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# The Lexicogrammar of Hate Speech: *The Case of Comments Responding to “New Zealand Mass Shooting” Online News Video*

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the hate speech appearing in the comment section of YouTube channel entitled “New Zealand Mass Shooting in the Christchurch mosque” through the lexicogrammar of SFL’s interpersonal meaning, i.e., MOOD and modality. This study employed qualitative approach. Using content analysis method, this study analysed as many as 20 comments. The result shows that declarative MOOD is the most frequently used, serving the functions of giving statements, of indirect directive, and of threat. The other MOOD types used are imperative as well as interrogative that functions as a rhetorical question to assert a proposition. In terms of modality, modulated clauses outnumber modalized clause. The use of MOOD types in expressing hate speech responding to the incident indicates that the writers position themselves as superior toward the targeted people, i.e., the victims; whereas the type of modality used shows that the writers play as an authority and deprive others’ rights.

**Keywords:** *Interpersonal meaning, lexicogrammar, MOOD, modality, online hate speech*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Most works on online hate speech focus identifying and detecting hate speech to provide tools for information to solve problems related hate speech. Among the studies, some employed machine learning like support vector mechanism (SVM) and naïve bayes for hate speech detection (Febriana, & Budiarto, 2019; Mossie, & Wang, 2018; Zia et al., 2017; Waseem, & Hovy, 2016). Whereas other studies proposed models of hate speech classification based on word classification [11,12,25]. (Gao, & Huang, 2017; Gitari, Zuping, Damien, & Long, 2015; Watanabe, Bouazizi, & Ohtsuki, 2018). In addition, these works were mostly based on lexical items.

Online hate speech is characterized not only by the aggressive or abusive language but also the speech’s content, tone, the evaluation of its potential consequences as well as the motivation of the speaker toward targeted people. As it is defined by Cohen-Almagor (2013, p.43)

“...a bias-motivated, hostile, malicious speech aimed at a person or a group of people because of

some of their actual or perceived innate characteristics. It expresses discriminatory, intimidating, disapproving, antagonistic, and/or prejudicial attitudes toward those characteristics, which include gender, race, religion, ethnicity, colour, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation”

In this sense, hate speech covers any expressions or speeches which are intentionally expressed hatred to a person or a group of persons because of his or their specific characteristics. Though, the expression or speech does not necessarily contain abusive words. When people convey meaning or intention, they make use of both lexical and grammatical aspects of language. Therefore, a more comprehensive study analysing hate speech in the aspects of lexicon and grammar in term of interpersonal meaning will provide comprehensive tools to identify and detect online hate speech.

Considering the facts, this study aims to analyse online hate speech in YouTube comment section focusing on its lexicogrammar features of SFL’s interpersonal meaning. Interpersonal meaning is one of the three metafunctional meanings of language proposed

by Halliday (Bloor, & Bloor, 2004; Halliday, & Matthiessen, 2014) This kind of meaning refers to the meaning of language created by the speaker/writer and the listener/reader during the social interaction. The realization of interpersonal metafunction is through tenor. Tenor refers to the role and the social relationship of participants. It is about how participants position themselves an interaction (Eggins, 2004; Matthiessen, Teruya, & Lam, 2010). Eggins divides tenor into three continua, i.e., power, contact, and affective involvement. These three aspects simultaneously interact to represent the role relationship of participants in the interaction. Revealing the interpersonal metafunction of text can be done through the analysis of the MOOD of a clause and the modality used. The former refers to the grammatical category of the clauses consisting of an indicative type and interrogative type, and the latter refers to the mental system that locates between systems of polarity, positive and negative (Halliday, & Matthiessen, 2014). The MOOD of a clause does not only represent the clause structure, but it also realizes speech function. For instance, declarative MOOD realizes the speech function of giving information, while imperative MOOD realizes command.

Analyzing the interpersonal meaning's lexicogrammar of hate speech will provide a more comprehensive study to reveal the attitude of the speaker toward the targeted people. The corpus of this study is taken from comment section of YouTube displaying the video of New Zealand's Mass in Christchurch mosque, New Zealand in March 15, 2019 (CBS News, 2019).

