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*2025 2nd International Conference on Business Economics, Education, Arts and Social Sciences (EASS 2025)***Comparing Trump's and Harris's Last Campaign Speeches from a Critical Discourse Perspective**Zifeng Cai ^{1,*}¹ Guilin University of Aerospace Technology, Guilin, Guangxi, China

* Correspondence: Zifeng Cai, Guilin University of Aerospace Technology, Guilin, Guangxi, China

Abstract: As the US presidential election has been held nearly 60 times, this paper aims to compare the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in the final campaign speeches of Trump and Harris. It examines the discourse strategies used by politicians and how they shape public perception, as well as the role of voter engagement within the historical and institutional framework of the American democratic system. This study serves as a representative example of applying CDA theory to political discourse in the US election. By studying this paper, students learning English as a second language can gain insights into how discourse reflects power relations in different contexts, enhancing their ability to use English in discussions on societal topics. In an educational setting, the CDA methods introduced here differ from traditional grammar-focused approaches, immersing students in contextual learning and encouraging them to analyze how language constructs meaning and influences communication.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; Trump and Harris's speech; politics; similarities; differences

1. Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodological framework that examines the relationship between language use and social reality. It emphasizes that language is not only a tool for communication but also a component of social actions that can shape and reinforce social hierarchies. Since the late 1980s, CDA has developed into a mature field in the social sciences, aiming to uncover the often-hidden connections between language use, social structures, and power dynamics [1]. This involves analyzing how language practices, events, and texts are influenced by power relations and ideological frameworks, while also contributing to them. Additionally, CDA investigates how a lack of transparency in these relationships can sustain power and authority in society [2].

As a research method for analyzing the US election, CDA explores the power dynamics embedded in political discourse. The 2024 presidential election presented various challenges, including political debates and public discourse on key issues. For instance, internal divisions within political parties became more apparent, with differing views on party direction. Some voters expressed concerns about whether political parties adequately represented diverse social groups, while others debated the extent to which party factions influenced voter engagement. Moreover, candidates faced public scrutiny regarding their leadership qualities and political effectiveness.

The electoral system itself also sparked discussions about voter representation in the decision-making process. Although millions of voters participated, the outcome was sig-

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nificantly shaped by a small number of swing states, leading to public debates on the effectiveness of the electoral process. These discussions have raised broader questions about electoral fairness and how well the system reflects public opinion.

The issue of election transparency has also attracted attention, with public discussions on administrative challenges in the voting process, such as discrepancies in voter registration records. These debates highlight the need for continuous improvements to maintain a fair and transparent electoral process.

This paper addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What are the similarities in critical discourse between Trump's and Harris's final campaign speeches?
- 2) What are the differences in critical discourse between Trump's and Harris's final campaign speeches?
- 3) To what extent does critical discourse influence Trump's and Harris's final campaign speeches?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theory of Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has traditionally examined significant social and political discourse topics, including identity constructions related to minority groups, class, gender, and ethnicity [3]. In the political realm, political actors often use various forms of communication to articulate their views, engage with the public, and advocate for their policies. This process may involve shaping narratives and prioritizing specific viewpoints to strengthen their arguments and gain public support [2].

As politicians frequently address the public to advocate for their policies, their discourse often relies on shared beliefs and persuasive language techniques [4]. For example, Chilton (P.X) noted that the analysis of political discourse is not new; the study of Western classical rhetoric provides insights into how speakers use language in various forms to persuade and communicate their messages effectively [4]. Oral strategies such as humor, metaphor, and mythology play a significant role in political communication [4].

2.2. The Application of CDA on American Elections in the Recent Decade

With the adoption of a widely recognized method for analyzing political discourse, particularly in the context of US presidential elections, this study argues that the manifestations of CDA in previous elections are multifaceted, including:

Candidates' Debate Strategies: Carlin argues that presidential debates align with the traditional definition of "debate," which consists of three key features: (1) Each participant presents an opposing argument or stance on the issue. (2) Candidates must adhere to structured rules when presenting their viewpoints. (3) The public gathers information from the candidates' discourse [5].

Discourse in Media and Public Reactions: Susan Herring suggests that discussions and interactions in digital spaces, particularly those reflecting power imbalances, offer a valuable perspective for analyzing political discourse. This highlights CDA as a useful approach for examining how discourse reflects structured power relations.

