



## **Implicit Stances Taken by ABC and BBC towards Indonesia Presidential Election: CDA Perspectives**

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### **Abstract**

In linguistics, stance can be defined as linguistic mechanism used by the speakers/writers to express the feelings, assessments, attitudes, judgments, or commitments about the proposition. This paper is intended to analyze some statements, as the linguistic mechanism, used by ABC and BBC in conveying their stances towards Indonesia Presidential Election. It explores the implicit stances through the uses of lexical choices; nominalization; passivization; and over completeness in the editorials related to (1) the contenders in the election, (2) the uniqueness of the election, (3) the preliminary results: what the contenders said, and (4) issues surrounding the election. Applying van Dijk's models of CDA to examine the propositions representing the four points in editorials during weeks before and after the election date, analysis was carried out at the selected statements in the texts of their online news. The results showed that the statements constructed by ABC and BBC in the editorials are implicitly taking stances towards a particular side. On the whole, however, most of the statements can be seen as neutral. In terms of van Dijk's 'ideological square' some linguistic features used by ABC and BBC under analyses are dichotomizing one contender into 'Us' while the other into 'Them' and on the whole as neutral. Based on the novelty of the analysis, prospects for future researches are suggested

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The April 2019 Indonesia General Election was one of the big interests of many news resources around the globe. Not only because Indonesia is the third largest democracy, but also because this election was simply a huge one (Chatam House, 2019, pp. 1-3). The greatness of the election could be seen in the

blazing banners, flags and screens in cities and country-sides promoting thousands of political candidates (see: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2019, pp. 1-3). While voters were mostly hypnotized by the presidential election as the main event, they also elected members of the House of Representatives, 2,207 provincial level MPs across 34 provinces and 17,610 local councilors across more than 500 local authorities.

Naturally, news writers claim if they write the news as objective as possible during the process of the news writing. In terms of CDA, however, their neutrality is always questionable. When the news being reported is about crises or unpleasant events, it is very possible that holistic objectivity may not be realized. Consequently, discursive stance-taking may be observed in the news discourse (Ayoola, 2016, pp. 289-307). In choosing a topic, a story, or even a picture to be presented to consumers, many factors are always considered. Practically, in the process of preparing a news to be presented to public, a certain event can be depicted in various intended perspectives. In Wilkin's view (1997, p. 60), for example, Western media discourses are often used to portray and resonate the dominant western ideological perspectives, and in some way they are mediated account of what really happened (see: Ferguson, 1998, p. 155). Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. 2) argue that media are the domination and the marginalization of information by the elites, carried out intentionally, always subjected, and capable of shaping the consumers' minds to accept or reject such depiction.

This study is to explore the stances implicit in ABC and BBC statements in their editorials about Indonesia presidential election as part of general election around mid of April 2019 which up to date has been of the world's interest for many reasons (The Jakarta Post, 2019, pp. 1-2). In some views the depictions are based on the personalities of the candidates (Irawanto, 2019, pp. 1-11) and some are based on the world's geopolitics (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018, pp. 1-3). Some even call the presidential election as political contestation between populist challenge Prabowo (hereinafter PS) and Jokowi (hereinafter JW) as technocratic populism (Mietzner, 2015, pp. 17 and 23). In Flynn's view, the world's attention has been much on the country's vast natural resources and critical geo-political importance as Indonesia is the fourth largest population in the world where Muslims are the largest (Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2019, pp. 1-4).

The part of presidential election has not only domestically seized the energy

but also attracted global attention because the country's geopolitical bargaining power is quite strong and is hotly contested by overseas' interests (The New Lens, 2019, pp. 1-2). The interests can be seen in various news media particularly in world class online news media; hence online news discourses. This hot atmospheric contestation (as van Dijk proposed) can be seen as "political discourse context". In his view (2006, pp. 732-733),

Since such political situations do not simply cause political actors to speak in such a way, we again need a cognitive interface between such a situation and talk or text, that is, a mental model of the political situation. Such mental models define how participants experience, interpret, and represent the for-them-relevant aspects of the political situation. These specific mental models are called contexts. In other words, contexts are subjective participant definitions of communicative situations. They control all aspects of discourse production and comprehension.

