

# Unveiling Criticism: Analyzing Criticism Strategies in Thai Election Campaign Speeches

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<b>Article information</b>	<b>Abstract</b>
<p><b>Article history:</b> Received: 8 Feb 2024 Accepted: 6 Apr 2025 Available online: 11 Apr 2025</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Political discourse</i> <i>Speech acts theory</i> <i>Criticism strategies</i> <i>Thai politics</i></p>	<p><i>This study aims to investigate the use of criticism strategies by Thai politicians, the Move Forward Party (MFP) and the Phalang Pracharat Party (PPRP), in their campaign speeches. It also aims to find out whether these strategies are used differently by the two parties and how these differences reflect their political agendas. A qualitative and quantitative approach were adopted to analyze eleven videos of political campaign speeches for the 2023 Thailand general election. The results revealed that both parties employed more direct criticisms than indirect ones. Indirect speech is generally associated with politeness (Huang, 2007); however, the need for politeness toward political opponents seems unnecessary in the political context. Identification of Problem, Negative Evaluation, and Disapproval are the dominant direct criticism strategies. Among all indirect criticism strategies, they preferred Sarcasm and Asking. Moreover, the two parties employed five types of criticism differently, including Negative Evaluation, Consequences, Disapproval, Identification of Problem, and Sarcasm. The statistical analysis also revealed a significant association between the two parties and these strategies. PPRP members used Disapproval strategy more often to show the explicit contrasts in their cultural norms and beliefs with the MFPs. MFP members employed the remaining strategies more frequently to highlight issues within governmental institutions, aim at reforming institutions, and identify and evaluate their political opponents' administrative incompetence.</i></p>

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## INTRODUCTION

On May 14th, 2023, Thailand organized a general election. The Move Forward Party (MFP), a left-liberal and progressive party, achieved the highest seats and the largest proportion of the popular vote in the Thai House of Representatives. On the other hand, the Phalang Pracharat Party (PPRP), a pro-military and national conservative party supporting the former prime minister, Prayuth Chan-ocha, secured the fourth-highest number of seats (Kapoor, 2023). The election results suggested that the MFP's political campaign, which employed multiple forms of media, played a crucial role in their victory. Since political language possesses a significant degree of power, it is enabled to exert control over individuals' minds and influence citizens' decision-making processes (Nusartlert, 2017).

In political speeches, politicians often engage in illocutionary assertive acts which are used to convey the speaker's thoughts and beliefs (Khalid & Amin, 2019; Mufiah & Rahman, 2019; Sameer, 2017). It is also mainly used in election campaign speeches since it asserts the statements and opinions of the speakers. Baby et al. (2020) indicated that assertive utterances were used by the U.S. leader, Joe Biden, to express power and integrity and get the audience's attention. Types of assertives include suggesting, boasting, complaining, criticizing, concluding, and deducing. In Yusiska and Agustina's (2023) work on the political debate context, the type of speech act with the most prominent negative impact was the speech act of criticism. The accusatory and criticism speeches were typically used by the politicians to oppose the opposition members to reduce their credibility and make a negative criticism about the issue (Gadavanij, 2002). In other words, it is very common for the politician to employ speech acts of criticism to attack the opposite party, who is their political opponent. In the 2013 Bangkok governor election, instead of using only the party policies for the election, a negative campaign strategy was adopted by the Democrat Party to discredit the Phue Thai Party, and at that time this led to the critics against the Phue Thai Party (Nukulwatanavichai, 2017).

Within the Thai context, several studies have provided insights into the study of political discourse analysis, political marketing strategies, and persuasive strategies in both local and national elections (Panpothong & Phakdeephassook, 2022; Phanthaphoommee & Munday, 2024; Somlok & Jeawkok, 2020; Thabthan, 2022). The study of Thai criticism has yet to receive much scholarly attention, with only a few studies focusing on this field. For instance, Ercanbrack and Wichitwechkarn (1993) examined the expression of criticism in business contexts among Thai and American individuals. Their objective was to identify the differences in the realization of criticism strategies in business interaction and find if the status of the interlocutors influences these strategies. The data was analyzed using the Discourse Completion Task (DTC) and a response rating scale questionnaire. The findings revealed that both Thai and American participants predominantly employed the strategy of Move for Improvement and Explicit Criticism. Thais basically employed Tactics Comments (i.e., hints) as their third choice of strategies, whereas Americans primarily used the Inquiry strategy. Thai tacit comments were sometimes differentiated by expressions of concern for the listener that included subtly critical meanings.

