

Attitude in the Second 2024 US Presidential Debate

An Appraisal Analysis of Donald Trump's Use of Inscribed and Invoked Attitude

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This paper examines Donald Trump's use of attitudinal meanings in the second 2024 US presidential debate. The study applies the Appraisal framework, developed by Martin and White. The scope of examination is limited to Attitude, a semantic subsystem of appraisal. Attitude deals with positive and negative evaluative meanings, and is an effective tool for analysing election discourse because candidates may use negative evaluation of the opponent and positive appraisal of self. The purpose of this paper is to analyse Donald Trump's use of attitudinal meanings to examine how they may persuade the audience and change public perceptions. The selected data are examined to identify and categorise attitudinal meanings into three subtypes of attitude: affect, judgement, and appreciation, as well as their subcategories. This thesis identifies and analyses the layers of explicit and implicit attitude in the selected data, illustrates the complexity of attitudinal meanings, and discusses possible interpretations of the instances in different contexts.

Key words: evaluation, appraisal, attitude, discourse analysis, political, Donald Trump

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1 Introduction

Evaluative language is a widely used tool in political discourse. It can be used to make the speaker sound more persuasive, confident and powerful, to attract attention, or to manipulate audiences (Ananko 2017, 129). In this paper, I apply the *appraisal theory*, developed by Martin and White, to examine *Attitude* – “the subsystem of evaluative meanings by which addressees are positioned to adopt a positive or negative view vis-à-vis experiential phenomena or propositions about those phenomena” (White 2015) – in the second 2024 US presidential debate. The analysis of attitudinal meanings in political discourse can contribute to a better understanding of how politicians shape public perceptions and influence the society. The expression of attitude is interpersonal, because “the basic reason for advancing an opinion is to elicit a response of solidarity from the addressee” (Martin 2000, 14303/13/2025 12:24:00). In politics and especially during elections, candidates typically aim to portray themselves in a more positive light than their opponent. Attitude can be an effective tool for expressing positive self-assessment and negative other-assessment, which makes it particularly interesting for the analysis of election discourse.

This paper limits the scope of analysis to one *Appraiser*, Donald Trump, but covers multiple *Targets* of evaluation. As a former president of the US, Trump has a significant amount of influence and power, which makes him a relevant topic of political discourse analysis. His controversial stances and provocative demeanour set him apart from other presidents and have also impacted the norms in US political discourse. In the field of political discourse studies, the appraisal framework has previously been applied to examine Trump’s discursive strategies (Ross and Caldwell 2020; Zhang and Pei 2018; Aljuraywi and Alyousef 2022), but little research has been published of his most recent campaign. In 2024, Trump ran against Kamala Harris and won the popular vote, which made him the first convicted felon (also found liable for sexual abuse, defamation and business fraud) to be elected as the president of the United States. Considering the criminal conduct and other controversies associated with him, I suspect that the 2024 campaign is a particularly rich source for the study of evaluative language in political discourse. The purpose of this paper is to conduct a linguistic analysis of how Donald Trump uses evaluation, specifically positive and negative appraisal, and how the attitudinal meanings may be interpreted. It aims to (1) illustrate the complexity of attitudinal meanings through an in-depth examination of explicit and implicit meanings, (2) identify the

layers of inscriptions and invocations in selected data, and (3) analyse the instances in terms of how the audience may interpret them and evaluate the target.

From here, the thesis continues with section 2, which includes an overview of the social and political context and background, as well as the theoretical framework and key terms used in the analysis. In section 3, I introduce the methods used for data collection and analysis. Section 4 includes the analysis and discusses the results. Lastly, section 6 discusses and concludes the thesis.

2 Background

In 2.1, I begin this section with a brief overview of Donald Trump's recent political career. It provides some relevant context for the reader but, due to the limited scope of the thesis, definitions and detailed descriptions have been excluded. Next in 2.2, I turn to the theoretical background of this paper with an overview of the appraisal theory. Lastly, 2.3 describes the system of attitude in more detail and explains the categories my analysis is based on.

