Persuasive Strategies in Election Campaigns: A Critical Analysis of Donald Trump's Speeches During the Presidential Debate

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Abstract

This study explores the persuasive strategies used by Donald Trump during the 2024 election debate. T. A. Van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis offers a holistic lens to critically examine the intricate interplay of language use and persuasive intent within Donald Trump's campaign speeches. The findings indicate that Donald Trump frequently uses lexicalization, comparisons and self-glorification to positively present himself. The results also suggest that Donald Trump negatively presents his opponents. He employs rhetorical devices such as actor description, lexicalization and number game to persuade the presidential debate viewers.

Key words: campaign, discourse, persuasion, presidential debate, Kamala Harris, Trump.

Résumé

Cette étude explore les stratégies de persuasion utilisées par Donald Trump lors du débat électoral de 2024 avec la vice-présidente Kamala Harris. L'analyse est axée sur le discours de Trump. Cette analyse utilise le modèle socio-cognitif de l'Analyse Critique du Discours de T. A. Van Dijk (2006), qui offre une perspective holistique pour examiner de manière critique l'usage stratégique du langage et de l'intention persuasive dans le discours de Donald Trump. Les résultats indiquent que Donald Trump utilise fréquemment la lexicalisation, les comparaisons et l'autoglorification pour se présenter de manière positive. Les résultats montrent également que Trump présente ses opposants de manière négative. Il emploie les stratégies rhétoriques tels que la description des acteurs, la lexicalisation et le jeu des nombres pour persuader les téléspectateurs du débat présidentiel.

Mots clés : campagne, débat présidentiel, discours, persuasion, Kamala Harris, Trump.

INTRODUCTION

The way politicians use language to persuade their audience, especially during election campaigns has long been at the heart of the linguistic research. The messages delivered during an election time play a crucial role. Candidates persuasively craft their discourses so as to resonate with the expectations of the masses. In doing so, the politicians resort to various persuasive techniques such as emotional, ethical and rhetorical appeals to convince undecided voters. According to T. M. Holbrook (1999, p. 67), the politicians influence public opinion by generating persuasive information and this information "once acquired, has potential to move the electorate in one direction or the other". In democratic societies, political authority is based on people's free will. Thus, the approval of the people of a nation is essential for the workings of the nation and language is employed to achieve this goal.

Persuasion is aptly defined by R. M. Perloff (2003, p. 4) as "the study of attitudes and how to change them". He considers persuasion as a symbolic process in which a speaker tries to convince other people to change their attitudes or behaviour regarding an issue through the transmission of a message, in an atmosphere of free choice. It is worth mentioning that presidential debates give a unique opportunity to presidential candidates to persuade American public. American presidential debate is a key historical event in the United States presidential election campaign processes. According to I. Pekka (2011, p. 31), "American presidential debates are the most well-known political debates. They are also the most followed, viewed, controlled and the most researched political television programs". The presidential debates offer candidates a unique chance to sway the public's perception of their unpopular issue stances.

A close examination of Donald Trump's presidential debate speeches shows that the candidate uses a number of rhetorical strategies with the unstated hope of persuading voters to cast their ballot for him. The presidential debates have been substantially studied by scholars. However, there has been little discussion about Donald Trump's persuasive strategies during the televised presidential debates. Therefore, the main objective of this investigation is to show how Donald Trump presents himself and others during the presidential debates. It also aims at exploring Trump's persuasive strategies in 2024 presidential debate with Kamala Harris. In order to achieve such an objective, the following research questions are asked: How does Donald Trump portray himself and his opponents during the debate? What are the persuasive strategies used by Donald Trump? In a tripartite division, this work explores the literature on persuasion in American presidential debates, on the one hand. The analytical framework is discussed on the other hand. Finally, Donald Trump's persuasive strategies are examined using T. A. Van Dijk's (2006) model of Critical Discourse Analysis.

1. Overview on Persuasion in American Presidential Debates

1.1 Persuasion in Political Communication

Etymologically, persuasion is a Latin word. According to J. J. Iman (2019, p. 36), persuasion comes from the Latin word "persuadere" which denotatively means "to argue or advise". Persuasion can be defined as the act of inducing a person or an audience to believe or accept something by appeals to reason, ethics and emotion. In other words, persuasion is an act of convincing, influencing others to make them accept or adopt new beliefs and ideologies. Persuasion implies an effort to change addressees' perceptions, beliefs, preferences and attitudes towards an issue. In doing so, the communicator's goal is to draw out a desired response from his audience. Persuasion is extensively documented by many linguists. Aristotle's (2007) seminal work on rhetoric has put the study of persuasion to the foreground of Discourse Analysis. In fact, Aristotle (2007) sets forward three strategies to investigate

persuasion in discourse. For Aristotle (2007), the speaker's ability to be persuasive is based on the rational use of the following rhetorical appeals: logos, ethos and pathos. His three persuasive appeals offer a framework to scholars to investigate persuasion in discourse. D. Al Jazrawi et *al.* (2023) explain the three persuasive appeals as follows: Ethos: refers to ethical appeals, which concerns the credibility and charm of the speaker's character. According to Aristotle, there is persuasion through ethical appeal whenever the speech is delivered in such a way as to make the communicator worthy of credence. Pathos: involves emotional appeals, targeting the audience's emotions, attitudes and values. Finally, logos: is about the logical appeal, relying on evidence and real-world references to engage the audience's rationality.

