"Ndableg," "Ra Sah Ngeyel": Verbal Offense through the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Frustration can be expressed in public in different ways. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the grassroots protestors in Yogyakarta vent their frustrations triggered by the uncertainty through banners, which are simple, yet send messages of the country's wrongdoings in dealing with the pandemic. This paper discusses verbal violence through negative sentiments expressed in the banners the Yogyakarta grassroots organizations use to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic prevention campaign. This study collected the data from 20 banners displayed in rural areas in Sleman regency, Yogyakarta, during March through April 2020. The analysis applied a sociopragmatic approach. The findings reveal the banners' strong negative tones targetted to the lower-working class which reflect an inaccurate understanding of the fundamental concept of Covid-19 preventive measures and mitigation. Stigmatization of the lower-working class is underway to hurt the cohesion of society. The negative tones can escalate people's anxiety, counterproductive to Covid-19 pandemic mitigation as it is against the wisdom of coping with the pandemic with a peaceful mind. Therefore, it suggests that evaluation by the agents of authority is imperative to prevent misunderstanding of the Covid-19 pandemic and build effective communication skills.

Keywords:
stigmatizing language; verbal offense; negative emotion; COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic triggers a panic situation across Indonesia and has provoked people to take some impulsive acts. The landlord asked a nurse working in a referral hospital for COVID-19 in Jakarta to move out of her boarding house as soon as she returned from work (Mahardhika, 2020). Her eviction is motivated by the suspicion that she has the Coronavirus because she has helped the doctor treat a COVID-19 infected patient. The neighbors labeled her a superspreader, thus, harmful for the neighborhood. The locals denied another nurse from Semarang who died from COVID-19, and consequently, her remains must be transported far and buried in a cemetery outside her residential area (Widhana,

2020). Their denial is motivated by the fear that her remains will spread the Coronavirus and infect the surrounding regions. Similar stories happen in Sidoarjo (Faizal, 2020), Makassar (Cipto, 2020), Tasikmalaya (Nugraha, 2020), and in some other places. Those simultaneous, impulsive denials against the dead and medical personnel could happen only during the COVID 19 pandemic when skewed comprehension about COVID 19 information was unchecked. Therefore, at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the society is vulnerable to the virus infection and social stigma. According to WHO, social stigma in a health context is the negative association between people who share certain characteristics and a specific disease. In an outbreak, this may mean

people are labeled, stereotyped, discriminated against, treated separately, and/or experience loss of status because of a perceived link with a disease (World Health Organization, 2020).

Continuous exposure to news and rumors in social media about the unstoppable COVID-19 pandemic has brought confusion, which triggered frustration among members of society. People are made aware of the looming danger and desperate for decisive measures to stop the pandemic. They have learned from social media how other countries deal with the pandemic, but they do not see the Indonesian government going in the same direction. The government did not issue any form of travel restrictions and specific quarantines of travelers coming in/coming back to Indonesia, even from severely hit countries such as China (Djalante et al., 2020). The dignitaries often produce statements made in ignorance of the situation's true nature to add the confusion. When the state eventually makes some COVID prevention measures and policies, society regards their efforts as too late and poorly coordinated. It is more challenging for society to accept the government's unpreparedness when knowing the dignitaries on TV are not keen to address the issue.

Partly driven by the confusion with what is going on on one side and discontention with the government's slow response on the other side, the people took charge by imposing their own "local quarantine using creative methods" (Varagur, 2020). National Geographic reported that community-driven quarantines are common in big cities and small towns, spacious suburbs, and sparsely populated islands throughout Indonesia (Varagur, 2020). Marcus Mietzner (as in Varagur, 2020), an Indonesia-focused political scientist at Australian National University, asserts that the local quarantine is an indication of frustration with the central government's crisis response. In Yogyakarta, the disappointment is expressed verbally through handwritten banners displayed in public spaces.

As the center of Javanese culture, Yogyakarta is known for its hospitality and politeness (both in speech and manners). However, the communities produced handwritten banners containing verbal offenses.

Interestingly, the offense is not targeted to the government, but mostly to the Javanese society's lower-working class. Among the targeted lower-working class are mobile meatball hawkers, mobile vegetable vendors, scavengers, and online taxi-bikers. These groups are seen as potential super spreaders and stigmatized by the banners' choice of offensive words.

Stigmatizing language and disrespectful behavior affect how people [victims] see themselves and how society treats them (Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, 2019). Previous research has shown a correlation between linguistic behavior and psychological states. Hoffman, Moore, Gutner, & Weeks (2012) study speakers' linguistic behavior in an inferior position, i.e., people with Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), and reveal that they more often use positive emotion words in their speech. Positive emotion words are a form of linguistic appeasement behavior because positive emotion words typically target social threat by putting the audience at ease. They assume that positive words aim to orient the audience to a positive frame of mind in general. Thus, it could be akin to a safety behavior by steering the audience away from negative mindsets during a social threat.