2.1 Donald Trump

Before his presidency, Donald Trump was mostly known as a businessman and media personality. He first won a presidential election in 2016 as the Republican nominee. He was first impeached in 2019, and then again in 2021. In the 2020 election, he ran against Joe Biden and lost, but challenged the results both legally and publicly. In the 2024 election, Trump's campaign was focused mainly on economy and immigration. Trump's political views can be characterised as conservative and right-wing populist, appealing particularly to Christian nationalists. He has gained a cult-like following, associated with the political movement known as Trumpism, or the MAGA (Make America Great Again) movement. Criticism and public discussion of Trump's ideologies, rhetoric and political practice have revolved around racism and islamophobia, sexism, fascism and authoritarianism, intimidation, and misinformation to name a few.

2.2 The Appraisal Theory

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is "a functional-semantic approach to language which is concerned with the relationship between language and social structure" (Statham 2022, 34). The appraisal theory, developed by Martin and White, is interested in interpersonal meaning in SFL and provides a framework for the analysis of evaluation in language – the "meanings by which texts convey positive or negative assessments, by which the intensity or directness of such attitudinal utterances is strengthened or weakened and by which speakers/writers engage dialogistically with prior speakers or with potential respondents to the current proposition" (White 2015,1). In other words, it provides a framework for analysing how a speaker adopts and expresses opinions and stances.

The scope of this paper is limited to one of the three semantic systems of the appraisal framework, the system of *attitude*. Martin and White (2005) group attitudinal meanings into

three semantic domains: emotional reactions, judgements of human behaviour and character, and evaluation of things. These categories are referred to as *affect*, *judgement*, and *appreciation*. In the next section, I provide a brief description and examples of each category and the subcategories they can be divided into.

2.3 Attitude: Categories and subcategories

The category of *affect* involves emotional responses towards either existing or future entities or states. In other words, affect conveys positive or negative feelings. Emotional responses can be expressed as a state of mind (e.g. sad) or as behaviour (e.g. cry). Martin and White (2005, 49–51) divide affect into three groups of emotions: (1) *un/happiness* covers feelings of happiness, sadness, hate, and love, (2) *in/security* deals with feelings such as anxiety, fear, confidence, and trust and (3) *dis/satisfaction* covers feelings related to achievements and the pursuit of goals, such as boredom, interest, and dis/pleasure. I have provided examples of each type in Table 1.1:

Table 1.1
Types of affect

Un/happiness	He is sad . She feels happy . I hugged her.
In/security	She was surprised . I doubt it. He is confident .
Dis/satisfaction	He is yawning . She is fed up with it. I am pleased . An angry man.

The second type, *judgement*, relates to ethical evaluation of people and their behaviour. Martin and White (2005, 52) subclassify judgements into two broad categories: social esteem and social sanction. *Social esteem* involves admiration or critique of (1) how special, (2) capable, or (3) dependable a person is. Judgement of esteem operates within a community and is based on shared knowledge, culture, and values. *Social sanction*, on the other hand, operates on a more institutional level and is typically based on rules or laws. Judgements of this kind praise or condemn one's honesty or morality. Martin and White (2005, 53) illustrate the distinction between *esteem* and *sanction* in terms of who one might turn for help: "too much negative esteem, and we may need to visit a therapist; too much negative sanction, and a lawyer may need to be called in". These two higher level groups are divided into subcategories, illustrated in Table 1.2 below.

Table 1.2

Types of judgement

Social esteem	Normality	She seems odd . They are unpredictable and erratic . He is often quiet.
	Capacity	A thick-headed guy. They are clever enough . She is capable of doing it.
	Tenacity	She will do it. He is patient . A stubborn child.
Social sanction	Veracity	A credible witness. The minister is deceitful . He is lying to you.
	Propriety	A kind and caring wife. Billionaires are greedy . He is supposed to do it.

The third type of attitude is *Appreciation*. It involves attitudinal assessment of how products of behaviour or natural phenomena are valued. Martin and White (2005, 56) divide this category into “‘reactions’ to things (do they catch our attention; do they please us?), their ‘composition’ (balance and complexity), and their ‘value’ (how innovative, authentic, timely, etc.)”. I have given examples of the five types of appreciation and their realisations in Table 1.3:

Table 1.3

Types of appreciation

Reaction	Impact	The film was boring and predictable . A captivating story.
	Quality	The lyrics are repulsive and grotesque . A welcome change.
Composition	Balance	A logical conclusion. You have a symmetrical face.
	Complexity	The instructions were unclear . A detailed description.
Valuation		My bag is authentic , but yours is fake . The medication was ineffective .

