

# INTERPERSONAL METADISCOURSE MARKERS AS PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES IN BARACK OBAMA'S 2012 CAMPAIGN SPEECHES

## PEMARKA INTERPERSONAL METADISCOURSE SEBAGAI STRATEGI PERSUASIF PADA PIDATO KAMPANYE BARACK OBAMA TAHUN 2012

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### Abstract

One of language features which can be applied to reach the persuasive goal is interpersonal metadiscourse. Although it has been frequently investigated in written texts, research on interpersonal metadiscourse in campaign speeches is still relatively hard to find, whereas a lot of features of interpersonal metadiscourse in campaign speeches are used as persuasive strategies. This study aims to explain the meaning of interpersonal metadiscourse markers applied in Barack Obama's campaign speeches related to his persuasive strategy. The data are analyzed by using Dafouz's (2008) theory of interpersonal metadiscourse markers categorization. The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative. The results show that all interpersonal metadiscourse markers categories, namely hedges, certainty markers, attributors, attitude markers, and commentaries, are used in Barack Obama's campaign speeches. High frequency of use of attitude markers and commentaries shows that Obama in his campaign speeches tries to build emotional bond with his audience as his persuasive strategy.

**Keywords:** interpersonal metadiscourse markers, Barack Obama, persuasive strategy, campaign speeches

### Abstrak

Salah satu fitur bahasa yang dapat digunakan untuk mencapai tujuan persuasi adalah interpersonal metadiscourse. Meskipun telah banyak dibahas di dalam teks-teks tulisan, penelitian mengenai interpersonal metadiscourse dalam pidato kampanye belum banyak ditemukan. Padahal, banyak fitur interpersonal metadiscourse dalam pidato kampanye yang digunakan sebagai sebuah strategi persuasif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan makna pemarkah interpersonal metadiscourse yang digunakan oleh Barack Obama dalam kaitannya dengan pemilihan strategi persuasif yang digunakan dalam pidato-pidato kampanyenya. Data yang diperoleh dianalisis dengan menggunakan teori interpersonal metadiscourse yang dikemukakan oleh Dafouz (2008). Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif. Hasil dan pembahasan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa kelima kategori pemarkah interpersonal metadiscourse, yaitu hedges, certainty markers, attributors, attitude markers, dan commentaries digunakan oleh Barack Obama dalam pidato kampanyenya.

*Munculnya attitude markers dan commentaries sebagai kategori yang paling banyak digunakan menunjukkan bahwa Obama dalam pidato-pidato kampanyenya berusaha membangun ikatan emosional dengan audiens sebagai strategi persuasifnya.*

**Kata kunci:** *pemarkah interpersonal metadiscourse, Barack Obama, strategi persuasi, pidato kampanye*

## INTRODUCTION

Campaign speech is one of the persuasive media used by politicians to get political support. Through this media, they try to communicate their programs with his audience to reach a final goal: getting votes from their potential voters. For this reason, a campaign speech should be delivered in effective ways.

To reach the effective communication and persuasion that brings a successful interaction, a linguistic resource called metadiscourse can be applied. Generally, metadiscourse is defined as a term that refers to interaction between addresser and addressee (Amiryousefi and Rasekh, 2010, Dehkordi and Allami, 2012). The definition implies a significant role of metadiscourse since the use of this linguistic expression will determine the success of a communication.

A lot of research on metadiscourse have actually been conducted by many researchers. They not even only examined this feature, but also proposed some applicable models in metadiscourse analysis (see Vande Kopple (1985), Crismore *et al.* (1983, 1989, 1993), Fuertes-Olivera *et al.* (2001), Hyland (1998, 1999, 2005), and Dafouz (2003, 2008). Unfortunately their studies focused only on written texts, such as advertising, academic, and newspaper discourse.

