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Realisation of Impoliteness/Rudeness Strategies in Debates between the President and Opposition
Members of the Georgian Parliament

Abstract:

Politics has become very popular recently and therefore more and more people are concerned with political issues in the modern world. Due to this fact, the issue of impoliteness and rudeness in politics has become increasingly popular as an object of linguistic investigation in recent years. This paper explores impoliteness/rudeness strategies (viewed as an intentional form of face-aggravation caused by verbal and nonverbal means and interactively construed in a particular context, Limberg, 2009) in a specific area of political discourse, namely in parliamentary discourse, analysing the Georgian parliamentary debates as data.

The analysis of the empirical data has proved that the Georgian parliamentary debates are composed of a wide range of impolite and rude vocabulary, often insults and intentional or explicit face-threatening acts (FTAs) which in their turn are realised through a number of means: in particular, offensive accusations, interruptions, mocking remarks, also publicly observable cues such as facial expressions, attention, eye-contact, body posture, gesture, prosodic means (specific intonation patterns, range of the participants' voices and so on).

Key words: parliamentary discourse, impoliteness, face-threatening acts

1. Introduction.

1.1 General Overview

As modern life gets more concerned with political issues, interest in political discourse escalates among many people including linguists. Special attention is paid to the language ploys of politicians, especially members of parliament who are responsible for passing different kinds of laws. The language they use during debates, while gaining an advantage over opposing politicians,

appears to be undoubtedly interesting for political discourse analysis. In addition to this, not only verbal but nonverbal language is increasingly used by politicians to show their superiority and power. This can be considered to be the major reason for linguists to make politics a target point for carrying out a number of researches.

1.2 Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to carry out a linguistic analysis of the Georgian parliamentary discourse that can be considered as a process of joint, real-life interaction consisting of interventions made by several participants involved in a dialogic interaction and are assigned particular institutional roles. Therefore, the paper tries to show how Georgian members of parliament (MPs) employ specific forms of intentional impoliteness (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987) and rudeness strategies, how they attack face and how addressees respond to this offensive act in one of the subgenres of parliamentary discourse, namely, the parliamentary debates. The terms: impoliteness and rudeness are used synonymously, since both concepts refer to “prototypically non-cooperative or competitive behavior, the enactment of which destabilizes the personal relationships... creates and maintains an emotional atmosphere of mutual irreverence and antipathy and is (at least) partially determined by concepts of power, distance and emotional attitudes” (Kienpointner, 2008, pp: 245 - 263).

In this article I intend to analyse the Georgian parliamentary debates from the pragmatic perspective of linguistic politeness theory, viz. the usage of some acts which intrinsically threaten face; these face-threatening acts will be referred to henceforth as FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It should be noted that parliamentary debates are normally regarded as systematic, face-threatening speech events marked by un-parliamentary language and behaviour, as has been shown by Harris (2001) and Ilie (2001, 2003, 2005). These speech events cover a continuum ranging from mitigated acts, such as reproaches, accusations and criticisms, to very strong ones, such as insults.

2. Article structure

The paper is divided into the following sections:

1. Introduction

1.1 General Overview of the paper

1.2 Aims of the study

2 Methodology

3.1 Methods of analysis

3.2 Data collection

3.3 Data analysis

4 Results and Discussion

5 Conclusions

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3. Methodology

3.1 Methods of analysis

In this study the empirical data are analysed with respect to critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1993), conversation analysis (Yule, 2011) and additionally, interpretative and intuitive approaches are taken. Critical discourse analysis is crucial for conducting the given study. CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) is primarily interested and motivated by pressing social issues and therefore, theories, descriptions, methods and empirical work are chosen or elaborated as a function of their relevance for the realisation of such a sociopolitical goal. Since serious social problems are naturally complex, this usually also means a multidisciplinary approach and an account of intricate relationships between text, talk, social cognition, power, society and culture (Van Dijk, 1993 pp: 252 - 253). The given method is widely used in order to interpret and analyse the chosen debates appropriately.

