

INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS AND POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF IMRAN KHAN SPEECHES

Sadia Liaqat

M.Phil Scholar, Department of English, The Women University Multan, Punjab, Pakistan

Email: sadiaaliaqat181@gmail.com

1. Iram Iqbal

English Lecturer at The Prime College, Budhla Sant, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan

Email: Iramiqbal2743@gmail.com

2. Tooba Riaz

Visiting Lecturer, Department of English, Gazi University, Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Pakistan

Email: toobaaamir820@gmail.com

Abstract:

The present qualitative research focuses on discovering how indirect speech acts and politeness strategies are used in the political speech of Imran Khan, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan. The framework includes two theories that are respectively Searle's Speech act theory and Brown and Levinson (1987) Politeness Theory. A particular sample of five speeches (2018-2022) has been picked up through the application of purposive sampling as the part of an attempt to understand how the concepts of indirectness and politeness are used strategically to shape the perception of the listeners, control their actions, and to project political positioning. The results highlight the importance of politeness as having an persuasive and defensive role in political rhetorics to protect an image and be a people's navigator through power dynamics of politics. The study is useful in examining the role of pragmatism strategies in South Asia high stakes political communication.

Key Words: Political Discourse, Imran Khan's Speeches, Pragmatics, Speech Act Theory and Politeness Strategies.

1. Introduction

Political discourse has been used as a leading instrument of leadership to convey ideologies, shape the opinion of the masses, and stamp power. The style that is used in political addresses is carefully designed to accomplish certain goals and it may involve much more than the dissemination of information. This paper explores pragmatic features of political discourse through this perspective; in the context of indirect speech acts and politeness stratagem in the speeches of Imran Khan, a former Prime Minister of Pakistan (Saeed et al., 2019).

Pragmatics is a subdiscipline of linguistics whereby the context of communication provides contextual considerations to the understanding of meaning in communication. Political texts When dealing with political texts, speakers tend to use language in order to do something other than what is literally communicated. The Speech Act Theory developed by Austin states that a speech can serve a number of purposes, such as to make statements, deliver commands, raise questions and make promises among others. These roles are achieved by illocutionary acts, which are the essence when attempting to learn about the intentions of the political discourse (Sadia et al., 2020).

An indirect speech act happens when surface structure of an utterance and its intended illocutionary force are different. An example is when we ask someone to pass us some salt by using the word, Can you pass the salt? Structurally, it is a question but in terms of use, it is a request. Such indirectness enables the speakers to present indirect messages in their political speeches which gives a strong opportunity to handle the sensitive issues without attacking it head on. It is an

especially efficient method when it comes to the preservation of diplomatic relations and control of public opinion (Bashir et al., 2022).

1.1 Statement of the Problem:

Political rhetoric usually helps due to indirectness of the words and politeness strategies employed by speakers in order to maintain the relationship, criticize something, or persuade without being confrontational themselves. This is quite noticeable in speeches of political leaders where it is important to maintain the positive image in front of people, and touch upon a sensitive subject. Proficient in the use of rhetorical and practical elements, the speeches delivered by Imran Khan do not have a lot of literature devoted to indirect speech acts and politeness strategies. Analysis of such language options may give greater insight into how pragmatics influence the political discourse, how they are used to shape the opinions of the population, and how they help keep such social power structures stable.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. Identification and classification of the use of the indirect speech acts in selected speeches of Imran Khan.
2. To examine the politeness tactics that he uses in political talk.
3. To test the functioning of indirectness and politeness in such pragmatic purposes like persuasions, criticism, or favorable image handling.

1.3 Research Questions

1. Which are the common types of indirect speech acts that are presented in the Imran Khan political speeches?
2. Which politeness strategies does Imran Khan use in his speech?
3. What is the pragmatic role of so called indirect speech acts and politeness strategies in his discourse?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is meaningful because of the following reasons. To begin with, it will help to enhance a better grasp of reciprocity of the political instrumentalisation of language by political actors, who attempt to communicate information that are powerful messages as well as socially correct, walking the thin line on the sensitive issues without evoking any moral shock. Due to the concentration on the problem of indirect speech act, the study reveals slight linguistic phenomena that politicians use as the way of dealing with face needs and preserving politeness which is vital to create an idea of respect in the minds of audience and political legitimacy.

