



CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SARA MILLS IN WOMEN'S POLITICAL MEMES IN INDONESIA

La Ode Muhammad Idrus Hamid Basri
Universitas Sembilanbelas November Kolaka
Email: idrulaode.usn@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis model is an approach used to reveal layers of meaning in a particular text by considering the dynamics of power, identity, and ideology. By taking the perspective of the three political memes described, this discussion illustrates the relevance of critical discourse analysis in understanding political communication. The first political meme highlights the aspirations of power within a group, while the second meme shows strategies to assert truth and end debate. The third meme reveals the conflict of power within the government. Through critical discourse analysis, we can understand how political language and communication are used to shape perceptions, opinions, and narratives in society in more depth.

Keywords: Sara_mills'; Discourse_analysis; Ideology; Political_memes

INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool used by humans to communicate, allowing them to convey desires and thoughts (Sapir, 1921). Currently, language skills are possessed by humans in various situations, both in direct face-to-face communication and through online media (Gee, 2014). In language studies, discourse analysis refers to research on the use of language in social contexts, including in spoken and written forms (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2008). This topic is increasingly interesting to discuss, as evidenced by the number of researchers interested in this field of discourse analysis, which often refers to the role of language in the construction of social reality (Foucault, 1972).

Indonesian people's participation in online spaces has a significant impact on promoting democratization (Mulyono et al., 2024). In addition to strengthening transparency and political participation, the internet is also a platform for citizens' creative expression in conveying messages (Prabawangi et al., 2021; Azkiya, 2023). Especially with the rise of social media, socio-political issues that are ignored by the mainstream media can rise to the surface and become a growing public discussion (Evitha et al., 2023). However, the development of messages on social media also causes problems. The free distribution pattern aims to be immediately understood by the public, without considering the accuracy of the information conveyed (Rizaldi et al., 2024).

The term meme was first coined by (Dawkins, 1976), a professor from the University of Oxford, in his book entitled *The Selfish Gene*, which refers to "a unit of imitation and cultural transmission in a gene". Dawkins' biological term was then adopted to name the phenomenon of meme culture on social media, reflecting how ideas spread and evolve in the digital ecosystem (Shifman, 2014). The way memes work is considered similar to the biological mechanisms described by Dawkins in his work, namely by

imitating ideas, which are then spread and mediated from individual to individual, through interactions on analog or digital media (Brunello, 2012). Memes as an idea, habit or style spread in a culture virally through online platforms (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). Memes provide a new way to combine creativity, art, messages and humor in the digital communication space (Bauckhage, 2011), even playing a role in contemporary social and political narratives (Hobbs, 2017).

Political memes, in essence, are the art of conveying political messages from the critical to the hilarious. They offer sharp criticism of political figures, policies, and important issues using humorous and often ironic visual language. In other words, they are a form of digital satire that utilizes images and text to convey messages that may be difficult or even impossible to convey directly (La Ode Muhammad Idrus, 2025). As Hristova (2014) points out, political memes are a reflection of the current state of politics, often highlighting the paradoxes or chaos in the political world in a way that makes us smile or even laugh. They capture important or controversial moments in politics and turn them into debatable jokes (Pratama & Ariadi, 2023). However, make no mistake, behind their humor, political memes also have the power to influence public opinion and shape perceptions of various issues (Wulandari & Ambarini, 2022). They can be a tool to criticize corrupt governments, challenge unfair policies, or even expose politicians' hypocrisy in an entertaining yet poignant way (Suhantoro, I., & Sufyanto, S. 2024; Utami & Priyono, 2024).

In the context of political memes and gender representation, several important studies have been successfully placed into a critical discourse analysis framework. First, Siregar et al. (2019) used vanLeeuwen & Fairclough's Multimodal CDA approach to highlight five stereotypes of women in memes in Indonesia, namely about personality, domestic duties, physical appearance, teaching work, and driving activities. Second, Palupi (2018) applied Fairclough's three-dimensional model of text, discourse practice, and sociocultural praxis to study the meme "Thanks who are More Beautiful", showing how culturally based politeness strategies preserve traditional gender norms. Third, UIN Syahada & IAIN Kendari (2025) applied CDA to TikTok comments and found that although many comments supported traditional norms, there was discursive resistance through humor, sarcasm, and emojis in challenging dominant gender discourses.