Previous literature shows that current political discourse research has begun to take a greater interest in speech acts as a persuasive strategy. However, the number of studies conducting speech acts of criticism in Thai political discourse is still limited. Addressing this gap, this study aims to investigate the criticism strategies used by two parties of Thai political parties against their opposition in their political campaign speeches, and how these strategies can reflect their political agendas to influence public opinion and gain supports from voters. It particularly seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What types of criticism speech acts strategies are used by Thai politicians in their campaign speeches?
2. Are there any differences in the types of criticism used between the politicians in the Move Forward Party (MFP) and the Phalang Pracharat Party (PPRP)? How do these differences reflect their political agendas?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Speech acts theory

Speech acts is a theory of language that was first proposed by John Austin in 1962, and John Searle later developed it. Austin (1962) commented that the speakers do not employ language just to give information or convey the meaning of the speech, but it has been used to carry out an action. Austin categorized speech acts into three distinct classes, namely locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. First, the locutionary act refers to the act of “saying something”, which focuses only on the “meaning” of the utterance, including phonic, phatic, and rhetic. Secondly, the illocutionary act or so-called the performance of illocutionary act entails adherence to conventions, whereby the act is executed in accordance with established norms. Lastly, a perlocutionary act concerns the effect of the utterance on the audience. It is the act that occurs when the illocutionary force affects or influences the audience.

As cited in Searle (1976), Austin’s taxonomy of the illocutionary acts consists of five categories: verdictive, expositive, exercitive, behabitive, and commissive. However, Searle believed that Austin’s five categories of speech acts are related to only English illocutionary verbs. In fact, it is necessary to consider the speaker’s intention and not only the illocutionary verbs. The classification of Illocutionary Speech acts by Searle (1976) is divided into five categories: Assertives, Directives, Commissives, Expressives, and Declaratives.

### Speech acts of criticism

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), criticisms are a type of assertive speech acts showing that the speaker has a negative evaluation of some aspect of the hearer's positive face. It is defined as “the speaker indicates that he does not like one or more of hearer's wants, acts, personal characteristics, good, beliefs or values” (p. 66). Tracy et al. (1987) referred to the speech act of criticism as the “finding fault,” which is the process of providing a negative evaluation of an individual’s actions, words, or choices, which are the speaker’s responsibility.

According to Nguyen’s (2005) research, numerous studies from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 2000s have already examined various types of speech acts such as requests, compliments, complaints, refusals, offerings, and apologies. The speech act of criticism, however, attracted little interest. Until recently, there has been a focus on the study of speech acts of criticism, particularly criticism in an academic setting (Nguyen, 2005, 2008), criticism in media (Alshakhanbeh & Alghazo, 2022; Septiana & Haristiani, 2021; Tang, 2016), and criticism in political discourse (Rahmadani & Agustina, 2020).

Furthermore, criticism speeches from the participants were typically collected through written questionnaires and the Discourse Completion Task (DCT). Nonetheless, recent studies have increasingly focused on analyzing actual and natural interactions. Rahmadani and Agustina (2020) examined the strategies of criticism used by two political parties, the Tim Kampante Nasional (TKN) and the Badan Pemenangan Nasional (BPN), during the Indonesian presidential election debate in 2019. The results showed that both direct and indirect criticizing strategies

were observed in the debate, with the former being more prevalent than the latter. The most frequently used direct criticism strategies were Negative Evaluation, Statement of Problem, and Rejection, whereas the dominant indirect criticism strategies were Advice about Changes and Asking. In contrast, the study conducted by Alshakhanbeh and Alghazo (2022) reported different results. They investigated the speech act of criticism as employed on Facebook and Twitter against Jordanian government policies, and the influence of gender on participants' critique strategies. The findings revealed that indirect strategies were found to be more frequent than direct ones. The strategies of Sarcasm, Identification of a Problem, Negative Evaluation, and Grievances/Complaints to God are primarily used on social media. Furthermore, men and women use some criticism strategies differently because men are likely to employ the Expression of Uncertainty and Asking/Presupposing. In contrast, women tend to use Grievance/Complaint to Allah and Emojis/Pictures.

Table 1 displays the classification of criticism strategies employed in this study. The classification was derived from Nguyen's (2005) framework and adjusted to suit the present study's data. Nguyen focused on interpersonal communication, where the criticism targets the hearer. In this study, however, the political campaign speeches are considered one-sided political communication, thoroughly designed to persuade the voter about various policies and ideas, while also criticizing the other party to secure additional votes. The criticism is directed not against the audience who participated in the campaign but towards the party's opponents. The audience is regarded as a second party, while the political opponent takes the role of a third party in the discourse. Thus, some characteristics' descriptions for the criticism need to be revised. For example, the direct criticism of Disapproval originally refers to the speaker's attitude toward the hearer's choices. It is revised to "the speaker's attitude toward the opponent's choices/performances which considered inappropriate, or contrary to cultural and social norms, value, or expectations."