Application of Discourse Analysis Methods: Metaphor serves as a crucial element in CDA, as it contributes to shaping ideological perspectives and reinforcing underlying narratives. Critical metaphor analysis, therefore, helps uncover the intentions behind language use and the ideological influences embedded within discourse [6].

Candidates' Image Construction: Van Dijk suggests that ideological discourse often involves certain strategies, which he refers to as the 'ideological square.' These strategies include emphasizing the positive aspects of one's own group, highlighting the negative aspects of the opposing group, minimizing the negative traits of one's own group, and downplaying the positive attributes of the opposing group [5]. These discursive strategies

influence voters' perceptions and contribute to the complexity of political and social dynamics.

Political slogans, widely used in campaigns, serve as powerful symbols, yet their meanings can vary significantly among different groups, leading to diverse interpretations and expectations [6]. The Ideological Square provides a framework for opposing political groups to articulate their ideologies. Political discourse often employs language to construct distinctions between 'us' and 'them,' reinforcing group identities and shaping political narratives [6].

Additionally, some campaign slogans explicitly call for economic reconstruction, while also being interpreted in various ways, including perspectives on national identity and cultural values [7]. In Example (1), Rubio expressed concern that past successes might influence the election prospects of Republican candidates [8]. He emphasized the word "will" to illustrate his point that Hillary Clinton, as the Democratic candidate, had a more extensive political résumé compared to Republican candidates [8].

Example (1):

Marco Rubio: "If this election is a resume competition, then Hillary Clinton's gonna be the next president, because she's been in office and in government longer than anybody else running here tonight."

From the perspective of object, Fairclough believes that there is disparity among participants in discussion activities and unequal ability to control text production and dissemination [9].

From the perspective of consequence, Van Dijk explains that critical analysis of political discourse explores the social and political implications of power imbalances that may arise from the reproduction, misuse, or concentration of political power through discourse. It also examines how resistance or opposition to such discourse domination can emerge [9].

From another perspective on ideology, Kingdon once argued that 'Ideas are more likely to change, especially when confronted with events that open a "window of opportunity," when old policies no longer address existing problems, or when policies no longer align with their intended purpose' [7].

From the perspective of American domestic institutions, Wodak and Meyer noted that, from both domestic and international research viewpoints, critical discourse analysis is an essential approach for analyzing political discourse. CDA linguists are interested in the relationship between discourse and power. The discussion is determined by society, but only limited to this [6].

2.3. Summary

At present, CDA shows a dynamic development trend both domestically and internationally. More and more scientists are paying attention to this field, and research results are constantly emerging. Based on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, the theoretical framework and research methods of CDA continue to develop and improve, emphasizing the social and functional nature of language, not only regarding it as a communication tool but also as a reflection and construction of social relationships. With the deepening of globalization and increasingly complex social issues, CDA's research areas continue to expand, covering traditional disciplines such as linguistics, literary criticism, sociology, and political science, and gradually expanding to new fields such as communication, management, and education. It is worth mentioning that the current research status of CDA indicates its significant and extensive applications in analyzing discourse and exploring the relationship between language and social structures.

Among most studies on elections, scholars have analyzed critical discourses in the political field [2-11], but there is a lack of analysis on recent campaign speeches in the 2024 election cycle. This article will provide an in-depth analysis of the use of critical language in recent campaign speeches in the following sections.

3. Research Method and Data Analysis

The data of this study was collected from videos of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris's final campaign speeches, which were sourced from the Bili-Bili (bilibili.com) application. The total duration of Donald Trump's speech video is one hour and fifty-seven minutes, while Kamala Harris's four final campaign speeches last nearly one hour.

