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Exchange Structure in The United States Presidential Election Debate 2024: Donald Trump and Kamala Harris

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the 2024 U.S. presidential election debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris using the Interpersonal Function framework, specifically Exchange Structure (Move) from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The analysis identifies five Move patterns: "K1", "K2^K1", "K1^K2F", "K1^K2F^K1F", and "A1", along with one dynamic move pattern: Challenge and Response to Challenge (CH-RCH). The findings reveal that Donald Trump adopts a more authoritative and responsive stance in the debate, frequently assuming the role of Primary Knower (K1) to assert his knowledge and authority. He is more engaged in responding to challenges (RCH) rather than initiating them, indicating a focus on defending his credibility. In contrast, Kamala Harris actively challenges (CH) Trump's statements, often taking the Secondary Knower (K2) role by questioning or scrutinizing his claims before asserting her own position. However, she also assumes the Primary Knower (K1) role at times to establish her authority. Trump's debate strategy is centered on defending and reinforcing his credibility, while Harris employs a more confrontational approach, challenging Trump's assertions to cast doubt on his statements. This study contributes to the understanding of power dynamics and interactional strategies in political debates through an SFL-based discourse analysis.

Keyword: Systemic Functional Linguistics, Exchange Role, Donald Trump, Kamala Harris, Move

1. Introduction

Debates, interviews, conversations or speeches are verbal communication that occurs in person, which can be called spoken discourse. Compared to written discourse, spoken discourse is more spontaneous, contextual, and real time (Assenova, 2010; Gee, 2014; Mutmainnah & Sutopo, 2016; Yusuf et al., 2024). Example in a debate, it includes how participants communicate with each other, respond to questions or challenges, and control interruptions and turns. Spoken discourse analysis helps understand the dynamics of the exchange of ideas and the communication patterns used to attract the attention of the audience.

According Rajabi & Farshadi (2024), political debates on the global stage are an ideal place to examine how language interacts with power. Debates are an important aspect in political campaigns to highlight policy differences and influence public opinion, especially in presidential elections. The vision and mission of each candidate can be conveyed through debates to the public, so that voters can compare the candidates' ability to speak about policies, and see the character of each candidate. This debate is not just about policy proposals; it is also about reflection of national ideological and cultural divisions (Sides et al., 2019).

One of the debate phenomena that has stolen the world's public attention is the US presidential election in 10 September 2024, Millions of people tuned in to see the candidates compete during the debates, which became into media spectacles (Holmes, 2017). The debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris provided a valuable opportunity to observe how language is used to shape interpersonal function and influence public

opinion. The debate highlighted how both candidates communicated strategically to convey their goals and policies, as well as how they seek to gain voter support. Moreover, the debate demonstrated how political rhetoric, persuasive strategies (Aghaei & Rajabi, 2022), and power dynamics operate, influencing how the public perceives leadership and the future direction of national policy. This debate serves as an interesting case study of how language constructs political narratives and builds relationships with audiences.

One approach that applicable for analyzing this debate is systemic functional linguistic SFL (Halliday, 1985). This approach relies on the concept of metafuncion, which refers to the simultaneous expression of different types of meaning (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) and it consists of three functions, ideational, interpersonal and textual function. This research used Interpersonal function, because it focuses on how language is used for interaction, including exchange structures are formed in communication. In the context of the debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, the interpersonal function helps analyze how both candidates use language to assert authority, challenge each other, and engage with the audience.

In the interpersonal function approach, exchange structure (move) refers to how participants use language to construct, clarify, and challenge meaning within an exchange. It involves the sequence of moves in an interaction, where speakers' Moves can be categorized based on their function in the exchange, such as K1 (providing knowledge), K2 (requesting knowledge), A1 (offering action), and A2 (requesting action). The analysis of Moves in an exchange structure allows researchers to understand the dynamic roles of speakers, the negotiation of meaning, and the distribution of power and control in a conversation. This system provides insights into how participants manage turns, challenge or confirm ideas.

According to Martin & Rose (2007), an exchange consists of two primary components: information and goods or services, which are negotiated between participants. Within this framework, moves represent the smallest unit of interaction, occurring without interruption even when the speaker changes. When two or more moves are connected, they form an exchange, which serves as the foundation of social interaction (Yusuf et al., 2024). In the context of a political debate, these exchanges highlight how candidates navigate meaning negotiation to assert authority, challenge opponents, and connect with the audience effectively.

