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RECEIVED :25 /06/2025

ACCEPTED :05/08/ 2025

PUBLISHED :15/10/ 2025

Investigating the Power of Language in English Electoral Campaigns: A Socio-cognitive Approach to Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines how language functions as a tool of power tool in English electoral campaign discourse. It investigates linguistic strategies that candidates employ in constructing authority and establishing dominance, and the cognitive processes that these strategies to influence electoral decision-making. Central aims are investigating linguistic strategies employed by candidates in constructing power and authority among citizens, and investigating cognitive processes activated due to the integration of some of these linguistic devices detected in the English electoral discourses. The current study, drawing on qualitative approach, applies van Dijk's socio-cognitive analysis framework in analyzing 2024 the USA presidential election opening speeches, namely those of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. The analysis concludes that the USA election candidates apply sophisticated linguistic devices, emotion bypass, attribution manipulation, and situation modeling in constructing *manufactured authority* outside policy appraisal. Trump applies nostalgia nationalism while Harris applies institution-based credibility, those working below conscious threshold in order to reconstruct voter cognition. These findings give credence to van Dijk's framework in unmasking political speech as a power-building tool of communication in such a way that electoral victory is contingent on psychology triggers rather than policy rationalization

Keywords:

Political discourse
Language and power
Socio-cognitive approach
Cognitive manipulation
Dominance of Ideology



About the Journal

Zanco Journal of Humanity Sciences (ZJHS) is an international, multi-disciplinary, peer-reviewed, double-blind and open-access journal that enhances research in all fields of basic and applied sciences through the publication of high-quality articles that describe significant and novel works; and advance knowledge in a diversity of scientific fields. <https://zancojournal.su.edu.krd/index.php/JAHS/about>

1. Introduction

Language is one of the core power instruments of intimacy, persuasion and power in varied registers (Fattah, 2023) as in election campaigns in which candidates invests considerable time in preparing public statements in a bid to persuade, influence, as well as earns votes. Two-party-dominated American election processes with media-hyped campaigns as well as varied constituencies reflect a specific linguistic battlefield in which candidates must carry competing ideologies in sight as well as considerations.

Highlighting how language is a power instrument in the USA election campaigns has immediate pragmatic applicability towards democratic engagement, understanding of media, as well as electoral integrity.

While there is extensive research on political speech and persuasion, including a substantial body of socio-cognitive research examining language as a power tool in USA campaign elections, this field continues to evolve with new methodological approaches and findings that deepen our understanding of political discourse dynamics. Books like those of Jamieson (1992), Lakoff (2004), and Hart & Jarvis (1997) treat political speech but not how linguistic strategies accumulate power and trigger cognitive responses. This study addresses this need by investigating the interface between language, power, and cognition in the USA campaign speech.

This study meets this need by examining how language is a manifest power tool in the USA election campaign speeches, examining both candidates' linguistic strategies in constructing power as well as cognitive processes elicited by such strategies in order to influence election decision-making. The primary objectives are: first, analyzing linguistic strategies used by candidates to create power and authority over voters; second, investigating cognitive mechanisms activated by specific linguistic features and how these influence voters' perceptions, attitudes, and decisions within the American electoral context.

The research contributes to academic knowledge and practical understanding by providing the first systematic socio-cognitive analysis of language as a power tool specifically within the USA electoral campaigns, advancing political linguistics while offering evidence-based understanding for voters, campaign strategists, and media professionals. To achieve this, the study poses the following research questions:

1. How do electoral candidates (Trump and Harris) use language in their campaign statements to create a sense of power and authority over voters and rival candidates in the USA electoral campaign statements?
2. What cognitive mechanisms are provoked by specific linguistic features to affect electorates' voting decision in the USA electoral campaign statements?

2. Literature Review

Language inherently conveys power, operating not only as a communication tool but also as a medium to assert, negotiate, and challenge authority (Fairclough, 1989). This dynamic is particularly relevant in political discourse, where language shapes public consciousness and sets the agenda for societal values and beliefs (Wodak, 2015). Scholars have demonstrated how political actors use language to maintain dominance by encoding authority within their rhetoric and reinforcing social hierarchies (van Dijk, 2006). Power can be understood as the ability to shape people's actions, beliefs and decisions (Sherwani, 2020). Language serves as tool and a outcome of social interaction, enabling people and institutions to use this influence effectively (Fairclough, 1989).

Language is a structured communication system that allows individuals to share thoughts, emotions, and ideas. It performs important roles such as sharing information, building social connections, and helping individuals form their identities (Halliday, 1978). Language goes beyond simple communication by carrying cultural beliefs and values that influence and values that influence how society functions through everyday conversation and discourse (Fattah, 2020). In areas with multiple languages and ethnic groups, like Kurdish speaking communities, linguistics choices carries significant meaning and reflects underlining political and social tensions (Sheyholislami,

2011). When politicians choose to communicate in English or Kurdish, for example, this decision can create unity, show resistance, or demonstrate support for certain political objectives. Thus, language functions not just as a way to communicate with others, but also as an influential tool for expressing social and political positions.

Power within social and political frameworks represents the ability to affect people and institutions by influencing their beliefs, actions and decision making processes (Lukes, 2005). Michel Foucault's conceptual framework regarding discourse and authority demonstrates how language establishes power structures and natural, rendering control systems nearly undetectable to those experiencing them (Foucault, 1980). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) identifies how language reflects and reinforces power hierarchy, rationalizing power while maintaining social inequalities (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1998). Political rhetoric is often seen using rhetorical devices in framing convincing narratives, sidelining counter voices and framing how the general population views core issues. Studying these tactics in depth allows analysts to study how power functions both in exercising control as well as in being challenged (Wodak, 2015).

