

## Politeness as an Art in Communication: The 2016 USA Presidential Campaign Poster's Slogans

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### Abstract

*This paper discusses politeness not just as a way of mitigating face in a communicative event that seem threatening to both the communicator and the listener but as an art in communication. In the event where there is a possible face threatening act, the communicator crafts out language in a way that he/she communicates as well as ensure that both the positive and negative face is mitigated. Basing on the just concluded 2016 USA presidential campaign posters slogans, this paper looks at how politeness stands out as an art in communication as much as it mitigates the faces of the parties involved. Using analytical research design, the Trump's presidential campaign slogans on the posters will be sampled purposively to get data that will be analyzed and discussed to show how politeness is an artistic way of using words to communicate.*

### 1.1 Introduction

The Online Etymology Dictionary by Harper (2000) explains that the word communication is derived from the Latin verb *communicare* which means “to share” or “make common”. Communication is the sending and receiving information between two or more people. It may be verbal, written or through body language. Nevertheless, the information may include facts, ideas, concepts, opinions, beliefs, attitudes, instructions or even emotions. Holtgrave (2008) explains that acts of communication are forms of social discourse which maintain and regulate social activities and define status and power relations. Van Dijk (1999) observes that discourse is a reality that shape perceptions and understanding. Discourses are modes of thinking or systems of meaning production with narratives, texts, scripts and images that enable us to make sense of the world. Political information processing is often a form of discourse processing because much political action and participation is accomplished by discourse and communication. According to Van Dijk (1997) political discourse includes propaganda, political advertising, political speeches, media interviews, party programs amongst others. Most political discourses are very aggressive, hence the need for mechanisms and strategies that will ensure that there is no communication breakdown. In this case the need to craft and use language artistically to convey the information without affecting anyone's self or public image. Hanh (2014) explains that the art of communicating helps us move beyond the perils and frustrations of misrepresentation and misunderstanding to learn the listening and speaking skills that will forever change how we experience and impact the world. We communicate to be understood and to understand others. This is a motivator for analyzing politeness as an art in communication basing on the 2016 USA elections campaign poster's slogans of presidential candidate Trump.

Posters are important forms of visual communication used by the commercial and political advertiser use to persuade target audience. Campaign involves a series of actions taken to achieve particular results in politics, health or business. During elections campaign periods all over the world, posters are used to familiarize candidates to the electorates and entice them to vote for them. Sharndama & Mohammed (2013) observes that campaign posters are specifically designed to familiarize candidates and their ideologies to the electorates. Accompanying posters are slogans designed to give extra effects to the photographs of the candidates to achieve political objectives. The slogans are usually a word, phrase or sentence which politicians constantly recite in the course of presenting campaign speeches. Moreover, in their discussion Sharndama & Mohammed notes that the ultimate goal of politicians using posters and slogans is to make the electorate change by accepting their ideologies.

This paper will only look at how the slogans have been artistically crafted to mind the face of both the speaker (The presidential candidates) and the hearers. Politeness is universal in many ways. It can be observed as a phenomenon in all cultures, though, in different areas it refers to quite different things considering the cultures and the contexts. Politeness can be understood as a social phenomenon, a means to achieve good interpersonal relationships and a norm imposed by social conventions hence it is phenomenal, instrumental and normative by nature (Huang, 2008). Brown and Levinson's (1978; 1987) work observes that politeness norm assumes that everyone has a face which is the public self-image; Each face wants to be saved, in that it is the expression of speaker's intention to alleviate the face threatening acts. Politeness is about the norms of strategic manipulation of language in order to fulfill our conversational goals by saying what is socially appropriate. It is resorted to by speakers of different languages as a means to an end.

## 1.2 Art and Communication

Art is both the process and the product of some action, mostly related to expression of self (Wollheim, 1968). Art comes in various forms, shapes and sizes. Tolstoi (1898) expresses that any activity can be perceived as an art by looking for beauty in the process and result. Webster dictionary defines art as something that is created with imagination and skill and that it is beautiful or that it express important ideas or feelings. In this case, it is evident that art depends on creativity. Although all art is understood by some means of perception, various value systems may add other criteria of appreciation besides beauty such as harmony, balance, meaningfulness, originality, intensity, unity, purpose, expression etc. the experience of art involves the creativity process of the artist and the appreciation of the observer.

