THE LANGUAGE OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN

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Abstract

This study is aimed at finding out how meanings are realized in the election campaigns in the contemporary Indonesia and what role language takes in exercising power? The close-up linguistic analysis of three different texts has illustrated that the texts are rich in meanings: they make not just meanings about what goes on and why, but also meanings about relationship and attitudes, and meanings about distance and proximity. By relating specific linguistic choices to the construction and reflection of situational, cultural and ideological contexts, these three different texts have been shown to in fact encode meanings about such far reaching dimensions as: ways of talking to your die-hard fans, the experience of politicians, the responsibility of a statesman and expected behavior of a "good" leader. Meanings of the political campaigns in contemporary Indonesia are explicitly realized in a subtle ways. The exercise of power is achieved through ideological workings of language. Public space serves a rhetorical means. Competing figures establish their voices by constructing counter-narratives in public space.

Key words: meanings, election campaign, cultural context, ideological context, public space, rhetorical means, counter narratives.

Introduction.

Election fever had gripped the already hot Jakarta, as hundreds of thousands of Democratic Party supporters brought the capital's traffic to a halt. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono kicked off his party's campaign series on his first day of leave as president at Bung Karno Stadium in Senayan, Central Jakarta.

Shouldering the blame for the traffic chaos that gripped the city due to the election rally organized by his Democratic Party, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono began his speech with an apology.

"Allow me to apologize to the people of Jakarta for the inconvenience on the streets because of our campaign today. I am deeply sorry," Yudhoyono said before a sea of party supporters who flocked to Bung Karno Stadium in Senayan, Central Jakarta.

In his speech, he called on his die-hard fans to continue supporting the Democratic Party. "We are here to elect a party and a leader that will create improvement for the country within the next five years, a party whose programs are in favor of the people," said Yudhoyono, who repeatedly yelled out "31", the party's number in the ballots.

He continued by attributing his administration's success, especially on the issue of national security, law enforcement and the economy, to his party and its leadership. "If

an objective and honest evaluation is made, Indonesia is improving," said Yudhoyono, greeted by party supporters yelling out his acronym "SBY".

Meanwhile, former president and Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) chairwoman Megawati Soekarnoputri began her party's campaign in Jember, East Java, by criticizing Yudhoyono's direct cash assistance (BLT) program.

"BLT is meaningless. For a mere Rp 200,000 [US$16.96] people have to crowd like beggars. It would have been better if the money for BLT was spent on building roads or public toilets," she said.

Also taking aim at the government was the Greater Indonesia Movement (Gerindra) Party chairman Prabowo Subianto, during his party's campaign in Medan. He accused the government of failing to improve public welfare. "People demand change because they are fed up with all the lies," he said.

On the following day in Medan, Yudhoyono countered Megawati's criticism of cash aid. "The BLT is not for political interests but it has been used as a political issue on the eve of general election, Yudhoyono said after emphasizing that he would continue supporting cash aid program as part of the government's pro-people program if he wins the elections.

How meanings are realized in the election campaigns in the contemporary Indonesia? What is the role of language in exercising power?

Three main kinds of meanings

Halliday (1985) has argued that language is structured to make three main kinds of meanings simultaneously. This semantic complexity, which allows experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings to be fused together in linguistic units, if possible because language is a semiotic system: a conventionalized coding system, organized as sets of choices.

Systemic linguistics does not only ask functional questions about how people are using language, but it also interpret the linguistic system itself from the functional-semantic perspective. But how is language structured for use? The fundamental purpose that language has evolved to serve is to enable us to make meanings: to make sense of the world and of each other. The overall purpose of language then can be described as a semantic one, and each text we participate in is a record of the meanings that have been made in a particular context.

The choice of the word "meanings" rather than "meaning" in the last sentence is a significant one, for systemic analysis seeks to

demonstrate that linguistic texts are typically making not just one, but rather a number of meanings simultaneously.

Consider how you would answer the question "What do the texts of speeches above mean?" An immediate, and obvious, response would be that the meaning of the campaign texts is that, Yudhoyono apologized to people of Jakarta for the inconvenience on the streets because of their campaign that day, that he called on his die-hard fans to continue their supporting, that they are there to elect a party and a leader that will create improvement for the country within the next five years, and that if objective and honest evaluation is made, Indonesia is improving.

It is certainly the case that the text is making this kind of "real world" or experiential meaning. In fact, if we fail to understand the experiential meaning the text is making, then we are likely to encounter serious problems in social life.

