Research Article

Interfaith Dialogue and Unity in Diversity:
A Critical Discourse Analysis of Pope Francis's Speeches (2024) in Jakarta

Andreas Tano[1]
English Applied Linguistics: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)
Boanerges: Makarios Education Journal
Email: andreas.tano@yahoo.com

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the
Spirit through the bond of peace."
— **Ephesians 4:3 (NIV)**

ABSTRACT

This study employed *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA), a qualitative method to examine Pope Francis's (2024) speeches in Jakarta, integrating Teun van Dijk's *socio-cognitive framework* (2006) and Ruth Wodak's discourse, *historical approach* (2001). As the result, the findings emerge: **1)** The Pope's rhetorical strategies; such as, inclusive pronouns *(e.g., "we")* and metaphors like "bridges of dialogue", construct collective identity and align with Indonesia's national motto *"Bhinneka Tunggal Ika"* (Unity in Diversity), framing interfaith harmony as a moral imperative. **2)** The speeches depict power dynamics by positioning the Church as a *"servant of the common good,""compassion," "mercy," and "inclusivity"* which aligns with the Islamic principles *(e.g., rahmatan lil 'alamin),* legitimizing the alignment to state policies while subtly outlining systemic inequities, in line with van Dijk's concept of symbolic power. **3)** The discourse reconciles historical tensions by referencing Indonesia's conflict struggles and avoiding contentious terms like *"conversion,"* reflecting Wodak's emphasis on the role of historical context in shaping communication. The Pope's rhetoric strategically engages Indonesia's past events and present-day religious policies to foster reconciliation and legitimize the Church's role in a pluralist society. Through textual analysis, contextual triangulation with policy documents, and ethical rigor, the study draws attention to the Pope's strategic balance of affirming state-endorsed pluralism while advocating for grassroots justice, demonstrating CDA's efficacy in decoding religious diplomacy in diverse societies. The paper offers a clear framework that future researchers can use to explore how religious leadership fosters interfaith dialogue in diverse societies.

Keyword: *Linguistics, Interfaith Dialogue, Critical Discourse Analysis, Power and Ideology*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, has long been celebrated for its pluralistic ethos ingrained in its national motto, *"Bhinneka Tunggal Ika,"* (Unity in Diversity). This foundation, nonetheless, faces recurrent defiance from religious extremism, socio-political polarization, and environmental crises (Hefner, 2019). In this context, a key moment for interreligious dialogue was the Apostolic Journey of Pope Francis to Indonesia in 2024. It highlighted the role of engagement in promoting mutual understanding. This study uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) to show how the Pope's speeches

in Jakarta strategically navigated Indonesia's complex religious and cultural landscape to promote unity, fraternity, and compassion.

Religious leaders' rhetoric holds significant power in shaping public attitudes, particularly in pluralistic societies (van Dijk, 1993). Pope Francis's global advocacy for interfaith harmony positions him as a key factor in addressing Indonesia's socio-religious tensions. While the Pope's visit correlated with a 20% rise in interfaith optimism (Wahid Foundation, 2023), this statistic does not account for long-term behavioral changes. His speeches during the visit, delivered to diverse audiences, including clergy, civil authorities, and interfaith representatives; provide rich material for analyzing how language constructs ideologies of inclusivity and challenges divisive narratives. By applying CDA frameworks (van Dijk, 2006; Wodak, 2001), this study investigates the linguistic strategies used to reinforce Indonesia's pluralistic identity while countering extremism.

