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Mitigation Strategies in Prabowo Subianto's Taking the Turn on the Program "Presiden Prabowo Menjawab"

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Abstract
Public political interviews require effective turn-taking management and mitigation strategies to ensure that communication proceeds smoothly, politely, and harmoniously. Although both topics have been widely studied, research linking them in public political interviews remains limited. This study analyzes the use of mitigation strategies based on Caffi's perspective in President Prabowo's taking the turn, grounded in Stenström's turn-taking theory, during his interview with Najwa Shihab. Using a qualitative document analysis, data from three interview videos were transcribed, coded, and categorized in MAXQDA. The results show that in taking the turn, President Prabowo employed all three types of mitigation strategies, namely "bushes", "hedges", and "shields", with "bushes" being the most prevalent. In his interruptions, he also used all three strategies, again dominated by "bushes". Overall, the findings indicate that he employs mitigation strategies in a complex manner to reduce potential conflict and lower tension in public political interactions.

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Introduction

Interviews with prominent political figures such as President Prabowo Subianto require effective turn-taking management that adheres to prevailing social norms. Turn-taking plays a key role in ensuring that conversations proceed without hindrance so that they can run smoothly until the end (Sacks et al., 1974). Additionally, conversations also require mitigation strategies as one of the primary communication strategies for maintaining interpersonal relationships (Cheng et al., 2023). Figueras Bates & Kotwica (2020) state that mitigation strategies serve to soften or reduce the intensity of a message, keeping the conversation flowing without offending the partner and reducing tension. From this explanation, it can be seen that mitigation is closely related to politeness but has a broader scope (Widya & Agustiana, 2023). Based on this explanation, the use of mitigation strategies in managing turn-taking in the context of public political interviews plays a crucial role in the flow of the conversation. Therefore, a study on this topic is necessary to identify the appropriate and effective use of mitigation strategies in political conversations.

Statements by a head of state are always under the public spotlight, as they reflect his attitudes, policies, and leadership perspectives (Widad & Mukhzamilah, 2026). This is consistent with the broader function of mass media and public dialogue as a primary channel through which political figures shape public perception, political attitudes, and

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trust toward presidential candidates and leaders (Khoirunnisa et al., 2025). One of President Prabowo Subianto's most discussed public statements was his interview on the program "Prabowo Menjawab" in the dialogue segment with Najwa Shihab. This was influenced by Najwa Shihab's persona as a journalist known for being assertive, well-informed, and articulate in both speaking and steering the flow of conversation (Hendi, 2023). Amid critical questions, the President had to manage his turn-taking while implementing appropriate mitigation strategies, so that his messages would be accepted by the public without offending the interlocutor and while maintaining his leadership image. His speech acts in this dialogue are the focus of this study, given the dynamics of turn-taking and the extensive use of mitigation strategies within it.

Studies on mitigation strategies in conversation have been conducted extensively (Mao & Zhao, 2019). For example, Kravchenko et al. (2023) identified linguistic and pragmatic mitigation markers related to the topos of Precaution, and Ren (2018) examined mitigation strategies in Mandarin-language online consumer reviews of the Kindle E-Reader on Amazon China. However, research that thoroughly links mitigation strategies to turn-taking structures in public political discourse remains relatively scarce. The two have often been discussed separately, and their application in political interviews, such as that between Najwa Shihab and President Prabowo, has been scarcely examined, even though they influence one another in conversation. Given this gap, new research is needed to address it.

This study aims to fill that gap by examining the mitigation strategies employed by President Prabowo when taking turns in his conversation with Najwa Shihab, which are categorized into three methods: starting up, taking over, and interrupting. The novelty of this study lies in its combination of conversational elements that have rarely been discussed together. This study draws on Stenströms (1994) perspective, according to which turn-taking consists of three main elements: taking the turn, holding the turn, and yielding the turn. Additionally, it is based on Caffi's mitigation strategies, where mitigation strategies in taking the turn refer to the use of more tactful language to introduce a topic or ask a sensitive question (Albelda Marco & Arguedas, 2021). An example is President Prabowo's use of language that does not overly emphasize differences in status, such as speaking politely and not interrupting while the other speaker is still speaking.

The main focus is on how President Prabowo takes his turns, since, based on the researcher's observations, taking turns is the dominant method of managing turns throughout the conversation. The analysis will reveal the influence of mitigation strategies on dialogue quality, fluency of communication, and the relationship between the two parties. Thus, this study will fill a gap in pragmatic and sociolinguistic research by providing deeper insights into the role of mitigation strategies in managing turn-taking in political interviews, with a focus on effective and constructive taking the turn. This study addresses two research questions: how mitigation strategies are represented through President Prabowo's taking over and interruptions in public discourse?

Literature Review

1. Taking the Turn in Political Discourse

According to the Stenströms (1994) taking the turn is the act by which a conversation participant begins speaking to respond, add to, or continue the conversation. The speaker must take the initiative to begin speaking or introduce the topic, and

cooperation between listener and speaker plays a crucial role, so taking the turn is essential for an orderly conversation. It can take three forms: starting up, taking over, and interrupting.

