

# The Power of One Language:

## *Critical Discourse and Interaction Process Analysis of the Tower of Babel in Genesis Text 11: -9*

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**Abstract**— A tablet from the 6th century BC succeeded in revealing the giant six-level Ziggurat which became known as the Tower of Babel. According to the biblical text narrative in Genesis 11: 1-9, the construction of the Ziggurat was successful because the perpetrators were in one Babylonian language. If this theory is correct, then the concept of one language can be implemented in various lines of life so that all who are planned to succeed in its implementation with the involvement of all group members. To discuss, test these assumptions, and analyze the phenomenon of one language, research in the form of literature studies is carried out through this paper. The research aims to reveal the power of one language behind the success of the development, and at the same time, the irony of the destruction of the Babylonian Ziggurat. The Group Communication Theory and Critical Discourse are using analysis scissors. The results of the study show that one language can create unity and convergence for any purpose and design in a group or community. Even the unity of language builds internal filters within each person who is part of the community to distinguish good and bad information, which builds or breaks down positive or negative information because the unity of language plays a role in decision making and the formation of actions.

**Keywords**— *tower of babel; language; linguistics; discourse*

### I. INTRODUCTION

In today's modern Iraq there is an archaeological site identified as the ruins of an ancient six-story giant tower, which stood in ancient Mesopotamia and was named Babylon's ziggurat or today called the Tower of Babylon. The findings prove that the biblical record of the tower is not a myth, but an archaeological fact (George, 2006). According to the Bible, the tower will be erected to reach the sky. The full narrative is in the Book of Genesis, and Now the whole earth has one language and one speech. Moreover, it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and use them thoroughly." They had a brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. Also, they said, "Come on, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, let us be scanned abroad over the face of the whole earth (NKJV, 1997).

In Sumerian, the giant building is called 'E-friend-an-ki' which is relevant to biblical records as, "House of the foundation of heaven on earth." A text written on the cylinder of Susa during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar said that at the top of the Ziggurat, a particular temple dedicate to the god. Archeology explains that E-temen-an-ki is the most towering Ziggurat with its base in the form of a 90-meter square, consisting of six levels where the top, seventh, is designed as a temple for the god Marduk, the main worshiper of the ancient Babylonians (George, 2010).

In the end, Babylon Ziggurat, which built on the Sinear plain in the South Mesopotamia region, failed to stand up. The building is essential in urban planning and civilization (Walton, 1995). Archeology successfully excavated and found up to 30 ancient Ziggurats throughout the Mesopotamian region. The tower is essential as a social, political identity, primarily related to the religious system by dedicating it to the protective deities of the city (Parrot, 1955).

Bauer said that the building stood for the wrong purpose. The people who built it were motivated by pride to uphold their identity, even to rival God. Initially, these people united to build, but eventually, the unity of the group was scattered, isolated, and potentially war with each other. The ambitious project stopped in the middle of the road due to the language disorder between them (Bauer, 2007, p. 17). The community broke out and formed new groups according to their respective languages. The spread of humans to all the earth began from this event. Genesis Manuscript records, "But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the sons of men had built. Also, the LORD said, "Indeed, the people are one person, and they all have one language, and this is what they want to do; now there is nothing to propose to do will be withheld from them. Come on, let us go down and there confuse their language. So, the Lord scattered them on the abroad from there over the face of the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel because there is the Lord confused the language of all the earth; from there the Lord has been credited with them over the face of all the earth abroad (NKJV, 1997).

When viewed from a linguistic approach based on the records of the Kitab Genesis script, the Babel tower project starts from the unity of language among the development actors. Groups of ancient Mesopotamians can communicate with each other and understand each other's ideas because they are in the same language platform. As a result, understanding and smooth interaction within the community are creating. Without realizing it, it brings benefits in the form of success in achieving the goals set together. It is interesting to examine how the one language concept that occurs in the Babel tower case seen from the group communication approach. Thus, to fulfill the research objectives in this paper, the group communication approach is adopted using interaction process analysis.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In his classic book entitled *Personality and Interpersonal Behavior*, Robert Bales formulated a theory about group communication, which is still a reference today (Bales, 1970). Morissan later rewrote the theory in his book entitled *Theory of Communication Individuals to Masses*. Group communication according to Bales, as quoted by Morissan (2018, p. 335), is structured to explain the types of messages exchanged in a group, then the message process shapes the roles and personality of each member in the group and how the message is able to influence the formation of character and overall group character.

