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JEZIK, KNJIŽEVNOST, MOĆ



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## **THE INTERPLAY OF IMPOLITENESS AND POWER IN SERBIAN POLITICAL DEBATES – A CASE STUDY**

**Abstract:** The paper investigates the multidimensional interrelation between linguistic impoliteness and power in Serbian political debates. The main objective is to identify the specific face-aggravating strategies that political opponents employ in their interactional moves in order to exert power over one another. Additionally, we seek to account for the triggering, onset, sequencing, and resolution of these impolite exchanges. The case study is conducted on an hour-long four-person debate on Serbia's energy system stability, broadcasted on national television. The analysis shows that the interlocutors engage in verbal power struggles by purposefully utilizing and combining a limited set of primarily offensive strategies, with such frequency that ~~that~~ this confrontational behaviour obstructs the constructive debate. Individual interlocutors show preference for particular strategies which they realise by repeating the same or similar expressions and re-contextualizing the previous interlocutor's words, all aimed at positive self-presentation and, more often, negative other-depiction. Repetition serves to enhance impoliteness. Furthermore, these moves and counter-moves form proper negativity cycles of reciprocal face-threatening acts, which illustrate the attack–defence dynamics and all-or-nothing nature of political debates. Overall, the research confirms that power is relational, dynamic, and contestable, as well as that impoliteness, as an intentional exercise of power, breeds impoliteness in social interaction.

**Key words:** impoliteness, power, strategy, negativity cycle, political debate, Serbian

### **1. Introduction**

At its core, politics is concerned with power – the acquisition and relinquishing of power to make decisions that affect and, quite often, control other people's behaviour, to enforce one's own values and beliefs onto them, to control and allocate resources, etc. In that regard, all social issues may be seen as political. As one of the central elements of politics, and more broadly social life, power is often expressed via language. Rather, language is a site where power is revealed, performed, and even obscured, but also where power is created, as it is involved in challenging existing power relations (Thomas et al., 2004, pp. 10–11, 36–37).

Power is a complex, multidimensional concept that is not easy to define, especially when we consider its purpose in politics and the way political actors

exercise it by controlling their and others' use of language. Instead of seeing it as naked, monolithic, and static, we take power to be: (1) relational, because it is not an inviolable possession or quality of one individual, but rather can emerge only in social relations; (2) interactional, as there can be no social interaction without power and interactants never start out equal; (3) highly dynamic, meaning it is always there 'for the taking' and it switches between interactants; and (4) negotiable or, more precisely, contestable, given that it can be resisted and through resistance is again exercised (Locher, 2004, pp. 39–40; García-Pastor, 2008, p. 105). Every interaction is characterized by a specific imbalance in power, but even interactants of a hierarchically lower status can exert power over those of a higher status (e.g., through impoliteness) (Locher & Bousfield, 2008, pp. 9–10).

How we scrutinize power depends greatly on the phenomena to which it is tied. In the political arena, where the stakes are always high, actors frequently must assert their position by exercising power. One way to effectively do so is by communicating impoliteness. The concept of power is critically relevant to the investigation of linguistic impoliteness because these two phenomena are inextricably and intricately connected.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Similarly to power, impoliteness is far from a one-dimensional concept. Linguistic impoliteness has most often been discussed in relation to, or subsumed under, politeness. The last six decades, and especially since the publishing of Brown and Levinson's highly influential book *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (1978/1987), have seen a flourishing of academic interest in politeness. Several approaches, alternative conceptions, and revisions of the traditional, second-order, linguistically-grounded theory of this phenomenon have been proposed (Lakoff, 1973; Lakoff & Ide, 2005; Leech, 1983, 2014; Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987; Watts, 2003; Watts, Ide & Ehlich, 2005; Davies, Haugh & Merrison, 2011; etc.).<sup>1</sup> While research on social interaction has tended to focus on the communication of politeness, impoliteness was largely ignored until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The major imbalance in research was the result of two considerations: (1) that a comprehensive theoretical framework of linguistic politeness can adequately account for impoliteness as well, and, more importantly, (2) that conflictive talk, one form of which is impoliteness, is "rather marginal to human linguistic behaviour in normal circumstances" (Leech, 1983, p. 105). However, what prompted a revisal was the realization that, contrary to the presumption of cooperation as the general principle of communication (Grice, 1989) and impoliteness being seen, in layperson's terms, as not socially conventional, it is nevertheless ubiquitous in communication and can be quite relevant in specific situations (e.g., political debates) (Bousfield, 2008,

<sup>1</sup> On the distinction between first- and second-order approaches to politeness see Bousfield (2008) and Locher & Bousfield (2008).

p. 51). At this point there seems to be a consensus that the two phenomena can and perhaps should be considered together as broad opposites and that a politeness framework can be complete only when conflictive talk is included.