Starting up refers to any utterance that introduces a new topic and is not a response to a previous part of the conversation. It can be a hesitant start or a clean start. A hesitant start occurs when a speaker is not yet sufficiently prepared, characterized by pauses at the beginning of an utterance, word repetition, filler words, unstable intonation, repeated corrections, and nervous gestures or expressions. A clean start occurs when the speaker is fully prepared, evident in the absence of pauses and word repetition, as well as regular intonation and sentence structure.

Taking over is taking the turn after the previous speaker has finished, so it is related to the previous utterance. It has two types: uptakes and links. Uptakes are responses or answers to the previous speaker's utterance (Virginia & Mubarak, 2024), typically marked by words or expressions *such as "yes," "no," "ohh," "hmm,"* and *"ah"*. Links continue the previous speaker's utterance, marked by conjunctions such as *"and", "but", "because",* and *"so*".

Interruption is taking the turn before the previous speaker has finished. This can occur because the speaker does not want to give the listener a turn, or the listener does not want to wait for their turn (Priyastuti, 2017). Nevertheless, interruption also serves positive functions, such as correcting or supplementing the previous speaker's statement. Interruptions can be attention-grabbing or meta-commentary. Attention-grabbing interruptions emphasize certain words at the beginning of a statement to draw attention, for example through a higher pitch, a louder voice, and words like *"hey", "look",* and *"listen"*. Meta-comments refer to interruptions made using polite language, typically in formal situations.

2. Mitigation Strategies in Conversational Dialogue

Mitigation strategies are a set of tools designed and used to soften, reduce, and alleviate certain aspects of a person's speech (Hübscher et al., 2023), so that speech does not come across as harsh, direct, or forceful. Citing Widya & Agustiana (2023), Caffi divides mitigation strategies into three forms: bushes (content softeners), hedges (illocutionary softeners), and shields (linguistic shields).

Bushes soften the content of a message by employing less definitive or vague language (Caffi, 2007), allowing speakers to reduce their commitment or responsibility for what they say. Examples include the use of small words, de-intensifiers, approximations, qualifiers, or downplaying statements (Ahmed et al., 2024). Minimizing words such as *"a little"* and *"for a moment",* qualifying words such *as "maybe"* and *"it would be best",* approximative or estimative words such *as "around"* and *"approximately",* downplaying words such *as "only"* and *"just",* and downplaying statements such as *"not too difficult"* and *"no problem"*.

Hedges fall within the scope of the pragmatic force of the illocutionary aspect of speech acts. They reduce the force of a speech act, serve as markers of the speaker's uncertainty, soften a commanding or urgent tone, and protect the speaker's and addressee's face, making the utterance sound more polite, hesitant, and non-coercive. Ahmed et al. (2024) note that *hedges* can consist of mitigated performatives (such as *"I suggest"*), conditional modes (such as *"if"*), routine expressions (such as *"if you don't mind"*), deferred supporting steps (such as *"I'll check first"*), and so on.

Shields relate to the source of the utterance, creating distance from it by linking it to the opinions of others, so that responsibility does not fall directly on the speaker.

Al-ebadi & Hassan (2020) note three forms: deictic shields, which replace the subject or temporal reference; quotational shields, which use specific expressions so the speaker appears to be merely quoting or conveying something non-literally; and topical shields, in which the speaker shifts the topic to avoid sensitive issues. Shields serve to avoid uncomfortable situations that could threaten the speaker's or the addressee's face.

Methodology

1. Type of Research

This study employs a qualitative method using document analysis. Qualitative research is conducted in a descriptive and analytical manner. This method was chosen because it aligns with the research objective of conducting an in-depth analysis of an existing phenomenon. Document analysis was selected because the data consists of pre-existing materials, namely online content from YouTube. This approach allows researchers to obtain rich, detailed data and to understand real-world conditions without being physically present in the field (Sulistyorini et al., 2025). In other words, the researcher did not engage in direct data collection.

2. Data and Data Sources

The data consist of President Prabowo's utterances in his dialogue with Najwa Shihab, involving taking the turn as defined by Stenströms (1994) and mitigation strategies as described by Caffi (2007). The data were obtained from three videos on Najwa Shihab's YouTube channel: "Presiden Prabowo Menjawab"; "Presiden Prabowo Menjawab (PART 1): Serangan Aktivis, BOP, MBG, dan Dampak Perang"; and "Presiden Prabowo Menjawab (PART 2): Efisiensi, Pertaruhan MBG & Reformasi Kepolisian". Only the segments where President Prabowo was in dialogue with Najwa Shihab were used. These were selected because their exchanges consistently attract public attention and are rich in turn-taking management and mitigation strategies, a result of their positions in society. The data sources were chosen for their ease of access and the credibility of the channels.

3. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through document analysis, in which the researcher gathered documents as research data; in this study, the documents were videos. The video documents were then transcribed and processed using MAXQDA during data analysis.

4. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Creswell (2009) six-stage framework, supported throughout by MAXQDA, a linguistic corpus software that can convert data into segmented, meaningful concepts (Syahri et al., 2026). First, the researcher collected and organized three videos of varying duration from Najwa Shihab's YouTube channel. Second, the videos were reviewed thoroughly, transcribed, and imported into MAXQDA as text documents for easier repeated review. Third, the transcripts were coded in detail using MAXQDA's Code System, grouping utterances according to Stenström's (1994) theory of turn-taking, specifically taking the turn, and Caffi's (2007) mitigation strategies, which allowed consistent classification traceable back to source. Fourth, the coding results were used to describe conversational contexts and develop analytical categories, with patterns identified through MAXQDA's Code Matrix Browser and Visual Tools and linked to relevant theoretical concepts. Fifth, findings were narrated in the report and supported by data excerpts drawn directly from the MAXQDA coding results. Finally, the sixth stage

interpreted the findings in relation to the interview context, theoretical framework, and relevant prior studies to draw conclusions addressing the research objectives.