## 2. METHOD

This study was conducted using qualitative approach. The corpus was taken from the comment section of YouTube channel of CBS news reporting the incident of New Zealand mass shooting in Christchurch Mosques on March 15, 2019. The channel is selected due to the number of hate speech appeared. The comments chosen as the source of data were all hate speeches targeted on Muslims, which is based on the definition proposed by Cohen-Almagor (2013) and were posted in the last four months. As many as 20 comments were collected. Since the analysis using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is carried out on clauses, the collected hate speeches were then broken down into clause rank, every or which may consist of more than one clause, i.e., main clause and sub clause. Yet, only main clauses were analysed. As many as 63 clauses were then analysed using content analysis method to find out the lexicogrammar aspects.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Findings

#### 3.1.1. Analysis of MOOD

MOOD is the element of a clause that plays an essential role in identifying the purpose of the speaker in uttering the proposition. There are five types of MOOD; they are declarative, imperative, interrogative, exclamative and vocative. Table 1 illustrates the mood types and speech function realization of selected data. Table 1 shows that declarative MOOD overrides the other types; that is as many as 55 clauses or representing 86.9% of all types. The declarative MOOD is used to realize different speech functions.

The first is declarative realizing speech function of statement of opinion which takes 65% of all the clauses in declarative MOOD. In the second place is declarative MOOD functioning as statement of fact, as many as 9 clauses; while the other functions are statement of threat, statement of hope, and statement of dislike. Besides functioning as statement, there is also declarative MOOD realizing the function of indirect directive representing 7.2% of the declarative clauses. Examples of each are presented below.

- (1) Right Mile Yep, the invaders must be removed <sup>(1.1)</sup>
- (2) He said it in his manifesto <sup>(2.1)</sup> that children of invaders don't stay children <sup>(2.2)</sup>, they become adult and aid in the replacement process <sup>(2.3)</sup>. So, his objective was to leave nonalve <sup>(2.4)</sup> because that's what one does to a viper's nest
- (3) What a lovely sight <sup>(3.1)</sup>. Hopefully there will be more of these "incidents" <sup>(3.2)</sup> like Ilham Omar says this is only someone doing something <sup>(3.3)</sup> and that is all fine <sup>(3.4)</sup>

**Table 1.** Mood types and speech function realization

Mood types	Speech function	Frequency
Declarative	Statement of opinion	36
	Statement of fact	9
	Statement of hope	3
	Statement of feeling (dislike)	2
	Statement of threat	1
	Indirect directive	4
Imperative	Direct directive	4
	Suggestion	1
Interrogative	Rhetorical question	2
Exclamative		2
Vocative		-
Number of clauses		63

Extract (1) consists only one clause which is categorized into declarative MOOD because of its mood structure, i.e., subject + finite. Its declarative MOOD notwithstanding, this clause does not serve a function of statement, but indirect directive. In fact, directive is not always expressed in imperative MOOD. In most cases it is realized by interrogative or declarative (Lock, 1997). The declarative functioning as indirect directive is characterized by the use of modal auxiliary *must* which functions to moderate the command. Extract (2) consists of five clauses which are all in directive MOOD. However, the clauses in extract (2) realize different speech functions. Clauses no 2.1 to 2.3 serve the function of statement of fact.

Writing the clause, the writer wanted to inform the readers the reason why children also became the target. Clause 2.4 of extract (2) the declarative is used to serve the function of statement of opinion. This clause is a conclusion made by the writer about what are stated previously. By making this statement the writer wants to give his evaluative opinion on what has been done by the shooter. The hate speech in extract (3) is expressed in combination of exclamative and declarative MOOD. The declarative MOOD used in clauses 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 serve the function of statement of hope and of opinion respectively. Like in the previous extract, clause 2. Besides realizing the above-mentioned speech functions, there is also one clause that realizes a speech function of threat. The clause is presented below

- (4) This was a message to all the Muslims in the western world <sup>(4.1)</sup>: GET OUT <sup>(4.2)</sup> OR YOU'RE GONNA BE THE NEXT <sup>(4.3)</sup>

Extract no (4) represents hate speech which is expressed by using two types of MOOD; they are declarative (clause no. 4.1 and 4.3) and imperative (clause no 4.2). Clause no 4.1 realizes the function of statement of opinion in which the writer interpreted that the incident was a message to all Muslims who live in western world. Clause no. 4.2 is a direct directive by which the speaker is explicitly commanding/ordering the addressee, that is Muslims, to do what is written. The next clause, no 3.9 is declarative functioning as statement of threat. Clause no. 4.3 has the characteristics of threatening utterances, that is (i) the proposition that the writer conveys to commit future negative action against the addressee, that is Muslims, (ii) the commission of the future negative action depends on the addressee's compliance on the writer's directive (Fraser, 1998; Gales, 2011). The clause *you're gonna be the next* implies that the addressee will be the next target of the incident if they do not do what the writer said in the previous clause. This kind of utterance is also a prototype of verbal threat; that is (if you (don't) X, I will Y) (Gales, 2011; Salgueiro, 2010).

