

**A Pragmastylistic Analysis  
Of The Linguistic Strategies Manipulated  
In Presidential And Philosophical Debates**

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## The Linguistic Features of Pride in Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*

### A Pragma-Stylistic Analysis of the Linguistic Strategies Manipulated in Presidential and Philosophical Debates

#### Abstract

This study attempts a pragma-stylistic and pragma-discursive analysis of the strategies or techniques adopted in presidential and philosophical debates.

The study analyses two debates. First, the Presidential debate between Obama and McCain at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York on October 15, 2008. The second debate forming the corpus of this study is the debate between Dr. Greg Bahnsen and Dr. Gordon Stein, both highly ranked philosophers and debaters of their time. The second debate is known worldwide as "*The Great Debate*" entitled "*Does God Exist?*" This debate took place on February 11, 1985 at the University of California at Irvine.

The reason for the choice of these two debates is that one of them represents a political debate at a high standard administration in the number-one-advanced-country that holds most of the threads of the political game in the world. The other debate focuses on the everlasting philosophical religious question: "*Does God Exist?*" It will be seen that there are *Argumentative Strategies* in common despite the fact that religious philosophy and politics are worlds apart.

The tools used for analysis are mostly pragmatic, partly stylistic and discursive: deixis, implicature, speech acts, presupposition, Cooperative Principle, persuasion and logical fallacies.

**Keywords:**

Philosophy of language - indeterminacy of meaning – logical positivism – language games – debate – ideology - worldview – power – control - discourse analysis (DA) - critical discourse analysis (CDA), critical discourse studies (CDS) - Conversational Analysis (CA) - turn constitutional units (TCU) - Deixis, presupposition - speech acts – implicature - Cooperative Principle (CP)- persuasion: Logos, Pathos and Ethos – logic - logical fallacies.

**Introduction:**

This study presents an extensive study about debate and debating with the aim of describing how debates in general, and specifically the two debates under study bring about change in thought and life either in the debaters or in the audience (macro-structure). The second objective of the study is to describe the pragma-stylistic and the pragma discursive tools manipulated during the two debates under study to win the debate and/or bring about a change in the mind, and life.

*“Debate is the ultimate mind exercise...it is the process that determines how change should occur. It attempts to justify altering the way we think and live.”* (Alfred Snider, 2008). A debate, such as most of human activity, is done through language. The language of a debate has certain specific characteristics that differs from any other activity that is done through language. The characteristics comprise the use of logic, argumentation, pathos and ethos. Therefore, this study proves the essentiality of language to all human forms of life. Nothing exists until it is put into language. If the language is the medium through which a debate is performed, then the language has a philosophy that one needs to fathom. Therefore, the study deals with the philosophy of language. The

philosophy of language is the fount out of which linguistics in general, and specifically pragmatics spring. The philosophy of language is the source of pragmatics. The study defines the term debate and reviews the various debate formats. The third Presidential debate (Obama-McCain) debate takes the town hall format, while the Bahnsen- Stein Debate entitled “**Does God Exist?**” takes a hybrid format. The study reviews discourse analysis **DA** and critical discourse analysis **CDA** with the aim of setting the limitations between **DA** and **CDA** and pragmatics. It shows that **CDA** or critical discourse studies **CDS** can be used as an approach to analyze the two debates under study. **CDA** and pragmatics can be combined in what I have termed as a “pragma-discursive” methodology, which can form a wider perspective for analysis. The study defines pragmatics as an essential science for analysing the two debates under study and offers a brief review of the development of pragmatics as well. The thesis determines the five major axes/parameters of pragmatics, namely: deixis, implicature, presuppositions, speech acts and co-operative principle. These axes are reviewed respectively with the aim of using each of them for analysing the relevant aspect of the two debates under study. Each of the five parameters studies the term followed by a relevant extensive analysis of the two debates under study. The study reviews the three aspects of persuasion: *Ethos*, *Pathos* and *Logos*, and follows the review with a brief analysis. The study also deals with an extensive research on logic and logical fallacies both formal and informal with a brief analysis of the logical fallacies mentioned in the second debate (Does God Exist?). Below is a brief discussion of the findings and concluding remarks of the study.

