

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MEN'S AND WOMEN'S LINGUISTIC FEATURES USED BY DONALD TRUMP AND KAMALA HARRIS IN THE U.S. PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE 2024

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Abstract

Certain linguistic features are often associated with specific genders and may characterize gendered language use. This study aims to identify the similarities and differences in the linguistic features used by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris during the 2024 U.S. Presidential Debate to reveal how gendered features are adapted and balanced in a political context. This study focuses on the utterances of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. Using a qualitative approach, the writer employed Coates's (2016) theory of linguistic features to analyze the debate transcript. The results reveal similarities between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. Among 6 out of 7 types of linguistic features were used by both, namely minimal responses, hedges, questions, commands and directives, compliments, and swearing and taboo language. The differences can be seen in the use of one linguistic feature: tag questions. Tag questions were used only by Donald

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Trump, while Kamala Harris did not use this feature at all. The findings imply that linguistic features can no longer be strictly classified based on gender. In political debates, politicians, regardless of gender, tend to adapt and balance their linguistic features according to the demands of the debate context.

Keywords: Linguistic Features; Presidential Debate; Men's Linguistic Features; Women's Linguistic Features

Introduction

Linguistic features are crucial in shaping how speech is understood and how speakers are perceived, particularly in how language is associated with gender (Salsabila et al. 2024). The way individuals speak can influence how confident, persuasive, or authoritative they appear in public (Farhan, Revita, Oktavianus 2024). Earlier studies have argued that women and men use language differently. Features such as hedges, tag questions, and indirect speech are often associated with women's language, whereas men's language is identified by the use of direct speech, strong vocabulary, and dominance in interaction (Lakoff, 1973; Sharif et al. 2023). These studies have contributed to framing women's speech as 'weak' and men's as 'strong'. However, more recent studies suggest a different view, showing that both women and men mix linguistic features in their speeches (Leng and Wang, 2023; Li and Li, 2020). This indicates that linguistic features are not exclusively associated with one gender, as both women and men may use similar features in their speech.

Studying this issue is of great importance, particularly in the field of political communication, where language functions not only as a tool to persuade, but also to manage public image to gain voters (Abd Aliwie 2024). In political debates, candidates

must carefully choose their linguistic strategies in order to get public's attention, defend their argument, and challenge their opponents (Khajavi and Rasti 2020). In these context, candidates, regardless of gender, use linguistic features to maintain their positions, build public trust, and fulfil societal expectations (Knyazyan and Hakobyan 2018). Unlike scripted speeches, debates require quick responses and pressure to answer the questions, as well as knowledge to think critically. Therefore, the way candidates use language in debate reflects their political discourse and understanding of the main issues in society (Jiménez-Preciado et al. 2024).

Nowadays, as more women have entered politics that were once dominated by men, mixed-gender debates have become more common. In these debates, both men and women politicians are expected to present themselves as assertive while simultaneously managing how they are perceived by the public. According to Hargrave (2023), a politician's communication style significantly influences voters' perception. Politicians who use communal style (indirect, showing empathy) tend to be more likeable, while politicians who use agentic style (direct, assertive) seem more competent (Hargrave 2023). Politicians who adopt a communal style, characterized by indirectness and empathy, tend to be perceived as more likeable, while those who use an agentic style, marked by directness and assertiveness, are often seen as more competent. As a result, politicians need to strategically adjust their speech by combining or mixing linguistic features. This allows them to show strength without appearing too aggressive, while still maintaining the softer part that makes them approachable (Hinck et al., 2024).

The 2024 U.S. Presidential Debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris provides a particularly significant case for examining this issue. As two prominent political figures with different backgrounds, identities, and communication styles, they offer valuable material for analyzing how linguistic features are used at the highest and most competitive level of political discourse, presidential debate. Therefore, in order to

gain wider perspective, this study employed Donald Trump and Kamala Harris as its subject to examine whether gendered language features also occur in political debates.