Many linguists have undertaken the analysis of political discourses in specific contexts like election campaigns, press conferences and presidential debates in order to uncover the discursive strategies used by candidates to persuade the potential voters. The critical analysis of persuasive strategies in Donald Trump's final presidential debate conducted by S. W. D. Nancy (2017) explores the linguistic tools used by Donald Trump in the final presidential debate in 2016. It is found that Donald Trump always depicts the Americans as victims of the former government and exploits the conflict in Iraq, the economic decline. S. W. D. Nancy's (2017) analysis also proves that Trump uses pragmatic devices such as pragmatic presupposition, conversational implicature and stylistic features such as metaphor, irony, hyperbole, repetition and syntactic parallelism to persuade American.

W. Prafiri's and M. A. A. Nasir's (2023) study also helps to understand how Donald Trump employs persuasive strategies to influence others to vote for him. Drawing on Aristotle's theory of persuasion and adopting a qualitative analysis, W. Prafiri and M. A. A. Nasir (2023) found thirty-one statements indicated of containing pathos, thirteen statements of Logos and fifteen statements as Ethos. Besides, they reveal that Donald Trump frequently resorts to emotional discourses or Pathos with the aim of influencing the audience. In the light of their study, they deduce that persuasive strategies played a key role to evoke audience's emotions and feelings. Based on W. Prafiri and M. A. A. Nasir's (2023) findings, one can argue that Donald Trump uses Pathos as tactic in this election context to move his addressees. In this sense, W. Prafiri and M. A. A. Nasir (2023) write:

> Persuasive strategies are the range of options from which a speaker selects in deciding on an appropriate tactic or combination of tactics for persuasion in a given situation. Obviously, people do not use the same tactics in every situation that calls for rhetorical discourse. All of speakers have access to a range of communicative strategies, verbal and nonverbal, among which we choose in situations where persuasion is necessary. (W. Prafiri and M. A. A. Nasir, 2023, p. 33)

Politicians rely on the persuasive power of language to urge or persuade people to do something or adhere to a vision. R. H. Othman and S. A. Jehan (2015) explores the persuasive strategies in President Obama's speeches. Their study reveals the way President Obama employs persuasive techniques to influence the audience to believe him. They found that Barack Obama uses the first-person pronoun to shorten the distance between him and the listeners. According to R. H. Othman and S. A. Jehan (2015), this strategy helps him persuade the public to accept and support his policies and actions. Moreover, they notice that President Obama utilizes modal verbs to easily convey his message to the audience.

The way Donald Trump managed to win the 2016 election has sparked much scholarly interest in his discursive tactics. The qualitative analysis of persuasive techniques in Donald Trump's speeches by S. P. G. Rizky et *al.* (2019) is an endeavour to demonstrate how Donald Trump persuades his audience during the election campaign in 2016. In applying Aristotle's (2007) theory of persuasion, they have identified different types of persuasion in Donald Trump's utterances. They suggest that President Trump makes use of three persuasive strategies

in his public appearances which are: pathos, ethos and logos. He uses ethos to prove that he is credible, intelligent and he presents himself as a benevolent candidate. The occurrence of logos in his speeches shows that his statements are based on logic and facts. S. P. G. Rizky et *al.* (2019) reveal that Donald Trump commonly employs pathos to elicit the public's emotions towards the arguments he expressed during the campaign. It comes out that Donald Trump influences American people by appealing to their emotions.

1.2 Persuasion in Election Campaign Speeches

Are the policy arguments more persuasive when they are uttered by female or male political leaders? This key question has led to a substantial scholarly work on gendered discourses in the sphere of politics. For G. Anderson-Nilsson and A. Clayton (2021, p. 818), this question is essential as "various aspects of a speaker's identity can strongly influence his or her persuasiveness". In fact, J. N. Druckman and A. Lupia (2016) suggests that Americans are more likely to agree with those with whom they share a salient identity or with individuals about whom they already have positive opinions. G. Anderson-Nilsson and A. Clayton (2021) contend that perceptions of expertise are not necessarily associated with persuasiveness. They found that voters, especially republican voters in America still tend to favor the position advocated by the male candidates on some issue areas. In other words, it appears that seeing a female candidate as expert in a policy area does not necessarily persuade republican voters to agree with the position that the candidate takes.

