



## A Comparative Analysis of the Engagement Resources in the Harris-Trump 2024 Presidential Debate: A corpus-based study [In English]

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### ABSTRACT

The Engagement system of the Appraisal framework provides a descriptive characterization of how speakers/writers express their interpersonal positionings in terms of what kind of representation they use to show other voices in and in terms of how they engage with that representation. The present study employed the Engagement system to analyze the presidential debate held between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump in September 2024 Presidential Debate. It attempted to explore the most common engagement resources employed by Harris and Trump to enact interpersonal meanings. The findings showed that both speakers used more dialogically contractive resources than expansive. This indicates that the candidates' stance is that of more challenging the space for alternative positions rather than opening it up for alternative voices. Interestingly, Harris used more proclaiming resources of concur and pronounce than did Trump to set herself against alternative positions. Trump's high use of expansive resources of entertain seems to be an employed strategy of giving the impression of friendly openness calling for all voices and then ending with what would be allowing only for those agreeing with him to be let in. While the study is limited to the small data size, the findings provide us with insights into the most commonly employed engagement resources in Harris and Trump's speeches.

**Keywords:** Appraisal Framework, Engagement Resources, Discourse Analysis, Harris-Trump 2024 Presidential Debate.

### Introduction

Written language involves interactions between writers of text and their readers. According to Vološinov (1973), what should be the central theme when discussing language is the verbal interaction because an utterance is “the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener and addresser and addressee” (p. 86, emphasis in original). Halliday (1978, 2014) and Martin and White (2005) argue that researchers need to consider the significant functional role of texts, rather than only pure linguistic forms such as phonemes, lexical items and grammatical structures.

The Russian philosopher and literary critic Bakhtin (2010) introduced the notions of “diaglossia” and “heteroglossia.” While the former views language as the outcome emerging from interaction between speakers, the latter stratifies language in terms of socio-ideological consideration along with being stratified with respect to linguistic markers. Informed by these notions, Vološinov (1973) and Martin and White (2005) view all verbal communication as “dialogic.” According to Martin and White (2005), speaking or writing is always an “interaction” between speakers and hearers or between writers and readers. That is, writers/speakers communicate through building on and responding to what has been said/written before and, at the same time, through anticipating how actual or potential readers/listeners would perceive or respond to their messages. Therefore, it is pertinent to find out to what extent speakers/writers acknowledge prior propositions and how they engage with them, i.e., whether speakers/writers present themselves as “standing with,” as “standing against,” as “undecided,” or as “neutral” with respect to these prior propositions expressed by other speakers/writers (Martin & White, 2005).

Attempting to achieve this purpose, Martin and White (2005) proposed the Engagement system of the Appraisal framework in order to provide a systematic account of how speakers/writers attain their stances using linguistic elements. This system is intended to provide a descriptive characterization of how speakers/writers express their interpersonal positionings in terms of what kind of representation they use to show other voices in and in terms of how they engage with that representation (Martin & White, 2005).

The present study aimed to explore how language could be used by politicians to gain their audience’s trust and, consequently, their votes and support. One significant aspect of the data used in this study relates to Donald Trump; a non-political character who won an election (in 2016), lost a second term (in 2020), and finally was inaugurated in 2025

after winning a non-consecutive term, which is a special case in the history of American elections (only a second time after Grover Cleveland's case). It is an attempt to find out if language (more specifically engagement resources) used by Trump might have had a role to play in winning votes, and, as a result, achieving a significant political success (i.e., securing an extraordinary second term).

The present study employed the Engagement system to analyze the presidential debate held between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump in September 2024 Presidential Debate because debates typically consist of negotiating multiple opinions representing different voices adopting various positions. Whereas heteroglossia can be observed and analysed at various and more abstract types of discourse, speakers taking part in a debate engage in presenting their views and challenging the view of their counterparts. In a similar way, they engage with their audiences, affirming their stances and assuring their potential voters, and responding to and contradicting opposing voices. This heteroglossic nature of the debate makes the Engagement system the most suitable for exploring how Harris and Trump achieve their communicative objectives, such as gaining their audiences' trust and persuading them they are the right choice to be elected.

The study attempted to answer the following research question: 1. What are the most common engagement resources employed by Harris and Trump to enact interpersonal meanings in the 2024 Presidential Debate?

