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Constructing a Discourse of Hope and Inspiration: A Positive Discourse Analysis of Joko Widodo's Press Statements on COVID-19

Ernanda & Mark Nartey

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Constructing a Discourse of Hope and Inspiration: A Positive Discourse Analysis of Joko Widodo's Press Statements on COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Using positive discourse analysis as a framework, this article examines Indonesian President Joko Widodo's press statements on the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on how he constructed a message of hope and inspiration. The analysis demonstrates that Widodo used his language to encourage the people of Indonesia to be resilient, remain positive, and collaborate with the government to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic. The findings reveal that metaphor, lexicalisation, and rationalisation were the three main strategies that helped Widodo to construct his message of hope and inspiration and to formulate an emancipatory discourse intended to liberate the people of Indonesia from the difficulties of the pandemic and chart a way forward in the post-pandemic period. The study underscores the crucial role of language as a resource for hope and as a response strategy during a crisis as well as its significance in helping individuals, communities, nations, and societies make sense of their experiences and (re)imagine a positive future despite their present predicament.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began spreading in Indonesia in early 2020, has had a severe impact not only on the Indonesian health sector but also on the economy. According to the World Health Organization (2024), as of 20 December 2023, Indonesia has reported 6,817,154 confirmed cases of COVID-19, with a death toll of 161,930. Due to the pandemic, economic growth declined, dropping from 5.02 per cent in 2019 to 2.97 per cent in 2020, and unemployment increased from 5.28 per cent in 2019 to 7.07 per cent in the same period (Melati, 2023). The economic challenges have affected all Indonesians, including families, small businesses, big corporations, and diverse industries (Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, n.d.).

The importance of communication during a global pandemic such as COVID-19 cannot be overemphasised: effective communication can help reduce fear, panic, and anxiety as well as significantly reduce the number of infections (Ataguba, 2020). In this regard, the role of leaders in providing (re)assurance, guidance, and motivation to the public is essential. Political leaders, especially presidents, prime ministers, and heads of

state, could shape public opinion and promote specific behaviours or practices by using their authority and influence to draw attention to specific issues (Canes-Wrone, 2001). Hence, how they communicate during a pandemic underlines the importance of a discursive approach to crisis communication research as it illustrates how discourses even during a crisis can be used to do ideological work. It is therefore unsurprising that various studies have critically investigated discourses on COVID-19 by political leaders as instance of crisis communication.

Krishnatray and Shrivastava (2021) analysed the speeches of prominent national leaders from the USA, China, Japan, Germany, and India and identified frames that emphasised shared values such as empathy, social responsibility, and collective action during the pandemic. Wang (2022) examined the legitimisation strategies used by Donald Trump and Xi Jinping to justify their actions and policies in response to the pandemic, while Awawdeh and Al-Abbas (2023) used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to highlight specific linguistic elements in Trump's speeches during the course of the pandemic. Wodak (2021) used a discourse-historical approach to investigate how governments in Austria, Germany, France, Hungary, and Sweden performed crisis communication over the pandemic period and identified four frames that sought to mitigate the dread of death and counter the denial of death: a religious frame, a dialogic frame, a frame emphasising trust, and a frame of leading a war. In her study, Seixas (2021) investigated the use of war metaphors as a form of crisis communication by political representatives and found that such metaphors can promote resilience and help leaders empathise with the public, thereby repudiating the findings of previous work on war metaphors (e.g., Semino, 2021), which found such metaphors to be negative. Further, Yu and Tay (2022) analysed how a discourse of solidarity was formulated by representatives from China's foreign ministry amid the COVID crisis and argued that the solidarity discourse constructed has ideological implications for how collectivism and humanitarianism are acclaimed and practised in China.

Similarly, in an Indonesian context, Sultan and Rapi (2020) examined how the discursive strategies of government representatives throughout the pandemic aimed to build solidarity, and Ernanda (2023) analysed how President Joko Widodo's speeches at the G20 Summit sought to encourage all countries to unite and forge forward in the post-COVID period. Robin and Priscila (2020) used CDA (see Fairclough, 1995) to investigate power dynamics and linguistic choices in Widodo's speech amid the societal and governmental shifts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings revealed that Widodo was portrayed as a decisive leader in addressing public concerns during the COVID-19 outbreak. Prasetiyo and Sukarno (2022) investigated Anies Baswedan's efforts to deal with the COVID pandemic in DKI Jakarta. Their study revealed that Baswedan prioritised issues of safety and welfare for the citizens of DKI Jakarta, which reflects his competence in handling the pandemic and his attempt to burnish the image of a 'pro-people governor'.

