

Framing National Leadership: A Discourse Analysis of Prabowo Subianto's Inaugural Speech Using James Paul Gee's Seven Building Tasks of Language

Wiguna, Riefki Fajar Ganda¹, Felayati, Safrina Arifiani²

¹Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, ²Universitas Jenderal Soedirman

riefki.fajar.wiguna@unsoed.ac.id, safrina.arifiani@unsoed.ac.id

Abstract

This paper analyzes the 2024 inaugural speech of Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto through the lens of James Paul Gee's Seven Building Tasks of Language, a framework that enables a critical exploration of how language constructs and enacts social realities. The study investigates how Prabowo's discourse performs various linguistic functions that shape political meaning, reinforce collective identities, and articulate ideological positions. By applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodological foundation, this research reveals the ways in which language is used to assign significance to national challenges, promote specific social practices, construct relational identities between the speaker and the audience, and negotiate the distribution of social goods such as welfare, justice, and public trust. Furthermore, the speech connects Indonesia's historical struggles with its contemporary aspirations, while mobilizing religious, cultural, and technological sign systems to legitimize the speaker's vision and authority. Through Gee's framework, the speech emerges as a rich site of political meaning-making, wherein nationalism, moral accountability, and calls for unity are not merely expressed, but actively constructed through strategic linguistic choices. Ultimately, the analysis shows how political language serves as a powerful tool for leadership legitimacy, public persuasion, and the performative shaping of national identity.

Keywords: discourse analysis, Prabowo Subianto, political speech, Gee's Seven Building Tasks, critical discourse analysis.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the role of language in shaping public opinion and influencing political behavior has become a central concern of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Political figures do not merely use language to describe the world—they use it to construct preferred versions of reality, to frame problems and solutions, and to position themselves and others within narratives of legitimacy, morality, and power (van Dijk, 2008; Wodak, 2009). Inaugural speeches, in particular, provide insight into the ideological underpinnings of new administrations, often combining expressions of national identity, historical reflection, and visionary ambition. In these highly structured and symbolically charged moments, the performative aspects of leadership come to the fore, offering a window into how political authority is rhetorically enacted.

Prabowo Subianto's 2024 inauguration marked a significant political transition for Indonesia, as it signaled both continuity with past leadership and

a new emphasis on self-sufficiency, national resilience, and social reform. His speech presented a carefully crafted narrative aimed at consolidating support, bridging political divides, and aligning public sentiment with his administration's goals. By drawing on culturally resonant symbols, religious references, and appeals to historical memory, Prabowo constructed a discourse that emphasized unity, gratitude, and collective struggle. Through the application of Gee's Seven Building Tasks, this paper dissects how the speech functions not only as a communicative act but also as a mechanism for shaping national consciousness and defining the contours of leadership in a democratic society.

METHOD

James Paul Gee's framework of the Seven Building Tasks includes: significance, practices, identities, relationships, politics (distribution of social goods), connections, and sign systems and knowledge (Gee, 2011). These categories provide a comprehensive lens for analyzing how language enacts social realities. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) further anchors this study by examining how discourse is shaped by and shapes sociopolitical contexts (van Dijk, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

The method used is qualitative content analysis of the official English translation of Prabowo's 2024 inaugural speech. The text was segmented and coded according to Gee's seven categories. Exemplary quotations were selected to illustrate each building task. Contextual interpretation draws from Indonesian political discourse literature.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a detailed analysis of the linguistic strategies used by Prabowo Subianto in his 2024 inauguration speech through the lens of Gee's Seven Building Tasks of Language. Each sub-section below corresponds to one of Gee's tasks and explores how specific rhetorical moves contribute to constructing social meaning, asserting authority, and mobilizing collective identity. Through these analyses, it becomes evident that Prabowo's language choices are not only stylistic but are deeply political and ideological, revealing the discursive foundations of his leadership narrative.

The discussion focuses on the dynamic interplay between language and power, identity and ideology, and tradition and innovation. As Gee suggests, language is a form of social action—it is through speech that relationships are negotiated, identities affirmed, and public values reinforced. In this sense, Prabowo's speech becomes more than a policy outline; it is an exercise in symbolic governance, establishing a framework through which the administration positions itself in the eyes of the nation and the international community.

1. Significance

Prabowo constructs moral urgency and national seriousness:

Script 1

"We must have the courage to acknowledge the hindrances, challenges, obstacles, threats, and difficulties that lie before us."

"Let us not become too quickly content, and let us not turn a blind eye to the challenges and suffering faced by our fellow citizens."

"We will put the interests of the nation... above all else."

The theme of significance in Prabowo's speech is emphasized through repeated references to hardship, historical struggle, and the moral responsibility of leadership. By acknowledging the challenges Indonesia faces, he positions his administration as one that is not only aware of national realities but also courageous enough to confront them directly. This framing aligns with Gee's idea that language assigns value and urgency to particular ideas and issues, making them seem worthy of attention and action. In Prabowo's rhetoric, problems like poverty, corruption, and inequality are not abstract or distant; they are framed as immediate moral imperatives that define the character of leadership.