Furthermore, in Morissan, Bales divides six categories of analysis of the interaction process in the form of problems when the interaction process fails to achieve certain conditions (Morissan, 2018, p. 336). The problem consists of communication problems, evaluation problems, supervision problems, decision problems, and tension problems and friendship problems or group cohesion. This problem arises if some prerequisites met, which describe as follows::

1. If each member in a group does not provide enough information with each other, then the group experiences communication problems.
2. If each member in a group does not give each other opinions, then the group experiences evaluation problems.
3. If each member in a group does not ask each other questions and give opinions or suggestions to each other, then the group experiences supervision problems.
4. If each member in a group cannot reach an agreement, then the group experiences a decision problem.
5. If each member in a group is not sufficient to provide or display a dramatization, then the group experiences tension problems.
6. If fellow group members are not friendly with each other, reintegration problems will arise, which means that the group fails to rebuild cohesiveness or group unity.

Forrester used the Bales theory in a study to look at the relationship between Personality and Behavioral Intention In Student Teams. The results are very positive where there is high in agreeableness among students to receive and invite others to be and cooperate in groups (Forrester, Tashchian, & Shore, 2016). The research proves Bales's theory of forming group cohesiveness when each member in the group has high acceptance with each other (friendly and friendly) so that they can work together in a team to achieve the goals previously set. Likewise, the research findings conducted by Myaskovsky et al. About the influence of gender diversity in group performance. One of the results of the study concluded that although gender diversity influenced the behavior of group members, the overall performance in the group was maintained and maintained. This research is consistent with Bales' theory of the success of building communication within groups so that communication problems can overcome even if the group is not homogeneous in terms of gender.

The nature of group cohesion is a catalyst for achieving decisions within the group if the group takes a quick and appropriate decision-making process. One of the drivers is the presence of hidden profiles, as examined by Mojzisch et al. The study shows that group decisions are formed quickly because within the group there are hidden profiles that have an essential role in influencing group decisions. The hidden profile is considered to represent a prototype of a situation in which groups can outperform individual decision makers and, therefore, achieve beneficial processes in groups (Mojzisch & Schulz-Hardt, 2011). Regarding this, Morissan quotes Poole about group decision making (Poole, Seibold, & McPhee, 1985), explaining that the process is a convergence or agreement which is a final decision and to make it happen. Groups are required to build a social system in the context because it affects the motivation and coordination of resources within the group (Kerr & Tindale, 2004). This process referred to as structuring.

Following Poole's line of thought which borrowed Giddens's thinking, Morissan agreed in his book that structuration covers three regions. Each is an interpretation, moral, and power. Interpretation speaks of the similarity of terms so that each group member will easily understand each plan. Interpretation, in this case, leads to the formation of the same language as the communication platform in the group. If group members can understand each other because they are in the unity of the language, the group's goals and plans by themselves will be successful and achieved. Moral talks about someone in a group can speak so that they act in specific ways that can be accepted by the group according to the norms, and rules that apply in the group. Also, power, speaks of the use of various sources of power to persuade each group member to follow the set plans and goals.

Language is an essential part of discourse formation. Why is that? Because language has meaning. The use of specific languages can have implications in shaping reality and meaning it contains. That is why it said that language does not merely

reflect reality but constructs reality itself. Elisa Vass in her book entitled *Discursive Analysis of Interdisciplinary* which was later cited by Titscher (2000, pp. 42–43), discourse is a series of statements or utterances, which can be in the form of statements. It is a language as something that is practice. van Dijk (1997) added that discourse is text in context and is evidence that must describe empirically. Thus it can be concluded that discourse is a meaning that is bound in its context, which can see through language in the communication that is carried out.

### III. METHOD

This research is directed to reveal how the analysis theory of the interaction process explains and becomes a design for the events of the first group of people who decide to settle down, planning to build a Ziggurat as a group identity. This analysis chosen for two reasons. First, the manuscript in the Book of Genesis confirms that the construction of the tower of Babel was carried out in a group. Moreover, second, the construction of the Babel tower occurs because this group is in one language. Both of these reasons are relevant to the group communication theory, which was first put forward by Bales. Research also involves exegesis of two terminologies, namely 'one' language and 'disruption' language found in the Genesis book narrative to uncover theological descriptions of the text in its context. Correctly, to see the events experienced by groups when they are in unity of language and the consequences that occur when the same group experiences the opposite situation in the form of language disorder. The research involved discourse analysis for one reason; the text studied contained oral discourse (spoken discourse) in the terminology 'one language.' The analysis will direct at the use of discourse in social contexts, especially in interactions between speakers, without losing the theological meaning. According to Badara, to obtain a full understanding of the text, it is necessary to examine the practical functions of the language. The most appropriate step is to put the analysis in the sociocultural context and the language background, as discourse analysis (Badara, 2014, p. 27).

