

Theme-rheme analysis of *the Jakarta post* headlines on covid-19 issue

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Abstract – COVID-19 has been impacted worldwide attention since it is a serious disease. Millions of people are infected and the aspects of the government have been descent. COVID-19 has become a daily topic for Indonesia's newspapers. Media has an important role in giving information and awareness about this issue. Critical Discourse Analysis performs in portraying this issue by figuring out the representation of COVID-19 in the headlines. The headlines on The Jakarta Post were analyzed by employing Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistic. The data were taken by observing twenty newspaper headlines from The Jakarta Post newspaper on the national column on the first-week edition using purposive sampling. The writer uses purposive sampling because the writer wants to determine the sampling by specifying special characteristics. The newspaper uses topical theme in all of the headlines, yet the participants of the theme are different. The participants involved in the headlines were actor, verbiage, sayer, sener, and goal as their Themes. In representing the COVID-19, The Jakarta Post newspaper headlines used the theme to figure out the participant of the headlines. The participant actor shows the action or the content of the headlines. Participant verbiage shows the content of the headline. Participant sayer directly says the content of the headline. Participant sener shows that people are suffered due to this virus. The participant goal shows that the action gives a positive impact on something related to the topic. The Jakarta Post newspaper uses these theme in order to examine the representations of COVID-19 in Indonesia that is a dangerous virus. The dangers of COVID-19 can be seen by the use of the participant actor that is mostly done by the government.

Keywords: covid-19, discourse analysis, newspaper headlines, representation, theme-rheme

1. Introduction

The world is suffering from a novel coronavirus. This virus found after the World Health Organization (WHO) response to a statement by the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission from their website on cases of ‘viral pneumonia’ in Wuhan, People’s Republic of China. Afterward, the WHO declared that the novel coronavirus is called COVID-19. Due to this virus, the world is facing a global pandemic. Total 27, 236, 916 people are infected and 891,031 people death (WHO, 2020). March 2, 2020, marks the beginning of the entry of COVID-19 in Indonesia (Susilo, Ceva, & Widayat, 2020). Indonesia is in the 23rd sequence with total cases reaching 200,035 patients (WHO, 2020). COVID-19 has become a daily topic for Indonesia’s citizens. Mass media seemed to raise this COVID-19 as their topic discussion. During this pandemic, the role of mass media is needed. Media has an important role in giving information and progress about COVID-19. It is also stated that mass media has an important role in the socialization process of public policy (Permatasari, 2013). Since media is important during this pandemic, mass media has a link with society. The topic published by media is considered as important. In practice, to grab the reader’s interest, a great headline is indispensable. The headline represents how a topic is important. The headline is where the content of the topic will be shown. This part will make the readers interest and curious about the news so that they will read it completely. Besides, interesting main news topics are posted in front of the newspaper (Wandik & Mulyono, 2017). Mass media through newspapers has the power to influence the readers in response to some events.

Newspapers can influence readers about what issues are happening. It has the power to supports or rejects issues. It can also be said that a newspaper is a source of power in society. It is known that the words used in the newspaper whether spoken or written are never neutral. Everything that people say or write always carries a hidden message, moreover, shows the power that reflects our interest (Fiske as cited in Mardhyarini & Ariyanti, 2016). The press company has a policy for determining the headline (Wandik et al, 2017). Metila (2013) stated that headlines are presenting what newspaper agencies regard as the most crucial information readers ought to know. Press company has their ideology in determining headlines. It is stated that ideology is interpreted as an idea that becomes a basis for the behavior of an individual or a group (Locke, 2004). Hence, the headlines in newspapers often look different from other newspapers even though they discuss the same topic. It shows that the press company has their ideology for determining the headlines.

