



TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE BETWEEN TRUMP AND BIDEN IN 2020

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Abstract

This study was aimed at investigating the transitivity properties (processes, participants, and circumstances) used in the presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden in presidential election debate in 2020. The aim of this study was also to investigate the types of transitivity processes and the most dominant process occurred in the debate. Using a library study, the data were obtained from two transcription of debate. The data were analyzed qualitatively using Halliday's (1994) and Halliday and Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) theories. The findings showed that all types of processes, including material, mental, verbal, relational, existential, and behavioral processes, were found. The material process was significantly applied both two debaters. This indicates that the debaters had progressed to the stage of the material process. In other words, they all focused on the speaker's objectives, they were aware of the realization aspect of society action. To conclude, it was about the intentions, purposes, and directions of the arguments in the presidential debate between Trump and Biden about the critical crisis that the US was facing.

Keywords: Systemic functional linguistics, transitivity processes, presidential debate between Trump and Biden.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a kind of communication, especially when it comes to delivering a few ideas in a debate situation. Debate as defined by Zhang (2017); Freeley & Steinberg (2013) in Istiani and Puspita (2020) refers to a form of communication in which a debater can convey a message and make an argument about something. Some scholars argue that the debaters can also give the reason to protect their argument. The purpose of argument is to persuade someone to accept a certain conclusion.

The presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden in 2020 is one of events in America where they can give their idea about the statement given by the moderator. The 2020 American presidential election debate was a series of debates held for the 2020 U.S presidential general election. The first debate happened on September 29th, and set the record as the most-watched debate in American history. The final was took place on October 23rd. The duration of each debate is ninety minutes, then the debaters should respond or answer the moderator's questions. Only the democratic nominee Joe Biden and Republic nominee Donald Trump met the criteria for inclusions in the presidential debates, and thus were the only two to appear in the presidential debates. The candidates should be aware in selecting their arguments where it can persuade people to vote one of them in the presidential election.

From the linguistic side, the phenomenon explained in the previous paragraph was a very exciting and challenging political discourse which has been drawn much attention from linguists (Lan, 2018). Thus, the present writers decided to bring this study to examine Donald Trump and Joe Biden's linguistic devices in their presidential election debates using systemic functional linguistics. However, this study limits the discussion only for the analysis of transitivity system. Presidential candidates are encouraged to use transitivity, which reflects the dominant ideology in society when composing their statements to achieve the goals of their political aspirations.

This study applies an efficiency tool to analyze debate which is systemic functional linguistics (SFL) approach (Lan, 2018). SFL is a way to analyze how language works or functions in doing communication proposed (Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). The concept of SFL, according to Afrianto, Sujatna, Darmayanti, and Ariyani, (2020); Kuswoyo et al (2020); and Kuswoyo (2016), language is more of a meaningful resource than a set of regulations. The text-context interaction is also highlighted in SFL. SFL is a method for analyzing a text at multiple levels, ranging from lexicon-grammatical to text structure, and discourse. Semantic can also be revealed. Additionally, SFL is concerned with the meaning that the speaker produced (Kuswoyo et al, 2021). These meaning includes interpersonal, textual, and ideational meaning. This study focuses on experiential meaning or ideational meaning. Marbum (2016) and Afrianto, Indrayani, and Soemantri, (2014); Kuswoyo et al (2013) stated that ideational meaning refers to a person, an event, a phenomenon, an action, a situation, etc. Thus, meta-functions could be used to examine the text and see how it is produced. Transitivity analysis is useful for examining spoken texts, but additional research is needed to support its explanation of discourses. Transitivity analysis is most widely applied in literary works and news articles, although it is not widely used in spoken texts. Transitivity reveals the realization of ideational meaning at the clause level (Participants, processes, and circumstances).