On the other side, Bowen, Kinderman, & Cooke (2019) found the Media reporting of people with schizophrenia tends to use words that contribute to stigmatization. While the press has mostly avoided the use of words that press guidance has steered them away from (e.g. 'schizo' and 'psycho'), they still use a range of graphic language to present people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia as frighteningly 'other' and as prone to violence. This repetition of negative stereotypical messages may

well contribute to stigmatization processes many people who experience psychosis have to contend with. The use of negative (stigmatizing) words indeed produces adverse effect: "Certain ways of talking about mental illness can alienate members of the community, sensationalize the issue and contribute to stigma and discrimination" (Everymind, 2020). On an individual level, stigmatizing words or actions are harmful. Collectively, and over time, they have an even worse significant impact on people's health and well-being (Canadian Center on Substance Use and Addiction, 2019) This paper discusses verbal offense performed by Yogyakarta's grassroots organizations in their spontaneous response to the COVID-19 prevention campaign. Focusing on prior negative polarity and negative contextual polarity of the words, phrases, and clauses used in COVID-19 banners, it aims to explain that the banners' negative tones potentially harm the lower-working class and are counterproductive to the local wisdom of coping with the pandemic.

Literature Review
Socio pragmatic approach

The sociopragmatic approach helps to understand the social aspects or cultural contexts surrounding a speech event that provide better insight into the intended meaning. The research involving the sociopragmatic approach is concerned with affection and emotion, such as impoliteness: (see Abi–Esber et al., 2018 on linguistic taboo; Haugh, 2015 on impoliteness and taking offense in initial interaction; Sinkeviciute, 2017 on reaction to teasing; Culpeper et al., 2017 on conventionalized impoliteness formulae, insults, threats, incitement, and taboo words; Farnia & Sheibani, 2019 on impoliteness and threat response; Nieto, 2020 on defamation, and Márquez-Reiter & Haugh, 2019 on public denunciation).

Social aspects strongly affect communicative behavior (see Wardaugh, 2014;

Holmes, 2013). Studying how the grassroots organizations responded to the COVID-19 pandemic prevention campaigns, this paper applies the sociopragmatic approach in analyzing the negative expressions in the banners during the COVID-19 pandemic. To understand a touch of sarcasm in the banners, such as *Have your face printed in Yasin's book,* requires knowledge of the cultural setting related to the death ritual among Javanese Muslim families.

Communication in the Javanese cultural context

Pragmatic competence is the key to successful communication, for, without pragmatic competence, communication would eventually breakdown (Takkaç Tulgar, 2016:14). Communication in the Javanese cultural context follows the principle: *aja gawe wirange liyan* (Widagdo, 2012) or never damage others' face. This principle is parallel to the modern pragmatic concept of face being defined as a positive social image akin to identity (Sifianou, 2011). In any communicative situation, a Javanese must decide the most appropriate register of *dhupak bujang*, *esem mantri*, or *semu bupati*, depending on the addressee's relative status (Pranowo & Susanti, 2020). *Semu bupati (pasemon)*, the most indirect form, is the appropriate form to express annoyance or insult to the educated (higher social status). Meanwhile, *dhupak bujang,* the most direct one, is used when expressing annoyance to persons of a lower social status. Due to its versatility, i.e., acuteness and clarity to describe various situations, Javanese has a strong influence in daily communication using Bahasa Indonesia (Wahyono, 2016). Several studies on Javanese expressions of negative emotion have been conducted previously. To name a few, Wijana (2008) distinguishes *kata-kata kasar* (offensive words) from words of Ngoko speech level. He argues that understanding offensive words helps one to have better communication

with Javanese. Ibda (2019) classifies words of insults commonly used among Javanese speakers in Temanggung according to the degree of directness. The words of insult carry different functions: to express anger, to signal intimate relationship, and to show a feeling of astonishment.

Abusive language, stigma, and discrimination

Waseem et al. (2017) synthesized abusive language from previous research into a two-fold typology that considers whether (i) the abuse is directed at a specific target and (ii) the degree to which it is explicit. Abuse can either be directed towards a particular individual or entity or used towards a generalized Other, for example, people with a specific ethnicity or sexual orientation. Specific ethnicity or sexual orientation is an essential sociological distinction as the latter references a whole category of people rather than a particular individual, group, or organization. The other dimension is the extent to which abusive language is explicit or implicit. Explicit abusive language is unambiguous in its potential to be abusive, for example, a language that contains racial or homophobic slurs. Implicit abusive language is that which does not immediately imply or denote abuse. Here, the use of ambiguous terms, sarcasm, lack of profanity or hateful words, and other means often obscure its true nature.

Everymind (2020) argues that "Certain ways of talking about mental illness can alienate members of the community, sensationalize the issue and contribute to stigma and discrimination." It further presents examples of preferred language to use when communicating about mental illness compared to other expressions that potentially bring adverse effects.

