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A Critical Ecolinguistic Analysis of Environmental Discourse at Mulawarman University: Conservationism and Eco-Modernism in University Social Media

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Abstract: This study explores how environment and sustainability issues are represented in the social media discourse of Mulawarman University's student organizations. Using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework combined with an ecolinguistics approach, three Instagram posts were analyzed. The findings reveal that ecological terms and active language position humans as responsible agents for protecting nature, while nature is often portrayed as passive. Visual elements complement the textual messages to strengthen emotional engagement. The posts mainly function as awareness campaigns, referencing national policies but offering limited community perspectives. Socially, the discourse reflects conservationist and eco-modernist ideologies, focusing on institutional solutions. The study concludes that although Mulawarman University's digital environmental discourse successfully initiates meaningful conversations on ecological awareness, it remains symbolic. Future efforts should incorporate community perspectives and foster transformative ecological narratives for more profound societal impact.

Keywords: *ecolinguistics; critical discourse analysis; social media; environmental discourse; sustainability; mulawarman university*

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Introduction

Digital media can be described as "digitalized content that can be transmitted over the internet or computer networks" (Sikarwar, 2016). It also changes and grows within society while at the same time influencing it (Nesi, Telzer, & Prinstein, 2022). In today's digital era, digital media shapes how people create, share, and consume information. Platforms like Instagram, which were popular among young people, are now also used by institutions to spread information like promoting events and connecting with their audience. An example of this shift is how universities now use their own media.

Mulawarman University (@unmul), a public university in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, is one of the examples of institutions which actively uses social media to share different types of information, such as academic events, student achievements, community service activities, etc. The growth of the university's social media is supported by students, helping the university to maintain and expand its digital presence across students, alumni, lecturers, and the academic community. Besides the

university's official accounts, each faculty's Student Executive Council (BEM) also manages social media to share specific information about faculty events, competitions, seminars, etc.

In line with the shift, global environmental issues have become more serious in the last few decades. Because of this, researchers have become more interested in ecolinguistics, a field that studies the relationship between language and the environment. Stibbe (2020) explains that ecolinguistics looks at how language represents nature and how it affects the way humans see and act toward the environment. Language is not only a tool for communication but also shapes how people understand and relate to the natural world. Through ecolinguistics, researchers study how language can either support environmental protection or contribute to environmental destruction. One important approach in ecolinguistics is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which focuses on power relations and ideologies behind texts (Fairclough, 1995). In this way, CDA helps researchers uncover hidden ideas about nature and sustainability in the language used in different types of media.

Today, digital media has become a major space where environmental issues are discussed and shared. The internet offers a wide space for people to compete in building different ideas about ecological reality (Penz & Fill, 2022). Their study shows that the way environmental issues are framed in digital media can influence how people think and feel about those issues. For example, the choice of words and metaphors can make an issue like climate change seem urgent or unimportant. Because of this, it is important to study how digital media shapes public perceptions of environmental problems through the language it uses.

Moreover, environmental messages today are not only communicated through words, also through visuals. Instagram combine text, images, hashtags, and audience interactions to create meanings about environmental issues. Zheng, Cowley, and Nuesser (2024) explain that ecolinguistics in the digital age must look not only at texts but also at how visuals and digital tools are used to shape shared understanding. Pictures, posters, and videos play a key role in making environmental messages stronger or weaker. When analyzing platforms like Instagram, researchers need to see how visuals and words work together to support or hide ecological messages.

As a result, an ecolinguistics analysis of social media is important to understand how environmental and sustainability messages are shaped and shared today. As a university that presents itself as being based on tropical studies, Mulawarman University's Instagram activities provide an interesting case to study. This report aims to analyse how Mulawarman University represents environmental and sustainability issues on its Instagram, using an ecolinguistics approach through Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework.

This study aims to answer the following research question: How is the environment and sustainability represented in the university's social media discourse?

Literature Review

In widespread media social, the issues faced by Indonesians related to their natural environment are shaping public awareness. Through social media, readers can observe the narrative stories that have been built, and it is shown that the language can influence readers about the issue and how the language is represented in the issue. Ecolinguistics is how the language represents nature and how it affects the way humans see and act toward the environment (Stibbe, 2020). It explores the intricate connections between linguistic practices and ecological systems (Penz and Fill, 2022; Stibbe 2020) contributing to the development of ecological consciousness and environmental policies of a region or locality (Stibbe,

2021). In delivering the message, Stibbe (2021) divided two types on how the language delivers the natural issue, first anthropocentric which is commonly used in media stories to build the power and dominance of humans. Supported in the research shown on how the mass media shows anthropocentric to build humans power which based on the foundation of values and character, art and culture, natural resources and environment as conservative yet unequal. (Yuniawan T, 2018; Fadhilah & Suhandano, 2024). The last is eco-centric how nature is seen as independent and frequently used by conservatives (Fill & Penz, 2018).

