


Pros and Cons of Nickel Mining in Raja Ampat: A Critical Discourse Analysis Based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

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A B S T R A C T

Nickel mining in Raja Ampat, West Papua, has sparked intense debate among the government, corporations, indigenous communities, and environmental activists. This article analyzes the pro- and anti-mining discourse through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), focusing on three language metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Data was extracted from a YouTube video transcript by Kompas TV (June 9, 2025), featuring perspectives from a minister, a parliament member, an activist, and a musician. The findings reveal how social actors construct reality, power relations, and legitimacy through linguistic choices, including modality, transitivity, and lexical cohesion. These findings highlight power dynamics and unequal access in environmental decision-making.

Keywords: *Systemic Functional Linguistics, Nickel Mining, Raja Ampat, Environmental Discourse, Transitivity Analysis*

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INTRODUCTION

Raja Ampat, widely recognized as a global epicenter of marine biodiversity and a UNESCO Global Geopark, has increasingly become a contested arena where narratives of extractive economic development clash with those of environmental conservation. The emergence of nickel mining projects led by PT GAG Nickel and other companies such as PT KW Sejahtera Mining and PT Anugrah Surya Pratama on small islands like Batangpele has sparked multidimensional controversies. These disputes extend beyond environmental issues, touching on legal, ecological, indigenous rights, and political-economic dimensions that together illustrate the complexity of natural resource governance in Indonesia's frontier regions.

The conflict in Raja Ampat is further intensified by governance ambiguities surrounding mining licenses. The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources has been criticized for issuing permits in areas that are legally protected under Law No. 1/2014 and reaffirmed by Constitutional Court Decision No. 35/2023. Such actions expose the tension between central government authority and environmental protection mandates, as well as between short-term economic interests and long-term ecological sustainability. This situation exemplifies the broader national dilemma of balancing green development rhetoric with extractive practices that undermine conservation efforts.

This study analyzes the pro- and anti-mining discourse surrounding the Raja Ampat controversy by focusing on a Kompas TV YouTube video published on June 9, 2025. The analysis employs Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) combined with an ecological political

economy perspective (Bridge, 2004) to uncover how language reflects and shapes ideological struggles. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study seeks to reveal how competing actors use linguistic strategies to construct social reality, justify their positions, and influence public perception.

The first research concern is how pro-mining actors, such as government officials and corporations, differ from anti-mining actors – activists, indigenous communities, and artists – in constructing social meanings. Pro-mining discourse often emphasizes legality, national progress, and economic necessity, while anti-mining discourse foregrounds environmental degradation, cultural loss, and ecological ethics. These contrasting representations are realized through linguistic choices that foreground or obscure agency, responsibility, and legitimacy.

Within the framework of SFL (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), language is understood as a social semiotic system that realizes three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction concerns how experience is represented through transitivity patterns, nominalizations, and circumstantial meanings. For example, pro-mining statements like “PT GAK operates mines legally” deploy a material process with a clear human actor, whereas anti-mining expressions such as “coral reefs are destroyed by sedimentation” use passive constructions that highlight victims while suppressing agency. Nominalization, such as “land clearing,” further abstracts human responsibility and naturalizes extractive activities.

The interpersonal metafunction, on the other hand, deals with how speakers negotiate power relations and stance. Through modality and appraisal resources, discourse participants express degrees of certainty, obligation, and emotional evaluation. Phrases like “must be shut down” signal strong deontic modality, typical of activist language, whereas corporate or governmental voices prefer softer expressions such as “can be reevaluated.” The appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005) reveals how evaluative language – such as “outrageous,” “necessary,” or “sustainable” – constructs moral positioning and social alignment within the conflict.

The textual metafunction organizes discourse through theme-rheme structures and lexical cohesion. For instance, the government often places technical details such as “40 km distance” in thematic position to foreground regulatory compliance and divert attention from ecological harm. Meanwhile, anti-mining actors build cohesive networks around terms like “climate crisis,” “deforestation,” and “coral destruction,” linking local damage to global environmental narratives. Such textual strategies shape coherence, emphasize particular viewpoints, and subtly direct interpretive frames.

Complementing the linguistic analysis, the ecological political economy perspective (Bridge, 2004) situates discourse within broader structures of power, regulation, and material production. Concepts like extractivism and greenwashing are crucial to understanding how corporate and state narratives legitimize exploitation under the guise of “sustainable development” or “green energy transition.” By integrating SFL with political ecology, this study not only illuminates the linguistic construction of environmental conflicts but also exposes the contradictions between the rhetoric of ecological modernization and the realities of destructive extraction. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically – by expanding the scope of SFL into ecological political analysis – and practically, by offering a critical linguistic framework for policy advocacy and environmental justice movements.