**Table 1**  
**Categorization of criticism strategies adapted from Nguyen (2005)**

Types	Characteristics	Examples
1. <u>Direct Criticisms</u>	Explicitly expressing the problem with O's actions, decision, behavior, performance, or products, etc.	
a. Negative Evaluation	Frequently stated using evaluative terms with negative meaning or evaluative terms with positive meaning adding negation.	<i>"The national strategy is written by people with <u>no vision</u>."</i>
b. Disapproval	Typically involved a negative judgement or evaluation on O's actions, decisions, behavior, or performance which considered inappropriate, or contrary to cultural and social norms, value, or expectations.	<i>"I <u>don't approve</u> of this policy (Article 112 Amendment)."</i>

Types	Characteristics	Examples
c. Expression of Disagreement	Expressing opposing opinions or perspectives. It doesn't necessarily imply negative judgment or evaluation. Typically expressed through performatives such as "I disagree" or "I don't agree" (with or without modal verbs), negation words like "No," or presenting reasons against O.	<i>"This is <u>unfair</u>."</i>
d. Identification of Problem	Identifying and highlighting mistakes or issues found with O's actions, decision, behavior, performance, or products, etc.	<i>"<u>The distribution of government budgets among Thai people is not equal.</u>"</i>
e. Statement of Difficulties	Typically conveyed through the use of phrases such as "I find it hard to understand..." or "It is difficult to understand..."	<i>"After all, we <u>don't understand</u> how they came up with the issue that we must change the country in the way they want."</i>
f. Consequences	Indicating the unfavorable outcomes of O's past actions and warning about their possible future effects etc., for O or for the general public.	<i>"If Future Forward Party was the government 4 years ago, a merger between True and DTAC <u>would never have happened.</u>"</i>
2. <u>Indirect Criticism</u>	Inferring the problem with O's actions, decision, behavior, performance, or products, etc. by using various hints to raise H's awareness of the inappropriateness of O's actions.	
a. Correction	Correcting the O's utterances/ideas by providing specific choices to H.	<i>"Flooding is a natural disaster, but <u>don't let anyone tell you that it is a way of life</u> and people will have to bow their heads and accept it."</i>
b. Indicating Standard	Typically expressed as a norm that S believes is widely accepted and applicable to everyone, or as a collective responsibility rather than a personal commitment for O.	<i>"<u>Everyone who volunteers to be a representative of our fellow citizens must accept the inspection.</u>"</i>
c. Preaching	Typically stated as guidelines to O, with an implicature that O is incapable of making correct choices otherwise.	<i>"This is a new way of doing <u>politics</u>. They need to tell their citizens what they do or cannot do."</i>
d. Demand for Change	Usually expressed via such structures as "you have to", "you must", "it is obligatory that" or "you are required" or "you need", "it is necessary".	<i>"Dissent <u>must not</u> lead to imprisonment."</i>
e. Request for Change	Usually expressed with imperatives (with or without politeness markers), or want-statement.	<i>"We <u>want a future that they view people as human beings, not as machines that spin economic numbers.</u>"</i>
f. Advice about Change	Implied more authority and obligation and usually expressed via the performative "I advise you . . .", or structures with stronger modals like "should".	<i>"Royal institutions <u>should be</u> above politics and under the Constitution."</i>

	Types	Characteristics	Examples
g.	Suggestion for Change	Implied more tentativeness and flexibility and usually expressed via the performative “I suggest that...” or less direct structures such as “you can”, “you could”, “it would be better if” or “why don’t you” etc.	<i>“I <u>suggest that the public park be returned to the Treasury Department and then to the local government.</u>”</i>
h.	Asking/ Presupposing	Asking rhetorical questions to raise H or O’s awareness of the inappropriateness of O’s choice, etc.	<i>“<u>Isn’t it incredible?</u>”/ “<u>Do you love your own nation?</u>”</i>
i.	Sarcasm	Associated with a meaning that contradicts S’ intent about O’s actions, decision, behavior, performance, etc. Typically expressed by various linguistics tools such as metaphor, antithesis, rhetorical questions, etc. (Hernandez-Farias et al., 2016).	<i>“It’s just that on the day you retire after fighting all your life, <u>the government will take care of you more than just one boiled egg.</u>”</i>

Remarks: S = Speaker, H = Hearer, O = Opponent

### Speech acts of criticism and politeness

Criticism is a type of speech acts that is considered a face-threatening act and requires politeness and indirectness to minimize the potential face threat to the hearer’s positive self-image (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Face or self-image is associated with notions of being embarrassed or humiliated, or the concept of “losing face”. Therefore, people tend to use the language strategically to mitigate the effect of criticism and avoid imposing face-threatening acts on others. There were various studies using frameworks of criticism strategies and politeness.

Tang (2016) analyzed the criticisms of English and Chinese speakers in media discourse of U.S. and Taiwan talent contests. Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness and face notion are used as the study’s framework. English and Chinese speakers displayed varying usage of criticism strategies and redressive devices. The findings showed that both English and Chinese speakers employed more on-record criticism strategies than off-record criticism strategies because it helped ensure that the judges’ communication intentions are appropriately interpreted. Moreover, hedges addressed to the maxim of quality are mostly used as both English and Chinese face-saving devices. Since the device signifies the subjective point of view of the judges, it could reduce the force of the criticisms, and the undesired imposition of face-threatening acts on the receivers.

