



A Corpus-Based Study of Stylistic Variation of Donald Trump's Political Discourse: Identity, Setting, and Audience

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ABSTRACT

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Extralinguistic factors, which refer to the non-linguistic factors such as class, topic, age etc., play a central role in a speaker's stylistic variation and can elicit stylistic variation. This study examines stylistic variation in Donald Trump's political discourse, focusing on the discourse markers "actually" and "in fact" across three extralinguistic factors/dimensions: identity, setting, and audience. Results reveal systematic patterns in Trump's use of "actually" and "in fact," with "actually" increasing sharply in informal, interactive contexts during his presidential and post-presidential periods (identity dimension). Dialogic contexts (setting dimension) exhibited the highest combined frequencies of both markers, reflecting greater interactivity and clarification. Similarly, local audience speeches (audience dimension) favored "actually," emphasizing intimacy and informality. These findings demonstrate that Trump's stylistic variation is systematically shaped by extralinguistic factors, contributing to a deeper understanding of political discourse. The study underscores the importance of multidimensional stylistic analysis and suggests future research incorporating additional linguistic features, such as prosody and syntactic variation, to explore broader patterns in diverse social contexts.

KEYWORDS

stylistic variation, extralinguistic factors, political discourse, discourse markers, corpus-based study

1. Introduction

Variationist sociolinguistics, a discipline deeply concerned with linguistic style, has evolved significantly since Hymes (1974) defined style as “a way or mode of doing something.” This conceptualization has since expanded to encompass “ways of speaking” (Coupland 2007), positioning stylistic variation as a central yet historically underexplored facet of sociolinguistic research (Hernández-Campoy and Cutillas-Espinosa 2012a). Recent years have witnessed growing interest in understanding stylistic variation, particularly as a dynamic and contextually driven phenomenon. This shift underscores the necessity for a more nuanced understanding of how external factors influence linguistic choices and their broader implications for sociolinguistics.

Political discourse has provided a fertile ground for examining stylistic variation, with studies exploring the linguistic strategies of leaders to shape identity and engage audiences (e.g., Hall-Lew et al. 2012, Podesva et al. 2012a, 2012b, Reyes-Rodríguez 2008, Soukup 2012). As the most controversial American president in recent years, Donald Trump’s discourse has remained understudied from a stylistic variation perspective. While prior research has analyzed Trump’s linguistic practices (e.g., Jacobsen 2019, Schneider and Eitelmann 2020, Schubert 2019, Sclafani 2018), these studies have not systematically examined his style-shifting patterns through the lens of variationist sociolinguistics—a framework traditionally centered on spoken corpora and multifactorial analysis. Consequently, the mechanisms by which multiple extralinguistic factors influence his stylistic choices remain unclear. Although Clarke and Grieve (2019) analyzed stylistic patterns in Trump’s Twitter posts, their study did not extend to spoken discourse or the role of contextual dimensions in shaping linguistic variation, which leads to how Trump shifts his speaking style in spoken discourse under the influence of multi-extralinguistic factors remains unexplored. Furthermore, while much research has addressed phonological and orthographic variation (Hernández-Campoy and García-Vidal 2018), fewer studies have examined higher grammatical levels such as discourse markers in spoken contexts (Tagliamonte 2006). The variation of discourse markers within spoken corpora as a potential indicator of speaking style remains an underexplored domain.

This study addresses this gap by investigating stylistic variation in Donald Trump’s spoken political discourse, focusing on the discourse markers “actually” and “in fact.” These two markers are chosen not only because they are often considered functionally equivalent (Labov 1972, Sankoff 1980) and taken as different variants of the same variable, but also because they exhibit subtle stylistic distinctions and can represent different speaking styles. First, “actually” frequently appears in conversational contexts, aligning with informal and interactive styles (Biber 2006, Oh 2000), while “in fact” is more prevalent in formal writing, signaling assertiveness and precision (Buyse 2020, Waters 2008). Oh (2000) also concludes that “actually” tends to occur in spoken discourse and it occurs 3.7 times more frequently than “in fact”. Second, despite “actually” and “in fact” share the core meaning of “unexpectedness”, the difference between them lies in the way they signal it: “actually” tends to be associated with a denial of expectation, and thus often produces contrastive meaning, whereas “in fact” only goes against some aspect of the expectation, resulting in a strengthening of the expectation (Oh 2000). Thus, “actually” and “in fact” are used to represent different speaking styles in this research. While “actually” is used to represent conversational, informal and interactive style, “in fact” is used to represent formal, less conversational and interactive style. By analyzing the use of these markers, this study aims to illuminate how Trump’s speaking style adapts to varying contextual dimensions, providing new insights into the dynamic interplay between formality, informality, and interpretive strategies.

To achieve this, the study adopts a multidimensional framework, examining Trump’s use of “actually” and “in fact” across three extralinguistic dimensions: identity, setting, and audience. These dimensions align with theoretical advancements in sociolinguistic research, particularly the integration of multiple contextual factors as

proposed by speaker design theory (Coupland 1996) and audience design theory (Bell 1984). The identity dimension explores changes in Trump's stylistic preferences over time, corresponding to his pre-presidential, presidential, and post-presidential periods. The setting dimension investigates how monologic, dialogic, and mixed communicative contexts influence his linguistic choices. Finally, the audience dimension examines stylistic shifts when addressing national versus local audiences.

