

A Discourse Analysis of Assertives in American Vice- Presidential Debate 2020

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Abstract:

Assertives as a speech acts are utterances with the purpose to bring off the speaker to something with the truth the proposition being expressed. Assertives usually occur in the sentence of a question, description, statement of fact and conclusion, so they can be identified as the speaker's attempt to convince the listener and believe what is said by the speaker.

The current study is specified to analyze speech acts of assertives as used in American Presidential debates, namely, American Vice Presidential Debate 2020.

Generally speaking, the analysis aims to identify the dominant" types of assertives and how vice presidential candidates employ such types to achieve the remarkable results on which they depend in their interactions with their supporters. The analysis also aims to explain the meaning of such types of assertives which are found in the selected debate .

Key words: (Assertives, proposition, speech acts).

تحليل خطاب التأكيدات في مناظرة نائب الرئيس الأمريكي ٢٠٢٠

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المخلص:

التأكيدات كأفعال الكلام هي أقوال تهدف إلى إخراج المتحدث إلى شيء ما مع الحقيقة التي يتم التعبير عنها. تحدث التأكيدات عادةً في جملة السؤال والوصف وبيان الحقيقة والاستنتاج ، لذا يمكن تحديدها على أنها محاولة المتحدث لإقناع المستمع وتصديق ما يقوله المتحدث. تم تحديد الدراسة الحالية لتحليل أعمال التوكيد الخطابية المستخدمة في المناقشات الرئاسية الأمريكية ، وهي مناظرة نائب الرئيس الأمريكي ٢٠٢٠. بشكل عام ، يهدف التحليل إلى تحديد "الأنواع السائدة من التأكيدات وكيفية توظيف مرشحي نائب الرئيس لمثل هذه الأنواع لتحقيق النتائج الرائعة التي يعتمدون عليها في تفاعلهم مع مؤيديهم. ويهدف التحليل أيضًا إلى توضيح معنى هذه الأنواع من التأكيدات الموجودة في المناقشة المختارة. الكلمات المفتاحية: (التأكيدات ، الاقتراح ، أفعال الكلام).

1. Introduction

Language is a significant weapon in power disputes. Language is considered a potent weapon for influencing the conduct of others through words (Aichison ,1996,p.24).

This study highlights the Assertives made by the American vice - presidential candidates during the elections debate.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 The notion of truth and assertion in Frege 's philosophy

Nowadays, it is widely agreed in philosophy of language that the meaning of a sentence can be analyzed in terms of a proposition determining its truth-conditions. Therefore, determining the meaning of a sentence would enable speaker to determine directly the conditions under which it would be true to utter the sentence. By criticizing approaches such as those attributed to Frege. Travis (1975) proposed the delinking of the meaning of words from their truth-conditions so as to demonstrate, by means of contextualist arguments, that truth is not a semantic property, but rather a pragmatic dimension of the evaluation of utterances (Burge,2005,p.16).

According to Frege, any assertive sentence contains a "thought" that corresponds to what is meant or thought in asserting the sentence, i.e., its objective content. Thoughts are not reducible to the subjective representations of a single subject, what Frege calls "ideas"; they are rather shareable by all thinkers. The word 'sense' (or 'meaning') becomes synonymous with the term 'thought': a thought is an assertion expressing an objective sense (Greimann and Siegwart ,2007,p.289).

According to Austin, an assertion corresponds to what is said in a given use of a particular sentence to what is asserted. As such, it is an utterance or what he will refer to as a "speech act". As such, it is neither a sentence nor a proposition in the sense of Frege. The

main characteristic of an utterance is that its content changes depending on the occasion of the utterance; for example, what someone says in one context by a certain sentence is not the same as what he\she says in another context by the same sentence. In this sense, it is a departure from Frege's notion of truth, which is something that changes as the occasion changes (Gustafsson and sorli,2011,p.12).

2.2 Speech Acts Theory

The idea of speech acts can be explained using a theory of action, with reference to a definition of the context, on the basis of which discourses can be evaluated as appropriate or inappropriate as a function of the association of text structure with context structure(Van Dijk, 1977, p.11).

This theory was founded by the philosopher J.L. Austin in his book 'How To Do Things With Words' where he made the point that words also have force and meaning. Additionally he proposed the distinction between performatives (utterances used to do things) and constatives (utterances used to describe states of affairs) A speech act is an action which cannot be carried out unless the relevant sentences are uttered (Brown and Miller, 2013, p.412).

