



Critical discourse analysis of Donald Trump's tweets: An authentic teaching material for critical reading

Rahma Fitriana
Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta
fitrianarahma22@gmail.com

Abstract

Learners need to develop their critical literacy when they are dealing with texts in real classrooms (Porto, 2022). By looking at the texts critically, students did not only comprehend the content of the text but also could train their language sensitivity, which examines whether the use of language is appropriate for the intended purposes, and could enhance their higher-order thinking capacity. Learners can practice their critical thinking by immersing themselves with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) activities, which enable the learners to examine linguistic units, social contexts, and the writer's ideology behind the texts. The study attempts to analyse the ideology and framing strategy in a series of tweets posted by the former President of the United States of America, Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump) on the issue of immigrants, national security, and travel ban. It employed a textual analysis using Huckin's framework (1997) model of CDA and collected the tweets from @realDonaldTrump account, which talked about, or had direct relations with, those three interrelated issues. The findings showed that most of his tweets framed certain groups of people badly using provocative words, images, and videos. A critical reading task is possible to do by adopting critical analysis of these Twitter posts, where EFL readers are trained to be aware of the linguistic and multimodal elements in the tweets and make a link of those elements with textual features and the broader social contexts.

Keywords: *authentic materials, critical discourse analysis (CDA), critical reading, tweets*

INTRODUCTION

Raising students' language awareness and sensitivity has currently been an essential element of language teaching and learning. Learners do not only need to comprehend the texts, but also need to develop their critical literacy (Porto, 2022), which allows them to interpret and evaluate the text. Critical reading as a part of critical literacy has been linked to an improved cognitive abilities and critical thinking skills (Wallace, 2003). When the students read the text critically, they question the text and its arguments and underlying assumptions. Al Ghazali (2017) conducted a study of critical reading activities where the students read the newspaper article and discuss hidden messages of the texts and particular biases as the effect of the writer's slant. This reading activity was proved to raise students'

awareness on the language choices and the potential writer's intention to persuade the readers to think or behave in certain ways.

Nowadays, students are exposed to a wide range of media, including social media. There are loads of information in social media and it was updated in an extremely rapid manner, which leads Yin et al., (2012) label the social media text as 'noisy'. The information within the social media texts is not free from bias and implicit meaning, which can influence students to think or act in particular ways. On the other hand, the discussion on social media texts in the reading classroom was barely conducted (Hochman & Manovich, 2013). Teachers can use this type of authentic texts as the students are highly familiar of the social media posts. It is expected that students will find the materials meaningful and engage actively with the learning activities.

Numerous studies have discussed about the use of authentic materials for teaching critical reading (e.g., Al Ghazali, 2017; Amalia, 2016; Nasution et al., 2020). These studies have offered insightful findings, but they only use the printed materials, like newspaper and books as the authentic sources. Nasution et al. (2020), for example, used the text in a book and analysed it using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which was later presented in the classroom to teach discussion texts. Nasution et al. (2020) have clearly indicated a call for the future studies to work on other forms of texts including social media. Therefore, the current study aims to analyse Twitter posts by a popular and provocative account, @realDonaldTrump, who was the former President of the United States of America, Donald Trump. The analysis will be conducted using CDA to investigate ideology and framing strategy in his tweets and discuss it with a broader context of his position and power. The study also highlighted the pedagogical approach in using the tweets as a text in reading classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) emerged in the early 1990s, with the premise that linguistic analysis could provide a significant perspective to social critique (Bloommaert, 2005). It is, however, not only interested in investigating linguistic unit in isolation, but moves from there to study complex social phenomena (Paltridge, 2012). This employs the tradition which rejects the possibility of 'value-free' of any social phenomenon (van Dijk, 2005, p.352) and raises an awareness of not taking for granted what has been practised in society, therefore lends itself to critical investigation.