This study, underpinned by a comprehensive corpus, adopts a corpus-based multidimensional approach to examine the collective influence of extralinguistic factors on the stylistic variations in Donald Trump's discourse. The research is designed to address the following two questions:

1. How do the discourse markers “actually” and “in fact” vary in frequency and usage across the extralinguistic dimensions of identity, setting, and addressee in Donald Trump's political discourse?
2. What do these variations reveal about the impact of extralinguistic factors on Trump's stylistic choices and interpretive tendencies?

By analyzing a comprehensive corpus of over three million tokens, this study not only fills a critical gap in understanding Trump's linguistic strategies but also contributes to broader discussions of stylistic variation in political discourse. The findings underscore the importance of considering extralinguistic influences in analyzing language use, offering implications for both sociolinguistic theory and practical applications in political communication.

2. Stylistic Variation

The dynamics of stylistic variation and their underlying catalysts have been the focus of scholarly inquiry for nearly six decades, with Labov's seminal study in 1966 serving as a pivotal foundation. Various theoretical frameworks have emerged to explain these phenomena, including “attention to speech” (Labov 1966), “communication accommodation theory” (Giles and Powesland 1975), and “audience design” (Bell 1984). However, these theories have been critiqued as “unidimensional approaches” (Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994), implying that speakers predominantly adjust their linguistic output in response to a single, dominant factor. Recognizing the limitations of these frameworks in accounting for the full spectrum of stylistic variation, researchers have increasingly embraced a multidimensional approach that acknowledges the complex interplay of multiple influences. A notable advancement in this paradigm shift is the emergence of “speaker design theory” (Coupland 1996), which is rooted in social constructivism. This theory posits that a variety of contextual factors—both internal (e.g., purpose, tone, and frame) and external (e.g., audience, topic, setting, age, and familiarity)—can shape a speaker's agency and linguistic choices (Hernández-Campoy and Cutillas-Espinosa 2012a). The internal and external characteristics affecting speaker agency align broadly with Bell's (1984) classification of linguistic and extralinguistic variation factors, as shown in Figure 1 below.

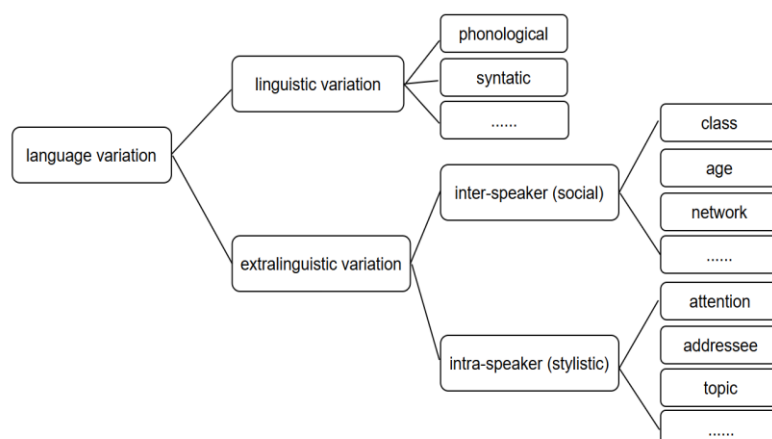


Figure 1. Some Factors Influencing Language Variation (Bell 1984, p. 146)

As seen in Figure 1 above, building on Bell's (1984) framework, it has been established that both linguistic and extralinguistic factors significantly contribute to language variation. Bell (1984) conducted an in-depth theoretic exploration of specific extralinguistic influences on individual speaking styles. As illustrated in Figure 1 above, intraspeaker variation is subject to a multitude of influences, including attentional focus, type of addressee, and topical content. Interspeaker variation, conversely, is shaped by distinct factors such as social class, age, and social network affiliation. While acknowledging the impact of inherent speaker characteristics on their speech, Bell (1984) also identifies the role of some additional factors—such as topic and setting—in modulating an individual's speaking style. These factors guide the speaker's stylistic choices, highlighting the complex interplay between personal and situational determinants of linguistic performance. This nuanced understanding emphasizes the dynamic nature of sociolinguistic variation and underscores the necessity for a comprehensive approach to its study.

To date, a constellation of extralinguistic factors has been identified that significantly influences speakers' linguistic choices. These factors include the topic of discourse (Blom and Gumperz 1972, Coupland 1981, Douglas-Cowie 1978, Giles and Powesland 1975), speaker identity (Coupland 2007), communicative setting (Bell 1984), interlocutor or addressee (Bell 1984, Hernández-Campoy and García-Vidal 2018), gender (Hernández-Campoy and Cutillas-Espinosa 2012b, 2013), and other pertinent social dimensions. A multidimensional analytical approach that encompasses these various factors has gained considerable traction in the field. For instance, Hernández-Campoy and Cutillas-Espinosa (2012b, 2013) have integrated extralinguistic factors such as gender, identity, and addressee in their research. Drawing on the synthesis of these factors, the present study constructs an extralinguistic multidimensional analytic framework, as seen in Figure 2 below.

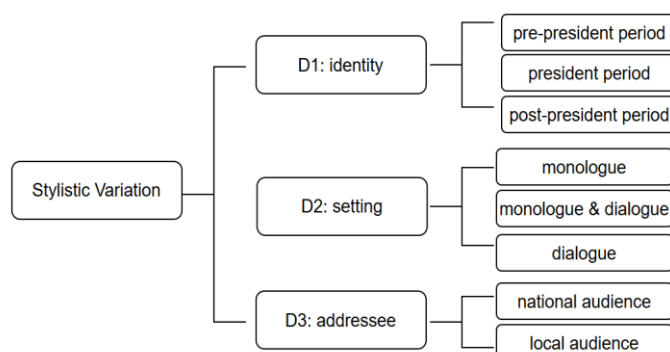


Figure 2. Analytical Framework for This Research: Multidimensional Extralinguistic Factors Influencing Linguistic Choice

As illustrated in Figure 2 above, the factors selected for this investigation—“identity,” “setting,” and “addressee”—provide an operational basis for categorizing the corpus into distinct sub-dimensions. This approach facilitates a nuanced examination of the corpus, aligning with the methodological requirements of the research.