2.1 Language and Power in Political Discourses

Political discourse operates as both an overt and covert tool of power, influencing ideological constructs and legitimizing governance structures (Fairclough, 2001; van Dijk, 2006). Michel Foucault's concept of discursive power demonstrates how language not only expresses authority but also normalizes societal hierarchies, making power appear natural and unquestioned (Rashidi, 2025).

Political rhetoric employs specific linguistic strategies metaphorical framing, euphemisms, and binary oppositions to manipulate public understanding and justify policy decisions (Charteris-Black, 2011; Lakoff, 2004). The strategic choice between terms like "illegal immigrants" versus "undocumented workers" exemplifies how language significantly alters public perception and policy discourse (Santa Ana, 2002). Speech acts further assert control through authoritative statements such as "We must act now," positioning political figures as decisive leaders while constraining alternative viewpoints (Wodak, 2009).

2.2 Socio-Cognitive Approach (van Dijk)

The Dutch linguist Teun Van Dijk has adopted an integrated approach in using cognitive theory as well as linguistic theory as well as social theory. Societal structure along with discourse structure needs to be mediated through a cognitive interface as a conceptual mediator between social reality as well as discourse (Van Dijk, 2006). Van Dijk calls his approach a socio-cognitive approach due to overriding focus in researching cognition in critical studies of discourse, communication, as well as interaction. His approach is problem-oriented with focus on social issues as well as contribution of discourse in power abuse as well as power dominance production as well as reproduction (Van Dijk, 2001)

The socio-cognitive framework of political speech explains how speech organizes cognition in cementing ideological stands. Politician strategically uses metaphors, narratives, and framing techniques to shape public perception and construct political realities (Chilton, 2004). For example, recurrent expressions in election discourse, as in "upholding national security" or "struggling for economic freedom", trigger some cognitive schemas with ideological alignments (van Dijk, 2008)

3. Methodology and Data Collection

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in CDA, specifically following van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach. The design is structured to examine how language, thought, and society interact in political discourse, revealing the ideological functions of discourse in constructing power relations and social representations.

3.2 Data

The data for this study is collected from the recent 2024 the USA presidential election campaign. The research focuses on campaign statements from the two dominant parties: the Democratic Party

by Donald Trump and the Republican Party by Kamala Harris. This includes their first opening campaign speeches, obtained from parties' official websites, and press releases. The qualitative data focuses on in-depth textual analysis to uncover the rhetorical strategies employed in American political discourse.

3.4 Model of Analysis

This study applies van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive approach to discourse analysis (2016, 2009, 2006), centering on three fundamental components: discourse, cognition, and society.

The Discourse Component examines linguistic structures and strategies used to create meaning. Key strategies include Actor Description, which depicts individuals or groups to shape perceptions favorably or unfavorably (Van Dijk, 1998); Comparison, highlighting differences between groups to reinforce biases (Van Dijk, 2006); and Emphasizing Positive Self-Description to bolster identity (van Dijk, 1993). Other elements include Examples and Illustrations for supporting arguments (van Dijk, 2008), Identification connecting groups with specific values (van Dijk, 1995), Metaphors linking abstract concepts to familiar imagery (van Dijk, 1997), Presuppositions embedding hidden assumptions (Van Dijk, 2008), Vagueness and Hedging allowing interpretive flexibility (van Dijk, 2000), and Victimization positioning groups as wronged to evoke sympathy (van Dijk, 1992).

The Cognitive Component is related to mental processing of discourse in terms of Internal Perceptions in the form of Mental Models (van Dijk, 2014), Situation and Context Models as schemes of interpretation (van Dijk, 2015), Social Cognition as mutual knowledge and beliefs (Van Dijk, 1997), Knowledge as influencing information appraisal (van Dijk, 2008), Attitudes as controlling evaluation (van Dijk, 1995), and Ideology as internal systems of belief (van Dijk, 2006). The Social Aspect study how language works and reinforces power structures with Power and Dominance processes (van Dijk, 1993), Social Structures shaping discourse with institutions (van Dijk, 2008), and Large Scale Analysis investigating general large-scale social patterns in mass media, politics, and culture (van Dijk, 2006)

4. Data Analysis

This analysis applies van Dijk's socio-cognitive model to examine the opening campaign speeches of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris during the 2024 electoral campaign.

Table 1:van Dijk’s Socio-Cognitive Analysis of Donald Trump’s Speech

		Socio-Cognitive Approach																				Empowers the statement											
No	Item	Discourse Components																	Cognitive Components				Social Components										
		Topics	Actor Descriptions	Comparison	Emphasize Positive Self-Description and Negative Other-Descriptions	Example/Illustration	Implication	Metaphor	Number Game	Presupposition	Repetition	Victimization	Disclaimer	Euphemism	Identification	Lexicalization	National Self-Glorification	Polarization	Pronouns	Vagueness & Hedging	Cohesion		Mental Model		Social Cognition		Power and Dominance	Societal Structure					
																							Situation Model	Context Model	Knowledge	Attitude and ideology		Macro	micro				
1	America’s comeback						✓		✓							✓						✓						✓					✓
2	Joe Biden is a failure.		✓		✓											✓							✓					✓					✓
3	You and all those watching are the heart and soul of this incredible movement.				✓																		✓		✓		✓			✓			✓
4	Greatest country in the history of the world									✓						✓								✓		✓		✓					✓
5	Our nation was at the pinnacle of Power, prosperity, and prestige.				✓											✓							✓		✓		✓						✓
6	In four short years, everybody was thriving like never before			✓	✓																		✓		✓		✓						✓
7	Fastest economic recovery ever recorded.																						✓		✓		✓						✓
8	We took out MS-13					✓																	✓		✓		✓						✓
9	The farmers know that because they got 28 billion of it.					✓																		✓		✓		✓					✓
10	232 wins and 22 losses				✓																			✓		✓		✓					✓
11	Our enemies speak of us with scorn.																							✓		✓		✓					✓
12	We will wage war upon the cartels.																							✓		✓		✓					✓
13	Republicans won 5 million more votes.				✓																			✓		✓		✓					✓
14	Young and old, black and white, Hispanic and Asian																								✓		✓						✓
15	To further drain the swamp.																								✓		✓						✓
16	This is not my campaign; it's our campaign.																								✓		✓						✓
17	Gas was \$1.87 when I was President.			✓																				✓		✓		✓					✓
18	China will surpass us if we don't act.				✓			✓																✓		✓		✓					✓
19	Blood-soaked streets																							✓		✓		✓					✓
20	I know it's politically incorrect, but I'll say it.																								✓		✓						✓
21	We are coming to take those corridors back.																								✓		✓						✓
22	We love this country																									✓		✓					✓
23	We will put America first.																									✓		✓					✓

