). Typically, the findings show that most rape news is represented through material processes with victims as passive participants and perpetrators or other participants with active roles (Amir & Talaat, 2019; Chaerunnisaha, 2020).

**Figure 1**  
*Transitivity network system (adapted from Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014)*



### ***Social Actor Analysis***

Social Actor Analysis involves an investigation of how social actors are represented in different ways (see van Leeuwen, 2008 p. 52 for the full system network). In this paper, we focus on Categorization and Nomination (van Leeuwen, 2008). Categorization can be further delineated into Functionalization and Identification. For Functionalization, social actors are represented in terms of an activity or something they do (e.g., their occupation or role). For Identification, social actors are referred to in terms of what they are with the three subtypes: (1) Classification (the classification in terms of the aspects of age, gender, class, wealth, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and so on); (2) Relational Identification (the identification of social actors in terms of their personal, kinship, or relations to each other); and (3) Physical Identification (the representation of social actors in terms of physical characteristics) (van Leeuwen, 2008).

In addition to Categorization with its three subtypes, Nomination (van Leeuwen, 2008) is also explored in this study. Nomination refers to the way in which social actors are nominated. This is typically realized by the use of proper nouns with three subtypes: (1) Formal (surname only), (2) Semiformal (given name and surname), and (3) Informal (given name only).

There are very few studies on rape news based on Social Actor Analysis. One interesting work by Evayani & Rido (2019), nevertheless, reveals the passive roles of victims and the representation of perpetrators as active agents. It has also been found that different newspapers from different countries have different ways of representing social actors. For example, *The Jakarta Post* represented social actors through the description of their gender, age, and occupation, while *The New York Times* presented them by their surname and title (Evayani & Rido, 2019).

## Method

### *Research Setting/Context*

The overarching research site is Thailand, where rape crimes are quite prevalent (around 30,000 cases in 2019 according to Mahavongtrakul [2019]). Our purposively selected data was taken from three Thai news agencies (*Bangkok Post*, *The Nation*, and *Khaosod English*). *Bangkok Post* is an English-language daily newspaper published in broadsheet and digital platforms and the print version was first published in 1946. The daily circulation of the Bangkok Post is around 110,000 readers. Most of the audience are expatriates and educated Thais who speak English. *The Nation* is an English-language daily digital newspaper and its print version was first published in 1971. However, now it is available online only. *Khaosod English* is a news website in the English language which was first launched in 2013.

### *Data Sample and Collection*

This study uses a systematic sampling method. To explain, we sampled 30 articles (3 x 10) covering rape from the *Bangkok Post*, *The Nation*, and *Khaosod English*. These are the three of the most well-known Thai news outlets that produce both print and online news articles in English. We chose articles published online after 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020. Our focus on English versions is attributed to our study's aim, which is to investigate the perspective of Thai news reporters who write news to serve groups such as foreigners and educated people. Research on Thai language news has been explored in previous research (e.g., Piangbunta, 2013).

For news article selection, only the rape news articles in Thailand were chosen. They had to be written in English by Thai writers in order to reflect Thai perspectives and ideologies. For each news article, only the paragraphs or clauses that mentioned the victim and/or perpetrator were chosen. An example of a chosen clause is “*The suspect* stands accused of committing rape in the early hours of April 15.” This clause was chosen because it consists of a perpetrator as a suspect. Another example is “*German tourist* was raped on Koh Sichang.” This clause

was chosen because it consists of a German tourist as a rape victim. An example of a clause that was not chosen is “Police Lt. Col. Perm Nakum received an emergency call at 2pm on Monday.” It does not include victims or perpetrators.

### ***Data Coding and Analysis***

For this study, Transitivity analysis is employed as a framework. The main unit of analysis is the clause. Based on the concept of levels and of the rank scale, a clause is a unit below the level of a paragraph but above the group: an independent clause contains one main verb or one process type. In a clause complex, there may be more than one verb or one process type; a group (or phrase in traditional grammar), on the other hand, may not contain a verb or a process type. In this study, there are 414 clauses which consist of the victims or the perpetrators from three Thai news agencies. Each clause was analysed according to Halliday’s (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) view on Transitivity analysis. At first, the process type (out of the six types) was determined and then the elements of the clause were analysed and identified as shown in Example 1.