This study focuses on the textual function to figure out how the choice of words in the newspaper headline expresses the messages. In Halliday (2004), it is stated that the textual function of the clause is constructing a message and the theme-rheme structure is the basic form of the organization of the clause as a message. It also added that in the organization of discourse, participant concerns with the process or circumstance chosen as the ideational point of departure for the message (McCabe & Heilman, 2007). In order to reveal the newspaper context, theme-rheme analysis is the linguistic tool in headline analysis. To reveal the representation behind media, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) performs as an approach to figure out the meaning in the headline. In Halliday’s term, to analyze the theme is by organized the clauses as

a message by having a distinct status assigned to one part of it. Then it combines with the rheme so that the two parts together constitute a message. This research focuses on analyzing newspaper headlines. The newspaper used in this research is The Jakarta Post (TJP) newspaper. TJP is only Indonesia's newspaper written in English. Since the emergence of the first case of COVID-19, TJP has always provided information related to this event. Related topics often appear in the headlines. Therefore, it becomes the main reason why this research uses newspaper headlines on the COVID-19 issue.

Studies applying CDA in analyzing theme-rheme in news headlines have been exercised by scholars. Sinaga (2019) did research by observing The Jakarta Post newspaper. The present research definitely aimed at analyzing theme and rheme and also investigates the use of Interpolations in the theme proposed attributive and theme in a reposted clause. The analysis of the type of theme becomes the result of this study. The research found that there were three types of themes, they are ideational/topical, textual, and interpersonal. The most dominant and powerful theme was topical followed by textual and interpersonal themes. Besides, the use of interpolations in theme, proposed attributive, and theme in the reposted clause also was found (Sinaga, 2019). Isti'anah researched media constructing in newspaper headlines about the Rohingya crisis (2018). The research focused on how the media reveals the Rohingya crisis. There were two newspapers involved, they are Myanmar and Bangladesh newspapers. The research found that Myanmar's headlines prove that the media's ideological perspective is to show the results of the Myanmar government's deeds to Rohingya. The headlines prove that the media is still under the government's control. On the other hand, Bangladesh media intentionally uses themes in order to uncover that a lot of Rohingyans have to fight for freedom themselves (Isti'anah, 2018).

Those studies observed the use of themes in order to figure out the message. This research develops the study of news headlines discourse from a different perspective. This research focuses on the textual structures of the headlines by applying theme-rheme analysis. The similarity found between the previous studies is using CDA to reveal the meaning of the newspaper headlines through the theme. The present study, it is analyzing the theme and rheme used in the newspaper headline as well as reveal the representation of the COVID-19 issue. However, the choice of newspaper is different in which this research has two objectives.

2. Method

This research employed a qualitative method. The data of this study was The Jakarta Post newspaper on COVID-19 issue in the national news column on September edition. The total of the data was 20 headlines during the first week of September taken from The Jakarta Post official website. In order to conduct this study, the writer followed two procedures. The first procedure is data collection. To collect the data, the writer used purposive sampling. The writer used purposive sampling because the writer wanted to determine the sampling by specifying special characteristics. In this study, the writer wanted to determine the exact data needed which was the newspaper headlines of The Jakarta Post on the COVID-19 issue. The writer collected the data from The Jakarta Post in the national news column. Then, the writer selected the

headline related to the COVID-19 issue. The second procedure is data analysis. There are several steps for analyzing the data. The first is that the writer identified the theme and the theme of the headline by examined the subject of the headlines. Then, the writer categorized the theme into a topical, interpersonal, or textual theme based on its subject. After that, based on the type of theme, the writer identified the participant of the theme. As a result, the writer examined the message through the Theme of the headline and analyze how the headlines represent the COVID-19 issue in Indonesia.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis finds that The Jakarta Post newspaper headlines use a topical theme. The topical theme refers to participants taking a role in the process of transitivity that expresses some representational meaning. However, the participant in each headline is different. The table below shows the participant in The Jakarta Post newspaper headlines.

Table 1 Participant of Theme on *The Jakarta Post* headlines

| Type of Participants | Occurrence |
|----------------------|------------|
| Actor | 7 |
| Verbiage | 7 |
| Sayer | 4 |
| Senser | 1 |
| Goal | 1 |
| Total | 20 |

The Table 1 shows different participants in the newspaper headlines. There are seven different participants found in *The Jakarta Post* newspaper headlines. The dominating participant is actor and verbiage, while senser and goal appear less in the headlines.