In such political contexts, some online media resources, particularly ABC and BBC, write their editorials close to 'positive stances', 'negative stances', or 'neutral' towards a certain party. Therefore, investigating the reality of these stances in terms of linguistics is critical for understanding the truth of the ongoing issues.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This paper explores the dynamics of the relationship between atmospheric events around the presidential election and the discourse of mass media reportage, particularly, online newswire reports. The tenet of objectivity traditionally upheld by the mass media probably lends credence to their perceived credibility among the masses they communicate to. Hence, the masses in any society most likely consider news reports as valid accounts of events. For this reason, the mass media have gained reputation as the mouthpiece of the society. Nevertheless, news may be influenced by the respective ideological perspectives of individual journalists, or even the different media organizations which they represent (Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. 2). It is arguably true that language is one of the major tools employed by the mass media in information dissemination to various audiences. Discursive choices made in communication are likely consequential on the perception of message by the audience. Especially, when the news being reported is about crises or unpleasant events, it may be likely that holistic objectivity may not be realized, and implicit stance-taking may be observed in the news discourse produced for mass consumption by the media. This study therefore

examines the discursive forms and patterns that ABC and BBC employ when reporting the chaotic presidential election since prevailing social conditions considerably influence properties of discourse, that is, discourse is able to represent, produce and reproduce social reality (Fairclough, 1989, p. 116). Discourse is generally used to refer to any coherent form of language use which in this context of the study is ABC and BBC news reports.

In news reports—as discourses—events are often represented not as they should be as in reality, but in a way the news resources want them to be (Xie, 2018, pp. 399-403). Events are not always described as the way they are in the real contexts; they go through journalistic process and practices which involve linguistic re-contextualization. After such manipulation, one single point may be depicted differently in different news resources which contain no longer similar attitudes and ideologies. Thus, points may be worded in different linguistic devices utilized to influence the readers' views of the events. As a result, news discourses play a very crucial role in changing or even shaping people's opinions about the events under discussions (Abdullah, 2014, pp. 1-16).

As Fowler (1991, p. 101) states, news media are not value-free reflection of facts; the world is articulated from a particular ideological position. Van Dijk (1998, pp. 126-128) argues that news reports signify an established category of media discourse which requires a distinct method of structural analysis. He proposes that the analysis should include lexical choice, nominalization, and passivization. According to Billig (2008, pp. 783-800), in CDA the concept of nominalization, along with passivization, has important ideological functions such as deleting agency and reifying processes. Although nominalization can reveal hidden ideology, Billig suggests critical analysts not do it in isolation; nominalization and passivization should be taken seriously in a standard way of writing critical analysis.

In socio-cognitive approach, van Dijk (2009, pp. 62-86) states that CDA integrates the various linguistic theories and approaches that attempts to link cognitive theories and approaches with linguistics. He proclaims that critical discourse studies are a critical 'perspective', 'position' or 'attitude' within the multidisciplinary approach as it intends to "shed light on covert ideologies in the social practice". He proposes a triangulation of the interrelationship among 'discourse' (hereinafter: ABC and BBC news discourse), 'cognitive' (hereinafter: the perception towards the news) and 'society' (hereinafter: the reader of the news).

To discover the social representations, attitudes and ideologies (hereinafter: the implicit stances) of social actors, the connection between the structure of discourse and the structure of society should be viewed (van Dijk, 1998, pp. 126-128).

