

# Stylistic and Rhetoric Elements on Memes in Education Context: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

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*In this digital age, the presence of internet memes becomes a common way to share information online. People may use different stylistic and rhetoric elements to communicate their ideas and convey a particular meaning. This paper aimed to analyze stylistic and rhetoric elements employed in the selected memes in education context by using Van Dijk Critical Discourse Analysis. The data were forty memes related to education which were collected from four Instagram groups, namely itb.receh, school\_life memoriess, 9gag.com, and memeindonesia.real. This research utilized descriptive qualitative method. The result showed that in stylistic, the most dominant dictions used were slang and denotative. The high frequency of using slang is done as a strategy to express a sense of familiarity to audiences and to show portrait of daily basis situation in students' lives, while the use of denotative dictions conveys clear understanding and avoid misinterpretation toward these memes. Furthermore, in rhetoric elements, no metaphor is found in the selected memes while graphics is mostly used in the memes to highlight important parts. It was delivered through the production of words in bigger size, bold, different colour, different type of fonts, words which are crossed out, and the use of emoticon. Graphic provides a visual representation for audiences and these highlighted words help them comprehend messages and values which the writer is trying to deliver.*

**Keywords:** *Critical discourse analysis; meme; rhetoric elements; stylistic elements*

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## INTRODUCTION

Internet memes, or memes that emerge in Internet culture, have gained popularity in recent years since social interactions increasingly take place on the internet. Shifman (2014) mentions Internet memes have undoubtedly grown to be powerful yet frequently invisible agents of globalization over the past ten years. They frequently present in the form of images or videos which are shared from person to person in which they are purposefully edited and imitated. Furthermore, they do not come from empty space, they have several intentions, such as conveying opinion and expressing social criticism. Akram et al. (2020) stated Internet memes are frequently

used by those who express their emotions online to promote their views. To add, Humington (2019) explained that the ability of an Internet meme to present information, opinion, and value that is simple to understand and promotes current views and attitudes is another factor that contributes to an Internet meme's ability to go viral.

In education sphere, memes related to education are gaining success among students relying on the number of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Tiktok and so forth. They influence students' daily lives and are regarded as one of reflection ways in education system. The more memes related to education are shared, the more issues would reflect people's perspectives. Dongqiang (2020) mentioned memes can be considered as a valuable bridge and educational relationship between teachers and students, as well as an effective educational medium for students. Today, it is time to start pay more attention on memes since they have played significant role in students' everyday lives.

In conducting this research, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is utilized in order to understand meme related to education. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) mentioned that CDA helps people see things more clearly by examining and evaluating the linguistic form, which is seen as the result of a social interaction. They continued by stating that linguistics forms may always include an ideology that represents a certain social construction. Additionally, Van Dijk (1998) claimed that a text consists of a number of structures that are mutually supportive. This dimension discusses three structures namely macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure. However, this research focuses on microstructure in stylistic and rhetoric elements.

Stylistic element is about diction or choice of words in writing to create different effect as a result. It examines diction and the writer's style to communicate their ideas. Van Dijk noted that writers make word selections to indicate a specific semantic connotation. Eriyanto (2001) mentioned that word choices chosen by writers present certain ideology, not a spontaneous thing. It shows how writers select one diction from various possible word choices available.

Related to rhetoric element, Van Dijk mentioned it works as stressing method to achieve the objectives effectively, and as strategy to persuade audience's attention to certain side. Rhetoric elements include graphic and metaphor. Eriyanto (2001) defined graphics is the element to highlight what is considered significant. In media discourse, graphics is employed by presenting different writing compared to others, for instance, writing in bigger font, bold, underlined, italic and so forth. Meanwhile, he defined that metaphor works as one way to present something in terms of something else. It may give some colors or aesthetic function to the language use. In other words, metaphor is a type of analogy that briefly contrasts two things.

Several researches have been conducted in meme with education context. Destira, Hidayat, Alek, and Sufyan (2021) examined the similarities and differences between Indonesian students and foreign students in Memes on Instagram through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis. Dongqiang, de Serio, Malakhov, and Matys (2020) analysed the ways and reasons of using Internet memes in education in various language spaces - Chinese, English, Russian, and Italian. Meanwhile, Ariyoga and Rahyono (2020) examined the ideational meaning and primary message in internet memes regarding the interaction between teachers and students in teaching and learning activities. Comparing to the previous researches, this research would have different finding since it uncovers microstructure elements both stylistic and rhetoric on memes related to education. Therefore, it is expected that other researchers with an interest in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis will consider the findings of this research as references for further research. Also, it can be used to give meme makers the chance to create more new memes in the context of education. In regarding to the explanation above, this research aims to find out the microstructures elements on memes related education, specifically in stylistic and rhetoric elements. For this reason, two research questions were formulated as follow: (1) what are the diction use on the selected memes in the context of education? and (2) what are graphics and metaphors use on the selected memes in the context of education?