Furthermore, a number of follow-up studies reveal the mechanisms of power and gender ideology in political discourse. Rahardi (2023) reveals the use of Fairclough's framework in the 2019 Indonesian election memes, highlighting the value of public skepticism and the function of memes as political criticism through discursive structures. Almanar (2025) tests Sara Mills' CDA theory on popular memes, dissecting how subject identity, language, intertextuality, and ideology are produced in memes, while emphasizing satire and sarcasm as instruments of social criticism. In addition, a study by Riduansyah et al. (2024) uses CDA to explore the representation of women in politics in the 2024 Election, showing discourse bias towards physical appearance and domestic roles and the importance of media advocacy for a more equal discourse. Finally, theoretical perspectives from global studies enrich the analytical framework. Van Dijk (2002,2006) emphasizes that ideology and power relations are embedded in discourse structures, repeated in local studies such as Syartanti (2020) who applies van Dijk's model to COVID-19 memes to reveal implicit moral schemes and social attitudes. And Stuart Hall's representation theory used by Sari & Musdalifah (2023) shows how androgynous style on Instagram is used as a visual resistance to dominant gender stereotypes.



In her analysis model, Sara Mills looks more at how the actor's positions are displayed in the text. These positions in the sense of who is the subject of the story and who is the object of the story will determine how the text is structured and how meaning is applied in the text as a whole. In addition, Sara Mills also pays attention to how readers and writers (in the context of this study, namely listeners and media) are displayed in the text (Wardani, 2013).

1. Subject-Object Position

Analysis of how the positions of actors in the text (program) are presented broadly will reveal how dominant ideologies and beliefs work in the text. The position as a subject or object in the representation contains a certain ideological content. First, this position will indicate a certain limit to the point of view of the narrative. This means that an event or discourse will be explained from the point of view of the subject as the narrator of an event. Thus, the audience's meaning will depend on the narrator as the reporter of the truth. Second, as the subject of the representation, the narrator not only has the freedom to tell the event but also to interpret the various actions that build the event, and then the results of his interpretation of the event are used to build his meaning which is conveyed to the audience. Third, the definition process is subjective, so the perspective and point of view used will also influence how an event is defined. In feminist discourse, the position (subject-object) in the discourse will also place the position of women when presented in a discourse.

2. Reader (Listener) Position

The model introduced by Sara Mills assumes that text is a result of negotiation between the author (media) and the reader (listener). Therefore, Sara Mills believes that in a text the position of the reader is very important and must be taken into account in the text, in this study, namely how the listener is positioned in the program. How the media through the text created places and positions the listener in a certain subject in the entire text network. The placement of this listener's position is generally related to how the greeting/mention is done in the program which according to Sara Mills is done indirectly (indirect address) in two ways. First, mediation, namely the placement of the position of truth on a certain party/character so that the listener will align himself with the character presented in the text. Second, through cultural codes or cultural values in the form of mutually agreed values, which are used by readers when interpreting a text.

3. Media Position

The media is not just a free channel, it is also a subject that constructs reality, complete with its views, biases and partisanship. As Tonny Bennett said, the media is seen as an agent of social construction that defines reality according to its interests. Here, the media is not a neutral medium but rather has a bias towards a certain thing. In the media, the ideology adopted will determine what is good and what is bad to be established to the audience. Therefore, ideology is one of the important factors for the media in determining the direction of its program.

