LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5
Issue 2
2026

AGENCY VS INCLUSION: A COMPARATIVE GENDERED MOOD ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL SELF-POSITIONING IN 2024 US NOMINATION SPEECHES OF TRUMP AND HARRIS

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21899017

Keywords
Political speech, gendered communication, mood analysis, self-positioning

Article History
Received: 11 May 2026
Accepted: 21 June 2026
Published: 30 June 2026

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Abstract

The language of a political leader creates a subtle message of how he/she desires to be perceived. The current qualitative study adopts Donald Trump and Kamala Harris's 2024 nomination acceptance speeches at the Republican and Democratic National Conventions as its text sources, to explore how these two politicians constructed their political image with the use of the three types of mood (declarative, imperative, interrogative) and the modal verb. The study employs the framework of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to identify and examine 20 purposively selected clauses from each speech in terms of agency and inclusion, mood and modality, Subject, Finite, and Residue structures. In applying Deborah Tannen's theory of gendered communication namely report-talk versus rapport-talk and status versus connection, it is investigated if these preferences reflect a gendered pattern of political communication. From the analysis, it appears that both speakers heavily rely on the declarative mood for assertion of confidence/commitment which is typically marked as modalized by "will" in the statements. There are differences, however, in the expression of agency and inclusion. In the service of personal commitment and collective language, Harris frequently employs hortative verbs like "let us." Trump's speech is more a reiteration of his own promises and one call to action; it's rhetorical questions that confront critics, not the audience. The mood choices seem to not only communicate but to influence how each of the candidates establishes authority and connection. The results of this qualitative study involving a purposive sample are not intended to be generalized, but rather to provide a close, contextual reading of political self-positioning. By exploring the relationship between politics and grammar, the study adds to the fields of discourse analysis and gender studies.

INTRODUCTION

Political self-positioning is among the most important competitions in political discourse: a candidate's political campaign constructs an identity that relies as much on grammatical statements as on political stances. They are also clearly represented in nomination acceptance speeches - when a candidate speaks for not only

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2026

a policy area, for not only a party, but for themselves, for a party, a country, and asks to be trusted with authority. The candidate's choice of language does not simply provide the political meaning, in fact, it creates it. The aim of this study is to compare and contrast the presidential nomination acceptance speeches addresses of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, July 18, 2024 and the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, August 22, 2024, respectively. The speeches were influenced by the unique context in which they were delivered: Trump's speech was given days after an assassination attempt on him during a rally in Pennsylvania, while Harris's speech was delivered after a nomination fight that lasted an unusually short period of time. In addition to the political messages they contain, both speeches provide a rich site for grammatical analysis of the role of mood (declarative, interrogative, and imperative) and of the use of modals affirming, questioning, or commanding in the construction of a public, political self.

The main analytical tool adopted in this study is Halliday and Matthiessen's (2023) Systemic Functional Linguistics in particular the Mood system. In this model, the interpersonal aspect of language is produced grammatically in terms of Subject, Finite, and Residue, and the selection of these 3 language elements gives rise to statements of authority, prompts for interaction, or directions. In addition to Mood, modality also has the capacity to weaken or strengthen a commitment, and to shift from certainty to obligation (as conveyed through the use of modal verbs like will, must, should, etc.). In addition, since both Trump and Harris are of the same genre but represent different genders and share similar political concerns, their speeches offer a chance to compare and contrast two general orientations in rhetorical style: report-talk and rapport-talk, as well as status and connection (Tannen, 1990). Despite the attention that political discourse analysis has given to rhetorical devices such as metaphor and framing in campaign speech, comparatively fewer studies have taken an in-depth look at the use of Mood and Modality as grammatical rhetorical tools in the self-positioning of a political sender. Mood analysis has already been applied successfully in political studies and used to uncover how speakers construct their authority, solidarity or persuasion, as it was found for Trump's previous speeches and for political figures like Imran Khan. No study, however, has simultaneously compared a Trump and a Harris speech that came from the same election year to explore the ways in which agency and inclusion are achieved by choosing certain mood/modalities and what connections that might have with gender. The aim of this study is to attempt to fill that void by conducting a qualitative comparative discourse analysis of 20 purposively selected clauses of each speech. Rather than making a generalized statement about political language and gender, the goal of this exercise is to read closely the strategies each candidate uses within the grammar – the questions candidates ask and the answers that he or she provides – and the implications these choices make for the relationship between gender and political language. The present study, therefore, enriches existing discussions in discourse analysis, political communication and gender and language research.

1.1 Research Objectives:

To investigate the differences in the use of mood choices (declarative, imperative, interrogative and modal verbs) by Trump and kamala to position their political-self in their 2024 RNC and DNC nomination speeches.

To examine the ways gender influences the deployment of mood types (declarative, imperative and modal expressions) to show agency and inclusion in their acceptance speeches.

