

Conference Paper

The Silent Language of Political Communication of President Vladimir Putin

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Abstract.

The delivery of messages in political communication varies. One of them was President Vladimir Putin's political communication when he received a diplomatic visit from other Presidents, including President Joko Widodo's visit in 2022. The messages sent and received by these two important people provoked different perceptions by the public. The extreme social distancing between President Vladimir Putin and other Heads of State was interesting to analyze. The purpose of this study was to analyze the distance (proxemics) of communication of President Vladimir Putin and President Joko Widodo, and President Vladimir Putin and President Emmanuel Macron. Data were collected from newspapers. Photographs showing the communication distance between President Putin and other heads of state were analyzed using proxemic theory. This research shows that President Vladimir Putin has a different way of welcoming and engaging himself when communicating with the President of Indonesia and the President of France. This non-verbal way of conveying messages shows both power and respect for the interlocutor.

Keywords: communication, proxemic, symbol, non-verbal communication

1. Introduction

Journalists in carrying out their duties are always observant of the communication events they witness. He didn't just get an inspiration to make a news story, but he paid attention to other elements that were also important. Not only verbal language is the focus of coverage, but also non-verbal or unspoken language such as clothing worn, body movements, facial expressions, and other gestures. All of these things certainly did not escape from the analysis of a journalist. Therefore, in every report, a journalist does not forget to always display photographs that complement his written message.

It is a scene shown by the country's leader, the object of journalism. Journalists see an anomaly or an unusual communication event occurring. The incident is a photo showing the distance in sitting position of the two state leaders. One photo shows the sitting position that is very far apart between President Vladimir Putin and the President

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of France. The second picture that was successfully captured by a journalist was the sitting position between President Vladimir Putin and President Joko Widodo.

The journalist aimed at the sitting position of President Vladimir Putin with the President of France, Emmanuel Macron. It appears that the sitting position of the two Presidents is unusual. They sat at the end of a large oval-shaped table. The two of them seemed to be sitting far from each other and were not accompanied by an interpreter. This unique and rare event is then aligned with President Putin's sitting position with President Joko Widodo. The two of them did not sit at the end of a very large oval table but they both sat on chairs with a small table between the two Heads of State. The two Presidents seemed relaxed and it was obvious they were smiling. They both look so familiar.

As a leader of a large country, Vladimir Putin is always under the media spotlight. It can be seen in the photo taken by a journalist that there are differences in the way President Vladimir Putin receives his state guests. On the one hand, he is meeting his guests at a large oval table and the two heads of state as an example when President Putin is welcoming the President of France. The two of them seemed to be sitting at the two ends of a very large oval table. It is no information of implementing social distancing to prevent transmission of Covid 19 or for some other reasons. The President is maintaining distance, not only physical distance from the head of state but psychological distance because the two leaders of the country are not on good terms.

The difference in the way of President Vladimir Putin entertaining his guests is very interesting to investigate and to analyze why President Vladimir Putin has a different way of receiving these state guests. Why are journalists actually interested in reporting the sitting position of the two heads of state rather than reporting the contents of the messages conveyed by the two heads of state? What do journalists want to convey by framing the sitting position of the host, in this case President Vladimir Putin is hosting President Joko Widodo and President Macron.

2. Theoretical Reviews

2.1. Semiotics

De Saussure's semiology differs from Peirce's semiotics in several respects, but both focus on signs. De Saussure published his book entitled *A Course in General Linguistics* [1]. In the book de Saussure envisions a science that studies signs in society. He also explained the concepts known as linguistic dichotomy. One of the dichotomies

is signifier and signified (signifier and signified) [2,3]. He said “the linguistics sign unites not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image a sign. The combination of the concept and the sound image is a sign. So, de Saussure divides the sign into two components, the signifier (or sound image) and the signified (or concept) and he says that the relationship between the two is arbitrary.

Peirce [4] defines semiotics as the study of signs and everything related to them (the way signs function, their transmission and reception). Fiske said that semiotics is the study of signs and meanings of sign systems, the science of signs and how meaning is constructed in media texts. While Preminger said that semiotics is the science of signs. Social phenomena/society are signs. Through semiotics, all signs in the mass media need to be interpreted for their meaning.