Metadiscourse in speech was investigated by Yipei and Lingling (2013), Sari (2014), and Esmer (2015). In their research article, Yipei and Lingling (2013) investigated metadiscourse in Steve Job's Stanford speech using Hyland's theory (2005) categorizing metadiscourse into

interactive and interactional. Using the same theory, Sari (2014) also analyzed metadiscourse markers but in different object, that is Michelle Obama's Speech. Meanwhile,

Esmer (2015) compared interpersonal metadiscourse markers expressed in Turkish Election Rally Speeches by two Turkish political Leaders using Dafouz's (2008) classification of interpersonal metadiscourse markers. To sum up, the differences of this present study from the previous ones lie on the theory and the object of research since this one answers: (1) what categories mostly used by Obama in his campaign speeches, and (2) what persuasive strategy Obama trying to attain by using the categories in his campaign speeches. Barack Obama's campaign speeches are chosen as the object of this study since Obama's oratorical skill is an interesting phenomenon to investigate. This fact was supported by Richard Green (2011), a renowned communication strategist, who said that Obama is America's third greatest presidential orator in modern era ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-greene/obama-is-america-3rd-gre\\_b\\_813868.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-greene/obama-is-america-3rd-gre_b_813868.html)).

Interpersonal metadiscourse, the second type of metadiscourse, is primarily concerned with rapport between speaker and listener. It has a more significant role than textual metadiscourse in campaign speech because it helps the speaker create what kind of interaction with the listener that he or she desires. It will determine the success of communication in campaign speech since the better the relationship established by the speaker, the easier the listener accepts what he or she is

delivering.

Interpersonal metadiscourse is derived from interpersonal meaning of language metafunctions proposed by Halliday. Halliday in Hyland (2005, p. 26) defines the interpersonal meaning as “*the use of language to encode interaction, allowing us to engage with others, to take on roles and to express and understand evaluations and feelings.*” Moreover, Lyons also in Hyland (2005, p. 26) states that interpersonal metadiscourse “*can help us express our personalities and our reactions to the propositional content of our texts and characterize the interaction we would like to have with our readers about that content.*” Thus, from both given meanings it can be concluded that interpersonal metadiscourse is more concerned with the interaction and relationship between addresser and addressee.

Interpersonal metadiscourse is considered more explicit and direct since it clearly states the addressers’ attitudes while by contrast, textual metadiscourse appears to be less explicit and uses indirect methods (Dafouz, 2003). Both categories of metadiscourse actually fulfil a persuasive aim, but, however, the degree of persuasion they carry is different one another (Dafouz, 2003). Dafouz (2003) claims that the interpersonal metadiscourse holds more persuasive functions than the textual one. Carrying the more persuasive functions, the interpersonal metadiscourse is then realized by some categories and subcategories. Dafouz (2008) divides it into five categories. They are *hedges*, *certainty markers*, *attributors*, *attitude markers*, and *commentaries* (illustrated in Table 1).

**Table 1 Interpersonal Metadiscourse Markers**

| <i>Macro-category</i>   | <i>Subcategory</i>            | <i>Examples</i>   |
|---|-------------------------------|---|
| <b><i>Hedges</i></b>  |                               |   |
| <i>Express partial commitment to the truth-value of the text</i>  | <i>Epistemic verbs</i>        | <i>May / might / it <u>must</u> be two o’clock</i>                  |
|   | <i>Probability adverbs</i>    | <i>Probably / perhaps / maybe</i>                                   |
|   | <i>Epistemic expressions</i>  | <i>It is likely</i>   |
| <b><i>Certainty markers</i></b>                                   |                               |   |
| <i>Express total commitment to the truth-value of the text</i>    |                               | <i>Undoubtedly / clearly / certainly</i>                            |
| <b><i>Attributors</i></b>   |                               |   |
| <i>Refer to the source of information</i>                         |                               | <i>‘x’ claims that.../ As the Prime Minister remarked</i>           |
| <b><i>Attitude markers</i></b>                                    |                               |   |
| <i>Express writers’ affective values towards text and readers</i> | <i>Deontic verbs</i>          | <i>Have to / we <u>must</u> understand / needs to</i>               |
|   | <i>Attitudinal adverbs</i>    | <i>Unfortunately / remarkably / pathetically</i>                    |
|   | <i>Attitudinal adjectives</i> | <i>It is absurd / it is surprising</i>                              |
|   | <i>Cognitive verbs</i>        | <i>I feel / I think / I believe</i>                                 |
| <b><i>Commentaries</i></b>  |                               |   |
| <i>Help to establish reader-writer rapport through the text</i>   | <i>Rhetorical questions</i>   | <i>What is the future of Europe, integration or disintegration?</i> |

