



MORAL LEADERSHIP IN GLOBAL DIPLOMACY: A LINGUISTIC AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT PRABOWO'S UNGA SPEECH

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Article History	Abstract
Submitted date: 2026-04-25 Accepted date: 2026-05-13 Published date: 2026-07-09	The study examines President Prabowo Subianto's speech to the United Nations General Assembly in 2025 using a Critical Discourse Analysis, Speech Act Theory, and rhetorical analysis methodology. The study examines how Prabowo establishes moral authority, appeals to common humanity, and portrays Indonesia as a conscientious actor in global diplomacy. The research indicates a strategic interplay of ethos, pathos, and logos; emotionally charged historical narratives; and strong promises to peacekeeping, all supported by performative aspects like emphasis, repetition, and prosodic cues. The findings show how Prabowo's language combines national identity, postcolonial solidarity, and moral universalism to promote a vision of ethical global leadership. The study adds to broader debates about Global South diplomacy, political communication, and the role of rhetoric in shaping international legitimacy.
Keywords: Global Diplomacy, Critical Discourse Analysis, Speech	
Abstrak	
Kata Kunci: Diplomasi Global, Analisis Wacana Kritis, Tuturan	Kepemimpinan Moral dalam Diplomasi Global: Analisis Linguistik dan Wacana Kritis Pidato Presiden Prabowo di Sidang Umum PBB Studi ini meneliti pidato Presiden Prabowo Subianto di Majelis Umum Perserikatan Bangsa-Bangsa pada tahun 2025 menggunakan metodologi Analisis Wacana Kritis, Teori Tindakan Tutur, dan analisis retorika. Studi ini mengkaji bagaimana Prabowo membangun otoritas moral, menyerukan kemanusiaan bersama, dan menggambarkan Indonesia sebagai aktor yang bertanggung jawab dalam diplomasi global. Penelitian ini menunjukkan adanya interaksi strategis antara etos, pathos, dan logos; narasi sejarah yang sarat emosi; dan janji-janji kuat untuk menjaga perdamaian, semuanya didukung oleh aspek performatif seperti penekanan, pengulangan, dan isyarat prosodik. Temuan menunjukkan bagaimana bahasa Prabowo menggabungkan identitas nasional, solidaritas pascakolonial, dan universalisme moral untuk mempromosikan visi kepemimpinan global yang etis. Studi ini menambah perdebatan yang lebih luas tentang diplomasi Global Selatan, komunikasi politik, dan peran retorika dalam membentuk legitimasi internasional.

Introduction

Geopolitical rivalry, humanitarian crises, and growing economic inequality continue to shape today's international political landscape. Rather than becoming more stable after globalization, the world appears to be entering a period of renewed tension, marked by regional conflicts, competition among major powers, and persistent gaps between developed and developing countries. These conditions have made international cooperation more difficult, while at the same time increasing the need for dialogue, negotiation, and diplomatic communication.

In this situation, global institutions such as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) play an important role as a meeting point for world leaders. The UNGA is not only a

formal diplomatic forum, but also a symbolic stage where countries present how they want to be seen by the world. Speeches delivered in this setting are therefore not just policy statements. They are also performances of identity, values, and political intention. Leaders use language to position their countries, respond to global issues, and sometimes to challenge existing international power structures.

Indonesia, as the world's fourth most populous country and a major actor in Southeast Asia, has consistently taken part in global diplomacy through the principle of "free and active" (bebas aktif) foreign policy. This principle reflects Indonesia's attempt to remain independent from major power blocs while still actively contributing to peace and international cooperation. Over time, Indonesia has increasingly positioned itself as a mediator and bridge-builder in global conflicts, particularly within the Global South context.

In 2025, President Prabowo Subianto delivered his first speech at the United Nations General Assembly. In this address, he highlighted Indonesia's commitment to global peace, justice, and humanitarian responsibility. He also emphasized the importance of shared humanity, the legacy of colonial history, and the need for stronger collective action in addressing global inequality and conflict. In addition, Indonesia's readiness to contribute peacekeeping forces in conflict areas reflected a more active diplomatic posture on the international stage.

