SOCIAL DISCOURSE OF \textit{FAKE NEWS} IN FRENCH AND ITS DIGITAL SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACY

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ABSTRACT

The research explored the social discourse of fake news in the French language and the French government’s efforts to overcome it with digital media literacy through social media. Fake news was getting more intense with the existence of social media as an instrument of dissemination. The fake news data were observed first, then selected according to the intensity of its distribution, and taken through social media platforms with the most users in France, namely Facebook and Twitter. Then this data set was verified and confirmed through the official fact-checking platform to ensure that the data text was fake news. This data verification method also practiced techniques socialized by the French government through a digital media literacy program. All data were analyzed qualitatively using a critical paradigm, particularly critical sociolinguistics, and post-truth theory. The analysis results show a relationship between language practice through fake news texts circulating on social media and the practice of government propaganda discourse through digital media literacy. These two practices also give rise to certain social practices and movements in French society. This also shows that digital media literacy efforts alone are ineffective enough to overcome the problems caused by fake news in society.

Keywords: social discourse, fake news, French language, digital social media, social media literacy

INTRODUCTION

Fake news is news deliberately created to hide the truth and reach the widest audience so that it is designed in such a way as to be disseminated (Rini, 2017). The phenomenon of the spread of fake news through social media can be found almost all over the world in the last decade. The definition of fake news itself has become a long debate among world academics in formulating this social phenomenon epistemologically (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019). According to McIntyre (2018), actually fake news is not a new thing in human civilization; it has even existed since 1439, along with the invention of print media technology. The real news was difficult to prove at that time because there was no journalistic code of ethics and adequate control over the news printed (McIntyre, 2018).

Habgood-Coote (2019) is one of those who oppose using the terms fake news and post-truth to discuss fake news, arguing that the two vocabularies are linguistically flawed and are often used as propaganda tools. However, this opinion is opposed by many other researchers and academics (Bernecker et al., 2021; Pepp, Michaelson, & Sterken, 2019; Rini, 2017), who argue that the Habgood-Coote argument cannot be proven. Research carried out by Pepp, Michaelson, and Sterken (2019) shows that the term fake news is a new idiom that best describes this social phenomenon. The vocabulary ‘fake news’ became the trending word of choice for Collins dictionary in 2017. The same French word called ‘infox’ was also chosen as word of the year in 2018 by Le Robert dictionary in France. According to the translation found in the UNESCO journalism training manual, the Indonesian version of the term itself is ‘	extit{berita palsu}’ (Ireton & Posseti, 2019).

Meanwhile, social media is the vehicle most often used as an instrument for spreading this fake news (Aricat, 2018; Bernstein & Hooper, 2021; Pathak...
It is also emphasized by several Indonesian scholars (Pinem, 2021; Rahayu & Sensusiyati, 2020; Wijana, 2021), who have researched fake news or hoaxes in the world’s context, using forensic linguistic techniques. Based on the explanation of these problems, the question in the research is how the fake news social discourse is produced in French. What features in French social media play in the fake news text? How are media literacy efforts through social media and French television to overcome this? How effective are these efforts in social practice in France? To answer these questions, the result of the research will be served as a model of analysis for the same phenomena in the Indonesian context.

METHOD

The research applies multiple perspectives which are incorporated into one paradigm of post-structuralism/post-modernism, especially approaches with critical perspectives in critical sociolinguistics. The object of research concerns with texts on social media related to fake news that involves a post-truth theory perspective to explore it comprehensively. So, the post-truth theory that has been heavily echoed in recent years (since 2016) is used as a supporting theory. In the context of the pandemic, the dissemination of fake news further exacerbates the social situation and makes it difficult to control the epidemic in the community. In the Indonesian context, for example, many news stories in the media that are potential people being influenced by fake news and refusing to go to the hospital for fear of being treated as a Covid patient. Various narrations of true stories circulating on social media, which are sometimes difficult to distinguish, dominate the discourse around the outbreak in society. More or less, the same thing also happens in France, a country whose literacy level has reached 99,9% compared to Indonesia, which only reached 93.9%, according to UNDP data in 2018. Even today, there are still French people who are anti-Covid-19 vaccines and have held demonstrations every week for the past few months.