Results

Presented below is Figure 1, the code cloud generated from the data analysis, followed by Figures 2 and 3, which show the frequency distribution of each coded data item.



Figure 1. Code Cloud Generated From the Data Analysis

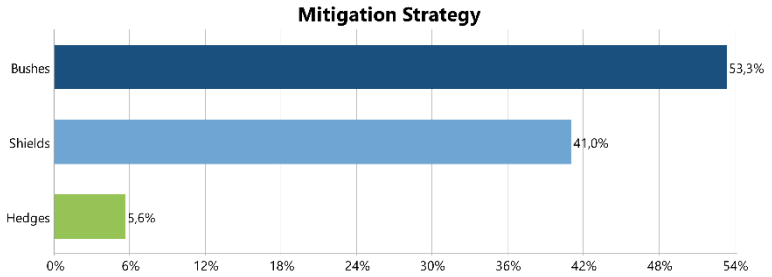


Figure 2. Frequency Distribution of Coded Mitigation Strategies Used by President Prabowo

Figure 2 shows the frequency distribution of the coded data on the mitigation strategies used by President Prabowo. The most frequently used strategy was bushes, followed by shields, and lastly hedges.

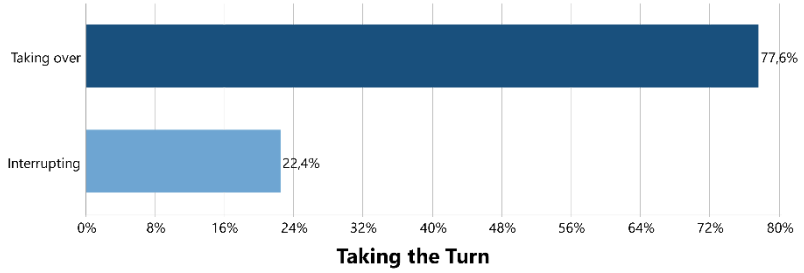


Figure 3. Frequency Distribution of Coded Taking the Turn Used by President Prabowo

Figure 3 shows the frequency of the forms of taking the turn used by President Prabowo during his dialogue with Najwa. Taking over was more dominant than interrupting.

1. Representations of Taking the Turn by Taking Over

1.1 Link

Table 1. Mitigation Strategies for "Link" in Taking Over by President Prabowo

No	Type of Mitigation	Category	Meaning	Word	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Bushes	Requesting agreement	Confirmation words	bener, nggak?; ya; iya, kan?	28	32.94%
2.	Bushes	Obscuring quantity	Indefinite numerals	sekian; beberapa; ratusan; banyak	9	10.59%
3.	Bushes	Limiting the scale	Magnitude downplayers	hanya	1	1.18%
4.	Bushes	Expressing doubt	Uncertainty words	mungkin	4	4.7%
5.	Bushes	Subjective opinions	Subjective words	saya ini kok berpendapat; menurut saya; saya katakan; saya ingin memberi kesempatan; saya lihat	6	7.06%
6.	Bushes	Weakening the meaning	Multi-meaning words	tidak baik	1	1.18%
7.	Bushes	Suggesting shared responsibility	Approximate values	katakanlah	1	1.18%
8.	Bushes	Limiting frequency	Frequency downplayers	kadang-kadang	1	1.18%
9.	Hedges	Introducing a possibility	Conditional expressions	kalau	2	2.35%

10.	Shields	Grounding with justification	Stated reason	karena	1	1.18%
11.	Shields	Substituting I with 'we', 'our'	Collective "we"	kita	31	36.47%
	Total				85	100%

1.1.1 Bushes

1.1.1.1 Requesting Agreement

Context: this closes an extended turn near the end of the RUU Polri exchange. Having just cited roughly Rp1,440 trillion in recovered state losses and invoked the case of Mexican officials compromised by drug cartels as a cautionary example, Prabowo ends the turn on a note of shared vigilance. Quote (1), *"...check and balance transparansi yang bener itu sangat penting, iya kan?"* (…proper checks and balances and genuine transparency are very important, right?) the tag *"iya kan?"* (right?) is the speaker's request for agreement, leaving room for confirmation rather than stating the opinion as definitive and conclusive. This makes the message more flexible and less absolute, letting the speaker avoid being too bound by its precision while projecting solidarity by assuming a common perspective with the interlocutor, which in turn helps sustain interactional continuity.

1.1.1.2 Obscuring Quantity

Context: produced in the RUU Polri segment, immediately after Najwa points out that the public has no access to the bill's official draft. Prabowo responds by pointing to elected legislators as an already-adequate channel of representation. Quote (2), *"..kan ada sekian ratus wakil rakyat…"* (There are several hundred representatives…) The word *"sekian"* (several) paired with *"ratus"* (hundred) avoids a specific number, leaving the proposition unbound to any precise figure and reflecting a low level of speaker commitment used to preempt objections. From a turn-taking perspective, this helps maintain conversational flow by directing the interlocutor's attention to the statement's general meaning rather than debatable factual details.

