

Uncovering Ideology Through Transitivity: A Study of President Jokowi's Apology

Suswanto Ismadi Megah S. ^[1], Sri Sugiharti ^[2], Zulida Abdul Kadir ^[3], Ismael Hasan Alsanafi ^[4],
Saira Kazmi ^[5]

^[1] megah76@yahoo.co.id

^{[1], [2]} Universitas Riau Kepulauan, Batam, Indonesia

^[3] Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, Batu Pahat, Malaysia

^[4] AlQadassiyah University, AlQadassiyah, Iraq

^[5] Quaid-i-Azzam University, Islamabad, Pakistan

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Abstract

In contemporary democratic societies, political apologies have evolved into strategic rhetorical acts used by state leaders to manage public perception, repair moral standing, and reinforce political values. In Indonesia, President Joko Widodo's public apology near the end of his presidency attracted widespread attention and provoked discourse about its underlying ideological motives. Rather than a spontaneous expression of regret, the apology appeared to be a calculated act of political communication, shaped by cultural values and designed to influence the public's perception of his leadership. This study aims to uncover the ideological tendencies embedded in Jokowi's apology by analyzing how the apology is represented in two prominent English-language newspapers in Indonesia, The Jakarta Post (TJP) and The Jakarta Globe (TJG). It seeks to determine how transitivity choices in the language are used to convey deeper political and cultural meanings. Employing a qualitative research design supported by quantitative content analysis, the study integrates Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly the transitivity framework, to examine 43 clauses extracted from news articles published in TJP and TJG. The transitivity analysis reveals that material processes dominate the discourse (40.5%), followed by mental (25.5%) and verbal (23.2%) processes. In terms of participant roles, Actor and Sayer occur most frequently, indicating that Jokowi strategically presented himself as an active doer and a sincere speaker. These linguistic patterns suggest a deliberate construction of identity, emphasizing responsibility, empathy, and leadership. The analysis further shows how Jokowi's apology aligns with Javanese cultural ideals of humility and Islamic values of repentance, which are embedded in Indonesian socio-political discourse. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of how political apologies are not only personal but also ideological acts embedded in media discourse. This study highlights the usefulness of integrating CDA and SFL in uncovering how language functions to maintain power, shape public memory, and preserve political legitimacy in post-presidency contexts. It also underscores the cultural specificity of apology strategies in Indonesia, suggesting that future discourse studies consider local traditions and values when analyzing political speech.

Keywords: apology; critical discourse analysis; ideology; political speech; transitivity

INTRODUCTION

On Thursday night, August 1st, 2024, President Joko Widodo of Indonesia publicly issued an apology as he approached the end of his second and final presidential term (Hapsari, 2024). The apology addressed the mistakes he had made while serving as head of state, signaling a moment of personal humility. More than a personal gesture, however, this act has prompted speculation about

its underlying ideological motives. The president's apology has been interpreted not merely as an acknowledgment of human fallibility, but also as a political discourse aimed at shaping public perception and legacy.

In essence, the function of an apology is multifaceted and heavily influenced by the speaker's identity, intention, and socio-political context (Ahmed, 2017). Although typically associated with correcting wrongdoing, apologies also serve broader social purposes, including relationship repair and image management (Murphy, 2015). Goffman (1971) emphasizes that apologies reflect a dual posture: while acknowledging a breach of social norms, the speaker may also attempt to mitigate blame. This complexity becomes more pronounced when the apology is delivered by a political figure, whose words carry symbolic weight and strategic intent. Apologizing places the speaker in a vulnerable position, yet it can also be used to assert moral authority, especially when the speaker is not directly guilty but chooses to acknowledge responsibility on behalf of a collective or institution.

The political impact of a state leader's apology is particularly significant. Such acts can foster reconciliation and understanding between groups or nations (David & Tam, 2023). In this context, saying "sorry" is not merely an expression of civility but becomes a political statement designed to display integrity and moral leadership. Apologies can function as diplomatic tools, influencing public sentiment, fostering forgiveness, and rebuilding social trust (Chu & Huang, 2020; David, 2017; Lind, 2009; Nobles, 2008). Public sympathy often increases when apologies are perceived as sincere, especially when they are delivered by high-ranking figures such as presidents (Kjaerby, 2024).

