DO POLITICIANS USE IMPLICATURE FOR NONSENSE? AN ANALYSIS OF 2024 U.S PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

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Abstract

Implicature was firstly coined as a strategy to create effective communication. It works differently when it has come to politicians. This study investigates the implicature used by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris in the first 2024 U.S presidential debate focused on war issues. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed to explore how the candidates used implicature and its use in political discourse. The result showed that both candidates violated Gricean theory of maxims to create implicature to hide and imply their real meaning. It is common in political discourse especially in presidential debate. This study was limited to war issue. Further research might be needed to investigate two areas; political implicature itself and war issues.

Keywords*: Implicature, political implicature, political discourse, U.S presidential debate*

INTRODUCTION

Language is closely related to identity. From the outer layer, for example, the language spoken can provide an idea of where a person is from, and even the details of how someone speaks can reflect the culture embedded in that person (Bauman, 2022; Bucholtz & Hall, 2022; Darvin, 2016; Fuller, 2007; Schecter, 2014; Wodak, 2012).

Grice's Cooperative Principle influences effective communication through four key maxims. This theory of maxims is also closely related to implicature. Implicature is a speaking strategy to imply meaning without stating it literally. Davis (2016) Implicature can make communication more effective without lengthy explanations. Grice (1991) distinguished two types of implicature: conversational and conventional. Brown and Levinson (1987) and Yule (1996) explained that conversational implicature arises from a general principle of conversation along with several maxims that speakers typically follow. It is closely linked to Gricean maxims and adheres to Grice's cooperative principle. Meanwhile, conventional implicature is when it involves specific words that add extra meanings when used (Yule, 1996).

Implicature becomes unique when used by politicians because they deliberately use it not to make communication more effective, but to conceal their true intentions by flouting the maxims to create conversational implicatures. Several studies have investigated implicature. Breaching maxims to create sarcasm in political context (Igaab & Wehail, 2023). Mustafa (2010) studied of how implicature was used in journalism. Meanwhile, other studies have identified how implicature was used by the politicians (Agelvis & Sulbarán, 2021; Khairat, 2018; Mahmood & Mustafa, 2023; Pujiati et al., 2020).

One interesting setting is the US presidential debate. Debates are the heart of democracy (Coleman, 2000). They can influence votes (C. J. Davis et al., 2011; Hillygus & Jackman, 2003). This paper aims to investigate the Gricean Theory of Implicature done by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris in the first 2024 U.S presidential debate, focusing on the issue of war and its intended use in the context of political discourse.

1. **Implicatures**

The theory of maxims, developed by Grice, is intricately connected to the concept of implicature. Implicature is a communication strategy where meaning is implied rather than explicitly stated. According to Davis (2016), implicature can enhance the effectiveness of communication by conveying complex ideas without the need for lengthy explanations. Grice (1991) identified two types of implicature: conversational and conventional.

Conversational implicature arises from the general principles of conversation and is governed by Grice's maxims, which are part of his cooperative principle. These maxims include quantity (providing the right amount of information), quality (ensuring truthfulness), relation

(staying relevant), and manner (being clear and orderly). Brown and Levinson (1987) and Yule (1996) explain that conversational implicature depends on these maxims, as speakers rely on them to convey additional meanings that listeners can infer based on context and shared knowledge. According to Grice (1991), the maxims can be intentionally violated or flouted, leading to a different type of conversational implicature.

Grice (1991) and Brown and Levinson (1987) discuss how conversational maxims can be deliberately flouted to create conversational implicatures. It can be seen in violating quality where the speaker could say something false that can create metaphor or irony. Then in quantity, speaker could disobey the maxim to give statements that seem uninformative. Irrelevant resposes also could imply hidden meanings and the last flouting maxim of manner like being overly detailed also can imply negative thing.