According to F. Ghasemi (2020, p. 19), "persuasive strategies in political discourse provide opportunities for politicians to influence, guide, and control their audiences according to their desires and benefits". During election time, politicians intensified political activities such as debates, press conferences and campaigns to sway voters' intentions in their favour. The election campaign is one of the important political activities carried out by the candidates to get elected as the United States president. In this sense, L. Bartels (2006, p. 78) points out that "in every election cycle, the major parties and their presidential candidates spend vast sums of money and prestigious amounts of energy on the campaign for the White House". This effort is very important, because the day-to-day campaign events and the strategies employed by the candidates have a significant impact on presidential election outcome according to L. Bartels (2006).

2. Critical Discourse Analysis as a New Perspective on Persuasion

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to Discourse Analysis. In line with this, R. Wodak (2011, p. 38) sees CDA as "an interdisciplinary research program, subsuming a variety of approaches, each with different theoretical models, research methods and agendas". CDA is a prominent framework that provides a holistic understanding of discourse. Understanding ideologies and power abuse embedded in politicians' discourses is the focus of CDA. In fact, CDA is a branch of Discourse Analysis which critically investigates discourses to unveil the lurking dominance, ideologies and power abuse in politicians and elites' discourses. Critical Discourse Analysis establishes itself as a new perspective on understanding discourse, especially political discourses which is seen as the breeding ground for perpetuating power dominance and ideological indoctrination. CDA is a science-based approach that highlights the underling ideologies in communication. N. Fairclough (1993) points out the role of CDA in the following terms:

> Analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships

between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony. (N. Fairclough, 1993, p. 135)

CDA goes beyond the traditional ways of analyzing discourses to critically delve into the way language is particularly used by the politicians to influence others. For M. Shaimaa (2023, p. 3), "what makes CDA different and distinctive from other approaches to discourse analysis is its critical nature". M. Shaimaa (2023) sheds light on this difference by further explaining that the notion 'critical' implies revealing the hidden connections and causes behind the production and reception of discourse. T. A. Van Dijk (1993) contends that the main object of CDA is not the study of discourse structures; rather it tries to explain them, keeping in mind the properties of social interaction and social structure. In other terms, CDA highlights the relationship between language, ideology, and power.

2.1 Van Dijk's Cognitive Approach to persuasion

T. A. Van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive approach within CDA offers tools and insights to study the interplay between discourse, cognition and society. T. A. Van Dijk's (2006) approach is grounded on the understanding that discourse is not only a social practice but also a cognitive one. T. A. Van Dijk (2006) asserts that mental processes and structures play a crucial role in the production, comprehension and dissemination of text. T. A. Van Dijk's (2006) framework serves to account for how power relations and social structures are both enacted and reproduced through discourse.

T. A. Van Dijk's (2006) analytical framework helps to investigate ideological resources in political discourses. For T. A. Van Dijk (2006, p. 728), "politics is one of the social domains whose practices are virtually exclusively discursive; political cognition is by definition ideologically based; and political ideologies are largely reproduced by discourse". It is through discourse that politicians defend and instil their ideologies in people's mind. In this sense, T.A. Van Dijk (2006, p. 732) points out that "discourses make ideologies observable in the sense that it is only in discourse that they may be explicitly formulated". From a cognitive perspective, T. A. Van Dijk (2006, p. 729) describes ideologies as "a special kind of social belief systems, stored in long-term memory". He suggests that these ideological belief systems are socially shared by the members of specific social groups or communities. In line with this view, one can argue that political speeches entail the enactment of ideologies. It can be said that political activities such election campaigns, parliamentary talks and political debates are essentially ideological.

To account for how ideologies are instilled through the strategic use of specific language T. A. Van Dijk (2004) suggests two distinct discursive 'macro strategies' of ideology. Those 'macro strategies' are conceptualized as the 'positive self-presentation' and the 'negative other -presentation'. Positive Self-Presentation and Negative Other-Presentation constitute the macro-level of text and talk analysis in T. A. Van Dijk's (2006) Socio-Cognitive analytical framework:

Positive Self-Presentation or in-group favouritism is according T. A. Van Dijk (2004, p. 42) "a semantic macro-strategy in the service of face keeping or impression management". Positive self-presentation is a communicative strategy used by politicians to present themselves in favourable light. T. A. Van Dijk (2004, p. 67) explains that positive self-presentation is an "ideological function which is applied to describe oneself as superior than the others". This strategy is characterized by the use of good qualities to talk about oneself or in-group members. In fact, the speaker emphasizes their good side and attempt to minimize negative attributes. T. A. Van Dijk (2006, p. 734) points out that "political speeches, interviews, programs or propaganda typically focus on the preferred topics of 'our' group or party, on what we have

done well". In their effort to persuade the voters during political events such as press conferences, interviews, debates and campaigns, the speakers put emphasis on their positive actions. T. A. Van Dijk (2006, p. 734) highlights this positive self-presentation strategy by saying that politicians create "meanings in many ways by intonation or stress, visual or graphical means, words order, headlining, topicalization, repetition, and so on". In doing so, the speaker's ultimate goal is to persuade the listeners.