|  |                                |   |
|--|--------------------------------|---|
|  | <i>Direct adress to reader</i> | <i><u>You</u> must understand, <u>dear</u> reader</i>                       |
|  | <i>Inclusive expressions</i>   | <i><u>We all</u> believe / let <u>us</u> summarise</i>                      |
|  | <i>Personalisations</i>        | <i>What the polls are telling me / I do not want</i>                        |
|  | <i>Asides</i>                  | <i>Diana (<i>ironically for a Spencer</i>) was not of the Establishment</i> |

Source: Dafouz (2008, p. 99)

Based on the information in Table 1, it can also be seen that the categories proposed by Dafouz (2008) can still be divided into two types regarding their orientations, that is proposition-oriented and relationship-oriented. While hedges, certainty markers, and attributors are considered proposition-oriented due to their focus on ‘the truth-value’ and ‘the source of information’, attitude markers and commentaries can be considered relationship-oriented because of dealing with the relationship between speaker/writer and reader/audience.

## METHOD

The method used in this study is qualitative. Thus, the data were collected, described and analyzed using qualitative approach (Sugiyono, 2010). Data were obtained from eight Obama’s speeches in his 2012 campaign rallies. Five steps then were taken in analyzing the data: (1) downloading the speech transcripts from [www.presidency.ucsb.edu](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu) (accessed in July 16, 2013), (2) analyzing the interpersonal metadiscourse markers used in the speeches, (3) identifying and categorizing the interpersonal metadiscourse markers based on the theory, (4) counting each category which occurs in the speeches to see its frequency, and (5) drawing conclusions based on the findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data, the writer found that 95 data of interpersonal metadiscourse markers occur in Obama’s campaign speeches. Frequency of occurrence of each category in

the speeches is illustrated in the Table 2 and Figure 2.

**Table 2 Frequency of Occurrence of Interpersonal Metadiscourse Categories in Barack Obama’s Campaign Speeches**

| Category          | Number and Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Hedges            | 12 (12.6%)            |
| Certainty Markers | 3 (3.16%)             |
| Attributors       | 11 (11.6%)            |
| Attitude markers  | 40 (42.10%)           |
| Commentaries      | 29 (30.5%)            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>      | <b>95 (100%)</b>      |

**Figure 2 Diagram of Frequency of Interpersonal Metadiscourse Categories Occurrence in Barack Obama’s Campaign Speeches**