The research method in this study is CDA, which assists in uncovering the latent power structures and ideologies within political discourse. Van Dijk's reference, as a cognitive method with 27 ideological discourse structures, has been proven to be a suitable concept for politicians aiming to influence public opinion and advance their goals [10]. By analyzing texts like political figures' speeches and policy documents, CDA exposes the power relations, interest demands, and ideological leanings behind the discourse. One can grasp the political intentions and values that speakers aim to convey through analyzing the vocabulary and rhetorical devices in political speeches. Moreover, CDA is capable of analyzing the strategies and effects of political discourse. Political figures and organizations utilize various discourse strategies, such as persuasion, mobilization, and influence, to shape public opinion. CDA helps researchers understand how these strategies function and their impact on the audience. Analyzing the language and visual elements in political advertisements is a good way to evaluate their potential influence on voters' attitudes and behaviors. Lastly, CDA is beneficial for the public to better comprehend political discourse, thereby enhancing their awareness of political participation and their capacity to do so. In a democratic society, the public's understanding of political discourse and their critical-thinking ability are of great importance for political participation. Therefore, CDA can help the public identify misinformation and false information in political discourse, enabling them to make more informed political judgments.

4. Results

4.1. Similarities

4.1.1. The Use of "We"

Personal pronouns showcase one's clear political background and stance regularly. For example, "We" are used frequently by Trump and Harris:

Example (2):

Trump: "Just pretend we're tied or losing by a little bit, we want to put on a display tomorrow of unity and everything."

Harris: "We are leaders who understand that the measure of our strength is not based on who we beat down."

The personal pronoun "we" carries significant commonality. In the political context, the use of "we" emphasizes the power of collective action, reflecting the political concept of the country as a collective and indicating that the policy formulation process takes into account the participation and interests of all parties. "We" conveys the role of politicians as representatives of a certain group, boosting the legitimacy of their decision-making. Furthermore, when a political leader calls "we", it evokes a mutual emotional connection, thereby enhancing a sense of identity.

4.1.2. The Use of Superlative Degree and Modal Verb

In addition, the superlative degree and modal verbs with higher certainty (e.g., must, should) were used in many political sentences in the campaign speeches of Trump and Harris, highlighting their political views, manifesting the politicians' confidence, and displaying strong vigor.

Example (3):

Harris: "However, the race isn't over yet, and we must finish strong."

Trump: "I believe the best part is that I'm talking to one of the most important people in the world."

The double negative construction and absolute discourse in these words reveal Harris's firm stance and determination to win this election, as well as the necessity and urgency to appeal to the masses to actively vote. The consecutive use of superlative degrees by Trump creates an approachable image, which affirms and recognizes the public. From the above two critical discourses, it has been proved that the use of superlative degrees and absolute discourse in political language is an effective and feasible way to attract the masses and motivate enthusiasm for supporting decision-makers' policies and stances.

4.1.3. Politician Words

Moreover, politicians' words are often charged with a high degree of intensity, among which tense expressions are frequently used. A substantial number of future tense forms appear in the speeches of Trump and Harris:

Example (4):

Trump: "We're going to have the greatest victory in the history of our country."

Harris: "I will spend every day working on my to-do list full of priorities to improve your life."

The attention and planning for future policies and actions are evident in these words, vividly embodying their forward-looking thinking and long-term vision. It is also a form of political terminology characterized by politicians' commitment and determination to future policies, as well as predictions of changes that may occur, equipping them with flexibility and adaptability. The policy views and popular support of politicians are implied by the frequent use of future tense forms.

4.1.4. Direct Political Discourse

Besides what has been mentioned above, it is indispensable to consider direct political discourse. Substantive political discourse can demonstrate the political stance and ideology of politicians, analyzing the use of direct language in the later speeches of Trump and Harris:

Example (5):

Harris: "Where the foundation of our democracy was forged."

"We are optimistic, and we are excited about what we can do together."

Trump: "We're going to have the American dream back soon, together."

It can be seen that both sides have a firm political stance and viewpoint, showing a reluctance to compromise or make concessions. Additionally, their display of confidence and determination plays a crucial role in achieving success in political struggles. To some extent, it also attracts more voters, helping them win the election.

4.2. Differences

4.2.1. The Extent of Using Statistical Data

With laying on the points of the contact of critical discourse analysis in Trump's and Harris's campaign speeches, it emerges from the specific analysis presented in the aforementioned chapter. It is now indispensable to demonstrate the course of the difference in Trump's and Harris's campaign speeches.