These considerations come with additional caveats. Namely, linguistic impoliteness is generally defined as communicative behaviour that is face-aggravating in a particular context, but there is some disagreement about what it is, especially in relation to intention (Locher & Bousfield, 2008, p. 3). In political discourse the question of intention is a complex one but bears enormous relevance. Because we can assume plausible intention in political debates as a communicative situation, in this study we follow Bousfield's (2008) conceptualization of impoliteness as the issuing of "intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal face-threatening acts (FTAs)", which are performed "unmitigated" and/or "with deliberate aggression", rather than, as is the case with polite utterances, seeking to mitigate the face damage. Additionally, for it to be considered successful, impoliteness must be communicated in such a way that the intention of the speaker to threaten/damage face must be understood by the hearer (Bousfield, 2008, p. 72).

The notion of face, central to many (im)politeness approaches, is broadly viewed as the public image of self specified in terms of approved social attributes, or the social value a person effectively claims for themselves in interaction with others (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). There is an attested fluidity to face because, although it is individually expected by the self, it is interactionally constituted between the self and the other. That means that it can be, and most often is, strengthened or weakened in interaction (Bousfield, 2008, pp. 38–39). Likewise, face has a Janus-like nature, with positive face (the desire for approval) and negative face (the desire to be free from imposition), constituting its two aspects (Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987, pp. 61–62). Research on face as such has come up against criticism, especially in relation to cultural differences and the rigid dualism in its conceptualization, but there is no denying that some notion of face is applicable to most communicative and cultural contexts (Bousfield, 2008, p. 42).

When it comes to the kind of impoliteness we are concerned with, instead of attending to the face needs of the hearer, the impolite speaker seeks to attack/damage their face so as to achieve a specific goal. This is not merely failed politeness, but rather impoliteness of the instrumental, strategic, and systematic kind, a purposeful and rule-governed verbal attack on the face which fulfils a function, the key point being that there is an intention of the speaker and a recognition of that intention by the hearer (Bousfield, 2008, p. 73; García-Pastor, 2008, p. 110). When analysing the use and countering of impoliteness in a communicative situation where social actors negotiate their positions vis-à-vis each other, it is necessary to take into consideration the aspect of power, because impoliteness is a means of exercising power, and it allows the impolite interactant to effectively take power. More precisely, impoliteness influences the conversation by altering or, rather, severely restricting the response options of the interactant whose face has been threatened by the impolite utterance (Locher & Bousfield, 2008, pp. 8–9). And nowhere is this more evident than in political debates where interactants bid for power via verbal confrontation.

Research on impoliteness, its communicative function and linguistic expression has been prominent in English literature, the major influence being Culpeper's (1996) pragmatic framework of super-strategies (i.e., Bald on record impoliteness, Positive impoliteness, Negative impoliteness, Sarcasm/mock politeness, Withhold politeness), which leans heavily on Brown and Levinson's (1978/1987) politeness framework. However, it has undergone certain revisions since its conception (see Culpeper 2011). Likewise, other alternative, postmodern frameworks have been proposed, most notably Locher and Watts' (2005, 2008) discursive approach, which puts emphasis on relational work, and Watts' (2008) socio-cognitive approach, which utilizes the conceptual integration theory of mental spaces. In relation to political discourse, García-Pastor (2008) investigated the positive and negative face-oriented impoliteness strategies that candidates employ to exert power in campaign debates in the context of U.S. elections. The analysis showed that those exchanges exhibit a zero-sum-game nature in that they proceed as successive chains of FTAs, performed by using different strategies, that showcase the inherent characteristics of impoliteness and its interrelation with power (García-Pastor, 2008, pp. 121–122). In Serbian literature linguistic impoliteness has not been researched extensively. Notable work, though, has been done by Stamenković, who investigated the progression of impolite exchanges in Serbian and English talk shows (Stamenković, 2013), the individual Serbian speakers' attribution of meaning based on which aspect of face is endangered (Stamenković, 2016), as well as the ensuing of disputes in political interviews due to interlocutors 'running' different blended conceptual spaces (Stamenković, 2017). More recently, Opačić (2022) dealt with verbal impoliteness strategies in two U.S. presidential debates in 2020, between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. Our research partly builds on the studies by García-Pastor (2008) and Stamenković (2013); but takes into consideration the idiosyncrasies of Serbian political debates as well.

