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Decoding Contextual Meanings: Indonesian Political Discourse on Social Media X

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Abstract

This study explores the construction of contextual meaning within Indonesian political discourse on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), with a particular focus on the speech acts of prominent public figures such as Denny Siregar and Natalius Pigai. Employing Halliday and Hasan's (1989) theory of contextual meaning alongside Searle's (1969) speech act theory, the research investigates how language is strategically used to convey political messages, shape public perception, and build ideological narratives. The analysis reveals that understanding political discourse in digital environments requires more than a textual reading; it necessitates an interpretation grounded in pragmatic context, communicative intention, and socio-political background. Key findings highlight the dominant use of indexical references, political implicature, and presupposition as tools to deliver implicit criticism or support. Moreover, speech acts in the form of representative, expressive, and indirect directives are frequently employed, often framed through irony and satire to influence opinion while mitigating legal repercussions. Through qualitative content analysis, the study demonstrates how public figures manipulate digital language to mobilize audiences, assert ideological positions, and engage in image construction. These insights contribute to broader discussions in political linguistics, media discourse, and pragmatic analysis within the Indonesian digital communication landscape.

1. Introduction

On the digital era, social media platforms have become powerful tools for communication, enabling users to exchange opinions, ideas, and criticisms without spatial or temporal constraints. Among these platforms, X (formerly known as Twitter) stands out as one of the most widely used in Indonesia, offering a space where political discourse is increasingly performed

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and consumed. While this openness fosters democratic participation, it also creates opportunities for excessive, polarizing, and even harmful communication practices.

Public figures with substantial followings frequently use X to disseminate politically charged content, including provocative and controversial tweets. Juditha (2015), in her analysis of trending topics such as *#Savehajilulung*, identifies Twitter as a highly active space for political engagement in Indonesia. Her study also highlights the tendency of users to respond to disagreements with hostility, sometimes escalating into forms of online harassment—revealing the dark side of digital free speech.

In a related context, Sulistyaningtyas (2009) underscores the strategic use of language in political campaigns, where the deliberate selection of positive and persuasive vocabulary serves to shape public perception and enhance the electability of candidates. These insights reflect the deeply rhetorical and performative nature of political language in digital spaces.

Given the layered and often implicit nature of political communication on social media, it becomes essential to examine how public figures construct meaning within their discourse. This study addresses this need by adopting a pragmatic approach—one that considers not only what is said but also how it is said, in what context, and to what effect. In particular, the study draws on speech act theory to explore the functions of language and on contextual meaning theory to uncover the underlying socio-political dimensions embedded in political tweets. Accordingly, this research aims to investigate how contextual meaning is represented in the political discourse of Indonesian public figures on the social media platform X.

2. Materials and Methods

This study explores the construction and interpretation of contextual meaning in political speech texts authored by Indonesian public figures on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter). In the age of digital communication, social media has become a primary arena for political discourse, where language is not merely a vehicle for information but a strategic tool for persuasion, alignment, criticism, and identity construction. Given the often implicit, layered, and context-dependent nature of political expression in these environments, this research seeks to uncover how political actors utilize language pragmatically to shape public perception and construct ideological narratives.

To investigate these phenomena, the study is anchored in two foundational theoretical frameworks: Halliday and Hasan's (1989) theory of contextual meaning and Searle's (1969) speech act theory. These frameworks offer complementary perspectives for understanding how language is both shaped by and shapes the context in which it is used.

Halliday and Hasan's model provides a socio-semiotic approach to discourse, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between linguistic choices and the situational context in which they occur. Their theory identifies three critical components for analyzing contextual meaning: **field**, **tenor**, and **mode**. *Field* pertains to the subject matter or the nature of the social action taking place, such as political campaigning or ideological debate. *Tenor* concerns the interpersonal relationships and power dynamics between participants, including whether the communication is formal or informal, hierarchical or equal. This dimension is particularly relevant in analyzing the relationship between political figures and their followers or critics online. *Mode* refers to the symbolic organization of discourse, including the channel of communication (e.g., written tweets, multimedia posts) and the degree of planning and spontaneity involved. Understanding these three components is essential for interpreting how linguistic choices reflect and respond to specific political and communicative contexts on X.

