

Exploring the Speech Acts of Exclusionary Utterances in American Political Speeches

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ABSTRACT

Verbal exclusion refers to a range of linguistic practices that sustain power dynamics and social inequality. It includes behaviors like linguistic discrimination, name-calling, stereotyping, and disparaging words that uphold social hierarchies or express power. The goal of the current study is to detect and pragmatically analyze spoken instances of verbal exclusion in American political speeches. The study attempts to pinpoint the speech acts that constitute verbal exclusion, the purposes of verbal exclusion, and the specific form of verbal exclusion that is most frequently employed by US politicians. The four texts from American speeches from 2011 to 2017 are the subject of the analysis. The study concludes that Verbal exclusion is used mainly to fulfil the function of identity construction. Lexical exclusion is commonly used by American politicians.

KEYWORDS: Verbal exclusion, Speech acts, Illocutionary force, Functions.

1. Introduction

Politicians employ a variety of techniques and methods to persuade or win over their supporters. One of these tactics, known as verbal exclusion, is the use of specific terms to establish or uphold social hierarchies, such as name-calling, stereotyping, insulting language, and linguistic discrimination. (Galindo, 2003). Language becomes a tool used by people or organizations to justify marginalization due to perceived differences or to declare their superiority. Thus, an understanding of the context is necessary in order to comprehend the meaning of linguistic exclusion. The focus of the current study is on verbal exclusion speech acts in American political debates. The purposeful use of words to marginalize, silence, or exclude people or groups based on social identities like race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status is known as verbal exclusion. Therefore, American political speeches from 2010 to 2024 serve as the analysis's data source.

This study is limited to analyze verbal exclusion on pragmatic level and tries to answer the following questions: (1) which type of speech act that is commonly used to issue verbal exclusion in American political speeches? (2) what is the illocutionary force of the exclusionary utterances in American political speeches?

The study aims at: (1) Identifying the types of speech acts that are commonly used to express verbal exclusion. (2) Specifying the illocutionary force of verbal exclusion in American political debates.

Accordingly, the study hypothesized that: (1) representative and expressive speech acts are commonly used in the production of verbal exclusion. (2) blaming and criticizing are the most common illocutionary force used in producing verbal exclusion.

To fulfill the aforementioned aims the following steps will be followed: (1) Surveying the literature of verbal exclusion and speech acts theory. (2) Analyzing the data which is represented by four texts which are taken from American political debates from 2011 to 2017 according to a model developed by the present study.

Literature Review

The Concept of Verbal Exclusion and Definitions

Verbal exclusion refers to a range of linguistic practices that sustain power dynamics and social inequality. It includes behaviors that uphold social hierarchies or assert dominance, such as name-calling, stereotyping, disparaging language, and linguistic discrimination (Galindo, 2003). Language becomes a tool used by people or organizations to justify marginalization due to perceived differences or to declare their superiority. Multiple factors, such as microaggressions and linguistic markers of social identity, contribute to verbal exclusion. According to Fine and Weaver (2019), subtly worded statements like microinsults and microinvalidations can send negative signals that diminish the identities or experiences of underrepresented groups. Reinforcing stereotypes and inequities, these language practices can be found in daily encounters, the workplace, media depictions, and educational settings. (1991, Bourdieu).

Functions of Verbal Exclusion

1. **Social Hierarchization:** According to Bourdieu (1991), linguistic practices reflect and reinforce social stratification. For example, in academic settings, specialized jargon can exclude those not versed in the discipline, reinforcing the divide between experts and novices.
2. **Ingroup vs. Outgroup Distinctions:** Verbal exclusion also functions to delineate ingroups from outgroups. This is evident in "in-group" language or jargon, which serves as a marker of membership and belonging. As Giles and Smith (1979) argue, the use of specialized or insider language can reinforce group cohesion while simultaneously excluding outsiders.
3. **Power and Control:** Language can be a means of exerting power and control over others. Foucault's (1977) theories on discourse and power emphasize how language can be used to marginalize and control individuals or groups by defining acceptable forms of expression and behavior.
4. **Identity Construction:** Language plays a role in constructing and asserting identities, which can lead to exclusionary practices. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) explore how identity is negotiated through language, noting that the creation of "otherness" through verbal means serves to maintain social boundaries.

