“The Fact is That Everything He is Saying So Far is Simply a Lie”
Expressive Truthmaking in the Political Debate*

This study investigates language use in political debates. It takes a closer look at linguistic markers of expressivity and truthmaking on word level in a presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. The results show clear differences between these two debaters. Trump uses expressive language more extensively than Biden. Examples of markers that Trump uses more often than Biden are reinforcing: very, much, super, totalizing: all, every, never, mental: know, think, want, verbal: tell, talk, say, hypothetical: if, could, would, and self-reference: I, me. Examples of markers that Biden uses more often than Trump are reinforcing: more, totalizing: none, mental: feel, verbal: ask, hypothetical: should, and self-reference: my. All in all, Trump uses these kinds of linguistic resources both more often and in larger clusters. There is also a difference between Trump and Biden in their choice of markers from the same group, for example between know (Trump) and feel (Biden), and between tell (Trump) and ask (Biden). The methodological results show that our current constellation of linguistic markers is effective as an analytical tool and highlights the importance of expressivity, in relation to empirical and logical truth, as a crucial component of truthmaking in political debates.

Keywords: Expressive language, presidential debate, truthmaking, paradox, linguistic markers.

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Introduction. Truthmaking in political debates can be a complex linguistic endeavor, including time restrictions, high stakes, and tough questions to be answered. This is even more so when truthmaking is interlinked with subjectivity, expressivity, and self-reference. Let us demonstrate the later by looking at two classical cases of self-reference, and after that look at subjectivity and expressivity. Our two initial examples are originally borrowed from Quine [1, p. 38—39], and slightly adjusted to our current theme. To begin with, envision a country that has a law stating that the president of the country can grant amnesty only to citizens that cannot grant amnesty to themselves. It is then obvious that any new president can grant amnesty to the old one. A trickier question is if a current president can grant amnesty to himself? The answer turns out to be utterly hard to find because: if the president pardons himself, he belongs to the group that he cannot pardon, but if he then cannot pardon
himself he belongs to the group that he can pardon, but then he cannot do it, and so on and so forth. From the logical and linguistic point of view a troubling question is also the difficulty to understand these possible answers, which, among other things, are raising serious questions about our ability to reason rationally by using mundane language. If we, despite this worrying discovery, wish to save a common conviction that humans are rational and logical beings we could claim that this question is meaningless because there simply cannot be any such president. A disqualification of the question, rather than the answer, may sound as a vise solution, at least at first, but what if we become unhappy with an explanation that rather dismisses than solves the paradox. We should not either forget the subjective dimension of the paradox, because, as Quine points out “one man’s veridical paradox can be another man’s platitude” [2, p. 12]. This last remark, if taken seriously, multiplies the possible questions and answers, and even making it possible that there might be such a president around, and perhaps not only one but several of them. But let us leave all this as it may for a moment and instead look at the second puzzling example where subjectivity, language, and self-reference become problematic in relation to questions of truth. Suppose you are using your mundane language as you always have, and suddenly discover that the word no actually means yes, and yes means no, making truths become lies and lies become truths. Perhaps this may sound like a bad dream, but under certain circumstances it will prove to be a reality. As we have already seen, these sorts of things sometimes happen when we suddenly face paradoxal contradictions in our mundane use of language. Our reactions to these kinds of things may vary considerably depending on the circumstances, and perhaps we will perceive them as amusing riddles, annoying uncertainties, or real worries regarding our own rationality.