Although some researchers have discussed gendered language in political areas (Akhmetzyanov et al., 2023; Aydyralieva et al., 2025; Dai and Wang, 2021; Hassan, 2023; Korostenskienė and Žebelytė, 2024; Sadouk, 2022; Shaukat, Rashid, and Shahid, 2025), there are still few studies that examine gendered language using Coates' classification of linguistic specifically in political debate. Therefore, this study focuses on identifying the similarities and differences in the linguistic features used by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris during the 2024 U.S. Presidential Debate. This study aims to reveal how two politicians of different genders use their linguistic features within the same debate situation and how these gendered features are adapted and balanced in a political communication.

Gendered Language Features

The study of gendered language features was first proposed by Robin Lakoff (1973), who argued that men's speech is treated as the norm, while women's speech is considered 'different' or 'deficient'. Lakoff suggested that men's language represents the standard form of communication, whereas women's speech is often labeled as weak, polite, or emotional, reflecting gender bias in society. Similarly, Holmes (2013) states that women tend to use more standard forms of speech than men as a way to signal social status, as they often avoid vernacular forms that may be negatively associated with women. Since then, gendered language features have been understood as functional elements associated with how men and women are socially expected to speak (Cameron, 2010; Mei Fung, Hie Ting, & Man Chuah, 2023). However, this early studies has been widely debated and reconsidered.

Some researchers support Lakoff's argument, suggesting that differences in men's and women's speech reflect social expectations and power relations. For example, in a

study of gendered discourse in movies, Fajarwati, Rahmatunisa, and Agustina (2026) found that male characters tend to use more directive and assertive forms of language, whereas female characters tend to use more hedges, compliments, and tag questions. This reflects to men's tendency to assert control or dominance in interaction. Similarly, Wulandari and Sari (2024), in their analysis of *Enola Holmes 2*, found that female characters are more likely to use hedges, empathetic expressions, and intensifiers to express their feelings. This tendency may be influenced by women's social roles and expectations in society, where they are often associated with being more polite, status-conscious, and part of a subordinate group (Yuliasari, Virtianti, Sari 2025). Moreover, in a study of gendered language in online discourse, Ginarti et al. (2022) analyzed male and female users on *Instagram* and *Twitter*, which found that female users tend to use empty adjectives, hedges, and super-polite forms, while male users more frequently use commands, directives, declarative sentences, and swear words.

However, other researchers argue that men and women may use similar linguistic features. For instance, Supriyono and Dewanti (2025) found that women also use features traditionally associated with masculine speech, such as commands, directives, swearing, taboo language, and minimal responses. This is influenced by social roles, situational contexts, and other social factors. Similarly, Dewati and Wulandari (2023), in their study of *The Prince & Me*, found that male and female characters used similar linguistic features with comparable frequency. According to Holmes (2013), factors such as participants, setting, topic, and function of conversation play an important role in shaping language use. Supporting this view, Alhammadi, Rabab'ah, and Alghazo (2024), in their analysis of *Talks at Google*, found that both male and female speakers use features traditionally associated with women's language, such as hedges, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, tag questions, empty adjectives, and super-polite forms. In addition, Ishak, Razali, and Sulaiman (2022) found that gender-neutral features such as hedges, fillers, and interruptions are commonly used by both men and women. These studies indicate that

gendered language features are dynamic and are influenced by context, social roles, and communicative purposes. This suggests that linguistic features should be understood as flexible resources rather than strict indicators of gender.

Linguistic Features in Political Debate Discourse

Political debate is a public discussion between candidates that allows them to present, defend, and challenge ideas to influence public opinion through argument and persuasion (Cameron and Shaw 2016). In political debate, language becomes a strategic tool to achieve political goals, which as gaining voters (Hinck et. al 2024). Candidates not only inform the audience about their policies but also demonstrate leadership competence and character when criticizing or responding to others on stage (Hinck et. al 2024). Thus, candidates use specific linguistic features to construct their authority, credibility, and trustworthiness from audiences (Cameron and Shaw 2016).