3.2 Data collection

For conducting the study of the Georgian parliamentary debates in respect of using impolite/rude language, confrontation between the opposing members of the parliament and the former president Mikheil Saakashvili held in 2012 was used; more specifically, four-hour parliamentary debates held on February 28, 2012; (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIRxkJtUbP4> or http://www.myvideo.ge/?video_id=1640168); (<http://www.myvideo.ge/v/1639761>)

3.3 Data analysis

Once the empirical data were chosen and collected, all the impolite and rude language markers were identified and recorded; namely, FTAs that threaten the positive image of the addressee, e.g. expressions of disapproval, criticism, accusations, insults (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987) then the collected material (speeches, question and responses, arguments and counter-arguments) was transcribed and translated due to the needs. On the next stage the data were analysed using the fore-mentioned methods.

4. Results and Discussion

In the Georgian parliamentary debates studied here, the opposition members of parliament express different opinions about the unemployment, education and business issues. Hence, the opposition members criticize the government's policy in the above-mentioned spheres and the majority of representatives respond to all the blame explaining the real truth and stance of their policy by giving vivid examples. The participants of the debates are the representatives of the opposition and leading party members, the president and ministers of Georgia being among them. It is necessary to take into consideration that the stance of each MP is not only individual. MPs represent the more or less official position of their parties and, above all, they speak on behalf of the citizens who have voted for them.

Thus, the debates studied here, are interesting from the pragma-linguistic perspective as the language used involves systematic face-threatening speech events, mainly accusations, reproaches, criticisms and insults.

The debates, initiated by one of the MPs from the opposition wing of the Georgian parliament Jondi Bagaturia, is addressed to the president, namely, the MP criticizes the president and the majority of representatives for having worsened the social conditions and having led the people to extreme poverty. The debates cannot be reproduced here in full but I hope that the extracts quoted below will suffice to convey the tone and tenor of the text. All the examples transcribed below in the Georgian language are also translated into English (see footnotes) to be fully understood and interpreted due to the research aims.

Let us consider the following extract in which the MP confronts the president and the government representatives:

(a)

პარლამენტის წევრი: (...) „ახალგაზრდებმა უნდა იცოდნენ, რომ მაღალი ფასები უმაღლეს სასწავლებლებში თქვენს (ხელით მიანიშნებს პრეზიდენტზე) პირად და კომერციულ ინტერესებს ემსახურება“ (...) ბიზნესი მონოპოლიზებულია (...) ... ((შემახილები დარბაზიდან მის შესაჩერებლად))¹

It is vivid that the MP directly accuses the president, without any redressive action and this is achieved by the use of possessive pronoun your + non verbal means (points at the president). The latter shows the speaker's negative evaluation and therefore, he threatens the hearer's positive face through accusations and criticism.

The accusation annoys the majority representative in the parliament hall and that is why they respond to it with paralinguistic means, i.e. jeering/shouting in order to stop the MP.

(b)

პარლამენტის წევრი: ნუ ყვირიხართ... მონოპოლიზებულია ბიზნესი! ბიზნესის ყველა სფერო მონოპოლიზებულია და ამ მონოპოლიას სათავეში უდგას თქვენს მიერ ხელდასმული კლანის მეთაური (...) იხურება წარმოებები და შესაბამისად ასობით ადამიანი კარგავს სამუშაო ადგილებს (...) ბანკები არის სახელმწიფო ჩინოვნიკების საკუთრებაში...((დარბაზიდან მკვეთრი რეაქციები და შემახილები))²

Here the MP continues criticising the leading party members: “All spheres of business are monopolized”... and then again puts blame on the government officials: “Business and jobs are the

¹ The youth must know that the high fees at the universities serve to your (points at the president) personal and commercial interests... Business is monopolized... (Jeering from the hall to stop him)

² Don't shout... All spheres of business are monopolized ...Every monopoly is led by the so-called “clan leaders” appointed by you. The factories are being closed and accordingly, hundreds of people are losing their jobs... Business and jobs are the privilege of only, only the government high-ranking officials; banks are owned mainly by government placemen (...)

privilege of only, only the government high-ranking officials"... The accusation aimed at the government is strengthened through the use of highlighted repetition. This heated criticism is interesting as it manifests impolite language, such as, "clan leaders" and "government placemen" that is followed by loud shouting/jeering and expressions of disapproval from the hall.

