

Strategic uses of vague expressions in Indonesian political talk show Mata Najwa: A pragmatic discourse analysis

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ABSTRACT

The use of vague expressions in political discourse interaction is often viewed as a form of linguistic ambiguity, however, previous research has not adequately explained their strategic function in confrontational public interactions, especially in the in the context of political talk shows. This study aims to examine the pragmatic function of vague expressions as a communication strategy in the Mata Najwa talk show episode "Berebut Tahta di Tengah Wabah" (Fighting for the Throne in the Midst of an Outbreak). A descriptive qualitative approach is implemented. In order to get in depth data analysis, pragmatic discourse analysis based on operational linguistic indicators, including indefinite quantifiers, hedging devices, general extenders, and placeholder expressions is used. The data consists of 127 responses from nine resource persons to host questions and statements, with a tendency to use vague expressions in sensitive questions. The results show that vague expressions function as a discursive strategy structured in three main forms. First, a mitigation strategy encompasses self-protection, politeness, and information limitation to reduce epistemic commitment and avoid sensitive issues. Second, an affirmative strategy utilizes factual data and assertive statements to build credibility and public trust. Third, a conversation management strategy utilizes inclusive pronouns and cultural symbols to build legitimacy and manage power relations. This finding confirms that vagueness is a strategic pragmatic practice in political communication that plays a role in shaping public perception and legitimacy.



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I. INTRODUCTION

Language is considered as the primary instrument of communication and playing a crucial role in achieving interaction goals, both in written and verbally practices. In general practice, moreover, communication requires not only clarity and accuracy of information but also

involves various strategies of communication employed by speakers to adapt messages to the context, goals, and underlying social relations. Communication strategies are understood as the ways and means used to overcome communication barriers while achieving specific goals, which can differ between individuals depending on their intentions and the medium used (Mariani, 2010). Thus, language use is not only oriented toward conveying explicit meaning but also toward achieving implicit meanings hidden within specific interaction contexts. For example, in the context of public communication such as a political media, language has a more complex function not only as a tool for conveying information but also as mean of constructing meaning, representing power, and shaping public opinion since media discourse is an arena for ideological negotiation in which actors use various linguistic strategies to defend their positions, build their image, and influence their audiences. Interactions in this format are open, dynamic, and often confrontational, placing high reputational pressure on participants. In such situations, communication strategies become crucial, particularly through the use of less explicit forms of language. This communication practice usually can be found in political talk shows that involve many political actors who have reputations that must be maintained in the public perception.

In addition, the complexity of communication strategies is getting increase in the contemporary context along with the development of digital public spaces and broadcast media that bring together diverse of social, cultural, and ideological interests. In line with the phenomena, several studies have been conducted related to some aspects such as cultural and contextual factors in the construction of meaning (Anwar & Murtadho, 2023), power relations in the reproduction and negotiation of social dynamics (Apriyani & Rosly, 2024), and the communication strategies of the younger generation on global issues such as climate change (Putri et al., 2025). Meanwhile, in the realm of political media, a study by Purwaningrum and Harmoko (2023) shows that media discourse shapes ideological positions through lexical choices and framing strategies and Purwaningrum and Harmoko (2025) indicate that interactions in political talk shows reflect the negotiation of power and the construction of public image through question strategies, metaphors, and evaluative language. This indicates that communication in political talk shows is a complex and interest-laden discursive practice. In addition, Handayani and Saefullah (2020) found that in the language practice of public space, actors in political talk shows tend to display behavior that attacked each other with words, leading to verbal attacks. This is supported by Handayani (2023) who examined the talk show hosts 'question patterns leading to verbal attacks used as strategies to obtain desired information.

One prominent linguistic strategy in the context of discursive practices in the public space is the use of vague expressions, utterances containing ambiguity (Sabet & Zhang, 2016). Linguistically, vague expressions are characterized by referential imprecision in the form of words, phrases, or sentence structures that allow for more than one interpretation. According to the various studies show that vagueness is not merely a formal phenomenon, but also has significant pragmatic value as interactional resources that enrich the social dynamics of

conversations (Jucker et al., 2003; Shi, 2015), as well as pragmatic strategies related to speaker intentions, social position, and conversational structure (Burton, 2014; Georgakopoulou, 2019).

Regarding to the vague expression, previous researches has examined vagueness from various perspectives. Khalil (2020) views vagueness as a reflection of speakers' epistemic limitations. In other contexts, Cheng and Warren (2001) point to the role of vagueness in the negotiation of meaning and social solidarity, while Wenzhong and Jingyi (2013) link it to persuasive rhetoric. In terms of linguistic form, Cutting (2007) and Tárnyiková (2019) identify the use of general extenders, indefinite quantifiers, and generic pronouns, while Khalil (2019) and Ghezzi (2022) highlight placeholder expressions as a strategy to reduce speakers' semantic responsibility.

Concerning these studies, therefore, vague expressions operate on the three main dimensions such as the epistemic dimension for reducing commitment, the interpersonal dimension for protecting social relations, and the rhetorical dimension for managing audience perception. However, most of these studies focus on non-political contexts, such as everyday conversation, intercultural communication, or commercial discourse. Consequently, understanding how equivocal expressions operate simultaneously across epistemic, interpersonal, and rhetorical dimensions as a mitigation strategy in confrontational political communication contexts remains limited. This gap is all the more relevant given the nature of political talk shows as high-pressure public interaction spaces, where every statement has implications for public image, legitimacy, and perception.

In line with the development of talk show practices both in television and media social, the definition of talk shows has also evolved and the parameters should include at least three forms of interaction: interviews, discussions, and speeches (Hilliard, 2000). Moreover, Ilie (2006) defines talk shows by looking at three important aspects: (1) the representation of rapid changes in hybrid media phenomena, (2) the nature of intertextuality in the use of diverse and overlapping forms of discourse, and (3) the event of reconstruction of discursive rules that are often violated. In accordance with the definition of a talk show, political talk shows are categorized as a type of talk show that has complex interactions between hosts, resource persons, and audiences that tend to be intertextual in their use of discourse. Therefore, it has a high tendency to reconstruct discursive rules. The way to understand the message delivered and the language behavior of speakers can be done through exploring the intrinsic elements of the language used both lexically and pragmatically (Raffman, 2013).

