Linguistic Capital and Political Authority: A Discourse Analysis of Southeast Asian Leaders' Statement at COP29

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Abstract

This study investigates how linguistic choices function as symbolic capital to construct political authority and shape global diplomacy in the national statements of Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines at 29th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29). Grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focusing on lexical, rhetorical, and stylistic features, and informed by Bourdieu's theory of language and power, and Hall's model of contextual communication model, the study examines how Southeast Asian leaders navigate an English dominant 'linguistic market'. A comparative analysis reveals distinct discursive strategies: Malaysia employed moral and diplomatic lexicon to establish moral authority; Singapore relied on technical and collaborative rhetoric to project pragmatic leadership; and the Philippines drew on cultural to assert empathetic authority. These linguistic strategies, functioning as language capital, shaped debates on climate finance and the Loss and Damage Fund. The study contributes to political discourse theory and diplomatic practice by demonstrating how non-native English-speaking leaders strategically convert their national habitus into diplomatic resource in English-dominated international forums.

Keywords: Linguistic Capital, Political Authority, Global Diplomacy, Critical Discourse Analysis, Southeast Asia

Introduction

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP 29 serves as a high stakes arena where language functions as a primary instrument of diplomatic authority and influence. In this multicultural setting, state leaders do not merely negotiate policy; they strategically employ rhetorical finesse and lexical choices to assert credibility and navigate complex power asymmetries (Yan, 2024; Saaida, 2023). Language in diplomacy can be a strategic tool for constructing political power, where proficiency in dominant languages like English enable leaders to assert influence and negotiate global governance (Ajvazi, 2022). Within this framework, linguistic capital becomes a form of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991)

enabling representatives to negotiate global governance and advocate for national interests such as a climate equity and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Furthermore, the effectiveness of these diplomatic overtures is deeply influenced by cultural communication styles, ranging from the implicit cues of high-context cultures to the explicit, policy driven rhetoric of low-context model of communication (Hall, 1976). Consequently, the intersection of linguistic capital and cultural context provides a robust lens through which to analyse how national identities and political legitimacies are constructed on the global platform. More importantly, understanding these linguistic choices is essential to uncovering how state leaders reinforce authority and influence in the context of international climate negotiations (Aljarelah, 2024).

Despite the increasing geopolitical weight of Southeast Asian nations in international climate governance, there remains a significant gap in understanding how their state leaders leverage language to project authority in English dominated forums. Most existing studies focused on Western diplomatic styles, often overlooking how leaders from non-Western contexts navigate the power asymmetries of English-dominated negotiations (Wang & Huan, 2024). This concern is compounded by a persistent scholarly tendency to treat the region as a monolithic ASEAN voice, an assumption that overlooks the strategic diversity of its member states. Recent studies reveal a significant perceptual gap where the appearance of regional unity is often used as a cover to push their own separate goals (Zhang et al., 2025; 2025 Southeast Asian Climate Outlook, 2025). This gap forces state leaders into a dual performance where they must use a high context style to maintain regional harmony while switching to a direct and technocratic low-context communication to satisfy global demands for precision (Satriawan, 2026; Elite Asia, 2026). Without a study that combines cultural communication styles with the concept of linguistic capital, the specific ways that Southeast Asian leaders balance these strategies to gain authority remain misunderstood. This present study addresses this gap by investigating how the intersection of linguistic capital functions as a tool for political legitimacy and regional influence, providing a nuanced understanding of Southeast Asian strategic presence in global diplomacy.

To address this, the present study delineates a comparative scope focusing on Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. These nations offer a rich basis for comparative analysis due to their distinct communicative strategies and historical relationships with the English language (Hutabarat, 2025). In these contexts, the use of English is more than a practical necessity; it is a strategic performance of identity and leadership. Recent research by Zhang et al., (2025) reveals that while ASEAN has historically moved towards a 'one identity' framework through a shared language policy, individual member states use this platform to project specific political-security and economic ideologies. For example, Malaysia often employs English to champion the interest of the Global South, emphasising moral authority and equity. Singapore by contrast adopts a precise, low-context approach to signal technocratic leadership while the Philippines leverages its bilingual proficiency to highlight climate vulnerability (Zhang et al., 2025).

While these varied rhetorical strategies are observable, it remains unclear how these specific styles are used to navigate power and secure influence during global summits. To resolve this ambiguity, the present study frames its investigation through two main objectives: 1) to analyse the linguistic strategies used by Malaysian, Singaporean and the Philippine

leaders to construct political authority; and 2) to examine how these linguistic choices function as symbolic power in global diplomacy. To achieve these objectives, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What specific linguistic strategies do leaders from Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines employ to construct an authoritative voice at COP29?

