



A Pragma - Discoursal Analysis of Famous Presidential Gaffes

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.37648/ijrssh.v11i03.001>

Paper Received:

19th June, 2021

Paper Accepted:

26th June, 2021

Paper Received After Correction:

29th June, 2021

Paper Published:

03rd July, 2021

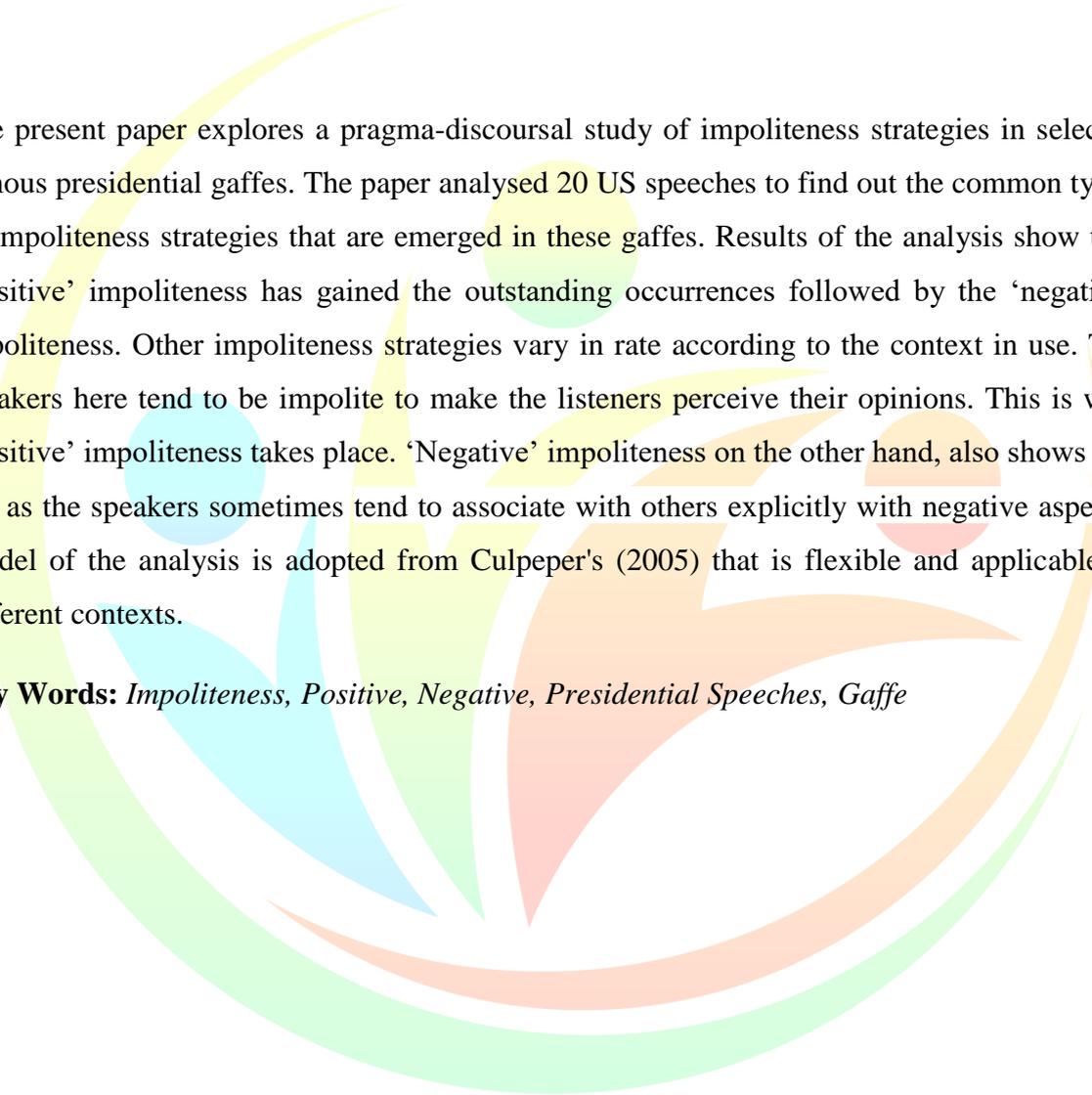


How to cite the article: Laith Safa Tariq, Prof. Sarab Khalil Hameed, A Pragma – Discoursal Analysis of Famous Presidential Gaffes, July-September 2021 Vol 11, Issue 3; 1-17 DOI: <http://doi.org/10.37648/ijrssh.v11i03.001>