These studies offer valuable insights into leaders' crisis communication strategies in diverse sociocultural contexts, but little research attention has been given to the discursive construction of hope and inspiration by political leaders as part of their crisis communication. Such research is essential to highlight what texts 'do well' and 'get right' in our eyes (Macgilchrist, 2007) and the role of discourse as an inspiring artefact, and to provide a comprehensive understanding of crisis communication that underlines the

resourcefulness of language and/or discourse. Consequently, this article adopts a positive discourse analysis (PDA) approach to examine how Joko Widodo constructed a discourse of hope and inspiration for the Indonesian people during the COVID-19 pandemic and the linguistic or discursive strategies he used to achieve this purpose. Several studies on COVID-19 discourses by politicians can be found in Western contexts, but there is a dearth of studies in settings like Indonesia. Hence, research that examines the COVID-19 discourses of political leaders in non-Western contexts will build on the existing scholarship on crisis communication from a critical perspective.

In the remainder of the article, we explain the conceptual framework, followed by the data and methodological procedures. Next, we discuss the findings, concluding with a summary of the key arguments and implications of the study.

Positive Discourse Analysis

This article is informed by positive discourse analysis, a framework that analyses texts that index inspiring discursive practices and highlights discourses that promote empowerment and social change (Bartlett, 2017). With a focus on reparative critical practices, PDA seeks to understand how language can be used to offer hope and restoration as well as how discourse can be used to promote emancipatory objectives such as resisting injustice, advancing the needs of marginalised groups, and centring the voices and agency of non-dominant groups. That is, it explores 'how change happens, for the better, across a range of sites' (Martin, 2004, 9). In so doing, it argues for a more interventionist stance in ideologically oriented discourse analysis. PDA is committed to a discourse of social change and hence emphasises progressive discourses and the analysis of hope-giving, reparative discourse, and on-the-ground practices that are oriented to wellbeing (Bartlett, 2012; Macgilchrist, 2016). It is proposed as a complementary approach to CDA, which aims to expose hegemonic discourses and discourses of oppression and disempowerment. CDA mainly concentrates on the deconstruction of power in relation to 'ideologically driven discrimination with respect to gender, ethnicity, class, and related social variables' (Martin, 2004, 179), while PDA adopts a more constructive approach and foregrounds the positive ends to which language or social actions can be put so as to advance the 'possibilities for transformations capable of enhancing human flourishing and mitigating social ills' (Hughes, 2018, 199). According to Martin (2004), both deconstructive and constructive approaches are needed to examine power relations in discourse and the development of positive social change. Therefore, PDA can be used alongside CDA to explore the construction of communality, values, shared interests, and collective aims during difficult periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

PDA does not celebrate a text based on the analyst's ideological stance. Instead, it identifies discourses that have the potential to enable social change. It also highlights instances of the progressive or positive uses of language or instances where discourse works – for example, how feminists remake gender relations in our world, how marginalised groups centre their agency and voices, and how Black people reconstruct racial narratives. For example, numerous studies have illustrated how discourse is used to convey messages of hope, strength, encouragement, resistance, inspiration, and unification (see e.g., Bartlett, 2012; Hughes, 2018; Nartey, 2020; Nartey & Ernanda, 2020). The notion of resistance is an important component of PDA. It is not only considered

a response to injustice, but also a social action that can instigate progressive social change. Therefore, resistance discourse 'is a generative project that treats objects of analysis as resources for imagining and implementing emancipatory agendas' (Hughes, 2018, 199).

Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we view resistance discourse as any form of language use that seeks to mobilise the masses for sociopolitical action (e.g., obeying COVID protocols and other precautionary measures introduced by governments), constructs solidarity as a response strategy, and helps people deal with the pressures, anxiety, and threats of the pandemic (Sultan & Rapi, 2020; Yu & Tay, 2022). We do not, however, consider anti-vaccine perspectives as resistance discourse in the context of PDA. As the pandemic spread throughout the world, it demanded action from political leaders to lead their citizens through the crisis. One of the key aspects of leadership during a crisis is communication. Consequently, PDA is a useful framework for this article given its 'focus on community, taking into account how people get together and make room for themselves in the world' (Martin, 2004, 184), especially in difficult times. It allows us to examine how Widodo's communication at the height of the pandemic functioned as an inspiring artefact aimed at providing belief, (re)assurance, and a spirit of enthusiasm to Indonesians. That is, the article assumes that during the COVID-19 pandemic the intention of Widodo's discourse was to bring a positive change in the mood, hopes, and aspirations of the Indonesian people despite the prevailing uncertainty. PDA offers a suitable framework to analyse the discursive strategies he used to achieve this objective, but it has been criticised for paying insufficient attention to the context that shapes emancipatory discourses (Bartlett, 2012). This article therefore combines PDA with Fairclough's (1995) notion of discourse as social practice and contends that combining PDA with approaches within CDA can help to provide a comprehensive understanding of the progressive discourses that PDA highlights. Discourse as social practice refers to 'social and cultural goings-on which the communicative event is part of' (Fairclough, 1995, 57) and it enhances analysis by paying attention to the immediate situational context, the wider context of institutional practices, and the wider frame of society or culture of communicative events. Through the integration of PDA with Fairclough's approach, the article offers a detailed understanding of the emergence, circulation, and societal impact of progressive discourses. This approach thereby provides insights into potential strategies for social transformation and progressive change.

