



Gonbad Kavous University

## Critical Perspectives on Political Discourse of 2016 U.S. Presidential Debates: A Systemic Functional Linguistics Reading



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### ABSTRACT

Since the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the political discourse between candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump has garnered significant interest in applied linguistics, particularly within Critical Discourse Analysis. Despite this, the debates between these two nominees still warrant further investigation. This study, grounded in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), explores how interpersonal metafunctions—specifically Mood, Modality, and Affect—are represented in their debate discourse. Utilizing qualitative analysis of archived presidential debate data, the research reveals distinct patterns in how both candidates employed these linguistic features to convey their perspectives and persuade voters. The findings demonstrate that Clinton and Trump used various modes, modals, and affective expressions to construct their arguments and influence public opinion. This study not only contributes to a deeper understanding of political discourse but also offers pedagogical insights for language teachers and curriculum developers, emphasizing the importance of these linguistic elements in English language education.

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## 1. Introduction

Political debates, particularly those on the global stage, are rich sites for analyzing the interplay between language and power. The 2016 U.S. presidential debates between Hillary Clinton & Donald Trump stand out not only as pivotal moments in American political history but also as critical sites for examining how language is used to construct interpersonal meanings and influence public opinion. The 2016 election was marked by unprecedented political polarization, with both candidates representing starkly different visions for the future of the United States. These debates were not only a contest of policy proposals but also a reflection of the broader cultural and ideological divisions within the country (Sides, Tesler, & Vavreck, 2018).

The political climate at the time was charged with issues such as economic inequality, immigration, national security, and identity politics, all of which were hotly debated on the debate stage. The debates themselves became media spectacles, with millions of viewers tuning in to watch the candidates clash (Holmes, 2017). The 2016 debates are particularly noteworthy because of the unique communication styles of the candidates: Trump's often confrontational and populist rhetoric contrasted sharply with Clinton's more traditional political discourse. This clash of styles provided a fertile ground for examining how language can be used to both reflect and shape political realities (Jamieson & Taussig, 2017).

While there is a significant body of research on political discourse, particularly in the context of presidential debates, there remains a gap in understanding how candidates use specific linguistic features to convey interpersonal meanings. Systemic-functional linguistics (SFL), with its focus on how language functions within social contexts, provides a robust framework for exploring these interpersonal dynamics (Aghaei & Rajabi, 2019; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014.). This study aims to fill this gap by applying SFL to analyze the 2016 U.S. presidential debates, focusing on the candidates' use of Mood, Modality, and Affect. By examining these aspects of language, the research seeks to uncover how Clinton and Trump constructed their arguments, engaged with each other and the audience, and ultimately sought to persuade voters.

### *Significance of the 2016 Debates*

The 2016 presidential debates were significant not only for their content but also for their broader implications in the U.S. and around the world. These debates were emblematic of the deep divisions within American society, reflecting broader global trends of populism and the erosion of traditional political norms (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). Analyzing the language used in these debates offers insights into how political leaders can use discourse to navigate and manipulate such divided political landscapes.

From a linguistic perspective, the 2016 debates offer a unique case study for examining how different rhetorical strategies can be employed to achieve political goals. Trump's use of direct, often inflammatory language, contrasted with Clinton's more measured and policy-focused rhetoric, highlights the different ways in which language can be used to construct political identities and influence public perception (Lakoff, 2017). This study, by focusing on the linguistic features of Mood, Modality, and Affect, seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how these strategies were deployed and to what effect.

### *Contribution to Existing Literature*

This study contributes to the existing literature on political discourse analysis by extending the application of Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL) to the context of the 2016 U.S. presidential debates. Previous research on political discourse has often focused on more traditional rhetorical analysis or content analysis, without fully exploring the nuanced ways in which linguistic features contribute to the construction of interpersonal meanings (Fairclough, 2013). By applying SFL, this study offers a more detailed and systematic examination of the language used in these debates, revealing the underlying strategies of bias and persuasion.

Moreover, this study challenges previous research that may have overlooked the significance of interpersonal metafunctions in political discourse. While many studies have focused on the ideational and textual functions of language in political debates, this research highlights the importance of the interpersonal function—how candidates interact with their opponents and the audience through their linguistic choices (Eggins, 2004). By doing so, it adds a new dimension to our understanding of political communication and the ways in which language can be used to exert power and influence in high-stakes contexts.