However, at the same time that it is making this strand of experiential meaning, the text is also making some other equally important meanings.

The text is, for example, making **interpersonal** meaning. There is a strand of meaning running throughout the text which expresses the writer's role relationship with the reader, and the writer's attitude towards the

subject matter. Yudhoyono clearly wants to establish a friendly rapport with his supporters, to be seen more as a "fellow sufferer" extending apology for the inconvenience might be caused by the campaign. This meaning of positive supportive solidarity is clearly separable from the meaning about the reason why they are at Bung Karno Stadium.

Finally, while expressing both **experiential** and interpersonal meaning, a text also makes what we describe as textual meaning. **Textual** meaning refers to the way the text is organized as a piece of speech. The campaign text above has been organized as a message about a party leader (*I*) and the party leader and his supporters (*we*). It is these pronouns which dominate first position in the sentences and clauses of the text.

This example demonstrates that a text can be seen to be expressing more than one meaning at a time.

Language and context

Our ability to deduce context from text is one way in which language and context are interrelated. Our equally highly developed ability to predict language from context provides further evidence of the language/context relationship.

Systemicists divide context into a number of levels, with the most frequently discussed being

those of **register** and **genre**. Register theory describes the impact of dimensions of the immediate context of situation of a language event on the way language is used. Three key dimensions of the situations are identified as having significant and predictable impacts on language use. These three dimensions, the register variables of **mode** (amount of feedback and role of language), **tenor** (role relations of power and solidarity) and **field** (topic of focus of the activity), are used to explain our intuitive understanding that we will not use language in the same way to write as to speak (mode variation), to talk to our boss as to talk to our lover (tenor variation) and to talk about linguistics as to talk about jogging (field variation).

The concept of genre is used to describe the impact of the context of culture on language, by exploring the staged, step-by-step structure cultures institutionalize as ways of achieving goals. While we can sometimes achieve our goals by just a short linguistic exchange, most linguistic interactions require many more moves. In fact, even a simple exchange is very frequently extended through politeness over a number of moves.

Most often when we use language to do things we have to do them in a number of stages. A humorous narrative, for example, tells a story involving (linguistically) a number of

steps (set of scene: time, place, participants; develop the actions; relate the dramatic event; give the happy ending; express a judgment on the outcome, and wrap up).

A higher level of context to which increasing attention is being given within systemic linguistics is the level of **ideology**. Whatever genre we are involved in, and whatever the register of the situation, our use of language will also be influenced by our ideological positions: the values we hold (consciously or unconsciously), the biases and perspectives we adopt. For example, Yudhoyono's campaign text above illustrates the ideological claims that if objective and honest evaluation is made, Indonesia is improving. Meanwhile, Megawati's campaign text illustrates the ideological claims that direct cash assistance (BLT) is meaningless and that for a mere Rp 200,000 people have to crowd like beggars. Whereas, Prabowo Subianto illustrates ideological claims that government fail to improve public welfare and people demand change because they are fed up with all the lies.

The identification of ideology should alert us to the fact that just as no text can b "free" of context (register and genre), so no text is free of ideology. In other words, to use language at all is to use it to encode particular positions, beliefs, biases, etc. However, for reasons which are themselves ideological, most language

users have not been educated to identify ideology in text, but rather to "read" texts as natural, inevitable representation of reality.

The implication of identifying ideology in text is that as readers of texts, we need to develop skills to be able to make explicit the ideological positions encoded, perhaps in order to resist or challenge them. This means we need a way of talking about how language is not just representing but actively constructing our view of the world.

Language has two meaning-making levels, an upper level of content known as **discourse-semantics**, and an intermediate level of content known as **lexico-grammar**. By comparing the traffic lights and language, we can see that what makes language different is that it possesses an intermediate encoding level of lexico-grammar. It is this lexico-grammatical level that is particularly important in understanding how language is able to make three types of meaning simultaneously. The three strands of meanings run through any text and get into the text largely through the clauses which make it up. Thus, as Halliday points out, grammatical description is essential to text analysis:

> it is sometimes assumed that (discourse analysis, or 'text linguistics') can be carried on without grammar – or even that it is somehow an alternative to grammar. But this is an illusion. A discourse analysis that is not based on grammar is not an analysis at all, but simply a running commentary on a text (Halliday 1985: xvii).