		Socio-Cognitive Approach																				Empowers the statement										
No	Item	Discourse Component																		Cognitive Component			Social Component									
		Topics	Actor Descriptions	Comparison	Emphasize Positive Self-Description and Negative Other-Descriptions	Example/Illustration	Implication	Metaphor	Number Game	Presupposition	Repetition	Victimization	Disclaimer	Euphemism	Identification	Lexicalization	National Self-Glorification	Polarization	Pronouns	Vagueness & Hedging	Cohesion		Mental Model		Social Cognition		Power and Dominance	Societal Structure				
																							Situation Model	Context Model	Knowledge	Attitude and ideology		Macro	micro			
24	Our southern border was by far the strongest ever.				✓											✓						✓		✓				✓				✓
25	We will restore American glory.															✓							✓		✓		✓		✓			✓
26	Porous border, We're being poisoned						✓			✓													✓		✓		✓				✓	
27	Under our leadership, we were a glorious nation.															✓			✓				✓		✓		✓				✓	
28	Radical left lunatics are running the government.				✓										✓			✓					✓		✓		✓				✓	
29	We were strong				✓					✓													✓		✓			✓			✓	
30	We were strongly doing this during the Trump administration.				✓					✓													✓		✓		✓				✓	
31	Now, we are a nation in decline.				✓																		✓		✓		✓				✓	
32	Millions are invading us.																						✓		✓		✓				✓	
33	The disasters in Afghanistan, perhaps the most embarrassing moment				✓	✓																	✓		✓		✓				✓	
34	I am a victim of the corrupt justice system.										✓													✓		✓			✓		✓	
35	Perhaps Biden doesn't even know what's happening.				✓			✓																✓		✓		✓			✓	
36	The Radical Left controls Congress, media, and corporations.					✓												✓						✓		✓		✓			✓	
37	We will make America wealthy again and powerful again. We will make America strong again. We will make America proud again. We will make America glorious/ great again.								✓						✓		✓					✓		✓		✓		✓			✓	

4.1 Discourse Components

The analysis reveals that Trump's opening speech utilized 17 out of 20 discourse components, notably omitting topics, euphemism, and cohesion.

4.1.1 Actor Description

Actor descriptions assign qualities in order to frame allies as good and enemies as bad. This statement *Joe Biden is a failure* hold strong negative presentation. Trump tries to question Biden right to manage the office or their views to be taken seriously by addressing him as *Failure*. He uses broad character judgments rather than a specific policy critiques to influence public opinion. *Radical Left lunatics* by addressing them *lunatics* suggests that they are mentally unstable and this makes their ideas to be worthless without having to actually argue against them. *Perhaps Biden doesn't even know what's going on* raises doubt concerning intellectual capacity while using *perhaps* is softer than directly accusation. These statements plants uncertainty in people's mind about person's basic competence.

4.1.2 Comparison

In four short years, everybody was thriving like never before - four short years frames the speaker's term as successful within the constraint of time, *all* suggests general benefit while hiding potential differences, *like never before* suggests such thriving is history-shattering. This comparative approach indirectly criticizes current conditions through idealization as a substitute for explicit confrontation with complex socioeconomic realities. These claims construct power in such a manner as to create nostalgic narratives that position the speaker with the capacity to revive past prosperity. *Gas was \$1.87 when I was President* this specific reference of price operates as tangible measurement of economy that individuals personally can interact with. By taking a single positive measure in isolation of any other economic context, the comparison makes for a neat economic story that makes the speaker's term objectively better. Such as declarations set power by providing concrete evidence of past success that justifies the speaker's economic leadership.

4.1.3 Emphasize Positive Self-Description and Negative Other-Descriptions

This approach establishes positive self-representation that generates perceived authority. *Our nation was at the pinnacle of power, prosperity, and prestige* uses alliteration *pinnacle, power, prosperity, prestige* as a memory aid while attributing multiple successes to a specific era. The *pinnacle* metaphor suggests unsurpassable excellence, framing later developments as decline. These statements shape power by associating the speaker with peak national achievement and positioning them as capable of restoration. *Under our leadership, we were a glorious nation* establishes direct connection between leadership and national condition, with *glorious* elevating political success to moral significance. The phrase *we were* establishes a narrative of declined status that the speaker positions themselves to recover. These statements shape power by creating causal links between the speaker's leadership and national greatness. *We were strongly doing during the Trump administration* repetition of strong reinforces this attribute as fundamental, while directly referencing the Trump administration creates explicit link between leadership and positive outcomes. These statements shape power by branding strength as the speaker's defining characteristic and political legacy.

1.4 Example/Illustration

Concrete examples substantiate abstract claims by grounding them in specific instances appearing to provide evidence. *The farmers know that because they got 28 billion of it* invokes a sympathetic group; the specific dollar amount creates an impression of precise accounting. *Farmers know that* positions this group as witnesses validating the speaker's claims, shaping power by providing concrete evidence of delivering tangible benefits to valued constituencies. *We took out MS-13* selects a specific, feared criminal organization illustrating security accomplishments. MS-13's violent reputation activates concerns about public safety; the colloquial phrasing *took out* creates an impression of decisive action without detailing methods, shaping power by demonstrating toughness and ability to eliminate threats. *The disasters in Afghanistan, perhaps the most embarrassing moment* selects a complex event to build a story about opponent's failure. Labeling it

disaster and *most embarrassing moment* simplifies the situation into a single failure, shaping power by contrasting the speaker's competence with opponents' catastrophic failures.