### Literature Review

The Appraisal framework has been used in many discourse studies to analyse how speakers engage with their hearers and to see which engagement resources, and in what contexts, were more effective than others in achieving speakers' aims. The political context might be considered one of the most important contexts when it comes to the speakers' (politicians in this case) need to engage with their potential voters. On the one hand, this political context is crucial because electing someone to be the president of a country means that many people will be affected by their decisions for at least several years. On the other hand, for someone to get elected, political candidates need to be able to engage with their potential voters and convince them that they are the best option for voters if voters want their needs to be met effectively.

Currently, the US political context is probably the most prevalent in worldwide media, which is not surprising considering its status the US

has in the world today. It has thus been the focus of many discourse studies that used Martin and White's (2005) framework (e.g., Al Fajri et al., 2022; Aljuraywi & Alyousef, 2022; Hidalgo-Tenorio & Benítez-Castro, 2022; Ross & Caldwell, 2020), and Donald Trump has also been the focus of such studies over the past eight years. Hidalgo-Tenorio and Benítez-Castro (2022) point out that Trump expresses his emotional appeal through his "personal" use of the language, which presents him as different than typical politicians. Another factor that makes Trump an unusual case is the time and effort he dedicates to the "rally speech" to address his audience. Unlike many politicians, Trump does not spend much of his campaign time meeting individual constituents and interest groups (Quam & Ryshina-Pankova, 2016). Some studies have also used different approaches than Martin and White's Appraisal system to analyse Trump's speech style (e.g., Liu & Lei, 2018; Zhao et al., 2020). Many studies on Trump's speech that used Appraisal theory have focused ATTITUDE (e.g., Aljuraywi & Alyousef, 2022; Ross & Caldwell, 2020; Song, 2019).

Aljuraywi and Alyousef (2022) employed Martin and White's (2005) ATTITUDE system of the Appraisal to investigate the interviews of Trump with Stahl and of Biden with O'Donnell during four political interviews on *60 Minutes*. The results showed that Trump's usage of Attitude resources (321) was higher with Stahl (132) compared to Biden's usage of Attitude resources (151) with O'Donnell (59). In addition, it was found that the predominant type of Attitude in Trump's speech was AFFECT while Biden used APPRECIATION more frequently. In addition, while it was found that both candidates used positive attitude resources at similar frequencies, these resources were used to reflect different political and social ideologies.

However, to the best of our knowledge, only one study by Quam and Ryshina-Pankova (2016) employed the Engagement system in their investigation of Trump's speech. By employing engagement resources in analysing three speeches (one speech per candidate), the researchers aimed to find out how each of the 2016 presidential candidates (Clinton, Trump and Sanders) aligned with their audiences. The findings showed that the candidates' patterns of interactions with their audiences were very different on several levels. More specifically, it was found that they greatly differed in terms of using expansive and contractive dialogic strategies. While all three candidates used a mix of expansive and contractive strategies, Trump was found to use more expansive resources (23%) than the other candidates (Clinton:15% and Sanders: 12%) as a way of assuming agreement with the audience. However, it was noted by

the researchers that the majority of Trump's resources were *expansive: Entertain* were mostly used when talking about election numbers or when using what might be called "political throat-clearing." According to Quam and Ryshina-Pankova (2016), Trump's heavy use of Entertain in a way which does not serve political argumentation resulted in inflating the raw numbers of the expansive resources he used. While this may have been the case, the researchers didn't seem to provide an explanation of what pragmatic function this frequent use of Entertain resources has served in depicting Trump as the right choice for the audience. By doing this, it could be that Trump was trying to refrain from being seen to have an "overly confident persona", as he most likely has been previously perceived.

Overall, Quam and Ryshina-Pankova (2016) concluded that Trump's heteroglossic language can be described as "simple," "straightforward" and "forceful" compared to the other candidates. Trump's style also showed that he used repetitive language a lot as an attempt to show his authorial voice and gain agreement and support from the audience. In addition, the writers pointed out that analysis of more data is needed in order to arrive at a more comprehensive conclusion about how the candidates used engagement resources to achieve their campaign goals.

Many studies have looked at the discourse features of US presidential candidate speeches and debates. However, some of them were done in the past and, therefore, involved presidential candidates that differ from the current candidates. On the other hand, more recent studies that analysed Trump's language either looked at different modes of discourse (i.e., speeches or tweets) or analysed the language using a different framework from the engagement framework. Unlike language produced in a "debate," which is generally considered to be spontaneous (and accordingly more natural), "speeches" and "tweets" can be "prepared" and "rehearsed." The Engagement system (Martin & White, 2005) is appropriate to the current dataset (i.e., political discourse) because of its practicality in capturing abstract notions and affair complexities the political discourse is normally flooded with through descriptively analyzing particular resources represented by single words or phrases. Thus far, and to the best of our knowledge, there are no studies that have investigated the last presidential debate that was held between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump in September 2024.