RQ2: How do these rhetorical choices function as symbolic power in global diplomacy?

By addressing these research questions, the study underscores the need for linguistic adaptability in international leadership and advocates for a more inclusive diplomatic environment that equitably represents the voices of Southeast Asian countries.

Literature Review
Language, Power and Authority

Language serves as pivotal tool for constructing political authority in global diplomacy, fundamentally shaping how leaders are perceived and how international relations are negotiated (Kulmanov et al., 2024). Through strategic linguistic devices such as metaphors, inclusive pronouns (e.g. "we" to foster solidarity) and assertive tones, leaders legitimise their standing and persuade audiences within high-stakes forums like COP29. This construction of authority is increasingly critical as climate change has transitioned from a purely scientific discourse into a profoundly politicised arena where linguistic choices serve to normalise specific ideologies and social practices (Wang & Huan, 2024). For instance, framing climate change as a "shared battle" unifies diverse stakeholders under a common cause while assertive rhetoric signals a state's leadership commitment, thereby enhancing its diplomatic credibility. However, such discourse is rarely neutral. It remains a site where social power and dominance are enacted, often favouring those with the rhetorical capital to shape public perception (Van Dijk, 2001). As a result, state leaders must employ precise language to avoid misunderstandings while balancing domestic priorities with global expectations, rendering language a primary tool of symbolic power (Zulfikar, 2021).

This strategic deployment of discourse aligns with Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital, a subset of cultural capital comprising the language skills and rhetorical styles valued within specific 'linguistic market'. In global diplomacy, this linguistic capital extends beyond mere proficiency to the strategic deployment of language to negotiate social positioning, particularly in high-stakes forums such as COP29, where leaders address climate commitments. Research indicate that international platforms reconstruct the responsibilities of nations based on this 'linguistic market'. According to Nhung (2018) developed nations are often represented as reluctant leaders who frame climate commitments as potential threats to economic growth while developing countries are frequently portrayed as dependents or victims seeking financial and technological support. These representations are often managed through specific linguistic mechanisms such as passivisation and nominalisation which mask the agency of powerful nations and transform concrete responsibilities into abstract possibilities (Nhung, 2018).

For Southeast Asian leaders, this linguistic capital is particularly crucial. It allows them to navigate global platforms historically dominated by Western powers and assert their roles in the evolving architecture of climate governance (Ajvazi, 2022). For example, state leaders

who master English's rhetorical nuances gain credibility in COP29, enhancing their nation's diplomatic influence (Lauring et al., 2022). This is particularly significant given colonial legacies that have shaped the English language's prominence in their societies, influencing how they balance global expectations with regional identities. Furthermore, linguistic capital interacts with cultural communication styles, where state leaders' ability to adapt rhetoric to diverse audiences, such as diplomats, NGOs, and media, reflects Bourdieu's (1991) concept of habitus. Here, internalised cultural and professional norms guide the strategic and often intuitive use of language to achieve diplomatic ends (Heller, 2022). The strategic application of English reflects the politicisation of climate discourse, where national interests are embedded in linguistic frameworks (Wang & Huan, 2024). This is evidenced by studies showing that nations strategically alternate between 'globalising' and 'localising' climate actions to construct a responsible national identity (Huan, 2024).

English and Diplomacy in Southeast Asia
In the Association Asian Nations ASEAN, English serves as the sole working language. English facilitates diplomacy among member states with diverse linguistic landscapes. Proficiency in English enables regional representatives to articulate complex policies with clarity, persuade diverse audiences, and counter systemic power asymmetries, such as North-South divides in climate negotiations (Hutabarat, 2025). As the dominant lingua franca of the United Nations, English, significantly shapes negotiation outcomes and dictates perceptions of legitimacy (Xhemaili, 2022). This includes Malaysia's multilingual Malay-English context, Singapore's English-centric governance, and the Philippines' bilingual English-Filipino proficiency (Rahmani & Saeed, 2024). This strategic adoption of English underscores its role in regional cooperation and global forums like COP29. Proficiency in English directly enhances the influence of these state leaders, enabling them to advocate for regional priorities (such as climate equity etc) in a setting where English dominates formal negotiations and media coverage. However, the way this language is used varies by nations. For example, Singapore's leaders often leverage precise, policy-oriented English to project technocratic expertise, while state leaders from Malaysia and the Philippines may blend English with culturally resonant rhetoric to emphasise Global South perspectives, reflecting their unique "linguistic markets" of their home countries (Yan, 2024).

