



THE IDEATIONAL MEANING IN THE U.S. PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE BETWEEN BARACK OBAMA AND MITT ROMNEY CONCERNING CHINA'S THREAT

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Info Artikel

Sejarah Artikel:

Diterima September 2013
Disetujui Oktober 2013
Dipublikasikan November 2013

Keywords:

Ideational meaning,
Transitivity, speech function,
debate, context of situation

Abstract

This article deals with ideational meaning realized in transcript of the U.S. presidential debate between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney concerning China's threat. Ideational meaning talks about subject matter. It relates to information about objects or to what the utterances are about. In realizing the subject matter of the debate transcript, three analyses are conducted; Transitivity, speech function, and also analysis on context of situation. The result based on those analyses shows two points of conclusion. Firstly, Obama through Material and Relational Processes stated his past actions and recent U.S. condition to show his success and through Mental Process he certainly stated his hopes for the future. Meanwhile, Romney through Material and Relational Processes certainly stated the unfortunate condition experienced by the U.S. as a result of Obama's policies and through Mental Process stated his wish to the U.S economy. Both speakers invited the audiences to accept the information concerning those solutions. Secondly, context of situation influences the debate transcript in its language use. Some terminologies in the area of economy and trade emerge as the influence of Field. Those terminologies make the conversation focuses on the subject matter being analyzed, that is China as a threat to the U.S.

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ISSN 2252-6706

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are social creature that cannot live alone without doing any communication with their surroundings. By communicating, human beings deliver their ideas and wishes to others. The communication among them can be realized through a tool called language. Ramelan (1999:1) states that “man speaks language; he uses language as means of communication with other people, as tool to express his ideas and wishes”. Thus, language is a tool for human beings to do the communication in achieving their needs as social creature.

Debate is an example of communication. “It is the process by which opinions are advanced, supported, disputed, and defended” (Branham, 1991:1). It is a kind of public speaking where people communicate their ideas and hold on to it by giving supporting logically reasons. In a debate, there will be two sides or persons who interact with contrary arguments concerning issues that are floored by the neutral side, the host of the debate. These two sides propose their arguments based on their own ideology or the way they put their point of view towards the issues. They give feedback to each other’s arguments.

Presidential debate is a debate between president’s candidates from different parties. It is led by a moderator as the neutral side. The moderator floors the issue of the debate which will be responded by the speakers of the debate based on their point of view towards it. There is no direct scoring system in this kind of debate for the judges in presidential debate are the audience. The audience will regard the candidates’ arguments towards the issue as their consideration in choosing their future leader. In every ideology that lies behind their arguments, there is message in it. The intention of the message is what could be called meaning of the message. As presidential debate is one of the ways to generate public’s opinion, the arguments are delivered in order to make the audience agree with them. Thus, the candidates are to keep their end up in delivering the intended

meaning in order to be accepted well by the audience.

Understanding meaning cannot be taken for granted, otherwise it will lead to misinterpretation. A study which deals with it is called Systemic Functional Linguistics. This study reveals how meaning is constructed by analyzing not only the sentence but also the whole texts. According to Gerot and Wignell (1994:10) “all meaning is situated in a context of culture and situation.” Context of culture is the total cultural background, while context of situation is the environment of the text. Halliday in Jenny Hammond et al. (1992:2) suggests that “there are three variables within any context of situation that largely determine the language choices that are made in the construction of any language text.” Those are field, mode, and tenor. Field is the social activity taking place; mode is the channel of linguistic communication, while tenor is the relationship between participants.

In this study, the writer will choose one of the variables of context of situation, that is field. Field exists in all language. There will always be certain focus of a topic that is discussed in a language, including in a debate. As debate is a discussion where each side holds on to their ideologies and arguments towards issue, thus, the issue must be something debatable, something interesting that challenges both critical point of view of the speakers towards it. In short, the issue in a debate, moreover in a presidential debate, must be something crucial for the life of people in general and for those taking part in the debate in particular. Thus, the writer finds it interesting to analyze one of the variables of context of situation, that is field.

