



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation.

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Confrontational Strategies in Political Communication

Qasim Abbas Dhayef¹, Ali Shawket Humood^{2*}

¹⁻² College of Education for Humanities, University of Babylon, Iraq

* Corresponding Author: **Ali Shawket Humood**

Article Info

ISSN (Online): 2582-7138

Impact Factor (RSIF): 8.04

Volume: 07

Issue: 01

Received: 09-12-2025

Accepted: 07-01-2026

Published: 06-02-2026

Page No: 866-871

Abstract

The article makes the most of a Critical Discourse Analysis approach to investigate the first debate of the 2024 presidential campaign between Joe Biden and Donald Trump. The analysis utilizes Teun A. van Dijk's integrated sociocognitive model of strategic discursive formation to explore the strategic architecture of confrontational communication. While Critical Discourse Analysis usually discusses issues of incivility and how they bear on confrontation and conflict in discursive communication, this analysis qualitatively examines paradigmatic instances of such communication to explore how the micro-linguistic building blocks of semantics, syntax, and style are used strategically to conduct a war of minds and ideas, with the macro-social objective of de-legitimizing the adversary and achieving discursive dominance. Findings show, the practice of confrontation is revealed to have a tri-level structure in which a repertoire of crisis-framing strategies, moral pollution, and epistemic aggressions is used at the discursive level. This is shown to transplant a mentality of siege and assault onto the cognitive interface of opponents. Ultimately, confrontation is revealed to be a struggle for a grip on the very reality itself within the realm of the social. The analysis extends a theoretical position from which it is argued that in the polarized communication of politics, power is performatively engaged at the discursive level in which the capacity to narrate what is true, legitimate, and real, is the founding political relation.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Confrontation, Van Dijk, Presidential Debate, Cognitive Models, Legitimacy, Power Relations

Introduction

In the discourse of political communication, the rhetoric of division has emerged as a hallmark of the modern era. In this regard, confrontation has not only become an integral part of the landscape, but has instead become the foundation upon which the entire rhetoric is focused. This can be seen quite prominently in the modern presidential debate, which represents a platform where disagreement and differences translate into direct confrontation, and the fight for votes turns into a battle of dominance and superiority. It must, however, not be overlooked that such an understanding of confrontation and incivility through the discourses of political communication resolves into a complex linguistic strategy. Hence, there is a pressing need to understand more about the structural manner in which confrontational discourse is realized, besides what is learned from the precise execution of these discourses on the negotiation of power in democratic systems. This study proposes that an adequate theory of confrontational politics, demands an extra-discursive framework that permits an articulation between the micro-level immediacy of linguistic interaction and the macro-level persistence of social power, and looks to an integrated framework of Critical Discourse Analysis as developed by van Dijk, where ideology and dominance are to be linked to micro-level text and talk through the mediation of social cognition. Although the model propounded by van Dijk is highly recognized, the use of the model as a holistic tool to analyze the quintessential aspects of live and multi-party confrontational political discourse, specifically in the setting of a debate, remains an open field for further research to be conducted. Essentially, it has been noted that the research focused solely on one form of analysis or the other; however, this research sought to analyze the efficacy of confrontational discourse as a

function of the simultaneous application of the linguistic, cognitive, and social aspects thereof. To this end, the present article conducts a qualitative case study, applying van Dijk's tripartite framework to the 2024 United States presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. In selecting five paradigmatic excerpts of peak confrontation, the analysis goes beyond cataloguing aggressive language to interrogate its integrated mechanics. The question driving the research is: How does the mechanism of confrontational discourse function across van Dijk's model, and what do these findings reveal about the division between linguistic structure and power relations in political speech? In answering, the paper intends to make concrete how specific rhetorical moves, from lexical choices and syntactic agency to interactional gambits, are mobilized to manipulate mental models of self and other performing and contesting social power in real time before a national audience.

