

POLITENESS AND FACEWORK IN UNITED STATES PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

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Abstract

Politeness is a universal phenomenon which governs human interaction. It is a means to avoiding and pacifying conflict and promoting smooth communication between interlocutors. It is also a way of showing respect and consideration for others, or ways of avoiding rudeness. This study therefore examined how politeness and facework operate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in the 2016 United States Presidential Debate. A total of seventeen oral discourses were selected from the debate. Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1990) was applied to the data for analysis. The data were analysed quantitatively. The study found out that positive politeness strategies which employ in-group identity markers were frequently used in the conversations. The asymmetric relationship between the interlocutors results in the frequent use of these in-group identity markers which were mostly used by the two debaters. It is therefore concluded that for social interaction to function smoothly, maintenance of each person's face through the application of politeness principle is a fundamental phenomenon.

Keywords: *Politeness, face, facework, political debate, politeness strategy, identity markers*

Introduction

Communication as a complex phenomenon remains vital to

the sustenance of relationships and human existence. It is, in fact, the oil that signifies human interactions. Despite this significance, communication is a double-edged sword which can be used either positively or negatively. Boulton (1978, p.41) attests to the negative social intend of language from the perspective of its potential for complexity. She observes that "language is often used, not to communicate but to deceive. This is often true of political and religious propaganda."

Political debate is an important tool politicians use to express views and feelings to the public with the sole intention of reshaping and re-directing the electorates' opinions to agree with theirs. The debate often highlights, among others, the programmes of successive administrations and proceeds to offer the speaker as the best candidate that can turn around the fortunes of the people. Significantly, Political debate helps the electorates to determine whose agenda or plan is best suitable for the nation. Therefore, it is essential for the co-debaters to observe the face needs of the audience and also to know when to face-safe or face-threat using any of the politeness strategies. Politeness is pervasive in social interaction because everyone has some emotional and social sense of self which he expects others to recognise (Yule 1996). It is "a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interaction and transactions" (Lakoff, 1990, p.34). It is maintained that a harmonious and peaceful co-existence is predicated by observing others' face want and avoiding Face Threatening Act (FTAs) in everyday linguistic intercourse.

The concept of politeness can be understood as strategic conflict avoidance which can be found in Brown and Levinson (1987) that the basic social role of politeness is in its ability to function as a way of controlling potential aggression

between interacting parties. Facework consists partly of utterances that are open to interpretation as polite. The study of politeness and its relation to facework is key to understanding the relationship of interlocutors in communication. Thus, in political debates that involve political parties, communication takes place and the face needs of both the speakers and listeners can be analysed as it is the case in this study.

Statement of the Research Problem

Politeness phenomenon has attracted considerable interest in pragmatic circles in recent times. Odeunmi (2002), and Olanrewaju (2013) have applied politeness principle to the context of social interaction by focusing on proverbs and culture especially within the Nigerian setting using the face management model. Babatunde and Adedimeji (2008) also gave a broader view and analysis of politeness phenomena among members of the university environment and the society in general. The current work seeks to examine the politeness strategies and the face deployment by debaters in 2016 United State Presidential debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The study is guided by the following questions: (1) How do they deploy positive and negative face in the political discourse? (2) How do the interlocutors manage face effectively during the political debate? (3) How do speakers address the face needs of the addressee using either bald-record or off-record strategies?

Theoretical Framework and Review of Related Works

The theoretical framework adopted is Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1990). Brown and Levinson made a major contribution to the development of politeness theory. They developed a theory of politeness that drew on Goffman's idea

of face and expanded upon Lakoff's rules of politeness. According to Brown and Levinson, there are two kinds of face, which reflect two different desires present in every interaction (Johnstone, 2008): negative face (desire to express one's ideas without resistance) and positive face (desire to have one's contributions approved of).

Brown and Levinson theorise that face must be continually monitored during a conversation because it is vulnerable. During a conversation, face can be lost, maintained or enhanced. It is important to not only maintain one's own face but also the face of others (Fraser, 1990). Interlocutors must be able to 'save face' when they are confronted with a "Face threatening act" (FTA), which threatens the faces of the addressees (Johnstone, 2008). Fraser outlines the four potential face-threatening acts proposed by Brown and Levinson (1990) as follows:

- 1) Acts which threaten the audience's negative face: ordering, advising, threatening, warning
- 2) Acts which threaten the audience's positive face: complaining, criticizing, disagreeing, raising taboo topics
- 3) Acts which threaten speaker's negative face: accepting an offer, accepting thanks, promising unwillingly.
- 4) Acts which threaten speaker's positive face: apologizing, accepting compliments and confessing.