The writer will analyze the ideational meaning which shows the subject matter through Transitivity used in the transcript of the U.S. presidential debate between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, particularly in the issue concerning China’s threat. The U.S.’ involvement in Cold War had made the relation, in whatever aspects of life, between the U.S. and

communist countries such as China were impossible to come true. The first U.S. and China relationship was started soon after Richard Nixon began to implement a new approach to international relations. He encouraged the United Nations to recognize the communist Chinese government. Formal diplomatic relations between these two countries keep on going despite some interpositions that happened many times. In 2000, Bill Clinton granted China permanent normal trade relations with the U.S. and paved the way for China to join the World Trade Organization in 2001. By 2010, China has become world's second largest economy after the U.S. China's track record in doing international trade is seen by the U.S. as not playing by the rules. China's economic policy which is labor-intensive causes its ability in producing low-cost goods yet it has not met the international quality standard. It is regarded as a threat, particularly economic threat, to the U.S. Take a look from their long history, the U.S. and China relations are very dynamic. Thus, the writer finds it interesting to find out the content in the sense of what is going on at the time (the ideational meaning) that lies in the issue of the debate.

Text

Halliday and Hasan (1985:10) state that "text in the simplest way is language that is functional. By functional, we simply mean language that is doing some job in some context." Furthermore, it is stated that text may be either spoken or written, or indeed in any other medium of expression that we like to think of.

Text is functional in the sense that it represents meaning in a context. A text can be spoken or written. So, when we speak or write, we are actually constructing a text and trying to construct meaning through it. In reverse, when we read a book or listen to a song, we are trying to catch the meaning that the text represents. However, according to Hammond et al. (1994:5), "there's no clear dividing line between spoken and written language. Some spoken texts have features typically associated with written

language, such as spoken argument in defense of a point of view..." Hence, debate then could be defined as an example of spoken text.

Context

According to Halliday and Hasan (1985:5), "there is text and there is other text that accompanies it; text that is 'with', namely the con-text. This notion of what is 'with the text', however, goes beyond what is said and written; it includes other non-verbal goings-on-the total environment in which a text unfolds." In interpreting the meaning in a text, there are some aspects that are to be considered. Those aspects are what could be called as context. Gerot and Wignell (1994:10) claim that "all meaning is situated in a context of situation and culture."

Context of Culture

"Context of culture determines what we can mean through being 'who we are', doing 'what we do', and saying 'what we say'" (Gerot and Wignell, 1994:10). Furthermore, Gerot and Wignell give an example of context of culture as follow:

Suppose, like one of us, you grew up in mid-western United States, the eldest daughter in a large farming family. Being the eldest daughter in this circumstances automatically casts one in the role of 'momma's little helper'. That's who you are in the family. This in turn determines what you do within the family and what you say.

It could be inferred, then, that context of culture controls and limits the utterances and sentences of the speakers and the writers in order not to swerve from the appropriate path of the existing culture surrounds them. In relation to context of culture and text, context of culture gives value to the text and constrain its interpretation.

Context of Situation

"Take the utterance: 'Just put it beside those other ones'. The meaning remains obscure until we know that it was said to a removalist

who had just lugged in another carton of household goods during moving one of us to Brisbane. Knowing the context of situation makes the utterances” (Gerot and Wignell, 1994:10).

The above example shows that it would be hard to interpret the sentence if we do not know exactly who actually the speaker is and to whom the sentence is delivered. Without knowing what actually the words ‘it’ and ‘those’ in the example above refer to, we cannot either precisely interpret the intention of the speaker.

There are three aspects of context in any situation that have linguistic consequences. These are called the register variables. Gerot and Wignell (1994:11) state that:

Field refers to what is going on, including activity focus (nature of social activity) and object focus (subject matter); mode refers to how language is being used, whether the channel of communication is spoken or written or language is being used as a model of action or reflection; tenor refers to the social relationships between those taking parts. These are specifiable in terms of status of power, affect, and contact.