The Liar’s paradox is a textbook example of this. Let us take a closer look at it. A short statement “I am lying” becomes notoriously problematic as soon as we ask if it is true. To begin with, our common sense tells us that statements can be true or false, but not at the same time. Any true statement should simply be true if it is telling the truth, and a lie if it is lying. One of the two should then always be the right one, making it a simple choice from the logical point of view. So far so good, but from that point on the bad dream starts becoming real, truth will turn out to be a lie and a lie turn out to be a truth. This happens because if I am telling the truth I will be lying, but if I am lying then I will be telling the truth,
but if I am telling the truth I will be lying, and so on in a never-ending circle where truths and lies replace each other. What is it then cause this vicious circle? Tarski and Leśniewski (among others before) worked on this problem, and their efforts resulted in an explanation asserting that the paradox arises because the statement is not only stating something at the level of natural language, “I am lying”, but at the same time also being self-referential and commenting itself at the level of meta language, “I am lying I am lying” \[3, p. 2 ff\]. In other words, the answer is that if a statement contains several simultaneous language acts at different language levels it leads to severe contradictions in some cases. This happens because we do not realize that we are continuously changing our perspective between object language and metalanguage during our interpretation of the utterance. This solution offered by Tarski and Leśniewski gives us at least a more thorough understanding of the problem. “Tarski concludes that ‘these antinomies seem to provide a proof that every language which is universal in the above sense, and for which the normal laws of logic hold, must be inconsistent’” Aaron \[4, p. 1\]. More could of course be said about Tarski’s solution and its potential problems, for example if it is a proper solution or a rephrasing of the problem (see \[5, p. 204 ff\] for discussion). In our case the situation may however be even worse, that is if we also count in the assessments of the speaker. The utterance, “I am lying”, is then not only self-referential on the level of the message such as “This message is false.” but also on the level of the interlocuter, stating “I am (a person who) is lying”. In the latter case we are moreover left with questions like, is the person speaking only making a mistake or lying only at this single occasion or is he perhaps a notorious liar? These kinds of later questions reveal that things get paradoxical even in terms of how to judge the speaker. This means that we in addition to the paradoxical alteration of focus regarding the message also need to consider the relation between the message and the interlocutor, that is, both concerning two levels of language (object language and meta language), and concerning the reliability of interlocuter, which leads to choices such as between an honest speaker who is lying, and a notorious liar telling the truth.

Some more words need also to be said about the concept of truth itself. The reasoning above already shows that there can be different criteria and it can be difficult to find only one unambiguous criterion. For example, logical line of truths can be described as circular references within delimited systems, i.e. types of self-reference, while a synthetic
truth also refers to external worlds [1, p. 87]. There are then several different ways of looking at truth. For the sake of space we only shortly mention some, such as correspondence, coherence, pragmatic, redundancy, and deflation theories of truth [1, p. 87]. The first-mentioned correspondence theory consists already in itself of two different types, namely congruence and correlation theory [6, p. 168]. Congruence theory implies direct isomorphism between thought and external facts, while correlation theory sees this relation as conventionally mediated [1, p. 87]. The problem is not only to find the truth but that there may be several kinds of truths, and that we may even need to make choices between them. As everyday ordinary consumers, we are used to choosing between different types of goods and services, but it may not be as obvious and acceptable to think that there are different truths available and we have to choose between them. The common everyday view of the truth however mostly relates to the correspondence view of a relation between a statement and the world’s corresponding state [1, p. 88]. More could be said about the views on truth but in our case, it suffices to say that truth, or truths, can be complex and complicated to deal with. Let us now move on to the foci of this paper, namely expressivity and subjectivity in real life truthmaking.

Previous research points out, that speakers relying on subjectivity set an emphasis on the authenticity and expressivity rather than logical truths and observation-based facts [7, p. 373]. Subjectivity is a legitimate form of truth claim but it emphasizes a speaker’s inner experiences, rather than any external verifiability or formal logics. Habermas [8, p. 62] gives following the description of such expressive sentences: “The expressive component remains implicit in the normal form, but it can always be expanded into an expressive sentence. The latter is constructed with the first-person pronoun (as subject expression) and an intentional [in Husserl’s sense] verb (with a predicative function), while the place of the logical object is occupied either by an object (e.g., ‘I love T) or by a nominalized state of affairs (e.g., ‘I fear that />’). Ivanishcheva, von Post & Räihä makes some further linguistic specification of Habermas expressive components, by pointing out reinforcements as linguistic devices for expressivity, that is words like “very, little, extremely” [7, p. 380], and predicative markers, such as “all, everyone, none” and “not” following the first person pronoun “I”, for example in sentences like “I have to say about my group that I do not know ... ” [7, p. 384], and processes (verbs)
that refer to inner states, such as “think” in sentences like “Pjotr thinks about football.” [7, p. 380] where the process “thinks” marks a mental domain. These later are characterized as verbal and mental processes, for example love, think, cry etc. (see also [9]). Emotions and their expressions are closely related to rationality and truth claims. Ivanishcheva, von Post & Räihä point out that “The speaker needs to communicate the subjectively experienced feelings in a way that makes them truthful” [7, p. 376]. Further on in our current study we will show how linguistic devises expressing subjectivity and self-reference are used for truthmaking in political debate. The term “truthmaking” refers here to the use of linguistic devises related to expressiveness and self-reference (regarding the philosophical term “truthmaker” see [10; 11]). For the sake of simplicity, we are from here on going to call all the above-mentioned linguistic devices markers of expressivity.