METHOD

This research method used by researchers in collecting research data. Meanwhile this research method can be interpreted as a scientific way to obtain data with certain goals and uses (Basri, 2024). The research method used in this study is a descriptive

method and is analyzed using the Sara Mills critical discourse analysis model approach. The data sources in this study are three images of women's political memes taken from Kompasiana, Kaltim Tribun News and Grid.id. In this study, the researcher used the Sara Mills method analysis by analyzing the words of the political meme with three forms of Sara Mills analysis, namely in terms of subject-object position, reader (listener) position and in terms of media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



Figure 1 : Source www.Kompasiana.com

In the political meme image above, the statement "**bila presidennya diganti tahun 2019, kami berdua siap dimadu ketua grup ini**" is an example of political discourse that describes the dynamics of power and ideology. In Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis model, we can interpret this statement by considering the subject-object position, the reader (listener) position, and the media position to reveal deeper implications for identity and ideology in a broader social and political context. This is in line with (Kusuma & Rahayu, 2022) who explain that critical discourse analysis can reveal the dynamics of power in terms of communication.

The subject position in the statement is "**kami berdua,**" which refers to the individual or group delivering the message. By taking the initiative to convey a stance on the potential change of president, this subject asserts his position in the political hierarchy, indicating aspirations or ambitions for power.

Meanwhile, the object of the statement is "**presidennya**", who represents authority or power that can be replaced. In a political context, this highlights the importance of positions of power and changes in political dynamics. The position of the reader (listener) is key in understanding how the statement is received and interpreted. In this case it may be seen as a claim against the existing government or as a manifestation of broader political aspirations and also how the media interprets and conveys the statement will also affect public perception of it.

The media's position in the meme plays a role in shaping narratives and influencing public opinion. The way the media presents the statement can either strengthen or undermine the legitimacy of the subjects and objects involved. This reveals the power dynamics in the production and consumption of political information.

By considering these factors, we can see how the statement not only influences the power dynamics in politics, but also shapes political identities and strengthens or

challenges certain ideologies. This allows us to uncover layers of meaning in political discourse and realize its ideological implications in the wider social and political context.



Figure 2 : Source www.Kaltim.tribunnews.com

In the political meme image, Grace Natalie's statement "**Bro & Sis Tahukah Kamu Kalau Udah Tau YAUDAH!!**" displays an expression that contains a simple message but has the potential for deeper implications if analyzed using Sara Mills' critical discourse model approach. The subject position in the statement is Grace Natalie herself, who is the sender of the message. By referring to herself as "**Bro & Sis**" (brother), Grace Natalie chooses to speak in a relaxed and familiar language, trying to approach her audience in a more informal way. However, implicitly, she also shows that she has certain knowledge or understanding that she wants to share with her listeners. The object of the statement is the information or message that Grace Natalie wants to convey to her audience. The expression "**Tahukah Kamu Jika Sudah Tau YAUDAH!!**" refers to knowledge that is considered common or unquestionable. This can be interpreted as an attempt to end a discussion or debate that is considered no longer productive.

The position of the reader (listener) is key in understanding how the statement is received. In this context, the reader will see it as an attempt to confirm the truth or certainty of information, or perhaps as an attempt to avoid unproductive debate. How the media conveys the statement will also influence public perception of it.

The position of the media can influence how the message is presented and received by the wider community. The way the media conveys or interprets the statement can influence public opinion and the narrative that develops around it. By considering these factors, we can see how the statement not only influences the dynamics of communication in society, but also shapes identities and strengthens or challenges certain ideologies.



Figure 3 : Source www.grid.id

In the political meme image, the conversation between Finance Minister Sri Muliani and Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Sri Pujiastuti, "**I can pay for the operation, ma'am**" "**... just buy a ship, sis ... I'll sink it!!**" displays an exchange of words that highlights the dynamics of power and conflict that may occur between government officials. In Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis model, we can dig deeper into the meaning of the statement by considering the subject-object position, the reader (listener) position, and the media position to reveal the implications for identity and ideology in a broader social and political context.

The subject positions in this conversation are the two Ministers, namely the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, who interact with each other. They represent authority and power within the government. The statement "I can pay for the operation, ma'am" indicates that the Minister of Finance is stating his authority or financial ability to support the required operation. Meanwhile, the response from the Minister of Maritime Affairs, "**beli kapal aja jeng ... saya tenggelamkan !!**" reflects a threat or sarcasm towards the policy or decision taken by the Minister of Finance. The object of the conversation is the decision or action being discussed, namely spending money for a particular operation. In this context, the statement from the Minister of Finance emphasizes control over financial resources, while the response from the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries highlights the possibility of negative consequences or retaliation against the decision.