Metafunction

Meaning which is carried out by language is not limited into only one meaning. Based on Kate, I read your new book yesterday.

	Kate	I	Read		your new book	yesterday
Interpersonal	Adjunct: vocative	Subject	Finite	Predicate	Complement	Adjunct: adverbial
	Residue	Mood		Residue		
Ideational		Actor	Process:	Material	Goal	Circ.: time
Textual	Theme		Rheme			

Constituent of interpersonal will be discussed first. In analyzing the clause, it uses Mood system which consists of Subject and Finite. Finite functions in negotiating meanings. Based on the analysis above, the Subject is placed by ‘I’, while the Finite lies in the word ‘read’ in which it is fused with Predicate. In this case, the word ‘read’ negotiates that the speaker did something to Kate’s new book; that is reading it. Thus, an interaction happens in this scope. It could be described that the speaker told

Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistic, there are three types of meanings: a meaning about the interaction (an interpersonal meaning); a meaning about reality (an ideational meaning), and a meaning about the message (a textual meaning). These three types of meaning are known as the metafunctions (Egins, 1994:225).

The three functions or constituents of interpersonal, ideational, and textual are also differentiated into three roles of Subject, Actor, and Theme. Each of those roles makes up a separate strand in the overall meaning of the clause. Halliday (2004:58-59) states that:

A clause has meaning as an exchange, a transaction between speaker and listener. The Subject is the warranty of the exchange; A clause has meaning as a representation of some process in ongoing human experience. The Actor is the active participant in that process. Meanwhile, Theme is the point of departure for the message. It is the element the speaker selects for ‘grounding’ what he is going on to say.

Despite having different roles in realizing meaning, those three functions can exist at the same time in one clause. Therefore, the three strands of meaning can be analyzed in a clause only. For the sake of a clearer explanation, below is the example.

Kate that he had read her new book the day before. Later, it opened chance for Kate to give responses to what the speaker had told her. Thus, it is clear that interpersonal constituent reveals a meaning of interaction.

The second is constituent of ideational. It is about encoding people experiences of the world around them. From the analysis above, it is clear that the Process attempts to represent an experience of the Actor. In this case, the speaker gave information to Kate that he had read her

new book the day before. Then, the content of what the speaker delivered which is expressed from what the Actor represents is what can be called as the ideational meaning of the clause.

The last is constituent of textual. It reveals meaning about message. In constituents of textual, the system of Theme are broken down into two functional components; Theme as given information and Rheme as new information. The term given here means that the information has existed before the new one appears. In this case, it could be informed that 'Kate' and 'I' already existed before the conversation happened. Meanwhile, 'read your new book yesterday' has just created because of the existence of Kate and I. Thus, there is a causal relationship between Theme and Rheme in the sense that Theme as given information produces Rheme as new information.

Ideational Meaning

According to Derewianka (2011:13), "one important function of language is to enable us to represent what is going on in the world; to talk about our experience, to reflect on our observations, to share knowledge and ideas." It concerns with how language functions to represent different kinds of experience. Halliday refers to this as the 'experiential' or 'ideational' function of language. It is centrally influenced by field of discourse.

As ideational meaning talks about experience, then it relates to information about objects or to what the utterances are about. Ideational meaning provides answers to questions such as 'What is happening?', 'Who or what is taking part?', and 'What gives us more information about the activity? When? Where? How?'

The System of Transitivity

"When we look at the ideational metafunction, we are looking at the grammar of the clause as representation. As with the clause as exchange, we find there is one major system of grammatical choice involved in this kind of meaning. This is the system of Transitivity, or Process type" (Eggin, 1994:228).

