



## **An Indonesian EFL Learner's Use of Evaluative Language and Gestures in a Spoken Persuasive Presentation: A Case Study**

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### **Introduction**

Spoken persuasive presentations are one social practice experienced by EFL learners in a speaking for Business Purposes course. In this course, the learners are trained to practice delivering spoken persuasive presentations in a business context. This classroom practice is designed by the English lecturers to provide opportunities for the learners to use English in the classroom (Widodo, 2015). In addition, this practice is also regarded as an authentic task given to the students because it resembles a real social practice, which the students might encounter in their future careers.

The practices of spoken persuasive presentations have been studied by many researchers (see Bhattacharyya, 2013; Brooks & Wilson, 2015; Kakepto, Said, Habil, Nemon, & Umrani, 2013; Ruiz-Garrido, 2015). These studies, however, have addressed more on the use of language than the use of gestures in the spoken presentation. Additionally, the previous studies have only put their focus on the moves and structures used by the speakers. Little attention has been given to investigate how speakers express meanings through language and gestures in the spoken persuasive presentation. In fact, gesture is as significant as speech in helping the speakers to convey meaning to the audience.

Many multimodal researchers (Kress, 2011; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Norris, 2004) have argued that communication is a multimodal practice. Thus, it is natural that in presenting, speakers do not only use language but also other semiotic resources, such as gestures to express their meanings. When the speakers fail to utilize these resources in their communication practice, we argue, their communicative purpose cannot be well achieved. Thus, it is important to explore and document how speakers make use of both language and gestures to achieve their purpose of communication.

This area of research is important in order to inform the EFL classroom practices on the importance of providing explicit linguistic and gestural resources for learners to create a well-argued persuasive text. To fill this need, we conducted a case study aimed at reporting how an Indonesian EFL learner made use of his language and gestures to express his interpersonal meanings in his spoken persuasive presentation.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Evaluative Language**

Evaluative language is a linguistic system used by language users to convey their interpersonal meanings (Martin & White, 2005). It is divided into three domains: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Attitude is a subsystem of evaluative language that can be used by the language users to express their positive and negative emotions. Attitude has three sub-divisions: Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation. Engagement deals with sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse. It consists of four taxonomies: Proclaim, Disclaim, Entertain, and Attribute. Graduation is used to grade phenomena whereby feelings are amplified and categories blurred. It has two sub-categories: Focus and Force.

### **Evaluative Gesture**

Rooted in Martin and White's (2005) framework of evaluative language, Hood (2011) has developed a gestural typology of evaluative resources. Similar to the subsystem of evaluative language, the subsystem of evaluative gestures consists of three domains: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. With regard to the evaluative gesture, Hood (2011) divides two domains of Attitude: Positive and Negative. This is because gestures generally signify either a positive or negative attitude (Pan, 2016). With regard to engagement, Hood (2011) broadly classifies Engagement resources into two areas: Expansion and Contraction. To analyze Graduation via gesture, Hood (2011) classifies Graduation into Focus and Force.

## **Methodology**

In this study, we employed a qualitative case study by using a videography research design. This research design was considered suitable because it allowed us to capture not only what the participant said but also what the participant did (Knoblauch & Schnettler, 2012). Most notably, this research design could record both language and gestures used by the participant in a more detailed and reliable way.

### **Participants**

There was one participant chosen in this case study. He was a semester IV student majoring in Speaking for Business Purposes. He was selected by administering a purposive sampling technique. The criteria for selecting the participant were: a) he was officially registered as an English DIII student majoring in Speaking for Business Purposes course in one of the State Universities in Bali, Indonesia, b) he did not have experience working in business industries. This information was gained through administering an interview with the participant, c) he had good English proficiency. This information was gathered by examining the participant's speaking scores in previous Speaking Courses, asking the lecturers in the department informally about which students had good English proficiency in the class, and interviewing the participant to assess his English proficiency.

## **Data Collection**

Video recording was employed to collect data. In the beginning, we video recorded all students (12 students) majoring in the Speaking for Business Purposes course. We video recorded the students' performances when they were delivering their spoken persuasive presentations in the classroom. To avoid video reactivity, we introduced the students with the tools used to collect our data and we informed them about our purpose for coming to their classroom. We familiarized the students with the tools in order to avoid research bias. Due to time constraints, only one out of those twelve students' performances was used as the data source.