4.1.5 Implication

Implication conveys messages indirectly, maintaining deniability while activating desired associations. *China will surpass us if we don't act* positions China as a competitor rather than complex trade partner, suggests current leadership is failing to respond adequately, and creates urgency through unspecified consequence of being *surpassed*. The vague call to *act* allows audiences to project their preferred solutions while positioning the speaker as someone who recognizes and will address the threat, shaping power by creating fear of national decline while positioning the speaker as the solution.

4.1.6 Metaphor

The phrase *Drain the swamp* trump uses this metaphor to show that he wants to remove corruption and bad rulers from politics. It compares two things, Washington politics and a swamp to make a point about cleaning up government. The statement *We're being poisoned* compares abstract political harm to physical poisoning to make the danger feel more real. He wants to suggest that policy is gradually harming society and the country. Similarly, the item "we will wage war upon the cartels" uses war metaphor to compare legal action to military warfare to emphasize how serious the response will be.

4.1.7 Number Game

232 wins and 22 losses... Republicans won 5 million more votes Trump uses this sophisticated statement to create misleading impressions. The presented statistics might be accurate but they are presented to mislead rather to inform. The *28,000 Mexican soldiers were provided* creates phrase is designed to be seen as a concert accomplishment but in actual it is just a number without context.

4.1.8 Presupposition

Presupposition embeds assumptions within statements, presenting contested claims as facts that needn't be defended. *Fastest economic recovery ever recorded* presupposes that an economic recovery occurred and was historically exceptional. These statements shape power by establishing the speaker's economic achievements as unquestionable historical facts. *To further drain the swamp* presupposes that the swamp exists and that previous draining efforts were successful. These statements shape power by assuming the speaker's anti-corruption efforts are ongoing and effective. *We will restore American glory* presupposes past glory existed and has been lost. These statements shape power by positioning the speaker as capable of returning the nation to a mythologized golden age.

4.1.9 Repetition

Repeated phrases reinforce central messages, creating memorability and ideological consistency. *We will make America strong/powerful/wealthy/glorious again* repeats the restoration theme with variations. These statements shape power by embedding the restoration narrative through rhythmic repetition that makes the message memorable and inevitable. *We were strong... we were strongly doing during the Trump administration* repeats *strong* to emphasize this quality. These statements shape power by associating strength as the speaker's fundamental characteristic through repetitive reinforcement. Multiple instances of *again* reinforce the restoration narrative throughout. These statements shape power by creating temporal frameworks that position the speaker as the solution to current problems.

4.1.10 Victimization

Portraying oneself or one's in-group as persecuted creates sympathy, justifies aggressive responses, and deflects criticism. *My opponents made me out to be a warmonger* positions the speaker as unfairly characterized. These statements shape power by generating sympathy while deflecting criticism of aggressive policies. *I am a victim of the corrupt justice system* claims persecution by institutions. These statements shape power by delegitimizing opposing institutions while positioning the speaker as a martyr. *Now, we are a nation in decline... We are being invaded by millions* portrays the nation as a victim of both poor leadership and external threats. These

statements shape power by creating collective victimhood that justifies the speaker's protective leadership.

4.1.11 Disclaimer

Disclaimers preemptively address potential criticism or acknowledge social norms before violating them. *I know it's politically incorrect, but I'll say it* frames the speaker as bold and truthful despite social constraints. These statements shape power by positioning the speaker as courageously willing to speak forbidden truths. *My opponents made me out to be a warmonger* acknowledges then dismisses others' characterizations. These statements shape power by showing awareness of criticism while maintaining the speaker's preferred narrative.

4.1.12 Identification

Identification strategies foster unity between speaker and audience, creating a sense of shared values, identity, and purpose. *Young and old, Black and White, Hispanic and Asian* unites diverse demographics under a single movement. These statements shape power by creating broad coalitions that transcend traditional divisions. *You and all those watching are the heart and soul of this incredible movement* directly includes the audience in the collective identity. These statements shape power by making supporters feel personally invested in the speaker's success. *We love this country* positions patriotism as a unifying value. These statements shape power by claiming moral authority through shared national devotion.

4.1.13 Lexicalization

Word choice carries ideological implications, with charged terms evoking specific emotional responses and value judgments. *Radical left lunatics* "radical" and *lunatics* delegitimize opponents through extreme characterization. These statements shape power by making opposition seem dangerous and irrational. *Fake News Media - fake* undermines media credibility. These statements shape power by delegitimizing information sources that challenge the speaker's narrative. These statements shape power by reducing complex political figures to simple negative labels.

4.1.14 National Self-Glorification

Appeals to patriotism and national pride reinforce the speaker's alignment with collective values and historical narratives. *Greatest country in the history of the world* positions America as exceptional and superior. These statements shape power by associating the speaker with national greatness. The phrase *Our nation was at the pinnacle of power, prosperity, and prestige* glorifies national achievements. These statements shape power by linking the speaker to peak national performance. *We will make America great again* promises restoration of mythologized past greatness. These statements shape power by positioning the speaker as capable of returning the nation to its rightful status.

4.1.15 Polarization

Creating sharp divisions between in-groups and out-groups simplifies complex political landscapes into binary oppositions. *Radical left lunatics are running the government* creates stark division between reasonable "us" and radical "them." These statements shape power by forcing audiences to choose sides and positioning the speaker as the reasonable alternative. *The Radical Left controls Congress, media, and corporations* positions the left as a monolithic, controlling entity. These statements shape power by creating conspiracy narratives that justify the speaker's opposition to established institutions. *Our enemies speak of us with scorn* establishes a clear division between patriotic in-group and foreign opponents. These statements shape power by creating us-versus-them frameworks that unite supporters against external threats.