Data and Methods

The primary data for this study is a corpus of 108 press statements on COVID-19 by Joko Widodo, the president of Indonesia, between 2 March and 30 May 2022. They were retrieved from the official website of the President of the Republic of Indonesia (https://www.presidenri.go.id). The statements were originally in Indonesian and were translated by the first author (Ernanda), who is Indonesian and a native speaker of the language. She generally adopted indirect translation techniques such as transposition, adaptation, modulation, and reformulation (see Pinheiro, 2015), which enabled her to preserve the meaning and nuance of the texts.

When it was feasible, the author translated directly from Indonesian to English. The topics addressed in the statements revolve around the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including measures taken to combat the spread of the virus. Specific issues discussed include the implementation of health protocols, updates on COVID-19 cases in Indonesia, decisions on social restrictions, lockdowns, and sector-specific closures. The press statements also covered the government's plans and efforts on vaccinations, the economic ramifications of the pandemic, strategies for economic recovery, and coordination between the central government, local authorities, and relevant institutions, as well as the role of the public in controlling the pandemic.

Following the data collection, the authors used the following analytical procedures. First, we examined the transcripts to identify the core ideas of the press statements. Next, we identified and categorised linguistic strategies that articulated hope and inspiration as well as positive messages aimed at boosting the morale of the Indonesian people amid the pandemic. Each author separately identified the strategies and they jointly decided on the final categories. After identifying the strategies, we explained them with recourse to contextual information such as the circumstances in which the press statements were made, the sociocultural situation of Indonesia, and broader issues relating to the spread of the pandemic across the globe. Finally, we interpreted the (potential) positive intention of the linguistic strategies while arguing that they functioned as an inspiring discourse aimed at fostering unity, building trust, spreading hope, and encouraging resilience during a crisis. As noted, our analysis was informed by PDA and the notion of discourse as social practice, and this enabled us to perform a detailed textual analysis that accounted for 'the social and cultural goings-on which [Widodo's] communicative event is part of' (Fairclough, 1995, 57).

Findings and Discussion

The analysis revealed that Widodo used three main strategies in his attempt to offer hope and inspiration to the Indonesian people during the COVID-19 pandemic. These mechanisms helped him to promote what he considered to be Indonesia's shared interests and collective aims during a crisis as well as to solicit the support of the citizenry and mobilise them for sociopolitical action. These strategies – metaphor, lexicalisation, and rationalisation – are discussed below.

Use of metaphor

Metaphors are one of the main linguistic resources that were used in communications on the COVID-19 pandemic (Wicke & Bolognesi, 2020). Some studies argue that 'war' metaphors for diseases have counterproductive effects (Hauser & Schwarz, 2015; 2020; Landau et al., 2018), while others say that war metaphors for diseases can produce negative and positive framing effects depending on the context (Flusberg et al., 2017). Semino (2021) contends that 'fire' metaphors have been more appropriate and versatile in communication about the COVID-19 pandemic. This article finds that Widodo's use of metaphor functioned as an incentivisation mechanism aimed at encouraging the

Indonesian people to remain strong and united as the country dealt with a crisis. The extracts below illustrate this point.

(1) *... terakhir, saya mengajak seluruh komponen bangsa, elemen bangsa, mari kita bersama-sama saling bekerja keras, memberikan dukungan, memberikan energi positif kita, kita menyatukan upaya serta tekad **melawan virus korona ini**.*

... lastly, I invite all components of the nation, elements of the nation, let's work hard together, provide support, give our positive energy, we unite in our efforts and determination to **fight this coronavirus**.

(2) *Dan sekali lagi, saya ingin memberikan apresiasi yang tinggi kepada seluruh jajaran yang bergerak di depan, dalam hal ini dokter, para perawat, tenaga medis yang berada di rumah sakit **dalam kita berperang melawan COVID-19 ini**.*

And once again, I would like to give high appreciation to all staff moving at the frontline, in this case, the doctors, nurses, and medical personnel in the hospitals **as we battle against this COVID-19**.

(3) *Dan kita harapkan pagi hari ini, dengan dimulainya vaksinasi di stasiun dan lingkungannya, kita harapkan semuanya **bisa terlindungi dari COVID-19**.*

And we hope that this morning, with the start of vaccination at the station and its environment, we hope that everyone **can be protected from COVID-19**.

(4) *Tentu dengan cara-cara yang aman dari COVID-19 agar tidak menimbulkan **risiko meledaknya wabah**.*

Of course, in ways that are safe from COVID-19 so as not to pose **the risk of an explosion**.

Metaphors are a persuasive technique that enable politicians to popularise their discourse, reconceptualise social issues, and convert expert knowledge into a form suitable to lay audiences (Cameron & Stelma, 2004; Charteris-Black, 2011). Consequently, metaphors enable the framing of certain worldviews while eliminating others. In the extracts above, Widodo used the metaphors of war (realised by the words 'fight' and 'protected') and fire (realised by the word 'explosion') to emphasise the threat posed by the pandemic, the urgency of the situation, and the need for decisive action.