Prabowo Subianto's background as a former commander of Indonesia's Special Forces (Kopassus) adds a distinctive dimension to his political communication style. His public speeches are often described as direct, emotionally charged, and assertive. This military background influences how authority and conviction are expressed in his rhetoric, creating a style that combines discipline with strong emotional delivery. In the context of international diplomacy, this becomes particularly interesting because it merges a security-oriented identity with humanitarian and moral messaging.

One of the most discussed moments in the speech was when Prabowo struck the podium while delivering a strong statement condemning global injustice and intimidation in international relations. This gesture drew wide attention because it turned a verbal message into a physical expression of urgency. The moment was widely circulated and interpreted as a sign of strong emotional conviction. International reactions, including public comments from figures such as Donald Trump, further amplified the visibility of the speech and contributed to its global reception.

From a linguistic perspective, the speech is interesting because it does not rely only on policy explanation. Instead, it combines several layers of communication, including rhetorical strategies, moral framing, and non-verbal performance. The speech uses emotional appeals, references to historical injustice, and expressions of commitment to peace. At the same time, it also includes direct commitments that function as diplomatic promises, such as Indonesia's readiness to participate in peacekeeping missions. These elements make the speech suitable for analysis using Critical Discourse Analysis, Speech Act Theory, and rhetorical frameworks.

Despite the importance of diplomatic communication from countries like Indonesia, most studies on political discourse still focus heavily on Western leaders. Speeches by figures such as American or European presidents are often analyzed in detail, while the rhetorical strategies of Southeast Asian leaders remain less explored. This creates a gap in understanding how Global South countries construct authority and legitimacy through language in international forums.

There is also a growing need to look beyond written transcripts and include the physical and performative aspects of political speech. In many cases, meaning is not only carried by words, but also by tone, gesture, and delivery style. In Prabowo's speech, for example, the use of emphasis and physical movement plays a role in strengthening the message. Ignoring these

elements would mean missing an important part of how meaning is produced in diplomatic communication.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine how President Prabowo Subianto constructs Indonesia's moral and political identity through his speech at the 2025 UN General Assembly. It also explores how language functions as a form of soft power, and how rhetorical strategies contribute to shaping international perceptions of Indonesia. More broadly, the study looks at how discourse reflects Indonesia's position within global politics and how it negotiates its identity as a middle power in an unequal international system.

Methodology

The study employs qualitative approach to analyzing and exploring the messages of President Prabowo's UN speech. The research is based on several theories, including Critical Discourse Analysis, Speech Acts Theory, and Classical Rhetorical Analysis (ethos-pathos-logos), as well as related theories such as Framing Theory and Paralinguistic Analysis, to uncover how language constructs power, authority, morality, and identity in international political communication.

The data comes from the transcript of Prabowo's speech at the 80th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York, United States, on Tuesday, September 23, 2025. The transcript was taken from the official United Nations website, but it was found that there were a number of parts that were not written, so the transcript from Detik.com media was used as a supplement. The audio-visual footage from YouTube Official Channel provides additional information for observing tone, emphasis, and gestures, as well as comments and replies to the speech published in various media.

Data collection and analysis began with establishing which speech samples piqued interest. The findings were then categorized into two types: speech acts and rhetorical strategies. The Critical Discourse Analysis theory will then be applied to investigate Indonesia's moral position, ideology, and representation in the international community. Furthermore, prosodic analysis will be used to determine speech delivery and nonverbal communication in conveying the speech's message.

Finding and Discussion

The research adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework combining Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Speech Act Theory, Rhetorical Analysis, Framing Theory, and Multimodal Discourse Analysis as no single theory alone can fully explain diplomatic speeches. The authors of the study found ten notable statements made by Prabowo during his address to the UN General Assembly, each accompanied by a unique gesture and strategic message. The following research delves deeply into these expressions, both verbal and nonverbal, to demonstrate their rhetorical value as well as their political ramifications.