2.2. Various types of nonverbal communication

Language consists of two, namely verbal language in the form of words and non-verbal language (aside from words). Non-verbal language is no less important than verbal language [4]. There are various types of nonverbal communication; (1) facial expressions. Facial expression is one type of nonverbal communication that has a big role [5-7]. (2) gesture. Gestures or body movements are usually used to convey messages without using words [8]. (3) body posture [9]. (4) paralinguistics. Paralinguistics is the nonverbal aspect of the speech process (verbal communication) [10]. This aspect includes the tone of voice, volume of voice, and the pitch of the tone used in speech. (5) eye contact. The way a person looks, stares, and blinks is considered to be able to show various emotions that exist in him [11]. (6) touch [12,13]. Touch can be used to communicate a variety of emotions, such as affection, intimacy, and sympathy. (7) appearances. Appearance such as choice of color, clothing, and hairstyle, as a means of nonverbal communication [14,15]. (8) proxemic, the language of space or the distance between participants [16,17].

Of the many non-verbal languages, the interesting one is proxemic. Proxemic is a type of nonverbal communication in the form of distance when communication takes place. For example, communication between children and parents is different from communication between teachers and students in schools. The distance or space in this communication is usually determined by how familiar and comfortable the communication participants are.

Further, proxemics which is the study of body position and body distance (space between participants when people communicate interpersonally) is described by Edward T Hall, also known as the father of proxemics. Proxemic according to Hall

is another form of explaining the relationship between his observations and theories about how a person uses a special space in culture and habits for interpersonal communication [16,17].

Another special definition of proxemic is the study of how a person is unconsciously involved in the structure of space or physical distance between humans as something regular as an orderly social order every day. There are three basic concepts of proxemic/interpersonal space proposed by Hall [18-20], among others (1) *Fixed feature space* is a structure that cannot be moved without our consent. (2) *Semi fixed feature space* is a spatial structure that can be partially moved at our will or our reach. (3) *Informal Space* is the space or area around our bodies with other people.

Hall suggests that when a person engages in interpersonal communication with others, there can be eight possible main categories of proxemic analysis, including (1) *Posture-sex factor*, namely the distance between partners during sex, for example. (2) *Kinesthetic factors*, namely proxemic behavior with the habit of touching the body so that it shows the level of intimacy between participants. Touching and touching behavior, a person may be involved in every way of groping, touching, holding, rubbing, touching, tasting food and drink, extending the handle, making pressures on the handle, sudden touch, or accidental touching. (3) Visual code, habitual eye contact with reach (looking at each other) and no contact at all. (4) Thermal code, observing the warmth of the communicator to the other. (5) Olfactory code, this factor includes the type and level of warmth involved when people converse. (6) *Voice loudness*, the power of sound when speaking is directly related to interpersonal space such as between two geese, and social distance (distance of communication between species). (7) Proxemic is the delivery of messages through the arrangement of distance and space.

Humans have areas or zones in communicating, territory also means an area or space that people claim as their own, which seems to be an extension of their body, the distance of the area (zone) is as follows (a) Intimate Zone, a zone that can make contact physically, from the distance of all zones only this zone is the most important because in this zone people guard it as if this zone is private property. Only emotionally close people can enter it such as lovers, parents, husband and wife, children and relatives, generally 0-46 cm apart. (b) interpersonal distance between 46 cm-120 cm. (c) Social distancing with a distance of 120 cm-360 cm. This zone applies to people who are not well known or even strangers, such as when in a shop talking to a shop assistant. and (d) Public distance is more than 370 cm. Lastly (8) is Territoriality, or a person's ownership of an area or object. There are 3 types of territory, primary area, secondary area, and public area.

The primary area is a person's executive area. For example, someone's workspace. *A secondary area* is a person's affiliation with an area or object. For example, students often use the library even though they don't own the building, but they often use the space in it. *Public areas*, marking places open to everyone, for example beaches and parks. Up to this point, our expectations of other people's behavior will vary from one distance to another.

3. Methods

This study focuses on the images presented in the online mass media *kompas.com* and *detik.com* on 29-30 June 2022. The paradigm of this research uses a constructivist paradigm, with a qualitative approach. Because this study focuses on images presented in mass media, the method used is semiotics, especially social semiotics which is seen as a method of how sign users use and construct semiotic sources to convey messages [21]. The focal point of social semiotics in this study is the practice of using grammar, in this case the image as a grammar is not seen as a sign [21]. Meanwhile, semiotic sources are all things used by signed users to communicate something [21,22]. The context in this study is the source of semiotics is the image chosen by the media to convey the message to the audience. Then the images were analyzed using LSF (functional systemic linguistics) introduced by Van Leeuwen [22]. The images in this study were analyzed in terms of meta-functions (ideational/representational, interpersonal, and textual). Representation is anything that is shown in the image. Interpersonal function refers to the personal meaning or the relationship between the participants in the picture and the person of the audience. While textual is an element in the image so that the image unites coherently as a single unit.

