

تحليل تداولي لاستراتيجيات التآدب في خطب

المهاتما غاندي

**A Pragmatic Analysis of Politeness
Strategies in the Speeches of Mahatma
Gandhi**

م.صدي علي حامد

Instructor: Sada Ali Hamid

جامعة تكريت/ كلية الآداب

College of Arts/Tikrit University

Email: sadaalihamed@tu.edu.iq

الكلمات المفتاحية: استراتيجيات التآدب، الخطاب السياسي، التداولية، الأفعال المهددة للوجه، التفاعل اللغوي.

Keywords: politeness strategies, political discourse, pragmatics, face-threatening act, interaction.

الملخص

تشتمل الخطب السياسية في الغالب على أفعال كلامية تُعدّ مهدّدة لوجه المتلقي، مثل توجيه الأوامر، أو الحثّ على الفعل الجماعي، أو التعبير عن المعارضة. وتتمثل إحدى الإشكالات الجوهرية المستمرة في دراسات التداولية وتحليل الخطاب السياسي في توضيح الكيفية التي يمكن من خلالها إنجاز هذه الأفعال المهدّدة للوجه بأسلوب إقناعي، من دون الإضرار بالانسجام الاجتماعي أو تقويض مصداقية المتكلم. وعلى الرغم من أن خطب المهاتما غاندي قد دُرست على نطاق واسع من المنظورين التاريخي والأيدولوجي، فإن ثمة نقصاً واضحاً في التحليل التداولي التفصيلي الذي يفسّر بصورة منهجية كيفية توظيف استراتيجيات التأدب لإدارة الوجه والتخفيف من حدّة المواجهة في خطابه السياسي.

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معالجة هذه الإشكالية من خلال تحليل استراتيجيات التأدب المستخدمة في مختارات من خطب المهاتما غاندي، وشرح وظائفها التداولية في تقليل الأفعال المهدّدة للوجه، مع تعزيز السلطة الأخلاقية وتحقيق التماهي والتوافق مع الجمهور. وتتعلق الدراسة من فرضية مفادها أن غاندي يعتمد اعتماداً منتظماً على استراتيجيات التأدب الإيجابي والتأدب السلبي، بدلاً من الاستراتيجيات المباشرة الصريحة دون تلطيف في الدعوة إلى المقاومة والتضامن والطاعة، من خلال لغة غير مباشرة تتسم بالاحترام.

ويُجرى التحليل في إطار نظرية التأدب التي قدّمها براون وليفنسون (1987)، والتي تتيح نموذجاً بنويًا منظمًا لدراسة إدارة الوجه والتأدب في التفاعل اللغوي. وتعتمد الدراسة منهجًا تداوليًا نوعيًا، حيث تقوم بتحليل ستة مقتطفات مختارة من خطب غاندي .

Abstract

Political speeches frequently involve acts that threaten the audience's face, such as issuing commands, urging collective action, or expressing opposition. A persistent problem in pragmatic and political discourse studies is explaining how such face-threatening acts can be performed persuasively without undermining social harmony or speaker credibility. Although Mahatma Gandhi's speeches have been widely examined from historical and ideological perspectives, there remains a lack of detailed pragmatic analysis that systematically accounts for how politeness strategies are used to manage face and mitigate confrontation in his political discourse.

This study aims to address this problem by analyzing the politeness strategies employed in selected speeches by Mahatma Gandhi and by explaining their pragmatic functions in minimizing face-threatening acts while reinforcing moral authority and audience alignment. The study hypothesizes that Gandhi consistently relies on positive and negative politeness strategies to promote resistance, solidarity, and obedience through indirect and respectful language.

The analysis is conducted within the framework of Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, which offers a structured model for examining face management and politeness in interaction. Adopting a qualitative pragmatic approach, the study examines six selected excerpts from Gandhi's speeches.



