Article

Presupposition in Kamala Harris' Statements in the 2024 United States Presidential Debate

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ABSTRACT

Debate is basically an exchange of opinions on a subject by giving reasons to defend each other's ideas. In the election context, debates are often related to social, political, and economic issues to gain audience votes. The purpose of this study is to explore what presuppositions were used by Harris in the 2024 U.S. presidential debate. The researcher used a qualitative methodology and presented the results descriptively. The results found that there were 16 existential, 45 factive, 8 lexical, 5 structural, 3 non-factive, and 0 counter-factual presuppositions. Based on these findings, the researcher concludes that Harris, in the debate against Trump, used concrete sentences that contain facts. This shows that Harris influenced the audience using assumptions that could not be directly refuted by the voters.

Keywords: *Presupposition, USA, Presidential debate, Kamala Harris.*

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INTRODUCTION

One of the important things in human's life is language. Language can show how someone's meaning. That is why in linguistics, there are studies about meaning. There are two branches of this study, namely semantics and pragmatics. Kroeger (2023) explains that semantics is the study of the literal meaning of a sentence or word, while pragmatics is the study of the aspects that make up a meaning based on the way a sentence or word is used. There are many branches in pragmatics; presupposition is one of them. According to Potts (2015) presupposition is the assumption of information conveyed by the speaker so that the utterance has a certain meaning. The speaker assumes that the information is already known by the listener, therefore, the information is conveyed implicitly. Viebahn (2020) argues that assumptions that are not conveyed explicitly but can still be understood by the listener are called presuppositions. The purpose of presupposition itself is for communication efficiency because there is no need to state information explicitly (Cooper, 2018). So, even though the speaker does not convey all the information directly, the listener can understand it well.

Language used by anyone, including in the political realm. The use of language in politics has a major role in shaping public opinion and views (Rashkin et al., 2017). This is based on the fact that people are influenced by a sentence that is acceptable to their hearts, if the sentence sounds harsh, they tend to ignore it. Therefore, politicians are very careful about what they say. Al-Gublan (2015) shows that politicians adjust the language they use to build a good image. In the politician's environment, it's often to persuading people or policy announcements, if it is wrong to convey something then it is fatal.

One of the agendas of politics is the presidential election—the day when the public chooses one person to become president. The process of electing a president is very long, starting from the campaign and presidential debates, until finally election day. The presidential debate is the most anticipated event by the public before making their final decision. It is a formal event where presidential candidates face each other to convey their

vision and mission, as well as to refute each other's arguments. One of the recent presidential debates was between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump for the 2024 U.S. election.

Kamala Harris, a debate contestant, has worked as a prosecutor and also a vice president of the USA of course this has an impact on the use of language that she uses when dealing with Trump. With a background as a prosecutor, of course he understands how a person represents himself and conveys information through language. Coulthard (2016) argues that the use of language or narrative can influence court decisions. His experience as a vice president also affects his ability to negotiate, form public opinion, and influence people through good communication. This is supported by Sarah & Murana (2018), who states that presupposition is the way in which a person characterizes knowledge of himself, others, and even social circumstances that occur. At the debate held in November 2024, in addition to conveying the vision and mission, he argued with Trump. With several debate themes determined by the moderator, he disagreed with the steps that Trump would take. Harris also questioned Trump's credibility by mentioning several decisions made by Trump as president that were considered wrong during the previous administration.

With so many statements issued, there is, of course, a lot of information received by the audience, both explicitly and implicitly. Harris is a representative of the center-left or progressive Democratic Party, a party that believes the government plays a role in society. Therefore, there are three reasons why the statements issued by Harris during the presidential debate were chosen as the object of this scientific research: first, the research is expected to help readers process the information obtained wisely; second, readers are expected to understand how Harris builds a political image; and third, to explore the use of language to influence the public without direct confrontation.

In the previous research, Elshehry (2018) concluded that presupposition is an important tool in political speech, especially for persuasive purposes. Youssef & Albarakati (2020) emphasizes that presupposition is built by assumptions through linguistic expressions and reinforced by contexts understood by speakers and listeners. Therefore, researcher want to explore how Kamala Harris as one of the candidates affects her electability and how she displays her credibility through what type of presupposition she uses during the debate against trump.

This study aims to analyze the types of presupposition used by Harris in presenting his arguments. This analysis is conducted to reveal the communication strategies employed by a political figure, especially in the context of his candidacy for President of the United States. By examining the types of presuppositions that appear in his political discourse, this research seeks to understand how Harris shapes political narratives, influences public perception, builds his image, and increases his electability in the eyes of the public. This approach is expected to contribute to the study of pragmatics in the political realm, as well as provide insights into how language is used as a tool of persuasion and ideological representation in the context of elections.

