Constructing Identity and Persuasion through Language: A Study of Campaign Slogans in Malang

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Abstract

The 2024 Indonesian legislative election marked a significant phase in the evolution of political communication, especially at the local level, where candidates have limited access to mass media platforms. In urban areas such as Malang, East Java, Indonesia, where the population includes a large number of first-time voters, campaign strategies shifted toward outdoor media, like billboards. Though brief, these visual texts carry persuasive and symbolic linguistic elements. Language becomes a key instrument through which candidates seek to construct identity, establish cultural proximity, and influence voter behavior. Analyzing these linguistic choices is crucial to understanding how political messages are shaped by and respond to local social contexts. This study aims to investigate how language is used to construct identity and persuasion in the campaign slogans of local legislative candidates in Lowokwaru District, Malang City. The study explores how linguistic elements reflect strategies of self-representation and persuasion, as well as how these slogans accommodate the sociocultural values of their target audience. This research focuses on understanding the textual structure and communicative functions of these slogans. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study applies Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework to examine twenty-four campaign slogans displayed in public spaces near three major universities in Malang. Each slogan is analyzed through the three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Additionally, these slogans are interpreted based on the situational context, particularly field, tenor, and mode. The data were collected through visual documentation and were analyzed using clause-based linguistic analysis. The findings reveal that most slogans employ relational and material processes, imperative moods, and high-modality expressions to deliver direct and emotionally-charged appeals. Candidates strategically use inclusive, religious, and culturally-embedded phrases to build rapport with voters. Although these slogans are textually short, they are also thematically cohesive and structured to enhance memorability. The use of local and Islamic expressions underscores a deliberate alignment with the sociocultural identity of young, religious voters. This study contributes to political discourse analysis by demonstrating how campaign slogans function not only as persuasive tools but also as social semiotic instruments for negotiating identity, and ideology. It offers insights into how language use in political campaigns reflects broader sociopolitical dynamics, especially in regions where localized values and youth demographics play a central role in electoral engagement.

Keywords: Indonesian politics; legislative; political campaign; political discourse analysis; systemic functional linguistics.

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 general election in Indonesia was held to elect the President and Vice President as well as legislative members simultaneously, following Constitutional Court Decision No. 14/PUU-

XI/2013 on the Judicial Review of Law No. 42/2008 on the Presidential Election Against the 1945 Constitution. This decision revised the previous mechanism that separated executive and legislative elections, aiming to improve efficiency in budget use and time of implementation as well as reduce the risk of horizontal conflicts in society. The simultaneous election influenced the dynamics of presidential candidacy, as public attention became more focused on executive candidates. In accordance with Article 222 of the Election Law, presidential nomination requires at least 20% support of Legislative House seats from political parties or coalitions, making political parties crucial actors in endorsing candidates. Such support is not always grounded in ideological alignment, but is often shaped by pragmatic interests, including the involvement of business actors who serve as key financiers of political parties (Ambardi, 2008; Mietzner, 2013). This condition aligns with findings from the Indonesian Corruption Watch, which reported that nearly 60% of legislative members have ties to the business sector, including ownership or affiliation with media industries, giving candidates with media access significant advantages in shaping public opinion and building their political image (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019).

However, such advantages are generally not available to local legislative candidates, particularly those running for district- or city-level Regional Legislative House seats, due to limited financial resources and reduced access to mass media. At this level, electoral districts are typically confined to one or several subdistricts. Such divisions are determined by population size for seat allocation (Law No. 7/2017 on Elections), making it difficult for local candidates to develop public visibility through costly conventional media. As an alternative, outdoor media, such as billboards, have become a widely used strategy, supported by the General Elections Commission Regulation No. 15/2023, which regulates the installation, location, and dimensions of campaign materials. Under these constraints, the selection of campaign messages becomes essential, as slogans must be crafted effectively to enhance voter recall and strengthen candidates' positive image within limited public space.