Van Dijk's theoretical ideology manifests in his very popular and influential framework known as 'ideological square' or 'conceptual square' (2000, p. 44). In the framework, he formulates the four principles that make it possible to explicate the hidden various ideological statements under investigation. They are (1) Emphasize positive things about 'Us'; (2) Emphasize negative things about 'Them'; (3) De-emphasize negative things about 'Us'; and (4) De-emphasize positive things about 'Them'. These four angles play a vital role in a broader contextual strategy of "positive self-presentation" and "negative other-presentation". Thus, 'two stances' are implicit in this van Dijk's ideological square; positive stance and negative stance. In essence, positive stance is taken by saying positive things about things or events, while negative stance is taken by saying negative things or events (see also: van Dijk, 2006, p. 734). It implies that the term 'Us' always refers to positive representation in social context while 'Them' refers to negativity, condemnation, and other negative stances.

Applying the above mentioned van Dijk's CDA models and frameworks (supported with other theories proposed by: Billig, 2008; Fairclough, 1989; White, 2006; and others) to illuminate the discourses in ABC and BBC newswires about Indonesia Election during the weeks before and after the date of the election. To the best of this paper concern, this is an early work to investigate the stances of online news media in terms of CDA. Previous works were mostly in terms of critical issues, common concerns, or politics (see: Budiharto and Meiliana, 2018; Mietzner, 2015). Others analyze the data in terms of dictions, sentence structures, and texts and contexts of production (see: Putra and Triono, 2018; Anshori and Sumarlam, 2019; Nurjamin and Saifullah, 2019). Although they were helpful in mining attitudes and stances in news reportages, it is still hard to find papers which directly discuss and analyse the hidden stances in online reportages.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To get a thorough analysis of the text from the fourteen news resources, textual analysis approach was used. It is the analysis of linguistic features and

discursive practice (Fairclough in Ramanathan and Hoon, 2015). An interpretive research method that identifies the statements in the texts of fourteen editorials of ABC and BBC in relation to the contextual background. It is based on the understanding that the construction of the text cannot be separated from the audience and its sociocultural environment to improve the understanding of the role played by the news media in constructing meaning within wider context (Cunningham and Turner, 1997). Through textual analysis of news items in terms of van Dijk's ideological square, this paper explores how statements in the fourteen editorials of ABC and BBC implicitly express their stances towards Indonesia presidential election. Analysis was focused on the use of lexical choices, nominalization, passivization, and over completeness covering the topics of (1) the contenders in the election, (2) the uniqueness of the election, (3) the preliminary results: what the contenders said, and (4) issues surrounding the election. As Fairclough (1989) states, it is possible to represent social events in a more generalized and abstract way in terms of structures, relations, tendencies and so forth.

## **DISCUSSION**

In this discussion, data in words, phrases, and clauses are put in between commas while data in sentences and longer statements are put in quotation marks. Each of the data is then analyzed based on either category of lexical choices, nominalization, passivization, or over completeness. Sub-conclusion is provided at the end of each part of the discussions.

### **Statements Related to The Contenders in the Election**

In its April 16, 2019 editorial, ABC writes, "--- Prabowo Subianto, who is widely expected to lose to the popular incumbent Joko Widodo, has foreshadowed mass demonstrations, ---" (ABC, 2019b, pp. 1-5). There are two points to note in this statement; the use of passive voice and sensitive lexical choice 'foreshadowed'. Furthermore, in its April 17 (2019c) editorial ABC used neutral naming 'Mr. Prabowo', it also used sensitive phrase 'hardline Muslim groups' and hyperbolic phrases 'boost the economy'; 'slashing taxes'; and 'cutting food prices'. While the use of passive might be intended to make the 'expectant' unclear, unknown, or even obscured (Fowler, 1991, p. 33), the use of 'hardline Muslim groups' means negative stance in terms of ideological significance (see: Fairclough, 1989, p. 116)

and ideological affiliations (see: Sykes, 1985, p. 87).

Lexical choice using 'Mr. Prabowo' is neutral, but the use of 'foreshadowed' and 'hardline Muslim groups' can—as an over completeness—be seen as giving negative stance. Essentially, it includes PS into 'Them' (van Dijk, 2009, p. 78). The inclusion is even more sensible when ABC (2019f) editorial uses the term 'conservative' in writing about candidate JW's vice president, "Mr. Widodo's running mate was conservative Islamic scholar Ma'ruf Amin" which can be felt as positive stance to JW. Hence, it includes JW into 'Us'.