1. Introduction

Language is central to political discourse, enabling communication, persuasion, authority, and social management. Leaders must mobilize audiences and convey ideology while avoiding direct confrontation, requiring strategic management of face through politeness

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory explains how speakers mitigate face-threatening acts using indirectness, mitigation, and solidarity. In politics, these strategies balance authority with respect and persuasion with credibility.

Mahatma Gandhi's speeches illustrate non-violent discourse grounded in moral appeal and collective responsibility. Through inclusive language, indirect directives, and moral reasoning, he inspired resistance while performing face-threatening acts, such as urging mass action or criticizing colonial rule.

This study examines selected speeches using Brown and Levinson's framework to show how Gandhi used politeness to manage face and enhance persuasion

2. Literature review

The study of pragmatics has long focused on how speakers express meanings that transcend literal terms. The concepts of politeness, which explain indirectness and interpersonal meaning in discourse, are fundamental to pragmatic analysis.

Levinson (1983:5) asserts that pragmatics is "the study of language usage". Whereas Yule(1996:3-4) argues that linguistic form is not as important as context and speaker purpose when determining pragmatic meaning.

As stated by Stadler (2018: 1), the study of language in context is known as pragmatics. Its primary goal is to investigate how the situation in which utterances are produced affects their meaning.

According to the discipline, people's general linguistic understanding is insufficient in cross-cultural interactions because each language has its own vocabulary. Based on Stadler, the context of a particular culture must determine the meaning of the statement. This implies that depending on the cultural context, the same words or phrases might have distinct meanings. People attempting to comprehend that context will require not only their language proficiency but also a particular sociopragmatic awareness that goes along with it.



As will be discussed later, Yule (1996:60) connects politeness to face, seeing politeness as a way for interlocutors to show that they are aware of each other's faces and adjust the social distance between them.

In accordance with Holmes (2001, 261), politeness is defined as the appropriateness of the words used in the given circumstance, and the degree of politeness is connected to the relationship between the interactants.

that "being linguistically polite involves speaking to people appropriately in the light of the relationship".

Crystal (2008) specifies politeness as "a term which characterizes linguistic features mediating norms of social behavior, in relation to such notions as courtesy, rapport, deference and distance". In light of Crystal's concept, language resources are used to achieve civility for a variety of social objectives.

2.1. Pragmatics and Political Discourse

Levinson (1983:21) defines pragmatics as the study of how meaning is created and understood within context, with particular attention to the speaker's intentions, implied meanings, and the link between language and social interaction.

In political discourse, pragmatic analysis shows how politicians use language deliberately to influence audiences, justify authority, and negotiate power relations. Political speeches frequently rely on indirectness, presupposition, and pragmatic inference, enabling speakers to express ideological stances without engaging in overt confrontation. (Chilton, 2004:4)

Political language entails the use of the capacity to coordinate the thoughts of multiple people. It is a tool used to manipulate society at large. The speech was heard by a large audience, and the success of the candidates may be influenced by the opinions of each individual. Political speeches convey feelings, provide ideas, and create and maintain social bonds. In pragmatics, the felicity condition, the cooperative principle, conversational implicatures, politeness, relevance, phatic tokens, deixis, and the speech act theory can all be used to evaluate political discourse. Therefore, pragmatic techniques like implicature and civility are crucial for comprehending how political meaning functions at a level higher than the literal one (Mohammed et al. ,2022:2316),

2.2 The purpose of Politeness

In accordance with Ide (1989:223), there is widespread consensus that the goal of enforcing the politeness principle in communication is to "oil" the flow of interactions and preserve social relationships by comprehending and upholding the customary rights and obligations that



members of a community are familiar with. It has a function in social categorization.

Depending on Lakoff (1990:34), politeness dynamically acts as a reducer-like mechanism for any challenge or confrontation that can arise between an addressee and a speaker. Stated differently, politeness is the linguistic strategy used by interlocutors to mitigate the impact of the face-threatening act (FTA) conveyed in the speech act performed in a particular circumstance. According to the linguistic community, being polite is therefore a socially acceptable conduct and is sometimes referred to as strategic conflict avoidance

2. 3 The Concept of Face

Brown and Levinson (1987:61) describe face as “the public self-image that every member seeks to claim for themselves.” This concept consists of two dimensions: positive face and negative face. Negative face is defined as “the desire of every competent adult member for their actions to be unhindered by others.” In essence, it reflects the fundamental human need for autonomy and freedom from imposition.