Transitivity is a tool by which we can achieve ideational meaning of discourse. Processes, Participants, and Circumstances are included in it. Each plays its own role in realizing the ideational meaning. Processes are the central one in Transitivity for it determines the order of meaning in a clause. Different Processes make different order of meaning in the clause, for instance the words 'She listens to a song', 'She writes a song', and 'She sings a song'. The Processes in those three clauses determine different order of meaning. However, Participants and Circumstances also plays great role in creating a precise interpretation of ideational meaning.

Processes

A Process is realized in grammar by means of a verbal group. According to Halliday (2004:170-171), there are six types of Processes in the English Transitivity system. Those are Material, Mental, Relational, Behavioral, Verbal, and Existential Process.

Butt et al. (1996:47) explain that Material Process is about doing. It could answer the question 'What did X do?' or 'What happened to X?' The Participants of this Process could be Actor, Goal, Range or Beneficiary. Meanwhile, Mental Process provides answer to question 'What do you think/ feel/ know about X?' Furthermore, there are four types of Mental Process; affective or perceptive (perceiving through the five senses), cognitive (thinking), desiderative, and emotive (feeling). The Participants in Mental Process are Senser and Phenomenon. Other Process type is Relational Process. It is often described as Process of being. There are two types of Relational Processes. Those are one that identifies which is called Identifying and one that describes something in clause which is named Attributive. As these two types are different since the beginning, the Participants in both types are also different from one another. Participants in Identifying are Token and Value, while in Attributive are Carrier and Attribute.

In relation to Behavioral Process, Halliday (2004:248-249) explains that

“Behavioral Processes are Processes of (typically human) physiological and psychological behavior, like breathing, coughing, smiling, dreaming, and staring. The Participant who is ‘behaving’ labeled Behavior. The Process is grammatically more like one of ‘doing.’” Meanwhile, concerning Verbal Process contains of verbal action, saying and all its many synonyms, including symbolic exchanges of meaning. It contains three Participants: Sayer, Receiver, and Verbiage. The last type is Existential Process. It is Process of existence. Gerot and Wignell (1994:72) state that "Existential Processes are expressed by verbs of existing: ‘be’, ‘exist’, ‘arise’, and the Existent can be a phenomenon of any kind.”

Participants

Speech Function

“Making an utterance is an interactive event inherently involving a speaker or a writer and an addressee. A speaker, in uttering, selects a speech role (giving or demanding) for her or

Butt et al. (1996:52) claim that “a Participant can be a person, a place, or an object, and in the grammar of a clause the Participant is realized by a nominal group, typically a noun or pronoun.” There are many different kinds of Process. Hence, there are also many different kinds of Participant, following the kinds of Process.

Circumstances

Derewianka (2011:66) states that “the Circumstances tell us about such matters as time, place, manner, accompaniment, matter, cause, contingency, role, and angle. These details are obviously important in comprehending and expressing aspects of their experience.” It functions to illuminate the clause.

himself, and, simultaneously and thereby, allocates a speech role to the addressee” (Gerot and Wignell, 1994:22).

Speech Role and Speech Function (Gerot and Wignell, 1994:23)

Combinations of options:		
Give:	goods and services	= offer
Give:	information	= statement
Demand:	goods and services	= command
Demand:	information	= question
Of course, the addressee has some discretion:		
	+	-
Offer	accept	reject
Statement	acknowledge	contradict
Command	undertake	refuse
Question	answer	disclaim

By analyzing the speech function (offer, statement, command, and question) in a text, every speech role produced by the speakers will be able to be revealed. Furthermore, the speakers’ purposes will also be able to be described. Their purposes in uttering their sentences will help in completing the analysis of ideational meaning of the debate transcript.

Descriptive Qualitative Approach

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) contend that:

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

It can be inferred that a qualitative researcher is to interpret the meanings in the data which is carried out descriptively to draw a conclusion. In this research, the descriptions about the ideational meaning are elaborated

through the knife of the analysis, the system of Transitivity. The research report is written descriptively in accordance with the research findings of the ideational meaning in the debate transcript of concerning China's threat.

