

# The subjectivity portrayed in online news under the theme of COVID-19 in Indonesia



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**Abstract** Subjectivity is a crucial problem in the news and can be seen through the representation of clause projection. This current study attempts to investigate the subjectivity portrayed in online news text. Dealing with this, qualitative approach through content analysis method was used as research design. The data were selected purposively from twenty online news from reputable newspaper in Indonesia under the theme of COVID-19 pandemic. The data itself were in the clauses forms and analyzed by using the theory of logical function. Based on the analysis, it is concluded that that the news has low subjectivity indicated by the domination of locution clauses rather than idea clauses (either in paratactic or hypotactic form). Locution clause are represented by the process such as *ujar* (said), *ungkap* (state), *berkata* (said), *tambah* (add), *terang* (explain), *jelas* (explain), *urai* (elaborate), *tutur* (state), and *imbuh* (add). Meanwhile, the indication of 'subjectivity' in the data includes the idea clauses represented by the process such as *pungkas* (conclude), *menurut* (thinks), *pikir* (thinks), and *asumsi* (assume). It can be inferred that the news writers and editors consistently keep the information as original as it is by maintaining the objectivity.

**Keywords:** subjectivity, online news, locution, idea

## 1. Introduction

Newspapers, as mass media, are among the providers of information. Newspapers are differentiated based on their coverage of local newspapers and national newspapers. Newspapers, as in any other type of text, express events taking place there (in the "real" world) through linguistic choices written by the editor. That is, events are reconstructed as text through discourse. In the social context of functional systemic theory, language has three main functions, which are called metafunctions. These metafunctions include ideational (experiential and logical), interpersonal, and textual functions (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014).

Analyzing COVID-19-related news through the lens of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) provides insights into how language is used to construct meaning and represent various aspects of the pandemic within a social context. SFL emphasizes the functional aspects of language, examining how language works to accomplish communicative purposes and how it reflects social structures. In the case of COVID-19 news, the SFL can be applied to analyze the language choices, representations, and discourses employed in media coverage. One key aspect of SFL is the concept of "ideational," "interpersonal," and "textual" metafunctions, which represent how language is used to convey information, express interpersonal relationships, and structure discourse (Yusuf et al., 2021). Applying these metafunctions to COVID-19 news allows us to dissect how information is presented, how social relationships are constructed, and how the news discourse is organized.

In terms of ideational functioning, COVID-19 news typically conveys information about the virus, its spread, and its impact on individuals and communities. SFL analysis examines the choices of processes (actions, occurrences) and participants (who or what is involved) to understand how events are represented. For instance, news articles may use passive voice to focus on the impact of the virus rather than attributing actions to specific individuals. Furthermore, when analyzing COVID-19-related news through ideational functions, systemic functional linguistics (SFL) places a significant focus on the clause complex, which consists of clauses and their relationships within a text. This analysis helps us understand how information about the pandemic is structured, what events are highlighted, and how participants in those events are represented.

Clause complexity is defined as a grammatical construction consisting of two or more clauses (simplex). From the perspective of SFL theory, complex clauses are described in ideational language functions. Complex clauses have interdependent relationships and logical semantics (Ali et al., 2015; Hajar & Sinar, 2019; Humaizi & Yusuf, 2024; Nurlela et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2021)). Furthermore, the interdependence of clauses is called taxis, and logical semantic relationships explain the relationship between primary and secondary clauses. The clause complex is fundamental to the construction of



meaning in language. Analyzing how information is linguistically structured helps uncover the intended messages, implications, and perspectives embedded in news reports. This understanding is crucial for critically assessing the framing of COVID-19-related news and its potential impact on public perception.

The cause interdependence relationship is divided into 2 categories, namely, parataxis (where the clause is related to the same entity or independent entity) and hypotaxis (where the clause is related to the main clause through a dependency relationship). In a parataxis clause, each clause is labeled with a regular number (1, 2, etc.), whereas in a hypotaxis clause, the clauses are labeled with a Greek letter ( $\alpha$ , etc.) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; McCabe & Heilman, 2007). The letter is used for the dominant clause, while the number is used for the dependent clause.

