

BETWEEN CRITICISM AND HATE SPEECH: A FORENSIC LINGUISTIC STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE ON THE MBG PROGRAM

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Abstract

This study examines the forms of hate-related discourse toward the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program on social media through a forensic linguistics perspective. As social media increasingly functions as a space for public discourse, it facilitates the emergence of various responses to government policies, ranging from constructive criticism to emotionally charged and potentially harmful expressions. This research adopts a qualitative descriptive method. The data consist of social media posts, comments, and video-based utterances that indicate negative or hate-related expressions toward the MBG program. Data were collected through observation, note-taking, and non-participatory techniques, and analyzed using lexical, semantic, and pragmatic frameworks within forensic linguistics. The findings indicate that most utterances cannot be strictly categorized as hate speech targeting specific identities. Instead, they represent evaluative and critical discourse characterized by sarcasm, exaggeration, and negative labeling. Lexical choices such as “toxic,” “stale,” and “rotten” demonstrate strong emotional evaluation, while pragmatically functioning as expressive and persuasive acts that influence public perception. Despite this, such discourse may still carry legal implications when involving unverified or misleading claims. This study underscores the importance of forensic linguistic analysis in differentiating between legitimate criticism, negative discourse, and hate speech within digital communication contexts.

Keywords – *hate speech; forensic linguistics; social media discourse; public policy; evaluative language*

Introduction

The development of digital technology and the rapid growth of social media usage have significantly transformed patterns of communication in society. Social media functions not only as a medium for sharing information but also as a discursive space where various opinions, criticisms, and responses to public policies are freely expressed. According to Boyd (2014), social media creates new interactive spaces that enable users to actively participate in the production and distribution of public discourse. In this context, freedom of expression is often accompanied by the emergence of deviant language practices, including hate speech.

One issue that has attracted public attention is the Free Nutritious Meal program (MBG), which has generated diverse responses from society in digital spaces. These responses are not always constructive; rather, they frequently contain hate speech, insults, and provocation that have the potential to trigger social conflict. Hate speech itself can be understood as a

form of expression that attacks individuals or groups based on certain identities and may lead to harmful social consequences (Waldron, 2012).

The phenomenon of hate speech on social media has become a significant concern as it relates to language ethics, social stability, and legal implications. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), language use in social interaction is closely tied to the principle of politeness, the violation of which may lead to interpersonal and social conflict. In the digital context, such violations become more complex due to the anonymous, rapid, and wide-reaching nature of communication (Jane, 2015).

Within the field of linguistics, hate speech can be analyzed not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as an act with legal consequences. Therefore, a forensic linguistics approach becomes relevant. Forensic linguistics is a branch of linguistics that examines the relationship between language, law, and judicial processes (Olsson, 2008; Coulthard & Johnson, 2010). This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of linguistic structure, meaning, and context in determining whether an utterance can be categorized as hate speech.

This study focuses on the analysis of hate speech related to the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program on social media. The selection of this topic is based on the high intensity of public discourse surrounding the policy and the potential emergence of language practices that deviate from norms of politeness and law. In line with previous studies indicating that social media serves as a fertile ground for the development of hate speech (Davidson et al., 2017), this study aims to examine the phenomenon more specifically within the context of public policy in Indonesia.

Accordingly, this study aims to identify and describe the forms of hate speech that emerge in discourse surrounding the MBG program on social media through a forensic linguistics approach. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of linguistic studies, particularly forensic linguistics, and to serve as a reference for understanding the phenomenon of hate speech in digital spaces. Perkembangan teknologi digital dan pesatnya penggunaan media sosial telah mengubah pola komunikasi masyarakat secara signifikan.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to provide an in-depth description of the phenomenon of hate speech in social media discourse. This approach is chosen because the data analyzed consist of utterances or texts that require interpretation of meaning based on social context and language use. The data sources in this study are utterances containing hate speech related to the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program, obtained from various social media platforms, including comments, posts, and video content. The data may take the form of written texts or spoken utterances, which are subsequently transcribed. The data are selected purposively, meaning that only data relevant to and indicative of hate speech are included.

Data collection is conducted using the observation method, which involves observing language use on social media without the researcher's direct involvement. This method is followed by a note-taking technique, in which utterances containing hate speech are recorded and documented. For video-based data, a non-participatory observation technique

(SBLC) is applied, involving the observation of utterances in videos and their transcription into textual form for further analysis.

