

Language of dissent: a discourse analysis of protest poetry in contemporary Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background: In post-Reformasi Indonesia, protest poetry has re-emerged as a key medium for articulating dissent, collective emotion, and political critique amid democratic regression. **Objective:** This study examines how contemporary protest poetry constructs resistance, negotiates power, and articulates collective identity and memory. **Method:** A qualitative approach integrates Critical Discourse Analysis, poetic-stylistic analysis, and sociolinguistic analysis across printed, digital, and performative texts. **Results:** Protest poetry functions as counter-discourse through delegitimizing representations of the state, while poetic devices such as metaphor and repetition enable affective political critique; non-standard language and grassroots registers further construct collective identity and preserve social memory. **Implication:** These findings highlight protest poetry as a vital site of political meaning-making and cultural resistance in contemporary Indonesia. **Novelty:** This study offers an integrative analytical framework that bridges discourse analysis, poetics, and sociolinguistics to reveal how aesthetic forms operate as political strategies in contemporary protest movements.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the post-Reformasi era, Indonesia has witnessed a paradoxical coexistence of democratic consolidation and recurrent civic repression. While Indonesia is frequently cited as the world's third-largest democracy, reports by organizations such as Freedom House and Amnesty International consistently indicate democratic regression, particularly in freedom of expression and assembly. Between 2019 and 2023, hundreds of activists, journalists, and students were reportedly subjected to intimidation, arrest, or digital surveillance during mass protests against controversial legislation, including the Omnibus Law and revisions to the Criminal Code. Within this climate, protest poetry has re-emerged as a salient cultural and political practice, circulating widely in printed anthologies, street performances, and digital platforms during moments of social unrest. These poetic texts articulate dissent, memorialize state violence, and mobilize collective emotions in ways that conventional political discourse often cannot. Despite their ubiquity and sociopolitical resonance, protest poems remain marginal in mainstream political analysis, making their systematic examination both timely and necessary.

Existing scholarship has extensively examined political discourse in Indonesia through journalistic texts, parliamentary debates, social media activism, and protest slogans. Studies grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis have revealed how state power, nationalism, and neoliberal ideology are reproduced linguistically in official and media narratives [1], [2], [3], [4]. Literary scholars, meanwhile, have explored Indonesian poetry in relation to identity, nationalism, and postcolonial aesthetics, often focusing on canonical

authors or historical periods [5], [6], [7]. However, contemporary protest poetry—particularly poetry emerging from grassroots movements, street demonstrations, and digital activism—has received limited interdisciplinary attention. Where protest poetry is discussed, analyses tend to privilege thematic interpretation or historical contextualization, rather than systematic linguistic scrutiny [8], [9], [10]. Moreover, few studies integrate discourse-analytic, stylistic, and sociolinguistic perspectives to examine how poetic language simultaneously performs aesthetic, ideological, and social functions. This gap suggests a need for research that treats protest poetry not merely as literary expression, but as a form of political discourse embedded in power relations, collective identity formation, and social memory.

Responding to this gap, this study investigates how language operates as a vehicle of dissent in contemporary Indonesian protest poetry. This research is guided by the following central questions: How are power relations, resistance, and ideology discursively constructed in protest poetry? What poetic devices are mobilized to transform political critique into symbolic and affective expression? How does linguistic choice reflect social identity, marginality, and collective memory in post-Reformasi Indonesia? Drawing on written, performative, and digital poetic texts, this study aims to demonstrate how protest poetry functions as a counter-discursive space that challenges dominant state narratives. By combining Critical Discourse Analysis, poetic-stylistic analysis, and sociolinguistic inquiry, this research systematically examines words, metaphors, pronouns, and discourse structures that encode dissent across multiple sociopolitical contexts.