While English facilitates communication, its dominance also creates linguistic inequalities. State leaders who are less fluent in English can be marginalised, reinforcing power imbalances in climate talks where native speakers often hold rhetorical advantages (Blommaert, 2005). These inequalities are deeply rooted in colonial histories, with Malaysia and the Philippines inherited English from British and American rule, respectively while Singapore's post-independence English policy solidified the language as a tool for global competitiveness. For these nations, English acts as a form of linguistic capital that shapes their presence and diplomatic image. In the high stakes environment of COP29, the ability to command English is more than technical skills; it is a form of symbolic power used to navigate global hierarchies. According to Li et al., (2025), this reflects a pragmatic 'bamboo diplomacy' where middle powers use multifaceted discursive strategies to navigate great power rivalries, framing nations as either confrontational actors or vital economic partners depending on the cooperative context. By analysing the specific English usage of state leaders Southeast Asia, this study explores how they deploy this capital to establish an authoritative voice in international diplomacy setting.

A Multidimensional Approach to Discourse
In this study, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a robust theoretical lens to examine how language constructs power, ideology, and authority in political discourse (Fairclough, 1992). Using Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model, the study analyses COP 29 speeches through textual analysis, discursive practice and social practice. Textual analysis focuses on linguistic features, such as lexical choices, grammatical structures, and rhetorical strategies. Discursive practice examines how speeches are produced and consumed, shaped by institutional norms and cultural contexts. Social practice situates discourse within broader socio-political structures, such as the global North-South inequalities or colonial linguistic legacies, showing how speeches reflect or challenge power dynamics in climate governance (Saaida, 2023). This approach is consistent with the recent turn toward examining the interaction between material climate realities and discursive communication (Wang & Huan, 2024).

Through symbolic power, leaders shape perceptions by framing climate issues in ways that align with their national priorities. Abu Laila's (2025) study on world leaders demonstrated that effective persuasion in climate diplomacy relies extensively on the strategic use of modality, evidentiality and self-presentation. Furthermore, current studies suggest that technocratic formats can often conceal underlying neo-liberal free trade ideologies, requiring regional actors to employ specific linguistic capital to challenge these hidden power structures (Machin & Liu, 2024). While CDA has traditionally prioritised Western perspectives, Wang and Huan (2024) emphasise the necessity of expanding research into developing nations and regional contexts to rectify imbalances in global knowledge. For example, Chinese discourse often constructs the nation as a responsible major power in contrast to western capricious counterparts, particularly during the shifts in US climate policy (Wang & Huan, 2024).

In the study, CDA is strengthened by Bourdieu's (1991) theory of language and power which views language as symbolic capital. In the 'global linguistic market', English proficiency is the primary currency as it grants legitimacy to speakers who master it (Johnstone, 2021; Bourdieu & Boltanski, 1975). This authority is guided by habitus, a set of internalised social norms, that influence a leaders' rhetorical choices. Through symbolic power, leaders shape perceptions, framing climate issues in ways that align with their national priorities and global perceptions. Recent analyses of high-level diplomatic speeches by Wang et al., (2024) suggest a strategic preference for 'polyphony' and 'implicit argumentation to navigate the sensitivities of diverse stakeholders.

To further understand these rhetorical choices, the study integrates Hall's (1976) framework of communication styles. This allows for a comparison of how different national identities are expressed. High-context communication relies on implicit cues, shared cultural knowledge, and relational language, such as metaphors or collective appeals, to foster solidarity and authenticity in climate advocacy (Markowitz et al., 2014). Low-context communication emphasises explicit, precise language, often using technical or policy-oriented rhetoric to project expertise. While traditional body of literature treats context as a fixed cultural trait, recent studies suggest that Southeast Asian leaders employ a context-switching strategy to navigate global hierarchies (Hutabarat, 2025). Malaysia and the Philippines strategically deployed high-context communication to foster Global south solidarity and navigate sensitive geopolitical rivalries (Li et al., 2025). While Singapore utilised low-context

communication to emphasise explicit, technocratic and policy-oriented rhetoric to, which projecting expertise and aligning with the Western-dominated 'linguistic market' of the UN (Nhung, 2018).

In conclusion, despite the growing importance of Southeast Asian voices in global platforms, their diplomatic discourse remains under-researched. Current studies frequently prioritise Western perspectives, often overlooking how state leaders from non-native English-speaking nation navigate English-dominated negotiation (Wang & Huan, 2024). These state leaders employ distinct communication styles shaped by unique colonial legacies and ASEAN diplomatic norms. Furthermore, there is a lack of research that combines CDA, Bourdieu's linguistic capital and Hall's communication framework to examine this specific region. Thus, the study seeks to address this gap by applying this multi-lens approach to examine how leaders from Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines construct political authority. By doing so, the study provides a nuanced understanding of their symbolic power and strategic presence in global diplomacy.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design; a methodology suited for an in-depth examination of nuanced linguistic choices and rhetorical strategies embedded within political discourse. The study utilises purposive sampling, focusing specifically on Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines. The countries were selected based on their shared regional identity within ASEAN which allows for a rich, comparative analysis of how different sociopolitical backgrounds influence communication in global diplomacy setting. The primary data for this study consists of official transcripts of speeches delivered during the UNFCCC COP 29 summit. All selected speeches were delivered in English by respective state leaders. These transcripts were retrieved from the publicly available and official UNFCCC website to ensure data authenticity and credibility thus eliminating the requirement for individual informed consent while maintaining full transparency in the data selection process.

