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Textual and Interpersonal Discourse Markers in Kamala Harris's Campaign Speeches

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Abstract

By examining two speeches delivered by the American nominee Kamala Harris, this study investigates the importance and functions of discourse markers (DMs) in political discourse. The paper aims to identify these markers, analyse their frequencies, and explore their functions within Harris's speeches. The researcher employs both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the discourse markers. This research deals with Hyland and Tse's (2004) functional classification model, which includes textual and interpersonal discourse markers. The findings reveal that, among textual discourse markers, the logical connective 'and' is used 290 times to convey a sense of continuity and accessibility. The most frequently used interpersonal marker is the commentary marker 'I,' which appears 169 times.

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1. Introduction

Like any other language, English has several discourse markers, including 'yes,' 'surely,' 'well,' 'so,' 'on the contrary,' and 'nevertheless.' These are grammatical forms or lexical items usually used to connect one utterance to another in discourse. Discourse markers are regarded as cues or signals for the hearer or reader that help create cohesion and coherence. These markers appear in various grammatical forms, including interjections, greetings, linking adverbials, and farewells, among others. Discourse markers play an essential role, not only in conversation but also in written texts (Fraser, 1988) ^[8].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definitions of Discourse Markers

Conventionally, Zuckermann (2009, p. 50) ^[17] (2009:50) asserts that few words or phrases, which were once regarded as "discourse markers," are used as "expletives" or "fillers"— phrases or words that have no fundamental role. However, they are now considered functional at various levels of analysis, such as reformulations, topic changes, stressing, discourse planning, hedging, or channelling. These functions can be categorised into three broad groups: (a) relations among (parts of) utterances, (b) relations between the speaker and the message, and (c) relations between the speaker and the hearer. For Lynn *et al.* (2004, p. 117) ^[13], a discourse marker in linguistics is a word or phrase that is comparatively syntax-independent, does not alter the meaning of the sentence, and has a somewhat empty meaning. Swan (2005, p. 13) ^[16] clarifies that a discourse marker is "a word or expression which indicates the relation between what is being said and the wider context." For him, it first connects a sentence to what comes before or after, and second, suggests the speaker's stance toward what they are saying. Therefore, discourse markers can be understood as linguistic expressions of varying lengths that carry pragmatic meaning and can facilitate discourse. This paper aims to explore the markers used in Kamala Harris's speeches.

2.2. Characteristics of Discourse Markers

According to Brinton (1996),^[5] Jucker and Ziv (1998)^[11] list several characteristics that distinguish discourse markers (DMs), which are:

1. They mostly deal with spoken rather than written language.
2. They are marked phonologically, with different intonations corresponding to their function in a given context.
3. They tend to occur in different slots in the sentence and discourse; they are mobile.
4. Their meaning is hard to specify lexically.
5. They are, as Schiffrin (1987)^[15] states, “syntactically independent or loosely attached with no explicit grammatical function.”
6. They are optional since their deletion does not affect the structure or meaning of the sentence. However, their absence “removes a powerful clue” (Brinton, 1996, p. 34).^[5]
7. DMs are multifunctional, performing on different levels.

2.3. Classification of Discourse Markers

2.3.1. Textual Discourse Markers

Textual discourse markers, according to Hyland and Tse (2004, pp. 156-177)^[10], can be sub-classified into seven categories.

1. **Logical markers:** These are markers that express semantic and structural relationships between discourse segments, helping readers clarify pragmatic connections. They include:
 2. **Additives**, e.g., ‘and’ and ‘furthermore’. The marker ‘and’ serves both structural and cohesive roles. Structurally, it joins two or more syntactic units, such as clauses, phrases, or verbs, while cohesively, it helps clarify the connection between the conjuncts. ‘And’ can also precede units of discourse such as elaboration, evidence, and clarification, contributing to the coherence of the argument. It may have a pragmatic effect in the sense that it signals a continuation by the speaker. However, ‘and’ does not provide information about what is being continued, for this information is inferred from the discourse content and structure. Additionally, it is used to indicate a “speaker’s continuation” (Fraser, 1988)^[8].
 3. **Adversatives**, e.g., ‘but’ and ‘however.’
 4. **Conclusive rapport markers**, e.g., ‘finally’ and ‘in sum.’ These markers indicate conclusions or summaries in the text.
 5. **Causal markers**, e.g., ‘so,’ ‘because,’ and ‘as a result.’ According to Schiffrin (1987, p. 330)^[15], ‘because’ is used by the speaker to indicate a cause-and-effect relationship, while ‘so’ signals a premise-conclusion relation and marks a result, thereby establishing a causal link between events.
 6. **Sequencers:** These markers indicate specific positions in a sequence and guide the reader through the presentation of different arguments in a particular order, e.g., ‘in the first place’ and ‘secondly.’
 7. **Reminders:** These markers refer back to previous sections of the text to resume, amplify, or summarise earlier arguments, e.g., ‘as.said.’
 8. **Topicalisers:** These markers explicitly signal a topic shift, making it easier for the reader to follow the

argumentation, e.g., ‘now.’

