



## **Linguistic Devices Used to Persuade and Manipulate Audiences of Political Discourse in the 2020 US Presidential Election**

**Ridhatul Fadhli<sup>1</sup>, Nur Rosita<sup>2</sup>**

English Department

Faculty of Languages and Arts

Universitas Negeri Padang

email: [ridhatulfadhli78@gmail.com](mailto:ridhatulfadhli78@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This study is concerned with the linguistic devices used to persuade and manipulate audiences of political discourse in the 2020 US Presidential election. This study focused on Donald Trump's and Joe Biden's rhetorical and framing strategies in their speech and debate. A qualitative method was used to conduct the study to analyze the data. The study aimed to find the rhetorical and framing strategies of Donald Trump and Joe Biden and to find how they persuade and manipulate audiences of the political discourse. The findings reveal that the rhetorical strategy, Pathos, or the appeal to emotions, was utilized the most by Donald Trump compared to a more balanced use of all rhetorical strategies by Joe Biden. At the same time, logos were focused more on debates for both candidates. For framing strategies, both candidates utilized emphasis the most to stress the importance of an issue or to concentrate on a message. According to the analysis, Donald Trump mainly used persuasive language, which can be seen by referencing "patriots" several times to evoke a sense of unity, which is different compared to his debates, where he is very manipulative in using statistics and facts that are not fully referenced and an abundance of straight lies. This can be seen when he claimed that he cut "drug prices," which is false. Joe Biden used a persuasive strategy by referencing history and events such as "Charlottesville".

**Key words:** Political Discourse, Rhetoric, Framing, Linguistic Device

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

According to Aristotle in Roberts (2007), three components were vital for effective communication: the person trying to convey the message or the speaker, and then the speech and the listener. However, speech was the instrument that played a big part in persuasion. Persuasive language was a part of speech used to convince another person to understand, manipulate, and change their stance on a topic to suit the speaker. The tool that was used to make a person persuasive was a linguistic device. Linguistic devices were techniques

<sup>1</sup> English ELLSP of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang graduated on December 2023

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang



used to create emphasis, evoke emotion, and add flair to intentionally shape how a listener comprehended the message in a way that suited the speaker's intentions.

In a democratic society, the approval of the masses or constituents of a nation was vital for the workings of the nation, and language was used to deal with this. According to Locke's "Two Treatises of Government," in Laslett (1988), this concept was popular sovereignty, where political authority was based on the people's will. This study discussed how candidates trying to represent the people were trying to appeal to the audience through political debates and speeches through arguments.

These scopes of studies were selected to provide a more conclusive result since they covered the bases for different contexts and devices. The analysis of these mediums contained linguistic devices such as rhetorical appeals such as ethos, pathos, and logos, as well as framing, which included emphasis, metaphor, analogy, and exclusion or omission. According to Allan, Burridge (2006), linguistic devices were techniques and strategies of languages that were used in specific ways to achieve the goals of manipulation, persuasion, and adequate conveyance of messages there (Hajdinjak & Amos 2019). This thesis aimed to investigate the language of politics by analyzing regularity and the allotment of linguistic devices, what influenced their use, and the interpretation of that language.

The four sources Mohammad (2022), Veselá (2021), Baby, Afzal, Bashara (2020), and Bataineh (2019) all tried to explain their speeches through the studies of pragmatics and political discourse; however, each chose different parts of persuasion. Mohammad (2022) and Veselá (2021) chose to focus on rhetorical strategies for their subjects, while Baby, Afzal, and Bashara (2020) focused on illocutionary, perlocutionary, and locutionary acts, and Bataineh (2019) focused on the linguistic device to persuade. While all focused on how their subject persuaded the audience in a political setting, the study could be divided into two sections. The first was rhetoric, which was the way to appeal to the audience, and the second was the specific technique or pattern of persuasion to achieve a particular effect. So combining the two sections, which were the persuasive strategy and the devices used to persuade, created a clearer picture of how linguistic devices were used. Comparing two successful and different politicians in terms of backgrounds, like Joe Biden, a long-time politician, and Donald Trump, a successful businessman and celebrity, we could discover different strategies. While there was a study about Donald Trump and Barack Obama, both subjects never interacted with each other or faced different relevant agendas during their tenure of power.