Complementing this approach is Searle's (1969) speech act theory, which shifts the analytical focus from what language means to what it does. Speech act theory views language as performative, emphasizing that utterances can enact social actions beyond their literal meaning. Searle categorizes speech acts into five principal types: **representatives**, which commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition (e.g., asserting, claiming); **directives**, which attempt to get the listener to do something (e.g., requesting, advising); **commissives**, which commit the speaker to a future course of action (e.g., promising, vowing); **expressives**, which reveal the speaker's psychological attitude or emotional response (e.g., praising, criticizing, congratulating); and **declarations**, which bring about change in the institutional or social reality (e.g., resigning, appointing).

In the context of this research, special emphasis is placed on **representative**, **expressive**, and **indirect directive** acts, as these are most commonly employed in political discourse on social media. Representative acts are often used to frame opinions as objective truths, while expressive acts allow speakers to communicate approval, disapproval, or personal stance—frequently through sarcasm or irony. Indirect directive acts, on the other hand, allow political figures to influence public behavior or attitudes without overt commands, thus maintaining plausible deniability while guiding interpretation and response.

By integrating these two theoretical lenses, the study provides a comprehensive account of how political meaning is constructed, conveyed, and interpreted in digital interactions. This dual-framework approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of the intersection between language, power, and context in Indonesia's evolving political communication landscape.

Data Collection

The data were collected using two primary methods: (1) the **documentation method**, involving the systematic collection of political tweets, and (2) the **observation method**, guided by a structured observation form as outlined by Bungin (2005, pp. 144–145). These methods were employed to identify relevant speech acts and contextual indicators within selected tweets by key political commentators.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a **qualitative content analysis** approach, following the procedures detailed by Bungin (2015, p. 83). This analytical method enabled in-depth interpretation of both the structural and contextual dimensions of political speech texts. Tweets were examined to uncover not only their linguistic content but also the pragmatic intentions behind them and the socio-political contexts they reflect.

By integrating contextual meaning theory with speech act theory, the analysis reveals how public figures construct layered political messages that rely on presupposition, implicature, irony, satire, and indexical reference. These strategies are instrumental in shaping audience perception, political alignment, and digital discourse.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the analysis based on Searle's speech act theory and Halliday and Hasan's theory of contextual meaning. The findings demonstrate how Indonesian public figures on X (formerly Twitter) employ pragmatic strategies—particularly through locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts—to construct meaning, shape political narratives, and influence public opinion.

3.1. Locutionary Acts in Political Discourse

Locutionary acts refer to the literal expression of an utterance, encompassing the structure and content of what is explicitly stated. However, in political discourse on social media, such utterances often carry evaluative undertones and rhetorical strategies that go beyond surface-level meaning.

Data DS01 (28 November 2023)

"Usianya udah 76 tahun. Tapi power suaranya ga turun-turun. Beda ama yang mantan militer usia 72 tahun. Makin tua makin kekanak-kanakan."

(*He is already 76 years old. But his vocal strength has not diminished. Unlike the 72-year-old ex-military figure—he becomes more childish with age.*)

The tweet above, by Denny Siregar, constructs meaning through contrast. While the locutionary act appears descriptive, the evaluative comparison between two political figures embeds a critique. The utterance implicitly praises the first figure—interpreted as Megawati Soekarnoputri—for her continued vitality, while simultaneously undermining the second figure—Prabowo Subianto—through a negative personal characterization.

Data DS02 (2 December 2023)

"Usia tidak cukup, ubah Undang-Undang lewat Mahkamah Konstitusi. Suara tidak naik-naik, gerakkan aparat untuk membantu. Debat tidak mampu, ubah peraturan lewat KPU. Hidup memang seGibran itu, kawan."