4.1.16 Pronouns

Pronoun usage establishes relationships between the speaker, audience, and others, creating inclusive or exclusive groups. *Our nation was at the pinnacle of power, prosperity, and prestige - our* creates shared ownership of national success. These statements shape power by making the audience co-owners of the speaker's achievements. *You and all those watching are the heart and soul of this incredible movement - you* directly engages the audience as participants. These statements shape power by making supporters feel personally essential to the speaker's mission. *We*

will put America first - we unites the speaker and audience in a common cause. These statements shape power by creating collaborative relationships that bind supporters to the speaker's agenda.

4.1.17 Vagueness & Hedging

Deliberate imprecision allows for plausible deniability while conveying ideological messages indirectly. *In four short years, everybody was thriving like never before - everybody* lacks specificity but creates inclusivity. These statements shape power by making broad claims that resist specific contradiction while creating positive associations. *I know it's politically incorrect, but I'll say it -* avoids specifying what is politically incorrect. These statements shape power by implying the speaker will expose concealed information without taking definitive stances on contentious issues. *Perhaps Biden doesn't even know what's happening* the word *perhaps* softens the accusation while still introducing the concept. These statements build power by weakening opponents while preserving the ability to deny making direct claims.

4.2 Cognitive Components

The cognitive model consists of mental models and societal structures.

4.2.1 Mental Models

This section examines the mental models employed in Trump's speech, analyzing how cognitive frameworks shape both the speaker's message construction and audience interpretation. The analysis focuses on situation models and context models to understand the underlying cognitive processes at work.

4.2.1.1 Situation Models

Our nation was at the pinnacle of power, prosperity, and prestige constructs an idealized version of the past, overlooking existing problems and policy shortcomings to present the speaker as someone who can restore previous greatness. *Fastest economic recovery ever recorded* credits complicated economic improvements entirely to individual leadership while ignoring worldwide factors, collaborative efforts and existing institutional frameworks. *China will surpass us if we don't act* establishes a threatening situation that supports dramatic policy changes. *Millions are invading us* reduces the complexity of migration into a crisis of survival. These simplified models gives power by converting complicated realities into emotionally powerful and politically useful stories.

4.2.1.2 Context Models

You and all those watching are the heart and soul of this movement builds a connection between speaker and audience, presenting loyalty as shared moral purpose. *Gas was \$1.87 when I was President* utilizes emotional strategies as the basis for policy criticism, departing the current situations from previous success *Although I am aware that it is politically incorrect, I will say that* it sets the speaker up for audiences to see controversial remarks as courageous honesty by portraying them as someone who is willing to speak the truth in opposition to constrictive social norms. *I am a victim of the corrupt justice system*, which turns accountability into persecution and presents a legal examination as evidence of institutional bias. By situating discourse within emotional and moral contexts, these frameworks provide justification for extreme behavior.

4.2.2 Social Cognition

4.2.2.1 Knowledge

Farmers know they got \$28 billion from China employs shared memories of trade policies to highlight subsidies as personal advantages. *232 wins and 22 losses* deploy numbers to proof the undeniable success of the current situation, even though the sources are unclear. *Fastest economic recovery ever recorded* uses logical appeals to dismiss the negative factors like pandemic effects or legislative cooperation. These persuasive claims form power via associating ideology to the political objectives or experiences based "facts or logical appeals" that avoid the audiences' close observation.

4.2.2.2 Attitude and Ideology

Radical left lunatics are running the government presents the other political opponents as irrational and threatening, portraying them as dangers to society. *Blood-soaked streets* uses poetic devices like imagery to support authoritarian responses and claim public protection. *We love this country* associate nationalism with moral goodness, making the political opposition appear

unfaithful. *Make America great again* transforms nostalgia into a container for various complaints bringing groups together through shared frustration rather than clear policy proposals. By portraying it as morally required, these constructs make hierarchical power appear to be justified by nature.

4.3 Social Component

4.3.1 Power and Dominance

Phrases like *We will restore America Glory* and *Make America great again* differentiates between the idealized past and current success, demonstrating the past as declining and unsuccessful. By separating in-group traits like strength and patriotism from out-group traits like corruption and weakness.

Numerical claims like *232 wins, 22 losses* and *5 million more votes* demonstrates political achievements in authentic language that supports the speaker's credibility via giving them the major authority to showcase political facts. Hostile labels such as *Radical Left lunatics* and *warmongers* underestimate opposing parties by mentioning them as mentally unstable and abnormal.

4.3.2.1 Macro Level

Claims like *greatest country in the history of the world* and *No country like the United States* makes the audiences to imagine an "idealized country" a country that bring different groups together including *Young and old, Black and White, Hispanic and Asian* under one cohesive ideological umbrella. This persuasive rhetorical strategy used to hide existing race-based inequalities as well as illustrating cohesiveness as essential for national and political recovery.

Phrase like *We completed the wall*, concerns about internal *porous borders*, and external danger including *being invaded by millions* and warnings that *China will surpass us*. These statements apparently promise cultural protection and national identity to the targeted audiences. Showing immigration and international economic as threats to national economy and unity.

4.3.2.2 Micro Level

Strategies consistently make complicated social and personal issues, turning general criticisms into personal conflicts. For example, this direct personal attack from Donald Trump to Joe Biden *Joe Biden is a failure* shift general criticisms into individual conflicts.

Emotional appeals like fear can effortlessly influence the audiences like *blood-soaked streets* which provokes subconscious responses while claims like *we love this country* appeal to patriotic devotion. These appeals avoid the audiences' rational consideration via building their trust and support through emotional associations.

