



# The Comparison of Conversational Features Used by Joe Biden and Donald Trump in Political Debate

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### Abstract

Conversation analysis is used to identify the use of features in an interaction by considering the institutional settings or situation. Here, political situation is used because of the condition of controlled situation must be different. This study aimed to compare the conversational features used by Joe Biden and Donald Trump in the final presidential election debate of America in 2020. This was a qualitative study using the conversational analysis approach proposed by Schegloff (1974). The data were analyzed based on the conversational features used including turn-taking strategies, adjacency pairs, and repairs. The results found there were some similarities and differences of conversational features used by both candidates. The similarities showed both speakers preferred to use most of all turn-taking strategies, types of first and second-pair parts, and repair strategies. Besides, the differences were found in the number of conversational features used. Donald Trump tend to use more features since he used more turn-taking strategy to take the turn during the debate. In sum, in political setting, people tend to take more turn to share their idea and respond the other. It affects the use of another conversational features including the frequency of using them. Furthermore, the result of comparing using three features in a political situation becomes the novelty of this research since this setting is a rare topic in conversation analysis. This result is also contributed on enriching references of future research using conversation analysis specifically in a political setting.

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## INTRODUCTION

Conversation analysis is a well-known approach to discourse analysis that focuses on identifying the important features of language use. In communication, this approach avoids analyzing sentences and phrases. Since both include the syntactical field, conversation analysis was first introduced in a research that focused on the implementation of a turn-taking strategy in a casual conversation (Sacks et al., 1974). In addition, it developed the basis theory of conversation analysis into the sequence organization in interaction that explains the features in detail (Schegloff, 2007). This theory discusses further the elements used in an interaction specifically conversation. By considering additional aspects needed in a conversation, it provides several features that support the continuity of turn-taking. Six types of features are possibly used in a conversation including the opening and closing, turn-taking, adjacency pair, preferred organization, feedback, and repair (Paltridge, 2012).

In this research, there are only three features used to be analyzed including turn-taking, adjacency pair, and repair. Since those features relate to each other in the continuity of the conversation. Repair has a big role in the use of turn design specifically for repairing troubles either produced by the first or another interlocutor through the units of a sequential organization (Drew, 2013; Hayashi et al., 2013). Trouble in a conversation refers to unclear utterances because of mishearing, mispronunciation, and misunderstanding. Besides, the units of sequential organization refer to the types of utterances used by the interlocutors which include the adjacency pair. Thus, the relation of the three chosen conversational features is put in the conversational function. Turn-taking aims to keep the flow of the conversation, adjacency pair shows the paired utterances that relate to the turn-taking, and repair refers to the interlocutor's strategy of correcting an error produced by himself or the partner.

In addition, many phenomena relate to this research. First, many television talk shows

that specifically take political themes present the use of various conversational features in the interaction. Besides, formal political interaction such as a meeting of the Indonesian People's House of Representatives or *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* also shows the various strategies for applying conversational features. The use of overlapping and interrupting strategy of turn-taking affects another type of conversational feature used by the interlocutor or another one. It reveals an assumption of the influence of interactional settings on the use of conversational features. The conversational setting is divided into two settings of interaction including traditional and institutional settings (Raclaw, 2010). Traditional setting refers to casual interaction, while the institutional setting takes place in other settings of casual interaction such as education, healthcare, genre, or politics. Institutional settings also bring a certain goal of interaction that is based on the type (Arminen, 2005).

In this research, the problem is in the setting chosen to be analyzed which is in the political setting. Since this setting is sensitive and tends to implicitly perform a controlled strategy of the interaction. In the academic field, the analysis of conversational features used in a political setting is a rare theme. Many pieces of research focus on casual and formal interactions such as classroom talk, interviews, and genres of male and female. It becomes the novelty of this study to take the political setting as the context of conversational features used by the interlocutors specifically in a final debate of the American presidential election 2020. Joe Biden and Donald Trump become the candidates for president in the United States of America that take much attention from independent and empowered countries around the world including China, North Korea, Russia, etc. Thus, comparing the conversational features used by both candidates should be interesting. Since the USA is a superior country and political setting in conversation analysis is a rare topic.

The importance of this research is divided into three categories. First, conversation analysis is an appropriate approach that is used to

examine sequence organization in an interaction specifically a conversation. This approach is a tool to analyze a conversation in a certain situation including an institutional setting (Rymes, 2009). In this research, it refers to the political setting which is specifically in the presidential election debate. Second, the political situation and democracy are the latest issues in the United States of America. Since 2020 the presidential election is conducted and it considers the influence of America on human life around the world. Third, the result of similarities and differences can enrich the references of future research in conversation analysis specifically in a political setting. Besides, in the academic field, this research can contribute to the awareness of applied linguistics in a conversation as it is a tool for using language to communicate among human beings.

