

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE OF 'CHEST FEEDING': LANGUAGE, IDEOLOGY, AND IDENTITY IN NYPOST, DAILYMAIL, AND PIKIRAN RAKYAT

Puspita Devi¹, Celina Rudiyaniti², Bianca Virgiana³

Univesitas Baturaja¹

Corresponding email: devi.fisipunbara@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how the newly coined term 'chest feeding' — introduced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in its guidance for transgender and non-binary individuals — is linguistically framed across three online news media: NYPost.com (USA), DailyMail.co.uk (UK), and Pikiran-Rakyat.com (Indonesia). Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary theoretical framework, supplemented by Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Entman's concept of framing as a linguistic packaging device, this study examines the lexical choices, metaphorical constructions, semantic prosody, and ideological positioning embedded in the news texts. The analysis reveals that each media outlet constructs the term 'chest feeding' differently through deliberate linguistic strategies: NYPost.com employs cautious, institutionally-distanced language that reflects political alignment; DailyMail.co.uk deploys emotive, morally-charged lexis and hyperbole to construct a discourse of danger and institutional betrayal; while Pikiran-Rakyat.com utilizes a politico-religious discourse framework that recontextualizes the term within Indonesian socio-cultural and ideological norms. The study demonstrates that the contested term 'chest feeding' functions not merely as a neologism, but as a site of ideological struggle where language actively constructs social identity, moral order, and political power.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana istilah baru 'chestfeeding' — yang diperkenalkan oleh Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) dalam panduannya bagi kaum transgender dan non-biner — dibingkai secara linguistik oleh tiga media berita daring: NYPost.com (Amerika Serikat), DailyMail.co.uk (Inggris), dan Pikiran-Rakyat.com

Keywords

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(Indonesia). Dengan menggunakan Analisis Wacana Kritis (Critical Discourse Analysis/CDA) sebagai kerangka teori utama yang diperkuat oleh model tiga dimensi Fairclough dan konsep framing Entman sebagai piranti pengemasan bahasa, penelitian ini mengkaji pilihan leksikal, konstruksi metaforis, prosodi semantis, dan posisi ideologis yang tertanam dalam teks berita. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa ketiga media mengonstruksi istilah ‘chestfeeding’ secara berbeda melalui strategi linguistik yang disengaja: NYPost.com menggunakan bahasa yang hati-hati dan berjarak secara institusional; DailyMail.co.uk mengerahkan leksikon emotif dan bermuatan moral; sementara Pikiran-Rakyat.com memanfaatkan kerangka wacana politiko-religius. Penelitian ini membuktikan bahwa istilah ‘chestfeeding’ yang masih diperdebatkan berfungsi bukan sekadar sebagai neologisme, melainkan sebagai arena perebutan ideologis di mana bahasa secara aktif mengonstruksi identitas sosial, tatanan moral, dan kekuasaan politik.

Introduction

Language has long been recognized as a primary instrument through which social realities are not merely described but actively constructed, negotiated, and contested (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993). In contemporary media discourse, the relationship between language and power is particularly evident in the way news texts select, emphasize, and semantically frame socially controversial issues. One such instance of linguistic and ideological contestation is the emergence of the neologism ‘chest feeding’ — a term introduced into mainstream medical discourse by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2023 as part of its inclusive language initiative to accommodate transgender and non-binary parents.

The term ‘chest feeding’ is semantically significant because it represents a deliberate departure from the conventionalized term ‘breastfeeding’, which has long been naturalized as a gender-specific, biologically-grounded term associated exclusively with cisgender women. By replacing the morpheme ‘breast’ with ‘chest’ — a body-part term perceived as more gender-neutral — the CDC engaged in a form of language planning that is simultaneously a medical, political, and ideological act. This terminological substitution immediately drew widespread attention from medical practitioners, political commentators, and the public, generating a rich corpus of news discourse that is highly amenable to linguistic analysis.

This study positions the debate surrounding ‘chest feeding’ not as a mere controversy in the field of public health communication, but as a compelling case study in the linguistics of neologism, political language, and cross-cultural discourse. The central research question driving this study is: How do NYPost.com, DailyMail.co.uk, and Pikiran-Rakyat.com linguistically construct the term ‘chest feeding’ and what ideological positions are discursively reproduced through their respective language choices?

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to at least three domains of English language studies. First, it advances the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by demonstrating how a single neologism can serve as an ideological battleground across geographically and culturally distinct media contexts. Second, it enriches the study of media language and news discourse by providing a comparative cross-cultural analysis of lexical and rhetorical strategies deployed in politically sensitive reporting. Third, it

contributes to the growing body of research on the relationship between language, gender identity, and social construction, a field that has become increasingly central to contemporary linguistics and English language education.

