

Referring Expression and the Representation of Indonesia's Presidential and Vice-Presidential Candidate 2024 through International Online Media

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

referring expressions,
referent,
representation.

The 2024 Presidential Election in Indonesia has received widespread attention from various international online media. This study is an analysis of the referring expression in articles taken from nine international online media during the Indonesian Presidential campaign 2024. This study focuses on how language through referring expressions represents its referent; Indonesia's President and vice president candidate 2024. Employing qualitative method, primary data is taken from 17 articles from nine international online media who were active in covering the Indonesian presidential election during November 2023 – 10 February 2024. Data is analyzed using referential identity method where the focus of the study is determined by the referent. It also employs Saussure's theory; signifier and signified. Referent and referring expression theories are adapted from Kreidler (2020) and Huford and Heasley (2007). The analysis revealed there are 58 referring expressions used in the articles. Language operates as a symbol that represents meaning. It is evident in this study that referring expressions can represent between a word phrase and an entity in the external world.

INTRODUCTION

In 2024, Indonesia held a general election to determine the president and vice president for the 2024-2029 period. The election of the President of Indonesia is one part of the democratic processes that is important in determining the country's leaders. The winning strategy that can be employed by the presidential candidates and vice-presidential candidates is to conduct campaigns. There are at least 8 election campaign methods based on Article 26 of PKPU No. 15 of 2023 reported by the KPU, one of which is a campaign through social media. The social media referred to here is print mass media advertising, electronic mass media, and the internet. To get support from the people, one of the strategies that can be done is to utilize the mass media.

With the development of information and communication technology, news in online media can be accessed anywhere. Online media has unlimited readership which allows for the rapid and efficient dissemination of information to the public. Online media has a very significant role in building the image of presidential and vice-presidential candidates. Positive news tends to strengthen a positive image, while negative news can affect or decrease the electability of candidates.

Language plays a very important role in conveying information through the news. The language used in the news has a great impact in shaping the representation of presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the eyes of the public. Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people (Hall, 2009:15). Saussure's explains that language operate through signs have interconnected elements. These elements are called signifier and signified. In this study, the signifier are referring expressions. A referring expression is any expression used in an utterance to refer to something or someone (Kreidler, 2020). Signified on the other hand deals with the ideas or concepts related to the signifier. An example of referring expression or in Saussure's term; signifier is *Gemoy* and *A grandfather who dances at rallies*. The two expressions which is taken from the New York Times refer to one of Indonesia's Presidential candidate; Prabowo. The referring expressions represent his 'unique' physical trait and tries to build the image of the candidate who has fun at rallies.

Many foreign media were monitoring the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election. Presidential elections in Indonesia often attract attention because of the fierce competition between candidates. International online media refers to media that operates digitally and has a global or international scope. In this study, nine international online media were selected because of the activeness in the news coverage related to the Indonesia presidential election. The medias are; The New York Times, Australian Outlook, The University of Sydney, The Straitstimes, CNA, CNBC, The Guardian, South Morning Post, and USNEWS.

There were 3 candidates in the Indonesian presidential election in 2024. Anies Baswedan - Gus Muhaimin, Prabowo Subianto - Gibran Rakabuming and Ganjar Pranowo - Mahfud MD. This article is interested in analysing the referring expression in nine international online media during the Indonesian Presidential campaign 2024. It studies how language through referring expressions represents its' referent; Indonesia's President and vice president candidate 2024. The method that will be used in this study is Saussure's theory which explains that signs have interconnected elements; signifier and signified. The signifiers are referring expressions, in the form of noun phrases and signified are ideas or concepts related to the referring expressions.

Not many studies have been conducted on referring expressions. A linguistics analysis on reference and its' type were conducted by Runadi and Simatupang (2006), Satya, Saehu, and Permaludin (2022), Prabawati, Ninda and Simatupang (2023). While Gunadi (2023) and Firdausy and Rochmania (2024) used Saussure's theory to analyse the representation of meanings in the lyrics of songs. In contrast to the studies above, this article focuses on analysing how signifiers (referring expressions) represent or signified Indonesia's presidential and vice-presidential candidate 2024 seen through the International online news media.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concepts used in this study are language and representation, Saussure's signifier and signified, and referring expression. Representation is the production of meaning through language. In the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, to represent something is to describe or depict it, to represent also means to symbolize, stand for (Hall, 2009:16). Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events (Hall, 2009:17). The relation between 'things', concepts and signs lie at the heart of the production of meaning in language. The process which links these three elements together is what we call 'representation' (Hall, 2009:19).

