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IIMPOLITENESS IN POLITICAL DEBATES BY GEORGIAN POLITCAL LEADERS

Abstract

The main goal of this ongoing research is to identify the ways, both linguistic (verbal) and supralinguistic (non-verbal) utilised by Georgian female political leaders when building up their identities in the process of TV debates. For this, the research relies on two theoretical sources: a genre-specific approach to political debate shows and the role of impoliteness in the process of construing the identity of the leader.

Key words: *Politians, female leaders, debates, face attack, (im-)politness*

INTRODUCTION

The fact that female politicians frequently employ masculine politeness strategies when conducting political debates has already been stated (Rusieshvili-Cartledge, 2017).

In addition, as shown by another research (Totibadze, 2016), female political leaders employ masculine metaphors as frequently as their male counterparts. The reason for this is considered to be the desire to impress their followers and persuade them that female leaders are as strong as their male counterparts.

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It is known that the post-Brown and Levinson approach to (im)politeness, which is referred to as "contestable" (Harris, 2007), or "post-modern" (Tekourafi, 2005) differs from the original theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987) in several aspects. Firstly, it considers (im)politeness as a form of social practice which has to be contested and in which participants of the discourse make assessments concerning what is polite or impolite (Harris, 2007; Eelen, 2001; Watts, 2003; Mills, 2003). Secondly, (im)politeness is looked upon as not enacted, within discourse (Culpeper, Bousefield and Wichmann (2003); Culpeper (2005).

Another concept of (im) politeness is frequently associated with is that of intentionality/unintentionality. According to Culpeper (Culpeper, 2005) "impoliteness comes about when (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally and (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination". (1) And (2) (Culpeper, 2005: 38). In addition to this, there is still no final agreement about which term would be the most appropriate to characterize intentionally offensive utterances (Bluefield, 2010).

On the other hand, Blitvich (Blitvich, 2010) maintains that the genre approach to the analysis of impoliteness can be used as the theoretical foundation for the exploration of intergroup, polylogic, mediated communication. According to this approach, following Fairclough (Fairclough, 2013), the genre is understood as a real locus of relational work. In addition, impoliteness is claimed to be the driving force behind one of the institutional genres, news interviews and is referred to as "news as confrontation", whose communicative goal is to reaffirm a view of the world. (Bitvich, 2010)

It should also be mentioned that one of the central concepts of the politeness theory, "face" is frequently seen as intentionally and discursively constructed and emerging in interaction (Airedale, 2006; Terkourafi, 2008). Furthermore, assessments of (im)politeness can be connected to the notion of identity, as well as the notion of face. The individual face is connected with I-identity and social face stems from we-identity (Blitvich, 2010: 59) and impoliteness may ensue when the identities and positioning that speakers are trying to construct are not verified by their interlocutors.

Genre Characteristics of Political Debates

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The fact that hosts and participants of political shows on TV engage themselves in a certain type of verbal performance has been attracting considerable attention. For instance, while discussing forms of conversational violence in political TV debates, Luginbuhl defines an act of conversational violence as a drastic restriction of the individual's conversational rights which may affect the speaker's conversational efficiency. In addition, the author distinguishes between two types of conversational violence: structural and personal. According to the author, in the case of structural conversational violence, "restriction of the speaker's rights is legitimised by the existence of conversational rights and options associated with the conversational role" (whereas in the case of personal conversational violence, the speaker clearly exceeds their conversational rights and obligations (Luginbuhl, 2007:13). Recent studies (Stubbeet al, 2000; Rusieshvili-Cartledge, 2017) agree that together with gender, interactional styles may also be influenced by "an intricate web of factors such as nation, culture, ethnicity, social class, and age as well as contextual norms and power differences between the participants" (Ladegaard, 2012). Following the same direction, having studied the speech of Hong Kong female leaders, Lindergaard (2012) concludes that they are also keen to use normatively masculine speech style. The same is confirmed by Totibadze (2016), who compared the speeches of two British female and two male Prime Ministers from the point of view of employment of gendered metaphors, and revealed that female politicians, like their male counterparts, also use masculine metaphors more frequently as feminine metaphors.