(*Age is not enough—change the law through the Constitutional Court. Vote numbers don't rise—mobilize the authorities to help. Incapable in debate—change the regulations through the KPU. Life is indeed that 'Gibran,' my friend.*)

This text exemplifies a locutionary act with a heavily sarcastic and satirical tone. The parallelism in the sentence structure reinforces the rhetorical strategy of repetition, emphasizing institutional manipulation. The final clause, containing the ironic term *"seGibran"*, functions as an indexical reference to Gibran Rakabuming Raka and encapsulates the speaker's criticism of nepotism in politics.

Data NS01 (2 November 2023)

"Kali ini Mata Najwa merekonstruksi set jamuan presiden... Bedanya enggak ada sambal." (*This time, Mata Najwa reconstructs the presidential luncheon setup... The difference? There is no sambal.*)

Here, the locutionary act serves a promotional purpose for an upcoming episode of *Mata Najwa*, yet the seemingly trivial reference to *sambal* may carry symbolic meaning—hinting at a lack of substance or intensity in the political dialogue. The tweet engages audiences through cultural cues while subtly framing the political event being referenced.

3. 2. Illocutionary Acts: Political Critique and Positioning

Illocutionary acts express the speaker's intention behind the utterance, including evaluating, criticizing, or influencing the audience. In political discourse, these acts often manifest through implicit judgments.

Data DS01 (28 November 2023)

"Usianya udah 76 tahun. Tapi power suaranya ga turun-turun. Beda ama yang mantan militer usia 72 tahun. Makin tua makin kekanak-kanakan."

(*He is already 76 years old. But his vocal strength has not diminished. Unlike the 72-year-old ex-military figure—he becomes more childish with age.*)

The utterance discussed earlier also functions as an **assertive** illocutionary act. By claiming that one figure has become more childish with age, the speaker conveys a belief intended to be accepted as truth. Additionally, the **expressive** function is evident in the sarcastic tone, reflecting disapproval. The juxtaposition of figures simultaneously delivers an implicit **directive**, nudging the audience to reassess their political judgments.

Data DS02 (2 December 2023)

"Usia tidak cukup, ubah Undang-Undang lewat Mahkamah Konstitusi. Suara tidak naik-naik, gerakkan aparat untuk membantu. Debat tidak mampu, ubah peraturan lewat KPU. Hidup memang seGibran itu, kawan."

(*Age is not enough—change the law through the Constitutional Court. Vote numbers don't rise—mobilize the authorities to help. Incapable in debate—change the regulations through the KPU. Life is indeed that 'Gibran,' my friend.*)

This tweet contains multiple **representative** speech acts in its critique of political maneuvering:

- *Changing laws via the Constitutional Court* critiques legal manipulation.
- *Mobilizing authorities to assist popularity* critiques abuse of state power.
- *Altering rules through the KPU* critiques regulatory bias. The **expressive** function is evident through irony, while the **implicit directive** encourages audiences to view these political strategies with skepticism.

Data NP01 and NP03 (7 and 19 December 2023)

(NP01) Ganjar & Mahfud katanya Anti Politik Dinasti tapi publikasi anak2 di banyak media. Calon sj mulai cenderung Politik Dinasti. Saya org tua besarkan sendiri Anak2 & seusai SMU kuliah di USA & Jepang tapi Saya tdk mau sepeti mereka 2 walau anak2ku juara SMU PL Jkt & lebih Genius. (Ganjar & Mahfud said they are Anti-Dynasty Politics but their children are published in many media. Candidates are starting to lean towards Dynasty Politics. I, as a parent, raised my children by myself & after high school they went to college in the USA & Japan but I don't want to be like them even though my children are champions of the Jakarta PL High School & are more genius.)

