



LANGUAGE STYLES AND FUNCTIONS IN TIKTOK POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF 2024 INDONESIAN LOCAL ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the language styles and functions used in TikTok campaign videos during Indonesia's 2024 regional elections (Pilkada). Using a qualitative descriptive method, the study explores how local political candidates employed short-form video content to influence and engage voters, particularly younger demographics. The data, drawn from five prominent candidates' TikTok accounts, were analyzed using Joos' (1976) language style classification and Holmes' (2013) language function framework. The findings reveal the predominance of casual and consultative language styles, which reflect candidates' intentions to appear relatable and informative. Referential and expressive language functions were the most frequently used to convey political messages and create emotional connections. This study underscores the importance of language strategy in digital political discourse and offers insights into how social media platforms like TikTok are reshaping political communication.

Keywords: Language Style, Language Function, TikTok, Pilkada 2024, Sociolinguistics, Political Communication, Youth Voter Engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, political campaigns have increasingly migrated to digital platforms, most notably social media, to capitalize on their reach and influence. TikTok, a platform primarily popular among Gen Z and millennials, emerged as a new political battleground during Indonesia's 2024 local elections (Pilkada). Unlike traditional campaign methods, TikTok offers a space where candidates can deliver political messages creatively and informally in under one minute.

The shift to TikTok aligns with global trends in digital campaigning. According to Theocharis and van Deth (2018), digital media have become central in mobilizing political participation. In Indonesia, the use of TikTok surged during election periods, with candidates embracing the platform to amplify visibility and personalize their image (Aprilianti & Fitriani, 2024).

Language plays a crucial role in shaping political identity and influencing public opinion. As stated by Fairclough (1995), discourse is both a reflection and a producer of social practices, including politics.

Joos (1976) categorized language styles into five types: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate, each corresponding to specific communicative situations. Holmes (2013) identified several language functions—referential, expressive, directive, phatic, metalinguistic, poetic, heuristic, and commissive—that serve varying communicative purposes.

This research investigates (1) the dominant language styles and (2) the language functions used by political candidates on TikTok during the 2024 Pilkada, providing insights into sociolinguistic strategies within new media political communication.

Sociolinguistics and Language Style Sociolinguistics explores the interaction between language and society, particularly how social factors influence language use (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Joos' (1976) typology is a foundational framework in this field, distinguishing between formal and informal registers. Casual and consultative styles are often used in public-facing but personal discourse, like vlogs or social media content (Eckert & Rickford, 2001).

Political Communication in the Digital Age Digital platforms afford politicians new ways to connect with audiences. Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) noted that political communication has evolved into a hybrid model involving traditional and digital media. TikTok's algorithm amplifies engagement, often favoring videos with colloquial language and humor (Zulli & Zulli, 2020).

Language Functions in Political Discourse Language functions define the speaker's intent. Jakobson (1960) introduced six functions later elaborated by Holmes (2013). In political contexts, referential functions deliver facts, expressive functions show emotion, and directive functions prompt action (Herbert, 2011). On TikTok, these functions often overlap due to the multimodal nature of video content.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach with a focus on content analysis, which is commonly used in sociolinguistic research to identify patterns and meanings in communication. The aim was to analyze both the style and function of language used by political candidates during the 2024 Pilkada through their TikTok content.

The selection of TikTok accounts was based on the following criteria: (1) verified status, (2) political candidacy in major regional elections, (3) consistent posting of campaign-related content, and (4) minimum follower base of 50,000. The five accounts chosen represent diverse geographic and sociopolitical contexts: Jakarta, Surabaya, Makassar, Medan, and Bandung.

The time frame for video selection was October to December 2024, coinciding with the peak of the campaign season. From each account, 20 videos were selected using purposive sampling to ensure thematic relevance and linguistic richness.