According to T. A. Van Dijk (2006, p. 735), Negative Other-Presentation in the sphere of politics can be defined as the act of associating "political opponents with negative topics, such as war, violence, drug, lack of freedom, and so on". This strategy of Negative Other-Presentation aims to negatively depict others, especially political opponents or out-group members. In other words, the intention behind this strategy be it in politics or in media is to degrade or belittle others, particularly social agents who are seen as opponents. Others are generally identified by the out-group pronouns such as 'they', 'them', and 'their'. T. A. Van Dijk (2006, p. 373) aligns with this view by stressing that the strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation "is very typical in this biased account of the facts in favour of the speaker's or writer's own interests, while blaming negative situations and events on opponents or on the others".

In addition to Positive Self-presentation and Negative Other-presentation strategies which represent the macro-level of text analysis. T. Van Dijk (2006) has suggested different rhetorical strategies or persuasive devices which constitute the micro-level of Critical Discourse Analysis. In this study, only five strategies are investigated in the sample data. The focus is put on five devices of persuasion in order to provide a deeper analysis of Trump's persuasion strategies. The aim is to show how Donald Trump makes use of these subtle ideological discursive strategies to influence potential electors during his campaign, especially during the face-to-face debate between him and Vice President Kamala Harris. The following is a detailed account of the five strategies discussed in this paper:

Actor description: T. A. Van Dijk (2006, p. 735) contends that 'actor description' deals with "the way actors are described in discourses also depends on our ideologies. Typically, we tend to describe in-group members in a neutral or positive way and out-group members in a negative way". Therefore, there is an identification of the participants or actors in terms of in-groups versus out-groups.

Comparison: is an ideological discursive strategy which is used by the speaker to compare 'in-group people' to 'out-group people'. In doing so, the speaker highlights positive attributes about 'in-groups' and emphasizes the bad things about 'out-group'.

Evidentiality/examples: T. A. Van Dijk (2006, p. 735) asserts that 'evidentiality' is an ideological strategy which is resorted to "when speakers present some evidence or proof for their knowledge or opinions. This may happen through references to authority figures or institutions, or by various forms of evidentiality: How or where did they get the information". In other words, this strategy is concerned with the credibility of discourse. Thus, knowledge discourse and its forms are injected with experts' evidences, references in order to legitimize. In this sense, examples are employed to back up claims.

National self-glorification: a powerful rhetorical device which implies various forms of positive references to or praise for one's own country, its principles, history and traditions.

Lexicalization (Lexicon): For T. A. Van Dijk (2011), the choice of the lexical items depends basically on the context of the discourse, its participants, aims, settings as well as the ideologies and knowledge of the producer of the discourse and his/her dominated group. According to M.

Saedeen and N. Albzour (2022, p. 36), Lexicalization is "the process of using the semantic qualities of words in order to positively or negatively depict someone or something".

The analytical framework put forward by T. A. Van Dijk (2006) encompasses fourteen rhetorical strategies. For the scope of this study, only five rhetorical devices are used in order to conduct the analysis. T. A. Van Dijk's (2006) five rhetorical devices discussed in this work are the most frequent rhetorical devices used in political communications to positively evaluate oneself and negatively present others.

3- Persuasive Strategies in Trump's Presidential Debate with Kamala Harris

3.1 Persuading Through Positive Self-Presentation

The debates give candidates "a well-publicized opportunity to convince, appeal, persuade and please" according to H. Halmari (2008, p. 248.). In this sense, the candidates emphasize positive things about themselves. It is noticed that President Trump commonly uses positive self-presentation to persuade the voters. T. A. Van Dijk (2004, p. 42) contends that "positive self-presentation or in-group favouritism is a semantic macro-strategy in the service of face keeping or impression management". Positive self-presentation tactics can be seen in the occurrences below:

(1) "**I created** one of **the greatest economies** in the history of our country. **I'll do** it again and even **better**". (D. Trump, 2024)
(2) "**We did things that nobody thought possible**. And people **give me credi**t for r**ebuilding** the military. They **give me credit for a lot of things**". (D. Trump, 2024)

Examples (1) and (2) elucidate how politicians enhance their self-image by using positive self-presentation tactics. President Trump uses lexicalization to positively portray his life. The following lexical choices: "I created", "the greatest economies", give me credit", and "rebuilding" serve to positively depict Donald Trump himself as a capable leader. In (1) and (2), one notices that the ultimate goal of Donald Trump is to present self as a competent and successful leader in the eyes of the voters. Competency is a valuable skill for politicians. Following Aristotle (2007), there are three ways that are necessary to appear credible: Competence, Good Intention and Empathy. In excerpts (3), (4) and (5), the candidate focuses on his competencies and the credit people give to him for his achievements. Donald Trump maintains that "top professors" give him credit for his "brilliant plan" or "great plan" and the repetition of the quantifier "many" are purposefully used to influence hearers' perception. In addition, Trump gives evidence by citing the 'top professors'.