The second type of MOOD found in the collected data is imperative. As many as 4 clauses are in imperative mood indicated by absence of mood element in the clause. The imperative mood of the selected data realizes two kinds of speech function. The first is realizing the function of direct directive which means that the writers are demanding good-&-service. The second function realized is suggestion, Clauses representing the imperative MOOD appear below.

- (5) Brenton Tarrant or how-to level things, Keep Islam far, very far and Muslims even farther <sup>(5.1)</sup>. The ones who promoted this invasion and assimilation, mainly leftist and progressives should be the next ones <sup>(5.2)</sup>  
(6) It was terrible some got away <sup>(6.1)</sup>, that is for the gang rape of white children in UK <sup>(6.2)</sup>. let's hope <sup>(6.3)</sup> there are more attacks against these Muslim white children rapist <sup>(6.4)</sup>

Extract (5) contains two clauses, one of which (clause no 5.1) is in imperative MOOD which is characterized by the absence of mood element. This clause serves the function of direct directive, which means that the writer is commanding or ordering the addressee, which is Brenton Tarrant, to do what is said. The other clause, no 5.2, is declarative clause functioning as statement of suggestion because of the use of modal auxiliary *should*. In the next extract (6), considering its structure clause no 6.3 can be categorized as imperative MOOD type. This clause normally realizes the function of either command or offer. However, the subject *us* in *let's* which refer to you and I (both the writer and the reader) indicates that the clause is addressed to both speaker and hearer, which mean that the writer is neither giving command nor offering something, but a function between them, i.e. suggestion (Halliday, & Matthiessen, 2014).

The last two types of MOOD used in collected hate speech are interrogative and exclamative. Firstly, the interrogative mood is used in two clauses. Generally, WH-interrogative mood realizes the function of demanding (requesting) information. However, in this context, the interrogative mood does not realize the function of demanding information, rather, it serves the function of rhetorical question. Sadock (1971) defined rhetorical question as a question whose illocutionary force is "an assertion of the opposite polarity from what is apparently asked" (Han, 2002). The clauses indicated as rhetorical question are presented below

- (7) Why these kinda people still exist? <sup>(7.1)</sup>  
(8) Why do Muslims still exist? <sup>(8.1)</sup> I agree <sup>(8.2)</sup>

The above clauses were written in response to the video of the incident of mass shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand. The question in extract no (7) the clause's subject *these people* refer to the victims which are

Muslim people. Therefore, in surface the question was asking why Muslim people still exist. In fact, giving such question the writer does not require an answer, but implicitly stated that *these kinda people should not exist*. The second interrogative clause extract (8) was written to respond the previous question in extract (7). Commonly, a response of a question is either answer or disclaimer (Halliday, & Matthiessen, 2014). However, this question reinforces the previous question to make its implicit meaning obvious. The subject of the clause *Muslims* refers to the subject of the last clause *these people*. The next clause (22) seems to answer the question (21), yet it does not really answer what is questioning. It is an expression of agreement on a proposition. Hence, it can be said that interrogative clauses in extract (7) and (8) are not a question, but a proposition which has an implicit meaning that Muslims do not or should not exist. Besides, according to Ranganath, et al. rhetorical questions used in social media are based on two motivations, i.e., “to implicitly convey a message and to modify the strength of a statement previously made” (Ranganath et al., 2018). The former motivation underlies the rhetorical question in extract (7). In contrast, the later motivation underlies the rhetorical question in extract (8).

### 3.1.2. Analysis of Modality

Modality, which is categorized into modulation and modalization, is an element within mood structure that signals speakers/writers’ attitudes and judgments, which indicate the certainty, possibility, and frequency, about particular situations or objects. It lies between yes and no polarity (Egins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Of the 63 clauses taken from hate speeches, there are only 13 clauses that use modality. The frequency of the use of modality is presented in the Table 2.

As it can be noticed in table 2, modulated clauses outnumber the modalized clauses. Modulation is used to assert obligation or inclination, which means that the speaker or the writer gets the hearer or the reader to do something. In other word, it is usually used in the exchange of good-&-service. In the data gathered, the modal expressions used by the writers of the hate speech are *have to*, *must*, *need to*, and *should*. All those modal expressions indicate a strong obligation. Though referring to the degree of strength *should* is weaker than the others (Collins, 2009). The following are some extracts containing modulated clauses

- (1) They have to go back <sup>(1)</sup>
- (2) Right Mile Yep, the invaders must be removed <sup>(2)</sup>
- (3) Brenton Tarrant is a hero <sup>(3.1)</sup>. He will take his place in the halls of Valhalla <sup>(3.2)</sup> and feast with the likes of the gods <sup>(3.3)</sup>. Multiculturalism is the root of evil <sup>(3.4)</sup> and must be fought with determination and without mercy <sup>(3.5)</sup>.

