INDONESIAN POLITICAL LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This study is aimed at analysing Indonesian political language from cooperative principle perspective. The object of the study is Indonesian political language in the forms of utterances taken from Indonesian online newspapers: The Jakarta Post. The data was analysed using Grice’s cooperative principle (1975). The study shows that politicians violated the maxims of cooperative principles regularly. They also violated the maxim of quantity in order to express strong commitment or to hide information. Moreover, giving incorrect information violated the maxim of quality to obey quantity maxim. Finally, the politicians also violated the maxim of relevance by saying things, which are not germane to the topic under discussion.

Key words: cooperative principles, maxims of conversation, and violation.

1. Introduction

Indonesian people conducted a legislative election on 9th April 2009. This election was followed by many parties. Millions of people participated in this election to vote their representatives. There were three big parties having high percentages: Democratic Party (PD: 20.8%), Golkar Party (14.7%) and the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI Perjuangan: 14.3%) (source: The Jakarta Post, 2009). These parties had tried to persuade their constituents to vote their candidates to be the president and vice president of Indonesia for the year of 2009 – 2014.

To hold their constituents, politicians tried to convince them. The politicians would often give speech or statement using political language. Political language plays an important role in convincing constituents. It is hoped that by giving the right amount of information, they will be their loyal voters. In doing so, they need to use language that is powerful. Language in politics has a close relationship with power. It relates to Fairclough (1989) that “language not only has become the primary medium of social control and power, but it has also grown dramatically in terms of the uses it is required to serve”.

The main concern of politic is to attract and hold political constituents. In this ritual, Hill (2000: 262) quoting Bundi (1980) reveals that politicians should practice “full disclosure,” sharing with voters all information that has shaped their positions.

From this perspective, political talks relate to the Grice’ cooperative theory; politicians are bound by Grice’s (1975) maxim of quality to say only what to believe to be true and not say what they believe to be false (Hill, 2000:263) considers failures of political talk as the failures of reference and truth and hence these failures show bad characters of the politicians.
Based on the Grice’s theory, the failures take place because of violations of conversational maxims, for instance the violations of the maxims of quality and quantity. Exploitations of the maxim of quality characterize politicians that may speak only to get elected rather than to inform. Exploitations of the maxim of quantity are characterized as inadequately referential, as mere imagery lacking the information necessary for rational choice, and thereby intended to appeal to voter emotion than rationality.

2. Research Method

The object of the study was Indonesian political language of three big parties having high percentages (Democratic Party, Golkar Party and Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle) and some small parties that succeeded in the threshold. The data are in the form of discourse in the context of utterances (verbal communications). The data sources are English online newspapers – Jakarta Post – on lined in April and May 2009. In collecting the data, the writer read the online newspaper, downloaded and noted them. The data were analysed in the frame of pragmatics by applying cooperative principle and its conversation maxim.

3. Finding and Discussion

3.1 Indonesian Political Language in Cooperative Principle Study

Members of more powerful social groups and institutions, and especially their leaders (the elites), have more or less exclusive access to, and control over, one or more types of public discourse (Van Dijk, 1996). This statement brings us to assume that a politician and a constituent in verbal interaction expect to cooperate to each other; the politician expects to be understood and to give effects to the constituent (interlocutor). The effects may be in form of verbal responds (critics, suggestions, supports, etc) and/or non-verbal responds (smile, a nod, etc) appropriately. To do so, Grice proposes cooperative principle. This principle assumes that in doing cooperative principle people should make contribution as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which people are engage (Levinson, 1983). It consists of four sub-principles (maxims): quantity, quality, relevance, and manner.

3.1.1 Maxim of Quantity

The maxim of quantity concerns with the amount of information for the current purposes of the interaction. Grice (1975) (in Yule, 1996) defines this maxim of quantity as follows: (1) make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purpose of the exchange and (2) do not make your contribution more informative than is required. In political language, the language produced by the politicians should not give too much or too little information. The appropriate amount of the information will help political constituents make up their decisions. It can be seen from one example below.