(3) "**I** went to the Wharton School of Finance and many of those **professors**, **the top professors**, think my plan is a brilliant plan, it's a great plan". (D. Trump, 2024).
(4)"**I** was **the only president** ever China was paying us hundreds of billions of dollars" (D. Trump, 2024).
(5) **I** wasn't given $400 million. **I** wish I was. My father was a Brooklyn builder. Brooklyn, Queens. And a **grea**t father and **I learned** a lot from him. But **I** was given **a fraction** of that, **a tiny fraction**, and **I built** it into **many**, **many** billions of dollars. **Many**, many billions (D. Trump, 2024).

In (5) President Trump states "I wasn't given $400 million" as way to remind the audience and his opponents that he is successful thanks to his own effort and brilliant ideas. Highlighting one's qualities can be considered as a subtle tactic of self-glorification. In utterance (3), the sentence "my plan is brilliant" illustrates the way Donald Trump contrasts his personality with that of his opponent. Futhermore, the frequent occurrence of the personal pronoun "**I"** is revealer of Donald Trump's self-glorification. The use of the pronoun 'I', enables Donald

Trump to distance himself from his opponents by displaying his self-positive qualities. In this perspective, N. Bramley (2001, p. 11) writes:

> Politicians seek to represent their different 'selves' and 'others' in such a way as to construct a reality that positions themselves and the groups to which they belong in a positive light as well as positioning the 'other' in a way that reflects the type of relationship that they have with the 'other'. (N. Bramley, 2001, p. 11)

Self-glorification abounds in Donald Trump's presidential debate with Vice President Kamala Harris. Self-glorification is a common strategy in President Trump's utterances. This self-presentational strategy goes along with the frequent use of hyperbole in the candidate's utterances. For instance, in (6) President Trump says that he has "the biggest rallies" and "the most incredible rallies". These utterances are hyperbolic in the sense that it can be seen that President Trump is overstating the facts. He employs the hyperboles to glorify his actions. In using the overstatements "the biggest" and "the most incredible rallies", President Trump subtlely implies that his opponent's rallies are not good. In line with this, Z. P. Toh (2021, p. 88) asserts that "self-glorification discourse is a political fact, a common political behaviour. It is most of the time in the name of that self-glorification discourse that most politicians are elected because they give the impression that the previous leaders are know-nothing".

(6) "People don't leave my rallies. We have **the biggest rallies, the most incredible rallies** in the history of politics" (D. Trump, 2024).

To convince people that they fit for presidential office, politicians emphasise the good things that people can get under their leadership. J. Charteris-Black (2005) corroborates this idea by pointing out that leaders depend on the verbal power to persuade people of the profits that arise from their governance in all kinds of political structures. Besides, the candidate should be able to manipulate the available rhetorical strategies to resonate with the overall expectations of the populations. The issue of inflation in America is put to the forefront of Donald Trump's rally as the main drive for returning in the White House to make America great again. To make his claims palatable and persuasive, he constantly utilizes hyperbolic phrases to refer to his achievements as former president and what he could do if he is elected again. The excerpts (7), (8) and (9) illustrate well this point:

(7) "Everybody knows what I'm going to do. Cut taxes **very substantially**. And create a **great economy** like I did before. We had **the greatest economy**" (D. Trump, 2024).
(8) "We did **a phenomenal job** with the pandemic. We handed them over a country where the economy and where the stock market was **higher** than it was before the pandemic came in". (D. Trump, 2024)
(9) "I built one of **the greatest economies** in the history of the world and I'm going to build it again. **It's going to be bigger**, **better** and **stronge**r" (D. Trump, 2024).

During the presidential debate in October 10, the issue of economy has been one of the key topics. As far as the topic of economy is concerned, Donald Trump based his arguments on evidentialities in order to convince the American public. He strategically uses illustrations as seen in (8) and (9). Doing so, Donald Trump was able to connect with the public more effectively. Hyperbolic statements are used by President Trump in examples (7) "very substantially", "great economy", "the greatest economy" and similar expressions are found in data (8) and (9) when he respectively maintains, "We did a phenomenal job with the pandemic", "I built the greatest economies in the history of the world" and "It's going to be bigger, better and stronger" (D. Trump, 2024). The past tense used to talk about his qualities suggests that Donald Trump is referring to his previous achievements when he was president. By recalling his experiences, Trump wants to convince American public to trust him again. G. P. S. Rizky

(2019, p. 199) corroborates this point by asserting that "to produce the trustworthiness, the speaker can begin with telling the speaker's experiences and values. Form the experiences and values that the speaker shares with the audience, it will help the audience start to believe in what the speaker says". To convince Americans, it is noticed that Donald Trump very often quotes trustworthy sources to support his claims.