ABSTRACT

The present paper explores a pragma-discoursal study of impoliteness strategies in selected famous presidential gaffes. The paper analysed 20 US speeches to find out the common types of impoliteness strategies that are emerged in these gaffes. Results of the analysis show that 'positive' impoliteness has gained the outstanding occurrences followed by the 'negative' impoliteness. Other impoliteness strategies vary in rate according to the context in use. The speakers here tend to be impolite to make the listeners perceive their opinions. This is why 'positive' impoliteness takes place. 'Negative' impoliteness on the other hand, also shows fair use as the speakers sometimes tend to associate with others explicitly with negative aspects. Model of the analysis is adopted from Culpeper's (2005) that is flexible and applicable to different contexts.

Key Words: *Impoliteness, Positive, Negative, Presidential Speeches, Gaffe*

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INTRODUCTION

To start with, the field of pragmatics and the field of discourse analysis are sometimes regarded as interdisciplinary subjects / fields of study. This reflects the fact that both of pragmatics and discourse have interest in the aspects of language i.e., context-dependent.

In a very general sense pragmatics can be defined as "the study of language use", on the one hand, discourse analysis, evenly, can be defined as "the analysis of the result of human communication, viz. discourse." (Brinton, 2001: 139)

It has been suggested that discourse analysis is more text-centered, more static, more interested in product (in the well-formedness of texts), while pragmatics is more user centred, more dynamic, more interested in the process of text production. Discourse analysis is frequently equated with conversational analysis, and pragmatics with speech act theory. It would seem difficult to distinguish the two with any conviction, however (Brinton 2001: 139).

It is worth saying that there is a huge overlap between pragmatics and discourse analysis.

This means that a large involvement of these two fields of study would share in

common. Good examples such as 'greetings' and 'farewells' of speech acts or may be 'well', 'so', 'or' as discourse markers have pragmatic and interactional functions and text-structuring / discourse functions.

As a matter of fact, a discourse analyst assigns himself to do an investigation of what language is used for. This means that what is required from discourse analyst is to take into account a pragmatic study and analysis when referring /doing discourse analysis. Therefore, he has to take into account the context analysis (Brown and Yule, 1983:1).

PRAGMATICS VERSUS DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Cutting (2002:2) believes that "pragmatics and discourse analysis have much in common in the sense that both investigate context, text and function. Both fields concentrate on the significance of words in communication and how interlocutors convey more than the words they utilized". In addition, both of them study discourse and text concentrating on how pieces of language become significant and how these pieces of language unified and joined for their users. As a matter of fact, function is the main concern of the two fields.

Puig (2003:2) points out that the field of pragmatics makes use of the involvement of human affairs to properly interpret utterances. Discourse analyst, on the other hand, focuses on the illustration of the implied parts within the language without the external components of that language. Consider the following example: A: “*you should hurry up a little in persuading them, because we’re all in a hurry to do all that*”. B: “*Do you read the papers?*” To explain B, A has to infer that it is related to the theory of ‘conversational implicature’. This means that “if you read the newspapers, you will know that I have done so many times”. This category is called pragmatics. . There is no explicit statement here in this utterance, on the other hand, it has to be inferred with regard to the context (Ibid.).

CONTEXT AND CO-TEXT

According to Song (2010: 876-877), “context performs crucial functions that help interactants in interpreting utterances. These includes removing ambiguity, specifying referents, and distinguishing conversational implicature.” Nonetheless, there are various types of context can be realized. One type is shaped as linguistic context or the co- text. Yule (1985: 98) t states that the co-text of a certain word gives a reference to all other words that would be found within the exact and

particular phrase / sentence. This indicates that it has a dominant influence to achieve the meaning of a specific word. The physical context is another type of context. In this respect, the physical location instructs the manifestation of meaning. (Ibid. 99). Accordingly, it is possible to say that pragmatics has much to do with the physical context, discourse analysis, on the contrary is mainly concerned with the co-text.

