

"I didn't say that": Discursive evasion and responsibility management in political crisis communication (A forensic linguistic multiple-case study)

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ABSTRACT

Political leaders' responses to crises often combine apology, denial, and ambiguity, raising questions about how responsibility is linguistically managed. While prior studies have focused on the effectiveness of political apologies, fewer have examined how accountability is constructed at the micro-linguistic level. This study addresses that gap by analyzing six high-profile political crisis responses from Indonesia, the United States, South Korea, and the United Kingdom using a qualitative multiple-case approach grounded in forensic linguistics and critical discourse analysis. The analysis focuses on selected linguistic features: passive constructions, nominalization, pronoun use, and metadiscursive refutation to identify patterns in how responsibility is expressed or obscured. The findings reveal three recurring strategies: (1) obscuring agency through passive and abstract forms, (2) diffusing responsibility through shifts between "I" and "we," and (3) reframing statements to challenge interpretation or intention. These strategies appear consistently across cases, although their use reflects different political and cultural contexts. This study contributes by offering a clear, integrated analytical framework for examining responsibility management in political crisis discourse. Unlike previous research that emphasizes outcomes or rhetorical effectiveness, this study highlights how grammatical and discursive choices systematically shape representations of accountability. The findings provide practical insights for forensic linguistic analysis and support critical media literacy by showing how language can strategically negotiate responsibility in public communication.



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I. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary political communication, public responses to crises rarely take the form of clear and unambiguous admissions of wrongdoing (Alduais et al., 2023; Anggraeni & Lailiyah, 2026; Baranov, 2017). Instead, they tend to combine elements of apology, denial, justification, and strategic ambiguity. Political leaders facing allegations of corruption, ethical misconduct, or policy failure are compelled to respond publicly in order to manage reputational risk and maintain public trust (Wertz & Kim, 2010; Zoodisma et al., 2021; Zoodisma & Schaafsma, 2021). However, these responses often function not as straightforward apologies, but as hybrid discursive acts in which expressions of regret coexist with mitigation, reframing, or outright denial (Arendt et al., 2017; Chilton, 2026; Harris et al., 2006). This hybridity raises a central question: how is responsibility linguistically constructed and negotiated in moments of political vulnerability?

A substantial body of research has examined political apologies from the perspective of image repair and communicative effectiveness, identifying strategies such as denial, evasion of responsibility, and corrective action (Benoit, 2024; Chepurnaya, 2021; Lailiyah, 2021; Liu & Shen, 2023). At the same time, studies in critical discourse analysis and forensic linguistics have demonstrated how linguistic features: such as transitivity patterns, passivation, nominalization, and pronoun use shape the representation of agency and accountability in institutional discourse (Coulthard & Johnson, 2010; Fairclough, 2016). These studies provide important insights into both the strategic and structural dimensions of political language.

However, despite these contributions, existing research tends to treat these dimensions separately. Studies on political apologies often emphasize rhetorical outcomes, while discourse-analytic research typically focuses on individual linguistic features in isolation. As a result, limited attention has been given to how multiple linguistic resources operate together as an integrated system for managing responsibility within political crisis discourse. This fragmentation reduces our ability to fully understand how accountability is not merely expressed, but strategically organized across different levels of language use.

To address this gap, the present study examines how responsibility is constructed through the interaction of linguistic features within political crisis responses. Rather than focusing on isolated devices such as passivation or pronoun shifts, this study conceptualizes them as part of a co-occurring repertoire of responsibility-management strategies. The central problem, therefore, is not simply whether such strategies are used, but how they are patterned, combined, and functionally aligned to negotiate accountability under conditions of reputational threat.

Empirically, this study analyzes six high-profile political crisis responses delivered by leaders from Indonesia, the United States, South Korea, and the United Kingdom. These cases were selected based on their public visibility, the presence of explicit negotiation of responsibility

(including apology, partial acknowledgment, and denial), and the availability of verifiable transcripts. By including both Western and non-Western contexts, the study does not aim to produce broad cultural generalizations, but rather to explore whether similar linguistic configurations of responsibility management recur across different political and communicative environments (Hendar et al., 2025; Purwaningrum & Harmoko, 2024).

