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Communication Culture in Political Debate in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aimed to explain the communication culture in the political debate in Indonesia. The data of the study was interpersonal interactions in the presidential debate of 2014 as uploaded on YouTube. To understand the political function, meaning, and motivation of the text, the researcher applied the theory of political messages of Vedung, which consists of content analysis and functional analysis. The results revealed that the communication culture in the political debate in Indonesia was a culture of using indirect speech, concealment of a speaker's identity, and politeness. Indirect speech is a way of expressing ideas implicitly, such as ambiguous terms and unspecific information. Concealing identity in the political debate was expressed by using the passive voice and the first person plural point of view. Politeness in the political debate appeared in the form of both positive politeness and negative politeness. In addition to these three cultures, impoliteness sometimes occurred as a communication culture. These findings demonstrated that communication in the political debate lies between two interests, i.e. rationality to produce sound communication and political interest to win people's support to achieve their political goals.

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1. Introduction

Communication in the political debate is aimed at winning voters' support. It has been proved that the method of communication in the political debate has a significant role in mobilizing voters' support. This was demonstrated in "The Great Debate" between Kennedy (Democrat Party) and Nixon (Republican Party) in November 1960. Before the debate, the American people favored Nixon. But the debate changed in terms of the support of the American people, who previously favored Nixon, which in turn drove Kennedy, a Catholic of Irish descent, to become the 35th US president [1]. Kennedy excelled in his communication and won the hearts of the American people. Fifty years

later, the US presidential debate between Obama and McCain seemed to repeat the history of the Kennedy and Nixon debate. Obama performed and communicated well. As a result, Obama won the voters' support and he glided smoothly to the White House to become the 44^{th} US president.

In Indonesia, political debate is a new tradition. It was first implemented in the presidential election of 2009 between Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) and Megawati Sukarno Putri (Megawati). SBY performed better than Megawati. Eventually, SBY won the debate, which led him to the presidential palace for a second term [2]. Five years later, with his modest and honest manner of debating, Joko Widodo-Jusuf Kalla was victorious over Prabowo-Hatta. This seemed to prove that in political debate, good communication will have a great effect on the voters' preference in the presidential election.

In regard to the effects of communication, McKinney state that political debate has four effects, i.e. behavioral, cognitive, image evaluation, and latent effects [3]. Behavioral effects are the changes in the voters' preference after watching political debates. Cognitive effects are associated with messages or issues that come into contact with the public. Image evaluation is the public perception of the candidates' character when are arguing. In this case, debaters should be aware of their communication manner, which suits the national culture. The character and communication manner, in turn, will have a good effect in terms of the changing of voters' preference.

In addition to performance and character during the debate, to win the voters' support debaters ought to communicate politely since politeness is one of the main Indonesian cultural characteristics. In this case, politeness is a complex system to soften utterances, which will threaten listener's face [4]. People speak politely as a known method of deception, in order to help preserve each other's face needs or to avoid face-threatening acts (FTA). FTA is the concept of the face as a basic want, which every member knows every other member desires, and which in general it is in the interest of every member to partially satisfy. This concept of the face consists of the positive face and negative face.

Communication culture among Indonesian people as reflected in Indonesian discourses [5]. He concludes that Indonesian communication culture includes the culture of indirectness, the culture of identity concealment, and the culture of politeness. These cultures are associated with the motivation of being polite and maintaining social harmony. Communication culture in Indonesia is a high-context culture, this is highly dependent on a context or nonverbal message [6]. Communicators of this

culture tend to communicate indirectly and implicitly. Direct and explicit messages are considered as impolite. This is a trademark of Indonesian communication culture.

Positive and negative politeness representation on television's dialogues discourse. He found that the interactants use strategies of positive and negative politeness [7]. Positive politeness strategies include the use of (1) empathy and sympathy, (2) group identity markers, (3) asking for agreement, (4) repetition of utterances, (5) humor, (6) being optimistic, (7) offers and promises, (8) involving the listener and the speaker in activities, (9) seeking reasons or posing questions, and (10) giving presents. Negative politeness strategies include the use of (1) indirect utterances, (2) asking for apologies, (3) impersonal forms, (4) general rules of interaction, and (5) respect.

