



A Critical Discourse Analysis of Youth Representation in BTS' Speech at the UN General Assembly

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Abstract. *In the era of digital globalization, popular culture plays a significant role in shaping public discourse and youth identity. This study examines how youth identity is constructed and represented in BTS's speeches at the United Nations General Assembly in 2018 and 2020. Using a qualitative approach, this research applies Norman Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which consists of textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. The data were obtained from official transcripts of BTS's speeches, supported by Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of representation. The findings reveal that youth identity is constructed through various linguistic strategies, including personal narratives, pronoun usage, metaphors, repetition, and emotional language. Youth are represented as resilient, globally connected, and socially responsible individuals. At the discursive level, the speeches are shaped by institutional collaboration and distributed widely through digital media, allowing audience participation. At the social level, the discourse reflects dominant ideologies of individual empowerment, global citizenship, and inclusivity. However, the representation tends to emphasize individual agency while overlooking structural factors such as social inequality. In conclusion, BTS's speeches function not only as communicative texts but also as social practices that construct youth identity within global discourse.*

Keywords: *Youth identity, Representation, Critical Discourse Analysis, BTS, Global popular culture.*

Abstrak. Di era globalisasi digital, budaya populer memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk wacana publik dan identitas kaum muda. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana identitas kaum muda dibangun dan direpresentasikan dalam pidato BTS di Sidang Umum Perserikatan Bangsa-Bangsa pada tahun 2018 dan 2020. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini menerapkan Analisis Wacana Kritis (CDA) dari Norman Fairclough (1995), yang terdiri dari analisis tekstual, praktik diskursif, dan praktik sosial. Data diperoleh dari transkrip pidato BTS, didukung oleh teori representasi Stuart Hall (1997). Temuan menunjukkan bahwa identitas pemuda dibangun melalui berbagai strategi linguistik, termasuk narasi pribadi, penggunaan kata ganti, metafora, pengulangan, dan bahasa emosional. Pemuda digambarkan sebagai individu yang tangguh, terhubung secara global, dan bertanggung jawab secara sosial. Pada tingkat diskursif, pidato-pidato tersebut dibentuk oleh kolaborasi institusional dan disebarluaskan secara luas melalui media digital, memungkinkan partisipasi audiens. Pada tingkat sosial, wacana tersebut mencerminkan ideologi dominan pemberdayaan individu, kewarganegaraan global, dan inklusivitas. Namun, representasi tersebut cenderung menekankan agensi individu sambil mengabaikan faktor struktural seperti ketidaksetaraan sosial. Kesimpulannya, pidato BTS berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai teks komunikatif tetapi juga sebagai praktik sosial yang membangun identitas pemuda dalam wacana global.

Kata kunci: Identitas remaja; Representasi; Analisis Wacana Kritis; BTS; Budaya populer global

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and digital communication, public discourse is no longer dominated solely by political leaders and institutions but is increasingly influenced by

popular cultural figures (Jin & Yoon, 2017). One prominent example is BTS, a global K-pop group whose influence extends beyond entertainment into global advocacy. Their speeches at the United Nations General Assembly demonstrate how cultural figures contribute to shaping global narratives, particularly regarding youth identity (UNICEF, 2018; UNICEF, 2020).

Youth identity is not a fixed concept but is constructed through social interaction, media representation, and cultural discourse (Hall, 1997). In this context, BTS's speeches present an interesting case of how youth are represented within the intersection of popular culture and institutional discourse. While these speeches promote empowerment and inclusivity, they may also reflect ideological influences shaped by global institutions.

This study aims to analyze how youth identity is constructed in BTS's speeches, what discursive strategies are used, and what ideologies are reflected in the discourse.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, the writer employs a qualitative research approach using Norman Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Referring to Sugiono (2013), qualitative research is a way of investigating the natural state of a subject, in which research is the main tool and the information obtained is in the form of words or writing. The analysis is conducted at three levels: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. This model was chosen because of its ability to connect language analysis with the broader social environment.

The data sources for this study are divided into two groups: primary data and supporting data. The primary data consists of two speeches delivered by BTS at UN General Assembly meetings. The first speech was delivered in 2018 with the title "Speak Yourself", while the second speech was delivered in 2020 with the title "Love Myself". The supporting materials in this study include scientific journals, news reports, and other sources related to the research topic. Data were collected through documentation methods from reliable online sources.

The analysis focuses on linguistic features such as vocabulary, pronouns, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies, as well as the processes of discourse production, distribution, and interpretation within broader social and ideological contexts.