Moreover, the invocation of sacrifice and struggle creates emotional resonance with the audience, connecting the present with the collective memory of Indonesia's fight for independence. This not only underscores the importance of current political efforts but also legitimizes them by placing them in continuity with past heroic efforts. In doing so, Prabowo elevates the symbolic weight of his leadership by suggesting it is part of a larger national legacy of courage and resilience (Chilton, 2004; van Dijk, 1997).

2. Practices

The speech outlines national development and moral self-reflection:

Script 2

"Let us be courageous in correcting our own faults."

"We must achieve food self-sufficiency."

"We must also properly manage our water."

Prabowo's speech articulates a variety of practical and moral behaviors expected from both the government and the citizens. These include administrative reforms, infrastructural projects, digital innovations, and personal accountability. By encouraging self-criticism and invoking systemic challenges, he promotes a culture of transparency and continual improvement. These references exemplify Gee's concept of practices—how language enacts and references routine, socially recognizable activities.

Furthermore, his emphasis on food and energy self-sufficiency reflects broader nationalist practices, tied to economic independence and resilience. The language used to describe these goals frames them as duties and collective aspirations, reinforcing a discourse of disciplined patriotism. In this way, the

practices mentioned are not merely technical objectives but part of a broader ethos of national renewal (Achmad, 2021; Susanto, 2019).

3. Identities

Prabowo frames himself as a humble servant and the people as national heroes:

Script 3	“We earned [independence] with immense sacrifice... from the poorest among us.”
	“A brave leader... will have the call to face the impossible.”
	“We are all Indonesian children.”

The construction of identities in the speech is deeply populist, portraying Prabowo as a leader born of the people and accountable to them. His repeated identification with the struggles of the common citizen serves to humanize his image while simultaneously elevating the status of ordinary Indonesians as national builders. This use of inclusive identity serves a legitimizing function—if the leader is one with the people, his goals are inherently their goals.

Additionally, Prabowo crafts an ideal national identity rooted in courage, solidarity, and resilience. By attributing Indonesia’s independence to farmers, fishers, and laborers, he challenges elitist histories and offers a counter-narrative that celebrates grassroots contributions. This approach to identity aligns with Gee’s theory that language constructs who we are and how we are recognized within specific social contexts (Anderson, 2006; Gee, 2011).

4. Relationships

The president cultivates relational closeness and diplomatic harmony:

Script 4	“Leaders must work for the people.”
	“Let us acknowledge our colleagues regardless of ethnicity, religion, party.”
	“A thousand friends are too few, one enemy is too many.”

The speech seeks to redefine the relationship between state and citizen, casting leadership as a role of servitude rather than authority. Prabowo’s rhetoric positions the government as morally obligated to serve, thereby reversing traditional hierarchies and fostering a sense of relational equality. This strategy enhances trust and affirms democratic values, reinforcing the idea that sovereignty lies with the people.

In foreign affairs, Prabowo promotes a relationship of peace and mutual respect with the global community. His reference to a non-aligned stance and support for Palestine reflects Indonesia’s longstanding foreign policy principles, rooted in anti-colonialism and solidarity with oppressed peoples. These relational stances, both domestic and international, project an image of Indonesia as an ethical and principled actor (Kusuma, 2020).

5. Politics (Distribution of Social Goods)

Prabowo foregrounds inequality and social justice:

Script 5	"There are too many of our people living below the poverty line."
	"All our resources must be used... for the prosperity of our people."
	"We must ensure that all subsidies... really reach [the needy]."

Prabowo's speech addresses the distribution of social goods with a direct and urgent tone. His references to malnutrition, poverty, corruption, and lack of access to basic needs point to systemic inequalities that he pledges to address. These issues are not presented as unfortunate circumstances but as injustices requiring immediate governmental intervention. By using language that emphasizes inclusivity and fairness, he constructs a political vision grounded in equity and social welfare (Stiglitz, 2012).

Furthermore, the promise to leverage digital technology for direct subsidy distribution underscores a shift toward more efficient and accountable governance. This rhetorical move positions Prabowo as both empathetic and technologically forward-thinking. Within Gee's framework, such discourse distributes value and entitlement, marking who should receive what and why, thereby shaping perceptions of fairness and legitimacy (Rahardjo, 2023).

6. Connections

Historical legacy is linked to future obligations:

Script 6	"Our independence was not a gift... It was the farmers... the laborers."
	"Let us build Indonesia upon the foundation laid by our predecessors."
	"We must become a global food estate."

The speech frequently draws links between Indonesia's historical narrative and its future aspirations. By situating present efforts within the context of past sacrifices, Prabowo constructs a coherent national timeline that validates current policies as continuations of unfinished historical missions. These connections create a sense of duty and destiny, framing modern challenges as opportunities to honor past generations.