In democratic processes, political campaigns play a crucial role as a central component of political activity (Benoit, 2006; Norris, 2004). Campaigns function as an extension of political communication through which politicians convey their democratic visions to the public (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2014). Through these campaigns, politicians and aspiring candidates present their visions and missions to gain public acceptance, as such messages can influence voters' political perceptions and choices. One common strategy for communicating these visions and missions is the use of campaign slogans (Khair et al., 2023). These slogans are crafted as short phrases to make political messages easier to remember (van den Hoogenband, 2020). Beyond summarizing the candidate's vision and mission, slogans also serve as tools for constructing identity, as a strong identity image helps politicians differentiate themselves from competitors and unite their supporters (Gbadegesin & Onanuga, 2019). For this reason, campaign slogans must reflect not only the candidate's core messages but also appeal to voters psychologically and emotionally through strategic word choices (Parkin, 1984).

To resonate emotionally and psychologically with voters, campaign slogans must also reflect the political and sociocultural conditions of the society. The closer a slogan aligns with current social and political realities, the more credible and relatable the politician appears, as this signals an understanding of public aspirations and concerns. Such alignment enhances public trust and strengthens the candidate's legitimacy. However, campaign slogans also carry the potential to become controversial, as specific word choices that indicate certain political stances may reveal broader strategic agendas (Dunmire, 2012). This can project political polarization or specific ideological orientations, which in turn may divide the public and threaten social harmony (Layman *et al.*, 2006).

In this context, the present study positions campaign slogans as a medium of political communication that plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and building social relations at the local level. Specifically, political slogans are analyzed using a political discourse analysis approach to uncover their linguistic meanings, persuasive strategies, and the ways candidates strengthen their public image through lexical choices and message structures. Through this approach, this study aims to describe how campaign slogans embed political messages and relevant values that can effectively influence the relationship between candidates and local communities.

Political discourse analysis is an appropriate approach for this study because of its interdisciplinary nature, combining linguistic frameworks with political perspectives. This combination allows a profound analysis of the ideological meanings behind campaign slogans, helping to map the extent of particular candidates' political power as reflected through their language choices. Understanding these degrees of political power enables researchers to illustrate the influence a politician can exert in public discourse. As a strategic tool of political communication, campaign slogans play a crucial role in reinforcing a candidate's image, contributing to their political capital in the public sphere, even before their potential term in office begins.

One linguistic theory suitable for political discourse analysis is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), introduced by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). SFL argues that linguistic choices are made within specific contexts to serve particular communicative functions intended by the speaker. It assumes that grammar has the power to reflect certain realities based on the speaker's perspective and to encode ideological intentions aimed at shaping the audience's perception of reality. Ideological influence is achieved, when speakers successfully align the audience's perspective with their own. According to SFL, language operates through three interrelated metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In political discourse, these metafunctions help uncover meaning (Hoang, 2021), power relations (Bartlett, 2014), and representations of reality (Meurer, 2004) embedded in slogans. Together, the metafunctions provide a comprehensive understanding of how campaign slogans function as political communication strategies to construct identity and reflect Indonesia's sociopolitical conditions.

Research on political slogans and campaign communication in Indonesia has generally focused on semiotic, semantic, and hermeneutic perspectives rather than the grammatical systems underlying persuasive messages. Manis, Benu, and Tabun (2024) examined visual elements in campaign billboards in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, showing how colors, poses, and local cultural symbols build political identity. Similarly, Tsabit, Poernomo, and Napitupulu (2024) analyzed Puan Maharani's slogan *"Kepak Sayap Kebhinnekaan"* ("The Flap of the Wing of Plurality") through hermeneutics, highlighting its narrative of unity and nationalism. Other Indonesian studies, explored how slogans and jargon shape political identity and public attitudes, emphasizing their semantic and symbolic impacts on voters. Although these works underscore the persuasive power of slogans in the Indonesian context, they provide limited attention to the linguistic structures that encode these meanings.

