

## WEIGHING IRAN'S NUCLEAR: CONSTRUING REALITY THROUGH ITS OPPOSITION

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### ***Abstract***

Political speech has been an interesting social phenomenon to study. The language interplays within political discourse discover more than what is said. This study analyzes Benjamin Netanyahu speech in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) 2013 under the discussion of nuclear Iran. The study focuses on the representation of nuclear Iran based on Benjamin's perspective and uncovers the power strata between Iran and Israel. The study is conducted under a qualitative approach by using the three stages model of Critical Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional grammar approach. The result of the study indicates that nuclear Iran has the capability to contribute several impacts in the energy sector, peace and resolution process worldwide, and terrorism sphere in the Middle East. Benjamin's speech also mirrors the power strata between Iran and Israel. More specifically, Benjamin implicitly acknowledges Iran as a powerful party within the discourse.

***Keywords:*** Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)  
Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), politics, power

### **INTRODUCTION**

Language serves communicative purposes beyond sharing ideas and thoughts. Halliday (1985) believes that language serves the function as needed by the speaker. Specifically, as one of social activity, linguistic activity functions to maintain or break several social conventions, rules, and relationships. In today's world, where war is no longer favorable, language also functions to win over political dispute through diplomacy in a political meeting. Such communication is done at a political meeting attended by political figures on an international scale (Mellisen, 2005).

Through diplomacy, political interest is bargained by negotiating them. Language in this case plays an important role in bargaining several political issues and interests. This makes politics becomes a discursive phenomenon and language itself becomes a political phenomenon (Pelinka, 2007) Through language, political figures exert their power to

maintain or break off social constraints. Dijk (2006) even states that politics is one of the social fields that is ideological because different parties with their ideology, interest, and power are at stake. The main goal of exerting power through language is creating a political group regarding particular political matters. This can be happening because as one of social activity, linguistic activity reflects the speaker's social and ideological belief. Thus, the political group is based on the similarity of ideologies, interests, and alliances (Dijk, 2006).

In this study, the researcher specifies the discussion of political discourse into the discourse discussing politics and politicians. More specifically, this study will discuss Benjamin Netanyahu's political speech in UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) 2013 in the case of nuclear Iran. Diplomatic meeting such as UNGA is conducted as one of the diplomatic talks where the members of the United Nation (henceforth: UN) gather and discuss current International problems and the solutions. In this case, Benjamin's political speech is deemed as Benjamin's political struggle to reach the agreement and to solve the International disputes.

Not to mention, opposing or defending particular parties in such political meetings pose a challenge for the speaker. This is because the spoken form of the text, one of them is political speech, could not be corrected once it is stated. The best thing a speaker could do is revising his previous statement by saying "let me explain" or "in other words" and deliver his revisions (Nick, 2001). Thus, the speaker needs to be very careful in choosing his words to avoid misunderstandings and any meaning errors.

As in nature, the field of politics is a battle of power because, in politics, politicians need to maintain their power and position through the text produced by them (Dijk, 1997). Thus, the analysis of politics belongs to Political Discourse Analysis. In this paper, the complexity of the political discourse is analyzed using the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Grammar/Linguistics (SFG/L) approach. This approach aligns with the CDA concept which deems language, as one of the social practices, as a means of exerting power particular participant in the discourse. Both CDA and SFG agree that analysis of language should be done on three levels. The first analysis is text analysis at the textual level, the second is processing analysis drawn in discursive level and the last is the social analysis done under explanation level. The textual analysis focuses on the description of the object of analysis (Janks, 1997). Processing analysis denotes the way the object of analysis is perceived (Janks, 1997). The textual analysis highlights the socio-historical condition governing the process (Janks, 1997).

Since the object of this study is nuclear Iran, this study will employ ideational metafunction and left the interpersonal and textual metafunctions behind. This is because nuclear Iran is an inanimate object. Thus the focus of the analysis is on the portrayal of nuclear Iran holistically as well as its impact predicted by the opposition country, Israel.

Several studies have been conducted in the scope of Iran & Israel's political discourse. Irham and Wahyudi (2012) note that the legitimation of political discourse can be exerted through the use of disclaimers in the text. Specifically, the paper found that Netanyahu

used disclaimers to legitimize his political state and delegitimize his opposition at the same time. Kadkhodae, E., & Ghasemi Tari, Z. (2017) discover that discursive tools such as lexical style and argumentation, are used to frame Iran as a security threat to the U.S. and its US allies, specifically Israel and the international community. Amin (2019) reveals that in constructing Iran as a security threat, Netanyahu employs five elements of securitization theory including the threatening subject and threatened object systematically through various discursive strategies and rhetorical devices. Those studies add more insight to this present study in describing the portrayal of nuclear Iran and its contribution to the adversary of Iran & Israel.