(NP03) Org yg tersenyum dari penentuan Wapres PDIP itu Muhaimin Iskandar darah biru NU. Mahfud tidak dianggap NU oleh kultural jg Struktural. Sy tahu lebih dari 26 thn. Kita akan lihat membludaknya suara NU ke Anies & Muhaimin. Tapi Pak Prabowo menang di Putaran ke 2 setelah vs Amin. (The person who smiled from the determination of the PDIP Vice President was

Muhaimin Iskandar, a blue blood of NU. Mahfud was not considered NU by the cultural and structural. I have known for more than 26 years. We will see the surge of NU votes for Anies & Muhaimin. But Mr. Prabowo won in the 2nd Round after vs Amin.)

Natalius Pigai's utterances in Data NP01 and NP03 exemplify complex **representative** and **expressive** illocutionary acts that operate through **moral contrast and socio-political evaluation**. His strategic use of comparison—both explicit and implicit—serves to critique political figures and elevate his own ethos, thereby engaging his audience in a reevaluation of political authenticity and integrity.

In NP01, Pigai constructs a personal narrative that contrasts sharply with the actions of Ganjar and Mahfud, who he accuses of engaging in the very dynastic politics they claim to oppose. By stating, *"Ganjar & Mahfud said they are Anti-Dynasty Politics but their children are published in many media"*, Pigai highlights an inconsistency between their public rhetoric and private actions. This observation is not framed as an overt accusation but as a **representative act**, presenting his belief as a factual observation. The assertion invites readers to question the sincerity and moral coherence of the candidates' political stance.

Pigai then shifts to a **personal comparison**, stating: *"I, as a parent, raised my children by myself & after high school they went to college in the USA & Japan..."*. This utterance functions as an **expressive act**, demonstrating pride and asserting a moral high ground. He frames his own parenting as independent and merit-based, implicitly suggesting that unlike Ganjar and Mahfud, he refrains from leveraging media or political influence to promote his children. The phrase *"I don't want to be like them"* is a **strong evaluative judgment** that positions Pigai as an ethical counterexample, thereby reinforcing the moral dichotomy he constructs.

In this utterance, **presupposition** also plays a role: by highlighting his children's academic achievements ("champions of the Jakarta PL High School & are more genius"), he presupposes their worthiness, further legitimizing his decision to keep them away from public political exposure. This rhetorical move strengthens the contrast and appeals to values such as meritocracy, independence, and humility—qualities that resonate with public expectations of political integrity.

Moreover, Pigai shifts focus to the internal dynamics of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), one of Indonesia's largest Islamic organizations. The statement, *"Muhaimin Iskandar, a blue blood of NU"*, carries significant **indexical and expressive weight**. Referring to Muhaimin as *"darah biru NU"* implies not only lineage but also legitimacy, cultural depth, and symbolic authority within NU's socioreligious framework. This designation functions as an **expressive illocutionary act**, communicating admiration and endorsement, while simultaneously casting doubt on the religious-cultural legitimacy of Mahfud MD, who Pigai says is *"not considered NU by the cultural and structural"*.

Pigai's claim that he has "known [this] for more than 26 years" adds **personal credibility** and reinforces the **representative nature** of the statement, suggesting that his evaluation is grounded in long-standing insider knowledge rather than speculation. The prediction that NU votes will "overflow to Anies and Muhaimin" also functions as a **representative act** but carries **directive implicature**—an indirect effort to shape reader expectations and guide political sentiment toward the Anies-Muhaimin coalition.

Finally, the closing line, *"But Mr. Prabowo won in the 2nd Round after vs Amin,"* introduces a speculative future scenario framed as a projected outcome. While descriptive on the surface, this functions subtly as a **strategic perlocutionary act**, aiming to prepare or influence public perception regarding likely electoral dynamics. It implies a competitive landscape and legitimizes

the Anies-Muhaimin ticket as serious contenders, capable of forcing a second round—thus amplifying their political capital.

3. 3. Perlocutionary Acts: Audience Reaction and Opinion Shaping.