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

This research employed qualitative research design because the data is ordinarily expressed in qualitative terms. Patton (2002) stated qualitative research as an attempt to understand the unique interactions in a particular situation. The data of this research were texts in the memes related to education. There were forty education memes in total which were collected from ten memes in each Instagram groups. Forty memes which were selected in this research were published in 2022. The data that were chosen during that time are regarded to be accurate in portraying current conditions in the digital age. Instagram groups such as *Itb.receh*, *school\_life memories*, *9gag.com*, and *Meme Indonesia* were used as the sources of data because these Instagram groups frequently posted internet meme in many contexts, including the context of education. The research was conducted from January 2023 to March 2023.

The technique which was employed to collect the data is documentation. This technique was used to obtain the documents of data in the form of memes in the education context. After that, the data were analysed by using Van Dijk Critical Discourse Analysis. In that model, microstructure was examined from semantic, syntactic, stylistic and rhetoric elements. However,

this research focuses on stylistic and rhetoric elements. In stylistic, the data were analysed based on the word choice used in the memes. It was also supported by the theory of diction proposed by Putrayasa (2007). Meanwhile, in rhetoric, the data were analysed from metaphors and graphics utilized in the memes. After all the data have been analysed, the conclusion of this research was made. In addition, Cope (2014) explains that the validity or truth value of qualitative research and the transparency of the study's conduct are essential to the relevance and objectivity of the results. In this research, data triangulation was used to check credibility of the findings and conclusion. It referred to collecting the data from more than one source, in this case are several Instagram groups.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### *Stylistic Element in Memes Related to Education*

To display the result of stylistic element in this research, diction use was shown in Table 1 as follows:

**Table 1.** Diction Use in Memes in Education Context

No	Diction	Quantities	Percentages (%)
1	Slang	32	29
2	Denotative	30	27
3	General	18	16
4	Connotative	10	9
5	Specific	9	8
6	Scientific	7	6
7	Synonymous	3	3
8	Jargon	2	2
9	Homophonic	0	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>111</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 indicates that slang is the most frequently used diction in this research, followed by denotative diction. These diction distributions do not happen without any consideration. They are designed to show certain ideology to readers. Van Dijk mentioned that language users may have recourse to different words to express a given meaning. The use of informal words such as slang and denotative dictions would help readers understand the meaning easily. It is also influenced by the situation of conversation taking place in these memes is mostly in daily basis. Due to the use of informal dictions, these memes convey a sense of familiarity and equality. So, it can be inferred from the memes that the writer sees himself not as the one in a superior position but rather as the same as the audience, the readers. People are influenced effectively by this strategy through language, which reduces their sense of being instructed. Certain dictions are

chosen by meme maker to express humour and entertain readers as well.

Datum 1

**Figure 1.** The Use of Slang Diction



(Source: Instagram *itb.receh*)

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Patrick : akhirnya lulus smk, **otw** magang ke Jepang  
Spongebob : emang **lu** bisa bahasa Jepang?  
Patrick : bahasa bukanlah masalah karena **gwe** adalah **wibu**  
Patrick : **makkkk!!!! Pengen** pulang

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Anderson and Trudgill (1990) states slang can make someone's speech active, passionate, and engaging because it makes jokes, shows individuality, and makes speech simple. The first sentence, '*akhirnya lulus smk **otw** magang ke Jepang*'. The word '*otw*' is a slang which stands for 'on the way' or '*sedang di jalan*'. This is a textspeak which is typically used to let other people know that the speaker is en route to where she/he is. This slang is frequently used by many people in daily communication both online and face-to-face.