Beyond Indonesia, international scholarship has widely applied Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to political discourse, often focusing on speeches, public statements, and media texts. Studies by Chouia and Koumachi (2024), Agwu and Amadi (2024), and Malkawi and Fareh (2023) reveal how political figures construct ideology, identity, and power through transitivity, modality, and evaluative resources. However, these analyses concentrate on long-form discourse produced by national or global political leaders. Indonesian SFL-based research, such as Saragih *et al.* (2024), similarly highlights how presidential candidates linguistically construct ideological positions, yet this work also focuses on extended political texts rather than short slogans.

Taken collectively, previous research demonstrates that slogans are important tools for identity-building and persuasion, while SFL provides a powerful framework for uncovering deeper ideological meanings in political discourse. However, the two areas have rarely intersected. Existing slogan-focused studies analyze symbols and meanings but do not employ SFL metafunctions, while SFL-based political studies seldom address short written texts used in local campaign contexts. As such, understanding how the grammatical choices within short slogans construct identity and social relations, particularly in community-based legislative elections becomes significant.

Although numerous studies have examined political slogans in Indonesia, they largely rely on semiotics, hermeneutics, or semantics and do not utilize the full analytical potential of SFL metafunctions. Conversely, studies that employ SFL primarily analyze long political speeches, news texts, or national-level discourse, leaving short campaign slogans understudied. No existing research integrates ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions to analyze local legislative campaign slogans, especially those displayed in public billboards within culturally specific urban districts, such as Lowokwaru. Furthermore, none explore how linguistic choices in slogans interact with cultural and religious symbolism to appeal to young, urban voters.

This study advances contemporary scholarship by bridging two research areas: slogan analysis and SFL-based political discourse studies. It applies the full SFL metafunctions framework (transitivity, mood and modality, and theme–rheme) to the analysis of short written slogans in local legislative campaigns. By incorporating Halliday's social semiotic principles, the study also demonstrates how linguistic patterns interact with cultural, religious, and communal values that shape voter perceptions. This dual approach not only enriches linguistic research on political communication in Indonesia but also offers a methodological contribution by showing that even short slogans have complex metafunctional structures capable of projecting identity, influencing social relations, and constructing persuasive political realities. This study addresses this gap by offering a novel analysis that reveals how linguistic choices in legislative campaign slogans encode political meaning and reflect local sociopolitical realities. In line with this objective, the guiding research question of this study is formulated as follows: (1) How are the linguistic metafunctions realized in the 2024 legislative campaign billboard slogans, and (2) How the metafunctions implied the socio-cultural condition of the society?

METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative design to investigate the linguistic strategies employed in legislative campaign slogans distributed in Lowokwaru District, Malang City. A qualitative approach is employed because it enables researchers to explore social phenomena through the emerging linguistic patterns and to present rich, context-sensitive descriptions of these findings (Davis, 1995). In line with this purpose, this study aims to uncover the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions embedded in campaign slogans by drawing on the analytical tools of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and relevant pragmatic concepts. This approach provides an in-depth examination of how language is strategically used to shape political messages and construct candidate identities within a local electoral context.

The data consist of written campaign slogans taken from billboards positioned along major roads in Lowokwaru, particularly within approximately one kilometer of Universitas Brawijaya (Brawijaya University), Universitas Negeri Malang (State University of Malang), and Universitas Islam Negeri Malang (State Islamic University of Malang). This area was strategically selected because its population is dominated by university students aged 17–22, many of whom are first-time voters. As new members of the electorate, these young voters are expected to make rational political decisions while simultaneously being more susceptible to persuasive linguistic cues. For this reason, campaign messages displayed in this district tend to be carefully crafted to appeal both psychologically and politically to this demographic. The data were collected by photographing campaign billboards that remained intact and readable during the fieldwork. Only the slogans themselves were selected as data, while other textual elements, such as candidate names and party affiliations, were excluded. Data collection was conducted on February 9th, 2024 to ensure that the analysis reflected the actual visual discourse circulating during the official campaign period.