Secondly, the investigation of the speeches by Imran Khan can be used to gain some insights into the pragmatics of South Asian political speechmaking, where values and manners of politeness are different than those observed and explored in pragmatics in the Western world. This means that this localized perspective enhances the cross-cultural pragmatic study and extends the theoretical models under politeness and indirectness.

Lastly, the research of the current study will be useful to political scholars, people of communication strategies, linguistic experts, and teachers as they may get practical knowledge regarding the dynamics of language, power, and politeness. It can also assist audiences in being more media literate in that they will be more critical in dealing with the pragmatic modes that politicians employ in order to manipulate and bargain the meaning below the literal level of speech.

1.5 Definition of the main terms

The section includes the definitions of the main terms on which the study is based.

1. **Positive Politeness:** Tactics aimed at reducing the difference between the speaker and the listener, usually the solidarity or the common value demonstration.
2. **Negative Politeness:** Tactics of not making demands on the listener, so as not to appear pushy, usually by hedging or being indirect.
3. **Bald on Record:** Communicating straightforwardly without the attempt to tone down the imposition.
4. **Off-Record (Indirect):** Communication through subtle messages that enable the audience to guess the motive of the communicator.

When applied in the realm of politics, such tactics are used to succeed in a situation where relations of power, public opinion, and foreign policies form a complex.

2. Literature Review

Ahmed et al. (2020) attempt to perform speech act analysis of the address Khan gave at the United Nations General Assembly, specifically the part where he speaks about Islamophobia. They were able to find out that, they have mostly used representational and expressive acts and both direct and indirect speech acts were the means of conveying his message. This is in line with the classification of speech acts by Searle (1975) where he points out the strategic use of language by Khan as he chooses to tackle the sensitive issues.

Hussain et al. (2021) have conducted the analysis of the maiden speech delivered by Khan as Prime Minister and noted the employments of both positive and negative politeness, as well as bald on and off-record politeness strategies. The research also revealed that positive forms of politeness were more common, which indicates the desire of Khan to build common ground with his audience, as well as match that group on values.

Saeed et al. (2019) detected the application of the rhetoric strategies of ethos, pathos, and logos, as well as an indirect speech act that was used to convince the listeners. The review they present suggests the deployment of language by Khan to be strategic in not only informing the opinion of the people but also trying to persuade them to get on their side through influencing their opinion.

Sadia et al. (2020) examined the politeness tactic adopted by Pakistani and American politicians engaging in interviews. Based on their evidence two groups employed same style of politeness strategies but their cultural circumstances influenced the performance of the strategies to be dissimilar hence implying that the use of politeness strategies employed by Khan is also influenced by cultural circumstances and conditions.

Bashir et al. (2022) have dissected Khan speeches and interviews on the history of political crisis in Pakistan to prove how language was his choice to back his political stands and opinions. This kind of strategy brings out the importance of looking not only into the political discourse of political speeches but also into the power processes and ideologies that drive political speeches.

3. Methodology

The study is based on qualitative method and is meant to discuss the ways in which Imran Khan applies the rhetorical devices of indirectness and politeness to deploy them to influence and persuade and control his image in the minds of his constituents. A sample of five speeches, approximately 60–90 minutes each, have been selected through purposive sampling and analyzed through the lens of content analysis method. Moreover, the analysis is grounded in the theories of pragmatics, particularly Searle's classification of speech acts (1969) and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987). Indirect speech acts have been identified following Searle's taxonomy, focusing on instances where the literal meaning diverges from the intended meaning. Politeness

strategies have also been categorized into positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, and off-record strategies, as outlined by Brown and Levinson.