This study argues that protest poetry constitutes a strategic linguistic practice that reconfigures political resistance through aesthetic form. Preliminary analysis suggests that poetic language enables dissent to be articulated through allegory, embodiment, and collective voice, allowing critique to circulate beyond formal political arenas. The frequent use of collective pronouns, non-standard language, and embodied metaphors signals a deliberate alignment with marginalized communities and lived experiences of repression. Furthermore, protest poetry operates as a repository of collective memory, preserving narratives of violence, trauma, and hope that are often excluded from official histories. By foregrounding poetry as political discourse, this study contributes to broader debates on language, power, and resistance in Southeast Asia. It also demonstrates the analytical value of integrating discourse analysis with literary and sociolinguistic approaches, offering a model for examining cultural texts as active agents in democratic struggle rather than passive reflections of social reality.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Critical discourse analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) constitutes a central theoretical framework for examining the relationship between language, power, and ideology in sociopolitical contexts. Broadly defined, CDA views discourse as a form of social practice that both reflects and shapes power relations within society. Scholars such as Fairclough conceptualize discourse as dialectically related to social structures, emphasizing how linguistic choices reproduce or challenge dominance and inequality [11]. Other traditions within CDA, including those advanced by van Dijk and Wodak, foreground cognitive structures and historical contexts, respectively [12], [13]. In studies of political expression, CDA has proven particularly effective in revealing how marginalized voices contest hegemonic narratives. However, its application to literary texts, especially poetry, remains comparatively underexplored, suggesting the need to extend CDA beyond conventional political genres into aesthetic forms of resistance.

Within CDA, several analytical categories are commonly employed to operationalize this study of power and resistance. These include lexicalization, transitivity, modality, pronominalization, and intertextuality. Lexical choices often reveal ideological positioning, particularly through evaluative and metaphorical language that frames social actors as legitimate or illegitimate. Transitivity analysis examines how agency and responsibility are distributed, illuminating whether oppression is foregrounded or obscured [14], [15]. Pronoun usage, especially the construction of “us” versus “them,” has been widely recognized as a discursive strategy for building collective identity and opposition. Intertextual references allow texts to engage with, appropriate, or subvert dominant discourses circulating in society. In protest-oriented texts, these features frequently function to delegitimize state authority while legitimizing popular resistance [8], [9], [16]. When applied to poetry, these categories enable CDA to capture how symbolic language performs ideological work, thereby expanding the analytical scope of discourse studies into cultural resistance.

2.2. Poetic-stylistics

Poetic-stylistic analysis represents another key conceptual foundation for this study, focusing on how formal and aesthetic elements generate meaning. Stylistics traditionally examines linguistic deviation, foregrounding, and patterning in literary texts, while poetic analysis emphasizes metaphor, imagery, rhythm, and sound. Some scholars approach poetic language as autonomous and self-referential, prioritizing aesthetic value [2], whereas others adopt a functional perspective, viewing poetic devices as socially and politically

motivated choices [8]. In politically engaged poetry, stylistic features often transcend purely aesthetic concerns and become instruments of critique and persuasion. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes poetry as a multimodal and performative practice, particularly in contexts of protest and activism. Nevertheless, debates persist regarding whether stylistic analysis should remain text-internal or incorporate socio-political context. This study aligns with integrative approaches that treat poetic form as inseparable from ideological function, especially in texts emerging from contentious political environments.

Several stylistic categories are particularly salient in the analysis of protest poetry. Metaphor is widely regarded as a central device, enabling abstract political realities to be rendered through embodied and affective imagery [2]. Repetition and parallelism function as rhetorical strategies that intensify emotional resonance and reinforce collective demands [8]. Diction and register choice signal ideological alignment, especially when poets deliberately employ colloquial, non-standard, or vernacular language [7]. Imagery related to the body, space, and violence frequently appears in protest poetry, symbolizing repression, vulnerability, and resistance [9]. Structural features, such as fragmentation or incantatory rhythms, may reflect experiences of trauma or urgency [10]. By systematically examining these stylistic elements, scholars can demonstrate how poetic language transforms political critique into symbolic action. Such analysis underscores the role of aesthetics not as ornamentation, but as a constitutive element of political communication.