Based on the background explained above, this study is conducted to reveal nuclear Iran based on the perspective of Benjamin as the representative of the opposition and Jewish state based on the experience he had and traced to the interpretation he might have within the discourse. Not to mention, this study also uncovers the power strata of the Jewish state and Iran based on the phenomenon of nuclear Iran.

## **REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Systemic Functional Grammar**

Systemic Functional Grammar or Systemic Functional Linguistics believes that language is systemic and functional. Language is systemic because word-choice is formed through a system (a system of an article, a system of definiteness, etc.) (Bache, 2010). Language is also functional because the structure or its form is used to serve particular communicative purposes socially (Bache, 2010). Without serving that function, the structure of language is considered pointless (Endarto, 2017). Though in some cases, function matters more than structure, one needs to know and understand the structure of language to produce an effective utterance (Endarto, 2017). Thus, it is important to note that language depends much on the context where the member of discourse take place (Butt et. al., 2000).

In SFG, the meaning-making process is served through three metafunctions. The first metafunction is ideational. This metafunction is reflected through the transitivity system (process, participant, and circumstances). The components of ideational metafunction are experiential and logical functions (Barlett and Grady, 2017). It is because through language the discourse member allows their representation of events and all elements embedded in that events along with the logical relations between a state of affair and that events (Barlett and Grady, 2017). Through the first metafunction, the discourse member construes the reality based on his perspective. This metafunction deems that language is used to represent experience (Halliday, 1994). The second metafunction is interpersonal metafunction which is drawn through mood and modality system. It discusses how the interlocutors interact communicatively and enact social relationships (Halliday, 1994) (Martin, 1996). Through this metafunction, language is used as social action (Barlett and Grady, 2017). The third metafunction is textual which is defined through the analysis of theme and rheme. The analysis of theme and rheme allows us to identify the

newsworthiness of the text based on how the speaker arranges the information by constructing a logical and coherent text (Halliday:1994) (Barlett and Grady, 2017).

### **Political Discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis**

Discourse referring to the political field is considered as a Political Discourse. Political Discourse is exercised within the discourse related to political activities such as ruling, governing, legislating, voting, and protesting. Not to mention, the situation and place where the discourse takes place also determine whether the discourse is political or not. The texts delivered in political communicative events such as cabinet meetings and parliamentary sessions are deemed as Political Discourse. Thus, the stakeholder of Political Discourse is not only the politicians but also the society and the mass media. Specifically, Political Discourse has several criteria in defining its activities, situation, and the subjects of the discourse (Dijk, 1997). Since politics is the battlefield of power, the critique of the political discourse is closely related to the critical analysis. Fairclough (1995) argues that the term critical should be able to criticize the relation between properties of text and social processes to address the meaning behind the text which is not asserted. The analysis is demanded to be not only descriptive but also interpretive and explanative. Therefore, Critical Discourse Analyst should make a red line between the form of the and the function of language

### **METHOD**

To get a comprehensive understanding of the social phenomenon, this study is drawn through a qualitative approach under the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis using Systemic Functional Grammar as the tool of analysis. The data source is the transcript of Benjamin Netanyahu's speech in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) 2013. The data source is available to download at <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.550012>. Since the whole speech is not only talking about Iran's nuclear, the researcher chooses the sentence which has a "nuclear Iran" expression. Further, the sentence is analyzed based on the role of the expression in the sentence. The utterances positioning nuclear Iran as the affecting participant are taken as the data.

The position of nuclear Iran and its role are later discussed in the findings and discussion parts by using Fairclough's three stages of analysis. The first stage is focusing on anything represented in the text. This stage belongs to the descriptive level which uncovers the roles and processes represented through the use of vocabularies. The second stage is the discursive level focusing on several factors interplaying within the production and interpretation of the text. The last stage is the explanation level denoting the scope of the social and socio-historical practices within the discourse. This stage denotes several social conditions manifested in the text.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **The roles of nuclear Iran found in the text**

As an affecting participant, Iran's nuclear program appears in two kinds of processes, material and relational. The detailed number of the processes is presented in the table below.