Moreover, a political apology can humanize the speaker and establish a shared emotional connection with the audience. This strategy may be employed to address historical injustices, reduce social tension, or promote national unity (Augoustinos, Hastie, & Wright, 2011). A public apology by a head of state not only addresses specific misbehavior but can also serve as a rhetorical tool to frame future policy and shape collective memory (Millam & Don, 2020). As David and Tam (2023) note, apologies are crucial instruments for political leaders seeking to reconcile societal divisions, given their influential role within the national fabric.

This phenomenon has drawn attention in the field of language studies, particularly in media and political discourse, because apologies are typically embedded in texts that either explicitly or implicitly thematize language (Johnson & Ensslin, 2007, p. 6). Discourse Analysis (DA) offers a framework for exploring how language is used in context, especially where formal linguistic analysis proves insufficient to reveal underlying meanings (Eriyanto, 2000, p. 15). In this view, an apology is more than a linguistic act—it is a discourse that conveys social intent and power relations. Thus, analyzing public apologies through DA allows for a deeper understanding of their communicative function.

While traditional DA focused on the internal organization of texts (Fitch & Sanders, 2004), it lacked the robust theoretical grounding needed to expose the ideological content within texts. In response, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) emerged as a subfield, particularly effective in uncovering power dynamics and ideological structures in media discourse (Noor, 2015). CDA developed in the 1980s out of dissatisfaction with approaches that analyzed language without attending to context. When combined with Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly through the lens of transitivity analysis, CDA becomes a powerful tool for revealing ideology in both spoken and written discourse (Kazmi, 2024).

Rooted in "Critical Linguistics" from the University of East Anglia in the 1970s, CDA emphasizes the relationship between language and society, focusing on how texts reinforce or challenge power structures (Asad, Noor, & Jaes, 2019). Key approaches in CDA include van Dijk's socio-cognitive model, Fairclough's social practice model, and Wodak's historical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2009; Wodak, 2011). Of these, Fairclough's three-dimensional framework is most relevant to this study, comprising text analysis, discourse practice, and social practice. This framework is enhanced by Halliday's SFL, which conceptualizes language through three metafunctions, ideational, interpersonal, and textual, each realized within a clause structure (Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Halliday, 1994; Thompson, 2004).

Among these, the ideational metafunction is realized through Transitivity Analysis (TA), which examines how experiences are encoded through participants (e.g., actors, goals, sayers), processes (e.g., material, mental, verbal), and circumstances (e.g., time, place). According to Halliday and

Matthiessen (2004), this system enables analysts to interpret how people, actions, and events are represented in language. Fairclough (1995) emphasizes that TA is vital in CDA as it helps uncover how power and ideology are inscribed in grammatical choices. The process and participant types used in a text determine who is framed as the agent or recipient of actions, revealing patterns of inclusion, exclusion, agency, or passivity. TA has thus been widely used in media discourse to identify how ideological stances are embedded in the representation of actors and events (Fairclough, 1995; Asad et al., 2019).

Despite the growing body of research on political apologies, few studies have examined them in the Indonesian context through a transitivity-CDA framework. While prior studies have explored apology strategies in religious, educational, and regional sociolinguistic contexts (Ansori, 2018; Retnowaty & Maulida, 2019; Zulkhaeriyah et al., 2021), and others have focused on political apology in global settings (Chu & Huang, 2020; Gibney & Warner, 2000; Kitagawa & Chu, 2021), there remains a lack of analysis addressing how Indonesian political figures, particularly President Jokowi, construct ideological messages through public apology in media discourse. This presents a gap in the literature that this study seeks to fill.

