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THE RHETORIC OF REJECTION: DENY AND COUNTER IN TRUMP AND HARRIS'S 2024 DEBATE DISCOURSE

T.B.G. Nguyen¹ , X.H. Tran²  

¹ Duy Tan University, Da Nang City, Vietnam;

² The University of Da Nang, University of Science and Education,
Da Nang City, Vietnam

 txhiep@ued.udn.vn

Abstract. This study examines the use of Disclaim resources – specifically Deny and Counter – in the 2024 presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, drawing on Appraisal Theory within Systemic Functional Linguistics. It investigates how linguistic strategies of rejection function to manage disagreement, construct evaluation, and shape interpersonal positioning in real-time political discourse. Adopting a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative analysis with qualitative discourse analysis, the study compares the frequency, distribution, and rhetorical functions of Deny and Counter in the candidates' debate performances. The findings show that Trump employs 193 Disclaim instances (19.78% of 976 clauses), considerably more than Harris's 60 instances (13.19% of 455 clauses), indicating a stronger tendency toward oppositional and confrontational rhetoric. In both datasets, Deny overwhelmingly outweighs Counter, with “*not*” as the most frequent marker, while “*but*” serves as the primary Counter resource, reflecting a shared preference for direct negation and contrast. The study contributes to the extension of Appraisal Theory to real-time debate interaction and offers insights into how political actors strategically deploy rejection resources to influence audience alignment and evaluative interpretation. The findings highlight the central role of Deny and Counter in persuasive political discourse.

Keywords: disclaim resources, deny, counter, engagement, debate.

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РИТОРИКА ОТКАЗА: ОТРИЦАНИЕ И КОНТРАРГУМЕНТ В ДИСКУССИЯХ ТРАМПА И ХАРРИС НА ДЕБАТАХ 2024 ГОДА

Т.Б.Д. Нгуен¹ , С.Х. Чан²  

¹ Университет Дуй Тан, Дананг, Вьетнам;

² Университет Дананга, Университет науки и образования,
Дананг, Вьетнам

 txhiep@ued.udn.vn

Аннотация. В настоящем исследовании рассматривается использование ресурсов *Disclaim* — в частности, *Deny* и *Counter* — в президентских дебатах 2024 года между Дональдом Трампом и Камалой Харрис в рамках теории оценочности (Appraisal Theory) системно-функциональной лингвистики (Martin & White, 2005). Цель исследования состоит в выявлении того, каким образом языковые стратегии отрицания и опровержения используются для выражения несогласия, конструирования оценочных смыслов и формирования межличностного позиционирования в политическом дискурсе, разворачивающемся в режиме реального времени. В работе применяется смешанная методология, сочетающая количественный анализ с качественным дискурс-анализом. Сопоставляются частотность, распределение и риторические функции ресурсов *Deny* и *Counter* в выступлениях обоих кандидатов. Результаты показывают, что Дональд Трамп использует 193 реализации ресурсов *Disclaim* (19,78 % от 976 клауз), что существенно превышает показатель Камалы Харрис — 60 реализаций (13,19 % от 455 клауз). Это свидетельствует о более выраженной склонности Трампа к конфронтационной и оппозиционной риторике. В обоих корпусах ресурс *Deny* значительно преобладает над *Counter*: наиболее частотным маркером отрицания выступает *not*, тогда как *but* является основным средством реализации ресурса *Counter*, что отражает общую тенденцию к использованию прямого отрицания и противопоставления. Исследование способствует дальнейшему развитию теории оценочности применительно к анализу интерактивного дебатного дискурса и позволяет глубже понять механизмы стратегического использования ресурсов отрицания для воздействия на аудиторию и формирования оценочной интерпретации. Полученные результаты подчёркивают ключевую роль ресурсов *Deny* и *Counter* в реализации убеждающего потенциала политического дискурса.

Ключевые слова: ресурсы отрицания, отрицание, контраргумент, вовлеченность, дебаты.

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Introduction

Election campaign debates constitute a significant component of contemporary democratic politics and attract substantial public attention through live broadcasts, media coverage, and online discussions. They provide voters with an opportunity to compare candidates' policies, arguments, and leadership styles within a shared public forum [1]. Beyond their informational function, debates serve as sites of ideological contestation, in which political actors construct arguments, negotiate positions, and challenge opposing viewpoints through language [2]. As a result, political debates offer a valuable context for examining the persuasive and interactional dimensions of political discourse.

The 2024 U.S. presidential election created an especially dynamic political environment following President Joe Biden's withdrawal from the race on July 21st, 2024 and the subsequent nomination of Vice President Kamala Harris as the Democratic candidate [3]. Against this backdrop, the presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris on September 10th, 2024, emerged as a pivotal campaign event, providing both candidates with an opportunity not only to present policy proposals but also



to directly challenge and undermine each other's claims before a national audience [4]. In such highly adversarial settings, language functions as a strategic rhetorical resource, through which political actors defend positions, reject criticism, and shape public interpretations of political issues.

The dialogic nature of political debate is particularly relevant to Appraisal Theory, developed within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics [5, 6]. Among its three subsystems – Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation – Engagement system focuses on how speakers position themselves with respect to alternative voices and viewpoints [6]. Through Engagement resources, speakers can either expand dialogic space by acknowledging alternative perspectives or contract it by rejecting, challenging, or limiting competing positions. One of the most important contractive categories is Disclaim, which comprises the resources Deny and Counter. Deny functions through explicit negation to reject alternative propositions, whereas Counter introduces contrastive meanings that challenge expectations or replace prior assumptions. These resources are particularly salient in political debates, in which candidates are required to respond to criticism, contest opponents' arguments, and establish ideological distinctions.

Previous studies have demonstrated the value of Appraisal Theory for investigating political discourse. Research on the Attitude subsystem has shown how political leaders employ evaluative language to construct identities, project authority, and promote ideological positions [7–13]. Other studies have focused on Engagement resources, revealing how political actors negotiate dialogic space, manage audience alignment, and construct persuasive arguments through monoglossic and heteroglossic strategies [14–19]. More broadly, research on stance and interpersonal positioning has shown that language users strategically manage commitment, evaluation, and audience alignment through linguistic choices. For example, Dashdamirova [24] demonstrated that native and non-native academic writers employ stance markers to construct authorial positioning and regulate degrees of commitment, highlighting the importance of dialogic management across discourse contexts.

Despite these valuable contributions, existing studies have largely concentrated on the overall distribution of Engagement categories and broader evaluative strategies, paying comparatively little attention to the specific rhetorical functions of Disclaim resources. Recent research has begun to address this issue. El-Sufi [25] demonstrated the prominence of denial strategies in Donald Trump's inaugural and farewell addresses, while Lin and Yang [26] showed that Disclaim resources play an important role in regulating epistemic legitimacy and ideological positioning. Similarly, Nguyen and Tran [27, 28] found that Deny and Counter constitute significant components of Trump's political rhetoric, contributing to dialogic contraction and persuasive force. Nevertheless, these studies focus primarily on prepared and monologic genres such as campaign speeches, inaugural addresses, and press conferences.

A similar limitation can be observed in emerging research on the 2024 Trump–Harris debate. Existing studies have examined rhetorical strategies, lexical choices, metaphor use, and ideological representation in the candidates' discourse [29–31]. While these studies provide valuable insights into rhetorical and ideological outcomes, they focus primarily on what positions the candidates construct rather than how those positions are interactionally negotiated and defended during debate exchanges. As such, the linguistic processes, through which disagreement is constructed and managed, remain insufficiently investigated.