Brown and Levinson (1987:62) define positive face as : “the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others.” This dimension of face relates to the individual’s self-image that they wish others to value and approve. In this sense one can conclude that positive face refers to the interlocutor’s wish to have their self-image appreciated and endorsed, while negative face denotes the desire to remain free from imposition, interference, or disturbance.

Yule (1996, 60) argues that face is “the public self-image of a person. It refers to the emotional and social sense of self that one has and expects everyone else to recognize ”.

Leech (2005:1) believes that Brown and Levinson's idea is presented as an abstract communication model. It aims to take into consideration how social circumstances influence language use, making it one of the most significant contributions in the subject. The social value or self-image that people uphold when dealing with others is the fundamental way that politeness is viewed within this framework.

2.3.1 Types of Face

Brown and Levinson (1987:65–66) argue in their politeness theory that both speakers and listeners possess face needs, and that different types of face can be challenged by various actions directed at either party. For example, a speaker may threaten the listener’s negative face through requests, commands, suggestions, or threats. Examples :

- (1) Could you please give me a piece of cake?(request)
- (2) Please attempt to be calm . (command)



(3) You could seek another way . (suggestion)

(4) He has to answer this question. (threat)

Brown and Levinson (1987:65–66) argue in their politeness theory that both speakers and listeners possess face needs, and that different types of face can be challenged by various actions directed at either party. For example, a speaker may threaten the listener's negative face through requests, commands, suggestions, or threats. Examples:

(5) He can fix the problem instead of her. (offers)

(6) I assure you that I will undertake and complete the task on your behalf (promise)

In relation to the speaker, positive face is generally threatened by actions such as apologies or taking responsibility, as these require acknowledging one's mistakes and can harm the speaker's desired self-image. For instance, not ceasing an action may result in adverse consequences (threat). (ibid.)Examples:

(7) I apologize for the mistake (apologize)

(8) Honestly, this was my fault. (confession)

The difference between positive and negative face lies in the fact that face threatening acts (FTAs) can be categorized based on...

a-What part of the face are they threatening

b- The presence of at least two interactants in every contact, such as the speaker and the hearer .

Brown and Levinson (1987:67) use these two criteria, but they also note that the positive and negative features of face-threatening situations overlap significantly., Examples

(9) You never complete the task on timetable. (complaint)

(10) I apologize for interrupting, but it is not correct. (**Interruption**)

(11) I am extremely displeased by what you did. (forceful expression of emotion)

(12) We must be more careful next time. (**Mutual Face Threat**)

2.3.2 Face Threatening Act Strategies

Brown and Levinson (1987:68) propose a set of strategic options that speakers may draw upon in the realization of speech acts. The choice among these strategies is guided by pragmatic considerations, chiefly intended to attenuate the potential face-threatening impact of the act on the addressee. Due to their complexity, these strategies presuppose a degree of rationality on the part of the interlocutors, as assumed by the two theorists. When performing a face-threatening act (FTA), the strategies are principally classified into two broad categories.

A-on record

b-off record.

The first category is further subdivided into performing the act baldly or performing it with redressive action. The latter is, in turn,



realized through two forms: positive politeness and negative politeness. The second category is characterized by the absence of a determinate structural pattern, attributable to the obfuscatory nature of the speech act. In this case, the utterance is intentionally indirect, allowing for multiple possible interpretations by the addressee and resulting in an ambiguous or indeterminate illocutionary force. In simpler terms, the second category of FTA strategies is grounded in the use of indirect expression to communicate the speaker's intended meaning. This approach may be manifested through rhetorical devices such as metaphor, irony, hinting, exaggeration, and contradiction (Brown & Levinson, 1987:69).

