
Echoes of Violence: Speech Act Theory and the Pragmatics of (Im)politeness in Gaza Genocide Newspaper Coverage

Qurat ul Ain¹, Luqman Manzoor²

1 Master in Language and Literature, Yanshan University. quratulain2024@outlook.com

2 MPhil scholar, Department of Applied Linguistics, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Email: luqmanmanzoor875@gmail.com

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Abstract

The Gaza-Israel conflict, a historical and persisting issue, has recently reignited with a humanitarian emergency in Gaza following Hamas' attack on Israel in October 2023. This study analyzes the representation of the conflict in global media, focusing on the strategies employed by newspapers to convey sensational news and the linguistic features used for politeness. The research poses three key questions: 1) How do different countries portray the ongoing genocide in Gaza, and is impoliteness present in these representations? 2) What strategies do media organizations employ to frame news about the Gaza conflict in either a polite or impolite manner? 3) What speech acts are prevalent in news articles covering the continuing violence in Gaza? Employing a qualitative approach, this research examines politeness strategies using Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson's "Politeness - Some universals in language usage" as a framework. Data was collected from major newspapers, and MAXQDA facilitated the qualitative analysis. The study focuses on the USA's New York Times, The Times (UK), The Japan Times, Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor (Switzerland), and Al-Jazeera (Qatar). The sample size includes five carefully selected articles from each newspaper, ensuring a comprehensive examination of speech acts and politeness strategies. The findings reveal distinct speech acts (Declaratives, Directives, and Commissives) and identify politeness strategies like "Bald on record Maximum urgency and desperation" as predominant in news articles, shedding light on the linguistic decisions employed by newspapers in framing the conflict.

Keywords: Gaza genocide, Speech Act Theory, Politeness, Impoliteness, Media framing, Newspaper coverage

Introduction

The Gaza-Israel conflict has its roots from history and in the present days, the conflict has started again. Since there is a humanitarian emergency in Gaza, after the attack of Hamas on Israel on 7th October 2023, after breaching Israel's military barriers encircling Gaza. Hundreds of news articles were published in the support of Israel. Political parties and other influential sources have given their views regarding the ongoing conditions. Newspaper authors have used different approaches to portray their statement. Till this day, Israel has been bombing every single piece of land in Gaza. The one sided war has been going on for more than one hundred and ten days. The civilians are getting killed in the name of "fighting the terrorists". The powerful countries used

"the power of language" to stop whatever is happening in Gaza at the moment. Due to the recent war in Gaza, people are getting every detail through the media and news reporters. The global population is only dependent

on news in order to know the insights of War/Gaza. These newspapers are playing an important role in shaping people's perspectives. The language used in the news articles is made “polite” for the readers to digest the hard reality or it might not be changed and stated as it is portraying the “impolite” behaviors. Some of the selected newspapers articles have used the features of politeness such as, urgency, warning, solidarity and desperation and understatement. A few of the lexical choices used show emergency and indicate impoliteness as well. The main purpose of this research is to analyze:

1. How do different countries represent the ongoing genocide in Gaza through their respective media outlets? Is impoliteness used in these media reports?
2. What specific strategies are employed by media organizations to frame sensational news concerning the Gaza conflict in a more polite or impolite manner?
3. Which speech acts are common in news articles covering the continuing violence in Gaza?

The research emphasizes the importance of the use of linguistic features in conveying harsh information. This study adopts a qualitative research approach to analyze and interpret the content of politeness strategies among the newspaper articles. The data was collected from online resources like the websites of the newspapers and later on MAXQDA was used in annotating the data. A lot of other researches have been done on this issue before, yet it still has some limitations to it. It would be important to mention here that this research focus mainly on the politeness strategies based on “Politeness - Some universals in language usage” by Penelope Brown, Stephen C. Levinson.

Literature Review

The Gaza-Israel conflict, historically complex, recently escalated following Hamas' attack in October 2023. Examining global media representation, this study focuses on newspapers' strategies and linguistic features for conveying the conflict. Scholars like Livingston (1997) and Entman (2012) highlight media's role in constructing narratives and framing conflicts, influencing public opinion. Galtung and Ruge (1965) and van Dijk (1998) explore linguistic features and power dynamics in media discourse. Critical Discourse Analysis unveils how language shapes interpretations. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory informs the study, examining positive and negative politeness strategies in media language. A qualitative approach, employing MAXQDA and frameworks related to speech acts and politeness, ensures comprehensive analysis. Sample selection includes major newspapers from the US, UK, Japan, Switzerland, and Qatar. This thoughtful selection ensures a global perspective on the Gaza-Israel conflict, aligning with the study's aim to understand how major media outlets shape public perceptions of complex geopolitical events.

