

# Political Debates and the Power of Textuality: Analyzing the First Debate of Indonesia Presidential Candidates' Election in 2023 from a Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** This study aimed to find out the types of textual meaning of the first debate of the Indonesia presidential candidates' election in 2023

**Methods:** This research used descriptive qualitative which the data were obtained through presidential candidates' election debate about human rights (HAM), government and improving public service, and corruption eradication. The subject of this research was the presidential candidates' election in 2023. The data collection instrument used takes a note to look carefully and is directed in finding the textual meaning of the first debate presidential candidate's election to the desired data.

**Results:** The result of this research showed that the presidential candidates' election debate used topical theme 85 with the percentage (25%), textual theme 114 with the percentage (33%), interpersonal theme 29 with the percentage (8%), unmarked theme 115 with the percentage (34%), and marked theme 1 with the percentage (0%). The types of textual meaning dominant are unmarked themes. To analyze data, the researchers used the DeepL translate tool.

**Conclusions:** According to the aforementioned data, it can be concluded that using textual meaning on the first debate of Indonesia presidential candidates' election in 2023 it showed that the presidential candidates' election debate dominant used unmarked theme and topical theme in their debate to express the arguments/opinions.

**Keywords:** Debate, Indonesia, presidential election, systemic functional linguistics, textual meaning.

Language is a communication tool used to convey messages and ideas between individuals or groups. Language can be verbal (spoken) or written, and each language has specific grammar rules and vocabulary. The importance of language is huge, as it allows humans to interact, convey information, understand cultures, and express feelings. With language, humans can communicate, learn, cooperate, and broaden their horizons and knowledge. According to Tampubolon et al. (2024), language is a complex system of communication that used human beings. Through language, individuals can communicate, learn, co-operate and build cultural identity. Thus, language is a complex communication system used by humans to convey messages, ideas, and emotions through symbols of sound or writing.

Communication is the act of conveying and receiving information, ideas, or feeling from a place, person, or group to another. Communication has an importance and role in various aspects of human life, including in individual, professional, political, social, and cultural relationship (Savoy, 2017). In the context of communication, understanding the theme and rheme helps the speaker to convey the message clearly and effectively, while the listener or reader can easily identify the main topic and new information. Debate in the presidential election contestation is an instrument of political communication to gain public sympathy (Zhang, 2017; Herman et al., 2023a). Debate strategies are not limited to delivering programmes, ideas, and visions, but also strategies in argumentation, body gestures, emotional intelligence, and various other stage material tricks. According to Alfani (2015), Political communication is communication that is used of a person, group of people, or organizations that are a political message for the purpose of engaging and influencing the behavior of other people or other groups to follow the thought-provoking ideas and desires

conveyed by the communicator (Elsanhoury et al., 2020; Kashif et al., 2022).

In this research, the researcher is interested in analyzing the presidential candidates' election debate in Indonesia. The presidential candidates' election debate is one of the most important stages in the presidential election process. This gives candidates the opportunity to introduce themselves, outline their views and answer important questions about the country. This debate is also an exciting event and a decisive moment in determining electoral support. Presidential debate is a debate event to show how worthy someone is to carry out a position as president. This event is usually held before election time and according to the selected candidate. The two candidates will argue with each other about a predetermined topic of discussion. The results of the debate between candidates will support the election results that will be held later. To the explanation above, the debate is a communication tool that contains meaning and has structured language that can reveal how debate participants use language to build arguments, organize information, and influence listeners' opinions and debates aim to gain justification and support for the proposals presented. There are also a number of purposes for debates, including making policy, determining right or wrong, and rejecting charges. Debates conducted to elect a leader are often referred to as political debates. The stage of political debates suggested in the media becomes a strategic moment for prospective leaders to show who they are to voters.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a language theory that focused on understanding how language works. Although SFL considers the syntactic structure of the language, it focuses on the functions of the language (what and how the language does) compared to the structural approach which focuses on the elements of the language and their combinations (Halliday, 1978, 1985; Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Yujie and Fengjie, 2018;

Aminu, 2017; Ping & Lingling, 2017; Xiang, 2022; Chen, 2018; Shaumiwaty et al., 2024; Herman et al., 2023b; Herman et al., 2024; Setiawati et al., 2024). In this research, the researchers chose to discuss about textual meaning or textual function. The first debate very interesting to be analyzed, because this debate is talking about vision and mission of presidential candidates, deepening of the vision and mission of presidential candidates, and promises of presidential candidates. And on the topics of law and human rights, government, eradicating corruption, strengthening democracy, and civic harmony, it also has a segment of pure questions from the presidential candidates. Researcher is interest in analyzing the presidential debate because Indonesia is holding a presidential general election and it is a hot topic being discuss by all Indonesian people and young Indonesians.