#### **Example 1**

<i>Ronnakorn Romreun</i>	<i>killed</i>	<i>the tourist</i>	<i>on April 7</i>
Actor	Pr: material	Goal	Cir: Location: Time

After that, we counted the frequency of each process type for the Thai online rape news articles and changed the count into a percentage. Then, we discussed how the victims and perpetrators were represented through each process type. After that, we used Van Leeuwen’s (2008) social actor framework was used for an analysis of participants in terms of victims and perpetrators. For example, from the clause above, Ronnakorn Romreun as an Actor and rape perpetrator can be categorized as Nomination (proper nouns) and the tourist as a Goal and rape victim is applicable to the category of Functionalization (role). Finally, an inter-rater measure was ensured by having a second coder in the field

of applied linguistics check around 20% of the coded data (83 clauses). For the Cohen's Kappa coefficient as a measure of coder agreement for categorical data, the value is 0.77 which means substantial agreement (Landis & Koch, 1997).

## **Results**

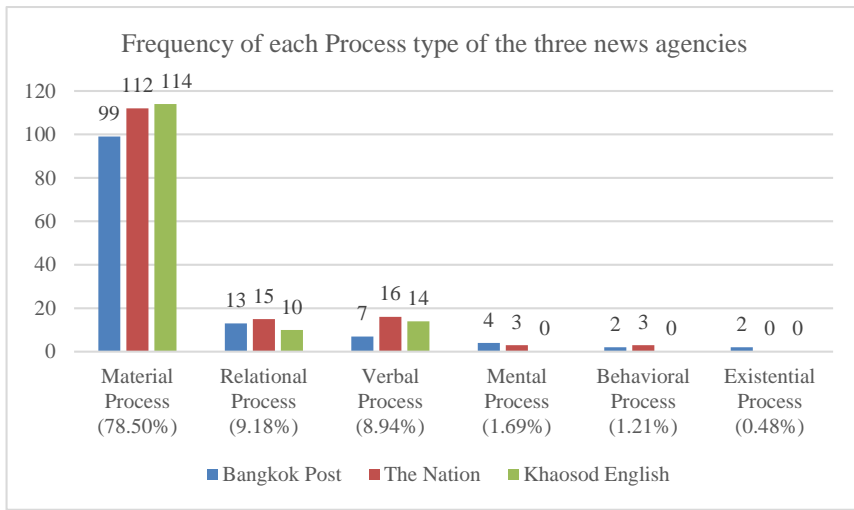
This section shows the results in terms of (1) process types used in the rape news in Thailand and (2) representation of victims and perpetrators in the rape news.

### ***Process Types Used in Rape News in Thailand***

Figure 2 shows the frequency of six process types used in the rape news in *Bangkok Post*, *The Nation*, and *Khaosod English* to represent perpetrators and victims. Our findings reveal that perpetrators and victims in rape news are mostly represented through material processes. This process type is frequently used to represent both perpetrators and victims in all three news agencies. Material processes were the most frequently used at 78.50% while the other process types are used less than 10 %. Relational and verbal processes can be counted only as 9.18%, followed by mental, behavioural, and existential processes. There is a huge gap between the use of material process and the other five process types. For example, mental processes accounted for only 1.69% of process types, while behavioral processes accounted for just 1.21%; there was only 0.48% occurrences of the existential process type.

## Figure 2

*Frequency of process types used in the rape news from the three news agencies*



Relational processes and verbal processes are not used as frequently as the material process in all three news agencies. The relational process is used to represent states of being or relationships between two entities. Victims and perpetrators are represented as participants. Verbal processes are used to represent perpetrators and victims as talking, saying, or asking. The mental process represents victims and perpetrators in rape news in terms of what they think or feel. It concerns the consciousness of the participants. The last two process types are behavioural processes, which concern physical and psychological behaviours, and existential process, which represent states of being as there is something existing.

### ***Representation of Victims and Perpetrators in Rape News***

Whereas the previous section focused on process types, this section places an emphasis on the representation of victims and perpetrators in the news articles. In other words, this section involves how victims and perpetrators are represented through each participant type.