In social media platforms such as Instagram have become important spaces where people communicate not only daily life but also complex ideas about the environment. From a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective, these platforms are more than just channels for sharing information, they reveal power relations, agency, and underlying ideologies through both language and visuals. Gardam, Riedlinger, and Angus (2025), for example, showed how climate denial messages on Instagram use memes and images to spread and reinforce ideological views. Similarly, Koop-Monteiro et al. (2023) used discourse network analysis to explore Instagram posts related to animals and climate change, mapping how images, hashtags, and recurring themes come together to shape public understanding of ecological issues. Their findings suggest that Instagram is a dynamic space where engaging, multimodal strategies, such as visual storytelling and thematic framing can significantly boost ecological awareness. This offers a useful comparative framework for analyzing how student-led content at Mulawarman University may blend language and imagery to construct environmental narratives and promote sustainability values. Ecolinguistics benefits from this multimodal perspective, allowing researchers to see how environmental messages are constructed, challenged, or promoted through the combination of words and visuals on digital platforms.

Methodology

1. Data Collection

This research used a qualitative data approach to investigate how environmental and sustainability issues are represented in Mulawarman University's official social media discourse, particularly on the Instagram platform. This methodological approach is guided by Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is complemented by principles of ecolinguistics to explore how language choices reflect deeper ecological values and ideologies.

The primary data for this study consisted of three selected Instagram posts from the official accounts of BEM KM Mulawarman University (@bemkm_unmul), BEM FKIP Mulawarman University (@bemfkipunmul), and BEM FMIPA Mulawarman University (@bemfmipaunmul). The selection criteria were based on relevance to environmental themes, such as sustainability, environmentally friendly practices, conservation, and ecological events. The posts were purposively selected to ensure that they represent the university's discourse on ecology and sustainability. Each post includes visuals (images), written text (caption and hashtags), and engagement (likes, comments), which were documented and analyzed.

2. Analytical Framework

The analytical approach used in this study is based on Fairclough's (1955) Three-Dimensional Framework for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a model that allows researchers to uncover the relationship between language, power, and society. This framework is particularly useful when paired with an ecolinguistics perspective, which pays attention to the ecological implications of language use.

By applying this integrated approach, this research seeks to understand not only the discourse content used in some Mulawarman University's social media posts, but also the underlying ideologies and social practices that inform and are informed by this discourse. This research framework consists of three levels of analysis:

a. Textual Analysis (Description)

Text analysis involves an in-depth examination of the linguistic features contained in the selected social media posts. It examines linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, metaphors, modality, and visual elements.

b. Discursive Practice (Interpretation)

Discursive practice focuses on how texts are produced, distributed and consumed within a social context. It explores the production, distribution, and consumption of the texts, including genre, intertextuality, and audience engagement.

c. Social Practice (Explanation)

Social practice linking discourse to broader social and ecological structures. It investigates the broader social and ecological structures influencing and influenced by the discourse, including ideologies, and power relations.

Findings and Discussion

The results of the study are explained as follows:

1. Textual Analysis

a. Official account @bemkm_unmul

There is a post entitled DEFORESTATION uploaded through the Instagram account of BEM KM Mulawarman University, on February 1, 2025. This post shows the use of strong ecological vocabulary. Terms such as "*deforestation*", "*penembangan liar*", "*reboisasi*", "*moratorium hutan*", and "*ekosistem gambut*" prove that this post was made on a serious environmental issue. The language used is informative and persuasive, with an active sentence structure that points to humans as the perpetrators of change, such as "*upaya penyelamatan hutan harus menjadi tanggung jawab bersama.*" This emphasizes that the position of humans as the centre in saving nature, or what in ecolinguistics is referred to as an anthropocentric approach.

