

# LEVELS OF FORMALITY IN OBAMA'S INTERVIEW AND SBY'S INTERVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

This study was intended to describe levels of formality used by Obama and SBY in their interviews. This study was carried out with descriptive research. The data were collected with documentary technique and the instrument used was documentary sheet. The data were analyzed by descriptive comparative. The result of the research show that Obama tends to use Casual level (44,78%), Formal (29,05%), Consultative (26%), and Intimate (0,17%) while SBY tends to use Formal level (49,20%), Frozen (3,16%), Consultative (34%) and Casual (13,83%). So, in speaking Obama is more friendly because sometimes he did a joke and laugh while SBY is more serious to answer or to response the interviewer's questions. It is hoped that the result of this study is useful to everyone who wants to study about levels of formality.

**Key words :** *Levels of Formality, Obama's Interview, SBY's Interview.*

## INTRODUCTION

Interview is conversation between two or more people which is done by face to face where questions are asked by the interviewer to get facts or statements from the interviewee. An interviewer should know people who will be asked to help him or her in preparing the questions such as in interviewing the president, the interviewer should have different style when interview the president. For president is one of important people in a country so when interviewing the president, interviewer should have good preparation in asking the questions by using formal style of language to respect him (Verschueren:1987).

According to Keraf (1991) good language must have 4 elements, thus are: honesty, respect, good manners, and the last is interest. The levels of formality have special characteristics according to the speakers' social background, the relationship to their listeners, and the speech situation. Levels of formality is a way to express the idea with special language show the writer's soul, spirit and concern (the use of vocabulary). Weinstein (1984) states that levels of formality is divided into five levels, they are *frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate*.

Frozen is language that never changes which is used in the most formal situation such as wedding vows. While formal style is standard English which is used in formal speeches, meetings, job interview, and official session of bureau chiefs. It is quite different with consultative level. It is the style most open to give and take of everyday conversation discussed so far. Moreover, casual style is simply defined as a style that is used for the conversation in our relaxed or normal situation that appropriate to the conversation with our friends, the background information so freely inserted into casual conversation. And the last is intimate. It is language which is used by lovers or other close family and friends who do not require complete constructions or clear pronunciation since there has been mutual understanding among them.

If people use a level that is too intimate, he or she presumes a level of intimacy that the listener and reader do not share. If people use a level that is too formal, he or she may be perceived as an arrogant, condescending outsider. In either case, people damage the relationship with the listener and reader that they need to accomplish his or her purposes. When people need to express a concept for which there is no ready made form

in the language, two things can be done based on Kempson's theory (1988) : the language can be changed, perhaps by introducing a new form to carry the desired meaning, or the existing resources of the language can be used to unpack the meaning to be expressed. Thus, 'university' might be expressed by the equivalent of place where people go to learn difficult things when they are over eighteen. Either way, however, such items in another language need not to express concepts, which are expressed by remembered linguistic items in one language.

Cultural communication styles can vary depending on context and can be extremely different from one person to another. According to Biber (1988) the English-speaking world often operates at a semi-formal level. The language is friendly and welcoming, but with some formal expressions. While Indonesian language is also almost everything that relates with official used formal writing or spoken. The difference of culture, way of speaking and personality between Obama and SBY influence the using of levels of formality.

Obama is popular for his speech while SBY is popular for his authority. But Obama is more friendly than SBY because Obama is often smile when speak in front of public while SBY is quite cool. Both of them are good in speaking mainly in giving the speech and answering the questions in interviews.

In analyzing levels of formality between Obama and SBY, this study used descriptive comparison. Comparison is one of the most efficient methods for explicating or utilizing tacit knowledge or tacit attitudes (Wolf, 2003). So to discover levels of formality used by Obama and SBY and to discover the differences and similarities between Obama's utterances and SBY's utterances in answering the interviewer's question, it will be compared by using descriptive comparative.

According to Bolinger (1987) descriptive Comparison aims at describing and perhaps also explaining the invariance of the objects. It does not aim at generating changes in the objects; on the contrary, it usually tries to avoid them. Understanding various levels of formality will help people measure the effectiveness of people's communications, make adjustments, and become flexible in their communication style.

But in fact, many people especially students seldom use appropriate levels of formality when they speak to the lecturers or teachers although in formal situation. For that, it is important to make the research about levels of formality so the students or

people know the appropriate level to select language in speaking in order to build a good communication with others.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research is qualitative research which was conducted by descriptive method. Qualitative research is a research procedure that will produce descriptive data in form of written and spoken words from people or people's behaviour that can be research. The objects of this study were *Obama's* interview and *SBY's* interview during a year of 2011. And the data are in forms of words or utterances used by Obama as a President of America and SBY as a President of Indonesia.