On the other hand, conventional implicature involves specific words or phrases that inherently carry extra meanings. According to Yule (1996), these implicatures are tied to the conventional meanings of certain expressions, regardless of the context. For example, words like "but" or "even" can add layers of meaning that go beyond their literal use, contributing to the overall message being communicated.

In summary, implicature, whether conversational or conventional, allows speakers to convey nuanced meanings. Both forms play a crucial role in effective communication by allowing speakers to imply meanings that listeners can interpret based on shared understanding and linguistic conventions.

2. Political implicature

According to Grice (1991) implicatures are often described as subtle semantic implication. They are also understood pragmatically in relation to contexts (Atlas, 2011; Gazdar, 2020). In this discussion, the term will be specifically focused on the pragmatics of context. Therefore, political implicatures will be defined as those implicatures that are particularly grounded in the political context. This approach emphasizes how the surrounding political environment and circumstances influence the inferred meanings beyond the literal content of the communication.

Political implicature refers to the inferences drawn from speeches based on their political context rather than their literal content (van Dijk, 2008). These implicatures arise from the context models of participants, which encompass their political identities, roles, goals, actions, and beliefs. Unlike semantic implications, which derive directly from the speech content, political

implicatures are pragmatic and contextual, shaping how the speech is interpreted in a political environment.

For example, when a politician emphasizes peaceful intentions while supporting a controversial policy, the political implicature may involve legitimizing the policy and defending their position against criticism. Political implicatures help legitimize policies, align with international allies, and delegitimize opposition. They are essential for understanding the political functions and strategies within debates, revealing underlying motives and goals that are not explicitly stated in the speech (van Dijk, 2008).

3. Debate as political discourse

The use of language by politicians is interesting to study as political discourse. Political discourse is the way language is used in political settings. It includes all kinds of communication, like speeches, debates, policy documents, campaign materials, and media commentary. Teun van Dijk (1997) often examines the role of discourse in politics, highlighting how debates can reflect and shape power relations and ideologies. Weissenrieder & Fairclough (1997) discusses how debates utilize language to construct and contest meanings and identities, emphasizing their function as a platform for political communication. Wodak (2012) through critical discourse analysis, focuses on how language in debates is used to exercise power and influence. These scholars collectively provide insights into how debates contribute to political discourse by shaping public opinion and political behavior.

Presidential debate becomes one of the most waited event before election because it shows both global concern, humor and satire. Day (2023) suggests that satire is a strategic tool in debates, serving as a significant form of constructive social criticism. Thus, it is interesting to see how satire is made and the meaning behind it in political discourse like debate.

The reason why the US presidential debate is a political discourse that always gains attention is due to the US itself, and Trump, with all his antics, becomes a discourse eagerly anticipated by people worldwide. Ting (2024) states that the 2024 U.S. presidential election will provide answers about what the US will offer to the world. A number of studies have analyzed U.S political scheme including their presidential debates (Ali & Abdulmunim, 2021; Khalil & Abbas, 2017; Rakhmasari, 2023; Savoy, 2018; Elder and Berlin, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

In this study, researchers employed a descriptive qualitative research approach. It is an approach in qualitative research designs that seeks to offer a detailed summary of events using everyday language (Creswell, 2009). Descriptive analysis was used to explain the implicatures

present in the U.S. 2024 first presidential debate aired on ABC News. The object of this research was the televised debate held as part of the presidential election process. The data collection techniques were as follows:

1. Watched the recorded U.S. 2024 first presidential debate aired on ABC News.
2. Reviewed the video from beginning to end to identify and code the war issues.
3. Replayed the coded segments in slow motion to ensure accurate transcription
4. Transcribed the data into text to facilitate analysis.
5. Coded the final data to analyze the implicatures

For data analysis, researchers applied Grice's implicature theory (1991) to describe the implicatures used by the presidential candidates. Creswell's (2009) coding method was employed, allowing researchers to systematically categorize and interpret the qualitative data. Subsequently, the researchers correlated the findings with Grice's theory to provide insights into the candidates' communication strategies.