Data Analysis and Procedure

This study follows a rigorous six-step analytical process designed to examine how state leaders strategically employ language to construct political authority within the global climate arena. By following this systematic approach, the study ensures that the finding is both credible and replicable.

- *Step 1: Data acquisition and verification*. The process began with the collection of official speech transcript from UNFCCC database. Each transcript was subjected to preliminary verification check against available secondary records to ensure data integrity.
- *Step 2: Familiarisation and researcher reflexivity*. The speeches were read several times to understand their content and style. During this phase, reflexivity was practised by explicitly acknowledging the researchers' cultural and academic backgrounds to minimise interpretative bias.
- *Step 3: Coding and textual analysis*. In alignment with textual analysis dimension of CDA key language features, such as word choices, rhetorical techniques, and themes, were manually coded to identify how language reflects power. Transparency was maintained through detailed documentation of the coding and interpretation processes.

- ***Step 4: Cultural contextualisation***. Hall's (1976) high-context and low-context framework was applied to analyse the speeches' cultural context. This corresponds to CDA's discursive practice focusing on how regional identities influence diplomatic delivery. Rich, detailed explanations of the data were provided to offer a credible and comprehensive understanding.
- ***Step 5. Theoretical interpretation of linguistic capital***. Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital was applied to interpret how rhetorical choices function as tools of authority. This links the data to CDA's social practice by connecting individual speeches to broader global issues.
- ***Step 6: Comparative synthesis***. Finally, the study performed a comparative analysis of the the three countries. By noting the similarities and differences tied to their political contexts, the study reveals how language shapes their respective roles in international climate governance.

Findings

The discourse analysis reveals distinct language strategies employed by state leaders from Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines to construct political authority within their COP29 speeches. The following sections detail the lexical choices, rhetorical strategies, and stylistic devices used, illustrating how these strategies function as linguistic capital to project symbolic power.

Linguistic Strategies and Linguistic Capital

Lexical choices are pivotal in establishing each leader's political authority. In the context of global diplomacy, these choices function as linguistic capital that is utilised within the "linguistic market" of COP 29 (Bourdieu, 1991). By selecting specific terms to convey credibility, morality, or empathy, state leaders establish their legitimacy and exert symbolic power. Table 1 categorises these strategies as identified in the speeches of Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines.

Table 1
Lexical Strategies Used by Malaysian, Singaporean and Philippines State Leaders at COP29

Code	Malaysia	Singapore	Philippines	Analysis
Moral	"Galling" in "It is galling to see how developed countries spend billions of dollars on war and conflict…" (Page 8).	N/A	"Hope" in "We are their last, best hope" (Page 3).	Constructs moral authority by positioning the speaker as an advocate for justice, forming linguistic capital to rally support and challenge inequities, and enhancing legitimacy in the COP29 field.
Technical	"Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)" in "This document outlines our commitment to achieving our NDC target…" (Page 4).	"6 GW by 2035" in "Singapore raised our ambition… to around 6 GW by 2035" (Page 2).	"National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)" in "Support developing nations in implementing NAPs…" (Page 2).	Constructs technical authority by showcasing policy competence, forming linguistic capital to assert credibility and align with UNFCCC norms, and enhancing symbolic power.
Humanising	N/A	N/A	"Lives, livelihoods" in "These are actual lives, livelihoods, and futures…" (Page 2).	Constructs empathetic authority by humanising impacts, forming linguistic capital to evoke sympathy and urgency, and strengthening moral legitimacy.
Cultural	N/A	N/A	"Bayanihan" in "We draw inspiration from the Filipino tradition of 'bayanihan,'…" (Page 3).	Constructs cultural authority by grounding discourse in national identity, forming linguistic capital to build

				solidarity and authenticity, and enhancing diplomatic influence.
Diplomatic	"Multilateralism" in "We call for a recommitment to multilateralism…" (Page 8).	"Act in solidarity" in "Let us act in solidarity to turn our climate ambitions into reality" (Page 9).	"Collective" in "A New Collective Quantified Goal on climate finance…" (Page 2).	Constructs diplomatic authority by emphasising cooperation, forming linguistic capital to position the speaker as a collaborative leader, and enhancing legitimacy in global diplomacy.