The specific technique used to persuade Aristotle in Roberts (2007) rhetorical theory and Reese, Gandy, & Grant (2003) framing theory was chosen. The rhetorical theory was used to understand the broader strategy of how the orator tried to achieve their goals, whether that was ethos, pathos, or logos. Framing theory was then used as an additional spice so that specific techniques gave the message more impact. It was imperative to study two highly successful politicians considered opposites to see a broader range of rhetorical strategies

and framing techniques regarding backgrounds since Joe Biden had been a lifelong politician most of his life. At the same time, Donald Trump had a business and acting background.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

The research was conducted using the descriptive-qualitative strategy of Miles and Huberman (1994). Contents from the two 2020 US presidents are collected, and then data reduction happens, which was when the data was systematically organized, summarized, and condensed. The last part was data display, which involves visually representing the data through tables to help the researcher examine links, relationships, or differences in the data, which enables the discovery of new themes or patterns.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Research Finding**

Data analysis, the results of the analysis are shown in the table. The table was categorized into two parts to answer the research questions. The first finding table is about Donald Trump and Joe Biden Rhetorical strategy. The second finding table is about the Framing strategy of Donald Trump and Joe Biden in their own respective speech and debate.

### **1. Rhetorical Analysis of Donald Trump and Joe Biden**

#### **A. Speech**

##### **1) Ethos**

Ethos is the appeal to authority, in which the speaker tries to convince the audience that they should be trusted or reliable. The data about ethos from Donald Trump and Joe Biden was as followed:

(Datum 31)

**Context:** "That's what we believe and above all else that's what's at stake in this election."

This Joe Biden statement implies a sense of responsibility by suggesting that what is at stake in the election is aligned with what Americans believe. This means that it is the responsibility of the American people to act to save the nation. Donald Trump did not use any responsibility for the indicator ethos in his speech.

##### **2) Pathos**

Pathos is the appeal to emotions, in which the speaker tries to diagnose and acknowledge the emotions of the listener. The data about Pathos from Donald Trump and Joe Biden was as followed:

(Datum 15)

**Context:** "Very fine people on both sides? With those words the President of the United States assigned a moral equivalence between those spreading hate and those with the courage to stand against it."

This statement by Joe Biden evokes emotions and its social aspects. The emotion aspect is expressed by concern and disbelief about the moral equivalence. It elicits an emotional response related to the shocking nature of the President's words and the perceived injustice. Additionally, it appeals to the social aspect by

emphasizing the contrast between those spreading hate and those standing against it, which carries a social and moral significance.

3) Logos

Logos is the appeal to logic, in which the speaker tries to give logical reasoning to strengthen their claim. The data about Logos from Donald Trump and Joe Biden was as followed:

(Datum 15)

**Context:** "Very fine people on both sides? With those words the President of the United States assigned a moral equivalence between those spreading hate and those with the courage to stand against it."

This statement analyzes the Donald Trump's words and their implications logically, pointing out the perceived moral equivalence. It presents a reasoned assessment of the President's statement.

B. Debate

1) Ethos

(Datum 170)

**Context:** "Because there is never been an administration or president who has done more than I've done in a period of three and a half years."

Donald Trump asserts their achievements as President and emphasizes their accomplishments as a basis of credibility and authority. This is supported by a logical argument that suggests unprecedented levels of achievement in a specific timeframe.

2) Pathos

(Datum 21)

**Context:** "And, by the way, the 20, the 200 mil- the 200,000 people that have died on his watch, how many of those have survived?"

Joe Biden uses the shock value of the number of deaths to evoke the emotions of the audience so that they are reminded of the death toll under Donald Trump's watch.