Findings on Process Types Analysis

From the identification of the Process types found in each clause of the debate transcript, the result produced is presented in the table below.

Text	Process Types	Sum of Analyzed Items	Percentage (%)
Transcript of the U.S. Presidential Debate between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney concerning China's Threat	Material	170	36.6
	Mental	63	13.5
	Relational: Identifying	46	9.9
	Attributive	147	31.6
	Behavioral	14	3.0
	Verbal	21	4.5
	Existential	4	0.9
TOTAL		465	100

Both speakers, through Material Process, stated the actions of the past, present, and future. Their past actions were aimed at showing their success or disapproving other, while the actions of present and future showed their visions coping with the issue. Obama was describing his actions of setting up a trade task force to go after cheaters and determining the policy of auto industry and Tax Code. Meanwhile Romney explained unemployment condition experienced by the U.S. citizen.

In other case, by using Mental Process, Obama certainly stated his wish of having a relationship with China, while Romney, with a high certainty, described his wants as making the U.S. as the most attractive place in the world to grow businesses. Compared to Relational and Material Process as the top-two most frequent Process, this one has a wide discrepancy in number and percentage with them by occupying only 13.5% of the whole clauses. It indicates that the speakers were indeed using personal feelings or inner experience in supporting their solutions, yet they put their focus more in the factual evidences than in personal feelings.

Furthermore, from the result of Relational Process analysis, two points of conclusion could

be drawn. Firstly, the speakers attempted to describe the U.S. trade and economic condition. Obama stated the U.S. condition in the past and present to show his success, while Romney aimed at showing Obama's failure in his leadership. Secondly, Obama and Romney stated and emphasized their internal and external solutions coping with the issue. Obama stated that his internal solution was making investments in education and research, and his external one was insisting China to play by the rules. Meanwhile, Romney stated that his internal and external solutions were making the U.S. as the most attractive place to grow businesses and labeling China as currency manipulator.

In addition, through Behavioral Process, Romney stated China's and someone reactions to the U.S. unfortunate condition. Romney dominated the usage of Behavioral Process. However, occupying 3.0% of 465 clauses, it indicates that both speakers were rarely showed someone's reaction coping with the issue of the debate compared to showing relations, actions, inner experience, and also someone's saying.

Both speakers, through Verbal Process, restated their interlocutor's and also their own statements. It is aimed at refusing other's disapproval. Verbal Process indeed has a quite wide discrepancy with top three most frequent Process types; however, it shows another side of delivering speaker's statements and solution towards the issue of the debate.

Existential Process represents Romney's descriptions regarding the U.S. trade condition related to China. Having the smallest percentage, it indicates that he did not put his top priority in giving information concerning it explicitly. He indeed stated the U.S.-China trade condition, yet he mostly inserted it within his statements.

Findings on Speech Function Analysis

From the identification of each clause in the debate transcript, the result of speech function analysis gained is presented in the table below.

Text	Initiating Function	Speech	Sum	%	Responding Speech Function	Sum	%		
Transcript of the U.S. Presidential Debate between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney concerning China's Threat	Give	Offer	5	2.4	Accept	1	0.5		
					Reject	1	0.5		
		Statement	108	50.9	Acknowledge	47	22.2		
					Contradict	25	11.8		
		Demand	Command	13	6.1	Undertake	0	0	
						Refuse	0	0	
		Question	6	2.8	Answer	6	2.8		
					Disclaim	0	0		
		TOTAL			132	62.2		80	37.8

Offer being in the sixth place indicates that the participants very rarely directed the topic of the debate. They tended to let it flowed flexibly according to the speakers' responses. The fact that the limitation of time to explore solutions existed more than the limitation of the topic indicates that the moderator put his priority in giving equal chance for the speakers to speak than to keep the topic of the debate focus. Furthermore, the percentage of only 0.5% of Accept and Reject proves that most of the Offer did not need any verbal responses.