1.2 Research Questions:

How do Donald Trump and Kamala Harris position their political-self through the usage of different Mood choices (declarative, imperatives, interrogative and modal verbs) in the 2024 RNC and DNC nomination speeches?

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In what ways gender influences the use of mood types (declarative, imperative and model expressions) to construct agency and inclusion in their acceptance speeches?

Literature Review

Effective Persuasion: Ideology and Political self-Presentation

The rhetoric of politics has long been a way to 'store' policies as well as to shape ideology, authority, and identity. In critical discourse analysis of presidential campaign speeches from the 21st century, Rani and Anwar (2026) show how Obama, Trump, and Biden each construct a self in relation to their campaign speech agendas that resonate with narratives of collective civic engagement, emotional wholesomeness, and populist grievance, respectively. They reveal that the art of persuasion is not limited to use of pronoun and metaphor but is also about the overall construction of national identity, emphasizing the interwoven nature of ideology and self-presentation in presidential speech. For example, Rani and Anwar (2026) conclude that the rhetoric of Trump is characterized by populist hostility towards identified elites, Obama by democratic mobilization, and Biden by moral or emotional calling to duty, three rhetorical orientations that emerge in typical grammatical and lexical patterns. Furthermore, Analysing nomination acceptance speeches by female vice-presidential candidates across Ghana and the United States, Fordjour and Sikanku (2022) find that female candidates blend masculine-coded authority with feminine-coded inclusion, a pattern that speaks directly to how acceptance speeches construct gendered political selfhood.

Mood, Modality and the Grammar of Political Authority

Like Critical Discourse Analysis has shed light on the way in which political speech tends to transmit ideology and power, Systemic Functional Linguistics has shed light on how grammar functions as coding system to convey inter-personal meaning (Matthiessen, 2013). In this system, each clause is delimited by a Mood (declarative, interrogative, or imperative), which is potentially or actually modalized, thereby encoding a speaker's assertions of authority, invitations to dialogue, and/or issuing a directive. The type of Mood chosen and the modals embedded with it (will, must, should etc.) reveal the speaker's interpersonal positioning of themselves with respect to the audience and with respect to the political proposition being promoted. Butt, Anwar, and Anwar (2025) take this approach, but instead of analyzing a political speech, they analyze media reporting on a politician's arrest (i.e., Contextual framing). Their analysis, which is neither exclusively quantitative nor exclusively qualitative, reveals that all three outlets used primarily the declarative, rather than interrogative or indicative, mood, but that there were significant variations in the way in which mode and reported hortative moods were used to represent subjectivity; one outlet used the protesters' very own hortative moods to enforce emotional solidarity, while the other used a comparatively modulation-free, fact-oriented style. Therefore, the indicative dominance of one ideology over the other could either be rhetorical, signaling a rhetorical displacement of ideology or an actual ideology that is truly neutral, an issue which is also true for political discourse as much as media. Similarly, A systematic review of 160 SFL studies by Cheng (2024) confirms that political speech is one of the most productive sites for interpersonal metafunction analysis, with Mood and modality consistently emerging as key resources through which speakers negotiate authority and solidarity with their audiences.

Gender, Language and Political Communication

Neither Critical Discourse Analysis nor Mood-based approaches, individually, account for the question of how a speaker's gender influence(s) such choices in languages. The initial model put forth by Tannen (1990) suggests that the speaker's orientation to independence and hierarchy (report-talk, status) or to solidarity and relationship-building (rapport-talk, connection) sets the tone for the overall pattern of his or her language. However, subsequent studies have upheld and challenged it in the context of political speech. For example,

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according to Cameron (2022) women politicians are held to a higher standard than men for how their speech should sound when they speak to audience, they are expected to conform to rapport-talk, which is marked as a naturally more kind and less aggressive form of talk — the idea that rapport-talk is therefore not merely a descriptive observation but a disciplinary standard to which some men are held more loosely than women in public life. Likewise, Shaw (2020) has demonstrated that although gendered patterns of language usage may continue in legislative chambers, there is often more variation among individuals within a given gender body than there is between the gendered groups, making it difficult to simply correlate biological sex with communication style. Thus, at least according to Cameron (2022) and Shaw (2020), gendered expectations are real and consequential but do not have fixed properties in the languages of individual speakers; they are social pressures.

Johnson and Williams (2020) take this research one step further by examining how male politicians tend to embody a protective masculinity that is more self-protective in terms of strength and security, while women are more often applauded for their empathy and emotional openness — which can instead serve to reinforce limited stereotypes of what it means to be a good politician. Speakers and audiences are subsumed in gendered expectations and neither group functions in a predictable and uniform manner. While it is assumed that rapport-talk is a universal trait of female politicians, Haselmayer et al. (2022) revealed that women in the Austrian parliament did not uniformly avoid negativity or confrontation, but rather, were strategically chosen in an institutional setting. Similarly, Holland and Wright (2017) illustrate that perception of gendered language depends not only on the language spoken by the politician, but also on how what is being said is framed as illegitimate. They explain how a politician's authoritative voice can be weakened by outside delegitimizing language as in the case of double delegitimization in Australian politics.