This study focuses on Jokowi's final apology as represented in two prominent English-language newspapers in Indonesia—The Jakarta Post (TJP) and The Jakarta Globe (TJG)—to explore how transitivity structures in these texts reflect ideological positioning. These media texts serve as a lens through which Jokowi's political identity and legacy are mediated to a wider audience. The novelty of this study lies in its combination of Fairclough's CDA and Halliday's SFL to reveal how ideology is linguistically encoded in the grammatical construction of apologies within political discourse. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

- (1) What are the process and participant types of the transitivity analysis constructed in the apology of Jokowi's speech?
- (2) What ideology is constructed in the apologetic discourse of Jokowi's speech?

METHOD

For the following reasons, the study employed a qualitative methodology, with a quantitative content analysis as the main research design. The researchers are keen to thoroughly examine the Indonesian president's political speech to ascertain its degree of significance. Consequently, a qualitative design provides a structure for these objectives. However, in order to support qualitative analysis and strengthen the qualitative method, this study employs statistical analysis as well as word and phrase frequency counting, which are then presented as tables. In this study, the text under examination was unveiled using the qualitative technique, and the ideational meanings identified in the text were realized through the application of transitivity processes within Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) Systemic Functional Linguistics.

This study was conducted using a two-stage qualitative-descriptive method. Initially, the text was read thoroughly to comprehend its contents in full. Second, utilizing the framework that Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), the text was divided into manageable sentences for examination. Each clause was then examined using the Transitivity examination. Thus, the text was explored from two perspectives: one broad, in which the text was considered as a whole, and another, in which the text writer employed clause-by-clause transitivity analysis to convey the ideational metafunctions of the text.

As this study employed a qualitative style of investigation, the researcher became the primary instrument for gathering the data. To collect data for critical discourse analysis, the text was closely studied, and the sociocultural and ideological milieu in which it was written was examined. This was carried out to thoroughly comprehend the text's substance, which would serve as the foundation for additional study.

This study analyzed 43 clauses drawn from news articles reporting President Jokowi's public apology, published in Indonesia's two leading English-language newspapers: The Jakarta Post (TJP) and The Jakarta Globe (TJG). The analysis applied Transitivity Analysis (TA) as part of Systemic Functional Linguistics to uncover how language structures reflect ideological meanings. The data collection involved downloading the relevant articles, and then copying and pasting the content into Microsoft Word for text processing. The texts were carefully segmented into individual clauses, the

unit of analysis in transitivity studies, which were then categorized by types of processes (material, verbal, mental, relational, behavioral, and existential) and participant roles (such as Actor, Goal, Sayer, Sensor, etc.). To facilitate analysis, each clause was transferred into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, where occurrences of each process and participant type were systematically labeled and counted. This practical approach allowed the researcher to observe patterns in how actions and actors were represented in the discourse, especially in terms of agency, responsibility, and ideological positioning. By identifying who was portrayed as the "doer" or "receiver" in each clause, the study aimed to expose embedded ideological roles and highlight how grammatical structures serve to support Jokowi's political image through language.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data findings are based on the clauses obtained from The Jakarta Post (TJP) and The Jakarta Globe (TJG). The analysis shows that TJP contains a total of 24 clauses, while TJG contributes a smaller number with 18 clauses. The results indicate that the verbal process appears most frequently, accounting for 13 occurrences (34.2%), followed by both mental and relational processes, each with 7 occurrences (18.4%). There are no instances of existential or behavioral processes. These findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of Process in the news media

Types of Process	Quantities (%)		Total
	TJP	TJG	
Material	3 (3.9%)	13(31.2%)	17 (40.5%)
Behavioural	2 (4.6%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (4.6%)
Mental	7 (16.2%)	4 (9.3%)	11 (25.5%)
Verbal	6 (13.3%)	4 (9.3%)	10 (23.2%)
Existential	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Relational	6 (13.9%)	3 (6.7%)	9 (20.9%)
	24 (56%)	18(43.8%)	43 (100%)

The findings showed that the most common process represented to Material process with 17 occurrences (40.5%), in both English newspapers in Indonesia TJP and TJG, followed by the process of Mental with 11 occurrences (25.5%), representing a pattern of the grammatical role of Sensor. Then, the Verbal process came after the Mental process with 10 occurrences (23.2%), followed by the Relational process with 9 occurrences (20.9%). Then, the Behavioural process with only 2 occurrences (4.6%). The last is the Existential process without any occurrence used by Jokowi.