2.3 The Concept of Assertives

For a long time, linguists and philosophers have been interested in assertive speech act verbs. Searle (1979) has well defined this category of speech act verbs. He states that the illocutionary function of members of the assertive class is to commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition expressed in varying degrees (Searle, 1979,p. 12). Most of Austin's (1962) expositives and verdicts are included in this class. Examples are: affirm. state, describe, inform, tell, swear, assert, insist, etc.

Stalnaker (1972,p.315) identifies the following characteristics of assertions. Firstly, assertions have content; an act of assertion involves the expression of a proposition (something that represents the world as being a certain way). The second characteristic of assertions is that they are made in a context (three situations that include a speaker with certain beliefs and intentions, and some people with their own beliefs and intentions to whom the assertion is addressed). Thirdly, it is important to note that at times, the content of an assertion depends upon the context in which the assertion is made, such as who is speaking or when the assertion occurs. Lastly, acts of assertion affect, and are intended to affect, the context of the situation, including the attitudes of the participants. How the assertion affects the situation will depend on its content.

Searle (1979,p.12) points out that the illocutionary purpose of assertives (representatives) is to represent a state of affairs that has a word-to-world fit, i.e. words fit into the world; beliefs are expressed; and any proposition can occur, such as assertions.

Crystal (2008,p.446) states that assertives (representatives) are terms used in the theory of speech acts to describe utterances in which the speaker conveys his belief about the truth of a proposition.

Vanderveken (1991,p.125) summarizes the main characteristics of assertive speech acts. As he explains, assertiveness has an assertive point, a neutral mode of achievement, a neutral propositional content condition, a preparatory condition that a speaker has reasons or evidence to support the truth of the propositional content; sincerity conditions that the speaker believes the propositional content and neutral degree strength conditions. It is called the performative verb "assert" in English, and it is realized syntactically in declarative sentences. To make assertions, simple declarative sentences are used whose illocutionary force marker is identical to their sentential types .

3. Methodology

There are procedures that are adopted in the investigation of this study:Firstly, qualitative research is chosen because there is a full

description and analysis of assertive speech acts in the American vice-presidential debate 2020 carried out under the pragmatic level. Secondly, making presentage calculation to determine the most frequent assertive speech acts and their strategies are used by candidates. Finally, the adopted model of searle 's (1979) and searle & vanderveken 's (1985) works to analyze the selected utterances containing assertives in this debate.

4.Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Data Analysis

Throughout the analysis, three levels are considered. It begins by identifying the types of assertive speech acts commonly used by candidates during The American Vice Presidential Debate 2020, then it expands to show the intention of each candidate. Six assertive speech acts are involved, each of which can be employed by different strategies which are direct, indirect, explicit or implicit.

1.Criticizing in American vice presidential debate2020

Sample 1

Harris "Donald Trump, when asked about the wildfires in California and the question was, you know, the science is telling

us this, you know what Donald Trump said? Science doesn't know. **So, let's talk about who is prepared to lead our country over the course of the next four years on what is an existential threat to us as human being"**

Despite the null appearance of the performative verb, Harris often used the proposal "let's" in conjunction with an imperative sentence to describe the act of criticizing. There is still a strong element of criticizing in the speech, however, In line with Biden's proposal for a new administration, she emphasizes Trump's failure to lead the country through the use of the adjective "existentialism" to convince all people to support her election as a member of the new administration .An indirect strategy is used because there is indirect relation between the form and function of this sentence.

2.Denying in American vice presidential debate 2020

Sample 2

Pence " **You did nothing on criminal justice reform in California. You didn't lift a finger to pass the first step back on Capitol Hill. The reality is, you're representing yourself "**

Pence demonstrated the illocutionary force of denying to offend Harris by using "**you did nothing**" and "**you did not**" as utterances of denial. As a consequence of such negative words,

Pence implicitly asserts that he denies Harris's assertion which she made previously in her role in the court and senate. These statements use a direct strategy.

3. Bosting in American vice presidential debate 2020

Sample 3

pence **"The American people, I'm gonna say again, can be proud of what we done"**

By using the adjective "**proud**," Vice President Pence emphasizes the accomplishments of Trump's administration over the past four years with the intention of boasting. In this utterance, indirect and implicit strategies are used.