This research was stimulated by some previous research that focused on a similar topic. The previous research analyzed the use of conversational features in various settings including classroom talk and interviews. The findings of the previous research showed that some conversational features appear in an interaction based on the situation (Kong & Su, 2014; Ali, 2018; Izza et al., 2019; Giovanni & Fitriati (2018); Jarrahzadeh & Zadeh, 2017; & Al-Wossabi, 2016). All findings showed there were turn-taking and adjacency pair that could not be separated, since those features are related to each other. The situation also affected the use of conversational features. Thus, the conversational features analyzed in the previous studies became the gap to this research. This research chose three conversational features and took political debate as the setting. Besides, the previous studies focused on two conversational features and conducted in various settings.

In addition, the political setting of interaction is also possible to be chosen. Since it includes the institutional setting. This condition of interaction affects the way of politicians in applying conversational features including greeting and preferred organization (Albert & Raymond, 2019). In a political setting, people tend to use specific greetings to perform their

persona that attracts the audience's judgment. The specific greeting is formed differently than the greeting in a casual conversation. Since it brings a certain political aim that affects the use of other conversational features in the interaction. Thus, the setting of the interaction affects the use of conversational features (Ingram & Elliott, 2014).

In political settings, speakers tend to use certain paired utterances such as question-answer, because it gives them a limitation that includes the topic of interaction (Iswara et al., 2019). The paired utterances refer to the type of adjacency pair that appeared during the political interaction. Besides, taking a turn is also affected in this setting. The role of turn-taking in a political interaction specifically a debate contributes to the mission of the party that is brought by the politician (Sample, 2015). Thus, the political setting affects the use of adjacency pair and turn-taking which is also followed by repair.

Repair could be categorized into two types including the source of repair and the prompting (Levinson, 1983). The source of repair includes self-initiated and other-initiated repair which refers to the people producing the repairs. The prompting refers to the self-initiated and other-initiated. Here, self-initiated repair explains the use of repair by the trouble source that is prompted by themselves (Al-Harahsheh & Obeidat, 2015; & Emrani & Hooshmand, 2019). Other-initiated repair refers to the prompting of repairment that comes from another speaker (Lilya, 2014; & Kendrick, 2015).

Based on the phenomena above, the researchers compared the use of conversational features in the final debate between Joe Biden and Donald Trump. To explain the goal, the researchers objectively tried to find the similarities and differences in conversational features used by both speakers in the political debate setting. Since, the conversational features chosen were turn-taking, adjacency pair, and repair, it was expected the findings could present the similarities and differences of various conversational features used in the debate.

The results of this research are also expected to give some beneficial contributions including theoretical, practical, and pedagogical sides. On the theoretical side, the result could contribute to the references of future research that uses the conversation analysis approach specifically in political settings. Besides, the results could practically invite people's linguistic awareness of using appropriate conversational features to keep the interaction flow running well. On the pedagogical side, the result is also expected to inspire all aspects of education in understanding and applying conversational features in the classroom interaction to keep alive interaction specifically in spoken activities such as discussion or speaking class.

## METHOD

The present research aimed to compare the use of conversational features by Joe Biden and Donald Trump in the final debate of the American presidential election 2020. The qualitative method was applied to analyze and explain the comparison of conversational features used by both candidates for American president with conversation analysis as the approach (Potter & Edwards, 2004).

The subject of the research is the final debate of the presidential election 2020 which was recorded by the CAN YouTube channel. The transcription of the recording was used to compare the similarities and differences of conversational features used. here, transcription and video recording were used as the type of data. In qualitative research, transcribing an audio or video recording aims to ensure the quality of its audibility and the accuracy of the word process (Given, 2008).

The data was obtained by some stages. First, the researchers watched the video recording of the American final debate election 2020 on the CAN YouTube channel. Second, the researchers wrote the transcript in the transcription table. Besides, the CAN YouTube channel provided subtitles that helped the researchers to recheck the transcript. In the transcription process, the symbols of the transcription procedure were used

to identify the conversational features of the speakers.