Communication has both the direct and symbolic aspects. The direct aspects are always a fact as an event in space-time while the symbolic aspect is always a theory as a meaning our consciousness gives to an experience. In this light this paper analyzes how politeness as an art in communication has been used to consciously convey information on the 2016 USA campaign posters slogans of presidential candidate Trump.

## 2.1 Perspectives of Politeness Theory

Politeness norm assumes that everyone wants to save face. Traditionally, politeness has been known as good manners. Politeness norms are designed to safeguard the communication from breaking down and avoid psychological and physical harm to interlocutors to the most or create a better position or autonomy in communication to the very most. Different authors have discussed various perspectives of politeness theory, most of them share the assumption that, through linguistic form, speakers unveil the social relationship that they perceive or would like to create, maintain or modify with other individuals. In pragmatics, politeness cannot only be understood as the use of language by certain communities of practice in a specific context but must necessarily be broadened to include an individual's linguistic behavior. In this light, politeness must necessarily refer to ways in which linguistic action is carried out and more specifically, ways in which the relational function in linguistic action is expressed (Kasper, 1998). Politeness is related to the reasons why individuals' (linguistic) acts adopt specific forms. Here is a table summarizing the perspectives of politeness as explained by different authors;

Authors	Politeness Perspective
Searle (1969,1975, 1979)	Indirect formulations of messages
Grice (1975)	Conversational implicatures which involves the cooperative principles of quality, quantity, relation and manner
Lakoff (1973, 1977, 1989)	Minimizing the risk of confrontation in discourse through avoidance of offence and reduction of any possible friction.
Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987)	Showing an awareness of other people's face and face wants
Leech (1983)	entails avoiding disruption and maintaining social equilibrium and friendly relations
Ide (1989) & Matsumoto (1988, 1989)	Smooth communication due to respect shown by individuals to others owing to inequalities in social status, age amongst other characteristics.
Fraser & Nolan (1981)	a particular linguistic form or register to convey deference or respect in a particular context may convey the opposite in another context depending on the social norms

Fraser(1990, 1999); Meier (1995); Spencer-Oatey(2002, 2005, 2008); Mills(2003, 2005, 2008)	Contextual appropriateness or adequacy
Holtgraves (2005)	Maintain face for the sake of social harmony and smooth communication.
Watts (2003); Locher (2004); Watts & Locher (2008)	Took a discursive approach departing from the dominant research paradigm by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987); discusses about relational work and for a message to be perceived to be polite, impolite or merely appropriate depends on the judgments the interactants make at the level of relational work insitu i.e. during an ongoing interaction in a particular setting.
Christie (2005)	The politic behavior as communities of practice perspectives as some acts committed are dictated by the situation and may not necessarily be a FTA at that particular time.
Culpeper (1996, 2005) & Bousfield (2007)	Intentional impoliteness or rudeness;
Spencer-Oatey (2000, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2008 & 2009)	Looked at politeness on the basis of rapport management.
Tracy (2008)	Equates impoliteness to failing to do the politeness strategies by going bald on record without redressing the FTA.

Politeness is a wide theoretical aspect due to not only the different cultures involved but also the different features that characterizes a particular discourse. This paper will use the off record and on record strategies as expounded by Brown and Levinson (1987) to show that politeness is more than just a means of enhancing, maintaining and saving face in communication but it is also an art of language use. This will be done by analyzing the slogans on the 2016 candidate Trump's presidential campaign posters of 2016.