Although example phrases can help understand the semantic categories, it should be noted that the attitudinal value of a lexical item is typically not fixed. Attitudinal lexis (i.e. lexis which explicitly conveys attitudinal meanings) may fall into any of the semantic domains of attitude, depending on the context in which they are used. In some cases, the target of evaluation is a clear sign of the type of attitudinal meaning involved, as is the case with ‘successful’ in the examples below:

She is very successful .	[Judgement; targets a person]
A successful outcome.	[Appreciation: targets a product of behaviour]

The categorisation of attitudinal meanings becomes more difficult when the same attitudinal lexis construes two types of evaluation at the same time. For example, in *your behaviour disgusts me*, the verb encodes feelings but also judges the target *your behaviour*. In addition to explicitly inscribed attitude, appraisal can also be realised implicitly.

Invocations are implicit realisations of attitudinal meanings, intended to make the recipient feel a certain way about an entity or state. Although they do not require attitudinal lexis, an inscription may also serve as a *token* of invoked attitude. Alternatively, an evaluative reaction may be invoked by attitudinally neutral language. The evaluative meanings associated with neutral expressions may arise from e.g. opinions or culture. Consequently, the same expression may have attitudinal value to some but be read as neutral by others. For example, *fighting like a girl* is not explicitly attitudinal but negative evaluation may arise from viewing girls as weak or otherwise inferior. Similarly, being *anti-abortion* may invoke either positive or negative judgement, depending on one’s views on reproductive rights. I now turn to section 3, which explains how the appraisal framework was applied to analyse explicit and implicit meanings in the text.

3 Material and Methods

This section describes the methodology of this paper. In 3.1, I discuss the collection and preparation of the material. Then, in 3.2, I explain the process of reducing the amount of data to a manageable level, as well as the methods used to analyse it. This section also touches on some of the challenges of applying the appraisal framework in practice, and how I dealt with them.

3.1 Data Collection

This paper is based on a qualitative discourse analysis of Donald Trump's speeches in the second 2024 US Presidential debate, hosted by ABC News, that was held on September 10 between Kamala Harris and Trump. I began the data collection by retrieving a transcript of the debate from the ABC News official site. To check for possible differences, I compared the full transcript to a recording of the debate. No changes were made to the text, including spelling and other markings. I then made two copies of the transcript, one including the full debate and one that was edited to include only Trump's utterances. Lastly, I added line numbers to make the text easier to manage during the data selection and analysis. Because only a partial transcript is included in the appendix, I chose to exclude line numbers from the final version of this paper.

3.2 Data Selection and Analysis

I began the process of selecting data with an initial text level examination of Trump's speeches. Then, I excluded parts where a full understanding of the topic of discussion would require extensive knowledge of complex political events and issues, such as US foreign policy and history regarding the Middle East. Next, I conducted a second analysis which also considered the semantic level. I then selected thirty excerpts based on their clarity, coherency, and comprehensibility as an isolated example. In other words, I wanted to avoid misinterpretations and taking things out of context. Moreover, the selected excerpts represent a manageable range of reoccurring topics and targets and include instances of all types of attitudinal meanings. Due to the limited scope of a BA-thesis, only nine excerpts (230 words in total) were included in the final analysis. In addition to the already mentioned criteria, an important factor in the final data selection was the proximity of the excerpts within the full debate transcript, because using multiple examples from the same turn (in conversation) helps follow the analysis without reading the full transcript. Consequently, this enabled me to

examine evaluative items that rely on co-textual references for the attitudinal meaning to arise. Despite the added workload, I chose to combine the data selection and analysis, because the processes support each other, and because doing two things in a single reading is more efficient.

