

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of five sub-chapters, starting with the background and context of the study in order to give an overview of the study. Then, it outlines the statement of the research problems and the goals of the study, which are important to define the focus and direction of the research. Moreover, this chapter explains the importance of the research from both theoretical and practical viewpoints. The scope and limitation of the study are also clearly stated to establish the boundaries of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Debates in political campaigns often attract a lot of public attention. This occurs because political debate is one of the main elements in democratic process in various countries. This moment becomes more prominent especially in the context of presidential debate. Additionally, Nasihah (2024) argues that a presidential debate is a crucial moment in the process of democracy which functions as a stage where candidates present their vision, policies and value to the voters. Therefore, there are so many people stay informed with the political events because this will indirectly determine the fate of their nations by informed decisions about their future leadership.

At the same time, presidential debate is not only used as a forum for policy discussion of each candidate which is being watched globally, but now it has become an arena of rhetorical performance. It is in agreement with Benoit (2013) and Hamed & Alqurashi, (2025) who state that Presidential debates have become competitive arenas where candidates use persuasive rhetoric to influence the voter's perception. It can be said because victory is often determined not by the truth or facts that are conveyed, but by skill in managing perception and attacking opponents. It means that communication strategies play an important role in shaping public opinion and voter preferences.

Denial is one of many strategies used by politicians in a political debate. This strategy is used by candidate to deny accusations and control the narrative. Moreover, this strategy may be a move in a strategy of defence and saving positive self-presentation (van Dijk, 1992b). Denial functions as more than saying "no" but

it is a complex defence mechanism that allows a speaker to refuse responsibility, shift the blame and build their image as a victim or a hero unfairly attacked. According to Flinders & Hinterleiter (2025), denial and blame seeking behaviour can help politicians avoid blame by changing public opinion, so they can stay supported even if there is controversy. Therefore, analysing the denial strategies employed in political debate is crucial to uncover how they influence voter perception and how they try to distance themselves from controversial issues that can damage their image.

One of the political debates that often becomes a global focus and the most discussed topic among politicians and leaders in the world is the 2024 United States presidential debate (Pangemanan, 2025). This intense attention is caused by its role in shaping the direction of domestic and international politics and also because the United States is a superpower nation with significant influence in the global economy, military, technology and education (Wulandari et al., 2022). In addition, the candidates of the U.S presidential debate that are Donald Trump and Kamala Harris are two prominent political figures known for their sharp contrast in style and policy, making their competition very interesting and watched by public in worldwide. Thus, regarding this case, the researcher is interested in analysing the denial strategies employed by the United States presidential candidates during the 2024 debate.

Several previous studies that are relevant to this current study show that denial strategies in political debates and other various objects have been investigated. First, Fouad (2019) conducted a study that analysed the denial strategies employed by Amr Moussa and Abul Futouh during the first televised Egyptian presidential debate. Next, Meral (2022) conducted a study that analysed denial strategies within comments on the Turkish forum Ekşi Sözlük regarding the Armenian minority in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis. Then, Ali & Ebrahim (2023) analysed denial strategies employed by Iraqi Kurds and Arabs when talking about the Kurdish question. The last is a study from Zilincik & Sweijjs (2023) entitled *Beyond deterrence: Reconceptualizing Denial Strategies and Rethinking their Emotional Effects*. After reviewing some previous studies that are relevant to this study, no studies were found that specifically investigate the same object using the same

theories as this current research. Therefore, based on this gap the researcher will conduct a study entitled *An Analysis of Denial Strategies used by the U.S Presidential Candidates During the 2024 Debate*.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background of the study presented above, the researcher formulates two research questions that will be discussed later, as follows:

1. What are the types of denial strategies used by the U.S Presidential candidates during the 2024 debate?
2. What are the functions of denial strategies used by the U.S Presidential candidates during the 2024 debate?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the research questions in above, the researcher formulates two objectives of this study, as follows:

1. To explain the types of denial strategies used by the U.S Presidential candidates during the 2024 debate.
2. To explain the functions of denial strategies used by the U.S Presidential candidates during the 2024 debate.

1.4 Significance of the Study

By conducting this study, the researcher expects that this study provide both theoretical and practical significance. In terms of theoretical significance, this study is expected to enrich knowledge about critical discourse analysis within academic context, especially in the dimension of denial strategies. This understanding can help the readers to know that during debates the candidates use denial strategies as a key persuasive tool to influence public opinion and manage accountability. Therefore, this study contributes to academic knowledge by providing an understanding of the role of denial in spoken political interactions.

Practically, this study is expected help students in critical discourse analysis class, especially for those who are interested in denial strategies so that it can helps in analysing the types and functions of denial strategies employed by presidential candidates in the debate. This is significant because a better understanding of denial strategies enables students or readers to evaluate political messages critically and identify rhetorical strategies that may cover up the truth. The last, by conducting

this study the researcher hopes that the readers understand the types and functions of denial strategies used in written or spoken language so that when listening to the debate they will understand the purpose of the arguments that use by participants debate.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope or the focus of this study is in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis. In this study, the researcher applied the theory proposed by Teun A. van Dijk (1992b) to analyse the types and Teun A. van Dijk (1992a) to analyse the functions of denial strategies employed by candidates during debate.

This study is limited to analyse one video of the United States presidential debate 2024 that is available on the ABC News YouTube Channel. This study focuses only on the verbal arguments that indicate denial strategies employed by two candidates of the United States president during the 2024 debate which are Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. Additionally, this study is limited to examine the words, phrases, and sentences in the arguments of the candidates that indicate the types and functions of denial strategies based on van Dijk (1992b) and (1992a) theories. This study doesn't analyse non-verbal cues such as voice, facial expressions, and body language.