FINDINGS

Based on the analysis, the war discussion was found in minutes 1:00:09 to 1:20:01. Below paragraph is the result and discussion of the study.

Conventional implicatures

Conventional implicature is when it involves specific words that add extra meanings when used (Yule, 1996). Both Harris and Trump use specific words to add extra meanings. The data can be seen in the next paragraph.

1. Conventional implicature done by Kamala Harris
   In minutes 1:01:37, Harris said: *"…We must chart a course for a two-state solution and in that solution there must be security for the Israeli people. Israel and in equal measure for the Palestinians but the one thing I will assure you always I will always give Israel the ability to defend itself…"*

To understand how her conventional implicature in the answer above, we need to see the context. The moderator discussed the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, highlighting the issue of hostages, including Americans, who are still being held. They referenced a statement made by Vice President Harris in December, where she affirmed Israel's right to defend itself but emphasized the importance of adhering to international humanitarian law and protecting innocent civilians. The moderator noted that, despite her comments nine months ago, the situation has resulted in an estimated 40,000 Palestinian deaths and nearly 100 hostages still in captivity. They

pointed out that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently stated that no deal is currently being negotiated, and President Biden has not succeeded in resolving the deadlock. The moderator then asked Harris how she would address this challenging situation.

The use of the word *"but"* after "*Palestinians"* added meaning, where Harris emphasizes that Israel has the right to defend itself. Meanwhile, the Palestinian death toll is mentioned in a context where the numbers do not compare to the hostages used as a reason for Israel's defense. Although Harris does mention the tragic loss of Palestinian lives, the primary focus on Israel's defense could imply a lesser emphasis on the Palestinian perspective. The conventional implicature here might be that her primary concern is with Israel's security, which could lead listeners to infer a relative lack of support for Palestinian issues.

The extra meanings discussed by Yule (1996) in conventional implicature by adding specific words appeared in Harris's answer. This reflects idea that political implicatures are used to manage and influence public perception and political alliances (van Dijk, 2008). Another use of conventional implicature done by Harris was when she said *"I will assure you"* added a layer of certainty and commitment, emphasizing her unwavering support for Israel's defense, which might imply a prioritization of this point over other. The use of diplomatic language allows for multiple interpretations, which can be seen as a way to address a complex and sensitive topic without alienating either side.

2. Conventional implicature done by Donald Trump

Trump in 1:03:33 said "*...They took off all the sanctions that I had Iran had no money for Hamas or Hezbollah or any of the 28 different uh spheres of Terror and they are spheres of Terror horrible Terror they had no money it was a big story and you know it you covered it very well actually they had no money for Terror they were broke. Now they're a rich Nation and now what they're doing is they're spreading that money around..."*

The answer from Trump was still in the same context where moderator asked how Trump would negotiate with Netanyahu. Trump accused that the current administration lifted the sanctions as pivotal change that had encouraged to financially support Hamas. The extra meanings uttered in Trump's answer can be seen in "Now, they're rich nation". This framing aligns with van Dijk's idea that political discourse often highlights contrasts to influence perception. By contrasting the past *"they were broke"* with the present *"they're a rich Nation",* Trump suggested a deterioration in policy effectiveness.

Conversational implicatures

Both candidates created conversational implicature to imply meanings by flouting the maxims. The following paragraph will discuss how Kamala Harris and Donald Trump used conversational implicature in context order. The first context as stated in the previous discussion in conventional implicature. Both Harris's and Trump's answer violate the maxims. Harris for example gave the irrelevant answers on how she would stop Palestinian death toll asked by the moderator. Instead of mentioning and emphasizing the higher number of the death toll, Harris chose to show her side to Israel. Harris talked almost two minutes and she mentioned Israel nine times and Palestinian two times.