**Table 2.** The frequency of modality occurrence

Modality types	Frequency	Percentage
Modulation	6	54%
Modalization	5	46%
Number of clauses	11	100%

In the first extract (1), a deontic *have to* is used to express hatred. Deontic *have to* indicates that the speaker or the subject of the clause has an obligation to perform the action mentioned as the verb of the clause. Performing the obligation is still based on the speaker’s, or the deontic source’s, own volition, though [5,20]. In extract (1) the deontic source is not the speaker, but the third person *they*, which refers to the Muslims or the victims. Hence, the use of *have to* in extract (1) implies that the subject, *they*, referring to the victims of the incident or the Muslims, has an obligation to go back to their place of origin. Similarly, the next extract (2) has the same implication.

Yet, instead of using *have to*, the writer of extract (2) uses deontic *must*, which possibly gives a stronger effect since deontic *must* indicates imposing a directive. It pinpoints a robust and unconditional obligation, which means that the subject of the clause is forced to perform the action. Furthermore, study conducted by Collins evidenced that when used with third person subject, *must* include into objective deontic (Collins, 2009). It means that the judgment on the obligation is based on an objective assessment. Then, in extract (3) the deontic *must* is used in passive declarative clause, in which the doer of the action (verb) is omitted. The use of passive, then, implicates that the object of the clause, that is multiculturalism, is given emphasis, and thus the important point of the clause. By using deontic *must* the writer suggests that someone obliges to do the act, no matter who the doer is.

Besides modulated clauses, clauses with modalization can also be found in the data. As it is shown in table 2, modality functioning as modalization, which represents the expression of probability and usuality, is used in 5 clauses. The modal expressions used are *will* and *can* occurring as many as 4 and 1 respectively. Both modal auxiliaries have a different level of degree when used to express possibility. The use of *will* in expressing possibility gives indication that the writer is 100% certain on the status of the proposition. While using modal auxiliary *can* in negative polarity has the meaning of “barely possible”. Using the negative *can* indicate that the writer is 99% certain on his/her proposition (Azar, 2002).

The following data is the example of hate speech containing modalized clauses.

- (19) Islam is gradually banned worldwide <sup>(48)</sup>. I can see <sup>(49)</sup> Islam will be gone <sup>(50)</sup> and labelled as deadly

cult religion in the future <sup>(51)</sup>. I can predict <sup>(52)</sup> Islam cannot survive into 22nd century <sup>(53)</sup> as many countries have started to draft all sort of law to restrict Islam <sup>(54)</sup>:

1. China's Xinjiang re-educate camp for Muslims <sup>(55)</sup> (I can say it is an open prison camp)
2. Trump's travel bans on Muslim majority countries Libya, Iran, Somalia, etc <sup>(56)</sup>
3. Persecution of Rohingya Muslim in Myanmar <sup>(57)</sup>  
Bye-bye Islam <sup>(58)</sup>  
It is good and peace for future generation <sup>(59)</sup>

The expressions of epistemic stance are scattered all through extract (19), which is categorized as modalization. Epistemic *will* in clause (50) is to show future conditions indicating "prediction" and "predictability" (Collins, 2009). Using the epistemic *will* in expressing the proposition (50), accompanied by evidence as mentioned in clauses (55), (56), and (57), conveys the writer's high confidence in the truth of the proposition. Then, the epistemic modal *can* in the clauses (53) expresses ability referring to possibility. The clauses (52) *I can predict* and (49) *I can see* function as a prompt of the next clauses that the writer wants to convey is about prediction. Modality *can* show that the writer has the ability to make a prediction about the topic of the next clause. While modality *can* in clause (53) can be categorized as a theoretical possibility inasmuch as that the writer mentions enabling circumstance (Collins, 2009; Portner, 2009). Likewise, according to Azar modality *can* in negative implies "almost impossible" (Azar, 2002). Thus, it can be said that the use of modality *can* conveys that the proposition made by the writer is true based on the pieces of evidence mentioned in the next clauses.

### 3.2. Discussion

The analysis of MOOD and modality on the comments in the YouTube comment section on the video of New Zealand mass shooting reveals the writers' attitude toward targeted people. Firstly, the analysis on the MOOD and modality shows that the use of MOOD, mainly declarative one, outnumbers the use of modality. Conveying a message in declarative MOOD functioning as giving statement, the speaker positions himself as a provider of information. The use of this type makes the information given indicates the writers' confidence in the validity of the message. However, it is potential to trigger adverse reactions since what is stated is something negative about targeted people.