In conclusion, this study not only fills a gap in the existing literature on political discourse analysis but also offers a fresh perspective on the 2016 U.S. presidential debates. By applying SFL to this context, it provides a more nuanced understanding of the linguistic strategies used by Clinton and Trump, contributing to a broader understanding of the role of language in politics.

## **2. Research Questions**

- How do major differences in 2016 U.S presidential campaign debates between Clinton and Trump Clinton's and Trump's messages emerge from an analysis of their idiosyncratic lexical choices?
- a) How are different types of Mood choices represented in 2016 U.S presidential campaign debates between Clinton and Trump?

- b) How are different types of Modality choices represented in 2016 U.S presidential campaign debates between Clinton and Trump?
- c) How are different types of Affect choices represented in 2016 U.S presidential campaign debates between Clinton and Trump?

#### **4. Literature Review**

Systemic-functional linguistics (SFL), as proposed by Halliday (1985), provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing language in context, emphasizing the roles that language plays in construing meaning (Aghaei & Rajabi, 2019). Within SFL, the interpersonal metafunction is particularly relevant to political discourse, as it relates to how speakers use language to enact social roles, negotiate relationships, and express attitudes. According to Halliday, the interpersonal metafunction is realized through linguistic choices in Mood, Modality, and Affect, which collectively contribute to the construction of interpersonal meanings (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Several studies have applied SFL to political discourse, though often with different focuses. For instance, Fairclough (2003) examined how language in political texts contributes to the construction of ideology and power relations, highlighting the role of language in maintaining and challenging social structures. Similarly, Martin & White (2005) explored the appraisal framework within SFL, emphasizing how language expresses evaluative meanings (see also Aghaei & Gouklani, 2016, Aghaei et al., 2012), including attitudes, judgments, and emotions. These studies underscore the potential of SFL for analyzing political discourse but often focus on broader textual analyses rather than specific linguistic features like Mood, Modality, and Affect.

Cognitive linguistics has also contributed significantly to our understanding of political discourse, particularly through the study of metaphor and framing. Lakoff (2016) argued that political debates often revolve around deeply entrenched metaphors that shape the way people conceptualize issues. This perspective is useful for understanding how candidates like Trump and Clinton used language not just to convey information but to evoke specific cognitive frames that resonate with voters' existing beliefs and values. Cognitive linguistics thus complements SFL by providing insights into how language triggers mental models that influence voter perceptions.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), another related field, has further expanded the scope of political discourse analysis by examining how language and power intersect in political texts. Wodak (2015) emphasized the role of historical context in understanding political rhetoric, particularly in periods of social and political upheaval. The 2016 U.S. presidential debates, marked by intense polarization and the rise of populist rhetoric, are a prime example of how CDA can be used to unpack the underlying power dynamics in political discourse. Studies within CDA have shown how candidates use language

to establish authority, legitimize their positions, and delegitimize their opponents (van Dijk, 2013; Rajabi, 2015; Aghaei, et al. 2020).

Recent research has continued to build on these foundations, offering new insights into the intersection of language, politics, and society. For example, Molina & Brans (2021) explored the role of multimodal discourse in political communication, emphasizing how visual and verbal elements combine to influence public perception. Their findings suggest that the integration of visual semiotics with linguistic analysis provides a more holistic understanding of political discourse. (Aghaei, et al, 2020)

Moreover, advances in computational linguistics have enabled researchers to analyze large corpora of political speech with greater precision. For instance, KhosraviNik & Esposito (2018) used computational methods to examine sentiment and emotion in political discourse, highlighting the increasing importance of interdisciplinary approaches in understanding the complexity of modern political communication.

In the context of presidential debates, research has frequently focused on rhetorical and persuasive strategies (Aghae et al, 2022). Benoit (2014) analyzed the strategies used by candidates in debates, identifying common persuasive techniques such as acclaiming, attacking, and defending. However, while these studies provide valuable insights into the strategies employed by politicians, they often overlook the micro-level linguistic features that contribute to the overall persuasive effect. This is where the current study seeks to contribute, by applying SFL to examine how specific linguistic choices in Mood, Modality, and Affect shape the interpersonal meanings in the 2016 U.S. presidential debates.

