Delving into the metaphors of MM and SM

WILLIAM Shakespeare, Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong.

Many might recall — or sooner forget — studying the English playwright’s use of metaphors in his plays and sonnets. But what of the metaphors employed by the two senior Cabinet ministers in their speeches?

For example, Mr Goh juxtaposed concerns about the rising cost of living with better quality of life in his 1996 National Day Rally speech thus: “FairPrice also reports that more workers now buy liquid detergent instead of powder detergent, shower cream instead of soap.

“I use soap, not shower cream. Even then, my bath costs more. I now use soft mild soap, and shampoo and conditioner, instead of Lam Soon soap.”

Not quite literary inspiration. But as communication lecturer Ong Siow Heng recalled, the metaphor struck a chord with Singaporeans.

And because most local speeches have not been analysed, the practice associate professor with the Singapore Management University (SMU) has co-authored a book, *Metaphor and Public Communication*, which focuses on key speeches of Mr Lee and Mr Goh.

Publisher Marshall Cavendish intends to market the book to secondary schools and junior colleges for their history and General Paper classes. The book will also be a recommended text for speech communication students at SMU.

Given the persuasive power of language, Dr Ong believes Singaporeans should also be aware of its use in the local context.

“Language can effect us to change our value system, our beliefs, our attitudes and certainly, our behaviour. Therefore, examining the metaphors that public servants use is very important,” he told TODAY at the launch of his book on Friday.

People also use language to “present ourselves to the world and to make ourselves acceptable”, said his co-author and wife, Nirmala Govindasamy-Ong, a senior educational consultant at Hwa Chong Institution.

Commenting on the range of metaphor types used by the two political leaders to appeal to different people at different times, she said: “It shows they try very much to be men of the people. If they’ve shaped themselves that way, or presented themselves that way, that’s the way they are also accepted.”

The recently concluded General Election, too, had its fair share of metaphors.

For instance, Dr Ong said: “During the final rally of the Workers’ Party, the celebration and the commitment reflected in the taking of the pledge together — that was a very powerful metaphor.

“In that particular example, we realise metaphor isn’t something that’s just embellishment. It goes deeper into a person’s psyche, emotions, allegiance to a country and so on.”

*Metaphor and Public Communication: Selected speeches of Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong will be out in major bookstores by June 1.*