Nguyen (2005) also investigated the types of criticism and criticism responses in Vietnamese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners and Australian native speakers in academic contexts. A written questionnaire and a role-play are employed as instruments to elicit the “natural” use of criticisms and criticism responses from the participants. Regarding the criticism, Vietnamese EFL learners were less straightforward than the Australian native speakers, opting for less direct strategies, and instead relying on more indirect approaches. About the target norms, however, this did not imply that these criticisms were inherently more “polite”. The Vietnamese EFL learners used the strategies of Demand for Change and Advice for Change,

which entailed offensive and imposing indirect criticism. Moreover, Septiana and Haristiani (2021) examined the politeness strategies employed in Japanese criticism speech acts within the anime movie, *Boruto: Naruto Next Generation* using Nguyen's (2008) criticism strategies and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987). The findings revealed that anime characters often employ a Negative Evaluation strategy explicitly, whereas the Correction strategy is predominantly employed indirectly. Bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record politeness strategies are also found as politeness strategies.

## METHODOLOGY

### Data collection

This study is descriptive qualitative and quantitative, and a linguistic framework adapted from Nguyen's (2005) criticism strategies is used in this research. The data for this study comes from eleven videos of political campaign speeches from the 2023 Thailand general election. To ensure a balanced comparative analysis, the dataset includes a total duration of 13 hours of content from each party. This consists of five videos from the Move Forward Party (MFP) and six videos from the Phalang Pracharat Party (PPRP). It should be noted that this current study focuses on political campaign speeches where the second party is the audience and the third party, whom they criticize, is the political opponent. Other types of speeches, such as interviews or debates, are excluded since different types of speeches may have different rules and conventions that influence how politicians use language. The timeframe is from March to May 2023, when both parties launched their political campaigns.

### Data analysis

First, the researcher manually reviewed the relevant sources available on the official YouTube and Facebook pages of the MFP and the PPRP. The criteria are: 1) the view count of each video clip is more than 5,000, and 2) the length of each clip is approximately 120 to 150 minutes. After that, the selected speeches were downloaded and transcribed into text in Thai. The texts were then translated into English. Next, the coding and analysis strategies were processed following Saldana's (2014) work:

- 1) The collected speeches were categorized based on the criticism strategies in Table 1. Each speech was then assigned the datum unit with its corresponding code and number. For instance, the code "MFP-NE1" indicates that it belongs to the Move Forward Party (MFP) and indicates the strategy Negative Evaluation (NE). Due to the possibility of many strategies within the criticism, an utterance may have an overlapping strategy. To assure accuracy and consistency, each clause was given a distinct code focusing on its primary purpose of a strategy (Breuer & Napthine, 2008) and each strategy was underlined to highlight the main point in the clause. The speaker's voice tone, facial expressions, and gestures were also used to help distinguish the overlap between strategies. Then a peer debriefing was conducted to ensure the credibility and reliability of the categorization (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

2) In preparation for analysis, the speeches were grouped into themes such as political oppression and injustice, capitalism and inequality, economic crises, patriotism, loyalty to the monarchy, etc. This systematic categorization paves the way for an insightful analysis of the speeches. Additionally, a second round of a peer review was conducted to ensure the highest level of accuracy.

In terms of the quantitative data, the number of criticism utterances was analyzed using the R statistical programming language. The analysis included percentages of frequency and a Pearson Chi-square test to determine the significance of observed differences between the speeches of the MFP and PPRP. Within the context of political communication in Thailand, where unique dynamics and complexities emerged, this approach helps uncover underlying patterns that might be overlooked. The mixed methods used in this study also provide a more comprehensive understanding of how politicians use their language differently based on their party's political agendas by providing empirical evidence of those differences. However, discrepancies could arise due to differences in the interpretation of the findings (House, 2018), which could be attributed to Thai political dynamics such as cultural norms and/or political ideologies.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Criticism strategies

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted to find the association between the political parties and the criticism strategies they used, either "direct" or "indirect" ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Pearson's  $\chi^2$  revealed a non-significant association between the political parties and the type of strategies ( $\chi^2(1) = 0.080, p = 0.777$ ). This suggests that there was no difference between members of MFP and PPRP in how they employed the criticism strategies.

The total number of criticism strategies found in the political campaign speeches performed by MFP and PPRP members was 349. According to the frequency normalization in Table 2, it was shown that both parties employed more direct criticisms than indirect ones. The MFP members preferred direct criticism strategies with a significant proportion (58.45%) while using a smaller frequency of indirect strategies (41.54%). Similarly, the PPRP members tended to use a higher frequency of direct strategies (60.56%) than indirect strategies (39.43%). Following Rahmadani and Agustina's work (2020), the direct strategies of criticism used during the Indonesian presidential election debate were observed to be the most frequent strategies. In contrast, some studies revealed a preference for indirect criticism strategies (Al Kayed & Al-Ghoweri, 2019; Alshakhanbeh & Alghazo, 2022; Chalupnik, 2011). Chalupnik's (2011) study on criticism strategies employed by Polish and British speakers found that the two languages exhibit a similar usage preference. Both Polish and British speakers mainly used indirect strategies for the expression of criticism. Based on previous literature, it can be asserted that direct criticism strategies are predominantly employed in political discourse compared to everyday conversations, which often rely on indirectness. The use of indirect speech is generally associated with politeness (Huang, 2007). However, the need for politeness towards their opponents seems unnecessary in the political context.

