



Representing Corruption and Arabic Terms in Online News: An SFL Transitivity Study

Hanifah Mu'izah¹, Frans Sayogie², Abdullah³

¹⁻²⁻³ *Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia*

hanifah.mu'izah25@mhs.uinjkt.ac.id, frans.sayogie@uinjkt.ac.id, abdullah11@uinjkt.ac.id

Abstract:

This study examines the portrayal of corruption and the use of Arabic terms in four online news articles published by Kompas.com and Detik.com in May-June 2017. The case involved a member of the House of Representatives from the PKS faction, Yudi Widiyana Adia, who was suspected of using Arabic terms as code in communications related to bribery surrounding road construction projects in Maluku and North Maluku. Adopting a qualitative-descriptive approach grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), this study focuses on the transitivity system within the ideational metafunction to analyze how each media outlet linguistically constructs the same corruption incident. The findings indicate that Kompas tends to represent corruption through material processes that position the actors as the agents of the action, whereas Detik more frequently employs verbal processes that position the source as the primary speaker. This difference also influences how Arabic terms are represented in the context of corruption. These consistent linguistic patterns indicate a difference in editorial orientation between the two media outlets in their coverage of the same corruption case, although broader generalizations require a more extensive corpus analysis.

Keywords: *Arabic term, corruption representation, online news, systemic functional linguistics, transitivity*

1. INTRODUCTION

Media never operates in an ideologically neutral space. Every linguistic choice made by a journalist, from verb selection and participant placement to clause structure, actively shapes how readers understand social reality (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). This becomes particularly critical in the context of corruption reporting, where media framing not only influences public perceptions of actors and events but also plays a role in shaping discourse about accountability,

justice, and the integrity of state institutions (Bednarek & Caple, 2012; Fowler, 1991). In the Indonesian context, this ideological dimension carries an additional layer of significance: when corruption involves actors from Islamic-based political parties, media language choices actively contribute to and potentially distort public perceptions of the relationship between Islamic identity and political integrity. Mainstream Indonesian media operates within a complex ideological landscape in which editorial interests, political affiliations, and market pressures interact to determine how events are constructed into news narratives (Eriyanto, 2002). Nguyen (2025) further argues that media discourse analysis reveals how news content does not merely report events but actively constructs meanings, frames issues, and conveys ideologies in ways that shape both individual understanding and broader societal perceptions, a theoretical premise directly applicable to the present study's examination of how Kompas and Detik construct the same corruption event through systematically different linguistic choices. Understanding how these linguistic choices operate ideologically, particularly in the context of Indonesian Islamic politics, is therefore important not only for applied linguistics but also for media and democracy studies.

In May–June 2017, two national media outlets (Kompas.com and Detik.com) published a series of news articles concerning an unusual case: the use of Arabic terms, specifically the words *liqo'* (meaning 'meeting') and *juz* (a division of the Qur'an), as codes in a bribery scheme involving a member of the House of Representatives from the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) faction. The use of religious terminology to disguise transactional meaning constitutes a form of instrumental code-switching (Gumperz, 1982), that is, a deliberate shift between linguistic codes driven by the pragmatic goal of concealing meaning from outsiders, rather than by prevailing socio-cultural context. This strategy is not only rare in Indonesian corruption cases but is also analytically distinctive in that it exploits the symbolic authority of religious vocabulary as a shield in illegal communication, a dimension that has never been examined from a linguistic standpoint.

Scholarship on corruption discourse in the media has developed both internationally and domestically, albeit with differing orientations. In international literature, Marchetti & Stanziano (2024) demonstrate that the politicization of corruption on social media reflects deeper ideological fragmentation in the digital public sphere. Cross-cultural comparative studies suggest that the way media construct corrupt actors—as active agents or as passively involved parties—has direct consequences for public perceptions of accountability (Budiawan & Mulyani, 2025). In Indonesia, research on corruption discourse in the media has been dominated by communication and sociological approaches. Eriyanto (2002) examined the construction of political news in Indonesian media from a framing analysis perspective, while Perdana & Zamzamy (2025) analyzed comparative media framing in the coverage of the PT Pertamina Patra Niaga corruption case. Permatasari & Yuanti (2026) compared language use in the coverage of the Pertamina corruption case between national and international media and found differences in framing orientation that reflect distinct journalistic functions.

From a linguistic standpoint, research grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) on Indonesian news texts has shown considerable development. Fauzan (2022) applied SFL and critical discourse analysis to coverage of the Ferdy Sambo case in Kompas and Tempo, finding that grammatical choices systematically reflect ideology and power relations in online news texts. Sukiman et al. (2023) examined the transitivity system in news discourse on the Kanjuruhan tragedy across three online media outlets and found that material processes dominate narrative construction as a strategy for building event representation. Wulansari & Mazid (2024) employed

transitivity analysis to reveal ideology in the political documentary *Dirty Vote*, demonstrating that the dominance of material processes is used to construct specific political narratives. Damayanti et al. (2025) integrated SFL transitivity analysis with Entman's framing theory to examine the representation of the Prabowo-Gibran candidacy in international media, finding that the interplay of material and relational processes creates subtle yet effective ideological framing. In the domain of legal texts, Fitri et al. (2021) showed that process choices in Indonesian judicial texts reflect ideologically constructed representations of actors and legal events that vary according to the institutional position of the text's author. Meanwhile, Asad et al. (2019) demonstrated that transitivity analysis of online news can reveal media ideological alignment through consistent patterns of process selection.