Theoretical Framework

Discourse, Power, and Ideology

The analytical perspective of this study is primarily based on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, which specifically takes into account the integrated approach to CDA developed by van Dijk. Essentially, the founding premise of the CDA approach critiques the concept of the neutrality of the medium of communication, which is rooted in the approach that the primary social practice of human interaction is discussed through the creation of asymmetrical relationships of power between communicators (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Dijk, 2015)^[3, 10]. This can be identified within the integrated approach of van Dijk (1998)^[6], which creates a tripartite relationship between the social practice of communication, cognition, and society. The basic assumption is that social power, which here means the power of one group over the actions, and even the ideas, of another, is realized, legitimized, and countered through discourse (van Dijk, 1993)^[5]. The discursive realization of power becomes institutionalized and is sustained through ideology. In the case of political discourse, therefore, every statement is essentially involved in the battle for ideological hegemony and the manipulation of the consent of the public.

Three Levels Analytical Framework

To apply his suggested framework on the discourse, power, and ideology relationship, van Dijk recommends a triangulated model that requires researchers to conduct analysis at three different but integrated levels. This ensures that social reality is not reduced to either linguistic forms or abstract sociological constructs.

Micro Level (Discourse Analysis)

The micro level is the site of the observable text and talk itself, wherein concrete linguistic choices manifest the abstract social and cognitive processes. Van Dijk (2001)^[7] outlines several dimensions for analysis, which this study synthesizes as follows: semantic structures (topics, presuppositions, implications, evidentiality), syntactic structures (agency through active/passive voice, transitivity, modality), stylistic and rhetorical structures (lexical choice, metaphor, hyperbole), and interactional structures (turn-taking, interruptions, speech acts like accusations or justifications). It is in and through such linguistic features that power becomes coded into discourse; syntactic agency might assign or erase blame, for instance, while lexical choice

morally valorizes or condemns.

The Interface (Cognitive Analysis)

The cognitive level is the essential, yet often under-analyzed, interface between society and discourse. According to van Dijk (2014)^[9], social structures and social practices can only do their work through the minds of social actors. This level emphasizes socially shared, collective representations, such as mental models and ideological schemas. A mental model, for any social actor, refers to a subjective episodic representation of an individual event or situation. This could mean, for example, a candidate's mental representation of an event, like a failure of foreign policy. This is, in turn, underpinned and shaped by deeper and more permanent levels of underlying ideological schemas that govern individual beliefs about matters of identity, norms, goals, and that usually take the form of polarized categories of "Us" and "Them". Political discourse seeks to manage mental models strategically, aiming to install, strengthen, or refute them within social actors' minds.

Macro Level (Social Analysis)

The macro level of analysis concerns the broad societal structures and relations within which discourse is embedded. This involves identifying the relevant social groups, institutions, and their hierarchical relationships, such as political parties, media, and the electorate. The central concern is how access to and control over public discourse, like the privileged platform of a presidential debate, is itself a resource of power (van Dijk, 2001)^[7]. Social analysis examines the strategies groups use to (de)legitimize their own or their opponents' social positions, authority, and policies. In a debate, this level frames the encounter as a public ritual where institutional and political power is performed and contested for a national audience.

Confrontational Discourse as Strategic Practice

Synthesizing this framework, confrontational discourse in political environments can be defined, for the purpose of analysis, as: A goal-oriented, multi-level strategic practice, which moves beyond simple disagreement or normative incivility (Papacharissi, 2004)^[4] toward the idea of rhetorical weaponization of linguistic structure itself. As a strategic practice, it:

1. Employs specific micro-discursive moves. Such as face-threatening speech acts, adversarial lexical sets, interruptive turn.
2. Assaults the opponent's mental model or schema of the world like, characterizations of their competence as negative, their policies as dangerous to the in-group with the ultimate goal of changing their minds on some issues.
3. Social goal of weakening the opponent's legitimacy, destabilizing their hold on power, and ascertaining the speaker's dominance within the macro-structure of the political field.

Such a definition places confrontation not on the misfortune of dialogue but rather on the strategy of political action, rendering van Dijk's triangulated model the exact tool necessary to unearth the entire operational dynamics of such confrontation within the target dialogue data.