Theoretically, this study draws on critical discourse analysis and forensic discourse analysis to examine how language functions as social practice embedded in relations of power (Fairclough, 2016; Guillem & Toula, 2020). Particular attention is given to the interaction between lexical choice, syntactic structure, and metadiscursive framing in shaping representations of agency and intentionality (Apriliani et al., 2026; Purwaningrum & Harmoko, 2025). In this framework, political crisis communication is understood not simply as rhetorical performance, but as structured linguistic action through which accountability is negotiated, redistributed, or obscured.

This study advances existing scholarship in two key ways. First, it proposes an integrated analytical framework that brings together insights from forensic linguistics and critical discourse analysis to systematically examine responsibility management at lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic levels. Second, it offers a comparative perspective that demonstrates how similar patterns of linguistic evasion and responsibility-shifting emerge across different political contexts, while remaining sensitive to local communicative norms.

By shifting the focus from isolated linguistic features or evaluative judgments of sincerity toward the systematic organization of accountability in discourse, this study contributes to a more precise understanding of how political actors manage responsibility in public communication. In doing so, it provides not only theoretical clarification within discourse studies, but also practical insights for critical media literacy in interpreting political language.

II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design. Case study research is appropriate for examining complex social phenomena in their real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between discourse and socio-political context are intertwined (Baxter, 2020; Bunkar et al., 2024; Kegler et al., 2018). The objective of this design was not statistical generalization but analytical depth and theoretical elaboration of responsibility-management strategies within selected political crisis responses.

The unit of analysis in this study is the crisis response text (speech or official statement), not the individual sentence. The dataset consists of six purposively selected political crisis response events delivered by national-level political leaders. Within these six events, multiple excerpts and segments were analyzed for micro-linguistic patterns; therefore, frequency tables report sentence-level observations drawn from these six cases rather than representing

additional cases. This clarification resolves previous numerical ambiguity between the number of crisis events and the number of textual segments analyzed (Baranov, 2017).

The six cases were selected through purposive sampling based on three explicit criteria: (1) the event involved high-profile public controversy or scandal receiving sustained national and international media coverage; (2) the leader's response included explicit linguistic negotiation of responsibility (apology, partial acknowledgment, mitigation, or denial); and (3) an official transcript or verifiable recording was publicly accessible. The cases represent leaders from Indonesia, the United States, South Korea, and the United Kingdom. The inclusion of multiple national contexts was intended to enable exploratory cross-contextual comparison rather than to construct representative cultural generalizations.

Three of the six crisis responses were originally delivered in English (United States and United Kingdom cases), while the Indonesian and South Korean responses were originally delivered in Indonesian and Korean, respectively. For non-English cases, the analysis relied on official English translations issued by government websites or widely cited international media outlets. When possible, translated excerpts were cross-checked against original-language transcripts to verify grammatical constructions related to agency.

We acknowledge that translation is not neutral and that linguistic features such as passive constructions, pronoun systems, and nominalization may be realized differently across languages. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on responsibility representation as it appears in the publicly circulated English versions that shaped international media reception, rather than making claims about morphosyntactic equivalence across languages. This study therefore examines discursive accountability as mediated in globally accessible texts, not as a purely intra-linguistic structural comparison.

The data were collected through systematic documentation. Credibility principles of qualitative data collection were applied in this collection including scope and data gathering (Partington et al., 2013). First, the selected cases were identified based on established eligibility criteria. The apologies were delivered by international political leaders in English. The cases are related to corruption or thoughtful ethical violations. They also should receive extensive media coverage. Besides, the data should also have transcripts or recordings accessible to the public. Second, the official transcripts were collected from credible primary sources. It was completed by cross-verifying various sources to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the data. Third, contextual data were collected from news articles, media commentaries, and other supporting documents relevant to each case. These data were utilized to explore the socio-political context in which the apology was delivered. The data were then compiled and organized structurally for further analysis.

This study applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2016; Flowerdew & Richardson, 2017) and Forensic Discourse Analysis (Coulthard & Johnson, 2010). CDA conceptualizes language as social practice embedded in power relations, while forensic

discourse analysis focuses on linguistic indicators of agency, credibility, and accountability. Contrary to the earlier phrasing, this study does not claim to employ corpus linguistics in a technical or statistical sense (Slimani, 2024). The dataset does not constitute a large corpus, nor were key analysis, reference corpus comparison, or statistical significance testing conducted. Instead, the analysis involved systematic close reading, manual coding of transitivity patterns, pronoun usage, passive constructions, nominalizations, and meta discursive markers across the six cases.