3) Logos

(Datum 84)

**Context:** "You should get out of your bunker and get out of the sand trap in your golf course and go in the Oval Office and bring together the Democrats and Republicans and fund what needs to be done now to save lives."

Joe Biden used a rational rebuttal in which he stated that Donald Trump should try to find and act for a solution, like working with Democrats and Republicans in congress to save lives, instead of crying about the problem.

## 2. Framing Analysis of Donald Trump and Joe Biden

### A. Speech

1) Emphasis

a) Highlighting Key points

(Datum

**Context:** "Very fine people on both sides? With those words the President of the United States assigned a moral equivalence between those spreading hate and those with the courage to stand against it."

This sentence by Joe Biden emphasized the contrast between those spreading hate and those who stand against it, underlining the President's role in assigning moral equivalence.

2) Metaphor

(Datum

**Context:** "Their crazed faces, illuminated by torches, veins bulging and bearing the fangs of racism."

This sentence painted a vivid and emotional picture of the people involved in the described event, using metaphor to evoke strong emotional responses such as "crazed faces" and "bearing the fangs of racism"

3) Analogy

(Datum

**Context:** We must remember we share one home and one glorious destiny."

Donald Trump bridges the understanding between himself and his follower that they are the same and thus share one home and one glorious destiny. This creates unity under a common identity.

a) Emotional appeal

4) Exclusion

a) Labelling

(Datum 2)

**Context:** "Because it's the outsiders who change the world and make a real and lasting difference."

Donald Trump labeled his followers as "outsiders" to create a scenario where his voters would view the other side as the enemy, which would unite them under a common goal.

B. Debate

1) Emphasis

(Datum 8)

**Context:** "Now, what's at stake here is the President's made it clear, he wants to get rid of the Affordable Care Act."

Joe Biden highlighted the word "stake" and followed it up at the end with "Affordable Health Act." He emphasized that if Donald Trump were reelected, the "Affordable Care Act" would disappear, highlighting the importance of the people's decision.

2) Metaphor

(Datum 226)

**Context:** "He's Putin's puppy."

Joe Biden's metaphor connects the president's relationship with Putin to that of a subservient or obedient pet, creating a clear image of dependency and weakness.

3) Analogy

(Datum 226)

**Context:** "The rainforests of Brazil are being torn down, are being ripped down. More carbon is absorbed in that rainforest than every bit of carbon that's emitted in the United States."

Joe Biden tried to bridge the understanding by explaining the danger of what is happening, which is devastating deforestation, which in turn means that the trees cannot fully absorb the carbon that the US is producing. This is a reasoning to the audience so that they have to support the green deal.

#### 4) Exclusion

(Datum 237)

**Context:** "But they won't do it, because they're run by radical left Democrats."

Donald Trump labeled the social democrat wing of the Democrat party as "radical," which oversimplifies the stance of the social democrat who wants "radical" and significant change to the status quo all the time, which is not valid

### 3. Persuasive and Manipulative Strategy

In Donald Trump's speech, his heavy reliance on pathos (64.28%) reveals a deceptive tactic designed to generate strong emotional reactions from the audience, including resolve and hope. His scant use of ethos (35.71%) suggested an effort to influence others by using commonality as a ground to gain trust and credibility. Even though there were not any Logical arguments used, it does not necessarily mean that Donald Trump is manipulative but is just him trying to be persuasive. This can be seen from the following data from Donald Trump's speech:

(Datum 2)

**Context:** "outsiders who change the world"

This Emphasizes a shared destiny it's using ethos to establish a sense of credibility and unity. These statements do not manipulate or emotionally blackmail the audience; rather, they seek to establish a sense of trust or commonality.

Donald Trump changed his rhetorical strategy from not using any logos in his speech to mostly using logos 74.91% of the time in the presidential debates. This was a stark difference in his speech and debates, as he mostly used Pathos in his speech. Donald Trump's Logos mainly used statistics and facts to support his arguments; however, this may be manipulative since he never references where he got those facts or statistics from. This can be seen from the following data in Donald Trump's debate:

(Datum 43)

**Context:** "Drug prices will be coming down 80 or 90%. You could have done it during your 47 year period in government, but you didn't do it. Nobody's done it."