Malaysia' s discourse is characterised by a blend of moral and diplomatic lexicons, by utilising terms such as "galling" (p.8) to critique the inaction of developed nations, Malaysia's state leader positions the country as a principal advocate for the Global South. This moral critique is supported by a commitment to ""multilateralism" (p.8) which underscores a cooperative leadership style. Furthermore, the use of technical lexicon, such as "Nationally Determined Contribution" (p. 4) bolsters credibility by demonstrating policy expertise. These choices collectively formed language capital, enhancing Malaysia's symbolic power as a moral and competent actor in the climate field.

Singapore's rhetoric relies heavily on technical lexicon such as "6 GW by 2035" (p.2) and diplomatic lexicon, "act in solidarity" (p. 9) to build pragmatic authority. Precise terms, such as "6 GW" and "US$500 million" (Page 7), showcase technocratic expertise. This approach aligns with Hall's (1976) know-context communication where clarity and precision are used to project expertise. By pairing these technical markers with diplomatic phrases such as "act in solidarity " (p.9) Singapore establishes itself as a reliable and innovative leader. This deployment of linguistic capital ensures the nation's legitimacy and influence within the English-dominated negotiations.

The Philippines employs humanising, cultural and technical lexicons to construct empathetic authority. Terms such as "lives, livelihoods" (p.2) evokes sympathy, while the cultural tradition of "bayanihan" (p. 3) fosters authenticity and solidarity. This approach reflects high-context communication, utilising emotional and cultural appeals to strengthen advocacy. Simultaneously, technical terms such as "National Adaptation Plans" (p. 2), signals policy engagement, allowing the nation to navigate power asymmetries as a credible and compassionate advocate for the Global South.

Rhetorical Strategies and the Construction of Authority
Beyond lexical choices, the analysis in Table 2 reveals that rhetorical strategies are central to establishing political authority. By utilising Ethos, Pathos and Logos state leaders enhance their credibility, evoke emotion, and present logical arguments, embodying linguistic capital to project symbolic power.

Table 2
Rhetorical Strategy Applied by Malaysian, Singaporean and Philippines State Leaders at COP29

Code	Malaysia	Singapore	Philippines	Analysis
Ethos	"We are also enacting a Climate Change Bill, which will enhance Malaysia's climate change governance…" (Page 3).	"Singapore pledged up to US$500 million to crowd in other concessional capital…" (Page 7).	"Two weeks after COP29, the Philippines opens its doors to host [Loss and Damage Fund]…" (Page 2).	Constructs credible authority by showcasing expertise or leadership, forming linguistic capital to position the speaker as a trustworthy and competent actor, enhancing symbolic power in the COP29 field.
Pathos	"It is galling to see how developed countries spend trillions of dollars to fuel war and conflict…" (Page 4).	"The latest Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) Synthesis Report underscores the stark reality…" (Page 1).	"In the last 2 months alone, we were hit by three strong tropical cyclones… affecting 7 million Filipinos…" (Page 1).	Constructs moral/emotional authority by engaging audiences' emotions, forming linguistic capital to rally support and legitimise advocacy, strengthening diplomatic influence.
Logos	"Although we contribute less than 1% of global emissions…" (Page 4).	"As an alternative energy-disadvantaged city state, Singapore does not have access to the same decarbonisation potential…" (Page 2).	"We advocate for… a New Collective Quantified Goal on climate finance…" (Page 2).	Constructs rational authority by presenting logical arguments, forming linguistic capital to justify actions and demands, enhancing credibility and legitimacy in global diplomacy.

Malaysia employs Ethos by detailing national policies, such as "enacting a Climate Change Bill" (p. 3), to construct credible authority and showcase governance expertise. Pathos Appeal was also evident in critiques such as "…developed countries spend trillions on war…" (p. 4), evoking indignation to assert moral authority as a Global South advocate. Furthermore,

Logos Appeal justified advocacy with data. For example, "less than 1% of global emissions" (p. 4), reinforced rational authority. Collectively, these strategies formed language capital, positioning Malaysia as a credible, moral, and rational leader, cumulatively resulting in symbolic power.

Singapore prioritises Ethos through institutional leadership in initiatives such as the US$500 million pledged (p. 7), establishing pragmatic authority as an innovative hub. Its use of Logos Appeal is particularly prominent, outlining specific geographical constraints as an "alternative energy-disadvantaged city state" (p. 2), to logically justify its policy approach. While Pathos is used more subtly to convey urgency regarding the "stark reality" (p. 1) of climate change. This strategic deployment of language capital emphasises low-context clarity (Hall, 1976) and enhances Singapore's symbolic power as a technocratic actor.