**Analytical Framework**

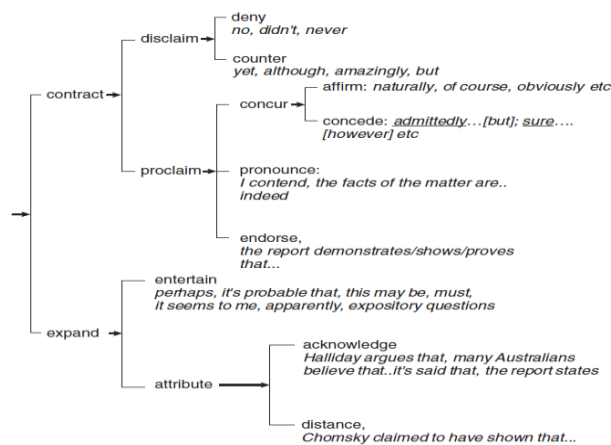
The analysis of data was conducted within Martin and White’s (2005) appraisal framework, which is based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 2014). This framework consists of the three main systems: (i) “Attitude,” which, according to Martin and White (2005), is “concerned with our feelings, including emotional reactions, judgements of behaviour and evaluation of things,” (ii) “Engagement,” which “deals with sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse,” and (iii) “Graduation,” which “attends to grading phenomena whereby feelings are amplified and categories blurred.” (Martin & White, 2005, p. 35).

The present study focused on the Engagement system because its linguistic resources deal with heteroglossic communication, which is closely related to the nature of the context to be analysed here (a debate). The Engagement system focuses on how interpersonal meanings are enacted by speakers when they deal with other viewpoints either by contractively closing space for other voices or by expansively acknowledging them. This Engagement system is suitable for analyzing a debate because a speaker participating in a debate needs to take into consideration two sides simultaneously: the audience (or potential voters) and the opposing debater(s). This type of discourse involves a speaker addressing an audience in an attempt to have them agree with and approve of what is being said.

Figure 1 shows how the Engagement system is structured.

**Figure 1**

The Engagement system (Adapted from Martin & White, 2005, p. 134)



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Martin and White (2005) distinguished between monoglossic and heteroglossic utterances. While a monoglossic utterance does not recognize the possibility of alternative views and is classified as being true, an heteroglossic utterance suggests other viewpoints. Heteroglossic engagement formulations are subdivided into contractive and expansive resources. According to Martin and White (2005), “dialogically expansive” wordings are used by writers/speakers to show that they are opening up dialogue space with other voices (i.e., the authorial voice presents its position as one of other possible positions). On the other hand, “dialogically contractive” wording closes down dialogue space with other voices by either directly rejecting other positions or representing them as not applying. It can also entail closing down space to other positions through challenging them, confronting them and sometimes excluding them.

While the contractive resources include disclaim and proclaim, the expansive resources include entertain and attribute. In the ‘disclaim’ element, authors position themselves as at odds with, or rejecting, some contrary position, while in ‘proclaim’ they set themselves against alternative positions. Each element is further subdivided into subsystems. With regard to ‘pronounce,’ for instance, an utterance like “I’d say he’s the man for the job” would be put more towards lower on the gradability scale, and “I insist that he’s the man for the job” would be put more towards higher on the scale. Whereas, “I contend he’s the man for the job” would be somewhere between the previous two utterances on the scale. The authorial voice in the ‘Entertain’ element represents the authors’ own subjectivity as one of a range of possible positions, while it represents assertions in the attribute element based on external subjectivity as one of several viable stances. An example of entertain considered to have lower intensity would be “I suspect she betrayed us” whereas “I am convinced she betrayed us” would be much higher on the scale. These examples of engagement resources gradability are adapted from Martin and White (2005, p. 136).

Martin and White (2005) argue that these classifications and values should not be viewed as dichotomous. Engagement values can be viewed on a gradability scale (*lower* ← → *higher*), which represents their degree of intensity or how invested the speaker/writer is in the utterance.