For the data analysis technique, the researchers used the table of conversational features including turn-taking, adjacency pairs, and repair to find out the similarities and differences of the data. It also conducted in some stages. First, identifying was used to gain and analyse the data based on conversational features used by using the transcription. Second, the data was put in the table based on the instrument used for conversational features analysis that included in classifying stage. Third, the result of classifying the data was used to compare the conversational features used by Joe Biden and Donald Trump. Fourth, interpreting the result to find the novelty of this research . In the end, the researchers formulated a conclusion and suggestion for future research that takes a similar approach and situation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the researchers present the findings and the discussion of the research to answer the problem formulation stated in the introduction. The result was divided into three parts that were categorized based on the conversational features chosen to be analyzed in this research including turn-taking, adjacency pair, and repair. First, the results of analyzing turn-taking are provided in the table. it consists of three turn-taking strategies, two tables of adjacency pair analysis including the results of analyzing paired utterances and each pair part utterance used by both speakers, and a table of repair consisting of four repair strategies and the findings. All results were followed by a discussion that explained the similarities and differences of the results and related to some theories.

### 1. Turn-Taking

First, the following table presents the turn-taking used by Joe Biden and Donald Trump in the final debate:

**Table 1.** The Analysis of Turn-Taking

Turn-Taking Strategy	Sub-strategy	Joe Biden	Donald Trump
Taking the turn		89	112
	Starting up	0	0
	Taking over	55	65
	Interrupting	9	15
	Overlapping	25	32
Holding the turn		0	0
	Verbal filler	0	0
	Silent pause	0	0
	Lexical repetition	0	0
	A new start	0	0
Yielding the turn		5	16
	Prompting	2	10
	Giving up	2	2
	Appealing	1	4
Total		94 strategies	128 strategies

According to Table 1, the result of analyzing the turn-taking strategy in the final debate presidential election of America 2020 can be seen that some strategies are not used during the political debate. In total, Joe Biden used 94 strategies and Donald Trump used 128 strategies. The holding the turn strategy shows 0 used which means no one of the sub-strategies is used during the debate. In each strategy, Joe Biden used 89 taking the floor strategy, and 5 yielding the floor strategy. Donald Trump used 112 taking the floor strategy, and 16 yielding the floor strategy.

In the sub-strategy of taking the turn, Joe Biden took over 55 times, interrupted 9 times, and overlapped 25 times. Donald Trump took over 65 times, interrupted 15 times, and overlapped the turn 32 times. Besides, in the yielding the turn, Joe Biden prompted twice, gave up twice, and appealed once. Donald Trump prompted 10 times, gave up twice, and appealed 4 times.

The similarities showed that Joe Biden and Donald Trump preferred to use the taking and yielding the turn strategy in the debate. Since

a debate is a controlled interaction, the purpose of this situation is to present the political point of view of the speaker. The situation of interaction affects the goal of the interaction itself (Arminen, 2005). In political debate, people tend to present their strong political side to promote themselves. It is applied through performing themselves in the debate by using conversational features in sharing their idea. In short, the use of taking and yielding the turn is influenced by political goals.

In a debate, people tend to interrupt and overlap another speaker's turn to share an idea. It aims either to respond to another speaker's idea or to share their point of view. The situation of political debate affects the use of turn-taking strategy in the interaction specifically interrupting and overlapping (Albert & Raymond, 2019). Thus, the use of a turn-taking strategy in a debate is affected by the theme as in a political debate, speakers tend to use overlapping and interrupting that are included in taking the floor strategy.

Despite that, there was a different frequency of using the turn-taking strategy by both speakers. Donald Trump used more times of turn-taking strategy than Joe Biden. Donald Trump used a turn-taking strategy 128 times including 112 taking the turn and 16 yielding the turn. Joe Biden used 94 turn-taking strategies including 89 taking the floor and 5 yielding the floor. From deeper analyses, it found that Donald Trump got more chances to use a turn-taking strategy because he has high intentions to share his point of view and respond to other speakers' utterances. He used 65 taking over, 15 interrupts, and 32 overlapping to take his turn. Joe Biden used 55 taking over, 9 interrupting, and 25 overlapping.

Taking over takes a big role in controlled interaction specifically political debate (Gorjian and Habibi, 2015). Since people in this situation tend to show their contribution and have an intention in sharing their opinion. Besides, the use of interpreting and overlapping also contributes to a debate for specific purposes. The use of overlapping and interrupting aims to collaborate the idea of other speakers that is incompatible with the current speaker's idea (Habibi et al., 2020). In overlapping, the speaker

tends to take their turn by cutting off other speakers' turns, ignoring unfinished utterances, and forcing their turn. Besides, the speaker prefers to consider other speakers' utterances and turn in applying the interrupting.