3. RESULT AND DISSCUSSION

1. Textual Analysis

The textual analysis reveals that BTS's speeches construct youth identity through a sophisticated combination of linguistic and rhetorical strategies that operate at multiple levels of meaning. These strategies include personal narratives, pronoun usage, metaphorical expressions, repetition, emotional and evaluative language, imperative forms, and rhetorical engagement. Together, these elements function to produce a coherent and persuasive discourse that shapes how youth identity is represented and understood (Hall, 1997).

One of the most prominent features is the use of personal narrative as a central strategy of identity construction. The speaker begins by positioning himself as "an ordinary boy," which serves to reduce hierarchical distance and establish authenticity. This positioning allows the speaker to simultaneously function as an individual subject and as a representative of a broader youth community. Through storytelling, identity is constructed as a process of transformation, moving from confusion and self-doubt toward self-awareness and acceptance. Temporal references to past, present, and future further reinforce the idea that identity is dynamic and continuously evolving (Fairclough, 1995). However, this narrative also reflects a linear and progressive model of identity development, which may implicitly promote an idealized notion of personal growth that does not fully account for complex social realities.

Pronoun usage plays a crucial role in shaping relational meaning and constructing collective identity. The shift from "I" to "we" signals a transition from individual experience to shared experience, suggesting that the struggles faced by youth are collective rather than isolated. Expressions such as "we all lost our names" emphasize solidarity and shared emotional experiences. Meanwhile, the use of the pronoun "you" directly engages the audience, encouraging introspection and participation. This interaction creates a dialogic structure in which identity is not only presented but co-constructed between speaker and audience. However, this collective framing may also obscure differences in social, cultural, and economic conditions among youth, presenting a more homogeneous representation than reality.

Metaphorical language is another significant element in constructing youth identity. Metaphors such as “we became like ghosts” and “my world shrank into a room” vividly represent emotional states such as invisibility, isolation, and uncertainty. These expressions allow abstract psychological experiences to be communicated in a more tangible and relatable way. In addition, symbolic contrasts such as darkness and light function to construct a narrative of struggle and hope, positioning youth as individuals who are capable of overcoming adversity. Through these metaphors, identity is portrayed as fluid and adaptive. However, the emphasis on emotional resilience may also simplify the complexity of youth experiences by prioritizing internal processes over external conditions.

Repetition functions as a powerful rhetorical device that reinforces key ideological messages. The recurring phrases “speak yourself” and “love yourself” serve as central discursive anchors that define the core message of the speeches. These repeated expressions not only enhance memorability but also operate as ideological slogans that promote self-expression and self-acceptance as fundamental aspects of youth identity. The repetition across different speeches also creates intertextual continuity, linking the messages into a broader narrative. Nevertheless, this emphasis on self-focused empowerment reflects a dominant ideological orientation that prioritizes individual agency.

Emotional and evaluative language plays a crucial role in shaping audience perception and building persuasive impact. Words associated with vulnerability—such as “fear,” “doubt,” and “uncertainty”—create a sense of authenticity and emotional connection. These expressions present youth as individuals who experience real struggles, making the discourse more relatable. At the same time, positive evaluative language highlights resilience, hope, and growth, constructing an optimistic representation of youth identity. This dual representation of vulnerability and strength creates a balanced yet persuasive image. However, this emotional framing may also lead to an individualistic understanding of identity formation, where overcoming challenges is seen primarily as a personal responsibility.

In addition, imperative and motivational language is used to encourage active engagement from the audience. Expressions such as “find your voice” and “let’s dream

again” function as calls to action, positioning youth as agents who are responsible for shaping their own identities. The use of inclusive forms such as “let’s” reinforces a sense of collective participation and shared responsibility. This creates a motivational tone that frames identity as something that can be actively constructed through effort and determination. However, this emphasis on action may also overlook structural limitations that influence individuals’ ability to act.

Rhetorical strategies such as questions and modality further enhance audience engagement. Questions like “What is your name?” are not intended to be answered directly but serve to provoke reflection. Modal verbs such as “can,” “must,” and “will” reinforce notions of possibility, obligation, and certainty, shaping how youth identity is positioned. These strategies contribute to a persuasive discourse that encourages confidence and agency.

Furthermore, the use of inclusive language contributes to the construction of youth as a global and unified community. Expressions such as “whoever you are” and “all of us” emphasize universality and shared experience. This aligns with broader global narratives that promote inclusivity and equality. However, this universalizing tendency may also obscure differences and inequalities among youth, presenting an idealized representation that does not fully capture diverse realities.

An important aspect of the analysis is the presence of discursive silence, referring to what is not explicitly addressed in the speeches. While the discourse emphasizes themes of self-expression, resilience, and empowerment, it does not directly engage with structural issues such as economic inequality, access to education, or systemic barriers. This absence suggests that identity is framed primarily as an individual process rather than one shaped by broader social conditions. From a critical perspective, this silence reflects an ideological choice that prioritizes individual responsibility while marginalizing structural factors.