## Methodology

### Research design

Analysis of data followed a mixed-method research design. While quantitative and descriptive statistics results are reported, qualitative analysis of data was also employed through examining utterances at the clause level in order to better understand how these engagement resources were used and for what purpose.

Grounded in Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal framework, this study utilized the Engagement system in the analysis of Harris–Trump 2024 presidential debate. It aimed to find how the two candidates aligned themselves with their audiences, whether the two candidates used different resources to convey similar/different propositions, and whether these differences can be understood from the view of the political party that the speakers are affiliated with (i.e., Democratic [Harris] vs. Republican [Trump]), from the view of gender, or from other factors such as educational background.

### Data collection

The data used for analysis in this paper is based on the debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, which was held on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2024, and was moderated by David Muir and Linsey Davis. The transcript was obtained from ABC News website. It was the first time Harris and Trump held a debate prior to the 2024 US presidential elections. The total number of words produced by Harris in the debate was around 6,758, while for Trump it was around 9,730.

### Data analysis procedures

In order to ensure a detailed analysis of the debate, a semi-automatic annotation as well as a manual revision was performed. As a first step, the data went through semi-automatic annotation using MAXQDA software. While achieving total objectivity is impossible, doing this should limit the writer's subjectivity in the manual annotation stage since the exact resource words will be identified in both texts by the software. On the other hand, automatic analysis provided instances based only on the input words. So, if an engagement resource word was not included in the coding file, it will not be considered by the software because, as expected, it only relies on matching input wordlists with identical words found in the text. In addition, if not properly set, it might identify parts of words as single words, which may result in errors in the analysis.

Along with raw frequency data of each subcategory of engagement instances (e.g., Deny, Concur, Acknowledge, etc.), percentages out of

100 for each subtype were calculated based on the total number of engagement resources found by each speaker's corpus. Percentages of occurrences makes comparability between the two speakers more valid. For example

**Table 2**), when looking at the raw number of Deny instances by Trump (n=160), we found that it is much higher than Harris (n=83). However, the percentage out of total number of engagement instances used by Trump is 31%, while it is 32.68% for Harris. On the other hand, while Trump used a slightly higher number of Acknowledge (76) than Harris's instances of the same resource (69), the percentage out of total engagement instances reveals the opposite (i.e., Trump: 14.73%; Harris: 27.17%).

#### Results and Discussion

**Table 1** shows the number of words in each candidate's speech and the total number of engagement resources used by each candidate and their percentages out of total words.

**Table 1**

Overall frequencies of words and engagement resources made by Harris and Trump

|                      | Harris         | Trump        |
|----------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Total Words          | 6758           | 9730         |
| Engagement Resources | 254<br>(3.76%) | 516 (5.30 %) |

The frequency and percentage of occurrence of each engagement category and subcategory is presented in

#### **Table 2.**

The findings show that both candidates used more dialogically contractive resources than expansive

**Table 2**). This indicates that both candidates' stance is that of more challenging the space for alternative voices than opening it up for alternative voices. The contractive resources in Harris's speech formed 69.69% of total engagement resources she used and 52.71% in Trump's speech. Harris used more contractive resources (69.69%) in the debate

than did Trump (52.71%). On the contrary, Trump used more dialogically expansive resources (47.29%) than did Harris (30.31%).

As for the contractive resources, both candidates equally employed more disclaiming resources (e.g., not, but, despite, still) than proclaiming (e.g., of course, show, demonstrate) resources to directly reject alternative positions. Harris, however, employed more proclaiming resources (21.26%) of concur and pronounce (e.g., absolutely, actually, of course, highlight, note, announce) than did Trump (4.65%). Within the disclaim category, both candidates employed more resources of denying (e.g., no, not) than countering (e.g., while, but, although, yet, just) since the former resource disaligns the audience with the external voices because they construe the speaker as “sharing this axiological paradigm with the reader” (Martin & White, 2005, p. 121). While the use of Deny resources by the two candidates was close (Trump: 31%; Harris: 32.68%), extracts from their speech reveal different styles with regard to where these resources can be placed on the gradability scale. For example, instances of Deny resources, such as ‘no,’ ‘not’ (as a single word), ‘never,’ and ‘nobody’ are used more frequently by Trump to show confidence in what he does and what he believes.