2.3. Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics provides a third conceptual lens for understanding protest poetry, particularly in relation to identity, voice, and social context. At its core, sociolinguistics examines how language varies according to social factors such as class, ethnicity, generation, and power relations. In critical traditions, language is understood as a site where social identities are negotiated and contested. Scholars have emphasized that marginalized groups often develop alternative linguistic practices to resist symbolic domination [3], [5]. In the context of social movements, language serves not only communicative but also performative functions, constructing solidarity and shared meaning [17]. However, sociolinguistic studies of protest have largely focused on slogans, chants, or digital discourse, leaving poetic texts relatively neglected. This gap is significant, given poetry's capacity to condense social experience, articulate collective emotions, and circulate across generations and media.

Key sociolinguistic aspects relevant to protest poetry include language variation, stance-taking, and collective memory. The use of non-standard varieties, slang, and grassroots vocabulary often signals resistance to elite linguistic norms and affirms subaltern identity [18]. Stance-taking allows poets to position themselves affectively and ideologically toward power, injustice, and solidarity [19]. Importantly, protest poetry also functions as a medium of collective memory, preserving narratives of violence, loss, and struggle that may be excluded from official discourse [16]. Through repetition and circulation, poetic texts become repositories of shared experience and tools for intergenerational transmission of dissent [20]. Analyzing these features reveals how language in protest poetry operates simultaneously at individual, communal, and historical levels. Consequently, sociolinguistics enriches the analysis by situating poetic discourse within broader processes of social identity formation and cultural resistance.

3. METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study consists of linguistic and discursive elements in contemporary Indonesian protest poetry, including words, phrases, metaphors, symbols, and broader discourse structures. These units are examined within written, performative, and digital poetic texts produced in sociopolitical contexts of dissent after the Reformasi period (post-1998), with particular emphasis on the 2019–2023 protest cycles [21]. The corpus was selected to represent diverse modes of circulation and sociopolitical settings in which protest poetry emerges. Table 1 presents the corpus composition, sources, and contextual relevance.

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in critical-interpretive inquiry. Qualitative design is particularly suitable because this research seeks to uncover ideological meanings, symbolic strategies, and social positioning embedded in poetic language rather than to measure frequency or causal relationships. This study integrates three complementary analytical frameworks—Critical Discourse Analysis, poetic-stylistic analysis, and sociolinguistic analysis—within a single research design. Such triangulation enables the analysis of protest poetry as both a linguistic artifact and a sociopolitical practice. The design follows an interpretive paradigm in which meaning is understood as socially constructed and context-dependent. Previous studies in discourse and literary analysis have demonstrated that qualitative designs are especially effective for examining resistance discourse, cultural texts, and marginalized voices [22], [23]. By situating poetic texts within their historical and political contexts, this design allows for a nuanced understanding of how dissent is articulated, aestheticized, and circulated in contemporary Indonesia. Overall, this research design aligns with critical traditions that view language as a site of power negotiation.

Table 1. Corpus of protest poetry

No.	Data Type	Corpus Description	Period	Source
1	Printed protest poetry	Poems from <i>Nyanyian Akar Rumput</i> and <i>Aku Ingin Menjadi Peluru</i>	1999–2015	Official publishers, literary archives
2	Digital poetry	Poems circulated during <i>Reformasi Dikorupsi</i> protests	2019–2020	Instagram, Twitter/X, independent literary platforms
3	Performative poetry	Poems recited in student protests and solidarity stages	2018–2023	Documentation from LBH, KontraS, community YouTube channels
4	Multimedia poetry	Video-based poetic performances with textual overlays	2020–2023	Activist media archives