The research theme map and how social media is connected to fake news is elaborative yet can be compressed. The introduction shall focus on the background of the research: (1) Why and what is going on with fake news in French, and how has social media responded? (2) What are the previous studies about the topics? (3) Which gap from the social media responded? (2) How are the previous studies around the topics? (3) Which gap from the social media is connected to fake news is elaborative yet can be compressed. The introduction shall focus on the background of the research: (1) Why and what is going on with fake news in French, and how has social media responded? (2) What are the previous studies about the topics? (3) Which gap from the social media responded? (2) How are the previous studies around the topics? (3) Which gap from the social media is connected to fake news is elaborative yet can be compressed.
excessive and inappropriate punctuation marks; (2) excessive use of emoticons; (3) selection of provocative lexical types; (4) orthographic errors (writing spelling). Data-01 is based on these morphological categories.

**Data-01** (Source: Twitter, accessed on June 9, 2021)

ALEXANDRA HENRION-CAUDE GÉNÉTIQUE MONDIALEMENT CONNUE D’UNE GRANDE COMPÉTENCE EN ARN À CALCULER ET LES VACCINES « ONT 500 PLUS DE RISQUES DE MOURIR OU D’AVOIR DE GRAVES SEQUELLES QUE **LES NON VACCINÉES? **chez A. BERCOFF «AVC, PHLEBOCRISE CARDIAQUE EMBOLIE PULMONAIRE».

**Translation:**
Alexandra Henrion-Caude a world-renowned geneticist with her expertise in the field of RNA has calculated that ‘vaccinated persons’ are twice as likely to die or suffer from severe complications than ‘unvaccinated persons’ in A. Bercoff. ‘Stroke, inflammation, heart attack, pulmonary embolism’.

In Data-01, textual anatomy clearly shows some irregularities, such as the use of capital letters in all words. If looking back, this text does not use a period or comma punctuation sign. This paragraph consists of one sentence, which does not end with a period, as is often the rule of the French orthograph. Then some words use two quotation marks at once, at the beginning and end. There are words with one quotation mark but typed with excessive spaces. It can be concluded that in Data-01, it is found that the use of punctuation marks is lacking and/or nonexistent, and some punctuation marks are used improperly.

Data-02 shows the excessive use of emoticons and orthography errors or spelling errors in French in a post on social media.

**Data-02** (Source: Twitter, accessed on June 9, 2021)

*Faut faîte tourner* Les médias sont pas au courant... ça pas de variant index. [Official information/Government of India]

**Translation:**
You may remember, 2 weeks ago when Merry Andriani, et al. reported, Véran is coming in the fall. « Video short Lisez et partagez très à lire, car Autumn risks getting you into trouble, if you are not make sure you de le piquer les cobayes.»

The Indian government launched an official declaration to the entire planet affirming that all news about the virus related to its country is false, likewise, the news of the “Indian Plague” does not exist and demands that it be immediately withdrawn from all platforms, WHO really has a hard time doing it.

At a glance, the text in Data-02 already shows an anomaly and an informal form; moreover, it is credible as a text claimed to be “official government information.” The informal text style is seen in the use of many emoticons. It is also found an orthographic error in the text, “...ya pas”, which should have been written “il n’y a pas”, meaning “nothing,” and the word “soucie” meaning “problem”, should have been written “soici”. Then there is also the use of capital letters that do not comply with the spelling rules in French: SONT FAUX, N’EXISTE PAS. Syntactically, the error is also found in the conjugation of “faut faite tourner”, which should have been written as « il faut faire tourner ». As it is well known, French is a language of flexion that uses conjugation to match verbs with the subject, time, and mode. The conjugation process has standard rules, and its error is often socio-culturally indicating the social class and education level of the speaker.

At the syntactic level, many of the fake news texts analyzed in this research have these characteristics: - Conjugation errors - Use of imperative sentences - Omission of the subject of the sentence. In addition to Data-02, in the Data-03, some conjugations are not suitable.

**Data-03** (Source: Facebook, accessed on June 21, 2021)

« Vous savez peut-être il y a 2 semaines que le gouvernement indien a déclaré que “Chaque lit d’hôpital sera occupé par des patients atteints d’Alzheimer ? Les prions sont similaires à la maladie d’Alzheimer mélangée à la maladie de Parkinson et à des vertiges sévères si graves qu’il n’est plus possible de marcher sans tomber. Apportez les aimants lorsque vous allez à l’épicerie et assurez-vous de les tester sur les aliments que vous achetez. Si les aimants s’y collent, c’est contaminé. N’achetez pas.»