The first step in the appraisal analysis itself was a close reading of the data and identification of explicit meanings. At this point, I labelled inscriptions as negative or positive, and categorised them into *affect*, *judgement* and *appreciation*. Next, I examined the targets of evaluation and made note of both explicit text-level targets and indirect or ‘real’ ones. I then moved on to analysing the excerpts in terms of implicit attitudinal meanings and categorised the invocations in the same manner as the inscriptions. Throughout this process, I identified more indirect targets as well. Then, all attitudinal meanings were analysed in more detail and categorised by subtypes of the broader semantic categories. The final analysis is organised into subsections based on the target that the analysis of each example is mostly focused on.

The identification and categorisation of meanings, especially invocations, is based on my own interpretation. I started the analysis with an examination of inscriptions, because they have “largely stable attitudinal value across different contexts of use” (Don 2016, 2). With invocations, I took into consideration different perspectives and possible interpretations of the text to minimise subjectivity and bias. Furthermore, I have justified my interpretations with textual elements, comparisons, or alternative ways of expressing the same idea. In many of the examples, some of the evaluative meanings fall into several categories. They may also convey assessment both explicitly and implicitly, and evaluate multiple targets with the same expression. For each attitudinal meaning discussed in the analysis, I have included the formal categories in the text to avoid leaving anything up to the reader’s interpretation.

4 Analysis

The analysis is divided into three sections. Section 4.1 examines four excerpts which relate to the topic of immigration. In 4.2, two examples of Harris as the target of evaluation are analysed. Section 4.3 includes three examples of Trump's evaluation of self. To avoid clutter in these analysis sections, detailed discussion of Trump's evaluation of immigrants and how the audience may read the attitudinal values is given its own section. In 4.4 I discuss context-reliant interpretation of targets, and illustrate the points through a comparison of hypothetical audiences. The excerpts have been edited for clarity: inscriptions are underlined and **invocations in bold**. In instances where these two overlap, I have marked the more relevant one, or the one that is given the most attention in this paper. Some attitudinal meanings have been excluded from the discussion and are thus not marked in the examples. For the full turns (speeches) that the excerpts are part of, see appendix A.

4.1 Target of Evaluation: Immigrants

Immigration was one of Trump's main points of discussion. In his speeches, Trump evaluates immigrants and asylum-seekers using a wide variety of explicit and implicit attitudinal expressions. In some cases, descriptions of this target are heavily saturated with negative assessment, as seen in example (1):

- (1) On top of that, we have millions of people **pouring** into our country from **prisons and jails, from mental institutions and insane asylums**.

On the text level, the target in (1) is *people*. Semantically, it is clear from the co-text that the 'real' target are the people immigrating or seeking asylum in the US. Trump seems to limit the target of evaluation to immigrants who come in "*from prisons and jails, from mental institutions and insane asylums*", but the audience would likely not be able to distinguish these individuals from other immigrants. Thus, even if Trump intended to target a specific type of immigrant, it is likely that attitudes invoked in the hearer would effectively target all immigrants.

Generally speaking, "*prisons, jails, mental institutions and insane asylums*" are not explicitly attitudinal lexemes per se. In this case, however, the implication is that people evade being committed to prisons or psychiatric institutions by immigrating to the US. The negative judgement of the target as immoral, insane, or dangerous (Social sanction: Propriety) depends on the hearer having existing negative views about prisoners or mentally ill people. Negative

judgement can also arise from the verb *pour*. Its attitudinal meaning is subtle but can be revealed through a comparison of what is said vs. what could have been said instead. *Pouring* implies that something is flowing uncontrollably, continuously, or rapidly. In this case, it functions to further evoke fear of immigration. Had Trump used a verb such as *come* or *immigrate*, the meaning would not be as clearly attitudinal. However, negative judgement could still arise in hearers who already have negative attitudes towards immigration. The excerpt also invokes negative affect of dissatisfaction, as it conveys Trump's general feelings of displeasure.

In example (2), invoked judgement is less reliant on existing attitudes. Here, Trump makes bold (and false) statements about the behaviour of the previously discussed target:

(2) They're **taking over** the towns. They're **taking over** buildings. They're going in violently.