Considering to the phenomena and the problem framework, this study aims to analyze the linguistic marker indicating strategies underlying the use of vague expressions in the responses of resource persons on political talk shows, with an emphasis on the pragmatic function as a communication strategy. Thus, this study has theoretical significance in expanding the understanding of the role of vagueness as a pragmatic resource in discourse analysis, especially in the context of confrontational and interest-laden political

communication. In addition, this study contributes to uncovering the dynamics of political communication in the contemporary public sphere, especially in the increasingly dominant talk show format on television media and digital platforms, which places political actors in an open, fast-paced, and high-risk interaction space for public image and legitimacy.

II. METHOD

This study implemented a qualitative descriptive design combined with a discourse analysis approach to examine the use of vague expressions in the responses of resource persons on political talk shows in Indonesia television. The aim of this study was to analyze the linguistic forms and pragmatic functions of vague expressions as a communication strategy in political discourse. The discourse analysis approach used refers to a framework that emphasizes the relationship between language structure, social context, and power (McCarthy et al., 2019; Paltridge, 2022; Van Dijk, 2015). The operational framework of the analysis refers to the concept of vagueness as a linguistic phenomenon (Raffman, 2013) and the classification of pragmatic functions of vague expressions, which include mitigation, commitment or information accuracy, and discourse management (Sabet & Zhang, 2016).

The data were obtained purposively from the Mata Najwa program, specifically the episode "*Berebut Tahta di Tengah Wabah*" (Fighting for the Throne in the Midst of an Outbreak), accessed through the official YouTube channel. The selection of this episode was based on methodological considerations as an information-rich case such as a communication context that brought together the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and political contestation, resulting in intense, confrontational, and reputationally risky interactions. Nevertheless, this study recognized the limitations of data representation that could potentially limit the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, this research finding is positioned as an analytical generalization rather than a statistical generalization, with an emphasis on the depth of contextual interpretation rather than the breadth of the data. Thus, the research focus is directed at exploring the strategic mechanisms of the use of vague expressions in high-stakes communication situations.

In addition, in order to interpret the process considered not merely procedural but involved a critical reading for possible ambiguities of meaning and potential researcher bias, the analysis procedure was carried out through several systematic and reflective stages. First, the data were transcribed and segmented based on turn-taking units to establish consistent units of analysis. Second, utterances containing ambiguity were identified using operational linguistic indicators, including indefinite quantifiers, hedging markers, general extenders, and placeholder expressions. Third, each utterance was analyzed contextually, considering the relationship between participants, the communicative purpose, and the type of speech act to determine its dominant pragmatic function. Therefore, the classification of functions was not carried out mechanically, but rather through an iterative process of comparing the data to ensure consistency of categorization.

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To enhance reliability and transparency, furthermore, this study employed several validation strategies. First, the data reliability was checked by recoding the data at different times to test the stability of the classification results. This coding was categorized based on participant type, the nature of the expression (vague versus non-vague), and key words within the expression. Second, some of the data were analyzed with two linguistic experts through analytical discussions to obtain peer debriefing and strengthen the validity of the interpretations. Third, this study presents explicit operational indicators and representative data examples as a form of audit trail, allowing for traceability of the analysis process. Although this research is interpretive, these steps were taken to minimize uncontrolled subjectivity and increase the credibility of the findings. With this approach, the research not only outlines analytical procedures but also emphasizes reflexivity in the data interpretation process. Therefore, ambiguous expressions are positioned not simply as linguistic phenomena, but as pragmatic strategies structured within the dynamics of confrontational and high-stakes political communication in the media.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the identification of utterances in the political talk show episode "*Berebut Tahta di Tengah Wabah*" show that the resource person tends to respond to the host's questions that are considered pressing or require sensitive answers with vague expressions. The results of the classification of disguised utterance data (vague expressions) based on the identification of utterances that have the potential to contain vagueness using operational linguistic indicators, including: (1) indefinite quantifiers (some, around, more or less), (2) hedging devices or markers of weakening commitment (maybe, it seems, we think), (3) general extenders and general categorical expressions, and (4) placeholder expressions or non-specific references. The data obtained were 68 turn takings for the host, with 58 interrogative sentences and 16 declarative sentences addressed to 9 resource persons who were divided into complete responses in the form of complete sentences and incomplete responses in the form of incomplete sentences. The response data for 9 resource persons can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Source response sentences to host questions

No	Types of Response	Total Response	Total Word	Average
1	Complete Response	78	2.403	30.8
2	Incomplete Response	49	518	10.5
	Total	127	2.921	23

Mitigation Strategies

Mitigation strategies in linguistics are communication strategies used to reduce the impact of conflict. This strategy is carried out by speakers by creating ambiguous or vague expressions using mitigation trigger terms such as hedges, modalities, politeness, or hesitation marker particles, and passive structures. Data analysis shows that the tendency of sources to respond to the host's questions by providing ambiguous or vague statements indicates different functions of mitigation strategies, namely to protect themselves from the host's questions, maintain politeness, and downplay or minimize the problem or quantity, as categorized in Table 2.