The study reaches the conclusion that language influences how we think about or perceive the world around us. The study of language represents a part of our endeavor to

discover more about ourselves and the world around us as humans. Studying languages gives us better control on it ourselves and exercise power and control over others as well. Since the “Does God Exist?” debate is about answering an ideological/philosophical and/or a religious question, the study finds that instances of pragmatics have been alluded to in the three Holy religions, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam long ago before the science of pragmatics was established.

The researcher proves that Pragmatics - which is a subfield of linguistics - first seeds and basic ideas descends from philosophy generally and lies at the core of Ordinary Language Philosophy in particular and so does the whole science of Linguistics with its sub-branches.

Gottlob Frege was the logician and philosopher who started to investigate the “*Philosophy of Language*” that later developed at the hands of Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and J.L. Austin who is primarily remembered as the developer of the theory of speech Acts. The term “*Philosophy of language*” designates an investigation of the nature of language; the relationship between language, language users, and the world; and the concepts with which language is described and analyzed.

By the beginning of the 20th century, a more comprehensive philosophical engagement with the nature of language emerged in the writings of Frege, Wittgenstein, and Russell. This began what became a, perhaps the, central branch of philosophy, the philosophy of language. This concern with language was a concern with ordinary language its use, what we can do it, its pragmatic and semantic aspects. The main task of the philosophy of language is the study of linguistic meanings.

As a positivist Carnap (May 18, 1891 – September 14, 1970), who was a German philosopher, divided all meaningful assertions into two classes (1) analytic propositions or logico-mathematical and (2) empirically verifiable ones. In logical positivism, meaning is a relationship between **words and things**, and its study is empirically based. Because language, ideally, is a direct reflection of reality, signs match things and facts. **Statements which are treated as belonging to the set of analytic statements is a matter of pragmatic decision**, provided that the set can be clearly defined.

Since about the mid-20th century, the topics of communication and interpretation have been the purview of the philosophical and linguistic discipline of **pragmatics**

Ordinary language philosophy is the name given to some conceptions of philosophy, which emanated, after the Second World War, from J. L. Austin (1911 – 60) in Oxford and from Wittgenstein in Cambridge, and which championed the importance for philosophy of attention to ordinary language. The Oxford ordinary language movement was lead, and inspired by, J. L. Austin. In his *How to Do things with Words* which **marked the practical beginnings of pragmatics**.

The study also defines the term “debate” proves the debates essentiality to our lives. The research concludes that the debate is the *“ultimate mind exercise...it is the process that determines how change should occur. It attempts to justify altering the way we think and live”* (Alfred Snider, 2008). Alfred C. Snider (2008) points out that debate is about change. Debate is the process that determines how change should occur. It attempts to justify altering the way we think and live.

The study points out that *The Obama-McCain Third Presidential Debate*: The third presidential debate occurred on Wednesday, October 15 at 9:00 PM EST in the David S. Mack

Sports and Exhibition Complex on the campus of Hofstra University in New York. It is a town hall debate format. The focus was on domestic policy and the US economy. It was moderated by Bob Schieffer, CBS News chief Washington correspondent and host of Face the Nation. The third debate of the 90-minute was sponsored by the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD). This debate is in the TOWN HALL format.

The study also maintains that “*The Great Debate*”: (*Does God Exist?*) is a debate between an atheist and a Christian theist. The Great Debate between Dr. Greg Bahnsen (theist) and Dr. Gordon Stein (atheist) was a formal debate it was held at the University of California (Irvine) in 1985. The Great Debate is not as strenuous or rigid as the presidential debates, and it is not as strenuous as the intercollegiate debate patterns. This debate is divided up into four major segments. Segments numbered one through three comprises the main debate. Segment number four is a question and answer period. The study finds out that the “Does God Exist?” debate is a hybrid debate. It is not as strenuous or rigid as the presidential debates, and it is not as strenuous as the intercollegiate debate patterns.

The study concludes that the term discourse or discourses refers to systems of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects, and these always involve the exercise of power, as their constitution involves the exclusion of certain possibilities and a consequent structuring of the relations between different social agents. This describes the process of debating itself where a debater wants to exercise power over his opponent or the audience.