The study draws upon a corpus of eleven news articles published between July and August 2023 across the three selected media outlets: five articles from NYPost.com, four from DailyMail.co.uk, and two from Pikiran-Rakyat.com. The selection of these three media is deliberate: they represent geographically distinct contexts (American, British, and Indonesian), different editorial orientations, and different socio-cultural and ideological backgrounds — factors that are expected to produce meaningfully divergent linguistic constructions of the same phenomenon.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a Framework for Media Language

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a paradigm of discourse analysis that places the relationship between language, power, and ideology at the centre of its inquiry (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Unlike conventional linguistic analysis that treats language as a neutral medium of communication, CDA operates from the premise that language is fundamentally ideological — that every lexical choice, syntactic structure, and rhetorical strategy in a text reflects and reproduces particular power relations and social formations (Fairclough, 1995).

Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse analysis is particularly central to this study. Fairclough (1992) proposes that every discursive event must be analyzed simultaneously as: (1) a linguistic text, encompassing vocabulary, grammar, and textual structure; (2) a discursive practice, involving the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption; and (3) a social practice, situated within broader social, institutional, and ideological contexts. This tripartite framework enables a rigorous examination of not only what a text says, but how it says it and why it says it in that particular way.

In the context of media discourse, Fairclough's model has been productively combined with Teun van Dijk's (1993) socio-cognitive approach, which emphasizes the role of mental models and social cognition in the production and interpretation of news texts. Van Dijk argues that news discourse systematically reproduces ideological positions through mechanisms such as positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation — a dynamic that is clearly operative in the news texts analyzed in this study.

Neologism, Language Change, and Contested Terminology

A neologism is a newly coined word or expression that has entered a language to fill a perceived lexical gap or to rename an existing concept from a new ideological perspective (Crystal, 2008). The linguistic process of neologism formation is never ideologically neutral: the act of naming — or renaming — an existing phenomenon carries profound social and political implications, as it reflects the power of certain social actors to impose their conceptual frameworks upon shared linguistic systems (Cameron, 1995).

The term 'chest feeding' exemplifies what sociolinguists refer to as 'politically motivated neologism' or 'ideological relexicalization' (Fairclough, 1992) — a process whereby a term is deliberately reformed to challenge, subvert, or expand the semantic boundaries of an existing concept. In this case, the morphological substitution of 'breast'

with ‘chest’ reflects the ideological project of inclusive language, which seeks to decouple the act of lactation from its historically gendered linguistic associations.

However, politically motivated neologisms frequently become sites of what Blommaert (2005) terms ‘language ideological debates’ — public controversies about the proper use of language that are, in essence, debates about social values, norms, and identities. The term ‘chest feeding’ has provoked precisely such a debate, making it a particularly rich object of linguistic analysis.

Semantic Prosody and Framing as Linguistic Devices in News Discourse

Semantic prosody refers to the consistent aura of meaning — either positive or negative — that a word or phrase acquires through its habitual co-occurrence with other words of a particular evaluative orientation (Sinclair, 1991; Stubbs, 2001). In news discourse, semantic prosody is a powerful instrument of ideological positioning, as it allows media producers to convey evaluative stances implicitly through lexical choice rather than through explicit statement.

Entman’s (1993) concept of framing, originally developed within communication studies, has been reinterpreted by linguists as a fundamentally discursive and linguistic phenomenon. From a linguistic perspective, framing involves the deployment of specific lexical items, metaphors, syntactic structures, and rhetorical devices to package a particular interpretation of reality as natural, obvious, and legitimate (Bednarek & Caple, 2012). Entman identifies four core framing devices that this study adapts as linguistic analytical categories: problem definition (lexical and syntactic choices that construct the nature of an issue), causal attribution (linguistic strategies that assign agency and responsibility), moral evaluation (evaluative language and modality), and treatment recommendation (directive and modal language that prescribes action).

Cross-Cultural Media Discourse and Language Ideology

The cross-cultural dimension of this study situates it within the field of comparative media linguistics and language ideology. Language ideology, as theorized by Woolard and Schieffelin (1994), refers to sets of beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use that are socially and culturally constituted. Different linguistic communities hold different language ideologies that shape how they respond to phenomena such as politically motivated neologisms, inclusive language policies, and terminological innovation. Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) established that there is as much cultural variation in ideas about speech as there is in speech forms themselves, with communities holding differing beliefs, values, and attitudes toward language that are tied to their social institutions and political interests. Elaborating on this, Kroskrity (2004) argued that language ideologies are beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use that index the political and economic interests of individual speakers, ethnic groups, and nation states — rationalizations that are typically multiple, context-bound, and constructed from the sociocultural experience of the speaker.