Moreover, Håkansson (2024) documents that the hostility directed toward women political leaders differs significantly across contexts (countries) and can vary depending on the context (audience). This means that the communicative style of women's political leaders is not the primary determinant of whether they are rewarded or punished, but rather on the condition and place in which they are speaking. The study by Ruiloba-Núñez and Goenaga Ruiz de Zuazu (2024) of gender-balanced elections in Andalusia is no exception in finding that language is used strategically across candidates, sometimes similarly, rather than along stereotyped lines. Combined, these studies indicate that while Tannen's original model of "gendered" political talk is not fixed or universal, it is instead subject to negotiation between specific genre, institutional, and audience constraints. Rather than defaulting to either masculine or feminine communication styles, Bauer and Santia (2022) show that female candidates actively calibrate their messaging across election cycles, balancing stereotypically masculine and feminine traits depending on electoral context and partisan pressure. Building on this, Bauer and Santia (2023) argue that gendered electoral contexts, the partisanship of the race, the political moment and the composition of the field shape female candidates' campaign messages as much as gender itself does, cautioning against reading any communication pattern as purely gendered.

2.4 Research Gap and Positioning of the Present Study

What is not sufficiently explored here is how Mood and modality, not lexical framing or media representation or general rhetorical style, negotiate agency and inclusion in a same cycle, cross gender comparison of equivalent political speeches. Previous studies including Butt, Anwar and Anwar (2025) focused on the media discourse without looking at the political speaker's own voice, while previous work on gendered communicative research, including Cameron (2022), Shaw (2020) and Johnson and Williams (2020), addressed political speech without systematically examining the modality and Mood structures of political speech. This double gap is exactly where the study in the present context stands: gender-based communication studies that fail to analyse in-depth the clause-level grammar and mood studies that fail to incorporate gender analysis. Drawing on Butt, Anwar, and Anwar (2025) and Rani and Anwar (2026), who raised linguistic issues

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and ideological questions, respectively, while incorporating the findings of the review of the literature above, this study explores the speeches that Trump and Harris gave at their 2024 nomination acceptances to analyse whether and how their use of Mood and Modality indicates alignment with or deviations from Tannen's (1990) predictions for this genre.

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study is qualitative comparative discourse analysis that produces a deep examination of a purposive selection of clauses within each speech, focusing on both the structure of the clauses and the purpose they serve in the discourse. This is a qualitative study because the key research questions concern the nature of the construction of political selfhood through Mood and modality choice, rather than simply how often they occur. Sample's overall Mood profile is summarized in descriptive frequency counts which are not findings in themselves, but rather a starting point for qualitative interpretation.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

The study is based on two theoretical frameworks that complement each other. Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2009), with focus on the interpersonal meta-function in the light of Mood system, is the key analytical system used. In this system, each key clause is made up of a Mood element — composed of Subject and Finite and preceded by the Residue — which includes any remaining predicating elements. The grammatical structure in which a speaker's interpersonal attitude is expressed: in declarative clauses (Subject before Finite) expresses a statement and offers information; in interrogative clauses (Finite or WH-element before Subject) asks for information and/or reflection; in imperative clauses (usually no separate Subject) gives directives and/or invitations to action. Modality is closely related to Mood, which Halliday and Matthiessen (2009) distinguish in two kinds: modalization (degrees of probability and usuality: may, might, will, always, etc.) and modulation (degrees of obligation and inclination: must, should, need to, going to, etc.). The combination of mood and modality forms the main grammar with which a speaker may assert authority, solidarity and commitment to an audience. The second framework is Tannen's (1990) theory of gendered communication: report-talk (motivated to define the status, the information and the independence); rapport-talk (motivated to establish and maintain the connection, the solidarity and relationship. In this study, Tannen's framework is not used to assert how women and men necessarily communicate, but, instead, as a lens for understanding the Mood and modality patterns that are identified in the data.

3.3 Data

The main data comprise two speeches: Kamala Harris's acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, Chicago (22 August 2024); and Donald Trump's acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, Milwaukee (18 July 2024). The text for both transcripts comes from The American Presidency Project (www.presidency.ucsb.edu). Interjections from the audience and no-verbal markers (e.g. [Applause] or [Clapping]) were omitted; only the speaker's turns were analyzed.

3.4 Sampling

Twenty clauses were selected in a purposeful way from each speech. There were three criteria used in selecting the clauses: relevance to political positioning; distribution across opening, policy body, and closing of the speech to avoid clustering; and a discernible Mood and modality structure, which was required to be clear and unambiguous. Before selection, all clauses were checked against the original transcripts.