To gain a better understanding of the meaning negotiation in political debates, this study incorporates linguistic theories such as systemic functional linguistics (SFL), exchange structure (move) and dynamic of move. This research differs from previous studies, *Critical perspectives on political discourse of the 2016 U.S. presidential debates: A systemic functional linguistics reading, Rajabi & Farshadi (2024)* that only look at the mood aspects in exchange roles, so in this research will also looks at the other pattern 'moves' in the exchange structure. This research uses the notion of 'K1/K2/A1/A2' and related communication procedures to identify the meaning negotiation. By observing this move pattern and dynamic move, we can better understand how each participant navigates the conversation and establishes their attitude.

1.1 Problem of The Study
1.   What are the differences of the realization between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris in terms of Exchange Structure?

2. Method

Qualitative research usually included a variety of educational research approaches, such as ethnography, naturalistic research, case studies, fieldwork, and participant observation. According to Ary et al. (2009), qualitative research usually involved analyzing data in the form of words rather than numbers or statistics. This analysis used a qualitative method based on the framework developed by (Ezzy, 2012), because this method was very suitable for analyzing speech in the debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. Ezzy outlined several steps for organizing the collected data, such as using open coding to identify emerging categories, sampling and classification. This study adopted a linguistic approach in discourse analysis through the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework proposed by (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), which allows for in depth analysis of elements such as Move from exchange structure approach. With this qualitative method, researchers could see the patterns how candidates negotiated meaning, exchanged information, and managed interactions during the debate.

The researcher was focused to identify the type of Move (K1, K2, A1, A2) Using Martin's (1992) structure, the utterances were coded according to their exchange structure (Move), and the Dynamics of Move (Challenge, Clarification, Confirmation). The coded results were organized into tables. This study analyzed the debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris held on 10 September 2024, with a total duration of 1 hour and 49 minutes. From several full debate videos available on YouTube, this study selected the version uploaded by "The Wall Street Journal," as it provided a complete recording with clear video and audio quality.

3. Result and Discussion

The result Exchange structure is about how people interact with each other to exchange ideas, share information, or ask for clarification during communication. It shows how conversations are organized into turns, which include different steps called "moves". These moves have specific functions, such as starting the interaction (initiation), answering or reacting to what was said (response), and wrapping up or giving feedback on the interaction (follow-up). By analyzing exchange structures, we can see the roles that people take on during a conversation, such as being the one in control or being the one who asks questions. It also helps us understand their relationships with each other and whether their interaction flows smoothly or has interruptions and conflicts.

In this analysis, I will categorize each move pattern found in the debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. Each move will be identified based on its function in the interaction, whether it involves giving information, asking questions, responding, or challenging. I will analyze how Donald Trump and Kamala Harris take on different roles, such as primary knower (K1), secondary knower (K2), primary actor (A1), secondary actor (A2), dynamic of moves (clarification, confirmation, challenge). By categorizing these moves, I aim to show how their use of moves reflects their strategies to assert dominance, defend their positions, and influence the audience throughout the debate.

3.1 Realization of Moves

In this analysis, I will categorize each move pattern found in the debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. Each move will be identified based on its function in the interaction, whether it involves giving information, asking questions, responding, or challenging. I will analyze how Donald Trump and Kamala Harris take on different roles, such as primary knower (K1), secondary knower (K2), primary actor (A1), secondary actor (A2), dynamic of moves (clarification, confirmation, challenge). By categorizing these moves, I aim to show how their use of moves reflects their strategies to assert dominance, defend their positions, and influence the audience throughout the debate.

A. Realization of Primary Knower (K1)

In systemic functional linguistics, the concept of primary knower refers the speaker who has the knowledge and provides information. Sometimes, a speaker initiates by giving information without being asked. If the listener does not respond, the speaker is still considered K1 because they hold and share the knowledge.

Table 3.1 Realization of Moves as k1

Interpersonal Meaning		
Utterances	Minute	Move
KH: ...well the former president had said the climate change is a hoax ...... I am proud that as vice president over the last four years we have invested a trillion dollars in a clean energy economy while we have also increased domestic gas production to Historic levels....	00:59:59	K1

In the data from the table 3.1, KH took on the role of the primary knower (K1) by sharing her actions and criticizing DT's stance on climate change. KH pointed out that DT had previously called climate change a "hoax". DT did not directly respond to these remarks, allowing Harris to maintain control of the conversation as K1. In realization of moves, when the listener doesn't respond, the speaker remains the primary knower (K1).