To address these gaps, the present study investigates the use of Deny and Counter resources in the 2024 Trump–Harris presidential debate. Specifically, it examines their frequency, distribution, and discursive functions within the interactional context of debate discourse. Examining the interaction between two opposing candidates in a high-stakes presidential debate, the present study contributes to Appraisal Theory by deepening understanding of how Disclaim resources are strategically deployed to constrain alternative viewpoints, negotiate interpersonal positioning, and influence audience alignment within adversarial political discourse.



Research Aim and Objectives

Research Aim

This study seeks to examine how Disclaim resources – particularly Deny and Counter – are employed in the 2024 Trump–Harris debate through the lens of Appraisal Theory [6]. It focuses on how these linguistic resources function within an interactive debate setting to manage opposition, negotiate meaning, and shape argumentative trajectories. More specifically, the study aims to investigate the role of these resources in expressing stance, challenging alternative viewpoints, and constructing persuasive discourse within a highly competitive political context.

Research Objectives

To achieve this aim, the study is guided by the following objectives:

- To identify and classify Disclaim resources (Deny and Counter) in the 2024 Trump–Harris debate based on the Appraisal framework [6].
- To analyze the frequency and distribution of these resources in the discourse of both candidates.
- To examine the rhetorical functions of Deny and Counter in rejecting, contrasting, and positioning viewpoints within the debate.

Research Questions

In line with the above objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

- What types of Disclaim resources (Deny and Counter) are employed in the 2024 Trump–Harris debate?
- How are these resources distributed across the discourse of the two candidates?
- What rhetorical functions do Deny and Counter perform in structuring argumentation and managing opposition?

Research Significance

This study contributes to the analysis of political discourse by examining the role of Disclaim resources within the Appraisal framework in a live debate context. By adopting both quantitative and qualitative approaches, it provides a more comprehensive understanding of Deny and Counter function not only as linguistic resources but also as strategic tools in political argumentation. The findings offer insights into how political speakers employ language to challenge opposing viewpoints and reinforce their rhetorical positions. Accordingly, the study enhances research on discourse analysis, Appraisal Theory and political communication while also providing implications for English language education, particularly in enhancing learners' critical awareness of evaluative language and persuasive discourse strategies.

Theoretical Background

Appraisal Theory

Appraisal Theory, developed within the tradition of Systemic Functional Linguistics, provides a comprehensive framework for examining how speakers and writers express evaluation, construct interpersonal meanings, and position themselves in relation to alternative viewpoints in discourse [6]. Building upon Halliday's interpersonal metafunction of language [5], the framework extends linguistic analysis beyond the clause level to account for evaluative and dialogic meanings operating across larger stretches of discourse. Although Appraisal Theory is related to concepts such as sentiment, stance, and evaluation, it differs in its systematic focus on the linguistic resources, through which these meanings are realized and negotiated [6].

According to Martin and White [6], Appraisal Theory consists of three interrelated subsystems: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. The Attitude subsystem concerns evaluative meanings and comprises Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation. Affect relates to the expression of emotions and feelings, Judgment evaluates human behaviour in terms of social norms and values, and Appreciation assesses objects, phenomena, processes, and states of affairs. The Engagement subsystem examines how speakers position their voices with respect to alternative viewpoints and competing perspectives while the



Graduation subsystem accounts for the scaling of evaluative meanings through adjustments in intensity, quantity, prototypicality, and category boundaries. Together, these subsystems provide a comprehensive model for analysing how speakers construct, negotiate, and amplify meanings in communication [6].

Engagement

Among the three subsystems of Appraisal Theory, Engagement is particularly relevant to the study of political discourse because it focuses on the dialogic management of viewpoints and interpersonal positioning [6]. Engagement examines how speakers present propositions either as uncontested statements or as responses to actual or potential alternative voices. Rather than treating utterances as isolated expressions of opinion, the Engagement framework highlights the inherently dialogic nature of discourse, in which speakers continually acknowledge, negotiate, challenge, or suppress competing perspectives [6].

Martin and White [6] distinguish between two broad categories within the Engagement system: Monogloss and Heterogloss. Monoglossic utterances present propositions as self-evident or authoritative statements without explicit reference to alternative viewpoints. In contrast, heteroglossic utterances recognize the presence of other voices, perspectives or positions within the communicative context and thus open up the dialogic space to varying degrees. Through these resources, speakers can align themselves with, distance themselves from or challenge competing viewpoints, thereby influencing audience interpretation and interpersonal alignment [6].

Within the heteroglossic domain, contractive resources function to restrict dialogic alternatives and strengthen the speaker's preferred position. One of the most significant contractive categories is Disclaim, which consists of the subcategories Deny and Counter [6]. As illustrated in Fig. 1, these resources enable speakers to reject, challenge or replace alternative propositions through distinct linguistic mechanisms.

Deny functions through explicit negation and is typically realised by forms such as “not,” “no,” “never,” “none,” “nobody,” “nothing,” and so on. By directly rejecting alternative propositions, Deny narrows the dialogic space and presents the speaker's position as more authoritative or legitimate [6]. Counter, by contrast, introduces a proposition that runs contrary to an expectation established by prior discourse. It is commonly realized through markers such as “but,” “however,” “yet,” “although,” “even though,” “instead,” and so forth. Rather than simply negating a proposition, Counter replaces or reorients an expected interpretation to constrain dialogic alternatives while simultaneously introducing a corrective or contrastive perspective [6].

Fig. 1 presents the classification of Disclaim resources within the Engagement system proposed by Martin and White [6].

In summary, Appraisal Theory – and particularly the Engagement subsystem – provides a robust theoretical foundation for analyzing how speakers negotiate alternative viewpoints and manage interpersonal positioning in discourse. Within this framework, Disclaim resources, including Deny and Counter, offer valuable analytical tools for examining how political actors strategically reject, challenge, and reframe competing perspectives. Therefore, the Engagement framework is especially well-suited to investigating the rhetoric of rejection in contemporary political debate discourse [6].

Previous Related Studies

Political discourse has long been recognized as a site, in which political actors construct evaluation, negotiate ideological positions, and shape audience alignment through language [5]. Within Systemic Functional Linguistics, Appraisal Theory provides a comprehensive framework for investigating how speakers express attitudes, position themselves toward alternative viewpoints, and manage interpersonal relationships with audiences [6]. Consequently, appraisal-based research has become increasingly influential in the analysis of political communication.

Early studies applying Appraisal Theory to political discourse focused predominantly on the Attitude subsystem, examining how political figures employ evaluative language to construct identities and achieve persuasive objectives. For instance, Rohmawati [7] and Ding [8] demonstrated that Barack

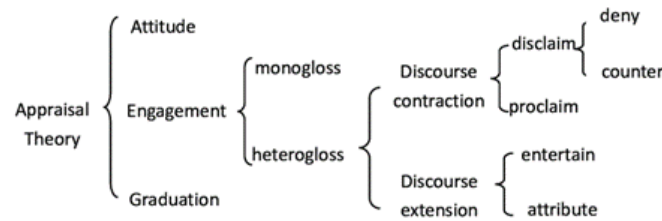


Fig. 1. Disclaim resources [6, p. 134]

Obama strategically utilized Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation to project optimism, solidarity, and national unity. Similarly, Mazlum and Afshin [9] identified distinct evaluative patterns in the speeches of Obama and Rouhani, reflecting differing diplomatic orientations and ideological commitments. Comparable findings were reported by studies of Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton, which showed how appraisal resources functioned to balance emotional appeal, political legitimacy, and audience engagement. Extending the analysis to leadership and crisis communication, Abdulameer and Noor [10] revealed how evaluative language was employed to construct ideological positions in responses to the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem while Jombadi [11] demonstrated that appraisal resources contributed to the construction of leadership authority during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research on presidential rhetoric has similarly highlighted the prominence of evaluative meaning. Zhou [12] found that Judgment resources dominated Donald Trump’s inaugural address, whereas studies of Joe Biden’s victory discourse emphasized the strategic use of positive evaluation to promote unity and social inclusion [13]. Likewise, analyses of speeches by Indonesian President Joko Widodo revealed how variations in Judgment and Appreciation reflected shifting political priorities and communicative goals [14, 15]. More recently, Mohammed [16] demonstrated that the distribution of Attitude resources varies according to communicative context, with Ban Ki-moon’s acceptance speech emphasizing Judgment and Appreciation while his farewell speech relied more heavily on Affect. These studies confirm the value of Appraisal Theory in uncovering evaluative and ideological dimensions of political discourse. However, their predominant focus on Attitude has left other dimensions of appraisal, particularly Engagement, comparatively underexplored.