The overall research method is carried out qualitatively by utilizing the literature review that is related and relevant to the subject matter of the study as explained by Baker and Hum (Baker, 2016)(Hum, 2013). Whereas to conduct discourse analysis, Halliday & Fairclough models chosen which cover three elements, namely field of discourse, the involvement of discourse (tenor of discourse) and mode of discourse as explained by Kriyantono (2014, p. 263).

### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### A. *The Text of Genesis 11:1-9*

The main discussion is the narrative contained in the book Genesis. Based on the narrative version of the King James Version (KJV), the text presented as follows. "And the whole earth of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they have bricked stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, the top may reach unto heaven; and let us make a name, lest we were scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built. And the LORD said, Behold, the people are one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do, and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, go down, and there is their confounding language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from being in the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth "(Genesis 11: 1-9). In the text, two things are the center of attention for analysis, namely, the concept of one language and the concept of language disorder.

#### B. *Interaction Process Analysis*

Based on Owens's description, the word "one" (one) language is a singular feminine noun (Owens, 1998, p. 41). The Strong Dictionary translates it from Hebrew 'echad' with the ordinal meaning of unity (Strong, 1986, p. 11). By combining the two, the result of 'one' language exegesis speaks of the absence of another language, except that it is the only one, which forms the basis of the discourse in the first group or community, which built the tower of Babel. The unity of the language makes the group homogeneous and uses Bales theory; the group does not have obstacles in building communication between members. Bonding in a group that communicates through the same language platform becomes strong and moves the formation of conventions. That is why Genesis follows the text of one language with sentences, and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined doing. The text 'one' language is in the context of a joint mission that is socio-cultural at that time, namely the mega project in the form of Ziggurat. Historically, a tower at that time became a city marker as an identity.

Moreover, it was associated with tower architecture in those days, which was mostly used to support worship temples to gods (Douglas, 2007, p. 116). Maka dari hal ini terlihat bahwa keinginan kelompok untuk menegaskan identitas diri, menjadi jelas maksudnya di dalam teks yang mengikutinya. Selengkapnya teks itu berbunyi, "go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). So from this, it can be seen that the desire of the group to enforce self-identity becomes evident in the text that follows it. The full text reads, "go to, let us build us a city and a tower, the top may reach unto heaven, and let us make a name, we have scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11: 4). Morissan indicators regarding six categories of analysis of the interaction process explained. Problems born due to communication failures did not appear in this group because the Babel tower

builders were able to provide enough information to each other. All groups give each other opinions with each other; each member in a group does not ask each other and proactively gives opinions or suggestions to each other; reached an agreement to work together to build the mega project; enough to provide or display dramatization; and friendly to each other in the spirit of group cohesiveness. It can conclude that Bales's idea of the analysis of the interaction process can be used to explain the meaning behind the unity of the people who built the Babylonian Ziggurat.

### *C. Discourse Analysis*

The approach through discourse analysis shows parallel conclusions. Using the indicators proposed by Fairclough can be seen as five essential characteristics of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). First, in action. This element fulfilled because the action in question is the language that forms the discourse used to interact within the group. The text supports this through the use of the word "let us" in Genesis 11: 4. It is an appeal to invite, through the use of language, to act to do something. Second, is the context, which takes into account the background and situation of the accompanying socio-cultural conditions. Commonly at that time, the group built its city by establishing identity through tall buildings that could see from a distance. When is history or history? This indicator places discourse within the accompanying historical context. The Tower of Babel preceded by a post-flood, which formed and developed, then decides to settle in a place (James C. Davis, 2005, pp. 42–45). The decision to settle and build civilization is a turning point in human history. That is what is seen in the Babel tower case because the discourse that built became a historical marker for the group itself. Fourth is power. Especially about ideas because in the emergence of every discourse, the battle of power begins, what Mojzisch revealed at the beginning as a hidden profile. While the last indicator is an ideology, the motives behind the wishes of the group that built the tower of babel revealed through the 'identity' discourse. Look again at the discourse in Genesis 11: 4 text: And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, the top may reach unto heaven; and let us make a name, lest we were scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

The ideology of this group has seen from the motivations and discourses put forward, namely enforcing group identity. Ideological unity encourages each group member to move together to defend interests, and act to achieve agreed goals. Not easy to do. However, again, the impact of the unity of language can shape ideology. Also, vice versa, as stated by Udasmoro, discourse can be built continuously through an ideologization process. The sentence in the text that reads "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower" reflects a strategy to achieve the dissemination of ideological discourses (Udasmoro, 2018, p. xviii). The ideology that is forming there is group identity.

