

## Impoliteness in Some American Presidential Debates: A Pragmatic Study

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### Abstract

The current research is concerned with a pragmatic study of attack and defense acts that are used by President Donald Trump in the American Presidential Debate in 2020. Attack is an attempt to harm or defeat someone, and it is a bold message that the speaker or attacker does not like or disagree with the other antagonist. On the contrary, defense means a person responds to an attack of his or her opponent. After an attack, the politician either negates or fact-checks claims made by his opponents or tries to set the record straight. By the end of the study, it is expected to answer the following questions: What are the most frequent strategies of attack and defense that utilized by President Trump to formulate his speech? What are the reasons behind Trump's attacks and the usage of impoliteness strategies? This research aims to show the negative impact of Trump's attack and the positive impact of defense on the audience who watch him and whether the President is succeeded in his defense against the attacker or not .

In light of the abovementioned aims, the research hypothesizes that: first, there are some reasons that motivate presidents to use attack and defense in the political debates. Second, President Trump uses attack acts more than the others during the debate. Third, the strategies of impoliteness are used clearly by President Donald Trump than the other president who discusses him. In order to achieve the aims and verify the validity of the hypotheses of the research, the researcher has adopted a model based on Culpeper's (1996 –2005) "impoliteness strategies".

Before starting to analyze the data, it is shown the difference between attack and defense acts, the debates, and the background of Trump under the title theoretical framework. Then, a quantitative and qualitative of research analysis with an overview of the methodology.

**Keywords:** Attack, defense, presidential debates, opponent, politician ,bold message, claims

### *Section One: Introduction*

Language is a tool of communication. As a result, the user of the language has access to a wide amount of language methods associated with various language functions that are employed for the purpose of communicating. In fact, language varies depending on the nature of the community and the types of people who use it, as well as their goals, attitudes, circumstances, and their origins. Pragmatics is a body of knowledge about language that focuses on aspects of the language. Pragmatics is closely linked to the language used as a verbal exchange in a

conversation that may include many utterances. Pragmatics is a body of knowledge about language that focuses on aspects of the language. Pragmatics is closely linked to the language used as a verbal exchange in a conversation that may include many utterances .

Accordingly, the present study shows the role of language in Trump's speech in identifying the use of impoliteness strategies according to Culpeper's model (1996 – 2005) .The current chapter illustrates the main problem of the study by asking some questions that seek to be answered. Then, the researcher shows the aims and the hypotheses listed followed by the procedures to reach such aims and validate such hypotheses. Finally, the limits of the study followed by the significance of the study are specified .

## ***Section Two: Theoretical Framework***

### ***2.1 The Concept of Impoliteness***

Language is a cultural phenomenon that allows humans to communicate knowledge, views, opinions, desires, threats, instructions, gratitude, promises, declarations, and emotions, among other things. As a result, one of the key subjects of research that has gained a lot of interest is the study of impoliteness. Impoliteness researchers, on the other hand, have only lately emerged in comparison to politeness research, which has a lengthy history. Lachenicht (1989), Culpeper (1996, 2005), Bousfield (1997), and Kienpointner's work in this area have all proven to be noteworthy (1998). Goffman is regarded as the father and inventor of the impoliteness phenomenon, according to Bax and Kadar (2012:14). Similarly, Jamel and Jobert link impoliteness to Goffman's (1967) concept of face, using the term 'insult' as an example (2012:16).

The Face Threatening Act (FTA), as defined by Brown and Levinson (1987), is related to particular sorts of activities fundamentally threatening the face (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 65). FTAs are categorized based on the type of face threatened (positive or negative) and whether the threat is directed towards the listener's or speaker's face (Ibid: 65-68). Requests, for example, threaten the listener's negative face; attacks, on the other hand, target the listener's positive face; and thanks, on the other hand, threaten the speaker's negative face.

### ***2.2 Theories of Impoliteness***

According to Bousfield and Locher (2008: 82), there are some theories of impoliteness: in this study, Culpeper's (1996, 2005) theory is analyzed. The role of the S (speaker) in perceiving impolite behavior is confirmed by Culpeper (Levorvato, 2009: 64). Austin's approach, on the other hand, ignores the role of the S and instead focuses on the role of the H (hearer) and how it evaluates a sentence as polite or impolite.

Culpeper illustrates the difference between politeness and impoliteness in his book 'Language and Characterization', "The essential distinction between politeness and impoliteness is a matter of intention: whether the speaker intends to

defend face (politeness) or to attack it (impoliteness)," he argues (Culpeper,2001: 246). Impoliteness defines from a different angle in which impoliteness is seen as "communicative acts perceived by members of a social community to be purposefully offensive behavioral" (Tracy & Tracy's as cited in Esmaeel, 2016: 26).