***Material Process: Perpetrators as Actors and Victims as Goals***

Material processes are used to represent both perpetrators and victims in the rape news as Actors and Goals when there is the use of a transitive verb. However, there are also some other major participant types such as Client and Recipient for other types of verbs. It is the process type which is used the most frequently in all three news agencies. In the three news agencies, victims and perpetrators are represented in the same patterns.

The first pattern is that perpetrators are mostly represented as an Actor while rape victims are represented as Goals in the material process. In *Bangkok Post*, *The Nation*, and *Khaosod English*, perpetrators are represented as Actors in the news at 66.29%, 54.79%, and 66.66% while victims are represented as an Actor for only 24.44%, 30.35%, and 30.50%, respectively. On the other hand, victims are mostly represented as Goals for 68.88%, 67.85%, and 66.10%. The second pattern is the use of verbs. The verbs that are used with perpetrators are different from those used with victims. For example, the verbs that are usually used with the perpetrators as Actors and the victims as Goals mostly involve the process or action before, after, and of raping such as “drugged”, “persuaded”, “lured”, “approached”, “assaulted”, “harmed”, “took”, “attacked”, “inflicted”, “penetrating”, and “raped”. On the other hand, the verbs used for perpetrators as Goals tend to be about the legal process such as being “arrested”, “handcuffed”, “charged”, “locked up”, “brought”, and “identified”.

As for the verbs that are used with the victims as Actors, they tend to be about what the victims were doing around or during the rape period such as “worked”, “walking”, “leaving”, and “attending” as well as the condition in which the victims responded to the rape which already occurred (e.g., “sneaked” and “could not return”).

Based on Social Actor Analysis, perpetrators in this study tend to be represented as being active in the activity (activation) whereas victims are likely to be the passivated social actors (passivity). An analysis of social actors based on van Leeuwen’s framework (2008) is shown in Table 1 below:

**Table 1**  
*A Social Actor Analysis based on van Leeuwen's framework (2008)*

Social Actor	Type	List of words	
		Bangkok Post	Khaosod English
1 Perpetrators as Actor	Functionalization	workers and contractors; A 33-year-old monk; three fellow workers; a subcontractor of the Prawet construction site; The suspect; the alleged rapists; a railway employee; the second defendant; a sleeper-car employee; the gang	A 74-year-old monk; the monk; The suspect; the two older suspects; suspects; her attackers; defendants;
	Identification: Classification	A man; men; a Thai man; An Asian man; teenagers; A 29-year-old man;	A 33-year-old local man; teen boys; 24-year-old Romakorn Romreun; Noppadol; a British teacher; the English teacher
2 Perpetrators as Goal/ Circumstance	Functionalization	Her husband	-
	Identification: Classification	Mr Anusorn; Wanchai; Mr Wasant	Ronnakorn Romreun; Wissani; Bennett; Wichai; Wichai Chotfisaena
3 Victim as Actor	Functionalization	A 52-year-old northern man	A 33-year-old local man; teen boys; the teens;
	Identification: Classification	-	Rewat Hamsupan; Anthony James Bennett
4 Victim as Goal/ Circumstance	Functionalization	the victim	a 15-year-old girl; a Hmong woman
	Identification: Classification	One of the women; the girl; the Norwegian woman; a young girl; a 13-year-old girl; a girl; a 12-year-old girl; an autistic woman	Customers; tourist; a German tourist; a Norwegian tourist; a Norwegian tourist; the victim
5 Victim as Goal/ Circumstance	Functionalization	his 12-year-old stepdaughter	girls; dozens of women; a Hmong woman; a 12-year-old girl; a German tourist; a Norwegian tourist; a Norwegian tourist; The patient; children; minors; an 11-year-old schoolgirl
	Identification: Classification	(a young girl's) body	12-year-old daughter; their daughter; the girlfriend of a 16-year-old
6 Victim as Goal/ Circumstance	Functionalization	Mon	the girl's unclothed body; a boy's body; her body; the six-year-old's corpse; the body
	Identification: Classification	-	-

The perpetrators as Actors tend to be represented through Functionalization, that is, their occupation (e.g., monk, contractors, workers, doctor, gynaecologist, and teacher) and role (e.g., defendant and suspect) and through *classification*, that is, gender, race, and age (e.g., an Asian man; teenagers). The representation of perpetrators as Goal also conforms to this pattern.