The primary sources of information in this study are the poetic texts themselves, obtained from verified and ethically accessible repositories. Printed poems were sourced from officially published anthologies and university-affiliated literary archives to ensure textual authenticity. Digital poems were collected from publicly accessible social media platforms and independent literary websites that played a documented role during protest movements [24], [25]. Performative poetry texts were transcribed from video recordings of public events, including student demonstrations and cultural solidarity forums, with contextual metadata preserved. Secondary sources of information include scholarly journal articles, critical essays, and reports on Indonesian social movements, which were used to contextualize the poetic texts and inform analytical interpretation. These secondary sources were drawn from reputable international journals in discourse studies, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies. The combination of primary and secondary sources ensures both empirical richness and theoretical grounding, enabling this study to situate poetic discourse within broader sociopolitical and academic debates.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic, multi-stage procedure. First, relevant protest events and movements were identified based on documentation from civil society organizations and media reports. Second, poetic texts associated with these events were retrieved using purposive sampling, guided by criteria of political relevance, circulation within protest contexts, and linguistic richness. For digital data, posts containing poetic content were archived manually, preserving original wording, date, and platform context. Performative poetry was transcribed verbatim, with attention to pauses, repetition, and audience interaction where relevant [26]. To ensure reliability, only texts with clear attribution, contextual traceability, and public accessibility were included. All data were anonymized where necessary, particularly for digital authors, to address ethical considerations. This careful collection process ensures that the corpus accurately reflects the linguistic practices of protest poetry while maintaining methodological rigor and ethical responsibility.

Data analysis was conducted in several iterative stages. First, the corpus was subjected to close reading to identify recurrent themes, metaphors, and discursive patterns. Second, Critical Discourse Analysis was applied to examine lexical choices, pronoun use, transitivity patterns, and ideological positioning, following Fairclough's three-dimensional model of text, discourse practice, and social practice. Third, poetic-stylistic analysis focused on metaphor, repetition, imagery, diction, and structural devices that contribute to political allegory and affective resonance. Fourth, sociolinguistic analysis examined language variation, stance-taking, and identity construction, particularly in relation to marginality and collective voice. Analytical memos were used throughout to document interpretive decisions and ensure transparency. By integrating these analytical stages, this study systematically reveals how protest poetry functions as a discursive, aesthetic, and social practice of resistance.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Discursive construction of resistance and power

To systematically capture how resistance and power are discursively constructed in contemporary Indonesian protest poetry, this study summarizes key linguistic patterns using a Table Chart. Table 2 organizes recurring discursive features identified through Critical Discourse Analysis across the corpus, including lexical choices, pronominal strategies, representations of social actors, and dominant ideological oppositions. This visualization enables a comparative overview of how protest poems frame relations between the state, the people, and marginalized groups across printed, digital, and performative texts. By mapping these features against protest contexts and modes of circulation, the table highlights the consistency and variation of resistance discourse within the corpus. Prior CDA-based studies emphasize that tabular categorization is particularly effective for revealing patterned ideological tendencies in qualitative data,

especially when dealing with heterogeneous textual forms [1], [3], [15]. Thus, Table 2 functions not as quantification, but as an analytical scaffold that foregrounds dominant discursive configurations shaping protest poetry in post-Reformasi Indonesia.

Table 2. Discursive construction of resistance and power in contemporary Indonesian protest poetry