Table 1: The result of ideational process discussing Iran's nuclear as the affecting participant

No.	Ideational Process	Total
1.	Material	2
2.	Relational	8

In detail, the material process found in discussing Iran's nuclear program as the affecting participant is analyzed below.

Excerpt 1: Today our hope for the future is challenged by a nuclear-armed Iran that seeks our destruction.

Table 2: The table of the material process

No.	Actor	Material process	Goal	Circumstances
1.	A nuclear-armed Iran	Challenges	Our hope	For the future
2.	A nuclear-armed Iran	Seeks	Our destruction	

Notice that in defining the subject of the sentence or actor in the material process, the speaker equipped the utterance "nuclear Iran" with the word "armed" in the middle. This collocation implied several notions. First, the word armed functioned as an adjective indicates that nuclear Iran is carried as a weapon. Second, as the word suggests, being "armed" gives a notion of attacking and being attacked which leads to a sense of protection. In this case, Benjamin does not deem nuclear Iran as one of innovation of natural resources but as an armament that gives Iran an ability to attack any parties and to defend its nation.

In the column of the material process, there are two kinds of transitive verbs; challenges and seeks. Those verbs function to describe the action of the actor. They have also been an indicator of the material process. Through this process, an actor of the process, Iran's nuclear program, is deemed as an active agent that could give an interrupted impact from its action.

The goals of the process and the circumstances mentioned implied that Benjamin projects two possibilities of scenario. The first scenario is happening right now and another occurs in the future time. In other words, Benjamin assumes that the destruction due to nuclear Iran hampers today's condition. Meanwhile, in the future, people's hope is also being at stake because of nuclear Iran. The word "hope" has a positive connotation. It implies an ideal condition wished by the speaker. However, when projecting this condition, the speaker uses a negative verb as the material process. Meanwhile, for describing the word "destruction", having negative connotations, the speaker utilizes the neutral connoted verb "seeks".

Besides performing the material process, Benjamin also performs a relational process when bringing up nuclear Iran as an affecting participant. Of the eight relational processes, five of them are causative relational while the rest are intensive relational. Four of the causative relational processes mention a nuclear-armed Iran as the carrier while the last causative brings up the danger of nuclear Iran as the carrier.

The detail of the analysis of causative relational is drawn through the excerpt and tables 3 and 4 below.

Excerpt 2: A nuclear-armed Iran would have a chokehold on the world's main energy supplies. It would trigger nuclear proliferation throughout the Middle East, turning the most unstable part of the planet into a nuclear tinderbox. And for the first time in history, it would make the specter of nuclear terrorism a clear and present danger.

Table 3: The table of causative relational process

N o.	Carrier	Relational: Causative	Attribute	Circumstances
1	A nuclear-armed Iran	Would have a chokehold	On the (world's) main energy supplies	Worldwide
2	A nuclear-armed Iran	Would trigger	Nuclear proliferation	Throughout the Middle East
3	A nuclear-armed Iran	Turns	(The most unstable part of the planet) into a nuclear tinderbox	The most unstable part of the planet
4	A nuclear-armed Iran	Would make	The specter of nuclear terrorism	(In the Middle East) A clear and present danger

Causative relational are brought up when the speaker tries to portray the capability of the agent, a carrier of the process. The difference between material and causative relational is the level of power exerted on the public. In the material process, the power exertion of the actor is drawn explicitly while in causative relational the power is implicitly exerted. This is because in causative relational the impact is indirect and despite giving direct impact, the process is aimed to change the characteristics of the attribute.

Though the first causative process has a possessive relational mark "have" yet the idea of the whole sentence has made it a causative relational. By using the metaphor "chokehold", the speaker does not portray nuclear Iran as a human being who has hands performing a chokehold. Yet, the speaker tries to exaggerate the harmful impact of nuclear Iran on energy supplies worldwide.

The rest 3 causative relations; trigger, turns, and make, indicate a condition of forming a cause in the Middle East. "Trigger" projects the situation that causes another event, "turns" refers to the situation where change happens, and "make" denotes the process of creating something new. Those three causative relational are utilized by Benjamin to give a portrayal of the future in the circumstances of the Middle East.

Besides, pointing out nuclear Iran as an armament, Benjamin also describes the dangers of nuclear Iran through another causative relation. Interestingly, this causative relational projects the other two processes.

Excerpt 3: The dangers of a nuclear-armed Iran and the emergence of other threats in our region have led many of our Arab neighbors to recognize, finally recognize, that Israel is not their enemy.