Łysiuk (2020) believes that most people are easy to manipulate because they do not realize that words are symbols that bear an intense emotional load. In the Indonesian context, the term "terrorist or terrorism" is often used for a violent act committed by one wearing a Muslim outfit. It can immediately do harm to anyone else wearing a similar outfit (BBC.com, 2018). A convenient reference for an emotionally loaded word is available from Liu, Hu, & Cheng (2005) in the form of a list of sentiment words (negative or positive polarity). However, a word may differ from its prior polarity depending on the context of use, thus, contextual polarity.

Methods

This research applies a sociopragmatic approach. A sociopragmatic approach enables the researcher to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge of naturally occurring discourse (Reiter & Placencia, 2005). The data are words and phrases of negative polarity extracted from 20 banners related to the COVID-19 pandemic produced by the local people in Sleman regency, Yogyakarta, during March-April

Table 1.
The language to use and not to use when communicating about mental illness

Do say	Don't say	Why?
A person is 'living with' or 'has a diagnosis of' mental illness	'mental patient,' 'nutter,' 'lunatic,' 'psycho,' 'schizo,' 'deranged,' 'mad'	Certain language sensationalizes mental illness and reinforces the stigma
A person is 'being treated for' or 'someone with' a mental illness	'victim,' 'suffering from,' or 'affected with' a mental illness	Terminology that suggests a lack of quality of life for people with mental illness
A person has a 'diagnosis of' or 'is being treated for' schizophrenia	A person is 'a schizophrenic', 'an anorexic.'	Labeling a person by their mental illness

Source: Everymind, 2020

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2020. Only handwritten banners are selected to consider their spontaneous expressions and rawness of frustration by the grassroots level of the society against the uncertainty of the situation during the Covid-19 pandemic. The banner-making spontaneity is reflected in the banners' very simple design, i.e., handwriting in paint, spelling mistakes, and the use of recycled material (the backside of an old banner). The data collection is done by photographing the banners and copying the words verbatim into the data cards.

The analysis focuses on the negative polarizing words and the negative tone they convey. Tone refers to "quality **in the** voice **that** expresses **the** speaker's feelings **or** thoughts, often towards the person **being** spoken to." (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). Accordingly, the banners' negative tone refers to the negative attitude expressed through the words they chose. The analysis of negative polarizing words uses *A List of Sentiment words* (Liu et al., 2005) to identify their prior negative polarity and negative contextual polarity. Subsequently, polarizing words, particularly adjectives and adverbs, indicate text subjectivity and are most likely to convey tone (Lam, 2018): some indicate more positive qualities, while others indicate negative attributes. Finally, the cultural context

analysis is conducted to interpret the intended meaning that contributes to stigmatization. The cultural context analysis focuses mainly on the social norms and religious values and the communicative pattern and social networks of various groups in Yogyakarta.

Below is a sample of the selected banners.

Results

All banners use casual language, a typical style among young adult speakers. This casual language demonstrates a non-formal register exhibiting fresh wordplay creativity in three languages: Javanese, Indonesian, and English. The dominant language, however, is Javanese. The banners' collage-like design gives room for several contributors to put their ideas on a single banner. The impression of spontaneity and collaborative work in making the banner is solid: different paint colors, messy layout, and inconsistent writing style. The banners are displayed in some strategic places such as the gate and road junction. Many of them complement the barricade set up at the entry to a neighborhood to create local quarantine.

In general, the banners contain writings that express deep emotion addressed to society's lower-working class. Banner no 6 (exhibited in Figure 1) explicitly describes the targeted groups of the lower-working class. They are *eyek* [mobile

Figure 1.
A banner displayed in the vicinity of Jogja Bay waterpark in Sleman - Yogyakarta

[Mobile greengrocer, satay hawker, meatball hawker, visitor, stranger, lunatic, online taxi bike are not welcome. Corona victim is a betrayal.]
Source: Author, 2020

green grocer], *bakul sate* [satay hawkers], *bakul bakso* [meatball hawkers], *tamu* [visitor], *wong asing* [foreigner/tourist], *wong edan* [lunatic], *ojol* [online taxibiker]. Although the targeted groups' designation seems arbitrary, the justification lies in the fact that these professions require one to go from place to place. During the COVID-19 pandemic, society sees their high mobility potential to turn them into virus transmitters.

The most frequent phrase in use is *Rasah ngeyel* [Don't be hardheaded], including its synonym, *ndableg* [obstinate]. The choice of a similar phrase in many banners may be a coincidence, but imitation is also likely since these banners' location is not far apart. Another possible explanation is that it is a shared expression of anger among Javanese society. Since this paper focuses on the product, not on the authorship, the idea's originality will not be addressed. Moreover, its combination with other expressions continues to show the creativity and ingenuity of ideas.

Table 2 below presents the contents of the banners. No attempt has been made to tidy-up, standardize, or otherwise adjust the data represented in this paper. The author adds bold type for easy identification of the most frequent phrase.