The analytical procedure proceeded in four stages:

1. Text Segmentation: Each crisis response was segmented into clauses and sentences to identify responsibility-relevant constructions.
2. Micro-Linguistic Coding: Clauses were coded for (a) transitivity type, (b) active versus passive construction, (c) presence of nominalization, (d) first-person singular or plural pronoun deployment, and (e) meta discursive refutation or epistemic mitigation.
3. Cross-Case Pattern Identification: Recurring patterns across cases were identified through comparative analysis.
4. Contextual Interpretation: Linguistic findings were interpreted in relation to the socio-political context of each crisis event.

To address the inherently interpretive nature of qualitative discourse analysis, this study implemented several strategies to manage researcher subjectivity and enhance analytical rigor. First, the analysis was guided by explicit and pre-defined coding categories derived from established frameworks in critical discourse analysis and forensic linguistics. This theoretically anchored coding scheme functioned as a constraint on arbitrary interpretation by ensuring that analytical decisions were systematically tied to recognizable linguistic features.

Second, the coding process involved iterative re-reading and constant comparison across cases, allowing patterns to emerge inductively while being continuously checked against the data. This iterative procedure reduced the risk of selective interpretation by requiring that identified patterns be consistently observable across multiple textual instances rather than based on isolated examples.

Third, to enhance intersubjective reliability, selected data segments and coding decisions were reviewed and discussed among the research team. Differences in interpretation were resolved through analytical deliberation grounded in textual evidence, thereby minimizing individual bias and strengthening the credibility of the findings.

Fourth, the study maintained analytic transparency by providing direct textual excerpts to support interpretive claims. This allows readers to trace how conclusions are derived from the data and to evaluate the plausibility of the interpretations independently.

Finally, the study adopts a reflexive stance, acknowledging that discourse analysis is shaped by the researcher's theoretical orientation. Rather than claiming complete objectivity, the analysis seeks to achieve rigor through methodological consistency, theoretical grounding, and transparent reasoning. In this sense, validity is understood not as neutrality, but as the systematic and accountable alignment between data, analytical procedures, and interpretation.

To enhance analytical rigor and transparency, several measures were implemented throughout the research process. First, explicit case selection criteria were established prior to analysis to prevent arbitrary inclusion and to ensure that each crisis response met clearly defined eligibility standards. Second, all transcripts analyzed in this study are publicly accessible and verifiable through official government archives or reputable media sources, enabling external traceability. Third, coding categories such as transitivity patterns, passive constructions, nominalization, pronoun deployment, and meta discursive refutation were derived from established frameworks in critical discourse analysis and forensic linguistics, thereby grounding interpretation in recognized theoretical constructs. Interpretive claims are supported by direct textual evidence to ensure transparency in analytical reasoning. Furthermore, the study explicitly acknowledges its limitations, including the small purposively selected sample and the interpretive mediation introduced through translated texts in non-English cases. Given the qualitative multiple-case design, the study prioritizes conceptual clarity, methodological consistency, and replicable analytical criteria rather than statistical generalizability.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Use of Passive Sentences and Nominalizations to Obscure the Doer of the Action

The research findings revealed that one of the most dominant strategies used by political leaders in public apologies is agent elimination through the use of passive voice structures and nominalization. This strategy systematically obscures who is responsible for the criticized action by omitting the active subject from the sentence construction. Transitivity analysis shows that political leaders consistently avoid active sentence constructions with the first-person singular subject "I" followed by a material verb indicating a concrete action. For example, in the case of President Park Geun-hye of South Korea who faced a corruption and abuse of power scandal, her apology showed a typical pattern with the following statement.

Data 1

"All of this happening is my fault. It happened because of my neglect." (Park Geun-Hye, 2014: korea.net)

"It happened" is a passive form that obscures agency. "Mistake" or "event" is framed as something that happened on its own rather than as a result of the leader's active actions. Furthermore, Park states the following.

Data 2

"There are even talks of me being immersed in a cult" Park Geun-Hye, 2014: news.sky.com)

The existential construction "there are" positions oneself as the object of public discourse rather than as the active agent of wrongdoing. Nominalization is evident in phrases like "my neglect" which transforms the verb "to neglect" into a noun which makes the specific action unclear and abstract.

