

## **ILOCUTIONARY ACTS IN THE 2024 ABC NEWS PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE BETWEEN HARRIS AND TRUMP: A PRAGMATIC STUDY**

**Silfia Pratika<sup>1</sup>, Ervina Cm Simatupang<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Widyatama, Indonesia: [silfia.4925@widyatama.ac.id](mailto:silfia.4925@widyatama.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>

### **Artikel Info**

Received :22 Des 2024  
Reviwe :8 Maret 2025  
Accepted :22 April 2025  
Published :25 April 2025

### **ABSTRACT**

This research aims to analyze the use of illocutionary acts in the 2024 U.S. presidential debate between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, focusing on how the candidates employ language strategically to influence public perception. Grounded in Searle's (1979) speech act theory, which builds upon the foundational work of Austin (1962), the study investigates five categories of illocutionary acts: assertive, commissive, declarative, expressive, and directive. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected from the official transcript of the debate and analyzed through categorization and contextual interpretation (Yule, 1996; Thomas, 1995). The results reveal that assertive acts dominate the discourse, reflecting the candidates' efforts to build credibility and assert policy achievements or critiques. Commissive acts were used to make promises and show future commitments, while directive acts served to challenge opponents. Expressive and declarative acts helped shape emotional connections and formal policy stances. These findings demonstrate how each candidate constructs political narratives through language use, reinforcing Mey's (2001) view that pragmatics involves understanding meaning within sociopolitical interaction. The study offers insights into the persuasive power of language in political communication and contributes to the broader field of pragmatic analysis. By synthesizing these frameworks, this study underscores the role of speech acts in crafting political narratives, shaping public perception, and advancing political communication research.

**Kata Kunci:** *illocutionary acts, assertive, commissive, declarative, expressive, directive*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Political debates serve as a crucial arena where presidential candidates not only present their policies but also engage in persuasive discourse to influence public opinion and strengthen their political image. In these high-stakes contexts, language becomes more than a medium of

communication it transforms into a strategic tool for constructing narratives, challenging opponents, and connecting with voters.

One of the most significant political events in recent times is the 2024 U.S. presidential debate between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, aired on ABC News. This debate received global attention due to

its intense rhetorical strategies and contrasting political ideologies. However, while many studies have examined political language in past presidential debates, there is still limited analysis focusing on how speech acts are strategically used by both candidates to shape public perception, particularly in the post-pandemic political landscape where emotional and strategic appeals have become more prominent. This gap in pragmatic analysis, especially in terms of illocutionary functions, forms the basis of this study.

This research adopts Searle's (1979) theory of speech acts, which classifies illocutionary acts into five categories: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. This framework builds upon Austin's (1962) foundational work, which introduced the notion that language performs actions. According to Searle, illocutionary acts reveal the speaker's intention and play a central role in how meaning is negotiated within a communicative context. In the realm of political debates, these acts do not merely represent the speaker's stance, but also function persuasively to win voters' trust, redirect discussion, or delegitimize opponents.

The present study seeks to analyze how Kamala Harris and Donald Trump utilize illocutionary acts to advance their rhetorical goals during the 2024 presidential debate. By applying a pragmatic approach, this study examines both the types of illocutionary acts used and their contextual impact within the debate. The objective is not only to classify these acts but also to interpret how each type contributes to constructing persuasive political narratives.

This investigation is expected to contribute to the field of pragmatics, particularly in the subfield of political communication, by offering deeper insights into how language operates as a strategic

device in presidential debates. It also seeks to highlight the evolving nature of political rhetoric in a polarized era where emotional resonance and assertive positioning are increasingly central to public persuasion.

## **B. METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze illocutionary acts in the 2024 U.S. presidential debate between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump. The primary data source is the official transcript of the debate, chosen for its authenticity and relevance. The transcript serves as the main corpus for identifying linguistic strategies used by both candidates.

The data collection process involved selecting utterances that represent five types of illocutionary acts, assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative—as categorized by Searle's (1979) framework. Each utterance was analyzed based on linguistic markers and contextual relevance, with considerations given to the speaker's intention, audience, and discourse environment.