Trump violated maxims which caused conversational implicature too. Instead of explaining the factual way to stop the attach in Gaza, Trump threw psycho war to accuse that Harris hated Israel. The irrelevance done by Trump also supported the implied meaning behind his quantity and quality maxim violation. Trump could not give the strategic way and threw rhetorical and hyperbole idea if he were the president, no war would happen. In minutes 1:04:07, Trump even said "*I'll get the war with Ukraine and Russia ended if I'm president-elect I'll get it done before even becoming president*". Those statements were not relevant at all as the moderator had not shifted to Ukraine crisis.

In the debate, both Kamala Harris and Donald Trump used conversational implicature by flouting Grice's maxims, creating deeper meanings within their responses. Harris, when asked about the high Palestinian death toll, flouted the maxim of relevance by focusing predominantly on her support for Israel, mentioning it nine times compared to only two mentions of Palestinians. This disproportionate emphasis suggested a strong alignment with Israel's right to defend itself, subtly implying that her primary concern lay with Israel's security. According to Grice's (1991) theory, by providing an answer that seemed irrelevant to the specific question, Harris invited the audience to infer her prioritization of Israeli interests over directly addressing the humanitarian crisis. This aligned with van Dijk's (2008) concept of political implicature, where the structuring of discourse served to highlight certain political alignments and downplay others, shaping audience perception. Levinson (1987) also supports this view, suggesting that such strategic use of language can manipulate audience interpretation by emphasizing certain aspects while omitting others.

Similarly, Trump flouted several maxims, particularly relevance and quantity, to create conversational implicatures. Instead of detailing a concrete strategy to address the conflict in Gaza, he accused Harris of hating Israel, a claim that flouted the maxim of quality due to its hyperbolic nature. This irrelevant accusation served to distract from his lack of a detailed plan, implying that Harris's policies were detrimental without providing substantive evidence. By

claiming he could end the Ukraine-Russia war before taking office, Trump flouted the maxim of relevance, suggesting an exaggerated sense of his diplomatic prowess.

This rhetorical strategy aligned with van Dijk's notion of political implicature, where discourse was used to assert dominance and competence, encouraging the audience to view his leadership as uniquely capable of preventing and resolving conflicts, despite the lack of specific policy details. As Yule (1996) notes, such flouting can lead audiences to seek deeper meanings, interpreting these rhetorical moves as indications of broader political strategies and strengths. Levinson (1987) further explains that these conversational strategies can serve to reinforce the speaker's desired image and influence audience perceptions by creating implicit contrasts with their opponents.

This finding also supports several previous studies on how implicature is used as a strategy to influence and expand politicians' electorates (Khamarshekh, 2020), and to maintain power (Agelvis & Sulbarán, 2021; Faruk Zararsız & Seyhan, 2024). Both Trump and Harris, regardless of the types of implicatures they employed, aimed to gain votes and maintain their power. They tended to ignore substantive issues and emphasize their claims without regard for fact-checking. Van Dijk (2008) explains that political discourse often involves strategic manipulation of language to highlight certain viewpoints and downplay others, thereby shaping public perception and reinforcing power structures. This aligns with the idea that politicians use language not only to convey information but also to influence and control the narrative, ultimately serving their political objectives.

In 1:17:07, Harris said *"...how quickly you would give up for the sake of favor and what youthink is a friendship with what is known to be a dictator who would eat you for lunch…"*. In the debate, Kamala Harris responded to a question about handling Vladimir Putin, contrasting her approach with President Biden's. She reminded Trump that he is running against her and criticized his claim of ending the Ukraine war in 24 hours, suggesting he would concede to Russia. Harris highlighted her efforts to support Ukraine, including meeting with President Zelensky and bolstering NATO's defense. She emphasized the importance of sovereignty and argued that Ukraine's independence is due to U.S. and allied support.