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3.5 Coding Scheme

Two independent layers were used for coding each of the sampled clauses. The first layer was based on the analytical unit defined by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) as Subject+ Finite+ Residue, which is used to identify the Mood type, declarative, interrogative, or imperative, of a sentence. The distinction of the bare imperative (Subject omitted, directive function) and hortative imperative (let us/let's, inclusive function) was made because it proved analytically relevant to the agency/inclusive function aspect of the research questions. The second layer also picked out modality, if given, as in the case of a modal verb, whether it's of the type "modality" (probability or usuality) or "modulation" (obligation or inclination); the type of modality (or modulation) was indicated with the type of modal and the actual modal verb was specified. Quoted speech in a clause was marked clearly and not as the speaker's voice. The complete coding tables for both speeches are given separately, Table 1 (for Harris) and Table 2 (for Trump).

3.6 Analytical Procedure

The analysis was carried out in four stages. The two transcripts were cleaned up so as to include only the speaker's speech, while audience interjections and non-verbal dimensions are omitted. Second, every transcript was read completely and twenty clauses were selected in each, based on the sampling criteria outlined above; each was read verbatim and checked against the source transcript at every stage. Thirdly, each selected clause was coded by Mood type and modality (as described above) and descriptive frequency counts made for this sample overall. Fourth, a clause-by-clause, context-sensitive qualitative and thematic analysis was carried out to see how the decisions of Mood and modality create agency and inclusion in each speech. The findings were then analyzed based on Tannen's (1990) model and compared with patterns of consistency or divergence from the predictions and were specifically addressed in relation to other explanations such as genre, incumbency status, and individual style.

Data Analysis

Kamala Harris (DNC, 22 Aug 2024) and Donald Trump (RNC, 18 Jul 2024)

Table 1 — Kamala Harris (DNC

S. No.	Clause	Mood Type	Mood (Subject+ Finite)	Residue	Modality	Explanation (Political Self-Positioning)
1	"let me start by thanking my most incredible husband, Doug"	Imperative (hortative)	(no Mood element; "let me" is directive marker)	start by thanking my most incredible husband, Doug	—	Personal/relational opening; establishes rapport before political content; low political-agency relevance
2	"I accept your nomination to be president of the United States of America"	Declarative	I accept	your nomination to be president of the United States of America	—	Core self-positioning: declarative acceptance of formal candidacy; asserts agency over political role

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S. No.	Clause	Mood Type	Mood (Subject+ Finite)	Residue	Modality	Explanation (Political Self-Positioning)
3	"I became a prosecutor"	Declarative	I became	a prosecutor	—	Biographical agency claims underpinning later political authority
4	"my entire career, I've only had one client: the people"	Declarative	I 've	my entire career, ...only had one client: the people	—	Agency reframed as service; positions self as representative of the collective, not self-interest
5	"a harm against any one of us is a harm against all of us"	Declarative	a harm against any one of us is	In our system of justice, ...a harm against all of us	—	Inclusion-oriented value claim; collectivizes harm, building solidarity over individual authority
6	"We are all in this together"	Declarative	We are	all in this together	—	Explicit inclusion claim; dissolves speaker/audience distinction
7	"I will be a president who unites us around our highest aspirations"	Declarative	I will	be a president who unites us around our highest aspirations	Modulation commitment ("will")	Agency (personal commitment) fused with an inclusion goal (uniting "us")
8	"I will proudly sign it into law"	Declarative	I will	proudly sign it into law	Modulation commitment ("will)	Agency: modalized personal commitment to future executive action
9	"we trust women"	Declarative	we trust	women	—	Inclusion: collective stance-taking, aligning speaker with a shared "we"
10	"Why exactly is it that they don't trust women?"	Interrogative (WH-)	(Why exactly) is it	that they don't trust women	—	Rhetorical challenge; recruits audience into shared judgment

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S. No.	Clause	Mood Type	Mood (Subject+ Finite)	Residue	Modality	Explanation (Political Self-Positioning)
						against an out-group ("they")
11	"As president, I will bring back the bipartisan border security bill that he killed"	Declarative	I will	As president, bring back the bipartisan border security bill that he killed	Modulation commitment ("will")	Agency: policy commitment explicitly tied to presidential authority
12	"I will sign it into law"	Declarative	I will	sign it into law	Modulation commitment ("will")	Agency: repeated modelized commitment reinforcing decisiveness
13	"As commander in chief, I will ensure America always has the strongest, most lethal fighting force in the world"	Declarative	I will	As commander in chief, ensure America always has the strongest, most lethal fighting force in the world	Modulation ("will") + Modalization ("always")	Agency: high-authority claim tied to military command role
14	"I will always honour and never disparage their service"	Declarative	I will always / never	honour / disparage their service	Modalization ("always"/ "never")	Agency blended with relational inclusion: pledge oriented toward a group (service members)
15	"I will never hesitate to take whatever action is necessary"	Declarative	I will never	hesitate to take whatever action is necessary	Modulation strong commitment ("will never")	Agency: decisive, unilateral resolve
16	"I will not cozy up to tyrants and dictators	Declarative	I will not	cozy up to tyrants and	Modulation (negative commitment)	Agency via opposition: self-definition against named others