In the political debate context, study by Aydyralieva et al. (2025) and Akhmetzyanov et al. (2023) found that women politicians combine their features with men's language as a strategy to overcome gender stereotypes and maintain their position as political leaders. Aydyralieva et al. (2025) argue that public perceptions of politicians are still shaped by gender stereotypes and its significantly influence the delivery and perception of speeches. Similarly, Akhmetzyanov et al. (2023) found that society more easily understands and accepts politicians' speeches that contain 'masculine' features. Although agree with this, Hassan (2023) argue that factors such as context, type of topic, and the way speakers utter words are equally important elements in conversation. In debates, each candidate is expected to appear assertive and directive, while also avoiding seems overly aggressive. Hassan found out that both men and women politicians use hedges and tag questions features to soften their speech. Politicians are not strictly limited by men's dominance in politics, women politicians may still show their 'feminine' features to strategically pursue their political goals and personal motivation.

Additionally, men politicians may use ‘feminine’ features, such as hedges, to soften their speech and avoid making assertions that might attract criticism (Dai and Wang 2021; Korostenskienė and Žebelytė 2024). This suggest that both men and women politicians blend their linguistic features due to the demands of persuasion, credibility, and audience expectations (Sadouk 2022; Shaukat, Rashid, and Shahid 2025).

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine and interpret the linguistic features used by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris during the 2024 U.S. Presidential Debate. Qualitative research approach focuses on describing social phenomena as they occur and generating interpretations that provide a systematic and detailed understanding of the research object (Järvinen and Mik-Meyer, 2020; Creswell and Poth, 2018). Through this approach, the study aims to reveal how linguistic features are used strategically in political debates to construct meaning, express ideas, and influence audiences.

The data for this study were obtained from a video of the 2024 U.S. Presidential Debate available on the official Wall Street Journal (WSJ) YouTube channel, titled “*Full Debate: Harris vs. Trump in 2024 ABC News Presidential Debate | WSJ.*” The video has a duration of 1 hour, 49 minutes, and 25 seconds, including approximately 90 minutes of debate between the two candidates. The debate covers several key issues, such as the economy, immigration, abortion, foreign policy, and health care. To support the accuracy of the spoken data, the researcher also referred to the official debate transcript provided by the ABC News website. The use of both video and transcript sources ensures the reliability and validity of the data. For this research, utterances were counted based on sentences. This method was used to make the data easier to organize and analyze consistently, especially in identifying the linguistic features used by both candidates. Based on this counting method, Donald Trump produced 842 utterances, while Kamala

Harris produced 372 utterances. These utterances were used as the main data for identifying and analyzing the linguistic features used by both candidates.

The data collection process was conducted through several systematic steps. First, the researcher carefully watched the debate video to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context. Second, an automatic transcript of the debate was generated using the Language Reactor extension. This transcript was then verified by comparing it with the official transcript from ABC News to ensure accuracy. The researcher focused exclusively on the utterances produced by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, while excluding the moderator's speech, as it was not directly related to the analysis of linguistic features between the two candidates. The selected data were then cleaned by removing irrelevant parts and rechecked by repeatedly watching the video to maintain accuracy. Finally, the data were organized into a Google Docs for further analysis.

The data were analyzed using content analysis based on Coates' (2016) theoretical framework. Content analysis emphasizes interpreting data within its context to understand how meaning is constructed and communicated (Krippendorff, 2019; Lyhne et al., 2025). In this study, content analysis was used to examine how each candidate employs linguistic features to convey ideas, establish authority, and persuade the audience. The analysis process consisted of several steps. First, the researcher created two separate tables in a Excel for the utterances of each candidate. Each table included columns for data number, utterances, and types of linguistic features, namely minimal responses, hedges, tag questions, questions, commands and directives, compliments, and swearing or taboo language. The data numbers were assigned sequentially based on the order in which the utterances containing the linguistic features appeared in the debate transcript. For example, "**(124) DT**" refers to the 124th utterance identified in the data and indicates that the utterance was produced by Donald Trump. Second, the researcher

identified and classified each utterance according to these categories. All identified data were then systematically organized into the respective tables.