Data analysis is carried out qualitatively using a forensic linguistics approach. The analysis consists of three stages: identification, classification, and interpretation. In the identification stage, the researcher selects utterances that contain elements of hate speech. The data are then classified based on types of hate speech, such as insults, derogatory expressions, and provocation. The analysis further examines lexical, semantic, and pragmatic aspects to understand word choice, meaning, as well as the context and intent of the utterances.

As a theoretical framework, this study adopts forensic linguistics, which examines the relationship between language and law, particularly in identifying utterances that may violate social and legal norms (Coulthard & Johnson, 2010). In addition, the concept of hate speech as a form of expression that attacks individuals or specific groups and has the potential to cause social harm is also used as a reference in the analysis (Waldron, 2012). Thus, the forensic linguistics approach is employed to reveal the linguistic characteristics of hate speech and its implications within the context of digital communication. The results of the analysis are presented descriptively by outlining the forms of hate speech identified along with their linguistic explanations.

Finding and Discussion

The findings of the study indicate that there are several utterances containing hate speech related to the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program. These data were obtained from several social media accounts.

1. Geger! Siswa di Garut Protes Sajian MBG Bau Basi, Ini Penjelasan Sekolah. Sumber:harapanrakyat.com

The data in the form of the utterance “Geger! Students in Garut Protest MBG Meal Serving Due to a Stale Smell, Here Is the School’s Explanation” demonstrates the use of language that tends to be sensational and evaluative when examined through a forensic linguistics approach. Lexically, the word “geger” carries a strong emotional charge and functions to attract readers’ attention while constructing the impression that the reported event is extraordinary or shocking. Meanwhile, the word “protest” indicates dissatisfaction, and the phrase “stale smell” contains a negative connotation referring to poor food quality. Collectively, these lexical choices form a framing that emphasizes the negative aspects of the reported event.

Semantically, this utterance does not merely convey information about students’ complaints regarding the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program, but also constructs an evaluative meaning that may influence public perception. The use of the word “geger” amplifies the meaning of the utterance, making the event appear to have a significant impact and to warrant widespread attention. From a pragmatic perspective, the utterance functions as a representative speech act because it conveys information, but it also contains indirect expressive and persuasive elements aimed at attracting readers’ interest, as commonly found in online media headlines.

From a forensic linguistics perspective, this utterance does not explicitly constitute hate speech, as it does not target or attack any specific individual or group. However, it has the

potential to shape negative opinions toward parties associated with the MBG program or the school institution. If the information presented is inaccurate or exaggerated, such an utterance may lead to legal issues, such as defamation or the dissemination of misleading information. Therefore, this utterance is more appropriately understood as a form of media discourse that employs linguistic strategies to construct attention and public perception, rather than as direct hate speech.

2. Menu MBG di SDN Cisaranda 1 Warkon terdapat belatung, Guru: Siswa tak mau makan, jijik!

Sumber: ayobandung.com · 21h ago

The data in the form of the utterance “MBG Menu at SDN Cisaranda 1 Warkon Contains Maggots, Teacher: Students Refuse to Eat, Disgusted!” demonstrates the use of language with strong lexical loading that tends to construct negative perceptions in the public sphere. Lexically, the word “maggots” is highly connotative and carries associations of disgust, as well as referring to food that is unfit for consumption. This term intensifies the emotional impact on readers. In addition, the word “disgusted,” as a direct expression of the students’ response, reinforces the affective reaction to the situation. Meanwhile, the phrase “refuse to eat” indicates rejection, further strengthening the impression that the food condition is unacceptable. Overall, these lexical choices form a discourse construction that strongly emphasizes negative aspects.

Semantically, this utterance does not merely convey factual information about the condition of food in the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program, but also contains a strong evaluative meaning. The presence of the words “maggots” and “disgusted” constructs a negative image of the program’s quality. The meaning produced is not neutral; rather, it tends to lead readers toward a negative judgment even before fully understanding the context. Thus, the utterance functions not only as a means of conveying information but also as a tool for shaping public opinion.

From a pragmatic perspective, the utterance functions as a representative speech act because it reports an event, but it also contains an expressive function through the direct quotation “disgusted!”, which reflects an emotional stance. Furthermore, the sentence structure demonstrates a foregrounding strategy, emphasizing the most striking element—“maggots”—to capture readers’ attention quickly. In the context of social media or online media, such utterances may also be categorized as indirect persuasive strategies or clickbait, as they are designed to increase audience appeal and engagement.