Table 2. The speaker's response sentence to the host's

Category	Data	Strategy	Key Expressions	Example Speech
Self-Protection	D-1	Hedging of commitment	<i>Mungkin</i> (maybe)	"...kalau time frame-nya dipercepat ya mungkin karena saya sudah merasa siap..." (...if the timeframe is accelerated, maybe it's because I feel ready...)
	D-2	Obscuring fact	<i>Mungkin</i> (maybe)	"...itu mungkin salah satu pertimbangan dari ketua umum." (...that might be one of the chairman's considerations)
	D-3	Unclear Reference	<i>mungkin, masyarakat</i> (prehab society)	"...mungkin masyarakat' (...maybe the public)
	D-4	Delegation of responsibility	<i>Kayaknya</i> (like/as)	<i>Kalau rekomendasi itu kan kayaknya ibu ketua umum...</i> (If it's a recommendation, I think it's the chairman's...)
	D-5	Double hedging	<i>kita lihat dulu</i> (let's see, <i>mungkin</i> (maybe)	'O ya... kita lihat dulu dong...' Oh yeah... we'll see..."
	D-6	Ambiguity of commitment	<i>Insya Allah</i>	' <i>Insya Allah sampai selesai. Pilkada saja belum selesai</i> (Insya Allah, until it's finished. The regional elections aren't even over yet)
	D-7	Unspecific Reference	<i>sudah pernah saya katakan</i> (I've said it before	' <i>Kalau saya sudah pernah saya katakan juga Mbak</i> ' (If it's a recommendation, I think it's the chairman's...)

Table 2. (Continue) The Speaker's Response Sentence to the Host's

Category	Data	Strategy	Key Expressions	Example Speech
Politeness Strategy	D-8	Softener opinion	saya rasa (I felt)	' <i>Ya... saya rasa sih tidak</i> ' (Yeah... I don't think so)
	D-9	Identity distancing	saya kira (I think)	" <i>Masa mirip. Saya kira beda</i> (It's not similar. I think it's different)
Limiting Information	D-10	Generalization	semua, seluruhnya (all)	" <i>Itu saja, semua, semuanya, seluruhnya...</i> " (That's all, everything, everything, everything...)
	D-11	Accumulation of Generalization	segala macam (all kinds)	" <i>Semua masa depan, segala macam...</i> (All the futures, everything..."

Table 2 shows that mitigation strategies were realized through three broad categories: self-protection, politeness strategy, and limiting information, each of which is manifested through specific lexical choices as pragmatic markers. Judging from the resource persons' responses. Seen from the conversation between the host and the resource persons, coming to the three categories, the self-protection category is the most dominant form of mitigation. This strategy is realized through the use of hedging, such as "maybe, I think," and ambiguous expressions such as "God willing, we'll see first, and I've already said that." These expressions indicate an attempt to reduce epistemic commitment to the proposition being conveyed. The discourse and pragmatic function of these categories of mitigation are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. Discourse function and pragmatic function of speech in talk shows

Major Categories	Discourse Functions	Pragmatic Functions
Self-Protection	Creating ambiguity, disguising position, shifting responsibility, reducing epistemic commitment, protecting self-image (face-saving),	Reducing epistemic commitment, protecting self-image (face-saving), and avoiding sensitive issues such as nepotism, privilege, or ambition for power
Politeness Strategy	reducing epistemic commitment, protecting self-image (face-saving)	Maintaining positive and negative face, conveying rejection or differences subtly
Limiting Information	Giving the impression of comprehensiveness without detailed elaboration	Limiting the depth of information, maintaining control over the narrative, and avoiding potentially detrimental clarifications

Vague expression mitigation strategies as a self-protection tool

The results of the analysis show that the use of vague expressions in the context of Indonesian political talk shows is not a form of communicative indecisiveness, but rather an interaction strategy in communication to demonstrate defensive functions (Self-Protection Strategy) in responding to questions, objections, or verbal attacks as a mitigation function as indicated in Data 1 (D-[1] – Data 7 (D-[7]) that were consistently used to reduce the certainty of

a proposition, avoid explicit commitments, and minimize reputational risk in confrontational situations.

This finding expands on Khalil (2020) view, which views vagueness as a reflection of the speaker's epistemic limitations. In this research data, the uncertainty indicated by "maybe" (D-[1]-D-[3]) is not due to a lack of information, but rather a deliberate strategy to avoid direct confirmation of sensitive issues such as inconsistencies in political stances or allegations of nepotism. Thus, the epistemic dimension of vagueness functions as a commitment reduction mechanism, rather than as an indication of ignorance.

Meanwhile, D-[2] and D-[3], the expressions "maybe" and generic references such as "society" are used by the source to create referential ambiguity. Pragmatically, this strategy obscures the presuppositions established by the presenter's questions, namely the assumption of family political coordination or nepotism. This aligns with the findings of Cutting (2007) and Tárnyiková (2019) regarding the function of indefinite quantifiers and generic references as markers of structural vagueness. D-[4] and D-[5] show the mitigation strategy develops into a more complex form, namely double protection, the obscuration of commitment accompanied by the transfer of responsibility to an institutional actor (the party chairman). Expressions such as "*kiranya*" and " *mungkin mungkin*" (perhaps one of the considerations) not only reduce epistemic commitment but also frame the decision as the result of a formal procedure. From a discourse analysis perspective (McCarthy et al., 2019; Paltridge, 2022), this step demonstrates the negotiation of meaning within the power relations between host and interviewee.

Furthermore, in certain situations, vagueness has cultural and rhetorical dimensions as shown in D-[6]. The use of the religious expression *Insya Allah* shows that the expression not only reduces futuristic commitment but also activates religious values as symbolic legitimacy in the Indonesian cultural context. Semantically, the expression implies commitment, and this contains moral legitimacy while maintaining the image of not being ambitious for higher political positions, but pragmatically still opens up the possibility of change in the future. This finding is in line with Cheng and Warren (2001) and Lin (2013), who see vagueness as a tool for negotiating meaning within certain cultural norms as a form of self-protection. Meanwhile, data D-[7] shows the use of a placeholder expression through the phrase "I have already said it." Structurally, this phrase appears to refer to a previous statement, but does not provide an explicit reference. This expression has an ambiguous meaning, namely as if the speaker has indeed made the intended statement and the speaker is indeed an honest person. In the context of talk shows that tend to be confrontational, this strategy serves to shift the focus from sensitive questions to alternative narratives that are more reputationally secure (Handayani & Saefullah, 2020; Handayani, 2023).