This imbalance is theoretically significant because political discourse is inherently dialogic. Political actors rarely communicate in a vacuum; rather, they continuously position themselves in relation to competing voices, alternative interpretations, and anticipated audience responses. Recognizing this dialogic nature, scholars have increasingly turned to the Engagement subsystem to investigate how political speakers manage dialogic space and negotiate interpersonal positioning. Early research by Miller [17], Becker [18] demonstrated that Engagement resources play a crucial role in political persuasion by enabling speakers to establish legitimacy, secure audience alignment, and marginalize opposing viewpoints. Subsequent studies further confirmed the importance of Engagement in various political contexts. Ismail [19], for example, found that political leaders strategically combine monoglossic and heteroglossic resources to balance authority with inclusiveness. Similarly, Guo and Xu [20] observed that diplomatic discourse tends to favour expansive resources in order to facilitate consensus-building and maintain cooperative international relations. By contrast, Abubakar [21] showed that electoral discourse relies more heavily on contractive resources that challenge opponents and reinforce ideological commitment.

Recent studies have reinforced these observations while highlighting the growing importance of dialogic positioning in contemporary political communication. Alshammari and Alyousef [22], for instance, reported that both Donald Trump and Joe Biden relied predominantly on heteroglossic resources in their 2024 campaign speeches, although Trump employed both expansive and contractive options more extensively than Biden. Similarly, Dianová and Brusenbauch Meislová [23] demonstrated that fear-based appeals in British Prime Ministerial Brexit discourse served not only evaluative purposes but also



important dialogic functions by legitimizing preferred political actions and delegitimizing competing interpretations. These findings suggest that political persuasion depends not merely on evaluation but also on the strategic management of alternative voices and viewpoints. Nevertheless, most Engagement studies have concentrated on broad categorical distributions, often treating contractive and expansive resources as general indicators of rhetorical style. As a result, the specific interpersonal functions of individual Engagement categories remain insufficiently examined.

Among these categories, Disclaim is of particular theoretical importance because it represents one of the principal mechanisms, through which political actors reject, challenge, and reframe competing viewpoints [6]. Comprising the subcategories Deny and Counter, Disclaim enables speakers to directly contest alternative propositions while simultaneously advancing preferred interpretations. Despite its central role in political contestation, Disclaim has often received only limited attention within broader analyses of heteroglossia and persuasion. However, its specific contribution to political communication remains insufficiently understood.

Recent scholarship has begun to address this limitation. El-Sufi [25] found that denial strategies constituted a dominant feature of Donald Trump's inaugural and farewell addresses, functioning to reinforce certainty, authority, and ideological commitment through the rejection of alternative perspectives. Likewise, Lin and Yang [26] argued that Disclaim resources contribute to the regulation of epistemic legitimacy by positioning certain interpretations as more credible than competing alternatives. Similar patterns have been identified in Trump's more recent political discourse. Nguyen and Tran [27] reported that Deny, Counter, Entertain, and Acknowledge were among the most frequently employed Engagement resources in Trump's 2024 re-election announcement speech, reflecting a strategic combination of dialogic contraction and expansion. Furthermore, Nguyen and Tran [28] found a substantial increase in Disclaim resources between Trump's 2017 and 2025 inaugural speeches, suggesting a shift toward stronger dialogic contraction and a more confrontational rhetorical style. While these studies provide important evidence regarding the ideological significance of Disclaim, they are largely based on prepared monologic speeches. In general, they offer only limited insight into how Deny and Counter operate in interactive communicative environments, in which competing voices are immediately present and actively contested.

This limitation becomes particularly evident in the context of political debates. Unlike campaign speeches, debates are characterized by direct confrontation, real-time rebuttal, and continuous negotiation of competing claims [1, 2]. Such conditions make debates especially suitable for examining Disclaim resources because candidates must repeatedly reject accusations, challenge assumptions, and construct ideological contrasts under immediate interactional pressure. Nevertheless, appraisal-based research has devoted comparatively little attention to debate discourse.

Existing studies of the 2024 Trump–Harris presidential debate have focused primarily on rhetorical style, metaphorical framing, lexical choices, and ideological representation. Wicke and Bolognesi [29], for example, examined contrasting lexical patterns in the candidates' discourse while Jesudas and Mohammed [30] investigated broader discourse strategies from a critical discourse perspective. Similarly, Kieu and Ho [31] analyzed conceptual metaphors employed by both candidates to frame political issues and ideological positions. These studies reveal important differences in rhetorical style, with Trump's discourse generally characterized as confrontational and conflict-oriented, whereas Harris's rhetoric appears comparatively policy-oriented and institutionally framed. However, their analytical focus remains largely on the positions constructed by the candidates rather than the dialogic processes, through which those positions are negotiated, defended, and imposed during interaction. As a result, the linguistic mechanisms through which disagreement is enacted and managed remain inadequately explored.

Taken together, the existing literature reveals three interrelated research gaps. First, despite the extensive application of Appraisal Theory in political discourse studies, scholarly attention has focused



predominantly on Attitude resources, leaving Engagement – particularly Disclaim – relatively under-developed. Second, studies examining Deny and Counter have concentrated mainly on prepared and monologic genres, limiting our understanding of how these resources function in interactive political communication. Third, research on the 2024 Trump–Harris debate has emphasized rhetorical style, metaphor, and ideological representation while paying comparatively little attention to the interpersonal mechanisms, through which disagreement is negotiated. By investigating Deny and Counter resources in the 2024 Trump–Harris presidential debate, the present study addresses these gaps and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how political actors employ dialogic contraction to reject competing viewpoints, construct ideological authority, and influence audience alignment in contemporary adversarial political discourse.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design that integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the use of Disclaim resources in the 2024 Trump–Harris presidential debate. Drawing on the Engagement system within Appraisal Theory [6], the study focuses specifically on the dialogically contractive resources of Deny and Counter. The quantitative analysis identifies their frequency and distribution while the qualitative analysis examines their interpersonal and rhetorical functions in the negotiation of political disagreement and ideological positioning.

Data Source and Corpus Preparation

The data consist of the official transcript and video recording of the first 2024 U.S. presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris on September 10th, 2024 and published by ABC News [4]. The transcript was verified against the video recording to ensure accuracy, especially in instances of interruptions, overlapping speech and incomplete utterances. Following the removal of non-verbal elements and moderator instructions, the final corpus contained 14,002 words, comprising 8,093 words produced by Trump and 5,909 words produced by Harris.

The corpus was manually segmented into clauses in accordance with principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics [5]. A clause was defined as a unit expressing a distinct experiential and interpersonal meaning. The final dataset consisted of 976 clauses produced by Trump and 455 clauses produced by Harris.

Coding Procedure

All clauses were manually annotated using the Engagement framework, with particular attention to the Disclaim category, including Deny and Counter resources. Deny resources were identified when linguistic forms of negation functioned to reject, invalidate, or challenge propositions and assumptions. Counter resources were identified when contrastive expressions introduced propositions that contradicted, modified, or reoriented prior expectations. Coding decisions were determined primarily by interpersonal function within the discourse context rather than by lexical form alone. To enhance coding consistency, a pilot analysis was conducted on approximately 10% of the corpus to refine coding criteria and establish operational definitions. Subsequently, the entire dataset was coded manually using a structured coding scheme derived from the Engagement framework.