The Javanese words of prior negative polarity used in the banners vary, which include *ngeyel* [obstinate], *ndableg* [obstinate], *emosi* [angry], *dupak* [beaten up], *diantemi* [beaten up], *jelek* [ugly], *protes* [protest], *mati* [die/dead], *utang* [debt], *cidro* [betray], *edan* [crazy], *sepele* [trivial]. Aport from these, negation is also used to put words of neutral/positive polarity into negative polarity, for instance *ora / ra / ora usah* [no], *ojo* [don't], and *rung* [not yet]. The explanation provided here is a literal translation in English.

Both the style and the diction that the banners use are indication of the authors' age. In general, Indonesian young people[1] prefer

Bahasa Gaul, or casual language, characterized by shortened form, the directness of expression, and code-mixing. The shortened form is *rasah* (from *ora usah "don't"*) and *Bro* (from English word *brother*); the directness of expression such as *Eman nyawamu* "love your life," and code-mixing such as *slowdown waspada Corona*, and *Lockdown dulu, Bebs*. When producing written Javanese, most young people are ignorant of the standard spelling of Javanese. They cannot distinguish the pronunciation from the writing. For instance, they wrote *nompo* for *nampa*. Apart from their peculiar linguistic characteristics, young people in Indonesia are the most active groups in society to organize social and religious events in public spaces (Sebastian & Chen, 2014). In their study, Sebastian & Chen (2014) reveal that youth plays an active role in such events as the independence day celebration, sporting events, and religious festivals (e.g., as *takbir keliling* and the *tabligh akbar*) but shows lack of enthusiasm in politics and political matters. During the COVID-19 pandemic, due to their technical knowledge, young people are likely to be the most intensively exposed to news and rumors about the pandemic from social media; therefore, the most motivated group to take action in the COVID-19 pandemic prevention.

In communicating the message, the banners adopt a power-distance relationship rather than solidarity. It is in line with young people's linguistic behavior when expressing disappointment or anger. In such a speaker-listener relationship, the speaker exercises power over the listener, e.g., doing an FTA (Face Threatening Act). Face threats usually produce feelings of embarrassment, shame, humiliation, agitation, confusion, defensiveness, or chagrin (Redmond, 2015). Most of the banners use direct imperative such as in these examples: *Eling utangmu, do rung lunas* (19) [Mind your

1 Indonesian Muslim Report (The Conversation, 2020)

classifies Indonesian Young people into generation Z (aged between 14 and 21 years old) and young millennial (22-29). This paper focuses on the second age grouping, i.e., between 22-29 years old.

Table 2.
Potentially offensive words, phrases, and clauses used on banners during COVID-19.

No	Original text	Explanation
1	*DC dilarang masuk. Akeh wong emosi*	Debt Collector is not allowed to enter. Residents are emotional.
2	*Lockdown dulu Bebs; **Ngeyel** dupak*	Temporary lockdown, Babe; Obstinate, beaten up.
3	*Ra gelem semprot ra sah lewat*	Refusing to get sprayed, don't pass.
4	*Jalan ditutup; **Rasah ngeyel***	The road is closed; Don't be hardheaded.
5	*Lockdown. Ora manut aturan, ora urus*	Lockdown. Disobeying the rules, take the blame.
6	*Eyek, bakul sate, bakul bakso, tamu, wong asing, edan, ojol, ojo rene sek. Korban Corona ttd wong cidro*	Mobile greengrocer, satay hawker, meatball hawker, visitor, stranger, lunatic, online taxi bike are not welcome. Corona victim is a betrayal.
7	*Golek dalan liane*	Find another route.
8	*Dilarang masuk, kamu jelek*	Not allowed to enter, you're ugly
9	*Tutup sementara. Golek dalan liyo*	Temporary Closed. Find another route
10	***Rasah ngeyel**. Eling kesehatan*	Don't be hardheaded. Mind your health
11	*Lagi sensitif. Protes diantemi. Bank Plecit & Sales dilarang masuk*	We're sensitive. Protesting, beaten up. No entry for personal bank and salesman.
12	*Kanggo seng ndableg Ono telu pilihan* 1. *Neng omah* 2. *Melbu UGD* 3. *Raimu melbu buku Yasin*	Three options for the obstinate: 1. Staying home 2. Going to the Emergency Room. 3. Having your face printed on Yasin book
13	*Nek watuk pilek, prikso!!! **Rasah ngeyel.***	See a doctor immediately for your cough and running nose. Don't be hardheaded.
14	***Ra sah ngeyel**. Ora nompo dayoh*	Don't be hardheaded. Not welcoming visitors
15	*Jaga kesehatan bersama. Mikiro. **Rasah ngeyel***	Keep our health. Think. Don't be hardheaded.
16.	*Lockdown. **Dilarang ngeyel** Bro*	Lockdown. No obstinacy, Bro.
17.	*Lockdown. **Rasah ngeyel***	Lockdown. Don't be hardheaded.
18.	*Eman nyawamu. Koe ki wong sepele, rasah nyepeleke.*	Love your life. You're nobody, don't underestimate.
19.	*Nyawaku tergantung polahmu!!!. Wes to, **rasah ngeyel**. Eling utangmu do rung lunas. Nek nganti keno mesakno anak bojomu tak kon ganti ngangsur.*	My life relies on your deed!! Look, don't be hardheaded. Mind your unsettled debt. Pity on your wife and children, who must pay in installments if you're infected.
20.	*Eling angsuran. Slowdown waspada corona. **Rasah ngeyel**, mati kubur dewe*	Mind your installment. Slowdown, corona alert. Don't be hardheaded. Dead, arrange your own funeral.