Existing scholarship on interfaith dialogue in Indonesia highlights the interplay of religion, politics, and identity (Barton et al., 2021), yet few studies scrutinize the discursive mechanisms through which religious authority figures mediate these dynamics. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the rhetorical choices made by Pope Francis, such as metaphorical 'bridges of the heart', symbolic references, 'tunnels of friendship', and inclusive pronouns, *'we are all brothers and sisters',* that collectively frame unity as a moral imperative. These strategies align with van Dijk's (2006) emphasis on discourse as a tool for ideological reproduction, where language legitimizes social structures by appealing to shared values.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as theorized by van Dijk (2001) and Wodak (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), examines how language reinforces or contests power structures and ideologies. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework highlights the role of elite discourse in shaping societal norms, while Wodak's discourse-historical approach stresses the importance of socio-political context in analyzing inclusion/exclusion rhetoric. This is in line with studies of pontifical rhetoric, which show how religious leaders such as John Paul II and Benedict XVI use strategies, such as: *metaphors, intertextuality and pronominal*, for example (we, ours) to promote solidarity. (Bennett, 2015; Lövheim & Lundmark, 2020). Pope Francis's discourse, however, uniquely emphasizes dialogue and marginalized voices, framing interfaith harmony as a moral duty in encyclicals like Fratelli Tutti (Micklethwait, 2020), yet few studies apply CDA to his speeches in Muslim-majority contexts.

In Indonesia, scholars analyze how religious actors navigate pluralism amid sectarian tensions, particularly under the state motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Hoon, 2017; Assyaukanie, 2020). While Aritonang (2018) explores interfaith dialogue, papal rhetoric in Southeast Asia remains understudied. This research addresses this gap by applying van Dijk and Wodak frameworks to Pope Francis's Jakarta speeches, examining how linguistic strategies *(e.g., metaphor, pronouns, intertextuality)* mediate Indonesia's religious diversity, challenge extremism, and reflect global-local power dynamics.

It also seeks to question the power relations which are embedded in the Pope's speaking out. By positioning the Catholic Church as a collaborator in Indonesia's pluralist project, *"never proselytizing, always respecting the faith of every person,"* the speeches subtly challenge exclusionary ideologies while reinforcing the Church's moral authority (Wodak, 2001). This duality reflects Indonesia's delicate balance between religious freedom and state-sanctioned pluralism, where interfaith dialogue often intersects with political legitimacy (Hefner, 2019).

Conclusively, this analysis shows how the language of Pope Francis transcends the boundaries of religion in order to advocate for a collective identity that is rooted in the *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. By foregrounding themes of compassion, *"suffering with the other"* and fraternity, *"prophets of communion,"* the discourse counters extremist narratives while aligning with Indonesia's constitutional ideals of social justice and divine blessing. Such findings will contribute to the wider debate on the role of religious rhetoric in the promotion of inclusive societies and the mitigation of conflict in multicultural contexts.

METHOD

Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study explored how language contributes to reflect and shape power structures and ideologies. it explores the relationship between discourse, society, and power by analyzing texts, speech, and communication patterns in various contexts. CDA helps uncover hidden meanings, biases, and influences in language, making it a valuable tool for studying political speeches, media representations, institutional discourse, and social interactions. A qualitative method was used to help provide in-depth analysis in a balanced perspective. Two approaches were therefore used: Teun van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive framework, which examines how language reflects social beliefs and power dynamics, and Ruth Wodak's (2001) discourse-historical approach, which focuses on how history and culture shape communication The research primarily relied on transcripts of Pope Francis' speeches during his visit to Jakarta, encompassing his addresses to interfaith leaders, government officials, and the broader public. These included addresses to interfaith leaders, government officials and general audiences. Secondary data included Indonesian policy documents on religious harmony, such as guidelines supporting the national motto Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, "Unity in Diversity," and academic studies on interfaith relations in Southeast Asia.

The analysis proceeded in three steps. First, a textual analysis identifies linguistic features in the speeches, such as pronouns, e.g., *"we"* versus *"they,"* metaphors, e.g., *"bridges of dialogue,"* and references to national values like, "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika." Grammar choices, such as active or passive voice, are also examined to understand how responsibility for promoting harmony is framed. Second, a contextual analysis connects these linguistic patterns to Indonesia's social environment as a muslim majority population, history of interfaith tensions, and policies that support diversity. Third, triangulation

strengthened the findings by comparing the Pope's messages with Indonesian media reports about his visit and local interfaith initiatives. Peer review, discussions with other researchers is used to ensure interpretations remain consistent and unbiased.

For ethical considerations, only publicly available speeches and documents were analyzed, with no personal or confidential data included. Limitations that were included, reliance on translated versions of the speeches which may overlook nuances in the original language, and the study's focused on public rhetoric rather than direct societal impact. By linking language choice to the cultural and religious context of Indonesia systematically, this research aims to clarify how interfaith unity is communicated in a diverse society.