Saussure analyzed the sign into two elements; signifier and signified. Signifier is the form (the actual word, image, photo, etc.), while signified is the idea or concept in our head with which the form was associated. The connection between the two systems of representation (signifier and signified) produced signs; and signs, organized into languages, produced meanings and could be used to reference objects, people and events in the 'real' world (Hall, 2009:36).

Theories on referring expressions are taken from Yule (1996), Plat and Plat (1998), Kreidler (1998), Plat and Plat (1998:311), Huford and Heasley (2007) and Kreidler (2020). Yule (1996) describes referring expression as an act in which a speaker, or writer, uses linguistic forms

to enable a listener, or reader, to identify something. A referring expression is any expression used in an utterance to refer to something or someone (or clearly delimited collection of things or people), i.e. used with a particular referent in mind (Hurford & Heasley, 2007:37). Kreidler (2020:130) explains that referring expression is a piece of language, a noun phrase, that is used in an utterance and is linked to something outside language, some living or dead or imaginary entity or concept or group of entities or concepts. The noun phrase *a student* in an utterance such as *A student was here looking for you*, where the speaker has a particular person in mind when he says *a student*, is a referring expression. In the sentence *Perseverance is the key to be a successful student*, *a successful student* is not a referring expression, because in this case, a speaker would not have a particular person in mind in uttering the word.

A referent attributing to a particular referent is called definite reference. Hurford and Heasley considers definite phrases as referring expression. The definite phrases are classified into various kinds (2007:39):

1. proper names in the example *John*
2. personal pronouns for example *he, it*
3. longer descriptive expressions exemplified in the phrase *the man who shot Abraham Lincoln*

METHOD

The data in this study was taken from international online media articles covering the 2024 Indonesia presidential and vice-presidential campaigns. Data collection in this study uses purposive sampling techniques. The primary source of data in this study is taken from international online media articles covering news related to the 2024 Indonesia presidential and vice-presidential campaigns held on November 28, 2023 until February 10, 2024. Document study is also used as a data collection method, where information is obtained by looking for various sources that contain information relevant to this research.

Data is collected using note taking techniques. The main data source is taken from 17 articles from nine international online media; *New York Times*, *Australian Outlook*, *The University of Sydney*, *The Straits Times*, *CNA*, *CNBC*, *The Guardian*, *South Morning Post*, *ND USNEWS2*. The online media were chosen due to their activeness in their news coverage related to the Indonesian presidential election. The articles can be accessed online.

Data reduction is carried out by selecting, focusing, and simplifying data. Data is limited to international online media news articles released during the campaign period. Data is analyzed using referential identity method where the focus of the study is determined by the referent. The object under study will be aligned with its determinant reference. Referent and referring expression theories are adapted from Kreidler (2020) and Hurford and Heasley (2007). Furthermore, Saussure's

theory will be used to analyze two elements, the first is signifier which in this study are referring expressions. The second is signified, which are ideas or concepts with which the form is associated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through the international online media news articles, 58 signifier or referring expressions which denote the presidential and vice-presidential candidates are found. The referring expressions identified are all definite phrase categorized as longer descriptive expressions. The signifier or referring expressions will all be presented in tables. The ideas or concept or signified will be explained following the table.

Table 1. The signifier (referring expression) of presidential candidate 1 - Anies Baswedan

Referent	Signifier (Referring Expression)	Signified
Anies Baswedan	1. The chancellor of Islamic-oriented Paramadina University	An academic
	2. The youngest in Indonesia's history to take such a post	An academic
	3. An intellectual and an Islamic scholar	An academic
	4. The first Academic to run for the presidency in 20 years after Mr Amien Rais in 2004	An academic
	5. The grandson of Abdurrahman Baswedan - a national hero of Arab descent who fought for Indonesia's independence	A political figure with a prominent family background
	6. The spokesman for Jokowi	A former right hand of Jokowi
	7. The country's education minister in October 2014	Involvement in government
	8. The perfect fit for K-popification	Close to young supporters
	9. Former academic	An academic
	10. Antithesis of Jokowi	Contrasting figure with the government
	11. Governor of Jakarta from 2017-2022	Involvement in government
	12. Ex-Jakarta governor	Political career
	13. The dark horse in Indonesia's Feb. 14 presidential election	Strong traits in politics
	14. The 54-year-old	Physical age
	15. An independent candidate	Not affiliated with any political parties
	16. A former Fulbright scholar and university lecturer	An academic

Table 1 show 16 signifiers or referring expressions which refer to Anies Baswedan. How do the referring expressions represent the first presidential candidate?

