What has Changed? Stance and Engagement in Mahathir Mohamad's UNGA Speeches

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Introduction

The analysis of language in communication is not only the analysis of propositional information, but also the analysis of how speakers and writers express their ideas (Hyland, 2008). The speaker/writer-audience interaction becomes an important site for language analysts as this interaction reflects the speakers and writers' purposes and provides a tool in understanding language use. As Hyland (2001a) proposes that the success of a dialogue with the audience depends largely on a balance between the language users' claims and their assumptions of the audiences. Stance and engagement commonly addressing to the audiences explicitly are rhetorical ways to achieve this interaction. These rhetorical strategies allow language users to invoke the readers and to include them as participants by assuming their possible reactions and knowledge. Past studies on stance and engagement have mainly focused on written discourse (e.g., Crosthwaite, Cheung, & Jiang, 2017; Hyland, 2001b; Hyland & Jiang, 2016; Jiang & Ma, 2018). These studies suggest something of writers' senses to imagine the potential audiences. Despite the current massive interest in stance and engagement, spoken discourse is a disregarded discourse which has largely escaped the notice of language analysts. This study thus addresses this research gap, offering an account of Mahathir Mohamad's two public speeches at United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in the years of 1999 and 2018, respectively. This account will seek to establish if there exist certain interaction achieved by stance and engagement in his UNGA speeches. In addition, this study will try to determine whether there is any change of using these rhetorical strategies in the years of 1999 and 2018. Scholars concern the changes in written discourse. For instance, Hyland and Jiang (2017) investigate the changes of academic writing and find that academic writing has become more informal in recent years. We know little of the changes in the use of rhetorical strategies in spoken discourse. The interest in Mahathir Mohamad's speeches lies in that his speeches gain attention from scholars, such as in the field of Critical Discourse Analaysis (CDA) (David & Dumanig, 2011; Mohammed Shukry, 2013), and politics (Milne & Mauzy, 1999; Hwang, 2003). Few studies have been found in examining rhetorical resources. Speeches at UNGA have enormous global significance. Does Mahathir Mohamad construct engagement with audiences in the years of 1999 and 2018 the same way? Are there similarities and differences in the use of stance and engagement between the two speeches? This study aims to address these questions. The following section discusses the methodology in this study.

Methodology

The study adopts a corpus-based approach to qualitatively analyse the stance and engagement in the two UNGA speeches. Information on the two speeches is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of Mahathir Mohamad's two UNGA speeches

	Speech in the UNGA's 54th session in 1999	Speech in the UNGA's 73rd session in 2018
Word tokens	3622	2346

First, the two speeches were downloaded from the websites:
(i)   http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/54/PV.16
(ii)   http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/73/PV.12
The speeches were then converted into plain texts. *AntConc* (Anthony, 2018) was used to manually and automatically search for the potential stance and engagement markers. Stance and engagement construct interaction in the discourse. As Hyland (2005) states that, these rhetorical strategies "contribute to the interpersonal dimension of discourse" (p. 176). Based on Hyland (2005), the key resources in realising stance are hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mention, and the key features of engagement are reader pronouns, directives, questions, shared knowledge and personal asides. The analytical framework in this study is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The analytical framework in this study adopted from Hyland (2005)

	Features	Explanations
Stance	Hedges	to mitigate the degree of commitment and open dialogue (e.g., may; might; perhaps; suggest)
	Boosters	to emphasise certainty or close dialogue (e.g., must; will; need to)
	Attitude markers	to express writer's attitudes or emotions (e.g., interesting; unfortunately)
	Self-mention	to express explicit reference to the writer (e.g., I; me; us; the author; our)
Engagement	Reader pronouns	the most explicit acknowledgement of the readers; take readers into a discourse, realised through second person pronouns, particularly inclusive we which identifies the reader as someone who shares similar ways of seeing to the writer (e.g., you; your; reader; one)
	Directives	initiate reader participation; realised through imperatives and obligation modals, which direct readers a) to another part of the text or to another text, b) how to carry out some action in the real-world, or c) how to interpret an argument (e.g., assume that; remember; let us)
	Questions	capture readers' attention and invite readers to take part in the argument; writers use questions by assuming that readers are interested in the issue and are likely to follow the writer's response to it. (e.g., ?)
	Shared knowledge	construct readerships by presuming readers hold such knowledge; less imposing than reader mentions; explicit signals asking readers to recognise something as familiar or accepted (e.g., it is true that; it is well-known that)
	Personal asides	writers' interruptions of the ongoing discourse by offering comments on the discussion; the comments are writer-reader

		interaction rather than the interpretation of the propositional content (e.g., parentheses; dashes)

For analysis of frequencies, due to differences in the word tokens of the two speeches, the raw frequencies of the annotated items were converted into a normalised frequency per 100 words.