## 2.2 Literature Review

Available literature shows that politeness is an area that has been widely researched. Various politeness theoretical perspectives have been used to analyze and explain discourse. Though this provided a great milestone in Politeness in discourse, some researchers use data to challenge the face work theory as explained by Brown and Levinson (1987) whereas others use it to show the various developments in politeness as they expound on the main features of the theory. Mauney & Jeon (2014) in their research, they explored the possibility of new politeness paradigms in computer mediated discourse on Facebook. Specifically, they examined the discourse expectations, linguistic catalysts for face threatening acts and mitigations opinion to maintain face in discourse about politics. The study addressed the gap in the literature concerning the relationship between politeness theory and discourse about politics in online communication. They noted that previous studies in politeness theory and political science maintain that perfect strangers are not likely to engage in discourse about politics because doing so may result in face threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). However, discourse about politics is common on Facebook communication regardless of the possibility of a face threatening acts occurring. Moreover, this research showed that discourse about politics on Facebook can be a means of socialization and one way to express attitudes and opinions about reality (Ostman, 2013) as well as a medium to establish and negotiate an online identity (Focault, 1988). Despite this basis on politeness in political discourse, this paper purposes to show that the off record and on record politeness strategies used on the slogans of the presidential candidate Trump's 2016 campaigns posters is not just politeness strategies but an artistic use of language to save face as it also enhances and maintains the communication of his ideologies.

Ambuyo, Indede & Karanja (2011) while discussing 'politeness' or 'politics' in Question Time discussion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Kenyan parliament noted that some politeness strategies are not just used as a ritual requirement by the Standing Orders of the Kenyan parliament but politeness influences both the relational and content dimensions of communication. Moreover, other strategies are used as a way of doing FTA's while others appear as politic behavior (Watts, 2005) and as communities of practice perspective (Christie, 2005). The negative and positive politeness strategies as explained by Brown & Levinson (1987) were used for analysis. However, this paper looks at how the off record and on record politeness strategies have been artistically used to communicate various aspects of the USA presidential candidate Trump's ideologies on the campaign posters slogans of 2016.

Moreover, Laura (2010) while researching on Facework on Facebook explained that there is evidence that members use local texts to create a shared repertoire of prior texts in order to narrate something about self and create a sense of in group, maintaining positive face and building a community online. This is an indicator that words are not just used before considering their consequences consciously or unconsciously. This motivates the need to explore how politely language is artistically crafted to communicate the ideas and manifestos found on the campaign posters slogans of the 2016 USA presidential candidate Trump.

Locher & Watts (2005) discussed that politeness should not be equated with FTA mitigation because it is a discursive concept. This means what is polite (or impolite) should not be predicted by analysts. This reduces politeness to a much smaller part of Face work than was assumed until the present and it allows for interpretations that consider behavior to be merely appropriate and neither polite or impolite. They propose relational work, the "work" individuals invest in negotiating relationships with others which includes polite or appropriate behavior, is a useful concept to help investigate the discursive struggle over politeness. This was done by analyzing discourse of a naturally occurring dinner party and the overall aim was to demonstrate that much of what has commonly been thought as politeness may be perceived by participants not as politeness but rather as the kind of behavior appropriate to the current interaction that is politic behavior. Ideally this looks at language use in a natural friendly set up but this paper is looking at creativity employed in the choice of words to tone down the effect of language used in a highly aggressive environment which is the political scene.

Moreover, Sruibaite (2014) looked at politeness theory as it is applied to written art reviews. The study focused on art reviews in Lithuania in the early and mid 70's, it analyzed the different strategies used by the art reviewers as they attempted to critique pieces of art while maintaining their face as well as the face of the artists. The study was able to identify the face - saving acts and all the four politeness strategies at work. The author discussed in his findings that reviewers usually appear to have in mind the addressee's positive face (the desire to be liked and to be approved) as well as his negative face (the desire to be left free to act as he chooses). This work gives a hint that politeness strategies are essential and are considered in any piece of art. Basing on this idea this paper looks at politeness not as just the off record or on record strategies but as an art in communication. The words used to represent these politeness strategies have to be crafted in a way that they are not just communicating the intended idea but they do it politely.

### **3.0 Methodology**

Analytical research design was used in this study. The population consists of the 2016 USA presidential candidate Trump's campaign posters slogans as recorded and archived on YouTube. Data was purposively sample debasing on his main ideology of making America great again. An observation schedule containing off record and on record strategies tenets as explained by Brown and Levinson (1987) was used as a data collecting tool. Content analysis was done to show that these strategies were not just used to save face of the interlocutors but they also show how words can be artistically crafted to enhance communication.