The methodological precedent of comparative SFL analysis of news text covering the same event has also been established. Suparto (2018) applied transitivity analysis to two online news articles covering the Ahok blasphemy case in Indonesia and found that different media outlets construct markedly different representations of the same event through systematic variation in process types and participant roles, establishing an important methodological precedent for SFL-based comparative news analysis in the Indonesian context. More recently, Dewi et al. (2021) examined how a British online outlet constructs the representation of Indonesian political figure Prabowo Subianto through the transitivity system, demonstrating that process selection and participant positioning significantly shape how media outlets construct political identity across different editorial contexts. Muhammad (2024), in a study of political headlines from five major Nigerian newspapers, confirmed that material processes dominate political discourse at 48%, reflecting an action- and agency-oriented construction that forecloses alternative interpretations of political actors' responsibility, a pattern that closely parallels the findings on Kompas texts in the present study.

While these studies have collectively established the productivity of the SFL transitivity framework for analyzing media and political discourse, three gaps remain unaddressed. First, no study has specifically applied transitivity analysis to corruption news texts involving Arabic code-switching in the context of Indonesian Islamic politics, a phenomenon that requires both linguistic and cultural sensitivity. Second, prior studies have generally analyzed a single medium or a single text, leaving systematic comparison between two media outlets covering the same event, including parallel texts published on the same day, unexplored within the SFL framework in Indonesia. Third, methodologically, this study extends prior SFL scholarship by incorporating a chronological analysis of two distinct reporting moments, enabling examination of editorial orientation consistency across time, a dimension that has rarely been explored in existing transitivity studies of news texts. These gaps constitute the foundation and justification of the present research.

This study analyzes four news texts from two media outlets, two from Kompas.com and two from Detik.com (Atriana, 2017; Gabrillin, 2017a, 2017b; Prasetia, 2017). Although all four texts cover the same event, they display markedly different linguistic constructions, reflecting the distinct ideological positions of each media outlet. The study employs the SFL framework developed by Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), specifically the transitivity system within the ideational metafunction, which provides a structured analytical tool for identifying how experience is encoded in language through three components: process, participant, and circumstance.

This study aims to identify the dominant transitivity process types in the four news texts and to reveal how participant and circumstance patterns indicate differing representational tendencies between the two media outlets in their construction of the same corruption event, within the limits of the corpus examined. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of SFL scholarship in the context of Indonesian-language media discourse particularly by demonstrating the relevance of transitivity analysis in revealing ideological constructions in legal and political news genres involving issues of religious identity. Practically, the findings may serve as a reference for media researchers and journalism practitioners in understanding how language choices shape the representation of corruption events in the public sphere. Based on this focus, the study addresses two research questions: (1) What transitivity process types are dominant in the four news texts on the PKS corruption case? (2) How do participant and circumstance patterns reflect the representation of corruption actors in each text?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a theory of language developed by Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday since the 1960s (Wiratno, 2018). SFL views language as a social semiotic system that functions not only as a tool of communication, but also as a means of constructing reality and ideology (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). From this perspective, every linguistic choice made by a speaker, including journalists, is not a neutral choice, but one laden with social and ideological meaning (Eggs, 2004). This foundation renders SFL relevant as a framework for media discourse analysis, particularly for revealing how news texts construct the reality of corruption incidents.

In SFL, language functions simultaneously through three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction concerns the role of language in representing human experience of the world, both external experience such as events and actions, and internal experience such as thoughts and feelings (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The interpersonal metafunction regulates social relations among speakers through the mood and modality systems, while the textual metafunction organises messages into coherent texts through the theme-rheme system (Wiratno, 2018). The present study focuses on the ideational metafunction, given that its research questions concern how the two media outlets represent corruption actors and incidents.

The applicability of this framework to news discourse analysis has been confirmed across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. Piga (2023) demonstrates that transitivity functions not merely as a grammatical description tool but as a means of tracing how discourse constructs particular versions of social reality across institutional contexts. Gómez-Jiménez & Bartley (2023), in a longitudinal study of two contrasting British newspapers covering the same social issue across eighteen years, show that systematic differences in transitivity patterns between outlets reflect stable editorial ideologies rather than event-driven variation. Sari et al. (2024) further demonstrated that the combined application of transitivity analysis and the appraisal system in fraud news texts reveals how process selection works in tandem with evaluative language to shape reader perception of culpability.