1.1.1.3 Limiting Scale

Context: this appears in the discussion of the Makan Bergizi Gratis program, right after Najwa asks which flagship program would be cut first under fiscal pressure; Prabowo had just argued that inefficiency, not a genuine lack of funds, is the real constraint. Quote (3), *"...hanya tinggal diorganisir,"* (…it only needs to be organized) the word *"hanya"* (only) reduces the perceived weight of the organizing process, as if it were a simple step without any burden, so the proposition is not tied to a specific scale that could be contested. This lets the speaker avoid potential objections while maintaining the smooth flow of the conversation.

1.1.1.4 Expressing Doubt

Context: this line follows Prabowo's claim of having saved roughly Rp300–500 trillion through first-year efficiency measures, in response to a question about possible Rp200 trillion fuel-subsidy pressure. Quote (4), *"Oke mungkin benar"* (Okay, maybe that's true) the word *"mungkin"* (maybe) places the proposition in the realm of possibility rather

than certainty, creating epistemic distance between the speaker and the claim so that it cannot be directly verified or refuted by the interlocutor. This allows the speaker to maintain the flow of conversation by minimizing potential conflict or objection.

1.1.1.5 Subjective Opinions

Context: this follows a moderator's aside telling Prabowo to be patient about waiting until 2029 to leave office, in an exchange about the disproportionate arrest of student activists during the August unrest. Quote (5), *"...yang saya lihat, ya..."* (…from what I see) the phrase *"yang saya lihat"* (from what I see) frames the utterance as the speaker's personal view rather than a universally applicable objective statement, so its truth cannot be factually verified because it was framed from the outset as a non-binding subjective judgment. This lets the speaker convey a viewpoint without provoking a direct rebuttal, maintaining the smooth flow of the conversation.

1.1.1.6 Weakening Meaning

Context: part of Prabowo's answer to whether he would follow through on the Police Reform Acceleration Committee's recommendations, even where doing so meant confronting entrenched power structures. Quote (6), *"...kondisi-kondisi yang tidak baik itu..."* (… those unfavorable conditions …) the phrase *"tidak baik"* (unfavorable conditions) is a euphemism substituting for sharper terms like bad, damaged or problematic softening the assessment so the proposition feels more neutral and less provocative, and the interlocutor is not prompted to react defensively.

1.1.1.7 Suggesting Shared Responsibility

Context: offered in the same response on state budget inefficiency, immediately after Prabowo asserts that roughly 30% of the Rp3,700 trillion state budget is lost to waste. Quote (7), *"...dari 30% katakanlah e 10% produktivitas"* (…from 30%, let's say, uh, 10% productivity…), *"katakanlah"* (let's say) frames the 10% figure as a tentative illustration rather than verified data, implicitly inviting the interlocutor to accept or negotiate it, so responsibility for the proposition is not borne solely by the speaker. This helps the speaker avoid the risk of factual confrontation that could disrupt the conversation's flow.

1.1.1.8 Limiting Frequency

Context: later in the same response on institutional reform, describing how Prabowo gives underperforming police or military officials a private warning and a grace period, such as three months, before harsher measures follow. Quote (8), *"...kadang-kadang e itu jalan yang terbaik..."* (…sometimes, uh, that is the best course of action…). *"Kadang-kadang"* (sometimes) conditions *"jalan yang terbaik"* (the best course of action) as applicable only at certain moments rather than as a universal principle, reducing the speaker's commitment to the utterance's truth while narrowing the interlocutor's space to raise a comprehensive objection, and preventing a defensive response.

1.1.2 Hedges

1.1.2.1 Introducing Possibility

Context: follows Prabowo's defense of anti-corruption efforts in state-owned enterprises and his assertion that grassroots supporters ("rakyat yang di bawah") still back him, responding to the implicit suggestion that public trust might be eroding. Quote (9), *"Kalau memang rakyat tidak suka sama saya..."* (If the people really do not like me…)

unlike bushes, which operate at the referential level, this hedge operates on the speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition itself: *"kalau"* (if) presents a loss of public support as a hypothetical, conditional scenario that is neither acknowledged nor rejected, protecting the speaker from the consequences of an unequivocal claim. A conditional statement does not demand as urgent a response as an affirmative one, so confrontational reactions are less likely.

1.1.2.2 Grounding with Justification

Context: opens Prabowo's answer on whether police reform recommendations would be carried out even against entrenched internal power structures. Quote (10), *"Karena hukum… bagian penting daripada negara yang kuat dan berhasil."* (Because the rule of law is an important part of a strong and successful state.) the conjunction *"karena"* (because) reinforces the preceding claim by supplying a logical justification, legitimizing the statement and implicitly reducing the risk of rebuttal, since reasoned claims are harder to refute than bare ones. This signals that the proposition rests on an accepted principle rather than mere opinion.

1.1.3 Shields

1.1.3.1 Substituting I with 'we', 'our'

Context: part of the same closing turn discussed in excerpt (2), coming immediately before it, where Prabowo invokes the case of Mexican police, military officers, and even a former president compromised by drug cartels as a cautionary example for Indonesia. Quote (11), *"...jangan mengira bahwa kita ini imun…"* (Don't assume that we are immune…) the pronoun *"kita"* (we) weakens the speaker's claim by distributing responsibility for the proposition to a broader group, so the idea is not presented as a purely personal view but as a collective understanding seemingly shared by all. This minimizes the potential for rejection by framing the statement as a shared concern rather than a personal accusation.