Secondly, the existence of clauses functioning as command and rhetorical question indicates how the writers position themselves and view targeted people. Command is one of directive speech acts by which a

speaker asks the hearer to do what is asked. In the hate speeches collected, it is expressed in two ways. The first is by using imperative MOOD. Demanding the hearer to do something requested by using imperative clause appears that the writer is powerful, and thus has the right to give orders. In other word, the existence of imperative MOOD indicates a subordination relation between the writer/speaker and the reader/hearer (Fairclough, 1996; Yu, & Wu, 2016). The other way used to express command is by using modulated statement functioning as indirect directive. From the data analysis, it reveals that the modulation used in expressing indirect directive is the modality which has strong value, i.e., *must*. This is an indication of a strong command. Therefore, using this modulated declarative clause to assert a command the writer assumes himself to have more power over the reader (Yu, & Wu, 2016).

The next is the use of rhetorical question in expressing hate speech that represent the writers' judgment on the targeted people. Based on the analysis what is implied from the rhetorical question given by the writers is that Muslims do (should) not exist anymore. By giving this statement the writers suggest or order others to make Muslims not exist anymore. In this case, it can be said that the writers play as someone who has an authority or expertise to give order or suggestion about the case. According to Blankenship and Craig (2006), being used in persuasion, rhetorical question can increase the strength of the influence, and create "relatively strong resistant".

The last is that the analysis of the modality used in the collected hate speeches shows that the use of modality strengthens the result of MOOD analysis. The uses of modals and quasi modals in both modalized and modulated clauses indicate that the writers position themselves of having more power over the readers or targeted people. The fact that the number of modulated clauses is higher than modalized clauses evidence that the writers of hate speech create an image of authority. The modalization indicates that the writers want to construct an image that the interpretation they made toward the topic is objective and factual (Martin, & White, 2005). Whereas the modulation of the clauses of hate speeches gathered reflects the powerful status of the writer over the readers or targeted people.

To summarize, the result of the analysis of the clauses of hate speeches collected from the comment section of the selected YouTube channel in terms of interpersonal meaning's lexicogrammar reveals that hate speeches are expressed in authoritative and subordinating language. The writers play the role of authority and put the targeted people as inferior, and even deprive their rights, despite the fact that the writers do not occupy the position of authority. This result is in line with the statement of Maitra and McGowan (2012) that racist hate speech subordinates, ranks their targets



as inferior, and deprive the targeted people of right and power as well as legitimate discriminatory behaviour.

Prior studies on hate speech identification have proven that the use of certain software is effective in identifying whether a speech can be categorized as hate speech by using language filtering, i.e., positive and negative words; while others proposed models of hate speech classification based on word classification. These studies proved that the result is quite satisfying due to the fact that the tools and the models proposed is effective in detecting hate speeches. However, since those studies were only based on word categorization, positive and negative word, as well as speech polarity, they fail to deal with metaphorical structure, like rhetorical question. Those studies would either identify the rhetorical question as positive or clean speech since the speech contains neither negative words nor negative polarity, like in extract (7) and (8). Thus, the analysis using SFL's interpersonal metafunctional meaning gives more comprehensive analysis on identifying hate speech.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of interpersonal meaning's lexicogrammar on hate speeches appearing on the comment section of the selected YouTube channel displaying the video of *New Zealand Mass Shooting incident* revealed that hate speeches are expressed mostly in indicative MOOD, particularly declarative which serve not only the function of giving statement, but also as indirect directive and threat. Besides declarative, the other type of indicative MOOD found is interrogative. Yet, the interrogative MOOD did not serve the function of demanding information but serve as rhetorical question. There can also be found hate speeches expressed in imperative MOOD which is considered unusual in indirect communication like YouTube in which the participants of the interaction are not face to face. In addition to the MOOD, the analysis of modality showed that the use of modulated clause is higher than the use of modalized clause. The two findings uncover the attitude of the writers of the collected hate speeches that they are subordinating the targeted people, playing as authority, and depriving others' right despite the fact that they are not in the place of an authority.

The conclusion of this study gives an indication that SFL's interpersonal meaning is a useful tool in identifying hate speech. Through the analysis of interpersonal meaning's lexicogrammar hate speech can be identified through the speaker's motivation or attitude toward targeted people which is expressed in the speech. For future research, it is necessary to conduct a large-scale of hate speech corpus to provide the more

stable result. Therefore, the result will be beneficial to detect hate speech in legal case.

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