1. *"We differ in race, religion, and nationality, yet we gather together as one human family" (line 4)*

One of the most prominent discourse strategies in the speech is Prabowo's insistence on human equality, expressed through explicit linguistic formulation. The statement "We differ in race, religion, and nationality, yet we gather together as one human family" serves as the first major data point. Linguistically, this utterance demonstrates a unifying frame through contrastive structure ("we differ... yet we gather"), a rhetorical pattern often used to move

audiences from difference to solidarity. The phrase “one human family” establishes a moral macro-frame, positioning all nations within a shared moral community.

Norman Fairclough (1995) and Teun A. van Dijk (1993) emphasize how discourse reflects and reproduces power relations and ideologies. For example, Nelson Mandela’s speeches often framed post-apartheid South Africa as a nation overcoming oppression and seeking reconciliation, constructing moral authority through discourse of unity and justice. Within the CDA, the Prabowo’s sentence reflects a universalizing move that delegitimizes geopolitical divisions and asserts an egalitarian ideology. This phrase might be interpreted as a reflection of Pancasila, the Indonesian official ideology, particularly the third principle, “The Unity of Indonesia”, that promotes harmony in a pluralistic nation with many ethnicities, religions, cultures, and languages and this can serve as a foundation for promoting unity among nations around the world. Furthermore, the speech reflects Indonesia’s attempt to reposition itself from regional actor into moral voice of the Global South.

2. *“endowed with unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (line 5)*

Prabowo invokes universal rights in the sentence “...endowed with unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The statement is aimed to emphasize universal human equality and shared moral values beyond political, national, or ideological differences. The sentence, which is intertextually linked to the United States Declaration of Independence, serves as an intellectual borrowing, granting his moral standpoint historical credibility.

In Aristotle’s theory of rhetorical analysis, there are three main appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos refers to the credibility or authority of the speaker, which helps establish trust with the audience. Pathos is the emotional appeal used to influence the audience’s feelings, values, and sympathies. Logos refers to logical reasoning, where arguments are supported by facts, evidence, or rational structure (Aristotle, trans. 2007). From the perspective of rhetorical analysis, the use of this globally recognized triad strengthens Prabowo’s credibility (ethos) by aligning his speech with widely accepted moral and political values, while also situating Indonesia’s moral argument within a Western canonical framework. At the same time, it can be argued that such references also evoke pathos by appealing to shared ideals of freedom and human dignity. However, from a critical standpoint, the invocation of universal principles such as liberty and happiness may appear paradoxical, as these ideals are not fully realized in many parts of the world where oppression and inequality still persist.

Furthermore, from CDA perspective, this intertextual reference of Prabowo speech to United States Declaration of Independence can be understood as a form of “borrowing authority,” where meaning is strengthened by drawing on historically and culturally powerful texts. By invoking language associated with the United States Declaration of Independence, the speech does not merely repeat a well-known moral ideal, but strategically aligns Indonesia’s position with a globally recognized discourse of human rights and political legitimacy. This alignment enhances persuasive power on an international stage, where such references carry symbolic weight. However, this universal framing can also be read critically, as it highlights a tension between idealized principles of freedom and equality and the continued existence of global inequalities and forms of oppression. In this sense, the appeal to universality functions both as a rhetorical strategy for legitimacy and as an invitation to reflect on the gap between normative ideals and political reality.

3. *“We were treated less than dogs in our own homeland.” (line 11)*

Another salient feature is Prabowo's use of emotionally charged history to construct shared suffering. The research object for this portion is the initial statement "For centuries, Indonesians lived under colonial domination, oppression, and slavery." The lexical chain—"domination, oppression, slavery"—uses gradational severity to heighten emotional impact. Similarly, the sentence "We were treated less than dogs in our own homeland" intensifies the pathos appeal through dehumanizing metaphor. These expressions not only recall collective trauma but also establish Indonesia's moral authority in advocating justice for oppressed peoples today. In other words, Prabowo emphasized that Indonesia has a long history of combating colonialism and hence has significant capital to contribute to the battle against injustice.

