

استخدام الكلام غير المباشر في الفكاهة في خطابات مختارة للرئيس الأميركي أوباما: تحليل تداولي

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الخلاصة

تهدف هذه الورقة الى البحث عن كيفية استخدام الكلام الغير مباشر في الفكاهة . فالكلام الغير مباشر هو عامل أساسي في لغة الفكاهة . حيث تمكن المتحدث من ارسال الرسائل المعاني بصورة غير مباشرة و بطريقة فكاهية اكثر و مؤدبة. تبدأ هذه الورقة البحثية باعطاء نظرة شاملة عن مفهوم الكلام الغير مباشر و دورها بإنتاج الفكاهة و السخرية. ثم تستعرض النظريات التداولية لباخ و هارنش، براون و ليفنسون، أوستن و سيرل، و بعض الباحثين الاخرين من اجل وضع اطار لفهم و تحليل كيفية استخدام الكلام الغير مباشر في الفكاهة. أيضا تبحث هذه الورقة دور السياق في تفسير الكلام الغير مباشر، بالإضافة الى دور قوة الكلام، قوة العمل اللغوي و قوة الأثر. في الختام الورقة البحثية تقدم و تحلل مجموعة مختارة من العبارات اللفظية الفكاهية و الساخرة أيضا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكلام الغير المباشر ، الأفعال الغير المباشرة ، الفكاهة ، السخرية.

The Use Of Indirect Speech Acts In Humor In Selected Speeches By President Obama: A Pragmatic Analysis

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the use of indirect speech acts in humor. Indirect speech acts are an essential factor of humorous language. They give the speaker the ability to convey messages and meanings indirectly in a more humorous and polite way. The paper begins with an overview of the concept of indirect speech acts and their effect in producing humor. Then, it presents the pragmatic theories of Bach and Harnish, Brown and Levinson, Austin, Searle and some other scholars to present a framework for understanding and analyzing indirect speech acts in humor. This paper also investigates the role of context in inferring indirect speech acts, in addition to the role of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary forces. Finally, the paper presents and analyse selected utterance from President Obama's speeches that are humorous and ironic too.

Keywords: indirect speech acts, indirectness, humor, the irony.

Literature Review

According to politeness concerns, indirect speech acts are usually preferred to direct speech acts. Usually, direct speech acts tend to be too direct and impolite in most contexts, but on the contrary, indirect speech acts give the opportunity to the speaker to avoid the illocutionary force of the utterances (Thomas, 1995: 68). It is more polite to say "I feel thirsty" instead of saying "give me water".

There are many interpretive challenges that accompany indirect speech acts. Due to the mismatch between the intended and literal meanings, the listener or hearer must interpret the indirect speech acts according to the speaker's shared contextual and background knowledge. Yet, in some cases the process of inference may lead to a miscommunication, particularly when there is no common background (Grice, 1989: 43). In contrast, it is easier to interpret and comprehend direct speech acts because of the explicit direct illocutionary force (Leech, 1983: 140).

The choice of direct or indirect speech acts depends on maintaining a balance between clarity and social appropriateness in communication. However, Because of their inferential nature, indirect speech acts are often used for pragmatic and social reasons that are related to politeness, but they introduce more space for miscommunication (Wierzbicka, 2003: 198).

For Searl (1975: 74) politeness is the main motivation for using indirect speech acts. He defines indirect speech acts as “cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another” (Ibid.: 60) cited in (Flowerdew, 1990:

Nogaard et al. (2010, 154) define speech acts as “speakers perform the speech act (the primary act) by another speech act (the secondary act)”, this means that there are changes in the functions of speech acts, for instance, a speech act which appears as a statement may function as a request, and other speech acts that appear to be as announcements may function as warning or threat speech acts. A similar definition to Nogaard's et al. (2010) is suggested by Kotmann (2020: 183), he adds that “two speech acts are realized at once, one of them being explicit and the other implicit”. In relation to the communicative intention of the speaker, the important speech act is the implicit one.