Methodology

In the present study, the qualitative, interpretative approach

informs a critical discourse analysis of a singular, defining event: the first 2024 United States Presidential Debate. The debate brief acts as a critical case study, providing a high-stakes, nationally televised venue within which not only is confrontation both legitimate and desirable but strategically central to the performance/operation of leadership in seeking legitimacy/mandate. From the transcript of the debate, purposive sampling was employed to identify five salient excerpts from the discourse from the singular, overall text based on exemplification of confrontation, where discourse is taken not simply as respectful, even fundamentally disagreeing, but also incorporates direct, personal accusation, challenges to competence or honesty, and struggles for interactional control/ dominance. This means a close reading to discern specific linguistic strategies at a micro-level of discourse, interpreting how they are used to engage cognitive models of self, opponent, and issues at hand in a way that confronts or attacks these models, and ultimately, evaluating how they socially impact in terms of symbolic power and ideological position in the political field. The juxtaposition of these elements in a single paragraph of analysis is meant to generate a nuanced approach to confrontation as a holistic level of political communication.

Analysis and Discussion

Excerpt 1

Biden: *You have to take a look at what I was left when I became president, what Mr. Trump left me. We had an economy that was in freefall. The pandemic is so badly handled, many people were dying. All he said was, it's not that serious. Just inject a little bleach in your arm. It'd be all right. The economy collapsed...*

Trump: *We had the greatest economy in the history of our country... He has not done a good job. He's done a poor job. And inflation's killing our country."*

The opening challenge of the debate on the economy immediately signals and sets the discursive space that all other clashes take place within. At a micro-discursive level, Biden's opening move for his syntactic strategy involves a tactic of negation and displacement of agency "You have to take a look at what I was left... what Mr. Trump left me." This passive verb form, "was left" semantically situates Trump as the agency for a state that is represented as being in a state of "free fall" and "chaos" indexed by the emotive and derisory referencing of the "inject a little bleach" comment. The result is a stylistic choice that functions not only as a matter-of-fact refutation but also as a face-threatening act intended to associate the opponent with incompetence and absurdity. Trump's counter falls as a direct semantic inversion, with an assertion of a model of "the greatest economy in the history of our country" destroyed by external forces "We got hit with COVID" and subsequently mishandled by Biden, whom he labels categorically as having done "a poor job". His lexical choice "killing our country" turns economic policy into a discourse of national vitality and mortal threat.

Cognitively, what is at play here is a struggle over the fundamental mental models of recent history, with each candidate's objective being to embed a mental model of recent history, conceived of as a series of narrative tropes around rescue as opposed to ruin, into the mind of the audience. Biden's mental model is a sequence of crisis 'the

collapse under Trump' and heroism 'we got things together again'. Trump's mental model is a narrative of golden age disruption (COVID) and inept response, and his objective is to prompt a cognitive schema of nostalgia for his administration. The struggle is contained in the direct and unambiguously contradictory nature of each candidate's mental models, each speech act intended to refute the opponent's and enshrine its own as an acceptable mental model of recent history, a mental model of recent history intended to inform judgment about a candidate's performance.

Socially, this is the raw contest for political legitimacy and the right to define reality. In characterizing Trump's tenure as a period of catastrophic failure, Biden seeks to delegitimize his opponent's core claim to competency and, by extension, to fitness to reclaim power. On the other hand, Trump's discourse seeks to delegitimize Biden's presidency altogether as an aberrant decline from an antecedent state of greatness, in a story that serves to mobilize his in-group on a mission of restoration. This macro-struggle is not about economic data points but about which leader can successfully anchor his ideology, the story of America of his group, as the authentic one, thereby laying claim to the symbolic authority to lead.

