

THE LANGUAGE OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN IN POST-CIVIL WAR MUSLIM SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines post-conflict Aceh electioneering in 2012 by the ex-GAM politicians. It deals with their idiosyncratic political rhetoric campaigned in the selected Aceh media before the election. It does not only analyze the narrow, micro and mechanic sense of linguistics relevance to politics, but also the wider, macro and systematic and strategic use of discourse. The language of ex-GAM political campaign appears to be engineered, either partly or entirely, to increase their possibility to win the pre-election campaign in post-civil war Aceh. The paper focuses on the actor of rhetoric (rhetor) – their strategies, similarities and differences canvassed to printed newspapers and portal news. Its findings does not always generalize and applicable to other timing of election. Nevertheless, it is also possible that such accounts illustrate the generic repeated picture of prior elections and to some degree, of the next elections too.

KEYWORDS

language of political campaign; post-civil war; rhetoric, discourse

LANGUAGE AND POLITICAL CAMPAIGN

Different types of communication in the political sphere require different rhetorical strategies. There are obvious but important differences in these rhetorical properties. Changes in strategies or themes also reflect contemporary personal branding in promotional political culture and political marketing (Wernick 1991; Scammel 1999; Steger et al. 2013). The purely linguistics aspects of political campaigns have also been studied, such as Sutopo (2009) in the context of

contemporary Indonesian politics, media bias (De Nooy and Kleinnijenhuis 2013), and general political communication (McNair 2011; Trent and Friedenberg 2008).

If one basic understanding of language of political campaigns is political communication and political rhetoric, the idea that word and symbol are now important in the era of “driven market politics” (Newman 1999:2-7) is crucial. This paper will specifically analyze the election campaign, or in the words of Trent and Friedenberg (2000), it serves as the pre-primary phase of rhetorical transaction where voters are exposed to candidates through media in symbolic, instrumental, and pragmatic communication acts. The essence of political communication at this stage is “talk” as a part of human interaction (Shea and Burton 2001: vii). And the ones who do the talking are political candidates with prepared and crafted language. Thus, in every political campaign people focus on the candidate’s political rhetoric.

Language is often described as an acceptable pragmatic aspect of human communicative ability. Language itself is an act of communication. Therefore, language and action can help determine the actual meaning of speech and communication in real life. It is well known, for example, that if a politician is speaking before a crowd in an open public campaign, very often he or she exercises “a goal-directed action” that has “practical effects and consequences” (Nerlich and Clarke 1996). Language is also a symbolic action (Burke 1968) that can be implemented in every aspect of life, including politics. Its social significance to some degree is apparent because almost all activities which require actions work through language. Below are some examples of how language serving as expressive symbolic act is used in the backdrop of 2012 political campaign by the ex-GAM politicians.

Utterance

Utterance is linguistically defined as “any stretch of speech by one person before which there is silence on his part and after which there is also silence on his part” (Fries 1954:23). According to Austin (1962), utterance cannot be separated from the context or the purposes of language use. Although utterance generally applies to any kind of saying by a speaker, utterance here is specifically understood as the verbal expression of saying, stating, speaking, telling stories, pronouncing, talking, and remarking.

Below is *The Atjeh Post*’s transcript from Malik Mahmud when he was pointing at the latest situation in Aceh, particularly, in the development sector. His utterances are surely the rhetoric of analogy. After mentioning two neighboring countries, namely Singapore, and Malaysia that have been enjoying economic success, he then goes back to compare Aceh to these two countries using a numeric argument, by saying that Simeulue (a remote regency and island in Southern region of Aceh) is four times bigger than Singapore, but Singapore enjoys far higher levels of economic development. Another contradictory rhetoric employed by Malik in his utterance, which actually belittles Irwandi’s efforts, is his comparison of the contemporary condition of Acehese villages to Malaysia fifty years ago. Both

excerpts come from article describing Malik's discontent regarding the current development in Aceh by comparing Aceh to "closed shops" (*lage keudee teutop* in Acehnese):

(12) *Padahal, katakanlah seperti Simeulue itu empat kali lebih besar dari Singapore," kata Malik.* (13) *"Saya sudah keliling ke kampung-kampung di Aceh.* (14) *Kondisi Aceh saat ini sama seperti Malaysia 50 tahun lalu," kata Malik.*

(12) "Although, let's say, for example, Simeulue is four times bigger than Singapore," Malik said. (13) "I have been traveling around villages in Aceh. (14) The condition of Aceh today is similar to Malaysia 50 years ago," Malik said.

(*The Atjeh Post*, "Mengapa Malik Mahmud Bilang Aceh Lagee Keudee Teutop?," 6. 3. 2012)

The trope of political commitment is used in the aspect of utterance used by Hasbi Abdullah as the head of DPRA in the following examples from *Harian Aceh*. Hasbi states that he is committed to the joint petition proposed by NGO activists in order to accelerate the acquittal of the former ex-GAM political prisoners, Ismuhadi and friends, who were accused of a terrorist bomb attack on the Jakarta Stock Exchange in 2000:

(1) *Ketua DPRA Hasbi Abdullah menyatakan berkomitmen menandatangani petisi bersama dengan Penjabat Gubernur Aceh untuk pembebasan tahanan politik dan narapidana Ismuhadi dkk.*

(1) The leader of DPRA Hasbi Abdullah has **stated** that he is committed to sign the joint petition, together with the governor caretaker, about the release of convicted political prisoners, Ismuhadi and Co.