Vague Expression Mitigation Strategies as a Form of Politeness

Unlike position-oriented self-protection, politeness strategies serve to manage interpersonal relationships and minimize potential conflict. This strategy is realized through

opinion softeners such as "I feel" and "I suppose/think/don't think so," which pragmatically mark statements as subjective opinions, not absolute claims, as indicated in D-[8] and D-[9]. In D-[8], the response "I don't think so" indicates epistemic downgrading, namely a reduction in the propositional force of the rejection. Illocutionary, this utterance still contains a rejection of the assumption of privilege, but perlocutionary, it reduces the potential for confrontation. This aligns with the concept of negative politeness, where the speaker avoids the appearance of imposing a position to avoid conflict and the potential for impoliteness.

A similar phenomenon is seen in D-[9], where the speaker uses a rhetorical question followed by "I think it's different." This structure allows the speaker to indirectly reject the statement while maintaining an argumentative position. Thus, vagueness in this context functions as a strategy for balancing opposition and interactional harmony. Although the function of politeness tends to also use hedging, this is distinguished from self-protection not by its linguistic form but by its pragmatic orientation, namely, self-protection focuses on avoiding substantive risks, while politeness focuses on managing relationships and face. In line with this case, this strategy is not considered as a form of linguistic weakness but rather a conscious and strategic discursive choice in political communication. Thus, in the hybrid and intertextual nature of political talk shows, the resource person spook not only to the host but also to a wider audience via television and digital platforms. Therefore, mitigation strategies in the form of politeness strategies cannot be understood as mere linguistic politeness but rather as part of image management in public political communication.

Vague expression mitigation strategy as a form of information limitation for generalization

Referring to Table 1, D-[10] and D-[11] show that vague expressions are used as a mitigation strategy to minimize and limit information (information minimization strategy). In contrast to the self-protection category, and the politeness strategy, this category focuses on controlling information space through generalization and blurring references. This information limitation strategy is demonstrated through the use of lexical expressions such as "all," "everything," "all of them," "all of them," "that's all," and "all kinds" that semantically, these words indicate the meaning of totality, however, pragmatically, this totality actually results in ambiguity because it is not accompanied by concrete details as presented in D-[10] and D-[11].

The expression "programs for all futures" in D-[10] represents a form of referential vagueness that fails to specify the type of program, its objectives, its duration, or the specific issues addressed. The word "all" creates a comprehensive and comprehensive impression, but lacks factual details. From a pragmatic perspective, these expressions serve to avoid mentioning specific information that could potentially be tested or criticized, to control the direction of the conversation to prevent it from developing into more technical follow-up questions, and to create an optimistic image without opening up space for concrete verification as a reference that regarded as a form of discursive shielding, protecting against

potential political risks in this context by maintaining the impression of program readiness without revealing details that could become the point of further argumentative attack.

In contrast to D-[10], D-[11] shows that the information restriction strategy appears to be more explicit through the repetition of utterances of totality, such as ‘...everything ...’, ‘all kinds of ...’, ‘all n...’, and ‘nothing ...’. In accordance with the utterances used, the repeated use of the words creates an accumulative effect that builds an image of absolute transparency. However, analytically, this totalization actually eliminates specification because it does not provide an explanation of what data can be accessed, whether access is full or limited, and the verification mechanism for this transparency. Therefore, this strategy is practically considered as a form of overgeneralization as mitigation, such as the use of excessive generalization to avoid detailed elaboration. Thus, mitigation strategies through minimizing and limiting information do not simply reflect linguistic ambiguity, but rather constitute structured discursive practices designed to avoid potentially questionable details, create a comprehensive and convincing impression without concrete verification, and shift or distribute responsibility effectively.

Assertive Strategies

An assertive strategy is known as a type of representative speech act carried out by speakers to convey information that is believed to be true. In the context of talk shows, this strategy is often carried out by both the host and the source. Table 4 shows that in answering the host's questions, the resource person, in addition to using vague expressions as a mitigation strategy, uses assertive strategies to protect himself from maintaining credibility, building trust in the public, and directly denying accusations by stating facts, conveying opinions that are believed to be true, and providing confirmation of his position in the conversation.

Table 4. Functions of affirmation strategy reviewed from category

Sub-category	Linguistic features	Data	Utterances
Maintaining credibility	Providing data with figures or facts	D-12	<i>Kalau di Solo praktis kompetisi sudah berhenti sejak nominasi perjuangan diberikan kepada Gibran</i> (In Solo, the competition practically stopped when the nomination was given to Gibran)
		D-13	<i>Dari 45 kursi di Solo PDI perjuangan menguasai 30 kursi artinya secara elektoral</i> (Of the 45 seats in Solo, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) controlled 30, meaning electorally)
		D-14	<i>PDI perjuangan sangat dominan apalagi lawan meski Gibran tokoh yang kita tidak tahu siapa latar belakangnya...</i> (... the PDI-P was very dominant, especially against Gibran, a figure whose background we don't know...)