After the data were collected, the data were analyzed descriptively. There are five steps in analyzing the data. First, identifying the data and then reducing data which has been identified proper to the levels of formality. After that classifying the Obama's and SBY's utterances found in their interview based on levels of formality. And next analyzing and interpreting the data which has been classified including the differences and similarities from Obama's and SBY's utterances and at last concluding the data.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

After collecting the data, the data were analyzed by descriptive comparative in order to find out levels of formality used by Obama and SBY in their interviews. The analysis of the levels of formality would be shown from the analyzing the data from some of their utterances.

### *Frozen*

Frozen is the most formal style which is often used by the person of high level or important figures in order to give precedence and respect over the hearers and the speakers. The sentences are not only constructed individually, but also sequences of sentences are intricately related to ordinary occasion such as religious service.

SBY as one of important figure or president in Indonesia used this style in his interviews. It showed that SBY is able to construct the sentence in answering the

interview. However, frozen style is not found in Obama interview, it can not be concluded that Obama is not able to construct the sentence in interview but it is influenced by the personality of each president. SBY is more like to add the words that relate to the God, for example:

- Baik, *alhamdulillah*.
- **Tuhan** tidak akan mengubah nasib sebuah kaum kecuali kaum itu yang mengubahnya, yang membangun masa depannya.
- Tapi percayalah, Saudara-saudara, rakyat Indonesia, ada jalan yang baik ke depan, **Allah itu Maha Pengasih lagi Maha Penyayang**, kalau kita sungguh bekerja akan diberikan jalan yang baik untuk masa depan kita yang baik.
- Tetapi kalau saya tarik kembali, "**Bismillah**," semuanya itu ibadah.

The addition word of "alhamdulillah", "bismillah" made this utterances are included into frozen style. The word that relates to the God is eternal and it must not be altered in anyway. But SBY altered those words to show his personality that he is loyal in his religion because he is also uttered some of God's word.

### *Formal*

Formal is one of the levels of formality that people should use when he or she is talking with someone who is older than him/her and holding higher social status than him/her. But it is not happen in America, people is prefer use semi formal or informal to formal in spoken to show that American is friendly and welcoming even he is a president. While in Indonesia, people is prefer use formal to informal to respect the older and the higher status.

**Table 4.1 Distribution of Obama’s Utterances and SBY’s Utterances in Formal Levels**

NO.	OBAMA	SBY
1.	In theory, we <b>should be able to get</b> 60 votes out of the Senate.	Anggaran tersebut <b>seharusnya terus ditingkatkan.</b>
2.	Now, we have produced over 1.8 million jobs just in the last year.	Angkatan kerja tahun lalu itu jumlahnya 116 juta, sedangkan tahun ini 2011 kenaikan angkatan kerja tersebut menjadi 119 juta atau 1 tahun bertambahlah saudara-saudara kita yang mencari pekerjaan dengan angka 3,4 juta.
3.	<b>We have to</b> increase oil production here	<b>Marilah kita belajar bersama-sama</b> menggunakan secara seimbang.
4.	Obviously I <b>disagreed</b> with us going into Iraq, but I will say that we are bringing the war in Iraq to an honorable conclusion because of the extraordinary service of our men and women, both military and civilian in Iraq.	Unjuk rasa <b>dilarang</b> tapi sebaiknya saya ingin kepala desa betul-betul mengurusinya, sebagaimana yang saya lihat kemarin sebagai contoh, kepala desa di Haurwangi di Kabupaten Cianjur.
5.	Thank you so much for doing this.	Terima kasih.

From the utterance above, we can see that both of Obama and SBY have different stlye in speaking formally. The first example, the formal levels is shown from the word “**should**” that Obama used while SBY also used the word “**seharusnya**”. In this case, both of the presidents used the same term to ask their citizen and colleague formally to do as what they hope.

The second example, the formal levels is shown by the fact that Obama and SBY state. Both of them told about the increment labor from the last year by showing in number.

And the third example showed the different function of language. Obama’s utterance tends to obligation sentence, it is looked from the word “**have to**” while SBY’s utterance is demanding for his word “**marilah kita belajar bersama-sama**”. The forth example showed that both Obama and SBY used prohibition sentence

“disagreed” and “dilarang” but Obama used active voice to tell the sentence directly but SBY used passive voice. And the last examples, actually both of them have same purpose to say “Thank you” or “*Terima Kasih*”, but Obama in this case said it completely by adding the word “so much for doing this”. It is made the listeners or the readers more understand what the president thanks to.

