



## A Pragma-Critical Discourse Analysis of Directive and Commissive Illocutionary Force in Selected American Political Speeches

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### Abstract

Critical and text linguistics play a key role in analyzing the speaker's intended meaning. Pragmatics examines communicative action and its appropriateness within context, while Critical Discourse Analysis identifies and investigates social injustice in language. Commissive and directive speech acts have been the focus of much investigation in political discourse; however, previous studies have not dealt with situational and background context from CDA perspectives. This study employs a combined qualitative and quantitative methodological approach, utilizing an eclectic model consisting of Searle's directive and commissive speech acts, Fairclough's sociocultural model, and Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach. The data is empirical, consisting of eight selected political speeches from the presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris hosted by ABC News in September 2024, with four texts analyzed for each speaker. The study investigates how both politicians view themselves from a pragma-critical perspective, how Searle's approach reflects conflict pragmatically, the most occurring elements in Van Dijk's model, and how Fairclough's approach constructs discourse. Findings reveal that Trump utilizes more commissive speech acts (100%) than Harris (75%), employing ordering, threatening, and vowing as powerful linguistic tools. Trump utilizes the 'society' element more frequently (75%), demonstrating dominance and power interactions, while both speakers employ Fairclough's discursive and social practices equally. These two models can address concerns about language use by powerful elites against helpless people during interaction, contributing to understanding how directives and commissives negotiate power and construct political legitimacy in high-stakes disputes.

**Keywords:** Commissives, Critical Discourse Analysis, Directives, Illocutionary acts, Manipulation, Pragmatics, Trump-Harris debate



## تحليل الخطاب النقدي التداولي للقوة الإنجازية التوجيهية والالتزامية في خطابات سياسية أمريكية مختارة

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### المستخلص :

يلعب علم اللغة النقدي وعلم اللغة النصي دورًا رئيسيًا في تحليل المعنى الذي يقصده المتحدث. يدرس علم التداولية الفعل التواصلية ومدى ملاءمته للسياق، في حين يحدد تحليل الخطاب النقدي الظلم الاجتماعي في اللغة ويحقق فيه. شكلت أفعال الكلام الالتزامية والتوجيهية محورًا للعديد من الدراسات في الخطاب السياسي؛ إلا أن الدراسات السابقة لم تتناول السياقين الظرفي والخلفي من منظورات تحليل الخطاب النقدي. توظف هذه الدراسة منهجية بحثية مختلطة (كمية ونوعية)، مستخدمة نموذجًا انتقائيًا يتألف من أفعال سيرل التوجيهية والالتزامية، والنموذج الاجتماعي الثقافي لفيركلاف، والمنهج الاجتماعي المعرفي لفان دايك. البيانات تجريبية، وتتكون من ثماني خطابات سياسية مختارة من المناظرة الرئاسية بين دونالد ترامب وكامالا هاريس التي استضافتها قناة إيه بي سي نيوز في سبتمبر ٢٠٢٤، مع تحليل أربعة نصوص لكل متحدث. تبحر الدراسة في كيفية نظر كل من السياسيين إلى نفسه من منظور تداولي نقدي، وكيف يعكس نهج سيرل الصراع تداوليًا، والعناصر الأكثر تكرارًا في نموذج فان دايك، وكيف يبني نهج فيركلاف الخطاب. تكشف النتائج أن ترامب يستخدم أفعالًا كلامية التزامية (١٠٠%) أكثر من هاريس (٧٥%)، موظفًا الأمر والتهديد والتعهد كأدوات لغوية قوية. يستخدم ترامب عنصر "المجتمع" بشكل متكرر (٧٥%)، مما يظهر تفاعلات الهيمنة والسلطة، بينما يوظف كلا المتحدثين الممارسات الخطابية والاجتماعية لفيركلاف بشكل متساوٍ. يمكن لهذين النموذجين معالجة القضايا المتعلقة باستخدام اللغة من قبل النخب القوية ضد الفئات المهمشة أثناء التفاعل، مما يساهم في فهم كيفية تفاوض الأفعال التوجيهية والالتزامية على السلطة وبناء الشرعية السياسية في النزاعات عالية المخاطر.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الأفعال الالتزامية، تحليل الخطاب النقدي، الأفعال التوجيهية، الأفعال الإنجازية، التلاعب، علم التداولية، مناظرة ترامب-هاريس

## 1. Introduction

Establish the context, background and/or importance of the topic, pragma-critical discourse analysis of directive and commissive speech acts (Austin, 1962 & Searle, 1969) is a controversial area of study in which a lot of papers have been written, but indicating the issue, problem, or controversy in this research paper is being investigated. This element has become the most prominent feature of this form of conversation due to the nature of politics itself. This study explores manipulation in ten of Trump's political speeches. It entails discovering how Trump produces ideological discourse to present reality for his audience, which Trump undertakes to promote his agenda, philosophy, and program to his audience. Besides, overstatement extends over the other figures of speech and argumentative appeals in British parliamentary discourse and makes the discussions very rhetorical as a result. Finally, pathos triumphed over other argumentative appeals. This indicates that arguers in the British parliament resort to feelings and stimulation of the audience's emotions when presenting their points. The current study fills the gap of speech acts from a critical perspective in the situational and background context, which the previous studies did not discuss and explore.

The present study aims to address this gap by exploring how directives and commissives are deployed jointly in modern political discourse to establish authority, negotiate political identities, and reinforce social power in high-stakes political disputes. Specifically, this research seeks to: (1) identify how Donald Trump and Kamala Harris view themselves as politicians from the perspective of pragma-critical discourse analysis; (2) explain how Searle's approach reflects conflict pragmatically; (3) identify the most occurring elements in Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model; and (4) examine how Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis constructs and shapes the discourse of text concerning the selected data. To achieve these objectives, the study attempts to answer the following research questions: (1) In what way do both Donald Trump and Kamala Harris view themselves as politicians from the perspective of Pragma-Critical Discourse analysis?; (2) To what extent does Searle's approach reflect the conflict pragmatically?; (3) What are the most occurring elements in Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model?; and (4) How does Fairclough's approach to CDA construct and shape the discourse of text concerning the selected data?