The visuals in this post show a dramatic effect, using illustrations of burned and damaged forests that convey a sense of crisis. Then, the combination of text and images presents a tense picture, inviting the audience to feel how important environmental sustainability is.

b. Official account @bemfkipunmul

The post uploaded on August 12, 2023, entitled Press Release Green Clean Healthy which is related to ecolinguistics: There was vocabulary related to ecological terms in the caption of his post such as the use of the words 'Green Clean Health, reforestation, Karang Mumus River, mitigation, climate change adaptation, tree seedlings, Environmental Agency, River School, clean up action, plastic waste, environmental agenda.' The vocabulary used shows what activities are carried out, who helps and the desired results of these activities.

Then if we look at the grammar structure of the caption, it is known that there are several agents and objects that can be identified such as 'new students of FKIP UNMUL (1200 people), the organizing committee (100 people), the Community Social Service of BEM FKIP UNMUL (as the initiator of this event), the World Clean Day (WCD) team of East Kalimantan and Samarinda, the deans and vice-chancellors of FKIP, the Environmental Service, Sekolah Sungai and the surrounding community (who were invited to participate)' which can be identified as agents in the caption. As for the objects, they are known as follows, 'the earth, Karang Mumus River, UNMUL Campus Environment, plastic waste, and tree seedlings.'

Meanwhile, in the available text, there is a narrative that objectifies nature and makes the agent described as the one who makes changes to nature, which can be seen from the phrase "1000 pohon untuk bumi" as if the earth needs the agent's help. It can also be seen in the phrase "melestarikan bumi kita." This also shows that the narrative used is only a symbolic form.

Apart from the narrative of the text, the modality of the statement taken from the text shows that this activity was successfully carried out which can be seen from the phrase "*komitmen dalam penghijauan ..., aksi nyata mahasiswa FKIP UNMUL ..., mengajak semua elemen masyarakat...*". Both from the narrative and the modality nature is demonstrated as something that must be maintained by the agent or shows the position of humans above nature which is called anthropocentric. In addition, the visual works together with the text.

c. Official account @bemfmipaunmul

The post analysed was uploaded on Tuesday, April 22, 2025, containing a message commemorating Earth Day.

The analysis revealed several linguistic characteristics that support environmental awareness. First, there is the use of ecological vocabulary such as "*berkelanjutan*", "*tantangan lingkungan*", and "*konservasi*" that explicitly point to environmental issues. In addition, there are action terms such as "*langkah kecil*", "*perubahan*", and "*solusi*" that build a proactive narrative in addressing environmental issues. Moreover, in grammatical aspects, this post consistently uses an active sentence structure which can be seen in the phrases "*kita memiliki peran*", "*mari bersama-sama bergerak*", dan "*jadilah agen perubahan*". The use of the pronoun "*kita*" and the nickname "*sobat KM FMIPA*" create solidarity and a sense of togetherness. The term "*agen*" specifically refers to the college students as the main actors of environmental change.

In addition, the use of environmental metaphors such as "*langkah kecil kita berpengaruh besar*" aims to convey the message that individual contributions are still valuable in the collective effort to conserve the environment. This kind of metaphor serves as a motivational tool that invites active participation without feeling pressured. The modality aspects used such as the persuasive phrases "*mari bersama-sama bergerak*" dan "*jadilah agen perubahan*" show efforts to build engagement with readers. The language modality used is optimistic and hopeful, creating a positive feel in environmental discourse that is often discussed in a pessimistic tone.

Additionally, the use of relevant visuals is also important in shaping public perception and reinforcing the message. Using an image of a healthy earth with natural elements such as white clouds, green trees, and grass creates a visual representation of the ideal environment to be realized.

2. Discursive Practice

a. Official account @bemkm_unmul

In this post, this content was produced by a student organization, more precisely BEM KM Mulawarman University as a form of environmental awareness campaign. The goal is very clear, which is to build public opinion about how important it is to address deforestation as a serious issue that cannot be underestimated. The genre of this post can be said to be about public awareness campaigns, which is evidenced through the text in the image and caption that presents the problem, impact, and suggested solutions. There is also intertextuality through the phrases "*moratorium hutan*" and "*sertifikasi ISPO*."