POLITENESS THEORY

Lakoff (1975) points out that politeness as kind of behaviour used in societies to reduce friction in personal communication. Likewise, Leech (1983) believes that the term politeness as behaviours used in order to maintain comity. Also, Brown and Levinson (1987) defined politeness as” the use of communicative strategies designed to maintain hearer's face “. They add that it is a form of interaction in the way to urges people to be co-operative and strengthens the relation between them. Mills (2003) thinks of politeness as the intention of the speaker's expressions employed in order to reduce face threatening acts towards the hearer. Thus he gives a similar to that of Brown and Levinson’s.

In spite of the fact that there are different definitions of politeness, but, it is very difficult to give a clear definition. Up to

now, scholars who are showing curiosity in politeness have not come to settlement on how to give a direct and precise definition to it (Mills, 2011; Kadar and Haugh, 2013). This is due to the fact that politeness is different from culture to culture, from language to language and from community to community.

FROM POLITENESS TO IMPOLITENESS

As a matter of fact, Lakoff (1975), Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987) are considered the father of researches in politeness. They provide the researchers with a systematic scheme of the developing and analysing politeness (Eelen, 2001). However, they are not free from criticisms. Part of the criticisms is that they neglected impoliteness and considered it as the absence of politeness (Mills, 2009). In fact, this criticism and the limitations of traditional studies have resulted in creation of new studies in which impoliteness is the main interest (Bousfield, 2008; Locher and Bousfield, 2008). “The lack attention of politeness approach to elucidate richly the confrontational interaction in impolite discourse has resulted in the recent interest in impoliteness” (Ibid.)

IMPOLITENESS: DEFINITION

In traditional model, the study of impoliteness has not been given enough and considerable treatment. Eelen (2001) states that impoliteness was ignored and referred to as absence of politeness. Thus, some scholars who are interested in impoliteness studies notify that impoliteness is a matter of communicative strategies that are oriented to attack face.

Watts (in Lambrou and Stockwell, 2007 : 211) states “ ... (im)politeness is a term that is struggled over at present, has been struggled over in the past and will, in all probability, continue to be struggled over in the future.”

Impoliteness is the "communicative strategies designed to attack face and thereby cause conflict and disharmony" (Culpeper, 1996:350). On the other hand, the revised definition of impoliteness by Culpeper (2005) is demanding to include the role of the hearer, informing the imminent role of the hearer in assessing impoliteness. He (Ibid.) believes that “Impoliteness takes places when: (1) there is an intention from the speaker to communicate a face attack, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or establishes behaviour as intentionally face-attacking. (3) To combine point 1 and point 2 together “. In this regard, there are two things have been taken into consideration

in Culpeper's definition: The role of the hearer and the intention of the speaker.

Consequently, Eelen and Culpeper believe that politeness theories would barely refer to impoliteness, but practically their deep concern was on politeness components. This is why that their comments on impoliteness were inadequate. Generally, the account behind the late and modern interest in impoliteness explains that politeness approaches were disabled to provide interpretations to clarify the displacement and argumentative interrelation in the field of impolite discourses (Bousfield, 2008: 71).

CULPEPER'S MODEL (1996), (2005)

Culpeper (1996) was the first who put an account to impoliteness. He was the first who put a systematic classification to impoliteness exemplified by his model (1996) and then revised in (2005). (Orthaber, 2017).

Bousfield, (2008: 90) states that there is an advantage of Culpeper's model of impoliteness. This means that it is based upon actual life data. It also challenges non-identical kinds of discourses starting with incompatible and impolite illocutions in U.S. army training discourse. It is also ending with impolite interaction within bilingual Spanish/English children's

discourse. The reason behind implementing Culpeper's model is that it is flexible. This means that there is a variety of written / verbal data achieved by Culpeper. This variety makes it more reliable. Accordingly, Culpeper examines on media data in general and he also examines television programs particularly in order to give evidence how his impoliteness model performs and operates. Moreover, Culpeper's model is flexible and applicable to different contexts (Mullany & Stockwell, 2010).

