
UNCOVERING USA PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE GENRE

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Abstract

Presidential debate (PD) draws the most attention compared to other political discourses as the candidates present their profile and proposals using rhetorical communicative strategy to convince voter candidates and defeat their adversaries. However, the generic structure of PD is seldomly being the perspective of linguistics studies. The paper aims at scrutinizing the genre of USA Presidential debate using the genre analysis framework proposed by Swales and Bhatia. Thus, the study employs two parts of genre analysis: move, and strategies analysis. The present study finds that there are six moves of USA PD namely greetings-informing the debate format, introducing the topic, thesis, argumentation, and closure. The communicative purpose of the moves is persuading the American voters in the election day. The finding implies pivotal stages of PD to construct political discourse. This study is expected to contribute to EFL teaching and learning especially in teaching genre exposition integrated in four English skills.

Keywords: *genre analysis; generic structure; move; USA presidential debate*

1. Introduction

Presidential debate (PD) is one of political agendas held within presidential election event of a democratic country. PD is a major campaign agenda in modern election which has received people's attention and has impact on democratic process (Keum & Cho, 2021). As stated by Wicaksono et al. (2018), in PD, candidates convey their vision and mission to their voter candidates. In other words, PD facilitates presidential candidates to fight in knowledge regarding to their proposals if they were elected (Parvaresh, 2018). It can be said that PD is a "display window" for voters to decide which candidates can convince them more on proposal they present. United States of America (USA) is a democratic country who had been holding PD for sixteen times. The live-televised USA PD is the most awaited political debate by many people around the world as people can perceive USA presidential candidate especially in foreign policy. In 2020, United States of America (USA) had Presidential Election as the noble agenda. At this moment, the USA Presidential Election was held in the middle of COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, some adjustments regarding to the health and safety protocols were prioritized. Accordingly, the debate format was filthy different from other USA PDs in America's history. There were two couples of presidential candidates in 2020, the first were President Donald Trump (incumbent) and Mike Pence from Republic Party and the second were the Former President Biden and Kamala Harris from Democrat Party.

PD of any country has become one of most interesting political discourses to be studied by some scholars in applied linguistics. PD has been examined through the perspective of linguistic meta discourse sub-category hedges and boosters (Jalilifar & Alavinia, 2012; Kusumawati et al., 2021; Surtikanti et al., 2022), Critical Discourse Analysis (Elhambakhsh & Jalalian, 2015; Sartika, 2021), Pragmatics (Sibarani & Marlina, 2018; Kasenda, 2018), Systemic Functional Linguistics (Wicaksono et al., 2018; Kousser & Tranter, 2018), and many more. However, as far as the researcher's knowledge, there are few scholars who are interested in portraying PD in the perspective of genre. Setiyadi & Setyandari (2018) and Wicaksono et al. (2018) examined the genre of governor candidate debates in Indonesia. However, they focused on the figurative language and discourse markers uttered by the candidates. Based on Setiyadi and Setyandari (2018) the findings revealed that the genre used in the debate of Governor candidate in Central Java 2018 was macro genre of discussion, while the macro genre consisting of some micro genre such as description, exposition (argumentation and hortatory), explanations, recount, and procedures. They also found that the social function of each genre corresponded to its genre. Meanwhile, based on Wicaksono et al. (2018) research, the structure of the debate of Governor Candidate in Jakarta 2018 consists of three segments namely opening, main, and closing segment. According to them, the opening segment facilitates the candidates to expose vision and missions; the content segment enables the candidates to give response from another candidates' argument; and the closing segment is the segment where the candidates state their closing statement. Despite some scholars have revealed genre and schematic structure of political debate; however, applied linguistics scholars do not examine yet the schematic structure of presidential debate especially the USA presidential debate. Different value and culture of a country brings different phase of social process. (Santosa et al., 2021) defines social process as the manifestation of values and cultural norms. The value and cultural norms in social process are realized through the procedure or structure of a verbal social process. It can be said that the value and cultural norms of PD in the context of USA might be different from other countries. The verbal social culture is also called as genre.