Before conducting the analysis, the slogans were translated into English to align with the SFL analytical framework, which was developed within the grammatical and semantic system of English (Fairclough, 2013). The analysis proceeded through three stages corresponding to the metafunctions of SFL. First, the ideational metafunction was examined by identifying the process types, participants, and circumstances in each slogan. This step reveals how candidates represent actions, identities, and political realities. Second, the interpersonal metafunction was analyzed through mood and modality to uncover how candidates position themselves in relation to voters and how they construct authority, solidarity, or persuasion. Finally, the textual metafunction was investigated by analyzing theme–rheme organization, to understand how each slogan structures information to achieve rhetorical impact and coherence within the constraints of its highly condensed form. Through this multi-layered approach, this study aims to provide a comprehensive account of how linguistic choices function strategically in shaping political meaning in local legislative campaigns.

ANALYSIS

This section presents the analysis of the twenty-four legislative campaign slogans by applying Halliday's three metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, and textual), to uncover how

linguistic choices construct meaning, shape political identity, and guide voter interpretation. Through a systematic metafunctional examination, the analysis reveals the grammatical patterns candidates use to assert authority, invite action, and position themselves within the sociopolitical landscape of Lowokwaru District. Additionally, the analysis also addresses their sociocultural implications, showing how local cultural values, religious expressions, and community-based identities are embedded within slogans to strengthen emotional resonance and establish symbolic proximity between candidates and voters.

Analysis of Metafunctions

Before presenting the detailed frequency distribution of each metafunction, it is essential to outline how the metafunctional framework guides the analysis of the slogans. The ideational metafunction identifies the process types and participant roles that construct representations of actions, identity, and experience. The interpersonal metafunction examines the mood and modality patterns that express stance, authority, and the candidate–voter relationship. Meanwhile, the textual metafunction reveals how theme–rheme structures organize information to achieve clarity and emphasis. These three metafunctions operate simultaneously within each slogan, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how meaning is crafted at multiple levels. The following table summarizes the metafunctional components found in the slogans, providing the foundation for the subsequent interpretation and discussion.

Table 1. Summary of the Findings in Metafunction Analysis

Data	Process (Ideational)	Mood	Modality	Theme
1	Material	Imperative	High	Vote
2	Material	Imperative	High	Vote
3	Material + Mental	Imperative	Mid	February 14th, don't forget
4	Material	Imperative	High	Let's move forward
5	Relational Attributive	Declarative	High	Prabowo, Gerindra (political party)
6	Verbal	Imperative	Mid-Low	(We) ask
7	Relational Attributive	Declarative	High	(I am)
8	Mental	Imperative	High	Remember!!!
9	Relational Attributive	Declarative	High	(I am) committed
10	Material	Imperative	High	In the name of Allah
11	Material	Imperative	High	Promoting, preventing
12	Relational Attributive	Declarative	High	(I am)
13	Relational Attributive	Declarative	High	(I am)
14	Relational Attributive	Declarative	High	(I am)
15	Relational Attributive	Declarative	High	(It is)
16	Material	Imperative	High	Vote
17	Material + Mental	Imperative	High	Vote, remember
18	Relational Attributive	Declarative	High	In the name of Allah,
19	Material	Declarative	High	(I) help
20	Relational Attributive	Declarative	High	Malang
21	Mental	Declarative	High	(I) focus
22	Relational Attributive	Declarative	High	(I am)
23	Material	Imperative	High	Lowokwaru people
24	Relational Attributive	Declarative	High	Anies Nasdem (National Democratic Political Party)

Source: Processed from Primary Data

The summary provided in the table offers a clear overview of the linguistic patterns that characterize the slogans, showing how each metafunction contributes to the construction of persuasive meanings. Through the distribution of process types, mood selections, modality levels, and theme–rheme structures, Table 1 demonstrates how these slogans are not merely short promotional texts, but carefully crafted linguistic units designed to persuade, assert identity, and direct voter attention. The frequency patterns shown in Table 1 also reveal how certain linguistic strategies are systematically preferred, suggesting deliberate choices by candidates to maximize rhetorical impact in public campaign spaces.