Source: Author, 2020

unsettled debt]; *Golek dalan liane* (7) [Find another route]; *Nek watuk pilek, prikso* (13) [see a doctor immediately for your cough and running nose].

The tones are strongly negative. The linguistic element contributing to the negative tones are mainly negative sentiment words of prior negative polarity and negative contextual polarity. The following are samples of the banners which deliver strongly negative tones.

1) *Tutup sementara. Golek dalan liyo* (9) [Temporary Closed. Find another route]. This banner contains no negative prior polarizing words. Still, the phrase *dalan liyo* [another way], in this context, obtains its negative sense due to the underlying assumption that a road is a public facility that entitles everyone the right to access. This negative contextual sense carries a cold, unfriendly tone. It disregards the addressee's feeling of "bafflement," and a worse effect can be the addressee's feeling of "abandonment" since the banner provides no direction to an alternative route. The message is similar to "No trespassing" in the American culture setting. However, it usually applies to private property that makes sense to protect the owner's privacy.

2) *Eling utange do rung lunas* (19) [Mind your unsettled debts] carries a humiliating tone. This expression contains a prior negative polarizing word, *utang* [debt], and negation *rung* [not yet]. Debt is highly confidential information. It can be shameful when one finds out his/her debt becomes public knowledge. Worse, the banner adds a verbal phrase *do rung lunas*, which means 'debts that have not been paid out,' to suggest that the addressee has many unsettled debts. The word *do* [a non-standard spelling for *dha*], a shortened form of *podo* [non-standard spelling for *padha*], is an attribute for plurality. In a collectivistic cultural background like Javanese culture, debt closely associates with social standing. Although it is not a crime, having a debt can be a disgraceful portfolio. Known for having many (unsettled) debts will ruin one's image in society. The Javanese culture has a cynical saying *ning akeh utange* [but having many debts], an attribute that degrades one's good status.

3) *Mati, kubur dewe* (20) [dead, arrange your own funeral] carries a more pathetic tone. *Mati* [die] is a prior negative polarized word. Traditional Javanese culture does not recognize a funeral home; handling a dead member is everyone else's affair. The living will be responsible for taking care of his funeral. A funeral is part of communal obligation rather than individual or family responsibility. In today's Javanese society, where a funeral home is available, even if the family obtains assistance from a funeral home for the funeral arrangement, the neighbors involve themselves voluntarily. Therefore, we should not take this expression literally that the dead has to bury himself in a grave; instead, it is about the unwillingness of the neighbors to help his family in the funeral arrangement. It is horrible for a Javanese family to imagine their beloved dying in a dishonored state.

In a collective culture society, alienation is a severe social sanction, but a condemnation "*Mati, kubur dewe*" is probably at the far end of Javanese society's social punishment continuum.

Channeling collective frustration into the banners, the copywriters have taken different communicative strategies: direct, by using negative prior polarizing words, and indirect, by using figurative language, which produces negative connotation. As seen from Everymind's (2020) point of view, the use of sentiment words in the banners can alienate the targeted groups and contribute to stigma and discrimination against them. Sentiment words facilitate the banners' messages in labeling, threatening, and attacking the privacy of the lower-working class.

Labeling. Two powerful negative words: *ngeyel*, *ndableg* appear in the banners, which target the lower-working class. As made explicit in banner 6 (see Figure 1), the targetted groups are food hawkers, vegetable hawkers, scavengers, and online taxi-bikers. Targetting these words to a particular individual or group is an act of labeling: accusing the target of having negative personal traits described by the terms (see Everymind, 2020). Interestingly, included in the list is *wong edan* [lunatic], which is not a profession. Adding *wong edan* into the targeted groups' list implies that the banner associates Coronavirus with dirt, similar to bacteria, from which the society makes sense of washing hands protocol for Covid-19 prevention.

Threatening. With an underlying prejudice that the targeted groups are obstinate, the banners see threat (intimidation) as the best way to make them obedient. The banners attempt to make them aware of bitter consequences if they refuse to cooperate, or disobey the rules, in the hope that they will change their mind. The data show consistent use of conditional sentence structure in its

reduced form. Data numbers 1) and 2) are synonymous and share a similar structure (IF positive, positive). Likewise, 3) and 4) also use parallel structures (IF negative, negative).

