

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

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### **Abstract**

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

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

### **BACKGROUND**

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

Through diplomacy, political interest is bargained by negotiating them. Language in this case plays an important role in bargaining several political issues and interests. This make politics becomes a discursive phenomenon and language itself becomes a political phenomenon (Pelinka, 2007) Through language, political figures exert their power to maintain or break off social constrains. Dijk (2006:732) even states that politics is one of social fields that is ideological because different parties with their own ideology, interest and power are at stake. The main goal of exerting power through language is creating a political group regarding particular political matters. This can be happening because as one of social activity, linguistic activity reflects the speaker's social and ideological belief. Thus, the political group is based on the similarity of ideologies, interests and alliances (Dijk, 2006:732).

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

Not to mention, opposing or defending particular parties in such political meeting pose a

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

The complexity of the political discourse is best analyzed using the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Grammar/Linguistics (SFG/L) approach. This approach aligns with CDA concept which deems language, As one of social practices, as a means of exerting power particular participant in the discourse. Both of CDA and SFG agree that analysis on language should be done on three levels. The first analysis is text analysis in textual level, the second is processing analysis drawn in discursive level and the last is social analysis done under explanation level. Textual analysis focus on the description of the object of analysis (Janks, 1997). Processing analysis denotes the way the object of analysis is perceived (Janks, 1997). Textual analysis highlights the socio-historical condition governing the process (Janks, 1997).

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

Several studies have been conducted in the scope of politics and SFG. Wenden (2005) conducted a study under the title *The Politics of Representation: A Critical Discourse Analysis of an Aljazeera Special Report*. The study is done by interpreting several excerpts. The focus of the analysis is the social interpretation of the text. Horvarth’s research project (2009) entitles *Critical Discourse Analysis of Obama’s Political Discourse* focuses on the linguistic representation of Obama’s political speech. It highlights Obama’s perspective in perceiving several social phenomena. Alameda (2008) even conduct a case study with the title *SFL and CDA: Contributions of the Analysis of the Transitivity System in the Study of the Discursive Construction of National Identity (Case study: Gibraltar)*. As one of political community, the study focuses on the Gibraltar identity within the discourse.

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

## **REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

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

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

## METHOD

To get a comprehensive understanding of the social phenomenon, this study is drawn through a qualitative approach. By using this approach, this study discuss meaning based on people experience by describing how people make sense of their lives, what are their experiences and how they interpret the experiences which eventually construct their social lives (Meriam: 1988). The data source is the transcript of Benjamin Netanyahu's speech in United Nation General Assembly (UNGA) 2013. The data source is available to download at <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.550012>. To classify the data of the study, the researcher analyzes the transitivity system of the data source. Since this study is highlight nuclear Iran, the data are taken from the utterances positioning nuclear Iran as the affecting participant.

The position of nuclear Iran and its role are later discussed in the findings and discussion parts by using Fairclough's three stages of analysis. The first stage is focusing on anything represented in the text. This includes the vocabulary, the participant, the circumstances and grammar. The second stage is discursive level focusing on several factors interplaying within the social production and interpretation. In this study, the first two levels are discussed in findings section. The last stage is explanation level denoting the scope of the social practice within the discourse. This stage denotes several social conditions manifested in the text. In this study, this level is discussed in discussion section.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

As affecting participant, Iran's nuclear program appears in two kind of processes, material and relational. The detail number of the processes are presented in the table below.

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

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

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

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

Table 2: The table of the material process

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

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

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

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

Through these material processes, Benjamin construes two state of affair. First, Benjamin is afraid that nuclear Iran worsen the Middle East conflict. As in the current status quo, Middle East has been inflicted with political, geographical, and ideological conflict as well as terrorism issues within the area. The existence of nuclear Iran could raise the tension between countries and may lead to bigger state of war, a nuclear war. Nuclear Iran could also be a means of Iran to claim themselves as a powerful block in Middle East. This condition may also be utilized by Iran to create more Iran's

proxies. Therefore, a calm and peace situation will not be reached as long as nuclear Iran exists. Second, Benjamin also afraid of being attacked by Iran through its nuclear. This fear is reasonable because for Iran, Israel is an alien colonizing the land of Palestinian (Nader, 2013:22). However, to horrify his fear, Benjamin uses pronoun “our” which indicates that Iran may also attack other countries. Since the speech is delivered in international scope, the pronoun also implicitly indicate that Benjamin regard the International as his allies not Iran’s.

Besides performing material process, Benjamin also perform relational process when bringing up nuclear Iran as an affecting participant. From 8 relational processes, 5 of them are causative relational while the rest are intensive relational. 4 of the causative relational processes mention a nuclear-armed Iran as the carrier while the last causative brings up the danger of nuclear Iran as the carrier.