Meanwhile, the Philippines relies on Pathos to construct empathetic authority highlighting extreme vulnerability through the mention of "…three strong tropical cyclones… affecting 7 million Filipinos…" (p. 1) and their impact on "7 million Filipinos" (p.1). This is balanced by Ethos, built through proactive leadership in "hosting the Loss and Damage Fund" (p. 2) and Logos, utilised to demand financial equity via the "New Collective Quantified Goal" (p. 2). By blending high-context emotional resonance with the precise policy demands of international policy, the Philippines effectively builds linguistic capital, amplifying its symbolic power as both a moral and credible advocate.

Stylistic Devices and the Strengthening of Authority
Beyond the strategic use of rhetorical appeals, stylistic devices play a critical role in strengthening political authority. By creating vivid narratives, reinforcing core commitments, and showcasing diplomatic connectivity these devices function as additional linguistic capital. As illustrated in Table 3, Malaysia Singapore and the Philippines employ specific stylistic tools to enhance their symbolic power within the COP29 negotiations.

Table 3
Stylistic Devices Deployed by Malaysian, Singaporean and Philippines State Leaders at COP29

Code	Malaysia	Singapore	Philippines	Analysis
Metaphor	"Crossroads" in "We are at a crossroads in our fight against climate change…" (Page 2).	"All hands on deck" in "It will require all hands on deck – from governments to…" (Page 4).	"Bayanihan" in "We draw inspiration from the Filipino tradition of 'bayanihan'…" (Page 3).	Constructs visionary authority by creating compelling narratives or relatable imagery, forming linguistic capital to engage audiences and position the speaker as a leader with insight or moral clarity, enhancing symbolic power in the COP29 field.
Repetition	Repetition of "multilateralism" in "We call for a recommitment to multilateralism……Multilateralism remains key…" (Page 4).	N/A	Repetition of "vulnerable populations" in "The most vulnerable are listening in…in…call for equity for vulnerable populations…" (Pages 1–2).	Constructs steadfast authority by reinforcing core messages, forming linguistic capital to emphasise leadership and conviction, and strengthening legitimacy in global diplomacy
Parallelism	N/A	Parallelism in "We are working with countries in and beyond Southeast Asia, such as with Japan on Green Partnership initiatives, and with the IMO on decarbonisation…" (Page 3).	N/A	Constructs connective authority by showcasing networks or coordinated efforts, forming linguistic capital to position the speaker as a collaborative leader, enhancing diplomatic influence.

Malaysia utilises metaphor to depict climate action as a critical juncture or "crossroad" (p.2), thereby constructing visionary authority. This imagery positions Malaysia as a forward-thinking Global South leader. Furthermore, the repetition of "multilateralism" (p.4) emphasised steadfast commitment to collective action, enhancing the nation's moral authority. By leveraging these high-context (Hall, 1976) stylistic devices, Malaysia effectively generates linguistic capital that amplifies its symbolic power as a principled advocate.

Singapore utilises metaphor such as the "all hands on deck…" (p.4) appeal to evoke collective effort and build connective authority. This is further supported by the use of

parallelism when listing international partnerships, such as initiative with Japan and the IMO. These structured devices highlight Singapore's extensive networks and reinforce its pragmatic technocratic authority. In line with low-context communication preferences, these precise stylistic choices serve as language capital, establishing Singapore's symbolic power as a collaborative and efficient hub in global climate forum.

The Philippines deploys metaphor to symbolise communal unity through the tradition of "bayanihan" (p.3), constructing cultural and empathetic authority that resonates with other climate-vulnerable nations. The repetition of the phrase "vulnerable populations" (p.1-2) serves to highlight the core of their advocacy, strengthening their moral authority. By blending high-context cultural imagery with repetitive emphasis, the Philippines's state leader builds a form of language capital than enhances their symbolic power as a compassionate voice for climate justice.

Linguistic Choices as Language Capital in Global Diplomacy
The following findings illustrate how linguistic choices function as language capital to influence global climate diplomacy. Table 4 presents synthesis of lexical, rhetorical, and stylistic strategies across four key themes: Equity Advocacy, Policy Alignment, Collaborative Framing, and Vulnerability Emphasis. Each theme is analysed through its diplomatic implications, and its theoretical connections to Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic power and Hall's high-context or low-context communication frameworks.