Review of Literature

This research was made to classify what types of presupposition exist in the presidential debate United States 2024, and describe what the meaning of the existing presupposition is. Researchers use a pragmatic approach, especially presupposition because in politics, words are very influential, speakers can influence the thoughts of the audience using word games.

Yule (1996) writes that pragmatic is a variety of studies from the branch of linguistics that studies the relationship between meaning and context of use. To be more detailed, pragmatic is the science that explains how an utterance is interpreted by listeners and speakers according to the context of the situation, assumptions, or other things that are conveyed implicitly. In contrast to semantic, the study focuses on the literal meaning that is conveyed explicitly. Grice (1975) argues that pragmatic does not focus on literal meaning, but how speakers and listeners construct further meaning based on context.

There are many scientific concepts in pragmatic, including presupposition, the theory that will be used by researchers to answer existing research questions. Yule (1996) argues that presupposition is an assumption that is considered true by the speaker before delivering a statement. Usually, presupposition is used by the speaker to make the information conveyed

can be understood efficiently and has relevance in the context of communication. Levinson (1983) states that presupposition is an assumption that is considered true in a conversation and becomes a condition for a statement to be accepted. Huang (2007) also argues that an assumption that becomes a basis in the framework of conveyed information, and is fixed even if the form of the sentence is changed, then it is called a presupposition.

Yule divides presupposition into 6 kinds:

Existential Presupposition

It is a type of presupposition that indicates the existential existence of a thing in an utterance, or expresses ownership. The requirement to identify an utterance as containing existential presupposition is the presence of a noun phrase.

Factive Presupposition

Type of presupposition who involves the assumption that a point mentioned in the sentence is an accepted or true fact. In this case, a claim is assumed to be true, even if the speaker does not fully agree with it. The indicators of an utterance can be said to be a factive presupposition are realize, regret, know, aware, glad etc.

Lexical Presupposition

Lexical presuppositions occur due to the use of certain words that inherently assume the presence of pre-known information. Certain words or phrases trigger presuppositions because they carry with them certain assumptions based on their meaning.

Structural Presupposition

According to George Yule refers to a type of presupposition that arises because of the grammatical structure of the sentence or expression. This structure assumes that there is certain information already received or known by the listener, regardless of whether the information is explicitly mentioned in the sentence.

Non-Factive Presupposition

Presupposition occurs when a statement presupposes something that is not true or not necessarily true. It usually appears with verbs like imagine, dream, pretend, hope, or wish. The resulting assumption is hypothetical or unreal.

Counterfactual presupposition

It is a presupposition that occurs when there is a supposition about something but it contradicts the existing facts or reality. It is usually used in conditional sentences that show an outcome that is unlikely to happen because the reality is different.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Creswell (2009) Qualitative research is a method for exploring and understanding social or human problems by developing a detailed and comprehensive understanding. This research emphasizes the use of descriptive language, captures the in-depth perspectives of participants, and conducts studies in a context. The researcher will collect and process data from the Harris' dialog in the 2024 US presidential debates, using George Yule's concept of presupposition as the main theory to explore presupposition in harris' arguments, then present it descriptively to help readers understand the result.

This research uses transcript of United States presidential debate as the main data and use books or journals about pragmatic and presupposition as tool to explore the information inside. First, the researcher watched video "*Trump Vs Harris | Full 2024 Presidential Debate*" on YouTube who uploaded by ThePrint. It is to understand the object to be analyzed, and used kome.ai to make transcript of the video. Last, researcher was sorting and tidying the scipt.

To collect statements, researcher create limitations to choose sentences that relate to public policy and those that are personal. Then, researcher choose sentences who indicates have presupposition at a glance, and move it into table.

After the transcript have scanned fully, next step is analyzing sentences that contain presuppositions one by one. Then, the sentences are classified based on their presupposition type. Then, is to examine the context of the sentence, which involves understanding about political situation in which the statement is made. Last one, a descriptive explanation is needed

to provide and elaborate on the meaning of the sentence, including the presupposition contained, in order to provide a deeper understanding of the sentence's effect on the reader.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

After collecting and analysing kamala Harris' statements during the 2024 presidential debate, researchers have collected 77 data from 6 types of presuppositions. These data are assumptions contained in sentences that are informative, persuasive, and provocative. However, the author only describes 1 data for type of presupposition. For more details, the data will be displayed in table 1.