War metaphors can be interpreted as an enemification strategy that reinforced the need for COVID-19 to be resisted (see Nartey, 2019; Nartey & Ernanda, 2020). The construction of such resistance discourse, we argue, was essential in the context of COVID-19 as it motivated preventative measures and other actions aimed at eliminating the virus (the enemy). Framing the virus as an enemy served the purpose of providing strength in a difficult situation, rallying the masses to partner with the government, and enlisting the support of everyone in dealing with the pandemic. This view is evident in expressions such as 'I invite all components of the nation', 'let's work hard together', 'let's provide support', 'give our positive energy', and 'we unite in our efforts and determination' (Extract 1) and 'all staff moving at the frontline' (Extract 2). When these expressions were used in conjunction with the assertion 'This situation requires us to take firmer steps together to stem the spread of COVID-19' (*Situasi ini mengharuskan kita mengambil langkah-langkah yang lebih tegas agar kita bersama-sama dapat membendung penyebaran COVID-19 ini*) (Widodo, 2021), the discourse of resistance against the virus was heightened and the fears of the Indonesian populace were allayed as they were

informed of how the government was tackling the pandemic. That is, as the commander-in-chief, Widodo was encouraging the Indonesian people to remain confident and not despair despite the adversity.

Bhatia (2008) asserts that the purpose of discursively constructing a 'common enemy' is to determine a metaphoric target for missiles to aim at and to create a sense of unity. Also, the prevailing understanding of the nature of war and the presence of an enemy implies that the enemy needs to be defeated. Widodo's use of a war metaphor was seemingly trying to invoke this mental frame in the Indonesian people and thereby unite the citizenry by suggesting an obligation on their part to withstand their enemy (the virus) by, for instance, adhering to the COVID-19 protocols. Such a relationship between past and present frames can be 'a mental representation of our knowledge of the world, a data-structure that is located in human memory and can be selected or retrieved when needed' (Bednarek, 2005, 689). Furthermore, we argue that by 'enemifying' COVID-19 using a war metaphor, Widodo made the threat of the virus more tangible. Hence, his high appreciation of the frontline staff (Extract 2) and his point on vaccination (Extract 3) were likely to resonate more with his audience. Such resonance heightened his message of optimism and solidarity when he said that 'we hope that everyone can be protected from COVID-19' (Extract 3).

Like that of war, the fire metaphor (Extract 4) underscored the dangerous nature of the pandemic, the urgency of the situation, the need for decisive action, and the importance of joint responses from citizens and the government. The metaphorical use of 'explosion' suggested that the virus was a lethal bomb that could detonate if preventative actions were not taken. With respect to COVID-19, Semino (2021) illustrates that fire metaphors could convey danger and urgency, explain how contagion happens and the role of individuals in preventing it, explain measures for reducing contagion, and highlight the role of health workers. Consequently, Widodo's use of the fire metaphor was instructive as it amplified his position on the importance of safety and protection (Extracts 3 and 4) and reiterated his message of confidence and (re)assurance to the people of Indonesia. In sum, the war and fire metaphors helped Widodo to frame the pandemic as dangerous, emphasised the need for collective effort and shared responsibility, and assured Indonesians that the prevailing challenge was temporary: together with their government, they would find a lasting solution to the problem.

Apart from these metaphors, Widodo used personification in communicating about the pandemic. For instance, he personified the virus (Extracts 5 and 6), hospitals (Extract 7), and the economy (Extract 8) for rhetorical effect. This personification underlined the menace of COVID-19, and the measures being implemented by the government to safeguard lives and the economy. Personification can be persuasive if it evokes attitudes, feelings, and beliefs about people and applies them to attitudes, feelings, and beliefs about abstract entities or issues (Charteris-Black, 2011). Hence, through personification, Widodo aroused certain emotions in the Indonesian people with the goal of encouraging equanimity in adversity, soliciting support for the government's plans in the midst of the pandemic, and promoting unity of purpose in the fight against the virus. The possible net effect of this was a message of hope intended to inspire belief and optimism in Indonesians.

(5) *... kita harus mulai menyiapkan transisi dari pandemi ke endemi, dan juga mulai* **belajar hidup bersama dengan COVID** *... masyarakat harus sadar bahwa* **COVID selalu mengintip kita***, sehingga protokol kesehatan harus terus dilakukan, terutama memakai masker.*

... we must start preparing to transition from pandemic to endemic and start learning **to live together with COVID** ... the public must be aware that **COVID is always spying on us**, so health protocols must continue to be carried out, especially wearing masks.

(6) *Penyakit ini* **tidak mengenal ras maupun diskriminasi***. Setiap orang, tidak peduli apa asal-usulnya, status ekonominya, agamanya, maupun suku bangsanya, semua-nya dapat terkena. Ini penyakit yang* **tidak melihat siapa kita***.*

This disease **knows no race or discrimination**. Regardless of their origin, economic status, religion, or ethnicity, everyone can be affected. It's a disease that **doesn't see who we are**.