A large and growing body of literature has investigated transitivity from various topics; sonnets (Afrianto, Indrayani, and Seomantri, 2014; articles (Marbum 2016; Munalim 2017); presidential debates (Lan, 2018; Fadilah and Kuswoyo (2021) and classroom discourse (Kuswoyo and Rido, 2019). For example, Afrianto, Indrayani, and Seomantri (2014) focused on transitivity on Shakespeare's sonnets. A study by Marbum (2016) deals with the process types of transitivity found in the National Geographics' articles. In 2017, Munalim (2017) published a paper in which they described mental processes in teachers' reflection papers: a transitivity analysis in systemic functional linguistics. Similarly, in Lan's (2018) studies have shown that in transitivity processes, Donald Trump's simple and causal speaking style contributes to his improbable victories in modern US history. Other studies (Kuswoyo and Rido, 2019) have considered the process types in Engineering lecture Introduction. Recently, Fadilah, and Kuswoyo (2021) investigated transitivity analysis in news reports on Covid 19 of Jakarta Post-press. Although some research has been carried out on transitivity, there is very little scientific investigating of transitivity system on presidential debates. Thus, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What kinds of transitivity processes are used by Donald Trump and Joe Biden in the 2020 American presidential election debates?
2. What is the dominant of transitivity process used by Donald Trump and Joe Biden in the 2020 American presidential election debates?

METHOD

A research method is a pivotal tool in research since it presents different points of view (Suprayogi and Pranoto, 2020). This study applied a qualitative research method and library study because the data involved in the form of words, phrases, and clauses. Halosko 2010 in (Ivana and Suprayogi, 2020), qualitative research is a kind of study that collects and analyzes data by using non-numerical data to evaluate its meaning. Further, this present study also used a library study. The library research provides a source of data that focuses on a specific issue, and those data may be conveniently accessed by the present writers offered by Merriam (2009). Meanwhile, to answer the research question, the study used systemic functional linguistics theory by Halliday (1994) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). The aim of this study is to investigate the types of transitivity processes used by Donald Trump and Joe Biden in presidential debate in 2020.

Besides, the primary data of this current study were taken from two texts of debates between Donald Trump and Joe Biden in 2020 American presidential election debates. There were two debate texts taken from the Donald Trump and Joe Biden labeled into DT and JB. Those texts were obtained from online media namely Rev blog spot (<https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/Donald-trump-joe-biden->

The present writers adopted the data analyzing technique from Kuswoyo and Rido (2019). This current study tagged every clause with DT/Mat01/ I. As an example, clause DT/Mat01/I. DT means Donald Trump, Mat means stand for material process, 01 means first clause, and I stand for symbol of the order of data based on the highest percentage. The analysis steps involve examining clauses for transitivity, determining a percentage for participants, process, and context, presenting the findings, discussing the findings, and drawing a conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study uses two debate texts of Donald Trump and Joe Biden as sources of the research. Then each clause that indicates transitivity processes in the table is classified. The findings show that all processes are found. They are material process, mental process, relational process, verbal process, behavioral process and existential process. Further, the data reveal that the most dominant process used in presidential debate Trump and Biden is material processes. It can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. Distribution of transitivity processes found in the presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden

No	Transitivity	Donald Trump		Joe Biden	
		Frequencies	Percentage	Frequencies	Percentage
1	Material	281	44,6%	204	46,6%
2	Mental	204	32,4%	107	24,4%
3	Verbal	65	10,3%	59	13,4%
4	Relational	51	8,1%	27	6,2%
5	Existential	24	3,8%	38	8,7%
6	Behavioral	5	0,8%	3	0,7%
	Total	630	100%	438	100%

Table 1 shows that 630 clauses found from Donald Trump’s texts and 438 clauses from Joe Biden’s texts. The findings further reveal that Trump tend to use material process that is 44,6% with 281 times of occurances, followed by mental process 32,4% with 204 times next is the verbal process 10,3% or 65 times, and relational process with 8,1% or 51 times of occurances. For the existential process contribute 3,8% and the last is behavioral process with 0,8% or 5 times that occur in the presidential debate text. Meanwhile, in Joe Biden’s debate text, it was 438 transitivity processes found in the presidential debate text. Similar to Trump, Biden dominantly respond the questions or arguing some statement through material process that is 46,6% or occur 204 times. It was followed by mental process with 24,4% or 107 times, then the verbal process with 13,4% or 59 times, fourth was existential process with 8,7% or 38 times. Next, relational process with 6,2% or 27 times. The last is behavioral process with 0,7% or only 3 times from the Joe Biden.