This study is based on a mix of Searle's directive and commissive speech acts (1969), Fairclough's sociocultural model (1995), and Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to critical linguistics (2000). You can look at political discourse from a lot of different angles with this three-part framework. These include the pragmatic, sociocultural, and cognitive angles. The data

is real and comes from eight political speeches chosen from the presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, which ABC News organized in September 2024. Each speaker had four texts looked at. This debate is a great source of information because it shows two people who disagree politically arguing in real time about the US presidency. It teaches us a lot about how directives and commissives work together to establish power and shape political stories. This study is important because it could help us learn how political elites use language to get power and control over other people. The study combines speech act theory with critical discourse analysis to create a strong framework for explaining how directives and commissives work as strategic tools for politicians to get support, strengthen their legitimacy, and assert their authority. The findings have implications for both academic understanding of political discourse and for raising public awareness of the language strategies that powerful people use to control and sway public opinion. Also, the study adds to the growing body of research that combines pragmatics and critical discourse analysis. It does this by presenting a model that can be used in many situations where language is used to negotiate power and social relationships. The study found that Trump uses more speech acts that promise something than Harris does. But both people use sociocultural and socio-cognitive approaches the same amount.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Key Words

#### 2.1.1 Pragmatics

According to Van Dijk (1977, p.140) pragmatics is that part of language study, which focuses on action, and it has two tasks. The first task is to turn objects to (discourses or sentences or possible words, etc.) into acts. In other words; what has been the abstract structure of the utterance-object must become the abstract structure of the utterance-act. The second one is to place these acts in a situation, and formulate the conditions stipulating which utterances are successful in which situation.

#### 2.1.2 Speech Acts Theory

Speech act is a term suggested by Austin (1962, p.60) and widely used in linguistics nowadays. It refers to a theory which analyzes utterances in relation to the behavior of speakers and hearers in interpersonal communications. It is a communicative activity, i.e., a locutionary act that is defined with reference to the intentions of speakers during speaking (the illocutionary force of their utterances). There are several categories of speech acts, namely, directive, commissive, declarative, expressive, and representative.

#### 2.1.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Wodak (2024) defines Critical Discourse Studies (CDS)—the currently preferred term for CDA—as "a problem-orientated interdisciplinary research

programme, subsuming a variety of approaches, each with different theoretical models, research methods, and agendas. What unites all approaches is a shared interest in the semiotic dimensions of power, injustice, and political-economic, social, or cultural change in society". This definition emphasizes that CDA investigates not linguistic units per se but rather complex social phenomena requiring multi/inter/transdisciplinary and multimethodological approaches, while clarifying that the objects under investigation need not be related to negative or exceptionally serious social or political experiences—any social phenomenon lends itself to critical investigation.

## 2.2 Discourse and Society

This section discusses discourse's socio-situatedness, or how spoken and written discourse is used and understood in diverse social and cultural contexts. Speakers have many social identities and discourse community memberships. They may use a language repertoire for their interactions. They may speak multiple languages in their communities. Many countries have this issue. Language choice may depend on the context, such as family, friends, religious, educational, and employment situations. Social factors like who we are talking to, the social context, the topic, function, and goal of the interaction, the social distance between speakers, the formality of the setting or type of interaction, and each speaker's status also influence language choice in these situations (Holmes, 2008).

## 2.3 Political Discourse: A Contemporary Definition

Political discourse is a complicated and creative way for politicians and political groups to fight for and keep power. It is a kind of institutional discourse that shows a country's culture, politics, and social and political life. It also serves to inform, manipulate, predict, legitimize, persuade, and spread political propaganda. According to Hart (2025), politics is mostly a symbolic activity that happens when people make and read texts and speak. This includes not just formal speeches, but also TV debates, press conferences, interviews, and digital media that are a big part of everyday life. Political discourse flows in multiple directions: from institutions to citizens, from citizens to institutions, and among citizens. The way political elites talk to each other and the public always has an effect on each other. This flow going in many directions shows that political communication is always changing. In some sociopolitical situations, people use language choices as tools to shape public opinion, build identities, and negotiate power relations.

## 2.4 Language and Society

Language is part of the way society works, the way people interact with each other, and the way power works. Boutet, Fiala, and Simonin-Grumbach (2025) contend that linguistic practices are governed by social structures

while concurrently influencing the social order in a reciprocal dynamic. Discourse constitutes the principal medium for the construction and negotiation of social identities, relationships, and ideologies. The social context, topic, interaction goals, social distance, formality, and speaker status all affect the language that is used (Holmes, 2008). These sociolinguistic factors have a big impact on how meaning is made and understood in communication events.

### 2.5 Manipulative Strategy as a Facet of Discourse Analysis

Manipulation in political discourse is a type of social power abuse in which powerful groups change the thoughts and actions of others in ways that are not in their best interests. Van Dijk (2006) posits that, unlike persuasion, which allows interlocutors the freedom to believe or act according to their preferences, manipulation incapacitates "recipients from understanding the true intentions or recognizing the full consequences of the beliefs or actions advocated by the manipulator." Van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework analyzes manipulation through three interrelated dimensions: discourse (text and conversation), cognition (mental focus), and society (exploitation of power). The main ways that manipulation works are through ideological polarization, especially by presenting oneself positively and others negatively (Van Dijk, 1998). In politics, people can use other manipulative techniques to gain social power and control, such as theatrical emotionality, appeals to shared values, implication, presupposition, and emotionally charged language. These methods work on both a large and small scale.