(7) *... sehingga* **tidak membuat lumpuhnya rumah sakit** *lantaran over-kapasitas pasien COVID-19 ...*

... therefore, **the hospital is not paralysed** due to the over-capacity of COVID-19 patients ...

(8) *Kita buat lebih terarah, spesifik, asya, tajam, untuk mengatasi masalah COVID-19,* **tapi tidak membunuh ekonomi** *dan kehidupan asyarakat.*

We make it more focused, specific, and sharp to overcome the COVID-19 problem, but not **to kill the economy** and people's lives.

Use of lexicalisation

Lexicalisation, or wording, is a social process (Mey, 1985). It implies that language use, specifically the choice and construction of words, is influenced by and embedded within social contexts. How language is used and understood is shaped by societal structures, norms, and interactions, so the words used by political actors can be imbued with ideologies (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1995). Widodo's lexical choices, especially his use of pronouns and collective nouns, helped him to ingratiate himself with the Indonesian people to gain their trust and promote national unity in the pandemic period, as the following extracts illustrate.

(9) **Pemerintah** *terus bekerja keras untuk mengantisipasi hal ini, untuk mempertahan-kan daya beli masyarakat, untuk mengurangi risiko PHK (pemutusan hubungan kerja), dan mempertahankan produktivitas ekonomi, produktivitas masyarakat di seluruh wilayah Tanah Air, Indonesia.*

The government continues to work hard to anticipate this, to maintain people's purchasing power, to reduce the risk of layoffs (termination of employment), and to maintain economic productivity, and community productivity throughout Indonesia.

(10) **Pemerintah** *terus bekerja keras untuk meringankan beban masyarakat yang terdampak.*

The government continues to work hard to ease the burden on the affected communities.

(11) Bahkan hari-hari ini **para menteri** bekerja lebih keras walaupun sebagian dilakukan dengan cara online untuk mengatasi isu kesehatan dan mengatasi dampak perekonomian akibat COVID-19 ini.

Even these days, **the ministers** are working harder, even though some of it is done online to address health issues and deal with the economic impact of COVID-19.

(12) **Saya dan seluruh jajaran kabinet** terus bekerja keras untuk menyiapkan dan menjaga Indonesia dari penyebaran COVID-19, dan meminimalkan implikasinya terhadap ekonomi Indonesia sebagaimana kemarin telah disampaikan bahwa salah satu menteri kami terdeteksi positif terinfeksi COVID-19.

I and the entire cabinet (will) continue to work hard to prepare and protect Indonesia from the spread of COVID-19 and minimise its implications for the Indonesian economy as yesterday it was announced that one of our ministers had tested positive for COVID-19.

In these extracts, the collective nouns 'the government', 'the ministers', and 'the entire cabinet' emphasise the actions Widodo and his government took to address the pandemic and safeguard the welfare of the people. Through a predicational strategy, which consists of using verb phrases such as 'continues to work hard', 'are working harder', and 'will continue to work hard' (Wodak, 2001), Widodo depicted his government as diligent and conscientious in a time of crisis. We argue that this construction contributed to a positive self-presentation mechanism aimed at providing reassurance to Indonesians and fostering confidence in the government as a collective entity working for the people. This emphasis on collective action reassured citizens that they were not alone in facing challenges during this difficult time. It is instructive to note that the verb phrase 'work hard' was repeated in all the extracts. This can be analysed as an intensification mechanism (Wodak, 2001) that aimed to underline the positive efforts of Widodo and his government and to elicit the trust of the populace. Unlike Ho (2013), who found that the use of the collective noun 'the government' is associated with past events and is a way to avoid future responsibilities, the extracts above highlight the positive actions of the government and, more importantly, its commitment to future responsibilities.

By indicating that the government will 'maintain people's purchasing power', 'reduce the risk of layoffs', 'maintain economic and community productivity', 'ease the burden on the affected communities', and 'protect Indonesia', Widodo presented an image of a strong, decisive, forward-looking leader who could tackle the difficulties caused by the pandemic. That is, he appeared to be 'having the right intentions', 'thinking right', 'sounding right', 'looking right', and 'telling the right story' (Charteris-Black, 2014, 94). In a period of despair such as the COVID-19 crisis, Widodo's message, we contend, was likely to lift hearts. The first-person pronoun 'I' is typically used to dissociate oneself from a group. In Extract 12, however, 'I' is co-located with the collective noun 'the entire cabinet', which positions the speaker as part of the positive action described. By combining the collective nouns with the pronoun 'I', Widodo stressed both his government's and his own personal objective to improve conditions in Indonesia despite the pandemic. Such lexicalisation presents Widodo as a selfless, patriotic leader and paints a positive

picture of the government in a manner that can offer encouragement to the population during a time of adversity.