While exploring the genre of news interviews "news as confrontation" Blitvich discusses the function of impoliteness in cases of intergroup, polylogic, mediated communication (Blitvich 2009: 83-84). Furthermore, Blitvich argues that impoliteness is the driving force behind the "new" news interviews and singles out the features of this genre. Specifically, it is maintained that at the level of the relationship between interviewee and interviewer, impoliteness manifests itself both at the lexico-grammatical level and interactionally (Blitvich 2009: 84) and is employed to create rapport between the politicians and the overhearing audience. This research has revealed that the political debates on Georgian TVchannels can also be considered to be the "politial debates as open confrontation", as they follow the characteristic features singled out by Blitvich descussing the genre specifics of the "news as confrontation".

The Data and Methodology

The data for this research were extracted from the shows broadcast on the Georgia TV channels: First Channel, Rustavi 2, TVPirveli and Imedi TV. The research described in this article is based on the relevant empirical data taken from several sources: materials of parliamentary (2016) and presidential elections in Georgia (2018) in the format of debates in political talk shows transmitted on both governmental and oppositional channels (altogether six hours of transcribed speeches). In this article, extracts with one of the female leaders taking part in debates, were analysed.

The methodological framework of this article, as described above, is based on the approach which connects impoliteness, face and identity (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2009; 2010; 2013; amongst others). In this context, identity is defined as a social positioning of self and other built by both parties of the communicative act - the constructor and the interlocutor (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; Joseph, 2004). The extracts were analysed based on the following criteria: 1. what can be the genre characteristics of TV-debates on Georgian TV? 2. What is the function of impoliteness and how is it connected with the process of construing identity of the political leader? Particular attention was paid to the employment of masculine strategies by the female leaders.

The data were analysed at two levels-linguistic and para-linguistic (gestures and prosodic features).

Extract 1

This extract is taken from the show "Arena" on the public Channel 1. It is led by a professional journalist whose function is to moderate the show and to make sure that each of the participants is allotted equal time. Another characteristic feature of this genre of show is that the debaters are selected, invited and agreed on by the prospective candidates of the debates themselves; The move of the show is as follows: each of the candidates has one minute to present themselves and then is given two minutes for each question initiated by the journalist or the opposing candidate(s). Therefore, both the moderator and the participants have equal rights to ask questions. The final part of the show includes one more interesting move, specifically, that debates finish by the candidates addressing their voters (i.e overhearing audience) about their plans concerning their political activities.

In the following extract, the female leader A debates with two male colleagues from two opposing parties.

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1. *A: During all this pre-election period, none of [you]have ever asked*

2. *questions to each other. It seems tome that they have qustions only for me.*

3. *I am interested what makes you different. Are you two parties or one?*

4. *When I asked to invite two representatives of two parties, both of you just burst into here.*

5. *I find it strange that these two men have been teaching me how to be polite*

6. *for two months and the listener knows this well too ....*

7. *But I will emphasize this that both of these parties used the most offensive words*

8. *they found in the Georgian language against me.*

9. *If I refer to them otherwise than "they" it will not be offensive for them.*

In this extract the female political candidate for presidency debates with her two male opponents (leaders of two opposition parties). As a whole, during the show, she tries to convince the overhearing audience that she is a European leader fighting against the candidates who come from the Soviet era. In this particular extract, she starts her question time by attacking and therefore, not verifying her opponents' identities as fair and independent leaders. Specifically, in line 1 she tries to accuse the opponents of asking only her questions and moreover, she emphasises the fact that she asked for opponents from two political parties and instead she got politicians from one and the same party. This is a direct face-attack on the opponents who used to be members of one ruling party, which later split into two parties., As well as this,   by asking this question (line 3 and 4) Speaker A attacks both the politically independent party identity of her opponents and their positive face. In addition, as was mentioned above, this flow of thought is initiated by the question (lines 1-2) when she protests against the fact that neither of the opponents had any questions for each other but both of them attacked her. From this point of view, she presents herself as a victim, attacked by two rivals from one and the same background.

Next, Speaker A (line 4) makes the claim of the sameness of the opponents even stronger. Next, she directly attacks the opponents by referring to them as "bursting" (shemovardit) into the studio (this word in Georgian implicates violence, entering by force, breaking in). This feeling is further strengthened by a referring to the opponents as "two men" and by the pronoun "they", instead of using their names and honorifics, which would be appropriate to the situation (lines 5-9) and,

despite the sanctioned impoliteness, accepted by this genre of interviews, will be considered to be impolite.