Table 2:van Dijk’s Socio-Cognitive Analysis of Kamala Harris’s Speech

		Socio-Cognitive Approach																				Empowers the statement							
No	Item	Discourse Component																		Cognitive Component			Social Component						
		Topics	Actor Descriptions	Comparison	Emphasize Positive Self-Description and Negative Other-Descriptions	Example/Illustration	Implication	Metaphor	Number Game	Presupposition	Repetition	Victimization	Disclaimer	Euphemism	Identification	Lexicalization	National Self-Glorification	Polarization	Pronouns	Vagueness & Hedging	Cohesion		Mental Model		Social Cognition		Power and Dominance	Societal Structure	
																							Situation Model	Context Model	Knowledge	Attitude and ideology		Macro	micro
1	Joe got the COVID pandemic under control		✓		✓																	✓		✓					✓
2	He has created more than 15 million new jobs							✓							✓							✓		✓					✓
3	I would sit with Joe in the Oval Office while he would bring members of both sides of the aisle		✓																					✓		✓			✓
4	Trump University... was forced to pay \$25 million to the students it scammed				✓					✓												✓		✓			✓		✓
5	Donald Trump was just found guilty of 34 counts of fraud																✓					✓		✓	✓				✓
6	If Trump gets the chance he will sign a national abortion ban					✓				✓							✓						✓	✓	✓				✓
7	Our fight for the future is also a fight for freedom																		✓				✓	✓					✓
8	When we fight, we win.				✓			✓		✓													✓	✓					✓
9	Building up the middle class will be a defining goal of my presidency								✓						✓								✓	✓					✓
10	As President of the United States, I will sign it into law																		✓				✓	✓					✓
11	Joe’s legacy of accomplishment... is unmatched in modern history														✓	✓							✓	✓					✓

4.4 Discourse Component

4.4.1 Actor Description

Harris states *Joe got the COVID pandemic under* to show strong positive actor description. She addresses Biden as someone who can handle scary problems and crises that is related to everyone's daily life and to qualify him as a good leader. Another example is *I would sit with Joe in the Oval Office while he would bring members of both sides* She uses *Joe* instead of President Biden to make him seem approachable and the *Oval Office* setting emphasize his role as the nation's leader. On the other hand, she portrays Trump as dishonest *Trump University was forced to pay \$25 million to the students it scammed* she suggests that he tricked people who put trust in him.

4.4.2 Positive Self-Description and Negative Other-Description

He has created more than 15 million new jobs portrays the as an economic hero making it sound like the leader made these job happen personally. *The phrase "When we fight, we win"* position themselves as powerful leader of an effective movement. *Joe's legacy of accomplishment is unmatched in modern history* compares him to all recent presidents suggesting the speaker has deep knowledge and is able to judge presidential performance.

4.4.3 Polarization

In the statement *Donald Trump was just found guilty 34 counts of fraud* Harris shifts attention from polices to personal character. Creates two sides, "guilty criminals" vs. "innocent victim" indirectly pushes people to choose a side.

4.4.4 Number Game

He has created more than 15 million new jobs uses massive statistics without referring to full context and creates emotional impact through the size rather than meaning. The number presented to impress rather than to inform.

4.4.5 Metaphor

When we fight, we win is clear call to action, directly tells people to fight to win and builds motivation. Besides, it encourages extremism, makes compromise to sound as losing and opponents seem like enemies to defeat.

4.4.6 Presupposition

Building up the middle class will be a defining goal of my presidency assumes electoral victory, policy focus and presidential effectiveness making the claim for governance to the speaker as normal and insinuating policy mandates as normal governmental duties. *As president of the United States, I will sign it into law* assumes electoral victory and cooperation from legislature, making the authority for the speaker seem certain as against depending on the democratic mechanisms.

4.4.7 Pronouns

Our fight for the future is also a fight for freedom uses possession language that invokes quick psychological buy-in to shared power, making people believe they have a vested interest in the result. *When we fight, we win* Uses plural pronouns which engage mental frameworks about team strength and collective competency, sharing power in the collective but leaving leadership control.

4.4.8 Repetition

When we fight, we win describes repetition in synchronized structure making mental connections between political action and some victory making the strength of the group seem as an automatic correlate of their labors.

4.4.9 Lexicalization

Trump University was forced to pay \$25 million to the students it scammed to inject mental paradigms involving exploitation, portraying Trump as a person misusing powers in order to bring harm to others. *Joe's legacy of accomplishment is unmatched in modern history* uses legacy and accomplishment in a positive light portraying Biden's leadership as constructive and helpful, infusing mental paradigms where his leadership is based on service.

4.4.10 Implication

If Trump gets the chance he will sign a national abortion prompts audiences to draw inferences about Trump's suitability for office while facilitating denial about broader assertions to power. *Trump University was forced to pay \$25 million to the students it scammed* states specific legal

states clear legal consequences but suggests broader inferences about Trump's nature that extend beyond individual incidents.

4.4.11 National Self-Glorification

He has created more than 15 million new jobs presents job creation as proof of American economic strength under effective leadership, linking Biden's authority with national achievement and making his power seem essential for ongoing success. Joe's legacy of accomplishment is unmatched in modern history positions Biden's authority within narratives of American exceptionalism, making his individual power appear as expression of national superiority.

4.4.12 Victimization

Trump University was forced to pay \$25 million to the students it scammed presents students as victims deserving protection, positioning opposition to Trump as defense of vulnerable populations and granting moral authority to those who resist his power. *If Trump gets the chance he will sign a national abortion ban* presents potential policy changes as victimization of women, positioning resistance to Trump as protection of vulnerable populations and concentrating moral authority with Trump's opponents.

4.5 Cognitive Components

4.5.1 Mental Models

This section examines the mental models employed in Kamala Harris's speech, analyzing how cognitive frameworks shape both the speaker's message construction and audience interpretation. The analysis focuses on situation models and context models to understand the underlying cognitive processes at work.

