

REGISTER DYNAMICS IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE: A STUDY OF DONALD TRUMP'S SPEECHES

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis penggunaan variasi register dalam pidato kampanye Donald Trump dalam pemilihan presiden Amerika tahun 2024. Berdasarkan teori five level of formalities milik Martin Joos (1967): frozen, formal, consultative, casual, serta intimate. Berfokus pada identifikasi jenis-jenis register yang muncul dalam pidato politik Donald Trump yang sekaligus digunakan sebagai strategi retorika untuk membangun citra serta otoritas di mata public. Data yang dikumpulkan melalui transkrip serta rekaman video pidato yang diambil dari akun YouTube official milik Donald Trump dan dianalisa secara kualitatif menggunakan pendekatan sociolinguistik. Hasil analisa menunjukkan bahwa Trump secara dominan menggunakan *casual register* untuk membangun kedekatan emosional dengan audiensnya, serta *formal register* untuk menyampaikan kebijakan dan memperkuat citra kepemimpinannya. *Register intimate* muncul dalam konteks dramatik untuk menggugah empati, sementara *frozen register* digunakan ketika mengutip konstitusi atau pernyataan legal guna menekankan otoritas institusional. Meskipun *consultative register* jarang ditemukan, kehadirannya tetap signifikan dalam interaksi bersifat dialogis.

Kata Kunci: Register, Donald Trump, Pidato

Abstract

This study analyzes the use of register variations in Donald Trump's campaign speeches in the 2024 American presidential election. Based on Martin Joos' (1967) five levels of formalities theory: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. Focuses on identifying the types of registers that appear in Donald Trump's political speeches which are also used as rhetorical strategies to build image and authority in the eyes of the public. The data collected through transcripts and video recordings of speeches taken from Donald Trump's official YouTube account and analyzed qualitatively using a sociolinguistic approach. The results of the analysis show that Trump predominantly uses casual register to build emotional closeness with his audience, as well as formal register to convey policies and strengthen his leadership image. Intimate register appears in dramatic contexts to evoke empathy, while frozen register is used when quoting the constitution or legal statements to emphasize institutional authority. Although consultative register is rare, its presence is still significant in dialogic interactions

Keywords: Register, Donald Trump, Speech

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is the main pattern in politics that politicians use as a medium to attract public votes. Not only that, language also acts as a politician's identity to persuade and mobilize the public. This is reflected in America's routine 4-year event, the presidential election. In this event, candidates will attract public attention with various strategies to gain support and their goal, which is to become president of the United States. This moment becomes a place where language is used as well as possible by politicians in attracting votes in real-time.

The use of language is also widely found in this event, ranging from newspapers, television, advertisements, to social media. This is related to the strategy of each candidate in attracting public opinion to gain victory. According to Khajavi & Rasti (2020), politicians rely on this tactic to secure their victory in the election. The language used in politics must be clearly and clearly able to influence the public so that they provide support to these politicians. Therefore, the language used in their campaigns must be persuasive to attract the general public.

Using persuasive language is a skill that must be mastered by a politician in every communication situation as the key to their victory and success. Politicians also often use language to influence their supporters by inserting language as a technical political strategy. This strategy is related to the use of register, which is part of linguistic theory that emphasizes the use of language diversity in various contexts. Politicians often insert the use of this context in various situations such as advertisements, debates, campaign speeches, etc. as analyzed in this study where politicians adjust their use of register. In the context of this research, Donald Trump's campaign speech in the 2024 US presidential election is the main focus, showing how linguistic use has a great influence on public perception as a voter (Charteris-Black, 2011). By choosing certain words, constructing sentences, and rhetoric, Trump is known as a politician who breaks the traditional rules of speech by using informal and emotional language in formal situations.

In the concept of register, which is part of sociolinguistics, register is a variety of language used in certain social or professional groups with their own uniqueness (Wardaugh & Fuller, 2015). This shows that the identity of a group can be reflected through the use of register. A social activity that has a context structure, members, and means of communication is also a form of

register that is included in linguistics (Agha, 2007; Halliday, 1965; M.A.K, 2013)

The intention for conducting this research is to delve deeper into how register is used in the context of US politics, with an emphasis on Donald Trump. The setting has been chosen as America's four-year agenda, with a new president to be elected in 2024. Using a qualitative sociolinguistic method, this study applies Martin Joos's (1967) thesis from his book *The*, which classifies formality into five levels: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. The transcript and video recording of Donald Trump's address on his official YouTube account serve as the primary data source for this research. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the use of linguistics as a political communication strategy, as well as the consequences for gaining public sympathy and attention.