The analytical procedure consisted of three main steps: 1) Categorization of utterances based on their illocutionary function, 2) Contextual interpretation to uncover rhetorical goals, and 3) Theoretical validation by comparing findings with prior studies such as Simatupang (2022), Rachman (2020), and Najib & Zulkifli (2019).

To ensure validity, this research applied a triangulation strategy by cross-referencing classifications with existing literature and consulting expert insights to minimize bias. Coding schemes and analytical notes were used to support consistency throughout the interpretation process.

This method enables a deep and structured understanding of how speech acts operate within the high-stakes context of political debate, offering insights that contribute to the broader field of pragmatic and political discourse analysis.

## **C.RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

In this section, the findings of the study are presented based on the classification of illocutionary acts as proposed by Searle (1979), which include assertive, commissive, directive, expressive, and declarative acts. The utterances analyzed were taken directly from the official transcript of the 2024 U.S. presidential debate between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump. Each utterance was categorized based on linguistic indicators, contextual relevance, and speaker intention, and then interpreted according to its pragmatic function within the discourse.

The presentation of results is structured into five subsections, each corresponding to one type of illocutionary act. In each subsection, selected utterances are analyzed to illustrate the strategic use of language by the candidates. The analysis not only identifies the type of speech act but also explains its rhetorical purpose in influencing voter perception, challenging the opponent, or reinforcing ideological positions.

1. Assertive Acts:

Data 1: "Our administration has reduced unemployment to historic lows." (Trump, Timestamp: 9:00)

This statement falls into the category of assertive act in that it claims the achievements of Trump's administration in the past. As pointed out by Searle (1979: 137), an assertive act is a type in which the speaker presumes to convey his or her belief regarding the propriety of a certain statement.

Trump's statement also fits his general story about being economically successful, which is typical in the realm of politics (Simatupang, 2022).

This illocutionary act has the primary purpose of enhancing Trump's leadership and instilling in the voters confidence that he can handle the economy as expected. Thus, Utami and Ariowibowo (2020) emphasize that such acts are performed to win trust and create an image of competence.

Data 2: "Millions are still struggling because of policies that favor corporations over people." (Harris, Timestamp: 8:27)

This statement is combative since it rebukes the policies of the other side of the political divide. By using such factual language, it can be argued that Harris speaks on behalf of those silenced. Similar strategies were noted in the political speeches of Najib Razak, where assertive acts were employed to focus on the notion of disparity (Farhan, 2020).

The goal of this particular type of referential expression is to sympathize with voters who feel disaffected by economic policies. It makes Harris one of the people, and, as Rachman and Simatupang report, it calls for a need for change within the political discourse that they analyze.

Data 3: "I intend to create a robust economy for the middle class." (Harris, Timestamp: 7:51)

Harris explains her vision for the future directly and confidently. Such an orientation of the statement is a wise tactic to appeal to voters (Lestari, 2020). Her pronouncement is also intended to appeal to and speak to middle-class voters by focusing on their economic worries. At the same time, it enhances a perception of Harris as one who is actively involved in the present but also

concerned about the future. For Khodijah (2020), such acts are very important for candidates who want to sell optimism and vision.

Data 4: "We created the largest economic growth in decades, benefiting all Americans." (Trump, Timestamp: 5:32)

This is an assertive act as it provides a claim of economic success attributed to Trump's administration. The emphasis on inclusivity and magnitude aligns with strategies identified by Ibrahim (2020) in debates to project national unity. This illocutionary act builds pride and reinforces Trump's narrative of accomplishment. It counters Harris's critiques of his policies, reinforcing a competitive edge in the debate.

Data 5: "I have always advocated for policies that protect American workers." (Harris, Timestamp: 8:47)

This statement qualifies as an assertive act because it asserts Harris's consistent stance on worker protections. The use of "always" emphasizes reliability and trustworthiness. Similar patterns were noted in Simatupang's (2021) analysis of persuasive discourse in film dialogues. The purpose of this illocutionary act is to solicit the support of working-class voters by portraying Harris as a reliable proponent of their concerns while simultaneously differentiating her policies from Trump's perceived emphasis on corporate interests.