Excerpt 2

Trump: *So that means he can take the life of the baby in the ninth month and even after birth... So, he's in ... he's willing to, as we say, rip the baby out of the womb in the ninth month and kill the baby. Nobody wants that to happen. Democrat or Republican, nobody wants it to happen.*

Biden: *He's lying. That is simply not true... We are not for late-term abortion, period, period, period."*

This debate on abortion goes beyond a particular policy stance, moving into a struggle to determine the moral nature of the opposition through an extreme test of semantic definition. At a micro-linguistic level, Trump uses an incredibly powerful rhetorical device with his use of hyper-specific hypotheticals. His declaration that Biden "is willing to, as we say, rip the baby out of the womb in the ninth month and kill the baby" is an extraordinarily sophisticated, yet provocative, linguistic move. Not only is the verb choice, 'rip' stylistically visceral, but the use of the noun phrase "in the ninth month" creates a maximum impact, followed by the simplistic moral calculation of the phrase repeated as a question, "kill the baby". This is not an argument in terms of trimesters or viability, but rather the crafting of an action of the extreme kind by his opponent. Biden's rebuttal is a triadic micro-discursive strategy of reaction, where he employs a direct speech act of accusation in stating "He's lying". He also uses a semantic correction in the statement "Roe v. Wade does not provide for that". He subsequently makes a triple denial of his opponent's act or stance in stating "We are not for late-term abortion, period, period, period".

In cognitive terms, this happens through the potent manipulation of affective splitting and moral models. The language being used by Trump aims to evoke and enhance a particular "us vs. them" form of ideological splitting in his base of supporters, so that while "we" stand for the protection of life, "they" advocate infanticide. Trump refers to "the former Governor of Virginia" as a mental model, a particular "cognitive exemplar" that grounds his statement in reality.

Biden seeks to counter Trump through attempting to break free from the forced ideological model and re-assert his own model of "Only when woman's life is in danger". So, we have a debate about which mental model should dominate the public discourse, whether it is that of brutal and elective late-term infant sacrifice, or that of exceptional and tragic infanticide in cases of womanly danger. Each candidate seeks to characterize the opponent's model as not only false but monstrous.

In terms of social dimension, such a confrontation is a performative contest for high moral ground and definitional power over the essence of opposition's identity. Here, we see a way in which Trump's discursive strategy seeks social delegitimization of Biden and the Democratic Party by relating them to a practice considered beyond civilized societal norms "Nobody wants that to happen. Democrat or Republican, nobody wants it". It is a blatant claim of superiority of in-group identity in relation to the out-group. Strikingly, there is Joe Biden's assertive negation, which is also a defense or countermeasure designed to prevent social de-legitimization by categorically denying being ascribed a deviant social identity. The competition for power is for symbolic representation of who is/is not "radical" and who embodies American values or occupies societal center or norm. More than it does in terms of actual policy, such a confrontation serves to establish ideological group boundaries.

Excerpt 3

"Biden: ...I went to the World War II cemetery ... World War I cemetery he refused to go to. He was standing with his four-star general, and he told him ... he said, I don't want to go in there because they're a bunch of losers and suckers. My son was not a loser. He was not a sucker. You're the sucker. You're the loser."

Here, confrontation explodes; the language shifts from the impersonal realm of policy to the deeply personal realm of loyalty, national sacrifice, and identity. The linguistic change is striking. Biden moves from his defense of servicemen's benefits from the policy realm to his deeply personal anecdote of his son's military service and death. The small engine of this confrontation in discourse consists in the direct quotation of accusation "A bunch of losers and suckers" an accusation attributed by Biden to Trump. This direct quotation is a grenade of discourse; its effectiveness is not in its grammatical or lexical complexity but in the harsh words selected by Trump. Biden's refutations of Trump's accusation, "My son was not a loser. He was not a sucker", is a moral syllogism. The conclusion that he draws is not a policy option but a raw interpersonal transformation "You're the sucker. You're the loser". This echoing grammar puts the slur back on the deliverer. What began as a defense of his son becomes a character attack on Trump? From a style standpoint, the repetitive chiasmus is like a hammer blow.