B. Realization of Secondary Knower followed by Primary Knower (K2^K1)

In moves realization, there is a pattern namely secondary knower followed by primary knower (K2^K1). In this pattern, the secondary knower (K2) shows that they do not have certain information and seeks to confirm or clarify it by asking a question. The primary knower (K1), who is assumed to have the information or authority, responds by providing or confirming the requested information.

Table 3.2 Realization of Moves as k2^k1

Interpersonal Meaning		
Utterances	Minute	Move
KH: what you will also notice is that people start leaving his rallies early out of exhaustion and boredom...	00:31:24	K2
DT: first let me respond this to the rallies she said people start leaving people don't go to her rallies there's no reason to go and the people that do go she's busting them in and paying them to be there and then showing them in a different light so she can't talk about that people don't leave my rallies we have the biggest rallies the most incredible rallies in the history of politics...	00:32:40	K1

In the table 3.2, Kamala Harris (KH) acts as the secondary knower (K2) because she introduces a claim about people leaving Donald Trump's rallies early, implying that this reflects a lack of enthusiasm or interest. Her statement indirectly seeks a response or defence from Trump. Donald Trump (DT) takes on the role of the primary knower (K1) by directly addressing her claim. He denies the statement, provides counterarguments, and elaborates on the success of his rallies, emphasizing their size and energy. This interaction follows the K2^K1 pattern, where KH, as the secondary knower, makes a claim that invites clarification, and DT, as the primary knower, provides information to counter her statement and assert his position.

C. Realization of primary Knower followed by Secondary Knower followed up (K1^K2f)

However, a different pattern, K1^K2f, can occur when the primary knower starts by giving information, making a claim, or criticizing, and the secondary knower reacts. This reaction can involve shifting the topic or agreeing with the primary knower. The K1^K2f pattern shows how debate exchanges can break from standard patterns, reflecting the dynamic nature of debates where participants often use strategies to steer the discussion or deflect attention.

Table 3.3 Realization of Moves as k1^k2f

Interpersonal Meaning		
Utterances	Minute	Move
KH: I am offering what I describe as an opportunity economy and the best econ economists in our country if not the world have reviewed our relative plans for the future of America what Goldman Sachs has said is that Donald Trump's plan would make the economy worse mine would strengthen the economy...	00:13:42	K1
DT: ... she doesn't have a plan she copied Biden's plan and it's like four sentences like Run Spot Run four sentences that are just oh we'll try and lower taxes she doesn't have a plan take a look at her plan she doesn't have a plan…	00:14:33	K2f

In the table 3.3, Kamala Harris takes the role of the Primary Actor (K1) by starting the discussion with offering her plan for an opportunity economy. She introduces an idea focused on creating jobs and helping the economy grow. By doing this, Kamala takes charge of the conversation and leads the direction of the topic.

Donald Trump follows as the Secondary Actor (K2F) by responding to her plan with criticism. He disagrees with her proposal and explains why he thinks it won't work.

D. Realization of Primary Knower followed by Secondary Knower Followed by Primary Knower Follow Up (K1^K2^K1F)

The K1^K2^K1F pattern is realized in interactions where the primary knower (K1) initiates by providing information or asserting a position, the secondary knower (K2) responds to or questions the information, and the primary knower (K1F) follows up to confirm, elaborate, or finalize the exchange. This structure allows the primary knower to maintain authority while addressing the secondary knower's input.

Table 3.4 Realization of Moves as k1^k2f^k1f

Interpersonal Meaning		
Utterances	Minute	Move
DT: they're not going to have higher prices what's going to have and who's going to have higher prices is China and all of the countries that have been ripping us off for years....	00:15:43	K1
KH: let's be clear that the Trump Administration resulted in a trade deficit one of the highest we've ever seen in the history of America he invited trade Wars you want to talk about his deal with China what he ended up doing is under Donald Trump's presidency he ended up selling American chips to China to help them improve and modernize their military....	00:17:18	K2f
DT: first of all, they bought their chips from Taiwan we hardly make chips anymore because of uh philosophies like they have and policies like they have I don't say her because she has no policy everything that she believed three years ago and four years ago is out the window she's going to My Philosophy now...	00:18:24	K1f

In the table 3.4 shows the K1^K2^K1F pattern. DT starts as the primary knower (K1) by saying higher prices will affect China, not the U.S. KH responds as the secondary knower (K2) by challenging his claim, pointing out the trade deficit, trade wars, and selling American chips to China. Trump follows up as K1F, countering her argument by saying the chips came from Taiwan and criticizing her policies.