Reliability and Data Analysis

To ensure analytical reliability, an independent coder with expertise in Appraisal Theory annotated the dataset. Inter-coder agreement reached 92.1% and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus. Analytical validity was strengthened through the application of clearly defined functional criteria based on the Engagement framework. The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, frequency counts and percentage distributions were calculated to identify patterns in the use of Deny and Counter resources by each candidate. Second, qualitative analysis examined how these resources



functioned to reject alternative viewpoints, construct evaluative stances, negotiate audience alignment, and reinforce persuasive arguments within the adversarial context of presidential debate discourse.

Analytical Tools

All coding and classification procedures were conducted manually and organized using Microsoft Excel, which was employed to construct coding matrices, manage annotations, and calculate frequency distributions. Concordance-style checking and repeated textual verification were also conducted manually throughout the analysis to ensure consistency in clause segmentation and coding decisions. Qualitative interpretation was subsequently carried out manually to preserve contextual and interactional meanings within the discourse.

Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, a quantitative procedure was employed to identify and compare the distribution of Disclaim resources across the dataset. Frequency counts and percentage distributions were calculated for both candidates to identify overall patterns of dialogic contraction. Second, a qualitative functional analysis examined how Deny and Counter resources operated within specific interactional contexts. Particular attention was given to how these resources were used to reject opposing viewpoints, reframe propositions, construct evaluative positioning, negotiate interpersonal alignment, and enhance persuasive force in adversarial political discourse.

Findings and Discussions

Deny resources refer to the explicit rejection of a proposition through linguistic forms of negation. They are typically realized through items such as “not,” “no,” “never,” “none,” “nothing,” “nobody,” “neither,” “nor,” as well as negative adverbs such as “hardly” and “rarely”. Functionally, Deny resources operate to directly oppose and invalidate alternative viewpoints to reduce their dialogic legitimacy within discourse.

Disclaim Resources in the 2024 Trump–Harris Debate

Deny Resources

In the 2024 debate, Donald Trump frequently employs Deny resources as a direct strategy for rejecting opposing claims and questioning their credibility. This pattern contributes to a highly confrontational discourse style, in which disagreement is foregrounded and alternative perspectives are strategically constrained.

Deny Resources in Donald Trump’s Discourse

In this debate, Donald Trump frequently employs Deny resources as a direct strategy for rejecting opposing claims and questioning their reliability. Through repeated use of explicit negation, he challenges his opponent’s statements, disputes presented facts, and reinforces his own position as firm and authoritative. This pattern of usage reinforces a highly confrontational discourse style, in which disagreement is openly emphasized and alternative perspectives are systematically excluded in order to strengthen his argumentative stance.

Example 1: “*I’m surprised you’re **not** talking about the border yet.*” (T450, C646)

In this statement, the negation “not” functions as a Deny resource that contracts the dialogic space by rejecting the implicit expectation that border issues should already be under discussion. Its rhetorical force, however, derives not only from the negation itself but also from its embedding within the evaluative mental process “*I’m surprised,*” which frames the absence of such discussion as unexpected and worthy of criticism. Pragmatically, the clause “*you’re not talking about the border*” presupposes that the border constitutes a salient and politically urgent issue, thereby presenting its omission as evidence of communicative inadequacy rather than a legitimate choice of debate focus. Rather than directly accusing Harris of neglecting the issue, Trump adopts an indirect strategy that conveys criticism through an expression of surprise, allowing him to challenge his opponent while maintaining an ostensibly reasonable and observational stance. Within the debate context, this utterance also performs a strategic



discourse-management function by shifting attention toward immigration and border security, issues that occupy a central position in Trump’s political platform. Stylistically, the combination of personal evaluation and negation encourages the audience to interpret Harris’s silence as deliberate avoidance rather than mere omission. The Deny resource operates not merely to negate an action but to guide audience inference, restrict alternative interpretations of the opponent’s behavior, and reinforce Trump’s broader rhetorical strategy of portraying border security as a neglected yet essential national concern.

Example 2: “*They had the highest inflation, perhaps in the history of our country because I’ve **never** seen a worse period of time.*” (T104, C156)

In this example, “*never*” functions as a Deny resource that contracts the dialogic space by categorically excluding any alternative assessment of the economic situation. Its linguistic force stems from its status as an absolute experiential negator in the clause “*I’ve never seen a worse period of time,*” in which the speaker draws upon personal experience to present the evaluation as both authoritative and difficult to dispute. The statement moves beyond a factual description of inflation rates and constructs a subjective judgment as an apparently objective conclusion, inviting the audience to accept the speaker’s experience as evidence of the severity of economic decline. This effect is intensified by the interaction between “*never*” and the superlative expression “*a worse period of time,*” which together create a form of hyperbolic evaluation that portrays the economic conditions as unprecedented rather than merely problematic. As competing representations of economic performance vie for legitimacy within the debate, such absolute language serves a strategic rhetorical function by discouraging more nuanced interpretations and foregrounding a crisis-oriented reading of national conditions. The combination of personal testimony, superlative evaluation, and categorical negation stylistically enhances the emotional force of the utterance while reinforcing Trump’s credibility as a witness to historical change. Therefore, the Deny resource functions not only as a marker of negation but as a persuasive mechanism for amplifying perceptions of economic failure, legitimizing a narrative of national decline and strengthening Trump’s broader argumentative strategy of attributing responsibility for that decline to the incumbent administration.

The Distribution and Frequency of Deny Resources in Donald Trump’s 2024 Debate Discourse

Table 1, which presents the frequency and distribution of Deny resources in Donald Trump’s 2024 debate discourse, highlights their prominence and uneven distribution throughout the dataset.

Table 1. The Frequencies of Deny Resources in Donald Trump’s 2024 Debate Discourse

Deny Resource	Instances (f)	Proportion (%)
not	97	9.94
never	25	2.56
no	18	1.84
nobody	5	0.51
lie	3	0.31
hardly	1	0.1
impossible	1	0.1
Total	150	15.37

The above table illustrates the distribution of Deny resources in Donald Trump’s 2024 debate discourse, with 150 instances accounting for 15.37% of the 976 analyzed clauses, indicating a strong reliance on negation as a central engagement strategy. The distribution is highly uneven, with “*not*” overwhelmingly dominant at 97 occurrences (9.94%), suggesting that Trump primarily depends on direct clause-level negation to reject propositions, challenge opposing claims, and express disagreement in a



clear and assertive manner. Other markers such as “*never*” (2.56%) and “*no*” (1.84%) reinforce categorical rejection through intensified negation while less frequent forms including “*nobody*,” “*lie*,” “*hardly*,” and “*impossible*” contribute additional evaluative and interpersonal impact. Collectively, the findings demonstrate that Trump’s discourse is characterized by direct opposition, strong dialogic contraction, and a confrontational rhetorical style that prioritizes explicit rejection over nuanced negotiation of alternative viewpoints.

Deny Resources in Kamala Harris’s Discourse

The use of Deny resources in Harris’s discourse functions as a strategic linguistic mechanism for rejecting opposing claims, narrowing dialogic space, and establishing an evaluative position grounded in democratic values and political accountability. Through this pattern, Harris directly challenges Trump’s arguments while simultaneously reinforcing the legitimacy and authority of her own stance within the debate context.