**Translation:**
The order sentence to disseminate news on posts found on social media is one indicator of fake news. Referring to the definition presented by Rini (2017), one of the criteria for news that can be categorized as fake news is a design in such a way as to reach as many public as possible and spread very quickly. In addition, fake news text also tends to omit the subject of the sentence. This indicates, at the same time, unclear news sources and references. In Data-04, the subject is omitted in the sentence ‘article long’, which grammatically indicates an incomplete sentence. It should be written C’est un article longs according to the grammatical rules.

The same thing is also found in Data-05, the following fake news text whose contents scare the public with the dangers of vaccines. However, the sentence does not use a clear subject or object, as underlined.

When they say the government of the “Indian Plague” does not exist and demands that it be immediately withdrawn from all platforms, WHO really has a hard time doing it.

At this stage, for all those who have been tested, you still have one chance to pass as long as you haven’t taken the vaccine.

This explains why ivermectin and other medications are banned! Natural antibodies and/or medications destroy these structures.

The fake news surrounding the vaccine controversy during the pandemic has been found circulating on social media in various versions. One of the most frequently found appearing repeatedly can be seen in Data-6.

**Data-04** (Source: Facebook, accessed on June 21, 2021)

Transportation and artificial intelligence will be used to deliver vaccines to remote areas, reducing costs and improving efficiency. «O Scoop – A lire d’urgence: « Pourquoi la quatrième vague de Vénan va-t-elle arriver à l’autome » et « Synthèse vidéo de la covid dans le monde ». par Q Scoop Article long, mais prenez vraiment le temps de le lire, car l’automne risque de vous arriver très fort en plein face, si vous n’êtes pas préparés.»

**Translation:**
The fake news in Data-04 is the title of a post on Facebook with a command sentence written in all capital letters and using an excessive exclamation point. In the text, there are three imperative sentences underlined by the author as a marker.

The fake news surrounding the vaccine controversy during the pandemic has been found circulating on social media in various versions. One of the most frequently found appearing repeatedly can be seen in Data-6.

**Data-05** (Source: Twitter, accessed on June 9, 2021)

A ce stade, pour ceux qui ont été testés, vous avez encore une chance de se rappeler que vous ne prenez pas le !

Ça explique d’ailleurs pourquoi l’ivermectine et autres traitements sont interdits!Les anticorps naturels et/ou les traitements détruisent ces structures

**Data-06** (Source: Twitter, accessed on June 10, 2022)

Tweet from LIBERTE (@GaumontRene) LIBERTE (@GaumontRene) Tweeted: Bill GATES admet que son vaccin ◐ «expérimental» ARNm CHANGERA L’ADN POUR TOUJOURS ◐ «Faites vous piquer les cobayes !

**Translation:**
Bill Gates admits that his experimental mRNA vaccine will change DNA forever …(laughing emoticon)! Let’s give the FR guinea pigs (French flag icon) a shot!
In Data-06, it can be seen that the command sentence used at the end of the post is ironic, at the same time, provokes emotion. People who receive the vaccine are considered guinea pigs. Moreover, the video included in this post has been modified and cut so that it looks like Bill Gates’s recognition as one of the pharmacology industry entrepreneurs who sell vaccines. According to Linden (in Greifeneder et al., 2021), people who are provoked by fake news are often no longer able to filter information cognitively. For example, the inability to see grammatical errors, such as in Data-06 sentences, is found in many accounts that spread the text.

The linguistic semantic perspective can analyze the meaning of sentences more comprehensively. In the collected French fake news texts, references to unclear sources and the use of impersonal pronouns or impersonal subjects do not refer to a precise person or group. In addition, semantically, it is also found that persuasive and provocative sentences intend to provoke emotions, generate hatred, and often take advantage of racist and religious sentiments. As an example, it can be seen in Data-07.