3. Method

This study employs a corpus-based approach to investigate stylistic variation, with a specific focus on the distinctive oratory style of Donald Trump. The Donald Trump Spoken Corpus (DTSC) was compiled by downloading transcripts directly from the American Presidency Project website at www.presidency.ucsb.edu.¹ The transcripts were downloaded according to the “date” and “document title”, which avoided the same transcript was downloaded repeatedly. Transcripts that belong to the same date or have similar document titles were manually read to determine whether they were overlapping transcripts. Overlapping transcripts would not be downloaded. After all transcripts were saved in .txt file, the corpus was cleaned. The dialogue contributions from other speakers in genres such as interviews, debates and press conference were excluded manually. The following excerpt is an example of Donald Trump’s Coronavirus press conference transcript, in which other speaker’s dialogue contributions have been replaced by @ mark.

...

Donald Trump: (18:03)

I want to thank you all for being here. We’ll take a few questions. Yeah, please.

Speaker 1: (18:05)

@

Donald Trump: (18:28)

No, I don’t know. I wasn’t involved in the deal. The concept of the deal is good, but I’ll let you know. We’ll do a little study on that. We’ll find out. If there is any problem, we’ll let you know about it very quickly, but I wasn’t involved in it. It’s a big deal. It’s a way of bringing back a great area too, in addition to pharmaceuticals. Kodak has been a great name, but obviously pretty much in a different business. And so

¹ The American Presidency Project website is hosted by the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB). It was launched in 1999 by John Woolley and Gerhard Peters and is available online.

we'll see what that's all about, but we'll let you know very quickly. Yeah, please.

Speaker 2: (18:56)

@

...

(Aug 4, 2020-Donald Trump Coronavirus Press Conference)

Then the corpus is segmented into three dimensions: identity, setting, and addressee. Each dimension is further divided into subdimensions to reflect different aspects of Trump's public communication.

Identity Dimension

For the identity dimension, the corpus is divided into three subdimensions: pre-presidential, presidential, and post-presidential periods. The following table presents the breakdown of the corpus for the identity dimension:

Table 1. Division of DTSC for Identity Dimension

Identity	Time Span	Text	Token
Pre-presidential period	16 June 2015-19 Jan. 2017	81	274,623
Presidential period	20 Jan. 2017-19 Jan. 2021	453	2,504,979
Post-presidential period	20 Jan. 2021-20 Jan. 2023	41	437,964
Total		575	3,217,566

As shown in Table 1 above, the corpus for the identity dimension comprises 575 transcripts from Donald Trump between 16 June 2015 and 20 January 2023, totaling 3,217,566 tokens.

Setting Dimension

For the setting dimension, only the presidential period transcripts are used, totaling 453 texts and 2,504,979 tokens. This dimension is categorized into three subdimensions based on the communication setting. Table 2 below illustrates the division of the corpus for the setting dimension:

Table 2. Division of DTSC: Presidential Period for Setting Dimension

Setting	Genre	Text	Token
Monologue	speech	235	1,463,538
Monologue & Dialogue	press conference; briefing	153	778,461
Dialogue	interview; debates	65	262,980
Total		453	2,504,979

Addressee Dimension

The addressee dimension also focuses solely on the presidential period data. It is divided into two subdimensions based on whether Trump is addressing local audiences or the general populace. Table 3 below presents the division of the corpus for the addressee dimension:

Table 3. Division of DTSC: Presidential Period for Addressee Dimension

Addressee	Division	Text	Token
General Audience	lectures addressed to a nationwide audience	381	1,784,827
Local Audience	lectures addressed to a local audience	72	723,822
Total		453	2,504,979

Following this categorization, the software tool LanksBox (Brezina et al. 2020) is employed to identify the target discourse markers “actually” and “in fact,” as well as to calculate their relative frequencies (per million tokens).

4. Results and Discussion

This study examines the usage patterns of the discourse markers “actually” and “in fact” in Donald Trump’s speech across different dimensions of his public identity. The overall frequency distribution reveals notable divergences between these two markers.

4.1 Overall Frequency Distribution of “actually” and “in fact”

To address the first research question, this section presents the overall frequency distribution of the discourse markers “actually” and “in fact” in Donald Trump’s political discourse. Table 4 below summarizes the relative frequencies across the entire corpus.

Table 4. Overall Frequency Distribution

Markers	Frequency	Percentage of Total
“actually”	2,085	77.5%
“in fact”	605	22.5%
Total	2,690	100%

Note: per million tokens

The results indicate that “actually” is used approximately 3.5 times more frequently than “in fact,” highlighting its dominance in Trump’s spoken discourse. A Chi-square Test for Goodness of Fit confirms a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 814.275$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.01$). The result aligns with the prior work of Biber and Finegan (1988) and Biber (2006), who identified “actually” as the most prevalent adverb in spoken corpora. This concordance is further corroborated by the research of Oh (2000) and Aijmer (2013), which similarly established that “actually” occurs with greater frequency in spoken English than in its written counterpart, while the frequency of “in fact” exhibits a more modest variation between the two modalities. The preponderance of “actually” over “in fact” within the DTSC may be attributable to the corpus’s exclusive composition of transcribed spoken discourses by Trump. Additionally, it is plausible that Trump’s deliberate and strategic overuse of “actually” is a calculated linguistic choice aimed at fulfilling his political objectives.