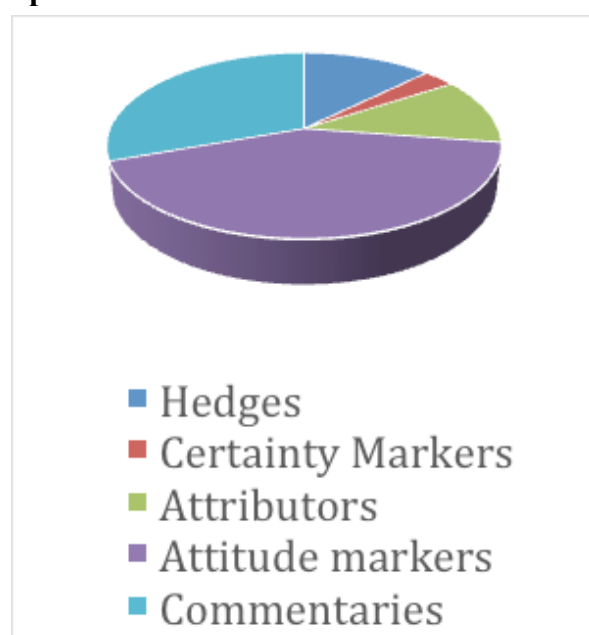


Table 2 and Figure 2 illustrate that attitude markers are the most frequently used category, which are 40 times or 42.10% of all data. The fact reveals that Obama's persuasive strategy preference in his campaign speeches is expressing affection to build emotional relationship with his potential voters. Meanwhile, the secondly most preferred category is commentaries, which are used 29 times (30.5%). The number shows that Obama also tries to shorten the distance between him and his audience, and thus positions himself as part of them. The rest of categories, namely hedges, attributors, and certainty markers are respectively used 12 times (12.6%), 11 times (11.6%), and 3 times (3.16%).

Hedges are used by Obama to minimize his level of certainty, as exemplified in Data 1 and Data 9. This function is in line with what Hyland proposes, that hedge helps speaker/writer *recognize alternative voices and viewpoints and so withhold complete commitment to a proposition*" (Hyland, 2005, p. 52). Of three subcategories proposed by Dafouz (2008), two subcategories, are found in the campaign speeches, namely epistemic verbs and probability adverbs.

#### Data 1

*Now, that **may** be a plan to win an election, but it's not a plan to create jobs.*

(Speech at a Campaign Rally in Cedar Rapids, Iowa)

In data 1, Obama talks about negative advertisements made by his opponents. He expects the advertisements will criticize and blame him on the United States economy setbacks, such as big number of unemployment.

By using epistemic verb *may*, Obama tries to say to the audience that his opinion regarding negative advertisement to win an election could be right or wrong. By using this verb, he also attempts to give his audience a choice to believe

or not to believe his statement. Interestingly, while on one hand Obama exposes his uncertainty whether or not negative advertisement will win an election, on the other hand he shows his strong certainty that negative advertisement will not create jobs.

#### Data 9

*And **maybe** it'll work.*

(Speech at a Campaign Rally in Parma, Ohio)

In data 9, Obama still talks about negative campaign attacks against himself. He tells the audience that his opponents sometimes blame him on the economic crisis. Nevertheless, he keeps believing that the black campaign will not change anything since he thinks that it will neither put people back to work nor grow the middle class. Obama uses probability adverb *maybe* to appreciate other possible arguments proposed by the audience. In other words, Obama allows his audience to argue that negative campaign will work or not.

While hedges help Obama express his uncertainty, certainty markers are in contrast used to show his strong certainty as Dafouz (2003, 2008) states that they express speaker/writer's full commitment to the statements presented and enable the audience to find out the speaker/writer's view or opinion. Certainty markers in Obama's campaign speeches are illustrated in Data 13 below.

#### Data 13

*Refusing to answer questions about the details of your policies until after the election, that's **definitely** not change.*

(Speech at a Campaign Rally in Dubuque, Iowa).

In data 13, Obama talks about his rival in the presidential election, Mitt Romney. In the piece of speech above, he argues that Romney's programs will not bring any change in the United States because they are just, what

Obama calls “*repackage of the old bad ideas*”. The adverb *definitely* in Data 13 functions to modify the verb *change*. Obama uses it to emphasize his certainty and confidence in his argument about real change. He is extremely sure that not answering questions about the details of policies until after election is not a change and thus this expression clearly shows Obama’s firmness on this issue.

Attributors refer to the source of information given in a text. They have double functions: explicitly telling the audience about the source of information given in the text and performing persuasive goal by mentioning the references (Dafouz, 2008). Moreover, they also help the speaker hold support and justification for his or her arguments (Noorian and Biria, 2010). Attributors are used by Obama to support his argument as exemplified in Data 16 and to criticize his rival in the election as in Data 19.

#### Data 16

*The problem is, like Bill Clinton said, there’s no arithmetic in it.*

(Speech at a Campaign Rally in Milwaukee, Wisconsin).

In Data 16, Obama talks about his opponent’s calculation on tax plan which he thinks does not make sense. Obama uses an attributor indicated in the utterance “...like Bill Clinton said, there’s no arithmetic in it”. By using the attributor, Obama brings Clinton into his speech to back up his argument about the reason why Republicans tax cuts plan is unreasonable.