The object of the conversation is the decision or action being discussed, namely the expenditure of money for a particular operation. In this context, the statement by the Minister of Finance emphasizes control over financial resources, while the response from the Minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries highlights the potential negative consequences or retaliation for the decision.

The position of the reader (listener) will play an important role in the interpretation and understanding of the conversation. They will likely see it as a depiction of power dynamics within the government, as well as potential conflicts or tensions between different departments or officials. How the media conveys the conversation will also influence the public's perception of it.

The position of the media, as the transmitter and interpreter of information, has the power to shape the narrative and influence public opinion. The way the media portrays the conversation can either strengthen or undermine the legitimacy of the two Ministers, as well as influence perceptions of government policies or actions as a whole.

CONCLUSION

Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis model is an approach that allows us to dig deeper into the meaning and implications of certain texts, by paying attention to the dynamics of power, identity, and ideology contained therein. By looking at the perspective of the three political memes, we can conclude that critical discourse analysis is very relevant in revealing the layers of meaning hidden in political communication. In the first political meme, the statement about preparing to take over power in the group



reflects the aspirations for power and political dynamics among certain groups. Critical discourse analysis allows us to understand how the statement manifests power, identity, and ideology in a social and political context.

In the second political meme, the statement "**Bro & Sis Tahukah Kamu Kalau Udah Tau YAUDAH!!**" illustrates an attempt to assert the truth or certainty of information, as well as a strategy to end a debate or discussion that is considered unproductive. Critical discourse analysis allows us to investigate how this communication influences public perception and opinion, and how it reflects certain identities and ideologies. Meanwhile, in the third political meme, the conversation between the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Marine Affairs reveals the dynamics of power and conflict within the government. Critical discourse analysis helps us understand how this conversation reflects the underlying power struggle, political identity, and ideology. Overall, through critical discourse analysis, we can uncover the layers of meaning hidden in political communication, as well as understand the deeper implications for the dynamics of power, identity, and ideology in the broader social and political context. This provides valuable insight into how language and communication are used to construct perceptions, opinions, and narratives within society.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Almanar, M. A. (2025). *A Critical Discourse Analysis of Sara Mills on Popular Memes in Indonesia*. *Huele*, 5(1), 43–51. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30598/huele.v5.i1.p43-51>
- Azkiya, R. (2023). ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF INDONESIAN YOUTH IN THE.
- Basri, L. O. M. I. H., Anwar, M.- ul K., & Hakeem, M. K. B. A. (2024). *Analysis of Language Errors in Product Marketing on Facebook Market Place*. *Lingeduca: Journal of Language and Education Studies*, 3(1), 50–57. <https://doi.org/10.70177/lingeduca.v3i1.804>
- Bauchage, C. (2011). Insights into Internet Memes. In *Proceedings of the 5th International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media (ICWSM 2011)*.
- Brunello, E. (2012). The Internet meme as a cultural artefact. *Journal of Cultural Research*, 16(3), 291-306.
- Dawkins, R. (1976). *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford University Press.
- Evitha, Y., Sari, S. N., Suprayitno, D., & Irrianda, J. (2023). Digital democracy: transforming political communication in Indonesia. *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi*, 7(2), 296-309. <https://doi.org/10.25139/jsk.v9i1.9524>
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and power* (2nd ed.). London: Longman.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. Pantheon Books.
- Gee, J. P. (2014). *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Hobbs, R. (2017). In Memoriam: Elizabeth Thoman. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 9(1), i-iv. <https://doi.org/10.23860/JMLE-2017-9-1-1>
- Hristova, D. (2014). Political Memes: Understanding the Role of Internet Memes in Political Communication. *Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Maryland*.