Data 6: "We invested billions in infrastructure projects to rebuild America." (Harris, Timestamp: 18:37)

This is a big move, according to Harris's determination to make infrastructure development one of the major policy achievements. The evidence shows actual progress and aligns with political strategies

geared toward economic renewal (Rachman, 2020). This function's illocutionary acts to present Harris as a visionary leader interested in long-term growth and national rebuilding.

2. Commissive Acts:

Data 1: "I promise to secure better trade deals for American workers." (Trump, Timestamp: 8:27)

This statement is categorized as a commissive act because it clearly promises to improve trade deals for American workers. According to Searle (1979), commissive acts indicate a commitment to future action, and Trump uses this to align with his policy priorities. Such strategies are supported by Farhan (2020), who highlights the role of promises in political discourse to establish credibility.

The function of this illocutionary act is to establish trust with voters, particularly those in working-class communities, by directly addressing their economic concerns. As highlighted by Rachman and Simatupang (2022), this promise reinforces Trump's image as a defender of the workforce.

Data 2: "We will expand healthcare access to every family." (Harris, Timestamp: 7:17)

This is a commissive act, as Harris pledges to make healthcare universally accessible. Such a pledge highlights her focus on inclusivity and equal access to resources. This aligns with the findings of Agustina et al. (2020), who emphasize that healthcare promises are pivotal in appealing to voters' sense of security and welfare.

The function of this illocutionary act is to resonate with families who struggle with healthcare costs, portraying Harris as an empathetic leader who prioritizes public welfare. According to Simatupang (2022), such acts enhance the candidate's relatability and moral authority.

Data 3: "We commit to lowering the deficit by 15%." (Trump, Timestamp: 10:32)

This is a commissive act because it promises a measurable financial goal. By committing to deficit reduction, Trump appeals to fiscally conservative voters who value economic stability. Ibrahim (2020) notes that specific numerical targets in promises enhance perceived accountability. The function of this illocutionary act is to project responsibility and fiscal discipline, enhancing Trump's reputation as a prudent economic manager. This aligns with the findings by Lestari (2020), who underscores the importance of fiscal commitments in political rhetoric.

Data 4: "We will allocate additional funds to disaster relief efforts." (Harris, Timestamp: 6:27)

This commissive act shows Harris's commitment to disaster-stricken communities by pledging financial support. It reflects empathy and a proactive approach to crisis management, as Farhan (2020) has discussed. This illocutionary act demonstrates her concern for affected citizens and builds trust among communities impacted by natural disasters. Simatupang (2021) highlights that such pledges often strengthen the candidate's image as a compassionate leader.

Data 5: "Our administration guarantees tax cuts for small businesses." (Trump, Timestamp: 10:03)

This is a commissive act as it guarantees a specific financial benefit to small businesses. By framing it as a guarantee, Trump conveys certainty and reliability. This aligns with Ibrahim's (2020) observation that guarantees in economic policy enhance the speaker's credibility.

The function of this illocutionary act is to appeal to entrepreneurs and small business owners, reinforcing Trump's image as a pro-business candidate. Such strategies are effective in fostering voter confidence, as noted by Rachman and Simatupang (2022).

Data 6: "We are committed to advancing gender equality in workplaces." (Harris, Timestamp: 20:22)

This statement is a commissive act that emphasizes Harris's dedication to workplace equity. The use of "committed" highlights a long-term pledge to systemic change. Farhan (2020) identifies such commitments as central to progressive platforms aiming to mobilize diverse voter bases.

The function of this illocutionary act is to appeal to progressive voters and organizations advocating for gender equality, strengthening Harris's image as an advocate for fairness and inclusion. As noted by Agustina et al. (2020), gender equality pledges resonate strongly with younger, socially conscious demographics.