### *Consultative*

Consultative is the usual form of speech in small groups except among close friends. It typically occurs between two persons while one is speaking, at intervals the others give short responses, by using standard signals. Interview is actually the conversation between two person that not usually use the consultative levels of formality. In *Obama’s* interview is found some consultative levels. It is more much than in *SBY’s* interview. But there are some of their utterances are looked similiar that included into consultative level. It can be seen from the table.

**Table 4.2 Distribution of Obama’s Utterances and SBY’s Utterances in Consultative Levels**

No.	OBAMA	SBY
1.	Yes, sure.	Ya, tentu masing-masing akan menyusun kembali jadwal waktunya.
2.	Having said that I understand how big of a strain.	Saya paham betul itu.
3.	And I think government has to be smart, it has to be lean, it has to be efficient.	Tetapi begini, saya beserta pemerintahan yang saya pimpin, harapan saya juga seluruh gubernur, bupati, walikota melakukan hal yang sama, bekerja lebih giat lagi untuk rakyat kita.

From the table above, we can see that there are differences from their although the meaning or the intention of their utterances are similiar. The first utterances, Obama just said “Yes, sure” without adding another explanation about what he sure but the

interviewer has understood about what Obama is sure. While SBY uttered what he is sure completely.

Second utterance is the opposite of the first utterance. In this case, Obama uttered what he understood more completely than SBY's utterance. SBY just said "*Saya paham betul itu*". But the meaning of their utterances are same that they have understood what they were talking about.

The third utterances between Obama and SBY have different function but the intention is same. Obama uttered it by commanding while SBY uttered it by offering. It can be shown from their utterances. In Obama's utterance, there is the word "**has to**", it means that should be done while in SBY's utterance there is still hope or the word "*berharap*" so the governments do or do not do that it depends on themselves. In other words, there is no imperative.

### *Casual*

Casual is the levels of formality that characterized by the use of the first name or even nickname rather than a little name and last name in addressing one another. Besides that this level is the use of slang. Another characteristic of casual levels is the omissions of unstressed words, particularly at the beginning of sentences, and contructions. It tends to be informal.

As the president of America, Obama is prefer to use this level because it can give impressable for the listener. While SBY just used this level in certain situation by addressing the interviewer.

**Table 4.3 Distribution of Obama's Utterances and SBY's Utterances in Casual Levels**

No	OBAMA	SBY
1.	<b>John</b> , we'll start with you.	Ya, <b>Bung Imam</b> , saya punya pandangan yang kurang lebih sama.
2.	But <b>I've got to say</b> , Lee looks like a pretty tough pitcher.	<b>Begini</b> , sebenarnya maknanya luas, Bung Maulana, ya.
3.	Go ahead.	Silakan.



The utterances in the table above showed that between Obama and SBY used the casual levels in similiar intention. The differences is in America, it is acceptable to call someone in formal situation just by using their first name or nickname like “**John**” because Obama has known him before. While in Indonesia is not acceptable to call someone with their first name or nickname however people have known each other. It will be addition in front of their name to show politeness such as “**Bung Imam**”. In this case the name of the interviewer is Imam while SBY adding *Bung* to show that they are friend but the situation demand SBY to call him like that because they are doing interview that are watched by the public.

The second utterances, in English the using of contractions such as “**I’ve**” is tend to be informal if we are speaking in formal situation. But Obama did this one in his interview. This case showed closer that English speaking often operates semi formal level or informal as have stated in previous chapter. While SBY used “**begini**”, it is the casual word that looked not formal. It should be better if SBY said “*seperti ini*”. Even though the languages that Obama and SBY are different but **I’ve got to say** and **Begini** have same meaning.

The last example from the casual levels, Obama’s utterance and SBY’s utterance have similiar meaning by using simple words to please the interviewer to continue another question. It is looked from their conversation.

#### Obama’s interview

Q (interviewer) : So I have another gay question. (Laughter.)

Obama : **Go ahead .**

#### SBY’s interview

Maulana : Saya masih punya banyak pertanyaan lagi ini pak.