Here, the phrasal verb *take over* functions as a token of invoked attitude. In this context, it implies that non-citizens could unlawfully gain control over or take possession of areas and property. If accepted as true, this claim invokes negative Judgement of immigrants as unjust or unethical (Social sanction: Propriety). Although *taking over* could be used without negative attitudinal values attached (e.g. *taking over responsibility*, which can even be a positive thing), it is not a neutral expression in this context. The attitudinal value is clarified and reinforced by the explicitly attitudinal description *violently*. Although on the text level, this inscription describes behaviour, the 'real' target are the immigrants. Because violence is generally condemned, a violent person is negatively judged as evil or immoral. This could be read as an invocation of negative affect (insecurity), as it seems to express fear. The portrayal of immigrants as a security threat continues in example (3), but this time, Trump also introduces a solution to the perceived problem:

(3) They're dangerous. They're at the **highest level of criminality**. And we **have to** get them out. We **have to** get them out fast.

Here, Trump reinforces the previously discussed Judgement of immigrants as *dangerous* (Inscribed: Judgement: Propriety). His claim of them being "*at the highest level of criminality*" is ambiguous in that 'crime level' typically refers to crime rates (e.g. of a country) and when used to describe the qualities of a person, leaves room for interpretation: Do these people commit crimes very frequently, or are the committed crimes considered more serious? Furthermore, the semi-modal finite *have to* functions as an invocation of negative

Judgement (Propriety) of immigrants. In this context, it implies that ‘getting them out’ is necessary for the safety of the country and its citizens. Additionally, it can be interpreted as invoking negative affect (Insecurity) because expressing this level of urgency can express an emotional reaction to a possible future event (fearing what happens if we do not get them out). However, there is no way of knowing whether Trump is having an emotional reaction of this kind, or possibly trying to appeal to the audience by seeming that way. Considering that this was said during a presidential debate and that gaining votes is the main goal of the candidates, it is possible that Trump also meant that electing him is the solution to eliminating this danger.

Although some of Trump’s claims are ambiguous or incoherent enough to where they are difficult to fact-check, many of his claims have been found to be false. Example (4) even became a global meme for its absurdity:

- (4) In Springfield, they’re **eating the dogs**. The people that came in. They’re **eating the cats**. They’re eating -- they’re **eating the pets of the people that live there**.

Cats and *dogs* are considered pets in Western cultures and eating them is generally condemned. In example (4), the invoked negative evaluation relies on shared cultural values and knowledge. The target “*the people that came in*”, which again, refers to immigrants, is negatively judged as immoral for victimising “*the people that live here*” by ‘eating their pets’. Although false, these claims can reinforce the demonisation of immigrants. For those who believe the conspiracy theory of Springfield’s Haitian immigrant minority eating people’s pets, Trump’s statements can also invoke positive judgement of him as morally just (Social sanction: Propriety) for speaking up about the issue. The interpretation of immigrant-related targets of evaluation is discussed further in 4.4.

4.2 Target of Evaluation: Kamala Harris

The negative judgement of immigrants as dangerous is also used for negative evaluation of Trump’s opponent. On a broader level, his comments about the current state of the country implicitly comment on the Biden/Harris administration. That is, by stating an existing problem, he implies that the sitting president has failed to prevent or fix it. In some cases, he also implies that they are incapable of fixing, or even may have caused the issues. In addition to these implicit assessments, Trump also targets Biden and Harris in more explicit ways, like in example (5):

(5) These are the people that she and Biden **let** into our country.

Here, Trump makes an accusation that includes implicit negative attitudinal meanings. These meanings rely on existing knowledge and values – *letting* immigrants into the country is not objectively condemnable. In this excerpt, Trump shifts the explicit target from immigrants to Biden and Harris, and uses the verb *let* as a token of invoked negative judgement.