Yielding the turn refers to the action of responding to another speaker's turn including prompting, giving up the turn, and appealing the turn to the controller. In debate or other controlled interaction, the controller refers to the host which has the responsibility to allow or reject the participants' appealing the turn strategy. Thus, they can get acceptance and refusal of their appealing the turn.

**2. Adjacency Pair**

The second result was about the analysis of the adjacency pair used by Joe Biden and Donald Trump in the final debate of the American presidential election 2020, which is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** The Analysis of Adjacency Pairs

No	Type of Adjacency Pair	The Used	Total
1.	Request-Acceptance	16 pairs	
2.	Request-Rejection	0 pair	
3.	Offer-Acceptance	22 pairs	
4.	Offer-Refusal	2 pairs	
5.	Invitation-Acceptance	4 pairs	
6.	Invitation-Refusal	3 pairs	
7.	Assessment-Agreement	0 pair	
8.	Assessment-Disagreement	43 pairs	
9.	Question-Expected answer	46 pairs	
10.	Question-Unexpected answer	2 pairs	
11.	Blame-Denial	21 pairs	
12.	Blame-Admitting	3 pairs	
<b>Total</b>		<b>161 pairs</b>	

Table 2 shows the result of adjacency pairs that are applied in the debate. There are 16 pairs of request-acceptance, 22 pairs of offer-acceptance, 2 pairs of offer-refusal, 4 pairs of invitation-acceptance, 3 pairs of invitation-refusal, 43 pairs of assessment-disagreement, 46

pairs of question-expected answer, 2 pairs of question-unexpected answer, 21 pairs of blame-denial, and 3 pairs of blame-admitting. There is a special case of using adjacency pair in this analysis. It was found that there is a question delivered by the host that get two expected answers from Joe Biden and Donald Trump.

The analyses of adjacency pairs also present the use of both pair parts, first and second pair parts, by Joe Biden and Donald Trump to answer all research questions. It is presented as follows:

**Table 3.** The Analysis of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Pair Parts of Adjacency Pair

Types of Adjacency Pair		Joe Biden	Donald Trump
1 <sup>st</sup> Pair Part	2 <sup>nd</sup> Pair Part		
Request		3	4
Offer		0	0
Invitation		0	0
Assessment		16	22
Question		0	3
Blame		10	13
	Acceptance	16	21
	Rejection	0	0
	Refusal	2	3
	Agreement	0	0
	Disagreement	23	20
	Expected Answer	23	23
	Unexpected Answer	1	1
	Denial	10	11
	Admittance	1	2

Table 3 shows that Joe Biden applied 3 requests, 16 assessments, and 10 blames for the first pair part. In the second pair part, he used 16 acceptances, 2 refusals, 23 disagreements, 23 expected answers, 1 unexpected answer, 10 denials, and 1 acceptance. Besides, Donald Trump used 4 requests, 22 assessments, 3 questions, and 13 blames for the first pair part. In responding to the first pair part, he used 21

acceptances, 3 refusals, 20 disagreements, 23 expected answers, 1 unexpected answer, 11 denials, and 2 admittances.

From Table 2 and Table 3, the results present that there are some similarities in using adjacency pair can be found in a debate. Speakers use a certain type of adjacency pair based on the type of turn-taking strategy used. In this study, the types of adjacency pairs are divided into two categories including the first and second pair part. The result showed that both speakers used most of the adjacency pair types including acceptance, refusal, disagreement, expected answer, unexpected answer, denial, and admittance. In the specific area, disagreement and expected answers were the most frequent type used in the debate. Since the debate focused on presenting the point of view of the speaker, the type of adjacency pair that was used related to responding to the host's first pair part that commonly includes in question and assessment.

The use of the second pair part of the adjacency pair in the debate relates to the continuity of the debate. Here, the role of Joe Biden and Donald Trump the political figure who is expected to perform a good politician based on the idealism of the party. Adjacency pair take an important role in the nextness of an interaction (Sidnell & Stivers, 2013). In this situation, both speakers applied most types of second pair parts to keep the continuity of the debate. They use them to respond to the host's first pair part, refute another speaker's idea, and share their point of view.

The differences can be seen in the frequency of using adjacency pair was different. Donald Trump also got more chances to use more types of first-pair parts of adjacency including request, assessment, question, and blame. Besides, Joe Biden used fewer types of adjacency pairs including request, assessment, and blame. It was influenced by the number of turn-taking strategies used during the debate. The more chance of using turn-taking during an interaction, people also get more chance to apply more types of adjacency pair in sharing their utterances and responding to other speakers. Conversational features relate to the continuity of an interaction

(Schegloff, 2007). It is stated that the adjacency pair becomes an important part of taking a turn in interaction to keep the continuity of the turn.