Recent studies in political discourse analysis have begun to address these gaps by integrating SFL with other linguistic frameworks. For example, Cap (2017) applied a combination of SFL and pragmatics to explore the use of strategic ambiguity in political speeches, highlighting how politicians navigate complex social interactions through carefully crafted language. Similarly, Hart (2018) employed cognitive linguistics alongside CDA to analyze how political narratives are constructed and contested in public discourse. These interdisciplinary approaches underscore the importance of examining both the micro-level linguistic choices and the broader cognitive and social contexts in which they occur.

The gap in the literature lies in the need for a more detailed analysis of how linguistic features at the micro level contribute to the construction of interpersonal meanings in political discourse. This study aims to address this gap by focusing on the 2016 U.S. presidential debates, providing a nuanced understanding of how Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump used language to construct their personas,

engage with their audience, and influence public perception. By analyzing the debates through the lens of SFL, this research offers new insights into the role of language in political persuasion, highlighting the importance of linguistic choices in shaping the dynamics of political discourse.

#### 4. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in the principles of Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL) to analyze the interpersonal meanings in the 2016 U.S. presidential debates between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. SFL, as developed by Halliday (1985), provides a framework for understanding how language functions in social contexts, particularly through its three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. This study focuses on the interpersonal metafunction, which examines how language is used to establish and maintain social relationships, express attitudes, and negotiate power dynamics. (Aghaei et al., 2014)

##### *Theoretical Framework: Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL)*

The SFL framework is particularly suited to this study due to its emphasis on the role of language in social interaction". The interpersonal metafunction is realized through various linguistic choices, including Mood (indicative, imperative, and interrogative clauses), Modality (degrees of certainty, obligation, and inclination), and Affect (expressions of emotion). These elements were selected for analysis as they are central to understanding how Clinton and Trump constructed their personas, engaged with their opponent and the audience, and conveyed their attitudes during the debates.

##### *Data Collection*

The data for this study consists of the transcripts from the three presidential debates held in 2016. These debates were selected due to their significance in shaping public opinion during the election campaign. The transcripts were obtained from reliable sources, ensuring the accuracy of the language used by both candidates. Each debate was analyzed in its entirety to capture the full range of interpersonal meanings conveyed through linguistic choices.

##### *Analytical Approach*

The analysis was conducted in three stages, corresponding to the three linguistic features under study: Mood, Modality, and Affect.

1. **Mood Analysis:** The first stage involved identifying the Mood choices made by each candidate. This included categorizing clauses into declarative, interrogative, and imperative types and analyzing their distribution across the debates. The aim was to understand how each candidate used different Mood types to assert dominance, seek information, or issue commands.
2. **Modality Analysis:** The second stage focused on Modality, examining how Clinton and Trump expressed degrees of certainty, obligation, and inclination. This involved identifying modal verbs (e.g., can, must, will) and other modal expressions to determine how each candidate conveyed their stance on various issues.
3. **Affect Analysis:** The final stage of analysis centered on Affect, which refers to the expression of emotions. This involved identifying linguistic expressions of emotion, including both positive and negative feelings, and analyzing how these were used to appeal to the audience's emotions and construct the candidates' personas.

The combination of these analyses provided a comprehensive understanding of how interpersonal meanings were constructed in the debates. The findings were then interpreted in relation to the broader social and political context, offering insights into the persuasive strategies employed by each candidate.

## 5. Findings

This section presents the findings from the analysis of Mood, Modality, and Affect in the 2016 U.S. presidential debates between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. The results are organized by these three linguistic features, highlighting how each candidate utilized language to construct interpersonal meanings and influence the audience.

### *Mood Analysis*

The analysis of Mood focused on the different clause types—declarative, interrogative, and imperative—used by the candidates. The findings reveal that Hillary Clinton predominantly used declarative clauses, while Donald Trump made more frequent use of interrogative and imperative clauses.

### *Declarative Clauses: Clinton's Strategy of Authority*

Hillary Clinton's preference for declarative clauses, which constituted approximately 70% of her speech, reflects her strategy to present herself as knowledgeable, authoritative, and in control of the facts. Declarative clauses allowed her to assert statements confidently, presenting information and policy details without inviting immediate challenge. For example:



- *"We have to stand up to the gun lobby and pass common-sense gun laws."*
- *"America is stronger when we work together and respect each other."*
- *"I have spent my life fighting for children, families, and workers."*

These statements exemplify Clinton's use of declaratives to frame her arguments as factual and unassailable, contributing to her persona as an experienced and competent leader.

