

INTERPERSONAL MEANING IN ZAKIR NAIK'S ISLAMIC SPEECH

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Abstract

This research explores how interpersonal meaning is constructed in the Islamic speeches of Zakir Naik by applying the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Within the context of 'dakwah', language operates not only as a channel for delivering religious knowledge but also as an interactive resource through which speakers establish authority, express conviction, and engage their audiences. As an internationally recognized Islamic preacher, Zakir Naik employs distinctive linguistic strategies that warrant systematic linguistic investigation. This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach and examines selected transcripts of Zakir Naik's public speeches. Analysis is conducted using the interpersonal metafunction of SFL, focusing specifically on the grammatical systems of mood. The clause is treated as the main unit of analysis, as it represents the primary locus of interpersonal meaning. Each clause is categorized based on its mood type. The result is declarative clauses are predominantly used, indicating a strong tendency toward asserting information and reinforcing religious authority.

Keywords: *Interpersonal Meaning, Declarative, Interrogative, Imperative, Islamic Speech*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas bagaimana makna interpersonal dibangun dalam dakwah Islami Zakir Naik dengan menggunakan kerangka Linguistik Sistemik Fungsional (Systemic Functional Linguistics/SFL). Dalam konteks dakwah, bahasa tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sarana penyampaian pengetahuan keagamaan, tetapi juga sebagai sumber interaksi yang memungkinkan penceramah membangun otoritas, menegaskan keyakinan, serta melibatkan audiens secara aktif. Sebagai pendakwah Islam yang dikenal secara internasional, Zakir Naik menunjukkan pola penggunaan bahasa yang khas dan layak untuk dikaji secara linguistik dan sistematis. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan menganalisis sejumlah transkrip dakwah Zakir Naik yang dipilih secara purposif. Analisis dilakukan berdasarkan metafungsi interpersonal dalam SFL, dengan fokus utama pada sistem gramatikal modus klausa. Klausa digunakan sebagai unit analisis karena merupakan ranah utama realisasi makna interpersonal. Setiap klausa diklasifikasikan berdasarkan jenis modusnya, sementara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa klausa deklaratif digunakan secara dominan, yang mengindikasikan kecenderungan kuat untuk menyampaikan pernyataan dan menegaskan otoritas keagamaan.

Kata kunci : *Makna Antarpersona, Deklaratif, Interogatif, Imperatif, Dakwah*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a tool for transmitting information; it is fundamentally a social resource through which speakers negotiate relationships, express attitudes, and position themselves within particular social contexts. In spoken discourse, especially in public and institutional settings, language functions as a means of interaction that reflects power, authority, belief, and interpersonal alignment. Religious speech, in particular, represents a distinctive form of public discourse in which speakers are expected not only to inform but also to persuade, guide, and legitimize ideological positions. Within this context, Islamic preaching offers a rich site for linguistic investigation, especially when delivered by figures with significant global influence such as Zakir Naik. Discourse analysis emphasizes the functional relationship between linguistic forms and their communicative purposes in real-life contexts. Discourse should be understood as language in use, where meaning is shaped by both the speaker's intentions and the social interaction in which language occurs. This perspective highlights that meaning is not limited to what is said explicitly, but also includes how speakers manage interaction, express certainty or doubt, and engage audiences through particular linguistic choices. Public speeches, therefore, are not neutral texts; they are structured interactions designed to influence listeners and establish particular social relations (Brown & Yule, 2013). A theoretical framework that is particularly relevant for examining such interactional meanings is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). SFL views language as a meaning-making system that operates through three interconnected metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Among these, the interpersonal metafunction focuses on how language is used to enact social roles, express judgments, and negotiate relationships between speakers and listeners. This metafunction is especially prominent in spoken discourse, where interaction and audience engagement are central (Abdulrahman Almurashi, 2016).

