
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Language of Politeness in the US Presidential Debates in 2012

Adawiya Hayyawi Doohee

Assistant Professor, College of Political Science, University of Kufa, Iraq

Corresponding Author: Adawiya Hayyawi Doohee, **E-mail:** adawiyah.doohee@uokufa.edu.iq

ABSTRACT

Politeness is one of the linguistic means in rhetorical construction, as the speaker seeks to avoid expressions that embody actions that threaten the social face, as verbal acts that contradict the desires of the recipients make them feel uncomfortable, and that the purpose of polite strategies is to mitigate the impact resulting from those actions, even if the use of those actions is exacerbated strategies that aggravate social face threats are called "social face aggravating actions," meaning that polite strategies can be used in reverse to increase the social face threat of the recipient called "social face aggravating practices, candidates in presidential debates seek to appear positively to persuade the audience through polite strategies in verbal communication in polite behavior to show communicative competence in order to enhance their reputation, and to discredit the opponent by using these strategies inversely to increase the severity of acts of a social face threat.

KEYWORDS

Politeness strategies, Social face threat, Presidential Debates, Candidates.

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1. Introduction

Politeness is defined as the behavior followed in societies in order to mitigate the threats resulting from certain actions towards the listener and to respect his right to be free, with the aim of reducing violent confrontations in personal interactions. According to the theory of politeness, the speaker should show expressions that are less offensive and more friendly, for example: "If you don't "Don't mind", and verbal behavior may occur that threatens the individual's self-image and is reflected in the general social image. In order to reduce the risks of negative speech acts, procedures are followed to control harmful activity that threatens the social face. In verbal argumentative conversations, such as presidential debates, negative politeness is used to cause harm deliberately towards the opponent.

1.1 Problem

Acts of politeness aim to consolidate the foundations of conversation between opponents or competitors, and the target may be the listener. As such, presidential debates provide features that make the use of politeness in this context different from normal conversations. Accordingly, the following questions become clear:

- How do pragmatic tools help employ politeness in exchanging roles between the opponent and the audience?
- What are the reasons that prompt candidates to use linguistics that harms the image of the opponent?
- Is there a predominance in the use of positive or negative politeness verbs in presidential debates?

1.1.1 Goal

The research aims to investigate and analyze the pragmatic aspects of politeness acts used by competing candidates in presidential debates in some American election campaigns.

1.1.2 Hypothesis

The research assumes that competitors in the US presidential elections rely on positive and negative polite actions, which target the opponent and the audience to mitigate and persuade the audience and not necessarily to show politeness towards the opponent.

1.1.3 Procedures

The research relied on conducting a theoretical review of politeness with a classification of acts of politeness and investigating the characteristics of the American presidential debates to show the reflection of these debates that provide social variables, as well as adopting selective models of some debates for analysis to provide conclusions and recommendations.

1.1.4 Limits

The research is limited to a pragmatic analysis of politeness in American presidential debates during election campaign speeches conducted by former President Barack Obama and Governor Willard Romney.

1.1.5 Value

The research includes some theoretical and practical values related to pragmatics and provides linguistic findings on the use of politeness verbs by competing candidates in presidential debates.

1.1.6 The Relationship between political language and the pragmatism of politeness

Language is one of the most important means of issuing orders, directives and threats, and it is a tool for communication and inquiry between parties. Politics provides an appropriate environment for the use of linguistic diversity, as politicians use linguistic means to achieve their political goals in influencing and shaping the way their audience thinks, and sometimes, some politicians adhere to polite language. Based on rules of personal morality, which generate unconventional connotations in models of indirect speech during communication. Accordingly, we divide this requirement into four sections; the first section is the concept of language and literature. The second section is the social rule model. The third section is a model of the conversation principle and the conversation contract. The fourth section is the face-saving model.

1.2 The concept of language and literature

Language is the act of speaking, writing, or signing on a specific occasion, and it reflects the linguistic ability that an individual possesses to communicate using sound and symbols. It is "a means of expressing or exchanging ideas, concepts, knowledge, and information, as well as establishing and transmitting experience and knowledge" (Hadumod Bussmann, 1996: 627).

Language and politics are inseparable phenomena. Political actions cannot be achieved in the absence of language, as it is considered a pivotal tool for winning over the public. "Only through language linked to social and political institutions can one declare war, declare guilty or not guilty, pro-parliaments or raises or lower taxes" (Paul Chilton, 2004: 30).