The term "genre" is well-known in western culture, especially in French, as a piece cut of wood. The meaning of the term variously develops in some fields particularly in applied linguistics field. For instance, in literature field, genre refers to kinds of text such as poem, novel, drama, and so on (Santosa et al., 2021). Meanwhile, genre in rhetorical field is used to differentiate kind of discourse such as persuasive, expression, argumentation, etc. (ibid.). Some applied linguistics researchers have defined genre in various ways. According to Swales (1990), genre is a recognizable communicative event defined by a set of communicative purposes identified and mutually understood by members of the professional or academic community in which it occurs on a regular basis. It means that genre is a group of particular communicative purposes in a discourse community. Swales (1990) puts genre in a context of situation where a discourse community exists. The genre in a discourse community is determined by context of situation, content, and communicative purpose of a discourse. Bhatia (1993, 2008) broadens Swales' term by including the psychological, specifically cognitive, level of genre construction. According to Bhatia, while there are a number of other factors that influence the nature and construction of a genre, such as content, form, intended audience, medium, or channel, it is primarily defined by the communicative purpose that it is intended to fulfill. It can be said that Bhatia argues that the genre is shaped and structured by the shared set of communicative goals. Meanwhile,

Martin (1992) and Imtihani (2010) view genre as a goal-oriented social process which is achieved in stages. The stages of social process are achieved through the sequence of social activities by a discourse community. Martin calls the stages of a social process as schematic structures.

Based on some definitions of genre, it can be said that genre realizes value and cultural norms of a society and it has particular function and goal-oriented. Since every genre has its function and purpose, thus, every genre also has different schematic structures. This point can be an interesting point for applied linguistics researchers to take genre as a domain or perspective of their research. Language can be realized through certain genre viewed from its communicative purpose. Besides, the manifestation of particular form of language in different communicative purpose could reveal language pattern used by certain community discourse. The present article attempts to fill the gap of the absence of genre analysis of USA PD so that other researchers who are interested to study USA PD can use it for their research. Thus, the study focuses on the schematic structure of USA PD of 2020.

2. Literature Review

The study of genre was started in 1980s when some applied linguistic scholars took into account on the social and cultural aspects of linguistics rather than on the surface description of language. The development of genre analysis has grown rapidly. In addition, theoretical perspectives on genre analysis include English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and Critical Genre Analysis. Analyzing genre entails investigating the other specific field of study construct, interpreting, and using the genre to achieve community goals, as well as why they write them in the manner that they do (Bhatia, 2002,2008; Bhatia & Nodoushan, 2015). Additionally, genre analysis provides an analytic method for observing the repeated communicative functions found in genres as well as the linguistic exponents of these functions (Liu, 2012; Cao & Guo, 2015). Thus, genre analysis is an observation of a certain discourse of specific field of study to find out communicative goals and functions. In so doing, non-linguistic criteria are typically used as the basis for identification and classification in genre analysis (Lieungnapar et al., 2017; Suwarni, 2021).

Swales' approach (1990) of genre analysis has been popularly used by genre analyzers as the framework of the research. Swales' genre-based rhetorical approach to text description is concerned with identifying the rhetorical or move structure of a genre and relating it to its communicative purpose while acknowledging the social context in which it occurs (Agbaglo et al., 2021). According to Swales, a genre is organized primarily by obligatory moves and lexico-grammatical features. A move is a sub-rhetorical unit in genre analysis that serves a coherent communicative function (Swales, 2004). Swales calls the moves as CARS Model which has objective to scrutinize particular purpose within the text. Thus, the overall purpose of the genre can be identified through each move which contributes in some ways. The sequence and frequency of moves must also be considered when analyzing moves or schematic structure. Devitt (2015) argues that move is logic maneuver applied by communicators which plays important role in the unified functional meaning of (a) sentence(s) in written and spoken discourse.

Bhatia's genre model (1993) involves the cognitive structure of moves and strategies which they realize the communication purpose of a genre. Both Bhatia (1993) and Swales (1990) agree that move realizes function of the discourse and its sequence helps achieve the communicative purpose. According to Bhatia (1993) each move consists of a number of strategies which are used to achieve the purpose of the move. In addition, to achieve communicative purpose of the discourse, speaker may have a choice to apply particular strategies considering the context and situation of the occasion, the nature of the topic, and the audience (Al-Saaidi, S.K.Z.Al-Shaibani, 2015). PD is one of political discourse which has communicative purpose to persuade hearers with the elaboration of rhetorical speech. To achieve the purpose, the participants of PD have to employ some steps or move and strategies. In agreement with Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), the researchers apply the model of genre analysis under the analysis of move and strategies which perform specific communicative purposes.