Table 1. Type of Presupposition

No	Type of Presupposition	Data founding	Sample data
1	Existential	16 data 21%	1. "We reduce our reliance on foreign oil" 2. "So, I'm the only person on this stage who has prosecuted transnational criminal organizations for the trafficking of guns, drugs, and human beings"
2	Factive	45 data 58%	3. "He ended up selling American chips to China to help them improve and modernize their military" 4. "We know that Xi Jin Ping was responsible for lacking and not giving us transparency about the origins of covid"
3	Lexical	8 data 10%	5. "Deny what over and over again are court cases you have" 6. "What I intend to do is built on what we know are the aspirations and the hopes of the American people"
4	Structural	5 data 6%	7. "Why in this election I actually have the endorsement of 200 Republicans who have worked with President Bush" 8. "That is why so many military leaders who you have worked with, have told me you are a disgrace"
5	Non-Factive	3 data 4%	9. "I imagine and have actually a plan to build what I call an opportunity economy" 10. "I think you've heard tonight two very different Visions for our country"

Discussion

Type of Presupposition
Existential

Sample Data 1
"We reduce our reliance on foreign oil" (00:37:26)

The sentence above is Harris' statement to Trump and the audience during the discussion session on energy policy and national security of the United States. He showed off the policy of reducing oil imports during the Biden administration which he considered a success.

Existential presupposition is a presupposition that assumes that an entity or event exists and happens. Thus, the sentence above is an existential presupposition type and reliance is the trigger in this sentence. Based on the data above, it means that the presupposition is that America has a dependency to import and use oil from other countries. By showing that the fact that America has a dependency on oil imports exists and is real, during the Biden administration, Harris as vice president at that time, said that they (the US government) reduced that dependency. Harris' statement was based on Biden's policy in March 2022 to stop importing oil from Russia, and March 2023 for the approval of the willow project in Alaska.

Sample Data 2
"So, I'm the only person on this stage who has prosecuted transnational criminal organizations for the trafficking of guns, drugs, and human beings". (00:23:59)

This sentence was issued by Harris when arguing about migration. Illegal migration has been a major problem for the United States government. During the Biden administration, Harris was tasked with finding the root of this problem. In fact, illegal crossings reached a record high during Biden's term but have been declining since six months before the election. This statement serves as Harris' rebuttal to the migration issue, which is often considered merely a campaign tool.

Then this sentence is included in the existential type, because there is a noun phrase that is assumed to exist. Organizations that commit illegal acts such as smuggling weapons, drugs, and even human trafficking as things that exist. Harris said that he has taken legal action against these organizations, unlike trump who has done nothing about it. Transnational criminal organizations are criminals who act in many countries, and the United States is one of them. However, from Harris' statement, these criminal organizations have been dealt with by the relevant authorities, and this action was taken by Harris to reassure Americans that at least criminal organizations have been reduced.

Factive

Sample Data 3

"He ended up selling American chips to China to help them improve and modernize their military" (00:10:55)

It is Harris' offensive statement to Trump. Harris accused Trump of weakening national security by making the wrong international trade policies. According to Harris, what Trump is doing can strengthen China, which is a rival of the United States.

The reason why the utterance is included in the factive presupposition is the use of the word "*selling*" as a factual verb. The statement was made by Kamala Harris to Donald Trump. China is considered a major rival of the United States, particularly in trade, so a *soft* attitude toward China is seen as a negative point in the eyes of the American public. Trump was the 46th President of the United States, serving from 2017 to 2021. During his term, he implemented many trade policies. Kamala stated that Trump made a poor policy decision by selling American chips to China, and that this move was exploited by the Chinese government to strengthen their military.

Sample Data 4

"We know that Xi Jin Ping was responsible for lacking and not giving us transparency about the origins of covid" (00:11:56)

Actually, this sentence was issued by Harris when discussing international trade. Previously, Trump was considered to have weakened America in terms of national security by selling chips to China to improve their military capabilities. It became a problem because China is a rival country. America should take policies that are beneficial not harmful. Although it is beneficial from an economic point of view, but in terms of military strength, the policy has threatened America. The closeness between trump and Xin Jin Ping is of particular concern to Harris. For him, America does not deserve to be associated with China, one of the reasons is because Xi Jin Ping has covered up things about covid.

In terms of presupposition, the sentence belongs to the factive type. This is because the word "*know*" acts as the trigger of the factive presupposition. The information following the word "*know*" is considered a fact that has occurred. Here, Xi Jinping is portrayed as having been secretive and lacking transparency about COVID-19 in the past few years. Because of this, Harris framed Trump's actions. Harris indirectly stated that the relationship between Trump and Xi Jinping was problematic, as Xi had concealed a major issue that impacted both the United States and the world.

Lexical

Sampel Data 5

"Deny what over and over again are court cases you have" (00:51:53)

In this statement, Harris said that Trump had avoided the cases against him. In context, Harris highlighted Trump's neglect of various court cases involving Trump, both in business matters, elections, and criminal behaviour during his previous term.