Table 4: The table of causative relational process projecting other processes

No.	Carrier	Relation: Causative	Attribute				
			Senser	Mental Process	Phenomenon		
					Token	Relation: intensive	Value
1.	The dangers of a nuclear-armed Iran and the emergence of other threats in our region	Have led	many of our Arab neighbors	to recognize, finally, recognize	that Israel	Is not	Their enemy

The predicate of causative relational "have led" denotes a cause that changes the characteristic of Arab and Israel. The change of Arabs characteristic is projected through the other two processes. Mental process, projected by the causative relational inferring a state of affair. A state of affair, mentioned by Benjamin, is exerted through another intensive relational process. "Recognize" denotes a new condition that was not acknowledged before. When Benjamin says that Arabs recognize Israel as not an enemy, it means that long before the dangers of nuclear Iran horrify the Middle East, the Jewish state is deemed as an enemy.

Excerpt 4: Yet, as dangerous as a nuclear-armed North Korea is, it pales in comparison to the danger of a nuclear-armed Iran. A nuclear-armed Iran in the Middle East wouldn't be another North Korea. It would be another 50 North Koreas.

Table 5: The table of Identifying the relational process

N o.	Token	Relational: Identifying	Value
1.	It (Nuclear-armed North Korea)	Pales in comparison to	The danger of nuclear-armed Iran
2.	A nuclear-armed Iran	Wouldn't be	Another North Korea
3.	A nuclear-armed Iran	Would be	Another 50 North Koreas

When the speaker wants to analyze the quality of a state of affairs, identifying relational serves this goal best. As described in the table, the quality of nuclear Iran is compared to the quality of nuclear North Korea. The first similarity is portrayed when Benjamin expresses the Token of the process. He also equipped Nuclear North Korea with an adjective armed in the middle of the phrase. Not to mention, the selection of token and value has defined that nuclear North Korea and Iran are comparable.

### **Plausible factors interplaying within the production and interpretation of the text**

Through these material processes in table 2, Benjamin construes two states of affair. First, Benjamin is afraid that nuclear Iran worsens the Middle East conflict. As in the current status quo, the Middle East has been inflicted with political, geographical, and ideological conflict as well as terrorism issues within the area. The existence of nuclear Iran could raise the tension between countries and may lead to a bigger state of war, a nuclear war. Nuclear Iran could also be a means for Iran to claim itself as a powerful block in the Middle East. This condition may also be utilized by Iran to create more of Iran's proxies. Therefore, a calm and peaceful situation will not be reached as long as nuclear Iran exists. Second, Benjamin also afraid of being attacked by Iran through its nuclear. This fear is reasonable because, for Iran, Israel is an alien colonizing the land of Palestinians (Nader, 2013). However, to horrify his fear, Benjamin uses the pronoun "our" which indicates that Iran may also attack other countries. Since the speech is delivered in an international scope, the pronoun also implicitly indicates that Benjamin regards the International as his allies, not Iran's.

As in table 3, the first Benjamin's concern considering nuclear Iran capability is its impact on energy supplies worldwide. This consideration is supported by the fact that Iran, as an importer of natural gas, needs to import gasoline and other refined oil products for Iranian consumption (ACA Research Staff, 2013). Iran is also lack technology in tapping and sustaining oil production while most of the technology in processing Iran's oil is owned by western companies (ACA Research Staff, 2013). Therefore, the preponderant need for Iran's energy would mitigate the oil allotment. The second consideration brought up by Benjamin is the circumstances of the process, the Middle East. Iranian-Israeli adversary and other Middle East conflicts are spiced with terrorism issue. This phenomenon has made the Middle east vulnerable than any other parts of the world. As written in the report for the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), Iran supports



terrorism and the anti-western group would be more than just defensive purposes if Iran is developing nuclear energy (Kahl, Dalton, Irvine, 2012). Iran is subjected covertly to support Hizballah, Hamas, and other militant groups by giving them lethal aid and armaments (Kahl, Dalton, Irvine, 2012). Thus, the nuclear backups from Iran to militant groups would create the emergence of Middle East nuclear rivals and the tension among countries (Kahl, Dalton, Irvine, 2012).

The possible reason why Benjamin prefers to use a disclaimer as Intensive Relational, as discussed in table 4, is because he is aware that some of the International communities still consider Israel as the enemy of Arab and he wants to highlight the change of that perspective in International communities. By mentioning that they are no longer an enemy, Benjamin tries to construe one state of affair. He wants to brag about the friendship to denote Arab support and perspective that Israel is no longer an invader of the land.