3. Research Method

Descriptive qualitative is employed in this study. It elaborates the natural phenomenon without doing experiment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research design is case study of content analysis. The source of the data is a recorded PD video retrieved from NBC YouTube Channel (NBC News, 2020; NBC News, 2020a) in March 2021. NBC is one of official media broadcasts of Presidential Debate. The researchers also used the PD transcript derived from the official website of Commission of Presidential. The PD 2020 being analyzed is the presidential debate session involving the moderators, Chris Wallace for round 1 and Kristen Walker for round 2, Donald J. Trump as the presidential candidate from Republic party, and Joe Biden as the presidential candidate from Democratic party.

In order to reveal the genre analysis, the researchers apply the Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) model of genre analysis to highlight the moves and strategies of the debate transcript. The rationale of choosing the framework is still relevant to analyze genre of both written and spoken text.

Debate Transcript	Move	Strategy
Round 1 and Round 2	M1.	S1.

Table 1. Move Analysis from Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993)

The researchers analyze the two rounds of PD of 2020 transcript to investigate the move of the text. As Bhatia (1993) states that move reveals the communicative purpose of the texts, while strategy consists of some ways to achieve the communicative purpose. Those principles are used to analyze the genre of the debate transcripts. As stated by Kristina et al. (2017) discourse patterning or moves are identified using inferences based on text content and linguistic cues. The meanings are realized linguistically through formulaic expressions, specific lexical items, and cohesive markers. Furthermore, the moves are investigated in terms of positioning, obligatory, optional, and iterative order.

4. Results and Discussion

Year of 2020 became a splendid political year of USA. The two presidential candidates, Donald J. Trump and Joe Biden, defeated each other to win the election. As one of political campaign agenda, the presidential candidates are required to participate in the

presidential debate. The Commission of Presidential Debate (CPD) planned to have three rounds of Presidential Debates. The first PD of USA was held on September 29, 2020 in Cleveland Ohio. It was moderated by Chris Wallace. The second round of debate was scheduled on October 15 but it was canceled due to Trump’s diagnosis of Covid-19. The final debate was held on October 22, 2020 moderated by Kristen Welker. Thus, 2020 has the fewest PD in America’s history since 1996.

CPD announced that the debate format was altered. This is because 2020 PD was held under COVID-19 Pandemic where some health concerns should be taken into account. According to CPD (CPD, 2020) each round of the debate lasted for 90 minutes. Each round was divided into six segments of approximately 15 minutes. Moderator opened each segment of PD with a question, after which each candidate had opportunity to respond it in two minutes. US PD is the manifestation of value and culture of freedom to speak. Each move of PD’s text realizes the goal of the discourse. The analysis of move and strategy could reveal the communicative purpose of PD.

4.1 Move 1

The first move of US PD of 2020 is greetings. In this move, the moderator greets, welcomes, and introduces him/herself and also the presidential candidates to audiences. In greeting the audiences, the moderator selects dictions related to time when the debate occurs and uses performative verb, “welcome”. Table 2 shows the examples of greetings move from PD round 1 and round 2.

Round 1	Round 2	Move	Strategy
Moderator: <i>“Good evening from the Health Education Campus of Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Clinic. I’m Chris Wallace of Fox News and I welcome you to the first of the 2020 presidential debates between President Donald J. Trump and former Vice President Joe Biden...”</i>	Moderator: <i>Good evening from Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. I’m Kristen Welker of NBC News and I welcome you to the final 2020 presidential debate between President Donald J. Trump and former Vice President Joe Biden...”</i>	1. Greetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Salutation - Introducing the place of the debate - Welcoming audience - Introducing the presidential candidates - Introducing the host of PD

Table 2. Linguistics realization of move 1

As shown in table 2, both moderators open the debate using “Good evening” form. Moradi (2017) categorizes “good evening” in the affirmation forms. Since the debate was held in the evening, the grammatical form of “good evening” is suitable to greet the audiences. In the respect of greeting move, Dewi & Harmawan (2023) state that this move is designed to formally announce the beginning of the program to audiences. Moreover,

greetings are able to engage good relationship between the host and viewers (Amoakohene, 2015).