If *let* is interpreted as ‘not doing enough to stop an outcome’, it invokes negative judgement of Harris and Biden as incompetent, unproductive or unsuccessful (Social esteem: Capacity). It could also be understood as them ‘giving the dangerous people permission to immigrate’, which would invoke judgement of them as unjust, immoral, or corrupt (Social sanction: Propriety). In the context of a political campaign, the goal of each candidate is to make themselves seem like the best choice for the voters. Ross and Caldwell (2020) found that Trump frequently used negative appraisal to undermine his opponents. Similarly, Aljuraywi and Alyousef (2022, 191) found that Trump employed more positive resources (Appreciation) to evaluate himself and negative judgements to evaluate his opponent. Trump’s evaluation of Harris in the 2024 debate is in line with the previous research:

(6) And just to finish off, she **doesn’t have a plan**. She **copied Biden’s plan**. And it’s **like four sentences, like run-Spot-run. Four sentences** that are **just oh, we’ll try and lower taxes**. She **doesn’t have a plan**. Take a look at her plan. She **doesn’t have a plan**.

This example (6) includes invoked evaluation of two main targets: Harris and Harris’ plan. Evaluation of the plan also functions as invoked judgement of Harris. It should be noted that many interpretations could be made about the target of evaluation, mainly because Trump is somewhat unclear about whether Harris has a plan or not. For the purposes and clarity of this analysis, let us accept that Harris has a plan.

The plan is first described as being “*like four sentences*”, referring to its length. On the text level, this does not have any negative or positive attitudinal value. Semantically, this is an invocation of negative appreciation, because the appropriate length of such plans is much longer. Thus, the token implies that Harris’ plan is too short (Appreciation: Composition) and consequently not effective or worthwhile (Appreciation: Valuation). The following description “*like run-Spot-run*” is also a token of invoked Appreciation (Composition and Valuation). It is a reference to a book written in simple language to help children practice reading. The implication is that Harris’ plan is not complex enough and consequently has less value.

The denial of Harris having an adequate plan is a signal of attitudinal stance. Denial provokes negative Judgement (Capacity) of Harris as incompetent. Furthermore, these tokens can also be read as Judgement of Tenacity, because in the context of presidential elections, having an unrealistic plan or no plan at all could make Harris seem unreliable. The token “*copied Biden’s plan*” also evaluates Veracity, because presenting someone’s work as your own would generally be considered dishonest. Additionally, this example reads as invoked affect (Insecurity) because Trump seems to express emotions of distrust. Trump’s attitudes, as well as goals of positive self-portrayal and negative opponent-portrayal, become more apparent when his evaluation of Harris’ plan is compared to that of his own. When asked about his plans for health care, he said he has “concepts of a plan”. This seems to function as a way of avoiding negative evaluation of self: admitting to not having a plan would activate negative evaluation of his capabilities, but ‘having concepts’ may be read as more than ‘not having a plan’.

4.3 Target of Evaluation: Self

Trump’s speeches in the presidential debate are a rich source for examples of positive self-appraisal, ranging from implicit to explicit – and fact to fiction. Some instances are also more difficult to interpret and analyse, as is the case with the next example (7):

(7) I have been a leader on IVF which is fertilization. The IVF -- I have been a leader.

Based on Trump’s main goal in the elections (i.e. winning), it is safe to assume that in this case, leader is intended to be explicit positive Judgement of self. However, he does not explain what it means to be “*a leader on IVF*” and what he has done to get the title. Similarly, the statements that follow (7) are explicit in their attitudinal meaning, but arbitrary beyond that level:

(8) In fact, when they got a **very negative** decision on IVF from the Alabama courts, **I saw the people of Alabama and the legislature two days later voted it in**. I’ve been a leader on it.

This statement (8) refers to an Alabama Supreme Court decision that effectively restricted IVF services in the state. Because Trump does not describe the decision or its implications – or his stances for that matter – evaluation of the target relies on the audience’s knowledge, stances, and values, mainly regarding reproductive rights. For example, restrictions to reproductive rights would be negative from a “pro-choice” and positive from a “pro-life”

perspective. Interpretation of ‘*a very negative decision on IVF*’ also depends on the recipient’s existing knowledge about Trump’s views or policies. Because Trump’s stance on abortion is negative, an anti-abortion voter may think Trump is also anti-IVF, and therefore assume that ‘negative’ means ‘pro-choice’. A pro-choice voter could have existing knowledge about the decision being against IVF, and thus Trump’s statement could also invoke positive judgements about him as moral (Propriety). Consequently, the ambiguous evaluation of *decision as negative* allows an interpretation that minimises negative judgement of Trump.