Donald Trump claimed he lowered drug prices by 80% or 90%. He stated statistics of how much he lowered the prices as if his statement were a matter of fact. This is misleading since, according to an article from The Washington Post (Cunningham, 2020), this is false after fact-checking the data. This shows that Donald Trump manipulated his audience by lying or exaggerating by not referencing his Logos statement.

Joe Biden constantly used a convincing strategy throughout his speech and the debate. He used a careful balance of ethos (31.02%), pathos (34.38%), and logos (34.38%) in his speech to appeal to the audience's emotions, establish his authority, and make persuasive arguments. This can be seen from the following data in Joe Biden's speech:

(Datum 5)

**Context :** "We haven't always lived up to these ideals."

Pathos is employed to evoke introspection and an emotional response related to growth. This statement acknowledges historical realities and encourages reflection, but it is not manipulative as it is based on historical facts.

(Datum 9)

**Context :** "I believe history will look back on four years of this president and all the embraces as an aberrant moment in time..."

Logos is used to make a logical prediction about how history will view the current president's term. This statement is an expression of the speaker's opinion and prediction, which is not manipulative.

(Datum 2)

**Context :** "We know it by heart."

Ethos is used by suggesting a shared understanding and knowledge of a historical document. This statement doesn't involve manipulation; it simply emphasizes a common familiarity with the document's content, which can establish credibility and a sense of unity among the audience.

According to Joe Biden's data from the debate, there was a change toward a more using more Logos which emphasized logical arguments and evidence-based reasoning (65.12%). The greater emphasis on logos suggested a persuasive strategy of providing well-structured arguments to persuade the audience.

(Datum 3)

**Context :** "The American people have a right to have a say in who the Supreme Court nominee is and that say occurs when they vote for United States Senators and when they vote for the President of the United States."

Logos is used to logically argue that citizens exercise their right to have a say in Supreme Court nominations through their votes for Senators and Presidents. This statement is based on a clear, rational argument and the democratic process, and it is not manipulative.

Regarding framing theory, both candidates extensively used the focused approach in their speeches and debates to steer the narrative and grab the audience's attention. Their more general persuasion objectives align with this thoughtful use of emphasis. Both candidates used metaphors and analogies to make complex concepts easier to understand for the audience and to add depth and emotional resonance to their framing.

(Datum 30)

**Context :** "And they're going to dominate you, Joe. You know that. Not according to Harris."

This statement from Donald Trump in his debate emphasizes the idea that the opponent's party will exert control. It reflects the speaker's perspective on the opponent's political dynamics and it does not constitute manipulation.

(Datum 29)

**Context :** "The point is that the President also is opposed to Roe V. Wade."

This sentence by Joe Biden in his debate emphasizes the President's stance on Roe v. Wade. The emphasis serves to highlight the President's position on a significant issue.

Finally, using framing and rhetorical theories, both Joe Biden and Donald Trump incorporated elements of both persuasion and manipulation in their speeches and debates. In the discussion, Trump initially leaned more heavily on emotional persuasion through pathos but later switched to a manipulative use of logos. Biden frequently used a persuasion strategy that included ethos, pathos, and logos. They primarily used framing techniques to control the narrative by focusing on particular issues and themes to persuade. Nevertheless, the ratio of manipulation to persuasion changed depending on the situation and the target audience's expectations.

## 2. Discussion

The researcher conducted a study about Linguistic Devices Used to Persuade and Manipulate Audiences of Political Discourse in the 2020 US presidential Election used by Donald Trump and Joe Biden, which includes rhetorical (Aristotle in Roberts 2007) and framing theory (Reese et al., 2003). There are three features of rhetorical strategies that Aristotle has introduced in Roberts (2007) and four framing strategies which have been introduced by Reese, Gandy, and Grant (2003). The researcher analyzed the features of rhetoric and framing strategy functions used by Donald Trump and Joe Biden in their presidential campaign official advertisement and the presidential debate.