1) *Ngeyel, dupak* (2) [Obstinate, beaten up]
2) *Protes, diantemi* (11) [protesting, beaten up]
3) *Ra gelem semprot, ra sah lewat* (3) [refusing to get sprayed, don't pass]
4) *Ora manut aturan, ora urus* (5) [Disobeying the rule, take the blame]

Both *Ngeyel* (Adjective) and *Protes* (Verb) are synonymous despite their different word class. Similarly, *dupak* and *diantemi* have a shared meaning, i.e., beaten up. Meanwhile, *ra* is a shortened form (contraction) of *ora.* Both are negations.

Attacking privacy. Meddling with someone else's private affairs is a serious offense. The right to be free from intrusion or interference is a critical element of privacy. The following two banners exploit the addressee's personal information, i.e., debt.

1. *Eling utangmu do rung lunas*" (19) [Mind your unsettled debts]
2. *Eling angsuran* (20) [Mind the installments].

It is a severe offense because revealing personal information to others causes a loss of one's freedom to interact with the world around him (Everymind, 2020). In other words, by manipulating the addressee's personal information, the banners force him/her to withdraw from the public arena.

The labeling, threat, and privacy attack targeted to the lower-working class have had a real effect. Food hawkers and scavengers disappear from the everyday scene in the neighborhood. It shows that the banners' message has been taken seriously by the targeted group; they stay away from the protected neighborhoods, sacrificing their business.

Some banners use the figurative language of sarcasm and mockery for channeling their frustration indirectly.

Sarcasm. Sarcasm is the use of remarks **that** clearly mean **the** opposite **of what they say,** meant to hurt someone's feelings or criticize **something in a** humorous **way** (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). Figure 2 below shows a sample of banners that use sarcasm. This banner expresses condemnation for the obstinate. It states three consequences (punishments) for the adamant ranked from light to severe. The 3rd consequence, that is, *Raimu melbu buku Yasin* [Have your face printed in Yasin book] is the most sarcastic remark.

As stated in the introduction, knowledge of the background culture is very important to understand culture-specific information, such as this sarcasm. 'Having one's face in Yasin book' is the opposite of 'having one's face printed on a popular magazine cover.' The latter is a privilege of only a few people with fame or achievement, while the first is a commemoration by the living for their lost loved ones. In other words, only after one is dead will one's face appear in a customized Yasin book. Figure 3 shows a Yasin book cover with a photograph of a late professor.

The following description is about the cultural background for the choice of that sarcasm. The banner fits the neighborhood where strong adherents to Islam live as it is a home for several traditional Islamic boarding schools. Like other Muslim communities in Java, the Muslim community in this area commemorates the dead by holding a religious-cultural ritual on the 7th, 40th, and 100th day after his/her death. The family will invite neighbors and relatives to recite the 67th Surah in the Qur'an, named Ya Siin. It is an innovation to publish a customized book containing *Tahlil* and Surah Yasin (hence, named Yasin book) with a picture of the dead on either the back or inside cover. The family will present it to the invitees as a gift.

Therefore, the expression *Raimu melbu buku Yasin* is an indirect way of telling the hardheaded the bitter consequence of his

Figure 2.
Banner "Kanggo seng ndableg" from Plosokuning Residential Area

[Three options for the obstinate: 1. Staying home; 2. Going to the Emergency Room; 3. Having your face printed on Yasin book.]
Source: Author, 2020

Figure 3.
Inside cover of Yasin book with a picture of the dead.
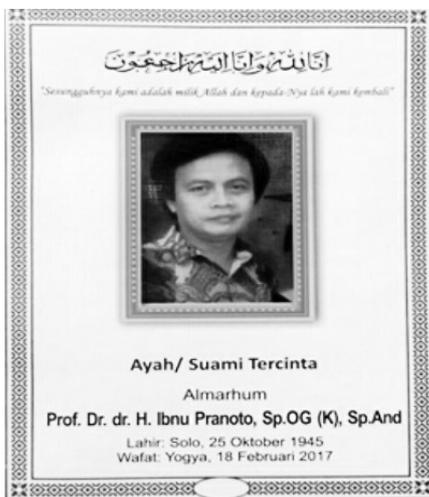
["Verily, we belong to Alloh, and only to Him shall we return"
Beloved Father/Husband
The late Prof. Dr. dr. H. Ibnu Pranoto, Sp.OG (K), Sp And
Born: Solo, 25 October 1945
Passed away: Yogya, 18 February 2017]
Source: Author, 2020

ignorance to physical contact/physical distancing (see Gugus Tugas Percepatan Penanganan COVID-19, 2020).

To say *raimu* [your face] can be impolite in some contexts. The addressee may interpret it as an insult, e.g., when the speaker is annoyed with the listener. Like in many other cultures, Javanese symbolizes dignity and self-esteem with "face" and "head." Javanese speakers recognize other expressions using *rai* [face], which refers to 'one's self-esteem.' For example, *ra nduwe rai* [having no face] means losing one's self-esteem, and *rai gedheg* [a face of plaited bambo] means having no sense of dignity.

