A Pragmatic Account of Flaming in some of Trump's Tweets

Qasim Abbas Dhayef

Dept. of English, College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Babylon/Iraq

Email: qasimabbas@uobabylon.edu.iq

Daniah Abdul Ameer Mohammed Al-Aassam

Dept. of English, College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Babylon/Iraq

Email: daniahabdulameer777@gmail.com

Abstract

Flaming is a universal and widespread phenomenon that is regarded as part of human language recently. It is a phenomenon that dictates a certain social etiquette as reckless behavior of giving insults and words of profanity. Thus, the current study aims to scrutinize this phenomenon by means of pragmatic analysis. Consequently, the study adopts a qualitative approach in analyzing the data. The data are obtained from the social media specifically from Tweets to be described in an analysis according to an adopted model. The results show that Trump's language is full of this phenomenon that expressed publically with implied intentions.

Keywords: flaming, pragmatics, Speech act, political speech, tweets.

1.   Introduction

The current paper is a point of departure for what the researcher intends to portrait about the phenomenon of flaming within the pragmatic framework. Accordingly, it circles problems like what kind of intended meaning that is implied by this phenomenon? and what are the pragmatic strategies exploited to express this phenomenon in each tweet? That is, the paper aims to highlight the core meaning of this phenomenon to find out its nature pragmatically. Also, it aims to find out the pragmatic strategies employed to reflect this phenomenon.

In an attempt to investigate the problems and reach the aims, the researcher hypothesizes that there are different forms of speech acts used to give flaming. For instance, threatening speech act, expressive, assertive, etc.

2.   Conceptual Framework

2.1   *Flaming*

Flaming refers to a kind of verbal assault that is directed to offend either a person, group, or organizations. That is, it is a form of profanity or personal attacks (Ferber, Foltz, & Pugliese, 2006; Reinig & Mejias, 2004). Similarly, a group of different scholars agree that "flaming" is a person's deliberate intention to ignite a feudal reaction or "flame" by using disdainful language or attacking someone's beliefs without respect or care for his/her response (e.g., Aiken & Waller, 2000; Ceron & Memoli, 2015).

In terms of types and divisions, some scholars like O'sullivan and Flanagin (2003: 85) give other divisions to the type of flaming:

1.   True flaming means "messages in which the flamer intentionally violates interactional norms, and the violation are understood by the receiver as well as by third–party observers".
2.   Missed flaming usually occurs when the flamer intends to flame, and a third party sees

it as a flame, but the receiver does not interpret it as such.

3.   failed flaming is called so because the flamer sends the flame but neither the receiver nor third parties understand it as a flaming.

4.   Inside flaming occur when the flamer and receiver see it as a flame, but a third party does not understand it. (O'sullivan and Flanagin, 2003: 85).

The current paper, however, is concerned only with the first type "true flaming" that is directly recognized by the participants.

2.2. Forms and Representations

Many forms of textual elements, such as aggressive, hate, and hostile language are tools that generate flaming. Additionally, swearing, derogatory names, negative provocative comments, threating, and even sexual inappropriate speech are all creators for flaming phenomena among people. (Dyer et al., 1995) and

In written language, Turnage (2007) affirms that flaming is represented by the use of capital letters, colors and bold writing. She says that capital letters appeal to or "equivalent of screaming". She adds that "the disproportionate use of question marks and exclamation points, and in the mixture of letters, numbers, and other typography to create negative words without actually spelling them out" are all indicators of flaming. For example, a text contains big, bold font can be interpreted as aggressive, while red colored font indicates swearing. Also, using digital facial emotional expressions such as the smiley ones or the grieve ones or others which are cultural-different in indication are used to represent flaming, (Cleary and Freeman, 2005: 63).

Furthermore, acronyms like "LOL!" Meaning (Laughing out loud), "ROFL!" (Rolling on the floor laughing) and "J/K" meaning (just kidding) are all means to represent flaming in specific contexts, (ibid).

2.3 Pragmatic Framework

Pragmatics is a distinct field of linguistics that is mainly concerned with meaning but from different point of view as it seeks for what do peoples mean when they use their language in different situations (Levinson, 1983: 5). That is why its famous definition is that "the study of language use" (ibid). Chapman and Clark (2014:1) clarifies that pragmatics represents an aspect of studying language in use as it concerns with how users of language "interact, communicate, and interpret linguistic behavior". One of its main goals is to find out how the words mean something and how their users use them to mean something else. That is, it seeks to pinpoint principles or norms that justify such various meanings in various situations.

Many theories have been developed within pragmatics to deal with the intended meaning by different strategies and tools. However, here, only some of them are presented because they are more related to the phenomenon of flaming.