Literature review

In his “An Essay in the Philosophy of Language” (1969), Searl states that indirect speech acts actually use language to produce an

illocutionary act which differs from the locutionary act (or the literal meaning) and the perlocutionary act (the reception of the hearer). Following Searl's classifications of indirect speech acts, there are two types: indirect questions, where the speaker asks a question without directly asking it, and indirect requests, where the speaker aims to request something without asking for it directly (63-64).

Moreover, Austin (1962) refers to direct and indirect speech acts in his book ‘How to Do Things with Words’. He claims that an utterance has both an illocutionary force (the intended meaning or use of word) and the locutionary force (the literal meaning of the word). He says that when the locutionary force is contracted with the illocutionary force then an indirect speech act occurs. Also, Austin classified illocutionary force into performatives, constatives, and behabititives (p. 5-6).



In his “Logic and Conversation” (1975: 45-46), Grice suggests the Cooperative Principle, which clarifies that in a conversation the speaker is expected to perform relevant, concise, truthful and clear communication. He suggests the concept of implicature, which refers to the intended meaning of an utterance in addition to its literal meaning. Grice categorized implicatures into two types; conversational implicatures, which are interpreted from the context of the speech, and conventional implicatures, which are maintained by using certain phrases or words (such as “yet” or “never”). Grice states that indirect speech acts involve the use of conversational implicatures.

Similar to Grice’s statement, Bach and Harnish (1979: 207-208) argue that indirect speech acts involve conventionalized indirect speech acts use. They suggest the notion of pragmatic presupposition,

which refers to the speaker’s assumption about the interlocutor’s beliefs and knowledge to convey meaning indirectly.

Furthermore, a detailed analysis of indirect speech acts is provided by Levinson (1983). He defines indirect speech acts as “speech acts in which what is said is not identical with what is meant” (Levinson, 1983: 216). He suggests a similar notion to that of Grice which claims that indirect speech acts involve the use of specific kinds of implicatures, these are conventional implicatures. In addition, Levinson presents the theory of politeness, which assumes that the speaker is supposed to be considerate and polite in their interaction with other interlocutors, also, he says that indirect speech acts are used to produce speech acts indirectly or more politely.

A further categorization of indirect speech acts is suggested by Mey (1993: 224- 226). He suggests that there are two types of indirect speech acts; indirect perlocutionary acts where the hearers are indirectly affected by what the speaker says, and indirect illocutionary speech acts, where the speech is performed indirectly. Besides, he says that indirect speech acts encompass using conversational implicatures that depend on cooperative principles. Mey states that indirect speech acts can be used to produce different communicative goals like subtlety, politeness, or irony.

Brown and Levinson (1987: 67-68) state that indirect speech acts might be used to produce face-saving acts, by using indirect speech acts to convey a more considerate and polite manner. As they claim, indirect speech acts can perform both positive and negative politeness strategies.

Referring to the importance of context in inferring indirect speech acts, Clark (1996) argues that indirect speech acts are context-dependent. According to him, indirect speech acts implicate the use of the common ground to express illocutionary force relying on the assumptions which are shared between the interlocutors. Similar to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) conceptions, Clark (1996) states that indirect speech acts can perform different communicative goals, such as efficiency, humour or politeness (294- 295).

1. Indirectness in Pragmatics

Indirectness in pragmatics is defined as meaning something different from what is said. Generally, this takes place when there is a violation or floating of one of Grice's conversational maxims, which consequently generates implicatures. The speaker can achieve some ends which include politeness by using strategic indirectness that is effortful for the listener.

A wider clarification of indirect can include “enabling” as well as “accidental” usages. There are instances when indirectness is the only option available to the speaker, such as need- statements that are among children’s earliest directives but are formally indirect, or metaphors to describe physical or emotional pain without literal equivalents (Terkourafi, 2019: 933).

Often indirect speech acts refer to communication in which the speaker's intention goes beyond the literal meaning of the words used. Essentially, the speaker conveys a message indirectly, relying on the listener's shared background information and context. A speaker uses

language in a way that requires the listener to infer what the speaker means (Dakheel & Al-Abedy, 2022: 667).