This can be said to be Prabowo's way of convincing diplomats from various countries and conveying to the world that Indonesia has the experience to rise from oppression and invite countries still oppressed to rise. Indonesia experienced centuries of colonial rule under European powers, most notably the Dutch, who controlled much of the archipelago for more than 300 years. During this period, Indonesians faced economic exploitation, political subjugation, and social inequality, as local resources were extracted for colonial benefit. This long history of colonization eventually fueled strong nationalist movements, leading to Indonesia's declaration of independence in 1945.

4. *"We knew what solidarity can do." (line 13)*

Prabowo used the phrase "We also knew what solidarity can do" to turn past tragedy into a diplomatic asset. This remark serves as a shift from victimhood to agency, presenting solidarity as a transformational force. Prabowo reframes historical suffering not as a permanent condition of victimhood, but as a source of political learning and moral strength that can be used to contribute to global cooperation.

Speech act theory, developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), categorizes communicative actions into three types: commissives, directions, and expressives. From a speech-act standpoint, this is an assertive that also indicates a commissive—Indonesia is prepared to offer the same solidarity that it previously received. This rhetorical technique is similar to the pattern observed in postcolonial discourse, in which historical victimhood is reframed as a platform for ethical leadership. Just like the previous sentence he said, Prabowo emphasized to the audience and the world's citizens that Indonesia, as a country that has experience of being colonized and successfully rising, can build solidarity to improve world peace. This statement is also in line with Indonesia's "Free" and "Active" foreign policy principles, which mean that Indonesia is a country that does not side with any power bloc (free), but remains active in maintaining world peace and resolving international problems (active). With this principle, Indonesia can be independent in global politics while still contributing through diplomacy, mediation, and participation in international organizations such as the United Nations.

5. *"The strong do what they can, the weak suffer what they must. We must reject this doctrine. The UN exist to reject this doctrine." (line 26)*

Another key finding emerges from Prabowo's use of classical authority. The research object here is his reference to Thucydides: "The strong do what they can, the weak suffer what they must." Immediately following this quotation, the President asserted that we must reject this doctrine. The UN exists to reject this doctrine. Linguistically, the dual repetition of "reject this doctrine" serves to construct a clear moral binary: power-based oppression versus universal

justice. The modal “must” conveys obligation and urgency, transforming the statement into a strong moral directive in Speech Act. The speech thus frames the UN not merely as a political institution but as a site of ethical resistance.

Furthermore, the statement “*The UN exist to reject this doctrine*” is delivered with a strong knock on the podium. This gesture serves as a paralinguistic intensifier. The combination of increased volume, significant emphasis on “this doctrine,” and physical impact on the platform imbues the utterance with emotional energy, similar to an expressive speaking act. It emphasizes urgency and moral outrage, demonstrating Prabowo's passionate rejection of world injustice. From a multimodal discourse analysis standpoint, this gesture strengthens the ideological attitude by transforming abstract emotion into embodied action, so making the message both heard and physically felt.

As a comparison, this type of gestural strategy has also been commonly used by world leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr., whose measured pauses and raised voice were deliberately employed to strengthen emotional impact and emphasize key messages. Beyond verbal language, political communication involves embodied performance. Similarly, Donald Trump’s frequent use of emphatic hand gestures and abrupt tone shifts reinforced his populist messaging. The physical knock on a podium, as seen in speeches by leaders like Fidel Castro, adds a dramatic, emphatic dimension that conveys conviction and urgency. Multimodal analysis examines how these paralinguistic cues complement and amplify the verbal message.

This performative intensity also caught international attention. Former U.S. President Donald Trump publicly praised Prabowo’s speech, noting that “his passion and strength of conviction at the UN were truly remarkable, showing the kind of leadership that demands respect.” Trump’s comment underscores how such prosodic and gestural emphases contribute significantly to perceptions of authority and moral leadership on the global stage, amplifying the speech’s impact beyond words alone.