From a forensic linguistics perspective, this utterance does not explicitly constitute hate speech, as it does not target or attack any specific individual or group based on identity. However, it has potential legal implications if the information presented is inaccurate or unverifiable, as it may harm certain parties, such as the school institution or the organizers of the MBG program. Therefore, from a forensic linguistics standpoint, this utterance is more appropriately categorized as evaluative discourse with negative connotations that may significantly shape public opinion, and thus should be examined carefully in relation to the accuracy of information and its social impact.

3. **@Nabilnuril: tpi mending di uangkan pakk.. krna menu gak sesuai ekpektasi pak ...dan blum tentu anak2 suka apa yg mereka sediakan pak. klo di uangkan orang tua bisa memasak makanan yg anaknya suka pak.. apa lagi buahnya kdang busuk bonyok dll... susu plant anak2 jelaz gak suka susu plant .. mending di uangkan 1hari 20rbu aja pak**

The data in the form of the utterance “but it would be better if it were given in cash, sir... because the menu does not meet expectations, sir... and it is not certain that children like what is provided, sir. If it were given in cash, parents could cook food that their children prefer, sir... moreover, the fruit is sometimes rotten or bruised, etc... plant-based milk, children clearly do not like plant milk... it would be better if it were given as 20,000 rupiah per day, sir” demonstrates characteristics of informal language commonly used in social media communication, and contains evaluative content regarding the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program. Lexically, the use of expressions such as “does not meet expectations,” “rotten,” “bruised,” and “children clearly do not like it” reflects negative evaluations of the quality of the food provided. These word choices are subjective and indicate the speaker’s dissatisfaction. In addition, the use of non-standard forms (e.g., abbreviations and informal spelling) reflects a casual language variety typical of digital communication.

Semantically, this utterance conveys a primary meaning in the form of criticism of the implementation of the MBG program, particularly concerning the quality of the food and its suitability to children’s preferences. The speaker not only expresses complaints but also proposes an alternative solution, namely converting the assistance into cash amounting to “20,000 rupiah per day.” The meaning constructed is both evaluative and argumentative, as the speaker attempts to persuade readers that cash assistance would be more effective than directly providing meals.

From a pragmatic perspective, this utterance performs both directive and expressive illocutionary acts. The directive function is evident in the suggestion that the program should be converted into cash assistance, while the expressive function appears in the expression of dissatisfaction with the food quality. The repeated use of the address term “sir” indicates an orientation toward authority or policymakers, suggesting that the utterance functions as a direct critique addressed to those responsible for the program. Furthermore, the repetitive style and emphasis on negative aspects indicate a persuasive attempt to influence readers’ opinions.

From a forensic linguistics perspective, this utterance does not constitute hate speech, as it does not attack any individual or group based on specific identity markers. However, it contains relatively strong criticism and has the potential to shape negative public opinion toward the MBG program. If statements such as “the fruit is sometimes rotten” or “children clearly do not like it” are not supported by valid evidence, they may, in certain contexts, lead to legal implications, such as the dissemination of unverified information. Therefore, this utterance is more appropriately categorized as evaluative and argumentative discourse in the digital sphere, reflecting public perceptions and attitudes toward a public policy.

4. **@orangsusah: beracun tadi teman saya muntah**

The data in the form of the utterance “it was poisonous, my friend vomited earlier” constitutes a brief statement that carries serious implications when analyzed from a forensic

linguistics perspective. Lexically, the word “poisonous” is a highly loaded term, as it indicates the presence of harmful substances that may endanger health or even safety. This term has significant legal implications, as it relates to potential poisoning or negligence in food provision. Meanwhile, the phrase “my friend vomited” functions as an account of direct experience, reinforcing the preceding claim and increasing the perceived credibility of the utterance, even though it may not necessarily be factually verified.

Semantically, this utterance constructs an implicit cause-and-effect relationship, suggesting that the “poisonous” condition caused the act of “vomiting.” Although this causal link is not explicitly explained, the sentence structure is sufficient to create the perception that a harmful incident has occurred. The meaning produced is both informative and evaluative, as it not only reports an event but also conveys a negative assessment of the object being discussed.

From a pragmatic perspective, this utterance performs a representative illocutionary function, as it conveys information or a claim about an event. However, in the context of social media communication, it may also function as a warning or alert to other readers. The simplicity of the sentence structure enhances its shock value and facilitates rapid dissemination, as it is easily understood and capable of generating concern.