The victims as Goal are mainly represented through Classification in terms of gender, race, and age (e.g., a girl, a Hmong woman) as well as through Functionalization in terms of their role as a victim, tourist, and customer. It should be noted that the victims were rarely represented as Actors.

The main differences of the representation of these two social actors are the use of Nomination and Physical Identification. Nomination is not typically used with the representation of victims but is used with the representation of sexual crime offenders through the subtypes of Semiformal and Formal Nomination. Nomination is not typically used with the representation of victims as it has long been standard practice in journalism not to name victims due to a possibility of a public stigmata, which would later discourage victims from reporting sexual attacks (Corbett, 2017). For Physical Identification, only victims are described with words referring to their physicality (e.g., body and corpses).

In addition, sensational language and a narration of vivid details can also be seen in the material processes in *Khaosod English*. Examples include “The doctor was pressing down his penis on her stomach” and “They got their breasts sucked on”. However, for the majority of the news articles, the language use is not sensational.

In the material processes, rape myths are also realized through the description of certain actions, circumstances and/or subtypes of participants such as Location. For example, “a Norwegian tourist who was leaving the popular “half moon party” on Phangan island” (*Khaosod English*), “On the night of February 15, the victim and her friends had been drinking at an entertainment venue in Thong Lor, before she went to the condominium room along with a friend and the suspect.” (*The Nation*), “A 33-year-old monk was arrested in U Thong district on Friday morning for the alleged rape of a drunk woman after they left a pub together” (*Bangkok Post*), and “the 25-year-old victim

had *sneaked out of her Bangkok home to board a train and see locations*” (*Bangkok Post*).

### ***Relational Process: The Attributes of Perpetrators and Victims and Who They Are***

Relational processes were the second most frequent process type found in *Bangkok Post*, *The Nation*, and *Khaosod English*. As mentioned earlier, there is a huge gap between the use of material process and relational process. In terms of relational processes, these represent states of being of victims and perpetrators. There are two main types of relational processes, which are Attributive and Identifying. In the three news agencies, there are similar patterns of representation of perpetrators and victims in terms of their attributes or conditions (Attributive) and who they are (Identifying). In these three news agencies, perpetrators and victims are mostly represented in the Attributive mode rather than the Identifying one. They also present the perpetrators and victims in a quite similar pattern.

For perpetrators, their attributes include the conditions they are in during the rape case (e.g., “under the influence of the drug”), the places where the crime occurs (e.g., at a drinking party in the Khaosan Road area; in the scene of the crime), and the states of being in the legal process (e.g., on charges of raping a girl under 13; in police custody). For defining who they are (Identifying), they are identified with the career (“Grab driver”) and being the “resident” in the proximity of the crime scene for one time each.

For victims, in terms of their attributes, they are described as being vulnerable through adjectives such as “asleep”, “naked”, and “dead”, as being passive (e.g., “quiet”), as having a negative mental state (e.g., “in shock” and “stressed”), and as being of a certain age (e.g., “15 years old”). As for who the victims are, they are defined only in terms of relationships (being “the girlfriend of a 16-year-old” and being a “wife”). Some of the attributes (e.g., being “too drunk to return home alone” and “at a drinking party in the Khaosan road area” are also in line with the rape myths which implies that it is a victim’s fault.

There is an identification process of defining who a victim is (“The initial accuser is a 29-year-old woman” (*Khaosod English*)).

The use of Functionalization of “accuser” rather than “victim” implies that a woman is not trusted, and this needs proof and trials before reaching a conclusion.

### ***Verbal Processes***

Verbal processes are ranked as the third most frequent process type. These are used to represent the perpetrators and victims in these three news agencies. Verbal process involves verbal actions such as asking and talking. Both perpetrators and victims are described as performing the verbal process with the use of similar verbs (e.g., “say” and “told”).