Structural presupposition is an assumption conveyed through informative sentences that have a certain structure. So, the data shown above is a structural type presupposition.

Over and over again is the main indicator that makes it a structural type. This phrase shows that the events that occur are done repeatedly. The presupposition contained in this sentence is that Trump often denies the cases that happened to him. Not only does he have one case, but he is caught in several, such as his scandal with a porn actress and storing state secret documents in his private property. He always denies that what he did was not a mistake and alleges that it was a political attack to undermine his presidential candidacy.

Sample Data 6

"What I **intend** to do is built on what we know are the aspirations and the hopes of the American people" (00:05:09)

Here, Harris speaks to the audience by convincing them that her current vision and mission are in line with the philosophical guidelines of the American Dream. Based on the data above, *"intend"* in this utterance is important because it acts as a lexical item. This is the reason why the utterance belongs to the lexical presupposition. Kamala addressed this sentence to all Americans to emphasize the outline of what she would do if elected president. She said she would build a country based on the values that have become an important part of them—the American Dream. Implicitly, Kamala suggests that the current America does not use these values as a national guideline, and she wants to change that. She wants to build an America in accordance with what its people dream of.

Structural

Sample Data 7

"Why in this election I actually have the endorsement of 200 Republicans who have worked with President Bush" (00:28:30)

Harris said this to convince the audience of his credibility, that he had the support of many republicans who had worked with the previous president, who was from another party. Structural presupposition has more striking characteristics than others, one of which is that it is the only type triggered using *wh*-questions. The sentence above carries the presupposition that Harris is truly supported by 200 Republicans and that they have worked for prominent figures, such as President George Bush. The beginning of the sentence clearly emphasizes that it belongs to the structural type because the information is conveyed through typical syntax, not through the lexical meaning of the words. Additionally, the use of *who* in the middle of the sentence is categorized as a structural trigger. This shows that the people referred to by Harris have qualified and credible political experience, as they have worked with Bush.

Sample Data 8

"That is why so many military leaders who you have worked with, have told me you are a disgrace" (00:53:29)

Very clearly here Harris discredits Donald Trump. This statement is on foreign policy and international conflicts. Russia-Ukraine and Palestine-Israel are specific conflicts that will be discussed. Harris considers trump's previous policies that jeopardized national security and did not care much about other countries' conflicts to be a problem. Trump's policies and attitudes are considered insulting to the dignity of American power, ranging from closeness to Kim Jong Un, even delighting in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Therefore, Trump is considered a disgrace by military officials for not having a firm stance.

This statement has structural presupposition. It can be seen clearly at the beginning of the sentence there is the word "why", this is a characteristic of structural presupposition type. There is explicit information that some of the high-ranking military officers mentioned that Trump was very embarrassing, and they talked about it to Kamala Harris. Of course this is based on military policy during the trump administration. Then there is another trigger, namely "who" in the middle of the sentence. This refers to the military officials who served when trump was in power before.

Non-Factive

Sample Data 9

"I imagine and have actually a plan to build what I call an opportunity economy" (00:00:56)

This phrase is used by Kamala Harris to describe her vision of an inclusive economic policy that focuses on creating opportunities for all people. She hopes to create a fair economy for all.

The non-factive type can be defined as a sentence that contains an assumption but not necessarily the truth. The presupposition contained is that the plan Harris has is not necessarily able to build an opportunity economy. The sentence above is classified as non-factive because it cannot be directly proven; it is possible that his plan could even harm the economy.

Imagine here acts as a trigger for the non-factive presupposition. This word basically introduces a speculative thought process, which shows that Harris' plan is expected to build opportunities in the economy.

Sample Data 10

"I think you've heard tonight two very different Visions for our country" (01:25:30)

This is the closing statement from Kamala Harris in the USA 2024 presidential debate data.

In the data above, the researchers concluded that this statement belongs to a non-factive presupposition. The main trigger is "think". This statement indicates that Harris assumes the audience has heard very different visions from the two presidential candidates. However, in reality, the audience could have judged that what was said by Trump and Harris was the same, or not much different.

CONCLUSIONS

In the research analysis of Presupposition in Kamala Harris' Statements in the 2024 United States Presidential Debate, several conclusions have been made. Based on the analysis, which shows that factive and existential types of presupposition are used more frequently, this indicates that Harris is attempting to shape public perception by presenting her narratives or arguments as facts or events that have already occurred implicitly. This occurred in order to increase Harris's electability. Then, in this study only 5 of the 6 types of presupposition were found, counter-factual presupposition is a type that is not used by Harris. This means that Harris prioritizes things or events that have happened rather than imagination. although this presupposition is basically just an assumption, Harris makes the assumption limit only from reality.

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