Both candidates used considerably different rhetorical strategies and in terms of the two candidates' political speech ads. Pathos is one of the most utilized by both candidates; it was the most used by Donald Trump in his speech and joint first for Joe Biden. Even in their presidential election, Pathos ranked second. This is similar to the results of Boris Johnson (Mohammad, 2022), in which Pathos is used as one the most used rhetorical strategies he employs the depiction of social groups to create unity towards his audience base by using words such as "you and "us".

Aristotle in Roberts (2007) thought that by appealing to the feelings and values of the audience, a speaker may establish an emotional connection with them. By doing this, the speaker can encourage the audience to feel united and included, which may encourage them to act or change their behavior. This act of uniting the people to fight something was used a lot by Donald Trump and Joe Biden in this research and in Veselá (2021), where Donald Trump and Barack Obama addressed the audiences directly to create an atmosphere of belonging to a cause by attaching others to their cause. Since they feel included, any call to action would be met with overwhelming support.

Donald Trump and Joe Biden's mostly used rhetorical strategies in their presidential debates such as logos by a large margin. This was not consistent with his speech in which he did not use any logos compared to Joe Biden, who used it a



decent chunk in his speech. Donald Trump's use of logical argumentation reasoning was mostly done through statistics, facts, and other sources. However, in Donald Trump's debate, he did not reference any of his statistics or his facts, which was also stated in Veselá (2021), where she states that the accuracy of his statistics and facts are low. Compared to Boris Johnson in (Mohammed, 2022) references where, some of his statistics originated from. Joe Biden, in this research, follows similar strategies to Barrack Obama in Veselá (2021), where their speech is supported by a citation from a quote from history to support the need for his audience base to be united against certain issues.

According to Van Dijk (1997), linguistic forms or structures can change in political discourse based on the actions, strategies, and tactics of political actors to try to influence the audience to gain power. This explained why Donald Trump and Joe Biden changed their strategies from speech to debate because the context of the political discourse changed their political discourse strategy. In the context of the debate, the two candidates were forced to be more argumentative since they were not just addressing the audience but also their opponent, compared to speech, where they can persuade the audience without being hindered by the opponent.

Ethos is the least used by a big margin in the debate by both candidates in this research. However, the second rhetorical strategy mostly used in their speech. Donald Trump, Joe Biden, and Boris Johnson's (Mohammed, 2022) utilization are similar between the two as they summoned the experience and achievements that they had previously, which is being the president, former vice president, and member of parliament. They pointed out their individuality as head of state or what they have done, which is a contrast to Barrack Obama (Veselá, 2021), who tries to connect with the common people through his experience of similar experiences.

According to Aristotle's Rhetoric in Roberts (2007), ethos is a rhetorical strategy of a political actor that tries to convince the audience that they are reliable, credible, responsible, and a high achiever. Since this research result states that ethos is the lowest used, this either means that the two candidates are not reliable, credible, responsible, and high achiever or that they believe that the tactics of ethos are not persuasive enough.

The primary framing strategy used by both Donald Trump and Joe Biden in both speech and debate was emphasis. According to Reese, Gandy, and Grant (2003), emphasis is focusing on a specific part to redirect the audience's attention. Donald Trump chose to emphasize values that they believed their audience connected with, such as perseverance, the importance of outsiders, and unity, which can be seen in, for example, "the future belongs to the people who follow their heart, no matter what the critics say." Contrast to Joe Biden, who used historical relevance, shared ideals, and the struggle for the nation's soul in his speech, for example in his speech where he stated that "Charlottesville Virginia is home to the author of one of the great documents in human history" for emphasis. This contrasts with King Abdullah's Speech (Bataineh, 2019), where he emphasizes issues and problems through repetition instead.