One of the main topics in Trump’s positive appraisal of self was the economy. The cost of living was a significant concern for many Americans during the elections. Trump’s campaign leaned heavily on his promises of making the economy better and, for example, lowering grocery prices. In example (9), Trump evaluates himself through his past accomplishments and his predictions for his future presidency:

(9) I created one of the greatest economies in the history of our country. I’ll do it again and even **better**.

The inscription “*one of the greatest*” evaluates the target *economies* (Appreciation: Valuation: positive), but is also linked to invoked judgement (Capacity: positive) of Trump as competent, accomplished, and successful. The link is made more apparent through the verb *create*: it implies that Trump did not indirectly improve or help stimulate the economy, rather, created an entirely new one. Furthermore, “*I created*” does not acknowledge any other participants and thus strengthens the positive judgement of Trump. The excerpt also includes positive judgement of normality by implying that Trump’s accomplishments are rare and special.

Trump’s competence is further evaluated through *will*. It invokes positive judgement (Capacity) of him as competent and capable. It also reads as judgement of Tenacity, as it presents the outcome of ‘doing it again’ as certain and as a result, Trump as dependable. Appraisal of his capabilities is reinforced by *better*, which adds to the description of what he can and will do for the economy as the president of the United States.

4.4 Interpretation of Targets

In section 4.1, I briefly discussed the target of immigrants in excerpts of a single turn in conversation. In this section, I consider that speech as a whole and examine how the target may be interpreted in different contexts. Excerpt (5) is not marked or analysed for evaluation, but it is interesting in light of the previous discussion.

- (10) And they're coming in and they're taking jobs that are occupied right now by African Americans and Hispanics and also unions. Unions are going to be affected very soon. And you see what's happening. You see what's happening with towns throughout the United States. You look at Springfield, Ohio. You look at Aurora in Colorado.

Here, Trump excludes *African Americans*, "*Hispanics*", and *unions* from the immigrants that his speech implicitly evaluates. References to Springfield and Aurora, also mentioned in examples (2) and (4), suggest that Trump makes these statements based on false claims about Haitians eating pets and Venezuelan gangs taking over Aurora. Throughout the speech, the text-level target is named *them*, *the people that came in*, *people from prisons*, etc. Even without any extensive knowledge about different countries of origin or rumours related to different minority groups, the audience is likely to read the target as *immigrants*, especially if they have existing knowledge of Trump's anti-immigration stance. Whether the audience evaluates the target (and consequently Trump) positively or negatively, depends on values and stances. Positive evaluations may arise if the audience are, for example,

- a) against immigration in general,
- b) not strictly against immigration and do not evaluate *African Americans* or "*Hispanics*" negatively, but are against allowing criminals to immigrate, or
- c) not strictly against immigration but are concerned about the situation at the border, and do not see enough concrete measures taken to fix it.

Even though they are realised as invocations, Trump quite clearly expresses negative attitudinal values. What is not clear from the speech is the target or the truth value of the claims. To interrogate how different attitudinal meanings can arise depending on the reader/hearer, the speech may be analysed from the perspective of someone who, for example,

- a) knows about Trump's anti-immigration stance and policies, and/or
- b) does not have negative attitudes towards immigration, and/or
- c) is concerned with the humanitarian issues related to immigration and deportations from the US.

From this perspective, the target may be read as all immigrants, or perhaps even second-generation citizens and asylum seekers. The speech would likely be met with negative attitude in this context.

5 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how appraisal is used as a tool in political discourse. Through a linguistic analysis of Donald Trump's speeches in the debate, this paper set out to identify instances of overlapping inscriptions and invocations to illustrate the complexity of attitudinal meanings. Additionally, it aimed to examine the identified instances of appraisal in terms of how the audience may interpret them and evaluate the target.

I successfully identified instances of both explicit and implicit evaluation in the selected data, analysed them for their attitudinal value, examined and described different targets, and discussed their possible interpretations. The findings highlight the effectiveness of attitude in election discourse, especially as a strategy for positive self-assessment and negative other-assessment. Moreover, they show how neutral language can be used to implicitly convey attitudinal values and possibly persuade the audience. Although the limited data used for the appraisal analysis are not enough to make generalisations about Donald Trump's language use, an in-depth examination of the examples was suitable for illustrating the levels of meaning in the utterances and adequately justifying my analysis.

