

## Language Communication in the Digital Era in the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics: Hate Speech Phenomenon

<sup>1</sup>Akhmad Saifudin

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Dian Nuswantoro

<sup>1</sup>[akhmad.saifudin@dsn.dinus.ac.id](mailto:akhmad.saifudin@dsn.dinus.ac.id)

KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
cognitive framing; cognitive linguistics; conceptual metaphor; hate speech; language communication	The digital age has dramatically changed our lives. New technologies are changing how people interact with each other, how stories are shared and distributed, and how reality is presented and perceived. These shifts are reshaping communication and influencing the cognitive processes underpinning language use. As digital tools mediate human interaction, they bring forth novel linguistic phenomena, from emerging online vernaculars to the subtle ways algorithms shape discourse. This paper aims to share knowledge about how language communication in the digital age is from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. Cognitive linguistics emphasises the relationship between language, thought, and meaning and offers a critical lens to analyse these issues. Concepts in cognitive linguistics, such as conceptual metaphor and cognitive or mental framing, can be used to examine communication phenomena in the current digital age, such as hate speech.

### INTRODUCTION

Communication in the digital era refers to new ways of conveying and receiving information influenced by technological advances, especially the internet and digital devices. In this era, communication is not only limited to face-to-face interactions or through traditional media but also involves various digital platforms that allow faster and broader interactions. Examples include using social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram), instant messaging applications (such as WhatsApp and Telegram), and online forums.

Digital communication allows information to be disseminated instantly to a global audience, creating more interactive relationships between individuals, groups, and organizations. Although this communication facilitates the exchange of information, it also brings challenges, such as spreading misinformation, hoaxes, and hate speech that can spread quickly on digital platforms.

In the context of digital communication, language is often adapted to the platform used. For example, people use shorter language, symbols (emoticons), and memes to express feelings or ideas on social media. In this ever-evolving landscape, Cognitive Linguistics provides a robust framework to explore how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and transformed in digital contexts. By examining how language reflects thought and culture, we gain valuable insights into how digital technologies redefine communication paradigms. For example, in a digital platform like Twitter (now changed to X), because the format must be short, it creates the use of short, complex, multimodal language communication. Using emoticons and memes will affect how our cognitive process understands messages that are often rich in social and cultural contexts.

These shifts are reshaping communication and introducing challenges that demand deeper linguistic and cognitive insights. In particular, phenomena such as hate speech and fake news have become prominent

issues in digital communication. Cognitive linguistics, with its emphasis on the relationship between language, thought, and meaning, offers a critical lens through which to analyze these issues.

Hate speech, for example, can be studied through conceptual metaphors and framing, which reveal how negative perceptions of certain groups are reinforced and spread. The phenomenon of hate speech is one of the impacts often found in digital communication, whether through Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram. Hate speech often has a negative impact on the person or party who is the target of the hatred. This can happen because the person who makes hate speech often uses or exploits the emotional side and manipulates it to frame the minds of readers or audiences. Negative impacts like this can actually be mitigated by utilizing knowledge from cognitive linguistics. By understanding how language shapes and reflects these mental processes, we can identify the mechanisms that make the phenomenon persuasive and widespread in the digital space. This perspective not only enriches our understanding of digital communication but also provides a basis for developing strategies to counter the spread of harmful content and promote healthier discourse in the digital era.

Before we discuss further how cognitive linguistics plays a role in Language Communication in the Digital Era, especially in studying the phenomenon of hate speech, I would first like to introduce cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphors, and cognitive framing.

## **COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS**

Cognitive linguistics is an interdisciplinary branch combining knowledge and investigation from cognitive psychology, neuropsychology, and linguistics. Cognitive Linguistics studies the relationship between language and human cognition, namely how language reflects the way we think and understand the world. Its primary focus is on the ways in which humans use language to describe concepts, experiences, and knowledge. Language is a tool for expressing thoughts, not just a system of symbols separated from the mind. Important concepts in cognitive linguistics include metaphor and framing—all of which show how language can influence our perceptions and actions, shape social reality, and influence emotions or public perceptions. For example, the metaphor "time is money" shows how we conceptualize time in measurable terms, similar to money.

Linguistics fundamentally focuses on the sounds, words, and grammar rules of a language, which consist of phonology (the sound system), morphology (the structure of words), syntax (the arrangement of words into sentences), and semantics (meanings). Cognitive linguistics studies how humans process and organize language to create specific meanings. In Japanese, for example, people can express language with active and passive forms to describe the emotional connection between the speaker and the content of what is being said. A Japanese person would use the passive form to say, "My little brother was bitten by the dog" rather than using "The dog bit my little brother" because of the emotional connection with the "little brother" that is being spoken. The point that I want to convey is that when someone speaks or writes something, he also expresses his emotions or feelings. By communicating his emotions, he actually also wants his listeners or readers to agree or have the same emotions. This is where cognitive linguistics can play a role by understanding how human cognitive mechanisms express their thoughts (or goals) to influence the perceptions, emotions, and actions of listeners/readers and even create social realities.