Types of Verbal Exclusion

1. **Lexical Exclusion:** This type involves the use of specific terms or jargon that are unfamiliar or inaccessible to outsiders. For instance, technical jargon in professional fields can exclude those who lack the necessary background knowledge (Swales, 1990).
2. **Syntactic Exclusion:** This occurs when complex sentence structures or grammatical forms are used to alienate those who do not possess the required linguistic competence. For example, legal language often employs complex syntactic constructions that can be confusing to laypersons (Tiersma, 1999).
3. **Pragmatic Exclusion:** Pragmatic exclusion involves the use of language in ways that assume shared knowledge or social norms, thereby excluding those who are not part of the in-group. This includes indirect speech acts or culturally specific references that may not be understood by outsiders (Searle, 1969).
4. **Discourse Exclusion:** This type of exclusion is based on the broader discursive practices and conventions that determine what is considered acceptable or normative. For instance, the way media frames certain issues can exclude alternative perspectives and reinforce dominant viewpoints (Van Dijk, 1993).

Searl's Classification of Speech Acts

Many linguists, such as Searle (1979) and Leech (1983) have their own remarks on Austin's classification of IA. For example, Searle (1979) criticizes Austin's taxonomy, he argues that not all the verbs that are listed in the taxonomy are illocutionary verbs, because some of them are not performative verbs such as the verb "intend."

In fact, Searle (1975) starts with a distinction between what he calls regulative and constitutive rules. The former, as he puts it, merely regulate antecedently existing forms of behaviour. For example, the rules of polite table behaviour regulate eating, but eating itself exists independently of these rules. Some rules, on the other hand, do not merely regulate; they also create or define new forms of behaviour (i.e. constitutive). The rules of chess create the very possibility of our engaging in the type of activity we call playing chess. The latter is just acting in accordance with the given rules.

An alternative taxonomy of SAs has been offered by Searle distinct from that proposed by Austin. Searle (1969) identifies three separate acts as:

- a) An utterance act (the production of speech sounds, words, and sentences).
- b) A propositional act (referring to an entity and predicating some properties of that entity).
- c) An illocutionary act (the making of statements, promise, apology, etc.).

Searle (1979) presents a list of the basic categories of IAs. He recognizes five types of SAs:

- a) Representatives: the purpose of this type is to commit the S (in varying degrees) to something's being the case. They have a word-to-world direction of fit, they express S's belief that the propositional content of the utterance is true, e.g., report, assert, etc.
- b) Directives: are those kinds of the speech acts that indicate an attempt by S to get H to do something, e.g., commands, requests, questions, etc.
- c) Commissives: they are committing the S to some future course of action, therefore they show world-to-word fit and the sincerity condition is intended, e.g., promise, vow, swear, etc.
- d) Expressives: they express the psychological state of the S about a state of affairs, they have no direction of fit and the truths of the expressed proposition are presupposed, e.g., thank, apologize, congratulate, etc.
- e) Declaratives: they are characterized by, first; the illocutionary point is to bring into existence the state described in the proposition, second; the direction of fit is both word-to-world and world-to-word, and finally; the propositional content corresponds to reality (world). Declarations require to take note of new information about the S's intended course of action, e.g., declare, appoint, name, etc.

The Model of Analysis

The present study develops a model to analyze verbal exclusion pragmatically which basically depends on identifying the use of speech acts the exclusionary utterances (Searle's classification of speech acts (1979), the types of verbal exclusion, and the functions of verbal exclusion.

Data Analysis and Findings

It is important to be mentioned that because of the limits of this study four situations that includes exclusionary expressions are tackled to test the workability of the model developed by the present study.

Excerpt 1

1. "Nasty Woman" - Donald Trump (Republican) vs. Hillary Clinton (Democrat) (2016)

Context: The third and final presidential debate, held on October 19, 2016, at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Hillary Clinton was outlining her plans to expand Social Security and Medicare: "My Social Security payroll contribution will go up, as will Donald's, assuming he can't figure out how to get out of it."

"Such a nasty woman." "But whether we like it or not, that's what it is."

The moderator, Chris Wallace, attempted to move on to the next topic. Clinton ignored the comment and continued discussing her policy proposals.

Analysis

2. Types of Verbal Exclusion

1. Lexical Exclusion:

The language used is simple and straightforward, making it accessible to a broad audience. However, the phrase "Such a nasty woman" might exclude individuals who find the language offensive or derogatory.