Table 4. (Continue) Functions of Affirmation Strategy Reviewed from Category

Sub-category	Linguistic features	Data	Utterances
Building public trust	Providing factual analysis	D-15	<i>Nah kalau di Medan itu ibarat kota Tak Bertuan</i> (Now, in Medan, it was like a no-man's-land)
		D-16	<i>Dari sisi electoral tidak ada partai yang sangat dominan ada dua partai pemenang Pemilu Tetapi dua-duanya hanya mendapatkan 10</i> (Of the 45 seats in Solo, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) controlled 30, meaning electorally)
		D-17	<i>Kursi yaitu PDI perjuangan dan Gerindra Kemudian PKS dapat 7 kursi PAN...</i> (There were two winning parties, but both only secured 10 seats: the PDI-P and Gerindra. Then, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) secured 7 seats, while the National Mandate Party (PAN) secured 7 seats...)
Denying the accusations	Responding with rebuttals that support the correct information	D-18	<i>Hal yang pertama, saya juga nggak ngerti kenapa saya dapat peringatan karena saya tidak ada mengundang orang, tidak ada mengundang masa,</i> (Firstly, I don't understand why I received a warning. I didn't invite anyone, I didn't invite any crowds)
		D-19	<i>Saya hanya hadir Bersama pasangan saya sama tim kampanye saya untuk mendaftar</i> (I simply attended with my partner and my campaign team to register)
		D-20	<i>Nah ternyata banyak masyarakat mengikuti dan saya tak tahu tuh</i> (Well, it turns out a lot of people followed, and I didn't know that..)

In its implementation, the strategy of maintaining credibility is indicated by using numerical data and concrete facts. The resource persons consistently presented quantitative information, such as the number of party seats or the distribution of electoral support, to confirm the accuracy of their statements in order to build the resource persons' image as a trustworthy source of information and validate their political arguments in the public perception. Meanwhile, the strategy of building public trust places more emphasis on presenting factual analysis. The resource persons were not only cited numbers but also interpret the local political context, such as party dominance in certain regions or the fragmentation of political power. This approach allows the audience to understand the political situation more broadly and strengthens their belief in the source's credibility. In contrast to the previous strategies, the strategy of denying accusations is characterized by responses that reject accusations or criticism while providing additional information that supports the truth of the statement. Thus, the resource persons used the strategies to defend themselves and

clarify public misunderstandings, thereby maintaining their position in competitive political conversations as described in Table 5.

Table 5. Functions of affirmation strategies viewed from a pragmatic function perspective

Sub Category	Linguistic Feature Word/phrase	Data	Pragmatic Function
Maintain Credibility	<i>Praktis(practical)</i> Quantitative Data (<i>45 kursi, 30 kursi</i>), <i>sangat dominan (very dominant); kita tidak tahu (we don't know)</i>	D-12, D-13, D-14	1. Asserting political dominance analytically without direct attack 2. Building legitimacy through numerical facts 3. Strengthening claims while using strategic vagueness to avoid direct accusations
Building Public Trust	<i>Ibarat kota tak bertuan</i> (Like a no-man's-land, no) <i>Tidak ada partai yang sangat dominan</i> (There is no dominant party) <i>Data kuantitatif</i> (10 kursi, 7 kursi) - (Quantitative data (10 seats, 7 seats)	D-15, D-16, D-18	1. Analytical metaphors to frame political conditions 2. Demonstrate objectivity and neutrality of analysis 3. Strengthen analysis with party seat distribution
Denying the Accusations Directly	I don't know); no one invited him, I don't know the room, only	D-18, D-19, D-20	1. Direct, fact-based denial of the action 2. Clarification of the action to build a defensive position 3. Constructing oneself as innocent
Asserting Position in Conversation	<i>Jauh lebih menarik</i> (Much more interesting.) <i>Mana ngomong nggak tau</i> (How can you say you don't know) <i>Pilkada adalah kompetisi</i> (Regional elections are a competition) <i>Tentu saja; mengikuti yang diputuskan KPU</i> (Of course, we must follow the KPU's decision) <i>harus Menyerahkan kepada pimpinan pusat/KPU/DPR</i> (We must submit it to the central leadership/KPU/DPR.)	D-21, D-22, D-23, D-24, d-25	1. Firm statements to demonstrate stance 2. Demonstrate consistency and personal responsibility 3. Normative definitions to control the framing of discussions 4. Assert adherence to formal authority 5. Delegation of institutional responsibility

Based on data D-[12]-D-[17], the resource persons used facts and figures to assert their credibility in the statement of, "In Solo, the competition has practically stopped since the nomination was given to Gibran. Of the 45 seats in Solo, the PDI-P controls 30 seats, meaning

that electorally, the PDI-P is very dominant." This strategy demonstrates an affirmative strategy to demonstrate competence and authority as a political observer. In a pragmatic context, the use of quantitative facts and objective descriptions reduces the need for expressions of doubt (vague) that are often seen as dominant in self-protection mitigation strategies, thereby affirming the source's epistemic position (Cutting, 2007; Khalil, 2020). Furthermore, affirmative strategies serve to build public trust. Analysis of the statement, "Well, in Medan, it's like a no-man's-land from an electoral perspective. No party is particularly dominant; two parties won the election, but both only secured 10 seats," shows that the source provides an objective and neutral analysis of the political situation. This strategy strengthens the interpersonal dimension of political, as the resource person builds a reputation as a credible party and maintains a positive relationship with the audience, while simultaneously educating the public about the local political context.

Affirmative strategies also serve to assert one's position in the conversation. D-[12] represents a direct response that emphasizes the differences in political situations between regions. Although the term "more interesting" is relative, this statement affirms the source's stance without creating direct confrontation, in line with the principle of face-saving in political communication. Meanwhile, D-[12], D-[18]–D-[20] were maintained to direct deny accusations in which the resource persons' response to accusations or sensitive questions with facts and explanations that support the truth, such as "I don't know," which asserts ignorance or impartiality on a particular issue. This strategy demonstrates both epistemic and rhetorical dimensions, namely, conveying accurate facts while managing public perception and reputational risk. In line with these strategies, affirmative and mitigating self-protection strategies, in the Indonesian socio-political context, particularly political talk shows, emerge as part of an adaptive political communication strategy when talk shows place speakers in confrontational situations with high reputational pressure as in the conditions overly direct or ambiguous answers that can lead to controversies or accusations of nepotism.