1.2 Uptakes

Table 2. Mitigation Strategies for "Uptakes" in Takeovers by President Prabowo

No	Type of Mitigation	Category	Meaning	Word	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Bushes	Requesting agreement	Confirmation words	ya; iya, kan?; ya, kan?; kan?; kan, begitu, kan?; ya? kan; benar ya	48	27.59%
2.	Bushes	Obscuring quantity	Indefinite numerals	sekian; kurang lebih; banyak	4	2.29%
3.	Bushes	Limiting the scope	Magnitude downplayers	hanya; ini tinggal; cukup; hampir	14	8.04%

4.	Bushes	Expressing doubt	Uncertainty words	kalau tidak salah; mungkin; kemungkinan; kalau enggak salah	7	4.02%
5.	Bushes	Subjective opinions	Subjective words	saya anggap; menurut saya; saya kira; saya merasa; *I think*	11	6.42%
6.	Bushes	Weakens the meaning	Multi-meaning words	bukan pekerjaan ringan	1	0.57%
7.	Hedges	Introducing possibilities	Conditional expressions	kalau	11	6.32%
8.	Hedges	Grounding with justification	Stated reason	karena	4	2.29%
9.	Shields	Substituting I with 'we', 'our'	Collective "we"	kita; *our; we*	70	40.23%
10.	Shields	Shifting responsibility to others	Attribution to others	BPKP; jaksa agung; lembaga yudisial aparat penegak hukum; pada prisipnya	4	2.29%
	Total				174	100%

1.2.1 Bushes

1.2.1.1 Requesting Agreement

Context: follows Prabowo's statement that legislative mechanisms can be corrected, in the RUU Polri transparency exchange. Quote (12), *"...beredar naskah-naskah ngarang-karangan, kan begitu kan?"* (…circulating fabricated drafts, isn't that so?) employs the bushes mitigation strategy through the agreement-seeking phrase *"kan begitu kan?"* (isn't that so?) This weakens the speaker's commitment to the proposition's truth, presenting it as a shared assumption rather than a certain claim. The speaker remains the originator of the idea but softens its assertiveness, encouraging only a minimal response from the interlocutor and keeping the flow of speech under the speaker's control.

1.2.1.2 Obscuring Quantity

Context: closes Prabowo's answer on law-enforcement indicators, after detailing roughly Rp1,440 trillion in state losses recovered from palm-oil cases. Quote (13),

"...selamatkan kerugian yang sekian banyak" (…save a considerable amount of losses.) word *"sekian"* (a considerable amount of) obscures the exact numerical amount of the losses, keeping the claim from being absolute and difficult to challenge on data accuracy. This also protects the speaker's face, since presenting exact numbers that later prove inaccurate could damage credibility, while directing the interlocutor toward the utterance's general meaning rather than its quantitative details.

1.2.1.3 Limiting the Scale

Context: follows Prabowo's warning that unchecked corruption will destroy the nation's wealth. Quote (14), *"...dipakai hanya segelintir orang"* (…is used by only a handful of people.) the word *"hanya"* (only) functions as a mitigating strategy that quantitatively limits the scope of the proposition without specifying a clear numerical limit, so the claim is not tied to a precise measure. This reduces the likelihood that the interlocutor will interrupt by questioning a specific number, directing them instead to the general meaning of the inequality.

1.2.1.4 Expressing Doubt

Context: part of Prabowo's example of law-enforcement success, citing seized problematic palm-oil plantations. Quote (15), *"...kemungkinan dalam waktu dekat akan sampai 2 juta."* (…possibly, in the near future, this will reach two million.) The word *"kemungkinan"* (possibly) softens the certainty of the proposition, presenting the *"2 juta"* (two million) figure as a tentative prediction rather than a settled claim. This keeps the interlocutor from immediately scrutinizing or refuting the specific figure, guiding them instead toward the general sense that the amount could still increase.

1.2.1.5 Subjective Opinions

Context: follows the palm-oil seizure figures, citing an even larger 3.7-million-hectare finding from the previous cabinet as evidence that cases once "not dared to be touched" are now being acted upon. Quote (16), *"...menurut saya sudah ada kemajuan…* (in my opinion, there has been progress) the phrase *"menurut saya"* (in my opinion) functions as a buffer signaling that the proposition is the speaker's personal assessment rather than an objective fact, so the interlocutor is not prompted to immediately refute or correct the speaker outright.

1.2.1.6 Weakening Meaning

Context: directly follows excerpt (16), acknowledging that anti-corruption work remains far from finished. Quote (17), *"Ini bukan pekerjaan ringan…"* (This is not an easy task..) rather than stating the difficulty directly with terms like *"sangat berat,"* (very dificult) the negated *"bukan pekerjaan ringan"* (not an easy task) leaves the task's burden vague and open to differing interpretations, so the general, unexaggerated framing tends to draw a brief response rather than a detailed rebuttal.