Brown and Levinson propose possible strategies that interlocutors can use to deal with face threatening acts:

a) Bald on Record

This is a strategy used when mutual demands are not overriding 'face' concerns, but are rather oriented to 'face', e.g., instances of greeting, warning, inviting, etc. Thus, it is said where the interlocutors act on the

basis of equality and common ground. However, Thomas (1995, p.170) observes that sometimes external factors may constrain interlocutors to opt- for direct utterances, e.g., in case of emergency or when under constraint, or even when ordering out of power, e.g., parent-son, teacher-student relationship. In such cases, the power holder often uses directness and attempts are made to mitigate the FTA, example: *get out immediately*. This strategy does not try to preserve face but can be used to threaten it if taken out of context.

b) Off-record

This strategy is more indirect. It is related to the Gricean notion of 'flouting', since the addressee does not abide by the cooperative principle and the conversation maxims. The speaker does not impose on the hearer. As a result, face is not directly threatened. This strategy often requires the hearer to interpret what the speaker is saying. It is also associated with the notion of ambivalence, since the communicative act is done in a way that no single and clear communicative intention (i.e., illocutionary force) could be attributed to the utterance. In other words, the addresser's utterance carries several defensible interpretations for the addressee to interpret and to identify the force (Brown and Levinson, 1978, p.216).

c) Positive politeness

As we have already stated, positive face requires that the individual's positive self-image be respected in everyday interaction with others. In order to achieve this, Brown and Levinson claim that conversational participants often work to minimise the social distance between them. Positive politeness is often compared

to that which is characteristic of interaction in an intimate setting such as between husband and wife or within family discourse (Blum-Kulka, 1997; Clancy, 2005). Discussing Brown and Levinson's theory of face management, Thomas (1995) says:

[Sometimes] when you speak to someone you may orient yourself towards that individual's positive face, and employ positive face, and employ positive politeness (which appeal to H's desire to be liked or approved of) (Thomas 1995, p.171).

The politeness expressed here equals Leech's principles of politeness such as 'seek agreement', 'avoid disagreement', 'be optimistic', 'give sympathy' (Thomas, 1995 p. 172, cited in Babatunde and Adeyanju, 2002, p.183).

Brown and Levinson (1990) list fifteen strategies in order to avoid threatening positive face:

1. Pay attention to a hearer's interests, wants, needs or goods.
2. Exaggerate interest in, approval of sympathy with a hearer.
3. Employ exaggeration and dramatic effect in your speech in order to interest and involve the hearer.
4. Use in-group identity markers.
5. Seek agreement/make small talk.
6. Avoid disagreement.
7. Find common ground.
8. Joke.
9. Assert or imply knowledge of and concern for

- a hearer's wants.
10. Offer, promise.
 11. Be optimistic.
 12. Use inclusive 'we' forms.
 13. Give (or ask for) reasons.
 14. Assume or assert reciprocity.
 15. Give gifts.

Negative Politeness

Negative politeness is action aimed at non-imposition on the hearer and so the maintenance of negative face requires the achievement of distance. A concept used in politeness theory to refer to a person's desire to act out of their own volition and not to be imposed upon by others (Brown and Levinson 1987). Negative politeness is achieved by the employment of conventional politeness markers, deference markers, by minimising imposition; for example salutation, indirect conventionality, hedging etc (Babatunde and Adeyanju, 2002, p.183). Brown and Levinson list ten strategies for the linguistic realisation of negative politeness.

Brown and Levinson (1990) list ten strategies in order to avoid threatening negative face:

1. Be conventionally indirect.
2. Question, hedge.
3. Be pessimistic.
4. Minimise the imposition.
5. Give deference.
6. Apologise.
7. Impersonalise.
8. Adopt an inclusive perspective.

9. Nominalise.
10. Claim or disclaim indebtedness to the hearer.

Methodology

This research work is carried out using a random selection of conversations bordering on seventeen controversial issues in the United States 2016 Presidential debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. These speeches were recorded and later transcribed. The speeches were analysed using Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness strategies of both positive and negative face, bald-on record and off-record. Quantitative data analysis was used to analyse the four elements of politeness strategy - positive strategy, negative strategy, bald on-record and off-record strategy. Frequencies of their occurrences are represented in tabular forms. Analyses of data revolve around seventeen controversial issues including taxation, fighting ISIS, Clinton's email, Obama's citizenship, accepting the outcome of election, Iraq war invasion, achieving prosperity in America, NAFTA, Obama's integrity, tax proposed, solar panel, governance, tax increase, Trump's tax returns, allegation of Clinton not having a presidential look and defending America's territorial integrity.