## **Data Analysis**

The following steps were used to analyze the data: (i) selecting data. Having gained the collected data, not all of them were included in the data analysis. The analysis only covered the one who met the pre-established conditions in the purposive sampling criteria; (ii) transcribing data. Transcribing multimodal texts was a demanding process because we needed to transcribe not only the language but also the gestures produced by the participant; (iii) analyzing the language used by the participants. We categorized the clauses based on the Appraisal system consisting of Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. In doing this, we were helped by the Appraisal analysis proposed by Martin and White (2005); (iv) coding kinds of gestures into presenting action, representing action, and indexical action; (v) categorizing gestures into typology of evaluative gesture proposed by Hood (2011), and (vi) re-reading the findings to ensure that they were relevant to the research objective.

## **Trustworthiness**

In order to maintain the trustworthiness of our research, we employed three strategies proposed by Creswell (2007, p. 207): method triangulation, peer-debriefing, and external audit. With regard to method triangulation, we employed an observation technique to support data that were collected from video recording. In this case, we sat at the back of the room, took the role as non-participant observers, who observed the research participant's performance when he was delivering a spoken persuasive presentation. In relation to peer-debriefing, we worked with two other researchers who conducted research in the same area as us. We arranged special days to meet in order to discuss and review our findings together. The two other researchers provided us with feedback in relation to our data interpretation. With regard to the external audit, we asked an external auditor to examine both the process and product of our research.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Evaluative Language Employed by the Indonesian EFL Learner in the Spoken Persuasive Presentation**

Our data analysis revealed that the research participant used three areas of evaluative language in his spoken persuasive presentation: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Each type of evaluative language is presented as follows.

## Attitude

Attitude is one type of evaluative language used by our research participant to convey his feelings. In this study, he employed two kinds of Attitude: Appreciation and Affect. Each of which is presented here.

**Appreciation.** Appreciation was the most frequent type of evaluative language used by the participant. Appreciation refers to resources used to transform feelings into propositions about the value of things (Martin & White, 2005). This system allowed him to show his feelings about things (e.g., the product). Appreciation has three areas of evaluation: Reaction (has to do with attention and emotional impact), Composition (has to do with the perceptions of proportionality and detail in a thing), and Valuation (has to do with the assessment of the social significance of things). Examples of Appreciation in our participant's data can be seen as follows.

1. Today, in this good occasion, I would like to explain our brand new smart phone product
2. So, this is the most unique and special smartphone
3. Our smartphone is covered by strong material
4. This innovation is a very great innovation
5. That will make the result of the picture blurry

Examples 1-5 show that the participant used lexis *good*, *unique*, *special*, *strong*, and *great* for Appreciation resources. The register *good* was used to appraise the circumstance, the register *unique*, *special*, and *strong* were used to appraise the smartphone, and the lexis *great* was used to appraise the phenomenon. These registers were used to show Reaction in relation to the quality of the appraised things. In addition to the positive Reaction, he also used negative Reaction as shown in example 5. The lexis *blurry* was used to appraise the other product negatively. The participant used all these Appreciation registers to arouse the audiences' interests to buy the product.

**Affect.** Affect was the second most frequent type of Attitude resources used by the participant. Affect is concerned with positive and negative responses and dispositions. This includes registers used to show positive and negative feelings in three domains: Un/Happiness (whether the appraiser is happy or sad), In/Security (whether the appraiser is confident or anxious) and Dis/Satisfaction (whether the appraiser is interested or bored) (Martin & White, 2005). Examples of Affect are shown as follows.

6. So, you can use this smartphone all day long without any worries about low battery
7. You don't need to worry about it (the damaged ram or the damaged processor)
8. Well, are you interested in it ladies and gentlemen?

The underlined words were used to show feelings or emotions. The register *worry* in example 6 and 7 was used to show his feelings of security about the product. The lexis *interested* in example 8 was used to show a feeling of satisfaction about the product. All these underlined registers were used to convince the audience to buy the product.