Perlocutionary acts involve the actual or intended effects of the utterance on the audience. In political discourse, these effects may include persuasion, provocation, or triggering public debate.

Data DS01 and DS02

"Usianya udah 76 tahun. Tapi power suaranya ga turun-turun. Beda ama yang mantan militer usia 72 tahun. Makin tua makin kekanak-kanakan." (DS01)

(*He is already 76 years old. But his vocal strength has not diminished. Unlike the 72-year-old ex-military figure—he becomes more childish with age.*)

"Usia tidak cukup, ubah Undang-Undang lewat Mahkamah Konstitusi. Suara tidak naik-naik, gerakkan aparat untuk membantu. Debat tidak mampu, ubah peraturan lewat KPU. Hidup memang seGibran itu, kawan." (DS02)

(*Age is not enough—change the law through the Constitutional Court. Vote numbers don't rise—mobilize the authorities to help. Incapable in debate—change the regulations through the KPU. Life is indeed that 'Gibran,' my friend.*)

Denny Siregar's tweets exemplify expressive and assertive illocutionary acts, designed not only to convey opinion but also to shape public sentiment. In **DS01**, the juxtaposition between the 76-year-old "vocal" figure (implicitly referring to Megawati Soekarnoputri) and the 72-year-old "childish" ex-military figure (likely referencing Prabowo Subianto) is a strategic rhetorical move. The contrast is not merely about age, but a commentary on perceived political maturity, emotional control, and leadership integrity. The phrase "he becomes more childish with age" is a pointed critique disguised in informal language, which can trigger a range of perlocutionary effects. For Megawati's supporters, this may reinforce admiration and loyalty. For Prabowo's supporters, the tweet might incite defensive reactions or provoke counter-attacks, potentially igniting a digital battleground. For neutral observers, the tweet may prompt reflections on how age correlates—or fails to correlate—with political wisdom and capacity.

In **DS02**, the tone is sharper and more cynical, delivering a layered critique of what the author perceives as manipulative political tactics. Each clause—"change the law through the Constitutional Court," "mobilize the authorities to help," "change the regulations through the KPU"—functions as a sequential indictment of opportunistic maneuvering within Indonesia's political institutions. These phrases are not neutral descriptions but satirical accusations that frame political actors (presumably the Gibran-Jokowi coalition) as unscrupulous and power-hungry. The final phrase, "Life is indeed that 'Gibran,' my friend," is a pun that morphs a proper name into a metaphor for unfairness or systemic manipulation, effectively branding Gibran as a symbol of corrupted processes.

The illocutionary force of DS02 is heavily assertive—it accuses, critiques, and signals disapproval—while its perlocutionary effects may include reinforcing public distrust, deepening political polarization, and catalyzing online discourse or "twitwars" among rival groups. Moreover, by embedding political critique in casual, almost humorous language, Siregar increases its shareability and resonance with everyday users. His discourse thus functions as a form of digital activism, wrapped in satire, with the power to subtly reframe dominant political narratives.
Data NP01 and NP03

(NP01) Ganjar & Mahfud katanya Anti Politik Dinasti tapi publikasi anak2 di banyak media. Calon sj mulai cenderung Politik Dinasti. Saya org tua besarkan sendiri Anak2 & seusai SMU kuliah di USA & Jepang tapi Saya tdk mau sepeti mereka 2 walau anak2ku juara SMU PL Jkt & lebih Genius. (Ganjar & Mahfud said they are Anti-Dynasty Politics but their children are published in many media. Candidates are starting to lean towards Dynasty Politics. I, as a parent, raised my children by myself & after high school they went to college in the USA & Japan but I don't want to be like them even though my children are champions of the Jakarta PL High School & are more genius.)