Example 3: “*You will **not** hear him talk about your needs, your dreams and your desires.*” (H130, C383)

“*Not*” functions as a Deny resource that contracts the dialogic space by excluding the possibility that the opponent engages with or advocates for the interests of ordinary citizens. The construction “*You will not hear him talk*” combines future modality with negation, transforming the proposition from a description of past conduct into a prediction of future behavior. This formulation encourages the audience to interpret the opponent’s alleged silence as a persistent and defining characteristic rather than an isolated instance. By denying the likelihood of such communication, Harris implicitly invokes the normative expectation that political leaders should address citizens’ concerns to challenge the opponent’s legitimacy as a representative of the public. The tricolon “*your needs, your dreams and your desires*” further amplifies the criticism by extending it beyond material concerns to encompass personal aspirations and emotional expectations. Moreover, the repetition of the possessive pronoun “*your*” establishes a direct interpersonal connection with the audience, encouraging listeners to perceive themselves as personally affected by the opponent’s alleged neglect. Within the broader campaign context, this rhetorical strategy constructs a clear opposition between the opponent and the electorate while simultaneously positioning Harris as aligned with citizens’ interests. Consequently, the Deny resource functions not merely as a mechanism of negation but as a persuasive strategy of audience alignment and interpersonal positioning, portraying the opponent as disconnected from the public and reinforcing the broader campaign narrative that effective political leadership depends on responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of ordinary citizens.

Example 4: “*Donald Trump said he was going to allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices. He **never** did.*” (H413, C1302)

Harris utilizes “*never*” as a strong Deny resource that contracts the dialogic space by categorically rejecting the possibility that Trump fulfilled his promise to allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices. The linguistic force of “*never*” lies in its status as an absolute temporal negator, which presents the alleged failure as complete and unequivocal rather than partial or open to qualification. This effect is reinforced by the elliptical construction “*He never did*,” whose brevity foregrounds the negation itself and gives the statement a decisive and emphatic tone. Pragmatically, the utterance derives its persuasive force from the contrast between the reported commitment “*said he was going to*” and the subsequent denial of action, inviting the audience to infer a discrepancy between words and deeds. Within the debate context, in which credibility and accountability are central concerns, this contrast functions as a powerful rhetorical strategy for undermining the opponent’s ethos. Stylistically, the movement from a detailed policy promise to the terse and categorical rebuttal creates a sharp opposition between expectation and reality, thereby intensifying the accusation of non-performance. By excluding alternative interpretations such as partial implementation or mitigating circumstances, the use of “*never*” not only strengthens dialogic contraction but also constructs a narrative of broken promises and political unreliability. Consequently, the Deny resource serves not merely to negate an action but to delegitimize the opponent’s credibility



and reinforce Harris’s broader argumentative strategy of portraying Trump as an untrustworthy leader whose commitments cannot be relied upon.

The Frequencies of Deny Resources in Kamala Harris’s 2024 Debate Discourse

The analysis below outlining the frequency of Deny resources in Kamala Harris’s 2024 debate discourse focuses on how different forms of negation are employed across 455 clauses to express opposition, correction, and argumentative alignment.

Table 2. The Frequencies of Deny Resources in Kamala Harris’s 2024 Debate Discourse

Deny Resource	Frequency	Percentage (%)
not	41	9.01
no	3	0.66
barely	1	0.22
never	1	0.22
no longer	1	0.22
Total	47	10.33

Table 2 illustrates that Deny resources account for 10.33% of the 455 clauses, indicating a moderate use of dialogic contraction. Among these, “not” is overwhelmingly dominant, occurring 41 times (9.01%), which suggests that negation is primarily realized through the most direct and unmarked form. In contrast, other Deny items such as “no” (0.66%), “barely,” “never,” and “no longer” (each 0.22%) appear only marginally. This uneven distribution highlights a clear preference for simple, explicit negation as opposed to more nuanced or intensified forms of denial. The pattern suggests that the speaker relies heavily on straightforward negation to reject alternative positions and to reinforce a firm and unambiguous stance while limiting dialogic space.

The Comparison of Deny Resources in Donald Trump and Kamala Harris’s Discourse in 2024 Debate

The comparative table below presenting a contrastive analysis of Deny resources in the discourse of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris during the 2024 debate outlines their frequencies and distribution patterns to identify similarities and differences in the use of negation as a dialogic strategy.

Table 3. Comparative Distribution of Deny Resources in Trump and Harris’s 2024 Debate Discourse

Category	Marker	Trump Frequency (976 clauses)	Trump (%)	Harris Frequency (455 clauses)	Harris (%)
Shared markers	not	97	9.94	41	9.01
	never	25	2.56	1	0.22
	no	18	1.84	3	0.66
Trump-speaker-specific	nobody	5	0.51	0	0
	lie	3	0.31	0	0
	hardly	1	0.1	0	0
	impossible	1	0.1	0	0
Harris-speaker-specific	barely	0	0	1	0.22
	no longer	0	0	1	0.22
Total Deny	—	150	15.37	47	10.33

Table 3 presents the distribution of deny resources in the 2024 debate discourse of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, both in terms of frequency and lexical diversity. It is evident that Trump employs significantly more deny markers (150 instances, 15.37% of 976 clauses) than Harris (47 instances, 10.33% of



455 clauses), indicating a stronger reliance on negation to contract dialogic space and reject opposing viewpoints. Both speakers predominantly use “*not*” as the central negation device (9.94% for Trump and 9.01% for Harris), confirming its role as the primary grammatical marker of denial in debate contexts. However, Trump makes more frequent use of stronger negators such as “*never*” (2.56%) and “*no*” (1.84%) compared to Harris (0.22% and 0.66%, respectively) to suggest a more absolute and emphatic rejection style. Furthermore, Trump’s discourse exhibits greater lexical variation, including unique markers such as “*nobody*,” “*lie*,” “*hardly*,” and “*impossible*,” which intensify evaluative force and contribute to a more confrontational rhetorical stance, whereas Harris uses a more limited range, with only “*barely*” and “*no longer*” appearing as marginal, speaker-specific items. Overall, the findings indicate that Trump’s use of deny resources is more frequent, varied, and rhetorically forceful while Harris’s approach is comparatively restrained, selective, and less overtly confrontational.

Counter Resources

This section examines the use of Counter resources in the 2024 debate discourse of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, with particular attention to their frequency, distribution, and functional roles in signaling contrast, developing rebuttals and enacting strategic opposition within the interaction.

Counter Resources in Donald Trump’s Discourse

In this debate, Donald Trump employs Counter resources as a strategic device to introduce contrast and reframe arguments to help him challenge Kamala Harris’s positions and assert his own opposing stance.

Example 5: “***But*** we have a president... that doesn’t know he’s alive.” (T727, C1017)

The coordinator “*but*” functions as a Counter resource that contracts the dialogic space by signaling a departure from an expected or previously available line of reasoning and replacing it with a contrasting evaluation. Its rhetorical significance lies not merely in marking opposition but in guiding the audience toward a reinterpretation of the preceding discourse. “*But*” acknowledges the existence of an alternative perspective only to immediately challenge and override it to position the speaker’s viewpoint as the more valid interpretation. This counter-expectational force is amplified by the subsequent clause “*doesn’t know he’s alive*,” in which the negation “*doesn’t*” combines with hyperbolic language to construct an extreme portrayal of presidential incompetence. Rather than offering a literal assessment, the expression functions as a stylistic device of ridicule and derision, inviting the audience to infer cognitive incapacity and unfitness for leadership. In the debate context, candidates seek not only to promote their own positions but also to undermine the credibility of their opponents, the interaction between “*but*” and “*doesn’t*” serves a strategic rhetorical purpose by transforming a political disagreement into a question of personal capability and legitimacy. The abrupt shift introduced by “*but*” creates contrastive emphasis while the exaggerated characterization that follows enhances memorability and emotional impact. This Counter resource operates not simply to introduce a contrasting proposition but to redirect audience evaluation, suppress alternative interpretations of the president’s performance, and reinforce Trump’s broader argumentative strategy of delegitimizing the incumbent administration through highly personalized criticism.