Research in cross-cultural media discourse has consistently demonstrated that the same event or phenomenon can be linguistically constructed in radically different ways depending on the socio-cultural and ideological context of the media producer

(Richardson, 2007). This study builds on this tradition by examining how the American, British, and Indonesian media contexts produce divergent linguistic constructions of the term ‘chest feeding’, reflecting different language ideologies, cultural values, and power configurations.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design within the paradigm of interpretivism, consistent with the epistemological premises of Critical Discourse Analysis, which enables a deep, contextually-sensitive analysis of language use in social settings without reducing discursive phenomena to quantifiable variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The corpus consists of eleven news articles published between July and August 2023 — five from NYPost.com, four from DailyMail.co.uk, and two from Pikiran-Rakyat.com — selected on the basis of three criteria: direct topical relevance to the CDC chestfeeding guidelines, publication within the specified temporal range, and availability of the complete text in the public domain. The three outlets were deliberately chosen to represent divergent national, cultural, and ideological contexts: NYPost.com represents conservative American tabloid journalism with a centre-right editorial alignment; DailyMail.co.uk represents British popular journalism known for its polemical editorial voice; and Pikiran-Rakyat.com represents Indonesian mainstream online journalism operating within a predominantly Muslim, socially conservative cultural environment.

The analysis proceeds through two complementary levels. At the micro-linguistic level, the study examines lexical choice and semantic fields, semantic prosody, metaphorical framing, modality and evidentiality, and transitivity. At the macro-discursive level, these micro-linguistic features are mapped onto Entman's (1993) four framing functions — problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation — reinterpreted as linguistic rather than purely communicative categories. This dual-level framework enables the study to trace the connection between specific language choices and the broader ideological constructions they serve.

Results and Discussion

T The Linguistic Status of ‘Chest feeding’ as a Neologism

‘Chest feeding’ is a compound formed through the morphological process of substitution, replacing the gendered morpheme ‘breast’ in the established compound ‘breastfeeding’ with the neutral anatomical term ‘chest’. This morphological operation is not merely a superficial terminological adjustment; it constitutes a substantive semantic shift that challenges the lexicalized presupposition embedded in ‘breastfeeding’ — namely, that the act of feeding an infant from the chest is exclusively associated with cisgender female anatomy.

The choice of ‘chest’ is linguistically significant because, in English, ‘chest’ functions as an unmarked, gender-neutral anatomical term, whereas ‘breast’ carries strong gender-specific connotations in its most common usage, typically being associated with female anatomy. By deploying ‘chest’ as the base morpheme, the CDC engaged in what Fairclough (1992) would describe as a form of ‘rewording’ — the replacement of one lexical item with another to construct an alternative representation of reality. This

rewording, however, did not go uncontested across the three media corpora examined in this study.

Linguistic Analysis of NYPost.com: Institutionally-Distanced Language and Political Caution

The five NYPost.com articles in the corpus exhibit a consistent linguistic pattern that can be characterized as ‘institutionally-distanced reporting’. Rather than deploying strongly evaluative or emotive language, NYPost.com relies primarily on three linguistic strategies: scare quotes, attribution structures, and epistemic hedging.

Scare quotes constitute the most prominent micro-linguistic feature in the NYPost.com corpus. The term ‘chest feeding’ appears consistently enclosed in quotation marks across the articles, a typographical device that functions, in Fairclough’s (1992) terms, as a form of ‘distancing’ or ‘ironic quotation’. Scare quotes signal that the writer does not endorse the semantic content or ideological assumptions of the quoted term; they construct the term as belonging to a particular social actor’s discourse (in this case, the CDC), rather than being a neutral description of reality.

Table 1.

CDA Analysis of NYPost.com Linguistic Features

CDA Element	Linguistic Feature	Textual Evidence	Ideological Function
Problem Definition	Scare quotes + nominalization	'Chest feeding' guidance 'failed' to address health risks	Distances media from CDC's terminology; constructs CDC as failing agent
Causal Attribution	Passive voice + institutional attribution	'Health risks were not mentioned by the CDC'	Assigns institutional responsibility without explicit blame
Moral Evaluation	Modal hedging + epistemic distancing	'CDC has a responsibility... but has been derelict'	Implies moral failure through lexical choice of 'derelict'
Treatment Recommendation	Directive modality + institutional address	'CDC needs to take action and answer questions'	Constructs CDC as obligated to respond; maintains institutional register

The attribution structures in the NYPost.com corpus are equally revealing. The articles make extensive use of reported speech and attribution clauses (e.g., ‘doctors accused CDC of...’, ‘Senator Marshall argued that...’), which serves the dual linguistic function of both distancing the media outlet from direct evaluative claims and constructing a discourse of institutional controversy and expert dissent. This pattern reflects what Richardson (2007) describes as the ‘voice management’ strategy of journalism.