CDA inherits the characteristic of discourse analysis tradition in the sense that it investigates patterns of language across texts and explore how discourse relates to the contexts (Paltridge, 2012). However, it broadens its emphasis to uncover how and why such a practice has come into being. Fairclough (2012) outlines that CDA can be characterized as normative and explanatory; being normative implies that it does not only describe the realities, but evaluates them critically, while a sense of explanatory is gained as it seeks to explain the discourse emerged in terms of properties of social interaction. Hence, it is more interested in analyzing authentic texts (Huckin, 1997), which means that the text has already been produced in society, not specifically created for the sake of being investigated for a particular study. Another key feature of CDA is its common interest in elucidating how discourse produces social domination and power abuse.

There is no single consistent method of what CDA is (Fairclough, 2010; Machin and Mayr, 2012; Paltridge, 2012), in fact it integrates theoretical backgrounds and

involves multidisciplinary analysis (van Dijk, 2005). Huckin (1997) suggests a framework to analyse texts critically by considering the text as a whole and reading sentence by sentence. This stage examines genre, framing, foregrounding and backgrounding, as well as presuppositions. Genre refers to text type which features represent its purpose. Framing is the way the text is presented, which relates to foregrounding and backgrounding, which signifies writer's emphasizing or undermining certain issues in the text. An extreme backgrounding is omission, that is leaving certain things out of a text, which Machin and Mayr (2012) label as a revealing tool because language use tends to foreground certain things and silence others. Presuppositions, finally, deal with particular meanings assumed in a text.

Furthermore, in a sentence level, topicalisation, agency, and connotations are examined. As the name suggests, topicalisation deals with what the sentence is about and Huckin (1997) highlights that writers might create particular slant in selecting what to put in the topic position. It is also central to look at agent-patient relations in sentences, to reveal who is doing what to whom. Connotations refer to additional meaning of certain words as well as phrases, and may include an investigation of labels, metaphors, and register within the text. Cameron (2012) states that metaphors contribute to the writers' attitudes and ideas upon the addressed topic.

In addition, this approach can be employed to analyse discourse in social media, which allows people to express their views online and others can read their posts. This area is resourceful for CDA since Kreis (2017) points out that political topics are common among social media posts and it can be inferred that social network-based discourse is shaped by its users and at once might shape other users accessing the posts. One of the most widely used social media is Twitter, a microblogging service that facilitates social interaction through 140 characters or less (Honeycutt and Herring, 2009). Its microposts are called tweets, in which Twitter users generate and share content. Web data can be used as corpora in discourse analysis due to numerous data available and its accessible retrieval (Zappavigna, 2012). Added to this, as mentioned above that CDA features the analysis of semiotic data, this web-based data may also contain a range of multimedia. It leads to what has been proposed by van Leeuwen (2006) that discourses are often multimodally realized, moving the analysis from text and talk into other modes of communication such as images and videos. Tweets comprise text, image, video, and even link to another media, which implies that critical analysis upon this data might comprise multimodal analysis.

B. Authentic teaching materials

Teachers generally attempt to use the resources in the classrooms to enable students' understanding and engage them in the learning activities. Authentic materials have been widely used by the teachers at any educational level to increase students' motivation in learning as it offers real-life problems (Fachraini & Sartika, 2019). As the learning materials share students' everyday practice, they will relate to the problem discussed and find it meaningful. Students are also exposed to real use of languages, which allows them to learn how to use the language in particular contexts and pick up the language. Rusmawaty et al. (2018) state that using real materials can connect students to the use of English based on the contexts, leading to an improved ability to communicate and understand cultural nuances.

Authentic materials in teaching reading usually includes the printed materials, such as newspaper, magazines, or books. A study conducted by Al Ghazali (2017) documented the use of the newspaper articles on the debates between two political parties to improve

students' language awareness and exemplify power relations which was entrenched in an authentic argumentative text. The newspaper articles in Al Ghazali's (2017) study were analysed using CDA to give the students insights on how dominations affect discourse, thus they can think critically when exposed to similar texts. In Indonesian context, CDA has also applied to analyse an authentic text to teach reading, for example in Nasution's et al. (2020) study. Nasution et al. (2020) analysed a text entitled 'Driving Age, Increasing' which was retrieved from the book 'Debatbase', a book on building argumentative skills. Using Fairclough's model, the analysis uncovered that the text was dominated by material, verbal, and relational processes, and involve multi-perspective arguments as well as evidence-based sentences, which fit the nature of discussion text. The analysed text can be used as an English teacher to teach discussion and at the same time promote students' language awareness in more detailed.

