POLITIC IMPOLITENESS: THE USE OF BALD ON-RECORD POLITENESS STRATEGY BY HOSTS OF ADVERSARIAL DISCUSSIONS ON RADIO

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the use of bald on-record politeness strategy by four hosts of adversarial panel discussions on radio. Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) influential and diversely discussed Politeness Theory holds that verbal interaction may break down if the participants ignore each other's face needs. By this argument, the bald on-record strategy would appear to be the least desirable choice among interactants. However, it has long since been shown that focusing on politeness in institutional settings exposes new dimensions of the phenomenon (Grainger, 2005; Mullany, 2005; Harris, 2000; Lakoff, 1989). Drawing on data obtained from seven episodes of confrontational discourse on radio, the paper establishes that this apparently impolite and face-threatening behaviour of the hosts is both common and effective in managing adversarial talk. It also shows, by situating the adversarial radio discussion in its institutional context, how the host's selection of bald on-record strategy may not be perceived as impolite. The paper concludes by proposing that the host's interactional behaviour may lead to a breakdown of the interaction only if it is perceived to be 'impolitely impolite' in the context of the specific community of practice.*

KEYWORDS: Bald On-Record Strategy, Face, Politeness Theory, Adversarial Panel Discussions on Radio, Managing Adversarial Talk.

INTRODUCTION

The task of the host of a multi-panel discussion on radio is two-fold: (i) interview the panelists, and (ii) moderate both the informational content of the discussion as well as the social interaction amongst the participants (the 'relational work', as Locher and Watts, 2005; Garcés-Conejos et al., 2010 describe it). To execute this task effectively, the host must maintain control, but in a manner that will also ensure that information is optimally transmitted to the non-present listener. It has been established (e.g.by Levinson, 1992; Thornborrow, 2002) that in institutional settings, such as the radio discussion, the talk is goal-oriented, involves specialized constraints on what counts as legitimate contributions to the goal, and establishes a particular framework within which the speakers interpret or respond to utterances. These three features of institutional talk have implications for the politeness strategies that the host may use during the adversarial panel discussion.

First, being task-oriented, adversarial panel discourse typically favours the Cooperative Principle proposed by Grice (1975) over the Politeness Principle proposed by Leech (1983) and further developed by Brown and Levinson (1978,1987) in that whereas the Politeness Principle emphasizes avoiding discord and establishing concord between participants, the Cooperative Principle favours the efficient exchange of information. Granted that no given discourse is entirely transactional or entirely interactional, the host's primary duty is to ensure that the transmission of information is optimal. Thus the Cooperative Principle would regularly override the Politeness Principle.

Second, institutional discourse, as Thornborrow (2002) describes it "…sets up positions for people to talk from and restricts speakers' access to certain kinds of discursive action." This view is supported by several researchers including Silverman (1997), Bousfield (2008), Terkourafi (2008) and House (2010). Silverman (1997), for example, observes that participants' social roles better position some interactants to strategically use available resources to achieve their practical interactional ends while restricting the strategic moves of others. Similarly, House (2010: 565) explains that "Sometimes institutionally sanctioned asymmetrical power relationships between interactants prior to and ensuing the interactional encounter on hand may prove to be immune to challenge and supposedly impolite face threat. In such instances consideration of politeness and impoliteness may indeed turn out to be of secondary importance."

Finally, the participants in institutional discourse are aware of and normally subscribe to the norms of their particular community. This affects the way they interpret or respond to utterances; it determines what linguistic behaviour may be seen as politic or non-politic. Politic behaviour is not necessarily polite in the sense prescribed by the Brown and Levinson model. Rather, it may accommodate disagreement, challenges and competition as perfectly acceptable forms of linguistic behaviour. Several studies of real verbal discourse, have shown that impoliteness is often deliberately enacted and failure to pay attention to the face needs of fellow interlocutors rarely results in conversational breakdown in confrontational discourse such as political interviews (Mullany, 1999; Holmes, 1992), and parliamentary debates (Shaw, 2000), as would be predicted by Brown and Levinson's theory (see also, House, 2008; Garces-Conejos, 2009; House and Lévy-Tödter, 2010).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work was conducted within the framework of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory. In the light of more recent research, the work reviews particularly Brown and Levinson's Politeness theory as it applies to adversarial partisan political discussions on radio.