In the last campaign speech, Trump's views were supported by statistical data, whereas Harris's speech is lacking of this. Politicians frequently utilize specific data to back up their arguments. Generally, this is a common phenomenon in the political eras, with citing a case that "It was a 3% chance and then we won a little place called Florida and went to a about a 7% chance and then it went to an 11%." The statistical data offer objective factual grounds, assisting politicians in making decisions regarding complicated matters and communications of the policy position of supporting market freedom and personal duty to the public. However, Harris was devoid of such a date in her speeches, and her political color and stance are relatively weak.

4.2.2. The Use of Celebrity Examples

Trump quote celebrity examples to shore up his political views. For instance, "Don said 'it's the equivalent of sinking a one foot putt that he put it in golf game.'" And "Franklin Grah said I love your speaking ability and I love your storytelling." The deeds of well-known individuals cited by politicians are in line with their ideological leadings. There are usually certain political perspective and political stances involved, with the aim of strengthening the persuasiveness and credibility to influential figures or events. Meanwhile, Harris tends to use her own story as evidence, "I grew up as a child of the civil rights movement, my parents would take me to marches when I was in a stroller and there were people there." It's a symbolic significance. This experience is closely tied to the history and culture of US, which evoke the public's emotional resonance and enhances national pride or a sense of belonging.

It's noticeable that political concepts and objectives are regularly conveyed in the tone of the public in Harris's speeches. For instance, "today I see the promise of America in everyone who is here, in every one of you, in every one of us. We are promise of America." It showcases a friendly image, which indicates that politicians hope to be regarded as standing with the masses, comprehending the needs and desires of the people. An identification with and promotion of democratic values are reflected as well. In comparison, Trump More emphasis is placed on using a satirical and humorous tone to clarify arguments. For instance, "Kamala has delivered soaring prices and through economic anguish at home. She's a radical left lunatic who destroyed San Francisco. Don't you like a president that doesn't need to use a teleprompter." Politicians satirize their opponents' policy stances and criticize the government's inaction to convey their dissatisfaction and criticism, stimulating the audience's thinkings and discussion, thereby increasing public political participation and awareness.

4.3. The Influence of CDA in Trump's and Harris's Last Campaign Speeches

To answer the RQ3 of "To what extent does critical discourse affects Trump's and Harris' final campaign speeches?", there is a strong influence that CDA causes on Trump's and Harris' s speech, which can be demonstrated by the following evidences.

4.3.1. Discourse Analysis of National Sentiment in Campaign Speeches

The campaign faces a complex situation, with different electoral groups holding various demands. On one hand, the use of strong rhetoric on issues such as immigration and trade has stirred significant controversy. The framing of immigration as a threat to job security and social services has resonated with certain voter groups, reinforcing their support for nationalistic sentiments and strengthening their core base. On the other hand, this discourse has been criticized by some for promoting exclusionary attitudes, which could undermine values of diversity and inclusion. This has contributed to social division, with language exacerbating conflicts between different social and demographic groups, potentially posing challenges to future social cohesion.

4.3.2. Discourse Analysis of Social Equity in Campaign Speeches

During the campaign, candidates need to align closely with the values and priorities of key voter groups to attract their support. Proposals centered around social justice can serve as a call to action, inspiring hope and motivating marginalized groups to engage and strengthen the campaign's momentum. However, some proposals may raise concerns among voters who prioritize economic freedom and are wary of government intervention. These voters fear that such policies could suppress economic vitality, place a burden on public finances, and potentially lead to instability in certain sectors.

5. Discussions

5.1. Summary of Overall Results

In the US election, the use of critical discourse is very common, and the political field should be supported by the theoretical framework critical discourse. This is consistent with Rubio's framework [8], which has been adopted into Clinton's speech successfully: Fisker analyzed the latest Democratic presidential debate between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama in 2008 [11]. The results show that Clinton and Obama use language to hold power [11]. In debates, they use reciprocity and reciprocity to put their opponents in a difficult position [11]. They believe that reciprocity is an important tool for gaining power and establishing democratic ideology through speech [11]. Similarly, in the fierce campaign speeches of Trump and Harris, they also gained power through language. Some candidates criticize their opponents as a way to reflect their own political power and ideological stance, while others often express their political views through inspirational language, reflecting their political image from their own perspective.