**Aims and questions.** The aim of this current study is to investigate and compare linguistic truthmaking through expressive linguistic devises on word level in the first presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden.

**Questions**
What linguistic forms of expressiveness are salient in the debate?
Are there differences between Trump and Biden in their use of expressivity?
A methodological question is if a word level mapping is a useful analytical tool.

**Material.** The material that is analyzed is the first presidential debate between Trump and Biden, September 2020. The debate was transcribed from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fX79e-0RiRU (broadcast Sep 29, 2020). Trump’s contribution contains 7500 words and Bidens 6800.

**Method.** The question of why presidential debates are interesting to analyse can be given different answers. Geer [12, p. 486] says that presidential debates “influence a large number of people in important ways, and that in tightly contested races these verbal exchanges between the nominees can be decisive events”. Regarding the debates as political
communication Isotalus & Almonkari [13, p. 1] refer to “the speed, intensity and extent of change in the structures of communication and in the ways in which political communication is carried out and concepts, such as “Americanization, mediatization, modernization, professionalization, presidentialization, personalization, and privatization.” The participants as individual speakers are also important. Nguyen, Q. N. & Sawalmeh M. H. M. point for example out that Trump’s presidential linguistic style is highly distinctive in terms of its simplicity, anti-elitism, and collectivism. They also give an example from the presidential debate from the year 2016, between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton:

“CLINTON: ...they showed he didn’t pay any federal income tax.
TRUMP: That makes me **smart**.

[...]But I could give you a list of banks, I would -- if that would help you, I would give you a list of banks. These are very **fine** institutions, very **fine** banks. I could do that very quickly.

TRUMP: ... I built an unbelievable company. Some of the **greatest assets** anywhere in the world... It’s an **unbelievable** company” [14, p. 68—74].

Some words in the excerpt above are bolded in the original article, but not commented on any further by the authors. This however something that we will do in this current study, among other things. We will also label most of the bolded words as expressive words. These and other kinds of expressive words and their use are in foci in this current study of the debate between Trump and Biden from the year 2020. The notion of expressiveness is borrowed from Habermas [8, p. 62] and the coding of the linguistic markers also follow Ivanishcheva, von Post & Räihä [7] and Räihä [1, p. 122]. Our method in this current study is qualitative and it is used to analyse linguistic markers of expressivity on the word level.

The debate between Trump and Biden is transcribed first and after that coded by categorising, expressive words in the transcription. Our initial coding does not include potential synonyms, other alterations, or non-occurrences, but only markers that are observable in both speakers’ contributions. Implicit markers and markers relations to each other beyond the analysed utterance (turn of talk) are not investigated. For the sake of space, we are not either making detailed analyses of all the coded markers, but rather include illustrative cases. Our transcription uses standard orthography. Linguistic markers of expressivity in the coding are pre-
sented below. (More extended empirical examples can be found in the Results section.)

Hypotheticality: if, would, could, ...
Liar meta comment: true, not true, lie ...
Mental meta comment: know, want, think ...
Reinforcing: very, good, super, ...
Self-reference: I, my, me, ...
Totalizing: all, every, none, ...
Verbal meta comment: say, tell, ask ...

Now let us look at two examples from the debate to show how our coding works. The parts coded are the first more lengthy utterances made in the debate by Trump and Biden. The expressive words are bolded and the amount of expressive words of the total amount of words is counted.