(*Harian Aceh*, "Hasbi Abdulah Komit Terhadap Pembebasan Napol," 17. 3. 2012)

It appears that narrating the past becomes the favourite topic of PA politicians. In his historical accounts in *The Atjeh Post*, Zaini recounts the story of the GAM movement and how he ended up joining GAM during the conflict. The emphasis on such rhetoric may be important in bringing back the past memory of enduring hardship, that it was not easy to bring peace back to the long-abandoned Aceh. The politicians also try to tell the public that they have made a great contribution to the MoU signing, and suggest that they should be specially regarded as fighters for a better Aceh. Finally, the ultimate impression created by reminding everyone of this melancholic and historical memory is that they deserve to receive more votes for the upcoming election:

(6) *Di hadapan para akademisi IAIN, Zaini juga menceritakan kembali tentang sejarah perjuangan orang Aceh dan sejarah dirinya bergabung bersama GAM.*

(6) In front of IAIN academics, Zaini **repeated** the story about the history of the Acehnese struggle and the history of his involvement with GAM.

(*The Atjeh Post*, “Ini Alasan Doto Zaini Bersedia Jadi Calon Gubernur,” 6. 3 2012)

Explanation

Explanation may ultimately have an important impact on the election campaign. This is especially true for voters who wish to know the arguments, platforms, and future plans of a politician or a political party should they be elected. Explanation can help the audience to understand the logic of arguments (Von Wright 2004) and it “should exhibit the ways in which nature operates” (Hon and Rakover 2001:14).

Explanation and its variations are crucial during the election campaign, since they serve as key elements in delivering the strategy to convince the audience.

In this regard, there is a moment quoted in *The Globe Journal* where Mualem explains the PA programs that will be enacted if they win the election. PA programs are to change everything from “A to Z,” according to Mualem. “Changing everything from A to Z” means producing a totally new Aceh, and discarding all the good works that the former Aceh leaders have done. This also signifies the great cleavage between PA and Irwandi. Everything inherited by Irwandi must be rejected and can no longer be continued:

(10) Mualem **menjelaskan** program PA jika memenangkan Pilkada akan merubah segalanya dari A-Z.. .

(10) Mualem **explained** the PA program saying that if they win Pilkada they will change everything from A to Z.

(*The Globe Journal*, “Jumpa Mualem, Staf Dubes AS Kirim Lima Pemantau Pilkada.” 5. 3. 2012)

Irwandi exercised an example in the following passage of how he used explanation to implicitly guide the audience to vote for him as “the credible, brave, knowledgeable, and honest leader” as shown in *Serambi Indonesia*’s report below. He is not saying directly that he is the right person, but he indirectly offers positive images of himself:

(7) Karenanya, **tambah** Irwandi, untuk membangun masyarakat Aceh yang lebih makmur dibutuhkan pemimpin yang kredibel, berani, berwawasan tinggi, serta jujur.

(7) Therefore, Irwandi **added** that to build a more prosperous society, Acehnese need a credible, brave, knowledgeable, and honest leader.

(*Serambi Indonesia*, “Mantan Kombatan dan Ulama Bertemu Irwandi,” 23. 2. 2012)

If we now look at the additional comments provided by Muzakir when asked by the reporters if there is a serious challenger for the next election, he discards such a possibility by answering that there is no one equal to PA, not even Irwandi, as the reporter from *The Atjeh Post* might probably expect. He added that Irwandi is no longer a real GAM, but a fake one:

(9) Muzakir **menambahkan**, saat ini tidak ada lawan yang dianggap terberat.
 (10) "Harian Rakyat Aceh juga telah mengetahui yang mana emas murni dan yang bukan, artinya mana GAM asli mana yang bukan. "

(9) Muzakir **added** that at this moment there was no heavy contender. (10)
 "The Acehnese know which one is pure gold and which one is not, meaning which one is the original GAM and which one is not. "

(*The Atjeh Post*, "Muzakir Manaf: Hindari Konflik, Agar Tak Ada Darah Mengalir," 8. 3. 2012)

Adnan Beuransyah, the chairperson of Commission-A in the Aceh Parliament, employs the argumentative explanation on why they actually selected the given five commissioners to be sworn in as Aceh Information Commission or *Komisi Informasi Aceh* (KIA) member candidates as reported by *Rakyat Aceh*:

(7) **Diungkapkan** Adnan Beuransyah, pihaknya menyeleksi 5 nama calon anggota KIA dan hanya menyiapkan 2 cadangan dikarenakan pemikiran komisi-komisi yang ada pun tetap solid dengan jumlah lima orang yang dilantik dan belum tergantikan dengan cadangan hingga kini.

