

A Comparative Analysis of Speech Errors in U.S. 2024 Presidential Debate

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*Jesselyn Kaonedyl¹, Diantry Binarwaty Habibie Nasution², Istiqomah³, May Sastia⁴,
Rahmadsyah Rangkuti⁵ 

¹²³⁴⁵Universitas Sumatera Utara

Corresponding Author: jesselynkaonedyl@students.usu.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study focused on reviewing and analyzing the types of speech errors, comparing the frequency of such errors, and examining the reasons behind speech errors, as made by former President of the United States Donald Trump (DT) and Vice President Kamala Harris (KH) in the 2024 presidential election debate. Theory of speech error by Clark and Clark (1977) is used as the main guidance in the analysis. The debate, entitled "Harris vs Trump in the ABC News 2024 Presidential Debate", lasted 90 minutes. This study used a qualitative approach, this study analyzed the video of DT and KH, examining words, phrases, and sentences by transcribing their speeches. The results showed that DT committed more speech errors in total but less in types, while KH committed more types of speech errors and less errors in total. The causes of these speech errors were due to social factors, including anxiety and social pressure during the debate. Based on the amount of speech errors, KH sounds more promising than DT and has bigger possibilities to attract votes in the upcoming election.

Keywords: *Speech Error; Presidential Debate; Filled Pause; Sociolinguistics.*

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INTRODUCTION

Sociolinguistics is a field of study that examines the intricate relationship between language and society. Sociolinguists delve into the ways in which language varies across different social contexts and its role in fulfilling social functions (Holmes, 2013). By meticulously analyzing language use, they can glean valuable insights into the mechanics of language, the dynamics of social relationships, and the nuanced ways in which individuals express their social identity. A profound understanding of language and its functionalities empowers individuals to articulate their thoughts and ideas effectively through speech. While speaking may appear to be a straightforward task, it is, in fact, a complex cognitive process that involves four distinct stages: conceptualization, formulation, articulation, and self-monitoring (Levelt, 1989). Despite the intricacy of this process, humans are prone to committing linguistic errors during the production of sentences. Based on Carroll (1986), speech errors usually happen when the speaker is anxious, nervous, or lacks confidence. There are other causes behind speech errors by Clark (1977) as follows: (a) Cognitive Difficulty, difficulties in finding the right explanation to express things. (b) Social Factors such as situational anxiety; anxiety when talking about a certain topic and reducing their execution efficiency, social circumstances; the pressure to speak clearly and avoid hesitation because someone else may take over the conversation. Research found that people make

more errors in speaking when they lack confidence and influence more people when they are confident, usually leaders in organizations are more confident and believe in their own abilities (Bandura, 1988). In conclusion, self-confidence is correlated with people's influencing abilities.

Presidential election is the process of selecting the new leader of a country and usually chosen by majority votes from the society, therefore presidential candidates must be a confident person to be able to influence people's votes. Debate is a way of communication to discuss a certain topic in public spaces where people are expected to oppose each other's ideas and influence people with their speeches. Debate has contributed to gathering learners from different backgrounds in educational fields (Zare&Othman, 2013). Presidential debate is one of the campaigns done by presidential candidates to attract votes from the audience. Presidential debate also requires the candidate to speak spontaneously in front of large audiences, which puts the candidates under a lot of stress, so it is normal for debaters to produce errors while speaking because they cannot predict what things their challengers will utter to attack them.

There are several previous researches discussing speech errors, cite the research done by Rangkuti et al. (2023) entitled "Speech Errors Performed by Former American Presidents in "60 Minutes" Interview: A Comparative Analysis". The purpose is to compare speech errors uttered by two former presidents of the United States' responses in an interview, the comparative analysis is based on an arranged, editable, and briefed interview. This research concluded that object 1 (BO) committed more total speech errors than object 2 (DT) even though object 2 committed more types of errors.

Another research discussing speech errors on different setting like radio shows done by Purnawati (2009) titled "A Study On Speech Errors On Damashinta Sunday Work Out: A Psycholinguistic Approach", used the same Clark theory, focused on speech errors made during radio shows called Damashinta Sunday Work Out and found that both the broadcaster and caller committed 9 types of speech errors, dominantly filled pause (50%), silent pause (19,05%), repeats (10,95%), and correction (6,67%.) as the highest utterances.

Lastly, presidential debate impact has been a topic for discussion since the very first presidential debate in 1976 through the research called "The Impact of a Presidential Debate on Voter Rationality" by Abramowitz (1978). Based on the findings in this research, debate can be considered as an attempt to shift voters' decisions and beliefs (Abelson, Aronson, McGuire, Newcomb, Rosenberg, and Tannenbaum, 1969). Based on this theory, inconsistency of candidates' attitudes in delivering speeches, such as speech errors, will produce psychological discomfort, which will affect voters' decisions.