Mockery. Mockery is an unkind or critical remark (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). Figure 3 exhibits the use of mockery in the banner. The expression, written at the lower left-hand corner, *Koe ki mung wong sepele, rasah nyepeleke* [You're nobody, never underestimate], is an unkind remark targeted to the lower-working class.

Javanese culture recognizes a covert social distinction between *wong cilik* (lower class) and

priyayi (upper class). It serves as a helpful guide in assessing status relationships between speaker and listener in communication using Javanese. The use of honorific and humific terms is governed among others by this status difference. A speaker of inferior status is supposed to use humific (humble) words whenever addressing himself and use honorific terms when addressing the listener of higher status.

In this context, however, the phrase *Koe ki mung wong sepele* refers not to the social class (lower class) alone but also the self-worth (dignity). It equals the distinction between "somebody" and "nobody," which goes beyond mere social class distinction. A "nobody" is a person with little self-pride. When a person with little self-pride underestimates the risk for Covid-19 infection, he will have nothing in him --he will become a disrespectful man. So, the expression *Koe ki mung wong sepele* aims to mock the addressee.

Discussion
Inaccurate Perception of COVID-19

Street vendors, scavengers, and online taxi bikers are all decent jobs. We sometimes notice a writing *Pemulung dilarang masuk* [no entry for scavengers] at a housing complex gate, but scavengers are generally welcome in many other places. It shows that neither disrespect nor prejudice against scavengers or other lower-working class exists in Javanese society. However, the banners have used some negative sentiment words to label the lower-working class with some negative attributes: *ngeyel* [hardheaded], *ndableg* [obstinate], *jelek* [uggly], and *wong sepele* [a person of no importance]. The most frequent word is, however, *ngeyel*. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2020), *obstinate* is "usually disapproving, and it means unreasonably determined, especially to act in a particular way and not to change at all, despite what anyone else says." *Obstinate* is included in prior negative polarity (see Liu et al., 2005).

An intimidation act against the targeted lower-working class takes the form of threats through conditional sentences: *Protes diantemi* [Were you obstinate, you will be beaten up], *Ora manut aturan, ora urus* [Nobody will take care of you if you are non- compliant]. These sentences seem to portray Javanese society as intolerant, which is not an objective picture of reality.

Figure 4.
Banner "Koe ki mung wong sepele" displayed in Karangasem – Condong Catur

[Prevention is better. Love your life. You're nobody, never underestimate.]
Source: Author, 2020

Cases of violence happened in some places, and they might start from personal conflict. However, physical abuse cases (beating) never occur because of an ignorant individual who disobeyed the rules at a neighborhood level. Similarly, no issues of abandonment arise when a person has broken the neighborhood rules.

The lower-working class's privacy attack primarily relates to revealing the debts that the lower-working class cannot settle. Assuming that the lower-working class has many debts and often fails to pay is idiosyncratic. Above all, having debts is not a crime, and it is a private affair that outsiders should not focus on.

The acts of labeling, threat (intimidation), and privacy attacks the banners do to the lower-working class are not based on concrete facts. Instead, it is impulsively driven by a misunderstanding of the COVID-19 pandemic. Young people build an association between Coronavirus and high-mobility individuals and filth. The belief is that the lower working class is more prone to COVID-19 infection since they go from place to place possibly infected with the Coronavirus and then transmit it when interacting with others in the neighborhood. It is similar to the fear that a nurse treating COVID 19 patients can transmit the virus from the patient to others around her in the neighborhood. Misunderstanding is suspected to result from the imperfect acquisition of new information. During the COVID-19 information dissemination process, the grassroots organizations did not receive adequate assistance and evaluation in new knowledge acquisition related to COVID-19. The flow of information is predominantely one way and there is a flood of potential misinformation.

Moreover, most disseminated information disregards different education levels, hence different abilities to comprehend new information. In such a situation, a misunderstood or partly understood item of information will likely be unnoticed and remained uncorrected for some time. As time goes, it may be fossilized, which makes any effort to correct it difficult.

The fact that the banners have been on display in public spaces for weeks without any evaluation (criticism) of the content is also evidence of a lack of control by authority agents. The creation of these banners is inseparable from the setting up of barricades at the entry to the neighborhood. The barricade setting up is another idiosyncratic idea about the COVID-19 spread. Blocking access into the neighborhood is irrelevant as it does not prevent people from promoting social and physical distancing. On the contrary, it encourages young people to flock to the sentry post. The sentry post soon transforms into a convenient meeting point for young people instead of a cafe or *burjo* eatery where they frequently spend their time with friends. It continues to stand there since the agents of authority never suggest taking down the barricade. Therefore, the grassroots organization's inaccurate perception is left uncorrected, and it means no remedy for innocent victims. They will have to continue living with a stigma until the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

Negative tone vs peaceful mind in coping with pandemic

The negative tones of the banners contribute to creating a restless atmosphere in society. Expressing negative emotion in public, even in rural areas, is now done more commonly. What appears in the banner (labeling, threat, and privacy attack) is probably a reflection of the global situation that public life is increasingly dominated by accusations of wrongdoing by people in their public and private capacities (Márquez-Reiter & Haugh, 2019).