Positive Strategy

The observed figures and percentages of positive politeness strategies are presented in Table 1 below followed by a chart presentation depicting the frequency of the strategies.

Table 1: Observed Figures and Percentages of Positive Strategy

S/N	Strategy	Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Pay attention to Hearer's interests, wants, needs, goods.	1	1.45%
2.	Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H).	5	7.25%
3.	Intensify interest to hearer.	0	0%
4.	Use in -group identity markers.	32	46.3%
5.	Seek agreement	1	1.45%
6.	Avoids disagreement	2	3.13%
7.	Presuppose/ raise/assert common ground	0	0%
8.	Jokes	0	0%
9.	Assert or presuppose speaker's knowledge of and concern for H's wants.	0	0%
10.	Offer, promise	6	9.0%
11.	Be optimistic	0	0%
12.	Use inclusive 'we' forms	11	15.9%
13.	Give or (ask for) reasons	11	15.9%
14.	Assume or assert reciprocity	0	0%
15.	Give gifts	0	0%
Total		69	100%

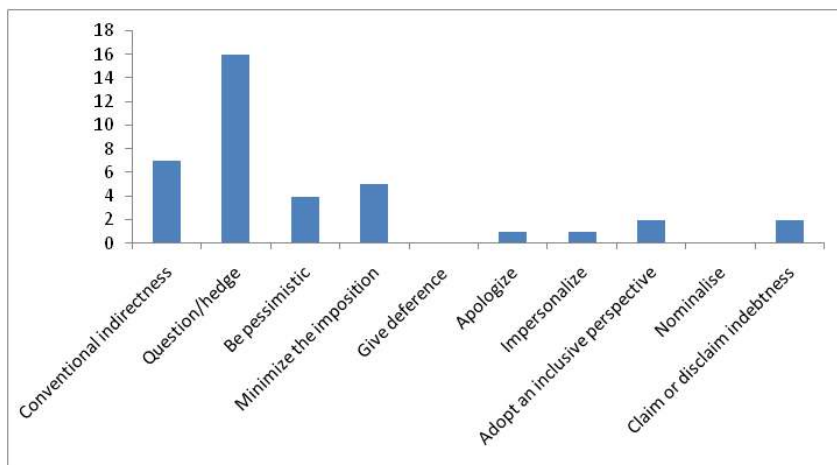
The above Table and chart represent the frequency for the positive strategies in the conversations. In the above chart, the frequent use of in-group identity markers makes 46.3 percent. The use of this displayed a high sense of politeness technicality considering the highest frequency of occurrence of the positive strategies.

Negative Strategy

The observed figures and percentages of negative politeness strategies are presented in Table 2 below followed by a chart presentation depicting the frequency of negative strategies in the conversation.

Table 2: Observed Figures and Percentages of Negative Strategies in the Conversations

S/N	Strategy	Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Conventional indirectness	7	2.6%
2.	Question, hedge	16	6.1%
3.	Be pessimistic	4	1.52%
4.	Minimize the imposition	5	1.9%
5.	Give deference	0	0%
6.	Apologize	1	0.38%
7.	Impersonalize	1	0.38%
8.	Adopt an inclusive perspective	2	1%
9.	Nominalise	0	0%
10	Claim or disclaim indebtedness to the hearer	2	1%
Total		38	100%



The above Table and chart represent the frequency for the negative strategies in the conversations. In the above chart, question/hedge is prominently used. The effect of this is that debaters often ask questions in order to expose some secrets or to devalue one another in the presence of the audience. For example in sample 4 where Trump says “Is it President Obama's fault?” and Clinton hedge the question by saying “...before you even announced”. These are indeed evident in the Presidential debate for debaters will want to ask questions they think their opponents might not want to answer. However, this is followed by conventional indirectness, minimization of imposition and so on.

Bald on Record

The observed figures and percentages of bald-on-record are presented in the Table below.

Table 3: Observed Figures and Percentages of Bald-on-Record in the Conversations

S/N	Strategy	Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Cases of non minimization of the face threat	32	100%

From the above table, we observe the frequent use of bald-on-record in the conversation. The non-minimization of face threat which has the total number of thirty-two (32) counts in the conversations. This implies that debaters act on the basis of equality and common ground. For instance, in sample 10 where Trump says “Secretary, you have no plan”. Also in sample 12 where Clinton says “You know, just join the debate by saying more crazy things”. All of these indicate that debaters have little respect for the positive face than the negatives.