From a cognitive perspective, it is a volatile mix of personal mental models and public ideologies. Biden appeals to his personal mental model, that of his son, an individual he holds dear and specific, while using it against Trump's purported mental model of the military as an institution comprised of contemptible people. It is now no longer a battlefield for resource allocations and medical access; it is a battle for primordial reverence and symbolic rhetoric for patriotic sacrifice. Ultimately, Biden's rhetoric seeks to disrupt any

potential representation of Trump as a respectful figure for the ideals of a nation; instead, it seeks to corroborate a mental model that portrays Trump as a figure who holds contempt for the individuals that comprise his ideals, the military. Socially, this is the ultimate face-threatening act, and it has the utmost impact on power. This is because, as van Dijk identifies, social power is underpinned by legitimacy and moral authority. Biden, in accusing Trump of vilifying the military, which is considered a sacred ideal group in American nationalist ideology, is using the ultimate strategy to deprive Trump of such legitimacy and authority in the most face-threatening manner possible because he is not simply offering a reasoned critique; he is offering a social execution of Trump as a candidate worthy of the function of Commanding Officer. The social and ideological stakes are such that the power at stake is the very power of authority and definition over what it means to belong patriotically as an American. Biden places himself and his son inside the "Us" as the patriot of sacrifice, while Trump is relegated to a "Them" disqualify the moral character of the opponent.

Excerpt 4

"Trump: ...because we don't have borders anymore. Every state is now a border... we're literally an uncivilized country now... He opened the borders nobody's ever seen anything like. And we have to get a lot of these people out and we have to get them out fast, because they're going to destroy our country."

Biden: Every single thing he said is a lie, every single one."

The latter dialogue is a perfect example of confrontation through discursive manufacture of social reality, whereby language does not describe but rather constructs a paradigm of national existential threat. Trump's discourse works as one ongoing chain reaction of catastrophic frames, syntactically obliterating nuance with "we don't have borders any more", a declarative dissolving complex administrative reality into absolute absence, immediately moving to the spatializing "Every state is now a border" transmuting a policy challenge geographically contained into a ubiquitous national condition; now the lexicon goes up in affective intensity from "rat's nest" (vermin, filth), "killers" (criminal, mortal threat) to the civilizational judgment "literally an uncivilized country now". His culminating pronouncement, "they're going to destroy our country", turns out not to be a policy prediction but an apocalyptic prophecy delivered as fact. This is a starkly meta-discursive negation, as embodied in Biden's rebuttal "Every single thing he said is a lie, every single one". Such negation occurs not on the level of argument but on the level of truth.

Cognitively, this is a direct warfare over the public's cognitive map of their understanding of the nation-state itself. Trump's rhetoric is designed to trigger, to solidify, this siege cognitive schema, in which the in-group, "our" country, is under relentless attack by a violent, chaotic out-group, "they". Trump's words and actions also give us vivid, fear-tinged images to reinforce this cognitive schema—overrun borders, endemic crime, and dissolution of nation itself. What gives Trump's rhetorical attack such force, such power, is that it is, at core, so schematic in its cognitive simplicity, it offers a simple, discernible culprit to explain our current societal ills. Biden's riposte, in turn, attempts to reset the

cognitive map itself, to snap out of this crisis cognitive schema and into one of typical, if grave, issues of public policy. The clash, then, is between two diametrically opposed cognitive landscapes.

At a social level, this confrontation is fundamentally about who exercises power over defining reality in relation to definitions of polity and its priorities. The discourse of Trump can be seen as performing a radical social (re)definition act. By attempting to frame immigrants as bearers of destruction, Trump aims to legitimize politics of exclusion, strength, and radical defense as a necessary and logical action against this reality. By doing this, Trump is able to consolidate his in-group on the basis of shared threats and a leader who is fearless in recognizing this reality. The denial offered by Biden is an attempt to insist on a social definition that is oriented toward “factual” definitions of governance and against a kind of demagogic fantasy. The power play offered by Biden is his attempt to appeal to a kind of social consensus in favor of reason as a legitimate basis of social definitions. Hence, Biden’s attempt to frame Trump’s discourse as outside legitimate political discourse is a key insight into this broader struggle, where confrontation is a key mechanism through which these fundamentally different visions of social reality clash in a violent sense.

Excerpt 5

“Trump: If it's a fair and legal and good election ... absolutely. I would have much rather accepted these but the fraud and everything else was ridiculous...”