(1) “Until now, we are sticking to the original plan to nominate Megawati as president. It has been the party's decision from the beginning,” (Tjahjo Kumolo, The Jakarta Post 25 April 2009).
The utterance (1) stated by chairman of PDI-P faction in the House of Representatives, Tjahjo Kumolo, might fulfill the information required by those who wanted to know the plan of PDI by choosing Megawati as the candidate to be the president. The utterance was informative because it met the principle of 5W 1H namely: the agent (who) was DPR faction, the original plan (what) to propose Megawati and the reason (why) Megawati was proposed to be the candidate, the date (when) was on April, the place (where), and the technique (how) was the convention of the party.

3.1.2 Maxim of Quality
The maxim of quality requires high standard of morality and honesty because it governs politicians to give only true information. In his quotation, (Yule, 1996) says “try to make your contribution one is true by its information. (1) Do not say what you believe to be false and (2) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence”. Honesty is mandate and lie is the violation of this maxim. The regulations express someone’s generosity and responsibility not to plunge someone with incorrect news.

In the political field, this maxim guarantees the constituents to share true information. This maxim may create political conditions in which the constituents are not only fully informed, but they may also accept the political policy with no hesitation and suspicious. Here is one example:

(2) "After the reform era, Habibie served as president for only one-and-a-half years, followed by Gus Dur for two years, when Ryaas and I served as cabinet ministers, and Megawati Soekarnoputri for three years," (Kalla, Jakarta Post 8 April 2009).

The utterance (2) gives the information based on the fact. In this utterance, the speaker had adequate evidence given to the constituents.

3.1.3 Maxim of Relation
The maxim of relation states that conversational participants have to give relevant contributions, which are stable to the topic under discussion (Levinson, 1983). This maxim ensures that the conversation be coherent. It, however, sometimes cannot be seen explicitly but it needs understanding contextually through its implicature. In the political field, the relevance of the following utterance meets its contexts. It can be seen from the following example. The politician is successful in convincing the constituents about the topic being discussed.

(3) "Whatever the parties, all have the same objective, which is to bring prosperity to the people. The difference lies in their respective ways of achieving this," (Kalla, Jakarta Post 8 April 2009).

3.1.4 Maxim of Manner
The maxim regulates the effectiveness of the conversation: the contributions should not be ambiguous or obscure, long winded, or incoherent. It should be brief and clear in expressing one’s ideas. Grice (1975) in (Yule, 1996) states “be perspicious” by the following
rules (1) avoid obscurity of expression, (2) avoid ambiguity, (3) be brief, and (4) be orderly. In the political field, the following utterances expressed a strong and clear statement:

(4) “Until now, we are sticking to the original plan to nominate Megawati as president. It has been the party's decision from the beginning,” (Tjahjo Kumolo, Jakarta Post 25 April 2009).

The statement (4) was uttered to respond the people confusion whether PDI will propose some other candidates. The speaker employed direct and literal speech act in uttering it.

3.2 Violations of the Cooperative Principle

According to Grice (1975) in (Thomas, 1995) “A float occurs when a speaker blatantly fails to observe a maxim at the level of what is said, with the deliberate intention of generating implicature”. The four conversational maxims tend to govern an ideal communication based on some norms – norms to speak honestly, relevantly and clearly in appropriate amount. In other words, these maxims are normative. These maxims are not universal – they are not applicable to all society because the natures of human and culture are heterogeneous. Human being does not only have norm to act honestly, but human being also has tendency to lie for certain reasons. These maxims are also culturally determined, some cultures are much less informative as demonstrated by Keenan (1976, in Foley, 2001) that Malagasy peasants, especially men, are typically much less informative in their information exchanges than are Americans or Australians. Javanese typically talk around the bush before they come to the main information. Hence, violations of these maxims take place regularly. Foley (2001:277) states: “In ongoing conversational interactions, speakers violate or flout Grice’s four Maxims regularly. They do this for a particular purpose; the hearer, assuming the operation of the Cooperative principle, tries to reason why the speaker has flouted a particular Maxim, what she is implying by doing so, and so comes to a conclusion about her intentions, an implicature”. Politic is characterized by conflict of interests to get political power. Based on its nature, politicians need many alternatives to express their interests and exploiting the conversational maxims can be part of the alternatives.

3.2.1 Violations of the Maxim of Quantity

Politicians often violate this maxim by giving too much information as the following political language discourses.