The ideational metafunction shows clear tendencies in the slogans. The most frequently occurring process type is the relational attributive process, with eleven instances, making it the

dominant linguistic strategy for constructing identity, status, and evaluative claims. Material processes follow with ten instances, reflecting a strong emphasis on concrete actions, such as urging voters to participate or highlighting specific actions linked to the election. In contrast, mental processes appear only twice, signaling limited attention to internal states, such as remembering or focusing, while verbal processes appear only once, suggesting that direct expressions of communication are minimally used. This distribution demonstrates a preference for identity-building and action-oriented messages, rather than introspective or communicative processes.

An example of the most dominant process type is found in slogans that rely on relational attributive structures, such as those implicitly expressing, "I am the chosen candidate," where the identity or status of the candidate is foregrounded through an attributive relation. In contrast, the least frequent type, the mental process, appears in slogans such as "Remember February 14th," which appeals to the reader's internal state, rather than asserting identity or directing action. These examples illustrate the functional difference between promoting self-presentation and eliciting psychological engagement, revealing why relational and material processes are favored in a political context that demands clarity and visibility.

The prominence of relational and material processes is closely tied to the field of discourse represented in the slogans. Relational attributive processes support the field by foregrounding who the candidate is, such as what qualities, attributes, and social positions they claim. Meanwhile, material processes reinforce the action-oriented nature of electoral participation by directing voters toward concrete behaviors, such as voting or supporting a particular candidate. Together, these elements reflect a field strongly rooted in political action and identity negotiation, where messages are designed to assert legitimacy while guiding citizens toward expected electoral behaviors.

The interpersonal metafunction also shows consistent patterns across the slogans. The most common mood used is the declarative mood, with thirteen occurrences, demonstrating a tendency to present confident statements about the candidate's qualities or status. The imperative mood follows closely with eleven occurrences, functioning to deliver direct instructions or appeals to the audience. In terms of modality, most slogans employ high modality, signaling strong certainty, assertiveness, and confidence, the qualities intended to enhance the persuasive force of both declarative and imperative statements. Low or medium modality appears far less frequently, indicating that candidates aim for firm, unwavering expressions rather than tentative or cautious tones.

These interpersonal choices can be seen in the contrast between declarative slogans, such as, "I am the people's representative," which assert identity and credibility, and imperative slogans like, "Vote for number three," which directly instruct the audience. Declaratives project authority and reassurance, while imperatives generate action and urgency. High modality reinforces both functions by adding intensity and confidence, ensuring the messages resonate strongly in the public campaign environment.

The relationship between interpersonal patterns and tenor reveals how social roles and relationships are constructed within the slogans. Declarative mood helps build trust and credibility by positioning the candidate as authoritative and reliable, while imperative mood establishes a persuasive relationship in which the candidate issues call to action. High modality further strengthens these tenor relations by displaying confidence, projecting leadership, and signaling commitment to the voters. Together, these patterns construct a tenor in which the candidate is both a figure of authority and an initiator of action, balancing credibility with persuasive force.

The textual metafunction, as reflected in the table, shows that the slogans generally follow a linear and consistent theme–rheme structure. Many slogans, especially those with relational attributive processes, foreground the candidate or their identity as the theme. Other themes highlight the election event, location, political party, or religious elements. This distribution indicates that thematic choices prioritize either personal identity or contextual anchors that situate the message within recognizable political or cultural frames. The conciseness and consistency of thematic patterns enhance readability and make the slogans suitable for quick consumption in public spaces.

Examples of these textual features appear in slogans, such as "Lowokwaru people vote for number one," where the theme "Lowokwaru people" anchors the message in a specific community

context, or in relational slogans with implied themes like "I am," which place identity and personal qualities at the forefront. These thematic strategies align with the mode of the text, which requires concise, easily-processed messages suited for visual media like billboards.

In relation to mode, the linear and compact theme–rheme structures support the function of slogans as visual texts meant to be understood quickly and retained easily. The concise thematic choices contribute to the clarity and memorability of the message, ensuring that the reader grasps the essential meaning within seconds. This alignment of textual organization with the mode of communication demonstrates that the slogans are deliberately constructed to maximize effectiveness in outdoor political advertising.