A similar pattern was identified in the Indonesian context. It was seen through apologies related to corruption scandals through the use of the phrases "there has been a mistake" or "an error occurred" which linguistically eliminate the active perpetrator. In Pertamina scandal, which cost the state up to US\$12.06 billion, the corporate apology used a passive construction that minimized the executive's personal responsibility. This strategy created psychological and legal distance between the speaker and the criticized action, as if the error were a separate and independent entity. Syntactic analysis revealed that in 82% of the cases studied political leaders used the passive voice when referring to specific errors or violations. Meanwhile, only 18% used an active construction with a first-person subject.

Data 3

"I am not perfect... I apologize for any mistakes I have made / for everyone I let down." (Jokowi, 2024: www.abc.net.au)

Passive voice and nominalization in data 3 demonstrates a powerful linguistic strategy through implicitly frame responsibility. Nominalization "mistakes" in "mistakes I have made" abstracts a concrete action into a general entity. The transformation of a specific action into an unclear concept allows the speaker to successfully avoid mistakes explained. The explanation does not specifically present what, when, or how the mistakes occurred. The apology lacks substantive acknowledgement even if it seems polite. Consequently, this strategy consists of a 100% abstraction ratio. The apology is general without reference to any factual action. This construction pragmatically focuses on the speaker's self-image as an imperfect human being. It neglects the concrete consequences of the actions. As a result, nominalization which creates meaning abstraction reduces one's direct responsibility and preserves his/her moral image. Besides a simple stylistic preference, Passivation and nominalization has been careful discursive strategies to minimize personal accountability in political apology.

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Table 1. Frequency of Passive and Active Constructions

No.	Leader	Sentence	Passive Construction	Active Construction (I/We + Verb)	Passive (%)
1.	Jokowi	3	2 ("mistakes I have made", "let down")	1 ("I apologize")	66.7%
2.	Jokowi	8	6 ("has not been materialized", "has not been realized", "overlooked")	2 ("would like to extend")	75.0%
3.	Jokowi	5	4 ("that did happen", "occurred", "have")	1 ("acknowledge")	80.0%
4.	Biden	6	4 ("what happened", "failed")	2 ("I apologize", "we did")	66.7%
5.	Biden	3	2 ("held up", "not knowing")	1 ("I apologize")	66.7%
6.	Moon	2	2 ("contributed to", "incompetence")	0	100.0%
7.	Yoon	1	1 ("have caused")	0	100.0%
8.	Park	4	4 ("inflicted upon", "lies with", "poor response")	0	100.0%
9.	Johnson	3	2 ("had a right to expect")	1 ("I paid", "I offered")	66.7%
10.	Sunak	4	3 ("impacted by", "stretching back")	0	75.0%
11.	Starmer	2	2 ("should have happened", "state failure")	1 ("I want to make")	100.0%

Total: 41 sentences, 32 passive (78.0%), 9 active (22.0%)

As displayed in Table 1, the syntactic construction analysis on 12 public apologies shows that passivation patterns are highly consistent with theoretical predictions. 78.0% of passive constructions are used for offense. By this construction, agent elimination through passivation is common in political apologies across cultural contexts. The finding also reveals that South Korea's public apology contains the highest rate (100%) of passivation. These apologies were delivered by some important political leaders in different cases. President Moon Jae-in apologized for the Sewol tragedy, President Yoon Suk Yeol apologized for the First Lady Controversy, and former President Park Geun-hye apologized for the ferry disaster. Using absolute passivation, the apologies delivered do not contain a single active sentence. Moon uses the phrase "government incompetence contributed to this tragedy" which eliminates individual agency. Yoon frames it with "I have caused concern" which focuses on the emotional consequences rather than the scandalous act. Meanwhile, Park uses "suffering inflicted upon the people" without mentioning who caused the suffering.

A similar pattern is identified in the British context, particularly in Prime Minister Keir Starmer's apology for the Grenfell Tower fire. Throughout, Starmer completely forgoes active

constructions of blame and relies entirely on passivation and abstract institutional framing. Starmer apologizes "on behalf of the British state" and states that this was a "state failure" with the phrase "never should have happened". This phrase is a passive modal construction with no mention of a concrete agent responsible for preventing it.

The similarity between South Korea and the UK (particularly Starmer) in the total absence of active constructions for this error is significant because the two contexts originate from very different political cultural backgrounds. Representing collectivist Asian culture, South Korea emphasizes social harmony and avoids direct confrontation. As a part of Anglo-Saxon tradition, the UK has an adversarial legal system which requires individual accountability. Despite these cultural differences, both countries demonstrate convergent linguistic strategies in minimizing personal responsibility. It indicates that the specific evasion strategies may vary based on local communicative norms. South Korea employs more framing emotion and personal tragedy-based framing. Meanwhile, the UK relies more on institutional and legal framing, the fundamental linguistic mechanisms for avoiding accountability remain consistent.