(5) “Of course, we will discuss over some topics.” (Megawati, Jakarta Post 30 April 2009)

This utterance does not give sufficient information since there is no information that readers can get from it.

(6) “We also continue to consolidate within our party to name a candidate in the upcoming presidential election, among the names we will likely to propose is Yudhoyono. But we will decide only after the legislative elections, while maintaining good communication with many parties” (Muhaimin, Jakarta post 17 April 2009).
In Indonesia, there is no such thing as a tyranny of the majority; what we have is a checks and balances system. Even if a coalition [between the Democratic Party and the PDI-P] is formed, we will surely respect one another equally,” (Hadi, Jakarta Post 10 May 2009).

The utterance (6) and (7) give more information than it is required by the readers. There are some points given in the utterances whether he stated about presidential candidate or good communication.

“We are willing to build a strong government in the next tenure and it is not all about sharing the power.” (Muhaimin, Jakarta Post 17 April 2009)

The utterance (8) violates the maxim of quantity since it gives more information that is required by the constituents.

3.2.2 Violations of the Maxim of Quality

The maxim of quality was exploited more often than the others. The maxim was usually exploited by giving “inappropriate” information. In this violation, the speaker very often did not intend to mislead the hearers but they did it because of their political reasons. Politicians often violated this maxim to fulfill the maxim of quantity. In the political field, however, there was a clash between the maxim of quantity and the maxim of quality. Maxim of quality was exploited to obey the maxim of quantity; the speaker did not want to reveal his political decision but he tried to provide information for the given questions. The violation of the quality maxim may be employed to intimidate the opposition groups.

“We are willing to build a strong government in the next tenure and it is not all about sharing the power.” (Muhaimin, Jakarta Post 17 April 2009)

The utterance (9) doesn’t give sufficient information because the first and the second clause are not related. The second clause didn’t support the first clause for he was not quiet sure about his information. It can be he was lack of evidence

“The electricity crisis is a consequence of the rapid growth, but I think that’s not a valid excuse” (Kalla, Jakarta Post, 28 April 2009).

The utterance (10) violates the maxim of quality in case the politician only predict the upcoming issue without having evidence whether it will be true or not.

“The same trick failed in 2004, and it will fail again too in the upcoming elections” (Andi Malarangeng, Jakarta Post 25 April 2009).

The utterance (11) also violates the maxim of quality due to an adequate evidence of the utterance.

3.2.3 Violations of the Maxim of Relation

Exploitations of the maxim were expressed with utterances, which were not germane with topics under discussion. The maxim of relevance is exploited by making a response or observation which is very obviously irrelevant to the topic in hand (e.g. by abruptly changing
the subject, or by overtly failing to address the other person’s goal in asking a question) (Thomas, 1995).

(12). "The cake has not even been put in the oven, so why are we discussing how to cut it. We don't even have the eggs to bake the cake yet," (Faisal quoted Megawati, Kompas 30 April 2009).

(13) "We can not just decide to bond together and go forward. It looks like selecting a husband or wife, you need to consider many factors," (Tjahjo Kumolo, Kompas 25 April 2009)

(14) "Golkar has been providing high quality entertainment in every general election since the reform era," (Jeffri Winter, The Jakarta Post 29 April 2009).

The utterance (12), (13) and (14) violet the maxim of relevance because the addresser didn’t give the relevant information. The utterance also failed to address the goal of the utterances. The readers were confused in analysing it because it didn’t have any relation with the topic discussed..

4. Conclusion

In the political language, politicians often exploit conversational maxim regularly. Politicians exploit quantity maxim by giving information less or more than is required. Less information is given to hide information that is not considered for mass consumption. More information is intended to show speaker’s strong commitment and be polite – exploiting irony principle does some of them. The maxim of quality is exploited by giving untrue information. The exploitations are done to mislead the hearers or to get good political bargaining position and to obey the quantity maxim and politeness principle. The exploitations are also done by giving weak information or information that was not supported by enough data or facts. Statements whose clauses oppose each other do the other exploitations. The last exploitations are aimed to obey agreement maxim of politeness principle, to minimize disagreement between self and other. The relevance maxim is exploited by giving information that is not germane with the topic under discussion. To understand the meaning and implicational relationship require implicature. Meanwhile, the maxim of manner is exploited by giving utterances which has good coherent.

References


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