In this research, researcher used textual meaning in analyzing the presidential debate to find out the understanding of how candidates use language to present arguments, strengthen their positions, and influence voters' opinions. Some of the aspects contain in textual meaning are the use of facts and data, rhetorical strategies, word and phrase selection, argumentation patterns, and interaction with opponents. And in this research, the researcher used translation to collected data in English because the presidential debate is the 2023 Indonesian presidential debate. Translation refers to the process of changing text from one language to another while maintaining the appropriate meaning, structure, style, and nuance as much as possible. This process is carried out to enable interlingual communication and allow access to information, culture and knowledge contained in various languages. The translation process involves a deep understanding of both languages involved, as well as the cultural, social, and historical context in which the text is used.

The phenomena in this research are Policy Comparison, debates between candidates on key policies, such as the economy, education, and

health. Candidates will show their visions and plans on how to handle that all. And one of the highlights of the public is that a millennial generation can be the vice president, the Constitutional Court issues a decision that clears the way for President Joko Widodo's eldest son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka to become Indonesia's vice-presidential candidate. Therefore, the issues contained in the presidential candidates' election debate are issues of people's welfare, corruption, and social justice. And there are issues about leadership, and the vision and mission of the presidential candidates that uses political language that contains facts and data.

Based on the researcher's experience in watching the first presidential candidate debate on YouTube <https://youtu.be/zB0RvKAc2kw?si=n6CZdqOgSeRKBuzh> with the date December 12, 2023. The researcher found several sentences that contain textual meaning on the first debate of the Indonesia presidential candidates' election in 2023, for example:

Source Language (Bahasa Indonesia)

*Di dalam undang-undang Dasar 45 di situ pendiri-pendiri bangsa kita mendirikan sebuah republik. Presiden Joko Widodo adalah Presiden di Republik Indonesia yang paling banyak ke Papua kalau tidak salah sampai hari ini beliau sudah lebih dari 19 kali ke Papua dan peningkatan pertumbuhan ekonomi di bawah pemerintah Pak Jokowi yang paling pesat yang paling tinggi selama sejarah Republik Indonesia.*

Translated into English (Target Language):

In the 45th Constitution, our founding fathers established a republic. President Joko Widodo is the President in the Republic of Indonesia who has been to Papua the most if I'm not mistaken until today, he has been to more than 19 times to Papua and the increase in economic growth under Pak Jokowi's government is the fastest, the highest in the history of the Republic of Indonesia.

Halliday (1994) stated that the system of theme is realized through a structure in which the clause falls into just two main constituents: a theme (the first part of the clause) and a rheme (Sitanggang, Murni and Sibarani, 2024). And the theme has five types namely textual theme, topical theme, interpersonal theme, unmarked theme and marked theme. This is an analysis of the types of textual meaning:

Clause 1:

In the 45 <sup>th</sup> Constitution,	our founding fathers established a republic.
<b>Topical</b>	<b>Rheme</b>
<b>Marked Theme</b>	
<b>Theme</b>	

Clause 2:

President Joko Widodo	is the President in the Republic of Indonesia who has been to Papua the most, if I'm not mistaken until today,
<b>Topical</b>	<b>Rheme</b>
<b>Unmarked Theme</b>	
<b>Theme</b>	

Clause 3:

He	has been more than 19 times to Papua and the increase in economic growth under Pak Jokowi's government is the fastest, the highest in the history of the Republic of Indonesia.
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Rheme</b>
<b>Unmarked Theme</b>	
<b>Theme</b>	