(c)

პარლამენტის წევრი: ნუ ყვირით...(..) ↑ ნუ ყვირით (..)

It is worth noting that while analysing a spoken text we should take prosodic means into account in particular, specific intonation patterns, and meaningful variations of pitch. In the above-given example the MP himself (not the Speaker) is trying to stop the audience which is achieved by rising intonation and high pitch level. It should also be noted that generally the parliament speaker calls for order but in the given situation the MP himself does this with the help of non-verbal means, namely hand movement.

(d)

*პრეზიდენტი: დაასრულებინეთ (..) აცადეთ, გამოხატოს თავისი აზრები(..)
((რონნიულად იღიმება)) ეს არის დემოკრატია (...)³*

The involvement of the president is important here once he uses his institutional power and asks the audience to give the opposition member time to finish his arguments. At the same time it is noticeable that the president tries to save his public self-image/ face that is achieved by reminding people of "the principles" of democracy. The last point to pay attention to in this example is one of the linguistic realisations of off-record strategy, namely irony. The latter is shown through a non-verbal action, viz. ironical smile.

(e)

პარლამენტის წევრი: (...) და ბოლოს (...) ((შეძახილები დარბაზიდან))... დღეს მე გამოვხატე ჩემი ხალხის აზრი(...) ჩემი დრო ამოიწურა და შესაბამისად გითმობთ მოედანს (..) გააგრძელეთ დემოკრატიობანას და დებატობანას თამაში (..) ⁴

³ Let him finish... Let him express his opinions...((Smiles ironically)) This is a democracy...

((გადის დარბაზიდან))

The given extract clearly depicts one of the most particularly distinctive characteristics of parliamentary debates, namely, interventions or interruptions that can be considered as spontaneous verbal reactions of MPs who interrupt the current speaker. In this case the interruptions consist of exclamations of disapproval and due to this, the MP has to split the sentence into several parts and wait until the audience calms down. It should be noted that during his seven-minute speech the MP uses approximately eleven non-verbal implications addressing the president and the majority members of the parliament. These interruptions can obviously be considered as a threat to the speaker's positive face. Apart from the linguistic device of repetition, the demonstrated extract is important since the MP speaks on behalf of the people having voted for his party and this mood is obviously highlighted through the use of possessive pronoun my: "opinion of my people"... It should also be noted that in his final words: "Go on playing the game of democracy and debating", the MP gives a clear implication that he does not care about addressee's positive face, moreover, he employs ironic remarks accompanied by aggressive sarcasm.

(f)

*პრეზიდენტი: მე მინდა ვუთხრა უმრავლესობის წარმომადგენლებს, რომ მეგობრებო, დემოკრატია არის ხელოვნება უსმინო აბსოლუტურ ტყუილებს (..) და ამ მასხარას, რომელიც ახლა აქ საუბრობდა თავისი ერთი სიტყვისაც კი არ ჯერა (...)*⁵

In his address to the audience the president goes on record i.e. he baldly indicates that everything mentioned by the opposition member is a mere lie and nothing more. It should be noted as well that the president does threaten the MP's positive face by accusing him of telling 'absolute lies' whilst the use of an intensifying adjective 'absolute' gives extra emphasis to the accusation. Here we can also identify one of the strongest FTAs, in particular, insult/abuse. The president goes on record and baldly threatens the hearer's positive face while calling the latter a clown. In this case the president

⁴ Today I have expressed the opinion of my people... It is time for me to finish and accordingly, I am ceding the ground to you...Go on playing the game of democracy and debating...