9. **Code glosses:** These markers explain, rephrase, expand, or exemplify propositional content. They reflect the writer’s expectations about the audience’s ability to follow the argument, e.g., ‘that is,’ ‘in other words,’ and ‘for instance.’
10. **Illocutionary markers:** These markers explicitly identify the act the writer is performing in the text, e.g., ‘I hope to persuade’ and ‘I back up this idea.’
11. **Announcements:** These markers refer the readers forward to future sections in the text, preparing them for upcoming argumentation, e.g., ‘ibid.’

2.3.2. Interpersonal Discourse Markers

Hyland and Tse (2004, pp. 156-177)^[10] sub-classify interpersonal markers into five main categories.

1. **Hedges:** These markers indicate uncertainty and prevent full attachment to the statements presented in the text. From a linguistic viewpoint, epistemic verbs like ‘may,’ ‘might,’ ‘would,’ probability adverbs like ‘perhaps,’ ‘maybe,’ and epistemic expressions like ‘it is likely,’ ‘it is probable’ have been examined.
2. **Certainty markers:** These markers provide full attachment to the statements presented by the writer, like ‘undoubtedly,’ ‘of course,’ ‘naturally,’ ‘in fact,’ ‘you know.’ Schiffrin (1987, p. 268)^[15] clarifies that ‘you know’ has two discourse functions: a marker of meta-knowledge about what speakers and hearers know, and a marker of meta-knowledge about what is generally known. It is also used to acknowledge that the speaker believes the hearer shares some knowledge about a specific piece of information.
3. **Attributors:** These markers serve “a double function in the text” and explicitly indicate “the source of the information,” e.g., ‘as the Prime Minister indicated,’ or they use authoritative references to serve persuasive goals (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 268)^[15].
4. **Attitude markers:** These markers express the writer’s affective stance toward the reader and the content presented in the text. Linguistically, these markers can take the following forms:
 - **Denotic verbs**, e.g., ‘must,’ ‘have to.’
 - **Attitudinal adverbs**, e.g., ‘surprisingly.’
 - **Adjectival constructions**, e.g., ‘it is difficult,’ ‘it is impossible.’
 - **Cognitive verbs**, e.g., ‘I think,’ ‘I believe.’
5. **Commentaries:** These markers help to establish and sustain rapport with the audience through rhetorical questions, e.g., ‘Is this the right attitude?’, direct appeals, e.g., ‘dear reader,’ ‘you,’ and personalisations, e.g., ‘I,’ ‘we,’ ‘me,’ ‘my feelings.’ Personalisers contribute to the development of rapport with the reader.

3. Functions of Discourse Markers

Academics need to use the language toolkit, among which is DM, to write forcefully and effectively. Actually, DMs are inevitable tools for scholars to fulfil distinct purposes, express messages, promote privileges, and construct results. They are applied to connect thoughts in an assumed context. Discourse markers, for this reason, serve numerous purposes. In speaking, scholars agree that the employment of DMs is to enable the listeners’ duty of acquiring what the utterers’ utterances were. Aijmer (2014, p. 210)^[1] states that discourse

markers serve as indicators leading to clarification in a specified context. Discourse markers show the same purpose in written methods; they contribute to attaining coherence in learners' writing. Schiffrin (1987, p. 326) ^[15] designates the involvement of discourse markers in coherence, stating that discourse markers "deliver contextual organisation for utterances" and that they "index an utterance to the resident context in which utterances are shaped and in which they are to be construed."

It is also claimed that the chief purpose of applying discourse markers in academic writing is to promote the usefulness of what learners produce (Coxhead & Byrd, 2007) ^[7]; (Hyland, 2008) ^[9]; (Karaata, *et al.*, 2012) ^[12]. Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) ^[14] claim that the function of discourse markers is not only to refer to the linking between a portion of a discourse and another, but also to shape subordinate and coordinate patterns over positioning the distribution at dissimilar points. The application of these strategies (DMs) expands the use of language in a mobile means and enables the continuing manuscript (Sciffirin *et al.* 2001). For Brinton (2010, p. 74) ^[6], DMs were applied to:

- Initiate a discourse
- Spot a borderline in a discourse (shift/ incomplete shift in a subject)
- Introduce an answer or a response
- Assist as a filler or a postponing approach
- Aid the utterer in keeping the conversation
- Support the discourse either cataphorically or anaphorically
- Spot either foregrounded or backgrounded data.