Communication culture in daily life communication, while Pramujiono investigated politeness on television's dialogues discourse [5, 6]. What about communication culture in the political debate? This paper addresses some communication cultures expressed by presidential debaters during debates. How do they apply a communication strategy to win the debate? What are the political motivations and calculations involved in using such communication strategies? These are some of the research questions to be answered.

2. Methods

This research was qualitative in nature. The data was communication cultures as expressed in communicative events in the presidential candidate debate of the 2014 general election. The presidential candidates were Prabowo-Hatta Rajasa (Pra-HR), Joko Widodo, and Jusuf Kalla (Jokowi-JK). The debate raised different issues: economic development and social welfare (round 1); food, energy, and environment (round 2); international politics and national defense (round 3); and democracy, good governance, and law enforcement (round 4). For this research, the documents were downloaded from YouTube.

The data were analyzed using the political messages analysis of Vedung [8]. This analysis consisted of two steps, namely content analysis, and functional analysis. Content analysis was concerned with the meaning of the message while function analysis was associated with the motivation and political calculations that led to the choosing of a communication strategy.

3. Results

The results from the data analysis reveal that communication culture in the political debate in Indonesia is a culture of using indirect communication, concealment of the speaker's identity, and politeness as described below.

3.1. Indirect communication

Indirect communication is a way of expressing ideas implicitly using indirect speech. In political debate, indirect speech is expressed in ambiguous terms and unspecific information. The following data is worth discussing.

> [1] HR: *Hanya kita mengimpor apabila terjadi gangguan pertanian kita akibat iklim ekstrim.* "Only if there is disturbance to our agriculture due to extreme climate do we import rice."
>
> [2] HR: *Oleh sebab itu, banyak hal yang harus kita jelaskan, tapi percayalah keadaan sekarang jauh lebih baik dibandingkan sebelumnya, lebih baik.* "Therefore, there are many things to explain. But, trust me that today's condition is better than ever before, better,"

The two data above are examples of indirect communication using unspecific information. In the data [1] HR says "*gangguan pertanian akibat iklim ekstrim* – agricultural disturbances due to extreme climates" without explaining what kind of disturbance occurs so that rice production declines and needs to import rice. In the data [2] HR says "*banyak hal yang harus dijelaskan* – many things to explain" without giving details of what should be explained. This is done because, on the one hand, HR does not want to burden debate partners because more detailed explanations may offend counterparts, but on the other hand it is not unencumbered with more detailed explanations because it may not be there.

3.2. Concealment of identity

Concealment of identity in political debate is expressed by using the passive voice and the first person plural point of view or involving the listener in the activity.

> [3] Pra: *Saya merasa masalahnya tidak terletak di pihak Indonesia. Saya kira masalahnya adalah mungkin Australia punya kecurigaan atau fobia terhadap kita.... Bagi mereka, mereka menganggap kita sebagai ancaman, mungkin.*

> "I think the problem does not lie in Indonesia. I think the problem is that Australia might have suspicions or phobias against us....In their opinion, we are threats, maybe."

In the above data, pre-involving audiences in the activity. At the beginning, Prabowo used the word "*saya* – I" to express his views on the bilateral relationship between Indonesia and Australia that often fluctuated. But in the end, he uses the word "*kita* – we" when conveying his stance on why the relationship between Indonesia and Australia often heats up. This is done because he wants to be polite and invite the people of Indonesia together to build a good neighborly relationship with Australia, open himself alone.

3.3. Politeness

Politeness in political debate appears in the form of positive and negative politeness.

3.3.1. Positive politeness

Positive politeness enables us to recognize that our listener has a desire to be respected. It also confirms that the relationship is friendly and expresses group reciprocity. In political debate, positive politeness is expressed in the form of empathy and sympathy, group identity markers, repetition utterances, humor, offers, and promises, involving the listener in the activity, seeking reasons and posing questions, and giving presents.

Empathy and sympathy

> [4] Jkw: *Saya ingin mengucapkan duka cita atas kecelakaan kapal TKI kita di perairan Malaysia. Semoga semuanya selamat.* "I want to express my condolence
>
> for the crash of our Indonesian migrant workers in the Malaysian ocean. I hope all survived."

In the above data, Jokowi began exposure of his vision mission by conveying sympathy to Indonesian migrant workers (TKI) whose ships had had an accident in Malaysia. This was done to engage emotionally with the families of victims who happened to watch the debate on television.