2.3.1 Speech Act Theory

Austin (1962) established the roots of what is nowadays eminent as Speech Act Theory (henceforth SA) when he has been the first to distinguish between what words mean and what they do as an issue of function. It is worth stating that SAT is first born in the sphere of philosophy when it is molded by the German philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and eventually given a linguistic guise by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). After many studies, Austin, concludes that all utterances whether they are constatives or performatives have both a "doing" element and a "saying" element (Al-Hindawi, 1999: 7). Precisely, he determines that people in their communication they are practicing three main acts: locutionary, illocutionary, and

perlocutionary acts. According to him (ibid.: 94),

• **locutionary act** is the act of uttering a particular utterance in certain construction with a certain meaning. Correspondingly, Austin (ibid.: 99) puts forward the view that this is the act of speaking; " it is the act of producing sounds and words with their referential meaning"

• **illocutionary act** is the act that has the force of the utterance (the meaning one wishes to convey to communicate) sine it deals with the way in which people use speech in a context and this way makes a great difference whether we are advising, ordering, suggesting, promising, etc. Similarly, Searle (1969: 58) mentions that the illocutionary acts embrace making a statement, asking a question, giving an order, making a promise, apologizing, thanking, and the like.

• With regard to **the perlocutionary act**, Austin (1962: 121) views it as the achieved effect of the illocutionary act on the hearer which has a consequence(s) for him/her. As Sadock (1974: 8) puts it, the perlocutionary act is the by-product of the act of communication.

The above three-act scheme is summarized by Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1983: 26) as locutionary act: the act of saying something, illocutionary act: the act done in saying something, and perlocutionary act: the act done by saying something.

In the same note, there is a modified version of this theory known as **Searle's Version of SA.** Seven years after Austin's (1962) SAT, Searle (1969), Austin's student, develops SA theory and gives it its final formal form. Searle (ibid.: 33) distinguishes only two types of acts: direct and indirect. A direct speech act, as Quirk et al. (1985:803) define it, is one where the structure is the same as the function, that is, a declarative, an interrogative, an imperative, and an exclamative issue a statement, a question, an order, and an exclamation respectively. That is there is a direct relation between its grammatical form and its illocutionary force as "close the door". On the other hand, indirect speech act occurs when there is direct road between form and function as in "why do not you close the door" when intended as an order.

However, Searle (1969) (cited in Black, 2006. 19) distinguishes five major classes of speech acts: each constitutes a host of other sub-acts which can be distinguished from each other by their felicity conditions. These include:

1. **Representatives (Assertives)** these are acts that have "truth-values which state what the speaker believes to be the case or not. They are Statements and descriptions in using them, the speaker fits his words to the world. Examples include asserting, concluding, stating, and the like. Black (2006: 20) argues that much fictions in literary texts consists largely of representative speech acts; in particular, much of the narrator's activity consists of representative speech acts".

2. *Expressives* these are acts that reveal the speaker's feelings and attitudes. They indicate the psychological state of the speaker in statements of pleasure, pain, dislike, joy, or sorrow. In using an expressive act, the speaker does not get the world or the words to match each other. Examples are thanking, apologizing, welcoming, etc. they have an interpersonal function.

3. *Directives:* these are essentially positive or negative commands expressing the speaker's wants. They include command, order, request, suggest, advice, and so forth. In using a directive, the speaker attempts to make the world fit the words via the hearer. Directives are

more likely to be found within character-to-character discourse. "Directives addressed to the reader occur rarely in the narrator's voice for the obvious reason that readers exist outside the communicative framework of the fiction" (ibid.)

4. Commissives: these are acts in which the speaker commits himself to some future course of action. They indicate the intention of the speaker. Acts such as promise, threat and offer are of this kind of acts. In using a commissive, the speaker undertakes to make the world fit the words. "Commissives are common in the discourse of characters in fiction, but rare in the narrator's discourse, though the beginnings of some novels function as a commissive". For example, "Once upon a time" might be regarded as "a commissive including the implied promise of a particular type of story" (ibid.22).

5. Declarations: these are speech acts which in their production, the world is altered. Declarations are performed appropriately if the speaker has a specific institutional role in a special context. The successful performance of declarations depends on the status of the speaker and the precise circumstances surrounding the event. Declarations include sacking a worker, performing a marriage, and sentencing a criminal. Since declarations are not real acts (1.e., lacking sincerity conditions), they hardly occur within literary discourse except as a "pseudo-speech act", as when characters marry, or are sent to prison (ibid. 23).

In terms of flaming, any of these acts may be the source of intriguing the flame as directives when producing orders or commissive as in making threats or even expressive acts as in expressing anger in a context that ignite a deep hate, teasing or harassment among characters.

3. Methodology and Data Analysis

The current paper uses a qualitative method of analysis in order to clarify how context contribute to the analysis of flaming phenomenon. To achieve this method successfully it is more suitable to adopt Searle's model of speech act to highlight the phenomenon under scrutiny. Notably, the context is the same in each tweet as stated by Hymes' model "speaking": the setting is the United States, and the time is months before elections. The purpose is to insult and degrade the speaker's opponent(s) and the end is to win the elections. Act sequence is represented by the use of simple language and argumentative style.