The study also finds out that Conversation analysis (CA) **studies the methods participants orient to when they organize social action such a debate through talk.** It investigates rules and practices from an interactional perspective and studies them by examining recordings the interactions that is going on in any debate and specifically the two debates understudy. The study reaches the conclusion that conversation analysis (CA) in particular and conversation analytic research in general may be subsumed in typically linguistic disciplines such as pragmatics.

Examples of the two debates are extracted and analyzed. It has been found out that a remarkable feature of the interaction in the two debates under study exhibit that speaker change is coordinated smoothly. Both interruptions (or other kinds of simultaneous/cross-talk) and gaps are relatively rare. In both debates the participants display an orientation to minimization of overlap, while at the same time, they also orient to minimization of gap.

It is also noted that in the two debates the basic organizational problem that participants have to solve each turn anew is to determine when the speaker will complete the current turn. The recipient is not only figuring out what the turn is about and what the speaker is doing with it, he also has to be alert for the moment it might become his turn to speak.

The study concludes, as well, that there is a need to employ pragmatics in analysing the two debates understudy to unravel the unsaid, throw light on obscure areas of hidden meanings, and seek more interpretation. Pragmatics studies the relation of signs to users of them. Since then, the usage of the term has bifurcated into a broad use, which subsumes sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, and a narrower use (associated especially with **philosophy of language** and

approaches to the study of meaning which derive from it) in which pragmatics deals with those aspects of meaning that are systematically context-dependent.

The research also finds out that pragmatic theories explicate the reasoning of speakers and hearers during the process of debating while working out the correlation in a context of a sentence token with a proposition. In this respect, a pragmatic theory is part of performance. The meaning in pragmatics is defined relative to a speaker or user of the language.

The study also reaches the conclusion that pragmatics differs from discourse analysis concerning the analysis of a debate in the importance given to the social principles of discourse. It takes a socio-cultural perspective on language usage, examining the way that the principles of social behaviour are expressed is determined by the social distance between speakers. It describes the unwritten maxims of conversation that speakers follow in order to cooperate and be socially acceptable to each other.

The thesis also finds out that pragmatics is the study of all those aspects of meaning not captured in a semantic theory.

The study concludes that the use of the first person singular “*I*” (IP) has been used often by the debaters to imply personal and social functions. The deictic pronoun I contributes to the pragmatic effects of attention seeking and persuasion as well. It is assumed that these effects could be attributed to interactive implications of the pronoun I that typically emerge in situations of dialogic discourse within each of the two debates.

The analyzed extractions from both debates prove that the first-person pronoun functions as a sign that is indexed to four regular contexts: referential context, perceptual context, the context of the speaker's subjective experiences, and the context of interaction. Furthermore, the interactive implications of the pronoun *I* are introduced into oral discourse as shown in the extracts from both debates due to the interplay of two or more of the postulated contexts. Moreover, besides contributing to the pragmatic effect of attention seeking the pronoun *I* can contribute to other pragmatic effects in situations of dialogic discourse, like the effect of persuasion like in McCain's "*I want to tell you...*" in (3:118) and in (13:512)

From the extracts that are analyzed, the study reaches the conclusion that in senator McCain's speech it has been noticed that the "*I*" is preferred when the process with which it co-occurs is a mental process denoting an action that can be accomplished on an individual basis. Therefore, as we have seen, McCain uses the *I* with material verbs of aggression such as: stand for..., want (9 occurrences)..., eliminate (2 occurrences)..., oppose (7 occurrences with the pronoun *I* and with the adverb "vigorously"), fight (10 occurrences)..., veto (2 occurrences)..., disagree (3 occurrences ...), repudiate (2 occurrences). Another instance where McCain uses the "*I*" accompanied by the "you" and the possessive "your" pronouns is when he says "*I want to leave money in your pocket. I want you to be able to choose the health care for you and your family*" (29:1199-1200). In this utterance the relation is direct between the speaker, McCain, and the hearers and this involves a promise concerning "*leaving money in the American's pockets*".