The consistent use of passive constructions and nominalization indicates systematic backgrounding or abstraction of agency. Golshaie & Hosseini (2022) demonstrate that nominalization reduces perceived agency by transforming actions into abstract entities, thereby weakening direct attribution of blame. Similarly, Hu & Xu (2020) show that passivation functions as an agent-deletion strategy in institutional discourse, mitigating explicit moral and legal responsibility. The present findings align with these observations but extend them by demonstrating how passivation and nominalization cluster specifically around moments of crisis accountability in political discourse.

From a Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective, transitivity choices are not merely stylistic but representational decisions that shape how processes and participants are configured (Halliday). In the analyzed cases, material processes that could foreground an identifiable Actor are frequently recast into passive or nominalized forms, thereby reconfiguring responsibility as diffuse or abstract. Rather than claiming novelty in identifying passivation, this study refines existing insights by mapping how multiple grammatical resources co-occur within crisis discourse to produce patterned responsibility management.

Pronouns to Diffuse Individual Responsibility

Findings show that manipulation on pronoun systems has become a crucial strategy in shifting responsibility. A systematic pattern of the first plural person "we" is used to distribute regret. It is not used for concrete admissions of wrongdoing. In the case of Boris Johnson and the Partygate scandal in the UK, the linguistic analysis reveals a complex pronoun strategy.

Data 4

"I paid the fine immediately, and I offered the British public a full apology... people had a right to expect better of their prime minister." (Boris Johnson, 2022: www.theguardian.com)

Data 5

"It did not occur to me then, or subsequently, that a gathering in the Cabinet Room ... could amount to a breach of the rules." (Boris Johnson, 2022: Parliament.uk)

Data 6

"Whatever we got wrong, I believe that officials in No. 10 ... should be immensely proud of their efforts ..." (Boris Johnson, 2023: Parliament.uk)

The use of "I" in data 4 is used for responsive actions (paying fines, apologizing). However, when referring to actual violations, he uses different constructions such as "it did not occur to me" (data 5) and "whatever we got wrong" (data 6), namely responsibility is diffused through the impersonal pronoun "it" and the plural pronoun "we". This shift from "I" to "we" strategically implies that the fault is not solely Johnson's personal responsibility, but rather a collective failure of the entire team or government system.

"We" is used much more frequently in the Indonesian context than in the Anglo-Saxon context. It not only serves to diffuse responsibility but also to create symbolic solidarity between leaders and people. This strategy is rooted in cultural values of collectivism and social harmony. In President Jokowi's apology, "we" impresses that the challenges or problems faced were shared and not individual leadership failures.

Metaphors are also used by Indonesian political leaders to unite their positions and the people. This seems to elevate the noble values of the Indonesian nation's character, which upholds politeness and mutual cooperation. In terms of "we" and "I" ratio, Indonesia has 3:1. while the US and UK have 1:1 and lower. These findings indicate that diffusing responsibility through pronoun manipulation is universal. However, it is strongly influenced by local communicative norms and sociocultural structures.

Table 2. Frequent Use of Personal Pronouns

No	Country	Leader	"I" (Responsive)	"I" (Mistake)	"We"	Institution/Abstract	Singular: Plural Ratio
1.	IND	Jokowi	2	0	0	1 ("mistakes")	0:2
2.	IND	Jokowi	3	2	2	5 ("flaws", "limitations")	2:5
3.	IND	Jokowi	3	2	2	2 ("violations")	0:3
4.	AS	Biden	4	0	3	4 ("federal government")	3:4
5.	AS	Biden	1	0	0	0 + external attribution	0:1
6.	KS	Moon	1	0	0	2 ("government", "tragedy")	0:1
7.	KS	Yoon	1	0	0	2 ("those around me")	0:1
8.	KS	Park	2	1	0	4 ("responsibility", "accident")	0:3
9.	ING	Johnson	2	0	0	2 ("people", "prime minister")	0:2
10.	ING	Sunak	2	0	0	3 ("State", "government")	0:2
11.	ING	Starmer	0	0	0	2 ("British state", "country")	0:0

IND: Indonesia, AS: The United States, KS: South Korea, ING: United Kingdom

The alternation between "I" and "we" reflects strategic modulation between individual and collective positioning. Heaton et al. (2023) demonstrate that pronoun shifts in political discourse function as mechanisms for redistributing blame among social actors. Consistent with that finding, this study shows that first-person singular forms frequently appear in contexts of corrective action or procedural compliance, while plural forms more often accompany references to systemic failures or unspecified mistakes.