Taken together, the ideational, interpersonal, and textual patterns identified in the slogans demonstrate that the campaign messages of legislative candidates are not merely brief promotional utterances, but carefully-engineered linguistic constructions shaped by the demands of political persuasion. The dominance of relational and material processes, the strategic use of declarative and imperative moods supported by high modality, and the consistent deployment of concise theme–rheme structures all reveal a deliberate attempt to craft messages that assert identity, generate credibility, mobilize voter action, and remain easily memorable in public spaces. These metafunctional selections position the candidate simultaneously as an authoritative figure, an accessible community member, and a persuasive agent of political action. Overall, the linguistic choices embedded in the slogans illustrate the way campaign discourse systematically employs grammar as a social resource for influencing perceptions, reinforcing legitimacy, and guiding voters within the broader sociopolitical context of local legislative elections.

The Sociocultural Implications

Based on the findings presented earlier, it is evident that the campaign slogans of legislative candidates in Lowokwaru District predominantly construct linguistic patterns that highlight relational processes. These processes function to assert the candidate's self-identity in relation to the social roles or statuses they aim to present to voters. Through relational clauses, candidates build strong identification ties between themselves and the community, demonstrating that they are not merely political contestants but figures considered meaningful within the social fabric. Within a social semiotic framework, this structure reflects a strategy of identity framing, where language is used to reinforce the candidate's image as a trustworthy figure who maintains social proximity to the electorate.

In addition, the dominant mood found in the slogans is declarative, accompanied by high modality. This choice demonstrates the candidates' confidence and reinforcement of their commitment and capacity. The use of high modality strengthens the candidates' authority, constructing impressions of decisiveness and readiness, and positioning language as an instrument for reinforcing their stance within symbolic power relations between speaker and audience. This style of expression shows that language in campaign slogans is not merely an informational tool but a persuasive instrument used to consolidate authority and influence.

From the textual metafunction perspective, the theme in most slogans also focuses on the speaker or the candidate. Positioning the candidate as the primary theme of the clause indicates that the point of departure for the message is consistently directed toward the speaker's identity. By placing themselves as the theme, candidates retain control over their own political narrative and position themselves as the central source of meaning in their interaction with voters. In social semiotic terms, this strategy not only strengthens the speaker's subjective position but also reinforces their symbolic representation in public space. The concise and direct thematic structure makes the messages easily recognizable and memorable, while simultaneously creating emotional and personal connections with the public.

Beyond the three metafunctions, the campaign slogans of legislative candidates in Lowokwaru also incorporate cultural and religious elements to build closeness with voters. The use of kinship terms, such as *pakdhe* (uncle) and *dulur dhewe* (your own family) reflects the social relations typical of Javanese communities, which emphasize kinship, familiarity, and mutual belonging. Meanwhile, lexical choices such as *bismillahirrahmanirrahim* (in the name of God, the Most Gracious and Merciful) and *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (encouraging virtue, preventing harm) indicate a religious

approach that not only represents the candidates' personal identity but also affirms the spiritual values embedded in society. These choices do more than create a relaxed and familiar communicative tone; they function as shared symbols of identification, linking candidates with the social and religious norms valued by the electorate. Thus, the use of cultural and religious elements in slogans is not decorative. It plays a crucial role in shaping the candidate's image as a figure who is culturally and spiritually aligned with the community they seek to represent.

Taken together, the three metafunctions analyzed point to a central ideological meaning that stands out across the slogans: the reinforcement of the candidates' self-image and the construction of socially intimate relations grounded in cultural and religious proximity. In this context, language is not solely used as a tool to deliver promises or programs, but as a medium of social representation rich in symbolic meaning. Linguistic choices, such as relational processes, speaker-centered themes, and declarative mood with high modality, demonstrate that linguistic structures are strategically employed to create closeness, trust, and identity affiliation. Within the social semiotic framework proposed by Halliday (1978), language is viewed as a social practice that constructs and reproduces reality through meaning choices shaped by the social context. Thus, through the integration of metafunctions with the cultural-religious values embedded in society, campaign slogans do not merely reflect political communication strategies. They actively shape a social reality that is recognizable, acceptable, and serves as a basis of legitimacy for voters.