In summary, the literature review contextualizes the conflict, explores media's role, and positions the study within broader academic discussions on conflict reporting and media influence. Subsequent sections will present results and discussions, providing insights into newspapers' language choices in reporting the conflict.

Methodology

The research adopted the qualitative approach due to the limited number of newspaper articles taken for the study. The most popular content from the digital platforms of the E-newspapers were taken under consideration to meet the selection criteria. The research was conducted to look into the effects and reach of particular speech actions. The politeness methods were also checked by focusing on a wider readership by concentrating on the most visited articles.

Primary Tools

In this research, the primary tools employed for data analysis involve the use of frameworks related to speech acts and politeness strategies. These tools were applied meticulously within the MAXQDA software. MAXQDA was employed to tag and categorize the collected data. As it is a qualitative data analysis tool, so

it facilitated the comprehensive examination of the content within the chosen newspapers. The data was methodically analyzed using the frameworks of speech acts and politeness techniques as analytical lenses. While the examination of politeness strategies focused on the language use to indicate assertiveness, politeness, or respect, speech acts theory allowed for the identification of communicative acts within the texts. The research study aimed to identify the multiple levels of communication present in the news items by applying these frameworks.

Sample Selection

The newspapers chosen for this study came from the big five that are known for having powerful impact worldwide. The United States (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Japan, Switzerland, and Qatar are among these five big, owning the best news casting companies. The selection criteria were centered on selecting newspapers that have a large readership and a wide impact overall.

Newspapers Selected

I. USA's New York Times:

New York Times is a well-known American newspaper that is read all over the world and is well-known for its thorough coverage of the international affairs.

II. The Times (UK):

A popular daily newspaper, The Times, in Britain that is known for its extensive reporting on a variety of subjects, including international military and geopolitical events was selected for data collection.

III. The Japan Times:

The Japan Times is an established English-language daily in Japan that offers viewpoints on global issues from that nation.

IV. Switzerland's Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor:

The Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, based in Switzerland, was included despite not being specifically linked to any one nation because of its emphasis on human rights and possible influence on international discourse. V. Al-Jazeera (Qatar):

It is an international news agency with its headquarters in Qatar. It played a crucial role for its thorough reporting on events in the Middle East and around the world, offering a distinctive viewpoint from the Gulf region.

With great care, the news stories from various cultural and geopolitical contexts were chosen in order to guarantee a thorough study that captured a range of perspectives.

This research aimed to identify patterns in the communication strategies used by major newspapers in the chosen countries by utilizing MAXQDA in combination with frameworks related to speech acts and politeness strategies.

Sample Size

The sample size consisted of five selected articles that were taken out of the stated newspapers. This careful selection was made in an effort to guarantee a concentrated and comprehensive examination, allowing a detailed look into speech actions and politeness techniques in each of the articles.

Identifying Speech Acts

Three main speech acts were identified and seen in the chosen articles during the qualitative analysis. Declaratives, Directives, and Commissives were among them. The communicative target and contextual details of each speech acts lead to an in-depth understanding of the language used in the news reports.

Politeness Strategy

Using an effective tagging approach, the research found that politeness strategy such as "Bald on record Maximum urgency and desperation" in which there is "Increasing hearers' interest in sympathetic-advice/warning tone", Positive politeness in which "Directly quoted speech rather than indirect reported speech", and impoliteness strategy such as "Be Direct Stemming from Do

FTA on Record" was the most common politeness and impoliteness styles throughout the chosen articles. This tactic exhibits an open and honest communication approach that is frequently marked by urgency and desperation, direct speech and talking on record without caring for the face threat the hearer might feel. Finding this particular politeness tactic reveals information about the news articles' linguistic decisions, including the tone and persuasive devices used, including the tone and persuasive devices used.

Results and Discussions

The results indicate that urgency and desperation in the BALD-ON-RECORD category of the politeness strategy. The first objective of this study was to analyze how different countries present the news on Gaza-Israel conflict. The frequencies in the tables will allow us to understand the usage of politeness and impoliteness strategies by the selected countries for the news of the ongoing war on Gaza.

The following table shows what type of Impoliteness and Politeness (positive and negative) is used in **Al-Jazeera** newspaper article.

Type of Impoliteness Strategy (+ve and –ve) in AL-JAZEERA	Usage (No. of times)
Superiority/powerful-position	4
Emergency	4
Be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic (+ve impoliteness)	2

Type of Politeness Strategy (+ve and –ve) in AL-JAZEERA	Usage (No. of times)
Exaggeration	1
Maximum-urgency/desperation	3
Directly quoted speech rather than indirect reported speech	2
Be Direct Stemming from Do FTA on Record	2
White-lies	1
Doing-fta-is-in-h's-interest(sympathetic-advice/warning)	1
Give (or ask for) reasons	1

Intensifying-interest-to-hearer	1
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The following table shows what type of Impoliteness and Politeness (positive and negative) is used in the **New York Times** newspaper article.