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S. No.	Clause	Mood Type	Mood (Subject+ Finite)	Residue	Modality	Explanation (Political Self-Positioning)
	like Kim Jong Un"			dictators like Kim Jong Un	("will not)	
17	"I love our country with all my heart"	Declarative	I love	our country with all my heart	—	Affective self-positioning; personal agency directed at inclusive object ("our country")
18	"let us show each other and the world who we are"	Imperative (hortative)	let us (fused Subject+ Finite, inclusive)	show each other and the world who we are	—	Inclusion: hortative mood recruits audience into shared collective identity
19	"let's get out there, let's fight for it"	Imperative (hortative)	let's / let's	get out there / fight for it	—	Inclusion: mobilizing hortative collapses speaker/audience boundary into joint agency
20	"let us write the next great chapter in the most extraordinary story ever told"	Imperative (hortative)	let us	write the next great chapter in the most extraordinary story ever told	—	Inclusion: frames political future as co-authored, not a personal achievement

4.1 Patterns of Mood and Modality in Harris's Sample

Out of 20 clauses purposively sampled, 15 are declaratives, 4 hortative (imperatives), none bare, and 1 interrogative. The use of modality (modulation/modalization) is used in 8 of the 20 clauses, with almost all of this occurring in the policy and security part of sample (H7–H16).

4.2 Declarative Mood: Agency rooted in the commitment.

Harris's declaraties can be categorized into two different categories that can be used. The first group (H2–H6) establishes biographical and value-based self-positioning without modality "I accept…," "I became…," "I've…had one client…." putting forward claims that seem to be based on facts about herself instead of what she will do. "Will" is the lone exception in the second group (H7, H8, H11–H16 – all modulated "I will"): "I will be a president who unites us," "I will sign it into law," "I will ensure America always has the strongest…fighting force." This repeated Subject+Finite pattern (I will) is also good for asserting a reliable, unhedged future commitment, but here, as in other examples, the Residue is often combined with an inclusive and/or an agency clause ("unites us," "our highest aspirations"); and so agency and inclusion are not always distinct categories in her sample, though they combine in several clauses (H7, H13, H14).

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4.3 Modality: Decisiveness Without Interrogation

In the modulations (must/will) H7–H16, there are no hedges (no might/ could/ should) in this sample. All the modalized clauses are strong, first-person, and in the form of "will," "will never," and "will not," which serves to create the impression of resolve, not one of exploration or hesitation, as commonly thought, that is common with more tentative modals. This is important to emphasise, especially in the context of any assumptions that might be made about a communicative particle's Mood/Modality of the speaker's commitment, in this sample, it is not.

4.4 Interrogative Mood

In the sample, the only interrogative is the H10, "Why exactly is it that they don't trust women?" It is grammatically WH-interrogative but is pragmatically used like a rhetorical question in the two reference papers: it does not invite information but invites you to join the author in his or her consensus decision on unidentified "they". Because of its rarity (1/20) it is not considered to be a dominant characteristic of her Mood profile in this sample, but rather a specific note taken on this one purposeful occasion.

4.5 The Hortative Framing of the Imperative Mood

None of the four imperatives in the sample "are bare commands," they are hortative ("let me," "let us," "let's"). H1 is at the beginning, low political salience (a personal thank-you), and H18-H20 at the end, clearly inclusion-building, about the dissolution of the Subject boundary, between speaker and audience ("let us show...who we are", "let's fight for it"). As you can see, this 20-clause example doesn't contain any bare imperative, one that doesn't include any inclusive word.

Table 2 — Donald Trump (RNC)

S. No.	Clause	Mood Type	Mood (Subject+ Finite)	Residue	Modality	Explanation (Political Self-Positioning)
1	"I proudly accept your nomination for president of the United States"	Declarative	I accept	proudly ...your nomination for president of the United States	—	Core self-positioning: declarative acceptance of candidacy; personal agency foregrounded
2	"I am running to be president for all of America, not half of America"	Declarative	I am	running to be president for all of America, not half of America	—	Agency claim explicitly paired with inclusion rhetoric ("all," not "half")
3	"The discord and division in our society	Declarative (passive)	The discord and division in	be healed	Modulation obligation ("must")	Passive voice depersonalizes agency; healing framed as