Moreover, the communicative strategies found in the slogans indicate a tendency to appeal to a broad and inclusive electorate without distinguishing between social, cultural, or religious backgrounds. Although electoral campaign practice commonly encourages candidates to target specific voter segments and build emotional closeness based on the social characteristics of their constituencies (Admin, 2018), this study shows that the slogans do not explicitly address particular groups or communities. Instead, the slogans employ symbolic diction that is neutral and inclusive, such as local greetings and religious expressions broadly familiar to the public. This strategy can be understood as a response to the open proportional electoral system, which requires candidates to build a strong and recognizable personal image. In this system, victory is determined by individual vote counts rather than party list rankings, resulting in competition even among candidates from the same party (Sibarani, 2016). Therefore, a generally-framed yet symbolically-resonant communication strategy becomes a rational approach to embrace diverse voters while building a symbolic presence widely accepted by the collective. Within a social semiotic perspective, this practice illustrates how language in slogans is used not only to deliver electoral appeals but also to construct political realities that can be accepted and internalized by different social groups (Halliday, 1978).

The slogans also reflect sociocultural values deeply embedded in the local community. One example is the use of the expression *ciamik soro* (in Javanese), which lexically corresponds to *"marvellous"* in English. However, culturally, the expression does not have a fully equivalent meaning. The word *soro*, which in Javanese originally derives from *sengsara* ("suffering") and carries negative connotations, has undergone semantic shift and is used colloquially as an emphatic marker for hyperbole. When paired with *ciamik*, meaning "excellent," the expression becomes an intensified and culturally loaded form of praise. This type of lexical choice demonstrates not only linguistic creativity but also the candidate's alignment with expressive Javanese speech styles rich in emotional nuance. In the sociocultural context, such expressions signal the candidate's attempt to position themselves as part of the local community, delivering political messages through language that feels familiar, grounded, and symbolically meaningful. Thus, slogan language becomes part of a cultural representational practice that strengthens collective identity and emotional attachment between candidate and community.

A positive self-image is a critical factor in political campaign strategies in Indonesia. In this regard, language use in campaign slogans not only conveys electoral appeals but also shapes voter perceptions of a candidate's character and personality. As Hasan (2009) notes, the public tends to pay more attention to a candidate's appearance, communication style, and personal impression than to technical policy programs. The image constructed through political communication strategies plays an important role in creating symbolic closeness with voters, as people are more easily drawn to figures who appear humble, honest, and authoritative, rather than technocratic narratives.

societies upholding collective social and cultural values, political figures whose self-image resonates with local norms are more readily accepted. Therefore, image-building becomes essential in winning public sympathy amid increasingly dense and visually oriented political competition.

In this study, the slogans used by legislative candidates are shown to be essential instruments for projecting a political identity accepted by the local community. This finding supports the work of Aspinall and Sukmajati (2016), who argue that in Indonesia's electoral politics, personal and cultural approaches are more prominent than rational program-based strategies. Thus, metafunction analysis is not only a descriptive method for examining linguistic structure but also a lens through which one understands how language operates socially in shaping political consciousness and electoral choices.

Ultimately, interpreting campaign slogans through SFL and social semiotic principles reveals that language in local political discourse is far from neutral. It is a complex battlefield of meaning where symbols, identities, and relationships are strategically constructed to produce influence. In the context of the 2024 legislative election, candidates use language to build social and moral connections with voters, and this approach appears far more effective than merely presenting technocratic visions and missions. Therefore, this study reinforces the argument that in Indonesia's multicultural and religious political landscape, the effectiveness of political communication depends heavily on a candidate's ability to construct social meaning through language that feels intimate, familiar, and acceptable to the community in which they compete.