Data Collection:

- Download and transcribe 100 TikTok videos.
- Code utterances based on Joos' (1976) language styles.
- Identify language functions using Holmes' (2013) typology.
- Validate findings through peer-checking with two linguistics experts. Additionally, thematic triangulation and intercoder agreement were used to ensure reliability and validity. Interrater agreement between coders reached 87%, indicating strong consistency in categorization.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Language Styles Used

Language Style	Frequency	Example
Casual	45	"Halo, bro-sis! Jangan lupa coblos tanggal 27 ya!"
Consultative	35	"Program kami akan memprioritaskan pendidikan dan lapangan kerja."
Formal	15	"Dengan ini saya sampaikan visi dan misi saya kepada masyarakat."
Intimate	5	"Saya sayang kampung halaman saya. Terima kasih sudah percaya."
Frozen	0	Tidak ditemukan.

The dominance of casual and consultative styles suggests that candidates aim to build trust and relatability. The lack of frozen style indicates that TikTok's informal structure discourages rigid or ceremonial language, as found in formal speeches or written declarations (Chaika, 1982).

3.2 Language Functions Identified

Language Function	Frequency	Example
Referential	52	"Kami telah membangun 3 posyandu baru tahun ini."
Expressive	20	"Saya bangga menjadi bagian dari komunitas ini."
Directive	15	"Coblos nomor 2 untuk masa depan lebih baik!"
Phatic	13	"Selamat pagi warga Surabaya! Apa kabar?"
Metalinguistic	0	-
Poetic	0	-
Heuristic	0	-
Commissive	0	-

Referential function dominated, affirming the campaign's goal of providing informative content. Expressive and directive utterances were crucial for connecting emotionally and prompting voter action, confirming findings from similar studies by Arista & Murni (2014) and Silalahi et al. (2021).

The analysis indicates that casual (45%) and consultative (35%) language styles were the most frequently used by candidates across TikTok campaign videos. These styles allowed candidates to appear both approachable and informative, resonating well with younger audiences who prefer authenticity and clarity in political messages. In terms of language functions, referential (52%) and expressive (20%) dominated, highlighting the dual goal of informing and emotionally engaging with voters.

Regional Variation in Language Use A closer look at the five regional candidates reveals subtle differences in language use:

- **Jakarta Candidate:** Emphasized expressive and phatic functions to build emotional connections with urban youth.
- **Surabaya Candidate:** Balanced between formal and consultative styles to maintain credibility while staying accessible.
- **Makassar Candidate:** Frequently used intimate style, suggesting strong local ties and personalized appeal.
- **Medan Candidate:** Dominated by directive functions, often urging action and emphasizing political urgency.
- **Bandung Candidate:** Heavy reliance on casual style, reflecting the city's creative and youthful demographic.

These variations underscore the importance of context-sensitive language strategies, where candidates tailor their speech to match the sociocultural character of their constituents.

Figure 1. Distribution of Language Styles and Functions in TikTok Campaign Videos, affirming the campaign's goal of providing informative content. Expressive and directive utterances were crucial for connecting emotionally and prompting voter action, confirming findings from similar studies by Arista & Murni (2014) and Silalahi et al. (2021).

4. CONCLUSION

Language choices in TikTok political campaigns reflect the deliberate efforts of candidates to construct a public image that is both relatable and persuasive. The predominance of casual and consultative styles illustrates a shift toward informal and dialogic engagement, which aligns with the interactive and entertainment-driven nature of the TikTok platform. These styles help candidates appear more humanized, accessible, and responsive to the expectations of younger, digitally literate voters.

Moreover, the dominance of referential and expressive functions underscores the dual communicative goals of modern political discourse: to inform and to emotionally resonate. Referential language allows candidates to convey clear and factual messages about programs and policy priorities, while expressive functions establish emotional proximity and foster trust.

The findings of this study support the notion that sociolinguistic analysis is a powerful lens through which to understand how political messaging adapts to digital media ecosystems. Platforms like TikTok are not merely channels of dissemination but active arenas of identity performance and voter engagement. As such, the study provides valuable implications for both scholars and practitioners in political communication, particularly in designing linguistically strategic content that aligns with platform norms and audience preferences.

Future research may expand this study by incorporating a longitudinal approach, cross-platform analysis, or examining audience reception and feedback patterns to better understand the impact of language use on voter behavior.

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