2.2 The Transitivity System

The grammatical realization of the ideational meta function is the transitivity system. According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), the transitivity system constitutes the primary grammatical resource for construing human experience within a clause. Every clause consists of three components: process, participant, and circumstance. The process is the core of the clause and is realized by a verbal group; participants are the entities involved in the process, realized by nominal groups; and circumstances provide additional contextual information surrounding the process, realized by adverbial groups or prepositional phrases (Wiratno, 2018).

Halliday identifies six process types within the transitivity system. First, material processes represent physical actions or concrete events in the outer world, with the primary participants being the Actor as doer and the Goal as the recipient of the action. Second, mental processes represent conscious inner experience, including perception, affection, and cognition with participants consisting of the Senser and the Phenomenon. Third, relational processes express attributive or identificatory relationships between two entities, with participants comprising the Carrier and the Attribute in attributive types, or the Token and the Value in identifying types. Fourth, verbal processes represent acts of speaking, with participants such as the Sayer, the Receiver, and the Verbiage. Fifth, behavioral processes represent actions that are physical manifestations of mental processes, with the participant being the Behaver. Sixth, existential processes express the existence or emergence of something, with the participant being the Existent.

The application of transitivity analysis to Indonesian legal texts has been carried out by Fitri et al. (2021), who found that judicial texts tend to utilize material and verbal processes to construct the roles of participants in legal events differently, depending on the institutional position of the text's author. Asad et al. (2019) compared transitivity choices in election news coverage across online media from two different countries and found that mainstream media tended to exhibit linguistic choices more aligned with political interests compared to independent media.

2.3 News Texts as Ideological Constructions

The selection of verb forms in a text is not merely a grammatical choice, but also an ideological one. Martin & Rose (2003) assert that transitivity analysis can reveal how a text positions certain participants as active or passive agents and, consequently, who is deemed responsible for an event. In the context of news texts, Bednarek & Caple (2012) demonstrate that the selection of processes and the positioning of actors constitute framing strategies employed by media outlets to direct readers' interpretations of events. This is consistent with Fowler's (1991) argument that news texts invariably contain ideology operating implicitly through seemingly ordinary linguistic choices.

Research on the representation of corruption in Indonesian media has grown, particularly in the post-reform era. However, studies specifically employing the SFL framework to analyze corruption representation grounded in Arabic code-switching within the context of Indonesian Islamic politics remain extremely limited. It is this gap that the present study seeks to address.

2.4 Corruption Codes and Code-Switching as a strategy of Concealment

In this study, the term 'corruption code' refers to the strategy of using terms from another language to disguise the transactional nature of bribery-related communication from uninvolved

parties. This strategy constitutes a form of instrumental code-switching as defined by Gumperz (1982)—that is, a shift between linguistic codes driven by specific pragmatic goals, in this case the concealment of meaning rather than by prevailing socio-cultural context. Unlike social code-switching, which occurs naturally in bilingual communities, instrumental code-switching is calculative and deliberate (Gumperz, 1982).

In the case under analysis, the terms *liqo'* and *juz* carry a dual semiotic function. Denotatively, both refer to commonly used Islamic religious concepts; however, connotatively, within the communications among the corruption perpetrators, they function as markers for sums of money and the timing of bribe transfers. The use of religious terms as codes exploits two linguistic properties simultaneously: first, semantic opacity to outsiders unfamiliar with the context; and second, plausible deniability a reasonable possibility of denial, since the terms legitimately carry religious meaning (Gumperz, 1982; Fairclough, 1995).

The strategic dimension of code-switching in political contexts has been extensively documented in the literature. Moody & Eslami (2020) demonstrate that code-switching in political discourse is rarely a spontaneous sociolinguistic phenomenon but rather a deliberate ideological strategy employed by political actors to achieve specific communicative goals—including audience management and the concealment of politically sensitive meanings. This applies directly to the case analyzed in the present study, where the use of Arabic religious terminology in bribery-related communication exploits the symbolic authority of Islamic vocabulary as a form of plausible deniability (Gumperz, 1982). Suparno et al. (2025), in their transitivity analysis of the *Qasidah Nahdliyah*, similarly demonstrate how Arabic-language religious vocabulary in the Indonesian context functions as a vehicle for layered ideological meaning-construction—an observation that resonates with the code-switching dimension examined here, albeit in a markedly different communicative context.

From an SFL perspective, the way media outlets represent these codes in news texts becomes an important object of analysis: whether Arabic terms are positioned as the 'Goal' within definitive material processes, as 'entities' within tentative relational processes, or as 'rhetoric' within source-mediated verbal processes. Each of these choices constructs the reality of these corruption codes differently for readers.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach supported by simple quantification to describe the distribution of process types. This approach is suitable for research aimed at uncovering the meanings embedded in the linguistic representations of news texts, as it allows for an in-depth analysis of grammatical features that cannot be captured solely through quantitative methods (Creswell, 2014). The analytical framework used is SFL, with a specific focus on the transitivity system within the ideational metafunction.