### 3. Declarative Acts:

Data 1: "America will lead the world in clean energy innovation." (Trump, Timestamp: 8:27)

This statement is a declarative act as it projects a future-oriented vision of global leadership in clean energy. According to Searle (1979), declarative acts bring about a new reality through their utterance. Trump's statement aligns with his broader campaign message of positioning America as a global leader.

The function of this illocutionary act is to inspire confidence in Trump's vision for America's future, appealing to voters who prioritize innovation and sustainability. Ibrahim (2020) highlights that such



declarations foster national pride and ambition, particularly among voters aligned with progressive energy policies.

Data 2: "This administration's policies have failed our communities." (Harris, Timestamp: 11:07)

This declarative act criticizes the current administration's policies, marking a shift in political accountability. By framing the statement as a declaration, Harris emphasizes the urgency of change and accountability for systemic failures.

The function of this illocutionary act is to connect with disillusioned voters, positioning Harris as a candidate who acknowledges and addresses systemic issues. Farhan (2020) notes that such declarative criticisms are effective in debates for highlighting contrasts between candidates and mobilizing discontented voters.

Data 3: "We officially declare our support for renewable energy projects." (Harris, Timestamp: 15:17)

This statement qualifies as a declarative act as it formally announces support for a specific policy initiative. According to Rachman (2020), declarations like this are key in signaling commitment to actionable goals and demonstrating accountability.

The function of this illocutionary act is to appeal to environmentally conscious voters, portraying Harris as a leader dedicated to sustainability. This aligns with Simatupang's (2022) findings on the rhetorical power of policy declarations in advancing green initiatives and addressing voter concerns.

Data 4: "This legislation will transform the energy industry for future generations." (Harris, Timestamp: 14:02)

This declarative act announces the proposed legislation's transformative impact. By using definitive language, Harris emphasizes the long-term benefits of her policies and demonstrates her forward-thinking approach.

The function of this illocutionary act is to highlight Harris's visionary leadership, appealing to voters who prioritize innovation and sustainability. Agustina et al. (2020) suggest that such declarations enhance a candidate's credibility as a proactive policymaker with a clear commitment to the future.

Data 5: "This act officially recognizes climate change as a national emergency." (Harris, Timestamp: 16:45)

This declarative act formalizes a stance on climate change, signaling a significant policy shift. According to Searle (1979), such acts alter institutional realities by their very utterance and demonstrate a candidate's ability to enact meaningful change.

The function of this illocutionary act is to emphasize Harris's commitment to tackling climate change, appealing to progressive voters and environmental advocates. Ibrahim (2020) notes that declarations on climate policy are increasingly pivotal in modern political discourse, shaping public and institutional priorities.

Data 6: "This declaration reinforces our dedication to protecting democracy." (Harris, Timestamp: 22:18)

This is a declarative act that reaffirms a commitment to democratic principles. By framing it as a formal declaration, Harris underscores the importance of safeguarding democratic values and rallying support for governance reform.

The function of this illocutionary act is to rally support from voters who are concerned about political integrity and governance. Farhan (2020) highlights that such declarations resonate strongly during periods of political instability, serving as a unifying call to action.

#### 4. Directive Acts:

Data 1: "Explain to the American people how your tax cuts help the middle class." (Timestamp: 6:44)

This statement is a directive act as it seeks to compel the respondent to provide clarification or justification about their policy decisions. According to Searle (1979), directive acts attempt to make the hearer perform a specific action, such as providing an explanation or taking responsibility.

The function of this illocutionary act is to challenge the opponent's policies while appealing to the audience's curiosity and concern. Farhan (2020) highlights that directive acts in debates often aim to highlight gaps or weaknesses in the opponent's arguments, making them a critical tool for rhetorical engagement.

Data 2: "Tell me one regulation you would cut to help small businesses thrive." (Timestamp: 9:00)

This directive act demands a concrete example from the opponent, compelling them to justify their policy stance. Searle (1979) explains that such acts are used to elicit specific information or actions from the hearer.

The function of this illocutionary act is to emphasize the speaker's focus on small business priorities while scrutinizing the opponent's preparedness. Najib and Zulkifli (2019) highlight that directive acts like this

are employed to test an opponent's knowledge and to create rhetorical leverage.