4.2 Identity Dimension

To analyze the impact of Trump’s evolving public identity on his use of discourse markers, we examined the frequency of “actually” and “in fact” across three distinct periods: pre-presidential, presidential, and post-presidential. Examining the identity dimension, the use of “actually” and “in fact” varies significantly across Trump’s pre-presidential, presidential, and post-presidential periods.

Table 5 below presents the comparative frequency of these markers across these stages.

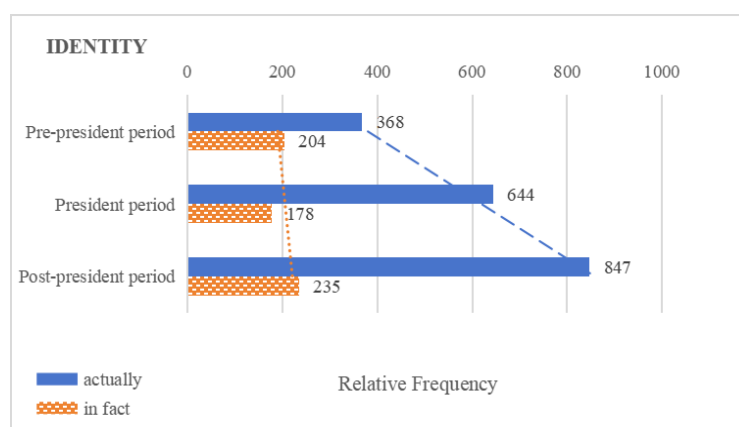
Table 5. Relative Frequencies of “actually” and “in fact” Across Trump’s Different Identities

Identity	“actually”	“in fact”	Total	Text	Token
Pre-president period	101(368)	56(204)	157(572)	81	274,623
President period	1613(644)	446(178)	2,059(822)	453	2,504,979
Post-president period	371(847)	103(235)	474(1,082)	41	437,964
Total	2,085	605	2,690	575	3,217,566

Note: per million tokens

An examination of the total frequency of these markers reveals a notable upward trend as Trump’s identity evolves. Specifically, during the pre-presidential period, the combined frequency of “actually” and “in fact” is 572 instances per million tokens. This figure escalates to 822 instances during his presidential tenure and further increases to 1,082 instances in the post-presidential period. This trend suggests a growing tendency to employ these markers for clarification and explanation, indicating an escalating interpretive nature in his discourse.

Upon closer inspection of the individual frequencies, it is evident that “actually” experiences a significant surge across the three periods, while “in fact” shows more subtle variations. The frequency of “in fact” maintains a relatively stable trajectory, whereas “actually” demonstrates a consistent and sharp upward trend across the three periods, as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3. The Trend of “actually” and “in fact” Across Trump’s Different Identities**

A Chi-square test for independence conducted across the three periods reveals significant statistical disparities in the occurrence of “actually” and “in fact” ($\chi^2 = 45.904$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.01$). Notably, pronounced differences are found between the pre-presidential and presidential periods ($p < 0.01$), as well as between the pre-presidential and post-presidential periods ($p < 0.01$). In contrast, no significant variation is observed between the presidential and post-presidential periods ($p = 0.973$). These statistics indicate that Trump’s speaking style undergoes a marked transformation following his ascension to the presidency, a shift that persists after his term in office. Compared to the pre-presidential stage, Trump’s political discourse during the presidential period reflects an increase in interactivity and informality, alongside a slight reduction in objective explanatory elements. This shift may be attributed to his efforts to enhance interaction and intimacy with his audience, thereby consolidating his political standing.

Compared to the pre-presidential stage, Trump’s political discourse during the presidential period reflects an increase in interactivity and informality, alongside a slight reduction in objective explanatory elements. This shift

may be attributed to his efforts to enhance interaction and intimacy with his audience, thereby consolidating his political standing. Following his departure from the presidency, the interactive and informal aspects of Trump's political discourse continue to rise significantly, while the objective explanatory nature also experiences a minor increase. This may reflect his dissatisfaction with the election outcome, as he sought to further engage with the public to garner support and clarify certain election-related issues. This trend suggests that Trump increasingly employs “actually” to emphasize informal, interactive discourse, particularly in post-presidential public appearances, aligning with his efforts to connect with audiences on a personal level. In different periods, Trump employs different communication strategies to serve his political purposes. At the same time, it can be said that Trump's stylistic variation creates different identities for him. For example, during his presidential period, he employed a more interactive speaking style to construct his identity as a populist president.

The following examples present the details of Trump's usage of “actually” and “in fact” in three different public roles:

Pre-presidential period:

- (1) But he (Obama) wasn't a cheerleader. He's actually a negative force. He's been a negative force. (DTSC-June 16, 2015-Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President in New York City)
- (2) We failed to develop a new vision for a new time. In fact, as time went on, our foreign policy began to make less and less sense. (DTSC-April 27, 2016-Remarks on Foreign Policy)

Presidential period:

- (3) He's on tape saying that he's holding back \$1 billion from Ukraine unless you change the prosecutor. Well, this, how about that question? I won't say who answered, because you know I'm not, I actually used to like the guy, he was a nice guy to me, but now I don't like him so much, but that's okay. (DTSC-December 18, 2019-Remarks at a Merry Christmas Rally in Battle Creek, Michigan)
- (4) Because it's known for major corruption. In fact, the new leader of Ukraine got in on a construction — on a, a platform where he looks for all of the problems of dishonesty, and everything that was going on in Ukraine, right? (DTSC-December 18, 2019-Remarks at a Merry Christmas Rally in Battle Creek, Michigan)