The logical semantic relationship of the clause is divided into 2 parts, namely, expansion and projection. Expansion consists of extension, enhancement, and elaboration. Projections are the second type of logical semantic relationship (Eggin, 2004; Ganie et al., 2020; Hanafiah et al., 2018; Saragih, 2007). Halliday states that projection is a secondary clause projected through a primary clause, which states it as a locution or an idea (Hajar & Sinar, 2019), (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In relation to subjectivity, if the quote in the news is more dominant in using ideas (represented by mental processes), then the subjectivity of the news will be greater. On the other hand, if dominant news uses locution (a verbal process), the level of subjectivity used by the editor in writing the news is low (Asad et al., 2019; Martin & Rose, 2003; Sinaga, 2019; Sinar, 2003; Zein et al., 2019). High subjectivity can be found in news that is either entertainment or controversial.

Projections are the second type of logico-semantic relationship. The projection relationship is divided into 2 parts, namely, locutions and ideas, which can be the basis for determining subjectivity in a piece of news (Andersen & Holsting, 2018; Gerot & Wignell, 1994; Miles et al., 2014; Wulansari, 2017). If a newspaper is more dominant in using idea projection, then the editor's subjectivity in writing news in the newspaper is high; conversely, if locutionary projection is more dominant, the editor's objectivity in writing the news is high (Ihsanuddin, 2020; Susanto, 2020).

Several previous studies have been conducted on COVID-19-related news through transitivity analysis (Fadilah & Kuswoyo, 2021), through interpersonal function (Putri et al., 2021), through humor (Mulyadi, Yusuf, & Siregar, 2021; Yusuf, Mono, & Humaizi, 2023), and through critical discourse analysis (Mintarsih et al., 2020; Wang, 2021). Moreover, studies related to clause complexes in many settings have been performed by scholars, such as in research abstracts (Raputri, 2022; Sinar et al., 2023), short stories (Sarip & Hidayat, 2019), conversations (Ifadloh & Nufus, 2017; Kurniawati & Astika, 2011; Zein et al., 2021), and exposition texts (Kurniawan et al., 2021). Based on the background presented in advance and the findings of previous studies, the clause complex is crucial for analyzing news about COVID-19 because it provides a systematic framework for understanding how information is constructed, organized, and conveyed through language. The clause complex, within the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) framework, allows for a detailed examination of the ideational function, focusing on the processes, participants, and circumstances involved in the events described in news articles.

Understanding and analyzing subjectivity in COVID-19-related news is highly important due to its profound impact on public perception. In the dynamic landscape of news reporting during a global health crisis, the way information is framed and presented shapes individuals' understanding of and attitudes toward the pandemic. Subjectivity, as revealed through the choice of clauses and linguistic expressions, influences the tone, emphasis, and implicit messaging within news narratives.