From a forensic linguistics perspective, this utterance carries more significant legal implications compared to the previous data. The claim that something is “poisonous” constitutes a serious allegation that may affect the reputation of certain parties, particularly if it is associated with a specific program or institution. If such a statement is not supported by valid evidence, it may potentially be categorized as the dissemination of misleading information or even defamation. Conversely, if proven to be true, the utterance may serve as part of linguistic evidence indicating the occurrence of a harmful incident. Therefore, in forensic linguistics, this utterance must be analyzed not only from a linguistic standpoint but also in relation to context, factual verification, and its legal consequences.

5. @putri Fatima: beracun lah,basi nd bau,buahnya bisuk

The data in the form of the utterance “it’s poisonous, stale and smells bad, the fruit is rotten” demonstrates the use of highly evaluative language with strong negative connotations in the context of social media communication. Lexically, the word “poisonous” is an extreme choice that carries a serious accusation, as it implies the presence of harmful substances. The word “stale” and the phrase “smells bad” further reinforce the image of food that is unfit for consumption, while “the fruit is rotten” intensifies the negative assessment of food quality. In addition, the particle “lah” functions as an emphatic marker, indicating certainty or strengthening the speaker’s claim. Non-standard forms such as abbreviations and informal spellings reflect the informal language variety typical of social media.

Semantically, this utterance constructs a cumulative meaning that emphasizes that the food in question is not only of poor quality but also potentially harmful. The combination of several negatively connoted words within a single utterance reinforces the impression that the described condition is severe. The meaning produced is both evaluative and hyperbolic, as the use of the word “poisonous” does not necessarily refer to a factual condition but may also function as an emotional intensifier.

From a pragmatic perspective, this utterance performs a strong expressive illocutionary function, conveying dissatisfaction, disgust, or anger toward the observed or experienced condition. In addition, it may function as an indirect warning to other readers. The short, compact, and clustered sentence structure (without clear conjunctions) reflects a spontaneous communication style typical of social media, while also enhancing its suggestive impact on readers.

From a forensic linguistics perspective, this utterance does not directly constitute hate speech, as it does not target the identity of any individual or group. However, the use of the word “poisonous” as an (accusation) may carry legal implications if directed at a particular party without valid supporting evidence, as it may damage reputation. Conversely, if the utterance reflects actual conditions, it may indicate a serious issue that requires further investigation. Therefore, from a forensic standpoint, this utterance can be categorized as evaluative discourse with high negative intensity, requiring verification of context and factual accuracy to determine its legal implications.

6. @grim reaper: mbg = makanan beracun gratis

The data in the form of the utterance “MBG = free poisonous food” represents a concise linguistic expression that carries a very strong evaluative load. Lexically, this utterance employs the acronym “MBG,” which generally refers to Free Nutritious Meals, and reconstructs it into “free poisonous food.” This shift in meaning reflects a form of wordplay that is satirical and ironic in nature. The word “poisonous” serves as the key element with highly negative connotations, as it implies a threat to health, while the word “free” is retained to emphasize the program’s context, albeit in a sarcastic tone.

Semantically, this utterance constructs a new associative meaning that deviates from the original meaning of the acronym MBG. This process of redefinition produces an evaluative meaning that is derogatory and discrediting toward the program. The resulting meaning is no longer neutral but conveys sharp criticism delivered implicitly through sarcastic humor. Thus, the utterance functions not only to convey information but also to shape negative opinion through a strategy of semantic simplification.

From a pragmatic perspective, this utterance functions as both an expressive and evaluative speech act, reflecting the speaker’s attitude of dissatisfaction or distrust toward the MBG program. Furthermore, the use of the equality sign “=” indicates an attempt at emphasis and simplification, as if the two meanings were equivalent. In the context of social media, such utterances also have high viral potential due to their brevity, memorability, and provocative nature.

From a forensic linguistics perspective, this utterance does not explicitly constitute hate speech, as it does not target any individual or group based on identity. However, it may be categorized as a form of symbolic derogation or discrediting discourse, namely an attempt to undermine a program or institution through negatively charged wordplay. The use of the word “poisonous” as a substitute for the official meaning may carry legal implications if it is considered an unfounded accusation that harms certain parties. Therefore, from a forensic standpoint, this utterance should be analyzed in relation to its context of use, the speaker’s intent, and its impact within the digital public sphere.

7. @**A****: MBG Beracun**

The data in the form of the utterance “MBG is poisonous” represents a very brief expression that carries strong meaning and significant implications when analyzed from a forensic linguistics perspective. Lexically, this phrase combines the acronym “MBG” (Free Nutritious Meal) with the word “poisonous,” which has highly negative connotations and implies the presence of harmful substances. This combination produces a meaning construction that directly discredits the program without further explanation. The simplicity of the structure actually strengthens its assertive effect, as there are no mitigating or balancing elements.