## **CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR**

In cognitive linguistics, people tend to simplify in understanding something, especially something or a new concept, by corresponding based on the experience felt by the body. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) introduced the

concept of conceptual metaphor, one of the main concepts used in cognitive linguistics. Metaphors that were previously known only as figures of speech that became language decorations were claimed by Lakoff and Johnson as one of the mechanisms of human cognition in understanding the world. Lakoff and Johnson, in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), explained that humans understand new concepts by mapping a familiar domain (source domain) to a new or abstract domain (target domain) (Coulson & Van Petten, 2002; Ghassani & Saifudin, 2020; Grady et al., 1999; Kövecses, 2010; Noviana & Saifudin, 2020, 2021; Saifudin et al., 2024). The source domain is a physical or concrete experience (such as space, direction, or the human body). In contrast, the target domain is an abstract or complex concept (such as time, emotion, or social relationships). An example is the metaphor of life as a journey. The abstract concept of life is understood by being corresponded to a more concrete journey. These two concepts are, of course, not the same but have several components in common; for example, the purpose of the journey reflects the purpose of life, the path of the journey represents the path of life or the process towards the goal, and obstacles on the journey describe the challenges that must be overcome in life.

### **COGNITIVE FRAMING**

Cognitive frames are fundamental structures in cognitive psychology and linguistics that shape our understanding and conceptualization of meaning (Łata, 2020). Frames are cognitive shortcuts that people use to help make sense of complex information (Kaufman et al., 2012). Frames help us to interpret the world around us and represent that world to others. They help us organize complex phenomena into coherent, understandable categories. When we label a phenomenon, we give meaning to some aspects of what is observed while discounting other aspects because they appear irrelevant or counterintuitive. Thus, frames provide meaning through selective simplification by filtering people's perceptions and providing them with a field of vision for a problem. Then, according to Lakoff (2014), framing is about getting language that fits your worldview. According to Entman (1993), framing involves selecting some aspects of a concept and highlighting their salience in a communicating text. Importantly, it promotes a certain causal and moral interpretation of the item described. Framing could be realized by one or many sentences, which could be metaphorical or literal. Linguistic framing shapes the way we perceive the world by constraining how we gather information about people, events, and situations (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

Thus, in cognitive linguistics, framing refers to how cognitive structures or conceptual frameworks (frames) shape a person's understanding of a situation, event, or object. This concept is closely related to the way humans interpret reality based on specific contexts and previous experiences. People can frame information using their perspectives to understand and even for persuasive purposes.

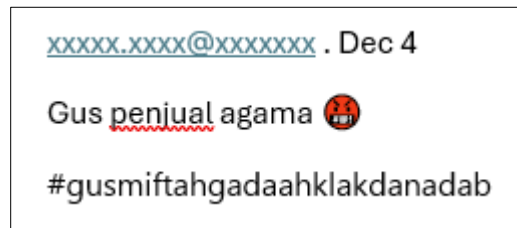
### **CASES IN THE HATE SPEECH PHENOMENON**

Elliott et al. (2014) define hate speech as speech that antagonizes and marginalizes people (or groups) based on their affiliation to a particular social or demographic category. Hate speech is a growing social phenomenon that poses significant challenges to society, particularly in the digital age (Василенко, 2019). Hate speech is aimed to injure, dehumanize, harass, intimidate, debase, degrade, and victimize the targeted groups and to foment insensitivity and brutality against them (Cohen-Almagor, 2015). Hate speech is an art form that refers to specific expressions of hatred against particular (groups of) people in particular contexts (Howard, 2019).

From the several concepts that have been explained, it can be concluded that hate speech refers to any verbal, written, or behavioral communication that degrades, insults, threatens, or discriminates against individuals or groups based on characteristics such as race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual

orientation, disability, or other identity characteristics. Hate speech often aims to incite hostility, prejudice, or violence against the targeted group or individual. Hate speech can be conveyed through any form of expression, including images, cartoons, memes, objects, movements, and symbols, and is usually in the form of negative stereotypes (Parekh, 2006) and dehumanization (Porter et al., 2019), and can be disseminated offline or online.

Data was obtained from a tweet on X, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** The Data

## 1. Conceptual metaphor analysis

### a. Metaphor Used: Commodification

- Sentence: "Gus penjual agama." 'Religious seller Gus'
- Source Domain: Commodification or trade (seller, merchandise, buying and selling).
- Target Domain: Religious values that are considered as merchandise.
- Metaphorical Meaning: In this context, the phrase "religious seller" implies that the figure mentioned (Gus) is considered to use religion as a tool or commodity for personal gain, whether in the form of power, influence, or material. This metaphor creates the image that faith or religious teachings have been turned into merchandise that has lost its sacredness.