Biden: ...you continued to appeal and appeal to courts all across the country. Not one single court in America said any of your claims had any merit... I doubt whether you'll accept it because you're such a whiner.”

This final confrontation rises to a meta-level in which the rules for resolving any conflict of power are part of the conflict. The small-damage interactions are a model in the use of the conditional or absolute word choice. Trump's reply, “If it's a fair and legal and good election ... absolutely” uses syntax that places a condition on unconditional agreement. The string of conjunctions “and” in a row, creates a high conditionality, while the dash leading off the “absolutely” makes an unwritten, aural subordination of agreement to conditionality. Trump instantly activates the counter-narrative “the fraud and everything else was ridiculous”, making illegitimacy the default cognitive frame. Biden’s riposte employs a forensic vocabulary of procedure “courts”, “claims”, “merit” and “evidence”. The final judgment upon his opponent in the label “whiner” is a stroke of exceptional rhetorical flair, moving from a vocabulary of juridical procedure as such to a vocabulary of immaturity and infantilism.

Cognitively, it is a battle over the “epistemic schemas” or rules that determine what is true that underpin a democracy. Trump’s rhetoric is one that reinforces an epistemic schema that is one of suspiciousness towards a system that is automatically fraudulent until it is proven otherwise to his mind. Biden is effectively engaging with and challenging that epistemic schema with one that is more authoritative and knows what is true, a judicial process that is a step-by-step one that is based on evidence, and whose complete rejection by all courts he uses to cognitively close the matter with his rhetorical flourish of “Not one single court...”. He then

resorts to character pathology with his charge that “something snapped in you” and that it is a cognitive failure rather than a political one.

Socially, this exchange discloses the ultimate frontier of political confrontation: the struggle over the mechanism of legitimation. Power in a democracy is not won through votes alone but is sanctified by the loser's consent. Trump's conditional language constitutes a direct attack on this sacrament. It retains for itself the right to de-legitimize the state apparatus of power and, by implication, keeps open an autonomous source of legitimation of his movement, based on grievance and “stolen” glory. This is a power gambit that works outside of, and in defiance of, institutional ratification. Biden responds with a fervent re-assertion of the institutional paradigm. His power consists in presenting himself as the guardian of the democratic process as such and defining acceptance not as concession but as civic duty. The macro-conflict here is not between left and right policies but between two conceptions of political reality: one pluralist and institutional, the other populist and anchored in a personalistic narrative of persecution and restoration. This confrontation illustrates that the deepest power relationship contested in political discourse may well be the authority to define what will count as reality and truth after the votes are cast.

Linguistic Structure and the Architecture of Power: A Synthesis

The key insight of the integrated analysis of the five confrontational episodes is that the debate was not a disinterested exchange of opposed views but rather a ritualized confrontational struggle in which language constituted as central an element of conflict as the content of the views being expressed. Indeed, confrontational discourse was realized as a strategic whole through the operating levels of all three of van Dijk’s levels. First, at the level of micro-linguistics, there is the repetitive use of elements of a semantic crisis construct “destroy our country”, “rat's nest”, of graphic hyperbole (“rip the baby out”), and of strategic use of personal insult (“you're the sucker”). These were not random bursts of incivility. Rather, they were clearly calculated to achieve particular social actions.

The efficacy of such minute-level tactics was entirely dependent upon their cognitive effects. Each linguistic action was designed to attack the opponent’s default conception of reality while affording in-group support for the speaker’s own. In Trump’s discourse, we find consistent efforts to embed a siege mentality blueprint of reality: America as a site of civility in a world under existential threat from chaos beyond its borders and weakness within them. In contrast, Biden’s discourse attempted to bolster a conception of reality in which a vigorous, fact-based form of governance was under attack from demagogic fantasy. So understood, the antagonist-antagonist confrontation played out as a competition to claim a position of epistemological ascendancy—an effort to uniquely privilege a conception of America in public consciousness. The force of a phrase like “if it’s a fair and legal election” derives not from formal linguistics but from its ability to maintain and extend an alternate reality for making sense of electoral outcomes that circumvents institutional validation in favor of individual complaint.