#### Data 19

*When the American auto industry was on the brink of collapse and more than 1 million jobs were on the line, Governor Romney said we should “let Detroit go bankrupt.”*

(Speech at a Campaign Rally in Cedar Rapids, Iowa).

In this data, Obama still criticizes Romney for his economic plan. He describes the real difference lying between his tax plan and his opponent’s. Obama claims his plan will grow middle class and promote more opportunity for class mobilization, while Romney’s will just make it worse. Attributor in the data is shown by the utterance “...Governor Romney said we should “let Detroit go bankrupt.”

The function of the attributor in this data is a little bit different from the previous ones that is for emphasizing criticism towards the opponent. This function of attributors in campaign speech is in line with Esmer (2015) where she found that this category was used by politicians to criticize their opponents especially the ruling party.

Attitude markers show writer’s/speaker’s affection towards both the text and the reader or listener. Of four Dafouz’s (2008) subclassification, all subcategories are used by Obama, namely deontic verbs, attitudinal adverbs, attitudinal adjectives, cognitive verbs. Obama uses attitude markers to express his affective values in the form of obligation, feeling, belief, and opinion towards both his ideology and audience as exemplified in Data 27, Data 41, Data 45, and Data 46.

#### Data 27

*That’s what we need to change.*

(Speech at a Campaign Rally in Dubuque, Iowa).

In data 27, Obama criticizes some politicians, including his rival Mitt Romney, who seem to suspend to answer questions about the details of their policies and rule out compromise. Deontic verb *need to* is used to tell the audience a collective obligation to change politicians’ bad behavior he has stated.

**Data 41**

*And **frankly**, that's what a lot of people are betting that you do.*

(Speech at a Campaign Rally in Cedar Rapids, Iowa).

In data 41, Obama hopes the audience to keep their spirit as in the 2008 presidential election. He says he knows that sometimes they are tempted to lose interest and get cynical of politics.

In this data, Obama applies an attitudinal adverb indicated by the word *frankly*. The adverb is used to make an acknowledgement. By using the adverb *frankly*, Obama acknowledges that a lot of people are sure that the audience sometimes lose their interest and get a little cynical on politics, not to mention the election.

**Data 45**

*It was **more difficult** to save, **more difficult** to retire.*

(Speech at a Campaign Rally in Cedar Rapids, Iowa).

In this data, Obama talks about the condition when he came to Cedar Rapids for his first campaign. He says that the people of America ironically worked hard to earn less back then.

Obama uses attitudinal adjective indicated by the word *difficult*. The attitudinal adjective is applied by Obama to show his frustration on the United States economy when he ran for the president. He claims that at that time the people were difficult to put away and to prepare for their retirement. Moreover, the health care and college cost too high back then.

**Data 46**

*I **think** they're wrong.*

(Speech at a Campaign Rally in Parma, Ohio).

In data 46, Obama describes his theory of economic growth. He refuses his opponents' theory of economy suggesting the country to

grow the economy from the top down. Otherwise, he proposes a different theory saying that the economy should be grown from the middle class out and by making sure everybody has the same opportunity to develop in a fair competition.

Attitude marker used in this data is a cognitive verb that is *think*. Obama uses cognitive verb *think* in this data to show his attitude towards the idea of growing economy proposed by his opponents. By using the cognitive verb, he shows his disagreement on the idea and states his own opinion.

Regarding commentaries, Obama uses this category in the campaign speeches generally to build emotional relationship with his audience. This function corresponds with Dafouz (2008) who argues that commentaries help establish and maintain relationship between the speaker/writer and his/her listener/reader. Of five sub-categories proposed by Dafouz (2008), four are used by Obama, namely rhetorical questions, direct address to reader, inclusive expressions, personalizations. As for rhetorical questions, two types of question are used by Obama, that is yes/no question and wh-question as exemplified in Data 71 and Data 68. By using yes/no question Obama actually asserts his belief to his audience (Han in Wong and Yap, 2015). Meanwhile the use of wh-question shows Obama's attempt to provide an audience-based interpretation (Monzoni, in Wong and Yap, 2015). Thus, yes/no question can be considered to have stronger force than wh-question in campaign speech context (Esmer, 2015).