Example 6: “*When I had it, I had tariffs and yet I had no inflation.*” (T15, C41)

The lexical item “*yet*” functions as a Counter resource that contracts the dialogic space by invoking and subsequently rejecting an expected causal relationship between tariffs and inflation. Linguistically, “*yet*” establishes a counter-expectational connection between the clauses “*I had tariffs*” and “*I had no inflation*,” signaling that the second proposition runs contrary to what many listeners might reasonably anticipate. The utterance presupposes the widely circulated economic argument that tariffs increase consumer costs and contribute to inflationary pressure; however, the use of “*yet*” challenges this assumption by presenting Trump’s experience as evidence that such expectations do not necessarily hold. The rhetorical force of the statement is strengthened by the first-person repetition of “*I had*,” which foregrounds the speaker’s personal record and positions him as a direct witness to the alleged success



of the policy. In the context of debate, economic competence is a central point of contestation, this countering move enables Trump to pre-empt criticism of his tariff policies and to reframe a potential liability as proof of effective leadership. Stylistically, the juxtaposition of tariffs and the absolute negation “*no inflation*” creates a concise and memorable contrast that simplifies a complex economic issue into an apparently straightforward causal claim. The Counter resource does more than introduce an unexpected relationship; it functions as a persuasive mechanism for challenging dominant interpretations of economic policy, validating the speaker’s past performance, and reinforcing Trump’s broader argumentative strategy of portraying his administration as uniquely capable of achieving positive economic outcomes despite conventional expectations to the contrary.

The Distribution of Counter Resources in Donald Trump’s 2024 Debate Discourse

This section examining the frequency and distribution of Counter resources in Donald Trump’s 2024 debate discourse highlights how these features contribute to his rhetorical and evaluative strategies.

Table 4. Distribution of Counter Resources in Donald Trump’s 2024 Debate Discourse

Counter Marker	Frequency (n)	Percentage of Clauses (%)
But	42	4.3
Yet	1	0.1
Total Counter Resources	43	4.41

Table 4 indicates that Counter resources in Donald Trump’s 2024 debate discourse are used relatively sparingly, accounting for 4.41% of the 976 clauses, suggesting that countering is not a dominant engagement strategy in his rhetoric. The distribution is notably uneven, with “but” occurring 42 times (4.30%) and accounting for the vast majority of instances, whereas “yet” appears only once (0.10%). This overwhelming preference for “but” points to a deliberate reliance on a simple and frequent connector to introduce contrast to enable the speaker to acknowledge a prior or implied proposition and then promptly overturn or reframe it. Such Counter usage, therefore, serves to contract dialogic space by directing the audience toward the speaker’s preferred interpretation while implicitly challenging alternative viewpoints. The minimal use of “yet,” which is more formal and stylistically marked, further suggests a tendency toward direct, accessible and conversational expression rather than stylistic variation. Additionally, the overall low frequency of Counter resources indicates that the speaker is less oriented toward dialogic negotiation through contrast and instead adopts a more assertive stance, likely relying more on Deny resources to reject opposing perspectives in a more explicit and categorical manner.

Counter Resources in Kamala Harris’s 2024 Debate

In the 2024 debate, Kamala Harris strategically employs Counter resources to construct contrastive meanings, contest opposing viewpoints, and reframe arguments. Through this approach, she manages disagreement in a measured manner while sustaining a coherent and persuasive rhetorical position.

Example 7: “**But** what we have in the former president is someone who would prefer to run on a problem instead of fixing a problem.” (H122, C375)

“But” functions as a Counter resource that contracts the dialogic space by signaling a shift from an available or implied expectation toward a contrasting interpretation of the former president’s conduct. Instead of merely signaling opposition, “but” performs a corrective discourse function by inviting the audience to reconsider any assumption that political leaders seek to solve public problems and replacing that expectation with a more critical characterization. This utterance relies on the shared assumption that effective leadership is measured by a commitment to addressing societal challenges; therefore, the claim that the former president would “prefer to run on a problem instead of fixing a problem” presents his behavior as a deliberate violation of this norm. The rhetorical force of the statement is strengthened by the contrastive structure “run on a problem” versus “fixing a problem,” which establishes a binary



opposition between political self-interest and responsible governance. The repetition of the phrase “*a problem*” creates parallelism that enhances memorability and sharpens the evaluative contrast while the mental-process expression “*would prefer*” attributes intentionality to the opponent’s actions, portraying the alleged behavior as a conscious strategic choice rather than a consequence of circumstance or policy disagreement. In this context, candidates compete to establish both competence and moral legitimacy, this countering move enables Harris to reframe political disagreement as evidence of flawed motives and questionable leadership values. As such, the Counter resource does more than introduce an alternative perspective; it functions as a persuasive mechanism for delegitimizing the opponent’s intentions, restricting more favorable interpretations of his actions, and reinforcing Harris’s broader rhetorical strategy of presenting herself as committed to problem-solving while portraying the former president as politically invested in the continuation of the very issues he claims to oppose.

Example 8: “*My opponent, on the other hand, his plan is to do what he has done before.*” (H21, C21)

The expression “on the other hand” functions as a Counter resource that contracts the dialogic space by establishing a contrastive framework, through which competing political visions are evaluated. The marker signals a shift from the speaker’s own policy orientation to that of her opponent, inviting the audience to compare the two alternatives while simultaneously guiding them toward a preferred interpretation. This utterance presupposes that electoral choices should be assessed in terms of future outcomes and political progress; against this backdrop, the characterization of Trump’s plan as “to do what he has done before” implicitly associates his agenda with repetition rather than innovation. The rhetorical force of the statement derives from the interaction between the contrastive marker and the vague but evaluatively loaded reference to past actions, which encourages listeners to draw upon their own perceptions of Trump’s previous presidency and interpret those experiences as evidence against returning to similar policies. The phrase “on the other hand” creates an appearance of balanced and rational comparison, allowing Harris to present her criticism as the logical conclusion of a fair evaluation rather than an overt attack. It helps candidates seek to distinguish themselves from their opponents, and this countering move serves a strategic function by constructing a binary opposition between change and continuity, future-oriented leadership and backward-looking governance. The Counter resource operates not merely as a discourse organizer but as a persuasive mechanism for framing the electoral choice in evaluative terms, restricting more favorable interpretations of the opponent’s agenda, and reinforcing Harris’s broader rhetorical strategy of positioning herself as the candidate of progress while portraying Trump as representative of a return to the past.

The Distribution of Counter Resources in Kamala Harris’s 2024 Debate Discourse

This subsection examines the frequency and distribution of Counter resources in Harris’s 2024 debate performance, providing a quantitative basis for understanding how she constructs contrast and negotiates opposing viewpoints in her argumentation.

Table 5. The Distribution of Counter Resources in Kamala Harris’s 2024 Debate Discourse

Counter Marker	Occurrences (n)	Percentage of Total Clauses (%)
<i>but</i>	12	2.64
<i>on the other hand</i>	1	0.22
Total Counter Resources	13	2.86

Table 5 indicates that Counter resources in Kamala Harris’s 2024 debate discourse occur at a relatively low rate, accounting for 2.86% of the 455 clauses, suggesting that this type of engagement is not central to her rhetorical approach. The distribution is also markedly uneven: “*but*” appears 12 times (2.64%) and accounts for nearly all instances, whereas “*on the other hand*” is used only once (0.22%), indicating limited diversity in contrastive markers. Functionally, “*but*” serves to introduce a shift in



perspective by acknowledging an implied or preceding proposition and then qualifying or challenging it, consistent with its role in Appraisal Theory as a resource for contracting dialogic space and steering the audience toward the speaker’s preferred interpretation. The single occurrence of “*on the other hand*,” a more explicit and formally marked contrastive expression, suggests a moment of more elaborated reasoning, in which alternative viewpoints are more clearly staged before being reinterpreted. Taken together, the relatively low frequency of Counter resources implies that Harris, similar to Donald Trump, does not rely heavily on concessive contrast. However, her occasional use of a more formal marker such as “*on the other hand*” reflects a slightly more structured and rhetorically explicit style, even though such instances remain rare.