Regardless of previous studies about speech error, researchers realized that there is no specific discussion about how speech errors in presidential debates might affect the result of an election. Therefore, using the 2024 presidential debate video from Youtube, this research aims to find which presidential candidates sound more promising and most likely able to easily shift voters' beliefs with a comparison of speech errors by DT and KH in a study entitled A Comparative Analysis of Speech Errors in U.S. 2024 Presidential Debate. This research seeks to determine who made more speech errors between DT and KH, identify the causes of these errors, and explore how the frequency and nature of these errors might influence their voter support in the upcoming elections.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach with a content analysis method. This research is descriptive research using qualitative methods, according to Selinger and Shohamy (1989), this method is in accord with the qualitative approach because it focuses on describing the phenomenon or situation under study. The data of this research include words, phrases, and sentences.

Data Source

In research, the data source is the YouTube video entitled **Full Debate: Harris vs. Trump in 2024 ABC News Presidential Debate | WSJ**. The researchers examined the YouTube video to identify speech errors uttered by DT and KH.

Essentially, every speaker makes mistakes in their speeches, which occurred during the Presidential Debate video as well. When the Presidential Debate video speakers give their speeches. They frequently commit blunders. Clark and Eve (1977:263) stated that the common sorts of speech errors are described below:

Table 1. the common sorts of speech errors

No	Common Errors	Speech Symbols	Examples
1	Silent Pause	//	A silent pause refers to a break in speech between words, based on the length of the pause.
2	Filled Pause	,.....,	The silence that occurs in between speakers.
3	Repeats	/	Utterances that repeat one or more syllables.
4	Retraced False Starts	\	Correcting words after the first uttered word.
5	Unretraced Starts	False \\\	Repetition of one or more words before the words that need to be repaired.
6	Correction (<i>that is, I mean, well, or rather</i>)	-	Correction in starting the sentence
7	Stutters	----	Speeches or utterances that are interrupted repeatedly can be resumed by the speaker after a few seconds (intended utterance).
8	Interjections	* *	Phrases that are added to a sentence to attract attention, express intense emotion, or surprise.
9	Slip of The Tongue	→	One of the typical speech errors.

Procedures

Data collecting procedure in this study will be collected. The activities are explained as follows: The researchers began by selecting and downloading the YouTube video titled *Full Debate: Harris vs. Trump in 2024 ABC News Presidential Debate | WSJ* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgsC_aBquUE&t=1391s) as the primary data source. The video was repeatedly watched to analyze speech errors by DT and KH, while relevant information was recorded based on Clark and Clark's theory of speech errors. The researchers categorized the speech errors into nine types, summarizing their frequency and creating a table for clearer differentiation. Finally, the researchers compared the total errors between DT and KH to assess their potential impact on voter preference in the debate.

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the analysis conducted by the researcher, the data collected from Donald Trump (DT) as Data I and Kamala Harris (KH) as Data II, the comparison of the frequency of

speech errors made by DT and KH during the “**Full Debate: Harris vs. Trump in 2024 ABC News Presidential Debate | WSJ**” debate can be seen in following tables:

Table 2. Types of Speech Errors made by DT

No.	Common of Speech Errors	Frequency of Speech Errors	Percentage
1	Silent Pause	51	41.46%
2	Filled Pause	15	12.19%
3	Repeats	33	26.82%
4	Retracted False Start	6	4.87%
5	Unretraced False Start	1	0.81%
6	Correction	-	-
7	Stutter	14	11.38%
8	Interjection	3	2.43%
9	Slip of Tongue	-	-
Total Errors		123	

Table 3. Types of Speech Errors made by KH

No.	Common of Speech Errors	Frequency of Speech Errors	Percentage
1	Silent Pause	37	44,6%
2	Filled Pause	4	%
3	Repeats	5	6.75%
4	Retracted False Start	3	4.05%
5	Unretraced False Start	3	4.05%
6	Correction	-	-
7	Stutter	22	29.7%
8	Interjection	-	-
9	Slip of Tongue	-	-
Total Errors		74	

Table 4. Types of Speech Errors made by DT and KH

No.	Common of Speech Errors	Frequency of Speech Errors	Percentage
1	Silent Pause	88	44.6%
2	Filled Pause	19	9.6%
3	Repeats	38	19.2%
4	Retracted False Start	9	4.56%
5	Unretraced False Start	4	2.03%
6	Correction	-	-
7	Stutter	36	18.7%
8	Interjection	3	1.52%
9	Slip of Tongue	-	-
Total Errors		197	