(NP03) Org yg tersenyum dari penentuan Wapres PDIP itu Muhaimin Iskandar darah biru NU. Mahfud tidak dianggap NU oleh kultural jg Struktural. Sy tahu lebih dari 26 thn. Kita akan lihat membludaknya suara NU ke Anies & Muhaimin. Tapi Pak Prabowo menang di Putaran ke 2 setelah vs Amin. (The person who smiled from the determination of the PDIP Vice President was Muhaimin Iskandar, a blue blood of NU. Mahfud was not considered NU by the cultural and structural. I have known for more than 26 years. We will see the surge of NU votes for Anies & Muhaimin. But Mr. Prabowo won in the 2nd Round after vs Amin.)

Pigai's critique of political dynasties as stated above, is likely to:
- Elicit affirmation among voters critical of nepotism,
- Challenge the credibility of anti-dynasty rhetoric,
- Encourage reflection on leadership authenticity in NU communities.

His projection that NU votes will surge toward the Anies-Muhaimin pair introduces **strategic expectation management**, shaping public assumptions about electoral momentum and legitimacy.

3. 4. Implicit Praise and Satirical Acknowledgment

Several utterances in the dataset demonstrate complex layers of meaning, where praise and critique co-exist:
- Praise for the 76-year-old figure's stamina (Megawati) enhances the negative portrayal of her opponent (Prabowo).
- The ironic remark *"Hidup memang seGibran itu, kawan"* acknowledges political privilege while criticizing the path to candidacy.
- The phrase *"darah biru NU"* affirms cultural authority, subtly delegitimizing others' claims to NU representation.

These speech acts reveal that public figures not only critique but also subtly elevate allies or ideals aligned with their own political positions.

3.5. Summary of Findings

Across all data, several key strategies were identified:
- **Indexical references** to political figures without naming them explicitly.
- Use of **political implicature** to deliver indirect yet contextually clear messages.
- Strategic **presupposition** to build narratives without overt assertion.
- A blend of **representative, expressive, and directive** illocutionary acts.
- Deployment of **irony and satire** as rhetorical shields and tools for influence.

These findings underscore the importance of pragmatic analysis in understanding how political discourse functions on social media. Political speech on X is not only a medium of

expression but also a site of ideological contestation, audience engagement, and public persuasion.

4. Conclusion

This study reveals that contextual meaning in political discourse on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) is deeply rooted in pragmatic dimensions and cannot be interpreted through textual analysis alone. Instead, meaning must be understood within the broader framework of discourse context, communicative goals, and socio-political dynamics. The analysis identifies several dominant linguistic strategies used by Indonesian public figures in their political communication:

1. **Indexicality** plays a central role, especially in the indirect referencing of political actors, institutions, and affiliations. These references are often strategically vague but remain interpretable due to shared contextual knowledge.
2. **Political implicature** is frequently employed to deliver nuanced, indirect messages that carry clear evaluative tones, often critical or satirical in nature.
3. **Presupposition** is used to construct narratives implicitly, allowing speakers to assert controversial or politically charged points without direct statements.

In terms of speech act functions, the study finds that:

- **Representative acts** dominate, particularly in the form of assertions, evaluations, and claims about political events or public figures.
- **Expressive acts** are equally prominent, especially in the form of sarcasm, irony, praise, and criticism.
- **Implicit directive acts** subtly guide public perception and behavior, often without issuing overt instructions.
- **Irony and satire** emerge as highly strategic tools for expressing dissent, critique, or support, often functioning as a protective rhetorical device within sensitive political contexts.

The use of these pragmatic strategies reflects a deliberate effort by public figures to shape public narratives, reinforce ideological stances, and influence voter perceptions—especially in the context of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that analyzing contextual meaning through a pragmatic lens offers valuable insights into the mechanisms of political communication in the digital age.

These findings contribute to the fields of pragmatics, political linguistics, and media studies by highlighting how digital discourse is shaped not just by what is said, but by how it is said, to whom, and in what context. Future research may expand this study by incorporating multimodal elements such as images and hashtags, or by examining the reception of these messages among different audience groups.

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