Politicians use personal pronouns to achieve several objectives such as to accept, deny, or distance themselves from responsibility (Bull & Fetzer, 2006), as well as to position themselves and others and to gain support for their ideas (Teo, 2004). Van Dijk (2000, 203) asserts that 'Among many other features of syntax, pronouns are perhaps the best-known grammatical category of the expression and manipulation of social relations, status, and power, and hence of underlying ideologies'. As shown in the following extracts, Widodo used the plural pronoun 'we' together with other inclusive expressions to gain the support of the masses and to echo his message of equanimity and optimism.

(13) **Kita harus** waspada. **Kita harus** tetap bekerja keras. Wabah ini **jangan** diremeh-kan. Ini realita. Tapi **jangan membuat kita pesimistis**.

    We have to be alert. **We have to** keep working hard. This epidemic **should not be** underestimated. This is reality. But **don't be pessimistic**.

(14) **Kita harus** kerja keras. **Kita harus** bersatu dan bergotong-royong menghadapi tantangan ini.

    We have to work hard. **We have to** unite and work together to face this challenge.

(15) **Kita harus** sadar bahwa tantangan yang kita hadapi tidak mudah. **Kita harus** hadapi bersama-sama.

    We must realise that the challenges we face are not easy. **We must** face them together.

(16) Berbagai usaha untuk menanggulangi pandemi terus **kita** lakukan dan **tentunya pemerintah tidak mungkin dapat bekerja sendiri mengatasi pandemi ini. Perlu dukungan dan kebersamaan dari semua pihak, terutama masyarakat**.

    We continue to make various efforts to deal with the pandemic, and of course, **it is impossible for the government to work alone to overcome this pandemic. [We] need support and togetherness from all parties, especially the community**.

(17) Penanganan pandemi COVID-19 membutuhkan kedisiplinan dan kerja keras dari **seluruh komponen bangsa**.

    Handling the COVID-19 pandemic requires discipline and hard work from **all components of the nation**.

Previous research has demonstrated that 'we' is often used to achieve speaker–audience alignment, foster unity and harmony, and establish a sense of collective responsibility (Krawrungruang & Yaoharee, 2018; Ranjha & Islam, 2018; Tęcza, 2018). The extracts above confirm this view and highlight the need for the Indonesian people to support Widodo and his government to overcome the pandemic. This idea of togetherness and shared responsibility can be interpreted as a form of inspiring discourse in that it empowers the populace and encourages people to see themselves as part of the solution. By implying that the people are part of the solution, Widodo conveyed a positive message of strength in unity and suggested the need for resilience and perseverance in the face of difficulty.

The force behind his statements was strengthened by his combined use of 'we' and deontic modals such as 'must', 'should', and 'have to'. Such lexicalisation places a moral

obligation on the people to recognise their shared responsibility by, for instance, remaining vigilant amid the global pandemic, working hard, and maintaining a positive attitude amid distressing conditions. Widodo stressed the responsibility of his government to encourage the people to believe that the government had the situation under control (Extracts 9 to 12), but also that the government could not deal with the pandemic alone. His lexical selection invoked a sense of unity and his assertion '[We] need support and togetherness from all parties, especially the community' (Extract 16) can be analysed as an instantiation intended to promote social cohesion amid the disruption caused by the pandemic. The lexical choice of 'community' is particularly noteworthy as it reiterated Widodo's portrayal of himself as a unifier and leader. In a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it would not be farfetched to assert that this discourse of unity and joint responsibility could boost public morale, offer people hope, and motivate them to support the actions suggested by their leader to solve the crisis. That is, despite the prevailing crisis, Widodo's encouragement to Indonesians using inclusive expressions such as 'we', 'together', 'the community', and 'all components of the nation' had the capacity to redress feelings of despondency and help people focus on the future, as in the extract below.

(18) *Percayalah,* **kita bangsa besar. Kita bangsa petarung, bangsa pejuang**. *Inshaa Allah* **kita bisa**. *Inshaa Allah* **kita mampu dalam menghadapi tantangan global yang berat sekarang ini**.

Believe me, **we are a great nation. We are a nation of fighters, a nation of warriors**. God willing, **we can**, and God willing, **we will be able to face today's demanding global challenges**.

This extract suggested that Indonesia is a strong nation, and its citizens are a force to be reckoned with. Hence, the country could bounce back from adversity and continue to thrive. Drawing on war metaphor ('fighters', 'warriors'), religious language ('God willing'), and positive words ('great', 'can', and 'able'), Widodo sculpted an image of power and robustness for Indonesia and suggested that Indonesians were capable of withstanding hardship. That is, the current predicament notwithstanding, the country had the fortitude to triumph. This positive evaluation of Indonesia, we argue, had the potential to inspire the populace and lift the spirits of those who may have been losing hope or courage due to the pandemic. To reinforce his point, Widodo used the engagement marker 'believe me' not only to draw attention to his statement, but also to emphasise his legitimate authority as president. In this capacity, he delivered a message of optimism and implied a bright future for Indonesia after COVID. His lexicalisation thus functioned as a conviction rhetoric (Charteris-Black, 2005) that conveyed persistence and a solid mentality needed to overcome hardship. We submit that the positive energy and/or confidence he oozed owing to his choice of words had the potential to create a powerful sense of optimism among Indonesians.