(10) "Look**, Viktor Orban** said it**. He said the most respected, most feared person is Donald Trump. We had no problems when Trump was president**" (D. Trump, 2024).

(11) "They said why is the whole world blowing up? Three years ago, it wasn't. Why is it blowing up? **He said because you need Trump back as president**" (D. Trump, 2024).

Donald Trump's quoting sources fulfil a strategic end. According to A. Partington (2004, p. 65), examples or sources fulfil certain goals and the first one is "to disarm potential attacks on the factualness" and evidentiality of what they are saying. Secondly, it is used for politeness purposes, as to impose less upon listeners. Finally, it enables the speaker to avoid appearing didactic. Quoting sources is a discursive strategy which is known as evidentiality (T. A. Van Dijk, 2011). Besides, T. Van Dijk (2011) explains that evidentiality is concerned with the credibility of discourse. Donald Trump's discourses are injected with experts' evidences, references and other linguistic ways of legitimization. One can say that President Trump resorts to sources and evidence so as to provide his claims with a sense of reliability.

The analysis of Donald Trump's speeches during the presidential debate with Vice President Kamala Harris has revealed that the candidate builds his positive self-image through the use of evidentiality, self-glorification, strategic lexical choices (lexicalization). Trump uses these verbal tactics to persuade American people to adopt his political agenda of making America great again. President Trump's skillful use of rhetorical strategies enables him to positively enhance his self-image. T. A. Van Dijk (2006) draws our attention on the nature of political discourse by asserting that ideologies are usually polarized in political discourses, especially in representing, categorizing a competing or conflicting group membership between ingroups and outgroups. This ideological polarization is manifested in President Trump's communication through a constant negative other-presentation.

3.2 Persuading Through Negative other-presentation

T. A. Van Dijk (2006) maintains that the overall strategy of positive self-presentation and other-presentation is very typical in this biased account of the facts in favour of the speaker's or writer's own interests, while blaming negative situations and events on opponents or socio-political issues such as immigrants, terrorists, youths and inflation. On the issue of immigration and border security, Donald Trump blames President Biden's administration, especially her opponent, Vice President Kamala Harris for allowing "millions of people pouring into the country". In the examples that follow, one can see how Donald Trump negatively presents his opponents and blames them on their management of the immigration in the US.

(12) "On top of that, we **have millions of people pouring into our country** from prisons and jails, from mental institutions and insane asylums" (D. Trump, 2024).

(13) "You look at Aurora in Colorado. They are taking over the towns. They're taking over buildings. They're going in violently. **These are the people that she and Biden let into our country. And they're destroying our country**" (D. Trump, 2024).

(14) **She doesn't have a plan**. Take a look at her plan. She doesn't have a plan (D. Trump, 2024).

In examples (12) and (13), Donald Trump uses actor description to negatively present the responsible for the massive immigration in the United States. Trump the blames Biden's and Kamala Harris' management of the border by asserting "these are the people that she and Biden let into our country" (D. Trump, 2024). In (14), he attacks Kamala Harris' plan. For Donald Trump, "she has no plan". He has repeated this idea throughout the presidential debate with Harris. This repetition can be seen in (14). To persuade American public that Vice President Harris is not fit for the office of US president, he compares Kamala Harris to President Joe Biden. The following is an example of this comparison:

(15) "But they're destroying our economy. **They** have no idea what a good economy is. **Their** oil policies, every single policy, and **remember this. She is Biden**" (D. Trump, 2024).

In (15), the comparison is subtlely done by Trump as way of constructing the ideologically opposition between him and his opponents. This comparison is identified as Donald Trump's construction of *Us* vs *Them* ideological opposition. In this kind of ideological struggle 'Them' or the 'Out-group' members are considered as enemies or dangerous. The extract (15) illustrates well how Trump depicts the 'out-group'. For instance, in (15) he negatively references them through the pronoun "they" which refers to others. One can read: "They have no idea what a good economy is" (D. Trump, 2024). The statements (16) and (17) are also instances of negative other-presentation. This negative portrayal of others is fulfilled through actor description. Actor description is how members of a particular group are described, whether positively or negatively. Donald Trump portrays the 'out-group' as a danger for America. The excerpts (16) and (17) are some cases of negative actor description. For instance, data (16) is a typical illustration of negative other-presentation and positive self-presentation. In fact, the speaker negatively highlights others' actions and positively evaluates his own achievements.