By using the Halliday & Fairclough method, namely three elements of discourse analysis, it can observe that the narrative shows a social action that is discussing. Construction of the tower of babel as group identity becomes the field of discourse in the narrative. The people who take part in the discourse (tenor of discourse) appear to have the same position and role within the social strata. Not seeing dissenting opinions made the decisions in the group run fast. The desire to have an identity unites the interests in the group. The choice of language as a mode of discourse is obvious, descriptive, and communicative. Unity of language makes ideas and meanings easily understood. Thus, it can conclude that the interpretation process within the group did not experience any obstacles. One language has made a unity of language so that the goals and plans of the group by themselves will be successful and achieved. Moral groups are formed, and each acts in permissive and mutually agreed upon ways. There is no use of power to move the whole group.

Unity of language has created a unity of identity, unity of vision and mission, and unity of personnel. Cohesion in groups becomes very strong, and they move in absorbing steps. Such a situation produces an attitude of arrogance on the one hand and potential power to realize anything, on the other. So, whatever things discussed can be easily realized. The text narration that reads "the people are one, and they have all one language, and this they are beginning to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do" (Genesis 11: 6). This word becomes the main problem that sticks out at the end of the narrative. Initially, the narrative presented the unity of language as ambitious strengths and plans, but the ending presented in contrast. The plan to build a ziggurat was canceled and failed to happen. The building is not resolved, and group unity divided. Initially seen as a large community with tremendous potential power, this group ended in the formation of new smaller groups. From the beginning it moved together in unity both physically, especially in language, changing its direction in different languages. Unity of language can unite, and the unity of language can produce a division to the Babel tower construction community. Because of divine intervention, the language in the group suddenly becomes chaotic and no longer uniform. A language divided into other units. The group drastically experienced six problem indicators as Bales theory, because communication was problematic. Group members cannot understand each other and fail to capture the intentions of others. This group experiences language confound. This word by Dictionary Strong is defined as a situation where there has been a mixture (Strong, 1986, p. 27). In other words, no longer look homogeneous. The group that initially communicated with one language suddenly experienced mixing due to differences in language within the group. Members move to form smaller groups according to their respective languages. In the eyes of linguistics, the chaos of language in Babylon occurs to the level of conception and nomenclature. Saussure says that language is a nomenclature, which is a list of terms that represent several things or objects (Saussure, 1988, p. 145). People who can initially agree because they have the same conception change not understand each other because of differences in nomenclature. Chaos originates from this phenomenon.

#### D. Theological Reflection

The tower of Babel is a part of the theological text contained in the scriptures. The unity of language revealed in the text cannot separate from the biblical meaning of 'echad' (one). Echad is not talking about melting unity. This word refers to the notion of unity. That is, differences combine in unity without losing the nature of the difference itself. In the context of the tower of Babel, language is position as a tool of unity. Everyone who has different ideas and thoughts can interact and communicate their ideas through the same level of language. This kind of thing becomes a handy tool in building spiritual life and giving ideas for reflection in the framework of developing spirituality.

First, it is about one language. Everywhere, big ideas can only do when the people who work on them have a unified language. Agreement and cooperation will only form by building understanding and excellent communication (Green, 2014). Second is pride. Babylon presents how humans try to build pride through their strength and wrong motivation. Humans try to compete with God, the creator of heaven, and earth to build an identity that is 'equal' to heaven (Strawn, 2019). Third, Babylon talks about a bad ending. Etymologically the word Babylon means chaos. Many things that humans started at first went well but ended in the wrong way. The Tower of Babel not only failed to build, but the group split and separated from each other (Marshall, 1997). These three things give a conclusion that through the discourse that developed, humans can choose actually, what kind of discourse can be developed to build their spirituality. It must realize, the continuity of society determined by the presence of the cooperative spirit of its members (Lubis, 2017, p. 100). Can be achieved by building discourse and making it parallel with spirituality so that humans do not repeat by building the second Babel tower.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Unity of language can be a catalyst for social change, ideological and political unity, the unification of power, means of control, success in achieving vision and mission and play a substantial role in encouraging cooperation in groups. Can be implemented in various aspects of life, especially in building discourses involving the public and broader interests such as the state or in the smallest units such as families. The unity of language can create unity and convergence for every purpose and design in groups or communities. Even the unity of language builds internal filters within each person who is part of the community to distinguish good and bad information, which builds or breaks down positive or negative information because the unity of language plays a role in decision making and the formation of actions.

Conversely, the chaos of language not only breaks down unity but weakens social cohesion in all aspects. Communication is damaged and has the potential to bring conflict because each builds a different perception of things discussed in general. Competition between groups can occur for truth.

Because of this, this research can continue to analyze how to build a discourse to unite both socially, politically and especially religiously in the Indonesian context amid an information-packed digital age and the emergence of a post-truth paradigm. The research is expected to make a significant contribution to educating the public in addressing various informational phenomena in the media.

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