Tweet (1)

Donald J. Trump

10 Sep. 2020
    The failed former Governor of Michigan, RINO Rick Snyder, who was responsible for the Flint Water Disaster (and I let him know it!), is now endorsing Sleepy Joe Biden, who doesn't have a clue! Snyder, whose political career was ruined by Flint, hurt a lot of people in Michigan…

The most prominent SAs used I this tweet are assertive, expressive, and declarative. The speaker Trump mixes these acts I an intelligent way to convince more his audience and hence achieve his own intentions. Consequence of this, in his first utterance, he uses assertive SA in which he asserts to the audience that Snyder is now supporting his opponent, Joe Biden.

Meanwhile, he gives a declarative SA when he announces him as a criminal rather than

only a governor, saying: "who was responsible for the Flint Water Disaster". Furthermore, within this act, he uses another implied act that is expressive SA as he expresses a negative sarcastic feeling towards Snyder. This, factually, is indicated by capitalizing the initials of shame job by Snyder which is "Flint Water Disaster". By this, he ignites the stimulates the audience to refuse such personality as Snyder by showing this negative side of his political duty to be reprimanded by all the audience.

Tweet (2)

Donald J. Trump

18 Sep. 2020

If Biden Wins, CHINA WINS. If Biden Wins, the mob WINS. If Biden Wins, the rioters, anarchists, arsonists, and flag-burners WIN. I am running for re-election to bring jobs and factories back to Wisconsin, to put violent criminals behind bars, and to ensure the future belongs... https://t.co/T6uifBSCKg [Twitter for iPhone].

At the very beginning of this tweet, the speaker Trump uses assertive SA in his first utterances. He asserts what he believes and hence he assures that when Biden wins the election, this means china wins too. The matter which implies another SA called expressive SA for the speaker expresses his feeling towards both Biden and China from one hand, and Biden and the mob on the other hand. That is, he expresses his true feelings of rejection and disapproval to the audience by linking issues rationally in the subsequent utterances, in order to appeal to the audience's logos.

Later in his fourth utterance, uses a third form of a SA; it is a commissive SA through which he commits himself to some future actions that occurs when Biden wins. He is promising them that many bad things will occur to their country when Biden wins the elections. Similarly, he promises them with bright future when he re-wins the elections.

Tweet (3)

Donald J. Trump

23 Sep. 2020

I hardly know Cindy McCain other than having put her on a committee at her husband's request. Joe Biden was John McCain's lapdog. So many BAD decisions on Endless Wars& the V.A., which I brought from a horror show to HIGH APPROVAL. Never a fan of John. Cindy can have Sleepy Joe.

At the very beginning of the tweet the speaker Trump uses both assertive and expressive SAs. First, it is an assertive SA for he states and informs the audience that he a superficial acquaintance with Cindy McCain. Second, it is an expressive SA for he expresses his deep far feeling of irritation which is indicated by "I hardly know Cindy McCain…", revealing a state of denying.

In fact, all Americans know that at the beginning of Trump's presidency, Trump derogates the late Senator Cindy McCain who was a Navy pilot spent two more years in Vietnamese prison and died in 2018.

In the second utterance, the speaker Trump again employs an assertive, expressive and declarative SAs at the same time since he states his stance in believing that Biden is a lapdog of McCain. Describing him in such a way uncovers his feelings and attitude towards his opponents; that it, it is an expressive SA expressing his irritate dislike of them. Furthermore,

this utterance is a declarative SA also for the speaker Trump declares his negative judgment towards both for the audience in a form of what is known as a reprimanding SA in order to make the audience adopt the same of his ideology in considering the opponents as being less power and domination and they can insult them the same way he does.

Then in his third utterance, he produces more evidence to justify his flamed style of the previous acts by using assertive SA again to affirms them that both figures specifically McCain has committed a lot of wars, blood and terrified the innocents for they do not have the traits and wisdom to control political issues. He shows their disqualification to be compared to his splendid qualifications particularly to VA accomplishment as he pretends. Reaching up at his final utterance to an assertive and expressive SAs in which he informs and congratulates McCain for supporting Biden saying, "Cindy can have Sleepy Joe!". That is, they are similar in their values and fail so they deserve to support each other.

3.   Conclusions

Based on the analysis above, the study concludes that flaming is a common phenomenon of language that has implied intentions though it apparently seems an insult or direct attack. Generally, it is popular in political domains specifically in Trump's tweets where the language is of specific personal interests.

Pragmatically, it has been found that speech act theory represents a fertile pragmatic representation of flaming. The most frequent types are assertives, expressives, and declarative one with the inyention of reprimanding. Furthermore, the context is the vital factor that elucidates the speaker's implied meaning and aim behind his use of flaming.

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