4.5.1.1 Situation Models

Shaping power by constructing factual authority through selective event *presentation Joe got the COVID pandemic under control* creates a situation model that attributes pandemic management success to individual leadership, omitting the roles of public health institutions and global factors. This establishes Biden as competent in crisis management while creating a baseline for leadership effectiveness.

He has created more than 15 million new jobs presents economic outcomes as direct results of political leadership, excluding market forces and post-pandemic recovery dynamics. The precise figure creates an impression of measurable achievement while reinforcing narratives that political leaders directly control economic outcomes. *Trump University... was forced to pay \$25 million to students it scammed* constructs a situation model of legal accountability that frames past events as character evidence, positioning the legal system's verdict as validation of ethical critique rather than merely procedural outcome.

4.5.1.2 Context Models

I would sit with Joe... while he would bring members of both sides creates specific scene which is *Oval Office meeting* and positions Biden as Facilitator, and herself as a witness. *If Trump gets the chance he will sign a national abortion ban* assumes congress would pass a ban and that trump would have no other considerations.

4.5.2 Social Cognition

4.5.2.1 Attitude and Ideology

Our fight for the future is also a fight for freedom shows emotional stance by suggesting aggression and urgency, also looks at politics as battles between oppression and freedom. *Joe got the COVID pandemic under control* indicates heroism by shows Biden as personally controlled the pandemic, besides credits systemic outcomes to personal leadership.

4.6 Social Components

4.6.1 Power and Dominance

Joe got the COVID pandemic under control and *He has created more than 15 million new jobs* establish power through competency narratives that attribute complex societal outcomes to individual leadership, creating dominance by positioning political figures as controllers of national destiny and making citizens dependent on effective leadership.

I would sit with Joe... bring members of both sides demonstrates power through insider positioning and access to decision-making processes, establishing dominance by claiming proximity to governance while presenting the speaker as facilitator of political cooperation. Legal accountability statements like *Trump University... was forced to pay \$25 million to students it scammed* and *Donald Trump was just found guilty of 34 counts of fraud* exercise power by leveraging institutional authority to delegitimize political opponents, creating dominance through strategic use of judicial outcomes as character evidence.

4.6.2 Societal Structure

4.6.2.1 Macro

Statements address grand institutions structures effecting entire populations. *Rising up the middle class will be among the clear objectives of my presidency* Emphasizes policy concerns and economic class, portraying the speaker as one who wholeheartedly identifies with working people and is committed to implementing substantial changes that will serve many. *Our battle towards the future is at once a battle towards freedom* and *When we fight, we win* becomes macro levels in making political action a moral stand in which supporting one party is akin to supporting values. The sentence *Joe's legacy of achievement is unsurpassed in contemporary history* places his work in a larger frame with a storyline of a leader whose impact goes beyond immediate present-day and into the larger course of the nation.

4.6.2.2 Micro

This research is focused on proximate interpersonal along with communicative process. The sentence *I would sit with Joe... enlist members of both groups* occurs at micro level in personal attachment construction as well as insider accessibility claim, constructing authority based on personal membership as opposed to organizational office.

4. Results and Discussion

By comparing the presidential campaign discourse between Trump and Harris, we can assess that the USA candidates use high-level discourse strategies in an effort to claim supremacy among the populace while invalidating their opposition. Such strategies offer "manufactured authority" in which candidates use words not just to inform, but to become the automatic choice for leadership. Trump's plan gains strength through emotion manipulation and reinterpretation of the past. His pronouncements like *We will make America great again* and pronouncements about America as *at the peak of power, prosperity, and prestige* makes false alliances with voters through *we* pronouns as co-ownerships in his purported successes. He brands naysayers as *radical left lunatics* while framing his administration as going through the *fastest economic recovery ever documented*, oversimplifying complex realities as narratives on his side.

Harris uses alternative but equally conscious language to build authority and undermine Trump. By using court cases to delegitimize Trump rather than talking about politics, she wins credibility. Her "*Win*" and "*Fight*" language makes voter to feel they are in a battle and this make them to be loyal to her. Both candidates use voter's emotions rather than ideas of actual policy ideas to attract voters to their sides.

The research identified that both candidates did a good job of tricking voters into making them feel rather than think critically toward policy. They use mental shortcuts to create tricky issues as simple good vs bad storylines with voters making decisions based on emotion, not on realities. Candidates release numbers as well as official-sounding statistics in order to seem credible, but nobody checks to see if it is true. This combination of emotive speech-making as well as fake-objective statistics is highly effective it gets people voting on behalf of the candidate who will make them safer or better, not on behalf of whoever is most qualified with actual plans in place for the nation.

5. Conclusion

This study analyses how language is working as power instrument in the USA election campaign speech through socio-cognitive investigation of van Dijk in an attempt to study interaction between discourse, cognition and social constructions. It corroborates on the fact there are a number of strategic linguistic structures utilized by political hopefuls in constructing authority as well as moral legitimacy in which such structures activate cognitive procedures with such effects on voter's

perceptions as well as responses towards political groups.

From research, it is seen how the USA election candidates deploy sophisticated linguistic tools emotional bypass, attribution manipulation, and situation modeling to compose "manufactured authority" outside of rational policy calculation. Trump deploys nostalgia-based nationalism and victimhood frames while Harris deploys institutional authority and moral framing, both operating below levels of consciousness in order to redirect voter thought. These findings ratify van Dijk's framework of critical discourse study, unmasking contemporary political speech as power-formation tool rather than communication, with pragmatic implications showing electoral success increasingly dependent on framing oneself as a necessary guardian through strategically calculated psychological manipulation rather than reasoning-based policy.

The analysis shows clear differences in how the two candidates use language to build power. Trump uses more discourse strategies overall, especially presenting himself as a victim of corrupt systems, using vivid metaphors like *drain the swamp*, and creating strong divisions between *us* and *them* with phrases like *Radical left lunatics*. He also uses selective numbers and statistics without full context to suggest success. This extensive approach fits his role as an outsider who must tear down existing institutions while building new support. Harris takes a different approach, focusing on existing government authority and legal systems by pointing to Trump's legal problems and connecting herself to Biden's achievements. She relies on established institutions rather than trying to rebuild everything from scratch. This pattern shows that challenging the system requires more complex language manipulation than defending it.