Our research findings concerning the use of Attitude resources in the persuasive text were not quite in line with the study conducted by Liu (2013). In Liu's (2003) study, her research participant employed all Attitude resources as proposed by Martin and White (2005). In so doing, her research participant could produce a powerful persuasive text. This is in line with Yang's (2016) argument that evaluative resources are regarded as a significant component in the persuasive texts, more importantly in a promotional genre because these resources could help the language users to convince their listeners.

On the contrary, compared to Liu's (2013) study, our research participant seemed to produce fewer Attitude resources. Instead of using all resources in the typology of Attitude, he only employed two of them: Appreciation and Affect. Additionally, a delicate analysis of each of this subsystem also revealed

that the participant used very limited registers. In reference to the function of Attitude resources in persuasive texts, he seemed to fail in achieving the communicative purpose of the persuasive text.

## Engagement

Engagement was another type of evaluative language performed by the participant. Through Engagement resources, he constructed a different level of intimacy by either affirming or distancing himself from what was spoken (Martin & White, 2005). Among the four types of Engagement resources used in this study, he used two types of Engagement: Entertain and Disclaim.

**Entertain.** Entertain was the first most frequent type of Engagement performed by the participant. He employed this resource by using modals and modal adjuncts of probability and usuality. The examples are presented below.

9. This tracker chip will help you to find your phone
10. So, probably, in your smartphone, the skin is covered by corning glass, right?
11. So, whenever there is a brand new series of processor or ram or maybe your ram or processor got damaged

Examples 6-8 show that student used modals (*will*) and modals adjunct (*probably* and *maybe*) to show his range of possibilities.

**Disclaim.** Disclaim was the second most frequent type of Engagement expressed by the participant. Through Disclaim, he expressed his denial or rejection about something. This was shown in the following examples.

12. Even though your hand is shaking, the focus is still in the balance
13. Another smartphone doesn't have this kind of feature

From the aforementioned clauses, it can be seen that the word *even though* in example 9 was used to express his concession or counter expectation. Meanwhile, the negation used in example 10 indicated a denial of features owned by the other product.

Our research findings concerning the use of Engagement resources revealed that the participant was not quite certain about the delivered issues. This was shown, for instance, by the use of Entertain resources, which presented more about his opinions related to the product. In this case, the participant mainly showed his individual subjectivity toward the presented issue. Through this resource, he anticipated a potential disagreement on the part of the addressee regarding his proportions. Our analysis also revealed that the research participant still used limited Engagement resources in his persuasive text, whereas, the use of Engagement resources is beneficial for language users to show their listeners about their position and stance (Yuliana & Gandana, 2018). In so doing, instead of producing a strong persuasive text, he seemed to produce a less powerful persuasive text.

## Graduation

Graduation was a type of Appraisal used by the participant to grade phenomena whereby feelings were amplified and categories were blurred (Martin & White, 2005). Graduation is divided into two categories: Force and Focus. The former has to do with the intensity of a word or expression. Meanwhile, the latter is concerned with resources used to sharpen and soften the categories. In the case of this study, the participant only used Force. The examples of Force can be seen in the following clauses.

14. So, this is the most unique and special smartphone
15. (It is) so, highly protected and long last
16. This innovation is a very great innovation

From these clauses, it can be seen that the underlined words (*the most, so, very*) were used to intensify the meanings to grasp the audiences' attention to the product (Martin & White, 2005). These research findings indicated that the research participant still used limited Graduation resources in his persuasive text. Our research findings support the study conducted by Ngo, Unsworth, and Feez (2012), which found that EFL students tended to have limited Attitudinal and Graduation resources. This might be caused by the lack of exposure given by English lecturers as well as the limited opportunities of the students to use their English in the classrooms (Astuti & Barratt, 2018; Astuti & Lammers, 2017a, 2017b). In order to overcome this, students need to be involved in the acts of creating texts through text familiarization on evaluative language used to create a powerful persuasive text.

### **Evaluative Gestures Employed by the Indonesian EFL Learner in a Spoken Persuasive Presentation**

Our data analysis showed that in relation to Attitude, the participant used one resource out of two sub typologies of gesture: that of positive gesture.

