

CLAUSE COMPLEX IN GEOPOLITICAL NEWS: TRUMP'S STATEMENT ON THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the realization of clause complexes in geopolitical news discourse, focusing on a Tempo news article reporting Donald Trump's statement urging Iran to stop imposing charges on ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz. The research applies the Systemic Functional Linguistics framework, particularly the theory of clause complex proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen, including expansion, projection, and taxis relations. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method using document analysis. The data consisted of clause complexes identified from the selected news text. The findings reveal that projection and enhancement are the most dominant logical relations in the article. Projection is mainly used to attribute statements to political actors and external sources, while enhancement functions to explain causal, temporal, and conditional relations. In addition, hypotaxis appears as the dominant taxis pattern, indicating the preference for hierarchical organization of information in news discourse. These findings demonstrate that clause complexes play an important role in constructing credibility, coherence, and logical explanation in geopolitical reporting. The study confirms that Systemic Functional Linguistics is an effective framework for examining how language structures shape meaning in contemporary online journalism.

Keywords: clause complex, geopolitical news, Systemic Functional Linguistics, projection, enhancement, Strait of Hormuz

1. Introduction

Language plays a crucial role in constructing social reality, especially in news discourse where information is not merely transmitted but also interpreted, framed, and legitimized. In the context of international politics, media language becomes increasingly important because geopolitical events are often complex, sensitive, and ideologically contested. News texts must therefore present information in ways that appear factual, coherent, and credible while simultaneously managing competing narratives and political interests. One of the linguistic systems that enables this process is the clause complex, which allows journalists to connect multiple propositions through logical relations such as cause, time, condition, contrast, and reported speech. Recent discourse studies confirm that syntactic complexity remains a central feature of political journalism because it allows texts to package large amounts of information efficiently and strategically.

Within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), clause complexes are regarded as realizations of logical meaning. Halliday and Matthiessen explain that language simultaneously performs ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions, and clause

complexes are particularly relevant to the ideational metafunction because they organize experience into connected sequences of events, reasons, consequences, and evaluations. Gerot and Wignell further classify clause complex relations into expansion (elaboration, extension, enhancement) and projection (locution and idea). Through these systems, a writer can show whether one clause adds information, explains another clause, reports speech, or represents thought. Contemporary research in discourse studies has shown that these relations are especially frequent in journalistic texts because news writing depends on explanation and attribution (Zhang, 2023; Li, 2022; Wang, 2021; Chen, 2020).

News discourse concerning war, maritime conflict, and international diplomacy frequently relies on projection structures because journalists must attribute statements to politicians, governments, and institutions. Attribution allows the media to preserve neutrality while still presenting controversial claims. Studies on media discourse demonstrate that projection verbs such as said, claimed, warned, announced, and stated are highly productive in political reporting because they function as evidential markers and ideological framing devices. They indicate whose voice is being foregrounded and whose authority is being legitimized. In addition, enhancement relations are common in geopolitical reporting because audiences need explanations regarding why a policy was introduced, when an event occurred, or under what conditions tensions escalated (Bednarek, 2021; Baker, 2020; White, 2020; Sun, 2023).

The current study focuses on a Tempo news article discussing a statement by Donald Trump requesting Iran to stop charging ships crossing the Strait of Hormuz. The issue is globally significant because the strait is one of the world's most important maritime chokepoints, carrying a substantial proportion of seaborne oil trade. Any restriction, toll system, military threat, or administrative disruption in this area can affect global energy prices, insurance costs, and regional stability. Because of this importance, statements made by political leaders concerning the strait are quickly transformed into international media narratives. Tempo reports that Trump urged Iran to stop imposing charges on tanker ships, citing reports that such practices were occurring. The article combines warning statements, reported claims, background chronology, and diplomatic context, making it highly suitable for clause complex analysis.

Although many studies have examined media framing, critical discourse analysis, and political rhetoric, fewer studies focus specifically on clause complex realization in Indonesian online journalism, particularly in geopolitical contexts. Most SFL studies in Indonesia still emphasize transitivity, modality, or thematic structure rather than logical relations between clauses. Yet clause complexes are essential because they reveal how journalists connect facts, sources, causality, and chronology into coherent narratives. By examining clause complexes, researchers can better understand how news texts construct legitimacy, urgency, and objectivity.