C. Critical reading

Having proficient critical reading abilities is crucial for the students' academic achievement. Wallace and Wray (2006) define critical reading refers to the ability to value, evaluate, and think through author's idea thoroughly in the text. It is different from the common reading activities which focus on understanding what it is stated in the text and take for granted that its content is correct. Critical reading, on the contrary, creates judgments about the text and focuses on evaluating what the text implies and does to the readers. Critical reading, as a part of critical literacy, trains the students to question the arguments within the texts and interpret the text based on the context. Wallace (2003) states that critical reading activities are inspired by CDA. Drawing from CDA, critical reading sees language as social practice and it invites the students to analyse how the text writer uses language choices and relate it to the broader context. By conducting this activity, teachers do not only guide them to comprehend the text, but also improve language awareness.

Although critical reading is a typical activity in English for Academic Purposes (EAP), but this skill is highly needed for all students as it could also promote students' critical thinking. The steps of bringing the critical reading into the classroom consists of 1) creating main questions as the objective of reading activities, 2) developing the main questions into more in-depth questions. 3) evaluating the text to achieve the objective of reading the text itself. Wilson (2020) reminds that fostering students' critical attitudes requires scaffolding from the teachers to develop more profound abilities and critical thinking. Furthermore, being critical is not always correct in each culture (Paltridge, 2017), and the teachers should ensure a secure space in the transcultural interaction that the students are engaged in.

D. Twitter posts

Nowadays students deal with the authentic texts in a variety of online media, including Twitter. Unlike other social networks, microblogging service like Twitter allows 'asymmetrical relationships between accounts' (Zappavigna, 2012, p.27), bringing any Twitter users able to get into @realDonaldTrump and read his tweets even though he does not follow back. Added to this, this social network features hashtagging, symbolised as #, labelling a particular topic, such as #SaveAmericanLives and #NoSanctuaryForCriminalsAct which appear in several Trump's tweets. It lets Twitter users to search for the tag, indicating a certain issue, via the search interface that Twitter provides.

There is a study of anti-refugee discourse on Twitter, which investigates the use of hashtag #refugeesnotwelcome (Kreis, 2017). Although Kreis (2017) carried out a study in European context, his analysis shows a similar finding of the use of hashtag to express their negative perspectives toward immigrants and to affiliate their stances. It is revealed that more than 7000 posts featuring #refugeesnotwelcome were tweeted in February 2016 alone (p.499), indicating that this hashtag gained massive affiliation upon the issue. These facts broaden the reach of @realDonaldTrump tweets as the audience is not necessarily from the huge number of his followers but also those who might be interested in the specific topic.

METHODS

A. Research Design

The study employs a textual analysis using Huckin's framework (1989) model of critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA approach puts social problems and political issues as the main concern (Blackledge, 2012). Fairclough (2009, p. 167) prefers the term 'social wrong' to reflect those issues and define it as 'aspects of social systems, forms, orders, which are detrimental to human well-being' thus according to Wodak (2011), CDA aims to make those opaque aspects more visible. Likewise, Paltridge (2013) discusses that CDA intends to critically reveal several hidden values in social practice through tracing underlying ideologies and particular biases embedded in texts. By discussing how a particular discourse has come to be the way it is, CDA agrees on a chance for transforming existing realities in a way that improves social practice (Fairclough, 2012), which marks how CDA aims somewhat differently from other textual analysis.

B. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The object of the study is a tweet collection of the president of the U.S., Donald Trump—in his account @realDonaldTrump, which are retrieved from the inauguration day to the end of his presidency. There were 85 tweets talking about, or having direct relations with, the issue of immigrants, national security, and travel ban. These interrelated topics were selected because they are not only major issues spreading on a large scale but also rumour as an official policy in the U.S. The tweets were retrieved from @realDonaldTrump Twitter's account from close details examination which requires looking at texts with conceptual analysis rather than scanning for keywords. They were crosschecked by accessing an archive of Donald Trump's tweets (<http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/>) to ensure that there is no tweet, that relates to the mentioned issues, is excluded, including the deleted feeds. These data, then, are analysed under Huckin's (1997) framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To begin an analysis, Huckin (1997) argues that it is important to determine the typical readers of a text we examined. This includes putting oneself in the readers' position so that the way they might commonly deal with these tweets can be traced. As Twitter is international service (Zappavigna, 2012), it is reasonable to suppose that @realDonaldTrump account is globally accessed, not only by the U.S. citizens but also

international society. His followers—the term referring to those who has subscribed someone’s account, vary from those supporting Donald Trump, those against him, to those who would like to stay updated on political issues, including that in the U.S.

A. Textual analysis

Genre

It is often complicated to decide what is the genre of microposts as it consists of various meaning configuration but limited in terms of character length. Zappavigna (2012) considers that tweets belong to conversation as it allows participation of other users to engage in someone’s post. Nevertheless, Trump has been observed not really interested in replying other tweets, but instead, expressing his argument, complaining about something, informing about the current events, and merely telling stories.

It is not easy to simplify, though, as @realDonaldTrump quite frequently realize two purposes in one tweet.

“I have instructed Homeland Security to check people coming into our country VERY CAREFULLY. The courts are making the job very difficult!”

In this post, he told what he has done, which might be regarded as personal recount, but then he added an argumentative point in the second sentence by challenging the judge’s decision for rejecting his proposed travel ban. It indicates that he firstly presented a contextual information before articulating arguments, suggesting that Trump’s tweets do not always confirm to a single structure.

Framing

From a corpus of @realDonaldTrump tweets, it is clearly seen that he has chosen to frame immigrants and refugees as dangerous and bring negative impacts toward America, which implies threatening the national security. It is also interesting to note that every time Trump depicted dangerous immigrants, he referred to people coming from those Muslim countries which also might frame the readers that Muslims are the ones instigating peril. Trump has also deliberately depicted this phenomenon as the main reason for having travel ban. It can be noticed by how frequent he posted such tweets in the first month on which the issue emerges and did not comprise any other cause of immigration ban when tweeting about this topic.

Foregrounding/ backgrounding

This collection of tweets foregrounds the urgency to implement travel ban as a significant solution to address national security and in so doing it backgrounds a central information regarding other potential measures. He also highlighted specific countries to relate it with terrorism but only mentioned a few other countries which citizens has also made trouble in the U.S., as backgrounded information. This reflects that Trump somewhat shows his slant and might lead to stereotype immigrants coming from those banned countries as those performing bad actions.

Omission

Added to this, he boasts the negative impacts that immigrants have given, neglecting the fact he could have said the benefits that the immigrants have already contributed to the country. On the other hand, Trump also avoid saying anything about the possible difficulties that other citizens got by an imposed travel ban, bringing to a notion that the

fact he did not include such information gives a sufficient reason to raise a doubt about his real interests.

Visual aids

There are several microposts which include pictures and other visual aids in @realDonaldTrump's tweets. For example, powerful photo of Trump's signing a draft for travel ban is presented (<https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/824440456813707265>) which features the president is signing the document and other government officials observe him assuredly. This image speaks louder by illustrating that the ban is essential and valuably supported by important people and the readers might get the feeling that they should encourage that policy.

Also, upper-case letters are used in the following tweets to draw the reader's attention and might create a strong sense for the readers.

*"Big day planned on NATIONAL SECURITY tomorrow."
"SEE YOU IN COURT, THE SECURITY OF OUR NATION IS AT STAKE!"
"72% of refugees admitted into U.S. (2/3 -2/11) during COURT BREAKDOWN are from 7 countries: SYRIA, IRAQ, SOMALIA, IRAN, SUDAN, LIBYA & YEMEN"*

Presupposition

By examining the whole text, the way these tweets are framed presupposes that the immigrants and refugees have bad characteristics and threaten Americans' safety. There are also several sentence-level presuppositions which are embedded in a series of Trump's tweets. For example, when he posted a tweet "*illegal immigration is plummeting... We are truly making America great again*", he implies that firstly, there is a differentiation of legal immigration and the illegal one—he purposefully said so, in order that his readership takes for granted what he believes and that there is certain type of immigration which should be banned; secondly, America had been a great country, but on a certain former period, it was not great. He skillfully relates these two entities to leave impression that making America great is achieved through prohibiting *illegal immigrants*.