Trump

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 top top* academic *good in every way good in every way in fact* some of her *biggest* endorsers are *very* liberal people from Notre Dame and *other* places so *I think* she’s going to be *fantastic* *we* have *plenty* of time *even if we* did it after the election *itself* *I* have a *lot* of time after the election as you *know* so *I think* that she will be *outstanding* she’s going to be as *good* as *anybody* that has served on that court *we really feel* that *we* have a professor at Notre Dame *highly respected* by *all said* she’s the *single greatest* student he’s *ever* had he’s been a professor for a *long* time at a *great* school and *we* just *we* won the election and therefore *we* have the right to choose her and *very few* people *knowingly would say* otherwise and by *the way* the democrats they *wouldn’t even* think about not doing *if* they had the *only* difference is they’d try and do it *faster* there’s *no way* they *would* give it up they had Merrick Garland but the problem is they didn’t have the election so they were stopped and *probably* that *would* happen in reverse also *definitely would* happen in reverse so *we* won the election and *we* have the right to do it Chris

(Bolded words make 33% of total amount words in this example)

Biden

the American people have a right to have a say in who the supreme court nominee is and that say occurs when they vote for united states senators and when they vote for the president of united states they’re
not going to get that chance now because we’re in the middle of an election already the election has already started tens of thousands of people have already voted and so the thing that should happen is we should wait we should wait and see what the outcome of this election is because that’s the only way the american people get to express their view is by who they elect as president and who they elect as vice president now what’s at stake here is the president’s made it clear he wants to get rid of the affordable care act he’s been running on that he ran on that and he’s been governing on that he’s in the supreme court right now trying to get rid of uh the the affordable care act which will strip twenty million people from having insurance health insurance now if it goes into court and the justice I have nothing I’m not opposed to the justices she seems like a very fine person but she’s written before she went in the bench which is her right that she thinks that the affordable care act is not constitutional the other thing that’s on the court and if it’s struck down what happens women’s rights are fundamentally changed once again a woman could be held pay more money because she has a pre-existing condition of pregnancy we’re able they’re able to charge women more for the same exact procedure a man did gets and that ended when we in fact passed the affordable care act and there’s a hundred million people who have pre-existing conditions and they’ll be taken away as well those pre-existing conditions insurance companies are going to love this and so it’s just not appropriate to do this before this election if he wins the election and the senate is democrat or republican then he goes forward if not we should wait until February (Expressive words make 7% of total amount words in this example)

A quick look tells us that the difference between Trump and Biden is easy to observe. This general picture of the difference between Trump and Biden is sustained throughout the whole debate, even if the difference is not always this obvious. The visual coding of the markers on text surface of the transcription shows us that Trump uses linguistic expressivity more extensively in comparison to Biden. Already these two initial examples are noteworthy and confirm that the method of coding linguistic markers of expressivity is useful in comparisons and give interesting results. Now it is time to move on to more detailed analyses.

**Results.** As already mentioned, we only analyse and compare markers that both speakers use, and only include some examples of the most
frequent ones from each of the categories mentioned above. This means that there are more markers to be found in the transcription, and also markers that only one of the speakers use. The markers shown are examples from the transcript, and they are bolded. There may be other markers of expressivity in the same example, but these are not bolded until they are in the foci of analyses. Now let us look at some examples.

Reinforcing quality markers in descending frequency order, regarding the whole debate, are *very*, *well*, *more*, *good* and *much*. If we look at the first one on our list, *very*, it is four times more frequent in Trumps utterances during the whole debate compared to Biden.