The referring expression represent Anies Baswedan as *an academic* (Referring expression 1, 2, 3, 4, 9 and 16). Anies started his academic career in 2001 as a lecturer. Then, he was elected Rector of Paramadina University in 2007 and served until 2015.

Anies Baswedan is also represented as a political figure with a prominent family background. This is seen through the referring expression; *the grandson of a national hero*. Anies Baswedan is the grandson of Abdurrahman Baswedan who is a hero of Arab descent who fought for Indonesian independence. His political career can also be seen in referring expression 7, 11, 12.

A lighter representation can be seen in the referring expression; *the perfect fit for K-popification*. This is related to the image of Anies Baswedan who is close to young supporters. The referring expression in the phrase; *the Antithesis of Jokowi* refers to Anies Baswedan being the antithesis of Jokowi. Antithesis is a metaphor that expresses ideas that are very opposing. In contrast, referring expression *the spokesman for Jokowi* signifies that once he was Jokowi's trustee.

Anies is also represented as a candidate who needs to be taken into account, even though his electability was still lagging behind his opponents in the 2024 Presidential Election. The referring expression that symbolises this concept can be seen in the phrase; *the dark horse in Indonesia's Feb 14 presidential election*. He is referred to as a dangerous party for his opponent in the 2024 presidential election fight. In the world of politics, dark horses are lesser-known competitors who can win unexpectedly.

Table 2. The referring expression of presidential candidate number 2 Prabowo Subianto

Referent	Signifier (Referring Expression)	Signified
Prabowo	1.This presidential Front Runner	High chances of winning the election
Subianto	2.Strongman bona fides	Qualification and achievement
	3.Symbol of the 32-year reign of Soeharto	Political background
	4. A Military strongman	Military background
	5.A volatile temper	Negative political image
	6. <i>Gemoy</i> , cute, grandfather who dances at rallies	Image of a candidate who is warm and everyone can relate to
	7.Civilian politician	Image of a candidate who is warm and everyone can relate to
	8.A funny, humorous figure	Image of a candidate who is warm and everyone can relate to

There are 8 referring expression which refer to Prabowo Subianto as seen in table 2. How is the presidential candidate number 2 represented?

The international media articles represent Prabowo through several of his controversies. One of them is related to his humorous personality and temperament (Referring expression 5 and 8). Other controversies are related to democracy issues. Based on the article released by the New York Times, it was explained that Prabowo was allegedly involved in the kidnapping of pro-democracy activists in 1998. But in reality, for the past two decades, Prabowo has tried democratic politics that display different personalities.

Prabowo Subianto is represented as an individual who has credibility and a track record that shows qualifications and achievements. This is seen through the referring expression; *Strong man bona fides*. This is evidenced by his track record as a former Indonesian National Armed Forces General. Prabowo is also considered to have a strong character. This strong character comes from the Indonesian period when it was under the "dictatorship of Suharto".

The referring expression; *the symbol of the 32-year reign of Soeharto* is used to refer to Prabowo which means a symbol of the 32 years of Soeharto's reign. This is related to Prabowo, which for many people in Indonesia is considered a symbol of 32 years of Soeharto's rule. When the military had a strong role under the Suharto government, Prabowo was involved in various military operations that were widely known for his involvement in various controversies. One of Prabowo's controversies that has persisted until now is the allegation of human rights violations.

On a lighter tone, the referring expression; *civilian politician and Gemoy, cute, grandfather who dances at rallies* are also attached to Prabowo's image. During the campaign, *Gemoy* became a campaign strategy which represented Prabowo as cute, adorable and close to the heart of the people.

As seen in table 3, 16 referring expressions of Ganjar Pranowo exist. What do the referring expressions denote?

The third Presidential candidate is represented as having positive characteristics (referring expression 1, 8, 9, 11, 12). His family background is also highlighted by the international online media (referring expression 4, 13). Through his political background, Ganjar Pranowo is represented as a potential and popular candidate, a legislator, the Governor of Central Java, and a candidate of the PDI-P party.