Discourse markers, in a nutshell, are functional words employed to perform grammatical functions by connecting thoughts in a part of writing in order to transfer from one sentence to the next smoothly and logically.

3. Research Approach

This study aims to examine how discourse markers, in their two classifications, are utilised in speeches. This research adopts Hyland and Tse's (2004) ^[10] functional classification model, which includes textual and interpersonal discourse markers. The researcher employs both quantitative and qualitative methods to manually analyse the data, including its frequencies and the functions involved in Kamala Harris's speeches as part of her 2024 presidential campaign.

3.1. Selection of Speeches

Samples from three speeches by Kamala Harris in this section will be analysed based on the classification of discourse markers by Hyland and Tse (2004) ^[10]: textual and interpersonal markers.

1. **Sample Speech One:** Remarks as prepared for delivery—Vice President Kamala Harris's Acceptance Speech on August 22 (2024a), at 12:17 AM.
2. **Sample Speech Two:** Vice President Kamala Harris's Full Speech on the Ellipse in Washington, DC, on October 30 (2024b), at 02:15 PM.
3. **Sample Speech Three:** Vice President Kamala Harris delivered her concession speech at Howard University in Washington, D.C., following her loss to Republican opponent Donald Trump in the (2024c) presidential election.

Table 1: Analysis of Textual Discourse Markers

No.	Category	Type	Frequency
1.	Logical A. Additive	and also	290 5
	B. Adversative	but yet instead on the other hand while	21 1 1 1 2
	C. Causative	so because as a result,	22 17 1
	D. Conclusive	finally, secondly	5 2
2.	Sequencers	first next then	5 5 1
3.	Reminders	another	9
4.	Topicalisers	now	9
5.	Code glasses	that is this is	15 4
6.	Illocutionary	0	0
7.	Announcements	next next	5 2

Table 2: Analysis of Interpersonal Discourse Markers

No.	Category	Type	Frequency
1.	Hedges	may would	1 21
2.	Certainty	in fact you know	2 1
3.	Attributors	0	0
4.	Attitude		
	A. Denotic	must have to	7 4
	B. Attitudinal adverb	0	0
	C. Adjectival	easy	5
	D. Cognitive	think believe	5 7
5.	Commentaries	you I we me	81 169 73 33

3.2. Discussion of Findings

3.2.1. Before the Elections

The results reveal that, among textual discourse markers, the logical connective ‘and’ was employed 290 times. In the examples above, ‘and’ conveys an idea of continuity and the accessibility of additional opportunities, expectations for lower-class people, and reforms (including the economy, lowering the cost of everyday items, healthcare, housing, and groceries). To present additional evidence, the utterer relies on exact markers to accomplish her aim. For example, markers such as ‘also’ were employed for this purpose, with ‘also’ appearing five times.

The most noticeable logical adversative marker was ‘but,’ which occurs 21 times. The chief purpose of adversatives is to differentiate thoughts. *But to serve the only client he has ever had himself* is a criticism of former President Donald Trump, contending that his policies and actions have benefited him more than the American people. It is implied that genuine leadership entails putting the needs and well-being of the community ahead of personal interests. Harris uses her speech to draw attention to the differences between what she describes as Trump’s self-serving actions and her idea of public service, which holds leaders accountable to their constituents. This part of her speech emphasises the larger issue of honesty and accountability, as well as the need for elected leaders to act in the public interest rather than pursue personal goals. Voters are looking for leaders who are dedicated to social justice and the welfare of the group. Harris’s message is also one of hope and solidarity, emphasising the future over the past and calling on Americans to unite to create a better society. She implies that it is our shared duty to preserve and promote the principles of democracy and inclusivity, as in: *But America, we are not going back.*

Other adversative markers like ‘yet,’ ‘instead,’ and ‘on the other hand’ are used once, and the marker ‘while’ is used twice.

The dominant logical causatives are ‘so,’ used 22 times; ‘because,’ used 17 times; and ‘as a result,’ used once. Their main purpose was to connect causes and results. For the causative ‘so,’ Harris emphasises what she sees as a negative attitude toward Medicare and Social Security by contrasting her strategy with Donald Trump’s. Her assertion that Trump *tried to cut Medicare and Social Security every year* casts her as an advocate for these vital programs, appealing to people who value social safety, integrity, and senior welfare.