Proposing that conversations are cooperative enterprises, Grice (1975) formulates the Cooperative Principle: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs by the purpose or direction of the talk exchange." From this principle he derives the four specific maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner as follows:

Quantity: 1. Make your contribution as informative as required.
           2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
Quality: 1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
           2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
Relation: 1. Be relevant.
Manner: 1. Avoid obscurity of expression.   2. Avoid ambiguity.
           3. Be brief   4. Be orderly.

The strict observance of these rules is expected to ensure the optimal transmission of information. For this reason, departures are marked occurrences that the host may feel compelled to address.

In addressing departures from the maxims, the host would exhibit linguistic politeness behaviour. The Politeness Theory originally put forward by Brown and Levinson (1987) gives a central place to the notion of face, the public self-image that a person wants to claim for himself. Brown and Levinson argue that it is generally in the mutual interest of interactants to maintain each other's face. If an interactant needs to make an infringement on another person's autonomy, it is seen as a potential *face-threatening act* (FTA). Faced with the problem of performing an FTA, speakers have to decide whether the FTA should be performed *on-record* or *off-record*. If the speaker chooses the on-record strategy, he can perform the FTA with *redressive* action by paying attention to the addressee's face needs, or without *redressive* action, thus going *baldly on-record*.

The adversarial nature of the panel discussions sampled for the study meant more FTA's to consider. Key questions of interest in this study were, "How are FTA's performed by the hosts in their attempt to deal with departures from politeness and cooperative norms?" and "What are the outcomes of such face threatening interventions?"

METHODOLOGY

In responding to the questions posed above, the Community of Practice (CofP) framework (Wenger, 1998; Meyerhoff, 2002; Eckert, 2005) is adopted. This is a sociolinguistic approach in which the participants themselves define what is polite and impolite behaviour against the norms they have for their specific discourse community. Thus impoliteness is viewed in context, as norm breaches (Locher and Watts, 2005) and because such impolitic behaviour defies participants' expectations, either the host or the panelists would often draw attention to it, one way or the other. However, as the manager of the talk, the host, where impoliteness is cited by a panelist, may affirm it as such or reject it. The assumption is that the host makes these judgments within the framework of the institutional goal.

To reflect the natural progression of the interaction, I predetermined three related categories of data as follows: transgressions by panelists, interventions of the host, and outcomes of the interventions. Transactional transgressions relate to the Gricean conversational maxims. Interactional transgressions in this work relate to the non-politic features of self-selection and interruption, offensive language and offensive tone, and

posing as the interviewer. Outcomes, on the other hand, have been labeled *favourable* and *unfavourable.*

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents, first, general summaries and observations on both the transactional and interactional data. This is followed by a discussion on how bald on-record strategy is exploited by the hosts as a resource to manage transactional and interactional transgressions during the adversarial exchanges.

Summary of Data on Transactional Content

A total of 45 informational transgressions were addressed by the hosts. Of the corresponding 45 interventions applied here, 31 involved the simple bald on-record strategy, representing a dominant 69% of the total. The next most frequently applied intervention was the simple negative strategy. This appeared a distant eight (8) times and represented 18% of all transactional interventions

In terms of outcomes, the simple bald on-record strategy interventions were the most favourable. Only two 2 of the 31bald interventions yielded non-preferred outcomes. The remaining 29 (or 95%) of the outcomes were all favourable in that the transgressing panelist submitted to the wish of the host.

Summary of Data on Interactional Content

Interventions for interactional transgressions, on the other hand, were dominated by non-bald strategies. Twenty-one (21) out of the 27 interventions, representing 78% of the total, involved non-bald strategies.

