

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION IN ERIC MUSA PILIANG'S "KNOW THY NEIGHBORS"

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how ethnic discrimination is depicted in the short story "Know Thy Neighbors" by Eric Musa Piliang. The study utilized a descriptive qualitative method. The researcher utilized transitivity as a tool to analyze the sentences. The analyzed sentences were interpreted and connected to the story's background and the social context concerning ethnic discrimination. The findings were discussed based on three discourse dimensions proposed by Fairclough. The study revealed that racism against Indonesians of Chinese descent is described through various forms of physical violence. The short story also delves into an in-depth analysis of social practices, specifically focusing on the causes of racism against Indonesians of Chinese descent. It highlights how economic anxiety and media influence significantly shape public opinion.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, ethnic discrimination, transitivity, Know Thy Neighbours

Introduction

Every individual deserves to be treated with equality, regardless of their race, beliefs, ethnicity, gender, and other factors. Discrimination refers to the unfair treatment and denial of human rights that individuals experience based on the fact that they belong in a specific group, class, or category. Ethnic discrimination is the most prevalent form of discrimination in society (Sumodiningrat & Nabila, 2022). Ethnic discrimination occurs when someone or a group of people are treated unfavorably based on their ethnicity.

Ethnic discrimination in Indonesia has been a significant issue, especially after the New Order regime ended in 1998 (Bertrand, 2003). The Chinese minority in Indonesia has historically experienced discrimination, particularly during the New Order era when there were attempts to assimilate them into the national community (Mustajab et al., 2023). This paper aims to discuss the portrayal of ethnic discrimination in the short story "Know Thy Neighbors" by Eric Musa Piliang (2018). "Know Thy Neighbors" tells the story of a resilient single mother of Chinese-Indonesian descent who, along with her two children, manages to survive the devastating riots that specifically targeted the Chinese-Indonesian community. The story effectively captures the tense atmosphere and conveys the characters' anxiety and fear as they witness the destruction of nearby houses and stores by native Indonesians. At the end of the story, the family manages to survive the riot after being saved by two indigenous men who know the family well.

Critical discourse analysis was used in conducting this paper. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a multidisciplinary approach investigating the intricate connection between language, power, and ideology within diverse sociocultural contexts (Al-Badri & Al-Janabi, 2022). Critical Discourse Analysis is suitable because it studies how social power abuse and

inequality are enacted through text and talk in social and political contexts. The objective of CDA is twofold: to describe and critically evaluate the role of text and talk in creating and perpetuating inequality, injustice, and oppression within society (Leeuwen, 2015). This paper adopted Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis theory (2003) regarding three discourse dimensions: textual analysis, discursive practice analysis, and social practice analysis.

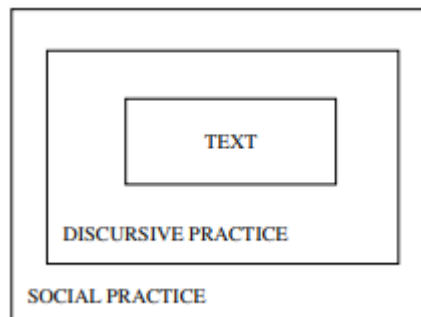


Figure 1. Discourse Dimensional

Textual analysis involves examining the linguistic features present in a text. Discursive practice analysis focuses on the production, consumption, and interpretation of texts. Social practice analysis examines the social context in which texts are situated. In analyzing the textual dimension, Halliday's systemic functional grammar was used. Halliday's systemic functional grammar (SFG) is a linguistic theory that considers language as a tool for conveying meaning. It places significant importance on the connection between the form and function of language (Trinh et al., 2017). This paper specifically utilized the concept of transitivity, which is a component of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), to analyze the short story. Transitivity is a linguistic concept that reveals how speakers and writers express their thoughts about the world and how they interpret their experiences of the world (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). According to Halliday (2014) the transitivity is divided into six types namely material, relational, verbal, mental, behavioral and existential. The material process refers to the actions that are carried out by objects that can be observed. The relational process involves the expression of relationships between objects. The verbal process refers to the transfer of information through spoken words. The mental process that involves conscious experiences such as perception, emotion, cognition, or desire. The term "behavioral process" refers to the actions that participants perform subconsciously. The existential process is marked by the use of "there" at the beginning of a sentence, followed by a verb such as "be," "seem," or "appear."