The second sentence is '*emang **lu** bisa bahasa Jepang?*'. The word '*lu*' is considered slang which means 'you' or '*kamu*' in Indonesian. Indonesian slangs are not the standard form and they are not used in formal education. However, they function in everyday discourse, usually in informal situation. In this data, instead of using '*kamu*', the writer used the diction '*lu*' to show that the setting of this conversation is informal one. Specifically, the writer made the context about conversation among friends. It is the same thing happened with the word '*emang*' which are used to represent non-formal situation. '*emang*' comes from the word '*memang*' which means 'indeed'.

The third sentence '*bahasa bukanlah masalah karena **gwe** adalah **wibu***' uses slang '*gwe*' and '*wibu*'. The word '*gwe*' is an Indonesian slang from the standard '*saya*'. It originally comes from Betawi language. The writer does not use the diction '*saya*' to avoid sense of formality and put more distance between speaker and listener. The word choice of '*gwe*' gives sense of

familiarity between the speakers and listeners. Meanwhile, *wibu* is a slang word to express an overly zealous anime fan who is very excited, upfront, and loud about anime. Anime is Japanese animation style, distinguished by blazing graphics and energetic characters. The last sentence '**makkkk!!!! Pengen pulang**' shows the use of non-formal diction '**makkkkk!!**' and '**pengen**'. The use of greeting '**makkkk**' instead of '**mamak**' or '**ibu**' represents a daily conversation context. The writer also chooses the word '**pengen**' which has a standard form '**ingin**'. The strategy of using informal dictions in casual conversation context help readers understand the meaning easily and depict intimate relationship between writer and readers. It is also related to what Leigh (2010) states that memes utilize communication as one of the methods to reproduce themselves.

Datum 2.

**Figure 2.** The Use of Denotation and General Diction



(Source: Instagram *memeindonesia.real*)

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*Murid paling belakang kalo ga **tidur** ya **makan***

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Denotation is the term for a word's dictionary definition, or its "literal meaning. Putrayasa (2007) states that denotation has literal meaning without any addition. The dictions '**tidur**' and '**makan**' in the sentence above show their true meaning. The definition of "sleep" according to Cambridge Dictionary is "being in a condition of rest when your eyes are closed, your body is at rest, and your mind is unconscious.". While the diction "eat" refers to placing or removing food from the mouth, chewing it, and swallowing it. These two dictions are fully stated in their literal meaning. After that, these two words are also considered as general diction as what Putrayasa (2007) mentioned in terms of broad scope of a meaning, the wider a word is, the more general it is.

Datum 3

**Figure 3.** The Use of Connotative Diction



(Source: Instagram *School\_life memoriess*)

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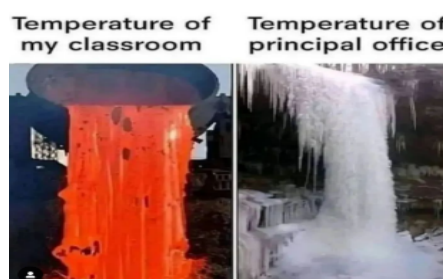
We all have that one friend who has **Ph.D**\_cheating’.

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Connotation is the use of a term to imply an association other than its original meaning. Connotations can be neutral, negative, or positive. Different connotations are frequently used by writers to provide additional levels of meaning to a word, phrase, or sentence. The diction ‘Ph.D’ in this data is considered as connotative since it signifies an association or second meaning beyond its literal meaning. In this meme, the diction ‘Ph.D’ may convey the meaning ‘high level or very good at’, while the literal meaning of Ph.D or Doctor of Philosophy is a high level degree earned after particular time length, culminating in defence of a research dissertation. The word choice ‘Ph.D’ in this meme aims to give sense of humour. However, the use of connotation is sometimes confusing to those who are not familiar with the diction. As what with Zuckerman’s (2015) points that memes are coded messages and therefore can be confusing for various people: members of the audience may have varying abilities and skills to read the ‘code’.

Datum 4

**Figure 4.** The Use of Specific Diction



(Source: Instagram *School\_life memoriess*)

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Temperature of my **classroom**, Temperature of **principal office**