### b. Psychological and Social Effects:

- Creates a negative perception of the figure mentioned as insincere in faith.
- Stimulates emotions of hatred or distrust, especially towards figures who use religious attributes in the public domain.

## 2. Cognitive framing analysis

### a. Primary Frame: Moral Discreditation

- Framing: The phrase "religious seller" frames the character (Gus) as someone immoral because he exploits religion for profit.
- Framing Goals:
  - 1) Reduces the credibility of the character mentioned.
  - 2) Directs public opinion to view the character as threatening pure religious values.
- Framing Strategy:
  - 1) Uses negative metaphors to attack personal character without providing concrete evidence.
  - 2) Arouses dislike or suspicion among the public towards the character concerned.

### b. Effects on Public Perception:

- Prejudice: Strengthens negative stereotypes about individuals who are active in religion and politics.

## CONCLUSION

The cognitive linguistic approach through conceptual metaphor analysis and cognitive framing provides a comprehensive framework for understanding hate speech. Using conceptual metaphor analysis and cognitive framing offers a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of hate speech. This approach identifies language patterns and reveals how hate speech creates, maintains, and spreads particular worldviews. With this insight, efforts to counter hate speech can be more effective in academic, social, and policy domains.

## REFERENCES

- Cohen-Almagor, R. (2015). *Confronting the Internet's Dark Side*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316226391>
- Coulson, S., & Van Petten, C. (2002). Conceptual integration and metaphor: an event-related potential study. *Mem Cognit*, 30(6), 958–968. [http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&dopt=Citation&list\\_uids=12450098](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&dopt=Citation&list_uids=12450098)
- Elliott, C., Chuma, W., Gendi, Y. El, Marko, D., Patel, A., & Tsoneva, E. (2014). *Hate Speech, Key concept paper*. [www.mecodem.eu](http://www.mecodem.eu)
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>
- Ghassani, N. S., & Saifudin, A. (2020). Studi Metafora Konseptual pada Idiom Bahasa Jepang yang mengandung Bagian Tubuh dan Bermakna Emosi. *Japanese Research on Linguistics, Literature, and Culture*, 2(2), 161–177. <https://doi.org/10.33633/jr.v2i2.3990>
- Grady, J. E., Oakley, T., & Coulson, S. (1999). Blending and metaphor. *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics*, 1, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-010-9307-3>
- Howard, J. W. (2019). Free Speech and Hate Speech. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22(1), 93–109. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051517-012343>
- Kaufman, S., Elliott, M., & Shmueli, D. F. (2012). Frames , Framing and Reframing By. *Psychology*.
- Kövecses, Z. (2010). Metaphor: A practical Introduction. In *English Linguistics/Journal of the English Linguistic Society of Japan* (2nd ed., Issue 1). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023919116538>
- Lakoff, G. (2014). *Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*. Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1999). *Philosophy in the Flesh*. Basic Books.
- Łata, M. (2020). Cognitive frames – inevitability or choice? *Philosophical Discourses*, 2, 133–147. <https://doi.org/10.16926/pd.2020.02.09>

- Noviana, F., & Saifudin, A. (2020). Pemaknaan lirik lagu Shabondama karya Ujo Noguchi berdasarkan analisis semiotika Michael Riffaterre. *Japanese Research on Linguistics, Literature, and Culture*, 2(2), 143–160. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33633/jr.v2i2.3978>
- Noviana, F., & Saifudin, A. (2021). Conceptual metaphors of “water” in Javanese proverbs from a cognitive linguistic perspective. In T. R. Soeprbowati, B. Warsito, & T. Triadi Putranto (Eds.), *E3S Web of Conferences* (Vol. 317, p. 02014). EDP Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.1051/E3SCONF/202131702014>
- Parekh, B. (2006). Hate speech. *Public Policy Research*, 12(4), 213–223. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1070-3535.2005.00405.x>
- Porter, E., Wood, T. J., & Bahador, B. (2019). Can presidential misinformation on climate change be corrected? Evidence from Internet and phone experiments. *Research & Politics*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168019864784>
- Saifudin, A., Risagarniwa, Y. Y., Citraesmana, E., & Sidiq, I. I. (2024). From pictures to words: A linguistic approach to comic strip humor. *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language*, 12(1), 396–411. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ijscsl.2024.2019157.3321>
- Василенко, Е. Н. (2019). Hate speech as an object of research and as a social phenomenon (Theoretical grounding of research prospects). *Philology & Human*, 4, 136–145. [https://doi.org/10.14258/filichel\(2019\)4-11](https://doi.org/10.14258/filichel(2019)4-11)