It was observed that the most frequently applied interactional interventions were composite in nature, collectively recording a prominent 48% of the total number of interventions. This was fairly balanced against the 52% for simple interventions. Only 3 counts of the composite interventions involved the bald on-record strategy plus other strategies. The simple bald strategy occurred another low three (3) counts.

Overall, the interventions for interactional transgressions recorded 21 favourable outcomes, and 6 unfavourable ones. The most effective interventions involved the simple use of the politeness strategy or the negative strategy, respectively recording favourable outcome rates of 5 out of 6 and 4 out of 4.

Of the three simple bald-strategy interventions, two yielded preferred outcomes when applied to group offences of speaker self-selection. The other yielded an unfavourable outcome when it was applied to address the same offence committed by an individual speaker. The simple bald on-record strategy, therefore, recorded a satisfactory 67% rate of favourability. All the same, this was the penultimate least favourable record in the interactional data. Again, it is observed that the actual incidence of use of the bald strategy was low, which further weakens the argument for its effectiveness in the moderation of the interactional content of the panel discussion.

What Patterns Emerge in the Data?

All the events sampled, except one, recorded more transgressions of transactional norms than of interactional norms. This reflected of course in the overall larger total of transactional transgressions over interactional transgressions.

Of particular significance to this study were the following two findings:

1. The simple bald on-record strategy was the overall dominant strategy employed to address transgressions of transactional norms (31 out of 45 interventions).

2. The interventions that involved the simple use of the bald strategy and the negative strategy recorded the most favourable and second most favourable outcomes respectively (32 out of 61 and 18 out of 61 favourable outcomes).

3. Interventions for departures from interactional norms were dominated, 89%, by non-bald politeness strategies (i.e. 24 out of 27 interventions) which were in turn dominated, 54%, by strategies used compositely (i.e.13 out of the 24 non-bald interventions).

I proceed to discuss these findings and to show some of the scholarly and pragmatic implications they may have.

Bald On-record as Talk Management Resource

It is evident that the bald on-record strategy was used to address departures from both transactional and interactional norms. This underscores a certain (structured) arbitrariness in the use of the bald on-record strategy by the hosts – structured in the sense that it is motivated by the hosts' awareness of their institutional responsibility to ensure efficient transmission of information. Therefore, the hosts were observed to intervene baldly if, within the context of the surrounding talk, they deemed this behaviour suitable for addressing a particular transgression, transactional or interactional.

Addressing Transactional Transgressions

The data reveals the simple bald on-record strategy as the predominant tool the host uses to intervene when panelists depart from the transactional norms of the discourse. The radio panel discussion privileges the informative content and, therefore, aberrations of the Gricean Maxims are considered seriously. Also compelling the host to be particularly efficient in addressing such aberrations is the reality of a third-party listening audience. In effect, the unwritten contract between listeners and the host dictates that the host should ensure the contributions by panelists are appropriately informative, true, backed by evidence, relevant to the topic, expressed in clear language, unambiguous in meaning, brief and orderly.

The above expectations that listeners have of the host are, of course, balanced by the latter's liberal access to discursive resources including politeness strategies. Having been so licensed by the Community of Practice, the host tends to sidestep the face-work that would

be required if he is to use strategies other than the bald on-record strategy. In fact, a majority of the bald interventions in the data, manifested as crisp interruptions of the current speaker. The following extract illustrates this:

Extract 1: Interruption as bald Intervention

('H' represents the host, other initials represent various other speakers; instances of the host's bald intervention are marked by asterisk, i.e. *H)

DP;   Sometimes I say why do people work themselves to the extent that they do because in many respects they have many similarities with Mr. Rawlings (.) in many respects … they're cut from the same cloth so I ask myself why do they work themselves up [to the extent they do]

KB;   [no but I don't understand] what he's saying.
        [is it a compliment or it is not]

*H;   [so (.) so (.) so (.) so your] so your feelings
     [about all this]…

KB;   [is it a compli]ment

*H;   your feelings about all this is it's an exercise in futility and   [un]less =

DP;   [yes]

H;   = there's a political movement it [won't work]

DP;   [in fact in] in fact it is it is basically a
substitute for the work they must do politically to come to a point where we have to go

Extract 1 above also illustrates the bald 'imposition of opinion'. This is further illustrated by the second marked instance in the Extract 2 below, "So yes you'll be picking up your salary". Extract 2 additionally shows the host's use of blunt face-threatening questions in the first marked instance.