### 2.6 Related Works

A lot of research published in the Journal of the College of Education for Women at the University of Baghdad has looked into how pragmatics, speech act theory, and critical discourse analysis work together in political settings. This section examines five pertinent studies from this journal and delineates the gap that the present research seeks to fill. Nashmi and Mehdi (2022) did a practical study of how identity was represented in American political speeches given between 2015 and 2018. The study looked at three randomly chosen speeches by well-known American politicians to see how identity shows up in real-life situations. The results showed that the data shows different types of identity representations, such as national and political identity. The most common pragmatic strategies were speech acts and reference, along with other things like rudeness and breaking the maxim. This study is similar to other research that looks at speech acts in American political discourse, but its main focus is on how identity is represented rather than how directive and commissive illocutionary forces work together to negotiate power and political authority. Moreover, Nashmi and Mehdi (2022) did not specifically investigate the

interaction of directives and commissives in real-time political debates, which is a primary focus of the current study. In the Journal of the College of Education for Women, Alattar (2021) wrote a practical look at the questions and answers that American defense attorneys use in cross-examinations. The study looked at how questioning and answering are used strategically in legal discourse to show how practical choices can help achieve certain institutional goals. This study shows that Alattar is still interested in pragmatic analysis in institutional settings, such as her earlier work on American presidential speeches (Alattar, 2014) and hyperboles in Obama's speeches (Alattar, 2017). However, it is focused on legal rather than political discourse and does not specifically look at how directive and commissive speech acts interact. This study builds on this line of research by using the same level of analytical rigor on political debate discourse, but with a focus on the directive-commissive interface.

Eidan and Abbas (2025) did a critical discourse analysis of water war discourse on social media. They looked at what Iraqi and Turkish politicians said and published their findings in *Midad Al-Adab*, which is connected to the College of Education for Women at the University of Baghdad. The study used a mix of Fairclough's three-dimensional framework (1995) and Van Dijk's ideological square (2000) to look at how political talk affects ideological stories. The results showed that material processes were very important. This means that politicians make ideological representations by focusing on the good things about their own group and the bad things about the other group. This study looks at the current research's interest in combining Fairclough and Van Dijk's frameworks for analyzing political discourse. However, it is different because it focuses on international water conflicts instead of the more complex relationship between directive and commissive speech acts in presidential debates. The current study utilizes a similar eclectic methodology, with a focus on speech act theory. There is still a big gap in the current research about how directive and commissive illocutionary acts work together to make political legitimacy during live political discussions. The previous studies published in the Journal of the College of Education for Women have made important contributions, but they haven't filled this gap. Nashmi and Mehdi (2022) looked at speech acts in American political speeches. They focused on how identity is represented through pragmatic strategies instead of the exact relationship between directives and commissives in power negotiation. Alattar's studies from 2014, 2017, and 2021 have all used pragmatic analysis on different types of discourse, like presidential speeches and legal discourse. However, they have not looked specifically at how directives and commissives work together in debate settings. Previous research has looked at directive acts on

their own, focusing only on how they establish authority. They have not looked at how they interact with commissive acts in a systematic way. Researchers have looked at commissive illocutionary acts a lot in political speeches, but they haven't looked at how commissives and directives interact in real-time discussions in a systematic way. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework has been used in studies published in this journal (Eidan & Abbas, 2025) to look at how mental models affect how people use language. However, it hasn't looked closely enough at how directive and commissive illocutionary acts work together to define political authority and negotiate legitimacy in real-time political discourse. The current study fills in these gaps by: (1) looking at how directives and commissives are used together in the Trump-Harris presidential debate to establish authority, negotiate political identities, and reinforce social power; (2) using a mix of Searle's speech act theory, Fairclough's sociocultural approach, and Van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework to provide a multi-dimensional analysis focused on the directive-commissive interface; (3) looking at real-time political discourse where the ability to respond quickly and negotiate power is important for political success; and (4) adding to the growing body of research published in the Journal of the College of Education for Women by showing how directives and commissives are used as strategic tools by politicians to mobilize support, reinforce legitimacy, and assert authority in high-stakes political disputes.

### 3. The Analytical Part

#### 3.1 Methodology of the Study

Upon selecting a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methodologies approach, and after performing a preliminary literature review and determining a proposal format, the subsequent stage is to design or plan the study. The process of structuring and articulating ideas commences with the formulation of an introduction to a proposal. In a qualitative project, the writer will identify an inquiry that is most effectively comprehended through the exploration of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2018).

#### 3.2 Research Design

The present study employs a mixed-methods research design that combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. Creswell (2014) posits that mixed-methods research provides a more holistic comprehension of research problems by integrating the benefits of both paradigms, making it particularly apt for the examination of directive and commissive illocutionary acts in political discourse. According to Dörnyei (2007), the qualitative section employs an interpretive methodology to examine the functioning of speech acts within their social and cultural contexts. This method allows for the analysis of subtle meanings, intentions, and

ideological consequences in the speeches of Trump and Harris as they manage power relations and construct political identities through language. The quantitative component employs content analysis to systematically count and categorize instances of directive and commissive speech acts, incorporating elements of Fairclough's sociocultural framework and Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model within the selected eight texts. We calculate the frequencies and percentages to see how things are spread out. When talking about statistical results with qualitative insights at the interpretation stage, both methods are used to give a full picture. This triangulation enhances validity and reliability by examining results from various analytical perspectives (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). It also lets the study look at both the frequency distribution and the strategic roles of speech acts in political debate discourse.

### 3.3 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection for this study followed a systematic multi-stage procedure to ensure accuracy and relevance. First, the primary data source was identified as the presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris hosted by ABC News on September 10, 2024. The full transcript was retrieved from the official CNN website (<https://www.cnn.com/2024/09/10/politics/debate-takeaways-trump-harris/index.html>) and verified for authenticity against the televised broadcast. Second, a purposive sampling technique (Patton, 2002) was employed to select eight extracts, four per speaker, based on criteria including: clear instances of directive or commissive speech acts, representation of key debate themes, demonstration of interactional conflict, and sufficient length for contextual analysis. Third, each selected extract was coded with a unique identifier (e.g., Harris-1, Trump-1) and organized into a structured corpus with contextual notes regarding the debate topic and preceding turns. Finally, all data were documented with complete source attribution; as the material consists of publicly available political discourse, no ethical approvals were required, though accurate representation of the original transcripts was ensured without alteration or manipulation.

### 3.4 The Eclectic Model of Analysis

This study uses a broad eclectic model that combines Searle's (1969, 1976) classification of illocutionary acts, Fairclough's (1989, 1995) three-dimensional model of CDA, and Van Dijk's (1998, 2000) socio-cognitive approach. This integration includes the practical, social, and cognitive aspects of directive and commissive speech acts in political debate discourse.