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

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

Table 3: The table of causative relational process

No.	Carrier	Relational: Causative	Attribute	Circumstances
1.	A nuclear-armed Iran	Would have a	On the (world’s) main energy supplies	Worldwide
2.	A nuclear-armed Iran	Would trigger	Nuclear proliferation	Throughout Middle East
3.	A nuclear-armed Iran	Turns	(The most unstable part of the planet) into a nuclear tinderbox	The most unstable part of the planet
4.	A nuclear-armed Iran	Would make	The specter of nuclear terrorism	(In Middle East) A clear and present danger

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

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

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

The first Benjamin’s concern considering nuclear Iran capability is its impact toward energy supplies worldwide. This consideration is supported by the fact that Iran, as an importer of natural gas, it needs to import gasoline and other refined oil products for Iranian consumption (ACA Research Staff, 2013:17). Iran is also lack of technology in tapping and sustaining oil production while most of the technology in processing Iran’s oil is owned by western companies (ACA Research Staff, 2013:17). Therefore, the preponderant need of Iran’s energy would mitigate the oil allotment.

The second consideration brought up by Benjamin is the circumstances of the process, Middle East. Iranian-Israeli adversary and other Middle East conflicts are spiced with terrorism issue. This phenomenon has made Middle east vulnerable than any other parts of the world. As written in the report for the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), Iran support terrorism and anti-western group would be more than just defensive purposes if Iran is developing nuclear energy (Kahl, Dalton, Irvine, 2012:7). Iran is subjected covertly to support Hizballah, Hamas and other militant groups by giving them lethal aid and armaments (Kahl, Dalton, Irvine, 2012). Thus, the nuclear backups from Iran to militant group would create the emergence of Middle East nuclear rivals and the tension among countries (Kahl, Dalton, Irvine, 2012:7).

Besides, pointing out nuclear Iran as an armament, Benjamin also gives a description of the

dangers of nuclear Iran through another causative relational. Interestingly, this causative relational projects other two processes.

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

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

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

The predicate of causative relational “have led” denotes a cause that change the characteristic of Arab and Israel. The change of Arabs characteristic is projected through other two processes. Mental process, projected by the causative relational inferring a state of affair. A state of affair, mentioned by Benjamin, is exerted through another intensive relational process. “Recognize” denotes new condition which was not acknowledged before. When Benjamin says that Arabs recognize Israel is not an enemy, it means that long before the dangers of nuclear Iran horrify Middle East, Jewish state is deemed as an enemy. The possible reason why Benjamin prefers to use disclaimer as Intensive Relational is because he is aware that some of International communities still consider Israel as the enemy of Arab and he wants to highlight the change of that perspective in International communities. By mentioning that they are no longer an enemy, Benjamin tries to construe one state of affair. He wants to brag about the friendship in order to denote Arab support and perspective that Israel is no longer an invader of the land.

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

Table 5: The table of Identifying relational process

No.	Token	Relational: Identifying	Value
1.	It (Nuclear-armed North Korea)	Pales in comparison to	The danger of nuclear-armed Iran
2.	A nuclear-armed Iran	Wouldn't be	Another North Korea
3.	A nuclear-armed Iran	Would be	Another 50 North Koreas

When the speaker wants to analyze the quality of a state of affair, identifying relational serves this goal best. As described in the table, the quality of nuclear Iran is compared to the quality of nuclear North Korea. The first similarity is portrayed when Benjamin expresses the Token of the process. He also equipped Nuclear North Korea with an adjective armed in the middle of the phrase. Not to mention, the selection of token and value has defined that nuclear North Korea and Iran is comparable. To glorify the horror, Benjamin even exaggerates the impact of nuclear Iran as 50 times the danger of North Korea's. His fear is reasonable due to the track record of North Korea which fails in cooperating with the world in terms of its nuclear. This has created tensions in International community.

### Discussion

In a world where war is no longer favorable, political dispute is done through diplomacy in a political meeting. Diplomacy is an official communication designed at foreign publics (Melissen, 2005:3). Such communication is done at political meeting attended by political figures in an International scale. Through diplomacy, political interest is bargained by negotiating them. Language in this case plays an important role in bargaining several political issues and interests. Through language, political figures exert their power to maintain or break off social constraints. Dijk (2006:732) even states that politics is one of social fields that is ideological because different parties with their own ideology, interest and power are at stake.

When Iran develops its nuclear, the safety of Israel, as its neighbor-opposition country, is at

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

Creating such allies is classified as Benjamin's struggle in creating dominant bloc or powerful participant within the discourse. This kind of group can only be achieved if they share similar ideologies, interest and alliances (Dijk: 2006: 732). The powerful participant has a privilege to choose which discourse types applied for all members (Fairclough: 1989). By choosing the discourse type, the powerful participants control the contributions of the other member through several constrains (Fairclough, 1989). The bigger dominant bloc created in a discourse, more power will be exerted in discourse. Thus, it results in more constrain for the powerless parties in giving their contribution.

In his speech, Benjamin exerts his power as the leader of Jewish state to invite the International community to take a stand on his side. The possible scenario if Benjamin's struggle is successful will be more oppression toward Iran and result in dismantling its nuclear. Benjamin's motivation in creating such discourse in nuclear Iran in UNGA is Israel's inability in facing nuclear Iran all alone. The Jewish state needs more support and allies to dismantle nuclear Iran. This implicitly states that Israel admits that the Jewish state is not powerful enough to win the battle over Iran. It is taken for granted that asking help form other powerful parties has put the agent of the discourse as a powerless participant. Benjamin may not state it out loud but from his struggle in UNGA, he implicitly puts Iran as more powerful parties than his country.

### **Conclusion**

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

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