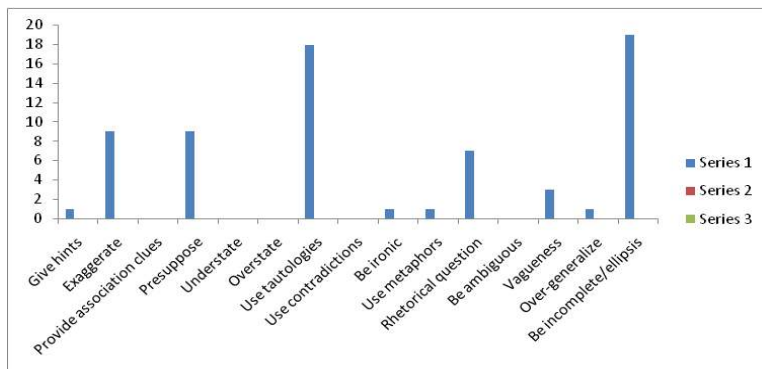
Off-record

The observed figures and percentages of off-record strategies are presented in Table 4 below followed by a chart

presentation depicting the frequency of off-record strategies in the debate.

Table 4: Observed Figures and Percentages of Off-record Strategies in the Conversations

S/N	Strategy	Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Give hints	1	0.6%
2.	Exaggerate	9	6.1%
3.	Provide association clues	0	0%
4.	Presuppose	9	6.1%
5.	Understate	0	0%
6.	Overstate	0	0%
7.	Use tautologies	18	12.4%
8.	Use contradictions	0	0%
9.	Be ironic	1	0.6%
10.	Use metaphors	1	0.6%
11.	The use of rhetorical question	7	4.83%
12.	Be ambiguous	0	0%
13.	Vagueness	3	2.07%
14.	Over-generalize	1	0.6%
15.	Be incomplete, use ellipsis	19	13.11%
Total		69	100%



The above Table and chart represent the frequency for the off-record strategies in the conversations. The chart and Table reveals that there is high use of ellipsis. The reason is that the debaters often obstruct each other during conversations. An instance is in sample 4 where Trump obstructs Clinton by saying “But you have no plan” when Clinton was about to say something and started with “There are...” However, ellipsis is followed by the use of tautologies, exaggeration, presupposition and so on.

Findings

The analyses of the conversations selected demonstrated that each utterance in the conversations exhibits a form of politeness or the other with different strategies being used. We identify in the data analysis how debaters were able to manage face effectively during the presidential debates. The use of thirty-two (32) in-group identity markers such as Secretary, Donald, Holt, Lester, Sidney Blumenthal, Patti Doyle etc. shows that debaters have in-depth knowledge about each other. Also, Trump and Clinton often call the attention of one another for sake of clarity. Also the use of tautologies depicts how the speakers create emphasis so that the listeners can pay more attention. For instance, in sample 3 where Clinton says “Well, that's your opinion. That is your opinion.” Also, in

sample 17 where Trump says “She doesn't have the look. She doesn't have the stamina.”

Analyses further reveal the ways and manners in which debaters use positive and negative face in political debate. This is evident in the use of positive and negative strategies used in the conversations. For instance, the use of inclusive “we” form in sample 1 when Clinton says “First, we have to build an economy that works for everyone, not just those at the top”, and also in sample 15 where Trump says “We are a nation that is seriously troubled”. In addition, the frequent negative strategy explicated in this research is the use of question/hedge. We have instances in sample 4 where Trump says “So is it President Obama's fault?” and sample 12 where Clinton says “Why not? Yeah, why not?”

The study has also reiterated how speakers attend the face needs of the addressee with the use of bald-record or off-record strategy during conversations. The use of non-minimization of face threats suggests that debaters interact on the basis of equality and common ground. We have instances in sample 3 where Trump says “Your husband signed NAFTA, which was one of the worst things that ever happened to the manufacturing industry” and also in sample 8 where Clinton says “In fact, Donald was one of the people who rooted for the housing crisis”. Off-record strategies are used when face is not directly threatened. For instance, in sample 11 where Trump used the rhetorical question: “And look at her website. You know what?” and sample 12, where Clinton used rhetorical question “Why not? Yeah, why not?” Thus, debaters were able to react to allegations levelled against each other in order to redeem their images.

Conclusion

The study argues that the concepts of politeness and facework are invaluable tool for examining human communicative

behaviour and attitude especially with regards to political debates. It has also demonstrated that the intricacies relating to politeness can endanger asymmetric relationship between participants. The frequent use of bald-record shows the level at which debaters face threat one another in order to criticise or protect their own image. In essence, it is clear that language use in any given situational context is a very crucial aspect of human existence. Language use is capable of causing conflict in the society if good manners and courtesy are not applied in the course of interaction. To this end, political debaters will always find one way or the other to use propaganda, satire, etc. through some politeness strategies to mitigate face threats.

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