The two significant roles played by the lexico-grammar is to allow us to mean anything we like, and to allow us to make more than one meaning at a time. The description of lexico-grammar from a functional perspective was seen to involve the minimal bracketing of constituents, and the consistent use of functional labeling. Since he constituents of each clause can be demonstrated to be playing more than one functional role at a time, it is necessary to develop three sets of functional labels to describe how the clauses in a text realize interpersonal, experiential and textual meanings simultaneously. Systems of lexical choice are not the only kind of systems we find in language. We also have systems of grammatical choice. This system says that whenever you produce a clause it must be a declarative (e.g. The baby is crying), an interrogative (e.g. Is the baby crying?) or an imperative (e.g. Cry!). How are the oppositions, or choices, in this kind of system realized?

Each choice is realized by a particular sequencing of a number of grammatical elements, here the elements of **Subject, Finite** and **Predicator**. The system says that

the choice "declarative", for example, is realized by the sequence of elements: **Subject** followed by **Finite** verb. For example, *The baby* (Subject) *is* (Finite verb) *crying* (Predicator), whereas the choice "interrogative" has the elements of Subject and Finite in the opposite order: *Is the baby crying?* The imperative is realized by the omission of the Subject and Finite elements, leaving only the Predicator: *Cry!*

In grammatical system, then, each choice gets realized not as particular words, but in the order and arrangement of the grammatical roles the words are playing. That is, these choices are realized by **structures**. We need to note that the choice from a grammatical system is expressed through the presence and ordering of particular grammatical elements. And of course these structures will eventually get realized as words, and then finally as sounds.

In the grammar of interpersonal meaning we can identify two essential functional constituents of the MOOD component of the clause: the Subject and the Finite. The definition of Subject offered by Halliday (1985:76) is that it realizes the thing by reference to which the proposition can be affirmed or denied. It provides the person or thing in whom is vested the success or failure of the proposition, what is "held responsible".

The second essential constituent of the MOOD element is the Finite. Halliday (1985: 75) defines the Finite in terms of its function in the clause to make the proposition definite, to anchor the proposition in a way that we can argue about it.

The part of the clause which is somehow less essential to the arguability of the clause than is the MOOD component is called RESIDUE. The RESIDUE component can contain a number of functional elements: a Predicator, one or more Complements, and any number of different types of Adjuncts.

The semantic focus now can shift from the organization of the clause to realize interpersonal meaning (its Mood structure) to the organization of the clause to realize experiential meaning. The description of this experiential strand of meaning will involve one major system, that of Transitivity (process type), with the choice of process implicating associated participant roles and configurations. While the Mood structure of the clause can be related to the contextual dimension of Tenor, Transitivity choices will be related to the dimension of Field, with the choice of process types and participant roles seen as realizing interactants' encoding of their experiential reality: the world of actions, relations, participants and circumstances that give content to their talk.

Most clause constituents are playing two and often three different types of meaning: a meaning about the interaction (an interpersonal meaning); a meaning about reality (an experiential meaning), and a meaning about the message (a textual meaning). The process type system is what underlies the differences I a paradigm such as: **material, mental, verbal, behavioural, existential, and relational process** as well as c**ircumstances.**

In the grammar of textual meaning we recognize that one major system is involved (the system of Theme), with a configuration of the clause into the two functional component of a **Theme** (point of departure for the message) and a **Rheme** (new information about the point of departure). The system network of textual meaning in the clause includes Topical Theme, Interpersonal Theme, Textual Theme, Multiple Themes,

The description of the Mood, Transitivity and Theme-Rheme of a text provides a reasonably thorough account of how the text is structured to make meanings in context. From a systemic perspective, text analysis is not an interpretive but an explanatory activity: 'The linguistic analysis of text is not an interpretation of that text; it is an explanation'. Halliday suggests that a more ambitious goal in text analysis is to be able to contribute an evaluation That is:

> The linguistic analysis may enable one to say why the text is, or is not, an effective text for its own purposes – in what respects it succeeds and in what respects it fails, or less successful (Halliday 1985: xv-xvi)

Along this understanding of text analysis the description of the lexico-grammar analysis of the campaign texts above can be presented below:

Lexico-grammar analysis
Mood analysis
Key:
S=Subject, F=Finite, Fn=negative, Fms= modalized, Fml=modulated
P=Predicator, Pml=modulated Predicator, Pms=modalised Predicator F/P=fused Finite
   and Predicator
C=Complement, Ca=attributive Complement
A=Adjunct, Ac=circumstantial, Am=mood, Ao=Comment, Ap=polarity, Av=vocative, Aj=conjunctive, At=continuity
Wh=wh- element; Wh/S, Wh/C, Wh/Ac=fused Wh element, mn=minor element
MOOD element of ranking (non-embedded) clauses is shown in bold

Text 1.