Muhaimin Iskandar, the vice-presidential candidate Number 1 is represented through his political background. His political career included the position of Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia and was once was the Minister of Manpower and Transmigration and Chairman of the National Awakening Party (PKB).

Table 3. The referring expression of presidential candidate number 3 Ganjar Pranowo

Referent	Signifier (Referring Expression)	Signified
Ganjar Pranowo	1. Ambitious smiling runner	Highlighting positive characteristics
	2. The third and last person as a potential presidential candidate	Chances in the election
	3. The most popular potential presidential candidate	Chances in the election
	4. A father of one	Family background
	5. A legislator	Political background
	6. The former governor of Central Java province	Political career
	7. The candidate of the party of President Jokowi	Political career
	8. A strong social media presence	Highlighting positive characteristics
	9. The man of the people	Highlighting positive characteristics
	10. The obvious front runner for the country's top job	Political career
	11. A hard worker and down to earth	Highlighting positive characteristics
	12. A humble background and affable	Highlighting positive characteristics
	13. The silver-haired son of a policeman whose family ran a mom-and-pop store	Family background
	14. The 55-year-old former student activist	Political background
	15. A lawmaker and governor	Political background
	16. Pro-poor policies	Political background

Table 4. The referring expression of vice-presidential candidate number 1 Muhaimin Iskandar

Referent	Signifier (Referring Expression)	Signified
Muhaimin Iskandar	1. Deputy speaker, Indonesia parliament	Political background
	2. Minister of labour and transmigration	Political background
	3. Heads the Nation Awakening Party	Political background

Gibran Rakabuming Raka is widely highlighted by international online media. As seen in table 5, 13 referring expressions are found.

The vice-presidential candidate number 2 is featured by the international online media related to the controversies surrounding the election. This is seen in referring expression 13. The media represented Gibran having positive (referring expression 7, 8, 9) but also negative image (5, 6). The referring expression *baby nepotism* is considered negative because the term is usually aimed at someone whose achievements are attained as a result of a family power or influence. Gibran, who was initially known as a businessman in the culinary field, is now following in the footsteps of his father President Joko Widodo in the world of politics. Previously, Gibran had no track record in the world of politics other than having been the Mayor of Solo.

Table 5. The referring expression of vice-presidential candidate number 2 Gibran Rakabuming Raka

Referent	Signifier (Referring Expression)	Signified
Gibran	1.Joko Widodo's millennial son	Family background
Rakabuming	2.Running mate of Mr Prabowo	Political background
Raka	3.The Mayor of Solo City	Political background
	4.Presidential front runner's deputy	Chances in the election
	5.Baby nepotism	Negative image
	6.The son of the incumbent president	Negative image
	7.A young politician	Positive image
	8.A Game Changer	Positive image
	9.The president's son	Family background
	10.An asset for Mr Prabowo	An image which could be positive or negative
	11.A crowd puller	Positive image
	12.The eldest of Jokowi's three children	Family background
	13.A controversial figure	An image which could be positive or negative

Only two referring expressions refer to Mahfud MD vice-presidential candidate number 3. He is represented through his political background, serving as the Co-ordinating Minister for Politics and Security.

Table 6. The referring expression of vice-presidential candidate number 3 Mahfud MD

Referent	Signifier (Referring Expression)	Signified
Mahfud	1.The running mate of former provincial governor Ganjar Pranowo	Political background
MD	2. Indonesia's Chief Security Minister	Political background

CONCLUSION

The analysis revealed there are 58 referring expressions found in the international online media articles. In this study, the signifiers are referring expressions, in the form of noun phrases and signified are ideas or concepts related to it. The referring expressions found are definite phrase, all categorized as longer descriptive expressions. 16 referring expressions refer to presidential candidate number one, 8 referring expressions exist in the articles for presidential candidate number two, and 16 referring expressions for presidential candidate number 3. As for the vice-presidential candidate, 3 are found referring to vice-president candidate one, 13 which refer to the vice president two and 2 for vice presidential candidate three.

From the referring expression, the International online media represented the presidential and vice-presidential candidate as having either positive or negative image. The referring expressions also depict their political and family background. Language operates as a symbol that represents meaning. It is evident in this study that referring expressions can represent between a word or phrase and an entity in the external world.

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