Table above shows the types and frequency of speech errors made by DT during the debate with a total of 123 errors and 51 silent pauses with the most frequent errors. KH's speech errors are listed in Table II with a total of 74 speech errors, the most frequent errors made by KH and DT are silent pause with 37 and 51 errors. Table III shows that generally, both research objects' highest frequency of error types was silent pause (44,6%), repeats (19,2%), stutter (18,7%), and filled pause (9,6%). Despite DT and KH having the same dominant types of errors, there was a slight difference in the order of the four most frequent errors. The four most frequent speech errors made by both are stutter, filled pause, repeat, and silent pauses. Therefore, the analysis in this section will focus on the top four errors committed by both DT and KH.

Data 1: DT made 51 silent pauses which were the most frequent speech error uttered:

"Finally after//75 years pay us back for all that we've done." (8:55)

"I'd like to see her go down//to Washington DC." (53:42)

"Their crimes weights are way down//Putin endorsed her last week." (1:06:03)

In sentence (1), DT paused between "finally after" and "75 years," where a pause was unnecessary, as the sentence would sound more natural without it. This illustrates that DT made silent pauses while speaking. The same pattern is observed in examples (2) and (3), where DT paused several times between words that did not require pauses.

Data 2: Similarly with DT, the most dominant speech errors uttered by KH are silent pauses. KH made 37 silent pauses. There are some silent pauses made by KH during the debate:

"So //Donald Trump has no plan for you." (13:13)

"Surprising fact// let's understand how we got here." (22:27)

"World leaders and// this// former president as president." (1:22:19)

In sentence (1), KH briefly paused between the words "so" and "Donald Trump." Similarly, in sentence (2), KH paused a moment after saying "surprising fact" before continuing with the next words, even though no pause was needed in either sentence.

Data 3: The second most common speech error DT made was repeat, with 33 errors. There the sentence DT made with repeat type of speech error during the debate:

"create a lot of good solid money **for our/ for our** country." (14:33)

"I have been a leader on IVF **which /which** is fertilization the IVF." (28:37)

"The same way **that they talked about that /that they talk about** abortion." (26:22)

In sentence (1), DT repeated the sentence "**for us/for us**" which did not need to be said twice, thus affecting the clarity of his speech. Similarly, in sentence (2), DT repeats the word "**which**" in his statement.

Data 4: The second most common speech error made by KH was stutter, with 22 errors. There are sentence KH made this with stutter type of speech error during the debate:

"thing we know that we have a---a shortage." (7:12)

"Donald Trump started he was a---a---a land he owned land he owned." (1:25:55)

"grow the Affordable Care Act but I---I---I'll get to that Lindsay I just need to" (1:33:13)

The sentence mentioned above shows that KH repeats sounds as words and syllables. During the debate KH often stuttered, sometimes stuttering many times within one syllable or statement.

Data 5: The third most common speech error DT made was filled pause, with 15 errors. There the sentence DT made with filled pause type of speech error during the debate:

"she knows that [**uhh**] we're doing tariffs on other countries." (8:51)

"I had no inflation [**uhh**] look we've had a terrible economy." (9:21)

"I have nothing to do with project 2025 [**uhh**] that's out there." (12:06)

In the sentence (1) DT did filled pause by producing [**uhh**] in the sentence.

Data 6: The third most common speech error made by KH was repeat, with 5 errors. There are several sentences that are counted as 'repetition' during the debate:

"Pregnancy to term "**and /and**" in asking for an abortion that is not happening it's" (27:24)

"If someone was a breast cancer survivor "**if a/ if a**" grandparent had diabetes (1:34:14)"

"Said no **you don't/ no you don't/ no you don't** get rid of the affordable care" (1:34:14)

In sentence (1), KH repeated the sentence "**and/and**" which did not need to be said twice, thus affecting the clarity of his speech. Similarly, in sentence (2), KH repeats the word "**if a/ if a**" in his statement.

Data 7: The fourth most common speech error made by DT is stutter with 14 errors. Thus the errors uttered in the speech by DT are:

"And it--- it will be the end of our country" (18:31)

"We were able to get it--- it and now states are voting on it" (21:30)

"The student loans and then her I--- I think probably her boss" (25:51)

The sentence mentioned above shows that DT repeats sound as words and syllables. During the debate DT also often stuttered.