The headlines employ the actor and verbiage as the dominating participants. The actor is the one doing the material deed or the constituents which perform the action. Halliday also added that actor is “construed as bringing about the unfolding of the process through time” (Halliday, 2004: 334). The headlines below show that actor is the participant of the headlines.

- H6. **Patients** crowd hospitals as Indonesia loses 183 'priceless' medical workers
- H7. **Scientists** extend volunteer registration for COVID-19 vaccine trial
- H9. **Indonesia** reports higher COVID-19 death rate among children than United States
- H11. **Indonesia** hits highest daily increase in COVID-19 cases, deaths
- H16. **Factory workers in Bekasi** required to report daily activities to stem COVID-19 risk

H18. **Doctors association** pleads for accessible health care for frontline medical workers

H20. **COVID-19** haunts industrial zones in Indonesia

In the first datum above, the theme is represented by the word “patients”. The word has the function as a participant in the clause. The verb representing that the theme of the headline is actor, represented in the word “crowd”. The actor as a participant means that the participant is doing something. The rest of the headline which “crowd hospitals as Indonesia loses 183 'priceless' medical workers” is called a rheme. The content of the theme means that the dangers of COVID-19 in Indonesia represented how hospitals crowded by patients because 183 medical workers in Indonesia are fallen due to COVID-19.

The second datum the headline that is marked as a theme is showed by the word “scientists”. The theme stands as a participant as the Actor or the doer. The action in this headline is represented by the verb “extend” in the clause “extend volunteer registration for COVID-19 vaccine trial” which is categorized as the rheme of the headline. The meaning of the content is that the scientists support the government in producing COVID-19 vaccines by extending the registration for volunteer whom willing to help improve the effectiveness of the vaccine. The theme employs the government in showing responsibility by extending the volunteer registration for the COVID-19 vaccine trial.

For datum H9 and H11, “Indonesia” represents the government. The representation of the actor as a doer shows by the verb “reports” and “hits”. Datum H9 means that the government compares that the death rate due to COVID-19 in children is higher than the death rate from COVID-19 in the United States and for datum, H11 is that the development of COVID-19 cases in Indonesia is very fast. It can be seen from the highest total death cases in Indonesia. Datum H16. above shows that the theme is represented by the “Indonesian Doctors Association”. The Actor as a participant supported by the verb “pleads” which means that the Indonesian doctor association asked the government to respond to the accessible health care for front-line medical workers. It also means that the government required the factory workers to report their daily activities and health condition in order to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission. The last is datum H20., COVID-19 is categorized as the theme of the headline. The actor as the participant showed by the following verb which “haunts”. The actor of the theme means that the participant is doing something, which haunts the industrial zone in Indonesia. It is an alert to the government to give a response to this pandemic.

Another dominating participant is verbiage. According to Halliday (2004: 306), verbiage is “the function that corresponds to what is said, representing it as a class of thing rather than as a report or quote”. Verbiage provides the content of a saying or the name of the saying may also be construed as a participant labelled. The headlines below show that verbiage is the participant of the headlines.

H2. **In Indonesia, coronavirus floods Cisadane River with extra hazard:**
Medical waste

H4. **Indonesia's 'Merah Putih' vaccine candidate to be ready for production mid 2021:** Jokowi

H8. **Efficacy and safety first:** Experts urge government not to put vaccines on pedestal

H10. **Many Jakarta, East Java residents assume they are immune to COVID-19:** Task force chief

H12. **We have worked as hard as we can:** Erick apologizes for govt's COVID-19 handling

H15. **Urgent response needed as pandemic slows progress on SDGs:** Experts

H17. **COVID-19:** Concerns mount as medical workers suffer pandemic burnout

Verbiage shows the content of the speech. It may be what is said or maybe the name of the saying (Halliday, 2004). The Theme in the first datum is used Verbiage as a participant. Verbiage means that the content of the message is said by someone. For the datum H2., the Theme is “In Indonesia, coronavirus floods Cisadane river with extra hazard,” which is the content of the medical waste that was said by the government or the related institution. The content means that the medical waste flooded the Cisadane river which also dangerous as the coronavirus. Coronavirus not only impact human, but also the environment. Cisadane river is full of medical waste. The second datum “Indonesia's 'Merah Putih' vaccine candidate to be ready for production middle of 2021,” is the theme.