Epistemic hedging is another prominent feature: phrases such as ‘potentially harmful’, ‘may cause’, and ‘could endanger’ reflect a deliberate moralization of health risk claims. From a linguistic standpoint, this hedging performs a complex function: it acknowledges the controversial nature of the medical claims while simultaneously

maintaining the possibility of danger — keeping the issue alive without fully committing to a definitive evaluative stance.

Linguistic Analysis of DailyMail.co.uk: Emotive Lexis, Hyperbole, and Discourse of Danger

In sharp contrast to the institutionally-distanced register of NYPost.com, the DailyMail.co.uk corpus deploys a markedly different set of linguistic strategies characterized by emotive lexis, hyperbole, direct address, and strongly negative semantic prosody. These strategies collectively construct a discourse of urgency, moral outrage, and existential danger.

The most striking lexical feature of the DailyMail.co.uk corpus is its deployment of a dense network of words with strongly negative semantic prosody: ‘poison’, ‘corrupt’, ‘radical’, ‘evil’, ‘harm’, ‘jumped the shark’, ‘guinea pigs’, and ‘sinful’. The use of the verb ‘poison’ in the headline ‘Biden’s Health Chiefs are telling biological men they can breastfeed, even though it may POISON infants’ is particularly significant from a semantic standpoint. The use of capitalization for ‘POISON’ further functions as a typographic intensifier, amplifying the semantic force of the lexical choice.

The zoomorphic metaphor ‘They’ve reduced our babies to guinea pigs’ is particularly revealing as an object of conceptual metaphor analysis. The metaphorical mapping draws upon the source domain of animal experimentation, constructing the babies as passive, vulnerable test subjects and the CDC/Biden administration as reckless experimenters. This metaphorical construction serves to dehumanize the institutional actors while simultaneously invoking a powerful cultural schema of ethical violation associated with non-consensual medical experimentation.

Fairclough’s (1995) concept of ‘synthetic personalization’ — the uses of direct address to construct a sense of personal relationship with the reader — are also operative in the DailyMail.co.uk corpus. Phrases such as ‘as you know’, ‘our babies’, and ‘before children are unnecessarily harmed’ position the reader as an implicated stakeholder in the controversy, fostering emotional identification and mobilizing the reader as a potential agent of protest.

Table 2.

CDA Analysis of DailyMail.co.uk Linguistic Features

CDA Element	Linguistic Feature	Textual Evidence	Ideological Function
Problem Definition	Evaluative noun phrases + hyperbole	'radical political activists'; 'evils of wokeness run amok'	Constructs ideological threat; naturalizes conservative worldview
Causal Attribution	Zoomorphic metaphor + agency attribution	'Reduced babies to guinea pigs'; Biden has 'poisoned' policy	Assigns deliberate, culpable agency; invokes ethical violation schema
Moral Evaluation	Semantic prosody + capitalization	'POISON infants'; 'sinful'; 'corrupted'	Dense negative prosody constructs moral condemnation
Treatment Recommendation	Imperative + inclusive pronoun	'There must be national outcry'; 'our babies'	Mobilizes reader as collective agent; constructs urgency

Linguistic Analysis of Pikiran-Rakyat.com: Politico-Religious Discourse and Recontextualization

The two Pikiran-Rakyat.com articles in the corpus exhibit a distinct discursive pattern that reflects the Indonesian socio-cultural and ideological context within which the media operates. The most salient linguistic feature of the Pikiran-Rakyat.com corpus is the process of ‘recontextualization’ (Bernstein, 1990; van Leeuwen, 2008) — the transplantation of a discourse produced in one social context (the American public health context) into a significantly different socio-cultural context (Indonesian Muslim society), with consequent transformations in meaning and ideological framing.

The term ‘chest feeding’ is consistently rendered in the Indonesian-language Pikiran-Rakyat.com articles not as a neutral medical term but as a symbol of what the texts construct as Western ideological imperialism. The headline ‘CDC Anjurkan Chest feeding: Transgender Bisa Menyusui Bayi, Pakai Obat Hormon Biar Punya ASI’ employs the Indonesian word ‘Biar’ (roughly, ‘so that they can have’) which carries a colloquially dismissive connotation in Indonesian, subtly constructing the entire procedure as artificial and contrary to nature.