**Table 2**

The occurrence of engagement resources in Harris and Trump’s speech

| Heteroglossic formulation | Harris |        |     |        |     |        | Trump |        |     |        |     |        |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|-----|--------|-----|--------|-------|--------|-----|--------|-----|--------|
|                           | No.    | %      | No. | %      | No. | %      | No.   | %      | No. | %      | No. | %      |
| Contract                  | 177    | 69.69% |     |        |     |        | 272   | 52.71% |     |        |     |        |
| Disclaim                  |        |        | 123 | 48.42% |     |        |       |        | 248 | 48.06% |     |        |
| Deny                      |        |        |     |        | 83  | 32.68% |       |        |     |        | 160 | 31.00% |
| Counter                   |        |        |     |        | 40  | 15.74% |       |        |     |        | 88  | 17.05% |
| Proclaim                  |        |        | 54  | 21.26% |     |        |       |        | 24  | 4.65%  |     |        |
| Concur                    |        |        |     |        | 28  | 11.02% |       |        |     |        | 6   | 1.16%  |
| Pronounce                 |        |        |     |        | 26  | 10.24% |       |        |     |        | 13  | 2.52%  |
| Endorse                   |        |        |     |        | 0   | 0.00%  |       |        |     |        | 5   | 0.98%  |
| Expand                    | 77     | 30.31% |     |        |     |        | 244   | 47.29% |     |        |     |        |
| Entertain                 |        |        | 8   | 3.15%  | 8   | 3.15%  |       |        | 168 | 32.56% | 168 | 32.56% |
| Attribute                 |        |        | 69  | 27.17% | 0   | 0.00%  |       |        | 76  | 14.73% | 0   | 0.00%  |
| Acknowledge               |        |        |     |        | 69  | 27.17% |       |        |     |        | 76  | 14.73% |
| Distance                  |        |        |     |        | 0   | 0.00%  |       |        |     |        | 0   | 0.00%  |
| Subtotal and percentage   | 254    | 100%   | 254 | 100%   | 254 | 100%   | 516   | 100%   | 516 | 100%   | 516 | 100%   |

While he is denying a position, an incident or a situation, he is, simultaneously, affirming that he is the right person to be elected. On the other hand, many, if not most, of Harris’s Deny resources could be seen in the form of “not” (e.g., ‘didn’t,’ ‘can’t,’ ‘won’t’).

According to Martin and White (2005), contractive resources close down space between the speaker’s voice and other voices representing their position as the only applicable proposition to be taken with regard to a particular situation or issue. This closing down of space might be achieved by the speaker by directly rejecting the other proposition

(Disclaim), or indirectly by showing why it is wrong or unapplicable (Proclaim). The following table presents examples of the use of contractive resources by the two candidates.

**Table 3**

Examples of contractive resources produced by the two candidates

| Trump  | Harris  |
|--|---|
| 1) I had no [Contract: Disclaim: Deny] inflation, virtually no [Contract: Disclaim: Deny] inflation.             | 1) That is not [Contract: Disclaim: Deny] happening.  |
| 2) They never [Contract: Disclaim: Deny] fired one person.   | 2) Yet [Contract: Disclaim: Counter] again, I said it at the beginning of this debate, you're going to hear a bunch of lies coming from this fella.                       |
| 3) This has been a disaster for people, for the middle class, but [Contract: Disclaim: Counter] for every class. | 3) And I am actually [Contract: Proclaim: Concur] the only person on this stage who has a plan that is about lifting up the middle class and working people of America.   |
| 4) Because what he's gotten away with is absolutely [Contract: Proclaim: Concur] incredible.                     | 4) And they did exactly [Contract: Proclaim: Concur] as he intended.  |
| 5) In fact [Contract: Proclaim: Pronounce], I was going to send her a MAGA hat.                                  | 5) I absolutely [Contract: Proclaim: Concur] support reinstating the protections of Roe v. Wade.  |
| 6) We'll find out [Contract: Proclaim: Endorse].   | 6) And I pledge [Contract: Proclaim: Pronounce] to you when Congress passes a bill to put back in place the protections of Roe v. Wade as president of the United States. |

The examples in the left column in Table 3 show how Trump closes down space for other voices by directly rejecting what has been previously suggested (examples 1, 2, & 3), or indirectly doing so (examples 4, 5, & 6). As stated earlier, 31% of total engagement resources Trump used were Deny (i.e., a direct rejection of the other voice). In example 1, Trump rebuts that he had an 'inflation' two times, affirming the second time with "virtually." In this example, Trump is not just denying that he had an inflation which has a negative financial effect on people, but he is also assuring that he was very far from putting the American people in that bad situation. Repetition has been found in the literature to be a distinctive feature of Trump's speech and is used as a

strategy by Trump to show himself to voters as a non-traditional politician (Zhao et al., 2020).