From all the examples it has been found out that McCain's excessive use of the pronoun *I* also denotes attention seeking and achieves a pragmatic effect of persuasion especially with the verbs "say to/ tell you" as discussed above.

Using the Pronoun *I* 116 times in 90 minutes also denotes an exclusive preoccupation with the self or can imply some other self-centered communicative behaviours.

The analysis finds out that Senator Obama uses the first pronoun singular *I*, as reference to the self, 149 times. Unlike McCain, Obama's use of the first person singular "I" comes related with the mental verb "think"(I + think) in 54 occurrences out of 149 occurrences of the first person singular "I" in his whole speech in the debate. This denotes that Obama wants to appear that he thinks deeply before he speaks or acts. The same happens with the verb "want" that comes after "I" in Obama's utterances 14 times in the whole debate. This denotes a will of or may be a need to adopt a new policy if he becomes a president. This is what he wants to communicate to his hearers.

In the "Does God Exist Debate?" Dr. Greg Bahnsen repeats the first personal pronoun (IP) 125 times during the whole debate while Dr. Stein repeats the first personal pronoun (IP) 151 times. Same conclusions are reached in this Debate.

The thesis concludes that the two debates are full of instances of implicature. research includes samples of the citations that carry implicatures in the Obama-McCain debate (third us presidential debate). The analysis lists the original utterances and discusses the implicature of each utterance, each in its turn. The same procedure is followed by analyzing the instances of implicature in the Great Debate between Greg Bahnsen and Gordon Stein. The Obama-McCain debate is termed, in this study, as the "first debate". The "Great Debate" is termed as the "second debate". An example from the first debate is when senator McCain says:

*I am convinced that, until we reverse this continued decline in home ownership and put a floor under it, and so that people have not only the hope and belief they can stay in their homes and realize the American dream, but that value will come up (2:51-54)*

In the above utterance, McCain implies that the number of home owners is declining and most of the Americans are no longer home owners. They either live in rented houses or live on mortgages to own their homes. That is why Senator McCain's intended policy aims at reversing "...*this continued decline in home ownership and put a floor under it*". Another implicature that is noted in the above utterance is that Americans cannot stay in their owned homes that is why they cannot "*realize the American dream*".

An example from the second debate is when Dr. Bahnsen says:

*My last introductory remark is simply to the effect that I want to concede to my opponent all issues pertaining to the control of ovarian maturation in Japanese quail. Okay? The subject of his doctoral dissertation in 1974 at Ohio State? (Audience laughter) (2-3:84-87).*

*Dr. Stein is a man of intelligence, and that is not in question in this debate. I would not pretend to hold my own in a discussion with him of the empirical details of his narrow domain of specialized natural science. However our subject tonight is really much different, calling for intelligent reflection upon issues, which are philosophical or theological in character (3:89-93).*

The above utterances by Dr. Bahnsen are sarcastic and ironical moulded in a highly exalted language. The utterances implicate totally the opposite. The subject of Dr. Stein's dissertation has nothing to do with the subject of a debate discussing whether

God does exist or not. Dr. Stein is not a man of intelligence when it comes to proving or disproving the existence of God. Dr. Bahnsen is holding his intelligence against the empirical details of Dr. Stein's "*narrow domain of specialized natural science*" (3:91). "*For some reason Dr. Stein has over the last decade left his field of expertise and given his life to a campaign for atheism which he is not up to*" (3:95-96). The above utterances undermine Dr. Stein's capability of debating the existence of God.

The study has reached the conclusion that semantic theories of presupposition have largely been abandoned. Levinson (1989:204) is of the opinion that that in their place, various theories of pragmatic presupposition have been put forward. Extracts of the two debates have been scrutinized and analyzed. The original utterance is cited and its presupposition is referred to by the sign ( → ). Examples from the first debate are as follows:

*I am convinced that, until we reverse this continued decline in home ownership and put a floor under it, and so that people have not only the hope and belief they can stay in their homes and realize the American dream, but that value will come up (2:51-54).*

- There is a continued decline in home ownership.
- Americans do not have the hope and belief that they can stay in their homes.
- Americans cannot realize the American dream.