3.1 Limitations

The study focuses on depth over breadth and may not be generalizable across all political speeches. Furthermore, interpretation of indirectness and politeness is inherently subjective, though efforts have been made to minimize bias through rigorous contextual analysis and theoretical grounding. Imran Khan, as the 22nd Prime Minister of Pakistan, has delivered numerous speeches between 2018 and 2023, addressing diverse audiences including the nation, parliament, and international forums. His politics has been characterized by a balance between aggressive politics and cultural norms of respect/decorum. So, the analysis has been centred on the ways in which he used indirect speech acts and other politeness strategies as mechanisms of dealing with delicate topics, establishing authority, and establishing rapport with his audience.

4. Data Analysis

To conduct the current study, the collection of publicly available speeches of Imran Khan, created between 2018 to 2022, was compiled:

The pragmatics and discourse analysis were applied to locate cases of the indirect speech acts and politeness tactics. Manual coding was used to bring out indirectness, the categories of acts of speech and the politeness strategies used. Cultural and situational aspects were also “put under consideration.

4.1 Identification of Indirect Speech Acts in Imran Khan’s Speeches

Indirect speech acts are where the actual intended illocutionary force is divergent with the actual utterance. Imran Khan often uses indirectness to ease complaints, request, or give recommendations.

4.1.1 Types of Indirect Speech Acts Observed

Indirect Requests: Khan also asks people to cooperate or provide assistance by using mitigated forms instead of direct imperatives. An example here could be in use of words like instead of saying, You have to stop corruption he could say, I hope everyone understands the need of integrity in governance.

Indirect Criticisms: When Khan does not want to face political opponents or institutions directly, he can resort to irony or use euphemistic language, e.g., Other powers are interested in preserving status quo other than serving the people.

Indirect Promises: Indirect language is used in the wording of political commitments in order to hold expectations at bay i.e., The description of our mission is as follows: we want to make sure that every Pakistani will thrive, which means that we have some promise, but its specifications are not binding.

Example Extract: UN General Assembly Speech, 2019

In this speech, Khan speaks about the position of Pakistan on the question of regional peace. Rather than openly making accusations at another nation, he mentions:

“We are convinced in dialogue and peaceful way to solve the problem but someone has other priorities” Khan, 2019).

The straightforward one is a statement of dialogue faith but pragmatically with a negative review against some opposing policies and avoids calling them to prevent diplomatic impudence.

4.2 Politeness Strategies in Khan's Political Rhetoric

This framework developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) enumerates four strategies of politeness namely bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness and off-record (indirect). Such rely on the situational application of these in the speeches of Khan.

4.2.1 Positive Politeness

This is a strategy that plays on the favorable feeling of being liked and approved to the hearer. Khan always includes people and talks of we, our country and togetherness. Pragmatic Function: Creates group identity, decreases social distance and promotes a cooperative action.

Example from 2020 Independence Day Speech:

“Together, we have faced many challenges and emerged stronger” (Khan, 2020).

4.2.2 Negative Politeness

This strategy recognizes the hearer's need not to be imposed upon.

Examples: When addressing political opponents or the public on sensitive matters, Khan often uses hedges and indirectness to soften impositions. Such a course does not violate autonomy and risks to face threats.

Case 2021 Parliament speech:

“Hopefully, it is hoped that every one of the members would take a serious consideration of these reforms towards benefit of the country” (Khan, 2021).

4.2.3 Bald On Record

Sometimes, especially when rallying behind some urgent cause of action or when addressing the nation, Khan employs form of direct and unmediated speech acts to demonstrate authority. Talking about covid 19 scenario, Khan said;

“All the people should adhere to the SOPs” (Khan, 2022).

4.2.4 Off-Record (Indirect)

This bears strong semblance to indirect speech act. Khan tends to either be ambiguous or ironic in their references to critical statements or requests without stating them explicitly.

4.3 The Pragmatic Role of Indirectness and Politeness in Political Discourse

Politeness and particular speech act indirectness are useful pragmatic purposes in the language of Khan:

a. Managing Face Threats: Politics also has to do with bringing bad news or criticism or demands. The latter minimizes face loss to the speaker and the hearer since it is carried out indirectly.

b. Maintaining Diplomatic Tone: In particular, indirectness mitigates possible insult in international reality.

c. Enhancing Persuasion: Goodwill and cooperation strategies implemented through politeness become essential towards building political legitimacy.

d. Navigating Power Relations: Khan is careful not to be too direct with the people with social status, whereas he speaks strangely with those who have no social status at all.