In table 5, to glorify the horror, Benjamin even exaggerates the impact of nuclear Iran as 50 times the danger of North Korea's. His fear is reasonable due to the track record of North Korea which fails in cooperating with the world in terms of its nuclear. This has created tensions in the International community.

#### **Petite explanation of Iran-Israel socio-historical context**

In a world where war is no longer favorable, the political dispute is done through diplomacy in a political meeting. Diplomacy is an official communication designed for foreign publics (Melissen, 2005). Such communication is done at political meetings attended by political figures in an International scale. Through diplomacy, political interest is bargained by negotiating them. Language in this case plays an important role in bargaining several political issues and interests. Through language, political figures exert their power to maintain or break off social constraints. Dijk (2006) even states that politics is one of the social fields that is ideological because different parties with their ideology, interest, and power are at stake.

When Iran develops its nuclear, the safety of Israel, as its neighbor-opposition country, is at stake. This motivates Benjamin in delivering such a speech in UNGA. Since his speech is criticizing nuclear Iran, his speech is classified as hate speech. As in nature, hate speech is performed to provoke more hatred toward the target. In this case, Benjamin does not only inform how horrible nuclear Iran is. He also wants the International community to be aware of nuclear danger and feels the same insecurities as him. When the fear is Internationalized, International's security will also be at stake due to nuclear Iran. This could benefit Benjamin because he would get more allies in opposing Iran.

Creating such allies is classified as Benjamin's struggle in creating a dominant bloc or powerful participant within the discourse. This kind of group can only be achieved if they share similar ideologies, interests, and alliances (Dijk: 2006). The powerful participant has the privilege to choose which discourse types applied to all members (Fairclough: 1989). By choosing the discourse type, the powerful participants control the contributions of the other member through several constraints (Fairclough, 1989). The bigger the dominant

bloc created in a discourse, the more power will be exerted in discourse. Thus, it results in more constrain for the powerless parties in giving their contribution. The fact that Benjamin tries to form a powerful bloc implies that Israel is not powerful enough to face Iran all alone. Thus, it denotes that somehow Iran is seen as a more powerful participant than Israel itself in Benjamin's eye.

### **Plausible critical assumption**

It is horrible for Israel to have Iran successfully develop its nuclear, moreover when it is built on secrecy. Secret nuclear Iran haunts the Jewish people because, as the opposition of Arab in the Middle East, it can lead to a nuclear war. Not to mention, Iran is not willing to share the development of its nuclear, since Iran does not ratify the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (henceforth: NPT). Iran was once ratified the NPT and violated its ratification due to its Iranian Revolution which led to the damage of the Iran-U.S. relationship. Iran and U.S. hostility has affected the relationship of Iran with Israel since Israel is one of the U.S. allies. This makes both countries hide nuclear development because they do not want their power is known by each other. If Iran and Israel know each other's nuclear development, the possibility of nuclear warheads is bigger than the current possibility because this enables the more powerful party to confidently attack the powerless one. Thus, the secret nuclear development built by both countries is somehow profitable. The uncertainty of power disables them to pull the trigger of a nuclear warhead. In other words, we can assume that, in the current situation, secrecy is the key to prevent nuclear warhead.

In fact, developing any energy, including nuclear, is the sovereign right of any country. If peace is defined as hindering the possible nuclear warhead, we can let both countries keep their nuclear in secret. However, if we want to achieve both peace and justice, there should be a third party which is more powerful than Iran and Israel's allies that is able to push any countries involved in this adversary to uncover their nuclear abilities and oppose the uranium supplier of those countries to stop giving them supplies in the middle of Iran & Israel reconciliation.

### **CONCLUSION**

The processes embedded in Benjamin's speech are material, causative relational, and intensive relational. Both material and causative relational processes imply that nuclear Iran is impactful enough. While the material process reflects the ability of nuclear Iran explicitly, causative relational shows its capability in harming the situation worldwide implicitly. Several factors that are impacted by nuclear Iran are the peace and resolution condition worldwide, the allotment of energy worldwide, and the terrorism sphere in the Middle East. This speech is also considered as hate speech aimed to persuade other countries in the International community to oppose nuclear Iran. This action is done by Benjamin because he unconsciously acknowledged that Iran is more powerful than the Jewish state with its nuclear.

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