The causative marker ‘because’ is used to indicate that Trump is responsible for the negative consequences in the country, as in *This is what is happening in our country. Because of Donald Trump.*

Likewise, the conclusive marker ‘finally’ is used to provide a final summary of the context’s ideas. This marker is used five times.

In the aforementioned illustration, we discover the use of sequence markers like ‘next,’ ‘then,’ ‘first,’ and ‘secondly,’ where Harris utilises these markers to signify a transition to an innovative phase or occasion in the prospect. Also, they were regarded as announcement markers, signalling a transition to upcoming units of the manuscript.

The reminder marker ‘another’ was employed nine times by the speaker to refer to previously mentioned points, such as how Trump is not fighting for the middle class but for himself and his friends, as in *He does not actually fight for the middle class. Instead, he fights for himself and his billionaires.*

Harris employs the topicaliser ‘now’ nine times to draw attention to how the country’s problems are changing and how the focus has shifted from dealing with the pandemic to economic concerns, especially growing expenses. This procedure provides a more comprehensive view of how leadership must evolve to meet the demands of the American people today.

The code gloss markers ‘this’ and ‘that’ are used to list the negative points about her opponent, Donald Trump. She portrays him as a polarising and unpredictable leader who is more concerned with retaliation and power than improving the lives of Americans. The phrase *that is not who we are* is used repeatedly to emphasise that Trump’s ideas run counter to the togetherness and cooperation that Harris feels express America, as in: *This is someone who is unstable, obsessed with revenge, consumed with grievance, and out for unchecked power. Donald Trump has spent a decade trying to keep the American people divided and afraid of each other. That is who he is. But America, I am here tonight to say that is not who we are. That is not who we are. That is not who we are. You see what Donald Trump.*

The marker ‘that’ was applied 15 times, and ‘this’ was employed four times.

The most commonly applied among the interpersonal markers were the commentary markers ‘I’ and ‘we.’ The marker ‘I’ was applied 169 times, and ‘we’ was employed 81 times. Kamala Harris uses these markers to build rapport with the hearer through reducing the remoteness between them,

irrespective of their age and social status differences. In her commentary, 'we' is widely used in both texts.

Hedge markers like 'may' and 'would' are also used. 'May' was applied one time, and 'would' was applied 21 times. Kamala Harris compares herself to Trump, highlighting that Trump will deliver tax cuts to his billionaire donors, while she will deliver tax relief to working people and the middle class.

The certainty marker 'in fact' is used twice, whereas 'you know' was applied one time. For attitude markers, 'must' was employed to convey the author's emotional morals toward

the hearer and the topic exhibited in the manuscript. It is used seven times. Markers such as 'have to' are utilised to show the speaker's attitudes. This marker is used four times. Finally, other attitude markers, such as adjectival ones, are used. 'Easy' is used five times to point out a situation. Furthermore, cognitive verb markers like 'believe' and 'think' were employed as attitude markers, reflecting Harris's thoughts. 'Think' is used five times, and 'believe' is used seven times.

3.2.2 After Losing the Elections

Table 3: Textual Markers

No.	Category	Type	Frequency
1. A.	Logical Additive	And	51
		Also	2
B.	Adversative	But	11
		Yet	1
		while	1
C.	Causative	So	8
		Because	1
D.	Conclusive	0	0
2.	Sequencers	0	0
3.	Reminders	let	5
4.	Topicalisers	now	1
5.	Code glasses	That is	2
		This is	3
6.	Illocutionary	0	0
7.	Announcements	0	0

Table 4: Interpersonal Markers

No.	Category	Type	Frequency
1.	Hedges	May	2
		would	1
2.	Certainty	You know	1
3.	Attributors	0	0
4. A.	Attitude denotic	Must	3
		0	0
B.	Attitudinal adverb	0	0
C.	Adjectival	impossible	1
D.	Cognitive	0	0
5.	Commentaries	You	25
		I	27
		We	32
		Me	4

The results show that amongst textual discourse markers, the logical connective 'and' was used 51 times. Kamala Harris continues to call for unity after losing the election. By repeating that change takes time and their voices matter, Kamala Harris motivates her spectators to continue being involved in the democratic process. The marker 'also' is used for this purpose, which is utilised 2 times.

The Logical adversative marker 'but' is used, which is counted 11 times. By using "but," she introduces a contrasting idea. Despite her feelings, it is crucial to consider the democratic process and the election outcomes. Kamala Harris states that she will assist the President-elect, Trump, and his team with the transition, despite having lost the election. By doing this, Harris emphasises the significance of unity and consistency in an elected society, as in: *I get it, but we must accept the results of this election. Earlier today, I spoke with President-elect Trump and congratulated him on his victory.*

I also told him that we will help him and his team with their transition and that we will engage in a peaceful transfer of power. Markers like 'yet' and 'while' are utilised for this purpose. 'Yet' and 'while' are applied 1 time each.