The data consists of four online news texts selected purposively because they cover the same event from different perspectives and contain rich linguistic features suitable for SFL analysis. The four texts are: (T1) Kompas.com, May 22, 2017, "PKS Politician Uses Arabic When Discussing Bribery Money"; (T2) Detik.com, May 23, 2017, "Arabic Terms Suspected of Being Corruption Codes, Here's What PKS Says" ["Arabic Terms Suspected of Being Used as Corruption Codes, Here's What PKS Says"]; (T3) Detik.com, June 8, 2017, "Using *liqo'* and *juz* as Corruption Codes: Here's the PKS Politician's Reason" ["Using *liqo'* and *juz* as

Corruption Codes: Here’s the PKS Politician’s Reason”]; and (T4) Kompas.com, June 8, 2017, “The Reason PKS Politicians Used Arabic When Discussing Bribery Money” [“The Reason PKS Politicians Used Arabic When Discussing Bribery Money”]. These four texts provide a productive basis for comparison: two texts cover the indictment hearing (May 22–23, 2017) and two texts cover the witness examination hearing (June 8, 2017), from two media outlets with different editorial orientations.

The analytical procedure was conducted in four stages. First, each text was divided into clauses as units of analysis. A unit of analysis is defined as a single clause containing an identifiable main process (verb); embedded clauses functioning as Verbiage or Goal were analyzed as separate units if they contained their own main verb. Second, each clause was classified based on the type of process within the transitivity system, following the criteria established by Halliday & Matthiessen (2014). The following examples illustrate the coding procedure applied:

Table 1: Coding procedure

Clause	Main Process	Process Type	Participant(s)	Circumstance
<i>Aseng menyuap Yudi agar pimpinan Komisi V mengupayakan proyek-proyek</i> [“Aseng bribed Yudi so that the chairperson of Commission V would facilitate the projects”]	<i>menyuap</i> [bribed]	Material (transitive)	Aseng → Agent Yudi → Recipient	Purpose: “ <i>agar pimpinan Komisi V mengupayakan proyek-proyek</i> ” [“so that the chairperson of Commission V would facilitate the projects”]
<i>Ledia mengatakan bahwa pihaknya menganut asas praduga tak bersalah</i> [“her party adheres to the presumption of innocence”]	<i>mengatakan</i> [said]	Verbal	Ledia → Speaker <i>pihaknya menganut asas praduga tak bersalah</i> [“her party adheres to the presumption of innocence”] →process Verbiage	-

Third, the participants and circumstances associated with each are identified and labeled according to their respective roles. Fourth, the results of the analysis are interpreted to reveal patterns of representation and ideological tendencies in media discourse construction.

To ensure coding consistency, all clauses were classified by strictly referring to the process type criteria of Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) as well as Wiratno (2018). Clauses situated at the boundary between two process types, for example, between material and behavioral, or between verbal and mental were classified based on the most dominant verbal element within the clause. The limitations of this study are explicitly acknowledged: with four texts as the corpus and coding performed by a single researcher, the findings are interpretive and limited to the cases studied. Broader generalizations regarding the reporting patterns of Kompas and Detik require a larger corpus and inter-rater reliability validation. Future research is encouraged to incorporate such validation procedures to strengthen the credibility of the coding process.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Overview of Process Distribution

The transitivity analysis of the four texts yielded a total of 112 classifiable clauses (T1: 34, T2: 28, T3: 27, T4: 23). The distribution of process types is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of Process Types Across the Four News Texts

Process Type	T1 (Kompas, May)	T2 (Detik, May)	T3 (Detik, June)	T4 (Kompas, June)
Material	20 (58.8%)	8 (29%)	6 (22%)	8 (34.8%)
Verbal	8 (23.5%)	13 (46%)	11 (41%)	10 (43.5%)
Relational	4 (11.8%)	4 (14%)	7 (26%)	4 (17.4%)
Mental	2 (5.9%)	2 (7%)	2 (7%)	0 (0%)
Behavioral	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	1 (5%)
Existential	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	34 (100%)	28 (100%)	27 (100%)	23 (100%)

Based on Table 2, a consistent pattern is observable in the two Kompas texts: T1 is dominated by material processes (58.8%), while T4 allocates greater space to verbal processes (43.5%), owing to its basis in direct courtroom testimony. In the two Detik texts (T2 and T3), a consistent pattern is also evident, with both dominated by verbal processes (46% and 41%, respectively).

4.2. Material Processes in Kompas News Texts (T1 and T4)

The emphasis on material processes in both Kompas news texts explicitly positions the actors as active agents responsible for their actions. Table 3 presents examples of material clauses drawn from both Kompas texts.