Semantically, this utterance constructs an associative meaning that is reductive in nature, simplifying the entire MBG program into something harmful. There is no contextual information or explanation of cause and effect, resulting in a generalized meaning. In this sense, the utterance can be understood as a form of labeling that carries negative connotations and has the potential to influence public perception broadly.

From a pragmatic perspective, this utterance performs a strong expressive and evaluative illocutionary function, expressing distrust or a negative judgment toward the MBG program. In the context of social media, such short and provocative expressions also function as rhetorical devices to attract attention and elicit responses from other users. The absence of context creates a wide scope for interpretation, thereby increasing its potential impact on shaping public opinion.

From a forensic linguistics perspective, the utterance “MBG is poisonous” does not directly constitute hate speech, as it does not target any individual or group based on specific identity markers. However, it carries the potential to be considered defamation or the dissemination of misleading information if it is not supported by verifiable facts. The use of the word “poisonous” as a direct claim about a public program constitutes a serious allegation that may affect the reputation of the parties involved. Therefore, from a forensic standpoint, this utterance can be categorized as provocative evaluative discourse that requires further analysis in relation to context, speaker intention, and factual accuracy.

8. Miris! MBG Justru Mubazir, Warga Sampai Punguti Nasi yang Menggunung
Sumber: pojoksatu.id

The data in the form of the utterance “It’s concerning! MBG Turns Out to Be Wasteful, Residents Even Collect Piles of Leftover Rice” demonstrates the use of evaluative and persuasive language with a relatively strong emotional charge. Lexically, the word “concerning” functions as an emotional marker that conveys a sense of worry or disappointment, while simultaneously guiding readers to share the same भावना. The word “wasteful” carries a negative connotation, referring to inefficiency or misuse of resources, thereby reinforcing a negative image of the MBG program. The phrase “piles of rice” represents a hyperbolic expression that depicts an excessive amount of food being wasted, while “residents even collect” emphasizes an extreme response to the situation. Collectively, these lexical choices construct a framing that highlights the failure or inefficiency of the program.

Semantically, this utterance builds a strong evaluative meaning by associating the MBG program with wastefulness and improper distribution. The meaning produced is not merely informative but also contains an implicit judgment that the program is not functioning as intended. The use of the word “turns out” strengthens the contrast between the initial expectation (a beneficial program) and the depicted reality (wastefulness), thereby intensifying the negative impression.

From a pragmatic perspective, this utterance performs both expressive and representative illocutionary functions. The representative function is evident in the delivery of information about the situation, while the expressive function is reflected in the use of the word “concerning,” which conveys the speaker’s attitude. In addition, the utterance contains an indirect persuasive function, as it has the potential to influence public opinion through dramatic and hyperbolic language. The sentence structure, which begins with an emotional expression (“It’s concerning!”), demonstrates a foregrounding strategy aimed at attracting readers’ attention.

From a forensic linguistics perspective, this utterance does not constitute hate speech, as it does not attack any individual or group based on identity. However, it can be categorized as evaluative discourse that has the potential to shape negative public opinion toward the MBG program. If the information presented—such as “piles of rice” or residents “collecting” leftovers—is not supported by accurate data, it may lead to legal implications, such as the dissemination of misleading information or harm to the reputation of certain parties. Therefore, from a forensic standpoint, this utterance should be understood as a linguistic construction that combines facts, opinions, and rhetorical strategies to influence public perception, and thus requires verification of context and factual accuracy before drawing further conclusions.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the use of the phrase “kawitan kodya” in TikTok digital content represents a transformation in the meaning of local Balinese cultural symbols within a contemporary urban context. The term *kawitan*, which traditionally refers to sacred genealogical origins, is reinterpreted as a symbol of modernity and community solidarity among “anak kodya” through the framework of humor. The expression “tabik sugra” functions as a performative strategy that constructs a digital persona while simultaneously strengthening social closeness between the creator and the audience, whereas the phrase “kle kle kle” serves as a humor marker that signifies solidarity and shared understanding within the urban Balinese community.

This phenomenon indicates that language in digital content functions not only as a tool of communication but also as a medium for identity construction, cultural meaning negotiation, and glocalization practices that integrate local symbols with modern global spaces. Thus, TikTok becomes a representational space that illustrates how urban Balinese identity is produced, reproduced, and negotiated through language and humor in the era of social media.

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