More sensitive words are found in its April, 18 (2019d) editorial where ABC quotes, "No, they are not the words of a victorious Joko Widodo, ---". Bizarrely, they're from the mouth of losing candidate Prabowo Subianto, ---". Here, the use of 'victorious Joko Widodo' can explicitly be seen as taking positive stance to include JW into 'Us', while the use of 'the mouth of losing candidate Prabowo Subianto' is clearly marginalizing PS into 'Them'. In terms of CDA the use of such noun phrases is ideologically charged and lead toward a preferred mode of thinking as an over completeness which in van Dijk's view (2009, pp. 44) means taking a stance.

Also related to the Contenders, in its editorial April 13 (2019a), BBC writes "--- seeking re-election, has embarked on an ambitious infrastructure push. To do it he has welcomed Chinese investment and accepted loans and partnerships ---". The use of 're-election', 'embarked', 'welcomed', 'accepted' and 'partnerships' in statement about JW are neutral, but 'ambitious' is positive as it is combined with 'infrastructure'; thus an inclusion of JW into 'Us'. Contrarily, in the same editorial BBC (2019a) writes, "---, former military general Prabowo Subianto, has accused the president of selling out the country to foreigners, and opposition lawmakers are claiming Indonesia is facing an influx of ---". Here, the use of 'former military general Prabowo Subinatio' is too formal and is an over completeness with ideologically charged. Furthermore, the lexical choices of 'accused', 'claiming', 'influx', and nominalization 'selling out the country to foreigners' are negative stances to PS. It is an inclusion of PS into 'Them' (van Dijk, 2009, p. 78). The two statements can—as Sykes (1985, p. 87) states—be identified as leading toward different ideological affiliations.

In April 18 (2019c) editorial titled "Who are the contenders?", BBC writes "Under his (JW) leadership the economy has grown steadily, but ---. He has courted

massive Chinese infrastructure investment". In contrast, it writes about PS, "Despite his background, during the campaign he sought to distance himself from the political class and railed against the 'evil elites in Jakarta'. He promised to review all Chinese investment projects in Indonesia". Here, the lexical choice, nominalization, and over completeness are very different and the stances BBC takes are clear; including JW into 'Us' and PS into 'Them'.

### **Statements Related to the Uniqueness of the Election**

On April 11 (2019a), ABC writes that "There is a lot of money to be made at election time". The uniqueness in the statement is instead of 'money to be spent' ABC writes 'money to be made', and it is not far from being true. This nominalization of the verb 'made' is unique as well as neutral and is not directed to any contender or any party supporting the two candidates. However, the use of 'preman groups', 'intimidation and threats', 'violence', 'publicly backing' are both unique and ideologically charged in view of the direct, public, free, and secret election. When cross-checked with other statements in some other ABC and BBC editorials, the over completeness is negatively stancing JW into 'Them'.

Further uniqueness is in BBC April 17 (2019b) editorial, "This was the first time the country's presidential, parliamentary and regional elections all took place on the same day, with more than 245,000 candidates ---". In different (2019d) editorial, it also writes, "The elections were the first time the country of 260 million people combined the presidential vote with national and regional parliamentary ballots, in order to save money. Around 80% of the 193 million --- in more than 800,000 polling stations". In terms of lexical choice of the two BBC editorials, the uniqueness of Indonesia Election is that it is (a) the biggest, (b) simultaneously on the same day, (c) complex, and (d) the money both to be spent (by government) and (most probably by preman groups) to be made. Such statements are not directed to any party, which is thus neutral stance.