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S. No.	Clause	Mood Type	Mood (Subject+ Finite)	Residue	Modality	Explanation (Political Self-Positioning)
	must be healed"		our society must			general necessity, not a specific actor's task
4	"We must heal it quickly"	Declarative	We must	heal it quickly	Modulation obligation ("must")	Shifts to active "we"; combines obligation with collective agency/inclusion
5	"we will have an incredible victory"	Declarative	we will	have an incredible victory	Modalization prediction	Confident prediction; collective agency framed as shared achievement
6	"I will tell you exactly what happened"	Declarative	I will	tell you exactly what happened	Modulation commitment ("will")	Personal agency: asserts narrative authority/control over the account
7	"We will not break"	Declarative	We will not	break	Modulation negative commitment ("will not")	Collective agency/resilience claim via negation
8	"We will not bend"	Declarative	We will not	bend	Modulation negative commitment ("will not")	Reinforces T7; repetition intensifies collective resolve
9	"We will not back down"	Declarative	We will not	back down	Modulation negative commitment ("will not")	Cumulative rhetorical build of collective agency through repeated negation
10	"I will never stop fighting for you, your family and our magnificent country"	Declarative	I will never	stop fighting for you, your family and our magnificent country	Modulation strong commitment	Shifts to individual "I"; positions speaker as protector of the collective
11	"What are you going to stop?"	Interrogative (WH-)	(What) are you	going to stop	—	Rhetorical challenge to critics; contests opposition's agency,

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S. No.	Clause	Mood Type	Mood (Subject+ Finite)	Residue	Modality	Explanation (Political Self-Positioning)
						indirectly legitimizing his own movement
12	"Can you believe what they're doing?"	Interrogative (Yes/No)	Can you	believe what they're doing	—	Rhetorical question inviting shared incredulity toward an out-group ("they"), building in-group inclusion
13	"I will end the devastating inflation crisis immediately"	Declarative	I will	end the devastating inflation crisis immediately	Modulation commitment	Strong individual agency claim; unilateral decisive action
14	"Drill, baby, drill and close our borders"	Imperative (bare)	(no Mood element; imperative)	Drill, baby, drill and close our borders	—	Bare command asserts directive authority without a grammatical Subject; action presented as self-evident
15	"I will end the illegal immigration crisis by closing our border and finishing the wall"	Declarative	I will	end the illegal immigration crisis by closing our border and finishing the wall	Modulation commitment	Individual agency; personalizes policy as extension of prior achievement
16	"I will end every single international crisis that the current administration has created"	Declarative	I will	end every single international crisis that the current administration has created	Modulation commitment	Individual agency; positions self as sole capable actor against predecessor's failures
17	"we must now come together, rise above past differences"	Declarative	we must	now come together, rise above past differences	Modulation obligation ("must")	Shift to inclusion: obligation applied to the collective, calling for unity rather than personal action

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An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
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S. No.	Clause	Mood Type	Mood (Subject+ Finite)	Residue	Modality	Explanation (Political Self-Positioning)
18	"I will strive to honour the trust you have placed in me"	Declarative	I will	strive to honour the trust you have placed in me	Modulation commitment	Individual agency framed relationally, oriented toward audience's trust
19	"I will never, ever let you down"	Declarative	I will never, ever	let you down	Modulation strong commitment ("will never, ever")	Individual agency; intensified negation underscores personal reliability
20	"we will win, win, win"	Declarative	we will	win, win, win	Modulation commitment	Closing collective agency claim; repetition emphasizes certainty and shared triumph

4.6 The Mood and Modality Patterns in Trump's Sample.

Out of the 20 clauses which are used purposefully, 17 are declarative, two interrogative and one imperative (bare) type clause. Modality occurs in 15 of the clauses, more than half of the sample in Harris and mainly in the policy and pledge segments of the document (T3-T10, and T13, and T15-T20). In this manner, something can be described as being in the Declarative Mood, which signifies responsibility via repeated personal commitment. The Trumpian statements focus heavily on modulated first-person pledges: "I will end the devastating inflation crisis," "I will end the illegal immigration crisis," "I will end every single international crisis." The Subject+Finite structure (I will) is then followed by an "end [crisis]" Residue, a grammatical structure that recurs in the sample, applied to various policy fields (economy, immigration, foreign policy). Unlike Harris's declaratives, where several modalized clauses folded in an inclusive Residue (e.g., "unites us," "our highest aspirations"), Trump's modalized declaratives in this sample (T6, T10, T13, T15, T16, T18, T19) keep the Residue focused on the speaker's own action or a directly personalized relationship to the audience ("honor the trust you have placed in me," "never let you down") rather than merging Subject and audience into a shared "we" performing the action together. A clear sub-pattern is also found in clusters of verbs T7–T9: "We will not break," "We will not bend," and "We will not back down," all of which have the same structure, but vary only in the verbs. The repetition "cumulative build," in this anaphoric explosion is used to enhance the collective resolve, so as to have no superfluous elaboration, as in Harris' sample, where no clause is repeated in this anaphoric form.