Through speech function of Statement, the participants gave information regarding the topic, the speakers' solution, the U.S. economic and trade condition, and the action that was taken by China in doing trade. Particularly, having the highest percentage, it indicates that the speakers were focusing their attention in letting the audiences realized their solutions. They were also letting the audiences aware of trading condition between the U.S. and China. Related to its responding speech function, the higher percentage of Acknowledge than

Contradict shows that the speakers tended to give positive responses to their statements more than to their interlocutor's, remembering the occasion is a debate. Hence, those positive responses were used for their own benefit.

In relation to Command, its percentage of 6.1% of all clauses indicates that the participants aimed to give limitation to the speaker who overtime exploring his solutions. This result shows that even though the speakers were given chances to maximally explore their solutions and opinions, there was still limitation of time to keep the debate flowing fairly and well. The responding speech function of Command, Undertake and Refuse, did not contribute any percentage in the transcript. This result proves that the commands did not need any verbal responses in responding the goods and services demanded by the initiator.

Speech function of Question was only initiated by Romney and Schieffer. The questions which were answered were only those coming from Schieffer. Meanwhile, Romney's questions did not need any answer for it was stated for the purpose of emphasizing. Being in the fifth place, it indicates that the moderator rarely initiated questions to be discussed. He rather let the flow of the debate be filled with speakers' solutions. Meanwhile, Disclaim was not contributing at all in the debate transcript. This result shows that none of the Question was responded negatively. Even though not all of the questions were answered, none of them were contradicted by the addressees either. It indicates whether the questions were feasible to be answered or aimed at supporting the speakers' statements.

Context of Situation Related to Ideational Meaning of the Debate Transcript

Field influences the language use in the debate transcript. Some everyday terminologies in the area of economy and trade emerge in the debate process remembering the purpose of the debate is to give information concerning the speakers' solution towards the issue to all of the U.S. citizens. Those terminologies make the

conversation focuses on the subject matter being analyzed, that is China as a threat to the U.S.

Concerning tenor of the text, the participants in the U.S. presidential debate have equal power, infrequent contact, and low affective involvement. It leads the language use to the using of vocatives. However, there exists politeness formula among all participants in this debate.

Furthermore, mode of the debate transcript related to its ideational meaning shows that the channel of communication of the text is spoken. This fact influences the language use in the debate in the case that the speakers used complicated grammar and spontaneous phenomena in delivering their statements. Moreover, their conversation is also context dependent which caused them to use pronoun to refer to something which supported their opinions.

CONCLUSION

First, the writer concludes that Obama, through Material Process, was describing his actions of setting up a trade task force to go after cheaters and determining the policy of auto industry and Tax Code, and through 41.5% of Relational Processes, was showing recent U.S. condition as his success in which jobs were saved and exports have doubled. Furthermore, through Mental Process, in a high certainty, he stated his hopes of having a relationship with China. In doing so, he prepared the U.S. by making investment in education and research so they would not lose the lead in things. While through Verbal Process, he disapproved Romney's idea in the liquidity of auto industry. Meanwhile, through Material, Relational, and Existential Processes, Romney, by using high modality, certainly stated the unfortunate conditions during Obama's leadership such as unemployment, companies' bankruptcy, and the increase of debt. Furthermore, through 3.0% of Behavioral Process, he described China's doubt in having relation with the U.S. as their reaction to U.S. condition. For that reason, through 13.5% of Mental Process, he stated his wish of

making the U.S. as the most attractive place in the world to grow businesses. Meanwhile, in refusing Obama's disapproval of auto industry's liquidation, Romney used Verbal Process. As 50.9% of the whole clauses of speech function belong to Statement, it shows that both speakers were inviting the audiences to accept that information.

Second, context of situation influences the debate transcript in its language use. Some terminologies in the area of economy and trade emerge as the influences of Field. Those terminologies make the conversation focuses on the subject matter being analyzed, that is China as a threat to the U.S.

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