### **Statements Related to The Preliminary Results: What the Candidates Said**

While in April 17 (2019c) editorial ABC writes in no ideological charging statements about JW and PS, in its April 18 (2019d) editorial, it differently writes, "On the face of it, Mr. Prabowo cites flaws in the election process ---". The nominalization 'cites flaws in the election process' instead of the verb 'protest' is expressing a stance where PS cannot accept the loss. In the following lines it writes, "He also accused pollsters of bias by ---" (see also: BBC, 2019b). In such statement,



the word 'accused' contains ideological tendency where ABC expresses PS's feelings of disappointment. This can be seen as a negative stance of ABC to PS. In other lines, however, ABC writes, "None of these of course—even if they were true—would be enough to reverse the election result reported by so many polling companies" (ABC, 2019d). This proves that ABC's view is similar to what PS feels about the result. In other words, ABC takes a stance similar to PS that the flaws will not change the results. It is therefore a positive stance to PS by including PS into 'Us' (see: Fairclough, 1989, p. 116; Sykes, 1985, p. 87).

On April 17 (2019b), BBC writes, "Mr. Widodo called for patience when he addressed his supporters". In other lines it writes, "Mr. Prabowo, however, disputed the figures and said ---. He urged supporters to be vigilant against any attempts to steal the election. The presidential race was a re-match of the 2014 contest between Mr. Widodo and Mr. Prabowo, who both made political moves in line with the increased prominence of conservative Islam in the country". The lexical choices 'disputed the figures', 'vigilant', 'attempts to steal', 'rematch', and 'conservative' are ideologically charged; while the first part of the statement is neutral towards JW, the latter part is negative towards PS.

In its May 22 (2019f) editorial, ABC differently writes, "Indonesia's Electoral Commission (KPU) has formally announced the results of last month's election—a day earlier than scheduled and in the dead of night, clearly to head off the threat of violent protests", and continued with, "President Widodo received 85 million votes out of 154 million ballots cast. His rival, General Prabowo, finished 17 million votes behind but is challenging the result". The long phrase 'a day earlier than scheduled and in the dead of night' is a nominalization bearing negative lexical senses. Furthermore, nominalization 'head off the threat of violent protests' in substitute of the verb 'blocking violent protests' is—to use Fairclough (1989)'s term—an ideological significance that KPU announced the results in concealment. The above statements were actually directed towards the KPU. But since KPU was officially organized by the ruling party, the negative 'Them' and negative stance go to JW.

### **Statements Related to Issues Coloring the Election**

Phrases 'pre-marked ballot papers', 'ghost votes', 'vote buying', and 'duplicated names' are constructed in sensitive lexical choices and can be seen as the most serious issues coloring Indonesia 2019 Election. In this, while some ABC

editorials write about the issue proportionally, the same issues are difficult to find in BBC editorials. In its April 16 (2019b) editorial for example, ABC writes, "Tens of thousands of pre-marked ballot papers were discovered in a Malaysian warehouse". In different lines, "It followed the discovery of tens of thousands of ballot papers in a Malaysian warehouse that were pre-marked for the incumbent President Joko Widodo". In its April 23 (2019e), ABC writes, "Millions of 'ghost votes' popping up across the nation". In different lines, it writes, "Some Indonesians have been paid up to \$25 in exchange for their votes".

The words chosen for constructing the above phrases (see: Reiter and Sripada, 2002, pp. 545-553; Trew, 1979, p. 35) to express the unfairness in the election is very rigid. Ideologically, the negative stance is closer to JW since he is at the time of the election still ruling the government. Thus, in terms of van Dijk's ideological square, it includes JW into 'Them'. It is then followed with passivization where the 'agent' remains unstated. Furthermore, the second half of the next statement is also passivized which also makes the 'agent' is unclear. The use of 'inanimate' agent in 'Millions of ghost votes' in the next sentences also leaves a sense that the doer of the action remains unknown (Cruse, 2006, p. 68). The use of passivization in the final statement produces unclear 'agent' (see: *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, 2008, p. 353). Ultimately, the ideological charges lead to an over completeness in implicit negative stance that are closer to JW who is responsible for the administration of such election.