Extract 2: Direct Questions/Imposition of Opinion

*H;   end of this month you going to pick up your salary? You still holding

       yourself out as Member of Parliament? Even though you don't go to work?

MA;   it is important to note that what we are doing is pursuant to an important

       national interest (.) what is [happening (.) what happen]ing –

*H;   [so yes you'll be picking   ] up your salary (.) its

      okay

MA;   no no people ask questions (.) from those questions you understand the the -

* H;   I asked a simple question (.) you are going to be picking up your salary,
       you'll still have the MP sticker on your car and we must still refer to you as
       honourable Mahama Ayariga

Other bald strategies used by the host to address transactional transgressions included, direct contradiction, challenge or correction of a panelist's submission, the use of a falling tone, sarcasm and retorts. Several of these were packaged as interruptions and interjections.

In any case, when the host employed non-bald strategies that recognized the offender's face wants, such attention was sometimes abused or misinterpreted by the offender. In one instance, the host uses positively polite receipt tokens, 'okay,' 'right,' 'yes,' to signal the speaker to conclude his submission. This appears to have rather encouraged the overly informative speaker to keep talking. The offender ends his long submission only when the host quickly raises another topic for discussion.

Addressing Interactional Transgressions

Interactional transgressions threaten the face needs of in-house studio guests. When the host intervenes in such cases, he draws attention to the person of the offender. Managing interactional offences, therefore, involves dealing directly with the egos of both the offended and the offender.

Where face needs are so directly called to play, the host recognizes that he needs to be generally less aggressive in his approach. This may account for the low incidence of bald on-record interventions in the interactional data. The host makes a deliberate choice of overlooking that option, thus, recognizing Brown and Levinson's assertion that "people can be expected to defend their faces when threatened, and in defending their own to threaten others' faces" (Brown and Levinson, (1987:61). What is observed here is that the host's politeness behaviour in this context is, therefore, pre-emptive, designed to avoid spending so much time and energy on non-informative content.

Indeed, as the findings bear out, where a host employs the bald on-record strategy to manage interactional offences it is mostly as one part of a composite strategy. He, more or less, rebukes the offender on behalf of the offended. The host's ultimate concern appears to be to move the interaction forward and get the panelists to focus on the transactional requirement of the discussion.

Extract 3: Double-edged Bald/Positive/Off-record Composite Strategy

BA;   (…) corruption … from 1992 to 2000 (…) and you compare it to what is
           happening now from 2001 to 2006 (.) its like … chalk and cheese
           ((general laughter))
KB;   evidence … evidence
BA;   yes
*H;   the evidence we have
           [is that it is 3.3 as against 3.3] in 1999
KB;   [this is such a serious (   )]
BA;   [hold on (.) hold on (.) hold on] … and indeed the president …
                                [part of the reason]
*H;   [first of all do you] believe in this corruption

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index thing
BA;   why not(.) I've no reason not to believe in it.

In the extract above, KB self-selects and interrupts BA. The host attempts to regulate this breach, first, with a retort in lieu of BA, "The evidence we have... 1999." When KB persists, the host then pointedly ignores the offender's attempts at gaining audience while endorsing BA's turn by addressing the question to him (KB), "First of all do you believe in this corruption index thing?"