Culpeper's Strategies of Impoliteness

Bald on Record Impoliteness

To use this strategy, there is much face at risk and there is an intention from the speaker to damage the face of the hearer. In this case, it is possible to say that the impolite utterance will be performed in a direct and obvious way. In this regard, Culpeper performs here face-attack act. This is opposite to face-threatening act for the sake of recognizing the face attack in case of there is an intention of the speaker from the part of the speaker deliberately (Mullany and Stockwell, 2010: 71). For example, when there are imperative commands that damage the face of the hearer who has no power to act.

Positive Impoliteness

To illustrate the model of Culpeper (2005), there are more sub strategies to positive impoliteness (cited in Mullany and Stockwell, 2010:72). These ranges of sub strategies are the followings:

“Ignoring or snubbing the other”, “selecting a sensitive or undesirable topic to talk about”,

“denying common ground with the hearer”, “using inappropriate identity markers”, “being disinterested and unsympathetic with the hearer”, “looking for disagreements”, “using obscure language”.

Negative Impoliteness

Thielemann and Kosta (2013: 239) point out that this strategy is shaped to attack the hearer's negative face want. In other words, there is a desire to be free from imposition. According to Culpeper's classification, negative impoliteness, comprises these sub-strategies (cited in Mullany and Stockwell, 2010: 72): “scorn – frighten – ridicule – and invade the hearer's space literally or metaphorically”.

Sarcasm / Mock Impoliteness

The speaker in this strategy intends using politeness strategies which are clearly insincere (Thielemann and Kosta, 2013:

239). In this regard, sarcasm gives the meaning of one or more sub- strategies which applicable superficially. It is also accepted but they keep the opposite meaning essence. ((Bousfield, 2008: 95).

Withhold Politeness

It refers to the fact that the speaker does not perform politeness where is it supposed to be. See the following example: the speaker keeps silent when it is expected to be thankful to the hearer. (Thielemann and Kosta, 2013: 239)

A. Affective Impoliteness

In this type 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). For example: *You made me crazy!* . In this example, the speaker utilizes such an impolite utterance to give the passive effect of the hearer on him. The speaker also informs the hearer that he is unwanted anymore.

B. Coercive Impoliteness

Culpeper believes that this kind of politeness happens where the speaker has a great efficient social rank than the level of the hearer.

Generally, coercive impoliteness is” a means of getting power via language” (Culpeper, 2005: 252). A good example as (*Shut up or I'll smash your head!*) (Huang, 2014: 150). In this case , there is an end from the part of the speaker in order to put an end to the addressee's behaviour .This is done by giving warning to him in order not to speak .

C. Entertaining Impoliteness

“The speaker pokes fun at the hearer and utilizes the target's feelings to obtain amusement” (Ibid.). See the following example: in Charles Dicken's novel *Great Expectations*: (in response to Miss Havisham's invitation to play cards with Pip) –*Young Estella: with this boy! Why, he is a common labouring boy* (Johanson, 1994: 25).

GAFFE: DEFINITION AND ITS ORIGIN

The term gaffe is a statement said when the politician believes it to be real, becomes fully aware the serious or shocking consequences of saying it, and yet unintentionally utters

, in public, the unutterable. (McKim and Skene, 2012) .

Kinsley (1988) points out this term comes from journalist Michael Kinsley, who said, "A gaffe is when a politician tells the truth – some obvious truth he isn't supposed to say. (Kinsley, 1988).

It is worth stating that the rise of Internet activism has brought about a new generation of negative campaigning where a political campaign can create attack ads within an hour of a politician making a gaffe.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DATA COLLECTION

The paper incudes 20 famous US presidential gaffes to be analysed with reference to impoliteness strategies. Model of the analysis is basically adopted from Culpeper (2005). The following table comprises famous presidential utterances that includes the gaffes, the type of impoliteness strategies, and the explanation of the gaffe in the context.