Then, the researcher counted the frequency of each linguistic feature using automatic counting feature in Excel and rechecked the results to ensure accuracy. Following this, three result tables were generated. The first and second tables present the linguistic features used by each candidate, including the types of features, their frequency and total number of feature occurrences. The third table provides a comparison of the frequency of linguistic features used by both candidates to identify similarities and differences. Finally, the researcher interpreted the results and drew conclusions based on the analysis. This process aimed to explain how linguistic features are strategically used and balanced by each candidate to influence audiences within the context of a political debate.

Results

Similarities of Linguistic Features

Based on the analysis, this study identified seven types of linguistic features in the 2024 U.S. presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. Of these seven linguistic features, six were used by both candidates: hedges, command and directives, questions, compliments, swearing and taboo language, and minimal responses. The frequency of each linguistic feature used by both candidates is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Similarities and Differences in Linguistic Features Between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris

Linguistic Features	Frequency		Similarity	Difference
	Donald Trump	Kamala Harris		
Minimal Response	6	2	✓	
Hedges	54	25	✓	
Tag Questions	2	0		✓
Questions	40	14	✓	
Command and Directives	48	50	✓	
Compliments	38	18	✓	
Swearing and Taboo Language	21	6	✓	
TOTAL FEATURES	209	115		

Table 1 shows that six of the seven linguistic features identified in this study were shared by both candidates. Overall, Donald Trump produced a higher total number of linguistic features (209 occurrences) than Kamala Harris (115 occurrences). The following sections present some of the similarities in the linguistic features used by the two candidates..

Hedges

Hedges are linguistic forms such as *I think, I'm sure, you know, like, sort of, and perhaps* which are used to indicate the speaker's certainty or uncertainty regarding the proposition being expressed (Coates 2016). Women often use hedges more frequently than men, while men tend to focus on more neutral topics and avoid discussing personal

or sensitive issues (Lakoff 1973; Coates 2016). Below are the examples of hedges used by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris:

Excerpt 1. Donald Trump's Hedges

(104) DT : *And this will be one of the greatest mistakes in history for them to allow -- and I **think** they **probably** did it because they think they're going to get votes.*

In this utterance, "*I think*" and "*probably*" are identified as hedges. According to Coates (2016), hedges are expressions that reduce the force or certainty of a statement. The phrase "*I think*" marks the following proposition as the speaker's personal opinion rather than an absolute fact, while "*probably*" indicates that the speaker expresses a degree of uncertainty about the proposition. Both expressions reduce the level of certainty of the statement and therefore are categorized as hedges.

Excerpt 2. Kamala Harris's Hedges

(47) KH : *And when we listen to this kind of rhetoric, when the issues that affect the American people are not being addressed, I **think** the choice is clear in this election.*

In this utterance, "*I think*" is identified as a hedge. According to Coates (2016), hedges are expressions that reduce the force or certainty of a statement. The phrase "*I think*" presents the following proposition as the speaker's personal opinion rather than as an absolute fact. As a result, the statement is expressed with a lower degree of certainty, which makes "*I think*" a hedge.

Command and Directives

Commands and directives are forms of communication in which a speaker attempts to get another person to perform an action, such as giving instructions or

making suggestions (Coates 2016). Men frequently use aggravated directives, which are stronger and more direct forms, while women use mitigated directives, which are softer and more polite. Below are examples of commands and directives used by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris.

Excerpt 3. Donald Trump's Command and Directives

(135) DT : *Come on **down to the office**, **let's** sign a bill.*

In this utterance, "*Come on down to the office*" and "*let's sign a bill*" are identified as commands and directives. According to Coates (2016), commands and directives are expressions used to direct or encourage someone to perform an action. The imperative "*Come on down to the office*" directly instructs the hearer to come to the office, while "*let's sign a bill*" is a mitigated directive that proposes a joint action involving both the speaker and the hearer. Since both expressions are intended to direct action, they are categorized as commands and directives.