Interpersonal meaning in SFL is primarily realized through the systems of mood and modality. Mood structures clauses according to their communicative function, such as giving information, asking questions, or issuing commands. Modality, on the other hand, reflects the speaker's attitude toward the proposition being expressed, including degrees of certainty, obligation, probability, and inclination. Modality plays a crucial interpersonal role by revealing how speakers position themselves epistemically and how they seek alignment or compliance from their audience. In persuasive discourse, strong or carefully calibrated modal expressions can enhance authority, credibility, and ideological commitment (Gao, 2012). A number of

empirical studies have demonstrated the importance of analyzing interpersonal meaning in public speeches. In the analysis of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's speeches, found that the dominance of declarative mood and the strategic use of modality contributed to the construction of leadership and persuasive authority (Amalia et al., 2018). As another related research showed that modality choices in Jacinda Ardern's COVID-19 speeches functioned to express responsibility, solidarity, and moral obligation, reinforcing trust between the speaker and the public. These findings indicate that interpersonal meaning is a key element in shaping how messages are received and interpreted by audiences (Kristianti, 2020). Besides, Interpersonal meaning analysis has also been applied beyond political discourse. Pane et al. (2018), in their study of doctor-patient interactions, revealed that mood and modality choices reflect institutional power relations and interpersonal negotiation. Although the context differs from public religious speech, the study reinforces the idea that interpersonal meaning is central to understanding how authority and roles are linguistically constructed across discourse types.

As a discourse type, Islamic preaching (dakwah) constitutes a purposeful communicative activity through which religious values, moral guidance, and ideological perspectives are conveyed to audiences. In essence, dakwah is inseparable from communication, as its effectiveness depends not only on the content of the message but also on how the message is delivered and how interpersonal relationships between the preacher and the audience are constructed. In contemporary society, the practice of dakwah has expanded beyond traditional religious spaces into public forums and digital media, requiring preachers to adopt more strategic and adaptive communicative approaches (Aini et al., 2023).

Recent scholarship on Islamic communication highlights the growing importance of interpersonal strategies in dakwah practices. The effective dakwah on digital platforms, such as YouTube, relies heavily on interpersonal engagement, including the use of dialogic language, audience alignment, and relational closeness (Gus & Iqdam, 2025). Similarly, the successful online preachers employ linguistic strategies that balance authority and familiarity in order to sustain audience attention and trust. These findings indicate that dakwah functions not merely as a one-way transmission of religious teachings but as an interactive process shaped by interpersonal dynamics (Naruto & Youtube, 2022). Furthermore, in shaping the success of dakwah communication, public speaking skills also play a critical role. The interactions between kyai or ustadz and santri are characterized by linguistic strategies that

construct authority, discipline, and moral guidance, underscoring the interpersonal nature of religious education (Kurniawan et al., 2024). From a linguistic standpoint, interpersonal meaning has been widely examined across various discourse genres. Research employing Systemic Functional Linguistics demonstrates that interpersonal meaning is realized through grammatical systems that enable speakers to enact social roles and negotiate relationships. The study of mood structures and modality choices play a crucial role in positioning speakers and listeners within particular relational frameworks. These grammatical resources allow speakers to make statements, issue directives, express certainty, or invite agreement, thereby shaping interactional meaning (Canadia et al., n.d.), (Tobing et al., 2020) and (Ramadhani, 2023).

Further studies reinforce the significance of interpersonal meaning in diverse contexts. Modality functions as a key interpersonal resource in televised talk shows, enabling speakers to express stance and evaluation (Khaofia & Info, 2018). The influence of interpersonal meaning in educational settings, particularly in the negotiation of authority and discipline between teachers and students (Prajnaparamytha, n.d.). More recently, Interpersonal meaning is also prominent in literary discourse, indicating that metafunctional meanings operate consistently across spoken and written texts (Picoult, 2025).

Although extensive research has been conducted on dakwah communication strategies and interpersonal meaning independently, limited attention has been given to studies that integrate these two perspectives through systematic linguistic analysis. Many dakwah studies focus on pragmatic or sociological dimensions of communication, while SFL-based interpersonal analyses often examine non-religious texts. Consequently, there remains a research gap concerning the grammatical realization of interpersonal meaning in Islamic preaching, particularly in the speeches of preachers with transnational influence.

Zakir Naik's Islamic speeches present a relevant object of study in this regard. His preaching style is characterized by assertive propositions, frequent interrogative constructions, and strong expressions of modality that convey certainty, obligation, and ideological commitment. These features correspond closely with the interpersonal strategies identified in dakwah communication research, yet they have not been sufficiently examined through a detailed linguistic framework. By analyzing Zakir Naik's speeches from the perspective of interpersonal meaning, this study seeks to bridge Islamic communication studies and systemic functional linguistics. In this way, the research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how interpersonal

meanings are linguistically constructed in contemporary Islamic preaching. It offers a linguistically grounded account of dakwah as an interpersonal practice and enriches discourse studies by demonstrating the relevance of mood and modality analysis in religious communication.