This study therefore aims to analyze the clause complex patterns found in the Tempo article, with particular attention to expansion, projection, and taxis (parataxis and hypotaxis). The study seeks to answer three questions: (1) What types of clause complex relations are most dominant in the article? (2) How are projection and enhancement used to construct geopolitical meaning? (3) What does the dominance of particular clause relations reveal about the communicative style of online political journalism? This research is expected to contribute theoretically to SFL-based discourse analysis and practically to media language studies, especially in Indonesian journal publications.

Recent studies in the last five years also support the relevance of this topic. Scholars have shown that online journalism increasingly compresses multiple meanings into complex syntactic units, especially when reporting diplomacy, war, or economic crisis. Clause dependency is often used to prioritize some information while backgrounding other details. Similarly, projection patterns shape reader trust by locating claims in institutional voices rather than the reporter's own voice. These developments justify renewed attention to clause complex analysis in digital news discourse (Liu, 2024; Gao, 2022; Huang, 2021; Martin, 2019; O'Halloran, 2019).

2. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Qualitative discourse analysis was selected because the objective of the research was not to measure numerical frequencies alone, but to interpret how clause complexes function semantically and rhetorically within a naturally occurring news text. Previous linguistic studies note that qualitative SFL analysis is particularly effective for examining how grammar realizes meaning in media discourse because it allows close reading of clause relations, source attribution, and contextual interpretation (Wang, 2021; Bednarek, 2021; Zhang, 2023).

The primary data source was a Tempo online news article titled *Trump Minta Iran Hentikan Pungutan Kapal di Selat Hormuz*. The article was chosen purposively because it contains dense political reporting involving warnings, diplomatic developments, chronology, and economic implications. Such characteristics are ideal for clause complex analysis since they typically require projection and enhancement structures. The unit of analysis in this study was the clause complex, defined as two or more clauses linked by logical semantic relations.

Data collection was conducted through document analysis. The article text was read repeatedly, segmented into sentences, and then broken into clause units. Sentences containing one clause only were excluded unless they formed part of a larger contextual complex. Clause complexes were then coded according to Gerot and Wignell's categories: expansion (extension and enhancement), projection (locution and idea), and taxis (parataxis or hypotaxis). This coding model has been widely used in recent SFL studies on journalism and institutional discourse (Li, 2022; Chen, 2020; Liu, 2024).

To ensure analytic reliability, each clause complex was rechecked based on conjunction markers, reporting verbs, dependency markers, and semantic relation between clauses. Interpretation emphasized how linguistic choices support journalistic purposes such as neutrality, explanation, chronology, and political framing. Findings were then organized into tables and discussed thematically in relation to current scholarship on media discourse and functional grammar (Sun, 2023; Gao, 2022).

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Clause Complex Data

To answer the research questions, the selected news text was segmented into clause complexes based on the Systemic Functional Linguistics framework. Each clause complex consists of two or more clauses that are logically connected through relations such as projection and expansion. The analysis focuses on identifying how the journalist organizes information, attributes statements to sources, and explains geopolitical events through grammatical choices.

The following table presents the clause complex data identified from the Tempo news article, along with their logical relations, taxis patterns, and communicative functions. This classification is useful for understanding how clause complexes contribute to meaning-making in geopolitical news discourse.

Table 1. Clause Complex Data

No	Clause Complex Data	Relation	Subtype	Taxis	Function
1	Trump mengatakan bahwa Iran memungut biaya kapal	Projection	Locution	Hypotaxis	Source attribution
2	Ada laporan bahwa Iran mengenakan biaya tanker	Projection	Locution	Hypotaxis	Evidential reporting
3	Mereka tidak boleh melakukannya dan harus berhenti sekarang	Expansion	Extension	Parataxis	Dual command
4	Trump memperingatkan Iran karena ada laporan pungutan	Expansion	Enhancement	Hypotaxis	Cause
5	Iran memungut biaya ketika kapal melintasi Hormuz	Expansion	Enhancement	Hypotaxis	Time
6	Trump menyetujui gencatan senjata dan Iran membuka selat	Expansion	Extension	Parataxis	Sequential Fact
7	Iran mengatakan bahwa pembicaraan akan dimulai di Islamabad	Projection	Locution	Hypotaxis	Diplomatic statement
8	Trump menyebut penghentian serangan tidak termasuk Lebanon karena Hizbullah	Expansion	Enhancement	Hypotaxis	Justification
9	Iran menganggap hal itu sebagai pelanggaran karena serangan berlanjut	Expansion	Enhancement	Hypotaxis	Caunter-claim
10	Kapal dapat melintas jika kebijakan dihentikan	Expansion	Enhancement (Condition)	Hypotaxis	Conditional Reasoning
11	Trump menulis di Truth Social bahwa praktik itu harus berhenti	Projection	Locution	Hypotaxis	Media-mediated voice

12	Ketegangan meningkat dan pasar energi bereaksi	Expansion	Extension	Parataxis	Consequence sequence
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3.2 Distribution of Findings

From the twelve clause complexes analyzed, it was found that a strong preference for dependent clause relations and source-based reporting.