Topicalization

Looking at sentence level, it is revealed that there is a pattern which puts the words referring to travel ban and immigrants as a topic position:

*The travel ban should be...
CHAIN MIGRATION cannot...
Immigration ban is....
If the ban were ...
the ban was ...
illegal immigration is ...
77% of refugees ...
72% of refugees ...
gang members, drug dealers, and others...
many very bad and dangerous people...*

By topicalizing travel ban and immigrants, Trump reinforces the importance of both subjects in his tweets, thus he creates a tendency to his proposed travel ban which might influence the readers' perceptions that this policy is crucial.

Agency

Although the immigrants are frequently topicalized in this text, they are depicted to have less power, such as *are being removed*, *77% of refugees allowing into...*, *72% of refugees admitted into...* which suggests that they only can enter a country if they are permitted to do so. It is noticeably contrasted to the predicatives attached to Donald Trump, attributing his position as the President of the U.S, for instance *I have instructed...*, *I will be making...pick on*, *I have no higher duty than to protect...* which illustrate that he is powerful and has authority to initiate actions.

Connotations

Several connotations are employed by the writer with different strategies. One of them entails labelling, which is used to mention immigrants *as the bad, bad dudes, evil, illegal criminals*. Instead of having neutral terms, Trump labels them as negative entity and might direct the readers to have such a perception. Added to this, he also makes use of pronouns to put a clear distinction between ‘we’ and ‘they’ to construct the sense of in-group and out-group (Van Dijk, 2011). This suggests distance relationship between the two, displaying the feeling of anti-immigrants by addressing refugees, or those supporting refugees as ‘they.’

“We must keep "evil" out of our country!”

“There is nothing nice about searching for terrorists before they can enter our country. This was a big part of my campaign. Study the world!”

“People, the lawyers and the courts can call it whatever they want, but I am calling it what we need and what it is, a TRAVEL BAN!”

He also conveyed connotations through the use of metaphors, such as *build the wall*—referring to the attempt of creating a border so that immigrants cannot enter, *fabricated the facts*—referring to a newspaper posting numerous fake news so that it can be compared to creating massive commodity and *business of security*—referring to a phenomenon of the judge blocks his proposed travel ban, which makes Trump accuses it as political things. Interestingly, he offensively posted a tweet *“The opinion of this so-called judge, which essentially takes law-enforcement away from our country, is ridiculous and will be overturned!”* in which Trump indulges the federal judge with the expression *so-called judge* although he is indeed the judge, putting forward that the judge was doing something wrong—by blocking travel ban and could not be considered as a real judge.

B. Social analysis

Based on the analysis above, it is revealed that Donald Trump has negative sentiments upon immigrants, which are addressed through his microposts in Twitter. Trump uses a variety of strategies to support negative sense of immigrants. He employs connotations to portray immigrants undesirably and attach images and videos capturing the migrants who committed to crime. Most of the tweets are in fact devoted to the reports concerning with bad things that several immigrants have performed and even any possible crime that they might commit to in the U.S. This occurrence is discussed by van Dijk (2011) as the negative-other representations which emphasize other bad characteristics and de-emphasize their good qualities and this strategy certainly disadvantages immigrants/refugees. Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that Trump employs Twitter posts to perform power for stereotyping immigrants.

To achieve thorough interpretation of this phenomenon, Huckin (2002) argues that CDA should also take account of the actual context surrounding. This includes discussion of what might cause Donald Trump create intensive tweets under these topics. Removing terrorists from America was one of his campaigns in the president election thus he is eager to show that he is working on it even from a few days after officially appointed. It might construct the sense that he is a successful president and, in that way, public trust is ensured. This does not necessarily, however, direct public opinion on who constitutes as terrorists to people coming from countries or religions, as what are implicitly embedded in his tweets. His attempts to issue travel ban through tweets might also relate to historical context in which Twitter posts have contributed to make Trump win the election (Goldfarb, 2017). By implication, he is aware that social media is powerful to bring about these issues and thus he employs it not only to express negative values over immigrants but also to convince people regarding severe need for the ban.