1. Material Process

Process of doing, happening or creating something or physical activities and tangibles action is material process (Eklesia & Rido, 2020). Halliday (1994) calls them action clauses expressing the fact that something or someone undertakes some action or some entity “does” something which may be done to some other entity. These processes can be probed by asking what someone did. There are two essential participants, namely actor and goal. The example of data is illustrated below.

(1) JB/Mat173/I

If we get the vaccine

If	We	get	the vaccine
-	Actor	Process: Material	Goal

The datum (1) above is talking about the vaccine that has not been available yet in the US. The actor “we” is the representation all of people or the society in US, whereas the word “get” is the process that actor need, and “the vaccine” is the goal of the material process. From this clause explains that all of people in US should get the vaccine. Then, the second material process as followed.

Data (2) from *I want to give them better health care at a much lower price.*

(2) DT/Mat180/I

I want to give them better health care at a much lower price.

I	want to give	<i>them better health care at a much lower price.</i>
Actor	Process: Material	Goal

The data above shows that the actor is “I”. “want to give “is the material process that acts by the actor, and the goal of the clause is “them better health care at a much lower price”. This clause describes that “I” is the representation of President Donald Trump, and “Them” is the representation of people or the society in the United States. It reveals that the President Donald Trump wanted to give society in US better healthcare with much lower price than Obama Care.

2. Mental Process

Halliday (1994) proposes that the three important sub-types are: 1. Perception (seeing, hearing, etc), 2. Affections and 3. Cognitions (thinking, knowing, understanding, etc.) That's a mental process. There are two participants in the mental process: Senser and Phenomenon. First, a senser is a conscious person who is experiencing, thinking about, or seeing something. Thought refers to cognitive sense, seen refers to perceptual sense, and love refers to emotions sense. The sensors detect the presence of a conscious being engaged in a mental process. The second phenomenon is that the set of entities that can play this role is not limited to any semantic or grammatical category. It triggered a mental process that revealed a far bigger pool of potential participants (Munalim, 2017). The data of mental process are presented below.

(3) DT/Men412/II

But I don't want to accept the National Guard

But	I	don't want to accept	the National Guard
-	Senser	Process: Mental	Phenomenon

The mental process is identified by the process “don't want to accept” and “I” is the senser, while the phenomenon is “The National Guard”. From the clause, the senser “I” is the representation of the president Donald Trump where does not want to accept the National Guard in United States. It is contrast with Munalim’s research (2017), where his research focused on the analysis of mental process. In his research, mental process becomes the third ranks, then in this current study becomes the second ranks. His research presents the word that express verbal process in any sub-types namely: cognitive sensing, desiderative sensing, perceptive sensing and emotive sensing that found in his research. Then, the next is the mental process offered below.

(4) JB/Men536/II

He's just afraid of counting the votes

He	is just afraid	of counting the votes
Sensor	Process: Mental	Phenomenon

In datum (4) above, the mental process of word “is just afraid” shows the feeling of the senser. It is taken from the Joe Biden dialogue in debate texts, the participant “he” is the senser in terms of transitivity interpretation, who feel the mental process of “is just afraid”. The phenomenon is in the word “of counting the votes”. This clause shows that the sensor “he” is the pronoun from the president Donald Trump who feeling “is just afraid” because of counting the votes by the Americans.

3. Verbal Processes

Saying is a verbal process employed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). Participants in this process include the speaker/sayer (participant who is the speaker), and the receiver (the one who addressed the information, the beneficiary of a verbal message, occurring with or without a proposition depending on position in the clause). Verbiage (the verbalization itself) is another term for verbalization. The word that express the verbal (e.g. assertions, questions, responses, and stories).