Both candidates used emphasis a lot, and this highlights the importance of emphasis in the context of speech and debate. This is supported by Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007), who state that emphasizing can have an impact on how the audience or listener interprets the information provided, frequently resulting in a favourable attitude or interpretation of the intended message, which is the overall goal of the people, in political discourse.

Metaphor is very rarely used overall throughout speech and debate by the two presidential candidates, which is a metaphor. This is very different from King Abdullah (Bataineh, M. 2019), where he utilizes metaphor a lot. In the rare instances that Donald Trump and Joe Biden use it, it is used to explain words that have a hidden meaning or an idea behind such as "the system," by Donald Trump in his speech, which means the establishment. King Abdullah's (Bataineh, M. 2019) utilization of emphasis is slightly different as he uses metaphor to compare or remind the audience of an event that already happened to contrast with the situation right now.

According to Reese, Gandy, & Grant (2003), metaphor is a way to create vivid images to help the listener understand a concept easier. In this case even though it was somewhat used in the two candidate's speech but it was missing in the debate which Lakoff, and Johnson, M. (2003) states that even though metaphors can be used to clarify an argument, it can be contentious act since it can be seen as manipulative this is due to the fact that metaphors can "convey evaluation" and provide a "new vision of reality," which may be interpreted as an attempt to influence the audience's emotions as opposed to making a reasoned argument.

#### **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Based on the research's findings, Donald Trump's communication strategy mainly relied on pathos, skillfully manipulating his supporters' emotions. Joe Biden, on the other hand, used a balanced strategy that successfully combined ethos, logos, and pathos. Both candidates made a point of emphasizing logos during the debates, highlighting their dedication to putting forth reasoned and fact-based arguments. In contrast, Biden maintained a holistic strategy that relied on ethos, logos, and pathos to engage emotionally and deliver well-structured arguments, whereas Trump increased the use of pathos to energize his fans. In the realm of framing, both candidates strategically employed emphasis, metaphor, analogy, and exclusion, effectively shaping the narrative and controlling the discourse. This analysis reveals the complex interplay of linguistic devices and highlights how it affects political communication. It provides a deeper comprehension of the complex nature of political speech, with its various levels of manipulation and influence. Both candidates' linguistic choices were in line with their overarching communication objectives and campaign narratives, demonstrating their flexibility and receptivity to the demands of their respective audience.

According to an analysis of Donald Trump's speech and debate tactics, at first, he placed a lot of emphasis on pathos in order to emotionally manipulate his

audience and elicit strong reactions and support. He made no mention of logos, indicating that he lacked logical, fact-based arguments. But there was a noticeable change when he moved to a more logos-heavy strategy without providing a wealth of supporting evidence in his debate. This change demonstrated a transition from a more emotional manipulation to a more logical method that may or may not be manipulative.

On the other hand, Joe Biden consistently employed a balanced strategy, using ethos, pathos, and logos to connect emotionally, establish authority, and present persuasive arguments. In the debate, he moved towards a more logos-heavy approach, focusing on logical arguments and evidence-based reasoning, while ethos and pathos still played roles. Both candidates employed a focused framing approach to shape the narrative and engage the audience, often using metaphors and analogies. They incorporated elements of persuasion and manipulation depending on the context and audience expectations, leading to changing ratios of manipulation to persuasion.

This thesis highlights the ongoing value of language analysis in the dynamic field of political discourse as the country struggles to manage the difficulties of political communication. Recognizing the crucial role of language, emotion, and logic in forming the electoral landscape and the broader political discourse, it paves the way for future study and investigation.

For future researchers, it is suggested to conduct other research related to linguistic devices in politics. Language politics can also be analyzed in political advertisements, social media postings, podcasts, and press conferences. It is essential to analyze different political candidates from many perspectives so we know widely about the rhetoric and how they persuade and manipulate. An audience response should also be considered to gauge the effectiveness of the language used. Another analysis should consider the psychological aspects underpinning linguistic persuasion, which impacts voter behavior and decision-making. Policy discourse analysis would also be a good addition since we can see clearly whether a person is more manipulative or persuasive easily.

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