Affirmation strategy as a form of credibility

Table 5 displays the function of the affirmative strategy used by Resource person (NS-5) in responding to questions related to local politics, as reviewed from the pragmatic function of each language element. Analysis of D-12, D-13, and D-14 shows the affirmative strategy is combined with the use of vague expressions to establish the resource persons' credibility. Data D-12 shows that the use of the word "practical" in the statement "In Solo, practically, the competition has stopped since the nomination was given to G" serves to assert political dominance analytically without directly attacking the opposing party. In this case, the word "practical" is a form of deliberate vagueness, emphasizing the intensity of the political situation without mentioning details that could spark controversy. This strategy aligns with the findings of Cutting (2007) and Khalil (2020), which suggest that vague expressions can be used to reduce epistemic commitment and manage interactional risk in high-stakes public situations to safe face-threatening situations as the strategy to project analytical authority while

maintaining a neutral public image. Furthermore, D-13, by mentioning of quantitative data "Of the 45 seats in Solo, the PDI-P controls 30 seats, meaning that electorally...", serves to build legitimacy through numerical facts. It means that the presentation of quantitative facts confirms NS-5's position as an observer with in-depth knowledge of local political conditions so that these numerical facts not only increase credibility but also serves to guide audience interpretation objectively, reducing the possibility of biased perceptions or subjective speculation.

According to D-14, it shows that NS-5 not only conveyed factual information but also guided the audience to understand the political context analytically, while maintaining the image and control of public interactions through the affirmative strategy with a combination of strong claims and vague expressions indicated by the phrase "very dominant" emphasizes the political claim and the expression "we don't know whose background" is a form of strategic vagueness that obscures information about the opponent without directly attacking. Thus, NS-5 not only conveyed factual information but also guided the audience to understand the political context analytically, while maintaining the image and control of public interactions.

Affirmation strategy as a form of building trust

Affirmative strategies are not only used to establish credibility but also play a role in building public trust by conveying information that sounds objective and analytical as indicated D-15-D-17 in Table 5. The affirmative strategy employed by NS-5 not only builds personal credibility as a political observer but also strengthens public trust by presenting objective, fact-based, and pragmatically structured analysis. This strategy is consistent with the epistemic, interpersonal, and rhetorical dimensions of vague expressions and political communication as described in the following description (D-[15]-D-[17]).

According to the data, D-15 figured out that the use of the metaphor "like a no-man 's-land" serves as an analytical framework to describe the political situation in Medan. This expression suggests that the source is interpreted objectively, without taking sides. In accordance with pragmatic theory, particularly, the use of metaphors as in this is like this is a strategy for neutrally conveying complex evaluations, while simultaneously mitigating the risk of negative interpretations from the audience. Furthermore, in D-16, the phrase "no party is overwhelmingly dominant" demonstrates the objectivity and neutrality of the analysis. This statement affirms NS-5's position as an observer providing factual explanations, rather than subjective opinions or attacks on specific parties. This strategy aligns with the findings of Handayani and Saefullah (2020), political actors use analytical and neutral expressions to maintain credibility and build audience trust in the context of political talk shows.

Different from D-[15]-D-[16], Quantitative data of the distribution of party seats in D-17 ("both only received 10 seats, namely PDI-P and Gerindra, while PKS received 7 seats..."), reinforces the source's analysis with empirical evidence. The presentation of concrete numbers allows the audience to evaluate the political situation objectively, while also reinforcing the impression that the information provided by NS-5 is trustworthy. In this case,

the combination of quantitative data and neutral statements demonstrates a pragmatic strategy for building public trust, as the audience is convinced that the analysis provided is fact-based, impartial, and relevant to the socio-political context.

Affirmation strategy as a form of asserting a position in conversation

The affirmative strategy, as a means of asserting a position in conversation, was particularly evident when the resource persons faced accusations or questions that could threaten their image and reputation, and they responded with direct, firm answers while mitigating the risk of confrontation (face-threatening situations). For example, 5's (NS-5) statement as indicate D-[21] in Table 5: "... is much more interesting than" demonstrates position assertion through a comparison of political conditions in the two regions. Although the term "more interesting" carries a vague connotation (vague expression), the statement still effectively emphasizes the resource person's view regarding the differences in election dynamics in both cities (Medan and Solo). In other words, the use of vague terms in this context allows NS-5 to assert her views without verbally attacking the other party, allowing the affirmative strategy to sound assertive yet socially safe. Therefore, the affirmative strategy as a positional assertion operates on three main dimensions, e.g., the epistemic dimension reflected in the use of vague expressions that diminish full commitment to a claim, the interpersonal dimension evident in efforts to maintain a positive image of the source without attacking the other party, and the rhetorical dimension emerges from the ability to control the audience's perception of the facts or their desired interpretation. Thus, the affirmative strategy used by NS-5 (D-[21]) in this context is not as simple as a verbal response, but rather a complex pragmatic mechanism, combining positional assertion, action clarification, and reputational risk mitigation. This strategy confirms that the source can convey a firm view, maintain credibility, and simultaneously build a neutral and analytical image, in accordance with the principles of discourse analysis and conversation analysis in confrontational political contexts.

Affirmative strategy as a form of denying accusations

The affirmative strategy serves as a mechanism to deny accusations in public interactions, which appeared particularly when resource persons were confronted with questions that could potentially cast them as the guilty party. This strategy is implemented by providing a rebuttal supported by facts and true information, while simultaneously asserting the source's position in the conversation.