Despite the growing body of research on interpersonal meaning in political and institutional discourse, relatively little attention has been given to Islamic religious speeches, particularly those delivered in global public forums. Zakir Naik's speeches are characterized by argumentative reasoning, frequent use of interrogatives, assertive declaratives, and strong modal expressions that signal certainty and obligation. These linguistic features suggest a deliberate construction of interpersonal meaning aimed at asserting religious authority, engaging listeners, and persuading audiences with diverse ideological backgrounds. Therefore, it is both relevant and necessary to analyse Zakir Naik's Islamic speeches from an interpersonal perspective. Such an analysis contributes to discourse studies by extending the application of SFL into the domain of religious preaching, which involves unique communicative goals and audience dynamics. Moreover, it provides insights into how religious speakers linguistically negotiate belief, authority, and alignment in contemporary public discourse. Understanding these mechanisms is particularly important in an era where religious speeches are widely disseminated through digital media and reach audiences across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design with a discourse-analytic approach grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The qualitative design is considered appropriate because the research focuses on interpreting linguistic patterns and meanings rather than measuring variables statistically. In line with SFL principles, the study seeks to describe how interpersonal meaning is realized through grammatical choices in spoken religious discourse. Similar qualitative SFL-based approaches have been successfully employed in previous studies analysing interpersonal meaning in written and spoken texts (Yuliana & Imperiani, 2017) and (Syafitri, 2025). Interpersonal meaning in this study is analysed through the grammatical systems of mood which are central resources for interaction in discourse. Mood analysis focuses on clause types such as declarative, interrogative, and imperative. The declarative mood primarily serves to convey information, while interrogative and imperative moods contribute to a more interactive discourse by actively engaging interlocutors and capturing their attention. The use of modality

further plays a significant role in shaping the attitudes and responses of participants within an interaction (Yu, 2017). In a related study, interpersonal meaning was examined through doctor–patient conversations at Pringadi Hospital using a Systemic Functional Linguistics framework and a descriptive qualitative approach (Pane et al., 2018).

Qualitative research is characterized by a design in which findings are not generated through statistical procedures or numerical measurement. Instead, it aims to explore phenomena in a holistic and context-sensitive manner by collecting data from natural settings, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument of analysis. Such research is inherently descriptive and tends to employ an inductive analytical approach, allowing processes and meanings to emerge from the participants' perspectives. Owing to its comprehensive and clearly articulated structure, this qualitative research design is widely regarded as an appropriate methodological choice, as it facilitates understanding among researchers and academics alike (Fadli, 2021).

The data of this study consist of selected transcripts of Zakir Naik's Islamic speeches delivered in public forums. The speeches were chosen purposively based on their argumentative nature and their relevance to Islamic doctrinal themes, which are assumed to involve intensive interpersonal negotiation between the speaker and the audience. The unit of analysis is the clause, as clauses are the primary grammatical units through which interpersonal meanings are realized (Yuliana & Imperiani, 2017). Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques. The selected speeches were transcribed carefully to ensure accuracy and completeness of linguistic features, including interrogative forms, modal verbs, and other interpersonal markers. The transcription process followed a systematic procedure to preserve the original structure of clauses, as accurate clause segmentation is crucial for SFL-based analysis. This approach is consistent to emphasize the importance of precise textual preparation in interpersonal metafunction analysis (Syafitri, 2025). The data analysis followed several stages. First, the transcribed texts were segmented into clauses. Second, each clause was analyzed in terms of its mood structure to identify whether it functions as declarative, interrogative, or imperative. This step aims to reveal how Zakir Naik positions himself interactionally, whether by providing information, asking questions, or directing the audience. Finally, the findings were interpreted to explain how mood patterns contribute to the construction of interpersonal meaning in Zakir Naik's speeches. The interpretation process involved relating linguistic patterns to the

communicative purposes of religious discourse.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chart illustrates how different mood types are used in Zakir Naik's speech, showing the grammatical patterns through which interpersonal meaning is conveyed.