Post-presidential period:

- (5) We all knew that the Biden administration was going to be bad. But none of us even imagined just how bad they would be and how far left they would go... We didn't know what the hell he was talking about actually. (DTSC-Feb 28, 2021-Donald Trump CPAC 2021 Speech Transcript)
- (6) Republicans believe that the needs of every citizen must come first. In fact, America must come first. We don't put it first. (DTSC-Feb 28, 2021-Donald Trump CPAC 2021 Speech Transcript)

The examples illustrate the distinct usage patterns of “actually” and “in fact” by Donald Trump. As elucidated by Oh (2000), despite both markers signaling a core meaning of “unexpectedness,” “actually” is typically associated with a refutation of expectation, thereby often engendering a contrastive semantic effect, while “in fact” merely contravenes a particular facet of the expectation, thereby serving to reinforce the overall expectation. Specifically, examples (1), (3), and (5) exhibit a more pronounced contrastive meaning compared to examples (2), (4), and (6), thus highlighting the stylistic variation in Trump's discourse.

In example (1), Trump utilizes “actually” to negate the public's expectation that Obama was a positive force,

subsequently presenting the counter-claim that “he is a negative force.” Similarly, in example (3), Trump initially criticizes Biden, yet employs “actually” to introduce a complimentary remark about Biden. In example (5), Trump discusses the Biden administration, which he initially deems unfavorable, but then shifts the focus to the perceived nonsensical nature of Biden’s discourse, thereby undermining Biden’s credibility.

Conversely, the use of “in fact” in examples (2), (4), and (6) diverges from the contrastive function observed with “actually.” In example (2), Trump bolsters the assertion that “we failed to develop a new vision for a new time” by appending the information “as time went on, our foreign policy began to make less and less sense.” In example (4), he amplifies his claim regarding the corruption of the Ukrainian leader through the subsequent information. Lastly, in example (6), Trump underscores his assertion that “the needs of every citizen must come first” by providing additional supporting information following “in fact.” This analysis thus underscores the nuanced stylistic and semantic distinctions between “actually” and “in fact” within Trump’s linguistic repertoire, highlighting the complexity of discourse marker usage in political communication.

However, the results of the statistical analysis, as measured by Cramer’s V, yielded a value of 0.14, indicating that identity plays a relatively minor role in the use of the two linguistic markers under investigation. Given that Cramer’s V ranges from 0 to 1, this value suggests that identity differences accounted for approximately 1.96% of the observed stylistic variation in Donald Trump’s speech ($V^2 = 0.14^2 \approx 0.0196$). While this finding highlights the limited explanatory power of identity in this context, it also underscores the potential influence of other unexplored factors, such as context, topic, and text type, which may exert a more pronounced influence on stylistic variation. Future research could further investigate these factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the sociolinguistic dynamics at play.

4.3 Setting Dimension

In the setting dimension, the frequencies of “actually” and “in fact” shift significantly depending on whether Trump is speaking in monologic, dialogic, or mixed settings. The impact of communicative settings on Trump’s use of the discourse markers “actually” and “in fact” is evident in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Relative Frequencies of “actually” and “in fact” in Different Communicative Settings

Setting	“actually”	“in fact”	Total	Text	Token
Monologue	843(576)	222(151)	1065(727)	235	1,463,538
Monologue & Dialogue	538(691)	155(199)	693(890)	153	778,461
Dialogue	232(882)	69(262)	301(1144)	65	262,980
Total	1613	446	2059	453	2,504,979

Note: per million tokens

Table 6 above presents the relative frequencies of these markers across different communicative contexts. As shown in Table 6 above, dialogic settings exhibit the highest combined frequency, reinforcing the interpretive style necessary for interactive communication. An analysis of the total relative frequency of these markers reveals a consistent upward trend from monological to dialogical settings. In monologue settings, the combined frequency is 727 instances per million tokens. This increases to 890 instances in mixed monologue and dialogue settings, and further rises to 1,144 instances in purely dialogical settings. This trend suggests that as dialogic elements intensify, these markers are increasingly employed to elucidate specific issues, reflecting an increasingly interpretive style.

A closer examination of individual frequencies shows that “actually” occurs 576 times in monological settings, rising to 691 in mixed settings, and 882 in dialogical settings. Similarly, “in fact” appears 151 times in monologues,

199 times in mixed settings, and 262 times in dialogues. This upward trend for both markers as the communicative setting becomes more interactive, as illustrated in Figure 4 below:

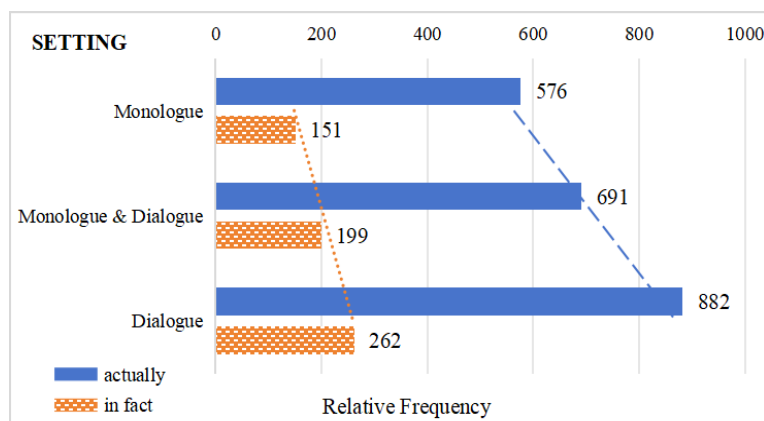


Figure 4. The Upward Trend of “actually” and “in fact” When Trump Speaks in Different Settings