(16) "**They've destroyed the economy** and all you have to do it look at a poll. The polls say 80 and 85 and even 90% that the **Trump economy was great. Their economy was terrible**".
(17) "Well, **bad immigration is the worst thing** that can happen to our economy. They have and **she has destroyed our country** with policy that's insane".

In these extracts (16) and (17), the speaker also makes use of lexicalization. Donald Trump employs lexicalization to instil his ideas in the minds of listeners with the ultimate goal to convince them to vote for him. M. Saedeen and N. Albzour (2021, p. 36) define lexicalization as "the process of using the semantic qualities of words in order to positively or negatively depict someone or something". The analysis of the selected data shows that President Trump constantly uses lexicalization to positively present himself and negatively present his political rivals. For example, he repeatedly uses the verb "destroyed" in the data (16) and (17) to accuse Biden and his Vice President for destroying America's economy with their "policy that is insane". The examples of lexicalization used by Trump to convince American not to vote for Kamala Harris are as follows:

(18) "The leaders of other countries think that they're **weak** and **incompetent**. And they are. They're **grossly incompetent"** (D. Trump, 2024)
(19) "She goes down as **the worst** Vice President in the history of our country. But let me tell you something. She is a **horrible negotiator**. They sent her in to negotiate. As soon as they left Putin did the invasion" (D. Trump, 2024).
(20) "She is **destroying** our country. She has a plan to **defund** the police" (D. Trump, 2024).
(21) "This is a **crooked administration**, and they're **selling** our country down the tubes" (D. Trump, 2024).

In the illustrative extracts (18), (19), (20) and (21) Trump uses lexicalization devices to viciously tarnish the positive image of Vice President Kamala Harris by associating her with the bad legacy of Biden's four years of ruling America. Trump grounds his attacks on the fact that Kamala Harris fails to improve the situation as an actor of Biden's administration. He constantly attacks her through negative lexical items such as: "weak", "incompetent", "the worst", "horrible negotiator". Lexicalization device is commonly employed by political actors to ingrain in people's minds certain ideas. In using this device, Trump's intent is to show that Kamala Harris is unfit for the White House.

(22) "She's **destroying** this country. And if she becomes president, this country doesn't have a chance of success. Not only success. We'll end up being Venezuela on steroids" ((D. Trump, 2024).

(23) "But if she won the election, the day after that election, they'll go back to **destroying** our country and oil will be **dead**, fossil fuel will be **dead"** (D. Trump, 2024).

For Donald Trump, if Kamala Harris is elected, the country will be destroyed. To persuade American that Kamala Harris can be the worst president, he negatively portrays her through pejorative lexical items. He employs pejorative lexical items like "destroying" and "dead" in (22) and (23). Besides, the negative comments such as "bad job", "no good", "poor job", "inflation" and "didn't fire" can be seen in the Donald Trump's utterances in (24) and (25). The occurrence of these pejorative terms to describe Kamala Harris sheds light on the ideological opposition between Harris and Trump.

(24) "So, when somebody does a **bad job,** I fire them. And you take a guy like Esper. He was **no good**, I fired him. But they have done such a **poor job**. And they never fire anybody. Look at the economy. Look at the inflation. They **didn't fire** any of their economists" (Donald Trump, 2024).

(25) "What **these people** have done to our country, and maybe **toughest** of all is allowing millions of people to come into our country, many of them are **criminals**, and they're **destroying our country**. The **worst president**, the **worst vice president** in the history of our country" (Donald Trump, 2024).

According to scholars like D. Matic (2012) and T. A. Van Dijk (1995), lexicalization is the primary means of achieving positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. T. Van Dijk (1995) suggests that lexicalization used to represent others negatively or to delegitimize their behaviors through using strongly negative words. As it can be seen in (25) a pejorative lexical item is employed to negatively presents Joe Biden and his Vice President as the "worst" leaders in the history of America.

Number game is defined by M. Saedeen and N. Albzour (2021, p. 37) as "the use of numbers in discourse to bolster the credibility or legitimacy of the discourse producers' views or beliefs". Apart from attacking his adversaries, the analysis also finds the occurrences of number game as a strategy of factual portraying of America socio-economic matters. In displaying how his opponents, especially Joe Biden and Kamala Harris are worsening the problems of America, President Trump strategically uses numbers to back up his claims. T. A. Van Dijk (2004) explains that political actors use numbers in their speeches to enhance the credibility of their speeches and show objectivity. In the following data (26) and (27), Donald Trump relies on numbers to make plausible arguments:

(26) Probably the worst in our nation's history. We were at **21%.** But that's being generous because many things are **50, 60, 70,** and **80%** higher than they were just a few years ago. This has been a disaster for people, for the middle class, but for every class.