In other words, he is proposing to the audience that they should choose someone who is similar to them and one who is aware of what they are going through. Another distinctive Deny feature he uses frequently is the “we’re not” expression (nine times). This is significantly higher than Harris’s usage of the same expression (three times). On the other hand, Harris’s instances of the single word “not” tend to take an objectively evaluative nature. For example, in denying what she believes are “false accusations” or “lies,” she seems to refrain from using personal pronouns (‘I,’ ‘we,’ ‘you,’ ‘they,’ etc.) and uses demonstratives instead such as ‘that’ and ‘this.’ This seems to be Harris’s way of showing her audience that she is well educated and very careful about what she says.

While Trump has his own style with Deny, Harris stands out by using much more Concur instances (i.e., an indirect rejection of the other voice), with 28, forming 11.02% out of her total engagement resources. As mentioned before, the use of Deny by Harris can be interpreted as attending to facts and truth checking, showing the audience that she cares about truth and respects her voters. This might be understood from the well-formed long sentences she uses when explaining why the other candidate is wrong. What can also be taken to support this interpretation is her many uses of Concur instances. She uses “actually” very frequently in an attempt to show reference to reality and facts, affirming that these values should at all times be taken into consideration.

In regards to the expansive sub-types of entertain (e.g., ‘it seems,’ ‘perhaps,’ ‘may be,’ ‘probably’) and attribute (e.g., said, claim), clauses acknowledge external subjectivity were more common in Harris’s speech (27.17%) than in Trump’s (14.73%). Both candidates preferred not to distance themselves from the claims being made by acknowledging the external voices rather than distancing themselves from them. The two speakers, however, were significantly different in employing entertain resources. While 32.56% of the engagement resources Trump used were of this type, Harris use formed only 3.15%. On the contrary, Harris employed more attribute resources (acknowledge and distance) (27.17%) than did Trump (14.73%).

When considering expansive resources (e.g., “perhaps”, “probably”, “it seems to me”), we are dealing with what speakers use to present themselves as not totally invested or not fully convinced in the proposition they are presenting. Hence, by using these resources, speakers open the space to other voices and to other propositions to be let in as possible alternatives (Martin & White, 2005). This presents the

speaker's position as but one of other possible positions. As Martin and White (2005) state,

When viewed dialogistically (rather than from the perspective of a truth-functional semantics, as is often the case), such locutions are seen actively to construe a heteroglossic backdrop for the text by overtly grounding the proposition in the contingent, individual subjectivity of the speaker/writer and thereby recognizing that the proposition is but one among a number of propositions available in the current communicative context." (p. 105)

Therefore, expansive resources may have differing functionalities when examined at the discourse level (rather than the semantics of each word looked at separately). This could explain the high percentage of expansive entertain resources (32.56%) used by Trump –a Republican— compared to Harris (3.15%), who might be expected to use these resources more frequently as a person coming from a liberal background and, hence, would be more open to allowing other voices to present themselves. Trump's high usage of these resources seems to be an employed strategy of starting with the semantics of single words that give the impression of friendly openness calling for all voices and then ending with what would be allowing only for those agreeing with him to be let in.

The following utterances, which reflect a great portion of Trump's usage of expansive resources, were produced by Trump in the debate:

1. 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.

2. It breaks up countries. We have inflation like very few people have ever seen before.

*Probably* the worst in our nation's history.

3. The student loans -- and then her I think *probably* her boss, if you call him a boss, he

spends all his time on the beach, but look, her boss went out and said we'll do it again,

we'll do it a different way.

In example (1), using the superlative form, he claims that President Biden and Vice President Harris had "the highest inflation," and then he says "perhaps" by which one might expect some kind of retreat to use a lesser evaluative degree, but he continues saying "in the history of our country," which adds even a more negative connotation, in addition to

emphasizing what he said earlier. A similar case can be seen in example (2) where Trump makes a strongly negative statement about how bad and unusual the “inflation” status got during their opponent’s administration period. It was very bad to the extent that only “very few people” have witnessed such a failure in the country’s history, indicating that during most of the country’s history, “inflation” rates were much less. In example (3), he uses “probably” for the purpose of downgrading/belittling Harris by not acknowledging her superior official (i.e., President Biden) in the form of showing hesitation to give him the rank of being “her boss,” by which he questions his trustworthiness and reliability saying “if you call him a boss.” By questioning the reliability of his debater’s superior, Trump is raising doubts about his opponent’s capability of filling the highest position in the country. In all of these examples (and many others), Trump uses Entertain words and phrases of the Expansive resources for the purpose of completely closing space against other possibilities that may suggest he was wrong in what he claimed or suggested. He strategically uses this technique to show that he is open for negotiating his claims if, and only if, they were possible for them to be contested.