We can take one example of how Trump uses it in a context: “*poll watchers a very safe very nice thing they were thrown out they weren’t allowed to watch you know why because bad things happen in Philadelphia bad things*”. In this example the word *very* is strengthening the positive valuation of *safe* and *nice* in opposition to *bad*, the later also repeated. (The later words are also counted as expressive, but we'll come back to these.) The word *very* is used for creating clear contrasts. There are several cases of this use in Trumps utterances. Here is another example: *he said very strongly masks are not good then he changed his mind he said masks are good*. The case is built by two clusters, *said very strongly, not good*, Trump also shows use of less antagonistic reinforcing, but the antagonistic use stands out in comparison to Biden. In case of Biden, we cannot find any cases of using *very* for creating dichotomies as exemplified above, during the entire debate. Here is one telling case of Bidens use of the word *very*: “*she seems like a very fine person but she’s written before she went in the bench which is her right that she thinks that the affordable care act is not constitutional*”. As we see the word *very* is used for reinforcing the quality, *fine*, without comparison to the opposite. As we already said, Trump uses *very* four times more often than Biden, when we compare percentage of expressive words in their individual contributions to compensate for their differences in individual contributions in the debate. Both the quantity and the use of *very*, shows differences between the two speakers. Trump uses this expressive device more frequently than Biden and to create antagonistic dichotomies, while Biden only uses it for simple reinforcing. Let us take one more telling case, this time the quantifying *much*. The contrast in frequency Between Trump and Biden is even bigger this time. Trump uses the reinforcing expressivity marker *much*, six times more often compared to Biden, during the
whole debate. Here is one example of the use: “I know suburbs so much better than you so much better than you”. As we can see the pattern is the same in case of much as in case of very. The word much is used by Trump to create a striking difference between him and Biden. We also see that Trump also adds an additional preceding reinforcing, so. The expressive three-word cluster, so much better, is also repeated by Trump. The repetition increases the expressiveness by hammering in the message, “so much better than you”. This example shows an expressive multipart strategy that Trump uses several times. It consists of combining markers of expressivity to an expressive cluster that is repeated. Here is one more example of this strategy: “you would have been much later Joe much later”. The cluster much later is repeated. Biden in contrast has only a few cases of including much, and it is only used as an reinforcing quantity marker. Let us look at one such example from Biden: “it’s going to make the economy much safer, look how much we’re paying now to deal”. As we see the repetition of much is not made within the same speech act and having a different reference. Biden does not either construct any clear-cut opponent or antinomy. Here is one more example from Biden: the billionaires have gotten much more wealthy. This example shows that also Biden combines reinforcing markers to clusters, much more, to raise the expressivity. The difference is that here Biden neither uses cluster repetition for raising the expressiveness nor to point out any clear opponents or dichotomies, within the same speech act. In comparison it seems that Trump uses expressivity of reinforcing quality markers more extensively and antagonistic while Biden is content with less antagonistic reinforcing strategies.

Next group of expressive linguistic devises used in the debate is totalizing words: all, never, every, ever and nothing. If start from the top of our list, by mapping the word all, the first thing we can say is that difference in the frequency of occurrence between Trump and Biden is small, Trump has 33 cases and Biden 31 in the debate. Here is an example of Trumps use of the expressive totalizing all: “they were a disaster they were a disgrace to our country and we’ve caught them we’ve caught them all we’ve got it all on tape we’ve caught them all”. The similar type of strategy is evident here as in Trumps use of reinforcing words. We can observe several kinds of the repetitions, not only limited to the phrases including the totalizing all, together with references to the opponent in clearly value-marked categories, disaster, disgrace. The marker, all, is all
inclusive. It is a categorical, and in some uses a bold expressive marker, and even more so when repeated (repetition as a strategy is described in [1, p. 121—214]). Emphasis in our analyses is on words expressive function, and as Habermas says, it is implicitly included in words but not always emphasized in their use (see [8, p. 62]). The boldness in using all is then referring to its high vulnerability to empirical and logical counter evidence. Only one counter example is enough to falsify its claim of totality in its truth functional use [1, p. 146] (see also [15]). But as a linguistic device in its expressivity function it rather needs to be a truthful expression of the speaker’s inner experience than empirically true. If it should turn out that one of those claimed to be caught by Trump actually was not caught the expressivity of all, can nevertheless be accepted as an authentic expression of his indignation. The claim all, is then not true but still truthful. This is of course nothing unusual because you can believe something that is not true. The point here is that expressivity of the word can be related to a truth value, but it is not necessarily correlated to any specific truth value. But what about Bidens use of the word all? There are cases similar to Trump above. We already mentioned that this is the case regarding the frequency, and it is also the case regarding the use of the totalizing, all. However, there are also some differences. The following is an example of both differences and similarities: “do you believe for a moment what he’s telling you in light of all the lies he’s told you about the whole issue relating to Covid. As we can see Biden does not claim that Trump is only telling lies, but rather that Trump has told lies regarding covid and it is the totality of these lies that Biden is referring to by all. It can be difficult delineate what is a lie and what is a truth in a political real time debate, and it is neither a formal trial, but the empirical truth is neither the main point here. Biden is rather departing from a presupposing that people are already know that Trump is telling lies. This and the previous example are also interesting in comparison because they show how the scope of a totalizing word, such as all, is depending on the context and use, in this case between Trumps claim of all evidence to Bidens presupposition of common knowledge of lies in case of Covid.