4. Asserting in American vice presidential debate 2020

Sample 4

Harris: "And Donald Trump, when asked about racial justice, said there were fine people on both sides. This is who we have as the President of the United States and American ,you deserve better . **Joe Biden will be a president who brings our country together .And recognizes the beauty in our diversity** and the fact that we all spend so much more in common than what separates us"

With the absence of the performative verb of assert, Harris's use of the auxiliary verb "**will be**" in the realm of assertion is considered very loud before confidently stating: "**who brings our country together**". In this way, Harris illustrates her ideology of "**the beauty in our diversity**", building unity, and creating a sense of belonging among the American people. The direct strategy is employed in this sentence .

5. Insisting in American vice presidential debate 2020

Sample 5

Harris "the American people know, that **Joe Biden will not ban fracking. That is a fact. That is a fact. I will repeat that Joe Biden has been very clear that he thinks about growing jobs**"

More than one time, insisting speech act was employed through the use of the Auxiliary verb "**will**". Although performative verbs of insisting were absent from utterances, the illocutionary force of insisting seemed strongly strengthened due to her repeated, "**That is a fact**". In a previous statement, Pence accuses Biden of wanting to Ban Franking. But Harris advocated that "**Joe Biden will not ban Franking**" She insisted it wasn't true. As a result of fracking, which is the process of pumping highly pressurized water, sand, and other chemicals into a rock formation to create fractures that can release trapped oil and gas, activists have urged

presidential candidates to speak out against it as it has fundamentally reshaped the U.S. economy, energy, politics, and environment. Fracking has contributed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the United States. In the end, Harris hoped to convince the listeners to become a part of making a positive change in the country as a whole. This sentence employs implicit and indirect strategies.

6. Complaining in American vice presidential debate 2020

Harris " And now **the Trump Pence Administration wants to take credit when they ran when they rode the coattails of Joe Biden's success for the economy that they had at the beginning of their term**"

Harris states that the Trump administration is taking advantage of Biden's economic success, since Biden was responsible with President Obama for the Affordable Care Act, which was signed by President Barack Obama in 2010 providing health insurance to over 20 million Americans that known as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Even without the performative verb of complaining, Harris has created a sense of protection towards the listeners, thereby easing their worries and concerns about health care, strategically

influencing people to take her side. In this case, the direct strategy is employed.

4.2 Data Findings and Discussion

Assertive speech acts used by Kamala Harris and Mike Pence in American vice presidential debate 2020

Assertive speech acts	Kamala Harris	%	Mike Pence	%
Asserting	6	20%	24	80%
Insisting	4	26.6%	11	73.3%
Complaining	6	37.5%	10	66.6%
Denying	8	57%	6	42.8%
Boasting	5	45.4%	6	54.5%
Criticizing	4	50%	4	50%
Total	33	100	61	100

The total distribution of assertive speech acts used by candidates in American vice presidential debate 2020

Assertive speech acts	Frequency	Percentage
Asserting	30	31.9%
Insisting	15	15.9%
Complaining	16	17%
Denying	14	14.8%
Boasting	11	11.7%
Criticizing	8	8.5%
Total	94	100%

Implicit and Explicit Assertive speech Acts

The strategies	Frequency	%
Implicit	94	98.9%
Explicit	1	1%
Total	95	100%

Distribution of Total Occurrence of Direct and Indirect Strategies

Strategies	Frequency	%
Direct	66	69%
Indirect	29	30.5%
Total	95	100%

Based on these findings, it appears that Pence uses the illocutionary force of Asserting most frequently in order to make the listeners feel informed and convinced of his assertions. This is a context in which he is eager to convey to the listener that the policies that he has implemented as vice president of the United States are the best. In order to assert,

there has to be a precondition of a fact or a truth, based on which Pence uttered an utterance that he believes. Therefore, he wants to convey his beliefs to his hearers.

Conclusion

The analysis of the debate also has yielded the following conclusions:

Both Harris and Pence utilize assertive speech acts to persuade the listeners to advocate for them and win the votes to become the vice president of the U.S. The study also found that Mike Pence used assertives more than Kamal Harris. Moreover, an illocutionary act of asserting is used more frequently than other assertives. Furthermore, implicit and direct strategies are dominant.

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