**Table 2**  
**Frequency of criticism strategies used by MFP and PPRP members**

Party	Strategy	Count	Frequency
MFP	Direct	121	58.45%
	Indirect	86	41.54%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>100%</b>
PPRP	Direct	86	60.56%
	Indirect	56	39.43%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>100%</b>

Based on the distribution of criticism strategies in Table 3, it was found that MFP members employed all 15 strategies in their criticism, while PPRP members employed 13 out of the 15 types of strategies. For the direct criticism strategy, the most frequent types used by MFP members were Negative Evaluation and Identification of Problem, while PPRP members were more likely to employ Identification of Problem and Disapproval. For the indirect criticism strategy, Asking/Presupposing and Sarcasm were the most common types used by the two parties. This discussion focuses on the most common strategy types, as shown in the table below. Strategies that were not frequently employed throughout the discourse are eliminated from the analysis: SD, CO, IS, PR, DC, RC, AC, SC.

**Table 3**  
**Distribution of criticism strategies used by members of the MFP and PPRP**

	Direct Strategy						Indirect Strategy								
	NE	DP	ED	IP	SD	CS	CO	IS	PR	DC	RC	AC	SC	AK	SR
<b>MFP</b>	33	9	10	49	2	18	4	8	1	8	2	1	1	22	39
<b>PPRP</b>	15	20	17	25	1	8	2	4	-	2	-	2	2	21	23

\*NE Negative Evaluation, DP Disapproval, ED Expression of Disagreement, IP Identification of Problem, SD Statement of Difficulty, CS Consequences, CO Correction, IS Indicating Standard, PR Preaching, DC Demand for Change, RC Request for Change, AC Advice about Change, SC Suggestion about Change, AK Asking/Presupposing, and SR Sarcasm.

### Direct criticism strategies

There are six criticism strategies used by politicians from both the MFP and PPRP, including Identification of Problem, Negative Evaluation, Disapproval, Expression of Disagreement, Consequences, and Statement of Difficulty. The following discussion focuses on the most common of these strategies.

### Identification of problem

The Identification of Problem strategy is used by the speaker to explicitly identify and highlight errors or issues with the decisions, actions, or behaviors of their political opponents. A significant association in using this strategy was found between the two groups ( $\chi^2(1) = 7.784, p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that MFP members employed this strategy more often than PPRP members. The main topics addressed by the MFP included political oppression and

injustice, capitalism and inequality. Furthermore, this study identified criticism as the most dominant strategy, comprising 23.67% and 17.61% of MFP and PPRP occurrences, respectively. Consider the following examples:

- (1) *"It's not a coincidence that people hate each other today, it's a deliberate agitation by the military."* (MFP-IP96)
- (2) *"The opposition, which is opposed to the government, speaks of various problems causing Thais to hate their country."* (PPRP-IP77)

Example (1) demonstrates how the MFP's speaker expressed her criticism by identifying the problem from her perspective. The speaker pointed out that nation's conflict arises from the military's conduct. Furthermore, the speaker employed the contrastive sentence "it's not..., it's..." to emphasize that the issue emerged due to the army and nobody else. This implies that the actions of the PPRP are despicable and unacceptable.

In Example (2), the PPRP speaker highlighted the issue concerning Thailand's anti-government protests, in which protesters demanded a new constitution and a royal reform. By referencing Thailand in the statement, the speaker attempted to convey that if Thai people hold hatred towards the government, it can also be signified as an expression of their hatred towards their own nation. The speaker believed that the MFP was the root cause of the problem, expressing criticism towards both the government and military.

In the examples above, both political parties addressed the same issue: the hatred among Thai citizens and its impact on the nation. However, they identified and emphasized the issue in distinct ways, following their respective political agendas and target voter bases. Supporting this observation, Alshakhanbeh and Alghazo (2022) found that many social media users employed similar strategy to criticize their government by referring to the problems and sharing these critiques with their networks.

### **Negative evaluation**

Statistical analysis revealed a significant association between the political party and the occurrences of negative evaluation strategy ( $\chi^2(1) = 6.75, p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that members of the MFP employed this strategy more frequently than the PPRP. They commonly addressed issues related to political oppression and injustice, and economic crises, while PPRP members tended to express a negative evaluation on the MFP towards concepts such as unity, youth agitation and supporting protests. Examples are shown as follows:

- (3) *"The coup d'etat is disgusting, dishonest, and disgraceful."* (MFP-NE10)
- (4) *"I am scared that the country will be completely ruined."* (PPRP-NE13)

In Example (3), the MFP member criticized the former government that launched the coup d'état in 2014, claiming the necessity of regaining stability during public protests against the Thai government. The negative adjectives, "disgusting, dishonest, and disgraceful", are employed to evaluate the military's action since it obviously violated the democracy and

human rights of the Thai people. They emphasized that such acts of seizing power through undemocratic means are unacceptable and should never be tolerated. In this speech, the speaker was not only able to criticize his opponents but also provide a powerful reminder to Thai people that undermining democratic process can never be justified.