Excerpt 4. Kamala Harris's Command and Directives

(66) KH : ***Let's** turn the page on this, **let's** not go back, **let's** chart a course for the future and **not** go backwards to the past.*

In this utterance, "*Let's turn the page on this,*" "*let's not go back,*" and "*let's chart a course for the future*" are identified as commands and directives. According to Coates (2016), commands and directives are expressions used to direct or encourage someone to perform an action. The repeated use of "*let's*" functions as a mitigated directive, reducing the force of the directive by expressing the action as a shared activity between the speaker and the audience. Therefore, these expressions are categorized as commands and directives.

Questions

Questions are important linguistic forms because this form gives speakers the power to ask for a response from others (Coates 2016, p. 94). Questions are often associated with a cooperative conversational style, which is linked to features of women's speech (Coates 2016). Below are the examples of questions used by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris:

Excerpt 5. Donald Trump's Questions

(124) DT : *I ask, what about all the people that are pouring into our country and killing people?*

In this utterance, "*What about all the people that are pouring into our country and killing people?*" is identified as a question. According to Coates (2016), questions are linguistic forms used to ask for a response from others. The utterance is expressed in an interrogative form beginning with "*what,*" indicating that the speaker is asking a question. Therefore, it is categorized as a question.

Excerpt 6. Kamala Harris's Questions

(18) KH : *He invited trade wars, you wanna talk about his deal with China?*

In this utterance, "*You wanna talk about his deal with China?*" is identified as a question. According to Coates (2016), questions are linguistic forms used to ask for a response from others. The utterance is expressed in an interrogative form, inviting a response from the hearer. Therefore, it is categorized as a question.

Compliments

Compliments function as positive politeness strategies because they attend to the addressee's positive face needs (Coates, 2016, p. 100). Women tend to use compliments more frequently than men (Coates 2016). Below are the examples of compliments used by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris:

Excerpt 7. Donald Trump's Compliments

(33)DT : *And he taught her well.*

In this utterance, "*he taught her well*" is identified as a compliment. According to Coates (2016), compliments are positive expressions that attend to the addressee's positive face needs by expressing praise or approval. The expression "*taught her well*" conveys approval of a person's ability or performance. Therefore, it is categorized as a compliment.

Excerpt 8. Kamala Harris's Compliments

(112) KH : *And I am proud that as vice president over the last four years, we have invested a trillion dollars in a clean energy economy while we have also increased domestic gas production to historic levels.*

In this utterance, "*I am proud*" is identified as a compliment. According to Coates (2016), compliments are positive expressions that show praise or approval. The expression is followed by "*we have invested a trillion dollars in a clean energy economy*" and "*we have also increased domestic gas production to historic levels,*" which describe achievements that receive a positive evaluation. Therefore, the utterance is categorized as a compliment.

Swearing and Taboo Language

Swearing and taboo language refer to the use of offensive, rude, or socially restricted words and expressions in conversation (Coates, 2016, p. 97). These include curse words, expletives, and other forms of language considered inappropriate or unacceptable in certain social contexts. Swearing and taboo language are often associated with masculinity, power, and toughness in conversational practice (Lakoff 1973; Alhammadi, Rabab'ah, and Alghazo 2024). Below are the examples of swearing and taboo language used by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris:

Excerpt 9. Donald Trump's Swearing and Taboo Language

(120) DT : *Now she wants to do transgender operations on **illegal aliens** that are in prison, this is a **radical left liberal** that would do this.*

In this utterance, "*illegal aliens*" is identified as swearing and taboo language. According to Coates (2016), swearing and taboo language consists of words or expressions that are considered offensive, socially inappropriate, or taboo in a particular context. The expression "*illegal aliens*" refers to undocumented immigrants using language that is widely regarded as offensive and stigmatizing. Therefore, it is categorized as swearing and taboo language.