SOCIOLINGUISTICS

The field of sociolinguistics is a vital segment of linguistics that explores the relationship between language and social life, particularly how societal factors such as ethnicity, age, gender, and regional origin shape language use. Yule (2020) asserts that the primary objective of sociolinguistics is to comprehend the function of language within society. Research topics in this discipline include multilingualism, language policy, and the influence of media on language practices (Wardaugh & Fuller, 2015). This focus on language variation highlights how individuals modify their language in response to different social contexts (Holmes & Wilson, 2022).

LANGUAGE VARIATION

Language variation reflects the influence of sociolinguistic factors on how language is used across different communities. It manifests in diverse elements such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical structures, varying based on geography, ethnicity, and class (Wardaugh & Fuller, 2015). Holmes & Wilson (2022) argue that such variation is further shaped by variables including gender, social standing, and professional background, leading to distinctive forms such as registers and dialects. This aligns with Li et al. (2023)), who emphasize the stability and longevity of language despite sociocultural transformations.

REGISTER

Register is a linguistic phenomenon where specialized language variation can reflect social relationships and professional affiliations. observed that register is able to remain stable for a long time, despite language evolution. Wardaugh & Fuller, (2015) also states that register embodies specific modes of speaking tailored to occupational or communal identities. These linguistic differentiations become practical communicative purposes in several domains. For example, Holmes mentions that how a journalist writes, a politician makes a speech, or an athlete is an example of how register is present in every context.

Based on Martin Joos' (1967) five level of formalities, register is divided into 5 sections, namely frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate

a. Frozen

A language variety that is very formal, fixed, and unchanging. This register is often used in sacred or official situations such as state speeches, legal texts, prayers, or oaths of office. The sentences are fixed and static and do not change with time.

"I hereby declare you as a husband and a wife"

b. Formal

Language variety is used in official contexts such as speeches, academic presentations, or news reports. This style of speech is well-structured, uses standard vocabulary, and is one-way, where the speaker conveys information to the audience without interruption or direct dialog.

"Ladies and Gentleman, I present to you the first judge for tonight."

c. Consultative

A consultative register appears in two-way communication between speaker and listener, while maintaining politeness and formal structure. This register is generally found in professional communication where one party has more expertise or knowledge, such as doctor-patient and lecturer-student.

Doctor: "I suspect you have tuberculosis. I will prescribe you some medicine. Please avoid smoking and allergens."

Patient: "Thank you, doctor."

d. Casual

A casual register, which is used in informal situations between friends or people who are already familiar. This style of language tends to be relaxed, pays little attention to structure, and often uses slang or unofficial greetings. Examples can be found in everyday conversations between friends.

"The heck is happening here, bro?"

e. Intimate

An intimate register is the lowest level in Joos' level of formality, as it is only used by groups or individuals with very close emotional relationships, such as spouses, families, and close friends. The language used is very personal, it can even be in the form of codes, affectionate calls, or expressions that are only understood by both parties.

"I will be missing you, my baby. Take care!"

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach to conduct a thorough analysis of Donald Trump's registration. The study's primary materials are a video recording and a transcript of Trump's address collected from his official YouTube account [youtube.com/DonaldTrump](https://www.youtube.com/DonaldTrump), employing documentation techniques. The material used is a video of Trump's speech at Madison Square Garden on October 27, 2024, which includes key utterances about the usage of register. The data collected and analyzed consists of Trump's utterances in the form of phrases, words, and sentences that correspond to Martin Joos's register categories.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. Frozen

- (1) *"That's the day this economy roars back. Because under the Congress has the power to lay and collect taxes — but under my leadership, we don't raise taxes, we cut them!"*