5. Findings & Discussion

The critical approach of the pragmatic analysis of the speeches by Imran Khan illustrates a subtle employment of the indirect speech acts on a backdrop of different politeness strategies, towards the accomplishment of numerous communicative agendas of the political discourse, such as persuasion, so-called face-saving and preservation of the authority with the seeming friendly appearance.

Since Imran Khan uses indirect speech acts abundantly, such as making indirect requests, indirect suggestions, and indirect criticisms, which are effective to diffuse the strength of his utterances

and attract his audience in a better way. As an example, he might say only something like: You need to follow the rules, but this could also be said: It would be great, that everyone could follow the rules. This indirect nature serves to alleviate possible face-threatening acts (FTA) and contributes to the maintenance of cooperation climate.

His speak suffers indirect speech acts that enable him to say the criticizing things in a non confrontational manner e.g., Some policies may require re-thinking, other than saying, out rightly, that the current ones are erroneous. This is an aspect of subtlety that helps in reaching a greater crowd due to lessening of defenses and opening up of conversations, even with those who disagree. The research proves that Imran Khan is a smart politician who uses positive politeness and negative politeness strategies often concurrently, as it can be seen in the politeness theory by Brown and Levinson.

Example of Positive Politeness is the frequent use of inclusion words by Imran Khan such as; we, our country, compliments and solidarity to establish a rapport with his audience. This helps in creating a collective self identity and respect among the people and this makes his credibility and persuasive power of what he says.

The second politeness strategy was negative Politeness. When touching on delicate subjects or making criticisms, he utilizes hedgling, indirect strategies, and formal language because in doing so he will honor the autonomy and the negative face of his listeners. As an example, modal verbs and toning down statements (such as might, could) make him less demanding and humble.

The interaction of the indirect speech acts and pragmatics of politeness is the core of the Imran Khan rhetoric style. Indirectness in itself is also an indirectness strategy because it neutralizes face threatening content. His speeches are both aggressive and diplomatic, which allows him to work in politically sensitive atmosphere without displeasing audiences.

This philosophy is especially noticeable in times when he is talking to opposition parties or disturbing matters. He manages to express leadership and confidence by using indirect criticism and simultaneously applying positive politeness patterns to keep down interpersonal strains.

Indirect speech acts and politeness found in Imran Khan is compared to more straight-forward or confrontational political discourse in other arena according to Pakistani society and respect, hierarchy and face-saving value. His practical decisions are satisfactory in regards to the audience and therefore his discourse is practical and acceptable in his culture.

Conclusion

The highlights that both the indirect speech acts as well as layered politenesses in the political address of Imran Khan are used to handle the interpersonal relations and intra-personal situations in managing politics and influence the different politically engaged parties to take the various actions as required. Such practicality increases not only the effectiveness of his communication but also his face as a respectful, though, demanding leader.

References

- Ahmed et al. (2020). A speech act analysis of the Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan's speech at UNGA with respect to Islamophobia. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities (IJSSH)*, 5(2), 59–71. <https://doi.org/10.58885/ijssh.v5i2.59.ha>
- Bashir et al. (2022). Discourse analysis of speeches and interviews of Imran Khan in the context of alleged regime change operation and political turmoil of Pakistan. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 6(4), 296–308. [https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022\(6-IV\)28](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022(6-IV)28)

- Hussain et al. (2021). Politeness strategies in Imran Khan's maiden speech as Prime Minister of Pakistan. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 5(2), 908–924. [https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2021\(5-II\)71](https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2021(5-II)71)
- Sadia et al. (2020). A pragmatic analysis of politeness strategies used by Pakistani and American politicians in interviews. *Elementary Education Online*, 19(4), 3774–3783. <https://ilkogretim-online.org/index.php/pub/article/view/4932>
- Saeed et al. (2019). Rhetorical and persuasive strategies employed by Imran Khan in his victory speech: A socio-political discourse analysis. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 10(2), 349–360. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v10n2p349>