Several previous studies have been conducted on the topic of critical discourse analysis in short stories. The study conducted by Windiyanto et al. (2022) aimed at investigating tiger parenting's power dominance in the short story titled "Two Kinds" by Amy Tan. By using transitivity, they found that the main character's mother applies abusive form of tiger parenting through physical actions, mental affection and verbal utterances, as depicted in the short story. Additionally, they discovered that the story depicts the life of the second generation of Asian-Americans. The rebellion of the character Jing-Mei against her tiger parents is portrayed through her expressions and utterances towards her mother. The second study conducted by Arslan et al. (2023) aimed at investigating social power relation in a postcolonial hybrid culture in the short story "My Son the Fanatic" by Hanif Kureishi. Their study reveals that the concept

of power relationships involves the sharing or opposition of power between two or more individuals. This story demonstrates that neither character is inherently more powerful than the other. Neither of the male participants maintain power throughout the speech, but they both held an equal status. However, women remain subject to powerlessness in relation to language and social factors. These two studies use critical discourse analysis to investigate about the power imbalance in the short story.

Method

The focus of this study is a short story called "Know Thy Neighbors" written by Eric Musa Piliang. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. According to Cresswell (2014), qualitative research is a research approach that focuses on the exploration and comprehension of social phenomena. In data gathering process, the researchers identified the sentences that exemplify social injustices within the text. Following that, the researchers analyzed the selected sentences and categorized them into six processes, utilizing the transitivity framework proposed by Halliday. The researcher analyzed the classified data using relevant theories. Finally, the researcher analyzed the sentences and connected them to the background information of the text and the social context surrounding ethnic discrimination.

Findings and Discussion

The findings and discussion are divided based on three discourse dimensions proposed by Fairclough (2003). The first stage is textually oriented discourse analysis which refers to detailed analysis of the text. In this stage, the transitivity process is adopted to justify how the language constructed in the text shows ethnic discrimination. The second stage is discursive practice which involved the text production and consumption to reveal the speaker identities and agenda to produce the discourse. This stage focuses on explaining how the story was posted in an online media. The third stage is social practice which to uncover the ethnic discrimination and the reasons that cause ethnic discrimination.

Textual Analysis

The analysis on textual dimension is aimed to analyze how the text represents ethnic discrimination. The following is the frequency of process types in transitivity system denoted in Eric Musa Piliang's "Know Thy Neighbors."

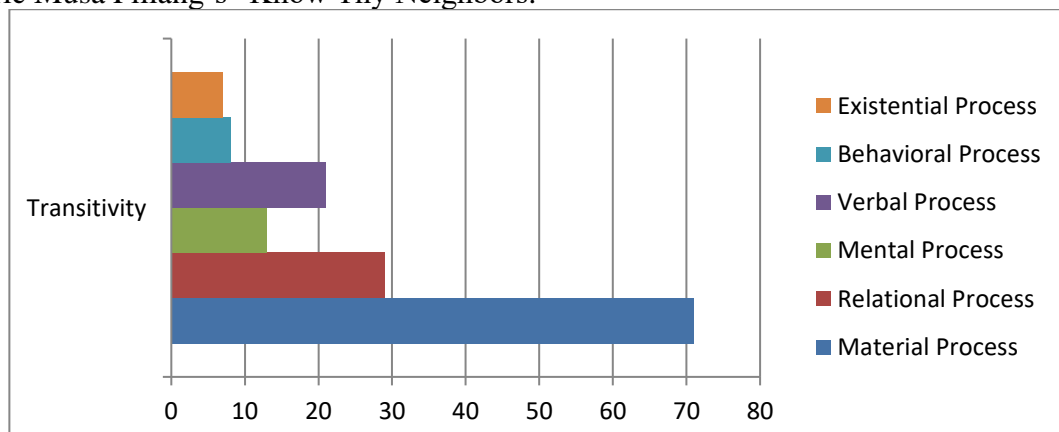


Figure 2. Transitivity portrayed in Eric Musa Piliang's "Know Thy Neighbors"

In the chart above, it can be observed that the most frequent type of transitivity occurred in the text is material process (48%), and followed by the second higher occurrence is relational process (19%) and the other process: verbal (14%), mental (9%), behavioral (5%) and existential (5%). The following descriptions are some examples of each process.

1. Material process

Material process is a process of doing or happening. The key participant who brings about the change or the one who does the deed is labeled as the **actor**. The **goal** refers to the impact or to the affected or the one that undergoes the process. The following sentences are the examples of material process.