The statement is based directly on the United States Constitution, using codified and unchanging language—a key characteristic of the frozen register. This register is

commonly used in legal, religious, and ceremonial contexts and retains its shape across time to maintain clarity and authority. The significance of this observation is supported by Nordquist (2020), which affirm that the use of fixed legal phrasing is essential to sustaining continuity and authority in judicial and governmental frameworks, even if such language appears sparingly. Phrases like "The President can order..." and "they can be imprisoned..." demonstrate institutional power through formal and declarative sentence patterns. Furthermore, linguistic choices like "lay and collect taxes" reflect constitutional language and judicial precedent, firmly anchoring the speech in the frozen register. In essence, the utterance's consistent reference, legal terminology, and authoritative tone clearly situate it within this register, emphasizing the linguistic consistency needed in legislation to maintain legitimacy, continuity, and accuracy.

b. Formal

- (2) *"I will massively cut taxes for workers and small businesses, and we will have no tax on tips, no tax on overtime, and no tax on social security benefits for our seniors."*

By offering tax incentives, Trump speaks directly to the concerns of workers, small business owners, and the elderly. His focus on their financial struggles underpins his broader economic policy plan. The formal register is reinforced through well-organized, purpose-driven speech and a tone steeped in governance and authority. The use of terms like "massively cut taxes" and detailed breakdowns of tax exemptions reflect a language style commonly used in political or legal frameworks. This formal and impersonal tone, with little use of slang or contractions, supports the speech's formal register.

- (3) *"On day one, I will launch the largest deportation program in American history."*

Trump frequently identifies immigration as a fundamental concern, linking it to national defense and cultural preservation. In asserting, *"On day one, I will launch the largest deportation program in American history,"* he adopts a formal register, marked by precise structure and an authoritative tone. Lexical items like *"launch," "deportation,"* and *"program"* reflect institutional language, while the phrase *"On day one"* suggests immediacy and control. Statements such as *"I will rescue every city and town"* reinforce personal commitment through the use of the first-person pronoun and future tense. Collectively, these elements exemplify

the features of the formal register: clarity, command, and policy-centered diction

- (4) *"This is an invasion of our country. Remember during the time I was trying to get the wall and I was getting all sorts of assurances and you couldn't get it from Congress."*

Trump intensifies the immigration debate by calling it an *"invasion,"* a word packed with emotional and militaristic weight. It's a calculated move to reignite support for his border wall and portray himself as a leader determined to act, even when blocked by Congress. He speaks in a formal, commanding tone, reinforcing his authority and policy focus. This style isn't just about sounding serious, it's about influencing how people think. Using strong, structured speech helps him look credible and keeps immigration at the center of public discussion. By choosing words like *"invasion"* and *"the wall,"* a proposed barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border that symbolizes Trump's hardline immigration stance, Trump sets the agenda, using formal political language to highlight what he wants the nation to prioritize. Vainio et al. (2024) provide further support for this idea, demonstrating that a formal delivery style can significantly improve how competent a speaker is perceived to be, particularly in situations where audience trust and clear communication are

c. Casual

- (5) *"..going to kick them the hell out of our country as fast as possible."*

Trump's choice of words reflects a deliberate use of casual register to mobilize emotional resonance and popular appeal. In saying *"kick them the hell out,"* he abandons formal diplomatic language in favor of blunt, idiomatic phrasing that echoes common speech patterns. The intensifier *"hell"* injects emotional force, signaling frustration and determination. Contractions like *"we're"* and a stripped-down syntactic style further contribute to the sense of informality and directness. His communication style blurs the line between political speech and everyday conversation, reinforcing a persona of authenticity and outrage.

- (6) *"That crooked Joe Biden has done a terrible job. You've destroyed our country."*

Trump's speech showcases how casual language can be a powerful way to connect with an audience. The casual register—relaxed, emotional, and full of everyday phrases—makes a leader sound more like the people they're speaking to. In calling Biden *"crooked,"* Trump

uses informal and emotionally charged language that resonates with frustration many listeners may feel. Phrases like *"We're not going to take it anymore."* Contractions such as *"you've"* give the speech a down-to-earth tone. This style isn't accidental; it helps Trump appear genuine and relatable. It shows he's not just giving a speech; he's speaking *with* the people, not *at* them. This is in line with Cavazza & Guidetti (2014) research that informal speech can improve the image of leaders who are close to the people. And that emotional closeness is exactly what makes casual speech so persuasive in rallies.