Data-07 (Source: Facebook, accessed on July 28, 2021)

Photo prise devant la CAF de rosny sous bois …

Bon ben on va continuer à bosser dur nous, il faut au moins bien entretenir tout ce monde, ça coûte beaucoup d'argent, leurs cape elles peuvent venir avec 15 cartes identités différentes on risque pas de les reconnaitre

Translation: Photo taken in front of CAF office rosny sous bois…. Yes, how else can we continue to work hard? We must keep the place clean. It costs a lot of money to give them cards with different identities. We will not risk recognizing them.

The Facebook photo in Data-07 has shared the text: “Bujumbura, Burundi, a white person is allowed to treat black Burundian porn officers like monkeys, meaning French « monkeys »… They themselves shout at him like a wild animal.”

The text in Data-08 is an illustration of a video showing a Caucasian being beaten by four Africans at a gas station. Media verifiers have confirmed that this incident happened long ago, not in Burundi but in South Africa. The actual incident is critical, as the beaten Caucasian bought fuel but refused to pay and tried to run away. This fake news circulating exploits the racism of whites and blacks that has been like fire in the hush of society for a long time.

The second part of the discussion is digital media literacy discourse practices and efforts against fake news in France. All data on fake news discourse texts collected in the research can be verified by background on several news verifier media in France, also known as fact-checking media. Through the digital media literacy program, these media provide platforms in the form of websites, images, and video verifiers, and some media also have accounts on several social media. Some of these media are covered by large, well-established media, whether from official government agencies, public media such as AFP, or private media such as France24, Liberation, Le Monde, and others. This fake news verification reporting model has been known in France since 2000 (Bigot, 2017) and gave rise to a separate type of journalism called “journalisme de vérification”. The models of clarification or verification of news often found through social media are related to visual-aural-visional verification, and news text verification. Several television channels in France also have fake news verification programs, which are also broadcast through the television channel’s YouTube media, thus providing wider access for the public without being constrained by space and time. The majority of these verification programs are titled: “vrai ou fake”, “intox”, “infox,” or “désinfox”.

Another form of verification is the correction of a narrative or image that conveys an incorrect message. Usually, this correction post is paired with red writing on the verified photo or image in the form of the words faux (false) or infonx (fake news), as can be seen in Data-10.

Data-10 (Source: Twitter, accessed on June 9, 2021)

Data-10 confirms at once two aspects, namely text and photos, by placing a red cross on the text and the words faux in red on the verified photo. Photo illustrations provide additional literacy that the narrative presented at the meeting in the picture does not match the actual facts. The debunked fake news post states, “British microbiologists say that vaccines give people false hope of giving people a sense of security”. This is verified by the French state news media AFP on its Twitter account and is declared fake news.

Another form of literacy from the same Twitter account, AFP, provides digital literacy by including official news with more valid references in the form of additional links in the post. It can be seen in Data-11 regarding the official statement from the Indian government about the Covid-19 variant that attacked India and claimed many victims in June 2021.

Data-11 (Source: Twitter, accessed on June 9, 2021)

Social Discourse of Fake News .... (Merry Andriani, et al.)
Data-11 shows that the verification post visually only puts a red cross in the text, then adds an additional official news link. However, the attached photo is not marked with any markings, only written at the bottom of the official affirmation from the Indian government, which does not deny the existence of certain types of Covid-19 virus variants in the country. This verification text refutes the fake news discussed in Data-02, which includes morphologically using emoticons excessively, and there are spelling errors in their writing. In general, fake news verifier accounts on social media give obvious signals and attract attention to verification posts, as seen in Data-12.

Data-12 (Source: Twitter, accessed on June 10, 2021)

The bubble graphic data in Figure 2 questions the effectiveness of efforts to fight fake news with digital media literacy that has been driven since 2017. It turns out that this one effort alone is not enough to defuse fake news and allow the public to fully cooperate to receive a free vaccine from the French government. A tougher effort is then taken by the French government by requiring a Sanitaire Pass (vaccine certificate and/or negative PCR test result) as a condition to be able to access public facilities, such as restaurants, cafes, shopping centers, and public transportation modes. Government employees and medical personnel who have not been vaccinated will not be paid their salaries starting November 15, 2021.