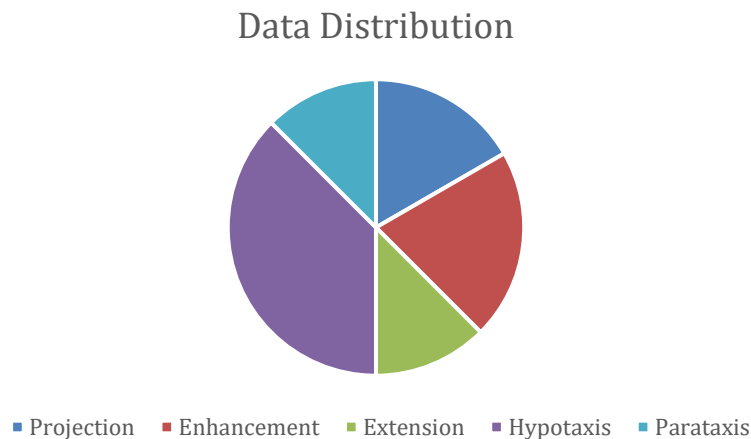


Figure1. Data Distribution

3.3 Discussions

A. Projection as a Strategy of Journalistic Neutrality

Projection appears prominently through expressions such as *“mengatakan bahwa, ada laporan bahwa, and menulis bahwa.”* These patterns show that the journalist transfers responsibility for controversial claims to political actors or cited sources. This aligns with previous studies showing that projection is central to maintaining objectivity in political journalism. Rather than directly asserting that Iran charged ships, the article frames the claim as something reported by Trump or external sources. This reduces reporter liability while preserving informational impact. Projection also constructs hierarchy of voices. Trump’s statements are foregrounded through reporting verbs, while Iran’s perspective appears later through counter-statements. Such sequencing subtly organizes ideological prominence.

B. Enhancement and Geopolitical Logic

Enhancement relations dominate explanatory segments. Clauses linked through *“karena, ketika, and jika”* clarify causes, chronology, and conditions. In geopolitical reporting, readers need to understand not only what happened, but why it happened and what may happen next. Therefore, enhancement structures are functional tools for making international conflict intelligible.

For example, *“Trump memperingatkan Iran karena ada laporan pungutan”* presents warning as a consequence of reported action. Similarly, *“Kapal dapat melintas jika kebijakan dihentikan”* frames diplomatic outcomes conditionally. Such constructions are common in conflict reporting because uncertainty and contingency are central features of political events.

C. Hypotaxis as the Dominant Taxis Pattern

The dominance of hypotaxis suggests that the article favors hierarchical packaging of information. Main clauses introduce key actions, while dependent clauses provide

explanation, attribution, or conditions. This is typical of online news writing, where headline-like clarity must coexist with contextual depth. Hypotaxis enables efficient information density without sacrificing coherence.

Parataxis, in contrast, appears mainly when presenting parallel actions or direct commands, such as *"tidak boleh melakukannya dan harus berhenti sekarang"*. This creates rhetorical emphasis and urgency.

D. Functional Interpretation of the News Style

Overall, the clause complex patterns reveal three stylistic tendencies of geopolitical journalism:

1. Authority-centered narration through projection.
2. Explanatory framing through enhancement.
3. Compact information management through hypotaxis.

These findings support recent scholarship arguing that grammar in digital journalism is not neutral but strategically organized to manage credibility, speed, and interpretive control.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that clause complexes are fundamental resources in constructing meaning within geopolitical news discourse. In the Tempo article analyzed, projection and enhancement emerged as the dominant logical relations, while hypotaxis was the prevailing taxis pattern. Projection enabled the text to attribute sensitive claims to political actors and external sources, thereby maintaining journalistic neutrality. Enhancement relations, meanwhile, explained reasons, chronology, and possible consequences of actions related to the Strait of Hormuz.

The findings confirm that clause complex analysis is highly effective for examining how online news texts organize authority, causality, and coherence. Rather than functioning as mere grammatical combinations, clause complexes serve rhetorical and ideological purposes in media communication. Future studies may compare multiple Indonesian and international news outlets or combine clause complex analysis with corpus linguistics to identify broader geopolitical discourse trends.

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