The content of the theme was said by Jokowi, represented the government. The government gives a response on the COVID-19 by producing the vaccine in the middle of 2021. The government wants to inform the readers that the COVID-19 vaccine ‘Merah Putih’ will be ready in the middle of next year. The participant of theme in datum H.8 is also verbiage. It showed by the theme “Efficacy and safety first”. The content was said by the experts as it is followed in the rheme “Experts urge government not to put vaccines on a pedestal”. The content means that the experts urge the government to stand for the efficacy and safety of people before they produce the vaccine. Experts also forced the government to look for the efficacy and the safety of the vaccine.

The theme of datum H.10 is “Many Jakarta, East Java residents assume they are immune to the COVID-19”. The participant of the theme is verbiage which the content is said by the Task Force chief. The content of the Theme is that the Task Force deplored that there are still many people who underestimate the COVID-19. It can be said that Jakartans, East Java is not aware of the dangers and do not heed the rules regarding the COVID-19. The Theme of datum H12 is ”We have worked as hard as we can”. The participant of the theme is verbiage showed by the theme is said by the government represented by Erick. The content of the theme is that the government asks for apologizing in handling the COVID-19. The government apologizes that their effort in handling the COVID-19 is quite disappointing. The government already worked as hard as they can. Datum H15. is also verbiage because the theme is said by the experts as “Urgent response needed as pandemic slows progress on SDGs”. The content means that the experts urge the government to respond to the pandemic due to the slow progress on SDGs. The theme in the last datum is used verbiage as the participant. For datum H17, the theme is “COVID-19” which is the content related to its rheme “Concerns mount as medical workers suffer

pandemic burnout”. The content means that the condition is increasingly worrying because many medical workers have suffered due to this pandemic. People are worried about the condition of medical workers that suffer from the COVID-19.

The other participant found in the theme is sayer. Sayer is verbal clauses represent the processes of ‘saying’. This category includes not only the different modes of saying but also semiotic processes that are not necessarily verbal. It can be a human or human-like speaker, of course; but it can also be any other symbol source (Martin & Painter, 2010). Halliday also added that sayer might more appropriately be called ‘symbolic’ processes and more constrained than in English, essentially being confined to speakers and writers (Halliday, 2004). The headlines below show that the participant of the theme is sayer.

H3. **Health Ministry** says COVID-19 bed capacity still ‘sufficient’ nationwide

H5. **Jokowi** mourns medical workers who have fallen to COVID-19

H13. **ICW** calls for increased transparency in COVID-19-related procurement amid irregularities

H14. **Medan District Court** declared COVID-19 cluster, one judge dies

According to Martin et al. (2010), sayer represents the process of ‘saying’ (asking, commanding, offering, stating, saying, telling, informing, querying, demanding, threatening, suggesting, and so on). The process of saying can be done by a human or human-like speaker, but it can also be other symbolic sources. The theme in the first datum is used Sayer as a participant. Sayer means that something is said by someone. For datum H3, the theme is “Health Ministry”. The sayer as a participant means that the rheme “COVID-19 bed capacity still ‘sufficient’ nationwide” is said by the Health Ministry. It is showed by the verb “says” that indicates the process of saying. The content means that the Health Ministry as the sayer tells the readers that Indonesia still has a sufficient bed capacity for COVID-19 patients. The second datum found that the process of saying is showed by the verb “mourns”.