(5) JB/Ver326/III

I've been arguing that

I	have been arguing	that
Sayer	Process: Verbal	Target

Based on the data above, “I” refers to the Sayer. It represents the vice president Joe Biden. While, the verbal process is “have been arguing” and for the target is “that”. To simply this clause, it reports that the Vice President Joe Biden has been arguing related to the families who had small amount of drugs, and the families should get the sequences of it, then the vice president arguing that the families should go to treatment across the board not send them to jail.

(6) DT/Ver962/III

They refuse to talk about it

They	refuse to talk	about it
Sayer	Process: Verbal	Target

This datum (6) shows that the sayer of the clause is “They” which reflects to everybody, the media, and allies. Meanwhile, the verbal process that Trump used is “refuse to talk”, and “about it” as the target. In this context, “It” refers to the truth that money totally three and a half million dollars. And Jow will announce the truth what secretly to the public and also Joe Biden will discredit his position in “His position has been totally thoroughly discredited”. This means that the media and the member of rallies have been refused to talk about the truth that safety secretly by Donald Trump.

4. Relational Process

A relational process is one in which a participant's identity and description are linked. Relational processes can be divided into two categories. They are relational attributive and identifying processes. The process of being is the attribution relational process. There are two types of players in the attributive relational process: carriers and attributes. Identifying relational process, on the other hand, is the act of assigning a value to something. Tokens and values are both involved in this process. The data is illustrated bellow:

(7) DT/Rel419/IV

Antifa is a dangerous radical group

Antifa	is	a dangerous radical group
Token	Process: Relational identifying	Value

The clause above shows that the relational identifying process type is elaborated. In terms of participant function, “Antifa” is an identified and “A dangerous radical group” function as an identifier, the verb *(is)* is employed by the President Donald Trump in transitivity term to express warming up sub-phase that aims at stating that Antifa is a dangerous radical group in America. In this current study has similarities with (Wahyudin, 2016), where relational process is the fourth rank in the both. Meanwhile, in his research he found only 4 relational processes in the news item.

(8) JB/Rel726/IV

We were President and Vice President

We	Were	president and Vice President
Carrier	Process: Relational Attribute	Attribute

From the datum (8) above, it shows the relational attribute process appear in the debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. The clause above is the relational process of attribute. Where the carrier is “we” follow the relational process “were” and the attribute is in the word “President and Vice President”. From the clause above, the present writer concludes that Joe Biden at that time when he and Donald Trump as president and the vice president, they will try do something to facing the issue regarding business with China.

5. Existential Processes

The act of existence is referred to as the existential process. It suggests that something had happened or seemed to happen. Existential processes are described by existing verbs like "be," "exist," and "arise," and the existent can be anything. It also reflects experience by saying, "There was/is something." It also conveys feelings. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) ‘the existing is any form of phenomenon that a nominal group in the sentence experiences during this process. The sample data of existential process is illustrated below.

(9) JB/Exis015/V

There is a hundred million people who have pre-existing conditions

There	is	hundred million people who have pre-existing conditions
-	Process: Existential	Existent

Datum (9) above shows that the existential process ‘be’ verb is was used. This process was used in the five rank for the occurrence in debate text. The use of the existential process in debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden reflects the sub- phase looking back to the society in America who have the pre-existing conditions. In term of transitivity interpretation, hundred million people who have pre-existing conditions as existent. This finding similar to the research present by Afrianto and Inayati, Existential process in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secret: a Systemic Functional Linguistic Study, 2016. Meanwhile, their research focused on the existential process that appears in Herry Potter and the Chamber of secret. In their research they found a lot of existential process with the key word “there”. There are two existent that (Afrianto and Inayati, Existential process in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secret: a Systemic Functional Linguistic Study, 2016) found in their research, namely: existent of entity and existent of event.

(10) DT/Exis546/V

Today there was a big problem

Today	there	Was	a big problem
Circ: Time	-	Process: Existential	Existent

The data above shows that the existential process is used by Donald Trump in his debate. “Today” is the circumstance of time. While, the existential process is “was” is because to prove to existing this process. Then, “a big problem” is the existent, because it is involved and realized in this existential process. From the data above, the present writer can conclude that Donald Trump gave information that there is a big problem that American faced at that time.