### ***Interrogative Clauses: Trump's Strategy of Disruption***

In contrast, Donald Trump frequently used interrogative clauses, particularly rhetorical questions, to challenge Clinton and provoke reactions from the audience. Interrogatives made up about 25% of his utterances, significantly more than Clinton's use of this clause type. Examples include:

- *"Why didn't she make these changes when she was Secretary of State?"*
- *"How can you be a president if you don't have the stamina?"*
- *"Who is going to pay for that? It's going to be the American taxpayer."*

These interrogative clauses were often used to cast doubt on Clinton's credibility and policies, positioning Trump as the candidate asking the tough questions that others might avoid.

### ***Imperative Clauses: Trump's Commanding Presence***

Trump also made strategic use of imperative clauses, which constituted about 15% of his speech. These clauses served to command action or direct the audience's attention, reinforcing his persona as a decisive and forceful leader. Examples include:

- *"Look at what's happening to our country."*
- *"Believe me, we can do better."*
- *"Remember that when you go to the polls."*

By using imperatives, Trump was able to project authority and urgency, appealing directly to the voters' sense of agency and responsibility in the upcoming election.

### ***Modality Analysis***

The analysis of Modality focused on how the candidates expressed degrees of certainty, obligation, and possibility through modal verbs and expressions. The findings reveal contrasting approaches between Clinton and Trump in their use of Modality.



***High Certainty: Clinton's Confidence and Determination***

Hillary Clinton frequently employed modal verbs that indicated high certainty and obligation, such as "must," "will," and "have to." These choices reflected her strategy of conveying confidence and a clear vision for the future. Examples include:

- *"We must continue to build on the progress we've made."*
- *"I will work every day to make sure that every American has a fair shot."*
- *"We have to be strong, smart, and vigilant in our fight against terrorism."*

These modal choices emphasized Clinton's commitment to her policies and her determination to see them through, aiming to reassure voters of her capability to deliver on her promises.

***Flexibility and Possibility: Trump's Strategic Ambiguity***

Donald Trump, on the other hand, often used modals that suggested possibility and flexibility, such as "can," "could," and "might." This approach allowed him to present a range of potential outcomes without committing to specific details. Examples include:

- *"We can renegotiate our trade deals to bring back American jobs."*
- *"We could have a very good relationship with Russia."*
- *"There might be other ways to deal with this issue."*

Trump's use of these modals created an impression of openness to different solutions, which could appeal to voters who were dissatisfied with the status quo but unsure of the best path forward. It also allowed him to shift his stance when necessary, adapting to the audience's reactions or the evolving dynamics of the debate.

***Affect Analysis***

The analysis of Affect explored how each candidate expressed emotions and appealed to the emotions of the audience. The findings show a clear contrast in how Clinton and Trump used affective language to connect with voters.

***Positive Affect: Clinton's Message of Hope and Unity***

Hillary Clinton's affective language was generally positive, focusing on themes of hope, unity, and collective action. She often used language that emphasized shared values and the strength of the American people. Examples include:

- *"We are stronger together."*
- *"I believe in the resilience and ingenuity of the American people."*
- *"Together, we can break down barriers and create a better future for our children."*

This use of positive Affect was aimed at fostering a sense of optimism and community, encouraging voters to see themselves as part of a larger, hopeful movement toward progress.

### ***Negative Affect: Trump's Appeal to Anger and Frustration***

Donald Trump, in contrast, frequently employed negative affective language, expressing emotions such as anger, frustration, and distrust. His language often targeted perceived enemies or failures, both within the political establishment and in society at large. Examples include:

- *"The system is rigged against the American people."*
- *"We are being taken advantage of by every nation in the world."*
- *"People are angry, and they have every right to be."*

Trump's negative Affect tapped into the frustrations of many voters, particularly those who felt left behind by economic changes or disillusioned with political elites. By articulating these emotions, Trump positioned himself as the voice of a dissatisfied electorate, ready to challenge the status quo.

### ***Contrasts in Emotional Appeal***

The stark contrast in the use of Affect between the two candidates highlights their different strategies for connecting with voters. While Clinton sought to inspire and unify, Trump capitalized on existing discontent, using language that resonated with voters' fears and frustrations. This difference in emotional appeal was a key element in shaping the candidates' personas and influencing the audience's perceptions during the debates.