Table 4
Linguistic Choices as Language Capital in Shaping Global Diplomacy

Code	Malaysia	Singapore	Philippines	Analysis
Equity Advocacy	Moral term "galling" and pathos in "It is galling to see how developed countries spend billions on war and conflict…" (Page 8); repetition of "responsibility" (Page 4).	N/A	Pathos in "The most vulnerable are listening in…" (Page 3); repetition of "equity" (Pages 1–3).	Functions as language capital by challenging North-South power imbalances, rallying Global South support, and influencing climate finance debates, accruing symbolic power to shape equitable UNFCCC outcomes (high-context).
Policy Alignment	Technical term "Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)" and ethos in "This document outlines our commitment to achieving our	Technical term "6 GW by 2035" and logos in "Singapore raised our ambition… to around 6 GW by 2035" (Page 2).	Technical term "National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)" and logos in "Support developing nations in implementing NAPs…" (Page 2).	Functions as language capital by ensuring credibility and alignment with UNFCCC norms, facilitating negotiation influence and policy adoption, accruing symbolic power through expertise (low-context).

	NDC target…" (Page 4).			
Collaborative Framing	Diplomatic term "multilateralism" in "We call for a recommitment to multilateralism…" (Page 4); metaphor "crossroads" (Page 4).	Diplomatic term "act in solidarity" and metaphor "all hands on deck" in "It will require all hands on deck…" (Page 7); parallelism in "We are working with countries in and beyond Southeast Asia…" (Page 3).	Diplomatic term "collective" in "A New Collective Quantified Goal…" (Page 2); metaphor "bayanihan" (Page 3).	Functions as language capital by building alliances and promoting cooperation, enhancing diplomatic influence and regional/global partnerships, accruing symbolic power through inclusivity (high-context).
Vulnerability Emphasis	N/A	N/A	Humanising term "lives, livelihoods" and pathos in "These are actual lives, livelihoods, and futures…" (Page 2); repetition of "vulnerable populations" (Pages 1–3).	Functions as language capital by evoking global empathy and demanding justice, influencing loss and damage frameworks and support for at-risk nations, accruing symbolic power through moral advocacy (high-context).

Equity Advocacy encompasses moral lexicon, pathos appeals, and repetition, exemplified by Malaysia's use of "galling" (p. 8) to critique global inequities and the Philippines' emphasis on "equity" (p. 1–3). These strategies challenge North-South disparities to shape climate finance negotiations, reflecting high-context shared norms and each nation's habitus. Conversely, Policy Alignment employs technical lexicon and ethos/logos appeals, exemplified by Malaysia's "Nationally Determined Contribution" (p. 4), Singapore's "6 GW by 2035" (p.2), and the Philippines' "National Adaptation Plans" (p. 2). These choices ensure low-context credibility and alignment with UNFCCC frameworks to enhance negotiation influence through demonstrated expertise.

Collaborative Framing utilises diplomatic lexicon, metaphors, and parallelism, including Malaysia's "multilateralism" (p. 4), Singapore's "all hands-on deck" (p. 7), and the Philippines' "bayanihan" (p. 3). These strategies foster alliances through high context appeals to solidarity, thereby accruing symbolic power. Finally, Vulnerability Emphasis, predominantly in the Philippines' use of "lives, livelihoods" (p. 2) and repetition of "vulnerable populations" (p. 1–3), leverages humanising lexicon and pathos to advocate for loss and damage

frameworks. This approach is rooted in the nation's vulnerable habitus and high-context empathy, effectively demanding global climate justice.

Discussion

Linguistic Capital as a Determinant of Political Authority

The findings reveal that Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines strategically deploy linguistic capital to construct distinct forms of political authority, reflecting their unique positions in the global order. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1991) assertion that language serves as symbolic power to assert influence within specific social contexts. In the high stakes of COP 29, these leaders converted their rhetorical choices into legitimacy, navigating an English-dominated "linguistic market" where proficiency is prerequisite for credibility (Lauring et al., 2022).

On one hand, Malaysia transformed a moral lexicon and visionary metaphors into moral authority. By critiquing develop nations inaction (e.g. "galling," p. 8) Malaysia positioned the nation as a principled leader for the Global South. This confirms Yan's (2024) observation that Malaysia often blends English with culturally resonant rhetoric to emphasise equity. This deployment of language capital enables Malaysia to challenge hegemonic structure, effectively using what Bourdieu's (1991) describe as the ability to impose meaning upon the climate debate.

On the other hand, Singapore constructed technocratic and connective authority through technical lexicon (e.g. "6 GW by 2035," p. 2). As noted by Rahmani and Saeed (2024), Singapore's English-centric governance allows the leader to project an image of global competitiveness. By leveraging a low-context communication style (Hall, 1976), Singapore focused on explicit, policy-oriented rhetoric that signals expertise. This expertise functions as linguistic capital, enabling a small nation to carve a niche as technocratic leader, thereby accruing symbolic power through competence rather than size.