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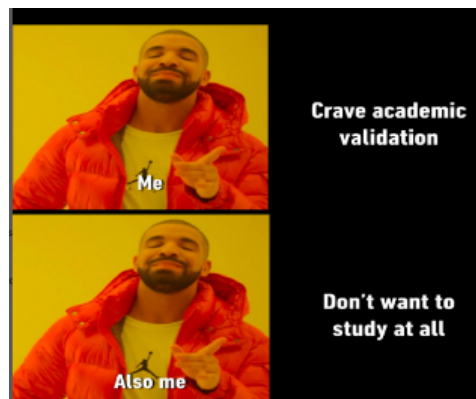
Specific words have a narrow scope and meaning. Putrayasa (2007) stated specific words



give clear and precise overview. the narrower the scope, they become more specific. The words ‘classroom’ and ‘principal office’ have more specific scope compared with ‘school building’ which has more general concept. In other words, ‘classroom’ and ‘principal office’ describe less broad term and denote specifically what they are. The use of specific words is intended to make it easier for readers to understand the context of the words or events being discussed. In this meme, the word ‘classroom’ and ‘principal office’ are used to specify different temperature or conditions in two different rooms which student experienced. Specific words are very useful to describe objects and to strengthen the message conveyed. In this case, it is straightforward to address the issue between two different rooms, they are classroom and principal office.

Datum 5

**Figure 5.** The Use of Scientific Diction



(Source: Instagram *9gag.com*)

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Me crave **academic validation**

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Putrayasa (2007) defines scientific word is difficult to understand by general public. It is commonly used in scientific writing in which only certain people understand the word. The word ‘academic validation’ belongs to scientific diction. That words mean a trend where students look for satisfaction in their academic performance, goals, and achievements. It is technical word whose meaning needs to be analyzed further because it cannot be comprehended easily by many people. This diction is used for a study or scientific interest. This word does not appear frequently in informal conversation because people are not familiar with the term. However, this word may come up frequently in scientific writing or in discussion among educated or intellectual ones.



Datum 6

**Figure 6.** The Use of Synonymous Diction



(Source: Instagram *memeindonesia.real*)

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*Ketika guru Mtk lebih milih ngobrol sama anak yang udah **jago** mtk ketimbang ngebantu lo yg kesulitan ngerjain soal*

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Putrayasa (2007) defined synonymous word can replace each other but there are some words cannot. Figure 6 shows the use of word '*jago*' which has synonymous meaning with 'good at'. In Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), the word '*jago*' means *hebat* which is 'great' or *mahir* which is 'proficient'. The sentence in this meme 'when the math teacher prefers to chat with student who is already good at math rather than helping you who have trouble doing questions' expresses comparison or contradictive treatment from teacher to students in classroom activity. Further, the use of word '*jago*' gives more nuance and emphasis to this meme toward the issue presented.

Datum 7

**Figure 7.** The Use of Jargon



(Source: Instagram *memeindonesia.real*)

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***kamu nanyeeaa?***

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The diction '*kamu nanyeeaa*' which is used in this meme is considered as jargon. Jargon is

special word or expression which can only be understood by some people in certain circles. ‘kamu nanyeeaa’ is a 2022 viral jargon uttered by Alif Cepmek, a young Tiktoker from West Jakarta. ‘Kamu nanyeeaa’ comes originally from the words ‘Apakah kamu bertanya? biar aku kasih tau ya’ (Are you asking? so let me tell you). Alif, that Tiktoker, often used this jargon when he started answering questions from netizens. It is now no wonder that this jargon becomes a trend for some people in which they are following his style in uttering it. People use this jargon in their daily lives to make jokes with their friends. It happens the same way with the use of that jargon in this meme. It is utilized to express humour and to entertain readers.

### ***Rhetoric Element in Memes Related to Education***

In rhetoric elements, there was no metaphors found in the memes related to education. With the characteristics of its simplicity which commonly has limited text, meme is more connected to graphics. Eriyanto (2001) stated that graphics investigates things which are considered important and highlighted. He also added that graphics can be portrayed by writing that is different from common writing, such as bold, italic, underlined, and words produced with different size. It includes using a caption, raster, graphic, image, or table to illustrate the importance of a news story's message. The visual component has cognitive effects since it closely analyses attention and interest levels and indicates which information is significant and interesting to raise attention. In this element, readers know how and in what way tendency is delivered by analysing the interaction style of the meme makers in creating meme.