Overall, the textual analysis demonstrates that BTS’s speeches construct youth identity as dynamic, resilient, and capable of self-expression. The discourse presents youth as individuals who possess the agency to shape their identities and futures. However, this representation is not entirely neutral. It reflects an underlying ideological orientation that emphasizes individual empowerment while minimizing the role of

structural conditions. Thus, language in these speeches functions not only as a tool of communication but also as a means of constructing meaning, shaping identity, and reproducing particular ideological perspectives within global discourse.

2. Discursive Practice

At the level of discursive practice, BTS's speeches are shaped by a complex interaction of production, distribution, and consumption processes, which are embedded within institutional, technological, and cultural contexts. This level of analysis reveals that the discourse is not produced in isolation but is part of a broader communicative network influenced by power relations and global communication structures.

The production of the speeches takes place within a formal institutional framework, particularly through collaboration with organizations such as the United Nations and UNICEF. This institutional context significantly influences both the content and the structure of the discourse. The speeches are carefully constructed to align with global values such as inclusivity, empowerment, and youth participation, indicating that they are not purely spontaneous or personal expressions. Instead, they represent a strategic form of communication shaped by institutional agendas. The involvement of multiple actors—such as speechwriters, editors, and institutional advisors—further reinforces the idea that discourse is collectively produced and ideologically mediated.

In addition, the institutional setting grants legitimacy to the speakers, transforming BTS from cultural figures into recognized representatives of youth voices at the global level. This shift in position highlights how institutional power determines who is allowed to speak and what kinds of discourse are considered valid within global forums. As a result, the discourse reflects not only personal perspectives but also broader institutional narratives.

The distribution of the speeches is significantly amplified through digital media platforms, which enable the discourse to circulate beyond the physical space of the United Nations. Platforms such as YouTube and social media allow the speeches to reach global audiences, particularly young people. This expanded circulation reflects a shift in contemporary communication practices, where discourse is no longer confined to formal settings but becomes part of a global digital environment. The accessibility of the

speeches across different languages and cultural contexts further contributes to their global impact.

Moreover, the role of audience participation is crucial in shaping the meaning of the discourse. BTS's fan community actively engages in translating, sharing, and interpreting the speeches, demonstrating that meaning is not fixed but continuously negotiated. This participatory culture reflects a transformation from passive consumption to active engagement, where audiences contribute to the reproduction and reinterpretation of discourse. As a result, the speeches become dynamic texts whose meanings evolve over time.

The consumption of the discourse varies depending on the audience's social and cultural background. For many young people, the speeches are perceived as inspirational and empowering, particularly due to their use of emotional and relatable language. For institutional audiences, however, the speeches may function as tools to promote global values and agendas. This diversity of interpretation highlights that meaning is constructed through interaction between text and audience, rather than being inherent in the text itself.

Furthermore, BTS's dual role as both cultural icons and institutional actors creates a hybrid form of discourse that combines elements of popular culture and formal communication. As cultural figures, BTS communicates through personal and emotional narratives that resonate with youth audiences. At the same time, their participation in a formal institutional setting requires them to align with global values and use accessible, universal language. This dual positioning allows BTS to act as mediators between institutional agendas and global youth audiences, translating complex ideas into relatable forms.

However, this hybrid role also raises critical questions about power and representation. While BTS appears to represent youth voices, their discourse is shaped and constrained by institutional frameworks. This suggests that the representation of youth identity is not entirely autonomous but influenced by broader structures of power. Therefore, discursive practice in this context reveals that meaning is produced through a complex interplay of institutional authority, digital media, and audience interaction.

3. Social Practice

At the level of social practice, BTS's speeches reflect broader sociocultural and ideological contexts that shape the construction of youth identity. The discourse is embedded within global processes such as globalization, digital communication, and the increasing influence of popular culture in shaping public narratives.

One of the dominant ideologies reflected in the speeches is individual empowerment. Youth are represented as individuals who possess the capacity to shape their identities through self-expression, self-awareness, and emotional resilience. This aligns with contemporary global narratives that emphasize personal agency and self-development. Through expressions such as "love yourself" and "find your voice," youth are positioned as active agents responsible for their own growth and transformation. While this perspective promotes confidence and motivation, it also reflects an individualistic orientation that may obscure structural constraints.

In this context, identity is framed primarily as a personal achievement, suggesting that success and self-realization depend largely on individual effort. This representation risks simplifying the complexity of youth experiences by overlooking factors such as social inequality, economic limitations, and unequal access to opportunities. As a result, the discourse may inadvertently shift responsibility from social institutions to individuals.