2.3.2 .1 Bald On record Strategies:

According to Brown and Levinson (1987:68–69), this strategy is commonly utilized in situations where the speaker perceives little or no threat of counteraction from the addressee, such as in cases of urgency, imminent danger, or when the speaker holds a position of significant superiority over the addressee.

Hence, the explicitness and transparency of the utterance represent a central characteristic of this strategy. That is, when a speaker performs a speech act in a direct and unequivocal manner, without implementing any mechanisms to alleviate the potential threat to the addressee's face, the act is classified as employing the bald on-record strategy Examples :

- (11) Stop talking
- (12) Close the door

2.3.2.2 On Record with Redressive Action:

Boicu (2007:7) acknowledges that the primary function of politeness strategies is to prevent face-threatening acts (FTAs) or to mitigate their impact. This objective is achieved through the deployment of either positive politeness or negative politeness, each of which is guided by the particular aspect of the addressee's face that the speaker seeks to attend to.

2.3.2.2.1 Positive Politeness Strategy

Brown and Levinson (1987, p.72) argue that positive politeness aims to satisfy the addressee's positive face by harmonizing the speaker's intentions with the desires of the hearer. They contend that positive politeness constitutes an approach-oriented strategy designed to reinforce the addressee's face by demonstrating that, in certain respects, the speaker's interests correspond with those of the hearer. This is accomplished by regarding the hearer as an in-group member or a friend, whose desires, face needs, and personal attributes are acknowledged and valued. In contrast, negative politeness is essentially avoidance-oriented, employing strategies that convey the speaker's recognition of and respect for the addressee's autonomy and freedom of action (ibid.: 75).



LoCastro (2012:139) argues that a speaker adopts a positive politeness strategy to attend to the addressee's positive face needs by demonstrating closeness, providing support, or performing similar acts that enhance the addressee's sense of respect and appreciation . Through this approach, the speaker signals both friendliness and a cooperative, helpful attitude.

Several strategies fall under the umbrella of positive politeness, including complimenting, offering, making promises, joking, expressing agreement, employing in-group identity markers, among others. (ibid.141). Examples

(13) That presentation you gave was truly remarkable and left a strong impression. (Complimenting)

(14) Would you like her to help him with these reports? (Offering)

(15) I'll finish this work by tomorrow for him (promising)

(16) Should he maintain this level of dedication, he may achieve professional status as a comedian (joking)

(17) I concur with your perspective on the importance of teamwork- That corresponds precisely with my own line of reasoning (agreeing)

(18) We share the same objectives, so it is in our best interest to resolve this collaboratively (Using in-group identity markers)

2.3.2.2.2 Negative Politeness Strategy

Brown and Levinson (1987:75) assert that negative politeness is inherently oriented toward avoidance and is realized through strategies that signal the speaker's recognition and respect for the addressee's autonomy and freedom of action. Within this framework, the speaker is attuned to the addressee's negative face needs and strives to avoid impinging upon them. Consequently, the speaker employs linguistic expressions that explicitly convey an intention to minimize imposition. "to disturb the addressee as little as possible" (LoCastro, 2012, 140).

This strategy is realized by various forms like apologizing; being pessimistic; being conventionally indirect; giving deference, and impersonalizing the act(ibid.) Examples

(19) Excuse me for disturbing you, but could you offer me some help? (apologizing)

(20) I wonder if you might have a moment to review this(Being pessimistic)

(21) Would it be conceivable to open the window? (Being conventionally indirect)

(22) Sir, you may be seated if you wish (Giving deference)

(23) It seems that the door should be closed. (Impersonalizing the act)

2.3.2.3 Off-Record Strategy:

Brown and Levinson (1987:69) argue that indirectness and implication constitute the primary features of this strategy. This approach



engages the addressee's capacity to interpret the conveyed message, a capacity that typically depends on the pragmatic knowledge shared between speaker and listener. A central aspect of this strategy is its focus on attending to the addressee's negative face. Examples

(24) This exam is a nightmare. (metaphor)

(25) I have an exam tomorrow. (hint)

(26) Isn't it a bit noisy here? (**Rhetorical question**)

(27) The house is a little messy (**Understatement**)

(28) He's told her a thousand times (**Overstatement**)

El-Samir (2014, 34) asserts that, within this strategy, the formulation of an utterance is structured such that the addressee is required to infer the speaker's intended meaning.