No.	Discursive Dimension (CDA)	Linguistic / Discursive Features	Representation of Social Actors	Discursive Function	Empirical Corpus Reference
1	Ideological Lexicalization	Violence and repression lexicon (e.g., <i>peluru</i> , <i>borgol</i> , <i>darah</i> , <i>dibungkam</i>)	State and apparatus as coercive forces	Delegitimization of state authority	<i>Aku Ingin Menjadi Peluru</i> (Wiji Thukul); protest poems circulated during Reformasi Dikorupsi (2019)
2	Pronominalization	Inclusive collective pronouns (“kami,” “rakyat,” “yang tertindas”) vs. exclusionary forms (“mereka,” “penguasa”)	People vs. ruling elites	Construction of collective resistance identity	<i>Nyanyian Akar Rumput</i> ; student protest poetry (2019–2020)
3	Transitivity Patterns	Active clauses for state violence; passive constructions for victims	State as agent, citizens as affected participants	Exposure of power asymmetry	Poetry recited in student demonstrations (documented by LBH & KontraS)
4	Nomination & Abstraction	Labels such as <i>rezim</i> , <i>aparatus</i> , <i>sistem</i>	Authority as structural, impersonal power	Critique of systemic domination	Printed protest poetry (post-1998 anthologies)
5	Interdiscursivity	References to Reformasi, student movements, state repression	Protest poetry linked to historical political discourse	Recontextualization of social struggle	Digital poetry on Instagram/Twitter during anti-Omnibus Law protests
6	Moral Evaluation	Lexical polarity (justice vs. oppression; humanity vs. brutality)	People as moral subjects of resistance	Legitimation of dissent	Performative poetry at solidarity stages and public readings
7	Discursive Positioning	Grassroots voice, marginal standpoint, street-level narration	Marginalized groups as epistemic authorities	Counter-hegemonic positioning	Community-based poetry videos (YouTube activist channels)

Table 2 reveals several dominant discursive patterns. First, the state and its apparatus are consistently constructed through negative lexicalization, including verbs associated with violence, silencing, and coercion. Second, pronoun usage shows a strong polarization between inclusive collective forms (“we,” “the people,” “the oppressed”) and exclusionary references to authority (“they,” “the rulers,” “those in power”). Third, agency is unevenly distributed: protest subjects are frequently positioned as victims or resisters, while the state appears as an abstract yet omnipresent force. Across digital and performative poems, these patterns are intensified through condensed and repetitive structures, whereas printed poems tend to elaborate resistance through extended metaphor. Intertextual echoes of historical repression, student movements, and state violence recur across data types, indicating discursive continuity [8], [18]. Overall, the table

demonstrates that despite differences in medium and temporality, protest poetry consistently mobilizes language to construct a binary opposition between popular resistance and institutional power.

These patterns can be interpreted as deliberate discursive strategies shaped by Indonesia's post-authoritarian political landscape. The persistent construction of the state as an oppressive entity reflects collective memory of authoritarian governance and contemporary experiences of democratic regression. The heavy reliance on collective pronouns functions to symbolically unify fragmented social actors into a single moral community of resistance, a strategy widely documented in social movement discourse. The abstraction of state actors, rather than naming individuals, suggests both a critique of systemic power and a protective strategy within repressive environments. Furthermore, the recurrence of similar discursive configurations across media indicates that protest poetry operates as a shared counter-discursive repertoire rather than isolated expressions [9], [16]. In line with CDA scholarship, these findings suggest that protest poetry does not merely reflect dissent but actively reorganizes social relations through language, positioning poetry as a critical site where power is contested, delegitimized, and reimagined.

4.2. Poetic devices as instruments of political allegory

To visualize the dominant poetic devices operating as vehicles of political allegory, this study employs a Word Cloud generated from recurrent lexical items and metaphoric expressions across the protest poetry corpus. Figure 1 foregrounds high-frequency words associated with bodily imagery, violence, spatial confinement, and collective emotion, which appear consistently in printed, digital, and performative poems. Rather than serving as a quantitative measure, the word cloud functions as a heuristic tool that highlights salient symbolic vocabularies mobilized in protest contexts. Prior stylistic and discourse-based literary studies have demonstrated that word clouds are particularly effective in revealing thematic and metaphorical density in large textual corpora, especially when texts are heterogeneous in form and circulation. Figure 1 enables a comparative reading of poetic language across media, illustrating how aesthetic choices converge around shared allegorical motifs despite differences in authorship and performance mode.