1.2.2 Hedges

1.2.2.1 Introducing Possibilities

Context: responds to Najwa's point that 80% of legislators are in Prabowo's coalition, so their agreement cannot simply be assumed. Quote (18), *"...kalau tidak puas dengan transparansi…"* (…if we are not satisfied with the transparency…) the conditional construction *"kalau tidak puas"* (if we are not satisfied) opens up possibilities rather than stating an obligation or certainty, so the speaker presents the action as an option worth considering rather than a command, avoiding the imposition of a single, definitive stance.

1.2.2.2 Grounding with Justification

Context: immediately precedes excerpt (14), warning of the consequences of unchecked corruption. Quote (19), *"...hancur masa depan kita, karena ee kekayaan kita*

hilang…" (…our future will be ruined because, uh, our wealth will be lost…) the speaker includes the reason *"karena ee kekayaan kita hilang"* (because, uh, our wealth will be lost) as a justificatory basis after stating the consequence, so the statement is framed through a cause-and-effect relationship that appears rational rather than imposed as a bare warning, reducing the impression of being threatening.

1.2.3 Shields

1.2.3.1 Substituting I with 'we', 'our'

Context: opens Prabowo's response to Najwa's complaint that the public has no access to the legislative process, directly preceding excerpt (12). Quote (20), *"...itu bisa kita perbaiki."* (…we can improve it.) the inclusive pronoun *"kita"* (we) downplays the speaker's role as the sole source of the idea by distributing responsibility to a broader group, so the speaker does not appear as the sole decision-maker and the claim made does not sound too binding.

1.2.3.2 Deleting 'I' and ascribing action to (1) impersonal source or (2) agentless passive

Context: immediately follows the palm-oil seizure figures in excerpt (15), reinforcing the claim's credibility. Quote (21), *"Saya dapat laporan ya, ini laporan dari BPKP, Jaksa Agung, ya,"* (I received a report, yes; this is a report from BPKP, the Attorney General, yes.) by explicitly stating that the information originates from BPKP and the Jaksa Agung (Attorney General), the speaker ensures responsibility for its accuracy is not placed entirely on himself, so potential criticism is indirectly redirected toward the cited sources rather than the speaker.

2. Representations of Taking the Turn by Interruptions

2.1 Meta-Comments

Table 3. Meta-Comment Mitigation Strategies in Interruptions by President Prabowo

No	Type of Mitigation	Category	Meaning	Word	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Bushes	Requesting agreement	Confirmation words	kan; ya	2	25%
2.	Bushes	Obscuring quantity	Indefinite numerals	belasan; berapa	3	37.5%
3.	Bushes	Limiting frequency	Frequency downplayers	kadang-kadang	2	25%
4.	Hedges	Prefacing with caution or hesitation	Apology word	maaf	1	12.5%
	Total				8	100%

2.1.1 Bushes

2.1.1.1 Requesting Agreement

Context: opens a long interrupting turn right after Najwa states the RUU Polri/TNI deliberation process has never been made public. Quote (22), *"Anda paham kan…"* (You understand, right…) the compact tag *"kan"* (right) attaches directly to the verb *"paham"* (understand) turning what could read as a flat assertion of the addressee's understanding into an assumption offered for confirmation. The confirmation it invites can be equally compact, a nod or a murmur, which lets the speaker keep the floor while performing the appearance of consensus.

2.1.1.2 Obscuring Quantity

Context: continues the same turn, describing the intensity of closed-door "*konsinyir*" drafting sessions. Quote (23), *"Mereka kerja berapa berapa hari…"* (They worked for how many days…) obscures quantity twice over: through the indefinite *"berapa hari"* (how many days) itself, and through the stammered repetition surrounding it. No specific duration is put on record, so nothing about timing can later be checked or disputed, what the utterance commits to is the intensity conveyed by *"tanpa berhenti"* (without stopping) not a measurement.

2.1.1.3 Limiting Frequency

Context: still within the same turn, characterizing "*konsinyir*" as an occasional rather than systematic practice. Quote (24), *"...kadang-kadang orang itu istilahnya menyelesaikan suatu masalah itu, kadang-kadang ada istilah konsinyir."* (…sometimes, in dealing with a problem, sometimes there is what is referred to as consignment.) the repeated marker *"kadang-kadang"* (sometimes) relaxes the certainty of the proposition by presenting it as a general tendency, allowing the interlocutor to simply agree or nod while the speaker retains control over the flow of the conversation.

2.1.2 Hedges

2.1.2.1 Prefacing with caution or hesitation

Context: the opening line of the same turn, before Prabowo delivers his firmer defense of the drafting process. Quote (25), *"Maaf ya, tapi ini kan"* (Sorry, but this has been...) the phrase *"maaf ya"* (sorry) functions as a hedge placed at the beginning of the utterance to reduce its illocutionary force before the main statement is delivered, conveying a cautious, polite attitude that keeps the information from sounding too direct, while the speaker still conveys it firmly underneath.

2.2 Alert Strategies

In his use of alerts during interruptions, Prabowo employed forty-six (46) forms of mitigation strategies. This is shown in greater detail in Table (3) below.