(7) Adnan Beuransyah **revealed** that they have selected five KIA members as candidates and only two proposed reserves because the commissions have a solid consensus with the five already inaugurated names and have not yet substituted the reserve names until now.

(*Rakyat Aceh*, "Lima Nama Komisioner KIA Dikeluarkan Dewan," 26. 3. 2012)

In the end, there is a spot in *The Atjeh Post* media excerpt when ex-GAM Commander Mualem elaborates the "accomplishment" in Aceh during their domination in parliament. The elaboration is completed by inserting an example of the availability of Iskandar Muda airport for international transits:

(7) Mantan Panglima GAM ini juga **menguraikan** beberapa program yang telah di kerjakan Partai Aceh melalui Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Aceh (DPRA), seperti Bandara Iskandar muda yang kini bisa disinggahi langsung oleh pesawat luar negeri.

(7) This Ex-GAM Commander also **elaborated** several programs which have been accomplished by the Aceh Party through the Aceh Parliament (DPRA), such as Iskandar Muda Airport, which can now be transited directly by international aircraft. "

(*The Atjeh Post*, "Muzakir Manaf Siap Perbaiki Ekonomi Aceh," 28. 2. 2012)

Attendance

Attendance does not possess much variation as the other expressive symbolic acts do. Attendance is the performative act of being present or participating in an event. It normally creates the sense of being invited by other event organizers. During a campaign, there are many organized events that must be attended by political

actors that can sometimes be compulsory, and decisive for future electoral success, especially in organizational politics (Gilmore et al. 1996).

Attendance in media reporting is represented in only one aspect, which is very clear – attending. This is probably due to the fact that during the election campaign there were many open public formal gatherings taking place. Open public campaigns were held in football stadiums and other public places or facilities. Below is an example from *The Globe Journal* of the usage of attendance in media excerpts. It is when Irwandi attended a campaign for his ex-combatants and Islamic scholar supporters in Pidie. A typical way of using it is to mention all key participants in order to increase media attention:

(3) *Dalam kegiatan tersebut juga **dihadiri** tokoh ulama dan para kombatan TNA wilayah Pidie dan Pidie Jaya, serta Gubernur Aceh Irwandi Yusuf atau yang paling dikenal dengan sebutan Tengku Agam.*

(3) This event was also **attended** by ulema and ex-TNA combatants in Pidie and Pidie Jaya Region as well as Govenor Aceh Irwandi Yusuf, popularly known as Tengku Agam.

(*The Globe Journal*, “Irwandi Yusuf Gelar Silaturrahmi Dengan Masyarakat Pidie,” 22. 2. 2012)

Addressing

Addressing is quite common in the language of a political campaign. It serves as the symbol of a particular politician’s ability to deliver the message to the given audience. Addressing is the expressive symbolic act that could “bring the crowd back in” (Oliver 1989). This could take place on various occasions. It could be at a university in an academic talk in which the candidates have been invited to explain their programs related to the organizer’s theme, such as when Zaini and Muzakir were invited to give lectures at a university in Southeast Aceh. Another occasion could be when opening the public campaign session in a stadium or it could also be in front of journalists.

The opening speech was delivered in the instance from *The Atjeh Post* by Mualem in his visit to an Islamic boarding school. Again, his trademark apologetic MoU rhetoric is used with a twist of scaring tactics like “if we forget the tricks aimed at us in the past, our efforts will be in vain again. ”:

(9) *Mualem **dalam sambutannya** menyampaikan: “pentingya masyarakat mengingat risalah MOU Helsinki, jangan sampai oleh kelalaian kita semua, nasib perdamaian ini tidak sampai pada janji yang ingin dicapai. (10) Kita tidak ingin Aceh kembali dirugikan seperi halnya nasib perjanjian Lam-Teh dimasa sebelumnya.”*

(9) Mualem in **his opening speech** stated, “It is important to remember the treatise of MOU Helsinki for the community; let us not be negligent if we want to see peace reach the promised goal. (10) We don’t want Aceh to be tricked as had happened in the past with the Lam-Teh agreement. ”

(*The Atjeh Post*, "Pertemuan Mualem dan Lem Faisal di Mahyal Ulum Al-Aziziah," 5. 3. 2012)

CONCLUSION

This paper provides a close-reading of the relationship between the language-action (expressive symbolic acts) and the political actors, namely the leading ex-GAM actors during the 2012 election campaign. It elaborates the general picture that language is centrally involved in the rhetoric of political actors and in struggles for power through their ideological viewpoints. This part is intended to demonstrate the argument that the use of strategic language has become a part of a course of action used by people (in this case, ex-GAM leaders) to support their cause (Edelman 1985).

Expressive symbolic acts comprise the evidence that every detail of what is spoken during the campaign activities is strongly interconnected. Each expressive symbolic act performed by the leading ex-GAM figures is well-linked. Sometimes it is very difficult to distinguish them, both in theoretical definition or and in their actual practice in the backdrop of intense rhetorical exchanges.

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