The most frequently occurring process in Jokowi's apologetic discourse is the material process, which represents actions or events in the real world. As the process of 'doing,' material clauses reflect activity, agency, and effort, often associated with power and control (Zhang, 2017). Fairclough (1995) emphasizes that transitivity choices, particularly material processes, are instrumental in expressing cultural, political, or ideological meanings. In this context, Jokowi uses material processes to depict himself as an active, solution-oriented leader. His apology, therefore, functions not only as an expression of humility but also as a means of reinforcing his public image as a president who works diligently for the nation. By consistently occupying the grammatical role of Actor in these clauses, Jokowi projects an ideological stance centered on responsibility, perseverance, and service, conveying to the audience that his leadership has been defined by tangible action and commitment.

Table 2. Types of Participants in the news media

Types of Participants	Quantities (%)		Total
	TJP	TJG	
Actor	3 (6.9%)	13(30.2%)	17 (40.5%)
Behaver	2 (4.6%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (4.6%)
Senser	7 (16.2%)	4 (9.3%)	11 (25.5%)
Sayer	6 (13.3%)	4 (9.3%)	10 (23.2%)
Existent	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Carrier	4 (9.3%)	1(2.9%)	5 (12.6%)
Token	2 (4.6%)	2 (4.6%)	4 (9.3%)
	24 (56.2%)	18(43.8%)	43 (100%)

As shown in Table 2, the most dominant participant role in the data is the actor. This role appears consistently in both The Jakarta Post and The Jakarta Globe, suggesting that the discourse strategically constructs Jokowi as a figure of action. In transitivity analysis, the actor represents the individual who performs the material process—the "doer" in the clause. By portraying Jokowi as an actor, the media emphasizes his agency and reinforces the perception of a proactive leader. This role placement implies that he does not merely reflect on his term passively but actively engages with the responsibilities of governance. The positioning also serves to align him with the ideological value of hard work, a quality that resonates positively with the Indonesian public. Through material processes and the actor role, Jokowi is discursively framed as a committed, hands-on leader who continues to take meaningful actions, even in the closing moments of his presidency.

Following this, the role of senser emerges as another significant participant function, typically associated with mental processes such as feeling, thinking, or perceiving. This highlights the emotional and cognitive dimensions of Jokowi's apology, suggesting that he is not only a leader who acts but also one who reflects deeply on his experiences. In political discourse, the senser role adds a layer of sincerity and introspection to public statements. By presenting Jokowi in this role, the media constructs him as a thoughtful and emotionally attuned president, enhancing the credibility of his apology. The use of mental processes invites the public to view him as someone aware of past shortcomings and genuinely concerned about the implications of his actions. This type of representation is powerful in building trust, as it shows that the speaker is not detached but personally invested in the outcomes of his leadership. The emphasis on the senser role ultimately helps bridge the emotional gap between the leader and the people, humanizing Jokowi and softening political tensions.

Another prominent participant role found in the data is the sayer, which is tied to verbal processes. This role signifies that Jokowi is frequently portrayed as the one who speaks, communicates, or delivers messages. In the context of a political apology, this representation is crucial because it foregrounds the act of public acknowledgment and transparency. By appearing as the sayer, Jokowi takes ownership of his message and projects himself as accountable and communicative. This aligns with the public expectation that leaders should not only act but also speak honestly about their decisions and mistakes. The presence of the sayer role supports the idea that the apology was meant to reach and resonate with a wide audience, serving as a bridge between the state and the public. Moreover, emphasizing Jokowi's voice reinforces his continued relevance in political discourse, signaling that even as his term ends, his words carry authority and intent.