Data 3: "Can you justify the tariffs imposed on essential goods?" (Timestamp: 13:42)

This is a directive act framed as a question, requiring the opponent to defend or justify their actions. By questioning the rationale behind tariffs, the speaker challenges the opponent's economic policy. The function of this illocutionary act is to raise doubts about the opponent's decisions while aligning the speaker with voter concerns about affordability. Ibrahim (2020) notes that directive acts framed as inquiries serve to destabilize the opponent's narrative while enhancing the speaker's alignment with public priorities.

Data 4: "Why did you veto the bipartisan bill for healthcare reform?" (Timestamp: 7:58)

This directive act seeks an explanation for a specific policy decision, directly questioning the opponent's actions. According to Searle (1979), such acts place the addressee in a position to account for their choices.

The function of this illocutionary act is to cast doubt on the opponent's commitment to healthcare reform while positioning the speaker as an advocate for bipartisan solutions. Agustina et al. (2020) emphasize that directive acts targeting polarizing issues like healthcare effectively engage audiences by spotlighting contradictions in the opponent's stance.

Data 5: "How do you justify your stance on reducing educational budgets?" (Timestamp: 9:14)

This directive act compels the opponent to provide a rationale for a potentially unpopular policy stance.

Education is a critical voter concern, making such statements impactful.

The function of this illocutionary act is to appeal to voters who prioritize education funding while questioning the opponent's values and priorities. Lestari (2020) suggests that directive acts focused on sensitive topics like education are instrumental in swaying voter perceptions and undermining opponent credibility.

Data 6: "Explain how your immigration policies align with American values." (Timestamp: 19:05)

This directive act challenges the opponent to reconcile their policies with broader national ideals. By framing the statement as a call for justification, it appeals to both logic and emotion.

The function of this illocutionary act is to highlight discrepancies between the opponent's policies and widely held values, positioning the speaker as a protector of national integrity. Rachman (2020) underscores that directive acts in this context are powerful tools for contrasting ideological differences and reaffirming the speaker's alignment with public sentiment.

#### 5. Expressive Acts:

Data 1: "I am heartbroken by the stories of families losing everything in the floods this year." (Harris, Timestamp: 44:58)

This statement is an expressive act as it conveys Harris's emotional response to a tragic event. According to Searle (1979), expressive acts reveal the speaker's psychological state, making this utterance a reflection of empathy and concern for affected families.

The function of this illocutionary act is to connect with voters on a personal level by demonstrating compassion. Farhan (2020)

highlights that such expressions of empathy are effective in humanizing political leaders, enhancing their relatability and appeal. Simatupang (2022) further emphasizes that empathetic expressions build trust and strengthen voter engagement, particularly during times of crisis.

Data 2: "I am deeply moved by the resilience of our nation." (Trump, Timestamp: 45:32)

This is an expressive act as it highlights Trump's admiration for the nation's collective strength. Expressive acts often reinforce positive emotions and solidarity, aligning with Trump's broader narrative of unity and resilience.

The function of this illocutionary act is to inspire confidence and pride among voters by emphasizing national resilience. According to Ibrahim (2020), such expressions play a crucial role in rallying collective support and fostering a sense of shared identity. Rachman (2020) also notes that emphasizing resilience in political discourse reinforces a leader's credibility and ability to unify citizens.

Data 3: "It's tragic to see so many struggling due to inflation." (Harris, Timestamp: 14:49)

This statement is categorized as an expressive act as it conveys Harris's emotional reaction to economic hardship. By acknowledging the struggles of ordinary people, Harris positions herself as empathetic and aware of economic challenges.

The function of this illocutionary act is to connect with voters who feel the direct impact of inflation, aligning Harris with their concerns. Simatupang (2022) notes that such expressions effectively build trust and highlight the candidate's focus on public welfare. Agustina et al. (2020) suggest that acknowledging economic struggles



strengthens a candidate's relatability and voter alignment.

