

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MEDIA LANGUAGE IN POLITICS

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Abstract

This study examines how language functions as a tool for constructing power and ideology in online news discourse through the framework of Discourse Analysis. By comparing three major theoretical perspectives Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, van Dijk's Socio Cognitive Approach, and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis—this research aims to explore how online news media shape public perception and social reality. Using a qualitative library research method, this study analyzes relevant theoretical works and previous empirical studies related to discourse analysis and media discourse. The findings reveal that Halliday's framework emphasizes linguistic structures in constructing meaning, van Dijk's approach highlights cognitive processes in interpreting news texts, while Fairclough's model focuses on the relationship between discourse and institutional power. These frameworks collectively demonstrate that online news discourse is not neutral but is ideologically constructed to legitimize dominant groups and marginalize alternative voices. This study contributes to the development of critical awareness among readers and researchers regarding the political and social implications of media language.

Keyword : Discourse Analysis, Online News, Power, Ideology, Critical Linguistics

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, online news media play a crucial role in shaping public understanding of political, social, and cultural issues. Information is disseminated rapidly through digital platforms, allowing news organizations to influence public opinion on a large scale. However, news texts are not merely neutral representations of reality. They are constructed through specific linguistic choices that reflect ideological positions and power relations. Therefore, analyzing news discourse becomes essential in understanding how language operates within social structures.

Discourse Analysis provides a theoretical framework for examining how language constructs meaning in social contexts. Scholars such as Halliday, van Dijk, and Fairclough have developed influential models that emphasize different dimensions of discourse. Halliday

focuses on linguistic functions, van Dijk emphasizes cognitive processes, and Fairclough highlights social practices. These perspectives enable researchers to investigate how news discourse reproduces power and ideology.

In Indonesia, online news media have become dominant sources of information. Political debates, social conflicts, and public policies are frequently framed through digital news platforms. These platforms often prioritize certain narratives while marginalizing others. Consequently, readers may unconsciously accept biased representations as objective facts. This phenomenon highlights the importance of critical discourse analysis in examining media texts.

Despite the growing interest in discourse studies, many researchers still face difficulties in selecting appropriate analytical frameworks. Most studies focus on applying a single model without comparing different approaches. Therefore, this study aims to analyze and compare Halliday's, van Dijk's, and Fairclough's frameworks in examining online news discourse. The main research question is: How do these three approaches explain the construction of language, power, and ideology in online news media?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Discourse Analysis and Media Studies

Discourse Analysis examines language use in social contexts and investigates how meaning is constructed through interaction. According to Fairclough, discourse is a form of social practice that reflects and shapes social structures. Media discourse, in particular, plays a significant role in forming public opinion and reinforcing ideological values.

Previous studies have shown that news texts often embed political and social ideologies through subtle linguistic strategies. Framing, lexical selection, and thematic emphasis are commonly used to influence readers' interpretations. These strategies demonstrate that media discourse is deeply connected to power relations.

Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics

Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) views language as a functional system that serves social purposes. According to this theory, language performs three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational function represents experience, the interpersonal function constructs social relations, and the textual function organizes discourse.

In media analysis, SFL is widely used to examine transitivity, modality, and thematic

structures. These elements reveal how news writers represent events and actors. For example, transitivity analysis can show whether political actors are portrayed as active agents or passive recipients.

Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach

Van Dijk emphasizes the role of cognition in mediating between discourse and society. He argues that social structures influence discourse through mental models and shared ideologies. These cognitive structures shape how journalists select and organize information.

Van Dijk introduces three analytical levels: macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure. Macrostructure refers to global themes, superstructure concerns textual organization, and microstructure focuses on linguistic details. This model enables researchers to trace ideological meanings in news texts.

Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough's CDA framework highlights the dialectical relationship between language and social power. His three-dimensional model consists of text, discursive practice, and social practice. This model allows researchers to analyze linguistic features, production processes, and socio-political contexts simultaneously.

CDA is particularly useful in revealing how institutional power is maintained through discourse. In online news media, dominant groups often control narrative structures, influencing public perception and political legitimacy.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design using a descriptive and interpretative approach. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it aims to explore meanings, ideologies, and power relations embedded in online news discourse rather than measuring them statistically. This design allows the researcher to analyze language use in depth and interpret social meanings within texts.