Table 3: Examples of Material Process Analysis in T1 and T4

No.	Clause	Actor / Goal	Process Type
1	"...mengungkap keterlibatan sejumlah penyelenggara negara" ["...revealing the involvement of a number of state officials"] (T1)	Actor: indictment letter / Goal: involvement of state officials	Transitive material
2	"Aseng menyuap Yudi agar pimpinan Komisi V tersebut mengupayakan proyek-proyek" ["Aseng bribed Yudi so that the chairperson of Commission V would facilitate the projects"] (T1, T4)	Actor: Aseng / Goal: Yudi (through bribe money)	Transitive material
3	"Yudi menugaskan Kurniawan untuk berhubungan dengan Aseng" ["Yudi assigned Kurniawan to liaise with Aseng"] (T1, T4)	Actor: Yudi / Goal: Kurniawan	Transitive material
4	"Kurniawan menyerahkan uang komitmen fee dari Aseng" ["Kurniawan delivered the commitment fee money from Aseng"] (T1)	Actor: Kurniawan / Goal: commitment fee money	Transitive material
5	"jaksa mencantumkan transkrip percakapan" ["The prosecutor included the conversation transcript"] (T4)	Actor: KPK prosecutor / Goal: conversation transcript	Transitive material

In the clauses above, the corruption actors, Aseng, Yudi Widiana, and Kurniawan are explicitly depicted as Actors in transitive material processes. Linguistically, this representation positions them as doers of the action, rather than merely as parties involved in an event.

One of the distinctive features of T1 (Kompas, 22 May 2017) is its use of strongly connotative nominally structured expressions, such as '*uang suap*' [bribe money'], '*komitmen fee*' [commitment fee'], and '*menyuap*' [bribed'], which are positioned as processes and goals within main clauses. This contrasts with T2 (Detik), which employs more tentative language. The absence of hedging words such as 'allegedly' in the journalist's narrative in Kompas suggests a higher degree of epistemic commitment.

In T4 (Kompas, 8 June 2017), although verbal processes appear more prominent as the text incorporates a substantial amount of courtroom testimony Kompas nonetheless retains a few material clauses that position the actors as the doers of actions. Clauses such as '*Yudi menugaskan Kurniawan*' ['Yudi assigned Kurniawan'] indicate that action continues to function as a crucial element in the narrative construction.

4.3. Verbal Processes in Detik News Texts (T2 and T3)

The predominance of verbal processes in both Detik articles reflects a journalistic strategy that positions the media outlet as an intermediary between sources and readers, rather than as a direct narrator of events. Both Detik texts construct their narratives through statements from strategically selected sources.

In T2 (Detik, 23 May 2017), the primary source is Ledia Hanifa, Head of Public Relations of the PKS Central Leadership. Expressions such as '*Ledia mengatakan...*' ['Ledia said...'], '*Ledia enggan menanggapi...*' ['Ledia was reluctant to respond...'], and '*menurut Ledia*' ['according to Ledia'] position PKS as a party actively producing defensive discourse. The clauses in this text consist of statements with high modality: '*terlepas dari istilah yang digunakan, bagian itu perlu diselidiki dengan benar*' ['regardless of the terms used, that element needs to be properly investigated']; '*kami berpegang pada prinsip praduga tak bersalah*' ['we uphold the principle of presumption of innocence']. Ideologically, this choice of source grants PKS the space to construct a counter-narrative against the emerging allegations.

In T3 (Detik, 8 June 2017), the primary Sayer shifts to Kurniawan as a witness at trial. Verbal clauses such as '*kata Kurniawan*' ['said Kurniawan'], '*ujar Kurniawan*' [stated Kurniawan'], and '*Kurniawan bercerita kepada jaksa KPK*' [Kurniawan told the KPK prosecutor'] dominate the text. The Verbiage of Kurniawan's verbal clauses are ideologically significant: his assertion that the use of Arabic terms was '*spontan saja*' ['spontaneous'] and without '*kesepakatan apa-apa*' ['any prior agreement'] linguistically reduces the degree of intentionality attributed to the corrupt acts.

4.4. Comparison of Parallel Texts (T3 and T4)

One of the analytical strengths of the corpus in this study lies in the existence of two texts published on the same date, 8 June 2017, by two different news outlets, covering the same hearing. This enables a more controlled comparison.

Table 4: Comparison of Opening Clauses in T3 (Detik) and T4 (Kompas), 8 June 2017

Aspect	T3 - Detik.com	T4 - Kompas.com
Opening sentence	“ <i>Jaksa KPK mengungkap dugaan komunikasi dengan kode Bahasa Arab...</i> ” [“KPK prosecutor revealed alleged communication using Arabic language codes...”]	“ <i>Mantan Wakil Ketua Komisi V DPR, Yudi Widiana Adia, diduga menerima suap...</i> ” [“Former Vice Chairperson of Commission V, Yudi Widiana Adia, is alleged to have received a bribe...”]
Dominant process in first clause	Verbal: 'revealed' (Sayer: KPK prosecutor)	Material: 'received a bribe' (Actor: Yudi Widiana)
Primary focus	The prosecutor's act (legal institution) of exposing the code	Yudi's action/status as the bribe recipient
Opening modality	Tentative: “alleged”	Tentative: “is alleged to have”, but directly refers to the perpetrator
Dominant Sayer	Kurniawan (witness)	Kurniawan (witness), but framed within Kompas’s material narrative