Statistical analysis reveals interesting patterns. A Chi-square test for independence across the three settings shows no significant differences ($\chi^2 = 1.199$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.549$), suggesting consistency in Trump’s usage of these markers. However, a Test for Goodness of Fit indicates significant disparities in the frequency of both “actually” and “in fact” across the settings ($p < 0.01$ for both). This suggests that while the relative proportion of the two markers remains consistent, their overall frequency is influenced by the communicative setting. The effect size of setting on the use of “actually” was found to be moderate, with a Phi coefficient of 0.32, indicating that setting variation accounts for approximately 10.24% of the observed variation in the use of this marker ($\Phi^2 = 0.32^2 \approx 0.1024$). By contrast, the effect size for “in fact” ($\Phi = 0.11$) suggests a weaker association, with setting accounting for only 1.21% of the variation in its usage ($\Phi^2 = 0.11^2 \approx 0.0121$). These findings highlight a notable discrepancy in the influence setting on the two markers, underscoring the importance of examining how linguistic variables interact with sociolinguistic factors in distinct ways. However, it still can be seen that as the setting shifts from monologue to dialogue, Trump adopts a more colloquial and informal style.

The observed variation in Trump’s speaking style can be attributed to the distinct characteristics of different genres in three communicative settings. In dialogue settings, which are inherently interactive and spontaneous, effective engagement necessitates adjustments in speaking style. Consequently, Trump increases the informality and engagement level to interact with his interlocutors and convey a sense of intimacy. This approach not only facilitates immediate rapport with the present audience but also aims to elicit a favorable impression among those who are absent. In contrast, monologue settings lack a direct interlocutor and the script can be previously prepared, leading Trump to adopt a more formal and less colloquial style. In these settings, the focus is primarily on the delivery of political messages and ideas, rather than on interactive engagement. Thus, Trump’s speaking style in monologue settings is markedly different from that in dialogue settings. The mixed setting, which encompasses genres such as press conferences and briefings, combines elements of both monologue and dialogue. Typically, Trump begins with a monologue to present his key points and then transitions to a dialogue format by taking questions from journalists. The nature of these genres positions the mixed setting between monologue and dialogue in terms of speaking style, exhibiting a moderate level of colloquialism and interactivity. The style-shifting observed across these three settings reflects Trump’s strategic adaptation to different contexts. This adaptability is crucial for effective communication in diverse settings, as it allows him to balance the need for formal message

delivery with the demands of interactive engagement.

The following examples illustrate Trump's usage of "actually" and "in fact" across the three communicative settings:

Monologue:

- (7) We're modernizing medical records to begin a seamless transition from the Department of Defense to the VA, something others have tried and failed to do. They've tried it for decades. Long time, they wanted to do it. It's actually not as easy as it sounds, getting it done, but we got it done... (DTSC-Jun 17, 2020-Speech Transcript Announcing Task Force on Veteran Suicide Prevention)
- (8) Eddie's opponent is a radical Liberal, and you didn't know that. In fact, he even says good things about me, but he'll never vote for me. (DTSC-Nov 6, 2019-Remarks at a Keep America Great Rally in Monroe, Louisiana)

Monologue & Dialogue:

- (9) Right. We're actually adding on through the Army Corps of Engineers. This is a big job and we are doing it in many states, not just New York and California. (DTSC-Mar 27, 2020-Donald Trump Coronavirus Task Force Briefing)
- (10) And Art Laffer who's tremendous... He's a tremendous... In fact, he (Art Laffer) recently got the Presidential Medal of Freedom. (DTSC-Apr 17, 2020-Donald Trump Coronavirus Press Conference Transcript)

Dialogue:

- (11) Nine months of a presidency. But you look at the market, how well it's doing, so you'd say well why do you have to do anything. We can actually do better. (DTSC-Oct 25, 2017-Interview with Lou Dobbs of FOX Business Network)
- (12) I'm going to build the wall one hundred percent. In fact, we had hundreds of bidders. We have many many designs. (DTSC-Apr 11, 2017-Interview with Maria Bartiromo on Fox Business Network)

The above examples further elucidate the nuanced usage of the discourse markers "actually" and "in fact" in different communicative settings. Examples (7) and (8) are derived from monologue settings, while examples (9) and (10) stem from mixed settings, specifically the "Question & Answer" sessions. Examples (11) and (12) are from dialogue settings. Across these examples, Trump's discourse is characterized by both explanatory and interpretative functions, with the markers serving to either partially negate or reinforce prior information.

In the monologue setting, example (7) illustrates Trump's use of "actually" to partially negate a presumed expectation. He acknowledges the difficulty of transitioning from the Department of Defense to the VA (Veteran Affairs), yet immediately counters this by asserting his ongoing efforts to assist American veterans. This use of "actually" serves to mitigate the negative connotation of the transition's difficulty, thereby reframing the narrative. In the mixed setting of example (9), Trump responds to a question regarding the provision of ventilators and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) by hospitals. Here, "actually" is employed to counter the journalist's implicit expectation that the Trump administration had been remiss in its actions. By providing information that contradicts this expectation, Trump uses "actually" to assert proactive measures taken by his administration. In the dialogue setting of example (11), Trump praises the market's performance during his presidency but immediately qualifies this with "we can actually do better." This usage of "actually" serves to both acknowledge the positive performance

and simultaneously express a higher standard or ambition, suggesting that the current achievements are not sufficient.