Presidential Gaffes	Types of Impoliteness Strategies	Explanation
<p><u>1-Clinton semi-fesses up to the Lewinsky affair</u></p> <p><i>After Lewinsky produced a dress with “memories” of her affair with the president, Clinton had no choice but to tell the truth. So how exactly did he phrase it? “I did have a relationship with Ms. Lewinsky that was not appropriate. In fact, it was wrong.”</i></p>	Sarcasm	<p>In this speech, It’s obvious that the president has a way with words. . Clinton finally fessed up about his involvement.</p> <p>The speaker says something which appears to be polite in its surface meaning, but implies the meaning of the opposite.</p>
<p><u>2-Nixon says nothing he does is illegal</u></p> <p><i>By now we all know the story of David Frost and Richard Nixon. It’s no wonder that Nixon once said to Frost, “When the President does it that means it’s not illegal.”</i></p>	Positive impoliteness	<p><i>In hindsight, he was a little off on that one. There is inappropriate identity marker in this speech The speech was not quite correct or accurate.</i></p>
<p><u>3-Nixon does sketch comedy</u></p> <p><i>When campaigning, Nixon was so desperate to reach out to the young voter that he said yes to an appearance on the popular Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-In. While his role was limited, he got a huge laugh (though it was aimed at him, rather than with him) when he uttered the show’s catchphrase, “Sock it to me!”</i></p>	bold on record impoliteness	<p><i>The speaker here is trying to show power in his interaction. In other words, the speaker is trying to attack or compete against someone in a very strong or forceful manner</i></p>
<p><u>4-Quayle misspells “potato.”</u></p> <p><i>Vice-President Quayle is at a school, speaking on education and a student comes forward for a spell-off of sorts. The 12 year old is asked to spell “potato.” He’s added an “e” to the end of the word.</i></p>	Negative impoliteness	<p><i>Here, the speaker explicitly associating the student with negative aspects, putting him indebtedness on record.</i></p> <p><i>Quayle must do the same and when he flips over his card (to reveal his answer), proving that sometimes a 12 year old is less careless than someone who holds office.</i></p>
<p><u>5-Biden is hopeful for the 20th century</u></p> <p><i>When commenting on the state of the economy, Biden</i></p>	Negative impoliteness	<p><i>There is a type of negative behaviour or mental state that is <u>typical</u> of</i></p>

<p>said, "I refuse to accept the notion that the United States of America is not going to lead the world economically throughout the 20th century."</p>		<p><u>a person in a particular situation.</u></p>
<p><u>6-George W. loves the environment</u></p> <p>When parting ways from the G8 summit in 2008, W. made a fantastic statement to French President Nicolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown. "Goodbye from the world's biggest polluter!"</p>	<p>Negative impoliteness</p>	<p>Does it help that Bush was grinning like a kid on Christmas morning when he made the statement? We're guessing it depends what side of the fence you're on. . The speaker here is showing or characterized by a patronizing or superior attitude toward others.</p>
<p><u>7- Trump : Mail in voting</u></p> <p>Trump called mail in voting " a corrupt system" adding there is " tremendous corruption and fraud going on"</p>	<p>Positive impoliteness</p>	<p>This is just wrong. Fraud is rare with mail in voting. It does happen every so often. There is no basis to call the whole system fraudulent.</p> <p>The speaker here looking for disagreement and sometimes tends to be impolite to make a listener perceive opinion.</p>
<p><u>8-Bush gets religious. Bush always had God on his side</u></p> <p>Why? Probably because as he put it, "I've been in the Bible every day since I've been the president."</p>	<p>Sarcasm or mock</p>	<p>There are indications on such implied meaning which is intended to make ironic style of speech.</p>
<p><u>9-Bush speaks Italian</u></p> <p>At the G8 Summit in 2008, Bush needed to catch the attention of Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and so he called out, "Amigo! Amigo!"</p>	<p>Positive impoliteness</p>	<p>How else would you address an Italian official? There's no telling what Bush was thinking when he blurted this one out i.e., maybe he is utilizing taboo words, and using inappropriate identity marker.</p>
<p><u>10- You're on Candid Camera</u></p> <p>A reporter once asked Dwight Eisenhower what important decisions his vice president, Richard Nixon, had helped him make. Eisenhower, with uncharacteristic candor, replied, "If you give me a</p>	<p>Positive impoliteness</p>	<p>It was such a revealing remark that the Democrats replayed it in campaign advertisements against Nixon in 1960. The speaker here</p>