(27) We are going take in **billions of dollars**, **hundreds of billions of dollars**. I had no inflation, virtually no inflation, they **had the highest inflation**, perhaps in the history of our country because I've never seen **a worse period** of time (D. Trump, 2024).

To provide the audience with concrete proof of the current socio-economic problems in the United States, President Trump uses number game as a strategy to make credible claims. In (26), he supports his argument with the percentage of inflation in America. This allows him to make people realise how the situation has become worse. The numbers in (27) "billions of dollars" and "hundreds of billions of dollars" refer to the money his administration will get from tariffs on foreign imports across the borders. These numbers positively portray what he wants to do in order to address the issue of inflation. In addition to the number game device, Trump employs lexicalization to talk about the bad record of Biden's administration. While, he enhances his positive image by mentioning big amount of money that he can generate if he is elected again. By contrast, he degrades others' image by criticizing the way they deal with the inflation. The use of numbers plays a key role in persuading others about a given claim. As it can be seen in the extracts (28) and (29), Donald Trump points out that he makes NATO countries pay "billions and billions, hundreds of billions of dollars" while his opponents in the rally can't do the same because they are "weak people".

(28) They're in for **$150 billion** less because Biden and you don't have the courage to ask Europe like I did with NATO. They paid **billions** and **billions**, **hundreds of billions of dollars** when I said either you pay up or we're not going to protect you anymore. So that may be one of the reasons they don't like me as much as they like weak people. (D. Trump, 2024)

(29) The polls say **80** and **85** and even **90%** that the Trump economy was great, that their economy was **terrible** (D. Trump, 2024).

(30) That didn't happen under Donald Trump. Let me just tell you, **they lost 10,000** manufacturing jobs this last month. It's going, they're all leaving (D. Trump, 2024).

(31) But when you look at what she's done to our country and when you look at **these millions** and **millions of people** that are pouring into our country monthly where it's I believe **21 million** people, not the **15** that people say, and I think it's **a lot higher than the 21**. That's bigger than New York state (D. Trump, 2024).

Number game device is commonly found in President Trump discourse. This discursive strategy helps him to make his statements more convincing. The strategy of number game is evidenced in examples (28), (29), (30) and (31). For instance, in (29) we notice the ideology of using positive presentation of in-groups versus negative presentation of out-groups in Trump's discourse. As the numbers show, he has a high record on economy. Donald Trump uses the numbers "80 and 85 and even 90%" to draw people's attention to his outstanding political actions. Similar numbers are found in excerpts (30) and (31). The numbers employed by President Trump in (30) and (31) degrades the image of his political opponents and threaten their face needs. By mentioning "millions" and "millions of people" pouring in the United States, Donald Trump is denouncing border insecurity. His claims on the issue are well supported by the use of numbers: "21 million people".

At the end of the presidential debate, the former President Donald Trump has come back on 2020 election results. When the monitor of the debate maintains that President Trump falsely claims that he has won the 2020 election. In answering the monitor's comment, Donald Trump says that the election was "fraudulent". Secondly, he puts forward some numbers to legitimize his claim about this election of 2020. This number game can be observed in example (32):

(32) "I got almost **75 million votes**. The most votes any sitting president has ever gotten. I was told if **I got 63**, which was what I got in 2016, you can't be beaten. The election, people should never be thinking about an election as fraudulent".

T. A. Van Dijk (2004) states that politicians use numbers to enhance the credibility and objectivity of their statements. To convince the American public that his claims are rights and credible President Trump brings out numbers, "I got almost 75 million votes" and "I got 63 million". As a matter of fact, one notices in (32) that Donald Trump relies on game number to persuade his supporters that he was fraudulently beaten in 2020 election. Hence, he deductively points out: "I was told if I got 63, which was what I got in 2016, you can't be beaten" (D. Trump, 2024). With regard to his numbers in the 2020 election, Donald Trump is convinced that he has lost the election to Biden because of "fraudulent" practices.

CONCLUSION

The American presidential debate is the most important political event for candidates as well as for the voters. It gives the candidates the opportunity to persuade the people to support their political visions. Using the Socio-Cognitive Theory of T. A. Van Dijk (2006), this study investigates Donald Trump's persuasive strategies during October 2024 presidential debate. The study examines the general strategies of Positive Self-Presentation and Negative Other-Presentation that represent the macro-strategy of studying discourses according to T. A. Van Dijk (2006). This study also explores five rhetorical devices put forward by T. A. Van Dijk (2006) which constitute the micro-level of text and talk analysis. The findings show that Donald Trump's persuasive strategies are embedded in the ideology of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. Donald Trump positively presents himself during the debate through the strategic use of self-glorification, evidentialities or examples and lexicalization. This critical study of President Trump's speeches also shows that he uses lexicalization, actor description, comparison and number game to degrade his rivals' public image.

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