However, there are also some variations. For perpetrators, the verbs in the verbal process are used to (1) threaten or lure the victim (“warn” as in “The sub-contractor also warned Mon (the victim) not to report the crime to the police”), (2) imply that they are suspected and need to explain themselves (e.g. “explain” and “claim”), and (3) assure someone that they will do something (e.g. “promise” as in “The other suspect had promised to surrender to police later”).

For victims, the different use of verbal process is in terms of implying the victim’s courage as in “She (the victim) spoke up about her ordeal in full”.

## **Discussion**

From the Transitivity analysis of 30 Thai online rape news articles written in English from the three news agencies, the results shed light on the implications in terms of (1) the linguistic patterns used to represent perpetrators and victims and (2) certain rape myths and ideologies.

### ***Linguistic Patterns Used To Represent Perpetrators and Victims***

For the linguistic patterns used to represent the perpetrators and victims, there are three main points of discussion. The first one is the comparison of this study’s results with the work on an analysis of rape news written in the Thai language. In this study, the perpetrators are mostly represented as Actors in material processes who do harm towards victims. This is in line with the research of Piangbunta (2013) which analysed 1,130 headlines from the top three newspapers written

in Thai language (*Thairath*, *Daily News*, and *Khaosod*). This reflects the nature of representing this type of news in Thailand which focuses on tangible actions between perpetrators and victims.

However, there are also some detailed differences of the results between our study and Piangbunta's (2013). The first difference is the verbs used to describe the actions which the perpetrators perform towards the victims. In the present study, the language used is typically not as sensational or dramatic as the one found in the Thai version of rape news. It involves the process or action before, after, and of raping such as "drugged", "persuaded", "watched", "approached", "assaulted", "harmed", "took", "attacked", and "inflicted". On the other hand, examples of the verbs in the rape news in Thai language (Piangbunta, 2013) are "ซิงพืด" (spread out), "ชยี้" (crush), "ฆ่าโหด" (cruelly kill), "กัด" (bite), and "ดูดกิน" (suck and eat). However, *Khaosod English* is a bit different from the other two English news agencies as it features some sensational verbs and graphic language. This difference can be explained through the fact that these newspapers are of different types and have different audiences. The English newspapers in this study target educated people in the country and non-Thai audiences such as expats and foreigners, whereas for the Thai newspapers in the study of Piangbunta (2013) the audiences are the majority of Thais served with sensational coverage.

The second difference is the role of victims. Whereas the victims in *Bangkok Post*, *The Nation*, and *Khaosod English* in this study are mostly represented as Goals being passive and acted upon helplessly, the victims in *Thairath*, *Daily News*, and *Khaosod* are represented as being Actors fighting back as well (e.g., "กัดลิ้น" bite (the tongue); "ฮึดสู้" (fight back), and "มีดแทง" (use the knife to stab). This difference can be attributed to the fact that in our study we do not focus only on headlines that are characterized by a sensational nature in order to draw public attention. Another possible explanation for the difference is that *Bangkok Post*, *The Nation*, and *Khaosod English* news articles are written in English (targeting foreigners and educated people) and

have different groups of audiences from *Thairath*, *Daily News*, and *Khaosod* which are popular broadsheets with sensational coverages of news for the Thai public.

Another linguistic pattern which will be discussed in this section is the attributes of the perpetrators and victims. In this study, the perpetrators are neutrally described in terms of the conditions they are in during the rape case, the places where the crime occurs, and their states of being in the legal process (e.g., on charges of raping a girl under 13; in police custody); they are also defined in terms of the perpetrator's career and being the resident in the proximity of the crime. This is different from previous research on the representation of perpetrators as being a "devil" or "monster" (e.g., Gutsche & Salkin [2015] which analysed the rape news in America) and as being perverted and vile (Piangbunta, 2013). Our study shows that although the perpetrators are portrayed negatively, they are represented through more neutral words. As for victims, in this study, they are described as being vulnerable mostly through adjectives, as having a negative mental state (e.g., "in shock" and "stressed"), and as having a certain age.