3. Functions of Verbal Exclusion

1. Social Hierarchization:

The statement can reinforce social hierarchies by trivializing previous comments and diminishing the contributions or concerns of others, maintaining the speaker's authority. "Such a nasty woman" explicitly targets an individual, reinforcing a hierarchy where the speaker holds power over the target.

1. Speech Acts:

Expressive Speech Act: "Such a nasty woman" expresses the speaker's negative evaluation of the target, conveying an emotional reaction.

Excerpt 2

Donald Trump (Republican) vs. Elizabeth Warren (Democrat) (2017)

Context: Trump used the term "Pocahontas" to mock Warren's claims of Native American heritage during a White House event.

Preceding: Trump was addressing a group of Native American veterans: "We have some great Native American veterans with us."

Excerpt: "Pocahontas, that's another beauty." (Donald Trump, 2017)

Following: The comment was widely criticized by Native American groups and political commentators: "The president's comment was offensive and inappropriate."

Analysis

1. Types of Verbal Exclusion

Lexical exclusion: Using "Pocahontas" in a dismissive manner marginalizes Native American voices by framing their ethnic identity in a derogatory way. This contributes to the broader societal exclusion of their perspectives.

2. Functions of Verbal Exclusion

Identity Construction: By derogatorily referring to Warren as "Pocahontas," Trump constructs a negative identity for her, affecting public perception of her ethnic claims and political stance. This maintains social boundaries and reinforces in-group versus out-group distinctions.

3. **Speech Acts:** The comment can be seen as a representative speech act, where Trump asserts a belief that belittles Warren's ethnic identity and, by extension, disrespects Native American heritage.

Excerpts 3

Rush Limbaugh (Republican Commentator) vs. Michelle Obama (Democrat) (2011)

Context: Limbaugh made a derogatory comment during his radio show about Michelle Obama's public health campaign.

Preceding: Limbaugh was discussing government spending on public health: "Why are we spending so much money on these initiatives?"

Excerpt: "It's time to get Aunt Jemima off the pancake box and Michelle Obama off the public stage." (Rush Limbaugh, 2011)

1. Types of Verbal Exclusion

Lexical Exclusion: The language is highly offensive and exclusionary, using derogatory terms that alienate and marginalize Michelle Obama and, by extension, the communities she represents.

2. Functions of Verbal Exclusion

Social Hierarchization:

The statement reinforces social hierarchies by using racial and gender stereotypes to demean Michelle Obama, thereby maintaining and perpetuating racist and sexist hierarchies.

3. Speech Acts:

Expressive Speech Act: "It's time to get Aunt Jemima off the pancake box and Michelle Obama off the public stage." expresses Limbaugh's negative evaluation and offensive stance.

Representative Speech Act: Limbaugh's preceding and following comments assert his opinion on government spending and public health initiatives.

Excerpt 4

Donald Trump (Republican) vs. Hillary Clinton (Democrat) (2016)

Context: A campaign rally during the 2016 presidential election.

Preceding: Trump was criticizing Clinton's political career: "Hillary's only achievement is being married to Bill."

Excerpt: "She'd be nothing without Bill." (Donald Trump, 2016)

Following: The crowd cheered, and Trump continued: "And we don't need another four years of Bill and Hillary."

Analysis

1. Types of Verbal Exclusion

Lexical Exclusion: The language is clear but dismissive, using terms that undermine Clinton's achievements and attribute them solely to her husband. This can alienate individuals who recognize her independent accomplishments.

2. Functions of Verbal Exclusion

Identity Construction: The language constructs an identity for Trump as someone who dismisses perceived inadequacies and challenges Clinton's legitimacy. It constructs an identity for Clinton as someone whose achievements are secondary to her husband's.

3. Speech Acts:

Representative Speech Act: "She'd be nothing without Bill." asserts Trump's belief that Clinton's achievements are due to her husband.

Expressive Speech Act: The crowd's cheering indicates their agreement and support for Trump's statement.

Conclusions

On the basis of the analysis conducted previously, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Politicians use representative and expressive speech acts mainly in the production of exclusionary expressions. The expressive speech acts are used to evaluate the women and their contribution in political situations. They use assertion speech act commonly to emphasize the inability of women in politics.
2. Lexical exclusion is mainly used by men politicians to exclude women and it is characterized by the use of word like "nasty", "nothing" and "Pocahontas".
3. Finally, verbal exclusion is basically used to express identity construction function.

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