A similar acknowledgment of heavy use of Entertain resources by Trump was found by Quam and Ryshina-Pankova (2016) where it was found that most of these instances were not used in politically argumentative contexts, thus inflating the number of entertain instances. That is, Trump often doesn’t use engagement resources in a typical style (i.e., to allow for the possibility for other voices to be “right” regarding what he claims to be “wrong”, or vice versa). This may indicate that while he used expansive resources in most of these cases, they were mostly used in the context of natural hesitance caused by limitations of human memory capabilities when it came to retrieving precise numbers. This can be interpreted as an instance of what has been noted above by Martin and White (2005) about entertain resources reflecting somewhat different functions if inspected from a broader contextual view. That is, Trump’s frequent use of Entertain resources could also be seen to serve as a strategy to show that other voices “might” be correct in what they are claiming mainly not because for the plausibility of them being “right” per se, but because they are “less wrong” than another way the other side could have gone.

### Conclusion

The present study employed the Engagement system to analyze the presidential debate held between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump in

September 2024 Presidential Debate. The findings showed that both speakers used more dialogically contractive resources than expansive. This indicates that the candidates' stance is that of more challenging the space for alternative positions. Interestingly, Harris used more proclaiming resources of concur and pronounce (21.26%) than did Trump (4.65%).

While the analysis done in this paper has its limitations—including, but not limited to, the small number of words of the corpus—the findings provide us with insights into the most commonly employed engagement resources in Harris and Trump's speeches. Through looking at these resources and how they might be understood, there is one widely acceptable conclusion about language, which can be supported by the findings of this study, i.e., the crucial role “context” plays in language. It seems that the more language data analysed, the more that linguistic elements (i.e., words, phrases, etc.) have to say when put together rather than separately. Thus, viewing language from an aspect isolated from its socially inherent functions/purposes does not seem to be the right approach to study language.

The findings of this study have implications for understanding how different language styles can play influential roles in persuading audiences. In this case, and this is but one factor (among other factors), we can see a non-typical politician who was able to convince his audience to re-elect him after losing their support in a previous term. We have a non-typical candidate who won an election while focusing on the “rally speech” (i.e., thus making the lower class his main and almost only audience), regardless of not trying to be sensitive or politically correct when using the language (as was found to be the case for the other candidate). This shows that engaging with the audience might sometimes be more about how “similar” and “confident” the addressor's language to the audience's than how “standard” or “accurate” in describing reality it is. In other words, the findings indicate that regardless of how formal the status of a presidency position is, the audience (i.e., voters) seem to be more interested in an “over-confident” candidate even though it may have been at the expense of political correctness. That is, lower-class audiences are more likely to tolerate inaccurate use of language if the speaker identifies with them if they present themselves to be naturally and confidently mistaken (which could be perceived as “real” and “genuine”) than self-consciously correct (which could be perceived as “fake”). Thus, being successful in persuading an audience seems to rely

greatly on understanding the internal surroundings of the audience and being able to make them hear a voice echoing their subconscious.

While these findings are based on data from a political context, they could be generalized over other contexts when similar conditions and circumstances apply. In particular, the overuse of entertain resources by Trump shows an example of using the semantics of Entertain words (i.e., words used normally for opening space for other voices) to serve the overall pragmatic purpose of closing space for other voices. This has its implications on the validity of the distinction usually made between “semantics” and “pragmatics.” It shows that the two subjects closely work together at different levels. While semantics functions linearly at the level of single words, which in turn may compose larger literal meanings at the level of the sentence, pragmatics plays a role at different levels of language composition starting from single words (e.g., discourse markers) going all the way to larger chunks of language compositions such as “speeches” or “debates.” Whereas indecisive words may show “hesitation” and “tentativeness” about claims being made at the conscious level of thinking, they may also be perceived as indicators of “confidence” and “self-assurance” at the subconscious level.

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