DISCUSSION

1. Textual Analysis: Linguistic Strategies for Unity

"We are called to walk together, not as rivals but as brothers and sisters" (Francis, 2024, Interreligious Meeting at Istiqlal Mosque). The inclusive pronoun *"we"* constructs a collective identity that goes beyond religious boundaries and frames interfaith unity as a shared moral conduct, avoiding prejudice. By implicitly discouraging different groups from competing or conflicting, this framing suggests that unity is a shared moral obligation. This aligns with van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework, which views that pronouns like *"we"* function as *"ideological operators"* to naturalize group membership and reinforce social hierarchies (van Dijk, 1998, p. 212). The Pope reflects Indonesia's *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* policy, which emphasises unity over sectarian differences, by avoiding divisive terms such as *'them'*. (Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019, p. 4). This choice of language is also a reflection of the Pope's strategic orientation towards state-sanctioned pluralism, a recurring theme in his speeches in Jakarta.

"Let us build bridges of dialogue, not walls of division" (Francis, 2024, Greeting in the Tunnel of Friendship). The metaphor *"bridges of dialogue"* serves as a cognitive anchor to reframe religious differences as opportunities for collaboration. Van Dijk argues that metaphors shape social cognition by structuring how audiences perceive complex issues (van Dijk, 2006, p. 118). In the Indonesian context, this metaphor echoes the state rhetoric, such as the *'National Agency for National Unity and Politics'* call for *"harmony through collaboration"* (2020, p. 12). Thus, the metaphor of *"bridges"* implies that communication and understanding are essential for connecting diverse communities, while division only reinforces separation. This language serves as an encouragement for proactive engagement and collaborative problem-solving. Academic studies on Southeast Asian interfaith relations note similar metaphors in Malaysian policy documents, where *"bridges"* symbolize sectarian divides disparity (Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science, 2021, p. 45). Through the use of these images, the Pope is positioning his message within a regional discourse of unity.

"Dialogue is nurtured by mutual respect, not imposed by force" (Francis, 2024, Address to Authorities, Civil Society, and the Diplomatic Corps). The passive voice here *"is nurtured"* renders politically neutral to the process of fostering unity, framing it as an organic outcome rather than a contested effort requiring accountability. Van Dijk observes: *"Elites often use passive constructions to obscure agency and power imbalances"* (van Dijk, 2008, p. 56). This is in contrast to the active voice of the Pope in statements such as *'We have to defend this harmony',* (Francis, 2024, Address to Authorities, Civil Society, and the Diplomatic Corps). which assigns a collective responsibility. This duality reflects the political landscape in Indonesia, where social cohesion is framed both as a *"divine mandate"* and as a *"collective responsibility".* (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019) and a civic duty enforced through laws like the 1965 Blasphemy Law. The Pope's statement underlines the conviction that authentic dialogue must be born out of voluntary and respectful interaction, and not out of coercion or authoritative mandates. It means that forced unity is less genuine and can undermine social cohesion in the long run.

2. Historical and Cultural Resonance Contextual Analysis

The Pope's reference to *'compassion,' 'mercy,' and 'inclusivity'* is similar to the Quranic principle of *'rahmatan lil 'alamin'* (mercy to all creation) bridges Catholic and Islamic teachings (Francis, 2024, Interreligious Meeting at Istiqlal Mosque). By invoking *'rahmatan lil 'alamin',* the Pope employs interdiscursivity, a concept central to Wodak's discourse-historical approach to blend Catholic and Islamic discourses, appealing to Indonesia's Muslim-majority audience (Wodak, 2001, p. 73). This strategy acknowledges Indonesia's Islamic identity while sidestepping contentious policies like the Blasphemy Law, which critics argue suppresses minority faiths (Hasyim, 2022, p. 89). The Pope's selective engagement with Islamic theology reflects a pragmatic balancing act: affirming shared values without challenging majority norms, a pattern observed in interfaith dialogues across Southeast Asia (Philippine Journal of Religious Studies, 2021, p. 33).