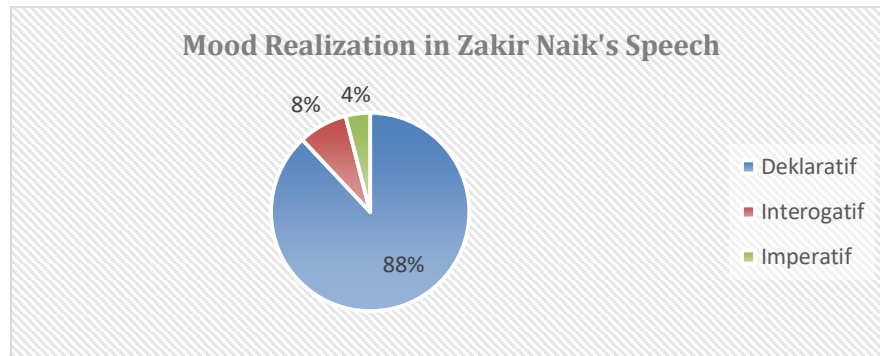


Chart 1: Mood Realization in Zakir Naik's Islamic Speech

The chart above indicates that declarative clauses are used most frequently, making up 88% of the data, which suggests that the speech is largely oriented toward explaining ideas and affirming religious viewpoints. Interrogative clauses represent 8%, serving mainly to involve listeners and stimulate reflection rather than to seek direct answers. In contrast, imperative clauses account for only 4%, and are employed selectively to emphasize advice, guidance, or religious obligations. Overall, this pattern reflects a communication style that prioritizes explanation and persuasion while maintaining audience engagement.

In general, each clause in Zakir Naik's religious discourse can be analytically divided into two principal components: Mood and Residue. The Mood element consists of the Subject and Finite, which together function to establish the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the audience. The Residue, on the other hand, is composed of the Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct, which collectively convey the propositional content or the action being expressed in the clause. Across the discourse, the most prevalent clause type is the declarative clause, which realizes the primary interpersonal function of religious preaching, namely to inform, explain, and assert doctrinal positions. Clauses such as *"The brother is quoting Exodus,"* *"Jesus Christ never spoke in Exodus,"* and *"This is the Bible I have got by the Christians"* exemplify a complete declarative structure, typically organized as Subject + Finite + Predicator + Complement. This pattern reflects an interpersonal function oriented toward stating facts or firmly held beliefs.

Within this discourse, the Mood is predominantly indicative-declarative, while the

Residue serves as the carrier of propositional meanings that the speaker presents as authoritative truth claims. Quantitatively, approximately 85% of the clauses are declarative in nature, indicating a strong dominance of information-giving and stance-taking functions. Clauses such as *“It is not the word of Jesus,”* *“He healed those born deaf and blind,”* and *“Miracle is not the criteria to make him God”* demonstrate declarative moods with finite elements realized through forms such as *is* or *did*. These grammatical choices contribute to an authoritative tone and reinforce the speaker’s epistemic certainty. In the context of Zakir Naik’s preaching, declarative clauses function not only to convey information but also to persuade. They are strategically employed to highlight theological distinctions between Christianity and Islam while maintaining an appearance of rational argumentation grounded in scriptural references. As a result, the interpersonal meaning enacted through these clauses is both assertive, in affirming specific viewpoints, and didactic, in positioning the speaker as an instructor who guides the audience toward particular interpretations. This dual function situates the speaker in an authoritative yet dialogically engaged role before an interfaith audience. In addition to declarative clauses, the discourse also contains a limited number of imperative clauses, such as *“You check it up.”* Structurally, these imperatives are characterized by the omission of the Finite element, leaving a configuration dominated by the Predicator and Complement. Although imperatives are commonly associated with direct commands, their use in this context does not convey coercion. Instead, they perform a persuasive interpersonal function, as Zakir Naik employs imperatives to invite the audience to verify claims by consulting their own religious texts. Interpersonally, this use of the imperative serves to foster engagement rather than to impose authority. It reflects a conventional asymmetrical relationship between a knowledgeable speaker and an audience encouraged to participate critically in the reasoning process. Thus, imperatives are utilized not to exert pressure, but to reinforce credibility while simultaneously opening space for rational examination. The discourse also includes several interrogative clauses, for example *“Which miracle did he do?”* From a structural perspective, this mood is realized through the inversion of the Finite (*did*) preceding the Subject (*he*), forming a typical English interrogative pattern. Functionally, however, such questions are not genuine requests for information. Rather, they operate rhetorically, serving to emphasize the claim that John the Baptist performed no miracles. The interpersonal function of these interrogatives lies in challenging audience assumptions and stimulating reflection. Through rhetorical questioning, Zakir Naik strengthens his