Data (D-[21] to D-[25]) demonstrate that the affirmative strategy operates pragmatically through a series of linguistic moves that systematically assert the source's position while mitigating accusations. For instance, D-21 (the statement "Medan is much more interesting than Solo" was a direct response that confirmed the source's stance. Although using a relative and open-to-interpretation expression, this remark effectively positioned resource person-3 (NS-3) as a situational analyst, rather than a victim of bias. By comparing the two contexts, the source strategically shifted the focus of the conversation from personal accusations to broader, more relevant situational comparisons. Furthermore, in D-22, the statements such as

"If I didn't speak, I wouldn't know I'd get a warning" emphasize consistency and personal responsibility as these statements serve as a form of self-defense, asserting that the source's actions were within procedural limits. The emphasis on cause-and-effect logic demonstrates that NS-3 is not avoiding responsibility but rather demonstrating an awareness of the consequences of the rules. Thus, the affirmative strategy here establishes a rational and controlled defensive position. Similar to D-[22], D-[23]-D-[25] that the resource person strengthened his image as someone who understands regulations and democratic structures, making the accusations against him less relevant in the broader normative context and places responsibility within a legitimate institutional framework to indicate about is consistency and personal responsibility.

In line with the affirmative strategies in D-[21] to D-[25], the strategies operate across three pragmatic dimensions, including epistemic, interpersonal, and rhetorical dimensions. In the epistemic dimension, the strategies demand that the resource person reduce commitment to potentially conflict-inducing claims by using fewer absolute expressions. Meanwhile, the interpersonal dimension, this strategy serves to maintain a positive image and protect reputation by avoiding confrontation. Different from the two previous dimensions, the rhetorical dimension serves the resource person consistently directs the conversation's focus on facts, procedures, and institutional authority, keeping the discussion within a controlled and credible framework. Thus, the affirmative strategy serves not only as a form of positional assertion but also as a mitigation mechanism that allows the source to maintain legitimacy and image stability in stressful political interactions. Therefore, the NS-3 affirmative strategy in denying accusations is not simply a defensive response, but rather a complex pragmatic mechanism: asserting a position, building a fact-based defense, and maintaining legitimacy and reputation in sensitive public spaces. This strategy is consistent with the principles of discourse analysis and conversation analysis, which emphasize the relationship between linguistic form, pragmatic function, and risk management in public interactions.

According to these strategies, which function as complex and structured communication mechanisms in political interactions, particularly in the context of talk shows, affirmative strategies, as a form of trust-building, are seen in the use of neutral and objective expressions, such as metaphors and numerical data, which direct the audience to accept the informant's views without creating bias or confrontation. These strategies, as positional affirmations, are reflected in firm and direct responses, which assert attitudes without attacking the other party, while maintaining control of the conversation. Finally, as a form of denial of accusations, these are carried out by providing fact-based rebuttals and claims of ignorance, which frame the informant as innocent while maintaining a positive image and integrity before the public. Thus, these four forms of affirmative strategies support each other in building credibility, strengthening social positions, and managing the dynamics of interactions in political conversations fraught with risks and reputational pressures.

Conversation management strategies

Conversation management strategies in political talk shows are used to control the topic of discussion, maintain the speaker's image (face-saving), and disguise partisanship to create a dominant narrative that benefits a particular political position. These strategies are built by expressing public assumptions that are assumed to be known or agreed upon by all parties. Data shows that resource persons used conversation management strategies by repeating words they deem important and expressing expressions that involve both the host and the speaker with the same knowledge. Phrases such as "we know...", "we can see...", "in my opinion...", "as I once said...", "we have to believe...", "...that we have created together...", and "...we know..." demonstrate management strategies used by speakers to control the conversation by obscuring power relations, strengthening the speaker's ideology, and building public perceptions of his or her credibility. The pragmatic function of these expression described in Table 6.

Table 6. Conversation management strategies in political talk shows

Subcategory	Language Signs	Data Code	Speech Example	Pragmatic Function
Building Closeness and Disguising Power Relations	<i>Pengulangan sapaan "Mbak"</i> (Repetition of the greeting "Ma'am")	D-26	<i>"Ya Mbak ini belajar terus Mbak..."</i> (Yes, Miss, you're constantly learning, Miss..)	Building interpersonal solidarity and reducing social distance
	<i>Sapaan "Mbak"</i> (Greeting "Mbak")	D-27	<i>"Masyarakat sudah cerdas Mbak."</i> ("The people are already smart, Miss.")	Creating an egalitarian atmosphere in interactions
	<i>Sapaan "Mbak" + klaim kolektif</i> (Greeting "Mbak" + collective claim)	D-28	<i>"Masyarakat Solo sudah tahu semua ya artinya kan mereka lebih tahu."</i> ("The people of Solo already know everything, which means they know better.")	Strengthening the impression of closeness and public legitimacy
	<i>"Nyuwun sewu ya Mbak"</i>	D-29–D-30	<i>"Karena nyuwun sewu ya Mbak bahwa yang namanya Bagyo dengan kata-kata settingan itu saya rasa terlalu naif."</i> (Because, Miss, I think it's too naïve to say that Bagyo uses those pretentious words.)	Politeness strategies for delivering criticism without confrontation
Building Collective Legitimacy	<i>Penggunaan pronomina inklusif "kita"</i> (Use of the inclusive pronoun "we")	D-31	<i>"Kalau kita melihat dari luar... fakta yang kita hadapi kita tahu itu betul-betul memprihatinkan."</i> ("If we look at it from the outside... the facts we face are truly concerning.")	Creating ideological solidarity and aligning positions with the audience
	<i>"Kita" sebagai pelaku program</i> ("We" as program actors)	D-32	<i>"Program pengentasan kemiskinan itu sudah kita siapkan Mbak."</i> ("We've prepared a poverty alleviation program, Miss.")	Building the illusion of collective participation and moral legitimacy
Cultural Identity Strategies	<i>Istilah Bahasa Jawa ("nyuwun sewu", "tikus pithi anoto baris")</i> (Javanese terms ("nyuwun sewu", "rat pithi anoto line"))	D-33	<i>"Memang ini ya menurut saya adanya tikus pithi anoto baris... Mbak nyuwun sewu."</i> ("Indeed, I think this is a rat pithi anoto baris... Miss, I'm giving you a thousand thanks.")	Strengthening local identity and cultural closeness with the audience

The research findings show that in Indonesian political talk shows, speakers not only answer questions informatively but also actively manage language as a strategic tool to navigate reputational risks, build legitimacy, and control public perception. The three main strategies identified —self-protection mitigation strategies, affirmative strategies, and conversation management strategies— do not exist in isolation but rather form a spectrum of complementary discursive practices in confrontational and high-stakes communication situations.