Data 4: "It's a testament to our strength that we overcame such challenges." (Trump, Timestamp: 12:15)

This expressive act emphasizes pride and optimism, celebrating collective achievements. Searle (1979) notes that expressive acts often serve to reinforce positive emotions, which Trump uses to inspire confidence in his leadership.

The function of this illocutionary act is to unify voters by focusing on shared successes fostering a sense of national pride. Ibrahim (2020) highlights that such acts are pivotal in reinforcing collective identity and optimism. Farhan (2020) adds that celebratory expressions in political discourse enhance a leader's image as a unifying figure.

Data 5: "I feel a deep connection to the struggles of ordinary citizens." (Harris, Timestamp: 15:12)

This expressive act reveals Harris's empathy for everyday struggles. By emphasizing a personal connection, Harris positions herself as a leader who understands and cares about the challenges faced by ordinary people.

The function of this illocutionary act is to humanize Harris and build rapport with voters who feel underrepresented. Farhan (2020) observes that such expressions enhance relatability and trust in political discourse. Lestari (2020) underscores the importance of personal connection in fostering voter loyalty and emotional resonance.

Data 6: "It's truly inspiring to see communities unite during tough times." (Trump, Timestamp: 21:30)

This expressive act celebrates unity and resilience, reinforcing Trump's focus on collective strength. Such statements are often used to highlight positive societal values and inspire optimism.

The function of this illocutionary act is to foster a sense of hope and solidarity among voters, aligning Trump with community values. Simatupang (2022) notes that such expressions are effective in rallying support and reinforcing a leader's connection with the public. Rachman (2020) adds that emphasizing community resilience strengthens a leader's narrative of stability and optimism.

### Discussion

Percentage Distribution of Speech Acts in the Debate

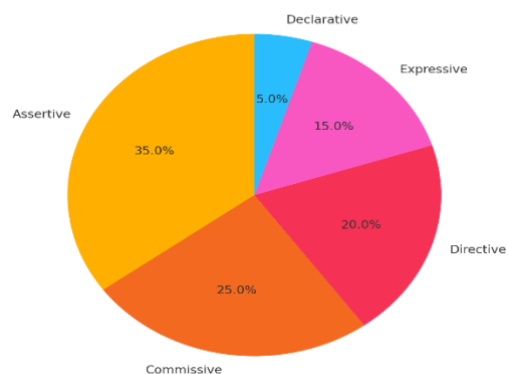


Figure 1 presents the percentage distribution of speech acts performed during the 2024 U.S. presidential debate. The data reveals that assertive acts dominate the interaction, accounting for 35% of all utterances. This reflects the candidates' primary strategy to build credibility by emphasizing accomplishments, policies, or critiques. Assertive acts function to align the speaker with public concerns, a rhetorical move that reinforces perceived authority and political stability (Ibrahim, 2020).

Commissive acts make up 25% of the total,

indicating the importance of future-oriented commitments in gaining voter trust. As seen in the promises made by both candidates—ranging from economic reform to healthcare expansion, commissive acts serve to project reliability and long-term vision (Rachman, 2020).

Directive acts, representing 20%, were used to challenge the opponent and control the direction of the debate. These acts are particularly influential in debates as they demand accountability, test opposing arguments, and emphasize contrasting ideologies (Najib & Zulkifli, 2019).

Expressive acts appear in 15% of the data, demonstrating the candidates' attempt to connect emotionally with the audience. These expressions of empathy, pride, or concern humanize the candidates and reinforce their relatability (Simatupang, 2022).

Although declarative acts only account for 5%, they hold significant rhetorical weight. These acts were used to formally announce policies or institutional positions, such as recognizing climate change as a national emergency. Despite their low frequency, declaratives contribute to the perceived authority and decisiveness of the speaker (Agustina et al., 2020).

The pie chart clearly illustrates the strategic preference for assertive and commissive speech acts in constructing persuasive political narratives. These findings highlight that political communication relies not only on content but also on speech act functions tailored to resonate with different segments of the electorate.