### 3. Repair

The third result shows the use of repair in the final debate that was applied by Joe Biden and Donald Trump. The following table presents the analysis:

**Table 4.** The Analysis of Repair

Type of Repair Strategy	Joe Biden	Donald Trump
Self-Initiated Self-Repair (SISR)	18 times	17 times
Self-Initiated Other-Repair (SIOR)	0	0
Other-Initiated Self-Repair (OISR)	1 time	3 times
Other-Initiated Other-Repair (OIOR)	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>19 times</b>	<b>20 times</b>

In Table 4, it can be seen Joe Biden chose to correct the trouble 19 times, while Donald Trump corrected 20 times. There is 2 type of repair strategy that is not used by both speakers including self-initiated other-repair, and other-initiated other-repair. Besides, both speakers only used 2 types of other repair strategies. They are self-initiated self-repair and other-initiated other-repair. Joe Biden used 18 times for correcting his trouble, and once to remind the trouble of another speaker. Donald Trump used 17 self-initiated self-repair, and 3 times to prompt others for correcting their trouble.

The third finding showed that both speakers preferred to use self-initiated self-repair to correct trouble in the debate. Self-initiated self-repair refers to the speaker's repairing strategy for trouble that is produced by himself (Levinson, 1983). Here, Joe Biden and Donald Trump preferred to correct a trouble that is produced by themselves and corrected it immediately by

themselves. Self-initiated self-repair can be analyzed through correction, replacement, restructuring, addition, specification, elaboration, exemplification, rewarding, and reordering). In this situation, both speakers used replacement, restructuring, and reordering the utterances into the right form. Thus, the use of self-initiated self-repair refers to rearranging the trouble into the right utterances so that the rival or listener can get the expected information or idea that is shared by them.

The differences show that Donald Trump used a more repair strategy in correcting trouble since he got more chances to use a turn-taking strategy. The findings proved that the number of using turn-taking strategies in an interaction take a significant contribution to the use of other conversational features. The use of the repair strategy is affected by the use of the turn-taking strategy as well as the adjacency pairs (Hayashi et al., 2013). Since the role of repair is to complete a turn specifically in correcting the trouble of interaction including mishearing and misunderstanding.

In sum, the similarities and differences found in this research showed a novelty which indirectly presented a relation of turn-taking, adjacency pair, and repair. In conversation analysis, there were six features commonly analyzed in various situation. Here, turn-taking, adjacency pair, and repair were analyzed and showed that the use of turn-taking in a conversation affected the use of other features including types of utterance and repairment. A speaker who tent to take more turn in an interaction had higher possibility of using more various conversational features. The type of adjacency pair used in the first and second pair part is affected by the type of turn-taking strategy since the were several options of using adjacency pair in taking a turn. Besides, repair was used to complete a turn by correcting a trouble in the utterances. It was also influenced the type of turn-taking used.

Furthermore, the results also contributed to enriching references of future research that focuses on analyzing interaction by the sequence organization. They showed that every

conversational feature correlate to each other specifically turn-taking, adjacency pair, and repair. It helped future research in deciding the type of conversational features to be analyzed specifically that used two or more features. The use of political settings in this research was also contributed to the science. Since conversation analysis in a political setting specifically in a debate was a rare topic to be observed, this research proved that this setting included in an institutional setting and was possible to be observed. In short, this research contributed in a science specifically in a sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. Since conversation analysis focused on human interaction and language use.

## CONCLUSION

After conducting the research, it was found that turn-taking, adjacency pair, and repair used by Joe Biden and Donald Trump in the final debate of the American presidential election show some similarities and differences. The similarities of conversational features used by Joe Biden and Donald Trump are divided into three categories based on the type of features analyzed in this study. Each similarity shows the frequency of strategy that is used by both speakers to show their contribution during the debate. The similarities also show the speakers' decision of using conversational features for delivering their idea and responding to the other's ideas. The differences in using conversational features in interaction include the continuity factors. Since the number of features used affects the number of other features used. People who tend to take more turns during an interaction get more chances to apply more varieties and some other features including adjacency pair and repair. Those features are related to each other for the continuity of an interaction. This research focuses only on comparing conversational features used by Joe Biden and Donald Trump in the final debate of the American presidential election 2020 that is expected to contribute to enriching references of conversation analysis in political situations specifically in a debate. Related to the findings in this research, further research is



needed to explore the use of conversational features in a political situation that can contribute to the references of using them in a debate.

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