Excerpt 10. Kamala Harris's Swearing and Taboo Language

(74) KH : *It is well known that he said of Putin that he can do **whatever the hell** he wants and go into Ukraine.*

In this utterance, "*the hell*" is identified as swearing and taboo language. According to Coates (2016), swearing and taboo language includes words or expressions that are considered socially inappropriate or offensive. The expression "*the hell*" contains a mild

swear word that adds emphasis to the statement. Therefore, it is categorized as swearing and taboo language.

Minimal Response

Minimal response are short utterances such as ‘*yeah*’, ‘*right*’, ‘*uh-huh*’, and ‘*mhm*’ function as backchannels (Coates 2016). Women generally tend to use minimal responses to show support for the current speaker (Mishra 2020). Below are the examples of minimal response used by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris:

Excerpt 11. Donald Trump’s Minimal Response

(87) DT : *Yeah, thank you.*

In this utterance, “*Yeah*” is identified as a minimal response. According to Coates (2016), minimal responses are short utterances, such as *yeah*, *right*, *uh-huh*, and *mhm*, that function as backchannels. The expression “*Yeah*” is a brief response that acknowledges the other person’s utterance. Therefore, it is categorized as a minimal response.

Excerpt 12. Kamala Harris’s Minimal Response

(44) KH : *Right.*

In this utterance, “*Right*” is identified as a minimal response. According to Coates (2016), minimal responses are short utterances that function as backchannels. The expression “*Right*” is a brief response used to acknowledge the other person’s utterance. Therefore, it is categorized as a minimal response.

Differences of Linguistic Features

Based on the analysis, this study found one feature differed between Trump and Harris: tag questions. The details of the frequency differences are presented in Table 1. Table 1 shows that Donald Trump used tag questions twice in his utterances, while Kamala Harris did not use any tag questions during the debate. The details of the differences between the two candidates are presented in the following sections.

Tag Questions

Tag questions are form such as *"isn't it?"*, *"wasn't it?"*, or *"right?"* and *"okay?"*, which are generally considered to be used slightly more by women rather than by men (Coates 2016). Tag questions are often used to seek confirmation, verification, information, or engagement from the listener. Below is the example of tag questions used by Donald Trump:

Excerpt 1. Donald Trump's Tag Questions

(108) DT : *And everybody's laughing at it, okay?*

In this utterance, "okay?" is identified as a tag question. According to Coates (2016), tag questions are expressions such as *isn't it?*, *wasn't it?*, *right?*, and *okay?* that are used to seek confirmation, verification, or engagement from the listener. The tag *"okay?"* is attached to the end of the statement, signaling that the speaker invites a response or acknowledgment from the hearer. Therefore, *"okay?"* is categorized as a tag question.

Discussion

The study show that Donald Trump and Kamala Harris used similar types of linguistic features during the 2024 U.S. Presidential Debate. The result show that among the seven types of linguistic features identified in this study, six are found to be used by

both candidates: minimal responses, hedges, questions, command and directives, compliments, as well as swearing and taboo language. Both Donald Trump and Kamala Harris are used minimal responses during the 2024 U.S. Presidential Debate. However, Donald Trump used this feature more frequently than Kamala Harris. According to Coates (2016), minimal responses are traditionally associated with women's language because they are used to avoid interrupting the speaker while showing support and acknowledgement as a listener. Donald Trump frequently used minimal responses for strategic communicative purposes during the political debate. Trump used them to acknowledge the moderator's questions before presenting his responses and to signal that he was engaged in the discussion. This finding aligns with Hassan (2023), who suggested that the use of minimal responses is influenced by the speaker's communicative goals and the context of the interaction rather than by gender.

According to Coates (2016), hedges are commonly used to soften statements and make them sound less direct. Therefore, hedges are often associated with women since they are linked to uncertainty and indirectness. However, in this study, hedges became the most dominant feature used by Donald Trump compared to Kamala Harris during the debate. Trump strategically used hedges to make his statements sound softer and less direct, avoiding strong or definitive claims that could lead to criticism from the audience. This finding aligns with Dai and Wang (2021) and Korostenskienė and Žebelytė (2024), who found that male politicians frequently use hedges to soften their speech and avoid making assertions that might attract criticism.