Table 4. Alert Mitigation Strategies in Interruptions by President Prabowo

No	Type of Mitigation	Category	Meaning	Word	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Bushes	Requesting agreement	Confirmation words	benar enggak; iya kan; ya; kan	13	28.25%
2.	Bushes	Obscuring quantity	Indefinite numerals	banyak; cukup; beberapa	4	8.69%

3.	Bushes	Expressing doubt	Uncertainty words	maybe	1	2.17%
4.	Bushes	Subjective opinions	Subjective words	*I think*	1	2.17%
5.	Bushes	Weakening meaning	Multi-meaning words	tidak ringan	1	2.17%
6.	Bushes	Limiting frequency	Frequency downplayers	kadang-kadang	2	4.35%
7.	Shield	Substituting I with 'we', 'our'	Collective "we"	kita; *we*	24	52.17%
	Total				46	100%

2.2.1 Bushes

2.2.1.1 Requesting agreement

Context: Prabowo's response to the acid attack on Kontras activist Andri Yunus, where speculation of state involvement had been raised, casting himself as a fellow victim while narrowing the conversation to his stated priorities. Quote (26), *"Konsen rakyat, pangan, energi. Benar enggak?"* (…the people, food, and energy. Is that right?) the closing tag *"benar enggak"* (is that right?) retroactively softens what had been a fairly assertive claim by requiring the interlocutor's affirmation, opening space for Najwa to participate rather than leaving the exchange monologic while steering the response toward agreement rather than rebuttal.

2.2.1.2 Obscuring quantity

Context: Najwa asks whether Indonesia might follow Malaysia's withdrawal from a tariff agreement it judged detrimental to its national interest. Quote (27), *"...ada beberapa alinea yang dia merasa…"* (…there are several paragraphs that he feels…). *"Beberapa"* (several) replaces a specific number with a loose, unverifiable estimate ranging anywhere from two to several, closing off the interlocutor's ability to question its accuracy while keeping their attention on the substance of the statement rather than debatable details.

2.2.1.3 Expressing Doubt

Context: part of the same sentence as excerpt (27), speculating on why Malaysia withdrew from the agreement. Quote (28), *"Mungkin dia karena mau buru-buru…"* (Maybe he was in a hurry…) the sentence-initial *"mungkin"* (maybe) places the entire explanation in the realm of conjecture, creating epistemic distance that frees the speaker from accountability for its truth, since a claim already flagged as conjecture does not demand the same verification as an affirmative statement.

2.2.1.4 Subjective Opinions

Context: returns to the Kontras-activist segment; after affirming his commitment to a clean government, Prabowo shifts to food prices during Ramadan as evidence of performance, closing with a positive evaluation in English. Quote (29), *"I think we are…"*. *"I think"* establishes distance between the speaker as evaluator and the claim being evaluated, so opinions framed this way tend not to provoke confrontational responses, since refuting an opinion carries a different argumentative burden than refuting a fact.

2.2.1.5 Weakening Meaning

Context: Prabowo describes the burden of cleaning up bureaucracy and state-owned enterprises, referring to a "deep state" and officials who feel immune to audits, while insisting he does not want to keep complaining about it. Quote (30), *"...ini pekerjaan tidak ringan..."* (…this is not an easy task…) the negated *"tidak ringan"* (not easy) avoids more explicit, strongly charged words like *"berat"* (difficult) or *"sulit"* (hard) creating broader interpretive space and lowering the speaker's commitment compared to a direct claim, which helps mitigate potential overreactions from the interlocutor.

2.2.1.6 Limiting Frequency

Context: raised in response to Najwa's question about the narrowing space for government critics, suggesting some incidents may be deliberately staged provocations, or "false flag operations." Quote (31), *"Kadang-kadang kan ada peristiwa..."* (Sometimes, there are events…). *"Kadang-kadang"* (sometimes) narrows the claim's temporal scope rather than obscuring its content, limiting it to certain moments rather than a sweeping, systematic accusation, which lets the speaker voice suspicion without bearing the burden of proving an absolute claim.

2.2.2 Shields

2.2.2.1 Substituting I with 'we', 'our'

Context: closes Prabowo's defense in the Kontras-activist exchange, after insisting the government has no repressive intent and that the security apparatus is being cleaned up. Quote (32), *"...rakyat kita enggak bodoh"* (…our people are not stupid). The word *"kita"* (our) operates not at the referential level like bushes but at the level of the speech act's subject: by merging speaker and addressee into a collective entity, *"the people are not stupid"* becomes a shared belief rather than the speaker's exclusive viewpoint, distributing responsibility for its truth and carrying a notable solidarity effect alongside its mitigating function.

Discussion

The findings show that President Prabowo used all three types of mitigation strategy when taking the turn. Bushes were the most frequent, followed by shields and hedges, and mitigation appeared in both forms of taking the turn, with taking over far more dominant than interrupting. Read through Stenström's (1994) framework, this distribution is meaningful. Taking over follows the previous speaker's completed turn and is tied to it as an uptake or a link, so it does not threaten the interlocutor's turn. Mitigation in this position therefore works inside an already cooperative turn structure, consistent with (Sacks et al., 1974) view of turn-taking as keeping conversation orderly and with (Figueras Bates & Kotwica, 2020) view of mitigation as keeping conversation flowing without offending the partner.