*Well, you know, I admire so much Senator Obama's eloquence. And you really have to pay attention to words (23:960-961).*

- Obama does not pay attention to words.
- McCain is not eloquent in the same manner Obama is (being not genuine)

*He said, we will look at offshore drilling. Did you get that? Look at. We can offshore drill now. We've got to do it now. We will reduce the cost of a barrel of oil because we show the world that we have a supply of our own. It's doable. The technology is there and we have to drill now (23:962-965).*

- Obama does not intend to offshore drill now.
- The cost of the Barrel is high.
- The U.S. does not have oil supply of its own.

Examples from the second debate are as follows:

*In the particular here, I should make it clear what I mean when I use the term God. I want to specify that I'm arguing particularly in favor of Christian theism, and for it as a unit or system of thought, and not for anything like theism in general, and there are reasons for that...three. The various conceptions of deity found in the world religions are in most cases logically incompatible leaving no unambiguous sense to general theism, whatever that might be (1:31-37).*

- Christian theism is logically compatible

*Secondly, I have not found the non-Christian religions to be philosophically defensible, each of them being internally incoherent or undermining human reason and experience (1:38-40).*

→ Christian religion is philosophically defensible.

*Dr. Stein is a man of intelligence, and that is not in question in this debate. I would not pretend to hold my own in a discussion with him of the empirical details of his narrow domain of specialized natural science. However our subject tonight is really much different, calling for intelligent reflection upon issues, which are philosophical or theological in character (3:89-94).*

→ The subject of tonight (Does God Exist) is not a narrow domain.

→ Dr. Stein is specialized in a narrow domain of specialized natural science.

→ Dr. Stein may not be a man of intelligence concerning the subject of tonight.

The research reaches the conclusion that there are strong parallels between the later Wittgenstein's emphasis on language usage and language-games and Austin's insistence that "*the total speech act in the total speech situation is the only actual phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating*" (1962: 147, qtd. in Levinson 227).

The study finds out that representatives is a category of speech acts where speakers try to convey their belief about the truth of proposition, e.g. *asserting, hypothesizing*. In the same vein, Searle contends that a representative speech act commits

the speaker to the truth of an expressed proposition. It represents the speaker's belief of something that can be evaluated to be true or false.

The research concludes that a debate is generally about the representative speech act of each of the debaters in the two debates under study. In the third Obama- McCain U.S. presidential debate each candidate believes in certain policies that he thinks would be for the welfare and prosperity of America and the Americans in case the audience would vote for his presidency. So, Senator Obama is trying to represent himself through certain representative speech act verbs in order to be convincing to the audience. The same, of course, applies to Senator McCain as well. Each debater of the two is trying to represent his belief of something that can be evaluated to be true or false. In the "Does God Exist?" debate each of the two debaters is representing a belief or a different world view. Dr. Bahnsen represents the Christian theistic world view as a system of thought and this is reflected clearly in the use of verbs or words denoting representative speech act of the world view he adheres to. The same applies to his opponent, Dr. Stein who represents and believes in an atheistic world view.

The study points out that representative speech act word lists (mostly verbs) have been reviewed in Searle's original paper (Searle, 1976), Levinson (1989), Crystal (2000), Cruse (2006), and Mey (2007). The representative speech act keywords are: (*think, believe, suggest, hypothesize, insist, boast, complain, conclude, deduce, assume, suspect and claim*). A speech act can be implicit and deduced from a whole sentence. Or, for example, verbs like "*presuppose*" and "*presume*" (although are not considered as an overt representative speech act keywords) also represent their speakers (debaters) in each of the two debates because the two

verbs commit the speaker to the truth of an expressed proposition.

Examples of the representative speech act represented by each debater in each of the two debates understudy are extracted and analyzed.

The study reaches the conclusion that Grice's four maxims are liable to be obeyed/ observed or breached/ violated during the process of debating. In the two debates understudy this can be noticed when there is an overlap or cross-talk in the first debate (Obama- McCain debate) and in the cross-examination segments in the second debate (Does God Exist?) between Dr. Bahnsen and Dr. Stein.