From the examples above, researcher realize that there are so many sentences that contain textual meaning on the first debate of Indonesia presidential candidates' election in 2023. Some related studied have been conducted that related to analysis textual meaning based on the Halliday and Matthiessen theory, one of them is Fatoni, Santosa, and Djatmika (2020), "Analysis of Textual Meaning on Lyrics of Supporter's Chant to Support Football Players in English Premier League". The research focuses on the

textual meaning of the supporting chants to support football players sung by supporters of the English Premier League (EPL), especially from the six biggest clubs (The Big Six). The difference between this research and previous research is that the researcher examined the presidential election debates in Indonesia by analyzing the types of textual meaning. This research aims to determine the grammar, understanding of content, assessment of arguments that present facts and data, and development of personal perspectives delivered by the three 2023 Indonesian presidential candidates Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo. Oral debate data was obtained from YouTube Channel.

## Research Methods

### A. Design of the Research

The researchers used descriptive qualitative method because it is relevant and appropriate. This research describes the worldview and Indonesian society in choosing the president, in a text through textual meaning analysis using type of Theme and Rheme theories in language. So, this research describes the facts in the data and analyze these aspects to achieve the research objectives. The researcher chose texts in Indonesian and English as the main data. The data of this research is the first debate of the Indonesia presidential candidates' election on December 12, 2023. This method will focus on the description and interpretation of qualitative data obtained from the presidential debate, such as debate transcripts, video recordings. In analyzing the presidential debates with a qualitative descriptive approach, researchers will look for patterns in the language used by the candidates, the communication strategies they use, and how political messages are conveyed to the audience.

### B. Data Source

A data source is a source of information that provides data to be analyzed, processed, or used in a particular context. According to Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2007), the source of data

for qualitative research can come from many sources including documentation, interviews, observation, audiovisual records, and physical artifacts (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Purba et al., 2023). This research data was collected by taking scripts and making notes of the debate by analyzing based on the types of textual meaning. The main data come from the conversation/debate of the Indonesian presidential candidates on the topics of vision, mission, law, human rights, government, eradicating corruption, strengthening democracy, and civic harmony, as well as pure question segments from the presidential candidates, with the link <https://youtu.be/zB0RvKAc2kw?si=n6CZdqOgSeRKBuzh>.

#### C. Instrument of the Research

The research instrument is chosen as an assisting tool to collect the data. In this research, the researcher used recording to collect data, the researcher took a note as an instrument to look carefully and directed in find the textual meaning of the first debate presidential candidates' election to the desired data.

#### D. Technique of Data Collection

The data was collected by documentary techniques. The documentary technique involves the collection, analysis and interpretation of relevant written documents, such as debate transcriptions, news articles, research reports and other official documents related to the debate. The researcher collected written documents related to the first debate of the presidential candidates' election. The first debate was watched and analyzed to find the types of textual meaning. The steps that the researcher took were:

- a. The researcher downloaded the first debate of the Indonesia presidential candidates' election on YouTube channel.
- b. The researcher watched the first debate of the Indonesia presidential candidates' election.
- c. Researcher is looking for scripts in the first debate of the Indonesia presidential candidates' election in 2023.

- d. Researcher made notes containing types of textual meaning on the first debate of Indonesia Presidential candidates' election 2023.

- e. Researcher translated the first debate of the Indonesian presidential election into English using the DeepL translate tool.

- f. The researcher wrote down the data source (time) that include the types of textual meaning in the first presidential election debate.

- g. Displayed the data in a table in accordance with the types of textual meaning.

#### E. Technique of Data Analysis

After getting the data, the researcher analyzed the data for answering the problem of the research. Technique that the researcher used, were:

- a. The researcher analyzed the presidential debate in 2023 according to types of textual meaning.

- b. The researcher underlined the use of textual meaning types.

- c. The researcher marks the types of textual meaning in the debate presidential candidates' election in 2023.

- d. The researcher used a formula by M.A.K. Halliday second edition (1994).

- e. The researcher made the findings and discussion to know the types of textual meaning namely theme and rheme in the first debate of the Indonesia presidential candidates' election in 2023.

## Results and Discussion

### A. Results

After analyzing the data, the researcher found what kinds of textual meanings are found in the first debate of Indonesia presidential candidates' election in 2023 as follows: the kinds of textual meaning in the first debate are topical theme, textual theme, interpersonal theme, unmarked theme, and marked theme.