<p><i>week I might think of one.”</i></p>		<p><i>gives a heavy accusation to exclude others from his account. In fact, any correction to this behaviour could not erase the worries of others.</i></p>
<p><u>11-Bush on his position</u></p> <p><i>Bush was always the first to remind us how difficult the job of being the President truly is. We aren't sure if he was trying to convince us or himself that he could do an adequate job, but when he said, “My job is a decision-making job, and as a result, I make a lot of decisions”</i></p>	<p><i>Withhold politeness</i></p>	<p><i>This means that it makes others /his people glad he was surrounded by (some) intelligent people that could help him manage the decision making. The speaker is trying to exclude the others from certain activity and ignoring them.</i></p>
<p><u>12- Bush loves Canada</u></p> <p><i>“This is my maiden voyage. My first speech since I was the president of the United States and I couldn't think of a better place to give it than Calgary, Canada.”</i></p>	<p><i>Sarcasm</i></p>	<p><i>The speaker is trying to show that Canada is the first of its type. There are indications on such implied meaning which is intended to make ironic style of speech.</i></p>
<p><u>13-Trump: Election observers in Detroit</u></p> <p><i>“our campaign has been denied access to observing any counting in Detroit”</i></p>	<p><i>Positive impoliteness</i></p>	<p><i>The fact that CNN reports point out that they have seen representatives of the Trump campaign roaming for three days at the TFC centre, where the counting of Detroit's mail ballots happened. The speaker here in this utterance sometimes tends to be impolite to make a listener perceive his opinion.</i></p>
<p><u>14-Barack Obama : During his inauguration speech:</u></p> <p><i>“Forty-four American have now taken the presidential oath”</i></p>	<p><i>Positive impoliteness</i></p>	<p><i>In fact, reports state that only forty-three individuals including Obama have served as president of the USA and have taken the oath. Grover Cleveland served two non-consecutive terms and is counted as both the twenty second and twenty – forth president. The speaker here is denying common ground with others.</i></p>
<p><u>15- Ronald Regan Unsound Check Prior to a 1984</u></p>	<p><i>Negative</i></p>	<p><i>A recording of his statement was</i></p>

<p>radio broadcast, Ronald Reagan was asked to speak into the microphone for a sound check. He said, “My fellow Americans, I’m pleased to tell you today that I’ve signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes.”</p>	<p>impoliteness</p>	<p>leaked, and Soviet forces were briefly put on alert. The speaker here is explicitly associating the others with negative aspects and frightening others by using negative association...</p>
<p><u>16- Bush reassures us about the economy</u></p> <p>Just as the economy became the epitome of a mess, Bush stepped forward to shed some light on the subject and try to put the minds of Americans at ease. “Let’s make sure that there is certainty during uncertain times in our economy.”</p>	<p>Negative impoliteness</p>	<p>The speaker here is trying to comfort someone and stop them from worrying:</p> <p>the typical or highest example of a stated quality, as shown by a particular person or thing . The speaker is putting the others indebtedness on record. Generally, the speaker here sometimes tends to be impolite to make a listener perceive his opinion.</p>
<p><u>17- Whose Finger Is on the Button?</u></p> <p>Harry Truman, who liked to express himself in terse, direct statements, was asked whether the U.S. would consider using atomic weapons against the Chinese in Korea. He replied, “The military commander in the field will have charge of the use of weapons, as he always has.”</p>	<p>Negative impoliteness</p>	<p>Reporters state that many Americans feared the General would start the next world war through the use of atomic bombs. The speaker here gives no feeling of concerns to the other: ignoring their feelings. The speaker is associating with others explicitly with negative aspects.</p>
<p><u>18-Barak Obama :Gutter Ball</u></p> <p>On The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, Barack Obama was asked about a recent bowling event. “I bowled a 129,” he replied. Leno replied, “That’s very good, Mr. President.” And the president added, “It’s like the Special Olympics or something.”</p>	<p>Sarcasm</p>	<p>Facts show that even before the taped show could be aired, the White House recognized the insult to participants in the Special Olympics, and campaign of apologies began. The speaker here polite in the surface meaning but he implies the opposite.</p>
<p><u>19-Gerald Ford What Cold War</u></p> <p>Debating Jimmy Carter in 1976, Gerald Ford declared, “There is no Soviet domination of Eastern</p>	<p>Positive impoliteness</p>	<p>The question is that if the president truly meant that the nations held behind the USSR’s Iron Curtain</p>