4.2 Move 2

In this move, the moderator explains the debate format. Thus, the purpose of this move is to tell the presidential candidates and also the audiences of particular rules during the debate. The moderator uses declarative clauses to inform the rules of the debate. Moreover, US PD of 2020 has new format due to COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the moderator has to inform it to all of the audiences. The realization of this move is shown in table 3.

Round 1	Round 2	Move	Strategy
Moderator: <i>The Commission has designed the format, six roughly 15-minute segments with two-minute answers from each candidate to the first question, then open discussion for the rest of each segment. Both campaigns have agreed to these rules..."</i>	Moderator: <i>It is conducted under health and safety protocols designed by the commission's health security advisor. The audience here in the hall has promised to remain silent. No cheers, boos or other interruptions except right now, as we welcome to the stage former Vice President Joe Biden and President Donald J. Trump. start."</i>	2. Informing the debate format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introducing the designer of the debate format - Explaining the debate format in details

Table 3. Linguistics realization of move 2

Moderator of a debate event has a responsibility to guide the flow of the debate with particular defined rules (Vitolo & Foley, 2016). In other words, it is mandatory for the moderator to deliver the rules in the beginning of the debate to inform both candidates and audiences. Thus, the information contains all participants of PD such as audiences and candidates.

4.3 Move 3

After announcing the debate format, the moderator starts the debate by delivering the first topic of the debate. In US PD of 2020, there are seven topics in round 1 and six topics in round 2. The topics are supreme court, COVID-19, climate change, race in America, economy, leadership, national security, and candidates' track record. This move aims at preparing the candidates to be ready to respond using their arguments. The realization of move 3 is shown in table 4 below.

Round 1	Round 2	Move	Strategy
Moderator: <i>Gentlemen, a lot of people have been waiting for this night, so</i>	Moderator: <i>And we will begin with the fight against the coronavirus.</i>	3. Introducing topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delivering the topic - Addressing the

<i>let's get going. Our first subject is the Supreme Court. .."</i>	<i>President Trump, the first question is for you. The country is heading into a dangerous new phase."</i>		question - Delivering the case - Delivering the question
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Table 4. Linguistics realization of move 3

In this move, the moderator announces the topic of the debate. First, he/she addresses the question for one of the presidential candidates to respond it first. The, he/she gives the contextual case before giving the question. After that, the question is delivered followed by the response duration. This move marks the beginning of PD.

4.4 Move 4. Thesis

This is the move which presidential candidates should respond the question from moderator. The presidential candidates has two minutes to answer the question uninterrupted. In this move, the presidential candidates convey their ideas, vision, and mission persuasively in order to get people's attention and win the election. Table 5 shows the linguistics realization of move thesis.

Round 1	Round 2	Move	Strategy
Trump: <i>"Thank you very much, Chris. I will tell you very simply. We won the election. Elections have consequences. We have the Senate, we have the White House, and we have a phenomenal nominee respected by all..."</i>	Trump: <i>"So, as you know, 2.2 million people, modeled out, were expected to die. We closed up the greatest economy in the world in order to fight this horrible disease that came from China..."</i>	4. Thesis	- Elaborating the case - Delivering the contextual examples - Stating the stance

Table 5. Linguistics realization of move 4

The purpose of PD as political discourse is to persuade and change people's mind. The final goal is to win the election. Thus, PD discourse has the same communicative purpose with exposition genre (Djatkika, 2014; Wicaksono et al., 2018). According to Santosa et al., (2021) exposition genre has three structures namely thesis, argumentation, and recommendation. In respect to thesis move, it presents the speaker/writer's point of view and stance of a certain topic (Swales, 1990). In other words, thesis move enables the presidential candidates to convey their thoughts and programs regarding to the topic being discussed. The candidates use persuasive dictions to make people in line with his ideology.

4.5 Move 5

After elaborating candidate's thoughts in thesis move, the next PD stage is open discussion. This stage is called Argumentation Move. The purpose of this move is to convince the audiences which candidate has the best ideas, vision, and mission. In this move, the

presidential candidates argue and defeat each other using rhetorical languages completing with undebatable proof. The linguistics realization of the move can be seen in table 6.