### **4.0 Findings and Discussion**

Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987) explains that every utterance in an interaction carries with it the potential to create a threat to either the speaker's or hearer's face. They explain that politeness involves showing an awareness of other people's face and face wants. Face refers to our public self-image; the positive face which involves good interpersonal relationships and the negative face which involves one's wants to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded. In their model, they explain four politeness strategies that can reduce any aggressiveness between individuals and maintain a more effective communication; the on-record, positive, negative and off- record strategies. This paper will only use the off-record and on-record strategies in show that politeness is all about the art involved in language use.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987) off record politeness relies upon implication, it is very indirect and involves the breaking of conversational norms to imply a particular recommended course of action. The speaker relies upon the hearer's ability to decipher and interpret the speaker's intended meaning. This can be done first through conversational implicatures which involves giving hints, clues of association, presuppositions, understatements, and overstatements, use of tautologies, contradicting phrases, irony, metaphors and use of rhetoric questions. Second it can be done by speaker being intentionally vague or ambiguous, over generalizing statements, displacing the hearer, being incomplete and using ellipsis.

The various slogans on the posters were creatively crafted to communicate to the electorate the agenda and ideologies of USA 2016 presidential candidate Trump whose main campaign agenda was making America great again. In doing this the slogans were also keen to the positive and negative face of both the addresser and the addressee as it is a matter of how many electorates he can convince to his side. Consider the following slogan:

*Trump make America great again,*

*Trump for president 2016,*

*Make America great again, the silent majority stand with Trump.*

This slogan gives hints of vast meanings, it implies that America had lost some features or characteristics and traditions as a nation that used to make them great, therefore, a vote for candidate Trump's presidency is a vote for the restoration of America's greatness. Nevertheless, it is also vague and an understatement because it does not directly tell the electorate which fields has lost greatness and how a vote for Trump would make it better again. Moreover, the slogan *the silent majority stand with Trump* gives clues of association whereby the majority of the electorate though silent they share in the ideologies that Trump propagates. This also takes care of the positive face of the addresser of being liked and approved of in his quest for presidency.

Another slogan that featured on one of the posters was *takeback our country*; this is an intentionally vague statement and can also be viewed as incomplete because it does not tell us where the country is to be taken from. Through implicature it seems a polite way of criticizing the position of America by also giving a hint of what is to be done if it has to be great again. Nevertheless, the way the words have been used defies Grice's cooperative principles of 1975 of quantity, which advocates for the use of enough words to enhance understanding in communication. The words have been artistically used to bring out the bigger picture of the ideology of getting back the country to the owners as portrayed by the possessive "our". A vote for Trump would be a collective effort of giving the electorates a chance to contribute in the restoration of their country through entitlement or ownership.

Several off-record strategies have been used on the following slogan; *we need real leadership, we need results, let's put the US back into business*. Tautology is evident whereby the words 'we need' has been used to stress and show the importance of real leadership and the results that the presidential candidate is talking about. This implies that there is deficiency of leadership and whatever is going on does not seem to yield any results. The slogan further expresses that they have to work collectively (let's) in order to bring the US back to business, which is also a vague statement and to some extent an overgeneralization which does not specify the business being referred to. This slogan seems to share the same meaning with the following; *It's time for another real president make America great again – Trump 2016*. The other one is, *America finally has a president who is not controlled by special interests, Trump invested over \$ 100 million of his own money into his campaign. President Trump turning talk into action. The American people are Trump's ONLY special interest. MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN! GREATER THAN EVER BEFORE!* Though this paper is not discussing the graphical nature of the slogans, we can note that some words have been capitalized to enhance its effects in convincing the electorate on the choice they are to make. In this case this slogan overstates the fact that the presidential candidate's interest is only the electorate and not in the money to be generated in the process. This slogan goes further to hint on the use of his own \$ 100 million to campaign. By taking care of the interests of Americans, he will make America greater than it has ever been. All this is in the quest of painting a picture of a selfless leader whose sole and great concern is on the Americans in that he is turning all the talk into action. It is evident that the words have been artistically crafted to bring out a more convincing picture of what is being communicated apart from just being polite. Nevertheless, he sarcastically uses these words to paint his opponent as someone who is vying for her own interest whether it is monetary or any other but not the concern of the Americans.