Figure 1. Poetic devices as instruments of political allegory

Figure 1 reveals a pronounced concentration of metaphors related to the body (e.g., blood, bones, wounds), violence (bullets, chains, beating), and spatial restriction (cages, walls, graves). These lexical clusters dominate across all corpus categories, indicating a shared symbolic repertoire of repression and vulnerability. Terms associated with collective emotion—such as anger, fear, memory, and hope—also appear prominently, suggesting the affective orientation of protest poetry. Notably, abstract political terminology is comparatively scarce, while concrete sensory imagery prevails. Performative and digital poems display a higher density of repetitive and emotionally charged words, whereas printed poems show more extended metaphorical constructions [2], [10]. The visualization thus demonstrates that protest poetry relies less on explicit political argumentation and more on symbolic condensation, transforming lived experiences of injustice into evocative poetic forms that resonate across audiences and contexts.

These patterns suggest that poetic devices function as strategic instruments for translating political critique into allegorical and affective expression. The prevalence of bodily and violent metaphors reflects the embodied nature of repression experienced by protesters, while spatial imagery symbolizes structural confinement and lack of political agency. From a stylistic perspective, such metaphors enable poets to

articulate dissent without relying on overt ideological language, which may be constrained or censored. This aligns with scholarship arguing that figurative language in protest literature serves both protective and mobilizing functions [10], [27]. The repetition and emotional intensity observed in performative and digital poems further indicate an orientation toward collective mobilization rather than contemplative reading. Overall, the findings demonstrate that poetic devices in protest poetry are not merely aesthetic embellishments but constitute a central discursive mechanism through which political meanings are encoded, circulated, and emotionally internalized by collective audiences.

4.3. Language, identity, and collective memory in protest poetry

To illustrate the sociolinguistic dimensions of protest poetry, this study employs a Treemap visualization that maps dominant language varieties, identity positions, and memory themes across the corpus. Figure 2 organizes linguistic features into hierarchical blocks, allowing simultaneous representation of multiple sociolinguistic layers within a single visual field. In this visualization, larger blocks indicate more salient or recurrent patterns, such as non-standard language use, collective identity markers, and references to historical trauma. Treemaps are widely used in qualitative discourse studies to visualize categorical prominence without implying statistical generalization [28]. Figure 2 functions as an interpretive device that connects micro-level linguistic choices with macro-level social meanings. It enables a comparative view of how protest poetry encodes identity and memory across printed, digital, and performative forms, highlighting sociolinguistic continuity amid changing political contexts.