Another serious thing coloring the election was the death toll related to the complex election. In its April 28 (2019h) editorial, ABC writes, "Indonesia's 2019 elections have killed over 270 electoral staff due to overwork, authorities say". On same date, BBC (2019d) writes, "More than 270 election workers in Indonesia have died, mostly of fatigue-related illnesses caused by long hours of work counting millions of ballot papers by hand, an official says". About two weeks later, BBC (2019e) writes, "---, more than 500 of whom are reported to have died ---".

First, in ABC's statement, the lexical choice in the phrase 'Indonesia's 2019 elections' as the subject of the sentence and the word 'killed' as predicate result in this sentence in 'inanimate-agentive'. That is, in Crystal's view (*A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, 2008, pp. 17-18), the subject is non-human, but the predicate is agentive (does as what human can do). This is ideologically charged where ABC is implicitly taking positive stance toward the event; it can even be

seen as including the government into 'Us'. Secondly, BBC's statement in "More than 270 election workers in Indonesia" as the subject of the sentence and the word 'died' as predicate results in 'animate-ergative' construction. That is, while the subject is human, the predicate is ergative. It can be felt; therefore, that BBC is implicitly taking positive stance (for not accusing the agent) toward the event. Hence, also including the government into 'Us'.

Another sensitive issue coloring Indonesia Election is religion. In its May 21, (2019g) editorial, ABC writes "Last week they (police) detained about 30 militant Islamists suspected of planning attacks to create mayhem during possible demonstrations, and (police) have prevented people from travelling across Indonesia to join any protests in Jakarta". Here ABC uses 'detained', 'suspected', 'mayhem', 'prevented' and phrases '30 militant Islamists', 'planning attacks', and 'protests in Jakarta'. When measured in Fairclough's view (1989, p. 116), the use of these words and phrases are significantly loaded with ideology. Since they are addressed to PS, the negative stance includes PS into 'Them' respectively (see also: Sykes, 1985, p. 87; van Dijk, 2000, p. 44).

Differently, in its April 17 (2019b) editorial, BBC writes, "One Muslim voter told the BBC that 'religion has been blown out of proportion in this election'". As lexical choice, the use of the word 'religion' is more neutral compared to 'militant' or 'conservative' (see: Sykes, 1985, p. 87), and this neutrality is parallel with the passivization in the statement. Thus, although the verb used is an 'action', the subject is inanimate (see: Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 2002, p. 56) who cannot do the action (see also: BBC, 2019c). This statement therefore is neutral and does not bring any significant ideology and thus the stance does not come closer to any one party.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

In this study, statements from 7 ABC editorials along with 7 BBC editorials were analyzed and discussed. In details, what and how lexemes, words, or phrases chosen; how phrases derived from nouns or other word classes were constructed and used; how sentences in active voice is switched into passive may result in positive, negative, or neutral stances towards a certain party or group. Most stances are implicitly taken by inclusion of a party or a group into 'Us' or 'Them' based on van Dijk's (2000, 2006) ideological square and some supporting theories.

Although in some editorials, ABC and BBC statements tend to include either JW or PS into positive “Us’ or negative ‘Them’, on the whole both ABC and BBC statements in those 14 editorials can—in terms of stances—be seen as neutral towards any party.

This study offers the prompts that news writers are able to overtly and covertly take stances through their news editorials by using language to tilt towards emotionalism in online news reports during chaotic-political events. Though only some part of the news items were analyzed, principally the analysis covered the whole texts of the news items to extract stronger evidence in the news items covering the aspects of the physical world, mental world, and aspects of the social world. Since this paper investigated the stances in terms of CDA, it is not to assume that each editorial expresses a stance. Instead, texts contents and temporal indicators were analyzed as representation of the news-writers’ attitudes to determine if these features were indicative of the news media stances. It is suggested, therefore, that this research is an introduction and opening to many further linguistic researchers on chaotic Indonesia General (particularly, presidential) Election that—up to date—has still been of international interest.

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