2.4 Face-threatening Behavior in Gandhi's Speech

Political speeches frequently contain face-threatening activities (FTAs), like calls for action, criticism, and directions. Through the use of polite language, Gandhi lessens these dangers and upholds the dignity of his audience while furthering his political goals.

2.5 Gandhi's Politeness Strategies

Brown and Levinson present four main approaches for becoming polite, Those are all apparent in Gandhi's speeches:

1. Bald-on-record strategies

They are used in morally urgent situations, including direct requests for justice or exhortations to take action.

2. Positive politeness strategies

Gandhi frequently used inclusive pronouns, common ideals, and collective identity (such as unity, sacrifice, and national dignity) to foster solidarity.

3. Negative politeness strategies

Gandhi's ethical stance and respect for personal freedom are reflected in these tactics, which lessen imposition by using polite language, modal expressions, and indirect requests.

4. Off-record strategies

Gandhi is able to express disapproval and criticism in an implicit manner while upholding a non-violent and morally upright discourse by using metaphor, indirect criticism, and moral parallels.

3. Methodology



A qualitative discourse analysis method was chosen for this study. It concentrates on sample passages from Gandhi's political speeches given during the Indian independence campaign. Instead of quantifying linguistic traits, the study seeks to analyze meanings, intentions, and interactional functions of language, which makes the qualitative method appropriate.

3.1 The Model Employed

To analyze politeness strategies in Gandhi's speeches, this study adopts Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987), which provides a systematic framework for understanding how speakers manage interpersonal relations and audience expectations criticism, and calls for action. Gandhi mitigates these threats by embedding them within polite linguistic forms, thereby preserving audience dignity while advancing his political objectives

3.2 Data Selection

The data for this study are drawn exclusively from Mahatma Gandhi's "Quit India" article delivered in 1942. This text represents one of the most significant moments in Gandhi's political discourse, as it directly addresses British colonial authority while mobilizing the Indian population toward mass nonviolent resistance." The "Quit India" text is particularly suitable for pragmatic analysis because it contains a high density of directives, appeals, warnings, and moral evaluations, all of which potentially constitute face-threatening acts.

4.Data Analysis

This study used the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) to analyze six chosen passages from Mahatma Gandhi's 1942 speech/article, "Quit India."

The analysis shows that politeness mechanisms are used strategically and methodically to control face-threatening acts (FTAs) while retaining persuasive power. In order to ascertain how politeness methods are used to lessen face-threatening acts, each expression is analyzed within its immediate textual and political context.

4.1 Method of Analysis

The analysis is conducted in a number of methodical steps:

1. Recognizing speech patterns that may constitute face-threatening actions.



2. Categorizing every statement using the politeness tactics proposed by Brown and Levinson (negative politeness, positive politeness, off-record, and bald on-record).
3. Describing the ways in which particular linguistic constructions—such as indirect expressions, modal verbs, and inclusive pronouns—serve as markers of politeness.
4. Analyzing the practical intent of each method in light of Gandhi's political objectives, including moral authority, solidarity-building, and persuading.

Excerpt 1

“Every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide.”

Analysis:

This excerpt issues a directive that could threaten the hearer's freedom by telling them what to do. Gandhi reduces this imposition using negative politeness. By saying “every Indian” instead of “you,” he frames the action as a shared moral duty rather than a personal command. This impersonal phrasing lessens pressure and respects the hearer's autonomy. As Brown and Levinson (1987) note, such strategies soften face-threatening acts while keeping the message persuasive.