Group identity markers

[5] JK: *Terima kasih kepada bapak Prabowo-Hatta telah setuju dengan kami. Pemekaran itu dilihat dari tujuannya agar bisa lebih baik kesejahteraannya, investasinya, pengelolaannya, dan demokrasinya.* "Thank you Mr. Prabowo-Hatta for agreeing with us. The division is seen from its purpose in order to achieve better prosperity, investment, management, and democracy."

In the above data, JK, besides thanking, also mentions the name of his debate partner Prabowo-Hatta. This is done to reduce social distance and the competition tension with debate partners.

Repetition utterances

[6] Jkw: *Bapak sering mengatakan mengenai pentingnya perubahan dan soal perubahan. Bagian mana dari kebijakan luar negeri pemerintah sekarang yang harus dirubah?* "You often say about the importance of change and the problem of change. Which part of the current government foreign policy should be changed?"

Pra: *Saya sering bicara tentang perubahan. Tetapi jika tidak perlu dirubah, tidak usah dirubah.* "I often talk about changing. But if you do not need to be changed, do not change."

In the above data, Prabowo repeats Jokowi's speech. This is done to maintain the continuity of communication in the debate. However, speech repetition can also function as a filler, i.e. a filler time lag while thinking of the answer.

Humor

[7] Jkw: *Pembangunan demokrasi, pemerintahan yang bersih, dan kepastian hukum adalah hal yang utama. Kalau presiden, nomor dua.* "Development of democracy, clean government, and legal certainty are the main points. Being a president is the second."

The data above shows that Jokowi uses a humor strategy in seeking support. "*Kalau presiden, nomor dua* – the president is number two" is the humor that contains the invitation to vote himself for the presidential candidate number two, while his rival,

Prabowo-Hatta, is sequence number 1. Here the motivation of political interests looks more dominant.

Offers and promises

> [8] Pra: *Tidak akan ada negara yang hormat pada Indonesia jika Indonesia lemah dan tak punya kekayaan dan kekuatan. Karena itulah, Prabowo-Hatta akan berjuang keras untuk menyelamatkan kekayaan nasonal Republik Indonesia sehingga kita bisa bangkit dan menjadi bangsa yang kuat berdiri di atas kaki kita sendiri.* "No single country will respect Indonesia if Indonesia is weak and has no wealth and power. For this reason, Prabowo-Hatta will strive to save the nations of the Republic of Indonesia's wealth so that we can rise up and become a strong nation standing on our own feet."

Political debate is one of the forms of the campaign, therefore the debate participants must offer and promise something for the welfare of the people. In the political debate, the promise is usually delivered in the final segment. The data above shows that Prabowo-Hatta promised to work hard to make Indonesia an independent nation. Political interests become the main motivation in the use of this strategy, which is aimed at obtaining voter support to become president.

Involving listener

> [9] Pra: *Kita harus menghilangkan kemiskinan, berantas korupsi, naikkan kesejahteraan rakyat. Baru ketahanan kita akan kuat dan disegani*, "We must eliminate poverty, eradicate corruption, raise the people's welfare. Then, our defense power will be strong and respected."

In Speech [9] Prabowo uses the pronoun "*kita* – we" in response to what must be done to strengthen national defense. For Prabowo, the real defense is by improving the welfare of the people. By using the pronoun "*kita* – we" Prabowo seems to want to invite the audience to cooperate in eliminating poverty, eradicating corruption, and raising people's welfare. There are at least two motivations in the speech. *First*, the motivation of politeness; that is, the speaker humbles himself not to be judged as an arrogant person. *Second*, political motivation, i.e. speakers want to share tasks by engaging the audience and viewers to work together to eliminate poverty, combat

corruption, and increase people's welfare. If it fails, failure is not the responsibility of the speaker alone, but the responsibility of all Indonesian people.

Seeking reasons and posing questions

This strategy is commonly used if the said partner wants to know the reason for which the speaker has a political view as it is spoken. Here is an example of using the strategy in a political debate.

> [10] Jkw: *Saat itu, pada tahun 1998, sedang mengalami krisis berat. Saat Ibu Megawati menjadi presiden, kondisi ekonomi masih belum baik.... Saya kira kuncinya cuma ada satu, yaitu* bay back *saham itu dan menjadi milik kita lagi.* "At that time, in 1998, was experiencing a severe crisis. When Mrs. Megawati became president, the economic condition was not good.... I guess the key is only one, that bay back the stock and become ours again".
>
> Pra: Jadi Bapak berniat untuk membeli kembali Indosat apabila Bapak menjadi presiden? Berarti memang Bapak akui...seharusnya memang tidak dijual untuk bangsa lain? "So you intend to buy back Indosat if you become president? That means you admitted... "should not be sold to other nations?'