The study of illocutionary acts reveals their importance in political discourse. It demonstrates how candidates employ language intelligently to accomplish their communicative objectives while also

identifying with their audience. Using Searle's (1979) framework, the five kinds of speech acts exemplify the various strategies adopted by Kamala Harris and Donald Trump during the 2024 presidential election debate.

Assertive actions help build trust and show authority. Trump uses assertive actions to highlight his successes, such as economic gains, which matches Ibrahim's (2020) findings that assertive actions show stability and leadership. Harris, however, uses assertive actions to criticize policies and push for change, reaching out to voters who want reform. Simatupang (2022) points out that strong critiques can connect well with audiences by talking about system failures, as shown in Harris's focus on underrepresented communities and economic inequalities.

Commissive acts show promise and indicate plans for the future, helping to build trust. Trump's commissive acts are about clear promises, like reducing the deficit and cutting taxes, which appeal to conservative voters. Harris's commissive acts focus on being inclusive, with promises like improving access to healthcare, which matches progressive values. According to Rachman (2020), commissive acts are important for gaining voter confidence by showing clear goals. Harris focuses on gender equality and disaster relief. This shows that she cares about fairness in society, which helps build trust with voters, according to Farhan (2020).

Declarative acts formalize positions and articulate transformative goals. Trump's declarations project leadership in innovation, particularly in clean energy, fostering national pride and ambition. Harris's declarative acts, such as recognizing climate change as a national emergency, underscore her commitment to systemic reform. As Agustina et al. (2020) suggest, declarative

acts in debates serve to articulate clear policy stances, enhancing a candidate's credibility and alignment with voter priorities.

Expressive acts show emotional connections, making candidates more relatable. Harris's expressive acts, like her care for flood victims, support Simatupang's (2022) claim that showing emotions builds trust and engagement. Trump's expressive acts, which focus on strength and unity, create a sense of pride and hope, as Ibrahim (2020) mentions. These acts show the different ways the candidates approach issues: Harris focuses on compassion and fairness, while Trump stresses national strength and togetherness.

The directive acts as a counter-adversary and shifts the focus of the debate. Harris uses directives to criticize Trump's policies, focusing on accountability and transparency; Trump uses them to impose dominance and test Harris on policy knowledge. Najib and Zulkifli (2019) indicate that in debates, directive acts highlight weaknesses and shift attention to critical issues that, in effect, manage voter perception.

These illocutionary strategies showcase the candidates' different narratives. Trump's language revolves around economic stability, national pride, and measurable achievements, which appeal to conservative and fiscally minded voters. Harris, on the other hand, speaks about progressive reform, inclusiveness, and empathy, appealing to socially conscious and reform-driven audiences. As Farhan (2020) notes, in political discourse, aligning linguistic strategies with voter priorities is important. The interplay of these speech acts not only highlights the candidates' rhetorical strengths but also underscores their ability to adapt language to address diverse voter concerns. This discussion shows how important

illocutionary acts are in creating political stories and getting voters involved. This analysis, therefore, contributes to pragmatics and political communication with the help of ideas from previous studies like Ibrahim (2020), Simatupang (2022), and Farhan (2020). It highlights how language can shape what people think and affect political results.

#### **D.CONCLUSION**

This study examined the strategic use of illocutionary acts in the 2024 U.S. presidential debate between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, using Searle's speech act theory as the analytical framework. The findings reveal that assertive and commissive acts were the most frequently used, reflecting the candidates' focus on building credibility and expressing commitment. Directive acts were used to challenge opponents, while expressive and declarative acts served to foster emotional appeal and formalize policy stances.

The study concludes that illocutionary acts function as powerful rhetorical tools in shaping political narratives, guiding audience perception, and reinforcing ideological positions. Each type of speech act contributes differently to the communicative strategy employed by political figures during high-stakes debates.

The implication of this research lies in its contribution to the field of pragmatics and political communication, highlighting how language can be employed not merely to inform, but to influence, persuade, and mobilize public opinion. Future studies are encouraged to replicate this approach across different political contexts to further understand the dynamics of strategic language use in political discourse.

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