2. The role of cognitive processes in understanding and interpreting indirect speech acts

The study of indirect speech acts indeed provides insights into the broader field of social interaction and communication. Indirect communication is a common phenomenon in day-to-day interactions. If there is a deep understanding of the mechanism and cognitive features of indirect speech acts, then there will be a deep understanding of how interlocutors navigate social communications and express meaning successfully, in addition to clarifying how interlocutors infer and respond to indirect messages which include the levels of predictability, certainty and semantic similarity that is connected with indirect responses (Boux et al., 2022: 2).

An indirect speech act can be interpreted by drawing upon background knowledge and situational context through the cognitive process of context integration. In order to determine the speaker's intended message, relevant information from memory is accessed and integrated with the current context. Often, individuals must make inferences to understand the implicit meaning behind indirect speech acts. By reasoning about the speaker's intentions, beliefs, and goals, as well as considering social and cultural norms, indirect communication can be understood. In addition to perspective-taking and theory of mind, indirect speech acts need cognitive processes. A perspective-taker adopts the speaker's viewpoint and considers their

intentions and beliefs. Theory of mind means the ability to attribute mental states to an individual's self and others. To understand indirect speech acts, both of these processes are essential (Ibid.: 13).

3. Humor and Irony

Humor is a general term that carries various meanings and definitions. Generally, it accompanies the concepts of irony, satire, sarcasm, mockery, ridicule, etc. Some scholars consider it as a communicative activity, as Martineau (1972: 103) says that it is "one social process" in almost every public system or "any communicative instance which is perceived as humorous". Other scholars consider humor as an individual feature, for instance, Koestler (1964: 31) gives a physiological definition saying that it is "the only domain of creative activity where a stimulus on a high level of complexity produces a massive and sharply defined responses on the level of complexity produces a massive and sharply defined responses on the level of physiological reflexes".

Supporting Koestler's notion, Martin and Ford (2018: 16) state that humor is "mental processes that go into both creating and perceiving such as amusing stimulus and also the emotional response of mirth involved in the enjoyment of it".

Humor can be a semantic resource that is related to involvement and appraisal, it works as a device taking various forms such as telling impolite jokes, teasing, funny stories or using hyperbole which results in providing the ability for interactants to exchange attitudes referring to degrees of "in-ness" and "otherness" (Eggins, Slade, 2004: 155).

On the other hand, the concept of irony has its roots dated back to Socrates and his methods to reveal truth, facts and insights by "means of contradictory assertions" (Lee, 1995) Quintilian (Institutio, VII, vi. 54), as cited in (Ibid.), claims that the ironist expresses what is untrue so as to reveal an opposing opinion or truth. Contrariwise, Kierkegaard (1841/1966) claims that the intention of the ironist is not to express what is false so as to gain an opposing opinion, but rather the ironist aims to draw the attention that the utterance lacks truth (Ibid.).

In accordance with many other definitions of irony, Nel and Christensen (2021:113) define irony as "saying the contrary to what is meant". Besides, they state that from a linguistic perspective, "irony is a metalinguistic device" (Ibid.: 114)

The concept of irony, according to Rose (1993: 87) "generally describes a statement of an ambiguous character, which includes a code containing at least two messages, one of which is the concealed message of the ironist to an 'initiated audience'".

4. Humor Strategies Employed in Indirect Speech Acts

1- Wordplay: speakers can use puns, ambiguities and rhymes to convey an indirect speech act in a playful manner. for instance, a punny proposition like "Let's skedaddle" instead of "Let's leave" (Attardo, 1994: 105).

2- Sarcasm: the speaker, actually, means the opposite of is literally said, which can function as an indirect criticism, compliment or reprimand in a sarcastic way (Krueez and Glusksberg, 1989: 114).

3- Exaggeration: hyperbolizing and overstating facts can be used to make a humorous point (Raskin, 1985: 36). For instance, to say "I'm freezing to death" may imply indirectly a suggestion to turn up the heat.

4- Incongruity: in accordance with indirect speech acts, creating a mismatch between what is produced and the context is possible to create humor, such as saying "What a lovely day for a picnic!" While it rains, which implies, indirectly, going inside (Sharon and Sharon, 2015: 89).