- (7) *"We're going to drill a baby drill and I will terminate the green new scam and we'll cut your energy prices in half"*

Trump's energy remarks rely on the casual register, marked by idiomatic phrases, contractions, and emotionally loaded language. His modified slogan *"drill a baby drill"* mirrors colloquial speech patterns designed to evoke crowd engagement. The term *"green new scam"* reflects lexical play and criticism, while the use of *"we're"* and *"we'll"* enhance conversational rhythm. His concrete promise to *"cut your energy prices in half within one year"* adds urgency and personal appeal. These features demonstrate a strategic use of informal language to reduce distance and increase relatability.

- (8) *"There's no way she becomes president. There's no way. Radical left lunatic who destroyed... She destroyed San Francisco."*

Trump's labeling of Kamala Harris as a *"radical left lunatic"* is a clear manifestation of casual register, marked by emotionally charged, informal, and evaluative language. The addition of *"destroyed San Francisco"* strengthens this tone, offering no nuanced explanation but relying on shared ideological context for impact. Casual register, as outlined by Joos, thrives in interactions where the speaker assumes familiarity with the listener, allowing for idiomatic and unfiltered expression. Politically, this register fosters a sense of closeness, tapping into audience emotions while reinforcing shared views through straightforward, affective language.

d. Intimate

- (9) *"Darling, that's a draft notice. They're drafting you to go and fight in some country that I've never heard... I've never heard of this country before. Oh no, I don't want my baby to fight. I don't want my baby to be killed"*

Trump crafts a scene of emotional vulnerability through a reenacted conversation between a mother and her soldier son, invoking words like *"my baby"* and

"darling" to capture the raw emotion families feel during wartime. While the language is typically reserved for private moments, its use here in a public speech is intentional—it brings an intimate register into the spotlight for rhetorical effect. Exclamations like *"oh no"* and repeated lines of disbelief make the exchange feel more authentic and relatable. This choice personalizes a broader political issue and helps the audience emotionally engage. Drawing on both Joos' and Biber's frameworks, the speech leverages intimate language to humanize the cost of conflict. In intimate registers, emotions play an important role to enhance persuasion and influence audience attitudes. Trump can use this strategy effectively in communicating with a large audience so as to create a personal bond between him and his supporters.

CONCLUSION

This research explores the application of Martin Joos's five register theory, namely frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate in the context of the United States presidential election in 2024. It can be seen based on the analysis that has been done, Trump uses registers to achieve his strategic communication goals by emphasizing the use of casual and formal registers. Out of five type of registers, Donald Trump only uses four out of five type. Consultative registers were not found in the data studied because consultative registers require two-way communication that interacts with each other where one party has higher expertise or knowledge. Trump predominantly uses casual register to connect with his audience and assert authority. Trump projects himself as a leader who is close to the people by creating a sense of closeness, relatability, and strengthening emotional connections with the audience through the use of idioms, contractions, and emotionally charged language. Meanwhile, formal register appears as a register that Trump often uses after casual register. Trump uses this register to show his authority as a head of state, explain his policies, and signal his credibility through the use of structured sentences, legal references, and assertive tone. Intimate and frozen registers also appear although not as many as the two previous registers. Their limited use such as frozen register which only appears in ceremonial and formal settings emphasizes the use of static sentences or phrases that cannot be used in any context. Another case with intimate register which only appears in close-relationships that occur within the scope of close families.

In summary, the dynamics of register use in politics not only show the versatility of linguistics but also illustrate how register can be used as a powerful rhetorical tool. By understanding the use of register in the political

context, it can show how political figures use language as a tool to influence the public, manipulate the use of language, and align their ideology with the audience to shape public identity.

SUGGESTION

With the limitations that exist in this study, it is hoped that future research will be able to develop new research related to the use of register using Joos. The topic analyzed can be related to the comparison between two or more famous politicians to find out the strategy of using register to deepen linguistic knowledge. In this case, the topic is not only limited to politics, but also other areas such as the entertainment industry, sports, etc.

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