The analysis was largely focused on judgement and appreciation. One aspect this paper was less successful in examining was affect. Without access to the appraiser's thoughts, analysing judgement and appreciation is easier because they involve targets other than the speaker. When the target or appraised is the person experiencing the emotion, it can be difficult to make the distinction between emotional reactions (i.e. affect) and emotionally charged expressions of other types of attitude. That is, in instances of judgement or appreciation, the word choices and tone of the appraiser can imply that they are speaking 'with emotion' but the point at which the emotional reaction is realised may be unclear. Only a few instances of affect were included in this analysis due to the risk of making interpretations based on the 'intuition' of the reader, without sufficient explanation and justification. The analysis did not identify explicit expressions of affect, such as *I am sad* or *she is crying*, in the selected data. For a broader examination of all three types of attitude, it would have been beneficial to include inscriptions of affect in the data.

In hindsight, limiting the scope of examination to inscribed and invoked judgement may have been enough for the purposes of this paper. On the other hand, instances such as inscribed

appreciation functioning as tokens of judgement are useful for illustrating the complexity of attitudinal meanings.

For future research, this paper could be built on in many ways. An interesting possibility for future research is a more critical approach, with more emphasis on socio-political and cultural aspects, especially power relationships between the speaker and the audience or the appraiser and the target. Furthermore, an analysis of the full debate, including the moderators and Kamala Harris, could reveal interesting patterns and differences between the speakers.

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Appendix A

Examples 1–5, 9

First of all, I have no sales tax. That's an incorrect statement. She knows that. We're doing tariffs on other countries. Other countries are going to finally, after 75 years, pay us back for all that we've done for the world. And the tariff will be substantial in some cases. I took in billions and billions of dollars, as you know, from China. In fact, they never took the tariff off because it was so much money, they can't. It would totally destroy everything that they've set out to do. They've taken in billions of dollars from China and other places. They've left the tariffs on. When I had it, I had tariffs and yet I had no inflation. Look, we've had a terrible economy because inflation has -- which is really known as a country buster. It breaks up countries. We have inflation like very few people have ever seen before. Probably the worst in our nation's history. We were at 21%. But that's being generous because many things are 50, 60, 70, and 80% higher than they were just a few years ago. This has been a disaster for people, for the middle class, but for every class. On top of that, we have millions of people pouring into our country from prisons and jails, from mental institutions and insane asylums. And they're coming in and they're taking jobs that are occupied right now by African Americans and Hispanics and also unions. Unions are going to be affected very soon. And you see what's happening. You see what's happening with towns throughout the United States. You look at Springfield, Ohio. You look at Aurora in Colorado. They are taking over the towns. They're taking over buildings. They're going in violently. These are the people that she and Biden let into our country. And they're destroying our country. They're dangerous. They're at the highest level of criminality. And we have to get them out. We have to get them out fast. I created one of the greatest economies in the history of our country. I'll do it again and even better.

Examples 7–8

Excuse me, I have to respond. Another lie. It's another lie. I have been a leader on IVF which is fertilization. The IVF -- I have been a leader. In fact, when they got a very negative decision on IVF from the Alabama courts, I saw the people of Alabama and the legislature two days later voted it in. I've been a leader on it. They know that and everybody else knows it. I have been a leader on fertilization, IVF. And the other thing, they -- you should ask, will she allow abortion in the eighth month, ninth month, seventh month?

Example 6

That's just a sound bite. They gave her that to say. Look, I went to the Wharton School of Finance and many of those professors, the top professors, think my plan is a brilliant plan, it's a great plan. It's a plan that's going to bring up our worth, our value as a country. It's going to make people want to be able to go and work and create jobs and create a lot of good, solid money for our -- for our country. And just to finish off, she doesn't have a plan. She copied Biden's plan. And it's like four sentences, like run-Spot-run. Four sentences that are just oh, we'll try and lower taxes. She doesn't have a plan. Take a look at her plan. She doesn't have a plan.