The third part of the discussion is the social practices related to fake news discourse in France. Social discourse is closely related to changes or movements in the society that are the result of social practice. There are a lot of social practices related to various issues in society that come from the social discourse being discussed through social media, such as religious issues, racism, health trends, and so on. One of the examples is what is happening in France at this time; there are several social practices during the pandemic.

The French government regulation regarding the application of Pass Sanitaire has become a social discourse that is growing rapidly in society during the pandemic. This obligation is considered a dictatorial act and contrary to the French State’s principle, which upholds freedom with the state motto: Liberté, Égalité et Fraternité (Freedom, Equality and Fraternity). Starting from a discourse circulating in the community through social media, resistance to this regulation then manifests in the form of demonstrations in various cities in France which took place every week since mid-2021. Figure 3 shows one of the demonstrations in Paris on September 4, 2021, attended by 140,000 people.

Data-13 (Source: Facebook, accessed on 10 June 2021)

Although there have been many protests against the Pass Sanitaire policy, the number of the French population that has received the vaccine is relatively good at 70% in September 2021, according to data from the official Covid tracker website in France https://covidtracker.fr/vaccintracker/. Social practices that can be found in the community exposed to fake news are not only in the form of resistance to things considered government propaganda but also invitations to avoid mainstream media. It can be seen in Data-14.

Data-14 (Source: Twitter, accessed on June 12, 2021)

The anti-vaccine movement itself actually exists as religious issues, racism, health trends, and so on. As social media give obvious signals and attract attention to verification posts, as seen in Data-12.

Data-15 (Source: Facebook, accessed on June 17, 2021)
public is more likely to prioritize emotions and how they are believed and felt in accordance with their preferred ideology ( Bakir & McStay, 2018). Some consumers whose read this post will accept it in its entirety and consider it the truth because it is in accordance with what they believe in through the news that has been consumed so far. Without realizing it, social practices related to such a way by social media algorithms (Shu et al., 2020). Human habits in surfing on social media, such as pressing the like button, sharing links or information, and commenting on certain issues, are all well recorded and taken into account by algorithmic data. Furthermore, on social media pages, the news or posts that appear in line with the habits that people often do and discuss. This has proven to further sharpen polarization and differences in society. The polarization and differences lead to certain social practices and social changes.

CONCLUSIONS

Through the discussion, it can be seen the use of a social discourse approach with a critical sociocultural perspective in analyzing the phenomenon of fake news. The three perspectives of critical discourse, narrative language practice, discourse practice, and social practice, can show the complex relationship between social discourse texts and social phenomena found related to fake news, which often has the potential to provoke social problems, provoke social divisions, and provocation of social issues. The analysis of verified text forms as fake news shows a tendency to (1) use insufficient or excessive and inappropriate punctuation marks; (2) excessive use of emoticons; (3) provocative lexical types; (4) orthography errors (writing spelling). At the syntactic level, many of the fake news texts analyzed in this research have characteristics of (1) conjunction errors, (2) use of imperative sentences, and (3) omission of the subject of the sentence. The collected French fake news texts often refer to unclear sources and the use of impersonal pronouns or subjects that do not refer to a concrete group. In addition, semantically, a lot of persuasive and provocative sentences are found intended to provoke emotions, generate hatred, and often take advantage of racist and religious sentiments.

The diffusion chain of this kind of fake news text through social media has generated a certain impact in French society, for example, in recently the anti-vaccine movement spreading fake news that provoke many other social or political movements, as also seen in Indonesia. Social media, as the main medium of contemporary society today, requires better technical tools to reduce the impact of social polarization and misinformation. Digital media literacy efforts alone have proven insufficient to stem fake news and protect the public from the spread of misinformation.

Critical social issues in fake news, such as those related to health, religious security guarantees, and racism, need special attention in handling. This is necessary considering that it is related to the issue of the right to life which is very basic for humans everywhere on this earth, especially during a pandemic when human nature is threatened by COVID-19. According to Egelhofer, J. L., & Lechler, S. (2019), fake news as a two-dimensional phenomenon: A framework and research agenda. Annals of the International Communication Association, 42(2), 1-25. doi.org/10.1057/s41373-019-00013-0. Further, the research in the French context shows the specific domain as the result of media literacy; journalism of verification. For further research, it could be developed into Indonesian and suitable better technical tools. This could be a way to reduce the negative impact of fake news.

REFERENCES