Studying subjectivity in COVID-19 news allows researchers and media analysts to unravel the underlying biases, intentions, and editorial decisions that may sway public opinion. The prevalence of locution clauses over idea clauses can indicate the degree of objectivity in reporting. This insight is crucial for ensuring that news sources maintain transparency and credibility, fostering trust in the information disseminated. Moreover, the impact of subjectivity on public perception extends beyond mere consumption of information; it can influence behavior, adherence to public health guidelines, and overall societal responses to the pandemic. By examining subjectivity in COVID-19-related news, a deeper understanding of how media narratives contribute to shaping public attitudes can be gained, ultimately informing strategies for effective communication and fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry in the face of a global health crisis. Therefore, the present study attempts to investigate the subjectivity portrayed in online news text through complex clause analysis based on systemic functional linguistic theory.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The research design applied was the method of content analysis through a qualitative approach. The newspapers chosen were Kompas and Media Indonesia, where these two newspapers were the best newspapers selected by the Indonesia Print Media Award (IPMA) in 2020. The data were in the form of clause complexes. The data were obtained in the form of news screenshots from the newspapers Media Indonesia ([mediaindonesia.com](http://mediaindonesia.com)) and Kompas ([kompas.com](http://kompas.com)) related to COVID-19, which were obtained online. The news taken was from news items related to the economy, education, and health in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. The news taken is from March 2020-April 2020. The time was chosen according to the beginning of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, as evidenced by the discovery of positive confirmed cases of COVID-19.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Logically, there are two important systems, namely, the system of taxis (the interdependency relationship of clauses) and the logico-semantic system of clauses (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), (Andersen & Holting, 2018). Taxis describes the interdependency of clauses that distinguish them based on their status. If the status is equal, the clauses hold the same status and are regarded as parataxis, which is then coded by the utilization of Arabic numbers (1, 2, 3...etc.). This coding is based on the sequence in which they occur. On the other hand, if unequal status appears in clauses (traditionally called superordinate and subordinate clauses), it will be considered hypotactic and coded by the utilization of  $\alpha, \beta, \gamma$ , etc.

The type of projection used in the source can be used as a parameter to measure the subjectivity of the writer (Saragih, 2007). If the clauses are dominated by 'idea' clauses, the subjectivity of the author in writing the news is high. This approach is reasonable since it involves the meaning projection or an idea report from the projected clause that shows the meaning delivered less than the actual words said by the source (Saragih, 2007).

Projection involves the representation of a linguistic experience in another linguistic experience. It is also comprehended as one clause being quoted or responded to by another clause (Saragih, 2007). Projection can be divided into two areas, namely, locution (speech is projected) and ideas (idea is projected). Locution is signaled by the use of verbal processes such as say, tell, or report. The locution clause is coded by using double quotes ("). Moreover, clauses containing 'ideas' address the employment of mental processes in projecting clauses. It is coded by the use of a single quote (') (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Based on their dependency, projections are categorized into paratactic and hypotactic projections. In the parataxis projection (quoting), the construction of the clauses holds the same status. This means that either the projecting or projected clause is considered to be independent and that the position is reversible (Saragih, 2007). The first clause is also understood to be regarded as an initiating clause. The initiating clause comes before the continuing clause.

### 3.1. Paratactic idea

In the context of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), the term "paratactic idea" typically refers to a type of syntactic structure known as parataxis. Parataxis is a grammatical and rhetorical structure in which clauses or elements are placed alongside each other without explicit markers of subordination or coordination. In other words, the clauses are independent and have equal syntactic status. The relationship between the clauses is often left for the reader or listener to infer. Example of a clause containing a paratactic idea. The example found in the data is presented as follows.

The "Menteri Luhut berasumsi jika tracing merupakan kunci dari pengendalian virus covid-19".  
 The Minister, Luhut, assumed that tracing is the key to controlling the COVID-19 virus.

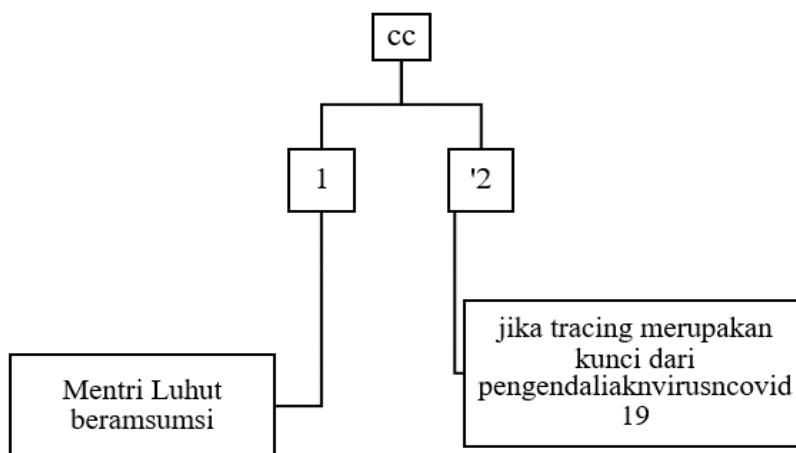


Figure 1 Paratactic idea.