This research is a contribution to scholarship in that it revealed how modern election rhetoric is a sophisticated cognitive manipulation device that converts democratic engagement from policy-based rationality into emotion-based loyalism construction, thereby revealing how language in politics has evolved as a powerful device of authority construction as opposed to facilitating an informed decision in democracy.

5. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study is restricted in fine-grained investigation of just two candidates' initial addresses with no diverse campaign modes as, debates, commercials. It omits empirical voter cognitive data along with media/audience interactions, and 2024 U.S. election-specific emphasis restricts generalizability.

Future work should expand to diverse campaign formats and candidates, incorporate empirical voter response measures such as, surveys, experiments, and compare cross-cultural electoral discourse. Analyzing media amplification effects and tracking longitudinal strategy evolution are also critical.

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ليكوليه وهى هيزى زمان له وتاره هلمه تى هلبژاردنه كانى ئينگليزىدا: شيكارىبه كى كومه لايه تى-هزرىبه

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پوخته

ئهم تويزينه وهيه پهيوه نديداره به ليكوليه وه له چونيته تى بهكارهينانى زمان وهك ئامرازيكى هيز له وتاره كانى هلمه تى هلبژاردنه كاندا له زمانى ئينگليزىدا. ئهم تويزينه وهيه ليكوليه وه له و ستراتيجيه زمانه وانينا نه دهكات، كه كانديه كان له بنياتنانى دهسلات و پرؤسه هيزرىدا بهكارىدههين بؤ چالاكردنى ئهم ستراتيجيه تى كه دهتوانن كاريگه رى دروستبهن له سهر بريارى دهنگه ران له هلبژاردنه كان دا. ئامانجه سهره كيه كانى ئهم تويزينه وهيه برىتين له ليكوليه وه له و ستراتيجيه زمانه وانينا نه كه كانديه كان بهكارىدههين بؤ پيشاندانى هيز و سه پاندنى بؤچوون و تيروانينه كانيان له نيو دهنگه راندا، ههروه ها دهكوليه وه له ديارده ي چالاكونى پرؤسه هزرىه كان بههوى كاريگه رى هه نديك له و ئامرازه زمانه وانينه كانه وه له هلبژاردنه كانى ئهمريكا دا. ئهم تويزينه وهيه سوود له ريبازيكى چونيته تى و ده رگريت به بهكارهينانى شيكارى كومه لايه تى-هزرى فان داىك له شيكرده وهيه دهسپيكه وتارى هلبژاردنه كانى سهروكايه تى ئهمريكاى سالى 2024. شيكارىبه كان به و ئه نجامه دهگه ن كه كانديه كانى هلبژاردنى ئهمريكا ئامرازه زمانه وانينه جياوازه كان بهكاردههين بؤ سه پاندنى بؤچوون و تيروانينيان و بنياتنانى "دهسلاتى بهره مهينراو" له دهروه ي ههلسهنگاندى سياسه تدا. به ديارىكراوى، تره مپ سوود له ناسيوناليزمى نؤستالژيا و ده رده گرئت، له كاتيكدا هاريس زياتر په نا بؤ متمانى دامه زراوه يى ده بات بؤ كاريگه رى دروستكرن له سهر دهنگه راندا. ئهم دؤزىنه وانه پشت به ريبازى فان داىك ده به ستن له ناساندنى گوتارى سياسى وهك ئامرازيكى بنياتنانى دهسلات گه يشتن به و ده رئه نجامه ي كه سهركه وتنى هلبژاردنه كان زياتر بهنده به هانده رى دهروونيه وه نهك به هزر و هوشه وه.

وشه سه ره كيه كان: ويژمانى سياسى، زمان و هيز، ريبازى كومه لايه تى-هزرى، دهسنتكارىكردى مه عريفى

استقصاء قوة اللغة في الحملات الانتخابية باللغة الإنجليزية: نهج اجتماعي-معرفي

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الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في كيفية استخدام اللغة كأداة نفوذ خفية في خطابات الحملات الانتخابية الأمريكية، وتبحث في الاستراتيجيات اللغوية التي يستخدمها المرشحون لبناء السلطة والعمليات المعرفية التي تحفزها هذه الاستراتيجيات للتأثير على عملية صنع القرار الانتخابي. وتتمثل الأهداف الرئيسية في دراسة الاستراتيجيات اللغوية التي يستخدمها المرشحون لبناء السلطة والتأثير على المواطنين، ودراسة العمليات المعرفية التي تنشطها بعض هذه الأدوات اللغوية في المجال الانتخابي الأمريكي. وباستخدام نهج نوعي، يطبق هذا العمل إطار فان ديك لتحليل الاجتماعي المعرفي في تحليل الخطابات الافتتاحية للانتخابات الرئاسية الأمريكية لعام 2024. ويخلص التحليل إلى أن مرشحي الانتخابات الأمريكية يستخدمون أدوات لغوية متطورة، وتجاوز المشاعر، والتلاعب بالإسناد، ونمذجة المواقف في بناء "سلطة مصطنعة" خارج نطاق تقييم السياسات. ويطبق ترامب نزع الحنين إلى الماضي القومية، بينما تطبق هاريس مصداقية المؤسسات، وهي أساليب تعمل دون وعي لإعادة بناء إدراك الناخبين. تعزز هذه النتائج إطار فان ديك في كشف الخطاب السياسي كأداة تواصل لبناء القوة، بحيث يعتمد الفوز الانتخابي على المحفزات النفسية بدلاً من ترشيد السياسات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخطاب السياسي، اللغة والقوة، النهج الاجتماعي-المعرفي، التلاعب المعرفي