Table 4 reveals a striking difference. T3 (Detik) opens with a verbal process that positions the KPK prosecutor as the speaker, thus framing the event as the act of a legal institution in the process of disclosing something. This creates a distance between the media outlet and the claim; Detik appears to report only what the prosecutor stated, rather than definitively asserting that corruption has occurred. By contrast, T4 (Kompas) directly positions Yudi Widiana as the Actor in the material process of “*menerima suap*” “receiving a bribe,” despite the use of the word “*diduga*” [“allegedly”]. This is linguistically more definitive in identifying the perpetrator.

4.5. Representation of Arabic Terms as Corruption Codes

In both Kompas texts (T1 and T4), Arabic terms are positioned as part of an assertive material narrative. T1 presents the complete SMS transcript without metalinguistic mediation. T4 includes Kurniawan’s explanation as Sayer, clarifying the meaning of the terms: ‘*Liqa berarti bertemu. Sedangkan Juz berarti bagian*’ [‘Liqa means to meet. Whereas Juz means a part’]; ‘*4 juz campuran itu maksudnya Rp 4 miliar dalam mata uang yang tidak sama*’ [‘4 mixed juz means Rp 4 billion in mixed currencies’].

In both Detik texts (T2 and T3), a different approach is adopted. T2 places the Arabic terms in the headline as entities that are ‘*diduga*’ [‘allegedly’] serving as codes, employing high modality. T3 provides a metalinguistic explanation at the end of the text: ‘*Liqa dalam bahasa Arab artinya pertemuan... Sementara istilah ‘juz’ yang digunakan mengacu pada juz Al-qur’an*’ [‘Liqa’ in Arabic means a meeting... While the term ‘juz’ as used here refers to a section of the Qur’an’]. This explanation adds to a critical distance between the media outlet and the claim that the terms constitute corruption codes.

4.6. Circumstantial Patterns

The analysis of circumstances reveals that locative circumstances (at the Tipikor Court in Jakarta; in the basement of Hotel Alia Cikini; at the Bekasi Barat Toll Road petrol station) and temporal circumstances (14 May 2015; 12 May 2015 at 23:00 WIB; Monday, 22/5/2017) are highly

prevalent across all texts, particularly those from Kompas. Kompas also incorporates a greater number of manner circumstances, such as: *‘dengan mengirimkan pesan berisi...’* [‘by sending a message containing...’]; *‘melalui Paroli alias Asep’* [‘through Paroli alias Asep’]; *‘dalam bentuk rupiah dan dolar AS yang dibungkus dalam sebuah goody bag’* [‘in the form of rupiah and US dollars wrapped in a goody bag’]. These manner circumstances reinforce the material narrative by detailing the mechanism of the bribe transfer, a feature considerably less prevalent in the Detik texts.

4.7. Comparative Implications and Sociopolitical Significance

Most notable in this study is the dimension of code-switching involving Arabic religious terminology. The association of Islamic religious vocabulary with corrupt practices in news coverage has sociopolitical implications that go beyond mere lexical choices. First, this documents how the symbolic authority of Islamic vocabulary can be exploited as a tool for camouflage in corruption-related communication, a phenomenon that, to the researchers’ knowledge, has not yet been linguistically explored in the Indonesian context. Second, the way each media outlet represents these codes reflects differing ideological positions regarding the relationship between the PKS’s Islamic identity and the corrupt practices of its members. Budiawan & Mulyani (2025) demonstrate that Indonesian media narratives on corruption involving public officials often carry ideological burdens of resistance and legitimization that go beyond factual reporting. In the case studied here, Kompas by allowing the SMS transcripts to speak for themselves without metalinguistic mediation implicitly establishes a direct link between Arabic terms and acts of bribery. Conversely, Detik by providing explanations of the meanings of *“liqo”* and *“juz”* opens space for alternative interpretations for readers who may be familiar with Islamic terminology, while simultaneously creating a critical distance from the corruption allegations themselves.