Figure 1 shows that the words 'berasumsi' and 'to assume' are signals of the use of ideas. The use of parataxis contributes to a straightforward and direct style of communication. This can be contrasted with hypotaxis, where clauses are linked through subordination, creating a hierarchical structure.

### 3.2. Paratactic locution

Paratactic locution refers to the relationship between two independent clauses in a complex clause in which a clause projects the other clause by using a verbal process. This is generally traditionally also referred to as direct speech. Another important point is that the positions of the two clauses that share the same status can be exchanged (swapped) with each other. The example found in the data is presented as follows.



"COVID-19 kini telah menjadi wabah bagi kita semua, untuk itu marilah kita bersama-sama menjalankan protokol kesehatan 5 M" ujar Siska, Perawat di Wisma Atlet".

"COVID-19 has now become an epidemic for all of us, so let us work together to implement the 5 M health protocol," said Siska, Nurse at the Athlete's House."

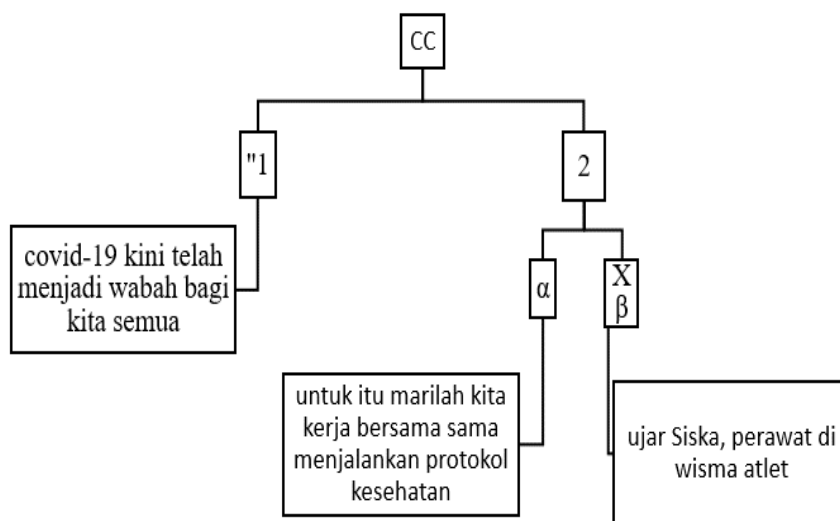


Figure 2 Paratactic location.

### 3.3. Hypotactic locution (finite)

In hypotactic locution (finite), it refers to the relationship between dependent and independent clauses in a complex clause. Furthermore, traditionally, this type of clause is also known as an indirect clause. This type of clause is categorized based on the use of finite in the projected clause. This happens when the projected clause is in an indicative or interrogative mood. The example found in the data is presented as follows.

"Presiden Joko Widodo mengungkapkan pemvaksinan merupakan salah satu cara agar kehidupan masyarakat bisa Kembali normal."

"President Joko Widodo said that vaccination is one way for people's lives to return to normal."