6. Behavioral Processes

The process of psychological or psychological activity is described as the behavioral process. This category of processes is something between mental and physical processes, and they usually only have one participant. The Behaver, the main participant, is usually a cognizant being. There is sometimes a Behaviour Range, such as a Participant, that extends the procedure. It can be seen in the following data.

(11) JB/Beh206/VI

I am concerned that any court would settle

I	am concerned	that any court would settle
Behaver	Process: Behavioral	Existent

Based on data (11) above, it shows the behavioral process. Behavioral process is the last rank of transitivity processes appears in the debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. The behavior is “I” where I is represent of pronoun Joe Biden, where it use the behavioral process “am concerned” and the existent is “that any court would settle “. From the datum above, the present writer shows Joe Biden concerned or focused on the court would be settle at that time. This findings on behavioral process contrast to (Kuswoyo & Rido, 2019) where in their research, behavioral process become the fifth. Meanwhile, in this current study is the last rank. Their research found the behavioral process “look” is to express the psychological activity.

(12) DT/Beh924/VI

They cried in the Oval Office

They	Cried	in the Oval Office
Behaver	Process: Behavioral	Circ: Location

Data 12 shows that behavioral process also used by Donald Trump. The behavior is “they” where they use the behavioral process “cried” and the circumstance of location is appear of “in the Oval Office”. The present writer shows that the behavior “they” is the pronoun of some liberal people cried in the Oval Office or in Donald Trump’s Office.

From the Table 1, it shows that the most dominant process of transitivity found in debate text is material process. The domination of the material process in debate texts between Donald Trump and Joe Biden indicates that the debate or the respond of statement from the moderator or interlocutors are centrally focused on the issues that moderator ask regarding the hot issues in that time concerning the goal of the debate to convey the audiences or the society, and to know what will the president do in the

future if they won the election. This finding may be similar to that of (Kuswoyo & Rido, 2019) who found that the orientation stage is employed more frequently. The results also suggest that the use of material clauses is mostly focused on the actions of Donald Trump and Joe Biden in relation to the moderator's question or the hot issues in US.

CONCLUSION

The debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden is examined using transitivity theory in this current study. The six processes have been identified and discussed in details. Each process and participants presentation is identified and described. The transitivity system in systemic functional linguistics has been proven to be an effective tool in the political debate through qualitative analysis. The following is a summary of the important results: the six types of transitivity processes discovered in debate texts between Donald Trump and Joe Biden have various frequencies. Material processes, with strong power and resolve, are primarily used to define the measures that the newly elected administration would do or what the new president is expected to undertake in order to protect the country and resuscitate the economy. The frequent usage of "we, I, they, and he" shortens the gap between the speaker and the audience. While America's current situation is unsatisfactory, the new president's first and most significant responsibility will implement certain recovery measures in order to revitalize the country. Mental processes can be said in the smooth presentation of policy, the unification of people's thinking, and the striking of a sympathetic chord in the audience's hearts. As a result, we can see that the candidates commonly use the words "I" or "we." The attributive mode relationship all processes used here are a fantastic choice for grabbing the audience's attention and enlivening the environment. The focus of a debate is obviously on typical human physiological and psychological activity such as breathing, coughing, smiling, and so on; therefore, behavioral processes are not frequently exploited by both sides.

The reality revealed by the study is that whatever language forms the speaker chooses, they all serve the topics of the discourses. The participation function of language as doing something is the interpersonal function that indicates the speaker's meaning potential. This is the section in which the speaker shares his own opinions and judgments while also attempting to influence the opinions and behavior of others (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In other words, it enables individuals to begin and maintain social contact, as well as to develop a sense of self and group identity. Language is used by the two candidates to interact with the audience, to develop and sustain specific relationships with individuals, to influence others' conduct, to make explicit their opinions, and to elicit and change others' attitudes, in addition to communicating certain facts. In political debates, those who pay more attention to interpersonal functions can more effectively propose policies and engage as many people as possible.

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