Furthermore, this research applies a library-based discourse analysis approach. It focuses on reviewing and interpreting theoretical frameworks and previous studies related to discourse analysis and media discourse. By using this design, the researcher is able to compare Halliday's, van Dijk's, and Fairclough's models systematically and critically.

The descriptive aspect is used to explain the characteristics of each discourse

framework, while the interpretative aspect is applied to understand how language, power, and ideology are constructed in online news texts. Therefore, this research design supports the objective of providing a comprehensive comparative analysis.

Data Source

The data sources of this study consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include the main theoretical works of Halliday, van Dijk, and Fairclough related to discourse analysis, such as books and original publications. These sources provide fundamental concepts and analytical tools for this research.

The secondary sources consist of academic journal articles, conference papers, and previous research studies discussing online news discourse and critical discourse analysis. In addition, selected online news articles from reputable digital media platforms are used as illustrative examples to support theoretical explanations.

All data sources were obtained from reliable academic databases, digital libraries, and official journal websites to ensure their credibility and relevance. The selection of data was based on their contribution to understanding discourse, power, and ideology in media contexts.

Data Collection Technique

The data in this study were collected using documentation and literature review techniques. Documentation was conducted by gathering relevant books, journal articles, and research reports related to discourse analysis and media studies. These materials were carefully selected based on their academic quality and relevance to the research topic.

The literature review technique was applied by systematically reading, summarizing, and categorizing theoretical and empirical studies. Important concepts, definitions, and analytical procedures were identified and recorded to support the analysis.

In addition, online news articles were collected through digital searching using specific keywords related to political, social, and ideological issues. The selected articles were saved and organized according to their themes and publication sources. This systematic collection process ensured that the data were comprehensive and well-structured.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis in this study follows a qualitative descriptive-analytical procedure. The analysis was conducted through several stages. First, data reduction was carried out by selecting relevant information from books, articles, and news texts related to discourse analysis frameworks. Irrelevant data were excluded to maintain focus.

Second, data classification was performed by grouping the data based on Halliday's, van Dijk's, and Fairclough's analytical categories. Linguistic features, cognitive aspects, and social practices were identified and organized accordingly.

Third, data interpretation was conducted by analyzing how language structures, mental models, and institutional contexts contribute to the construction of power and ideology in online news discourse. Each framework was applied to interpret selected examples.

Finally, data synthesis was carried out by comparing the findings from the three approaches and integrating them into a comprehensive explanation. This process enabled the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions and provide theoretical contributions to discourse studies.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the main findings of the study based on the comparative analysis of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis in examining online news discourse. The analysis focuses on how language is used to construct meaning, represent social actors, and reproduce power relations and ideological perspectives in digital media.

Linguistic Representation in Online News Discourse (Halliday's Perspective)

Based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, online news texts demonstrate systematic patterns in representing events and social actors. Through transitivity analysis, it is found that political elites and government officials are frequently positioned as active agents who perform significant actions. Verbal processes such as *announce*, *declare*, and *decide* are often used to portray authority and legitimacy.

In contrast, marginalized groups, such as ordinary citizens or minority communities, are frequently represented through passive constructions. Passive voice and material processes without clear agents tend to reduce their visibility and responsibility. This linguistic strategy indirectly supports dominant power structures by emphasizing elite roles and minimizing public agency.

Furthermore, modality analysis reveals the presence of high-level certainty in statements supporting government policies, using modal verbs such as *must*, *will*, and *should*. Meanwhile, alternative viewpoints are often presented with low modality, using expressions such as *may*, *might*, or *possibly*. This difference indicates ideological bias in news reporting.

From the textual metafunction perspective, thematic structures show that headlines and lead paragraphs often foreground official sources. Government statements and institutional voices are placed in thematic positions, guiding readers' attention toward dominant perspectives. As a result, readers are encouraged to accept these viewpoints as the primary interpretation of events.