Round 1	Round 2	Move	Strategy
<p>TRUMP: <i>There aren't a hundred million people with pre-existing conditions. As far as a say is concerned, the people already had their say. Okay, Justice Ginsburg said very powerfully, very strongly, at some point 10 years ago or so, she said a President and the Senate is elected for a period of time,</i></p> <p>BIDEN: <i>He's elected to the next election.</i></p> <p>TRUMP: <i>During that period of time, during that period of time, we have an opening. I'm not elected for three years. I'm elected for four years. Joe, the hundred million people is totally wrong.</i></p> <p>BIDEN: <i>That's simply not true.</i></p>	<p>BIDEN: <i>Make sure it's totally transparent. Have the scientific world see it, know it, look at it, go through all the processes.</i></p> <p>TRUMP: <i>I don't think we're going to have a dark winter at all. We're opening up our country.</i></p> <p>BIDEN: <i>My responses is, he is xenophobic but not because he shut down access from China. And he did it late, after 40 countries had already done that. In addition to that, what he did, he made sure that we had 44 people that were in there, in China, trying to get to Wuhan to determine what exactly the source was. What did the President say in January?</i></p>	<p>5. Argumentation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arguing opponent's statement - Stating opponent's track record - Stating candidate's stance

Table 6. Linguistics realization of move 5

According to Swales (1990), argumentation section is the significant part to support thesis. Thus, the candidates have to provide their statement details information or data to highlight their stance in thesis. The purpose of this move is to convince the audiences (Issa & Abbas, 2022). As US PD of 2020 has six to 7 topics, the next moves are the same as move 3 introducing topic-move 4 thesis- and move 5 argumentation. Those moves are repeated until the last topic of the debate.

4.6 Move 6

The last move of US PD of 2020 is closure. This move is done by the moderator as his/her role as the facilitator of the debate. As the beginning part of the debate indicates the first impression to audiences, the closure move is also important.

Round 1	Round 2	Move	Strategy
<p>Moderator: <i>... to be continued in</i></p>	<p>Moderator: <i>Alright. I want to thank</i></p>	<p>6. Closure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thanking all parties

<p><i>more debates as we go on. President Trump, Vice President Biden, it's been an interesting hour and a half. I want to thank you both for participating in the first of three debates that you have agreed to engage in. We want to thank Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Clinic for hosting this event. The next debate, sponsored by the Commission on Presidential Debates, will be one week from tomorrow, October 7th, at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. The two Vice-Presidential nominees, Vice President Mike Pence and Senator Kamala Harris will debate at 9:00 PM Eastern that night. We hope you watch. Until then, thank you, and good night.</i></p>	<p><i>you both for a very robust hour and a half, a fantastic debate. Really appreciate it. President Trump, former Vice President Joe Biden. Thank you to Belmont University for hosting us tonight and most importantly, thank you to those watching tonight. Election Day is November 3rd. Don't forget to vote. Thank you everyone and have a great night.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informing next agenda - Leave taking
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Table 7. Linguistics realization of move 6

In this move, the moderator thanks to all parties involved in PD. Besides, he/she conveys the next agenda of the election to the audiences. It can be said that this move has purpose to end the debate event and delivering leave taking.

5. Conclusion

The aim of the study is to find out the schematic structure of US presidential debate of 2020. The finding of the study reveals that US PD of 2020 has six main moves, and some of them are realized by strategies. The six moves are (1) greetings, (2) informing the debate format, (3) introducing the topic, (4) thesis, (5) argumentation, and (6) closure. Those moves indicate the communicative purpose of US PD that is to persuade the American voters in the election day. The study has implications for linguistics scholars on political discourse whereas the genre analysis study is rather inadequate. Thus, this study could fill the gap of genre analysis especially for presidential debate. Given , the present study merely focuses on the

genre analysis of US PD; it triggers for further research in PD as political discourse. Further studies can explore more about linguistics realization such as pragmatics, sociolinguistics, critical discourse analysis, and etc. with the perspective on genre. Moreover, future study can also analyze PD genre using different approaches such as Systemic Functional Linguistics and so on.

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