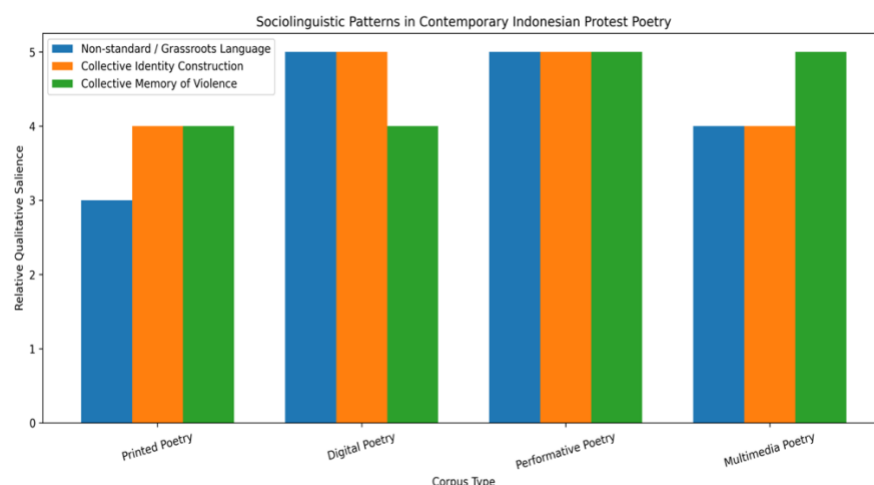


Figure 2. Sociolinguistic patterns in contemporary Indonesian protest poetry

Figure 2 reveals three dominant clusters. First, non-standard and colloquial language varieties occupy the largest area, encompassing slang, grassroots expressions, and oral-style phrasing. Second, identity-related categories emphasize collective positioning, including references to “the people,” “students,” “workers,” and other marginalized groups, while individual authorial identity is largely backgrounded. Third, memory-related segments foreground themes of state violence, loss, disappearance, and historical injustice, often linked to Reformasi-era and post-Reformasi events. Digital and performative poems show a stronger presence of vernacular language and immediacy, whereas printed poetry displays more reflective and narrative-oriented memory construction. Across all data types, elite or bureaucratic registers are notably absent. Overall, Figure 2 demonstrates that protest poetry consistently prioritizes communal voice and shared historical experience over individual expression or formal linguistic norms.

These patterns indicate that language choice in protest poetry is inseparable from processes of identity construction and collective memory formation. The dominance of non-standard language can be interpreted as an ideological rejection of elite discourse and an assertion of grassroots legitimacy. By foregrounding collective identities, protest poetry positions marginalized groups not merely as subjects of oppression but as authoritative narrators of social reality. Memory-related linguistic patterns suggest that poetry functions as an alternative archive, preserving experiences of violence and resistance that are often excluded from official histories. This aligns with sociolinguistic scholarship that views language as a medium for transmitting social memory and sustaining group solidarity [17], [20]. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that protest poetry operates as a sociolinguistic space where identity and memory are actively produced, negotiated, and circulated, reinforcing its role as a cultural instrument of resistance rather than a purely aesthetic practice.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that protest poetry operates as a consequential discursive practice rather than a peripheral cultural artifact. By consistently framing state institutions and authority through oppositional and delegitimizing language, protest poetry performs a critical social function: it reorganizes political meaning outside formal arenas of power. This discursive function is especially significant in contexts where institutional channels for dissent are constrained or distrusted. At the same time, such binary constructions may also risk oversimplifying complex political realities by reducing power relations to moral oppositions. Nevertheless, the capacity of poetic discourse to circulate rapidly across media and to mobilize shared affect suggests that its primary function lies in sustaining collective resistance rather than policy deliberation. In this sense, protest poetry complements, rather than replaces, formal political engagement [14]. Its significance resides in its ability to articulate dissent in accessible and emotionally resonant ways, thereby expanding the discursive space available for political contestation in contemporary Indonesia.

The discursive patterns observed are closely tied to Indonesia's historical and structural conditions of governance and repression. The persistence of oppositional language reflects long-standing memories of authoritarian rule and recurring experiences of state violence in the post-Reformasi period. These conditions foster a structural mistrust of authority, which is linguistically manifested through abstraction and depersonalization of state actors. Rather than naming individuals, poets target systems and apparatuses, indicating an awareness of power as institutional and diffuse. This tendency also correlates with strategic considerations: symbolic critique offers relative safety in environments where direct accusation may entail risk [18]. Furthermore, the convergence of discursive strategies across printed, digital, and performative media suggests the existence of a shared repertoire of resistance shaped by collective experience. These underlying structures—historical memory, institutional opacity, and uneven power relations—help explain why protest poetry consistently adopts similar discursive configurations across different sociopolitical moments.

The analysis of poetic devices underscores that aesthetic form plays a decisive role in political meaning-making. Metaphor, imagery, repetition, and symbolic diction are not ornamental features but functional mechanisms that translate political grievance into embodied and affective expression. This aesthetic strategy enhances the communicative reach of protest poetry, enabling it to resonate across social boundaries and levels of political literacy. By privileging bodily and spatial metaphors over abstract ideological language, protest poetry foregrounds lived experience and emotional truth. However, this reliance on allegory may also limit interpretive precision, leaving meanings open to appropriation or dilution [2], [7]. Even so, ambiguity can be understood as a strength rather than a weakness, allowing poetic texts to circulate widely and to be reinterpreted across contexts. The findings therefore highlight the dual function of poetic devices: they intensify political critique while simultaneously safeguarding its circulation in restrictive environments.