Representation means that the image is used to express the physical reality that the image maker wants to convey. The interaction between the participant in the picture and the reader/audience. When the image is received by the audience, an interaction process occurs. Compositional/textual means that images are used to organize or unite image elements to form a single unit.

Image analysis in this study uses an analytical model approach by Kress and Van Leeuwen [23] which divides images into three meta-functions, namely representation, interaction, and composition. In terms of representation, images are used to express physical reality, a person's experience, certain activities, certain attitudes, which the image/photo maker wants to convey. This representation is divided in two parts; narrative representation and conceptual representation. Narrative representation shows an

activity/activity/action/deed/action by the actor who does something, the activity that the actor performs, and the goal of the actor's activity. Conceptual representation is an image display that does not show activity but conveys a concept, for example showing the existence of an object, the relationship between something and something else.

4. Findings

Communication events shown in photographs successfully captured by a journalist are not a coincidence. President Vladimir Putin in welcoming another head of state must have been well prepared. The space used, the furniture prepared, the distance between the guest and the host must have been planned in detail because the President, in this case Vladimir Putin, as the host, must have planned a very special welcoming model for the guests who will be present. This was done because the President had thought about massive coverage of this rare event. The President has prepared symbols that can be read by the public without having to say it verbally.

Figure 1 is one of the photographs that was successfully captured by Kompas journalists. It seems that President Joko Widodo visited President Vladimir Putin in Russia. It seems that the distance between the two heads of state's sitting position is so close because the position of the two chairs is only limited by a small table, approximately 50 cm², which is enough to put a vase of flower as a decoration and put the stationery of the two leaders.

The two Presidents seemed to be sitting relaxed with cheerful faces without showing tense or stiff expressions. They both looked so comfortable sitting side by side and smiling at each other. It looks like the two heads of state are engaged in a serious yet casual conversation. President Joko Widodo's hands looked relaxed. Likewise, President Vladimir Putin's sitting position seems relaxed with his gaze facing President Joko Widodo.

From the interpersonal or relational perspective, the photographer wanted to convey a moment where the two Presidents were involved in a meeting that seemed close and friendly. This can be seen from the choice of a very small table, only fits a flower vase. Both Presidents also sat close together and seemed to be busy talking without being accompanied by an interpreter or other delegates. This is a sign that the two have a harmonious relationship by positioning a short distance between them [24]. And this marks the first visit of the Indonesian President to Russia and the President of Russia has the honor of being visited by Jokowi. In addition, Jokowi's arrival is a visit with a peace mission where Russia is involved in a war against Ukraine. Jokowi's arrival



Source: Kompas.com

Figure 1: Russian President Vladimir Putin Receives Indonesian President Joko Widodo's Visit to Moscow Thursday (30/6/2022).

besides bringing a message of peace, he also asked Russia to open the export faucet of food ingredients to all over the world, especially Indonesia, which is the world's second largest importer of wheat.

Figure 2 depicts the two Presidents in a large room. There are three large and tall curtains to show that the room for the meeting of the two Presidents is very large. To adjust the size of the room, the table used is a very large oval table. The diameter of the oval table is about 3-4 meters. The two Presidents sat facing each other at a very large oval table. It was obvious that the two Presidents sat very far apart because the two Presidents sat at the ends of the oval table. In the middle of the long oval table, there is a vase that looks so small because it really doesn't match the size of the table which is so big. It is not clear whether these two people are smiling at each other or vice versa. What is clear, the two Heads of State put their hands on the table. There seemed to be no body movement in the conversation between the two. They both look very serious. Just like in Figure 1, between the two Presidents there is no translator or the like. In Figure 2 a chair can be seen near President Vladimir Putin facing the audience but no chair can be found near President Emmanuel Macron. However, the seat remains vacant. The two Heads of State sat far from each other, face to face, and did not face the audience. They both look serious.

From the photo, it can be analyzed from an ideational perspective, it is a very wide and high room decorated with large curtains, a large oval table and 3 chairs. In addition, the dominant colors are silver and white. This photo is used to illustrate a diplomatic communication between two Presidents without being accompanied by their ministers

TABLE 1: Findings of Figure 1.