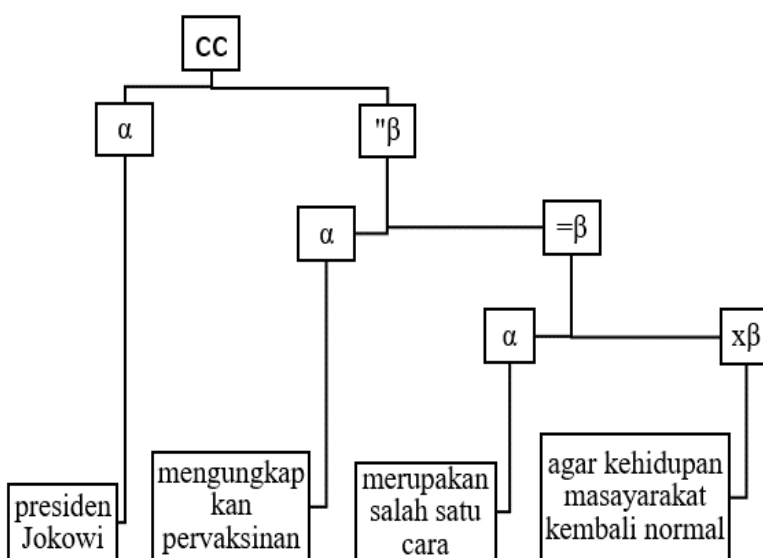


Figure 3 Hypotactic location (finite).

The analysis in Figure 3 shows that hypotactic structures involve the subordination of one clause to another. A subordinate clause often provides additional information or context, and this syntactic structure can be employed to convey various interpersonal meanings.

3.4. Hypotactic locution (nonfinite)

Hypotactic locution nonfinite is signified from the use of verbal processes in initiating clauses ( $\alpha$ ) but not in dependent clauses ( $\beta$ ), which are not finite. This is very likely to happen when the projected clause is in an imperative mood. The example found in the data is presented as follows.

“Menteri Keuangan, Sri Mulyani, mengatakan jika PPKM akan berlangsung selama 6 minggu”.  
 The Minister of Finance, Sri Mulyani, said that PPKM would last for 6 weeks.

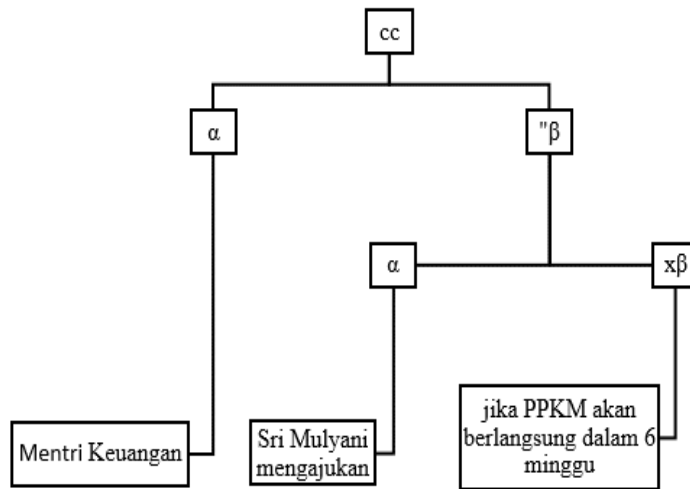


Figure 4 Hypotactic locution (nonfinite).

From the data displayed in Figure 4, hypotactic locution with the notation ( $\alpha$ " $\beta$ ) refers to the relation between the independent clause and the dependent clause in a clause complex in which the primary clause projects the secondary clause via a verbal process. This is signaled by the use of the work “mengatakan” or “said”.

3.5. Hypotactic idea (nonfinite)

Hypotactic Idea Nonfinite is different from finite Idea Nonfinite because, in the continuing, it is not finite. This is very likely to happen when the continuing clause is in an imperative mood. The example found in the data is presented as follows.

“Jika kita semua setuju untuk menjaga prokes dan vaksin, maka herd immunity bisa dicapai, pikirnya.”  
 "If we all agree to maintain health protocols and vaccines, then herd immunity can be achieved, he thought."