### **3. Research Objectives, Corpus and Methodology**

In this paper we investigate the multidimensional interface between linguistic impoliteness and power in conversational exchanges in Serbian political debates. The main objective is to identify the specific face-aggravating strategies that political opponents employ in their interactional moves in order to exert power over one another. Additionally, we seek to account for the triggering, onset, sequencing, and resolution of impolite exchanges in this communicative context. By investigating the interrelation between these phenomena in political debates, we may get a more comprehensive picture of the anatomy of impoliteness, as well as a deeper understanding of political discourse. This observation has been part of the impetus for the case study. In line with the subject and research objectives, we follow Bousfield's (2008) pragmatic, utterance- and discourse-level framework of impoliteness, which developed out of Culpeper's (1996) approach, but with some points of divergence. Namely, we are not primarily interested in distinguishing between FTAs that target the positive or negative aspect of face, given that both are most often under attack;

the dichotomy, then, appears to be unsustainable. Likewise, the above-mentioned super-strategies are disputable and different individual strategies have been identified depending on the context and corpus, so the ambiguities might not be fully resolvable and quantifiable (Bousfield, 2008, pp. 142–143). Instead, we are investigating the dynamics of impoliteness in a typically confrontational or even gladiatorial communicative situation, where it takes at least two to fight. More specifically, impoliteness does not occur in a vacuum, but requires an antecedent FTA acting as a trigger, a potential response to be paired with it in one or more sequences, and finally some form of resolution of the impolite exchange. A summary of all the steps is provided in Figure 1.

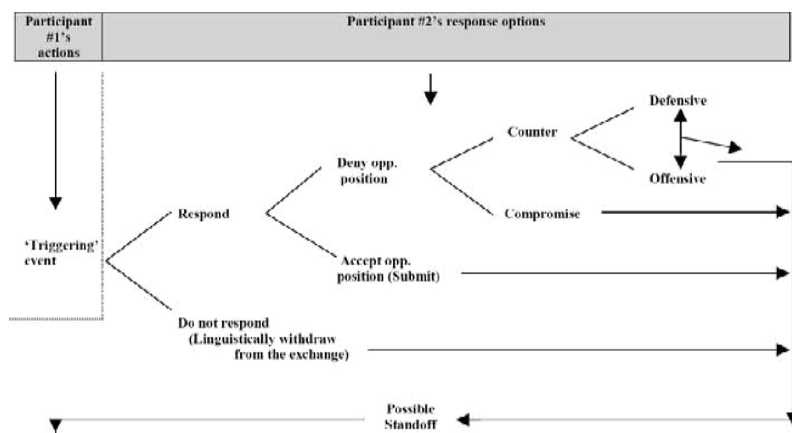


Figure 1. A summary of steps in an impolite exchange (Bousfield, 2008, p. 219)

So, a triggering FTA by the opponent allows two options – Respond and Do not respond (or Withdraw from the exchange). In choosing to Respond, the interlocutor under attack may Deny the opponent's position or Accept (and Submit to) it. In Denying, the interlocutor has the option to Counter the triggering FTA, using one or more Defensive/Offensive strategies, or Compromise. Countering may result in the Withdrawal of the opponent (as a form of Resolution), an Intervention of a third party (such as a moderator in a debate) or a possible Standoff, where the opponent considers the Counter-move of the interlocutor under attack to be a second FTA, which then triggers the whole sequence again. Bousfield (2008) lists a number of offensive strategies (e.g., Disassociate from the other, Use inappropriate identity markers, Seek disagreement/avoid agreement, Sarcasm/mock politeness, Criticize, Hinder/block, etc.), as well as a few defensive strategies (such as Dismiss/make light of face damage, Offer an account/explanation, and Opt out), which may serve as Counter-moves in the exchange.

Since the presented model is flexible and subject to trial and revision depending on the corpus and discourse type (Bousfield, 2008, p. 221), the research need not be constrained by it. Furthermore, the expression of impoliteness cannot be explained without contextualization, so interpretation of linguistic data is required. This study is conducted on an hour-long four-person debate on the topic of Serbia's

energy system stability, broadcasted on national television.<sup>2</sup> We employ a simplified combination of the stave and turn-based system of data transcription, because this allows us to view more easily which interlocutor said what and when in relation to other interlocutors, as well as not to visually interrupt the longer turns, which are prevalent in this type of exchange.<sup>3</sup> Several caveats need to be borne in mind when analysing such data. Namely, there is the context of a televised communicative situation where the interactants are presumably constrained by social norms and the need to keep face in front of the audience, the moderator, and their opponents. Likewise, the communication itself is constrained by the format of the debate (i.e., the participants being required to answer topic-related questions, with limited time allotted to responding to another participant's claims and possible rebuttals). As it is case-based, the study utilizes a relatively small corpus and it is not advisable to make broad generalizations. Thus acknowledged, we argue that the study does allow us to understand the dynamics of impoliteness and how interlocutors negotiate power through impolite utterances within the context and constraints of the communicative exchange in which they are engaged.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

The analysis shows that, in between answering specific questions, the interlocutors engage in verbal power struggles by purposefully utilizing a limited set of impoliteness strategies, with such frequency that this confrontational behaviour obstructs the constructive debate. The strategic issuing and counter-issuing of FTAs is meant to discredit the opponent and concurrently score points for the politician's image. Because the social distance and difference in power are not extensive, and it is not in the interest of one interlocutor to preserve the face of the others, such behaviour is to be expected.