These verbal means are further strengthened by non-verbal means of communication. Specifically, speaker A refuses to maintain eye-contact and generally tends to discard the opponents. She either looks down, into the camera or beyond it. This can also be considered to be a face attack to the opponent's positive, social group identity of independent and worthy leaders.

This feeling is heightened by lines 4-5 in which the opponents are accused of telling lies to the population. Therefore, Speaker A does not verify positive identities of her opponents and tries to attack them using every opportunity. All of these strategies can be considered to be a constitutive part of political debates, which is charcaterised by strategic, sanctioned impoliteness employed as a strategy aiming at establishing rapport with the followers and meeting their demands and expectations. By selecting the questions and verbal-non-verbal means of interaction, Speaker A "works" for her followers and communicates her stance to them. Although impoliteness is sanctioned in this genre of political shows, it still arises when the limits are violated and therefore, it is not neutralised.

Below there are extracts from the same show: (Speaker A. is the female candidate for the presidency and Speaker B is a member of an opposition party).

Extract 2

Speaker A: *[Addresses one of her co-detebers]*
1. *It must have been difficult for you to read and understand my brochure.*
2. *While working [abroad] I worked in NATO, in NATO's*
3. *"shtab kvartira"(Headquarters in Russian) (looks at one of the candidates meaningfully and smiles).*

In extract N2, A refers to the Russian word (shtab kavrtira) which had been used by one of the male counterparts earlier. By doing so, Speaker A directly refers to the background of her opponent associated with Russia and directly ridicules him, damaging his positive identity as a democratic, independent leader. The similar face-attack is performed in the extract below:

1. *A. I will answer this funny question*

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2. *B. It is not funny, kalbatono A*

3. *A: I find it funny. (Smiles).*

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The research issues this article addresses are the following: (a) linguistic and extra-linguistic means used while attacking the face of the opponent and responding to them, (b) reasons behind the face-attack and their connection to gender and genre specifics (c) consistency in using "feminine" or "masculine" styles in debates. "Extra-linguistic means" in this case are prosodic strategies employed by the speakers (pitch of the voice, tempo, intonation patterns and so on) which add contextual hints to the stretch of the discourse as well as their facial expressions and gestures. Luginbuhl states that in political discourse acts used in everyday conversation are transformed into the staged acts of conversational violence performed as part of the political role (Luginbuhl, 2007). In this way, Speaker A constructs her positive identity at the expense of non-verifying her opponents' positive identities and therefore damaging their face and assigning them only negative identities. This is necessary for her to convince her voters she is as strong as her male counterparts.

Generally, Georgian political debates/ shows can be considered to be one of the places (besides street demonstrations and manifestations) where systematic impoliteness in the form of ritualistic, sanctioned face attack is practised and participants of the debates pursue "staged" conversational violence to persuade the electorate to vote for them. In order to be successful, political leaders have to convince the voters that they are sound enough and strong enough to fulfill their expectations and keep their pre-election promises. In this respect, it can be argued that the female political leaders in Georgia face more acute challenges than their male counterparts.

Being women, they need more verbal and non-verbal efforts to persuade the prospective voters that they are capable of acting as a leader. In order to build up and secure this image, the female leaders repeatedly employ "masculine" conversational strategies and choose systematic impoliteness and conversational violence while debating with their opponents: hence, one of the leader's comment ("I am not going to have a debate with weak women"(Rusieshvili-Cartledge, 2017). As the data of this research have shown, while performing the face attack by committing conversational violence,

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Georgian female leaders address the individual as well as group face of the opponent. While doing so, they employ direct and indirect accusations, criticism, contempt, irony, and sarcasm manifested by (a) lexical means loaded with negative connotation though within the frames of political correctness, (b) expressive means (irony, metaphors, etc). Extra-linguistic means include interruption of turn-taking in the debate, aggressive tones, gestures, ironic facial expressions, and sarcastic smiles.

Mediated political debates on Georgian TV channels can also be considered to be cases of open confrontation with sanctioned impoliteness which is employed as a constitutive of the genre to create the rapport between the politician and the overhearing audience.

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