Negative perceptions toward the lower-working class that the banners reflect have the potential to weaken social cohesion. Social cohesion identifies two main dimensions:

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the sense of belonging of a community and the relationship among members within the community itself (Manca, 2014). The negative perception may build up into prejudice towards the lower working class, which hurts their sense of belonging, damaging social groups' relationship.

Creating a restless atmosphere in society is against Javanese culture's local wisdom in dealing with endemic (or pandemic). The wisdom advises not to fight pandemics with fear but with the strengthened spiritual energy that eventually contributes to increased optimism and body immunity (Setiawan, 2020). In the past, the Javanese society would work hand in hand to hold a communal ritual in the form of wayang [puppet] performance, cooking a special dish *lodheh kluwih*, or some other kinds of *ruwatan*². Despite being seemingly irrational due to its remoteness to the recommended procedures for endemic preventive measures at present (modern) time, this ritual has been successful in building a peaceful mind in the past (Setiawan, 2020). The logic lies in the Javanese values of "following the king's order, and you will be blessed and safe." Yogyakarta used to be a kingdom (sultanate) where the king was believed to have a great power of wisdom. Javanese people were obliged to live under the guidance of the king. During difficult times, the King will order the people to perform some rituals to keep away from evil powers, such as preparing a special dish *lodheh kluwih*. The feeling of contention from having performed the king's order enhances the peaceful mind, increasing body immunity.

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2 *Ruwatan* derives from *ruwat*, a metatesis from *luwar*, which means to escape or to be free. *Ruwatan* ritual is held to help someone escape from danger. According to the Javanese belief, someone who is suffering a miserable fate (*sukerta*) needs to undergo a *ruwatan* ritual to be free from Batara Kala (God of Kala). A *ruwatan* ritual has a general purpose of protecting humans from any disaster or misery (Darmoko, 2002: 33-34).

Targetting only the lower-working class raises a concern of discrimination in the COVID-19 pandemic prevention. The middle and higher classes in society may not understand the importance of their commitment to COVID-19 prevention. They will have no sense of obligation to restrict their mobility. As they may believe they are safe, they continue doing activities that can make them vulnerable to COVID-19 infection, such as going shopping in a crowded traditional market and shopping mall or spending time in a cafe. They may be unaware that close contact with an infected person without observable symptoms can even be more dangerous than the suspected groups, i.e., COVID patient and person with visible symptoms.

Conclusion

The banners created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are doing verbal offense to the lower-working class in society through 1) labeling, 2) threat, and 3) privacy attacks. The banners use words of prior negative polarity and negative contextual polarity to deliver negative tones that vary from unfriendly to pathetic ones. Sarcasm and mockery create pathetic tones that effectively serve the purpose of targetting the lower-working class. The paper concludes that an inaccurate understanding of COVID-19 prevention by the grassroots organizations is responsible for the offense. In the view of wisdom in dealing with a pandemic, negative opinionated expressions carrying the negative tones contribute to creating a restless atmosphere counterproductive to body immunity to fight the pandemic. They potentially harm social cohesion. The findings contribute to the understanding of what went wrong in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. First, misperception of COVID-19 prevention is evidence of the lack of evaluation by the authority in the COVID-19 information dissemination at the grassroots level. The authority agents do not exercise their control to correct it, leaving the

lower working class with the majority's stigma and discrimination. Secondly, society has not developed sociopragmatic competence, so people are prone to provoking negative sentiment words that potentially hurt society's cohesion. Thirdly, the COVID-19 pandemic prevention and mitigation have not followed the local wisdom. The local wisdom guides the community to be united (*golong gilig*), hand in hand, to build a peaceful mind. On the contrary, the agents of authority let society's elements divide with the growing suspicion toward others, i.e., keeping the banners in their place despite the stigma against the lower-working class the banners promote.

There may be some possible limitations in this study. First, this study uses only banners produced until April 2020 as a data source due to the time constraint. The fact that banners' production continues until May 2020 while the situations as its social contexts are dynamic, the attitude toward the lower-working class may change as reflected in the choice of expressions. Research using more extensive data extracted from banners produced until May 2020 will result in more comprehensive findings on the grassroots response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, the sociopragmatic approach does not explicitly examine the inequality and injustice in the society that inevitably affect the production of or word choice in the banners. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be able to reveal power inequality through its intertextual study. Therefore, applying the CDA approach in the future research of COVID-19 banners will explain the triggers of the verbal offense, i.e., privacy attack in the COVID 19 related banners in this study, which violates the Javanese communicative principle of *ojo gawe wirange liyan*.

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