The Theme of the headline is “Jokowi” which the participant is sayer. Due to that, the headline means that Jokowi as the sayer mourns for medical workers who have fallen to COVID-19. In the headline of datum H13, the sayer is represented by the word “ICW”. The process of saying in the headline is “calls” and the remaining clause “for increased transparency in COVID-19-related procurement amid irregularities” is classified as a rheme of the headline. The meaning of the headline is that the government through ICW asks for transparency about data and costs related to COVID-19. The theme for the last datum is used sayer as a participant. For datum H14, The sayer is represented by the word “Medan District Court”. The process “declared” is identified as the process of saying. The word “COVID-19 cluster, one judge dies” is classified as the rheme of the headline.

The participant sener also appears on the headline. From the data, there is only one headline that used sener as a participant of the theme. Based on the previous paragraph, sayer deals with the verbal process which is the process of saying, while sener deals with the mental process which uses the feeling like the process. Sener is the conscious being that is feeling, thinking, or seeing. This participant is endowed with consciousness. The nominal groups which denote non-conscious

entities have to be construed metaphorically as ‘personified’ (Martin et al., 2010). The headline below shows that the participant is a sayer.

H19. Karo regent candidate dies from COVID-19, daughter steps in

In the datum H19. The Theme is “Karo regent candidate.” The theme is marked as a sayer in the headline. It is identified as sayer by the mental process of “dies.” The “dies in the headline means that the Karo regent candidate becomes a victim of the dangers of COVID-19. To respond to the death of the Karo regent candidate, her daughter steps in to handle the event. The rheme of the headline is “from COVID-19, daughter steps in.”

The last participant appeared on the headline is goal. Similar to the sayer as a participant, the goal has also appeared only one on the headline. According to Martin et al. (2010), the goal is either actually brought into existence by the doing or it exists prior to the doing impacted in some way. The goal can be probed with do to/with. Also, it can often be accompanied by a representation of the result of the impact, such as a new location, a new possessor, or a new quality. It also added that the goal is “a participant impacted by a doing (the one done to/with)” (Martin et al., 2010, p. 103). The headline below shows that the participant of the theme is goal.

H1. **Smart city initiatives** aid COVID-19 response

As mention above, the goal is the participant which is impacted by the performance of the process by the actor. The action meant in the headline is “aid.” The theme of the headline is “Smart city initiatives.” The impact of the datum is due to the initiatives of the smart city, it helps in response to the COVID-19. The remaining clause “aid COVID-19 response” is the rheme of the headline.

In this section, the writer reveals the representation of the COVID-19 from the use of Theme in the headline. After finding the theme and the participant of the theme of the headlines, it is concluded that the choice of words in the theme determines the representation of the COVID-19 issue. The headlines show how the choice of word in the theme and rheme determine the representation of COVID-19. The theme shows that COVID-19 is dangerous. It is represented by the different types of participants such as actor, verbiage, sayer, sener, and goal. From 20 headlines above, it shows that COVID-19 is a serious illness.

The use of Actor showing the dangerous COVID-19 by the choice of the verbs that represent the action of the actor. For the verbiage, it can be seen by the content of the headlines. The participant sayer, directly said what content is going to say. Then, for the participant sener, the dangers of COVID-19 sense by the speaker of the content. The last is for the participant goal, the dangers of COVID-19 is seen by the impact of the doing. The theme and rheme of the headlines represent that the government also explicitly said that this pandemic also gives some impacts. Many people death suffering to this COVID-19 and the economic aspect also affected by COVID-19.

4. Conclusion

Critical Discourse Analysis focusing on the theme-rheme analysis in The Jakarta Post newspaper on the COVID-19 issue. The analysis is used to figure out the representation of COVID-19 in Indonesia. The application of the participant actor in

the headlines of the Jakarta Post proves that it shows how dangerous this virus is with the actions taken by the government. The use of verbiage shows the content of COVID-19 said by the experts or the government to show that this virus is seriously dangerous. The participant sayer said by the government shows that COVID-19 lowering the health facilities and the economic aspect. The use of sener also supports the previous analysis that the person impacted by this virus has died. The participant goal shows that the action of the government helps in responding to the COVID-19. The Jakarta Post newspaper uses this theme in order to examine the representations of COVID-19 in Indonesia that is a dangerous virus.

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