The roles of carrier and token, both linked to relational processes, also appear in the data and play a significant part in defining Jokowi's attributes and symbolic identity. These roles function to establish what Jokowi "is" or "represents" rather than what he "does" or "says." The carrier role assigns qualities or characteristics to Jokowi, while the token role connects him with specific identities or symbolic labels, such as being a responsible leader or a unifying national figure. These representations are essential in shaping how the public perceives him beyond his actions or statements. They emphasize the values associated with his leadership and frame his legacy in terms of what he embodies. In political discourse, especially during moments of transition, constructing identity through relational processes can influence how a leader is remembered. By positioning Jokowi in these roles, the media reinforces his ideological alignment with national values and stability, helping to legitimize his actions and maintain public confidence.

Meanwhile, the behavior role is the least represented in the data, appearing only marginally across the corpus. This role, typically linked to physiological or psychological behaviors such as smiling, reacting, or expressing emotions, plays a minimal part in constructing Jokowi's apology. Its scarcity suggests that the media avoids portraying him as a purely emotional or reactive figure. Instead, the focus remains on his deliberate actions, thoughtful reflections, and formal speech. The limited use of the behavior role supports the narrative of a composed and rational leader who communicates strategically rather than impulsively. This discursive choice reflects an ideological preference for projecting strength, control, and professionalism in political communication. By minimizing representations of emotional behavior, the discourse preserves Jokowi's authority and presents the apology as carefully structured rather than emotionally driven.

Lastly, the existent role does not appear at all in the dataset, indicating a complete absence of existential processes in Jokowi's apologetic discourse. This is a notable pattern, as existential clauses typically assert the presence of a situation or condition without assigning responsibility. The omission of this role suggests a deliberate avoidance of vague or impersonal constructions. Rather than stating that problems or suffering "exist," the discourse attributes specific actions, thoughts, and feelings to Jokowi himself. The lack of existential processes reinforces the narrative of a leader who is present, involved, and directly accountable. It also helps the media maintain a strong focus on agency and clarity in the representation of Jokowi's message. Overall, the participant structures reveal a strategic framing of the president as active, reflective, and responsible, an image carefully constructed through grammatical choices in the media.

The construction of participant roles in Jokowi's apologetic discourse also reveals an emotional appeal intended to influence public perception and foster national reconciliation. By presenting himself as a reflective and communicative leader, Jokowi seeks to evoke understanding and empathy from the Indonesian people. His apology is not merely a statement of regret but a strategic discourse act aimed at reshaping how the public views both his leadership and the nation's current condition. Through the media, particularly *The Jakarta Post* and *The Jakarta Globe*, Jokowi's message is distributed widely to ensure that his intentions reach the broader public. As a figure in a high societal position, his words carry weight, and the mass dissemination of his apology suggests an effort to align public sentiment with his own reflections and aspirations. The ideological function of the apology, therefore, lies in managing public emotions, shaping narrative interpretations, and encouraging forgiveness and continued support. By inviting the public to accept his apology and understand his position, Jokowi uses the discourse as a form of soft power to reinforce his influence in the final stages of his presidency.

Building on the ideological implications of Jokowi's apology, the social practice analysis reveals the sociocultural framework in which the discourse was produced. As an Indonesian leader of Javanese descent, Jokowi's communicative style is deeply shaped by Javanese cultural values, where speech acts, particularly apologies, are rich in meaning and context. In Javanese culture, apologies are often expressed verbally and go beyond simply admitting fault; they function as strategic acts to preserve harmony, show humility, and reinforce social cohesion (Sari, 2021). This cultural background significantly influences language use and speech act choices, including when and how one apologizes (Asmali & Yavuz, 2014; Tabatabaei et al., 2018; Sumarti et al., 2020; Ramlah & Sartini, 2023). Apologizing, therefore, becomes a means of maintaining good relationships and demonstrating cultural sensitivity. For Jokowi, the act of apologizing is not merely a personal or political obligation, it reflects a deeper cultural script where apologies may also carry a political tendency. Within Javanese sociopolitical contexts, an apology can be used not only after wrongdoing but also in anticipation of sensitive actions or to foster unity within a group. Thus, his public apology operates both as a culturally informed gesture and as a political strategy aimed at unifying the nation. By embedding these values into his speech and distributing it through national media to a predominantly Indonesian audience, Jokowi transmits his ideology of hard work and collective harmony. This aligns with the earlier finding that material processes dominate the discourse, reinforcing his constructed image as an active and responsible national leader.