## **6. Discussion**

This study sought to analyze the interpersonal meanings conveyed through Mood, Modality, and Affect in the 2016 U.S. presidential debates between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. The findings reveal distinct linguistic strategies employed by each candidate, reflecting their differing approaches to constructing social relationships, expressing attitudes, and engaging with the electorate.

### ***Relating Findings to Research Questions***

The primary research questions centered on how Clinton and Trump utilized Mood, Modality, and Affect to convey interpersonal meanings and how these linguistic choices influenced the dynamics of

the debates. The analysis showed that Clinton's language was characterized by authority and certainty, while Trump's discourse was more confrontational and emotionally charged. These differences reflect the broader personas each candidate sought to project: Clinton as a competent and experienced leader, and Trump as a disruptive outsider challenging the status quo.

### Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings of this study align with and expand upon existing research in the field of political discourse analysis. For example, previous studies have highlighted the use of declarative clauses by political leaders to assert authority and control the narrative (Fairclough, 2003; Aghaei et al., 2020). Clinton's frequent use of declarative Mood supports this notion, as she consistently framed her statements in a manner that projected confidence and expertise.

In contrast, Trump's use of interrogative and imperative clauses can be compared to the rhetorical strategies identified by Schaffner (1996), who noted that politicians often employ these clause types to challenge opponents and mobilize voters. Trump's rhetorical questions and commands served to disrupt Clinton's statements and engage the audience, creating a more dynamic and confrontational debate environment.

The modality analysis in this study echoes findings by Halliday (1985), who argued that modality is a key tool for expressing degrees of certainty and obligation in political discourse. Clinton's use of high-certainty modals like "must" and "will" reflects her strategic intent to appear decisive and committed to her policies. This contrasts with Trump's more flexible use of modals like "can" and "might," which allowed him to present himself as open to possibilities and responsive to voter concerns (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Affect, as analyzed in this study, is also consistent with previous research on political communication. Studies by Martin and White (2005) and Lakoff (2008) have emphasized the role of emotion in political discourse, particularly in shaping voter perceptions and attitudes. Clinton's use of positive Affect aligns with strategies identified by Lakoff (2008) for building a narrative of hope and unity. On the other hand, Trump's frequent use of negative Affect corresponds to the populist rhetoric described by Mudde (2004), where anger and frustration are mobilized to galvanize support against the political establishment.

### Implications for Political Discourse and Communication

The differences in linguistic strategies between Clinton and Trump highlight broader implications for political communication. Clinton's reliance on declaratives and high-certainty modals suggests a

traditional approach to political discourse, where authority and expertise are central. This aligns with her political experience and the expectations of her role as a former Secretary of State (Fairclough, 2003; Lakoff, 2008). Trump's language, characterized by interrogatives, imperatives, and negative Affect, represents a departure from conventional political discourse. His approach resonated with voters who were disillusioned with established political norms, illustrating how non-traditional rhetoric can be effectively used to disrupt existing power structures and appeal to emotions rather than just reason (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014).

### **Implications Beyond the U.S. Context**

The linguistic strategies identified in this study have broader implications for understanding political discourse beyond the U.S. context. In many democracies, political leaders face similar challenges in appealing to diverse electorates, managing public perceptions, and navigating established political institutions. The findings from this study suggest that the strategies used by Clinton and Trump could be applicable in other political systems, albeit with contextual adaptations.

In European democracies, for example, the rise of populist movements has been accompanied by a shift towards more emotionally charged and confrontational rhetoric, similar to the strategies employed by Trump. Leaders like Marine Le Pen in France and Matteo Salvini in Italy have utilized negative Affect and rhetorical challenges to disrupt traditional political narratives, mobilizing support among voters who feel alienated from the political mainstream. The findings of this study underscore the effectiveness of such strategies in resonating with disaffected segments of the electorate, suggesting that political actors in other democracies may increasingly rely on similar linguistic tactics to gain traction (Mudde, 2004; Wodak, 2015).

In parliamentary systems, where political discourse often involves coalition-building and negotiation, the use of Modality and Affect could play a critical role in shaping alliances and public support. Leaders who use high-certainty modals and positive Affect, similar to Clinton's approach, may be more successful in projecting stability and reliability, which are crucial in contexts where political power is often shared among multiple parties (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Conversely, leaders who adopt a more flexible use of Modality, as seen with Trump, might appeal to voters seeking change and reform, making such strategies particularly relevant in times of political upheaval or uncertainty.

