

# Discourse on Miss World Controversy in Indonesia

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## Abstract

This study is concerned with the Indonesian government which has bowed pressure against the protest by hard-line groups so that it cancelled the contest 'final stage' of Miss Universe 2013 switched all the pageant events in Bali. The objective of the study is to describe meta-functions of the text on the issue and explain why the decision was made in the way it was. The research method referred to systemic functional linguistics approaches. The result of this study suggests that the language use which realizes the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings of the text were influenced by the subject matter, the participants and the channel used. There have been contesting ideologies represented in the text of Miss World 2013 in Indonesia. On the one hand it is believed that the contest is "immoral event" and that it was an excuse to expose the contestants' bodies, despite the organizers having confirmed that there would be no bikini contest and all activities would conform to the host country's culture, norms and religious values. On the other hand it is believed that the event can help polish the country's image on the global stage as a peaceful and beautiful place with over 17,000 islands and home to more than 700 ethnic groups that honor differences while preserving its rich culture and history. By bending to pressure, the world may think otherwise.

**Key words:** discourse, language meta-functions, social and cultural context, social-practice, ideologies.

## Introduction

Increasing protests against the ongoing Miss World 2013 beauty pageant seemed to have been the weight behind the Indonesian government's last minute decision on Saturday to cancel the contest's final stage in Sentul, south of Jakarta. Then, all of the pageant events, from 8 Sept until 28, were held in Bali. The groups protested the "immoral event" and said it was an excuse to expose the contestants' bodies, despite the organizers having confirmed that there would be no bikini contest and all activities would conform to the host country's culture, norms and religious values. So the bikinis was no longer the issue. Still, the absence of the two-piece swimsuit in the contest was not enough to appease the protesters.

The objectives of the study are to describe the meta-functions of the text on the issue and explain why the decision was made in the way it was. Additionally, this study aimed at revealing what ideologies represented in the text on Miss Word 2013 contest in Indonesia.

## Research Method

The research method referred to systemic functional linguistics approaches on discourse analysis. It includes text analysis, relating the text to the context of situation and culture, finding out how the text is produced as social practice, what people think and believe, and what ideologies represented in the text.

## Findings and discussion

The systemic functional approach is increasingly recognized as providing a useful descriptive and interpretive framework for viewing language as a strategic, meaning-making resource. Systemic linguists advance four main theoretical claims about language: (1) that language use is functional; (2) that the function is to make meanings; (3) that these meanings are influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which they are exchanged; and (4) that the process of using language is a semiotic process, a process of making meanings by choosing (Eggs, 1994:2)

Halliday (e.g. 1985a, 1985b) has argued that language is structured to make three main kinds of meanings simultaneously. This semantic complexity, which allows experiential, interpersonal, and textual meanings to be fused together in linguistic units, is possible because language is a semiotic system: a conventionalized coding system, organized as sets of choices.

Experiential meanings are meanings about how we represent experience in language. Whatever use we put language to we are always talking about something or someone doing something. The experiential meanings of the texts on Miss World 2013 contest in Indonesia suggest that the subject matter of the issue is the protests against the ongoing Miss World 2013 beauty pageant in Indonesia.

Interpersonal meanings are meanings about our role relationships with other people and our attitudes to each other. Whatever use we put language to we are always expressing an attitude and taking up a role. The interpersonal meanings of the text are realized through a language use that involves participants such as the

Indonesian government, the religious hard-liner group, the organizer of the contest and the media audience (See Appendix).

Textual meanings are meanings about how what we're saying hanging together and relates to what was said before and to the context around us. Whatever use we put language to we are always organizing our information. The textual meanings of the text suggest that hosting the beauty pageant has been put as more prominent issue rather than the opportunity to boost tourism and the economy.

Register theory suggests that there three key dimensions of the context of situation, namely field (topic of focus of the activity), tenor (role relation of power and solidarity) and mode (amount of feedback and role of language). Our intuitive understanding that we will not use language in the same way to write as to speak, to talk to our superior to our subordinate, and to talk about clean governance as to talk about football, are explained by using these three dimensions.

The experiential meanings have been influenced by the context of situation, particularly the field. As the subject matter is the protest against the ongoing Miss World 2013 in Indonesia, the language use underline terminologies such as "inappropriate from a religious perspective."

The interpersonal meanings are influenced by the tenor that is the participants involved in the text. Since the participants involved in the texts include the Indonesian government, the hard-liners, the organizer of the event, and the readers of the media, the language use includes the lexical terms such as "The government has bowed pressure."