Questions also became the second most dominant feature used by Donald Trump. According to Coates (2016), women tend to use more questions than men because they are often associated with a lack of authority and power. However, in this study, Trump constantly used questions to control the flow of conversation, challenge his opponent,

and emphasize his arguments, making him appear more dominant, assertive, and persuasive during the debate (Ziembicki 2025). This finding aligns with Hassan (2023), who argues that debate candidates must appear assertive and directive, but not overly aggressive. Therefore, the use of questions in political debates is more closely related to context and topic than to gender.

In addition, compliments became another feature frequently used by Donald Trump. Although compliments are often associated with women's language because they function as positive politeness strategies (Coates 2016), Trump used them strategically to emphasize his achievements and credibility, as well as to build a positive image with the audience (Dalimunte 2022). Hence, compliments in political debates may function not only as a politeness strategy but also as a persuasive tool to gain audience trust and support (Cameron and Shaw 2016).

Swearing and taboo language also became another feature frequently used by Donald Trump. This feature is commonly associated with masculine speech because it includes curse words and other socially inappropriate expressions (Coates 2016; Stapleton et al. 2022). In this study, Trump frequently used swearing and taboo language to assert his authority and attract audience attention, helping him appear more assertive and direct in delivering his opinions (Stapleton et al. 2022).

In contrast, the most frequent linguistic feature used by Kamala Harris was command and directives. According to Coates (2016), men are more likely to use aggravated directives, whereas women tend to use mitigated directives. However, Harris frequently used aggravated directives when addressing or criticizing Trump to emphasize her authority and strengthen her arguments (Hinck et al. 2024). In contrast, when addressing the audience or persuading voters, she tended to use mitigated directives to remain approachable and empathetic. These findings are consistent with

Aydyralieva et al. (2025) and Akhmetzyanov et al. (2023), who highlight that women politicians often combine feminine and masculine linguistic features. This strategy helps Harris demonstrate authority without being perceived as either too soft or too aggressive (Cameron and Shaw 2016).

Interestingly, although tag questions are commonly associated with women's language, Kamala Harris did not use this feature during the debate, whereas Donald Trump used it twice. Harris may have avoided tag questions because the debate required her to appear authoritative when delivering arguments against her opponent. In contrast, Trump used tag questions as an interactional strategy to engage the audience. These findings are similar to those reported by Sadouk (2022) and Shaukat, Rashid, and Shahid (2025), who found that female speakers tend to avoid tag questions to appear more direct and assertive, whereas male speakers use them as a rhetorical device to encourage audience engagement.

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that both Donald Trump and Kamala Harris used similar types of linguistic features during the 2024 U.S. Presidential Debate. Among the seven types of linguistic features identified in this study, six were found to be used by both candidates: minimal responses, hedges, questions, commands and directives, compliments, as well as swearing and taboo language. However, the two candidates differed in only one linguistic feature. Trump used tag questions, whereas no tag questions were found in Harris's speech.

The findings indicate that Donald Trump used hedges, questions, compliments, and swearing and taboo language as communicative strategies to soften his claims, challenge his opponent, persuade the audience, and strengthen his arguments during the

debate. Meanwhile, Kamala Harris frequently used commands and directives to demonstrate authority while maintaining an approachable and empathetic image. Although tag questions are commonly associated with women's language, Kamala Harris did not use this feature during the debate, whereas Donald Trump used it as an interactional strategy to engage the audience.

The findings of this study indicate that linguistic features cannot be strictly classified based on gender. The debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris demonstrates that features traditionally associated with women's language were more frequently used by Trump than by Harris. This suggests that the use of linguistic features in political debates is influenced more by context, communicative purposes, and debate strategies than by gender itself. Therefore, the relationship between gender and linguistic features should be reconsidered by focusing on the context and function of language use. In addition, the findings show that politicians, regardless of gender, tend to adapt and balance their linguistic features according to the demands of the political debate context.

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