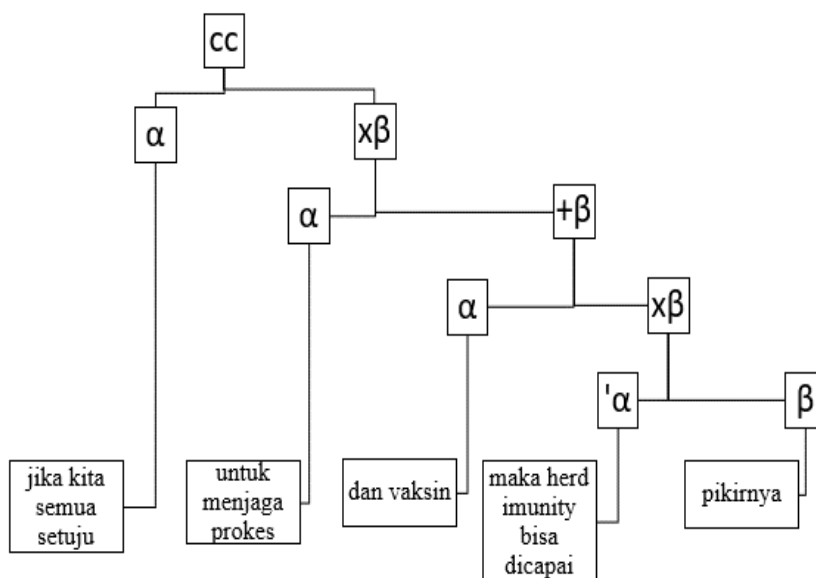


Figure 6 Hypotactic idea (nonfinite).

## 5. Conclusions

The analysis revealed that the news has low subjectivity, as indicated by the domination of locution clauses rather than idea clauses (either in paratactic or hypotactic form). Locution clauses are represented by processes such as *ujar* (said), *ungkap* (state), *berkata* (said), *tambah* (add), *terang* (explain), *jelas* (explain), *urai* (elaborate), *tutur* (state), and *imbuh* (add). Moreover, the indication of 'subjectivity' in the data includes idea clauses represented by processes such as *pungkas* (conclude), *menurut* (thinks), *pikir* (thinks), and *asumsi* (assume). It can be inferred that the news writers and editors consistently keep the information as original as it is by maintaining objectivity.

Based on the identified patterns of low subjectivity in news articles, as evidenced by the prevalence of locution clauses over idea clauses, there are several promising avenues for further studies in the field of linguistic analysis and journalism. First, a more extensive exploration of the impact of linguistic choices on audience perceptions could provide valuable insights. Investigating how readers interpret and respond to news articles with varying degrees of subjectivity could enhance our understanding of the effectiveness of maintaining objectivity in journalism. Furthermore, a comparative study across different news genres or topics could shed light on the contextual factors influencing linguistic choices. Analyzing whether subjectivity varies in coverage of political events, human interest stories, or scientific developments may reveal genre-specific language patterns. This exploration could contribute to a nuanced understanding of how journalistic language adapts to diverse communicative contexts.

For practical reasons, this study has practical implications for both media objectivity and public perception. First, these results underscore the effectiveness of maintaining objectivity in news reporting during a crisis. Media outlets can use these insights to reinforce and adapt editorial practices, placing greater emphasis on direct reporting (locution clauses) to preserve the original information without unnecessary interpretation. Media objectivity can be enhanced by refining reporting practices and, in turn, positively influencing the public perception of COVID-19 news through more transparent and consistent communication. Media organizations could benefit from incorporating identified locution clauses, such as "ujar," "ungkap," and others, into their editorial guidelines to enhance consistency and transparency. By prioritizing direct statements, news outlets can minimize potential biases and ensure a more objective representation of COVID-19-related information. This aligns with the study's initial objective of investigating subjectivity and contributes to fostering trust in news reporting.

Another fruitful area for future research is the examination of changes in linguistic patterns over time. Longitudinal studies could track shifts in language use in news articles across different periods, considering societal changes, technological advancements, and evolving journalistic norms. This temporal perspective would offer valuable insights into the dynamic nature of journalistic language and its responsiveness to external factors. Additionally, a deeper investigation into the role of individual journalists, news organizations, and editorial policies in shaping linguistic choices could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing subjectivity in news reporting. This could involve interviews, surveys, or content analyses focusing on the decision-making processes behind language use in news production.

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## Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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