Data 8: The fourth most common speech error made by KH is filled with 4 errors. There the sentence DT made with filled pause type of speech error during the debate:

"[**umm**] you know I this is I think one of the reasons why in this election" (34:36)

"Let's understand what happened here [**umm**] I actually met with Zalinski" (1:15:29)

"It's a tragedy that we have [**umm**] someone who wants to be a president." (1:25:24)

In the sentence (1) KH did fill pause by producing sounds [**umm**] such as "[**umm**] you know I this is I think one of the reasons why in this election". Same thing happened with sentence (2) "Let's understand what happened here [**umm**] I actually met with Zalinski", where KH made a filled pause in the middle of the sentence.

The data shows that both Donald Trump and Kamala Harris had the same top four speech error types: silent pauses, filled pauses, repeat, and stutter. However, a comparison of their speech errors shows that DT made more types of errors than KH. DT committed seven different types of errors, while KH made six, as KH did not make any interjection errors.

Despite this, both shared the same four dominant types of errors. In terms of total errors, DT made significantly more, with 123 errors compared to KH's 74 during the 90-minute debate.

Discussions

Based on the comparison of speech errors between DT and KH, researchers found that KH made more various speech errors. DT committed five types of speech errors while KH committed six types of errors, including silent pauses, filled pauses, repeats, stutters, retracted false starts, and unretraced false starts. In terms of total speech errors, DT made a higher number compared to KH, DT made as many as 123 speech errors, while KH made 74 errors. Both research objects had the same four types of highest errors, namely silent pause, filled pause, repeat and stutter.

Findings in this research align with the previous research done by (Rangkuti et al., 2023). The previous research compared two former presidents of the United States' responses in an interview, it was found that object 1 (BO) committed more total speech errors than object 2 (DT) even though object 2 committed more types of errors. In this research, KH committed more types of errors but DT still overweight the total errors number.

The highest percentages of speech errors in this research are also in line with the previous research conducted by Purnawati (2009). The former researcher focused on speech errors made during radio shows called Damashinta Sunday Work Out and found that both the broadcaster and caller committed 9 types of speech errors, dominantly filled pause (50%), silent pause (19,05%), repeats (10,95%) as the highest utterances. While the difference in this research, correction (6,67%.) from the former research does not align with stutter (18,7%) in this research's result as one of the four highest frequency of error types.

Based on Clark and Clark theory, both DT and KH were anxious because of the situation and social circumstances because they dominantly committed speech errors that signaled anxiety and hesitation in speaking. There are 2 reasons for speech errors by Clark; First, the inability to find the right word or language to represent the speaker's feeling (Cognitive Difficulties). Second, the pressure from society that affects how a speaker talks, including the way they deliver the speech. The result of this observation concludes that DT and KH both uttered a lot of speech errors during their debate due to social factors; situational anxiety and social circumstances. Both research objects are debating on a live stream and aware of how this debate will affect their future election in November 2024. The pressure of knowing how impactful this debate was, affected the mental situation of both DT and KH to be more hesitant and careful in delivering their speeches. More importantly, they are talking in a debating forum in which they can not predict what their opponents are bringing out to attack them, so this also puts an additional stress and anxiety for the candidates while arranging their sentences.

With a 123:77 comparison, DT was obviously more stressed in delivering his speech than KH. On the 90 minutes long video, DT was attacked with a lot of failures and complaints from his previous position as the United States' President by KH. This also affected the flow of the debate where KH sounded more confident in complaining and overthrowing DT's arguments, while DT kept trying to defend himself to clarify KH's claims.

Based on Abelson, Aronson, McGuire, Newcomb, Rosenberg, and Tannenbaum, the inconsistency of a candidate's responses in presidential debate will create psychological discomfort in the audiences and harden the chances of beliefs shifting. In this debate, DT tends to show more inconsistency by committing silent pause, filled pause, repeat, and stutter more than KH, which automatically makes KH sounds more promising than DT and possibly easier to shift voter's beliefs.

CONCLUSION

Donald Trump (DT) and Kamala Harris (KH) demonstrated notable differences in their speech error patterns during the 2024 presidential debate. DT committed more speech errors overall, while KH exhibited a greater variety of error types. The analysis, guided by Clark and Clark's theory of speech errors, attributes these errors to social factors, such as anxiety and pressure. Despite committing more types of errors, KH maintained a lower total number of errors, indicating a more controlled delivery. This distinction suggests that KH appeared more composed and precise in her communication. Consequently, KH's performance might positively influence voters' perceptions, making her a more appealing candidate. Therefore, her lower error count could increase her chances of gaining more votes in the upcoming election.

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