METHOD

The data for this study are drawn from a YouTube video uploaded by Kompas TV titled “*Kontroversi Tambang Nikel Raja Ampat*” (<https://youtu.be/EjYgj6MI-dM?si=pa3XNcdQUqCuhcsi>), which has received approximately 85,000 views. The 15-minute video features a range of stakeholders representing both sides of the mining debate, including Minister Bahlil from the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, Rico from Commission VII of the Indonesian Parliament, activist Charlos Imbiri from the USBA Institute, and musician-activist Robi Navicula. The video was released

shortly after the government's announcement of a temporary suspension of PT GAG Nickel's operations, capturing a critical moment in the public discussion of mining governance in Raja Ampat.

The analysis employs several linguistic and discourse-analytic techniques grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and supported by an ecological political economy lens. The transitivity analysis identifies process types, participants, and circumstances to uncover how agency and responsibility are represented in the discourse—for instance, how phrases like “Indigenous communities were not involved” encode exclusion through mental processes that omit active agents. Modality analysis measures the degrees of certainty and obligation expressed by various actors, while appraisal analysis categorizes evaluative language in terms of affect, judgment, and appreciation to expose ideological positioning. Intertextuality analysis complements these methods by examining how the video's discourse references or contradicts key legal and policy documents, including Law No. 1/2014 and the Constitutional Court Decision No. 35/2023.

To ensure validity, the research employs triangulation by comparing linguistic findings with external data sources such as Greenpeace Indonesia's environmental reports and publicly available satellite imagery depicting ecological impact in the Raja Ampat region. Member checking is also conducted through consultations with Papuan activists and local community representatives to verify cultural interpretations and ensure the accuracy of contextual readings. This methodological rigor strengthens the credibility of the analysis and aligns the study with ethical standards in critical discourse and environmental communication research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The pro-mining discourse in the Kompas TV video is characterized by linguistic strategies that rationalize extraction and frame it as a pathway to national progress. Material processes such as “PT GAK creates jobs” emphasize tangible economic contributions, foregrounding productivity and employment while deflecting attention from ecological harm. Circumstantial expressions like “the mine is 30 km from tourism sites” are employed to spatially minimize perceived environmental impact, suggesting a safe distance between industrial activity and conservation zones. Additionally, the use of low modality expressions such as “we are evaluating” reflects a bureaucratic tone that obscures accountability and creates an impression of procedural diligence. Through these discursive strategies, the government and corporate actors invoke epistemic authority, relying on technical data and regulatory language to assert control over public narratives and legitimize extractive operations.

In contrast, the anti-mining discourse constructs an ecological crisis narrative grounded in moral urgency and environmental justice. Relational processes like “mining is a legal violation” establish absolute evaluative relationships that position mining not merely as an economic issue but as an ethical and legal breach. High modality expressions such as “must be permanently shut down!” convey categorical imperatives, highlighting the activists' strong commitment to protecting the environment and indigenous rights. Lexical cohesion across terms such as “conservation,” “deforestation,” and “extinction” forms a semantic chain that situates local environmental damage within a broader global ecological crisis. These linguistic patterns amplify the sense of existential threat posed by mining, aligning the discourse with international environmental movements and moral appeals for ecological preservation.

Symbolic mobilization also plays a crucial role in the anti-mining discourse. Figures like musician Robi Navicula employ artistic expression and metaphor to connect environmental protection with cultural identity and national pride. His metaphorical statement, “Indonesia is biodiversity,” transforms ecological wealth into a symbol of collective identity, reframing

environmental conservation as a patriotic duty. Such rhetorical strategies enable environmental activism to move beyond technical debates and into the cultural and emotional domain, thereby expanding the movement's resonance among broader audiences.

At the ideological level, these discourses reveal deep tensions within Indonesia's energy transition agenda. The government's narrative of "nickel for electric vehicle batteries" positions mining as essential for global decarbonization, yet it paradoxically accelerates deforestation and the loss of carbon sinks, undermining the very goals of climate mitigation. Moreover, transitivity analysis shows a persistent marginalization of indigenous communities, who rarely appear as grammatical actors within the discourse. Their exclusion reflects unequal access to both linguistic and institutional power, reinforcing structural asymmetries in environmental decision-making. These contradictions illustrate the broader dilemma of reconciling ecological sustainability with developmental ambitions in resource-rich regions like Raja Ampat.

CONCLUSIONS

The SFL analysis reveals that the pro-mining discourse maintains dominance through technical rationalization and actor abstraction, using linguistic features such as nominalization and passivization to obscure agency and depoliticize ecological harm. In contrast, the anti-mining discourse constructs crisis narratives marked by high modality and strong emotive cohesion, emphasizing moral urgency and collective resistance. These contrasting linguistic strategies expose a fundamental power asymmetry in which the state and corporations monopolize epistemic authority and discursive resources to legitimize extraction, while local and activist voices struggle to assert ecological values. From a critical ecolinguistics perspective, this finding underscores that language does not merely represent environmental conflicts but actively participates in producing and reproducing environmental injustice through its selective framing of actors, processes, and values.

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