Example (4) illustrates the PPRP's negative evaluation of the MFP's policies, particularly concerning military abolition and constitution reform. The use of the past participle "ruined", which is intensified by the adverb "completely", expressed the speaker's strong feeling that the MFP's behaviors and actions would lead to national deterioration.

Various grammatical structures, including adjectives, nouns, noun phrases, and past participles, are used in the discourse to negatively evaluate performances or behaviors of the political rivals as well as emphasize their administrative incompetence to the audience. This strategy was also observed in Japanese discourse, which is used to directly and negatively criticize the interlocuter (Septiana & Haristiani, 2021). This was also noted by the study of Alshakhanbeh and Alghazo (2022) that Negative Evaluation was mainly employed by Jordanians following the Identification of Problem strategy.

### Disapproval

This strategy is used when the speaker wants to elaborate a negative assessment of the opponent's actions, decisions, behavior, and/or performance which was considered undesirable to cultural and social norms, values, or expectations. A chi-square test was conducted ( $\chi^2(1) = 4.172$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), which showed a significant association between the parties and the occurrences of the disapproval strategy. Specifically, members of the PPRP used this strategy more frequently than MFP members. The primary topics addressed by the PPRP were love for the nation and loyalty to the monarchy. Consider the following examples:

(5) *"This is not Thailand that we want to see."* (MFP-DP36)

(6) *"I cannot accept it if there are that kind of people, people who show ingratitude to the country."* (PPRP-DP33)

Example (5) reflects the MFP's strong disapproval of the PPRP, the former government. The speaker expressed a negative attitude toward the PPRP, indicating a dislike for the governance of the country. She implied that the PPRP's policies, actions, and decisions have caused Thailand to deteriorate. The use of negation "not" reinforces this disapproval, which emphasizes the PPRP's failure to effectively address the needs and concerns of the Thai people, resulting in dissatisfaction and despair.

In Example (6), the term "country" does not merely refer to Thailand as a nation, but also symbolizes both the government and monarchy. In this statement, the PPRP speaker indirectly referred to the MFP, which had consistently criticized these institutions. In Thai cultural norms, it is considered taboo to talk negatively about the royal family, especially the King. As indicated by the negation "cannot" with the term "accept", the speaker expressed his firm objection that such behavior and actions were disrespectful and against cultural and social norms, which he found intolerable.

Aligned with Al Kayed and Al-Ghoweri's (2019) study, the Disapproval strategy was also used by Jordanian speakers, indicating that the listener engaged in something prohibited or lacking value in their Islamic religion.

### Expression of disagreement

A disagreement statement is usually used to convey a different opinion, belief, or perspective of the speaker against their opponents. Based on a Chi-square test, there is no significant association between the strategy and both parties ( $\chi^2(1) = 2.462, p = 0.117$ ). From the samples below, it was found that the speakers expressed their disagreement towards their opposing political parties' actions or policies.

(7) *"We're not doing what they did 10 years ago, 20 years ago because it's not sustainable."* (MFP-EP44)

(8) *"I confirm that I disagree with the policy of abolishing conscription because it will certainly cause problems for our country in terms of national security."* (PPRP-EP48)

In Example (7), the combination of the negation, "not" and the verb "do", signifies the PRRP administration's failure in the past. The temporal markers, "10 years ago, 20 years ago", suggest a perception of enduring and repeated disappointment, indicating the speaker's belief that the PRRP's actions were ineffective and unacceptable. In addition, the speaker further explained her disagreement, emphasizing the potential for a more sustainable path for Thailand if the audience votes for the MFP.

In Example (8), the PRRP speaker expressed a different perspective on the conscription policy. It is used to attack the MFP's policy of abolishing the requirement of mandatory military service. The performative verb, "disagree", strongly expresses the speaker's disagreement about this policy. Furthermore, using the verb, "confirm," can validate the speaker's standpoint on this issue. This indicates their firm conviction that this proposed policy could cause more harm than good, affecting national security.

In certain cultures, including Japan, the overt expression of this strategy in everyday discourse is typically restricted because it may result in an undesired open conflict and humiliation for all involved (Pearson, 1984). However, the current study's speech occurs in a political context, which renders it unrestricted.

### Consequences

In this study, this strategy is employed not only to warn the audience about the potential future outcomes, but also indicate the negative outcomes or effects of the opponent's past actions, decisions, or behaviors. A significant association was found between both parties and the use of the consequences strategy ( $\chi^2(1) = 3.846, p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that this strategy was used more regularly by MFP members when compared to those of the PRRP. The MFP primarily addressed the issue of corruption whereas the PRRP focused on accusing the MFP of anti-patriotism. This is demonstrated in the following examples:

- (9) *“If that day they hadn’t disqualified Thanathorn, if that day they hadn’t disqualified Piyabutr, if that day they hadn’t disqualified Pannikar from politics, this law would have passed.”* (MFP-CS105)
- (10) *“The country is returning to its old days. Be careful, or we could see another round of political polarization.”* (PPRP-CS81)

Example (9) illustrates the consequences of the PPRP’s actions, which led to the disqualification of three political members and the demise of the Future Forward Party in 2020. The repetition of the conditional statement, “If that day they hadn’t disqualified,” was used to emphasize the PPRP’s actions, and the clause, “this law would have passed,” highlighted the negative consequence of that action. This indicates that the present circumstance would be different if not because of the PPRP’s actions. This statement can attract the audience’s attention as well as create a significant impact on their perception.