Prabowo asked Jokowi to explain the reason why he agreed with the sale of Indosat during the reign of Megawati Sukarno Putri. From the question, Jokowi explained that Indosat was sold because at that time Indonesia was hit by an economic crisis. To meet the state budget, Indosat was sold to foreign with a buyback option.

Extending present

> [11] Mod: *Kita berikan tepuk tangan kalau begitu (prok, prok, prok).* "Let us give applause then (prok, prok, prok)."

In the above data, the moderator presents a gift to JK who has responded by assuring that Indonesia is a country of Unity in Diversity. The prize is clapping. This is done to dilute the debate in order to keep it going well.

3.3.2. Negative politeness

Negative politeness strategies are strategies that are used to avoid losing face. In the political debate, the negative politeness revealed is indirect utterances, impersonal forms, general rules of interaction, and respect.

Indirect utterances

> [12] JK: *Pada hari Kamis lalu di Bandung, bapak bicara bahwa ada pihak-pihak yang ingin merubah demokrasi ke kleptokrasi, kekuasaan para maling.* "Last Thursday in Bandung, you stated that there were parties who wanted to change democracy to kleptocracy, the power of the thieves."

In the above, JK reported that Prabowo said there are those who will replace democracy with kleptocracy. Prabowo's pronouncement is an indirect communication to accuse political opponents of being anti-democratic. But Probowo did not name the person or party in question. Thus Prabowo seeks to reduce conflict with political opponents and open space to escape responsibility.

Impersonal form (passive voice)

> [13] Jkw: *Persoalannya, hanya kita ini tidak pernah menyiapkan pasar untuk mereka. kalau mereka sudah diperintah untuk menanam pepaya, mestinya disiapkan industri ekstrak jus pepaya yang bisa diekspor. Kalau mereka diperintah di sebuah wilayah untuk menanam melon dan semangka, mestinya juga pasarnya disiapkan.* "The problem is, we never provide the market for them. If they have been ordered to grow papaya, should be prepared industrial papaya juice extract industry should be prepared for export. If they were ordered in a territory to grow melons and watermelons, the market should also be prepared."

In the above, Jkw uses an impersonal strategy with a passive verb form. Besides the impersonal use of making the speech more polite, politically, Jkw does not take a position as the person responsible for the availability of the market for the farmers' harvest (see data concealment of identity).

General rules of interaction

> [14] Mod: *Hadirin yang saya hormati, agar debat pada malam hari ini berlangsung dengan tertib, lancar, dan damai, mari kita simak tata tertib debat berikut ini.* "Ladies and gentlemen, in order to have this evening's debate run well, let us consider the following rules of debate."

As a moderator, he must lead the debate well in order to keep it running in a smooth, orderly, and peaceful fashion. For that, he used a strategy of running the general rules of interacting.

Respect

> [15] Pra: *.... karena itu, dalam hal ini, saya sependapat dengan Pak Jokowi. Itu memang bagus dan saya hormati.* ".... therefore, in this case, I agree with Mr. Jokowi. That is good (idea) and I respect him."

The data above shows that Prabowo gives respect to Jokowi by saying that Jokowi's opinion is good and he agrees. The motivation that prompted Prabowo to do so was that besides politeness there was also a lack of conflict with the debating partners. Politically, Prabowo wants to win people's hearts to support him as president.

3.4. Impoliteness

Impoliteness in the political debate is often present, especially when there are attacks, in the form of provocations and fallacies. Provocations and fallacies are often used as a strategy to win the debate. One of the most commonly used is *argumentum ad hominem*. The following data is worth noting.

> [16] JK: *Berkaitan dengan visi misi bapak di depan, bagaimana Prabowo-Hatta akan menyelesaikan kasus-kasus pelanggaran HAM di masa lalu dan menjaga HAM di masa depan?* "In relation to your vision and mission, how would Prabowo-Hatta resolve the past human rights violations and safeguard human rights in the future?"