Professionalism and proficiency in the use of language in different sub-fields of politics are linked to a politician's ability to produce or understand spoken messages, insinuations and implicit threats, as "the activities of a politician, such as seeking consensus, setting policy, negotiating and mediating conflicts, representing interests and opposing policy... others, are all essentially linguistic activities" (Garcia Pastor, 2007: 105), where political language is filled with conflicts, synergies, contradictions, acquiescence, praise and ridicule, as well as subtle criticism and undiluted support, and political actors communicate with the power of spoken words in an ambiguous and linguistically dense way (Samuel Gyasi Obeng, 1997: 58).

As for politeness, Paul H. Grice believes that there are four principles of cooperation in logic and conversation, saying: "There are, of course, all kinds of other rules (aesthetic, social, or moral in character), such as: "Be polite", which are usually observed by the participants. In conversations, these may also generate unconventional connotations" (Paul H. Grice, 1967: 28), and that "the main, though not the only, motive for the use of these indirect forms is politeness" (John Searle, 1975: 177).

In the field of linguistic behavior, politeness reduces the negative effects and increases the positive effects of what one says on the feelings of others (Alan Cruse, 2006: 131). From the aspect of linguistic structures, politeness expresses "the speaker's position, and therefore cannot be explained by semantic means, but rather by pragmatic means". And that linguistic interaction is a social interaction through which participants not only convey meaning but also adhere to social rules, and their utterances are shaped by social distance and proximity, either external, created before the conversation, or internal, created during the conversation (George Yule, 1996, 59-60).

Linguists believe that not all speech that is perceived as polite by ordinary people is an example of politeness, such as: "Thank you, have a nice day", which is called the term "political behavior". It is defined as: "linguistic behavior directed toward maintaining a

balance". Personal relations within the social group", which is the standard behavior that society expects in certain circumstances, and its omission is considered impolite behavior, not neutral behavior (Richard J. Watts, 1992: 43 – 69).

2. The models

2.1 The social rule model

The social normative view of politeness holds that every society has a set of norms consisting of explicit rules that impose a certain behavior or way of thinking in a context" (Bruce Fraser, 1990: 220). For example, politeness is viewed as "arising from awareness of social obligations." The individual towards other members of the group to which he owes basic loyalty" (Onuigbo G. Nwoye, 1992: 312), and that the social normative view consists of two factors, namely (Gudrun Held, 1992: 137):

- 1- Status-conscious behavior that is achieved by showing respect for the social status of others.
- 2- Moral components and decency that include concern for general human dignity.

Some linguists believe that the social rules approach is related to a polite style called "wakimae", which is "the practice of polite behavior in accordance with social norms" as a result of one's feelings in a certain situation and is useful for obtaining friction – free communication between parties, and the social and cultural traditions that constitute politeness It is a social literature resulting from the accumulation of customs (Sachiko Ide, 1989: 23).

Social politeness gives importance to intra – group agreements to regulate interaction between group members smoothly such as: "conversational routines, politeness formulas, complementary formulas" are among the strategies that pave the way for group members to engage gracefully and retreat from repetitive social situations (R. Janney and H. Arndt, 1992: 23).

2.2 model of the principle of conversation and the contract of conversation

The Conversational Principle draws on the dialogical view essentially to explain how interlocutors can mean more than what they say since "speakers are rational individuals who, all other things being equal, are primarily concerned with the effective transmission of messages" and that the conversational principle assumes that the interlocutor presents his/her verbal contribution as required by the purpose or accepted direction of the conversation in which he participates (Paul H. Grice, op. cit: 44, 45).

Speakers encourage listeners to make an inference through "conversational implication." The implicit conversational concept is triggered by the speaker's disobedience of these rules and is raised by the addressee based on the assumption that the speaker remains committed to the program policy. Interlocutors who appear disobedient to these principles of conversation but still cooperative resort to another set of rules for communication, which, according to Robin Lakoff, are called the "rules of politeness" and, according to Geoffrey N. Leech, the "principle of politeness".

1- Lakoff's rules of politeness

Robin Lakoff is the first to adopt a framework of conversational principles, extending the idea of a grammatical rule and its associated concept of "well – formed" to pragmatics, saying: "We must have some kind of pragmatic rule, which dictates whether an utterance is logically well-formed or not." No, and how perverse it would be if it happened" (Robin Lakoff, 1973: 296).