Sometimes, too, the use of the bald on-record strategy may be packaged for humour as illustrated in this extract:

Extract 4: Bald On-record in Humour

KB;   I am with them on that score
EF;   Nana [Yaa]
*H;   [I'm] with Doctor David Pessey on the telephone
            [and then I will come back to my-]
KB;   [including the (…) let's bring them all together]
*H;   yes let's shut your microphone for a moment (.)Doctor David Pessey is on the
            line (.) I hope this time you are there

In the above example, the host plays up the second interrupting speaker's "let's" and says: "let's shut your microphones for a moment." She uses humour as a form of social control thus exemplifying what Giuffre and Williams (2003) and Norrick (1993) would describe as the playful use of language to achieve a range of identity and relational effects.

There were two instances in the interactional data where the bald on-record strategy was applied by the host neither humorously nor as a part of a composite strategy. One was in reaction to a group speaker selection offence. The host raises her voice imposingly: IF I MAY FINISH (Extract 5 below). The outcome of this intervention was favourable. A possible explanation is that the threat in the host's verbal act affected the collective face of the errant panel, not an individual. The face-threat was diluted on the individual basis and, therefore, not considered threatening enough; no panelist attempted to defend face here.

Extract 5: Bald On-record against Group Speaker Self-Selection
H;   what vision
IF;   what vision (.) that's the thing
            ((Babel involving all))
*H;   IF I MAY FINISH
KB;   Matilda can I also bring this in with this (.) the Africa Union is anchored on
            good governance –
H;   is this quotation from the speech?
KB;   ye:s on good governance, sound economic development (…)

The second incident also involved simultaneous interruption by two panelists as the H attempts to speak to a guest on the telephone. H picks up on one interrupting panelist's "let's" and baldly imposes: *yes let's shut your microphone for a moment (.) Doctor Pessey is on the line.*

Extract 6: Bald On-record against Pair Speaker Self-Selection
KB;   I am with them on that score
EF;   Nana [Yaa]
H;   [I'm] with Doctor David Pessey on the telephone
           [and then I will come back to my-]
KB;   [including the (…) let's bring them all together]
*H;   yes let's shut your microphone for a moment (.)Doctor David Pessey is on the
           line (.) I hope this time you are there

Again, the result here was favourable to the host, perhaps for a similar reason as for the incident in Extract 5, as the interruption ceases and H proceeds to have a smooth interaction with Dr. Pessey.

CONCLUSION

Though the host of the adversarial radio discussion negotiates a tight line between the face needs of his panelists and the informational demands of his third-party non-physically-present listeners, he considers the informational content to be the prime interest of the latter, and, indeed, the optimization of such informational content the primary object of his practice. To safeguard this interest the host regularly employs bald on-record strategies to manage breaches by his guests of the Gricean Maxims, with significantly predominantly successful results. The interaction does not break down because, as members of the community of practice, the participant panelists appear to accept that by virtue of his position in the discourse the host reserves the right to use bald strategies as often as he deems them appropriate, and insomuch as the intent is perceived to be the optimization of information transmission to listeners. Thus perceived, this potentially face-threatening strategy is now recognized to be not absolutely impolite (or not *impolitely impolite*) in the context of the CofP but only necessarily impolite (or *politically impolite*). In other words, though the participants may naturally find their face needs threatened by such use of bald strategies the threat is greatly mitigated in their acceptance that the adversarial nature of the discourse and the over-riding transactional demands on the host sanction his recourse to the use of the bald on-record strategy in this manner.

Implications

The implications of the findings for the on-air practice of the host are significant. For one, the host of such adversarial discourse, if he understands his privileges within the Community of Practice, would strategically deploy the bald on-record strategy for a

successful programme overall, but especially in dealing with panelists' aberrations of the informational content. To control the interpersonal relations among panelists, however, non-bald strategies appear to be the more effective choice because of the greater potential for threat to face involved. Additionally, the bald strategy appears to serve an important role in controlling group offences, and as a tool for creating humour, which itself serves various relational purposes. It will be interesting, though, to do a more in-depth study of the manifestations and role of non-bald politeness strategies too, especially in managing the interactional aspect of the confrontational radio talk show.

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