Self-protection mitigation strategies are characterized by the use of vague expressions such as "maybe," "*kiranya*," "*Insyallah*," "we'll see first," and "I've already said." These expressions function as a form of epistemic modality that reduces the level of commitment to the truth of a proposition. In the context of political talk shows, this strategy allows the interviewee to protect negative face, namely the right not to be bound by commitments that could be detrimental in the future. Thus, vagueness is not a rhetorical weakness, but rather a protective mechanism to avoid accusations of privilege, nepotism, or power ambition. This strategy is defensive: it reduces risk by blurring certainty and opening up space for reinterpretation.

In contrast, affirmative strategies demonstrate a different orientation. In data D-[12]–D-[17], the resource persons answered questions with quantitative data, party seat distribution, and assertive statements such as in D-[21]. This strategy demonstrates what pragmatic theory calls an assertive stance, namely, strengthening epistemic commitment to the proposition being conveyed to convey concrete facts in public discourse serves to build epistemic authority, namely, legitimacy as a competent and credible party. However, even within affirmative strategies, elements of vagueness, such as practicality or greater appeal, are found in which affirmation and mitigation are not always opposites but can operate simultaneously: facts are used to build credibility, while limited ambiguity is used to avoid direct attacks. In other words, affirmative strategies are proactive and argumentative, but still utilize pragmatic flexibility to maintain reputational stability.

Meanwhile, conversation management strategies operate on a more interactional and ideological dimension. Data D-[13] shows the repeated use of the greeting "*Mbak*," the inclusive pronoun "*kami*," and local Javanese terms such as "*nyuwun sewu*." Within the framework of politeness, the repetition of these greetings is a positive politeness strategy for building solidarity and reducing social distance. However, the use of "*kami*" goes beyond grammatical function; it forms an ideological construction of the ingroup, as if the speaker, presenter, and audience share the same social position and interests. This intention is found as well in these expressions, such as "if we look at...", "we know the facts we face...", and "we have prepared that program", which create the illusion of collective participation, even though these decisions and programs are actually within the purview of specific political actors. This strategy is purposed to obscure power relations and frames the resource person as part of the common people. In Indonesia's socio-political context, which is sensitive to issues of elitism and power inequality, this practice regards as functions of moral legitimacy based on symbolic

togetherness by control over pronouns and lexical choices, is part of the negotiation of meaning and social identity. Thus, conversation management strategies are not simply topic regulation, but also the production of collective identity and the obfuscation of hierarchy.

In accordance with these three strategies, the strategies are distinct but pragmatically interrelated orientations in which the mitigation self-protection strategy focuses on self-protection through reducing epistemic commitments, the affirmative strategy focuses on building credibility through strengthening epistemic commitments and presenting facts, and the conversation management strategy focuses on managing social relations and ideology through the construction of symbolic solidarity.

In the competitive space of political talk shows, meanwhile, these three operate in a complementary manner when questions are sensitive and potentially damaging to reputations. Interviewees tend to use mitigation to avoid direct commitment and to establish legitimacy and authority, and affirmative strategies are employed through data and factual analysis. However, in seeking to strengthen social closeness and construct a dominant narrative, conversation management strategies are mobilized through collective pronouns and local cultural symbols. Thus, the language practices in Indonesian political talk shows cannot be understood simply as spontaneous responses to questions, but as structured discursive strategies as an instrument to maintain an arena for negotiating power, legitimacy, and identity, where vagueness, affirmation, and interaction management work simultaneously to shape public perceptions in a democratic space fraught with reputational pressures and ideological competition.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that linguistic practices in Indonesian political talk shows cannot be understood as ordinary communicative responses, but rather as strategic discourse practices used to manage reputational risk, build credibility, and construct meaning in a competitive public sphere. Vague expression was found in the Talk show appearing in three main strategies in responding to host questions was considered unified as functions of mitigation (self-protection), affirmation, and conversation management and as complementary discourse system in high-stakes political communication. Practically, Mitigation strategies were realized through the use of vague expressions such as "maybe," "I think," "*Insya Allah*," and "we'll see first," which serve to lower the level of epistemic commitment to a statement. These strategies do not indicate uncertainty but rather serve as self-protection mechanisms to avoid social and political risks such as accusations of nepotism, abuse of power, or public controversy. In contrast, affirmation strategies were characterized by the use of quantitative data, empirical facts, and assertive statements aimed at establishing the speaker's credibility and epistemic authority. However, in practice, this strategy still contains an element of looseness of meaning through the use of relative terms, so that affirmation and mitigation are not always oppositional, but can run simultaneously to maintain image stability and reduce the potential for conflict. Meanwhile, conversation management

strategies function at the interactional and ideological levels through the use of inclusive pronouns (we and us), interpersonal greetings, and local cultural expressions such as *nyuwun sewu* (Javanese local expression). This strategy builds social closeness, creates the illusion of equality, and simultaneously obscures power relations in political communication. Judging from the characteristics of the vague expression function, these three strategies demonstrate that language in political talk shows like Mata Najwa functions as a complex discursive instrument to protect oneself, to build legitimacy, and to construct solidarity and direct public perception. In line with the strategies, political discourse was not only a space for information exchange, but also an arena for negotiating power, identity, and legitimacy in a democratic public space fraught with reputational pressures. This research, however, is limited to a single episode and focuses only on verbal data, which restricts broader generalization and excludes multimodal dimensions. Future research is recommended to expand the data corpus and incorporate multimodal discourse analysis for a more comprehensive understanding of political communication practices.

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