#### **Positive Attitude**

Attitudinal gesture is used to express either positive or negative emotions about people, things, or phenomena to the audience. In this study, the participant performed positive attitude by opening his arms and gesturing with his palms up. Additionally, this positive attitude was also strengthened by the appearance of a smile and some laughter. The examples can be seen in Figure 1.



*Frame 1a*



*Frame 1b*

*Figure 1.* Examples of attitude of the research participant: positive.

Figure 1 shows two instances of positive Attitude performed by the participant through gesture. In Frame 1a, he opened his palms up and put his smile on his face when he was greeting the audience. In Frame 1b, he performed almost the same kind of gesture and smiled when he was introducing himself to the audience. These were performed to welcome the audience and to show his friendliness.

#### **Engagement**

Engagement was used by the participant to source certain attitudes in his performance. Through the analysis, it was found out that he only used Expansion resources. The examples can be seen in Figure 2.

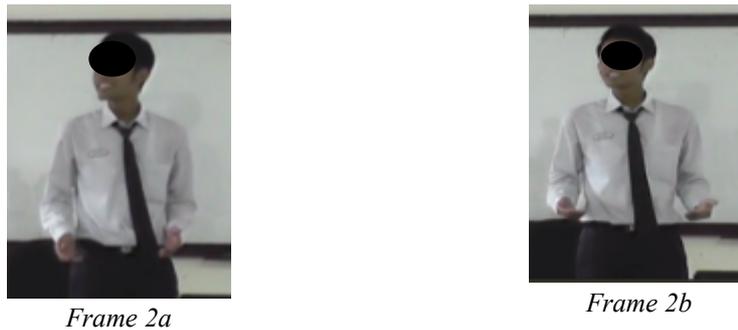


Figure 2. Examples of engagement of the research participant: expansion.

Figure 2 shows two instances of Expansion in Engagement resources performed by the participant. Both Frame 2a and Frame 2b illustrate the supine position of the palm indicating that he expanded his space to the audience.

### Graduation

In relation to Graduation, the participant only used Focus in his persuasive presentation. This is illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Examples of graduation of the research participant: focus.

Figure 3 illustrates two instances of Focus as Graduation resource in the gestural Appraisal system. Both frames show about the loose muscle tension of the participant. Surprisingly, these actions were performed accompanying Force resources in his verbiage. In Frame 3a, he stood still with loose, relaxed muscle tension uttering: *“That’s all about my introduction and explanation about Hyperius smartphone”*. Meanwhile, the action shown in Frame 3b was performed as he uttered: *“If there’re any questions, please feel free to ask”*.

Our study was quite similar with the study conducted by Lim (2017), particularly on the use of expansion resources. Both our study and Lim’s (2017) research demonstrated that the Expansion resources were used to invite the audiences to get involved to discuss the presented issues. Even so, our research participant used fewer gestures than the research participant of Lim (2017). This might have been due to the culture of the participant (Cooperrider, Slotta, & Nunez, 2018).

Generally, our research participant used limited gestural resources to convince his listeners about the presented issue. Since the use of gestures could reinforce or strengthen the meanings conveyed through the speech (Lim, 2017; Sato, 2018), the lack of usage of gestural resources in our study might indicate that our research participant failed to convince his audiences about the presented issue effectively.

## Conclusion

Our study demonstrated how an Indonesian EFL learner used his evaluative language and gestures in the spoken persuasive presentation. Even though he had employed the two resources, he was still considered as a novice speaker because of his limitations of knowledge and skills in utilizing both resources effectively. This research finding might contribute to EFL teaching and learning, in particular, in a Speaking for Business Purposes course in which English lecturers should provide sufficient exposure on the use of evaluative language and gestures in delivering persuasive presentations. This can be done by familiarizing students with authentic materials containing performances of professional speakers, such as TED talks. In addition, English lecturers can arrange speaking practice activities, which require a balanced use of language and gestures. In addition to this, the results of our study also suggest that material designers create learning materials, which consist of explicit evaluative language and gestures used by the students to help them create a powerful spoken persuasive text.

Future researchers who are interested in investigating the same area of investigation may consider studying evaluative resources in other contexts. Additionally, future studies may also involve data from speakers having different levels of English language proficiency and expertise in order to explore and document both similarities and differences of these speakers in using evaluative resources in their communication practices.

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