#### 3.4.1 Level One: Pragmatic Analysis (Searle's Speech Act Theory)

This level employs Searle's (1976) classification of illocutionary acts,

focusing on directives and commissives. Directives are acts in which the speaker attempts to get the hearer to do something (world-to-words fit), including commanding, ordering, requesting, inviting, forbidding, suggesting, and advising. Commissives are acts in which the speaker commits to a future course of action (world-to-words fit), including promising, offering, threatening, refusing, vowing, and volunteering (Searle, 1976; Yule, 1996). Analysis identifies: (a) speech act type; (b) linguistic realization patterns; (c) illocutionary force indicating devices; and (d) propositional content conditions.

### 3.4.2 Level Two: Sociocultural Analysis (Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model)

Fairclough (1995) sees discourse as a combination of text, discursive practice, and social practice. During the description stage, formal linguistic elements such as vocabulary selection, grammar, and textual structures are examined. During the interpretation phase, the connection between text and interaction is analyzed, concentrating on intertextuality, interdiscursivity, and the institutional processes that influence text creation. During the explanation phase, discourse is contextualized within extensive social frameworks and power dynamics, uncovering concealed linkages among language, authority, and ideology (Fairclough, 1989).

### 3.4.3 Level Three: Socio-Cognitive Analysis (Van Dijk's Model)

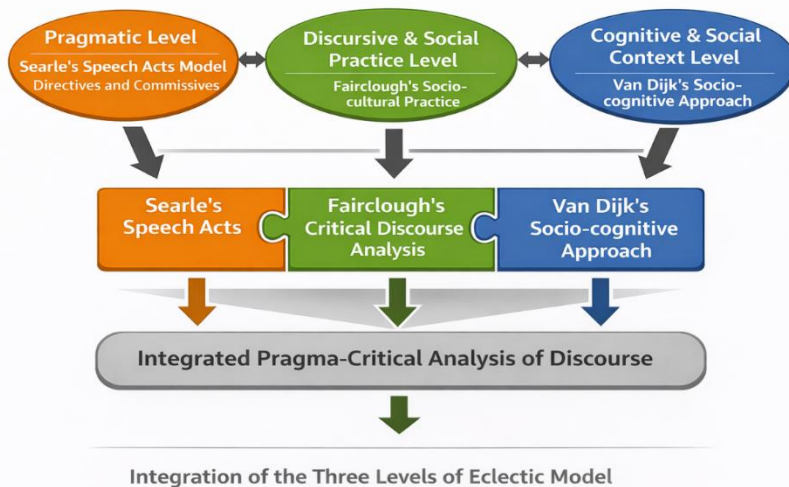
Van Dijk's (2000) socio-cognitive approach emphasizes mental representations mediating between discourse and society. Micro-level analysis examines local discourse structures including lexical choice, syntactic patterns, and local coherence. Macro-level analysis addresses global discourse structures such as topics, themes, and argumentation strategies. Cognition encompasses context models—mental representations of communicative situations (Van Dijk, 2008)—and social cognition including shared knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies. Van Dijk's (1998) ideological square reveals how discourse systematically emphasizes positive in-group information and negative out-group information while de-emphasizing negative in-group and positive out-group information.

### 3.4.4 Integration of the Three Levels

The eclectic model combines all three levels: speech act analysis finds pragmatic functions, Fairclough's framework puts acts in a sociocultural context, and Van Dijk's approach shows the cognitive representations and ideological structures that shape how speech acts are made and understood (see Figure 1). This integration facilitates an extensive examination of how Trump and Harris employ directive

and commissive speech acts to negotiate power, formulate political identities, and assert legitimacy.

**Figure (1)**  
*Integration of the Three Levels of Eclectic Model*



### 3.5 Data Analysis

This section presents the analysis of the selected political speeches from the presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris hosted by ABC News on September 10, 2024. The analysis follows the eclectic model proposed in Section Three, integrating Searle's speech act theory, Fairclough's three-dimensional model, and Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach. The data consists of eight extracts, four for each speaker, which are analyzed qualitatively and then tabulated quantitatively.

#### 3.5.1 Analysis of Harris's Presidential Debate Speeches

##### Sample No. (1)

"In this debate tonight, you're going to hear from the same old, tired playbook, a bunch of lies, grievances, and name-calling."

Level One: Pragmatic Analysis (Searle's Speech Act Theory)

This utterance realizes a directive speech act in the form of suggesting. Harris directs the audience's attention and expectations by suggesting what they will hear from Trump. The illocutionary force is to prepare the audience to interpret Trump's subsequent utterances as deceptive and immature. The performative force is achieved through the future-oriented structure "you're going to hear," which functions as a predictive warning. The propositional content

characterizes Trump's discourse negatively through the lexical items "lies," "grievances," and "name-calling."

Level Two: Sociocultural Analysis (Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model)

Description (Text Analysis): The lexical choices are highly connotative. "Tired playbook" metaphorically frames Trump's rhetoric as repetitive and unoriginal. "Lies" directly attacks Trump's credibility, while "grievances" and "name-calling" portray him as petty and personal rather than substantive. The syntactic structure is declarative, presenting the claim as factual rather than opinion.

Interpretation (Discursive Practice): Harris draws on intertextual references to Trump's established rhetorical style, which has been widely discussed in media coverage. The utterance positions her as a truth-teller who will expose Trump's tactics. The production of this text is shaped by the debate genre, where candidates simultaneously address their opponent, the moderator, and the viewing audience.

Explanation (Social Practice): This utterance reflects broader social struggles over truth and legitimacy in political discourse. Harris constructs herself as a reliable source of information while delegitimizing Trump as a source of misinformation. This aligns with Fairclough's (1995) notion of discourse as social practice that reproduces or challenges power relations.

Level Three: Socio-Cognitive Analysis (Van Dijk's Model)

Micro Level: The local discourse structure employs negative lexical items to characterize Trump's discourse. The use of "you're going to hear" creates a cognitive frame that prepares the audience to process subsequent information critically.