The other slogan that carried the whole ideological picture of the Republican presidential candidate was \* *Build the wall and make Mexico pay for it*

\* *Repeal and Replace Obamacare*

\* *Annihilate ISIS and Take their oil*

\* *Take Great care of our veterans*

\* *Can't be bought*

\* *Trump make America Great Again*

This slogan gives a hint of candidate Trump's presidency agenda. All the statements made have lots of implied meaning that can be deduced from them.

To understand more this information, background knowledge of each case is needed. They show that all these actions are to be taken for the basic interests of Americans, they benefit in the health sector as they will get better services at the best and minimum cost for all. The wall will take care of the illegal immigrants from Mexico at the cost of Mexicans, which is an ironical statement as it is not clear how that would be done as the wall in itself is an indication of a relationship that does not encourage positive cooperation between the two countries. In addition, it may be a demeaning statement to the Mexicans that has been politely crafted by how the words have been used to communicate the true picture of what is engulfed in the statement. Moreover, another irony is in the case of ISIS, it is not just in the defeat of ISIS and safety of Americans but also the economic benefit the country will enjoy from the oil. The veterans are to be given great care due to the fact attributed to the great sacrifice they take in fighting for the country and much more that can be deduced from that statement. The statement *can't be bought* is incomplete, we may ask ourselves who or what can't be bought, we are left guessing the real meaning behind that statement. The last statement definitely summarizes that once all the above actions have been taken by Trump then that will be a process of restoring the greatness of America.

Another strategy that was used on the slogans is rhetoric question;  
*When you think about it, wouldn't it be nice if we got along with Russia?*  
Donald Trump

*President Trump will make US – Russia relations great again!*  
*Make America Great again! Greater than ever before*

The slogan communicates to the electorate the position of the presidential candidate with regard to the relation of these two countries. It is a positive rhetoric question in that despite the suspicion that there is between them, it is a nice thing and it is part of his agenda to mend this relationship. This question gives room to the electorate to think deeper about this relationship being proposed. Through implication there seemingly will be more benefits in getting along with the Russians an action that will make America great than it has ever been.

Another slogan is; *Undocumented Democrats say Dump Trump*. It is ironic in the sense that whatever the undocumented democrats say has no value to the vote hunt at hand. This statement was used to reinforce the presidential candidate's ideology about immigration and undocumented immigrants. It presupposes the position of the undocumented immigrants. Moreover, this statement seemingly hints that the Democrats sympathize with the undocumented immigrants even though their vote won't count in this situation.

The other slogan *Obama you are fired!* Seems to be an intentional impoliteness or rudeness as explained by Culpeper (2005) and Bous field (2008). This is because it goes bald on record without redressing the FTA. It is true that President Obama's term had come to an end but that did not mean that he lost the job may be as a disciplinary action as the word "fired" is commonly used. Nevertheless, it may also imply the fact that Trump presidency who is a republican would mean a loss of Job to Obama who is a democrat, hence some of the agendas being propagated by him would be halted or altered. This slogan can have varied implied meanings depending on the circumstances at hand.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

Basing on the campaign slogans of the USA 2016 presidential candidate Trump, we can deduce that words were selectively used to paint the bigger picture of his main ideology of making America great again. Though, some slogans may seem more aggressive given that they are used to address politics which is a highly aggressive field there are some strategies that have been used to tone it down. From the above discussion, it is evident that Politeness goes beyond just a politic behavior, a social norm, a strategic conflict avoidance as well as a means of social indexing, a means of enhancing smooth communication through avoiding disruption and maintaining social equilibrium and friendly relations but it is also an art. The whole objective of politeness is achieved through the artistic way in which the words are crafted to convey the information as it also takes care of the face and face wants of those involved (the interpersonal relations).

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