**Data 71**

*And ultimately, that's what it comes down to:*

***Do you believe that we're on our own, all of us, or do you believe we're in it together?***

(Speech at a Campaign Rally in Parma, Ohio).

In data 71, Obama shares his belief that America becomes great since it was built in a

priceless spirit of collectivism. He knows that all Americans are individuals having willingness to take risks and appreciate any kinds of hard process, but at the same time, he believes that they hold the most important value called togetherness enabling them take care of others, do a lot of things, and build some projects always together. These are what really made the nation great in Obama's mind. By asking the rhetorical questions Obama tries to persuade the audience to believe in collectivism rather than individualism.

In data 68, Obama talks about his tax plan and his opponents's, and the difference between them. He says that he wants to hold taxes steady for most of Americans, who are the middle class. Meanwhile his opponents, Republicans, propose to hold it for all Americans, including the wealthy.

#### Data 68

*We disagree on the other 2 percent. Well, what do you usually do if you agree on 98 percent and you disagree on 2 percent? Why don't you compromise to help the middle class? Go ahead and do the 98 percent, and we can keep arguing about the 2 percent.* (Speech at a Campaign Rally in Cedar Rapids, Iowa).

In data 74, Obama is persuading his audience to vote for him in the election. He also affirms that the choice the audience makes is not only about two candidates or two parties, but also about two different visions of America. Direct address *you* is used to treat the audience as participants who hold a significant role to determine the future of United States, whether to build a strong and growing middle class or to go back to the top-down economics.

#### Data 74

*Now, in Iowa, in 3 days, you have a choice to make.*  
(Speech at a Campaign Rally in Dubuque, Iowa).

In data 86, Obama is attempting to persuade his audience to vote for him in the upcoming presidential election. He tries to convince his audience that if they keep working hard together to support him and give him their vote, they will win the election and make the United States dreams come true.

Inclusive expression *we* is used here to establish solidarity with the audience, or in this context, the people of Iowa. By using *we* Obama also tries to position himself at the same side as his audience by claiming his future victory as his audience's.

#### Data 86

*And if you're willing to work with me, if you're willing to keep on knocking on some doors with me, making some phone calls with me, turning out to vote for me, we'll win Iowa.*  
(Speech at a Campaign Rally in Dubuque, Iowa).

#### Data 91

*So if this is a debate about real change, I know what change looks like, because I've fought for it and I've delivered it and I've got the scars to prove it.*  
(Speech at a Campaign Rally in Dubuque, Iowa).

In data 91, Obama tries to convince his audience by claiming that he knows real change more than another candidate because of his experience in fighting for, delivering, and getting the scars to prove it. Personalization *I* in this data is served as a means of self-representation. By using *I*, Obama represents himself as an individual in the speech to emphasize his familiarity with the real change and his efforts to make it happen. This function also corresponds with what Bramley states in Ekawati (2016, p. 655) that pronoun *I* in political speeches can be used to show *compassion with the audience and to narrate a story*.



## CONCLUSIONS

All interpersonal metadiscourse markers categories, namely hedges, certainty markers, attributors, attitude markers, and commentaries are used by Obama in his 2012 campaign speeches. Of all categories, attitude markers and commentaries are used predominantly which shows that in his campaign speeches Obama tries to build emotional bond with his audience as his persuasive strategy. It is also interesting that certainty markers are the least category used, which can be interpreted as Obama's moderate way in convincing his audience.

Interestingly these results are slightly different from Esmer (2017) in which commentaries and certainty markers are mostly used in Turkish politicians' campaign speeches. In the Turkish context, the high frequency of use of certainty markers indicates the political leaders' clear expression on "personal feelings, concern and commitment in regard to the country's well being (Esmer, 2017, p. 7).

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