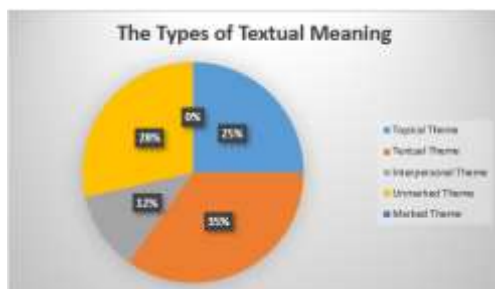


Figure 1. Percentage of Textual Meaning depicted from Data 1

From the figure above, each of debate used the five types of textual meaning. The research found the percentage and clause of the five textual meaning. Topical theme (25%), textual theme (35%), interpersonal theme (12%), unmarked theme (28%), and marked theme (0%) and the clause have 57 clauses on the first debate of Indonesia presidential election in 2023. The debate dominant in data 1 used textual theme on the first debate of Indonesia presidential election in 2023, because from data analysis, the researcher found that most utterance that used by presidential is suitable with the arguments based on the fact and truth. That is why textual theme the most dominantly used when they express opinions or arguments. The presidential candidates also used topical theme, unmarked theme, and interpersonal theme in their debate or arguments. However, the researcher found that marked theme was used very little in the debate or arguments compared to the other types. It shows that presidential candidates are not very relevant in answering or giving statements that the moderators want. So that marked theme has a low position of 0%.

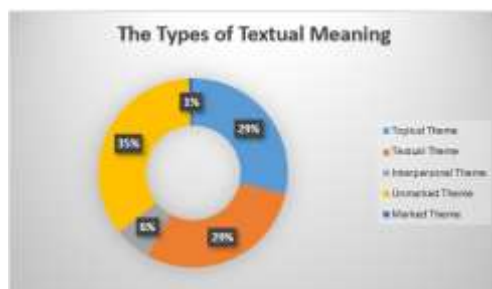


Figure 2. Percentage of Textual Meaning depicted from Data 2

From the figure above, each debate used the five types of textual meaning. The research found the percentage and clause of the five textual meanings. Topical theme (29%), textual theme (29%), interpersonal theme (6%), unmarked theme (35%), and marked theme (1%) and the clause has 61 clauses on the first debate of the Indonesia presidential election in 2023. The debate dominant in data 2 used unmarked theme on the first debate of the Indonesia presidential election in 2023 because from data analysis, the researcher found that most utterances that used by the presidential is suitable with the arguments based on the facts and truth. That is why unmarked theme the most dominantly used when they express opinions or arguments. The presidential candidates also used topical theme, textual theme, and interpersonal theme in their debate or arguments. However, the researcher found that marked theme was used very little in the debate or arguments compared to the other types. It shows that presidential candidates are not very relevant in answering or giving statements that the moderators want. So that marked theme has a low position of 1%.



Figure 3. Percentage of Textual Meaning depicted from Data 3

From the figure above, each of debate used the fifth types of textual meaning. The research found the percentage and clause of the five textual meaning. Topical theme (20%), textual theme (37%), interpersonal theme (8%), unmarked theme (35%), and marked theme (0%)

and the clause have 53 clauses on the first debate of Indonesia presidential election in 2023. The debate dominant in data 3 used textual theme on the first debate of Indonesia presidential election in 2023, because from data analysis, the researcher found that most utterance that used by presidential is suitable with the arguments based on the fact and truth. That is why textual theme the most dominantly used when they express opinions or arguments. The presidential candidates also used topical theme, unmarked theme, and interpersonal theme in their debate or arguments. However, the researcher found that marked theme was used very little in the debate or arguments compared to the other types. It shows that presidential candidates are not very relevant in answering or giving statements that the moderators want. So that marked theme has a low position of 0%.