The dominant logical causatives are 'so' (8 times used), and 'because' (1 time used). Their primary purpose is to establish a connection between causes and effects. 'So' assists to confirm Harris' feelings of love, gratitude, and dissolution, advocating that these emotions are a reply to the shore and confidence of the public, as in: *So let me say my heart is full today. My heart is full today, full of gratitude for the trust you have placed in me, full of love for our country, and full of resolve.*

The reminder marker 'let' is used 9 times. Kamala Harris applies the phrase *Let me say* to inspire the public to pay attention and get involved with what they pursue. It carries a sense of sincerity and a wish to connect, as in: *So let me say*

(*crowd screams love you*), and *I love you back and I love you back. So let me say my heart is full today. My heart is full today, full of gratitude for the trust you have placed in me, full of love for our country, and full of resolve.*

The reminder marker 'now' is used 1 time by the speaker after losing elections and accepting the results, as in *Now, I know folks are feeling and experiencing a range of emotions right now. I get it, but we must accept the results of this election.*

The code glosses that the marker 'this' is employed 3 times. Instead of giving up and surrendering to frustration, Kamala Harris inspires people to stay confident, act, and work cooperatively toward a shared purpose in challenging times, as in: *This is not a time to throw up our hands. This is a time to roll up our sleeves. This is a time to organize, to mobilize, and to stay engaged for the sake of freedom and justice and the future that we all know we can build together.* That is used for the same purpose, which is employed 2 times.

For the interpersonal markers, the most commonly applied markers were the commentary markers 'we.' The marker 'we' is employed 32 times, 'I' 27 times, 'you' 25 times, and 'me' 4 times. Kamala Harris utilises these markers to concentrate on individual pledge, personal agency, sentimental relation, legitimacy, and an invitation to cooperative action. It confirms the importance of personal efforts in the broader fight for a better future.

Hedges, such as 'may' and 'would', are used. 'May' is used twice, and 'would' once. Kamala Harris aims to connect, stimulate, and motivate the people to persist devoted to their common sight for the future, as in: *And may that work guide us even in the face of setbacks toward the extraordinary promise of the United States of America. I thank you all. May God bless you. And may God bless the United States of America.* The phrases *May God bless you* and *May God bless the United States of America* can recall feelings of trust, care, and ethical shore, echoing intensely with many hearers who share the same principles. The certainty marker 'you know' is used once, whereas the denotic marker is used 3 times.

The Adjectival marker 'impossible' is employed once. It highlights the importance of sustained effort and intention. It proposes that creating change requires a continuing pledge and flexibility, even in the face of challenges, as in: *Don't ever stop trying to make the world a better place. You have power. You have power. And don't you ever listen when anyone tells you something is impossible because it has never been done before.*

4. Conclusions

Based on the data analysis, the results (before losing the election) show that amongst the textual discourse markers, the logical connective 'and' was used 290 times to convey a sense of continuity and the possibility of more opportunities for lower-class people, as well as reforms in areas such as the economy, reducing the cost of living, healthcare, housing, and groceries. Kamala Harris employs discourse markers in her speeches to emotionally and mentally engage her audience, thereby influencing their knowledge, satisfaction, and emotions. Furthermore, Kamala Harris contrasts herself with her opponent, Donald Trump, to steer voters toward supporting her. After losing the election, most textual discourse markers are reduced, including logical markers (53), adversatives (13), causatives (9), reminders and code switches (5), and sequencers (0).

Regarding interpersonal markers, the most commonly

employed were the commentary markers, particularly 'I.' The marker 'I' appears 169 times, while 'we' was used 81 times. Kamala Harris used these markers to establish rapport with her audience, reducing the distance between herself and the listeners, regardless of differences in age and social status. Notably, 'we' was used extensively in both texts. While in speech three, the interpersonal markers are minimised into 88. Vice President Kamala Harris continues to call for unity. Kamala states that she will assist the President-elect, Trump, and his team with the transition, even though she lost the election.

Furthermore, Harris might prefer the welfare of the country through opinionated opposition. By choosing to exert influence on the elected President Trump, Harris could propose implementing strategies that align with her ethics, support for her voters' benefits, and demonstrate a readiness to make changes for the greater good, which may help position her as a dual-party commander, emphasising her commitment to development and consistency in a stimulating and radical environment.

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