### **2.3 Strategies of Impoliteness**

Culpeper expands on his (1996) model in 2005, shifting the focus away from deliberate face-attack and toward the concept of cultural context. He still acknowledges Brown and Levinson's PT even after his model's (2005) realization (1996: 91). Impoliteness can be developed and accepted through five super strategies, according to Culpeper. It's as follows:

#### **2.3.1 Bald on Record Impoliteness**

Whenever a speaker is attempting to damage the listener's face, this strategy is used, and the impolite utterance is delivered immediately and explicitly (Bousfield, 2008: 92). In contrast to FTA, Culpeper uses the term 'facial-attack-act' (FAA) to describe a face attack in which the speaker has an intentional intent (Mullany & Stockwell,2010: 71).

#### **2.3.2 Positive Impoliteness**

This strategy is typically employed to weaken the listener's positive attitude (his desire to be accepted) (Bousfield & Locher,2008: 134).

#### **2.3.3 Negative Impoliteness**

This strategy tends to appeal to the listener's negative desire (his wish to be liberated from restrictions) (Thielemann & Kosta,2013: 239). According to Culpeper's (2005) definition (quoted in Mullany & Stockwell,2010: 72), negative impoliteness encompasses the following sub-strategies:

- a. Scorn
- b. Frighten
- c. Ridicule
- d. And physically or metaphorically invade the listener's space.

#### **2.3.4 Mock or Sarcasm Impoliteness**

The addresser utilizes impoliteness strategies that are untrue to perform the FTA in his approach (Thielemann & Kosta,2013: 239). Furthermore, sarcasm means the usage of more than one sub-strategies that appear to be appropriate and acceptable on the surface but has the exact opposite meaning deep down (Bousfield, 2008: 95).

#### **2.3.5 Withhold Politeness**

This strategy is used when a speaker fails to show politeness in situations where it is anticipated, such as when the addresser fails to express gratitude or thank the listener (Thielemann & Kosta,2013: 239).

### **2.4 Functions of Impoliteness**

Culpeper outlines three functions of impoliteness in his recent book "Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence" (2011). These types all can

contradict interpersonal connections, identities, and social standards. They are as follows:

#### **2.4.1 Affective Impoliteness**

In this kind of impoliteness, the speaker exposes his anger towards the hearer and this consequently generates a negative emotional atmosphere between the speaker and the hearer (Huang,2014: 150).

#### **2.4.2 Coercive Impoliteness**

This is a type of impoliteness that causes a mismatch between the addresser or the producer and the addressee who is called the target, allowing the speaker to profit from the hearer's facial desires. This form of impoliteness, according to Culpeper, is more typical in conditions where the addresser is on a stronger and more powerful social level than the addressee. To summarize, this type of impoliteness is a language-based strategy for gaining authority (Culpeper,2011: 252).

#### **2.4.3 Entertaining Impoliteness**

When a speaker makes fun of the hearer and uses the target's emotions for entertainment, this type of impoliteness is generated (Culpeper,2011: 253).

### **2.5 American Presidential Debate**

The presidential debate is considered a sub-genre of political speech because of its unique context. Presidential debates, according to Chilton (2004: 72-73), contain political context and traditional political history reference that the audience is familiar with. Debate is a vital part of the political system in the United States, as it is to the destiny of American politicians. Debate is a classic feature of presidential campaigns, and many academics and political candidates consider it as an effective action in the process of political communication since presidential debates reach a large audience or viewers (Kaid & Bacha,2008: 159).

According to Bahm et al. (2004: 38), the most well-known political election debate in American history occurred in 1858 between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas for the position of United States Senator. However, in 1960, it was the first time that all of the networks that carried the debate witnessed a presidential debate face to face in public. This event is described as a successful movement in the political campaign's career (Kaid & Bacha,2008: 160). Americans, on the other hand, elect a new president every four years in a public electoral process. Four debates between the candidates must take place before the process. There are three of them for presidential candidates and one for vice presidential nominees (Nozica,2013: 2).

### **Section Three: Methodology**

Debate is one of the main central concepts in this study because investigating impoliteness strategies are expressed in the political discourse. Various texts are analyzed, all of them are taken from the debate on the internet and talks about the important debate between the two politicians Trump and Biden. The researcher divides the analysis into mixed methods, quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research, on the other hand can be utilized to depict events that can be

measured (Kothari,2004: 3). Qualitative research, on the one hand, is concerned with qualitative phenomena, and those that are associated to or incorporate value or kind (Kothari,2004: 3).