Use of rationalisation

The decisions governments make during a crisis can give the populace confidence in the system or make them sceptical. Widodo, for his part, rationalised his government's

decisions, especially in stabilising the economy and protecting public health. We maintain that the explanations and justifications he provided for his government's actions and decisions were intended to encourage the people to be resilient in the face of adversity and to be hopeful of the future rather than despairing, as seen in the extracts below.

(19) *Saya tegaskan kembali bahwa kesehatan masyarakat, kesehatan publik tetap nomor satu, tetap yang harus diutamakan.* **Inilah prioritas, tetapi memprioritaskan kesehatan bukan berarti mengorbankan ekonomi.** *Karena jika kita mengorbankan ekonomi, itu sama saja dengan mengorbankan kehidupan puluhan juta orang. Ini bukan opsi yang bisa kita ambil. Sekali lagi, kita harus mencari keseimbangan yang pas.*

I emphasise that public health remains number one, which must be prioritised. **This is a priority, but prioritising health does not mean sacrificing the economy.** Because if we sacrifice the economy, it is tantamount to sacrificing the lives of tens of millions of people. This is not an option we can take. Again, we have to seek the right balance.

(20) *Kenapa pemerintah memutuskan PPKM Mikro?* **Pemerintah melihat bahwa kebijakan PPKM Mikro masih menjadi kebijakan yang paling tepat untuk konteks saat ini untuk mengendalikan COVID-19 karena bisa berjalan tanpa mematikan ekonomi rakyat.**

Why did the government decide on PPKM Mikro? **The government sees that the PPKM Mikro policy is still the most appropriate policy for the current context to control COVID-19 because it can work without shutting down the people's economy.**

(21) *Pertimbangan aspek kesehatan harus dihitung secara cermat.* **Dan pada saat yang sama, aspek sosial-ekonomi masyarakat, khususnya pemenuhan kebutuhan hidup sehari-hari, juga harus diprioritaskan.**

Consideration of the health aspect must be calculated carefully. **And at the same time, the community's socioeconomic aspects, especially meeting the needs of daily life, must also be prioritised.**

To maintain trust and credibility, governments must validate their actions. Such rationalisation involves justifying or legitimising actions based on the purposes of established social systems and the knowledge that society has constructed to provide people with cognitive validity (Van Leeuwen, 2007). The extracts above demonstrate Widodo's use of a rationalisation mechanism, as he explained why the government had to strike a balance between healthcare and economic stability. He suggested that prioritising both health and the economy was essential to safeguarding the welfare of Indonesians since an 'either/or' approach that downplayed one of these priorities could be detrimental to Indonesia. In the extracts, Widodo articulated the importance of both priorities. In particular, he offered a rationale for the economy represented by effect-oriented instrumentality, where he explained the consequences of instability if the economy was not prioritised alongside health. This type of rationalisation enables sociopolitical actors to recommend actions they consider necessary (Igwebuike & Chimuanya, 2021). Therefore, it is unsurprising that Widodo claimed that PPKM (i.e., restrictions on micro-scale public activity) was the best policy to curb the transmission of COVID-19 without

shutting down the economy (Extract 20). Effect-oriented rationalisation also allows sociopolitical actors to make predictions about the future (Ali et al., 2016). Hence, Widodo stated that health remained the top priority of his government, but sacrificing the economy was tantamount to sacrificing the lives of tens of millions of people (Extract 19). By predicting the possible effects of his government's actions, Widodo suggested that his decisions stemmed from genuine concern for the welfare of Indonesians, a stance that was likely to induce a sense of confidence in the people.

We argue that Widodo's 'both/and' approach to dealing with the impact of the pandemic appealed to most Indonesians as it implied that the government was interested in all aspects of their welfare and was exploring diverse solutions to ensure this. Such an approach could be encouraging to the masses during a health crisis. On the one hand, the government was responsible for protecting the lives of its citizens, which justified the priority it placed on public health measures. On the other hand, strict lockdowns and restrictions on economic activities had significant implications for the economy, so maintaining economic performance was also a priority. Many Indonesians wanted the government to prioritise public health, but there were others who were concerned about the economic impact of drastic decisions. Hence, Widodo's reasoning of the government's dual approach could be a rationalisation mechanism aimed at providing (re)assurance to the people, especially those who might be dissatisfied with the government's decisions. In a difficult period such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which had both health and economic impacts, Widodo's message that his government was focusing on both healthcare and the economy to holistically address the crisis may have sounded rational to the people and restored their belief and confidence in the government. That is, his communication had the potential to foster trust with the public and enhance people's understanding about the interconnectedness between public health and the economy.

Another aspect of Widodo's rationalisation was what Van Leeuwen (2007) refers to as 'means-orientation', which is how someone does something or makes something happen or the actions required to achieve something.