5.2. Differences between Trump's and Harris's Speech

To explain this phenomenon, it can be shown by Chilton (P.X)'s statement in the literature review section that the analysis of political discourse is not something novel. The Western classical style tradition has turned into a means of comprehending how speakers utilize language in diverse ways for persuasion and other aims. For example, some candidates continue to use a radical approach, fiercely criticizing their opponents and portraying them in negative terms, while positioning themselves as fighters against a perceived corrupt system. Others may choose a different campaign strategy, avoiding direct attacks and instead focusing on presenting their own image and values. She emphasizes the positive words like "love", "democracy", "unity" and "hope", and strives to create an inclusive and harmonious atmosphere. It is encouraged for candidates to capitalize on public dissatisfaction with political elites and simplify complex political issues into binary struggles of support. His speech strategy aligns with his long-standing populist line, consolidates the base, resonates emotionally with voters, and attempts to attract middle-class voters dissatisfied with the Democratic Party. Harris's strategy reflects the Democratic Party's efforts to win over street voters. In the context of intensified political polarization, a moderate and inclusive stance is more likely to receive support from voters who oppose extremist policies. Both have to some extent increased national pride in winning voters' support. Trump has always emphasized the concept of "making America great again" because he wants to remember and reshape the image of a strong American nation. Although Harris has a soft style, she also points to the need to maintain America's position in the world and emphasizes her uniqueness as a democratic and diverse country. By arousing positive emotions among voters regarding the overall image of the United States, she hints that she could persuade the country to maintain its legitimate influence on the international stage.

5.3. Similarity between Trump's and Harris's Speech

Trump and Harris all talked about their national vision of development. Trump can promote economic growth and ensure prosperity in the United States through economic policies such as tax cuts and trade protection. Harris will also talk about how her policies will improve the socioeconomic situation in the United States. Here are some examples:

Example (6):

Harris: "I am the only person who has a plan to boost the middle class and working people in the United States. My plan is to establish an opportunity economy, such as a \$6000 tax cut for young families, which is the largest child tax credit in a long time, and a \$50,000 tax cut for startup small businesses. My opponent's plan is to cut taxes for billionaires and large corporations, which will increase the US deficit by \$5 trillion, and his Trump sales tax will make middle-class families spend about \$4000 more each year."

Trump: "Our economy is terrible because of inflation, which is a disruptor of the country. People can't afford basic necessities." "I don't have a sales tax, Harris is wrong, I will impose tariffs on countries like China"

Both of them also answered the immigration issue, which will be evidenced by following reasons: The United States is a multicultural country, but the influx of a large number of immigrants has impacted mainstream culture and sparked discussions on cultural integration and conflict. Moreover, immigration will create competition for local employment opportunities, taking away job opportunities or lowering wage levels. In addition, the issue of illegal immigration also involves many aspects such as border security control.

Example (7):

Harris: "Trump will talk a lot about immigration, even if it's not the current topic. Both parties' immigration legislation has been undermined in Congress due to Trump's lobbying of the Republican Party. "

Some political figures argue that illegal immigration is a significant issue, suggesting that certain policies may lead to increased immigration and associated social challenges. They claim that the actual scale of immigration may be higher than official estimates suggest.

Admittedly, other issues were also mentioned, such as health policy, federal reserve, diplomacy, technology etc.

All of these perspectives aim at demonstrating their abilities to drive the country to become better and create positive national development prospects in his speech.

6. Conclusion

This paper focuses on applying critical discourse analysis to the presentation of power in the final campaign speeches of key political figures. One candidate employed specific language and leveraged internal political resources and ideologies (e.g., conservatism, nationalism, and populism) to gain an advantage in their campaign speeches. In contrast, the other candidate faced challenges in these areas. This article analyzes the political discourse of two prominent candidates shortly after a recent election, reflecting on the political dynamics within the democratic political system, as well as the complexities introduced by history, political rhetoric, and voter behavior. Furthermore, it contributes to the application of the CDA framework in electoral studies. For students, this article provides an understanding of the latest power dynamics in elections and how to express power in English as a second language. For teachers, it introduces CDA as a method to move beyond traditional grammar instruction, immersing students in context and helping them understand the phenomenon of power inequality in discourse. Due to word limitations, this article does not address all related factors. In future research, the author plans to expand and supplement the theoretical analysis in their master's thesis.

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