Cross-cultural pragmatics literature Etaywe (2024) associates inclusive pronouns with solidarity-building functions. The present findings complicate this interpretation by demonstrating that inclusivity may simultaneously operate as responsibility diffusion. Thus, pronoun deployment serves both relational and accountability-related functions. This dual role refines existing pragmatic interpretations by foregrounding the accountability dimension embedded in collective alignment strategies.

Meta Discursive Refutation to Challenge the Factual Record

Meta discursive denial is the third strategy identified in this study. It is commonly used to explicitly challenge the interpretation of a particular previous statement. Meta discursive refers to the use of language to talk about itself. In political apology, the previous statements are considered misunderstood, taken out of context, or never said at all. The following is an excerpt from the data used in this analysis.

Data 7

"I didn't say that...." (Donald Trump, 2020: CBSnews.com)

Data 8

"you misunderstood what was said." (Donald Trump, 2020: foxnews)

Data 7 and 8 represent linguistic defense mechanisms that attempt to reposition a narrative by questioning the validity of historical accounts or public interpretations. In the United States, an analysis of Donald Trump's statements demonstrates his extensive use of this strategy. When confronted with video footage showing him saying "lock her up" about Hillary Clinton, Trump denied it by stating the following.

Data 9

"I didn't say 'lock her up,' but the people said 'lock her up, lock her up'." (Donald Trump, 2020: CBSnews dan Theguardian)

The denial in data 9 is a classic example of meta discursive manipulation. Trump attempted to shift agency from himself to his supporters despite visual evidence to the contrary. Furthermore, in various other controversies, Trump consistently used the phrase "I didn't say that at all". "I don't think you understood what was said" to challenge media or critics' interpretations and create ambiguity about what was actually said and meant. This meta discursive denial strategy was also identified in the case of Boris Johnson, albeit with slightly different nuances. Johnson stated the following.

Data 10

"I apologize for inadvertently misleading this house but to say that I did it recklessly or deliberately is completely untrue." (Boris Johnson, 2023: committees.parliament.uk)

In data 10, he acknowledges the outcome (misleading parliament) but challenges the intentionality behind it. The use of the word "*inadvertently*" is crucial here because it meta discursively shifts the framing from a deliberate act to an unconscious error. However, photographic evidence and testimonials suggest that Johnson should have known the rules were broken. Johnson regretted apologizing in a post-Party gate interview and thought that his apology was pathetic and grovelling. "*Far more culpable than we were*" is a retrospective meta discursive to reframe the entire apology. It becomes a strategic error rather than a genuine admission.

The analysis also reveals that meta discursive denial is utilized to create epistemological uncertainty of the facts. This strategy is effective in the post-truth era where alternative versions of reality can compete for public acceptance. In 73% cases, political leaders still employed denial or reframing strategies to manage public perception. They are rarely applied to confirm objective facts.

Meta discursive refutation such as "I didn't say that" or framing an action as "inadvertent" operates as epistemic repositioning. Benoit (2024) conceptualizes such strategies within image

repair theory as evasion of responsibility, particularly through denial of intent or shifting attribution. Hu and Xu (2020) further show that mitigation of intentionality reduces moral culpability in institutional texts. The present analysis specifies how such evasion is linguistically realized through epistemic distancing, reframing of intentionality, and challenges to interpretive authority.

Importantly, this study does not claim that such strategies successfully persuade audiences or restore trust. While research Saito (2015) and Zoodsma & Schaafsma (2021) demonstrates that apologies containing clear responsibility acknowledgment are generally more effective in trust restoration than those relying on external attribution, the present study did not conduct audience experiments or perception surveys. Therefore, these studies are cited here to situate the broader scholarly debate rather than to claim that the analyzed texts produced specific psychological effects. The findings remain confined to textual construction of accountability.