Within taking over, bushes mostly reduce the speaker's commitment to the content of his answers, as described by Caffi (2007). Requesting agreement is the largest bushes category in both links and uptakes. Quote (12), *"kan begitu kan?"* (isn't that so?), presents a claim as a shared assumption and invites only a minimal response. Other bushes loosen the claim itself: *"kemungkinan"* (possibly) in Quote (15) turns the figure of two million hectares into a tentative prediction, *"menurut saya"* (in my opinion) in Quote (16) marks a personal assessment rather than an objective fact, and *"sekian ratus"* (several hundred) in Quote (2) avoids a precise number. By softening the content, the President leaves little for the interlocutor to refute and keeps the turn without escalating confrontation. This supports (Hübscher et al., 2023) description of mitigation as keeping speech from sounding harsh,

direct, or forceful, and fits observations that the current government favors image-preserving responses under public pressure (Pratiwi, 2025).

Shields show a different pattern. The inclusive pronoun *"kita"* (we) is the single most frequent device in uptakes, links, and alert interruptions, whereas bushes are the largest group overall because they are spread across many categories. In Quote (20), *"itu bisa kita perbaiki"* (we can improve it), *"kita"* distributes responsibility from the speaker to a broader group, so a promise sounds like a shared concern rather than a binding commitment. In line with the description of shields as creating distance between the speaker and the utterance (Al-ebadi & Hassan, 2020), this strategy fits an interview in which the President is repeatedly asked to account for government decisions.

This pattern bears directly on power. In pragmatic studies, taking over the turn is often associated with the exercise of power, status, and control over discourse. As explained by Gusthini et al. (2018), participants do not have the same level of control in an interaction due to power imbalances, and these dynamics influence the formation of discourse (Beetz et al., 2021; Zhiyi, 2023). The data suggest that the President does not primarily emphasize his position as head of state. Bushes soften the content of the message, and shields such as kita reduce the visibility of the status gap. Taking over the turn thus appears as an effort to maintain the harmony of the interaction and defuse potential tension rather than as a domineering act, showing that power can also be exercised subtly through linguistic strategies appropriate to the communication context.

Interruptions are theoretically more face-threatening than taking over because they occur before the previous speaker has finished (Priyastuti, 2017), yet the data show that they too are accompanied by mitigation. In meta-comments, which are marked by polite language, mitigation softens the intrusion itself. In Quote (25), *"Maaf ya, tapi ini kan"* (Sorry, but this has been...), *"maaf ya"* (sorry) is a hedge placed at the start of the turn to reduce its illocutionary force before the main statement is delivered. In Quote (22), *"Anda paham kan…"* (You understand, right…), *"kan"* turns a possible assertion about the addressee's understanding into an assumption offered for confirmation, so the speaker keeps the floor while performing consensus. In alert interruptions, shields are the largest category, with *"kita"* outnumbering all bushes combined. Quote (32), *"rakyat kita enggak bodoh"* (our people are not stupid), merges speaker and addressee into a collective, so a strong evaluative claim becomes a shared belief. These findings suggest that the more forcefully the President claims the floor, the more he relies on inclusive framing, although this needs to be tested on a larger sample. Hedges were the least frequent strategy, possibly because they soften speech acts such as suggestions, requests, or commands (Ahmed et al., 2024), which arise less often in an interview in which the President mostly answers questions.

Compared to previous research, the findings align with studies indicating that political actors often utilize speech softeners to enhance public trust and strengthen their political image (Almutairi et al., 2022; Gribanova & Gaidukova, 2019; Kashiha, 2022; Mansour & Alghazo, 2021). However, previous studies generally treated mitigation as a linguistic strategy or a general way of speaking, whereas this study places greater emphasis on the detailed processes of interaction, particularly in taking over and interruptions. Mitigation is therefore understood not only as a linguistic choice but also as a systematic pattern of behavior in managing conversation.

This study offers a novel approach through the integration of Caffi's (2007) theory of mitigation strategies with Stenström's (1994) turn-taking approach. Stenström's categories show where mitigation occurs in the exchange of turns, while Caffi's categories show how content, speech-act force, and responsibility are softened there. Thus, mitigation is not only to word choice but also to how conversations are structured and conducted (Albelda Marco, 2020; Figueras Bates, 2021; Ramada, 2020), and it operates simultaneously at the levels of language, interaction, and power relations.

Theoretically, this study contributes to interactional linguistics by explaining how mitigation is employed in political conversations at the national leadership level. Methodologically, it demonstrates that a conversation analysis approach can uncover context-dependent mitigation strategies. Practically, it shows that conflict management by public figures depends not only on the content of messages but also on how speaking turns are managed and how mitigative interruptions are employed.

Conclusion

Based on the research results, President Prabowo Subianto employs mitigation strategies to defuse conflict in "Taking the Turn" through a manner of speaking that reduces tension, manifested by emphasizing inclusivity, downplaying the significance of conflict, and blurring differences through cooperative word choices and delivery methods. This functions as a symbolic means to prevent political division by shifting attention from personal conflicts to shared interests and national stability, showing that in high-level political communication, conflict mitigation depends not only on policies or decisions but also on how the President uses language to manage meaning, social positions, and power relations, as evident from the speech patterns analyzed using a conversation analysis approach. However, this study has limitations: it relies solely on President Prabowo's public statements from interviews, which are secondary in nature as they were derived from media reports, so it cannot apply certain principles of conversation analysis, such as repair and adjacency pairs, and the data are susceptible to bias from media editing and curation. Future research is therefore advised to use primary data from more natural interactions, such as political debates, open discussion forums, or transcripts of official communications, and to compare them with the responses of other political actors to make the analysis more comprehensive, contextual, and methodologically sound.

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