In Example (10), the speaker warned the audience not to vote for the MFP. He referred to the political conflict in Thailand between 2013 to 2014, which resulted in a split within Thai society. The phrase “Be careful” expressed caution about potentially dangerous circumstances in the future, implying that the speaker believes the MFP is the primary cause of these problems. If voters choose the MFP, Thailand may once again be involved in a political crisis, with the consequences of violence and turmoil in the country.

In summary, both parties employed the Consequences strategy to reveal the wrongdoing of their opponent and indicate the negative results or effects of their actions. It was observed that the conditional sentences (if--clauses) were used to refer to the possible outcomes or the past consequences of the actions. Similarly, Jordanians also adopted this strategy to criticize their peers through the conditional statements, such as “If you miss some classes”, which can lead to the negative result “you will not graduate” (Al Kayed & Al-Ghoweri, 2019).

### **Indirect criticism strategies**

The indirect criticism strategies consist of Correction, Indicating Standard, Demand for Change, Request for Change, Advice about Change, Suggestion about Change, Sarcasm, and Asking/Presupposing. The following discussion focuses on the latter two strategies, which are the most frequently employed.

#### **Sarcasm**

Sarcasm is the most dominant indirect strategy used by both political parties. It usually conveys the opposite meaning of the speaker’s utterances, and it can be overtly offensive to the particular subject or group that the speaker targets. The MFP speakers predominantly adopt this strategy in their speech to criticize their opponent, as seen by the high frequency of its usage. However, the PPRP members employed about half of the MFP’s strategy. It is also supported by the statistical analysis, which showed a significant association between the use of sarcasm strategy and the two parties ( $\chi^2(1) = 4.129, p < 0.05$ ). The MFP adopted this strategy when discussing government corruption and political oppression, while the PPRP members

addressed issues related to the MFP's conscription policy. The following sentences illustrate the use of Sarcasm statements:

- (11) *"People who run for election like us are called 'traitors to the nation', but the people who staged a coup are called 'good people'. Is this incredible?"* (MFP-SR177)
- (12) *"If you are going to abolish conscription, why don't you also abolish the requirement for children to go to school?"* (PPRP-SR131)

In Example (11), the MFP speaker compared themselves to traitors and a military coup to decent guys. Adopting the antithesis mechanism, the speaker intentionally expressed the reverse of his statement by relating the positive phrase "good people" with the term "a military coup d'état", which has negative connotation. Based on its very definition, a coup d'état is not a legal removal of a government; in contrast, it is an unlawful operation that negatively impacts the democratic system of a nation. The rhetorical question "Is this incredible?" further emphasizes the criticism, suggesting that the coup d'état is unfavorable, and it is unbelievable that the consequences of attempting a coup d'état turn out to be positive.

In Example (12), the PPRP speaker criticized the MFP's policy regarding the abolition of conscription. The linguistic mechanisms of reasoning and rhetorical questions were employed to indirectly hypothesize that if the mandatory military service were cancellable, then the compulsory education cancellation could also be possible. In making this statement, the speaker was being sarcastic, firmly believing that conscription is as essential as children's education. Therefore, the PPRP members strongly opposed this idea.

Both parties utilized the Sarcasm strategy to offend and attack their political opposition indirectly. Rhetorical questions, antithesis, and reasoning are commonly adopted as the mechanisms for expressing sarcasm. Igaab and Wehail (2023) also reported the use of rhetorical questions and antithesis in British and American political texts. The rhetorical questions are used to express negative assessments through sarcasm, while antithesis is achieved by employing contrasting vocabulary or situations. Additionally, MPF members employed sarcasm in their discourse to engage the audience and intensify the message of the speaker. According to Gadavani (2002), the functions of the Sarcasm strategy employed by politicians are to dissociate the speaker from the claim and promote interpersonal relationships with the audience. In other words, while Sarcasm serves as a tool to attack political opponents (the third party in this analysis), it simultaneously strengthens the relationship between the speaker and the voters (the second party) by reinforcing a shared in-group ideology.

### **Asking/ Presupposing**

In this strategy, speakers usually use rhetorical questions or statements to draw the audience's attention of their opponents' undesirable actions. It is the second-most preferred strategy employed by both parties. A Chi-square test revealed a statistically insignificant relationship between the use of this strategy and the political party ( $\chi^2(1) = 0.023$ ,  $p = 0.879$ ), which suggests no difference in the use of this strategy by both parties. Examples are shown as follows:

- (13) *“We would be arrested and imprisoned just because we thought differently. Is this the country (Thailand) we want to live together in?”* (MFP-CS155)
- (14) *“Do you want to see the conflict between two generations?”* (PPRP-CS71)

In Example (13), the MFP speaker employed the rhetorical question to emphasize the PPRP’s action towards the anti-government protesters who were imprisoned after calling for reform of the monarchy. The speaker did not directly mention the PPRP, but she intentionally spoke with the audience to raise their awareness of the PPRP’s action. She expressed her concern about this matter as well as criticized the PPRP that it was wrongdoing. In other words, she inferred that Thai people should live in a country with a true democracy, and that is the reason why the audience should vote for the MFP.