1. Allow (F) me (C) to apologize to (P) the people of Jakarta (C) for the inconvenience on the streets (C) because of our campaign today. 2. We (S) are (F) here (Ac) to elect (P) a party and a leader (C) [[that (S) will (F) create (P) improvement for the country within the next five years (C)]], (C) [[a party (S) whose programs (S) are (F) in favor of the people (C)]] .

Text 2.
1. BLT (S) is (F) meaningless (C). 2. For mere Rp 200 000,- (A) people (S) have to (F) crowd (P) like beggars (C). 3. It (S) would have been (F) better (C) if the money for BLT (S) was (F) spent (P) on building roads or public toilets (C).

Text 3.
1. People (S) demand (F) change (C) because 2. they (S) are (F) fed up (P) with all he lies (C).

Taking the texts above into consideration, Yudhoyono, Mega and Prabowo have all used public space to launch their campaigns. In other words, public space serves a rhetorical means. These competing figures establish their voices by constructing counter-narratives in public space. Meanwhile, the public audience no longer resides at the margins of the stage, but rather, plays a significant role as subjects whose voices are fought over.

One thing to keep in mind is that the stage is not eternal. Space is constructed and therefore, is emergence. The current political use of public space is being and will be challenged by other public space users too. The stage of public space is constructed and created by varied resisting forces.

Pragmatically, Yudhoyono's statement sounds cool and reflected the nature of a Javanese statesman rather than a politician. None of his words is direct and hurts anyone including his rivals. He recognizes well to whom he spoke to and in what cultural context his message was delivered.

Meanwhile Mega's statement and Prabowo's rhetoric sound antagonistic. Their criticisms did not reflect the culture of the society where the have been grown up. Direct attacks in our society are often contra-productive.

The phenomenon also indicates that the exercise of power in modern society is increasingly achieved through ideology, and more particularly through ideological workings of language. We live in a linguistic epoch, as major contemporary social theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and Jurgen Habermas have recognized in the increasing importance they have given to language in their theories.

Conclusion

The discussion of the analysis presented above illustrates how a systemic approach

can be used to gain understanding of how the political campaign texts make the meanings that they do. The close-up linguistic analysis of three different texts has illustrated theta the texts are rich in meanings: they make not just meanings about what goes on and why, but also meanings about relationship and attitudes, and meanings about distance and proximity. By relating specific linguistic choices to the construction and reflection of situational, cultural and ideological contexts, these three different texts have been shown to in fact encode meanings about such far reaching dimensions as: ways of talking to your die-hard fans, the experience of politicians, the responsibility of a statesman and expected behavior of a "good" leader. Meanings of the political campaigns in contemporary Indonesia are explicitly realized in a subtle ways. The exercise of power is achieved through ideological workings of language. Public space serves a rhetorical means. Competing figures establish their voices by constructing counter-narratives in public space.

Pedagogical implication

A discussion of language education in the schools is perhaps an appropriate way of concluding our topic at present, because what happens in schools can be decisive in determining whether existing orders of discourse, as well as more generally existing relations of power, are to be reproduced or transformed.

We frequently hear employers complain that many school leavers applying for jobs after years of compulsory education cannot write simply, clearly and without obvious errors. We must all share concern about the poor language capabilities of many children when they leave education, but it is striking that complaints about standard s are so often cast in narrowly instrumental terms, as if language capabilities were no more than skills or tools for performing tasks ('simply', 'clearly', 'without error', and so forth), and as if language education were no more than the transmission of such skills.

The picture of language use here is exclusively task-oriented: using language effectively, for effects such as conveying meaning. Even the language training of teachers is put I terms of tools for jobs (equip). Yet, language use – discourse – is not just a matter of performing tasks, it is also a matter of expressing and constituting and reproducing social identities and social relations, including relations of power. Pupils need to know about how the English language works and in consequence what they should have been taught and be expected to

understand. The development of children's language capabilities should proceed through bringing together their existing abilities and experiences, their growing critical awareness of language, and their growing capability to engage in purposeful discourse.

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