Consequently, the relation between linguistic structure and power relations proliferated here is essentially performative

and constitutive. One did not describe or claim power through discourse; it was performed and legitimized through it. The macro-social struggle for dominance, the right to lead the nation, was acted out by the micro-linguistic management of cognitive schemas. He who could define the key terms of the political reality, what constitutes a crisis, who is a patriot, what counts as a legitimate election, took for himself the discursive authority from which flows governing power. In this way, the debate made clear that in highly polarized political communication, confrontational discourse is the central mechanism for waging the meta-conflict over who holds the ultimate power, the ability to control the political narrative.

Conclusion

This critical discourse analysis has identified that the colorful, aggressive discursive exchanges between Trump and Biden in the 2024 debate are part of a highly sophisticated, multilevel strategic practice. By applying van Dijk's integrated model, the analysis went well beyond cataloging aggressive rhetoric to show how particular linguistic structures, from lexical choice and syntactic framing to interactional gambits, are systematically weaponized. These micro-discursive acts serve as the delivery mechanisms for a cognitive war, targeting and attempting to reshape the public's mental models and ideological schemas of the nation, its crises, and its leaders. The ultimate social objective of this practice is not to win an argument but to perform a bid for dominance through undermining the opponent's legitimacy while pressing one's own claim to define political reality.

Hence, the main contribution of this study can be said to be found in this overall, holistic way of understanding the working logic of confrontation. Here, it will be seen that in recent, polarized media systems, political power is being contested and performed through the discursive construction of competing epistemic realities. Not only are the findings of this study significant to political communication studies at large, but they are also significant because they bring to the table critical normative questions related to democracy and how confrontation strategies that appeal to existential threat and moral pollution can challenge the shared facts needed for deliberation.

Needless to say, this line of research has potential in continuing to investigate this same level of discourse in a longitudinal design with candidate utterances, or continuing to explore its applications in a comparative design examining various forms of media and political culture. This analysis simply serves to endorse the basic assumption of any critical discourse analysis, that is, language is never neutrality itself. As a basic commodity in the high-stakes drama of a presidential debate, language is ultimately the stuff from which power is both created and contested.

References

1. Benoit WL. *Communication in political campaigns*. New York: Peter Lang; 2007.
2. CNN Staff. *Read: Biden-Trump debate transcript*. Atlanta: CNN; 2024 Jun 27. Available from: <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/06/27/politics/read-biden-trump-debate-rush-transcript>.
3. Fairclough N, Wodak R. *Critical discourse analysis*. In: van Dijk TA, editor. *Discourse as social interaction*. London: Sage; 1997. p. 258-284.

4. Papacharissi Z. *Democracy online: civility, politeness, and the democratic potential of online political discussion groups*. *New Media Soc*. 2004;6(2):259-283.
5. van Dijk TA. *Principles of critical discourse analysis*. *Discourse Soc*. 1993;4(2):249-283.
6. van Dijk TA. *Ideology: a multidisciplinary approach*. London: Sage; 1998.
7. van Dijk TA. *Critical discourse analysis*. In: Schiffrin D, Tannen D, Hamilton HE, editors. *The handbook of discourse analysis*. Malden (MA): Blackwell; 2001. p. 352-371.
8. van Dijk TA. *Ideology and discourse analysis*. *J Political Ideol*. 2006;11(2):115-140.
9. van Dijk TA. *Discourse-cognition-society: current state and prospects of the socio-cognitive approach to discourse*. In: Hart C, Cap P, editors. *Contemporary critical discourse studies*. London: Bloomsbury; 2014. p. 121-146.
10. van Dijk TA. *Critical discourse analysis*. In: Tannen D, Hamilton HE, Schiffrin D, editors. *The handbook of discourse analysis*. 2nd ed. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell; 2015. p. 466-485.

How to Cite This Article

Dhayef QA, Humood AS. A critical discourse analysis of confrontational strategies in political communication. *Int J Multidiscip Res Growth Eval*. 2026;7(1):866–871.

Creative Commons (CC) License

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.