Aspect	Meta-function		
	Idea/Representative	Interpersonal	Textual
Communication atmosphere	President Joko Widodo in formal clothes sitting close to President Putin sitting in a chat room casually, full of smiles and facial expressions that look familiar.	The atmosphere of communication between the two Presidents seemed warm, relaxed and in a happy atmosphere. This meeting was very intimate, marked by the presence of only two people in the photo.	Sitting opposite each other indicates that both are equal, no one is lower and no one is higher. The hands of the two Presidents are also neatly arranged on their laps, indicating that no one is more dominant
Worn clothes	Both display a very formal dress. Both wore bright color shirts and were decorated with ties and dark pants and shoes combined with dark suits.	The clothes the two were wearing showed the official atmosphere of the two leaders.	The clothes of the two are also identical. They both wore the official attire of the leader of the country, not the traditional attire of each country. This is an indication that both understand equality and respect.
Room/place to communicate	The two of them were seen sitting on chairs and in the middle was placed a small table on top of which was decorated with a vase of flowers and in front of the two presidents, small notes were visible. The very small size of the table indicates the closeness of the relationship between the two parties.	The meeting room of the two Presidents is very nice, where the two of them sit side by side with only a small table and the distance they sit is also very close which implies closeness or intimacy.	The sitting position facing each other slightly tilted towards the camera shows that the two are involved in an intense but still warm communication activity.

or by translators. Based on the photo, it can be seen that the two persons are sitting at a distance. The distance between them is more than social distance zones. This zone is only for those who do not know each other well or between strangers [25].

To show the interaction of the participants, the source of semiotics used is the gaze of the two Presidents. The two Presidents sat opposite each other and placed the two steps on the large oval table. This shows that both participants limit themselves to more intimate interactions with the distance between them so far. Moreover, around the large table there was no one else sitting with the two Presidents. This is a sign that their conversation is very secret. This is evidenced by the presence of one seat to the left of President Putin which was left vacant.



Source: kompas.com

Figure 2: Russian President Vladimir Putin Attends a Meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron in Moscow **Monday (7/2/2022).**

Meanwhile, from a compositional or textual perspective, this photo was taken by a photographer with a distance far enough to be able to take pictures of the two Presidents separated by a very large oval table. Therefore, the details of the photo are not clearly visible. Facial expressions cannot be seen clearly, the position of the hands is also not clearly visible. The photographer wanted to convey the message that the communication that took place between the two Presidents took place in an atmosphere that was less intimate and perhaps less important by either Putin or Macron. This is supported by the dominant color choice in the space. The dominant color is a muted color, white to silver which shows something that is not dynamic.

5. Analysis

A reality is not always the real reality. There are times when reality is created and sometimes reality is not real. Reality is created with a reason to achieve certain goals. The media in constructing messages plays an active role in choosing a particular communication event or moment that can attract the attention of the audience. Just like a clause regarding Joko Widodo's meeting with Vladimir Putin on February 7, 2022. Putin's acceptance of Joko Widodo is presented in a different way. Journalists took photos of the President of Russia and the President of France as the two of them sat opposite each other in a room that may have been the Russian presidential palace when Putin received the visit of the French President on February 7, 2022. This sitting position far apart can be interpreted in various ways by the audience.

TABLE 2: Findings of Figure 2.

Aspect	Meta-function		
	Idea/Representative Describe the process you want to display	Interpersonal	Textual
Communication atmosphere	Communication atmosphere that seems stiff and unfriendly. Maybe because this communication event occurred during the Covid-19 period. President Putin met with the French President in a fairly large room with a very large oval table. Putin crossed his arms at the table while the French president put his hands together and placed them on the table.	The atmosphere of communication shown in this color photo wants to convey that the two are quite far apart. They don't seem very familiar. This is to show that the two are not in a healthy relationship.	The presence of this photo gives an illustration that President Putin and the President of France do not communicate intimately. The two of them kept their distance.
Worn clothes	Both are wearing formal attire. Both wore dark suit.	The two presidents appeared to be in formal attire. This shows that although the two of them do not seem familiar, they are both delegates who represent their respective countries. Every president in his duties carries the authority of the country he leads.	The venomous style of the two Presidents described their meeting as an official meeting, not a meeting with a friend on the golf course or at the dinner table.
Room/place to communicate	The space is large enough and the oval table is so large that it limits the two Presidents from conversing.	The large space and the large partition between the two participants gave an understanding that the two did not seem very close. Between the two of them there is a gap or barrier to interact more intimately	The position of the photo is deliberately taken from a distance far enough so that all participants appear in one photo. In addition, the photo taker wants to convey the message that the two are far enough apart when they are both communicating.