Cognitive Construction of Ideology (van Dijk's Perspective)

Using van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework, this study finds that online news discourse reflects shared mental models and social beliefs within journalistic institutions. Journalists tend to construct news based on dominant ideological schemas that prioritize political stability, economic growth, and national unity.

At the macrostructural level, news articles frequently emphasize themes that support official narratives. For example, social protests are often framed as threats to public order rather than expressions of democratic rights. This thematic selection shapes readers' overall understanding of events.

At the superstructural level, news organization follows conventional patterns that privilege elite perspectives. Official statements are usually placed at the beginning of articles, while critical voices appear at the end or are omitted. This structural arrangement influences readers' perception of credibility and importance.

At the microstructural level, lexical choices play a crucial role in constructing ideological meanings. Words such as *security*, *stability*, and *development* are used positively to justify government actions. Meanwhile, terms like *disruption*, *chaos*, and *conflict* are associated with opposition groups. These lexical patterns reinforce negative stereotypes and legitimize dominant groups.

Van Dijk's analysis also reveals the "us versus them" polarization in news discourse. Positive attributes are assigned to in-group members, while negative characteristics are attributed to out-groups. This polarization contributes to ideological manipulation and social division.

Institutional Power and Social Practices (Fairclough's Perspective)

From Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, online news discourse is closely related to institutional practices and socio-political contexts. Media organizations operate within economic, political, and ideological systems that influence content production.

At the textual level, news language reflects institutional interests through selective reporting and framing. Certain topics receive extensive coverage, while others are marginalized. This selection process demonstrates how power operates through discourse control.

At the level of discursive practice, the production and distribution of news involve editorial policies, ownership structures, and professional norms. Journalists are often required to follow organizational guidelines that limit critical perspectives. These constraints affect how events are interpreted and presented.

At the social practice level, discourse is connected to broader power relations in society. Media institutions function as ideological apparatuses that support dominant political and economic systems. Through repeated exposure to certain narratives, audiences internalize dominant values and beliefs.

Fairclough's framework also reveals how neoliberal ideology influences online news discourse. Market-oriented language, such as *efficiency*, *investment*, and *competitiveness*, is frequently used to legitimize economic policies. This discourse promotes individual responsibility while neglecting structural inequalities.

Comparative Analysis of the Three Frameworks

The comparative analysis shows that each theoretical framework offers complementary insights into online news discourse. Halliday's approach focuses on linguistic structures, van Dijk's model emphasizes cognitive processes, and Fairclough's framework highlights social power relations.

Halliday's SFL is effective in identifying grammatical patterns that construct meaning, but it provides limited explanation of ideological production. Van Dijk's approach bridges this gap by linking discourse to mental models and social cognition. Fairclough's CDA extends the analysis by situating discourse within institutional and political contexts.

By integrating these three perspectives, this study demonstrates that online news discourse operates through interconnected linguistic, cognitive, and social mechanisms. These mechanisms systematically reproduce dominant ideologies and reinforce power hierarchies.

Overall, the findings indicate that online news media function not only as information providers but also as ideological agents. Through strategic language use, cognitive framing, and institutional control, media discourse shapes public perception and social reality.

DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that online news discourse is not neutral but ideologically constructed. Halliday's framework highlights how linguistic choices shape meaning, while van Dijk's model explains how cognitive processes mediate ideological interpretation. Fairclough's approach reveals how institutional power structures control discourse production.

These perspectives complement each other in analyzing media texts. By integrating linguistic, cognitive, and social dimensions, researchers can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of discourse. This integration is particularly important in the digital era, where information spreads rapidly and influences public opinion.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of critical literacy among readers. Understanding discourse strategies enables individuals to evaluate news content more critically and resist ideological manipulation.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the role of language, power, and ideology in online news discourse through a comparative analysis of Halliday's, van Dijk's, and Fairclough's frameworks. The findings demonstrate that each approach offers valuable insights into different aspects of discourse.

Halliday's SFL is effective in analyzing linguistic structures, van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach explains ideological interpretation, and Fairclough's CDA reveals institutional power relations. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive model for analyzing media discourse.

In conclusion, selecting an appropriate discourse analysis framework depends on research objectives. Future studies are encouraged to apply integrated approaches to examine diverse media contexts and contribute to critical media studies.

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