January 20, 2017, President-elect Donald Trump will be sworn in as the 45<sup>th</sup> governor of the US. He has repeatedly stated that he will overturn several of President Barack Obama's and his administration's main policy decisions, particularly concerning trade negotiations, the Iran deal, relations with Russia and China, terrorism, and other issues .On January 20, 2017, President-elect Donald Trump will be sworn in as the 45<sup>th</sup> governor of the US. He has repeatedly stated that he will overturn several of President Barack Obama's and his administration's main policy decisions, particularly concerning trade negotiations, the Iran deal, relations with Russia and China, terrorism, and other issues. The most representative texts are chosen to be analyzed. Twenty speeches of President Trump are chosen according to impoliteness strategies. Finally, the data is analyzed to determine if the hypotheses are rejected or confirmed.

#### **Section Four: Data Analysis**

This section investigates the use of impoliteness strategies used by President Donald Trump during the *American Presidential Debates 2020*. So, the researcher analyzes the types of impoliteness that are found in Trump's speech by using the existing data and some texts in the following table. The impoliteness strategies are: *bald on record*, *positive impoliteness*, *negative impoliteness*, *sarcasm or mock impoliteness*, and *withhold politeness*. The following texts of President Trump are analyzed according to Culpeper's model of impoliteness strategies, sub-strategies and functions which are '*affective*', '*coercive*' and '*entertaining*': five texts are presented which utilized by President Donald Trump during his second debate with Joe Biden in 2020.

##### **Text (1)**

**Trump: "It is not guaranteed but it will be by the end of the year, but I think it has a good chance."**

On the analysis of Trump's political speech with his counterpart, Joe Biden and concerning the coronavirus pandemic, *positive impoliteness* is used to defend his policy. Trump says "*he isn't guarantee*" that the vaccine of the virus will be available soon due to so many obstacles. As a result, Trump states that he cannot promise or agree that the vaccine can be used fast. He denies making the statement, hence the statement '*is not guarantee*' positive impoliteness because ambiguous statements cause people to be puzzled and unsure.

Trump's speech is performed to hurt the listener's positive face. His speech affects the audience to be doubtful about Biden's claim as the president of the United States. Trump's criticism can be seen is conveyed in the form a *positive impoliteness strategy*. When President Donald Trump suggests a coronavirus vaccine, he uses the sub-strategy of '*seeking disagreement*' which is a *positive*

*impoliteness strategy*. In this case, Trump expresses his emotions, disagreement and opinions so that his speech belongs to *an affective function* of impoliteness.

### **Text (2)**

**Welker: “let me talk about”**

**Trump: “Excuse me.”**

According to Culpeper's model of impoliteness, the textual analysis of the current text shows that Trump uses *a bald on record impoliteness* during the discussion with his counterpart, Joe Biden. Trump seems unconcerned about Biden's face and believes his act is unimportant to perform so he interrupts him when the presenter direct a question to Biden. This text is considered as '*interrupting and pausing*' sub strategy of *a bald on record impoliteness*. When Biden asks him a previous statement "*when the last time Trump said that the Coronavirus was dangerous?*" The presenter, Walker interrupts the discussion after Joe Biden already has expressed his viewpoint, but Trump wants to reply to Biden's comment with the term "**Excuse me**". Trump chooses to interrupt Walker's speech immediately because he wants to convey his opinion. Because it is direct, "**Excuse me**" falls into *the bald on record impoliteness*. In response to Biden, Trump interrupts and delays Welker's speech. As a result, Trump's speech has *an affective function* to show uncontrollable feelings in his interruption to Biden.

### **Text (3)**

**Trump: “No, I think my timeline is going to be more accurate.”**

In the above text, the interlocutor, Welker asks Trump about a vaccine if it comes soon because the Americans will wear masks to protect themselves. Trump answers by the word "**No**", which is considered as a refusal statement. Trump expresses his disapproval with these words mentioned-above. The text has positive impoliteness because rejects the interlocutor's opinion and refuses to acknowledge the presence and views of the other contender. When Trump doesn't treat Biden like a normal person, he engages in positive impoliteness.

Trump expresses his disagreement as a means of defense of Biden's attacks and accusations by using the word "**No**", so this speech is considered as a sub-strategy of '*seek disagreement*'. In addition, Trump conveys his feelings and ideas strongly, so his speech falls under *the affective function* of impoliteness because he conveys his strong emotions and feelings strongly to the audience and attendees.