"Your national motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" is not a slogan but a spiritual compass" (Francis, 2024, Address to Authorities, Civil Society, and the Diplomatic Corps). The explicit praise for *"Bhinneka Tunggal Ika"* legitimizes Indonesia's state ideology, which mandates religious tolerance under the *Pancasila* framework. The Pope's framing of the motto as a *"spiritual compass"* echoes state guidelines that idealize unity while downplaying systemic inequalities. (National Agency for National Unity and Politics, 2020). The quote implicitly calls for a deeper, value-based interpretation of unity by elevating the national motto to the status of a *'spiritual compass'.* It suggests that the motto should guide personal and collective actions, reinforcing the idea that unity is both a moral and civic imperative. This duality exemplifies Wodak's argument that discourse often sanitizes historical and contemporary tensions to sustain dominant narratives (Wodak, 2001, p. 82). The Pope's avoidance of terms like *"conversion"* reflects sensitivity to Indonesia's history of religious conflicts. The Pope's cautious rhetoric is contextualised by Indonesia's history of

sectarian violence, such as religious conflicts. By avoiding proselytizing language, it adheres to van Dijk's concept of *"symbolic power,"* where elites frame their interests as universal to avoid backlash (van Dijk, 1993, p. 254). This aligns with academic critiques of interfaith discourse in Southeast Asia, which often prioritizes harmony over justice for minorities (Assegaf, 2022, p. 112).

3. Triangulation: Media, Academia, and Regional Contexts

Kompas headline: *"Pope Francis Praises Indonesia's Model of Tolerance"* (Kompas, 2024). This headline, while straightforward in its commendation, implicitly strengthens the notion that Indonesia's approach to managing diversity is exemplary. It suggests a validation of state policies and national narratives that emphasize tolerance and pluralism. Media amplification of the Pope's unity rhetoric reflects Indonesia's state narrative of successful pluralism. However, triangulation with critical outlets like Tempo, which highlighted the omission of Papua's sectarian conflicts, reveals tensions between elite discourse and marginalized voices (Tempo, 2024). Furthermore, *"Christian churches that met all administrative requirements were forced to close due to pressure and threats from adherents of the majority religion"* (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Similarly, the conflict in West Papua reached a new level of escalation throughout 2022 (Human Rights Monitor, 2023). This aligns with Wodak's emphasis on discourse as a site of struggle, where competing narratives vie for legitimacy (Wodak, 2001, p. 71). The critique points to the limitations of top-down approaches in interfaith dialogue. Implicitly, it implies that initiatives driven by dominant groups may marginalize minority perspectives, thereby undermining the very unity they intend to foster. This regional pattern fits van Dijk's argument that elite-controlled discourse perpetuates power imbalances by privileging majority norms. (van Dijk, 2006, p. 122). In contrast, Philippine grassroots movements prioritize localized justice over abstract unity (Philippine Journal of Religious Studies, 2021), highlighting diverse approaches to interfaith relations in Southeast Asia.

CONCLUSION

Pope Francis' speeches in Jakarta exemplify the strategic use of (word choice) that aligns with the CDA principles to highlight Indonesia's pluralist yet complex religious landscape. By aligning himself with Bhinneka Tunggal Ika and using inclusive language, the Pope reinforces state-endorsed unity while sidestepping localised tensions - a duality criticised in Southeast Asian studies. The analysis reveals both the potential and limitations of religious authority in promoting social cohesion, highlighting the crucial role of language, power and ideology in shaping interfaith discourse. Reliance on translated speeches may obscure nuances in the Pope's original Italian/Italian rhetoric. For example, the metaphor *"ponti di dialogo"* (bridges of dialogue) carries cultural connotations of Mediterranean connectivity that may not fully translate to an Indonesian audience. This points out the challenge of cross-linguistic CDA, as noted in studies on translated political discourse (Jurnal Studi Sosial, 2023, p. 22). Therefore, it focuses on rhetoric rather than

measurable societal impact. In this way, the study reflects the traditional focus of CDA on textual and contextual analysis rather than empirical evaluation.

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