In Example (14), this strategy enabled the PPRP speaker to make the audience aware of the problem. The utterance also referred to the similar topic discussed in the MFP speech. The speaker rhetorically asked the question to the audience, attempting to criticize the MFP’s actions. He asserted that MFP supporting the protesters and the royal reform could cause conflict and polarization among Thai people.

The above instances show that although both parties addressed the same issue, their perspectives are completely different. MFP members believe that demonstrating and making the request for royal reform are fundamental human rights, particularly the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. However, members of the PPRP oppose this idea, arguing that it is an unjustifiable action that might result in a state of national insecurity. Supported by Rahmadani and Agustina’s (2020) study, this strategy is the most common indirect strategy used by Indonesian presidential candidates to raise awareness of their opponent’s actions indirectly. Japanese people have also used this approach to criticize the hearer’s inappropriate actions and make them feel guilty (Septiana & Haristiani, 2021).

## CONCLUSIONS

This research aims to investigate the types of criticism strategies employed by Thai politicians in their campaign speeches and to gain insights into the different strategies used by members of the MFP and PPRP. The findings suggest that both MFP and PPRP members prefer direct criticism strategies over indirect ones. Members of the MFP predominantly employed Negative Evaluation and Identification of Problem, while members of the PPRP often used Disapproval and Identification of Problem. Additionally, both parties favored Sarcasm and Asking/Presupposing among all the indirect criticism strategies. This study focuses on criticism in public settings, which is closely related to politeness. However, it is essential to note that a primary function of political discourse is to attack the face of their political opponents and make negative statements about them (Bull & Fetzer, 2010). In such situations, politicians need to be direct and assertive to present their own policies, attract their potential voters, and expose their rival parties’ weaknesses. Therefore, they do not need to be polite or concerned about saving the opponent’s face. These results contrast with the previous studies that occurred in everyday discourse, which often involves the use of indirect speech to save others’ faces.

In response to the second research question, the statistical analysis revealed a significant association between the two parties and the use of strategies such as Negative Evaluation, Disapproval, Identification of Problem, Consequences, and Sarcasm. The significant employments of these strategies reflect their political agendas in several ways. First, the PPRP focused its criticism on patriotism, loyalty to the monarchy, the conscription policy, and institutional reform. As a national conservative political party, the PPRP aims to defend national traditions against the cultural revolution and uphold national sovereignty against transnational institutions and universal norms (Galston, 2022). They significantly employed the Disapproval strategy to show the explicit contrasts in their cultural norms and beliefs from the MFPs. This observation also aligns with the use of the Identification of Problem strategy. Despite both parties addressing the same issue regarding royal reform, they expressly identified and emphasized it in distinct ways. The PPRP viewed the MFP's demands for royal reform as inappropriate and offensive towards the monarchy, and goes against cultural norms and practices in Thailand. As a result, they strongly opposed and disapproved the act. Consistently addressing these issues can appeal to potential voters who are conservative and share similar beliefs and loyalty to the royal family.

Contrary to the PPRP's criticism, MFP primarily criticized its opponents for perceived inadequacies in how they manage and ran for government. The thematic patterns that emerged in their speeches included political oppression and injustice, capitalism and inequality, economic crises, and corruption. A variety of strategies such as Negative Evaluation, Identification of Problem, Consequences, and Sarcasm were significantly employed by the MFP members. These strategies reveal the MFP's commitment to highlighting issues within governmental institutions, aiming at reforming institutions, identifying and evaluating their political opponents' administrative incompetence. Furthermore, the MFP also used Sarcasm as an indirect strategy to implicitly criticize and attack their opposition party while also intensifying the message and strengthening interpersonal interactions with their voters because Sarcasm often relies on a shared understanding or belief within a group. The audience's ability to successfully interpret the sarcastic message reinforces their connection with the speaker. Overall, the MFP's successful use of these strategies helped draw voters' and supporters' attention to these systemic flaws and advocate for structural change. Due to political circumstances in Thailand, this might explain why they secured the most seats and the largest share of the popular vote in the 2023 Thailand general election.

Although this study provides insight in investigating criticism in political discourse, it has some limitations. The study solely concentrated on a specific genre of political communication—the campaign speech. However, different genres including broadcast interviews, political debates, and social media interactions, may yield different results. Furthermore, the scope of this study was limited to two specific Thai political parties. The findings only cover some aspects of criticism strategies used in the political realm. Future studies could compare a broader range of parties across various genres to reveal similarities and differences in their criticism strategies, and how these strategies impact public perception and democratic processes. They can also evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in achieving their political agendas, such as influencing voter behavior or shaping public opinion.

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