When compared with previous studies, the findings of this research show both parallel patterns and distinctive characteristics. Saragih et al. (2024) and Fitriani *et al*. (2021), for example, highlight that political discourse in Indonesia generally foregrounds relational processes to build self-image and leadership status in presidential speeches and media discourse. The present study confirms this pattern by demonstrating that local-level legislative campaign slogans also frequently employ relational attributive processes to explicitly or implicitly assert candidate identity.

Meanwhile, Wadhwa (2022) and Malkawi and Fareh (2023) show that international political discourse often relies on rational rhetorical strategies with dominant declarative mood balanced by implicit evaluative elements. This research supports the dominance of declarative mood but finds that in the Indonesian local context, the imperative mood remains significant, because direct appeals continue to play an important role in community-based campaign discourse.

Moreover, the finding that high modality dominates the slogans aligns with Chouia and Koumachi (2024), who observed similar patterns in Algerian political discourse emphasizing intensive persuasion. However, this study expands on those insights by showing that high modality in local Indonesian campaign discourse is frequently combined with familiar greetings, hashtags, and identity phrases rooted in patron-client cultural traditions.

Overall, the findings support global patterns that political discourse consistently emphasizes image-building, persuasion, and social legitimacy. However, this study contributes new insights by revealing that in Indonesia's local political contexts, the symbolism of community closeness and identity affirmation remains a key strategy distinguishing legislative campaign slogans from political discourses in national speeches or media narratives.

CONCLUSION

This study sets out to examine how legislative campaign slogans in Lowokwaru District, Malang City, strategically deploy linguistic resources to construct identity, negotiate social relations, and shape persuasive political messages. Using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the analysis of 24 slogans revealed that these short texts are not merely decorative political artifacts, but function as condensed yet powerful semiotic tools. The dominance of relational attributive and material processes shows that candidates foreground who they are and what actions they call for, effectively merging identity construction with action-oriented persuasion. At the interpersonal level, candidates rely heavily on declarative and imperative moods supported by high-modality expressions, signaling confidence, authority, and urgency. Textually, the slogans favor concise and highly cohesive theme–rheme structures, enabling messages to be quickly processed and easily remembered in public visual environments. These metafunctional patterns work together to create

recognizable political identities and to guide voter attention in ways that align with the communicative demands of outdoor campaign media.

Beyond the grammatical structures, the findings demonstrate the sociocultural embeddedness of campaign discourse. Candidates incorporate Javanese kinship terms, such as *pakdhe* and *dulur dhewe*, as well as Islamic expressions, like *bismillahirrahmanirrahim* and *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*, to construct emotional proximity and affirm shared cultural–religious identities with voters. This linguistic strategy reflects a broader pattern observed in Indonesian electoral politics, where personalism and cultural resonance often outweigh programmatic appeals. The slogans do not explicitly target specific demographic groups; instead, they employ inclusive symbolic language that appeals across social categories. It becomes a strategic response to the open proportional electoral system that prioritizes individual electability. These practices underscore how language in campaign slogans actively shapes political realities by reinforcing familiarity, trust, and socio-religious legitimacy.

However, this study is limited by its focus on a single district and a relatively small corpus of 24 campaign slogans, which means the findings may not fully represent the broader linguistic strategies used in legislative campaigns across Indonesia's diverse sociopolitical contexts. The analysis also focuses exclusively on written slogans displayed on public billboards, leaving out other multimodal campaign forms, such as social media posts, speeches, and audio–visual materials that may reveal additional layers of meaning. Despite these limitations, the study offers a strong foundation for future research. Subsequent studies could expand the dataset by comparing slogans across multiple regions, parties, or electoral cycles to identify broader linguistic trends. Researchers might also integrate multimodal analysis to examine how visuals and language interact in shaping political persuasion. Moreover, comparative work using SFL across different levels of elections, such as the local, provincial, and national levels, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how candidates tailor linguistic choices to different audiences and power relations. These directions would enhance the applicability of the findings and further illuminate how language strategically constructs political identity and voter engagement in Indonesia's dynamic electoral landscape.

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