logical argument that miracles should not be regarded as a criterion for divinity. Consequently, interrogative mood in this discourse functions in an argumentative and persuasive capacity rather than an informational one. The Residue component plays a significant role in constructing the semantic and ideological weight of Zakir Naik's message. Predicators are frequently realized by verbs denoting mental and verbal processes, such as *say*, *believe*, *agree*, and *hope*, which foreground elements of mental projection within the discourse. The presence of these verbs indicates that the preaching does not merely transmit factual information but also represents epistemic positioning and personal conviction. Complements commonly appear as religiously loaded nominal phrases, including "*the word of Jesus*," "*the Bible*," and "*the Father*," which function as conceptual objects within theological argumentation. Adjuncts are often employed to specify scriptural sources, for instance "*as the Bible says*," "*according to Jesus*," or "*in the Gospel of Matthew*." Functionally, these Residue elements reinforce intertextuality and source authority, thereby positioning Zakir Naik's arguments as textually grounded rather than purely subjective assertions. The relationship between Mood and Residue in this discourse reveals a balanced interaction between propositional strength and interpersonal engagement. Mood functions to frame the social relationship between the speaker (Zakir Naik) and the audience, whether Christian or Muslim, while Residue carries the theological content and logical substantiation of the arguments presented. Clauses such as "*I have got no objection in agreeing that Jesus did do miracles*" illustrate the integration of these two components. On the one hand, the Mood realizes interpersonal politeness through a mitigated declarative structure; on the other hand, the Residue contains the predicator *agreeing* and the complement *that Jesus did do miracles*, which together signal a dialogic and accommodating stance. Accordingly, the interaction between Mood and Residue in Zakir Naik's preaching reflects a synthesis of authority and courtesy, aligning with the communicative ethos of scholarly religious discourse: persuading without coercion and asserting positions without confrontation. The Mood and Residue structures in Zakir Naik's preaching serve not merely as grammatical mechanisms but also as resources for enacting the speaker's social and ideological roles. Through these structures, he positions himself as a religious authority who remains open to dialogue and critical engagement. Interpersonal meaning in Zakir Naik's preaching discourse reflects a dynamic balance between scholarly authority, social sensitivity, and persuasive engagement. In the opening segment, clauses such as "*The sister has asked a very good question*" and "*She asked the question...*" realize

appreciative and empathetic interpersonal functions, fostering a respectful and positive rapport with a female audience member—an aspect that is particularly significant within religious discourse, which often operates within hierarchical communicative norms. As the discourse progresses, the interpersonal orientation shifts toward a more rational and evidence-based mode, as seen in clauses like “*I was told in Arabic grammar*” and “*The Arabic grammar has got only two genders.*” At this stage, Zakir Naik positions himself as an intermediary between knowledge and belief. Through the use of declarative mood structures combined with technical lexical items such as “*Arabic grammar,*” “*two genders,*” and “*rules for feminine gender,*” he adopts an academic discursive style to lend intellectual support to his theological argumentation.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the interpersonal function becomes evaluative and conclusive. The mood structure serves as an authoritative assertion, bringing the extended explanation to a definitive and normative conclusion. This affirmative declarative form not only conveys a propositional statement but also reinforces an ideological stance that conceptualizes divinity in Islam as transcendent, extending beyond human categories such as gender. The analysis indicates that declarative mood choices are predominantly employed to construct a preaching discourse that is educational and argumentative rather than dogmatic. The strategic use of rhetorical interrogatives generates a dialogic effect, while the presence of elliptical clauses reflects the spontaneous and spoken nature of sermon delivery. These features together contribute to a discourse that remains accessible without sacrificing analytical depth. From the perspective of Halliday’s interpersonal metafunction, the discourse demonstrates a harmonious asymmetrical relationship between the speaker, positioned as an expert, and the audience, positioned as seekers of knowledge. The mood structures reflect Zakir Naik’s role as an educator and discourse agent: arguments are advanced logically through declarative clauses, challenges are posed respectfully through interrogative forms, and positions are finalized through conclusive statements. Consequently, the Mood–Residue analysis illustrates how grammatical choices actively support the social purpose of preaching, namely the communication of religious truths through rational explanation and effective interpersonal interaction.

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