5. Humor, Irony and Indirect Speech Acts

Because they involve expressing meaning indirectly through implicit communication strategies, indirect speech acts are closely related to both humor and irony. People regularly employ indirect speech acts in everyday interactions to make suggestions, requests, or commands in a polite or discreet manner. In order to convey the intended meaning, these indirect utterances usually depend on contextual factors and mutual information. Humor and irony can be manipulated to give a playful or sarcastic tone to the indirect speech act, giving the speaker the opportunity to deliver the desired message indirectly and at the same time generate an ironic, sarcastic or humorous result. In various social contexts, the use of indirect speech acts in a humorous or ironic manner can work appropriately to achieve several aims, such as making social harmony, saving face, or offering a form of coded communication.

Humor, irony and indirect speech acts are all samples of nonliteral language practice that depend on the hidden or intended meanings and mutual understandings. Holtgraves (2002) argues that "they all

involve saying one thing but meaning another" (p.155). The ability to recognize the intention behind the utterance that is different from the literal meaning is required to perform an indirect speech act. Clark and Gerrig (1984) state that "In using an indirect speech act, a speaker communicates one meaning (nonliteral meaning or indirect) by way of another (literal meaning or direct)" (p.57). This is similar to the inference of humor and irony.

With humor, irony and indirect speech acts there are oppositions between what is said literally and the intended meaning of the utterance. The ironic utterance compares contextual evaluative polarity with literal evaluative polarity (Attardo, 1994: 222). Grice's (1975: 45) maxims and cooperative principle clarify the interpretation of implicit meaning. As an example, there is a flouting of the quantity maxim in indirect speech acts and irony, which raises the need to infer what is beyond the literal meaning.

All of the irony, humor and indirect speech acts include "playfulness" with language

through the violation of direct and literal use of language. Dew et al. (1995: 15) argue “The playful cleverness of indirection constitutes much of the wit and charm of such nonliteral language use”.

When it comes to interpreting indirect speech, irony and humor, context plays an essential role. Gibbs (1986) states that “the interpretation of indirect speech acts, irony, and conversational jokes all rely heavily upon contextual information and speakers’ intentions” (p.107).

All three devices assume a shared understanding between the speaker and listener. The speaker must share knowledge of the situation and

social norms with the listener in order to pull off an indirect speech act, irony, or joke, according to Clark (1996: 344-345).

6. Data and Methodology

The present research paper is qualitative in nature. It describes and analyses various notions of indirect speech acts, humor and irony. The data of the study are taken from one source which is the youtube website. Ten extracts are selected from different speeches by President Obama. These data are analyzed pragmatically according to Brown and Levinson’s Politeness theory, Grice’s maxims, and Austin and Searle’s notions of speech acts. The analyses of the data refer, also, to humor strategies, because of its crucial role in delivering and interpreting the utterance.

1- “We are building an iron man”.

The President released this utterance during a White House manufacturing innovation event in 26/2/2014

President Obama said this utterance in his meeting with designers, engineers and other researchers who are seeking support from the Pentagon. If interpret the literal meaning, the utterance appears to be a direct one about building a machine or a robot that is made of iron. Yet, the context of the utterance can indicate an indirect speech act.

In fact, the use of term “iron man” can be used to refer to the superhero character Marvel Comics’ which carries the same name, and at the same time, the utterance contains many interpretations. The degree of directness plays a major role in interpreting such utterances, because here Obama may refer to the power of intelligence and creation of those researchers.



The utterance can be seen as an example of humor, because the speaker may use puns or he plays on words to create a sense of humor. The irony, also, can be used in this utterance, particularly if there is not an actual building of an iron man, but rather a machine or robot.

2- “I am told that the last three speakers here have been the Pope, her majesty the Queen and Nelson Mandela which is either a very high bar or the beginning of a very funny joke”

In this utterance, the irony lies in the reality that ‘the Queen, the Pope and Nelson Mandela are highly respected figures, and it is not expected to make a joke about such people. Suggesting making a joke by President Obama, will create a sense of ambivalence and surprise, and this is a key component of having humor.

In this utterance, the use of irony can create a sort of tension between these highly respectable people and President Obama, because of possible banter. But this tension ends when President Obama states the butt of the joke, which means that he will not make a joke about them. Consequently, this will lead to a sense of relief and humor.

3- “Things after Friday afternoon get a little challenge”

President Obama said this utterance mocking his staff for not giving him the paper of speech. 21/July/ 2016.