SBY : **Silahkan.**

#### *Intimate*

An intimate level is a completely private language developed within families, lovers, and the closest of friends. It might embarrass some for non-group members to hear them in-group intimate language. From three of *Obama’s* interviews, it is found only one intimate level:

- **So we always try to get a date night out on Valentine’s Day.**

The word “date” is often used for the lovers or close friend. In this case, Obama is asked by the interviewer about his wife and what they do on Valentine’s Day. For American, it is not taboo to tell everyting even to show their love to another such as to say “I love you” or to kiss someone that you love in front of public. But in Indonesia, these things are still taboo, it is seldom done by a president. So, there is no intimate level found in *SBY’s* interview and perchance there is no questions about his wife or family in his three interviews.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

After analyzing the levels of formality in *Obama’s* interview and *SBY’s* interview, it was found that not all levels of formality were found in their interviews. There are four levels of formality found in *Obama’s* interview and *SBY’s* interview. But the forth levels used by Obama and SBY are different. Obama used **Formal, Consultative, Casual, and Intimate** with dominantly by casual level while SBY used **Frozen, Formal, Consultative, and Casual** and dominantly by formal level.

The number and the percentage of levels of formality in Obama’s interviews and SBY’s interviews are shown in the table.

**Number of Levels formality used by Obama and SBY in their interviews.**

No.	Levels of Formality	Frequency		Percentage	
		Obama	SBY	Obama	SBY
1.	Frozen	-	16	-	3,16 %
2.	Formal	170	249	29,05 %	49,20 %
3.	Consultative	152	171	26 %	34 %
4.	Casual	262	70	44,78 %	13,83 %
5.	Intimate	1	-	0,17 %	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>585</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>

The table above shows the number and percentage of levels of formality in Obama’s interviews, there is no frozen level, formal is 170 (29,05%), consultative 152 (26%), casual 262 (44,78%), and intimate 1 (0,17%), and total number and percentage

of levels of formality in Obama's interviews is 585 (100%) with the most dominant levels of formality is casual. While the number and percentage of levels of formality in SBY's interviews, frozen is 16 (3,16%), formal is 249 (49,20%), consultative 171 (34%), casual 70 (13,83%), and there is no intimate intimate level, and total number and percentage of levels of formality in SBY's interviews is 506 (100%) with the most dominant levels of formality is formal.

As have stated by Biber (1988) that English-speaking world often operates at a semi-formal level. The purpose is to make them looked friendly and welcoming. Because America is a superior country that gives big influence to another country. It is seen from Obama's interviews that his utterances are dominantly by casual level. While Indonesia, the spoken and written language tend to be more formal. Because Indonesian people hold the five basic principles of the Republic of Indonesia which covered the norms to respect with others especially to the older one, as a president, he should be a model that give positive impression to his citizen. It seen from SBY's interviews that his utterances are dominantly by formal level. Beside that SBY also used frozen level in his interviews.

Beside that actually Indonesian people tend to use formal level in speaking. It can be found in "*The Analysis of Levels of Formality in Job Interview*" by Ananda Rarasti (2008). Ananda found that from ten job interviews which using Indonesian language that she analyzed, it is dominantly by formal level both the interviewer's utterances and interviewee's utterances. The case is influenced by the register (field, mode, tenor) that has been interpreted by Halliday and Hasan (1984). Field refers to *what is going on*, including events, social activity and topic or content. Mode refers to how language is being used, whether the channel of communication is spoken or written, and the use of language and status of language. Tenor refers to the social relationship between those taking parts. These are specified in terms of formality, status or power (agent roles or hierarchic relations), affect (degree, like or dislike), and contact such as frequently, duration and intimacy of contact. These three values- field, mode and tenor are thus the determining factors for linguistics features of the text.

Therefore, in having an interview session, a president should use the formal language in answering the interviewer's questions in order to make a good impression for public as the president is one important person in a country. But, sometimes when

people speak seriously or in other word monotone, the listeners will be bored so they will get nothing. But when people speak using variations or different levels, it would help the listener to understand and to remember what he have said.

And sometimes people need to think the utterances that people will state whether it sounds good or bad. Simply, people should know with whom he/she speaks, where, when, and what the topic. The purpose is to prevent mis-understanding with others so communication can be done well.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

After analyzing the utterances that describes levels of formality used by Obama and SBY in their interview, it can be conclude that

- Obama used formal, consultative, casual, and intimate levels in his interviews and it is dominantly by casual levels while SBY used frozen, formal, consultative, and casual levels in his interviews and it is dominantly by formal levels.
- There are differences and similarities between Obama's utterances and SBY's utterances.
- And levels of formality are influenced by language, culture, social context, and personality in order to create a good communication.

For this research is far from the perfection, it is hoped for the another researchers, who are concerned to this study, to conduct in depth researches and to make a detailed analysis of formality language in other object. And for the students, who want to improve their ability in speaking and writing, should know the using of levels of formality in order to make a good communication.

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