<p><i>Europe.”</i></p>		<p><i>weren't dominated by Soviets. The president repeated himself, asserting that Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia were free of Soviet interference. The facts declares that this destroyed all of Ford's credibility in foreign affairs. The speaker here is ignoring the role of others. Sometimes the speaker is trying to reflect his negative psychological state.</i></p>
<p><u>20-Obama says he's fit for the Special Olympics</u></p> <p><i>Obama might be a favourite of the media, but that didn't prevent them from letting his comment on the Special Olympics go. On Jay Leno, Obama was asked about his bowling game and replied that "it was like watching the Special Olympics because he was so bad"</i></p>	<p><i>Positive impoliteness</i></p>	<p><i>This case showed the President is like everyone else and sometimes speaks before he thinks.</i></p> <p><i>The speaker here is disinterested and using inappropriate oneness.</i></p>

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Results of the Analysis

Data analysis conveys that the most common type of impoliteness strategies is the 'positive' which reads 8 occurrences from the total number 20 and with a percentage of 40%. 'Negative' impoliteness strategy has gained the next stage after the positive impoliteness and reads 6 occurrences from the total number 20 with a percentage of 30%. Other impoliteness strategies are 'sarcasm' which reads 4 instances and with a

percentage of 20%, on the other hand, 'bold on' strategy and 'withhold' strategy have gained a very least percentages which are 5%. These two strategies show only 1 occurrences for each in this analysis. The following table illustrates these percentages of the impoliteness strategies:

Table (1) The Occurrences of Impoliteness Strategies in Presidential gaffes

Types of Impoliteness Strategies	Occurrences	%
Positive	8	40%
Negative	6	30%
Sarcasm	4	20%
Withhold	1	5%
Bold on Record	1	5%
Total	20	100

CONCLUSION

After stating the most prominent definitions of impoliteness and its strategies, elaborating on their meanings, and analysing the selected famous presidential gaffes, the researchers have come up with the conclusion that impoliteness is either intentional or accidental. Furthermore, impoliteness sometimes emerges as a reaction to a rude behaviour.

The intensity of positive impoliteness in these famous presidential gaffes would show various reactions from the part of the speakers such as ignoring, disassociating from the other, showing disinterested, and seeking disagreement, using taboo words and calling the other names. The speakers here tend to be impolite to make listeners perceive their opinions. This is why 'positive impoliteness comes about.

Other impoliteness strategies vary in rates in these presidential gaffes : negative impoliteness also show fair use as the speakers sometimes tend to associate with others explicitly with negative aspects. Sometimes this negative strategy would be used literary or metaphorically. Anyways, they tend to ridicule or to make identity of a person. As for 'sarcasm' impoliteness strategy, the study shows that there are indications on such implied meaning which is intended to make ironic style of speech. With regard to 'bold on record' and 'withhold' impoliteness strategies, it is clear that presidential gaffes of this study show no instances as they recorded only 5%. This means that there is no intentions from the speakers here to say things without any minimisation to the imposition. It is believed that this bold on

impoliteness is likely employed to shock/insult the addressee, this explains its rareness in these gaffes under analysis.

In a nut shell, politicians tend to use vague and indirect language in order to avoid making concrete statements and these gaffes are simply deemed to veer sufficiently far from the conventional wisdom in order to make said candidate exposed to attack.



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