After analyzing the data, the result of graphic use in memes related to education is shown as below:

**Table 2.** Graphics Use in Memes in Education Context

No	Graphics	Quantities	Percentages (%)
1	Words in bigger size	15	44
2	Words in bold	7	20
3	Words in different colour	6	18
4	The use of emoticon	5	15
5	Words in crossing out	1	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>

Datum 8

**Figure 8.** Words in Bold and Bigger Size



(Source: Instagram *itb.receh*)

Figure 8 expresses the graphic strategy of writer to convey the message of the meme by writing the words “*menunda tugas award*” and “*You*” in bold and bigger font while the rest of the words are not bold and in smaller size. The idea of this meme is task procrastination and this meme intends to express satire related to procrastinating problems. Also, this meme is addressed to readers or those who postpone doing task. It is shown by the use of pronoun “*you*”. Hence, the bold words ‘*menunda tugas award*’ and ‘*you*’ work to present the idea and the message of the whole parts of this meme. These highlighted words are seen important by the creator so readers will put more attention on those words. It is in line with Eriyanto (2001) that mentioned the element which is differently produced is considered necessary by the communicator.

Datum 9

**Figure 9.** Words in Crossing Out



(Source: Instagram *memeindonesia.real*)

Meanwhile, figure 9 shows different strategy to highlight important part. It can be seen that the sentence ‘*seorang siswa harus disiplin*’ is crossed out and then it is changed by the sentence ‘*ada PR yang harus dikerjakan*’. The previous sentence ‘*gue berangkat sekolah lebih pagi karena gue sadar*’ should be properly followed by the crossed sentence ‘*seorang siswa harus disiplin*’, to show how a student should appropriately do. However, instead of saying it, the meme creator changed it by saying ‘*ada PR yang harus dikerjakan*’. This meme talks about student’s characteristics in terms of going earlier to school for certain reasons. To contrast the idea, the

writer crossed out the words and replace it with new words with different ideas. This graphic strategy helps to present information in concise ways which highlight the idea of students' behaviour. This strategy also makes the message of this meme is easier to understand.

Datum 10

**Figure 10.** Words in Different Colour and Emoticons



(Source: Instagram *School\_life memoriess*)

Furthermore, figure 10 expresses different graphic strategy done by the writer. The sentence 'class is cancelled' and 'I love you' were written in different colours. The sentence 'class is cancelled' was in blue colour and bigger size, while the sentence 'I love you' was written in red. It emphasizes the comparison between these two sentences in which this meme compares the feeling of the words 'class is cancelled' with 'I love you'. The writer used different colours in both words to highlight the important points in this meme. This helped readers to get that point easier and comprehensible. Furthermore, the use of emoticon is also employed in this meme. To add sense of humour in this meme, smile emoticons are exposed in the end of this meme. Anastasia (2019) stated that internet memes are descendants of the emoticons (emotion icons). An emoticon is a symbol that is frequently used online to represent a certain emotion. Its purpose is to prevent misunderstandings in virtual communication, where the absence of visual information may result in message misunderstandings. In many online groups, the smiley is frequently used by the members. All in all, graphic strategy provides a visual representation for readers. Also, these highlighted sentences help readers comprehend the concept which the writer is trying to deliver.

There were several important points which needed to be discussed in this part. The result of this research pointed out that most of the selected education memes used slang and denotative words to convey meanings and purposes. The finding was in line with the study conducted by Syartanti (2021) found that memes used straightforward and informal diction although the study investigated memes in different topic. It was about COVID-19 and focused on humour discourse. Furthermore, the present research showed that the use of informal dictions and slang in conversational contexts facilitates the reader's understanding of the meme. Leigh (2010) states that

one way memes grow themselves is through communication, which is similar to this idea.

Despite the findings above, the present research has limitation in data sources. It was taken only from Instagram which it resulted limited findings. Future researches may reach more data from various sources such as Facebook, Twitter, Tiktok, and other sources related to education memes, so it will result more holistic findings.

## CONCLUSION

In Van Dijk model of Critical Discourse Analysis, microstructure focuses on the local meaning of the discourse by analysing several elements, including stylistic, and rhetoric elements of the discourse. In stylistic elements, it revealed that slang was the most used diction, and then it is followed by denotative diction. They aim to make readers engage with meme in everyday context and be able to understand it well. In rhetoric element, there was no metaphor found while several graphics were employed such as production of words in bold, bigger size, various colours, different fonts, and the use of emoticons. They are used to highlight the main point of the memes so readers are able to get the point clearly.

Memes in the context of education reflect people's behaviours and common expressions in the area of education. It is a very appealing area for more investigation. Today, education memes have recently flooded a number of social media platforms. Future researchers can use more resources, such as Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, and so on, to learn more about education memes and digital culture. Further research in this field may explore in macrostructures, superstructures, and social context toward memes in education context.

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