4.7 Modality: High-Density, Largely Unhedged Commitment

Within this sample, at 75% modal density, modality is the dominant feature, rather than a subsidiary one. Again, as in Harris's sample there are no hedging modals (might, could, may) every modal use is an obligation (must) or strong commitment/prediction (will, will never, will not). It may be worth flagging this one separately: "The discord and divisions in our society must be healed" is a passive saying with no named subject

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who is responsible for doing the healing, whereas the almost immediately following T4 ("We must heal it quickly") specifies an active collective Subject as the one who must do the healing.

4.8 Interrogative Mood: Rhetorical questions Addressed to an Out-Group

Both questions in the sample (T11, T12) are directed at the unnamed critic (they) and not at the audience's opinion/experience: what are you going to stop? and can you believe what they're doing? Neither calls for proper reflection from the audience as is done by Harris's interrogative (H10) that poses a question about the trustworthiness of society; both serve to discredit a point of view without developing shared moral inquiry.

4.9 Imperative Mood: A Single Bare Command

The sole imperative in the sample is T14, Drill, baby, drill and close our borders, which is pure, with no Subject, no hortative framing of the imperative in the form of let us or let's. This is the opposite of Harris's imperative profile in which all four imperatives were hortative, and none were bare. Structurally, a bare imperative state an imperative without inbuilt Subject+ Finite fusion ("let us," "let's") as found in the hortative form, where speaker and audience are jointly involved in the communication in the form of the imperative.

Findings and Discussion

This comparative discussion is built on the description provided by the clause-level coding of both speeches, Harris in table 1 and Trump in table 2, that are analyzed individually in the preceding sections. On the surface, there is no difference in either speaker's declarative-dominant, modally unhedged face: 75% of Harris's sample and 85% of Trump's sample are declarative clauses; no hedging modals (may, might, or could) are found in either the 20 clauses sampled. This convergence is far from a coincidence. As a genre, nomination acceptance speeches require both candidates to project assurance and confidence in their own right—tentativeness is not allowed when a candidate requests a country to place its faith in him/her for the presidency. In that sense, the genre itself requires both the speaker to be decisive and any comparative account to respect this pressure and allow for its similarities to be discussed before any differences come into view. However, the divergence is systematic and grammatically traceable in three different ways, each of which has implications for the constructions of agency and inclusion.

The first is about the density of modalities. There are 75% of modal verbs in Trump's sample clauses to Harris's 40%. This is significant and a deep divide between the political power construction of each speaker. The algorithm of modalized commitment is the most prevalent (is occurrence in almost every piece of the sample, the grammar of obligation (must, T3, T4, T17) and committed prediction (will, T5-T10, T13, T15, T16, T18-T20) is ubiquitous in Trump's political self. Harris distributes herself more equally among modalized commitment and unmodalized declaratives; biographical identity claims and value statements that assert that she is who she is and not what she will do. So Harris appeals to two resources for constructing authority at the same time, the one pertaining to the grammar of commitment and the other to the grammar of identity. Trump's strategy primarily relies on one of them. The second dimension is imperative type, and on this there is a categorical distinction. There are four imperatives in Harris's sample, all hortative in nature: "let us show each other and the world who we are" (H18), "let's get out there, let's fight for it" (H19), "let us write the next great chapter in the most extraordinary story ever told" (H20). Trump's sample contains one imperative, bare "Drill, baby, drill and close our borders" (T14). The difference between the two imperative types is not stylistic, but grammatical, since the hortative "let us/let's" kind of imperative introduces the addressee as a co-participant in the act, making it appear as if he were an integral part of it himself; the bare imperative, on the other hand, is used to impose an action which is obviously required, but which does not involve the listener in the action as a co-participant. This distinction, which surfaces only categorically: hortative type vs. bare type, is one of the fundamental differences between the two divergent interpersonal

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orientations in the two speeches. We might consider Harris's directives as structurally inclusive, whereas Trump's directive is structurally exclusive.

The third dimension is about modality in the declaratives, with the choice of subjects. Both speakers will either use the structure "I will" or "I'm going to" (abbreviated to "I'm gonna") as commitments, but what comes after changes. Harris' "I will" statements often turn into an extended "we" collective, such as "I will be a president who unites us around our highest aspirations" (H7) and "I will ensure America always has the strongest, most lethal fighting force" (H13). Trump's "I will" clauses leave the Residue trying to focus either on unilateral action as in "I will end the devastating inflation crisis immediately" (T13), "I will end every single international crisis that the current administration has created" (T16), or direct personal one-to-one interaction between speaker and audience: "I will strive to honor the trust you have placed in me" (T18), "I will never, ever let you down" (T19). In Trump's modalized declaratives, the audience is rendered the recipient of his individual action, rather than a collaborator in a common project. In Harris's modalized declaratives, it's both.