⁵ I simply would like to tell the representatives of the majority party that democracy is also the art to listen to absolute lies...The clown who has been speaking here, of course does not believe in a word he says...

reveals out-of-control or violent emotions as he uses an extremely insulting strategy (direct insult) while attacking the member of the opposition party (Brown & Levinson 1987; pp: 65 - 69).

Thus, the above-shown heated exchange is a manifestation of a significant amount of FTAs, therefore, they undoubtedly serve as an example of an impolite, rude and aggressive discourse of both sides: the speaker and the hearer.

We can also analyse other MPs' debates proving that the given parliamentary debates are extremely dynamic and loaded with a sufficient amount of impolite and rude verbal as well as non-verbal strategies.

Let us consider the following extract from the debate of another opposition representative:

(g)

პარლამენტის წევრი: „(..) თქვენს წარმოსახვით საქართველოში ყველა ბედნიერი და კმაყოფილია, ყველა მადლიერია პრეზიდენტის და მთავრობის, მაგრამ თქვენ გავიწყდებათ, რომ არსებობენ რეალური ადამიანები რეალური პრობლემებით... მათ შიათ, სწყურიათ...“⁶

It is worth noting that here the MP uses epithet “imaginary Georgia” to depict the stance of the country and criticizes the government for not creating jobs for ordinary people. His position is enhanced by the personal dimension through the use of the repetition of intensifying adjectives namely, “real_people with real problems”. The latter gives special emphasis to the MP's argument and therefore, does threaten the president's positive face through sharp criticism. He enhances the personal dimension through the use of the adverb “personally”, which highlights the veracity of the facts, on the one hand, and relies on his personal experience on the other.

The study of the empirical data (The whole debate is not fully transcribed in the given article) reveals that the language used by the opposing parliament members in arguments/counter-

⁶ In your imaginary Georgia, everybody is happy and pleased... Everybody is grateful to the president and the government but you forget that there are real people with real problems.. They are hungry, they are thirsty...

arguments mainly consists of verbal as well as non-verbal means, more specifically, an impolite attitude is revealed through:

1. Adjectives with direct negative meaning, such as populist, irresponsible, corrupted, insulting, impolite, authoritative, anti-national, monopolist etc.
2. Nouns and phrases expressing negative attitude: liar, clown, clan leader, placeman etc.
3. Non-verbal signals, expressed with body language, namely, aggressive posture, shrugging, hand movements while addressing the hearer or interrupting the speaker, eye rolling and ironical smile.

5. Conclusions

Having studied some of the recorded data from the Georgian parliamentary debates it can be concluded that the study brings to the surface the ritualized dimension of such debates, where questions from opposition parliamentarians are usually meant to attack the government for what they have (or have not) achieved, while questions from parliamentarians supporting the government usually encourage ministers to create a positive impression of the governmental work and themselves. As has been suggested by Franklin & Norton (1993), it seems that oral questions are asked primarily where the MP considers some publicity is desirable and therefore, aims to embarrass the opponent and intentionally threaten the hearer's image/face.

The main point to be mentioned refers to the usage of high level of criticism and aggression, constant usage of prosodic and para-verbal features, acute expressions of disapproval, impoliteness and accusations. However, it should be considered that the usage of the last face-threatening act is particularly interesting since in the Georgian parliament accusations of lying are not sanctioned unless being extremely harmful.

Based on the given picture it can be said that the study could serve as a starting point for further studies of the Georgian parliamentary debates and thus, some more sufficient researches can be carried out to trace the latest developments in the field.

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Nana Gilauri gained her Master's degree in English Philology at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University in 2006 and since 2007 she has been working at Tbilisi State University as an English language teacher. Currently Nana is working on her PhD thesis in the field of British and Georgian parliamentary discourses. Therefore, her research interests include pragmatics and sociolinguistics with respect to political discourse.