(22) **Hanya dengan langkah bersama, kita bisa menghentikan wabah ini**. *Semua orang harus berperan serta. Semua warga harus ikut berkontribusi. Tanpa kesatuan itu, kita tak akan mampu menghentikan penyebaran Covid-19.*

   Only by working together can we stop this epidemic. Everyone must participate. Everyone must contribute. Without that unity, we will not be able to stop the spread of COVID-19.

(23) **Hal ini tercapai berkat kerja keras, berkat gotong royong semua pihak**, *terutama Kementerian Kesehatan, TNI-Polri, pemerintah daerah, BUMN, dan pihak swasta yang turut membantu, serta masyarakat yang bersedia divaksin.*

   This was achieved through hard work and the cooperation of all parties, especially the Ministry of Health, TNI-Polri (Indonesian National Armed Forces and National Police), local governments, state-owned enterprises, and the private sectors that have assisted, as well as the community that is willing to get vaccinated.

(24) *COVID-19 adalah tantangan yang* **harus kita atasi bersama, melalui usaha dan kerja keras serta pengorbanan kita dalam menjalani berbagai pembatasan kegiatan ini**. *Inshaa Allah kita akan dapat segera terbebas dari pandemi*

COVID-19 ini.

COVID-19 is a challenge **we must overcome together through our efforts, hard work, and sacrifice in undergoing various restrictions on these activities**. God willing, we will soon be free from this COVID-19 pandemic.

(25) *Oleh karena itu,* **kita harus bersama-sama menjaga agar kasus COVID-19 tidak naik lagi**. *Kuncinya sederhana: ayo segera ikut vaksin, ayo disiplin, terapkan protokol kesehatan.*

Therefore, **we must work together to prevent COVID-19 cases from rising again**. The key is simple: let's take the vaccine immediately and be disciplined in implementing health protocols.

The extracts above illustrate means-oriented rationalisation by describing the actions required to address the pandemic in Indonesia. Crucially, collaboration between the government and citizens was the key to tackling the crisis. Drawing on absolute constructions (e.g., 'Only by working together can we . . . ', 'Without unity, we will not be able to . . . ') and parallel structures (e.g., 'Everyone must participate', 'Everyone must contribute'), Widodo implied that only collaborative efforts could address the challenges posed by the pandemic (Extract 22). This rationalisation was reinforced via expressions such as 'This was achieved through hard work and the cooperation of all parties' (Extract 23), 'we must overcome together' (Extract 24), and 'we must work together' (Extract 25), which emphasise the value of cooperation. Such pontifical language, it has been claimed (Kelsey, 2017; Nartey, 2023), is a form of mythic discourse that conveys a simplistic message. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, however, such enunciation offered Indonesians a logical reason to act conscientiously in the national interest. That is, Widodo exploited the popular adage of 'strength in unity' in a bid to promote social cohesion, bolster group identity, and promote patriotism. We assert that the 'strength in unity' discourse also helped him to build consensus for and acceptance of his ideas, policies, and actions. It also motivated and mobilised the masses for sociopolitical action. This form of language can elicit a response of reassurance and optimism from the population (Nartey, 2023): it implies that all is not lost and that the collective effort of the people and the government is powerful enough to overcome the prevailing challenge. In sum, Widodo's message had the potential to boost national confidence, raise public morale, and encourage a sense of determination as the country tried to emerge stronger from the pandemic.

Conclusion

Using PDA, this article has examined how Widodo's discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic functioned as an inspiring and empowering artefact aimed at encouraging the people of Indonesia to be resilient, remain positive, and collaborate with the government to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic. The analysis demonstrates how Widodo used language to motivate the citizenry, bolster group cohesion, build a communal identity, and develop a sense of direction for the Indonesian people.

Metaphor, lexicalisation, and rationalisation were the three main strategies that helped Widodo to construct his message of inspiration and empowerment. These strategies enabled him to sculpt the image of a strong, decisive, forward-looking leader who could

tackle the difficulties caused by the pandemic as well as to depict the Indonesian people as agents who could determine the outcome of their lives during and after the pandemic. By promoting what he considered to be Indonesia's shared interests and collective aims in the pandemic era as well as soliciting the support of the citizenry and mobilising them for sociopolitical action, Widodo formulated an emancipatory discourse intended to liberate Indonesians from the difficulties of the pandemic and chart a way forward after the pandemic. Therefore, the study's findings and insights contribute to the growing body of research on progressive discourses in a context underexplored in the literature.

The findings highlight the crucial role of language as a resource for hope and as a response strategy during a crisis as well as its significance in helping individuals, communities, and societies make sense of their experiences and (re)imagine a positive future even if present circumstances are dire. Further, the study illustrates the utility of combining PDA and CDA, thereby echoing the value of interdisciplinary research. Viewing the two approaches as complementary rather than contradictory helps to underline the commitment of critical social research to positive change and transformation.

Disclosure Statement

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