President Obama’s remark” Things after Friday afternoon get a little challenge” can be viewed as an example of an indirect speech act

that employs humor, irony and euphemism to deliver a negative message in a more indirect and courteous manner. the utterance also breaks from the Gricean maxim of quantity, creating tension and surprise. The use of euphemism is a type of positive politeness, which tries to keep the listeners’ positive face.

In this context, euphemism is an example of positive politeness, which strives to keep the listener’s positive face by avoiding direct criticism or negative intention. President Obama is able to send a harsh message in a more indirect and polite manner by employing a ‘euphemism.

4- “The end of the Republic has never looked better”

As President Obama prepares to leave office on the first of May 2016, take a look at one of his most memorable moments when he didn't hold back in his final speech at the White House Correspondents' Dinner as he unleashed barbs on himself, Donald Trump, Justin Trudeau, Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders and Ted Cruz.

It is a form of irony to use this utterance, since it implies that the end of the Republic is actually in a very poor state, despite its improved appearance. As a result, there is a sense of



irony and incongruity.

By using humor, irony, and understatement, the utterance conveys a negative message in a more polite manner. There is a sense of tension and surprise created by the utterance, which violates the Gricean maxim of quality. The use of irony and understatement as humor strategies can be seen in this utterance.

“Earn me some serious Tubman’s”

This utterance is taken from the same speech that the previous utterance has been taken from.

This utterance refers to the new 20\$ bill, which will feature the image of Harriet Tubman, a former slave, and abolitionist. There is a metaphor in this reference, which is a form of indirect speech in which a word or phrase is used to convey something else.

This utterance is also an example of hyperbole. Hyperbole is a form of humor which includes an exaggeration of effect. This leads to creating a humorous effect.

This utterance can be analysed as an indirect speech act that uses humor, metaphor and hyperbole to communicate a request in a more polite and indirect manner. The speech employs a metaphor to describe the new 20\$ money depicting Harriet Tubman, as well as hyperbole to produce a hilarious effect. Humor methods used in this statement include the use of metaphor and hyperbole.

5- “Here in this very spot and it’s anyone’s guess who she will be”

This utterance is taken from the same speech that the previous utterance has been taken from.

The utterance is a sort of indirectness in this context, implying that the speaker has no idea who the next speaker will be. By establishing a sense of surprise and incongruity, this use of indirectness provides a funny impact.

President Obama’s utterance can be analysed as an example of an indirect speech act that employs humor, indirectness, and

understatement to express a message in a more indirect and courteous manner. The speech deviates from the Gricean maxim of quantity creating tension and surprise. In this utterance, humor methods such as indirectness and understatement are used.

“He is the future” and I said “Justin give it a rest” I resented that. This utterance is taken from the same speech that the previous utterance has been taken from.

The line “He is the future” exemplifies Mey’s classification of indirect speech as a claim, in which the speaker attempts to transmit a meaning indirectly. This assertion’s indirectness provides a hilarious effect by producing a sense of surprise and incongruity.

The use of irony is clearly evident in this speech. The utterance is an example of understatement, a type of irony in which less is said than what is meant. By producing a sense of surprise and incongruity, this produces a funny impact.

The speech also incorporates the pragmatic concept of indirectness, as the speaker uses



Conclusion

The investigation of indirect speech acts, humor, and irony can reveal many significant gaps in our understanding of language use. The following findings are concluded:

- 1- Indirectness interpretation is totally context-dependent. And humor, irony, and indirect speech acts are mainly context- dependent phenomena.
- 2- The three concepts all include a degree of intentionality. The investigation of these concepts reveals the benefit of understanding the speakers' intentions so as to interpret language use. Humor, irony, and indirect speech acts are involve a deviation from social norms. To understand the relationship between these concepts, it is a must to know the role of social norms inshaping language use.
- 3- Power can be asserted or challenged by direct speaking acts, humor, and irony. To understand power dynamics and their impact in affecting language is important in discussing the relationship between these notions.

However, research on the relationship between indirect speech acts, humor, and irony can show very useful gaps in the process of understanding language use, in addition to the need for more for a subtler and context-dependent strategy for interpreting language and its role in social interaction.

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