The prominence of allegorical and affective devices is rooted in structural constraints on political expression and the cultural history of literary resistance [29], [30]. In contexts where direct political speech is surveilled or delegitimized, figurative language offers an alternative pathway for critique. Allegory allows poets to encode political meaning in culturally familiar symbols, drawing on shared narratives of suffering, struggle, and endurance. This stylistic orientation is also shaped by Indonesia's strong oral and performative traditions, in which repetition and rhythm enhance memorability and collective participation [4], [9]. The intensified use of such devices in digital and performative poetry reflects the affordances of these media, which reward immediacy, emotional impact, and audience engagement. Consequently, the stylistic patterns observed are not merely individual artistic choices but responses to broader structural and medial conditions that shape how dissent can be voiced and sustained.

The sociolinguistic patterns identified reveal that protest poetry plays a vital role in constructing collective identity and preserving social memory. By privileging non-standard language and grassroots registers, poets symbolically align themselves with marginalized communities and reject elite modes of expression. This linguistic positioning strengthens in-group solidarity and affirms the legitimacy of subaltern knowledge [4], [20]. At the same time, the recurring articulation of historical trauma and state violence positions protest poetry as an alternative archive, preserving experiences that are often excluded from official narratives. Such memory work is crucial for sustaining long-term resistance, as it links present struggles to past injustices and future aspirations. Nevertheless, the emphasis on collective voice may marginalize internal diversity and silence dissenting perspectives within movements. Despite this limitation, the overall function of protest poetry as a medium of identity formation and memory transmission remains a significant contribution to democratic discourse.

These sociolinguistic functions are grounded in structural inequalities of representation and access to historical narration. Marginalized groups often lack institutional means to record and disseminate their experiences, making cultural texts a crucial site for memory preservation. The preference for vernacular

language reflects both material conditions—such as educational inequality—and ideological resistance to dominant linguistic norms. Moreover, the intergenerational circulation of protest poetry facilitates the transmission of political memory beyond immediate protest moments [6], [23]. This process transforms poetry into a durable social resource that outlives specific events. The correlation between language choice, identity construction, and memory suggests that protest poetry operates within a broader ecology of resistance shaped by exclusion, repression, and cultural continuity. Understanding these underlying structures clarifies why poetic language remains a persistent and adaptive medium for political expression in contemporary Indonesia.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that contemporary Indonesian protest poetry functions as a complex linguistic practice in which discourse, aesthetics, and sociolinguistic positioning converge to articulate political dissent. The findings reveal that protest poetry does not merely reflect resistance but actively constructs counter-hegemonic meanings through strategic discursive framing, allegorical poetic devices, and the mobilization of collective identity and memory. The principal contribution of this research lies in its integrative methodological approach, combining Critical Discourse Analysis, poetic-stylistic analysis, and sociolinguistics to examine poetry as political discourse. By foregrounding poetry as an active site of power negotiation, this study advances existing perspectives in discourse studies and literary scholarship, offering a renewed understanding of how cultural texts operate within contemporary movements of resistance.

Despite these contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. The qualitative and interpretive nature of the analysis prioritizes depth over breadth and does not claim statistical generalizability. In addition, the corpus is geographically and linguistically situated within the Indonesian context, which may limit comparative applicability. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating cross-national comparisons, multimodal quantitative approaches, or longitudinal analyses to examine the evolving role of protest poetry over time. Further studies may also explore audience reception and circulation dynamics to better understand how poetic discourse shapes political consciousness beyond the production of texts themselves.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Gerry Kadamehang: conceptualization (lead), discourse analysis (lead), writing – original draft (lead), writing – review and editing (lead).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research related to human use has been complied with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by the authors' institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data availability is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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