In each of the two debates, examples where any of the four maxims is violated are extracted and analyzed. In the Obama-McCain debate during one of the interchanges between Senator McCain and Senator Obama we can see that the maxims of relevance and quality is observed while the maxim of manner is violated by Senator McCain when he interrupts senator Obama by the utterance "*We're not going to do that in my administration*" and "*We're talking about Joe the plumber*" (5: 172- 189). Here the order of speech is interrupted twice by senator McCain.

In the "Does God Exist?" debate the four maxims are only obeyed/observed or breached/violated in the cross-examination segments between Dr. Bahnsen and Dr. Stein. For example, when Dr. Bahnsen is cross-examining Dr. Stein, it is noted the four maxims of quality, quantity, manner and relevance are obeyed by both debaters. For each question there is a specific brief relevant answer. Dr. Stein makes his answers as informative as is required for the current purpose of the

exchange. His answers are relevant to the questions asked by Dr. Bahnsen. Dr. Stein is not ambiguous or obscure in his answers. He is also brief and his answers comes in an orderly manner. However, the maxim of relevance is violated, for example, in (15: 606-615) when Dr. Stein gives an irrelevant answer saying that Dr. Bahnsen has assumed that “*The bible says that God exists, and the bible is the inspired word of God, therefore what it says must be true, therefore god exists?*” Dr. Bahnsen, therefore repeats the question and says “*I didn’t ask you what I assumed, I asked you if I used that argument*”. Thus, Dr. Stein corrects his answer to be relevant to the question as he replies: “*No, you did not use the argument...*”

The research also concludes that pragmatic rules of persuasion are determined by a fictitious designer before the discourse begins. These rules govern the speaker’s choice of facts to present in the knowledge that the listener will interpret his/her statements according to these rules. Persuasion rules specify which statements the listener finds persuasive. Persuasion rules that maximize the probability that the listener accepts the request if and only if it is justified, given that the speaker maximizes the probability that his request is accepted. A persuasion situation involves an agent (the speaker) who attempts to persuade another agent (the listener) to take a certain action. Whether or not the listener should accept the speaker’s suggestion depends on information possessed by the speaker. Persuasion is the process of changing or reinforcing attitudes, beliefs, or behavior. Persuasion is the process by which a person's attitudes or behaviour are influenced by communications from other people.

Aristotle’s three classifications of persuasion, namely *Ethos*, *Pathos* and *Logos* are identified and defined. Extracts from both debates relevant to each category are analyzed. Being a philosophical debate about an ideological question between two philosophers, it has been found that the play upon

*logos* prevails in the “Does God Exist?” debate than in the third U.S. Presidential debate between Senator Obama and Senator McCain who are two politicians. As two politician who are candidate for the Presidency of the United States, they both appealed to *Ethos* and *Pathos* rather than *Logos*.

The study concludes that logical fallacies undermine the debater’s argument and make it invalid, if the debater commits one of the fallacies. A fallacy is an (often unnoticed) error or flaw in an argument, which prevents it from fulfilling its persuasive task; also an argument featuring such an error. Logicians since Aristotle have constructed lists and classifications of fallacies thought to be common and especially deceptive. A fallacy is formal when its invalidity is discernible from the argument's structure alone. Otherwise, the fallacy counts as informal. Any trick of logic or language which allows a statement or a claim to be passed off as something it is not has an admission card to the enclosure reserved for fallacies. Very often it is the case that what appears to be a supporting argument for a particular contention does not support it at all. Sometimes it might be a deduction drawn from evidence which does not sustain it.

Finally, the study finds out that some of the logical fallacies have been committed in the “Does God Exist Debate?” Dr. Stein who is an atheist commits four logical fallacies: *The Crackers in the Pantry Fallacy*, *Pretended Neutrality Fallacy*, *Begging the Question (petitio principia) Fallacy*, and *Circular Reasoning (Circulus in probando) Fallacy*. These fallacies undermine his argument about denying God’s existence. Using logic, Dr. Bahnsen exposes the above fallacies that Dr. Stein has committed, and proves that God does exist.