### **Text (4)**

**Biden: “I did not say either of those things.”**

**Trump: “you certainly did.”**

According to the political discourse analysis, the words "**you certainly did**" is a *negative impoliteness* strategy. In this line, Trump expresses his thoughts and opinions concerning the highways of being closed, that is a bad work. As a result, he uses rudeness, scorn, and ridicule against Joe Biden. In the dialogue above, Biden protests to Trump's claim of getting money from foreign countries,

but Trump attacks him by accusing him that he certainly takes the money to be a President and win the elections. Trump's speech is determined as *negative impoliteness* because Trump makes a comment that hurts Biden's reputation. Trump seems to be attacking Biden's negative face.

According to the above text, Trump uses '*Condescend, scorn or ridicule*' sub-strategy of impoliteness because he intended to insult and scorn the other candidate by making the audience disbelieve him. Trump's words have a *coercive function*, in that they elicit his uncontrollable emotions to Joe. '*Disassociating and scorning the others*' is the reality of *negative impoliteness* from the dialogue above. People's perceptions of Joe are negatively impacted by Donald's speech. Others may believe Joe is unfit to be a president of the US.

#### **Text (5)**

**Trump: "I take full responsibility. It is not my fault that it comes here. It is China's fault. You know what, it is not Joe's fault that it come here either. It is China's fault."**

Donald Trump's reaction to the coronavirus in this text is very emotional. Trump accuses China of being selfish since it controls all entry points into the country but permits all exits. Thus, Trump is furious with China, which he claims is spreading the virus outside of China, even to the United States. Trump attacks China by accusing it of spreading the virus in the air and causes the death of many lives in the United States and in the world. In this speech, Trump attacks Biden in an impolite and a negative way by associating Biden with a fault of China although his saying "**it is not Joe's fault..... it is China's fault....**". Therefore, Trump uses the sub-strategy of '*explicitly associating the other with a negative aspect*' of a *negative impoliteness strategy* that occurs in the discussion between the two politicians. Donald associates Joe with negative aspects explicitly. Thus, Trump's speech has the *affective function* to link his negative emotions and aspects of coronavirus with China.

**Table (4.1) Results of Impoliteness strategies in Trump's Speech**

<b>Strategies of Impoliteness</b>		
<b>Strategies of Impoliteness</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Bald On Record Impoliteness	3	11%
Positive Impoliteness	8	30%
Negative Impoliteness	11	41%
Sarcasm Or Mock Impoliteness	5	18%
Withhold Impoliteness	0	0%
Total	27	100%

From table (4.1), one can notice the *negative impoliteness* strategy has the highest number of occurrences which occurs (11) times and constituents about (41%) of the total number of impoliteness strategies and this is because American president Donald Trump uses negative impoliteness to attack his opponent, Joe Biden. Trump attacks President Joe Biden by scorning, condescending, and associating the other with a negative aspect. *Positive impoliteness* occurs (8) times at a percentage of (30%). Then, sarcasm or mock impoliteness occurs (5) times at a percentage of (18%). Then, *bald on record impoliteness* occurs only (3) times at a percentage of (11%). Finally, *withhold politeness* has (0) occurrences at a percentage of (0%). The total impoliteness strategies found is (27) at a percentage of (100%). The following sub-strategies can be utilized to realize the impoliteness strategies used in Trump's speech:

**Table (4.2) Results of Functions of Impoliteness in Trump's Speech**

Functions of Impoliteness		
Functions of Impoliteness	Frequency	Percentage
Affective Function	7	35%
Coercive Function	10	50%
Entertaining Function	3	15%
Total	20	100%

From table (4.2), one can notice that the coercive function has the highest number of occurrences (10) which constitutes about (50%) of the total number of functions because Trump in his speech forces Biden to admit his words strongly and forcefully. This is where Biden's face feels forced by Trump. The second highest function is an *affective function* with (7) occurrences at a percentage of (35%) because Trump has been very emotional in some statements towards both his opponent, Biden, and the presenter, Walker. Finally, the lowest function is the *entertaining function* which has only (3) occurrences with a percentage of (15%).

### **Conclusions**

The following conclusions are found during the analysis of Trump's speech:

1-The total impoliteness strategies found 20 data for Donald Trump. The data analysis of the study shows that only four types of impoliteness strategies are used by president Trump during the second presidential debate. The strategies used by Donald Trump are *bald on record impoliteness*, *positive impoliteness*, *negative*



*impoliteness, and sarcasm or mock impoliteness.* On the other hand, *withholding politeness* does not occur at all in the speech of Donald Trump. *Negative impoliteness* is the most frequent used in Donald Trump's speech with a percentage of (41%) which realized in the form of using condescending, *scorn, or ridicule* and *explicitly associating the other with a negative*. This is due to Trump deliberately attacking the other candidate with personal attacks like insults, scorn, or ridicule to make him look worst on the stage. Positive impoliteness occurs (8) times at a percentage of (30%) which has four forms as *seeking disagreement, ignoring and snubbing the other, and choosing a controversial or unpopular issue to discuss*. Then, sarcasm or mock impoliteness occurs (5) times at a percentage (15%) that is realized in the form of mocking. Then, *bald on record impoliteness* is the lowest number of occurrence (3) times at a percentage (11%) in the form of *imperative* and *interrupting and pausing*. This means that hypothesis No.2 is not verified.