The influence of institutional power is also evident in the discourse. Delivered within the United Nations, the speeches align with global agendas that promote inclusivity, equality, and youth participation. This institutional context legitimizes the discourse while simultaneously shaping its ideological direction. The representation of youth as empowered and globally engaged individuals reflects the values promoted by global institutions, indicating that discourse is influenced by broader power structures.

Globalization plays a crucial role in shaping the construction of youth identity as a universal and interconnected phenomenon. Youth are portrayed as part of a global community that shares similar challenges and aspirations, regardless of geographical or cultural differences. This representation emphasizes unity, inclusivity, and collective responsibility. However, it may also lead to the homogenization of youth identity, overlooking the diversity of experiences shaped by local contexts.

The speeches also demonstrate the role of popular culture as a form of soft power. BTS, as global cultural figures, are able to communicate messages in ways that resonate with young audiences worldwide. Their involvement in institutional discourse highlights the intersection between cultural influence and political communication. This suggests that popular culture can function as a powerful tool in shaping global narratives and influencing public perception.

However, the analysis also reveals significant ideological tensions within the discourse. One key tension is between empowerment and vulnerability. Youth are portrayed as resilient and capable, yet also as individuals facing uncertainty and emotional challenges. This dual representation reflects the complexity of youth identity but also creates ambiguity in how youth are positioned.

Another tension exists between individual agency and structural conditions. While the discourse emphasizes personal responsibility and self-development, it pays limited attention to systemic factors that influence youth experiences. This creates a partial representation of reality that prioritizes individual effort over social context.

Additionally, there is a contradiction between global unity and local diversity. The discourse promotes a universal image of youth identity, suggesting that all young people share similar experiences. However, in reality, youth experiences are shaped by diverse cultural, social, and economic conditions. This tension highlights the limitations of universal representations.

These ideological tensions demonstrate that youth identity is not a stable or homogeneous concept but a dynamic and contested construct. It is shaped through the interaction of multiple discourses, influenced by power relations, institutional frameworks, and cultural contexts.

In conclusion, the analysis of social practice shows that BTS's speeches not only reflect existing social realities but also actively contribute to shaping global understandings of youth identity. While the discourse promotes positive values such as empowerment, inclusivity, and global citizenship, it also reflects ideological limitations that require critical examination. Therefore, youth identity should be understood not as a

singular or universal category, but as a complex and evolving construct shaped by both individual experiences and structural conditions.

The construction of youth identity through language reflects the concept of representation, where meaning is produced and exchanged through cultural practices (Hall, 1997). Furthermore, discourse is not neutral but shaped by power relations and ideological structures (Fairclough, 1995).

4. CONCLUSION

This study has explored the construction of youth identity in BTS's speeches at the United Nations General Assembly in 2018 and 2020 through Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, encompassing textual, discursive, and social dimensions. The findings confirm that youth identity is not a fixed or neutral category, but a socially constructed phenomenon shaped through language, institutional processes, and broader ideological frameworks.

At the textual level, youth identity is constructed through a strategic use of linguistic features such as personal narratives, pronoun shifts, metaphors, repetition, and emotionally charged expressions. These elements work together to produce a persuasive discourse that positions youth as expressive, resilient, and capable of self-development. At the same time, these strategies create a sense of collective identification, reinforcing the idea that youth experiences are shared and globally relevant.

At the level of discursive practice, the speeches are produced within a structured institutional context involving collaboration with global organizations such as the United Nations and UNICEF. Their global distribution through digital platforms enables wide circulation and participatory engagement, allowing audiences to actively reinterpret and reproduce meaning. This demonstrates that discourse operates within a dynamic communicative network where meaning is continuously negotiated rather than fixed.

At the level of social practice, the speeches reflect dominant global ideologies centered on individual empowerment, inclusivity, and global citizenship. Youth are represented as active agents capable of shaping their identities and contributing to social transformation. However, this representation is not without limitations. The discourse tends to privilege individual agency while marginalizing structural factors such as

inequality, access to resources, and institutional constraints. Consequently, youth identity is constructed in a way that is simultaneously empowering and reductive.

Moreover, the analysis reveals inherent ideological tensions within the discourse, particularly between empowerment and vulnerability, individual responsibility and structural conditions, as well as global unity and contextual diversity. These tensions highlight that youth identity is a contested and continuously negotiated construct within global discourse, rather than a singular or universal experience.

Ultimately, this study argues that BTS's speeches function as more than symbolic expressions of youth empowerment; they operate as influential discursive practices that both reflect and shape global narratives about youth identity. While they successfully amplify positive and motivating representations, they also reproduce dominant ideological frameworks that require critical examination. Therefore, future discourse involving youth representation should move beyond individualistic narratives and incorporate a more nuanced understanding of structural realities, ensuring that representations of youth identity are not only inspiring but also socially grounded and inclusive.

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