If we move on to linguistic markers of hypotheticality both speakers use if, would, should, could, maybe. The most frequently used of these five, if, follows the pattern so far. Biden has 33% less cases of if compared to Trump. Lets look first at one example from Biden: “after all the all the ballots are counted all the votes are counted that’ll be the end of it that’ll be
the end of it and if it’s me in fact fine if it’s not me I’ll support the outcome”. Linguistic markers of expressivity, such as if, are used to frame things and situations that are not (yet) existing but imaginary possible, that is at least for the moment imagined and, in that respect, subjective. There are two cases of if in the example above. They are used to mark two future, but not (yet) existing, outcomes. Biden as a person is also framed as equally happy with both possible outcomes of the election. The statement is referring to Bidens inner state of mind, that is claimed truthful through the expressivity of the language. It is interesting that there are also many other markers from our initial list building up the expressivity, and to back up the subjective claim such as I, a cluster: me in fact fine if, and repetitions, three all, and two me. There is no explicit linguistic marker with reference to anybody else than Biden himself in this sequence. Now let’s look at one more example, this time from Trump: if Pocahontas would have left two days early you would have lost every primary. This is also an example where if marks a non-existing imaginary situation and what eventually could happen if it was a reality. Just as in the previous example there are supporting markers of hypotheticality, two would. The first one is contributing to the condition and the second one to the conclusion. There is also a fourth expressivity marker, a totalizing word, every. The markers of expressivity are this time fewer than in Bidens utterance, but they are used by Trump as earlier to explicitly pointing out an opponent, and this time also a negative outcome for the opponent. There are also ethnic antagonisms and controversies built into the utterance.

Next group of expressivity markers are liar meta comments, such as fact, true, not true and lie.

In this case the tables are turned, and Biden uses these markers much more extensively, that is eight times more frequent compared to Trump. Given this difference this is his most dominant expressive strategy among the markers we have looked in to so far. However, it is important to keep in mind that this kind of statement is only valid in comparison to Trump, in this debate, and given the markers studied. Here is an example of Bides use of the (and other previously discussed markers): the fact is that everything he is saying so far is simply a lie I am not here to call out his lies everybody knows he’s a liar. Given the high status of rationality and truth has as a cherished cultural value [1, p. 17], not least in the westernised culture [16, p. 44], then calling someone a liar has a potential expressive component (beyond the logical and empirical truth) that can be ex-
panded [8, p. 62]. One way to do this is repetition (see [1, p. 121] about repetitions). Repetitions are one of the things boosting expressivity in this example. There is also the marker fact that is commenting the rest of the utterance and adding to the expressiveness. Other markers that we are already familiar from our previous examples are totalizing markers everything and everybody and also the reinforcing marker simple. There are also other kinds of meta comments, the verbal comment saying, call out, and the inner mental marker, knows. In the analysed debate this is one of the utterances that stand out as highly expressive through its use of many different linguistic means to boost its expressivity. Seen from an interpersonal perspective they are boosting an unmistakable attitude. If compared with Trumps use of similar linguistic devices, it is hard to find more extensive expressiveness achieved through such meta comments. The few examples including Liars meta comments are short, and of which the most elaborate is: and that's not true neither right. The last example contains two markers forming a pragmatic tautology.