These three dimensions together tell a "literal" story that can be understood using Tannen's (1990) framework. In both types of examples (hortative imperatives and inclusive Residues; "we"-Subject declaratives), the balance of grammar reflects a rapport-talk orientation, where solidarity, connection, and collective identity are highly salient, even in those clauses asserting individual political authority. In the report-talk, status-oriented style, Trump uses his high-density "I will," the single bare imperative and his external, not internal, interrogation of his opponents (T11, T12), all of which mirror status-oriented interaction. The correlation with Tannen's (1990) prediction is real, but not complete and as the study's credulity and integrity demand, stated plainly. There is a significant moment of crossing of the 'gender' threshold in both speakers' presentation. Harris's modality is entirely unhedged, a feature that is more status-oriented than rapport-oriented and challenges the stereotype of women politicians as being tentative or deferential in their speech. Trump's anaphoric "We will not break, we will not bend, we will not back down" (T7–T9) engages the audience in a "we" of shared resistance, serving as a rapport-building device rather than a report-focused reading that would be expected. Analytically important crossings also imply that the genre of the nomination acceptance speech is by no means a direct reproduction of gendered communication patterns, but entails other rhetorical pressures, which interact, complicate, and at times helps to supersede the patterns.

It is also important to note that gender is never the only, nor the primary, explanatory variable in a two-speaker design. In addition to the obvious distinctions in gender, Trump and Harris have opposing political parties, differing levels of experience and different triggers in their speeches. Trump's speech comes days after an assassination attempt, which could easily help drive the strength of the collective resilience pledges and the bare, urgent tone of the T14 speech. As the first South Asian and Black woman to be nominated for a major party's presidency, Harris' speech was framed by history itself, which could have been an impetus to the hortative. These observed patterns should therefore not be interpreted as evidence of gendered modes of communication but rather as choices of mood and modality, broadly in keeping with Tannen's (1990) predictions in this context and with room for other contextual explanations. What they have shown, that they are grammatically "real" and clause-traceable and interpretable within a known theory and indeed, this is a proper range of a claim a two-speech qualitative study can only make without doubt.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the Mood and modality choices that Donald Trump and Kamala Harris employed to shape their political self in their nomination acceptance speeches, and to explore bearing (gently, but not exaggeratingly) on the gender politics of political language. The analysis of these forty clauses proves that grammar is far from being decorative in these speeches, and that the patterns that emerge are not the same for both speakers and that they are not easily subsumed under a single explanatory variable. Both

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speakers have a declarative-dominant, modally unhedged profile, which is congruent with the genre's requirements. There is no place for hesitation or epistemic softening during a presidential nomination address in front of a television audience at the height of the election season and that is the reason both Trump and Harris speak that way. Such shared surface of declarative and singularly committal modality is not inherently related to any one fluid style nor necessarily a masculine or feminine style, as it is tied as much to the rhetorical situation as to any one individual style. There is no doubting, hedging or deferring in either speaker.

The difference, however, is factual, and traceable grammatically. The politics of personal authority and collective invitation is the basis of Harris's political subjectivity. Her unmodalized declaratives reinforce her authority based on shared value and lived identity rather than the stacking of individual pledges; her closing imperatives are hortative, and include the audience as actors alongside; her modalized "I'll" constructions establish an overriding agency. Trump's political self does not function like this: His high-density modalization makes him appear the main player in several policy areas, and this bare imperative suggests that action is a "must," rather than something to be negotiated with other parties; Interrogation turns on opponents, not on the audience. The difference in these are not only style differences but difference in interpersonal orientations manifested in the clause itself. Overall, the patterns broadly follow Tannen's (1990) distinction between rapport-talk and report-talk; and between connection and status as organizational orientations. But the alignment isn't perfect — in a two-speaker setup, gender is mixed with party, incumbency, context, and style; and both speakers cross the "gendered line" at least once, Harris with her "tough" modes, Trump with his anaphoric modes, "we." It is also worth noting that these crossings are as analytically interesting as are the alignments; they indicate that the political genre does not reproduce successfully the patterns of gendered communication but generates its own pressures that interact with, and sometimes supplant them. This study's contribution is to show that mood and modality analysis is a valuable and accurate tool for studying political positioning: a tool capable of moving beyond rhetorical fanciness to the grammar that quietly positions the speaker in relation to the listener and redistributes authority and belonging. In future research, those patterns could be compared with a larger corpus of similarly constructed cross-gender political speeches and a multimodal analysis (i.e., one that includes the intonation and gestures as well as the grammar) would further improve the analysis. Within the confines of a qualitative, purposeful study, the present study will result in a detailed grammatical description of two distinctive political selves in language, shaped during a pivotal moment of democratic history; and a demonstration that the grammar of these two political selves was not an afterthought, but was integral to the politics.

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LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
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