Conversely, “in fact” is used in a reinforcing manner in examples (8), (10), and (12). In example (8), Trump strengthens his earlier claim about Eddie’s opponent being a “radical Liberal” by providing additional information, thereby solidifying his initial assertion. In example (10), after praising Art Laffer, Trump uses “in fact” to amplify his praise with further details, enhancing the positive image he is constructing. Finally, in example (12), Trump articulates his determination to build a border wall to curb illegal immigration. The use of “in fact” here serves to bolster his resolve by highlighting the practical steps being taken, such as the presence of many bidders for the wall’s construction. This not only reinforces his initial statement but also provides evidence of the feasibility and progress of the project. In summary, these examples demonstrate the strategic use of “actually” and “in fact” by Trump to navigate and shape the narrative in various communicative contexts. The markers are employed to either challenge or affirm expectations, thereby reflecting the dynamic and purposeful nature of political discourse.

4.4 Addressee Dimension

The addressee dimension reveals notable variations in Trump’s use of “actually” and “in fact” depending on whether he directly addresses national or local audiences. Table 7 below provides insights into the relative frequency of the discourse markers “actually” and “in fact” in Donald Trump’s speeches mainly directed at two distinct audience groups: general and local audiences.

Table 7. Relative Frequencies of “actually” and “in fact” in Addressing Different Audience Groups

Addressee	“actually”	“in fact”	Total	Text	Token
General Audience	1106(620)	343(192)	1449(812)	381	1,784,827
Local Audience	507(700)	103(142)	610(842)	72	723,822
Total	1,613	446	2,059	453	2,504,979

Note: per million tokens

As shown in Table 7 above, speeches mainly directed to local audiences exhibit a higher frequency of “actually,” emphasizing colloquial and informal tones. The analysis reveals that the total frequency of these markers is higher in speeches mainly aimed at local audiences (842 instances) compared to those mainly targeted at general audiences from the whole America (812 instances). This suggests that Trump employs these markers more frequently to elucidate, explain, or clarify issues when addressing local constituents, indicating a greater emphasis on the interpretive nature of his discourse in these contexts.

Upon examining the individual frequencies, when Trump addresses a general nationwide audience, “actually” occurs 620 times, and “in fact” appears 192 times. In contrast, when speaking to local audiences, the frequency of “actually” rises to 700 instances, whereas “in fact” decreases to 142 instances. An inverse pattern emerges between the trends of “actually” and “in fact” across the two audience groups, as depicted in Figure 5 below.

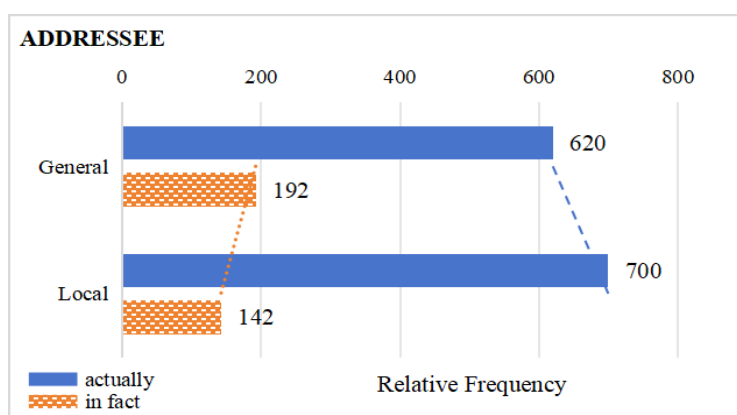


Figure 5. The Opposite Trend of “actually” and “in fact” When Trump Speaks to Different Addressees

A Chi-square test for independence between the two audience groups yields significant results ($\chi^2 = 11.793$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a statistically significant difference in the deployment of these markers across the groups. The more frequent use of “actually” and less frequent use of “in fact” when addressing local audiences suggests a tendency for Trump to adopt a more colloquial and informal style in these interactions.

These patterns may be attributed to the nature of the speeches directed at local audiences, many of which are campaign rallies conducted by Trump towards the end of his term, aiming at securing support and votes for re-election. The primary objective of these speeches is to garner local support, thereby necessitating a pronounced colloquialism and intimacy in his discourse. Such stylistic choices likely serve to foster a sense of connection and rapport with local constituents, emphasizing a direct and personal mode of communication that is often valued in political rhetoric. Building intimacy with audience through linguistic choices are one of the goals in the political agenda (Reyes 2015). When speaking to audiences, politicians often evoke the role of an interlocutor to build rapport and intimacy with the audience group (Reyes 2008). In speeches directed at local audiences, Trump shows the tendency to play the role of an interlocutor. This pattern indicates that Trump’s speeches to local audiences are designed to foster intimacy and personal connection, contrasting with the more formal tone used in national addresses.