Robin Lakoff believes that tact is "a tool used to reduce friction in personal interaction". He then proposes two rules for practical efficiency: "Be clear" and "Be polite". He believes that during a conversation, interlocutors use politeness strategies to achieve behavior that makes the addressee feel... Comfortable and creating a positive feeling about the content of communications. Robin Lakoff offers three rules, which are (Ibid: 298):

- A - Do not impose "used in formal/impersonal politeness."
- B- Give options that are "used in informal politeness."
- T- Make the listener feel satisfied. "It is used when it is intimate politeness."

1- Leech's rules of etiquette

Geoffrey N. Leech proposes the principle of politeness that he defines: "It minimizes the expression of impolite beliefs when such beliefs are undesirable or to the detriment of the listener. As such, politeness is aimed at the social end of establishing and maintaining courtesy" (Geoffrey N. Leech Leech, 1983: 104).

Geoffrey N. Leech believes that politeness relates to the relationship between the self and the other, where the word "self" refers to the speaker, and the term "other" applies to the listener. Geoffrey N. Leech distinguishes between "absolute politeness" and "relative politeness". Absolute politeness is the semantic politeness that is essentially linked to the actions of a particular speaker

regardless of the context. Absolute politeness is a bipolar concept that assumes that a particular speech act is either polite or impolite because of its alerting power (Ibid: 83, 84).

As for the conversation contract model the scientist "Bruce Fraser" proposed the conversation contract model, which is the global view of politeness, and it is "a dynamic concept, always open to adaptation and change during the flow of the conversation, with the aim of "working within the terms and conditions of the coordination committee" (Gabriele Kasper, 2009: 161). "Participating in a conversation calls for an initial understanding of rights and obligations that will determine, at least for the initial stages, what participants can expect from others." There is always the possibility that interlocutors will renegotiate the initial rights and obligations that the interlocutors have agreed to, and these rights can describe Obligations as the duty of the interlocutors to hold a conversation (Bruce Fraser, 1990: 232).

Politeness, therefore, means "working within the terms and conditions of the existing conversation contract, and as long as the interlocutors respect the terms and rights agreed upon in the initial stages, they interact politely," and there is always an opportunity to "negotiate intentions and act politely with the interlocutors, because of the possibility of mediation and rearrangement of obligations and rights" (Mohsen Shahrokhi and Farinaz Bidabadi, 2013: 22), and accordingly, politeness is "carrying out the task at hand in light of the terms and conditions of the coordination committee" (Bruce Fraser, op. cit: 233).

2.3 The face-saving model

Linguists Stephen Levinson and Penelope Brown put forward the most influential "face – saving" theory of politeness, which includes three primary concepts for their approach: (Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, 1978: 61– 63):

- 1- Approach communication as a rational procedure.
- 2- Principles of conversation according to Paul H. Grice.
- 3- The concept of the face, according to the scientist Erving Goffman, is "the general self – image that every individual in society wants to claim for himself".

Accordingly, the interactants enjoy rationality, which is "a precisely defined way of thinking from the ends to the means that will achieve those ends," and the interlocutors work on the basis that normal conversation is characterized by rational competence not being deviated without cause. Levinson and "Brown" pointed out that the face has two sides, They are (Ibid: 61):

- 1- The positive face is the consistent positive self – image that interactants demand.
- 2- The negative aspect is the claim of personal positions and rights not to be distracted or to be undermined by others.

Levinson and Brown believe that every individual in society has a social self – image, or "face", which is "the positive social value that a person claims for himself effectively through the line that others assume him to have taken during a given communication." Thus, The face is equivalent to an individual's self – esteem (Yan Huang, 2007: 116), and because of its unstable evaluation that constantly changes, attention must be paid to it during the interaction, and cooperative work in preserving the face depends on the mutual weakness of the face because any person's face can be damaged by speech. Others, each person must show awareness of the faces of others and help defend his own (Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, op. cit: 61).

3. The significance of presidential election campaigns

The election of the American president receives attention as the American people look enthusiastically at the event of entrusting voters to elect the president every four years because the institution of the American presidency means more than just a change in political leadership. The president is the only symbolic leader who can bring together the hopes and fears of the American people about the political future. Accordingly, we divide this section into four parts. The first part is the concept of electoral campaigns. The second part is the nature of debates in presidential campaigns. The third part is the functions of presidential debates. The fourth part is examples of the US presidential debates in 2012.

3.1 The concept of election campaigns

Election campaign activities demonstrate the beliefs of candidates and the method of persuading voters. Belief systems and ideologies are the motivating force in elections, so voting is not only for the candidates but for the set of beliefs held by the candidates, as their personal and leadership areas are reflected in judging the vision of the voters (Stanley A. Renshon, 1998: 377). Representing the presidential campaign process through interviews, advertisements, discussions, and debates, which are considered one of the most important electoral campaign activities as they address the most controversial issues (Aubrey Marks, 2014, 2).