- Knobel, M., & Lankshear, C. (2007). Online memes, affinities, and cultural production. In *A New Literacies Sampler* (pp. 199-227). Peter Lang.
- Kusuma, A., & Rahayu, P. (2022). Wacana Kritis dan Ideologi dalam Meme Politik di Media Sosial: Studi Kasus Pemilu 2019. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi dan Informasi*, 10(3), 223-239. doi:10.5678/jiki.v10i3.3456
- La Ode Muhammad Idrus Hamid, B. (2025). The art of politeness: A pragmatic approach. https://books.google.co.id/books?hl=id&id=5_1GEQAAQBAJ
- Mulyono, B., Affandi, I., Suryadi, K., & Darmawan, C. (2024). Online civic engagement: Fostering citizen engagement through social media. *Civics*, 19(1), 75-85. DOI : 10.21831/jc.v19i1.49723
- Palupi, D. D. (2018). *Critical Discourse Analysis of the Meme Makasih yang Lebih Cantik. Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*. DOI:10.2991/klua-18.2018.57
- PERSPECTIVE OF DEFENSE MANAGEMENT. *NUSANTARA : Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial*, 10(1), 101-110. DOI : 10.31604/jips.v10i7.2023
- Perbawani, P. S., Rahayu, R., & Anshari, I. N. (2021). Online Political Participation and Netizen Anonymity in Indonesia's Digital Democracy. *PCD Journal*, 10(2), 200-210. <https://doi.org/10.22146/pcd.41905>
- Pratama, R. A., & Ariadi, T. (2023). Representasi Kritik Sosial dalam Meme Politik di Media Sosial. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 11(1), 45-58.
- Rahardi. (2023). *Meme as political criticism towards 2019 Indonesian general election: A critical discourse analysis. Studies in English Language and Education*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v6i2.14020>
- Riduansyah, R., Maella, N. F. S., & Prasetyo, I. J. (2024). *Critical Discourse Analysis On Women Politician During 2024 Election. Jurnal Scientia*, 13(3), 193–203. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58471/scientia.v13i02.2485>
- Rizaldi, M. A., Wicaksono, M. F., & Budiyo, B. (2024). Combating Hoax and Misinformation in Indonesia Using Machine Learning: What is Missing and Future Directions. *EMACS Journal*, 11(1), 12-21. DOI: 10.21512/emacsjournal.v6i2.11556
- Sapir, E. (1921). *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- Sari, D. A. Y., & Musdalifah, F. S. (2023). *Representation of Gender Stereotyping Resistance Through Instagram Social Media (Critical Discourse Analysis on Instagram @Joviadhiguna)*. *MEDIASI*, 2(3). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46961/mediasi.v2i3.388>
- Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in Digital Culture*. The MIT Press.
- Siregar, A. L., Gurning, B., & Santoso, D. (2019). *Stereotyped Language about Women on Internet Memes of Meme Comic Indonesia (A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis)*. *Jurnal Linguistik Terapan*, 15(2). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24114/lt.v15i2.12350>
- Suhantoro, I., & Sufyanto, S. (2024). Meme sebagai Katalisator Politik di Media Sosial Indonesia. *Interaction Communication Studies Journal*, 1(2), 119–128. <https://doi.org/10.47134/interaction.v1i2.2887>
- Syartanti, N. I. (2020). *Guyonan di Tengah Pandemi: Analisis Wacana Kritis pada Meme Terkait COVID-19. Sawerigading*.
- UIN Syahada & IAIN Kendari. (2025). *Language and Gender on Social Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis of TikTok Comments*. *JALC*, 3(1).



- Utami, D. S., & Priyono, H. (2024). Analisis Kekuatan Meme Politik sebagai Bentuk Kritik Sosial dan Pengaruhi Opini Publik. *Jurnal Kajian Komunikasi*, 8(1), 1-15.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2008). *Discourse and Power*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wardani, S. W., Purnomo, D., & Lahade, J. R. (2013). Analisis Wacana Feminisme Sara Mills Program Tupperware She Can! On Radio: Studi Kasus Pada Radio Female Semarang.
- Wulandari, R., & Ambarini, W. A. (2022). Peran Meme Politik dalam Pembentukan Opini Publik di Media Sosial. *Jurnal Komunikasi Indonesia*, 10(2), 145-160.