Macro Level: The global topic is the unreliability of Trump as a political communicator. This contributes to the overarching theme of Harris's campaign: that Trump is unfit for office.

Cognition: Harris activates shared cultural knowledge about Trump's communication style, drawing on audience mental models developed through years of media coverage. The utterance aims to influence audience mental representations of Trump before he speaks.

Society: This utterance participates in the broader social conflict between Democratic and Republican worldviews, reinforcing in-group (Harris supporters) positive self-presentation and out-group (Trump supporters) negative other-presentation.

Sample No. (2)

"Nowhere in America is a woman carrying a pregnancy to term and asking for an abortion. That is not happening. It's insulting to the women of America."

### Level One: Pragmatic Analysis (Searle's Speech Act Theory)

This utterance realizes a directive speech act in the form of correcting or contradicting. Harris directly challenges a claim presumably made by Trump about abortion. The illocutionary force is to assert a factual correction while simultaneously directing the audience to reject the opposing view. The repetition of negation ("nowhere," "is not happening") strengthens the directive force by leaving no room for ambiguity.

### Level Two: Sociocultural Analysis (Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model)

**Description (Text Analysis):** The spatial deictic "nowhere in America" emphasizes absolute negation. The hypothetical scenario "a woman carrying a pregnancy to term and asking for an abortion" exposes the logical absurdity of the opposing claim. The final sentence "It's insulting to the women of America" shifts from factual correction to emotional appeal, using "insulting" to evoke moral outrage.

**Interpretation (Discursive Practice):** Harris draws on feminist discourse and the broader cultural conversation about reproductive rights. The utterance addresses multiple audiences: Trump directly, women voters who support abortion rights, and undecided voters concerned about women's autonomy.

**Explanation (Social Practice):** This utterance participates in the ongoing social struggle over women's bodily autonomy. Harris positions herself as defending women against misrepresentation, aligning with what Lazar (2014) terms "feminist critical discourse analysis," which examines how gender ideology is constructed and contested in discourse.

### Level Three: Socio-Cognitive Analysis (Van Dijk's Model)

**Micro Level:** The logical structure (if X, then Y) exposes the implausibility of the opposing claim. The use of emotional vocabulary ("insulting") targets audience affect.

**Macro Level:** The global topic is reproductive rights, one of the most divisive issues in American politics. Harris constructs herself as defending evidence-based reality against ideological distortion.

**Cognition:** Harris appeals to audience mental models of logical consistency and fairness. By exposing the absurdity of the opposing claim, she aims to modify audience attitudes toward Trump's credibility on women's issues.

**Society:** This utterance reinforces the ideological polarization between pro-choice and pro-life positions while positioning Harris with the majority of Americans who support abortion rights

according to polling data.

Sample No. (3)

"I will tell you, I agreed with President Biden's decision to pull out of Afghanistan. Four presidents said they would, and Joe Biden did."

Level One: Pragmatic Analysis (Searle's Speech Act Theory)

This utterance realizes a commissive speech act in the form of asserting agreement and praising. While not a promise about future action, Harris commits herself to a public stance aligning with Biden's decision. The illocutionary force is to demonstrate loyalty to her administration and to reframe the Afghanistan withdrawal as an achievement rather than a failure. The commissive element lies in her public identification with a controversial decision.

Level Two: Sociocultural Analysis (Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model)

Description (Text Analysis): The repetition of "I will tell you" creates intimacy and directness. The contrastive structure "Four presidents said they would, and Joe Biden did" uses parallelism to emphasize Biden's unique accomplishment. The lexical choice "did" is simple but powerful, implying action rather than empty rhetoric.

Interpretation (Discursive Practice): Harris responds to anticipated criticism of the Afghanistan withdrawal. She intertextually references the failures of previous presidents (Bush, Obama, Trump) to create a contrast that makes Biden appear decisive by comparison.

Explanation (Social Practice): This utterance participates in the social practice of legacy construction. Harris defends the Biden administration's record while positioning herself as a loyal and effective successor. The discourse reflects broader struggles over how historical events are interpreted and memorialized.

Level Three: Socio-Cognitive Analysis (Van Dijk's Model)

Micro Level: The syntactic structure emphasizes agency: "Joe Biden did" places Biden as the grammatical subject performing the action. The contrast with four previous presidents creates a cognitive frame of achievement.

Macro Level: The global topic is presidential effectiveness and follow-through on campaign promises.

Cognition: Harris activates audience knowledge of previous presidents' failures to withdraw from Afghanistan. This shared historical knowledge makes Biden's action appear more significant.

Society: This utterance reinforces Democratic Party narratives about presidential competence while implicitly criticizing Trump's failure to complete a withdrawal despite negotiating a deal.

Sample No. (4)

"He's trying to, again, divide and distract from the reality, which is, it is very well known that Donald Trump is weak and wrong on national security and foreign policy. It is well known that he admires dictators and wants to be a dictator on day one, according to himself."

Level One: Pragmatic Analysis (Searle's Speech Act Theory)

This utterance realizes a commissive speech act in the form of accusing and warning. Harris commits herself to a characterization of Trump as authoritarian and incompetent. The illocutionary force combines assertion of fact ("it is very well known") with warning to the American public about the dangers of a second Trump term. The accusation that Trump "admires dictators" and "wants to be a dictator" represents a strong commissive stance.

Level Two: Sociocultural Analysis (Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model)

Description (Text Analysis): The verbs "divide and distract" characterize Trump's rhetorical strategy negatively. The repetition of "it is very well known" presents the claims as established fact rather than opinion. The lexical choices "weak," "wrong," "admires dictators," and "dictator" form a chain of negative attributions that accumulate force. The phrase "according to himself" is particularly damaging as it cites Trump's own words against him.

Interpretation (Discursive Practice): Harris draws on intertextual references to Trump's own statements about dictators and his reported admiration for authoritarian leaders. This strategy of quoting the opponent against himself is a powerful rhetorical device in political debate.

Explanation (Social Practice): This utterance participates in the broader democratic discourse defending American institutions against perceived authoritarian threats. Harris positions herself as defender of democratic norms against Trump's alleged authoritarian tendencies.