They loot the shops before setting fire to them.

Actor Process Goal Circumstance

They even kill and rape.

Actor Process

It can be seen from two sentences above that the Actor is the subject that do the action. The difference between these two sentences is the construction of the sentence. The first actor *they* is preceded by the process and the goal. It emphasized on the goal or the object being affected by the performance of the action. In the second sentence is only preceded by the process. It emphasized on the action that done by the actor. These two sentences show the riot against Chinese Indonesian included the action of looting and burning the shops and attacking, raping and even killing.

2. Relational process

Relational process is a process of *being* and *having*. The word ‘relational’ means to characterize and to identify. The relational process is either identifying or attributive. If the process is identifying, the participants are **identified** (the participant which is identified) and **identifier** (the participant which does the identifying). Identifying process clauses are reversible. If the process is attributive, the participant is labeled as **carrier** and there is **attribute** which is the quality of the carrier or circumstance. The following sentences are the examples of relational process.

“This is a Chinese shop, just like all the others here. Don’t you watch the news?”

Carrier Attribute

They are the reason for this crisis.

Identified Identifier

they are the reason we are poor. Move aside.”

Identified Identifier

It can be seen from the examples above shows two distinct relational processes. The first sentence emphasized the attribute to its carrier. The second and third sentence shows the Chinese Indonesian are identify as the reason for the crisis happened and the reason the native Indonesians were poor. These show the fallacious thinking of the native Indonesian about Chinese-Indonesian.

3. Verbal process

Verbal process is a process of *saying*. It does not necessarily in the form of direct quotation but it can also be in the form of verbs that serve as process in verbal clause such as point out,

claim, assert etc. Verbal process involves the **sayer** who delivers the passage, the **receiver** to whom the saying is directed to, and the **verbiage** which is the content of what is said or indicated. The following sentence is the example of verbal process.

Halim had called from the airport last night, telling me to leave the house soon.

Sayer Circumstance Verbal Receiver Verbiage

The sayer *Halim* is a Chinese Indonesian who already left his house and everything behind. The verbal process is illustrated through the verb *telling*. The verbiage indicates that the main character is already being told to leave the house because the riot targeting Chinese Indonesian has already happened in other places before.

4. Mental process

Material processes are concerned with the experience of the real world, mental processes concerned with our experience with the world of our consciousness. In other words, mental process deals with the process of sensing. Metal process involves the **senser** or the one who feels (emotionally), thinks and perceives and the **phenomenon** is that which is felt, thought, or perceived. The following sentence is the example of mental process based on the short-story.

I sensed yesterday something was wrong when I saw some neighbors vacating.

Senser Mental Circumstance Phenomenon

their stores and loading stuff onto trucks.

The mental process here shows the senser *I* already felt that something bad would happen. The *phenomenon* indicates that the odd situation that suddenly everyone load their stuffs and left their houses. This mental process shows the main character finally understood that the situation was worse than she imagined.

5. Behavioral process

Behavioral process is a process of physiological and psychological behavior such as *breathing, coughing, smiling, dreaming* etc. The main participant is **behavior** and if there is another participant, the second participant is **behavior**. The following sentence is the example of behavioral process based on the short-story.

They are crying so hysterically and as I try to calm them, I simply ignore the noise outside.

Behaver Behavioral

The participant *they* as behavior refer to the main character's children. The behavioral process is illustrated through the verb *crying*. This process shows that the Chinese Indonesian experienced psychologically traumatizing situation because of the riot.

6. Existential process

Existential process represent that something exists of happens. There is only one participant namely **existent** which refers to the entity or event that is being said to exist. The following sentence is the example of existential process based on the short-story.

There is (existent) pushing and shoving between the crowd trying to get to our store and the human barricade. (existent)

There here stands as subject but it is not a participant. The participant is the action being talked on its existence or the existent. Existential process in this sentence emphasizes the existence

of violent attempt to harm the Chinese Indonesian.

Discursive Practice Analysis

Eric Musa Piliang is a writer and editor. The short stories he writes focusing on racism, colonization to feminism. In “Know Thy Neighbors”, the issue of racism is the main headline. This story is a reflection of the massacre of Indonesians of Chinese descent as a result of the monetary crisis that occurred in 1998 in Indonesia. He wanted to remind again of the bloody tragedy that befell Indonesians of Chinese descent as a minority. The situation that occurred at that time was economic anxiety.