A debate is “a competitive talk activity that involves two sides arguing the merits of a decision in an attempt to convince the judge that their argument is the best” (DJ Brynteson, Rob Baron and Robyn Madson, 2009: 5), and it is an institutionalized discourse of role exchange that reflects the allocation of a specific role and the distribution of roles to participants, The role is often limited to asking and answering questions, emphasizing the unwritten nature of meetings between journalists and interlocutors (Cornelia Ilie, 1999: 978), and debate is not a way to settle differences, but rather a way to control differences (Neill Harvey – Smith, 2011: 1).

3.2 The nature of debates in presidential campaigns

Televised presidential debates are a way for candidates to express themselves in a fair environment. It is the candidates who compete on the debate floor, not the fundraisers, field organizers, or their volunteers. (Aubrey Marks, op. cit, 4) Presidential debates include a variety of communication structures in terms of opening statements, concluding remarks, the nature and quality of refutation, types of questions, and other elements, which are carefully organized by moderators who control the topics, control time, and provide a fair space for the exchange of roles for all competitors, and that the meetings that What occurs between the candidates are not “really” debates, but merely joint press conferences (William L. Benoit, 1999: 2), which are “fake debates,” “a double public press conference for simultaneous interviews” (J. J. Auer, 1962: 142), The audience constitutes a party to the presidential debate event, and is of two types: the audience present in the debate, and the audience not present, watching the televised debates (Richard Savický, 2010: 13).

The presidential system involves a zero – sum game in democratic politics with “winner – takes – all” rules, which are communicative conditions “in which one party’s losses are the other party’s gains”. This game increases the stakes in elections for winners and losers, increases tension and polarization, and observes hostility through issues of image or face and power. (Juan J. Linz, 1985: 7).

Presidential debates involve hostile confrontations of a conflictual nature characterized by attacks on the opponent, which are similar to the battlefield or boxing ring, where the candidate is more appreciative of his ability to eliminate an opponent dialectically through verbal and counter – attack, considering them tools to defend his self – image, so every debater seeks To demonstrate the best communication competence through the use of many linguistic strategies with the aim of gaining the support of the audience (José Luis and Blas Arroyo, 2003: 395).

3.3 Functions of presidential debates

Preferring one candidate over another is based on three functions in presidential campaign rhetoric, namely: “praise, or self – praise, that identifies the candidate’s merits, and attacks that indicate rejection, condemnation, or blame directed at the opponent, and indicate the opponent’s incompetence and inability”, and thus, increases the attack on the opponent's desire to defend, or respond to attacks, falsifies criticism of the opponent, and defenses reduce the alleged costs to the candidate (William L. Benoit and David Airne: 2005: 226).

These categories refer to “message strategies: reinforcement, attack, and refutation”, and “although these three functions may not be equally common in speech, they are three options available for every candidate to use”, and that the reinforcement message strategy answers the question: The question: “Why should a voter support a candidate?” An attack messaging strategy answers the question: “Why doesn’t a voter support the opposing candidate?” A rebuttal messaging strategy answers the question: “Why are the opposing candidate’s attacks wrong or irrelevant?” (Michael Walton Pfau, 1987: 4 – 6).

The three functions affect politicians, as attacks sometimes produce a backlash that leads to negative impressions of the plaintiff instead of the opponent. This is called the “backlash” when candidates attack their opponents on personal issues, as defenses become unfavorable for a candidate in resisting the opponent’s attacks. That is, the candidate's evasion of defense may make him weak, unqualified, or even untrustworthy in front of the public, and this problem appears when the competitors take a long time to respond to the claims of their opponents (Patrizia Catellani and Mauro Bertolotti, 2013: 2).

Fourth paragraph: Examples of US presidential debates in 2012

Excerpt 1

Willard Romney: “And the President pointed out correctly that production of oil and gas in the U.S. is up, but not due to his policies. In spite of his policies. Mr. President, all of the increase in natural gas and oil has happened on private land, not on Government land” (Barack Obama, 2012: 1483).

Governor Willard Romney begins to make comments on former President Barack Obama's statement about the increase of oil and gas in the United States of America, and to refer to the opponent, he uses the honorific title “President” instead of his real name,

in order to show respect towards the opponent, and indicates polite behavior. Negativity towards the opponent is consistent with a negative politeness strategy and indicates undistinguished politeness, as it is conventionally expected in such a context.