A Comparative Analysis of Counter Resource Usage in the 2024 Debate Between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris

This section offers a comparative examination of Counter resources in the 2024 debate discourse of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, with particular attention to their frequency, distribution, and rhetorical roles in shaping oppositional meaning.

Table 6. Distribution of Counter Resources in Trump and Harris’s 2024 Debate Discourse

Counter Resource	Trump Frequency (n = 976 clauses)	Trump (%)	Harris Frequency	Harris (%)
<i>but</i>	42	4.3	12	2.64
<i>yet</i>	1	0.1	0	0
<i>on the other hand</i>	0	0	1	0.22
Total	43	4.41	13	2.86

Table 6 reveals notable differences in the distribution of Counter resources between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris in the 2024 debate discourse. Trump employs Counter resources more frequently (4.41%) than Harris (2.86%), indicating a greater reliance on contrastive strategies to challenge or re-frame propositions. In both cases, however, the use of Counter resources is heavily dominated by “*but*,” which accounts for nearly all instances in Trump’s data (4.30%) and remains the primary marker for Harris (2.64%), suggesting a shared preference for a simple, direct, and efficient means of introducing contrast. Trump’s use shows very limited variation, with only one instance of “*yet*” (0.10%) and no occurrence of more elaborated markers, reflecting a rhetorical style that favors immediate contradiction and rapid argumentative shifts. In contrast, Harris demonstrates slightly more diversity through a single use of “*on the other hand*” (0.22%), a more explicit and balanced contrastive expression that signals a more structured form of argumentation although such usage remains rare. These Counter resources function to contract dialogic space by acknowledging alternative viewpoints only to redirect the audience toward the speaker’s preferred position. Despite these functional similarities, the overall low percentages for both speakers suggest that concessive contrast is not a dominant engagement strategy in the debate, with both candidates – particularly Trump – likely relying more on direct rejection strategies such as Deny, resulting in a more assertive and less dialogically expansive discourse style.

Comparative Analysis of Disclaim Resources in Trump and Harris’s 2024 Debate Discourse

The following table offers a comparative analysis of Disclaim resources in the 2024 debate discourse of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, examining how each candidate deploys denial and countering strategies to construct evaluation and manage dialogic positioning.

Table 7, presenting a detailed distribution of Disclaim resources in Trump and Harris’s 2024 debate discourse, reveals both quantitative divergence and functional convergence in their rhetorical strategies. Trump employs a considerably higher number of Disclaim resources (193 instances, 19.78%) compared to Harris (60 instances, 13.19%), indicating a more intensive reliance on rejection-oriented language



Table 7. Distribution of Disclaim Resources in Trump and Harris’s 2024 Debate Discourse

Disclaim Resource	Marker	Trump Frequency (n = 976 clauses)	Trump (%)	Harris Frequency (n = 455 clauses)	Harris (%)
Deny	<i>not</i>	97	9.94	41	9.01
	<i>never</i>	25	2.56	1	0.22
	<i>no</i>	18	1.84	3	0.66
	<i>nobody</i>	5	0.51	0	0
	<i>lie</i>	3	0.31	0	0
	<i>hardly</i>	1	0.1	0	0
	<i>impossible</i>	1	0.1	0	0
	<i>barely</i>	0	0	1	0.22
	<i>no longer</i>	0	0	1	0.22
	Total Deny		150	15.37	47
Counter	<i>but</i>	42	4.3	12	2.64
	<i>yet</i>	1	0.1	0	0
	<i>on the other hand</i>	0	0	1	0.22
	Total Counter	43	4.41	13	2.86
Disclaim Resources	—	193	19.78	60	13.19

in his debate performance. This suggests that Trump’s discourse is more frequently structured around direct opposition, negation, and argumentative confrontation. Within the Deny category, both speakers show a strong preference for the marker “*not*,” which functions as the dominant form of explicit negation in their discourse. Trump uses “*not*” 97 times (9.94%) while Harris uses it 41 times (9.01%), demonstrating a relatively similar proportional reliance despite differences in absolute frequency. However, divergence becomes more visible in less frequent markers: Trump employs a wider range of negative expressions such as “*never*,” “*nobody*,” “*lie*,” “*hardly*,” and “*impossible*,” whereas Harris shows a more limited distribution, with occasional use of “*barely*” and “*no longer*.” This indicates that Trump’s denial strategies are more lexically varied and rhetorically forceful, contributing to a stronger overall oppositional stance. In the Counter category, both candidates again display parallel structural tendencies but at lower frequencies. The conjunction “*but*” dominates in both datasets, accounting for 42 instances (4.30%) in Trump’s discourse and 12 instances (2.64%) in Harris’s. The minimal use of alternative counter markers such as “*yet*” and “*on the other hand*” suggests that both speakers prefer direct adversative contrast over more elaborated concessive framing. Taken as a whole, the findings indicate that while Trump and Harris differ significantly in the intensity of Disclaim usage, they share a similar internal distribution pattern, with Deny functioning as the primary rhetorical resource and Counter playing a secondary role. This consistency highlights the central role of explicit negation in the 2024 presidential debate discourse, in which both speakers prioritize direct rejection over more nuanced negotiation of opposing viewpoints, reflecting the inherently adversarial nature of political debate interaction.

The following table presents a comparative overview of the use of Disclaim resources in Trump and Harris’s 2024 debate discourse. It reports the total frequency and percentage distribution of the two subtypes – Deny and Counter – within their debate discourse.

Fig. 2 and Table 8, indicating a comparative overview of the distribution of Disclaim resources in the 2024 debate discourse of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, highlight both clear quantitative divergence and notable structural similarity. In terms of overall usage, Donald Trump makes substantially greater use of Disclaim resources, with 193 occurrences compared to Kamala Harris’s 60 occurrences. This indicates that Trump’s discourse is more densely populated with rejection-oriented linguistic

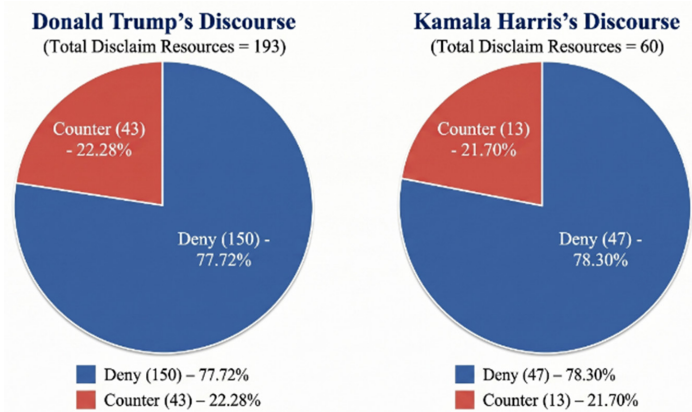


Fig. 2. Distribution of Disclaim Resources in Trump and Harris's 2024 Debate Discourse

Table 8. Distribution of Disclaim Resources in Trump and Harris's 2024 Debate Discourse

Speaker's Discourse	Total Disclaim Resources	Deny (n)	Deny (%)	Counter (n)	Counter (%)
Donald Trump	193	150	77.72	43	22.28
Kamala Harris	60	47	78.3	13	21.7

choices, reflecting a stronger tendency toward oppositional engagement. However, when examining the internal composition of these resources, both speakers exhibit a highly parallel pattern, in which Deny overwhelmingly surpasses Counter. Trump's discourse includes 150 instances of Deny (77.72%) and 43 instances of Counter (22.28%), while Harris's discourse contains 47 Deny instances (78.30%) and 13 Counter instances (21.70%). The near-identical proportional distribution suggests that although the two candidates differ considerably in rhetorical volume, they rely on the same hierarchy of rejection strategies. From a discourse perspective, this consistency implies that Deny functions as the primary mechanism for expressing disagreement, directly refuting propositions, and constraining alternative viewpoints. Counter, by contrast, plays a secondary role, typically used to reframe or oppose prior claims in a less direct manner. In sum, the findings indicate that both Trump and Harris prioritize explicit negation over more dialogically expansive forms of opposition, reinforcing the adversarial and contest-driven nature of presidential debate discourse.