6. “*We are ready to deploy 20,000 or even more of our sons and daughters to help secure peace in Gaza or elsewhere in Palestine....*” (line 28)

The speech shifts from moral critique to concrete commitment through the statement “*We are ready to deploy 20,000 or even more of our sons and daughters to help secure peace in Gaza or elsewhere in Palestine....*” This sentence constitutes a commissive speech act, where Prabowo promises a tangible contribution to peacekeeping. The phrase “sons and daughters” introduces familial metaphor, emotionally grounding the commitment while invoking national sacrifice. The use of large, specific numbers (20,000) strengthens the perception of seriousness and preparedness, aligning rhetorical leadership with operational action. In Critical Discourse Analysis, it shows how this portrays Indonesia as willing to sacrifice, thereby increasing its legitimacy as a peace-oriented actor.

7. “*Let us use science to uplift, not use to destroy.*” (line 52)

Another significant aspect of Indonesian identity is reflected in the environmental passage: “Let us use science to uplift, not use to destroy.” This antithetical structure (uplift vs. demolish) employs binary opposition to morally justify scientific progress. The directive “let us” conveys collective accountability, meaning that the ethical use of science is a shared worldwide responsibility. Prabowo frames technical modernity as requiring moral guidance, supporting the concept of responsible leadership. Pragmatically, the remark functions as both an aggressive and directive speech act, indirectly encouraging global players to pursue ethical

technological growth. Prabowo's speech emerged amid escalating humanitarian and geopolitical crises, particularly the Gaza conflict, broader instability in the Middle East, and increasing global tensions concerning inequality, war, and the legitimacy of international institutions. The Prabowo's sentence reflects a call for peaceful and responsible technological development and criticism of the misuse of science for warfare and global domination.

8. "This is the beautiful dream we must work toward together" (line 58)

The closing portion of the speech provides rich linguistic data, particularly the statement "Maybe this is a dream. But this is the beautiful dream we must work toward together." The metaphor "beautiful dream" softens the political weight of the message, shifting it into aspirational terrain. The modal "must" reintroduces obligation, while "together" emphasizes collective agency. This mixture of softness (dreaming) and firmness (must work) creates a balance of pathos and ethos, an effective closing strategy in diplomatic rhetoric. In discourse terms, the sentence transitions the speech from narrative and critique toward a visionary appeal. It encapsulates Prabowo's attempt to position Indonesia not only as a moral commentator but as a collaborative partner in shaping future global order.

9. "*Wassalamu'alaikum ... Shalom ... Om Shanti*" (line 60)

A multi-religious conclusion represents a unique linguistic and political strategy. The line "Wassalamu'alaikum ... Shalom ... Om Shanti" shows intentional code-switching between Islamic, Jewish/Christian, and Hindu-Buddhist traditions. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, this multilingual articulation represents Indonesia's identity as pluralistic and culturally harmonious. The employment of these greetings in quick succession reflects a performative alignment with worldwide religious diversity, supporting the fundamental notion of universal unity introduced earlier in the speech. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, this decision depicts Indonesia not only as a Muslim-majority country, but also as one that values and embodies interreligious harmony, a critical component of its soft-power projection.

Moral Leadership Construction in Global Diplomacy

The analysis of President Prabowo Subianto's speech at the United Nations General Assembly reveals a deliberate effort to construct Indonesia's identity as a morally principled and globally responsible actor. Through linguistic choices that emphasize shared humanity, such as referring to all as "one human family", this may indicate the speech appeals to universal values that transcend national and cultural divisions. The rhetorical strategy aligns with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) principles by using language to challenge prevailing global power structures and frame Indonesia as a voice for justice and equality, particularly for post-colonial nations.

A key function of the speech lies in its use of various speech acts that serve distinct communicative purposes. Prabowo's commitment to deploying peacekeepers is a clear commissive act, signaling Indonesia's readiness to act on its diplomatic promises. This suggests Indonesia is actively trying to position itself as a moral voice in global politics, rather than a neutral participant. Meanwhile, directives urging the rejection of "might makes right" philosophies function to mobilize international solidarity and collective action. These performative speech acts not only assert Indonesia's stance but also engage the global

community in shared responsibility, thus increasing the speech's pragmatic force and diplomatic significance.