Trump’s deployment of “actually” and “in fact” in addressing these two distinct audience groups is illustrated in the following examples:

To general audience from the whole country:

- (13) This week, we announced the creation of the joint United States-Canada Council for Advancement of Women Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders. Actually, very exciting. (DTSC-Feb 17, 2017-Weekly Speech)
- (14) My opponent was told to stay away from the election, don’t campaign. “We don’t need you. We’ve got it. This election is done.” In fact, they were acting like they already knew what the outcome was going to be. They had it covered and perhaps they did, very sadly for our country. (DTSC-Dec 2, 2020-Donald Trump Speech on Election Fraud Claims)

To local audience:

- (15) I can’t even listen to him but when I hear Russia I just turn it off. It’s crazy. But you know, getting along with countries is actually a good thing. Can we explain that? (DTSC-Sep 3, 2020-Donald Trump Latrobe,

Pennsylvania Rally Speech Transcript)

- (16) You know, they have 32% of our auto jobs, right? And it's probably the number one reason I ran for President. And in fact, I was in Michigan. I don't know if anybody remembers this, 12 years ago. They gave me the Man of the Year. You remember? (DTSC-Nov 02, 2020-Donald Trump & Mike Pence Rally Speech Transcript Traverse City, Michigan)

Examples (13) and (14) are derived from Trump's speeches addressed to national audiences, while examples (15) and (16) are from speeches delivered to local audiences. These examples illustrate the differential usage of the discourse markers "actually" and "in fact" by Trump, highlighting the stylistic and semantic variations in his discourse.

In examples (13) and (15), the marker "actually" is employed to introduce new information in a contrastive manner. In example (13), Trump expresses his opinion on the creation of the joint United States-Canada Council, which he deems "very exciting news." This council, focusing on women entrepreneurs and business leaders, is somewhat peripheral to Trump's own business interests, thus presenting a contrast to the expectations of his audience. Similarly, in example (15), Trump initially conveys his aversion to discussions about Russia but then uses "actually" to explain the benefits of maintaining good relations with other countries. The information following "actually" serves to counterbalance his initial negative stance, creating a contrastive effect.

Conversely, in examples (14) and (16), the marker "in fact" is used to reinforce and elaborate on previously stated information. In example (14), following Biden's victory in the 2020 US Presidential Election, Trump expresses his doubts about the election outcome. The information following "in fact" serves to substantiate his skepticism, providing additional details to support his claim. In example (16), during a campaign rally in Michigan, Trump criticizes Biden for outsourcing American jobs. He then uses "in fact" to highlight his own long-standing connection to Michigan, stating that he had been there 12 years prior. This usage of "in fact" not only reinforces his claim but also serves to establish a closer relationship with the local audience, thereby distancing himself from Biden. In summary, these examples demonstrate the strategic and context-dependent use of "actually" and "in fact" by Trump. While "actually" is often employed to introduce information that contrasts with prior expectations or statements, "in fact" is used to strengthen and elaborate on existing information.

While the analysis reveals a Cramer's V of 0.085, this indicates that addressee differences exert a limited influence on the use of these two markers, accounting for only 0.72% of the observed variation ($V^2 = 0.085^2 \approx 0.0072$). This finding underscores the relatively minor role of addressee-related factors in shaping Trump's deployment of these marker. Such results highlight the need for further exploration of additional variables that may contribute more substantively to stylistic variation.

4.5 Synthesis of Findings

The results across all dimensions reveal that "actually" is consistently associated with informal, interpretive discourse, while "in fact" retains a formal and assertive role. These patterns suggest that Trump's stylistic choices are highly adaptive, driven by contextual factors such as his role, the communicative setting, and audience type.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored the stylistic variation in Donald Trump's political discourse by analyzing the use of two

discourse markers, “actually” and “in fact,” across three extralinguistic dimensions: identity, setting, and audience. Drawing from a corpus of over three million tokens, the findings reveal systematic patterns in Trump’s linguistic choices, shaped by contextual factors and underscoring the dynamic interplay between formality, informality, and interpretive strategies.

The identity dimension demonstrates a significant evolution in Trump’s stylistic preferences over time. During his pre-presidential period, his discourse exhibited minimal use of “actually” and moderate use of “in fact,” reflecting a formal and explanatory tone. In contrast, his presidential and post-presidential periods saw a sharp increase in “actually,” signaling a shift toward greater informality and conversational style—a strategy aligned with his efforts to foster audience engagement and personal connection.

The setting dimension highlights the role of communicative contexts in shaping Trump’s stylistic choices. Monologic settings, such as speeches, show the lowest combined frequencies of the two markers, suggesting a more formal and less interactive style. Conversely, dialogic settings, including interviews and debates, exhibit the highest frequencies, reflecting Trump’s adaptation to conversational dynamics and his strategic use of interpretive markers to enhance clarity and interaction in these contexts.

The audience dimension underscores how audience type influences Trump’s language use. Speeches directed at local audiences display a higher frequency of “actually” and a reduced frequency of “in fact,” emphasizing informality and intimacy. In contrast, addresses to national audiences favor “in fact,” projecting a more formal and authoritative tone.

These findings collectively demonstrate that Trump’s stylistic variation is not random but systematically shaped by extralinguistic factors, with “actually” signifying informality and conversational engagement, while “in fact” conveys formality and assertiveness. This study enriches our understanding of the multidimensional nature of political discourse and highlights the importance of incorporating contextual factors in stylistic analyses. It shed significant light on the dynamic and strategic nature of linguistic choices made by politicians in their discourse. Future research endeavors should explore the use of discourse markers in a variety of political contexts, as well as in cross-cultural settings.

For future research, it is recommended to explore additional dimensions (e.g., gender or topic) or additional discourse features (e.g., intonation variation or syntactic variation), and to extend the analysis to include the discourse of everyday speakers or other political figures. Following Podesva (2007, 2011), incorporating phonological and prosodic features alongside lexical markers could provide a more nuanced understanding of style variation, especially in contexts where identity and audience engagement intersect. Such an approach would broaden the applicability of these findings, providing deeper insights into the linguistic strategies employed by both high-profile and ordinary individuals across diverse social contexts.

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Examples in: English

Applicable Languages: English

Applicable Level: Tertiary