Third, this study confirms that the framing differences between Kompas and Detik are systematic and consistent across two distinct reporting instances; they are not the result of differences in the events covered. This finding aligns with the argument by Permatasari & Yuanti (2026) that the differing journalistic orientations between investigative and procedural media reflect distinct editorial stances toward the media’s oversight function in democracy. In the Indonesian context, where public trust in law enforcement institutions remains under pressure (Budiawan & Mulyani, 2025), the choice of whether to position the corrupt actor as an active agent (Kompas) or as a subject quoted through the voices of others (Detik) has significant implications for the formation of public opinion and social pressure on the legal process.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal systematic differences in how Kompas.com and Detik.com linguistically construct the same corruption event, and these differences carry significant theoretical and practical implications. The dominance of material processes in Kompas texts, particularly T1, confirms Fowler’s (1991) proposition that news texts are never ideologically neutral; rather, linguistic choices including the selection of process types actively construct versions of social reality. By positioning corruption actors as explicit Actors in transitive material clauses, Kompas constructs a reality in which individual agency and culpability are foregrounded. This is consistent with Bednarek & Caple’s (2012) argument that process selection constitutes a framing strategy that directs readers toward interpretations of events. This pattern of action-

foregrounding through material processes is consistent with findings across multiple media contexts. Muhammad (2024) found that material processes constituted 48% of political headlines in Nigerian newspapers, reflecting an action- and agency-oriented discourse that foregrounds actor responsibility. Suparto (2018), in an earlier analysis of Indonesian online news on the Ahok case, similarly found that outlets employing more material processes positioned their subjects as active, accountable agents—while outlets relying more heavily on verbal processes created representational distance between the media institution and the claims being reported. In this case, Kompas's material framing encourages readers to perceive corruption as a series of deliberate, attributable actions performed by identifiable individuals.

Conversely, the consistent dominance of verbal processes in both Detik texts confirms Martin & Rose's (2003) observation that verbal processes function to mediate reality through the voices of sources, rather than constructing it directly. This has an important ideological consequence: by positioning sources whether PKS spokesperson Ledia Hanifa in T2 or witness Kurniawan in T3 as the primary Sayers, Detik effectively distances itself from the propositional content of the claims. Wijayanto & Masduki (2024) characterize Kompas as a 'polite watchdog' an outlet that maintains an investigative orientation while carefully managing its relationships with political elites. This institutional positioning helps explain why Kompas consistently foregrounds material processes and actor agency in its corruption reporting. Dewi et al. (2021), in their transitivity analysis of the British media's representation of an Indonesian political figure, further confirm that the choice of process type is never editorially arbitrary: media outlets strategically select process configurations that align with their institutional stance toward the events and actors being covered. This strategy aligns with what Fairclough (1995) terms synthetic personalization, wherein the media outlet adopts the role of a neutral conduit rather than an active narrator. However, this apparent neutrality is itself an ideological position, as the selection of which sources are granted the role of Sayer is never arbitrary.

These findings can be situated within a broader scholarly context through comparison with recent studies on corruption, discourse and transitivity in media texts. The dominance of material processes in Kompas aligns with Sukiman et al. (2023), who demonstrated that Indonesian investigative media tend to employ material processes to position actors as responsible agents. A similar pattern was identified by Fitri et al. (2021) in Indonesian judicial discourse, where material processes consistently define actor responsibility in legal events. Conversely, the dominance of verbal processes in Detik particularly through institutional sources such as party spokespersons and trial witnesses reflects what Fauzan (2022) describes as "ideological mediation through source voices," whereby media outlets delegate the construction of reality to quoted participants rather than presenting claims directly.

The present findings also resonate with international scholarship. Al-Badri & Al-Janabi (2022) demonstrated that the selection of Sayers in political news constitutes a decisive framing strategy in establishing authority over event interpretation. Similarly, Wulansari & Mazid (2024) found that verbal processes in Indonesian political discourse often create distance between media institutions and the claims being conveyed, a pattern clearly reflected in the Detik texts analyzed in this study. More broadly, Marchetti & Stanziano (2024) argue that the politicization of corruption discourse, which encompasses decisions regarding who is given voice and how their actions are represented has direct implications for institutional legitimacy and public perceptions of accountability. This systematic editorial difference is further illuminated by Gómez-Jiménez & Bartley's (2023) longitudinal finding that divergences in transitivity patterns between contrasting

newspapers reflect stable ideological orientations rather than responses to specific events. Their research reinforces the interpretation advanced in the present study: the consistent material-verbal divide between Kompas and Detik across two separate reporting moments reflects institutionalized editorial orientations, not situational reporting differences. Sari et al. (2024) similarly argue that the co-occurrence of process types with evaluative framing in news texts about legal cases constitutes a systematic representational strategy one that shapes whether readers perceive accused actors as morally culpable agents or as individuals embedded in complex institutional processes.

Particularly compelling evidence of editorially driven representation emerges from the comparison of parallel texts T3 and T4, both published on 8 June 2017 to report the same courtroom hearing. While Kompas opens with Yudi Widiana as Actor in a material process, Detik foregrounds the KPK prosecutor as Sayer in a verbal process. This contrast demonstrates that the same event may be linguistically constructed in fundamentally different ways depending on editorial orientation rather than differences in the event itself. Such findings extend and support van Dijk's (1998) proposition that ideology operates through micro-linguistic choices, including the seemingly routine selection of verb types in news discourse.