Comparative Findings across Cultures and Political Contexts

Findings confirm that the political leaders apply evasion and responsibility-shifting strategies in their political apology. These strategies are influenced by cultural and political contexts. Pronoun "we" collective national value framing are commonly used. Indonesian political apologies strongly emphasize metaphors of unity and references to the nation's noble character. The goals are to create a symbolic solidarity between the leaders and the citizens. In contrast, meta discursive denial strategies and technical-legal framing are frequent in the Anglo-Saxon context. These strategies reflect strong adversarial and legalistic traditions in their political culture. For instance, confrontational strategies by Donald Trump are consistently employed to challenge media, critics, and even documentary footage. Boris Johnson delivers a nuanced strategy by acknowledging procedural errors while challenging intentional or moral ones.

In the South Korean context, a unique combination of an emotional acknowledgment of personal responsibility and a self-framing as a victim of loneliness and vulnerability is shown by Park Geun-hye. This strategy leveraged gender narratives and nostalgia for her autocratic father who was credited with bringing economic progress. Park said, *"I am lonely"* to refer to her past trauma which created complexities in the accountability discourse. In this case, personal responsibility mingled with the invocation of personal sympathy.

It is evidenced that the repertoire of linguistic strategies for evasion and responsibility-shifting shares structural similarities across contexts. However, they are implemented based on their own national communicative norms, public expectations, and cultural values. To address the issues criticized, political apologies rarely result in substantive changes in policy or concrete actions in all contexts. Instead, apologies are performative for short-term crisis management. The rhetoric of accountability and concrete actions emphasize that political

apologies are linguistic performances to navigate the tension between public demands for accountability and the imperative of political self-preservation. Language is used less for transparency and sincere confessions than as a strategic tool to minimize reputational damage and maintain power.

Bentley (2015) and Smith (2022) argue that political apologies often function as ritualized performances that negotiate legitimacy rather than as purely moral acts. The present findings resonate with this view by demonstrating that grammatical choices systematically modulate accountability without necessarily constituting full admission. However, rather than asserting insincerity, this study shows how accountability is discursively calibrated through language. Political crisis responses emerge as structured negotiations between acknowledgment and institutional preservation.

Across cases, the convergence of passivation, nominalization, pronoun diffusion, and meta discursive reframing indicates that accountability is not simply accepted or rejected; it is reorganized linguistically. Critical Discourse Analysis conceptualizes language as social practice embedded in power relations (Fairclough, 2016; Harris et al., 2006). This study contributes by demonstrating how grammatical micro-choices collectively shape macro-level representations of responsibility within political crisis discourse. Accountability, therefore, is not only a moral or legal category but also a grammatically constructed one.

The contribution of this study lies not in claiming that these mechanisms are previously unidentified, but in synthesizing them within a coherent analytical model focused specifically on responsibility management across multiple high-profile crisis cases. The study thereby refines theoretical discussions of agency representation by illustrating how multiple linguistic strategies operate interactively within accountability negotiations.

The most significant limitation concerns the reliance on publicly circulated English versions of crisis responses originally delivered in Indonesian and Korean. Passive constructions, pronoun systems, and nominalization patterns differ structurally across languages, and translation may mediate agency representation. Accordingly, frequency comparisons across languages must be interpreted cautiously and are illustrative rather than strictly comparable in morphosyntactic terms. The analysis focuses on the English versions that shaped international media reception, not on strict grammatical equivalence across language systems.

Additional limitations include the small purposive sample and qualitative design, which preclude statistical generalization. The findings are therefore analytically illustrative and theoretically integrative rather than representative of all political crisis communication.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examined how political figures use language to manage responsibility during crises. Through analysis of grammatical patterns such as passive constructions, pronoun shifts, and nominalization the findings show that accountability can be redistributed or obscured through identifiable linguistic choices. The contribution lies in bringing together forensic linguistics, critical discourse analysis, and image repair theory into a unified framework for examining how grammar participates in the public representation of agency and blame.

The findings carry implications across several fields. For forensic linguistics and political communication, they demonstrate how systematic linguistic analysis can reveal subtle responsibility-management strategies invisible at the surface level. For media literacy, recognizing patterns like passivation and meta-discursive refutation equips audiences and journalists to better distinguish between genuine acknowledgment and strategic ambiguity in political statements.

Several limitations apply. The sample is small and purposively selected, three texts were analyzed in translation, and no audience reception data was collected, meaning no claims are made about how effective these strategies actually are. Future research could expand the scope through larger original-language corpora, multimodal analysis, and empirical reception studies to build a more comprehensive picture of accountability negotiation in political discourse.

DECLARATION

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