E. Realization of Dynamic Move of Challenge Followed by Response of Challenge (ch^rch)

The move pattern such as challenge followed by response of challenge (ch^rch) happens in debates when, after a statement and response (K1^K2 or K2^K1), one candidate challenges the other's point (ch), and the other responds with a response of challenge (rch). This back-and-forth allows candidates to question or defend their arguments, pushing for more explanation or trying to find weaknesses. It shows how debates move from sharing information to stronger arguments and disagreements.

Table 3.5 Realization of Dynamic Moves as Ch^Rch

Interpersonal Meaning

Utterances	Minute	Move
KH: under Donald Trump's abortion bans couples who pray and and and and dream of having a family are being denied IVF treatments... get the health care she needs barely can afford to do it and what you are putting her through is unconscionable and the people of America have not the majority of Americans believe in a woman's right to make decisions about her own body...	0:28:06	K2
DT: excuse me I have to respond another lie it's another lie I have been a leader on IVF... I have been a leader on fertilization IVF and the other thing they not you should ask will she allow abortion in the eighth month ninth month seventh month ...	00:28:41	K1
KH: Come on	00:28:50	K2f
DT: Would you do that?	00:28:51	Ch
KH: Why don't you answer the question, would you Veto?	00:28:52	Rch

In the table 3.5 shows the ch^rch pattern in moves. Kamala Harris starts as the secondary knower (K2) by claiming Donald Trump's abortion policies block couples from accessing IVF and cause hardship for women. Donald Trump responds as the primary knower (K1) by denying her claims, calling them lies, and saying he supports IVF. He then shifts the focus by asking if Harris supports late-stage abortions, such as abortions in the final months of pregnancy or for a 9-month-old fetus. Harris follows up (K2F) with a brief counter, "Come on," expressing disapproval. Trump escalates with a challenge (CH) by directly asking her if she supports such practices, prompting Harris to counter with a respond challenge (RCH) by asking Trump if he would veto abortion bans, shifting the pressure back onto him.

F. Realization of Primary Actor (A1)

In exchange structure, an actor refers to participants involved in the exchange of goods or services, rather than information. The primary actor (A1) is the one who initiates the exchange by offering or demanding goods or services, while the secondary actor (A2) responds by accepting, refusing, or negotiating the offer or demand.

Table 3.6 Realization of Moves as A1

Interpersonal Meaning		
Utterances	Minute	Move
DT: .... wait a minute I'm talking now you don't mind please does that sound familiar	00:46:08	A1

In the table 3.6 DT as (A1) is the primary actor because he is the one initiating control over the conversation by demanding the right to speak. He tells his opponent to wait and asks them not to interrupt.
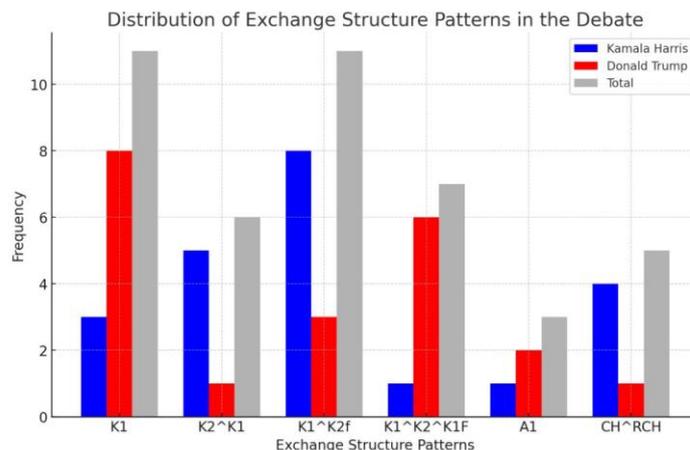
Figure 1. Block Diagram of Realization Move

From the analysis of the data, the result from various forms are realized, including the primary knower, secondary knower, primary actor, secondary actor, and their follow-ups. The data also reveals dynamic moves, such as clarification, confirmation, and challenge (Martin, 1992). However, in this analysis, only the challenge of dynamic move was found and his may result from various factors (Elorza, 2021). As observed in the debate, candidates use challenges either to seek more information or to undermine their opponents.