While Malaysia and Singapore established their standing through moral and technocratic legitimacy, the Philippines constructed empathetic and cultural authority. By foregrounding humanising lexicon (e.g. "lives, livelihoods," p. 2), and the "bayanihan" metaphor (p. 3), the Philippines transformed its national habitus into strategic diplomatic asset. This mirrors Heller's (2022) conceptualisation of habitus as a set of that guide the performance of identity. In this framework, the Philippines utilised cultural identity as a strategic resource to navigate specific linguistic market, which in this case, the COP29 negotiations. In sum, the findings underscore that language capital is context-specific, shaped by each nation's unique geopolitical and cultural habitus. This multifaceted performance of language demonstrates how political authority is strategically built through discourse.

The Strategic Role of Language Capital in Shaping Global Diplomacy

The findings further illustrate that linguistic choices function as active devices of language capital used to navigate power asymmetries and influence the outcomes of global diplomacy. This reflects the social practice dimensions of CDA, which examines how discourse reflects the and challenges broader power structures (Fairclough, 1991). On one hand, Malaysia's advocacy for equity, rooted in high-context moral appeals (Hall, 1976) and the repetition of terms like "responsibility" (p. 4), challenged North-South inequities. By aligning its discourse with the Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC)

principle, Malaysia utilised its linguistic capital to shape climate finance debates. This aligns with Ajvazi (2022) who argues that English proficiency serves as a critical mechanism for leaders to counteract power of asymmetries. Mastering diplomatic English enables southeast Asian leaders to reframe global narratives, ensuring regional priorities with a rhetorical sophistication that demand inclusion. Consequently, Malaysia is able to assert leadership in a space traditionally dominated by Western powers.

On the other hand, Singapore's use of policy alignment and collaborative framing, marked by technical lexicon, ethos/logos appeals, and stylistic devices such as "all hands-on deck" (p. 7), functioned as a diplomatic bridge. By balancing low context calls for solidarity, Singapore maximised the nation's influence as a mediator. This strategic "bilingualism" of communication styles facilitated its leadership in institutional frameworks like the Financing Ambitious Sustainability Transitions Partnership (FAST-P) partnership (Zulfikar, 2021). While the first two nations focused on finance and policy appeals, the Philippines emphasis on vulnerability was instrumental in driving the diplomacy of the Loss and Damage Fund. Its linguistic capital effectively evoked global empathy through high-context cues, while simultaneously meeting the technical requirements of international negotiations. As Saaida (2023) suggests, such discourse does not merely reflect reality but actively reshapes power dynamics, allowing the Philippines to shift diplomatic priorities toward climate justice. Collectively, these strategies achieved the second objective by illustrating how language capital enables smaller states to influence global diplomacy, navigating power asymmetries through strategic linguistic choices that resonate in the COP29 field.

Conclusion
This study has illuminated the intricate ways in which Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines strategically leveraged linguistic capital to construct political authority and shape the discourse of global diplomacy at COP29. The findings reveal that these linguistic choices are not merely stylistic but function as symbolic power that influences diplomatic outcomes. Malaysia skilfully utilised a moral and diplomatic lexicon to establish a principled moral authority; Singapore deployed technical and collaborative rhetoric to project technocratic legitimacy, and the Philippines harnessed humanising cultural metaphors to construct an empathetic authority. By integrating linguistic capital with CDA model, this study demonstrates how state leaders from the Global South accrue symbolic profit within an English-dominated linguistic market. The study also illustrates that high-context and low-context communication strategies are not mutually exclusive but are used interchangeably to balance regional authenticity with technocratic norms.

These insights provide actionable strategies for leaders and diplomats to enhance their diplomatic impact through linguistic adaptability. Rather than focusing solely on English proficiency, the findings highlight the importance of transforming national habitus into a strategic resource to build credibility across different audiences. Consequently, diplomatic training should emphasise the mobility of cultural capital for high-stakes persuasion, helping non-native speakers navigate the nuances of international forums. Furthermore, the study advocates for inclusive multilingual diplomacy within global platforms such as UNFCCC. By expanding translation services and reducing linguistic barriers, more equitable representation especially from smaller states can be ensured.

Despite these insights, the study's limitation must be acknowledged. The scope was primarily restricted to English transcripts from three nations during a single summit. Consequently, future research should adopt multilingual and multimodal analyses to capture a broader spectrum of diplomatic communications. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine how linguistic strategies evolve across COP summits. Moving forward, exploring these shifting power dynamics will be crucial to ensuring that the diverse voices of Southeast Asia resonate with greater effectiveness and continue to reshape the landscape of global governance.

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