Meta comments include mental and verbal comments. These are labeling the inner states of mind, in case of mental comments and the content in case of verbal comments. Let us look at an illustrative example of the latter uttered by Biden: say it do it say it. The labeling of the content that Biden refers as it, is done by using the word say, that is something he wants to be done by Trump. There are of course many such potential labels, speak, tell, shout etc. In this case Biden chooses to label the content as something that not only can be said but should be said. Repetition that can be observed also in this example is reoccurring feature in the delivery of markers of expressivity, in this case used to heighten the expressivity. The mental meta comments can be explicated together with our last group of markers.

The concluding group of expressive markers in our analyses is self-references. The most common in case of both speakers is the marker I. Trump makes this type of self-references 182 times during the debate, while Biden makes 88. Trump has longer repetitive sequences of self-references. In case of Trump, the self-references are often combined with mental meta comments. If we look at the three most common types (I think ..., I want ..., I know ...) then Trump has 27 such cases, that is five times more than Biden. Biden in turn has 6 self-referential verbal meta comments while Trump has only two. All in all, Trump uses self-referentiality more than twice as often as Biden, and in longer sequences, often
together with other expressive linguistic means. Now let’s look at an example of all this. (This time also the meta comments are bolded.) We look at a case where Trump’s utterance, besides mental meta comments, also includes his two verbal meta comments in this debate.

Trump: *It’s become very political because the left or I don’t know if I call them left I don’t know what I call them.*

This rather intricate example shows the marker of self-reference, *I*, that is repeated four times, combined with mental meta comments, that are labeling the inner (in this case negated) processes, as *know*. These mental markers further underscore the subjectivity in the self-reference. The two verbal meta comments, *call*, are tagging the speech act, that is labeling “very political” as an imaginary alternative, *if*, as “left”. This is followed by an uncertain conclusion including a repetition of the self-reference, *I*, with its subjectivity underscored by a mental meta comment, *know*, that is labeling the content of the inner (negated) process as self-referential tagging of the speech act. The sequence of markers of subjective self-referentiality works also as a buildup, and the speakers display of inability to label “very political” correctly is turned to a component for expressing authentic personal disliking.

This last example also shows a common feature of expressive language use, namely, what may seem like a failure, in this case the speakers inability to find the right word, can be used to achieve important communicative goals in the domain of linguistic expressivity.

Conclusions. If we summarize our main findings, we can see that Trump clearly uses more expressive forms in general. Examples of markers that Trump uses more often than Biden are reinforcing: *very, much, super*, totalizing: *all, every, never*, mental: *know, think, want*, verbal: *tell, talk, say*, hypotheticality: *if, could, would*, and self-reference: *I, me*. There are also single markers of expressivity that Biden uses more often than Trump, for example reinforcing: *more*, totalizing: *none*, mental: *feel verbal: ask*, hypotheticality: *should*, and self-reference: *my*. There is also a difference between Trump and Biden in their choice of markers from the same group, for example between *know and feel*, and between *tell* and *ask*. We want however to remind that our findings apply to the first presidential debate only, and the chosen markers. The clear differences in expressivity between the two participants in the presidential debate, Trump and Biden, can be observed both in general and studied in more
detail. The results are interesting and show that expressivity is a central feature in communication. It is, as we have seen, expressed simultaneously in combination with factual and logical content but at the same time have its own domains of truth validity, communicative functions, and linguistic characteristics. The methodology that is used in this study shows that already rather basic linguistic analyses, in this case limited to word level and single utterances, are able to show clear differences in speakers use of expressivity. This kind of analyses can of course be combined with more comprehensive linguistic and rhetoric analyses, but already on their own they can show interesting features and differences between speakers. The constellations of markers used in this investigation, originating from Habermas [8; 16] seminal work on rationality forms, are adjusted to this current study and the material used. The specific constellation of linguistic markers of expressivity is also exploratory and should be developed further in similar and other kinds of future studies. At this stage of development and applied to the presidential debate between Trump and Biden, the current constellation of markers show clearly that Trumps makes more extensive use of expressive linguistic devices compared to Biden. It also demonstrates that expressivity is a crucial feature in truthmaking, motivating further studies.

Библиографический список


Источники

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fX79e-0RiRU (дата обращения: 18.04.2021)

References


**Sources**

Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fX79e-0RiRU (accessed 18.04.2021).