In addition, the limited characters of Twitter posts, in which this stretch of discourse is produced, are also worth to consider. There is an argument that might raise to the claim which have been made in terms of omission and foregrounding/backgrounding. One could point out that tweets have character restrictions and that its user cannot be expected to talk about it further. Yet, it does not justify a selection pattern which can be observed from any other Trump's tweets related to these issues. A more balanced view would mention other positive impacts of having immigrants around, other than only mentioning negative effects, which is imprecisely restrained to crime issues.

C. Pedagogical implications

CDA provides several implications for language teaching. It helps students become critical readers, in the way that they are encouraged to analyse implied meanings in the text. Students will be framed that doing reading activities cannot only be achieved through matching comprehension to the teachers' understanding but needs to accommodate critical discussion, and in so doing, they practice critical literacy in language classroom. Critical literacy simply denotes looking at texts critically (Wallace, 2003) and CDA offers opportunities to do so in order that students could examine if the use of language is appropriate and fair for particular intended purposes (Kramsch, 1998), then further could improve their higher-order thinking skills (Afflerbach et al, 2015).

Added to this, it also allows explicit teaching of textual features. CDA can be used to let students think of framing, foregrounding, backgrounding, and omission to look at the whole text, and invite students to identify connotations, such as labels and metaphors to uncover embedded meanings of words/phrases in the texts. Specifically related to the analysis, it might be resourceful in language classroom as Huckin (1997) proposes that students are frequently interested in current issues, including those comprising political topics. Since it emerges as students' interest and something that they encounter in real life, students will engage in learning activities.

A critical reading task is possible to do by adopting critical analysis of Twitter posts. The target learners should comprise students with intermediate level or above, for example pre-college students and/or university students. This task aims to identify the textual and contextual features of the texts and discuss how and why they are reflected in it. The teachers can pick several @realDonaldTrump tweets within these interrelated issues as a reading text and provide a worksheet; both serve as the learning resources. It is important to note that the teachers should be also critical in terms of selecting texts and prepare a series of learning activities, keeping in mind that the teachers should have analysed the text themselves before handling over to students. This is due to an assumption that critical dialogues will happen

along critical reading activities (Wallace, 2003), so that teachers are expected to be knowledgeable in the topic discussed, moderate discussion well, and scaffold students to develop literacy skills and criticality. The other thing to consider when having this task is that the context in which English learning happens. In some countries, analysing governments' discourse is not really encouraged; instead, it is claimed as threatening or rebellious acts which can have serious consequences. Therefore, the teachers should ensure a safe space for the students to express themselves and engage in critical reading activities and at the same time, raise an awareness about the potential issue.

CONCLUSION

Twitter posts as texts published in social media often contain ideological underpinning and the students who are also the Twitter users should examine the posts carefully rather than merely reading as published. Using Huckin's (1997) framework, the study showed that @realDonaldTrump tweets employed variety of strategies to picture immigrants in the US negatively. The tweets frame the immigrants dangerous and terrorists, and create a presupposition that they could threaten the US' national security, leading him to impose travel bans. The tweets foreground bad actions performed by the immigrants from the banned countries and also background, if not omit, the contributions of the immigrants towards the country. Connotations are also used in the tweets and are achieved through labelling, in-group and out-group mentions, as well as metaphors. In addition, @realDonaldTrump used a picture attached in one of his tweets to create a sense that travel ban policy was important and that the policy was supported by government officials. Donald Trump was aware that social media was powerful in addressing these interrelated issues and persuade others about the urgent necessity of the ban.

The analysis can be used for teachers to generate discussion with students about the writer's potential tendency and bias embedded in the text. The students could learn beyond the language features and the text's structure, and dig broader information on sociocultural context, political situation, as well as the writer's power. Reading the authentic text and discussing it critically in the classroom will hopefully improve students' language awareness and critical thinking.

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