From a transitivity perspective, the Pikiran-Rakyat.com articles consistently deploy material process clauses that assign active, intentional agency to the Biden administration and CDC. The adverb ‘dengan sadar’ (consciously / deliberately) is linguistically significant because it transforms the CDC’s alleged negligence into a deliberate, intentional act of harm, reflecting the more strongly conspiratorial framing of Pikiran-Rakyat.com.

The most distinctive ideological recontextualization in the Pikiran-Rakyat.com corpus is the construction of the chest feeding issue as a threat to Indonesian religious and cultural values. Lexical items such as ‘ideologi’, ‘tatanan keagamaan’, and ‘budaya’ are deployed to position the controversy not as a medical or political issue but as a civilization and identity threat. This discursive move exemplifies what Wodak (2001) describes as the ‘ethnicization of discourse’ — the reframing of social issues in terms of collective cultural identity.

Table 3.

CDA Analysis of Pikiran-Rakyat.com Linguistic Features

CDA Element	Linguistic Feature	Textual Evidence	Ideological Function
Problem Definition	Recontextualization + conspiracy lexis	'Konspirasi politik'; 'membangun citra Transgender'	Repositions medical issue as cultural/ideological threat to Indonesia
Causal Attribution	Intentional agency ('dengan sadar') + political attribution	'CDC dengan sadar menempatkan bayi dalam bahaya demi dorong LGBT'	Transforms negligence into deliberate harm; assigns political motive
Moral Evaluation	Religious-cultural lexis + negative semantic prosody	'Merusak ideologi dan tatanan keagamaan bangsa Indonesia'	Frames issue as threat to national religious-cultural identity
Treatment Recommendation	Obligation modality + cultural protectionism	'CDC harus memperhitungkan potensi risiko'	Constructs obligatory institutional responsibility within cultural frame

Comparative Synthesis: Language Ideology and the Contested Neologism

A comparative synthesis of the three media corpora reveals that ‘chest feeding’ functions as a genuinely contested neologism — a term that, rather than settling into a stable semantic identity, remains a site of ongoing linguistic and ideological struggle. The three media outlets do not merely report on the controversy surrounding the term; through their respective linguistic choices, they actively participate in and reproduce that controversy.

The pattern of lexical and discursive divergence across the three corpora is consistent with language ideology theory, which predicts that the reception of ideologically charged neologisms will be mediated by the socio-cultural context of the receiving community. The American NYPost.com corpus demonstrates a language ideology that values institutional authority and political prudence, manifested in the cautious epistemic hedging and attribution-heavy reporting style. The British DailyMail.co.uk corpus reflects a language ideology that values direct moral assertion and popular mobilization, expressed through emotive lexis and rhetorical hyperbole. The Indonesian Pikiran-Rakyat.com corpus reflects a language ideology that foregrounds collective cultural-religious identity, realized through recontextualization strategies that domesticate the foreign term within Indonesian values and concerns.

These findings have important implications for English language studies, particularly in the area of intercultural pragmatics and translation studies. The fact that a single English-language neologism can generate three substantially different discursive constructions across three media contexts underscores the impossibility of treating words as semantically stable entities whose meaning can be simply transferred across languages and cultures.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the neologism ‘chest feeding’, introduced by the CDC as part of an inclusive language initiative, functions in media discourse not merely as a new lexical item but as a site of ideological contestation, where divergent linguistic strategies reflect and reproduce distinct political, cultural, and institutional positions. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis of eleven news articles from NYPost.com, DailyMail.co.uk, and Pikiran-Rakyat.com, the study has identified three distinct linguistically-constructed frames: a frame of institutional caution and political distancing (NYPost.com), a frame of moral outrage and social danger constructed through emotive and hyperbolic language (DailyMail.co.uk), and a frame of cultural-religious threat and political conspiracy constructed through recontextualization (Pikiran-Rakyat.com).

The study makes several contributions to English language studies. First, it offers an empirically-grounded case study of how neologisms function as sites of language-ideological conflict across cross-cultural media contexts. Second, it demonstrates the analytical productivity of combining Fairclough’s CDA model with Entman’s framing categories as a framework for analyzing politically sensitive news discourse. Third, it contributes to the field of intercultural pragmatics by illustrating how a single English-language term can be received, constructed, and domesticated in radically different ways by communities operating within different language ideologies.

Declarations

Author Contribution. Celina Rudiyaniti contributed to the conceptualization of the study, theoretical framework development, and overall manuscript writing. Puspita Devi was responsible for data collection, corpus compilation, and linguistic analysis. Bianca Virgiana contributed to the critical discourse analysis, literature review, and revision of the final manuscript.

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