Type of Impoliteness Strategy (+ve and –ve) in NYTIMES	Usage (No. of times)
Superiority/powerful-position	4
Emergency	1
Threat-to-the-hearer-is-small	1
Unmarked behavior	1

Type of Politeness Strategy (+ve and –ve) in NYTIMES	Usage (No. of times)
Offer (FTA-ORIENTED-BALD-ON-RECORD-USAGE)	1
Maximum-urgency/desperation	1
Intensifying-interest-to-hearer	2

The following table shows what type of Impoliteness and Politeness (positive and negative) is used in the **Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor** newspaper article.

Type of Impoliteness Strategy (+ve and –ve) in EURO-MED HUMAN RIGHTS MONITOR	Usage (No. of times)
Emergency	2

Type of Politeness Strategy (+ve and –ve) in EURO-MED HUMAN RIGHTS MONITOR	Usage (No. of times)
Doing-fta-is-in-h's-interest(sympathetic-advice/warning)	3
Intensifying-interest-to-hearer	1
Be Direct Stemming from Do FTA on Record	1

Maximum-urgency/desperation	2
Directly quoted speech rather than indirect reported speech	4
but-clause	1

The following table shows what type of Impoliteness and Politeness (positive and negative) is used in **The Japan Times** newspaper article.

Type of Impoliteness Strategy (+ve and –ve) in THE JAPAN TIMES	Usage (No. of times)
Superiority/powerful-position	2
Sarcasm-or-mock-impoliteness	1

Type of Politeness Strategy (+ve and –ve) in THE JAPAN TIMES	Usage (No. of times)
Doing-fta-is-in-h's-interest(sympathetic-advice/warning)	2
Directly quoted speech rather than indirect reported speech	1
Understate (-ve)	2
Be Direct Stemming from Do FTA on Record	1
Switching back &forth between past &present tenses	1
Be conventionally indirect (-ve)	1
Offers	1
NON-MINIMIZATION-OF-FACE-THREAT	1
Maximum-urgency/desperation	2
White lies	1
Marker-of-vagueness	1

The following table shows what type of Impoliteness and Politeness (positive and negative) is used in **BBC** newspaper article.

Type of Impoliteness Strategy (+ve and –ve) in the BBC	Usage (No. of times)
Speriority/powerful-position	1
Pointed criticism/complaint (including expressions of disapproval)	1
Make the other feel uncomfortable	1

Type of Politeness Strategy (+ve and –ve) in the BBC	Usage (No. of times)
Be Direct Stemming from Do FTA on Record	6
Maximum-urgency/desperation	7
Intensifying-interest-to-hearer	4
Directly quoted speech rather than indirect reported speech	3
Switching back &forth between past &present tenses	1
Maximum-urgency/desperation	7
Social Deixis	1
Doing-fta-is-in-h's-interest(sympathetic-advice/warning)	3
Personal Deixis	2
Uncertainty	1
White-lies	1
Safe-topic	1
Marker-of-vagueness	1

All of the five tables above show the politeness strategies are mostly used in the news reports and the impolite features are way less than the politeness markers. There are direct quotes and statements but it is to educated the audience and let them know the truth the governments might be hiding from them. If the results are to be divided in the forms of ratios of impoliteness and politeness features, the ratios would be **3:8, 4:3, 1:6, 2:11,** and **3:13** respectively. Looking at the speech acts, the three main speech acts that were found; directives, comissives and declaratives that lead to a more clearer, better and to the point understanding of the ongoing issues. The directive speech acts indicate the situation and direct the readers towards what is happening,

commissives indicating the future events that might take place and declaratives telling the exact statements from the addressed people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research underscores the importance of linguistic analysis in understanding how media outlets navigate the delicate task of reporting on sensitive geopolitical issues. The prevalence of politeness strategies in the studied newspapers suggests a conscious effort to present information in a manner that respects the audience's sensitivities while addressing the urgency and gravity of the ongoing conflict in Gaza. Further studies could delve into the impact of such linguistic choices on public perception and the effectiveness of conveying critical information in times of crisis.

Limitations

Although the existing methodology recognizes the existence of potential limits, it yet provides a strong basis for study. Understanding that research is a dynamic process, the technique plans for additional improvement and growth in future editions. By adding new viewpoints, improving analytical methods, and incorporating input gathered during the research process, these subsequent revisions seek to solve any potential limits. This flexible methodology guarantees the continuous enhancement and validity of the research outcomes.

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