The analysis of exchange structures in the debate highlights the "K1" pattern, which appears 11 times. Kamala Harris functions as K1 only 3 times, whereas Donald Trump takes on this role 8 times. This pattern demonstrates how the primary knower holds or possesses the information, while the listener either does not respond or does not deny the statement. In such cases, the speaker remains the K1, even in the absence of a response.

The analysis of exchange structures in the debate highlights the "K2^K1" pattern, which appears 6 times. Kamala Harris initiated this move 5 times, while Donald Trump did it once. This pattern illustrates how the Secondary Knower (K2) seeks clarification or confirmation, positioning themselves as someone who lacks certain information. In response, the Primary Knower (K1) asserts their authority by providing or confirming the information.

Another notable move realization found in the debate is "K1^K2f," which appears 11 times. In 8 times, Kamala Harris takes the role of the Primary Knower (K1), while Donald Trump does so only 3 times. This pattern shows how the Primary Knower (K1) asserts their knowledge or authority by providing information about their opinion, while the Secondary Knower (K2) responds, often seeking clarification or acknowledging the statement.

The move realization "K1^K2^K1F" appears 7 times in the debate, with Donald Trump initiating it in 6 instances and Kamala Harris in 1. This pattern occurs when the Primary Knower (K1) starts by providing information or making a claim, the Secondary Knower (K2) responds by questioning or challenging it, and the Primary Knower Follow-Up (K1F) then confirms, elaborates, or reinforces their position. his shows that Trump often restates or reinforces his point after being questioned, making sure he has the final say. It suggests he wants to stay in control and avoid looking wrong in the debate.

The dynamic move realization in challenge "CH^RCH" appears 5 times in the debate, with Kamala Harris initiating the challenge in 3 times and Donald Trump in twice. In this pattern, one candidate challenges the other's statement (CH), and the other responds by defending or respond the challenge (RCH).

In this move realization, there is only 3 times of (A1), with Donald Trump initiating it in 2 times and Kamala Harris did it once. The Primary Actor (A1) initiates the exchange by offering or demanding goods or services, while the Secondary Actor (A2) responds by accepting, refusing, or negotiating the offer or demand.

From the analysis, Donald Trump is more authoritativ**e** and responsive in the debate. He often takes the role of Primary Knower (K1) to show that he has the information and authority. He also responds to challenges (RCH) more than he gives challenges, meaning he focuses more on defending himself rather than attacking. Kamala Harris, on the other hand, is more active in challenging (CH) Trump's statements. She often takes the Secondary Knower (K2) role, asking questions or questioning Trump's claims before giving her own. However, she also takes the Primary Knower (K1) role several times to show she has authority too. Trump's

strategy is more about defending and proving his credibility, while Harris challenges and questions Trump more to create doubt about his statements.

4. Conclusion

In the question problem of study, In the 2024 presidential debate, the analysis shows the use of different exchange structures. The "K1" pattern appeared 11 times, this pattern demonstrates how the primary knower holds or possesses the information. The "K2^K1" pattern appeared 6 times, this pattern shows how the Secondary Knower (K2) asks for information or clarification, and the Primary Knower (K1) provides the information. The "K1^K2f" pattern also appeared 11 time, showing how the Primary Knower gives information and the Secondary Knower responds. The "K1^K2^K1F" pattern appeared 7 times, this shows how one candidate provides information, the other candidate questions it, and the first candidate confirms or explains more. The "A1" pattern appeared 3 times, Finally, "CH^RCH" pattern of dynamic moves appeared 5 times, mostly with Kamala Harris challenging Trump's statements.

From the analysis, Donald Trump is more authoritativ**e** and responsive in the debate. He often takes the role of Primary Knower (K1) to show that he has the information and authority. He also responds to challenges (RCH) more than he gives challenges, meaning he focuses more on defending himself rather than attacking. Kamala Harris, on the other hand, is more active in challenging (CH) Trump's statements. She often takes the Secondary Knower (K2) role, asking questions or questioning Trump's claims before giving her own. However, she also takes the Primary Knower (K1) role several times to show she has authority too. Trump's strategy is more about defending and proving his credibility, while Harris challenges and questions Trump more to create doubt about his statements.

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