The textual meanings of the text are influenced by the mode that is the channel used in realizing the issue. Since the channel used is written form the language used in the texts is simple in term of grammar and having high lexical density.

The context of culture also influences the language use of the texts. The Texts #1 on Miss World controversy is an editorial in nature. As a point of view put forward by the media it is aimed at persuading audience that something should or should not be. Such a text type is technically called exposition. The generic structure of such genre is consisting of statement of opinion and arguments and ended up with reinforcing statement. One among the linguistic features of such text type is the use of evaluative language (e.g. "Beauty contests are actually popular with competitions like Putri Indonesia and Abang-None Jakarta. Apart from Miss World, Indonesia has also sent participants to other beauty pageants such as Miss Universe, decisions that also received protests from hard-liners.")

In persuading the audience the text begins with a statement of opinion ("The government has bowed pressure.") It is then followed by an argument ("It seems like increasing protests by hard-line groups are enough for the government to switch into fast-mode and quickly decide on something. This time, the main sticking point is bikinis.") In other part a statement of opinion is made ("Most Muslims in Indonesia are moderate, yet, we see such protests constantly affect decisions"). This statement followed by an argument ("The protests against the beauty pageant may stem from a decree – issued by the education and culture minister back in 1084 when former President Soeharto was in power -- that banned Indonesian women from taking part in contests that included a bikini category, as it was considered inappropriate from a religious perspective.") Reinforcement in terms of the issue comes after the argument ("So the bikinis are no longer the issue.") and in terms of the effect of such decision enforcement is made ("But, by bending to pressure, the world may think otherwise.")

The texts on Miss World controversy in Indonesia were produced amid the social practice that put tolerance on differences as the country has been adopting democracy since the end of 1990's. Freedom of the press has been blossoming since then including English edition paper The Jakarta Post. This paper accommodates comments on hot issues of the day and letters for editors from its readers.

What people think includes the opinion that for decades, thousands of people from all over the world have come to Bali to enjoy its beauty and sunshine for which the most suitable attire are swimsuits and bikinis. It is also believed that there are no complaints from locals, who are famous for their friendliness.

The texts all tell us the memory of American pop star Lady Gaga, who was forced to cancel her sold-out concert in Jakarta last year, is still fresh in our minds. As is the instance when Jennifer Lopez to "tone down" her outfits and dance moves for her performance here. Both were a result of people's objections to their behavior as they deemed it to be both in line with Islamic values.

The media believed that protests against the beauty pageant may stem from a decree – issued by the education and culture minister back in 1084 when former President Soeharto was in power -- that banned Indonesian women from taking part in contests that included a bikini category, as it was considered inappropriate from a religious perspective. The authorities, however, seemed to have relaxed the ban since Soeharto's fall in 1998.

The media also think that beauty contests are actually popular with competitions like Putri Indonesia and Abang-None Jakarta. Apart from Miss World, Indonesia has also sent participants to other beauty pageants such as Miss Universe, decisions that are also received protests from hard-liners. But this time around, the government should

have been clear from the start. With its last minute decision – just a day before the opening night – now the Miss World organizers are faced with having to scramble to make rearrangements.

The texts tell us about the fact that we see such protests constantly affect decisions in spite of the fact that most Muslims in Indonesia are moderate. People think that Bali is the ideal venue to organize this international event, where contestants have to appear in evening dresses as well as swimsuits. The ancient culture of the common Balinese allows women to appear topless in public. So there is no need to heed the threats of hard-liners. People also believe that surely with support from security authorities, Bali would be a good host of the event.

The media was also of the opinion that hosting the beauty pageant, with 129 contestants from across the globe should be taken as an opportunity to boost tourism and the economy. It is also a promotion tool – not just for Bali but – for the country at large. Its opening ceremony alone was aired to more than 160 countries and was estimated to be watched by some 2 billion people worldwide. But, by bending to pressure, the world may think otherwise.

Our use of language is influenced by our ideological positions: the values we hold (consciously or unconsciously), the biases and perspective we adopt. The root cause of controversy on Miss World 2013 in Indonesia is the result of a conflict between two ideologies. One advocates that the contest is “immoral event” and that it was an excuse to expose the contestants’ bodies, despite the organizers having confirmed that there would be no bikini contest and all activities would conform to the host country’s culture, norms and religious values.

The other believes that such an event can help polish the country’s image on the global stage as a peaceful and beautiful place with over 17,000 islands and home to more than 700 ethnic groups that honor differences while preserving its rich culture and history.