**2-** Negative impoliteness is Donald Trump's most frequently employed strategy. Trump, according to the analysis of the study, is the true master of disrespect. Trump utilizes impoliteness strategies in this discussion not only to criticize Biden on the stage, but also to target other people off the debate platform. Mr. Trump is more prepared and disciplined than his competitors. He provides the best defense of his coronavirus effort, stressing on vaccine research and the necessity to strike a balance between protecting the innocent and reopening the country. This result obviously verifies hypothesis No.3.

**3-** The analysis of the data under investigation reveals that Donald Trump is the real master of impoliteness. With his impolite and controversial words in his debate, Trump has proven to be the only president who can turn the American presidential debate stage into a battle. Trump did not only attack his opponent, Joe Biden, but he also entertains the audience with his unpleasant words that he makes to hammer the other president, and he also utilizes impoliteness statements to avoid the worst attacks from his opponent. The findings obviously verifies hypothesis No.2.

**4-** The fact that Trump can make impolite statements can delight people and stimulate their interest in what he says on stage. As a result, he employs the entertaining function of impoliteness to amuse those who observe him. Meanwhile, throughout the debate, the dominant function of impoliteness occurs, namely, *the coercive function*, because speech contains many viewpoints and beliefs that should be agreed upon by the other person who hears him. The second function is the emotional function as President Donald Trump, expresses his feelings forcefully during the debate. Because the dominant political discourse is serious and formal, entertaining functions do not appear frequently, if at all, in the framework of political discourse.

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## الوقاحة في بعض المناظرات الرئاسية الأمريكية المختارة: دراسة تداولية

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### المستخلص

يُعنى البحث الحالي بدراسة عملية لأعمال الهجوم والدفاع التي يستخدمها الرئيس دونالد ترامب في المناظرة الرئاسية الأمريكية في عام 2020. الهجوم محاولة لإيذاء أو إلحاق الهزيمة بشخص ما ، وهي رسالة جريئة أن المتحدث أو المهاجم لا يحب الخصم الآخر ولا يختلف معه. على العكس من ذلك ، يعني الدفاع أن الشخص يرد على هجوم من خصمه أو خصمها. بعد هجوم ، إما أن ينفي السياسي أو يتحقق من صحة ادعاءات خصومه أو يحاول تصحيح الأمور. في نهاية الدراسة يتوقع أن يجيب البحث عن الأسئلة التالية: ما هي أكثر استراتيجيات الهجوم والدفاع شيوعاً التي استخدمها الرئيس ترامب في صياغة خطابه؟ ما هي الأسباب الكامنة وراء هجماتهم واستخدامهم لاستراتيجيات الوقاحة؟ تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى إظهار الأثر السلبي لهجوم ترامب والأثر الإيجابي للدفاع على الجمهور الذي يشاهده وما إذا كان الرئيس قد نجح في دفاعه ضد المهاجم أم لا.

في ضوء الأهداف المذكورة أعلاه يفترض البحث ما يلي: أولاً ، هناك بعض الأسباب التي تحفز الرؤساء على استخدام الهجوم والدفاع في نقاشاتهم السياسية. ثانياً ، يستخدم الرئيس ترامب الأفعال الهجومية أكثر من غيرها خلال المناقشة. ثالثاً ، استخدم الرئيس دونالد ترامب استراتيجيات عدم التأدب بوضوح الرئيس الآخر الذي يناقشه. من أجل تحقيق أهداف البحث والتحقق من صحة فرضيات البحث ، اعتمد الباحث نموذجاً قائماً على "استراتيجيات عدم الأدب" لكولبير (1996-2005).

قبل البدء في تحليل البيانات ، يوضح الفرق بين أعمال الهجوم والدفاع ، والمناقشات ، والسيرة الذاتية لترامب تحت عنوان الإطار النظري. ثم ، تحليل كمي ونوعي مع نظرة عامة على المنهجية. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** الهجوم، الدفاع، المناظرات الرئاسية، المعارض، السياسي، رسالة جريئة، ادعاءات.