Level Three: Socio-Cognitive Analysis (Van Dijk's Model)

Micro Level: The accusation of dictatorial ambitions targets fundamental American values about democracy and freedom. The reference to Trump's own words ("according to himself") strengthens credibility by providing evidence.

Macro Level: The global topic is the threat Trump poses to American democracy, a central theme of Harris's campaign.

Cognition: Harris activates audience mental models of dictatorship as negative and threatening. By linking Trump to this concept, she aims to transfer negative associations to his candidacy.

Society: This utterance reinforces the ideological polarization

between those who see Trump as a threat to democracy and those who view him as a strong leader. Harris positions herself on the side of democratic institutions and norms.

### 3.5.2 Analysis of Trump's Presidential Debate Speeches

Sample No. (1)

"She doesn't have a plan. She copied Biden's plan, and it's four sentences, like, 'Run Spot, Run.'"

Level One: Pragmatic Analysis (Searle's Speech Act Theory)

This utterance realizes a commissive speech act in the form of refusing to acknowledge Harris's policy proposals as legitimate. Trump commits himself to the stance that Harris lacks substance and originality. The illocutionary force is dismissive and contemptuous. The comparison to "Run Spot, run" (a reference to primary school reading primers) infantilizes Harris's policy proposals, refusing to treat them as serious presidential discourse.

Level Two: Sociocultural Analysis (Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model)

Description (Text Analysis): The short, simple sentences mirror the simplicity Trump attributes to Harris's plan. "Doesn't have" is absolute negation. "Copied" implies theft and lack of originality. The intertextual reference to "Run Spot, run" evokes childhood literacy, suggesting Harris's plan is elementary and beneath the dignity of presidential discourse.

Interpretation (Discursive Practice): Trump draws on his established rhetorical style of mockery and dismissal. The reference to "Run Spot, run" is a form of what critical discourse analysts call "recontextualization" – taking a text from one context (children's books) and applying it to another (presidential policy) to create a particular effect.

Explanation (Social Practice): This utterance reflects broader social practices of gender politics where women's intellectual contributions are dismissed as insubstantial. While not explicitly gendered, the infantilization of a female candidate's policy proposals has implications for how women's competence is evaluated in political contexts.

Level Three: Socio-Cognitive Analysis (Van Dijk's Model)

Micro Level: The metaphor of copying and the simile comparing Harris's plan to a children's book work together to create a cognitive frame of inauthenticity and simplicity.

Macro Level: The global topic is Harris's fitness for office, specifically her intellectual and policy credentials.

Cognition: Trump activates audience mental models of what serious

policy looks like (long, detailed documents) and contrasts this with the image of four sentences. He aims to create a mental representation of Harris as unprepared and unserious.

Society: This utterance reinforces the ideological divide between Trump supporters who view him as substantive and Harris as superficial. It participates in the broader social practice of delegitimizing political opponents through character attack.

Sample No. (2)

"The agreement was, was terminated by us because they didn't do what they were supposed to do. And these people did the worst withdrawal, and in my opinion, the most embarrassing moment in the history of our country. And by the way, that's why Russia attacked Ukraine, because they saw how incompetent she and her boss are."

Level One: Pragmatic Analysis (Searle's Speech Act Theory)

This utterance realizes a commissive speech act in the form of refusing to accept the Biden-Harris administration's narrative of the Afghanistan withdrawal, and blaming them for subsequent events. Trump commits himself to the stance that the withdrawal was catastrophic and directly caused Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The illocutionary force combines self-defense (explaining his own administration's actions) with accusation (blaming Biden-Harris for multiple failures).

Level Two: Sociocultural Analysis (Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model)

Description (Text Analysis): The repetition "was, was" suggests either spontaneity or emphasis. "These people" is distancing and dismissive, refusing to use titles or names. "Worst withdrawal" and "most embarrassing moment in the history of our country" employ superlatives for maximum negative impact. The causal claim "that's why Russia attacked Ukraine" makes a direct connection that many analysts dispute, presenting opinion as fact.

Interpretation (Discursive Practice): Trump defends his own administration's deal with the Taliban while attacking Biden's implementation. This dual move protects his legacy while attacking his opponent. The causal claim about Ukraine draws on right-wing media narratives that blame Biden for Putin's aggression.

Explanation (Social Practice): This utterance participates in the social practice of historical revisionism and blame allocation. Trump attempts to shape public memory of both the Afghanistan withdrawal and the Ukraine invasion in ways that benefit his campaign.

Level Three: Socio-Cognitive Analysis (Van Dijk's Model)

Micro Level: The causal structure (X caused Y) creates a strong

cognitive link between the withdrawal and the invasion. The superlatives "worst" and "most embarrassing" aim to establish the withdrawal as uniquely catastrophic.

Macro Level: The global topics are foreign policy competence and national humiliation. Trump constructs himself as the leader who would have prevented both disasters.

Cognition: Trump activates audience mental models of American strength and weakness. The withdrawal is framed as weakness that invited aggression, a cognitive frame familiar from realist international relations theory.

Society: This utterance reinforces the ideological polarization between those who view Biden's foreign policy as weak and those who see Trump's as dangerously unilateral. Trump positions himself on the side of strength and deterrence.

Sample No. (3)

"Look, Viktor Orban said it. He said the most respected, most feared person is Donald Trump."

Level One: Pragmatic Analysis (Searle's Speech Act Theory)

This utterance realizes a commissive speech act in the form of offering evidence of his international reputation. Trump commits himself to the stance that he is respected and feared globally. The illocutionary force is self-praise mediated through a third party. By quoting Orban, Trump presents the claim as objective rather than self-aggrandizing. The commissive element lies in his public commitment to this image of himself as a strong leader.

Level Two: Sociocultural Analysis (Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model)

Description (Text Analysis): The quotative frame "Look, Viktor Orban said it" presents the upcoming statement as evidence. The parallelism "most respected, most feared" pairs positive attributes (respect) with intimidating ones (fear). The repetition of "most" emphasizes superiority.

Interpretation (Discursive Practice): Trump draws on the authority of Orban, a fellow right-wing populist, to validate his self-image. This intertextual reference creates solidarity with nationalist leaders while impressing domestic audiences with international validation.