It is reasonable to argue that the Indonesian government has preferred to choose a win-win solution. The event went ahead as planned but the venue was shifted from south of Jakarta to the tourist island in despite protests – and threats – from a number of hard-line groups. Democracy seemed to have been practiced pretty well despite the fact that it was at the expense of the organizer. The event was concluded on Saturday night and aired around the globe with more than 160 countries and was estimated to be watched by some 2 billion people worldwide. The event has helped polish the country’s image on the global stage as a beautiful place with over 17,000 islands and home to more than 700 ethnic groups that honor differences while preserving its rich culture and history.

## Conclusion

Those three strands of meanings of the texts on Miss World controversy namely experiential, interpersonal and textual ones got realized through lexico-grammatical level in turn of which got realized through graphology level in printed media.

The texts on Miss World controversy are influenced by the context of situation, namely the subject matter, the participants involved and the channel used. The texts are also influenced by the context of culture. The major text is basically an exposition of which the social function is to persuade audience that something should be or should not be. The generic structure of such text type initially begins with statement of opinions followed by its arguments and ended up with reinforcement or recommendation.

The texts are produced in such away as social practice in the context of democracy which has been blossoming since the late 1990’s in Indonesia where freedom of the press and freedom of expression are no longer a luxury. Media is getting more open in exercising social control through editorial and readers enjoy more freedom to express their opinion through letters to editor.

The texts tell us about the fact that we see such protests constantly affect decisions in spite of the fact that most Muslims in Indonesia are moderate. People think that Bali is the ideal venue to organize this international event, where contestants have to appear in evening dresses as well as swimsuits. The ancient culture of the common Balinese allows women to appear topless in public. So there is no need to heed the threats of hard-liners. People also believe that surely with support from security authorities, Bali would be a good host of the event.

There has been a conflict of ideologies represented in the texts of Miss World 2013 in Indonesia. It involves the values each of the participants hold consciously or unconsciously, their bias and the perspectives they adopt. On the one hand it is believed that the contest is “immoral event” and that it was an excuse to expose the contestants’ bodies, despite the organizers having confirmed that there would be no bikini contest and all activities would conform to the host country’s culture, norms and religious values. On the other hand it is believed that the event can help polish the country’s image on the global stage as a peaceful and beautiful place with over 17,000 islands and home to more than 700 ethnic groups that honor differences.

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## Appendix

### Abbreviations:

S = Subject  
F = Finite  
P = Predicator  
C = Complement  
A = Adjunct

### Text # 1

#### The bikini issue? (*The Jakarta Post*, September 13, 2013)

The government (S) has bowed (P) pressure (C), again (A). It (S) seems like (P) increasing protests by hard-line groups (S) are (F) enough (C) for the government (S) to switch (P) into fast-mode and quickly decide (P) on something (C). This time (A), the main sticking point (S) is (F) bikinis (C).

Increasing protests against the ongoing Miss World 2013 beauty pageant (S) were (F) apparently the weight behind the Indonesian government's last minute decision on Saturday (C) to cancel (P) the contest's final stage (C) in Sentul, south of Jakarta (A). Now(A), all of the pageant events (S), from 8 Sept until 28 (A), will be (P) in Bali (A).

The groups (S) protested (P) the "immoral event" (C) and said (P) it (S) was (F) an excuse to expose the contestants' bodies (C), despite the organizers (S) having confirmed (P) that there would be no (P) bikini contest (C) and all activities (S) would conform to the host (P) country's culture, norms and religious values (C).

So the bikinis (S) are (F) no longer the issue (C). Still, the absence of the two-piece swimsuit in the contest (S) was not (P) enough to appease (P) the protesters (C).

Most Muslims in Indonesia (S) are (F) moderate (C), yet, we (S) see (P) such protests (C) constantly affect (P) decisions (C). The memory of American pop star Lady Gaga (S), who was forced to cancel (P) her sold-out concert (C) in Jakarta (A) last year (A), is (F) still fresh (C) in our minds (A). As is (F) the instance (S) when Jennifer Lopez (S) to "tone down" (P) her outfits and dance moves (C) for her performance here (A). Both (S) were (F) a result of people's objections to their behavior (C) as they (S) deemed (P) it (C) to be both in line with Islamic values (C).