Putin's acceptance of Joko Widodo is described in a different way. The photo shows President Putin receiving President Joko Widodo in the same room that Putin used to receive President Macron. The difference is the presence of a table. When Putin met with Macron, they both sat at the same table but the size of the table was so large that the distance between President Putin and President Macron was quite far, maybe more than 370 cm. They also did not appear to be accompanied by ministers or ambassadors.

Putin's acceptance of Joko Widodo seems very different. The two of them are depicted sitting on chairs where in the middle of them is a small table. Not found the distance far enough. Instead, they sat very close and they were involved in the discussion. There was no trace of unfriendliness on their faces. They looked at each other and smiled at each other. This indicates that the two have a warm interaction, and there is no wide distance between the two.

The hallmark of the mass media is to invite the audience to think about what the media has said, which the media considers important so that it gets a positive response from the audience and becomes the public's thoughts [26,27]. The way of sitting can be an interesting news item to be reviewed in depth. From the communicator side, in this case, those who were involved in sitting with President Vladimir Putin, President Macron, and President Joko Widodo, this event was nothing out of the ordinary. Sitting far apart like in the sitting scene between the President of Russia and the President of France because they are still keeping the health protocol considering that at that time it was still dangerous to sit close to each other. Likewise, when the Indonesian President was greeted by the President of Russia at a very close distance, both of them appeared not to be wearing masks because they thought the Covid-19 disaster had been controlled so they could temporarily take off their masks. Therefore, this very rare event is an ordinary event.

Regardless of the assumption that these events are common or not, this can be explored and analyzed from a communication perspective. The displayed image can be interpreted differently. Images captured by journalists can be used as material for communication studies because journalists display two images that are quite extreme. This incident was not a coincidence but was planned because a meeting between heads of state was not accidental. The meeting must have been carefully prepared by President Vladimir Putin before welcoming the arrival of the French President and President Joko Widodo. Moreover, they realize that the event must have been covered by the media, not only the local Russian media, but also the international media as a message of political communication between the two heads of state [28].

In accordance with the theory of social distance by Edward T Hall, the distance referred to is the proxemic zone that is used between individuals when interacting with other individuals. Distance settings determine the closeness or how high the level of familiarity of a person with other people when communicating. In other words, distance can define a relationship [16,17].

Distance settings determine the closeness or how high the level of familiarity of a person with other people when communicating [29]. The interaction distance of

the communication participants can be interpreted from the way the communication participants take distance when communicating. As shown in Figure 1, the President of Russia received President Joko Widodo, the distance chosen included the social distance between 1.2 – 3.6 meters. The closest social distance is often used in casual social settings while the farthest social distance is often used in more formal social settings.

The distance between the President of Russia and the President of France as shown in Figure 2 can be categorized as public distance (3.7 meters or more). The closest point is often used in formal discussions, while for public figures it is usually in the far phase, around 7.7 meters. When there is dyadic communication as shown in Figure 2, the communication that is established shows that the two are not familiar.

When compared between Figure 1 and Figure 2, the way the Russian President entertained the Indonesian President and the French President differed in terms of interaction distance. This can be interpreted that the President of Russia is more familiar with the President of Indonesia than the President of France. To see more about the contents of the talks of the three Presidents, further research is needed regarding the contents of the talks between President Vladimir Putin and President Joko Widodo and between President Vladimir Putin and President Emmanuel Macron to investigate their closeness to the contents of the discourse.

6. Conclusion

Distance in interpersonal communication can be interpreted in various ways, as stated by Edward T Hall. The closer the two people are, the closer the talking distance will be. On the other hand, if the two people are not familiar, maybe because they don't know each other, the speaking distance is definitely not as close as those who are familiar each other. If people who are not familiar or have just met or even strangers try to interact at close range, say intimate distance, then this will make the communication situation uncomfortable. Likewise, if two people are best friends and they are talking socially distanced or publicly distanced, then it can be said that they are not in a good relationship. Maybe they are hostile. So, the distance in communication can be interpreted differently. The case of the distance between President Vladimir Putin and Macron that is so far apart indicates that the two Presidents may be in an unfriendly state. In contrast to the conditions of the conversation between President Vladimir Putin and President Joko Widodo which were very close, showing that the two of them were like close friends.

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