The Rhetorical Functions of Disclaims in Trump and Harris's 2024 Debate Discourse

The Disclaim resources in Trump and Harris's 2024 debate discourse function as key interpersonal mechanisms for managing disagreement, constructing evaluation, and controlling dialogic space through strategies of denial and contrast. Both Deny and Counter resources operate to contract dialogue by limiting alternative viewpoints and guiding the audience toward the speaker's preferred interpretation although they differ in intensity and rhetorical function. Deny resources primarily serve to directly reject propositions, invalidate opposing claims, and assert evaluative stances. Trump's discourse is characterized by a more forceful and categorical deployment of negation, which functions to challenge, accuse, and reinforce authority, whereas Harris employs denial in a comparatively restrained and context-sensitive manner, often oriented toward clarification and accountability. From an Appraisal Theory perspective, this reflects variation in Engagement choices, particularly in how dialogic contraction is realized through differing degrees of force and authorial positioning. Counter resources, by contrast, function to introduce contrast and reframe arguments by linking opposing propositions within a single clause complex, thereby acknowledging an alternative position before reorienting it toward the speaker's stance. Trump tends to deploy this strategy for abrupt argumentative shifts that intensify evaluative



polarity while Harris uses it in a more structured and explanatory manner to foreground policy contrast. In general, both speakers rely on Disclaim resources as strategic Engagement devices, underscoring the adversarial nature of the 2024 presidential debate discourse.

The findings indicate that Disclaim resources – particularly Deny and Counter – play a central role in structuring disagreement, managing dialogic space, and enacting interpersonal positioning in the Trump–Harris debate. Trump employs Disclaim resources significantly more frequently than Harris, reflecting a stronger orientation toward overt dialogic contraction. Nevertheless, both candidates exhibit a similar internal distribution pattern, with Deny overwhelmingly outnumbering Counter, confirming that explicit negation serves as the primary mechanism for expressing disagreement in this interactional context. More importantly, Trump’s denial patterns display greater lexical variety and stronger evaluative force, whereas Harris’s use of denial is more selective and context-dependent, suggesting differences in authorial intensity and rhetorical assertiveness rather than in functional orientation. Counter resources occur relatively infrequently in both datasets and are predominantly realized through the conjunction “*but*,” indicating a shared preference for immediate adversative contrast over more elaborated concessive structures. From an Appraisal perspective, this pattern reflects a reliance on high-value Engagement resources that privilege dialogic contraction over expansion, particularly through explicit denial. Consistent with previous studies [25, 26, 28], the findings reaffirm the centrality of Deny as a key strategy of dialogic contraction in political discourse. They also support earlier research on Engagement and political communication [22, 27], which highlights stylistic variation in the deployment of evaluative and dialogic resources across political actors. However, the present study extends existing research by examining a live presidential debate rather than monologic political discourse, thereby capturing the dynamic operation of Disclaim resources under real-time adversarial conditions. Its theoretical contribution lies in advancing our understanding of the rhetoric of rejection by demonstrating that Deny and Counter function not merely as linguistic devices for negating propositions but also as rhetorical resources for delegitimizing opponents, constructing ideological positions and aligning audiences with preferred viewpoints. Methodologically, the study integrates quantitative distributional analysis with qualitative interpretation, providing a more comprehensive account of both the frequency and the functional significance of Disclaim resources in contemporary political discourse.

Conclusion

This study investigated the use of Disclaim resources – Deny and Counter – in the 2024 Trump–Harris presidential debate from the perspective of Appraisal Theory. The findings demonstrate that both candidates systematically employ these resources to manage disagreement, construct evaluations, and contract dialogic space, albeit with differing degrees of rhetorical intensity and stylistic orientation. Trump employs Disclaim resources more frequently than Harris, reflecting a stronger tendency toward overtly confrontational and oppositional discourse. Both candidates exhibit a similar internal distributional pattern, in which Deny overwhelmingly dominates Counter, confirming that explicit negation constitutes the primary mechanism for expressing disagreement in debate interaction. However, Trump’s denial patterns display greater lexical diversity and stronger evaluative force, whereas Harris’s use of denial is more selective and context-dependent. Furthermore, both candidates rely predominantly on the conjunction “*but*” to realize Counter resources, indicating a shared preference for direct adversative contrast over more elaborated concessive structures.

Beyond these empirical findings, the study makes a specific contribution to the understanding of the rhetoric of rejection in political discourse. Previous research has established the importance of Engagement resources in political communication and identified Disclaim as a key mechanism of dialogic contraction [17–20, 22, 25, 26, 28]. However, most existing studies have focused on monologic genres such as inaugural speeches, campaign speeches, political addresses, interviews, and press conferences. By examining a live presidential debate characterized by immediate interaction and direct ideological



confrontation, the present study demonstrates that rejection is not merely a linguistic act of negation but also a dynamic rhetorical strategy, through which political actors challenge competing claims, delegitimize opponents, reinforce ideological positions, and align audiences with preferred interpretations of political reality. In this respect, the study extends previous research by showing how Deny and Counter operate under real-time adversarial conditions and by highlighting variations in the intensity and rhetorical realization of rejection across political actors. The findings, therefore, contribute to a more nuanced understanding of rejection as a multidimensional discursive practice that simultaneously serves interpersonal, rhetorical, and ideological functions.

The study also contributes to Appraisal Theory by extending the application of the Engagement system to contemporary presidential debate discourse and by demonstrating the analytical value of Disclaim resources for examining political contestation. Methodologically, it integrates quantitative distributional analysis with qualitative interpretation, thereby providing a more comprehensive account of both the frequency and the functional significance of dialogic contraction in political discourse. The findings have practical implications for political communication, discourse analysis, media studies, and language education. They offer insights into how political actors strategically employ language to manage disagreement, construct credibility, and influence public perception while also providing a useful framework for fostering critical awareness of rhetorical and ideological positioning in public discourse.

Nevertheless, the study is limited by its focus on a single presidential debate, its restriction to Disclaim resources without consideration of other Engagement categories or appraisal subsystems, and its lack of audience reception analysis. These limitations constrain the generalizability and explanatory scope of the findings. Future research could thus examine a broader range of debates and political contexts, incorporate additional appraisal subsystems such as Attitude and Graduation, and integrate multimodal and audience-oriented approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how political persuasion is constructed, negotiated, and interpreted in contemporary public discourse.

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INFORMATION ABOUT AUTHORS / СВЕДЕНИЯ ОБ АВТОРАХ

Nguyen Thi Bich Giang

Нгуен Тхи Бич Джианг

E-mail: nguyentbichgiang@dtu.edu.vn

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-7171-2307>

Tran Xuan Hiep

Чан Суан Хиеп

E-mail: txhiep@ued.udn.vn

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5236-993X>

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