Results

This study identifies 157 stance and engagement in 1999's speech, averaging 4.33 cases per 100 words, compared with 123 in 2018's speech on the average of 5.24 cases per 100 words. Table 3 shows the details.

Table 3. Stance and engagement in Mahathir's UNGA speeches in the years of 1999 and 2018

Features of stance and engagement	Speech in the UNGA's 54th session in 1999		Speech in the UNGA's 73rd session in 2018	
	Raw F.	F.%	Raw F.	F.%
Hedges	43	1.19	8	0.34
Boosters	33	0.91	18	0.77
Attitude markers	10	0.28	3	0.13
Self-mention	30	0.83	57	2.43
Engagement	41	1.13	37	1.58
Total	157	4.33	123	5.24

Note: Raw F.=Raw frequency; F%=Frequency per 100 words

Table 3 indicates that Mahathir uses stance and engagement features to interact with audiences and bring the audiences into his two speeches. Notwithstanding this, the stance and engagement features in the year of 2018 are more than those in the year of 1999 (4.33 versus 5.24 per 100 words). Remarkably, much more self-mention is found in the speech of 2018 (0.83 versus 2.43 per 100 words).

The hedges in 1999's speech are *would*, *may*, *could*, *apparently*, *seem*, *often*, *possible* and *sometimes*, while Mahathir is likely to reduce the use of hedges in 2018. The hedges in 2018's speech include *would*, *may* and *often*. In 1999, Mahathir tends to reinforce certainty through the use of the boosters such as *actually*, *always*, *apparent*, *even if*, *in fact*, *indeed*, *must*, *never*, *should*, and *the fact that*. In 2018, Mahathir uses the boosters of *must*, *believe*, *even if*, *indeed*, *never*, *should*, *to be sure*, and *the fact that*. The attitude markers are *unfortunately*, *important*, *have to*, *hopefully*, *touching*, and *important*, *importantly* and *have to* in 1999 and 2018 respectively. The common self-mention in the two years' speeches is *I*, *me*, *us*, *our*, *we* (exclusive), *Malaysia*, and *Malaysian*. *Allow*, *consider* and *ensure* are the common directives in Mahathir's speeches. *We* (inclusive), *you* and *your* signal Mahathir's attempt to involve audiences in 1999, while Mahathir does not use *you* and *your* in 2018, but only *we* (inclusive). Personal asides are not found in Mahathir's speeches. This is perhaps due to that personal asides are typical characteristics in written discourse. Questions are less used in the year of 1999 than 2018 (0.06 versus 0.17 per 100 words). Shared knowledge is not common in Mahathir's speeches. There is only one occurrence in 1999's speech.

Discussion

The use of hedges conveys less authorial certainty. Mahathir hedges a little on the consequences of the world development. For instance, the hedge *would* in the examples 1 and 2 "The world *would* actually become poorer because of free trade (example 1 in the speech of 1999)", and "A nuclear war *would* destroy the world (example 2 in the speech of 2018)" reflects Mahathir's personal views towards the future situation of the world. The booster *must* in the examples "Everyone *must* accept whatever happens because it is free trade (example 3 in the speech of 1999)", and "They *must* abandon tariff restrictions and open their countries to invasion by the products of the rich and powerful (example 4 in the speech of 2018)" expresses Mahathir's assertiveness of the importance of free trade in the world. In the same vein, the attitude marker *unfortunately* in the example 5 "*Unfortunately*, some in the United Nations have rather unusual principles" signals Mahathir's unhappiness of some countries' performance in the United Nations. The use of self-mention stands out in comparison. Mahathir makes frequently more use of self-mention in 2018 than in 1999, especially much higher use of *Malaysia*. Mahathir keeps mention "the new Malaysia" and "the new Government of Malaysia" in 2018's speech. This may be due to the new government constructed after the 14th Malaysian general election in year 2018. It is the second time that Mahathir became the Prime Minister of Malaysia. He uses self-mention to emphasise the new democratic government in the UNGA. Compared with reader pronouns, directives and questions occur less frequently in the two speeches. Among reader pronouns, *we (inclusive)* has the highest occurrences in the two speeches. This is in line with Jiang and Ma's (2018) study, which indicates that the inclusive first person *we* is the most common device of reader pronouns. The use of inclusive first person in Mahathir's speeches may be explained by that inclusive first person can be used to invite the audiences to pursue the argument with the speaker (Jiang & Ma, 2018).

Conclusion

This study has identified the stance and engagement features in Mahathir's UNGA speeches in the years of 1999 and 2018. Stance and engagement are powerful linguistic resources. The individual can use these features to state opinions and create interactions in various ways. The identified stance and engagement markers have not only addressed a gap the knowledge of spoken discourse but also have important implications for instructors who are involved in teaching courses of public speaking. The speakers can be taught to understand their audiences, thus enable them to establish appropriate interactions with their audiences.

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