Additionally, the call to become a global food estate and achieve energy self-sufficiency reflects a forward-looking vision tied to geopolitical relevance. These connections between domestic development and global standing emphasize the idea that national resilience is not only beneficial internally but also strategically essential in an uncertain world. Through these linkages, language binds temporal, spatial, and thematic domains (Sukarno, 1959; Heryanto, 2008).

7. Sign Systems and Knowledge

The speech uses religious, cultural, and technological sign systems:

	“May the Almighty God... protect us all.”
Script 7	“Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo.”
	“With digital technology, we will... deliver the subsidies.”

Prabowo employs multiple systems of meaning to appeal to different segments of the population. Religious invocations affirm moral and spiritual legitimacy, reinforcing a shared ethical framework that transcends political divisions. The use of traditional Javanese wisdom such as “Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo” anchors the speech in cultural authenticity and indigenous values, signaling respect for heritage.

Simultaneously, the emphasis on digital innovation and data-driven governance reflects a technocratic orientation, aligning with modern expectations of state efficiency and accountability. This strategic blend of religious, cultural, and technological sign systems allows the speech to resonate across generational and ideological lines, showcasing Gee’s insight that language mobilizes different forms of knowledge to shape belief and behavior (Anwar, 2022; Gee, 2011).

Taken together, the seven building tasks in Prabowo Subianto’s inaugural speech form a comprehensive rhetorical strategy that blends symbolism, policy, and performance. Each linguistic move – whether emphasizing historical sacrifice, highlighting practical governance, or promoting collective identity – reinforces his legitimacy as a leader committed to national transformation. Through the deliberate construction of significance, identity, relationships, and values, Prabowo not only communicates plans but also creates a discursive environment where those plans are perceived as urgent, moral, and nationally aligned.

The speech ultimately functions as a unifying script for post-election Indonesia, attempting to transcend political divisions by appealing to shared ideals and inclusive narratives. It weaves together cultural wisdom, religious faith, historical memory, and technological aspiration into a cohesive national story. This synthesis of past, present, and future through language sets the foundation for a powerful conclusion—one that recognizes the role of discourse not merely as expression, but as construction: of authority, of unity, and of Indonesia’s imagined future.

CONCLUSION

Through Gee’s framework, Prabowo’s speech is revealed as a strategic blend of nationalist rhetoric, moral persuasion, and technocratic promise. Language here does not merely describe reality; it constructs a shared vision and authorizes leadership. As such, the discourse enacts a unifying, forward-looking national identity grounded in historical sacrifice and collective action.

The speech serves as a performative act of nation-building, where language is not only a vehicle for expressing intentions but also a means of enacting power, values, and belonging. By invoking inclusive narratives and aligning himself with the struggles of ordinary Indonesians, Prabowo positions his leadership within a moral and historical continuum. His use of emotionally resonant phrases, cultural

idioms, and religious references works to establish ethical credibility while reinforcing a shared ideological framework.

Moreover, the strategic invocation of digital modernization and economic self-sufficiency speaks to a forward-thinking vision that balances tradition with innovation. The simultaneous appeal to ancestral memory and technological advancement shows how the speech operates across multiple sign systems, uniting older generational narratives with the aspirations of a younger, digitally literate population. This multi-layered discourse constructs a flexible yet cohesive national identity – one that is resilient, inclusive, and aligned with Indonesia's evolving socio-political landscape.

In conclusion, Prabowo's inaugural address, when analyzed through Gee's Seven Building Tasks of Language, exemplifies how political language is both symbolic and functional. It mobilizes national sentiment, constructs institutional legitimacy, and activates a collective imagination about the future. As such, it is not only a reflection of leadership but a fundamental tool in the performance and perpetuation of it.

References

- Achmad, Z. (2021). *Language and Leadership in Indonesian Political Discourse*. Jakarta: Gramedia.
- Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso.
- Anwar, S. (2022). "Digital Governance and Public Trust in Indonesia." *Journal of Southeast Asian Politics*, 11(2), 33-45.
- Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice*. Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Longman.
- Gee, J. P. (2011). *How to Do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit*. Routledge.
- Heryanto, A. (2008). *Popular Culture in Indonesia: Fluid Identities in Post-Authoritarian Politics*. Routledge.
- Kusuma, B. (2020). "Constructing Unity: Language and Identity in Indonesian Presidential Rhetoric." *Asian Journal of Communication*, 30(4), 389-405.
- Rahardjo, M. (2023). *Social Justice and the State in Modern Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada Press.

- Stiglitz, J. E. (2012). *The Price of Inequality*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Susanto, H. (2019). "The Nationalist Vision in Prabowo's Campaign Speeches." *Jurnal Ilmu Politik*, 6(1), 19-35.
- Sukarno. (1959). *The Rediscovery of Our Revolution*. Department of Information.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1997). *Discourse as Social Interaction*. Sage.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2008). *Discourse and Power*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2016). *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (3rd ed.). Sage.