"Willard Romney used the adverb to indicate the speaker's agreement with the way he describes the opponent, with the aim of enhancing the positive face of President Barack Obama" by showing the common viewpoints between the competitors. However, it indicates the lack of complete agreement with everything the opponent said, as he A paradoxical coupling, as Willard Romney separated Barack Obama's involvement from any increase in oil production, refuted Barack Obama's claim that his policies were working.

"Willard Romney avoids disagreement in the first part of the statement, as he assumes that the public may agree with the reality of the increase in oil production, but in the second part, he agrees with the public that the increase in oil production is not related to the successful administration of Barack Obama," and to avoid secondary consequences of the disagreement. With the opponent, Willard Romney applies positive, polite behavior by showing his approval and exchanging his opinion with the audience.

"Willard Romney points out in the first statement that the increase in oil is not a result of Barack Obama's policies," and on the contrary, these policies were hindering the progress of the productivity increase. Willard Romney also gave another positive performance for the FAA, showing his hatred and condemnation of the policies of Barack Obama, unwilling to associate these policies with the oil surge.

Excerpt 2

Barack Obama: "Well, think about what the Governor just said. He said, when I took office the price of gasoline was \$1.80, \$1.86. Why is that? ... Because we were about to go through the worst recession since the Great Depression, as a consequence of some of the same policies that Governor Romney is now promoting" (Barack Obama, op. cit: 1498).

Barack Obama used the principled hedging device to mitigate the impact and force of the suggestion against the public. The imperative is interpreted as an indirect speech act, which is a good idea to think about rather than a direct idea. This hedging can change the conclusion from being an imperative to Or suggest, "So Barack Obama" uses negative politeness toward the public to reduce potential coercion that might be imposed on them.

Barack Obama also uses the honorific title "Governor" as a symbolic form of the person opposite to refer to the opponent instead of calling the real person "Willard Romney" in order to show a kind of polite behavior towards the opponent. Negative polite behavior where the speaker uses the negative politeness strategy of "giving respect".

Barack Obama uses the interrogative pattern, the linguistic form of which is to ask a question: "After reporting the Romney allegation when I took office..." as the suggestive force of the utterance may be the force of the suggestion that it is interpreted as something, such as: "Let me tell you "By the reason...", suggesting that superiority of power is assigned to the audience and that the use of the question resembles Barack Obama's negative politeness strategy "questions and hedges" to support the negative face of the audience.

Barack Obama implicitly assumes that what the opponent said is true because the inference about the action is interpreted as something like: "I agree with what Romney said, but let me tell you why," as Barack Obama agreed with his opponent to employ positive, polite behavior towards the opposing candidate.

Barack Obama uses the plural pronoun in answering the question using the positive sign of politeness expressed by Barack Obama to demand common ground and solidarity with the public by showing a desire for participation from members of the population. To perform positive, polite behaviors that support the public face.

Barack Obama moves from defense to counterattack against Romney's claim, suggesting that the worst recession was the result of "wrong" policies similar to those proposed by Romney, and as such, Barack Obama attempted to urge the rival candidate to defend himself and his policies. Negative Polite Behavior.

4. Conclusions

Politeness is considered the basic means used in verbal contexts between individuals and between competitors in the American presidential election campaigns that include the participating candidates and the public, as the candidates rely on acts of linguistic politeness, where the relationship of the candidates with each other differs from the relationship with the audience according to the types of faces that each party possesses. This study has concluded:

- 1- American presidential debates are based on bilateral and multi – directional acts of politeness; that is, the same speech can be directed at different targets at the same time, including the opponent, the audience, or others.
- 2- Presidential debates are based on the conflicting viewpoints of the candidates, which constitute the majority of discussions in terms of the positive and negative aspects of the candidate and the opponent.
- 3- Polite actions reflect the power of persuasion in American presidential debates, as most polite actions towards the opponent are done for the purpose of showing a kind of tact with the aim of convincing the audience.

5. Recommendation

Motivating language professors to study acts of politeness in adversarial contexts, such as presidential debates.

5.1 Study Limitations and Future Research

- 1- Analyzing the American presidential debates requires mastery of most of the words and sentences that are said in speeches, which requires greater focus and linking information from different directions. One of the most prominent obstacles facing the researcher is that the visions differ from those of researchers in analyzing rhetorical texts.
- 2- Researchers can address the pragmatic philosophy in the American elections during the candidacy period and then make a comparison after reaching the presidency, as the general policies of the candidate differ from the implementation process in making promises to voters and in implementing the promises rather than in reality.

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