JK accuses Prabowo of past sin, involving human rights abuses in East Timor. As a soldier, Prabowo only undertakes the task of securing the state from separatist threats. He states, "*Jadi, saya bertanggung jawab, hati nurani saya bersih, saya pembela HAM yang paling keras di negeri ini, saya tidak ragu-ragu* – So, I am responsible, my conscience

is clean, I am the hardest human rights defender in this country, I do not hesitate." *Argumentum ad hominem* was also used by Prabowo and Hatta when asked why the city of Solo and Jakarta, when led by Jokowi, did not get Adipura award.

3.5. Discussion

The political debate of the presidential candidate is one of the campaigns in fighting for popular support to become president. Despite being in an atmosphere of competition for popular support, as an Easterner, debate participants speak politely in order to make communication work smooth and avoid a sharp conflict. In order to avoid friction during interpersonal communication, participants should speak in a polite manner [9]. As an Eastern people, politeness is a very prominent communicating culture. This is also in line with Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness based on threats to the face, both the speaker's and the speech's face [4]. According to them, every speaker and interlocutor has a face to be saved in order for communication to work properly.

Based on the results of data analysis it was found that the communication culture in the political debate in Indonesia is a culture of continuity, cultural concealment of the speaker, and a culture of politeness. Because the political debate is competition, there is also a culture of continuity and decency, although the frequency is very rare. A culture of indetermination is characterized by the use of indirect speech, while concealment of identity is characterized by the use of the form of voice and involves a speech and audience. This is in line with the findings of Suparno, who concludes that the culture of Indonesian society communication is that of continuity, concealment of identity speakers, and politeness [5]. Of the three cultures of communication, politeness is the main motivation.

The culture of communicative politeness revealed in a political debate can be distinguished by positive politeness and negative politeness. This distinction is based on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness, though not all of their suggested politeness strategies are used in political debates [4]. Meanwhile, the culture of disagreement sometimes arises because it is triggered by the aroma of competition in the debate, especially when the participants of the debate provoke and discredit each other.

The theoretical concept put forward by Brown and Levinson of a face symbolizing a rational self-image can be used to judge the politeness of a speech [4]. The concept of advance was originally adopted from the local wisdom of classical Chinese society about mianzi and lian ever published in *The Chinese Concept of Face*. Mianzi represents a social perception of one's self-esteem built through the lian as one's morality. This

concept was later applied by Erving Goffman in his study of interpersonal communication [7]. Face-threatening acts distingush into two types, i.e. actions that threaten the positive face of the speaker and actions that threaten the negative face of the interlocutor [4]. The negative face is the need for freedom (the wish to be unimpeded by others in one's actions), and the positive face is the wish or desire to gain the approval of others.

The culture of discontinuity in political debates can be attributed to the rhetorical culture of the nations of Asia, including Indonesia, which tends to impart messages indirectly. In Asian rhetoric, the indirect delivery of messages is preferred because it is considered more polite than direct delivery [2016]. This is supported by the culture of Indonesian society that is still closed. Direct messaging is considered to be less polite. This is in line with Suparno's conclusion that the concealment of identity he calls "covert communication" has two motivations: positive motivations, such as showing humbleness, maintaining the objectivity of messages, and engaging together, and negative motivations, i.e. sharing, diverting, and even running away from responsibility.

As regards the uses of fallacy, that in a political debate, fallacy is often used as a winning arguing strategy [11]. This is supported by Walton who states that in the case of *argumentum ad baculum*, *agumentum ad verecundiam*, and *argumentum ad populum* [11]. Judging from the analysis of political messages of Vedung, the speech in political debate can be understood through two steps, namely content analysis relating to messages in speech and analysis of functions relating to motivation and political calculation. In keeping with the analysis, the culture of the continuity and concealment of the speaker's identity is motivated by two interests, namely the interests of obeying polite culture and political interests [8]. By politely he will be liked by the people so politically he will win support to become president.

4. Conclusion

Based on the data analysis, we come to the following conclusions. First, the communication culture revealed in the political debate in Indonesia is the culture of indirect communication, the culture of concealment of the speaker's identity, the culture of politeness, and the culture of disagreement. Second, the choice of communication culture is largely determined by the motivation of politeness as an Indonesian as well as political interest in gaining support in order to win the presidential election. In other words, the choice of communication culture in political debate lies in two interests at once, namely the interest of politeness in order to communicate politely as

a characteristic of the Indonesian nation and political interests in order to win popular support.

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