The analysis of socio-cultural practice provides insight into how Jokowi's apology is embedded within the wider ideological and cultural structures of Javanese society. This practice relates to the context beyond the text itself, how social values and norms influence the construction and reception

of discourse. Jokowi's socio-cultural background is shaped by the values of Javanese society, where he was born and raised. Although the Javanese-Indonesian population is multireligious, Islam remains the dominant religion and continues to influence everyday life. As a Javanese Muslim, Jokowi's act of apologizing resonates with Islamic teachings, which emphasize that the best person is the one who repents immediately after committing a mistake (Lim et al., 2022). Additionally, in Javanese culture, apologies are not expressed in isolation but are often accompanied by elaborative and polite language, reflecting humility and respect (Hikmah, 2015). This form of communication is deeply rooted in Javanese identity, shaping behavior from birth to death, and remains inseparable from one's personal and collective expression. The findings also reflect that Javanese people, who constitute over 45% of Indonesia's population, are politically dominant and significantly influence national discourse. As leaders in high authority are often seen as moral guides, the values embedded in Jokowi's apology reflect not only personal intention but also the cultural expectations of his Javanese constituents. The president's rhetorical strategy, therefore, mirrors a broader ideological philosophy rooted in both Islamic doctrine and Javanese tradition, creating a discourse that resonates with the social reality of the majority (Hikmah, 2015; Lim et al., 2022). In this way, socio-cultural practice plays a critical role in shaping both the creation and interpretation of Jokowi's apologetic speech.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the political discourse surrounding President Jokowi's public apology, as presented in *The Jakarta Post* and *The Jakarta Globe*, illustrates a deliberate use of language to shape his ideological stance through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The transitivity analysis reveals that the material process is most dominant, positioning Jokowi primarily as an Actor, a figure who is actively engaged in solving national issues. This representation is not incidental but ideologically loaded, as it signals power, decisiveness, and responsibility. The verbal and mental processes follow closely, projecting him as a communicative and reflective leader who is aware of the nation's circumstances and emotionally in tune with the people. The relational process, though less frequent, adds depth by emphasizing Jokowi's identity and symbolic role as a national figure. The scarcity of behavioral processes and the complete absence of existential ones highlight the rhetorical strategy of foregrounding agency while avoiding passivity or emotional vulnerability.

Further analysis of participant roles complements these findings. Jokowi is constructed through dominant grammatical roles such as Actor, Senser, and Sayer, suggesting a leader who acts, reflects, and communicates purposefully. These roles enable the apology to function as more than just a regretful statement; they help shape public perception of Jokowi as a diligent and morally grounded statesman. His constructed identity in these roles supports an overarching ideological goal: to solidify his leadership legacy and generate public sympathy as he approaches the end of his presidency. By using transitivity structures to highlight his role as a doer and speaker, Jokowi reinforces the image of a leader who remains engaged and committed to national welfare, even in his final term.

In terms of discourse and socio-cultural practice, the distribution of his apology through formal media channels and the cultural lens of Javanese and Islamic values further amplified its impact. Apologizing in Javanese culture is not merely an admission of fault but a culturally embedded gesture aimed at restoring harmony and social balance. Additionally, Islamic teachings emphasize sincere repentance, which adds a spiritual dimension to Jokowi's discourse. By embedding these values in his apology, Jokowi not only addresses his past but also projects humility, responsibility, and unity, resonating with the cultural expectations of the Indonesian majority. This layered discourse serves both as an act of image repair and a political instrument for maintaining public trust beyond his presidential tenure.

Based on the findings, future studies may further explore how apologies by political leaders differ across cultural contexts, especially in multilingual or multiethnic nations like Indonesia. Researchers can also compare how apologies are framed in different media types—such as televised speeches versus online articles, to assess the impact of the platform on ideological construction. Additionally, combining CDA with audience reception studies would provide insights into how such

apologies are interpreted by the public. This would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between discourse, ideology, and political legitimacy in diverse sociopolitical environments.

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