Then, the audience response in the form of 180 likes and 2 comments shows active involvement, not only are there comments that appreciate student concern, but there are also criticisms of the omission of mining issues from the deforestation narrative. This shows that this post is intended as an invitation that is optional, the public still has room to expand the scope of the narrative presented.

b. Official account @bemfkipunmul

The post uploaded by BEM FKIP which aims to document the new student admission agenda but still gives meaning to protecting the environment is a form of event post. But if examined in terms of intertextuality, there are no opinions expressed from various points of view. When looking at audience engagement, there are only 273 likes from accounts that follow, which means that only about 3.19% of accounts. And there is only one account that comments to support this action "*Aksi nyata dan komitmen kita untuk bumi* ♡". What is lacking from this post is the absence of voices from local communities.

c. Official account @bemfmipaunmul

The content posted by BEM FMIPA Unmul shows the institution's involvement in shaping ecological narratives at the student level, which categorized as an educational campaign in the form of commemorative remarks. It aims to educate and invite audiences to actively participate in the environmental movement. In addition, this content has a connection with the global discourse on environmental preservation through the commemoration of Earth Day. The use of phrases such as "*menuju dunia yang lebih hijau, lebih bersih, dan lebih berkelanjutan*" shows the influence of universal values on sustainability that are also echoed in international movements.

The audience engagements on this post are the post likes with a total of 26 likes (as of April 26, 2025) with a percentage of 0.78% of the total followers of this account (3,340 followers). Although this is a very small number since this post was just uploaded a few days ago, it indicates an interaction with the audience. While there are no comments on this post, the number of likes can be interpreted that students are ready to be part of the agents of change in maintaining the sustainability of the earth.

3. Social Practice

a. Official account @bemkm_unmul

From this post, it can be understood that the depiction of the environment that appears in this response reflects the ideology of conservationism wrapped in eco-modernism. Nature is positioned as something that can be damaged but can be saved through environmentally friendly

technology and collaboration between the community and the government. The mention of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK) in the caption shows the involvement of state institutions as powerful narrators in shaping the narrative of saving the environment. This shows that the campaign does not only involve students, but also official policy, which reinforces the opinion that saving nature is very important.

However, despite the presence of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry as a representation of state power, the narrative still ignores other narrators such as local communities and society whose role is crucial in protecting tropical forests in East Kalimantan. In addition, other major issues such as mining exploitation, which are relevant in the context of deforestation in the area, are not raised in the text, so they must be addressed by the audience in the comments.

b. Official account @bemfkipunmul

From the posts uploaded, the uploads reflect the ideology of conservationism which is seen from humans as protectors and nature as an entity that needs to be protected. Although it is not very visible, this post also reflects the ideology of eco-modernism in which institutions with faculty and student mobilization are shown as agents that can “heal” ecological problems. Looking back at the post, we can see that those who have the power and speak are the faculty represented by BEM FKIP and other supporting institutions (Environmental Agency) who act as agents. Meanwhile, nature and local communities/indigenous people remain silent and absent from activities that protect the earth.

In the text of the post that the activities carried out are one of the implementations of national regulations regarding higher education, namely the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, community service, and promoting “green development”. Culturally, nature is seen as resources (mining) and sacred place (indigenous people) where this activity shows how urban East Kalimantan's tendency to balance rapid economic development with environmental responsibility as seen in “green” campus activities. Thus, the campus is not only seen as a facilitator or green campus image but also as a moral actor that protects, promotes action, and preserves nature. Although the post reflects sustainable development and reinforces safe environment ideologies, it does not go into depth about subsequent actions, local community involvement and only basic ecological activities.

c. Official account @bemfmipaunmul

The caption in the post reflects a conservationist ideology that emphasizes the urgency of protecting the environment. In addition, eco-modernist ideology is also present in this post because it emphasizes the contribution of students as the main agents of change who have the authority to act for environmental sustainability. It is in line with government policies on sustainable development and conservation. In a region of East Kalimantan that is rich in natural resources but is also highly vulnerable to exploitation, campaigns like this reflect a cultural shift towards ecological awareness, especially among the younger generation.

The captions in this post seek to raise public ecological awareness with a communicative approach that is friendly and motivating. Although it is still symbolic and not directly proposing concrete policies, the call to become “*agen perubahan*” seeks to create bottom-up ecological action, which is the first step towards collective consciousness.

Conclusion

From the analysis using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework, it can be concluded that the three posts show efforts to raise environmental awareness, especially among students. Textually, they use ecological terms and active language to show that humans are responsible for protecting nature (anthropocentric). The visuals also support this message, either by showing environmental damage or positive actions. In terms of discursive practice, the posts act as campaign messages, but audience engagement stills low. The messages mainly come from institutions like BEM and government, while local communities absent. From the social practice view, it reflects conservationist and eco-modernist ideologies. They support ecological projects but lack in-depth discussion. Overall, the posts are a good start in promoting ecological awareness, but they should include community voices and real actions rather than just symbolic messages.

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