The representation of Arabic terms as corruption codes introduces an additional layer of ideological and sociopolitical complexity. Kompas allows SMS transcripts to function as self-evident material evidence within an assertive narrative frame, whereas Detik supplements the terms with metalinguistic glosses that create critical distance from the claim that these expressions functioned as corruption codes. Consequently, Kompas encourages readers to interpret *liqo'* and *juz* as established codes linked to bribery, while Detik preserves semantic ambiguity by foregrounding their legitimate religious meanings. This finding supports Gumperz's (1982) notion of plausible deniability as a feature of instrumental code-switching and suggests that media institutions may either reinforce or undermine such deniability through representational choices. This representational divergence resonates with Moody & Eslami's (2020) analysis of code-switching as a deliberate political strategy: just as political actors exploit code-switching to manage audience perception, media outlets may either reinforce or undermine such strategies through their own representational choices. Suparno et al. (2025) observe that Arabic religious vocabulary in Indonesian Islamic discourse carries multi-layered ideological functions that extend well beyond its literal semantic content a complexity that media outlets must navigate in deciding how to represent code-switching behavior for their readers. Nguyen (2025) further underscores that media discourse does not merely transmit information about such phenomena but actively constructs the interpretive frame through which readers understand them.

Beyond linguistic framing, the association of Arabic religious vocabulary with corrupt practices carries broader sociopolitical implications. This study documents how the symbolic authority of Islamic terminology may be exploited as a form of concealment in corrupt communication, a phenomenon that remains underexplored in Indonesian linguistic scholarship. At the same time, the differing representations of these terms reflect contrasting ideological positions regarding the relationship between PKS's Islamic identity and the corrupt actions of its members. As Budiawan & Mulyani (2025) argue, Indonesian corruption reporting often involves ideological processes of legitimation and resistance that extend beyond factual narration. In this context, Kompas implicitly establishes a stronger connection between Arabic terminology and corrupt practices, whereas Detik opens alternative interpretive possibilities while maintaining greater distance from the corruption claim itself.

From a practical standpoint, these findings carry implications for media literacy and journalism studies in Indonesia. Readers who rely on only one media outlet may encounter substantially different constructions of the same corruption event, shaping perceptions of responsibility and the seriousness of misconduct. This reinforces the importance of cross-outlet reading practices and highlights the need to equip audiences with analytical tools to recognize that linguistic choices in news discourse are not transparent reflections of reality, but mediated constructions shaped by editorial ideology. Such implications are especially relevant in the Indonesian context, where public trust in legal institutions remains under sustained pressure and where journalistic orientations toward the media's watchdog function continue to shape public opinion and social pressure surrounding legal processes.

It should be acknowledged, however, that this study is limited to four texts drawn from a single corruption case. Although the patterns identified are internally consistent and theoretically grounded, broader generalizations regarding the editorial ideologies of Kompas and Detik as institutions would require a larger corpus spanning multiple cases and time periods. Future research may also incorporate analysis of the interpersonal metafunction, particularly modality, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how epistemic commitment and source authority are constructed across Indonesian news media.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined how Kompas.com and Detik.com linguistically construct the same corruption event through the SFL transitivity framework, focusing on four online news texts published in May and June 2017. Three principal findings emerged from the analysis. First, the two Kompas texts are consistently dominated by material processes that position corruption actors, namely Aseng, Yudi Widiana, and Kurniawan, as active agents responsible for their actions, while the two Detik texts are consistently dominated by verbal processes that delegate the construction of reality to institutional sources such as party spokespersons and trial witnesses. This pattern holds across two distinct reporting moments, confirming that the difference reflects stable editorial orientations rather than circumstantial reporting choices. Second, the comparison of parallel texts published on the same date, June 8, 2017, to cover the same courtroom hearing provides the most controlled evidence of this editorial divergence: Kompas opens with the corruption actor as Actor in a material clause, while Detik opens with the KPK prosecutor as Sayer in a verbal clause, demonstrating that the same event may be linguistically constructed in fundamentally different ways depending on editorial ideology. Third, the representation of Arabic religious terms as corruption codes differs systematically between the two outlets. Kompas frames *liqo'* and *juz* as self-evident evidence within an assertive material narrative, while Detik provides metalinguistic explanations that create critical distance from the corruption claim, opening alternative interpretive space for readers familiar with Islamic terminology.

These findings contribute to applied linguistics and media discourse analysis in Indonesia by demonstrating the relevance of SFL transitivity analysis in revealing ideological constructions in legal and political news genres involving issues of religious identity. More broadly, this study documents a linguistically unprecedented phenomenon, namely the exploitation of Islamic religious vocabulary as instrumental code-switching in corruption-related communication and shows how media outlets construct this phenomenon in ideologically divergent ways. Future research may expand the corpus to include multiple corruption cases, incorporate analysis of the interpersonal metafunction through the Appraisal framework, and compare these findings with

patterns of political corruption reporting in other Muslim-majority countries to develop a more comprehensive comparative perspective.

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