“I appreciate the business they bring. I try to reciprocate whenever I can by meeting their needs, sometimes special requests for certain types or brands of rice. I also let them open credit lines and pay their bills at the end of the month. I gave them extensions to pay their credits when they came up with some hard luck stories. Some of them still owe us money.”

In the discourse above, the economic disparity experienced by indigenous people is still below average, while Indonesians of Chinese descent is above average. This is shown by the original people who still have to owe the shops owned by Indonesian of Chinese descent for their daily needs.

This story was posted on thejakartapost.com. By posting this story in The Jakarta Post which is an online newspaper in English in Indonesia. This text can be accessed by foreigners, expatriates and, most of Indonesians with the assumption that internet availability has begun to spread evenly.

The Indonesians who read this story were able to raise awareness of the problem of racism against Indonesians of Chinese descent, which still occurs today because of the economic disparity that still exists even though it is not as bad as it was twenty-four years ago. Expatriates from other countries as well as Indonesia can get literature that can educate them about racism against minorities wherever they are that racism can be triggered by social anxiety and opinion swaying by the media.

Social Practice Analysis

From Eric Musa Piliang’s “Know Thy Neighbors,” it can be seen that racist treatment towards Chinese-Indonesian takes place in Indonesia. For example, the occurrence of discriminatory practices in the scope of the economy is in these sentences;

“This is a Chinese shop, just like all the others here. Don’t you watch the news? They are the reason for this crisis, they are the reason we are poor.”

This act of racism is clearly illustrated through physical violence against minorities. It can be seen in these sentences;

“Because we are ethnic Chinese. We’re targets. It’s already happening in Medan and other cities.”

“They loot the shops before setting fire to them. They even kill and rape. They say it’s Jakarta’s turn tomorrow.”

“Burn! Burn!”

“Break the door down! Break it down!”

With the economic gap that happens in the story, Chinese descent in Indonesia must be discriminated against and even physically abused. In the story, there are a few reasons

implicitly and explicitly representing practical racism.

1. Economic anxiety

Considering that most big businessmen or entrepreneurs are of Chinese ethnicity, they generally enjoy better economic conditions than natives. Because several powerful businessmen called *cukong* or *konglo* are the main backers of the New Order government, the widespread practice of Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism (KKN) was made worse. 1997 saw the onset of the Monetary Crisis in Asia, and Indonesia was no exception. The Indonesian Monetary Agency increased rupiah currency trading from 8% to 11% in July 1997. The rupiah was then severely attacked on August 14, 1997, which further diminished its value. In September 1997, both the Rupiah and the Jakarta Stock Exchange reached their lowest points. Inflation occurred, corporate debt increased further, and food prices shot up. The state of Indonesia's economy is deteriorating as a result of the country's ailing financial sector, particularly after a crisis. Indonesia also applied for loans directly from foreign banks to help it get out of this crisis. As a result, riots broke out on May 13–14, 1998 in Jakarta and other cities. However, this method does not guarantee that Indonesia will be free from the monetary crisis, instead, the crisis will continue to spread, because the main factor in the occurrence of the crisis is not the banking sector. There was a massive demonstration against the government. Even riots and looting took place everywhere. And Chinese-Indonesian-owned businesses were looted by the natives.

2. Abuse of authority and power by media

The role of the media is to influence public opinion. In this instance, the mass media covers more than just the outcomes of the organization's public opinion polls. But they also incorporate their own polls into news reports. The next role of the media is to mediate interactions between the public and the government. The government uses the media to inform, elucidate, and try to win support for its policies and programs. In this situation, the media can offer the general public a means of government transparency. It can be seen that in the story, the media succeeded in leading public opinion so that the public took the opinion that one of the causes of the economic crisis was the economic disparity caused by the economy controlled by Indonesian entrepreneurs of Chinese descent.

Conclusion

Indonesia is a pluralist country which means it has many differences ranging from race, and ethnicity, to religion. However, racism towards minorities is still a scourge in everyday life. Through Critical Discourse Analysis, textual with transitivity discovered that racism against Indonesians of Chinese descent is depicted by physical violence such as looting, destruction of business premises owned by Indonesians of Chinese descent, to rape. Further analysis is on social practices, the short story describes the causes of racism against Indonesians of Chinese descent, caused by economic anxiety and opinion swaying through the media. This made the natives think that Indonesians of Chinese descent was the cause of the monetary crisis in 1998. They were economically influential but politically not.

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