Kamala Harris is criticizing Donald Trump's approach to foreign policy, particularly his perceived admiration for authoritarian leaders like Vladimir Putin. By saying *"how quickly you would give up for the sake of favor,"*. The phrase *"a friendship with what is known to be a dictator who would eat you for lunch"* suggests that Harris believes Trump's relationship with Putin is based on misguided admiration or personal gain, rather than strategic diplomacy. The

metaphor "eat you for lunch" implies that Putin would easily dominate or manipulate Trump in negotiations, taking advantage of his weaknesses. Harris is warning that such an approach could undermine American interests and values, particularly in the context of defending Ukraine and maintaining international stability.

By employing this metaphor, Harris aims to convey the idea that Trump's approach to foreign policy is not only ineffective but also dangerous, as it could allow dictators to easily manipulate him. This aligns with van Dijk's (2008) that political language is often crafted to emphasize certain viewpoints while downplaying others, ultimately shaping the audience's understanding and attitudes. The metaphor serves to underscore Harris's argument that strong, principled leadership is essential to counter authoritarian threats, positioning herself as the more capable leader in contrast to Trump.

Trump also violated the maxims. As stated by Grice (1991) and Brown & Levinson (2011) that tautology could also flouting the maxims of quantity where the tautology gives no informative utterances. In minutes 1:02:25, Trump started his tautology by saying *"…If I were the president" or "If I'm the President-elect"*. It is not once or twice, but during the debate talking about war, he mentioned the subjunctive mood repetitively without giving the real plans of how he would do to stop the wars.

Another maxim violation done by Trump is when he mentioned "*..they threw him out of a campaign like a dog we don't even know is he our president but we have a president that doesn't know he's alive"* in minute 1:14:31. It doesn't match the context where moderator asking the strategy to stop Ukraine-Rusia crisis. Instead of answering his plan, he blamed the former president who got out from the campaign. He added political satire in *"campaign like a dog"*.

Violating maxim of quality and relevance by adding unnecessary satire was also done by Kamala Harris in 1:16:34. She said that *"…our NATO allies are so thankful that you are no longer president…"*. Day (2023) stated that satire is very common in political discourse as it does distort the substance on purpose. Both Trump and Harris used implicature to state their motives and try to influence the voters.

Kamala Harris and Donald Trump strategically used implicature to shape public perception and reinforce their political positions. By flouting Grice's maxims, they crafted responses that emphasized their strengths and critiqued their opponent's weaknesses. Harris used conventional implicature and metaphorical language to underscore her commitment to Israel and portray Trump as vulnerable to authoritarian manipulation, aligning with van Dijk's (2008) theory of political discourse shaping audience attitudes. Meanwhile, Trump employed tautological

statements and satire to assert his leadership capabilities and distract from substantive issues. Both candidates aimed to influence voters and maintain power by managing public perception, illustrating how political language serves not just to convey information but to control the narrative and impact voter attitudes.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Both candidates utilized conventional and conversational implicatures, flouting Grice's (1991) maxims to convey deeper meanings and manipulate audience interpretations. Harris employed conventional implicature by emphasizing Israel's right to defend itself, subtly prioritizing Israeli security over Palestinian concerns. She used metaphorical language to criticize Trump's foreign policy approach, suggesting vulnerability to authoritarian manipulation. This aligns with van Dijk's (2008) that political discourse is crafted to emphasize certain viewpoints and shape audience attitudes.

Conversely, Trump used tautological statements and hyperbolic claims to assert his leadership capabilities and distract from the lack of detailed policy plans. By flouting maxims of relevance and quality, he implied criticisms of Harris and the current administration without providing substantive evidence. Both candidates aimed to manage public perception, illustrating how political language serves to control the narrative and impact voter attitudes. This study underscores the importance of understanding rhetorical strategies in political communication, highlighting the need for critical awareness among voters to navigate the complex landscape of political discourse.

Further research is needed to fact-check and evaluate the effectiveness of using implicature in political debates and could investigate in two areas; political discourse itself and war issue. This could involve analyzing voter reactions and perceptions to determine how well these strategies achieve their intended impact, providing deeper insights into the role of language in political influence.

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