Explanation (Social Practice): This utterance reflects broader social practices of strongman politics and nationalist internationalism. Trump's embrace of Orban, despite Orban's authoritarian tendencies, signals his own political values and alliances.

Level Three: Socio-Cognitive Analysis (Van Dijk's Model)

Micro Level: The use of a quotation from a respected (by some)

foreign leader adds credibility to self-praise that might otherwise seem boastful. The superlatives "most respected, most feared" aim to establish cognitive dominance.

Macro Level: The global topic is Trump's international standing and leadership credentials.

Cognition: Trump activates audience mental models of what strong leadership looks like: being respected by allies and feared by adversaries. This realist worldview resonates with many voters.

Society: This utterance reinforces the ideological divide between those who view Trump's international image as strong and those who see his admiration for authoritarians as dangerous. Trump positions himself in the tradition of realist foreign policy.

Sample No. (4)

"They allowed criminals. Many, many millions of criminals. They allowed terrorists. They allowed common street criminals. They allowed people to come in, drug dealers, to come into our country ... And I think they probably did it because they think they're going to get votes. But it's not worth it. Because they're destroying the fabric of our country by what they've done."

Level One: Pragmatic Analysis (Searle's Speech Act Theory)

This utterance realizes a commissive speech act in the form of vowing to address immigration and accusing the Biden-Harris administration of deliberate destruction. Trump commits himself to the stance that immigration policy is a crisis caused intentionally by his opponents. The illocutionary force combines hyperbolic accusation with implied promise of future action (to reverse these policies). The repetition of "they allowed" creates a rhythmic pattern of accusation.

Level Two: Sociocultural Analysis (Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model)

Description (Text Analysis): The anaphoric repetition of "They allowed" creates a litany of accusations. The accumulation of categories ("criminals," "terrorists," "street criminals," "drug dealers") creates a cumulative effect of danger and chaos. The phrase "destroying the fabric of our country" employs a common metaphor for social cohesion. The speculation about motives ("they probably did it because they think they're going to get votes") attributes bad faith to opponents.

Interpretation (Discursive Practice): Trump draws on anti-immigrant discourse that has been central to his political identity since 2015. The intertextual references to "criminals," "terrorists," and "drug dealers" echo long-standing tropes in restrictionist immigration rhetoric.

**Explanation (Social Practice):** This utterance participates in the broader social practice of immigration scapegoating, where complex social problems are attributed to immigrants and their perceived advocates. Trump constructs immigration as an existential threat requiring drastic action.

**Level Three: Socio-Cognitive Analysis (Van Dijk's Model) Micro Level:** The repeated syntactic structure "They allowed X" creates a pattern of blame attribution. The speculation about motives attributes intentionality to the policy, making it seem more sinister.

**Macro Level:** The global topic is immigration as crisis and threat. Trump constructs immigration not as a policy difference but as an assault on the nation itself.

**Cognition:** Trump activates audience mental models of crime, terrorism, and drug abuse, linking these fears to immigration. The metaphor of "fabric" being "destroyed" evokes organic, conservative understandings of society as a fragile whole requiring protection.

**Society:** This utterance reinforces the ideological polarization between those who view immigration as a crisis and those who see it as a strength. Trump positions himself as defender of the nation against those who would destroy it for political gain.

### 3.5.3 Tabulation of the data

The following table (Table 1) presents a comprehensive quantitative analysis of all eight selected extracts according to the eclectic model's analytical categories.

**Table (1)**

*A comprehensive quantitative analysis of the selected extracts according to the eclectic model's analytical categories*

Sample No.	Type of speech act	Specific Illocutionary Force	Discursive Strategies (Fairclough)	Micro/Macro Levels (Van Dijk)	Cognition/Society Elements
Harris-1	Directive	Suggesting, warning	Description: negative lexical choices ("lies," "grievances," "name-calling"); Interpretation: intertextual reference to Trump's rhetorical style; Explanation: positioning as truth-teller	Micro: local discourse structure of negative characterization; Macro: global topic of Trump's unreliability	Cognition: activates audience mental models of Trump's communication style; Society: reinforces Democratic-Republican polarization
Harris-2	Directive	Correcting, Contradicting	Description: spatial deixis ("nowhere in America"), absolute negation; Interpretation: draws on feminist discourse; Explanation: participates in struggle over reproductive rights	Micro: logical structure exposing absurdity; Macro: global topic of women's autonomy	Cognition: appeals to mental models of logical consistency; Society: reinforces pro-choice/pro-life polarization
Harris-3	Commissive	Asserting agreement, Praising	Description: parallelism ("Four presidents said they would, and Joe Biden did"); Interpretation: intertextual reference to previous presidential failures; Explanation: legacy construction and defense of administration	Micro: syntactic emphasis on Biden's agency; Macro: global topic of presidential effectiveness	Cognition: activates historical knowledge of Afghanistan withdrawals; Society: reinforces Democratic narratives of competence
Harris-4	Commissive	Accusing, Warning	Description: repetition ("it is very well known"), negative lexical chain ("weak," "wrong," "admires dictators");	Micro: self-citation as evidence ("according to himself"); Macro: global topic of threat to	Cognition: activates mental models of dictatorship as negative; Society:

			Interpretation: quoting Trump against himself; Explanation: defending democratic norms against authoritarian threat	democracy	reinforces democracy-authoritarianism polarization
Trump-1	Commissive	Refusing, Dismissing	Description: short simple sentences, intertextual reference ("Run Spot, Run"); Interpretation: draws on rhetorical style of mockery; Explanation: participates in gendered dismissal of women's intellectual contributions	Micro: metaphor of copying, simile of children's book; Macro: global topic of Harris's fitness for office	Cognition: activates mental models of serious policy; Society: reinforces substantive-superficial polarization
Trump-2	Commissive	Refusing, Dismissing	Description: superlatives ("worst," "most embarrassing"), causal claim; Interpretation: defends own legacy while attacking Biden; Explanation: historical revisionism and blame allocation	Micro: causal structure linking withdrawal to invasion; Macro: global topics of foreign policy competence and national humiliation	Cognition: activates mental models of American strength/weakness; Society: reinforces strong-weak polarization in foreign policy
Trump-3	Commissive	Offering evidence, Self-praising	Description: quotative frame, parallelism ("most respected, most feared"); Interpretation: draws on Orban's authority; Explanation: reflects strongman politics and nationalist internationalism	Micro: third-party validation through quotation; Macro: global topic of international standing	Cognition: activates mental models of strong leadership; Society: reinforces realist-idealist polarization in foreign policy
Trump-4	Commissive	Vowing, Accusing	Description: anaphoric repetition ("They allowed"), accumulation of categories, metaphor ("fabric of our country"); Interpretation: draws on anti-immigrant discourse; Explanation: immigration scapegoating as political strategy	Micro: repeated syntactic structure of blame; Macro: global topic of immigration as crisis	Cognition: activates mental models of crime and threat; Society: reinforces open-closed borders polarization

### 3.5.4 Overview of Quantitative Findings

The analysis reveals the following quantitative distribution across the eight samples:

#### 1. Speech Act Distribution:

- Trump utilizes 4 commissive speech acts (100%) and 0 directive speech acts (0%)
- Harris utilizes 3 commissive speech acts (75%) and 1 directive speech act (25%)

#### 2. Specific Illocutionary Forces:

- Trump: refusing (2), blaming (1), self-praising (1), vowing (1), accusing (1), dismissing (1)
- Harris: suggesting (1), warning (2), correcting (1), asserting agreement (1), praising (1), accusing (1)

#### 3. Fairclough's Discursive Strategies:

- Both speakers employ all three dimensions (description, interpretation, explanation) across all samples
- Description strategies include lexical choice analysis, syntactic structure, and metaphorical language
- Interpretation strategies include intertextuality, interdiscursivity, and genre awareness
- Explanation strategies connect discourse to broader social practices and power relations

#### 4. Van Dijk's Analytical Levels:

- All samples are analyzed at both micro and macro levels
- Micro-level analysis examines local discourse structures (lexical

items, syntax, local coherence)

- Macro-level analysis addresses global topics and themes
- Cognition elements appear in all samples, focusing on mental models and shared knowledge
- Society elements appear in all samples, connecting discourse to social structures and power relations

The tabulation demonstrates that while both speakers employ commissive speech acts predominantly, Trump's discourse relies more heavily on refusal and dismissal, while Harris combines directives with commissives to achieve both corrective and accusatory functions. Both speakers utilize the full range of Fairclough's discursive strategies and Van Dijk's analytical levels, demonstrating the comprehensive applicability of the eclectic model to political debate discourse.

#### 4. Conclusion

The present study examined the pragma-critical dimensions of directive and commissive illocutionary acts in select speeches from the September 2024 presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. The study employs a combination of Searle's speech act theory, Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, and Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to elucidate how politicians utilize language to negotiate power, construct identities, and assert authority. The findings indicate that Trump and Harris perceive themselves as fundamentally distinct types of politicians regarding the initial research question. Trump thinks of himself as a strongman leader whose power comes from being feared and respected by authoritarian figures all over the world. His actions, like quoting Viktor Orban, who called him "the most respected, most feared person," make this clear. This is an example of Van Dijk's (2006) "positive self-presentation," which is all about showing strength and power. Harris thinks of herself as a defender of the truth, democratic values, and the honesty of institutions. Her actions as a leader made her a truth-teller who exposes lies and protects evidence-based reality from authoritarian threats. The taxonomy is very useful for the second research question, which is how well Searle's approach shows conflict in a practical way. Trump only uses commissive acts (100%), like refusing, blaming, and vowing, to make his opponent look bad while sticking to the story of America's decline. Harris does both commissive (75%) and directive (25%) things. He uses directives to set the record straight and warn people, and commissives to accuse and show support. This distribution adheres to Searle's (1976) criteria of fit: Trump's commissives compel him to adopt specific stances, whereas Harris's directives endeavor to transform the world by rectifying

misinformation. The third research question inquires about the predominant components in Van Dijk's model. Manipulation works by putting together small and large levels in a planned way. Both speakers use words and sentence structures that are meant to get the audience's attention on a small scale. Trump's repeated use of "They allowed X" makes people blame others. Harris's logical structures that show how silly things are target people's mental models of consistency. These problems are important to the world on a larger scale: Trump sees immigration as an existential crisis, while Harris sees Trump as an authoritarian threat. The cognitive aspect indicates the presence of shared mental models: Trump invokes fears of crime and decline, whereas Harris references knowledge of democratic norms and women's rights. Van Dijk's (2006) distinction between persuasion and manipulation is pertinent: Trump's strategies increasingly resemble manipulation by framing opinion as fact and attributing insincere motives. Analysis in response to the fourth research question—how Fairclough's approach shapes discourse—shows that manipulation occurs on many levels. Trump employs superlatives ("worst withdrawal"), anaphoric repetition ("They allowed..."), and metaphor ("destroying our fabric") at the descriptive level. Harris employs spatial deixis ("nowhere in America"), absolute negation, and parallelism. Trump and Harris both use intertextuality when they talk about things: Trump uses language that is anti-immigrant, and Harris quotes Trump to show how wrong he is. Discursive practices are connected to larger social issues, such as immigration, reproductive rights, and democratic norms. They demonstrate how political discourse mirrors social power dynamics (Fairclough, 1995). The application of various analytical levels demonstrates that political discourse constitutes a contest over the construction of reality, wherein each candidate imposes their cognitive frameworks while delegitimizing the perspectives of their opponents. Manipulation functions through the employment of directive and commissive speech acts within specific discursive contexts. For instance, Trump uses negative other-presentation, and Harris uses exposing manipulative tactics. One significant implication is that this hybrid model can address concerns regarding the manner in which influential elites manipulate language to marginalize vulnerable groups. This builds on Fairclough's (1989) idea of "critical language awareness," which is the ability of people to see and fight against language manipulation. The model shows how language, power, and thought are all connected in political discourse. It also gives scholars and the general public the tools they need to look at and be aware of manipulation in political communication that has a lot at stake.

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