The second set of linguistic patterns worth discussing are the ones in line with those found in other studies on rape news. The first one is the most frequent use of material processes to represent rape news (Amir & Talaat, 2019; Chaerunnisaha, 2020). It is not surprising that material processes were used the most as news articles typically involve giving a recount which refers to retelling an event or an experience with the purpose to tell what happened (PDST, 2022). The second pattern is the tendency to represent the active role of perpetrators and the passive role of victims as well as the description of them in terms of gender (Categorization), age (Categorization), and occupation (Functionalization). This finding is supported by Evayani and Rido's analysis of the rape news of Jakarta Post (2019).

### ***Rape Myths and Ideologies***

In addition to the linguistic representation of perpetrators and victims, this study also sheds light on certain rape myths and ideologies. For rape myths, much previous research reveals that victim blaming permeates rape news (e.g., Gutsche & Salkin, 2015; Kalayanasant, 1993;

Tosh & Phillips, 2009). This is also evident in our study. Based on the four main types of rape myths by Bohner et al. (2009, p. 19), the description of rapes in the news in this study is applicable to one particular myth: “blame the victims for their rape”. To explain, one victim is represented as a “Norwegian tourist who was leaving the popular “half moon party” on Phangan island” (*Khaosod English*). This implies that it was her fault for her risky lifestyle of joining an all-night beach party which typically involved alcohol consumption. As another example, one victim is described as “drinking at an entertainment venue in Thong Lor, before she went to the condominium room along with a friend and the suspect.” (*The Nation*). It is implied that it was her choice of going out with the perpetrator. In a similar way, another victim is represented as being drunk and leaving a pub together with a perpetrator (*Bangkok Post*). This possibly implies that the victims were also at fault as they put themselves in a dangerous situation. This is quite similar to the work of Gutsche and Salkin (2015), which showed that the news represented the victim as losing control and falling down drunk on the street.

For the ideological implications, the ways the victims are identified (or defined as who they are) are quite stereotypical. They are defined only in terms of relations to other family members or men through Relational Identification (being “the girlfriend of a 16-year-old” and being a “wife” of someone) whereas the male perpetrators are defined in terms of career or general state (e.g., being a resident). The victims are also portrayed as being passive and in a poor mental state. This perpetuates the myths of women as being weak and passive as well as being acted upon by male perpetrators.

In addition, our study reveals that the use of graphic or sensational language to represent rape cases was absent in *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* and this is beneficial for the victims. One study which interviewed rape victims (Kittithamavoot & Ongkasing, 2016) shows that this kind of graphic language shames the victims and their family. From a critical point of view, there is no doubt that news media are an important tool that can shape our culture and attitudes and they should, therefore, be responsible for carefully representing certain social groups

and sensitive issues in a way that does not perpetuate stereotypical myths such as victim shaming.

## **Conclusion**

This study used Transitivity analysis and Social Actor Analysis to explore how perpetrators and victims in Thailand are portrayed in the online rape news articles from *Bangkok Post*, *The Nation*, and *Khaosod English*. The results reveal specific linguistic patterns used to represent victims and perpetrators in the rape news (e.g., the most frequent use of material processes; the representation of perpetrators as active agents and victims as being weak and passive; and the description of perpetrators and victims through classification).

It also sheds light on the implications for certain rape myths and ideologies (e.g., the myth of “blame the victims for their rape”). As shown in previous studies, these rape myths perpetuate and condone sexual violence against women (Edward & MacLeod, 1999; Anderson & Overby; 2020). An exploration of rape myths embedded in media can help expose the myths which create a stigma and a climate hostile to victims.

In consideration of the rape myths, there is also the need to demystify certain bias against rape victims in the media; this can be done through a careful analysis of the linguistic representation of social actors involved in a rape case. This may, in turn, transform audiences’ views towards this issue.

However, this study is not void of limitations. The main limitation lies in the aspect of sample size. As this study needed a manual coding of each clause as well as an identification of each element in a clause, the total number of the clause codes is not that high for generalization for other contexts. For future research, more work should be done in order to understand the use of language in rape news or other sensitive issues in various types of media. It is also useful to explore the issue of rape myths in other genres such as Thai television soap operas which have been criticized for condoning rape as well as political leaders’ speeches involving a rape case or rape law which can reflect the points of views of political figures who are predominantly male.

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