The protests against the beauty pageant (S) may stem (P) from a decree (C) – issued (P) by the education and culture minister (S) back in 1084 (A) when former President Soeharto (S) was (F) in power (C) -- that (S) banned (P) Indonesian women (C) from taking part (P) in contests (C) that included (P) a bikini category (C), as it (S) was considered (P) inappropriate (C) from a religious perspective (A). The authorities (S), however, seemed to have relaxed (P) the ban (C) since Soeharto's fall in 1998 (A).

Beauty contests (S) are (F) actually popular with competitions like Putri Indonesia and Abang-None Jakarta (C). Apart from Miss World (A), Indonesia (S) has also sent (P) participants (C) to other beauty pageants such as Miss Universe (A), decisions (S) that also received (P) protests from hard-liners (C).

But this time around (A), the government (S) should have been (P) clear (C) from the start (A). With its last minute decision (S) – just a day before the opening night (A) – now (A) the Miss World organizers (S) are faced (P) with having to scramble to make (P) rearrangements (C).

Hosting the beauty pageant, with 129 contestants from across the globe (S), should be taken (P) as an opportunity (C) to boost (P) tourism and the economy (C). It (S) is (F) also a promotion tool (C) – not just for Bali (C) but – for the country at large (C). Its opening ceremony (S) alone was aired (P) to more than 160 countries (C) and was estimated to be watched (P) by some 2 billion people worldwide (S).

Most of all (A), the event (S) can help polish (P) the country's image (C) on the global stage (A) as a peaceful and beautiful place with over 17,000 islands (S) and home to more than 700 ethnic groups (S) that honor (P) differences (C) while preserving (P) its rich culture and history (C).

But, by bending (P) to pressure (C), the world (S) may think (P) otherwise (A).

## Text #2

### Text your say

#### Miss World controversy (*The Jakarta Post*, August 31, 2013)

Your comments on Bali Governor Made Mangku Pastika, who (S) says (P) the Miss World beauty pageant (S) will go ahead (P) as planned (C) on the tourist island (A) in September (A) despite protests – and threats (S) – from a number of hard-line groups (C). (*The Jakarta Post*, August 31, 2013)

Governor Made Mangku Pastika (S) is (F) right to insist (P) firmly (A) that the Miss World beauty pageant (S) shall go ahead (P). Bali (S) is (F) the ideal venue (C) to organize (P) this international event (C), where contestants (S) have to appear (P) in evening dresses as well as swimsuits (C). The ancient culture of the common Balinese (S) allows (P) women (C) to appear (P) topless (C) in public (A). Do not heed (P) the threats of hard-liners (S). (Soebagjo Soetadji, Jakarta)

Do not be afraid of (P) intimidation (C), just do (P) it (C), Bapak governor (S). And encourage (P) the creation of good batik swimsuit designs (C). Show (P) the world (C) quality of production (C). Surely (A) with support from security authorities (C), Bali (S) will be (P) a good host of the event (C). Just make (P) everybody in Bali (C) your security officer (S), Bapak governor (A). (M. Dahlan, Jakarta)

Keep (P) security (C) high (A). Surely nobody (S) wants to hear (P) that Miss World (S) went bad (P) in Indonesia (A). It (S) is (F) one of many ways (C) to promote (P) the beauty of Bali (C). Hopefully (A), people (S) can see (P) it (C) in a positive way (A). (Hanna Nabila)

Imagine (P) people who (S) steal (P) public money (C) in the issuance of import permits for beef (A). Now (A) tell (P) me (C) I (S) cannot look at (P) pretty women (C) in beauty pageants (A). What (S) a bunch of hypocrites (C). (SM)

Pak Mangku (C), I (S) am glad to hear (P) that you (S) have decided to let (P) the pageant (C) go on (P). Bali (S) belongs to (P) the world (C) and we (S) are proud of (P) it (C). You (S), as the highest authority of Bali (S), have (P) every right (C) to decide (P) what people (S) can or cannot do (P) in your jurisdiction (A). People (S) from other parts of the country (A) simply cannot interfere (P). For decades (A), thousands of people from all over the world (S) have come (P) to Bali (A) to enjoy (P) its beauty and sunshine (C) for which the most suitable attire (S) are (F) swimsuits and bikinis (C). We (S) have yet to hear (P) complaints from locals (C), who (S) are (F) famous for their friendliness (C) (Robby Kaware).

## DECLARATION

I declare that this manuscript is authentically my work. All references in this manuscript are cited in accordance with academic ethic. This work is purposefully intended for publication in RHSS-IISTE only.

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The author, Dr Djoko Sutopo MSi

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