The speech's rhetorical structure skillfully integrates ethos, pathos, and logos to enhance persuasion. Ethos is established by positioning Indonesia—and by extension Prabowo himself - as a leader grounded in a history of struggle and ethical commitment. Pathos emerges through emotive language depicting colonial oppression and contemporary injustice, designed to evoke empathy and moral outrage. Logos is woven into the argument through historical and philosophical references, such as citing Thucydides to condemn power imbalances, providing intellectual grounding that appeals to rational judgment. This balanced triadic appeal effectively connects with a wide-ranging international audience.

From a framing perspective, Prabowo's depiction of the United Nations as a moral institution resisting tyranny serves to reframe global governance discourse. Instead of a neutral platform, the UN is portrayed as a normative agent committed to justice, peace, and human rights. This framing aligns Indonesia's foreign policy with these high ideals and positions the country as a legitimate defender of Global South interests. Such framing not only asserts Indonesia's diplomatic identity but also seeks to influence international perceptions and expectations about global power relations.

An important aspect that distinguishes the speech is its multimodal delivery, notably the physical gesture of knocking on the podium while declaring, "Thucydides warned The strong do what they can, the weak suffer what they must. We must reject this doctrine. The UN exists to reject this doctrine." This paralinguistic act intensifies the message's emotional charge, turning abstract moral outrage into a visceral, embodied expression of defiance. Drawing from Multimodal Discourse Analysis, this demonstrates how non-verbal communication complements and reinforces verbal messages, enhancing their persuasive impact and making the speech memorable in performance.

The speech's reception by global leaders, such as Donald Trump's public commendation of Prabowo's passionate delivery, further validates the effectiveness of these combined linguistic and performative strategies. Trump's praise highlights how such speeches are not only texts but also performances that construct leadership credibility and moral authority on the world stage. This reception underscores the importance of considering audience response and international political context in analyzing political rhetoric.

In sum, the integrated linguistic, rhetorical, framing, and multimodal analyses illustrate how Prabowo's UN speech operates on multiple levels: constructing Indonesia's identity, challenging injustice, committing to concrete actions, and leveraging embodied performance to maximize impact. The speech thus exemplifies the complex role of language in diplomacy, where words and gestures converge to shape perceptions, mobilize support, and negotiate power in the global arena.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated how President Prabowo Subianto's 2025 UN General Assembly speech strategically employs a combination of linguistic, rhetorical, and paralinguistic features to construct Indonesia's image as a morally authoritative and action-ready global actor. Through critical discourse analysis and speech act theory, the speech reveals a deliberate framing of Indonesia as a nation deeply rooted in historical struggle yet firmly committed to principles of justice, equality, and peace.

Prabowo's use of universal human rights language, emotionally charged narratives of colonial oppression, and explicit commitments to peacekeeping missions work together to establish both ethos and pathos, appealing simultaneously to reason and emotion. The

incorporation of intertextual references and moral imperatives further strengthens the logos dimension of his rhetoric.

Importantly, the speech's performative aspects, especially the intense prosody and the physical podium-knocking gesture, serve as powerful non-verbal tools that amplify the urgency and conviction behind his message. These multimodal elements do not merely accompany the words but actively shape the audience's reception, reinforcing Prabowo's position as a passionate and determined leader on the international stage. The recognition of these strategies by global figures such as Donald Trump illustrates the speech's success in transcending linguistic boundaries to achieve diplomatic influence. Overall, the speech exemplifies how language and performance intertwine in international diplomacy to construct national identity and project soft power.

Future research was suggested to explore the multimodal dimensions by analyzing audience reception and comparative studies of similar speeches by Global South leaders. Additionally, tracking the translation of rhetorical commitments into concrete diplomatic actions would provide further insight into the speech's practical implications.

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