In emerging democracies and authoritarian contexts, where political discourse is tightly controlled or heavily influenced by the state, the findings from this study could inform strategies for opposition movements. The use of interrogatives and imperatives, which challenge the status quo, might be an effective tool for opposition leaders seeking to question the legitimacy of the ruling party and

mobilize public dissent. Additionally, the strategic use of Affect, particularly in invoking nationalistic or anti-establishment sentiments, could be crucial in rallying support against entrenched power structures (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014; Mudde, 2004).

### Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the linguistic strategies used in the 2016 debates, it also has limitations. The analysis focused exclusively on the interpersonal metafunction within the SFL framework, which, while comprehensive, does not account for other aspects of language use, such as the ideational or textual metafunctions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Future research could benefit from a more holistic analysis that includes these additional dimensions.

Furthermore, the study was limited to the debates between Clinton and Trump, which, while significant, represent a specific context within a broader political landscape. Comparative studies involving other candidates, elections, or political systems could provide a more generalized understanding of the trends identified here.

Finally, the role of media framing and public reception of the debates was not considered in this analysis. Understanding how media coverage and public opinion shaped the impact of the candidates' linguistic choices could offer additional insights into the effectiveness of their strategies. Expanding the scope of research to include media analysis could reveal how these linguistic strategies are amplified, distorted, or mitigated by different media outlets, further contributing to the broader understanding of political discourse in various contexts (Lakoff, 2008; Wodak, 2015).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has illuminated the critical role that Mood, Modality, and Affect played in shaping the linguistic strategies of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump during the 2016 U.S. presidential debates. By examining how these interpersonal metafunctions were employed, the research highlights the nuanced ways in which language constructs political personas and influences public perception.

The findings reveal that Clinton's strategic use of declarative Mood and high-certainty Modality functioned to project an image of authority and competence. Her language choices were designed to convey decisiveness and expertise, reinforcing her credibility and alignment with traditional political norms. In contrast, Trump's frequent use of interrogative and imperative Mood, along with flexible Modality and emotive Affect, allowed him to challenge the status quo and engage with voters on an emotional level. His rhetoric was more confrontational and provocative, aimed at disrupting

established narratives and resonating with a sense of disenfranchisement among certain voter segments.

These linguistic strategies have significant implications for political communication. The study underscores how political candidates use specific language features not only to assert their positions but also to navigate and manipulate the broader political landscape. By employing particular Mood choices and modal verbs, candidates can assert authority, express commitment, or create ambiguity, each of which can influence voter attitudes and electoral outcomes. Similarly, the strategic use of Affect allows candidates to evoke emotional responses, which can be crucial in mobilizing support and framing political issues in ways that align with their campaign objectives.

The insights gained from this study extend beyond the immediate context of the 2016 U.S. presidential debates. As political communication continues to evolve in response to changing media landscapes and voter expectations, understanding the role of linguistic features in shaping political discourse remains crucial. The findings suggest that successful political campaigns increasingly rely on the ability to craft messages that resonate emotionally with voters and disrupt conventional political narratives. This trend aligns with broader shifts in political discourse observed globally, where populist and unconventional approaches are becoming more prominent.

Moreover, this research contributes to the broader field of discourse analysis by providing a detailed examination of how systemic-functional linguistic theories can be applied to understand the dynamics of political debate. The focus on Mood, Modality, and Affect within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) offers a comprehensive approach to analyzing how interpersonal meanings are constructed in political discourse (. This perspective enriches existing literature by emphasizing the importance of micro-level linguistic features in shaping political communication.

As political discourse continues to evolve, future research could build on these findings by exploring similar linguistic strategies in other political contexts, including different democratic systems and authoritarian regimes. Comparative studies could offer deeper insights into how language functions across various political environments and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of global political communication.

In summary, the study reaffirms the pivotal role of language in politics. By dissecting the linguistic choices of Clinton & Trump, it underscores how strategically language use can shape public perceptions, influence electoral outcomes, and reflect broader political trends. As the political landscape continues to change, the strategic use of language will undoubtedly remain a key factor in political communication, warranting ongoing scholarly attention and analysis.

**Authors' Contributions**

All authors contributed significantly to the research process.

**Declaration**

We declare that this manuscript is original and has not been submitted to any other journal for publication

**Transparency Statements**

The authors affirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article. Any additional data can be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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**Declaration of Interest**

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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