Excerpt 2

“The call of the moment is do or die.”

Analysis:

This excerpt is a strong face-threatening directive that leaves no choice for the hearer. It uses a bald on-record strategy, with no politeness or mitigation. Phrases like “do or die” create urgency and override the audience's freedom. As Brown and Levinson (1987) note, such directness is appropriate in crises where clarity matters more than politeness.

Excerpt 3

“I want you to know and feel that there is nothing but determination and courage in this struggle.”

Analysis:

This excerpt could threaten the listener's negative face because Gandhi is trying to shape their thoughts and feelings about the struggle. He softens this by using positive politeness. By saying “know and feel,” he connects emotionally with the audience and presents determination and courage as shared values. As Brown and Levinson (1987) explain, this approach reduces the force of face-threatening acts by emphasizing common ground.

Excerpt 4



“You may act upon it. Every Indian who desires freedom must be his own guide.”

Analysis:

This excerpt is a directive that could threaten the audience’s negative face by guiding their behavior. Gandhi softens it with negative politeness. Using “may” turns the order into a suggestion, giving the audience choice. The phrase “every Indian who desires freedom must be his own guide” avoids direct address, reduces pressure, and highlights collective responsibility. As Brown and Levinson (1987) note, this indirectness lowers the force of face-threatening acts while keeping the message persuasive and socially considerate

Excerpt 5

“Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind.

Analysis:

This excerpt is a request that could threaten the audience’s negative face because it asks them to reflect morally. Gandhi reduces this imposition by using an off-record strategy. He presents the directive as a “mantra,” offering it as wisdom rather than a direct command. This allows the audience to understand the intended action on their own. By focusing on common moral values, Gandhi eases the pressure and encourages willing action. Brown and Levinson (1987) note that off-record strategies help speakers guide listeners without appearing forceful.

Excerpt 6

“There is a mantra that I give you: recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen.”

Analysis:

This part is a request that could pressure the audience because it asks them to think about the condition of the poorest and weakest. Gandhi softens this by using positive politeness. He calls the instruction a “mantra,” presenting it as moral guidance rather than a command. This respects the audience’s judgment and freedom. By appealing to shared values, he reduces pressure and encourages willing acceptance. As Brown and Levinson (1987) explain, such strategies support the listener’s positive face, build solidarity, and combine moral authority with empathy

5. Findings

1- Gandhi uses polite and indirect words when he talks about responsibility and moral choice. He says may and ask so he does not sound forceful. He does not give orders. He shows political action as something people choose to do by themselves.



2- The analysis of selected excerpts from Gandhi's Quit India speech shows that he carefully uses politeness strategies to fit the situation. Here, politeness is not just good manners, but a tool to persuade the audience and keep them on his side.

3. Gandhi uses the positive politeness to create a feeling of unity with his audience. He cares about their feelings, gives moral advice, and uses words like *we* to make everyone feel together. This helps people feel included and makes his message stronger.

4- Bald on-record strategies are used only in urgent moments when clarity matters more than politeness. Phrases like "Do or die" are direct and show the seriousness of the situation. Gandhi often adds explanations to make these commands seem necessary, not forceful.

5- Gandhi uses indirect language to reduce pressure and protect the audience's freedom, presenting resistance as a voluntary moral choice rather than a command.

6-Gandhi uses direct language only to show urgency.

7- This study focuses on how face-threatening acts are handled during political urgency. The findings answer the research questions and support the main hypotheses

6. Conclusion

1-The study shows how Gandhi and persuaded without using force due to his proficient use of politeness. He changed severe political directives into moral appeals by using tactics that respect both positive and negative face. This lends support to Brown and Levinson's view that, even in difficult political circumstances, politeness is an important instrument for controlling social interaction.

2-It also displays how Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy is reflected in his politeness, which makes language an effective component of his moral and political approach. This study affirms that Brown and Levinson's model is suitable for resistance discourse and emphasizes how civility can be a potent rhetorical device in political speeches.

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