Table 1. Total of Types of Textual Meaning on First Debate of Indonesia Presidential Candidates’ Election in 2023

Data	Types of Textual Meaning				
	Topical Theme	Textual Theme	Interpersonal Theme	Unmarked Theme	Marked Theme
Data 1	28	39	13	35	0
Data 2	36	37	8	44	1
Data 3	21	38	8	36	0
Amount	85	114	29	115	1

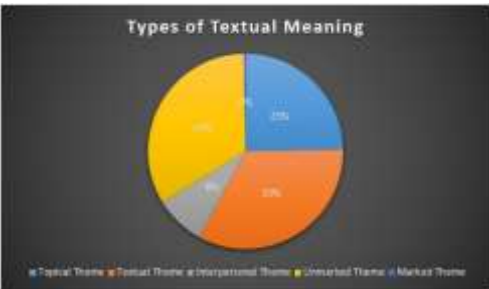


Figure 4. Percentage of Textual Meaning from the debate

From the table and percentage above, each of debate used the five types of textual meaning. The research found the percentage and clause of the five textual meaning. Topical theme (25%)

with the total 85, textual theme (33%) with the goal 114, interpersonal theme (8%) with the total 29, unmarked theme (34%) with the total 115, and marked theme (0%) with the total 1, and the clause have 171 clauses on the first debate of Indonesia presidential election in 2023. The debate dominant in data 1, 2, and 3 used unmarked theme on the first debate of Indonesia presidential election in 2023, because from data analysis, the researcher found that most utterance that used by presidential is suitable with the arguments based on the fact and truth. That is why unmarked theme the most dominantly used when they express opinions or arguments. The presidential candidates also used topical theme, textual theme, and interpersonal theme in their

debate or arguments. However, the researcher found that marked theme was used very little in the debate or arguments compared to the other types. It shows that presidential candidates are not very relevant in answering or giving statements that the moderators want. So that marked theme has a low position of 0% with the total 1.

### B. Discussion

The research was conducted to find out the kinds of textual meaning on the first debate of Indonesia presidential candidates' election in 2023. The researcher observed the presidential candidates namely, Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo. The researcher analyzed the debate about human rights, government and improving public services, and corruption eradication. Then, the researcher makes note the debate and translated the data of the debate. It was focused on Halliday theory about textual meaning namely topical theme, textual theme, interpersonal theme, unmarked theme, and marked theme.

The problem on the debate is the different policies with much explanation and not too briefly. It can be seen from research finding because the most dominant textual meaning is the unmarked theme. The unmarked theme is 115 with the percentage 34%, topical theme 85 with the percentage 25%, textual theme 114 with the percentage 33%, interpersonal theme 29 with the percentage 8%, and marked theme 1 with the percentage 0%. The researcher found that most utterance that used by presidential candidates is suitable with the debate based on the fact and truth, that is why unmarked theme the most dominantly used when they express arguments. The use of dominant unmarked theme because it uses many subjects such as I, you, they we, she, he, it and uses circumstantial adjunct.

Previous related research done by Ngongo M. (2023) has reported that the result of her research discovered that during the spoken text delivered by Nadim Makarim during COVID-19, all text happens to be successful in observing textual meaning. The similarities between

previous researchers are analysis of textual meaning regarding Halliday's theory of textual. However, this research has differences from previous researchers, this research focuses on the analysis of Halliday's textual meaning namely topical theme, textual theme, interpersonal theme, unmarked theme, and marked theme, then the topic of the first debate of Indonesia presidential candidates' election in 2023. It shows that this research is different from other research.

### Conclusion

The study aimed to find out the types of textual meaning of the first debate of Indonesia presidential candidates' election in 2023. This research focused on Halliday theory about textual meaning namely topical theme, textual theme, interpersonal theme, unmarked theme, marked theme. The procedures applied in analyzing data were watching, writing, translating, underlining the use of textual meaning on the first debate of the Indonesia presidential candidates' election in 2023, classifying textual meaning in the debate into each type of textual meaning and counting the dominant textual meaning. Based on the result of this research, that there are five types of textual meaning that found on first debate of Indonesia presidential candidates' election in 2023. They are of topical theme with 85 textual theme with 114, interpersonal theme with 29, unmarked theme with 115, and marked theme with 1. The dominant used unmarked theme in their conversation to express arguments, because from data analysis, the researcher found that most utterance that used by presidential candidates is suitable with the debate based on the fact and truth. That is why unmarked theme and the most dominantly used when they express arguments. Topical theme and textual theme have dominant used when they express arguments. Interpersonal theme and marked theme have a low position of 8% and 0%, it shows that presidential candidates' election is not very used in answering or giving statements.



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