We observed that, although there are four participants in the debate, when an FTA is issued, the one whose face is under attack is cognizant of it even when there are no physical cues (such as pointing), so the proof is in the proverbial pudding, i.e., the linguistic realization of impoliteness. They predominantly respond by denying the opponent's position and, more specifically, countering the original FTA with a new one, unless there is an intervention of the moderator as the third party. There is not a single instance of an interlocutor accepting the face attack by explicitly assuming responsibility for or agreeing with the impolite assessment or at least staying silent, which might also be interpreted as submission.

The debate appears to be a rather hostile communicative situation given the prevalent usage of offensive impoliteness strategies, most often criticism,

<sup>2</sup> Reč na reč: Energetska stabilnost Srbije. (2022, January 18). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOxcp68F7m0>

<sup>3</sup> The following symbols are utilized: S# (speaker identification within extract, e.g., S1 for 'speaker 1'), M ('moderator'), [...] (text omission for ease of illustration), = (latching contribution, i.e., a speaker begins their contribution immediately after another speaker ends theirs).

disassociation from the other, association of the other with a negative aspect/entity, challenging, seeking disagreement/avoiding agreement, and hindering/blocking the other (communicatively). Sarcasm/mock politeness, condescension, and inappropriate identity markers are also employed, although less frequently. Defensive strategies, on the other hand, are scarce in responses. We did note some cases of the interlocutor under attack offering an account/explanation or pleading (with excessive politeness) and, less so, ignoring the FTA, dismissing it or retreating, but these can be attributed to the idiosyncrasies of their communicative behaviour. In accordance with the framework applied, we do not claim any hierarchy of the observed strategies in terms of the gravity/intensity of the face attack (García-Pastor, 2008, p. 107), but there are some differences in their realization and the FTAs being performed explicitly or implicitly. The analysis also confirms that individual strategies rarely occur in strict isolation within a single utterance; rather, there is a notable complex co-realization of strategies within an extended turn-at-talk, resulting in an exacerbation of the face threat. The interlocutors tend to recycle the same combinations of strategies over multiple turns as well. The strategies have relatively fuzzy edges, meaning that it is not always easy to differentiate them clearly. Individual interlocutors show preference for particular strategies, which they realise by repeating the same or similar expressions and re-contextualizing the previous interlocutor's words, all aimed at positive self-presentation and, more often, negative other-depiction. As Bousfield (2008, pp. 156–157) notes, repetition of strategies and expressions, both within and across conversational turns, serves to increase the weight of imposition on the hearer whose face is under attack and emphasize the speaker's negative attitude toward them, thus enhancing impoliteness.

The following examples demonstrate the performance of impoliteness in the corpus, although in an abbreviated form. The focal points have been underlined.

(1)[...]

S2 Srbija ima pun potencijal da osigura energetska stabilnost [...] nama nisu potrebne mini hidroelektrane zato što ostavljaju katastrofalne posledice po životnu sredinu a sve i da svaku reku u Srbiji stavite u cev kao što je pokušavano u prethodnom periodu ne bismo dobili značajne količine energije [...] ono čega Srbija mora da se odrekne jesu nestručni kadrovi jesu kadrovi koji su po matrici raspodele odnosno grabljenja partijskog plena u toj meri unakazili energetska sektor u Srbiji [...] mi smo došli do toga da usred takvog postupanja imamo štetu koja je veća od milijardu evra [...] žao mi je što večeras nisu ovde gospođa Zorana Mihajlović ili gospodar gospodin Aleksandar Antić kao bivši ministar jer smatram da kao ministri duguju određeno objašnjenje građanima umesto njih su došle moje mlade kolege koje zaista ne smatram odgovornim za sve ovo što se

M

ali ostavimo to za debatu

S2

što se desilo

M

gospođu Nikolić

S4 Srbija koju danas predvodi predsednik Aleksandar Vučić vredno radi na svim poljima važno je da ulažemo i u sve izvore i u termo i u hidro uz rast obnovljivih izvora energije jer niko to pre nas nije [...] a za razliku od onih koji večeras nisu rekli iskreno narodu šta je za njih prioritet a pre svega mislim na predstavnike bivšeg režima koji su

večeras poslali Pavla Grbovića da govori u njihovo ime ja ću reći šta je njihov prioritet njihov prioritet je da dođu na vlast bez izbora i da dođu što pre do državne kase bez imalo srama i stida jer to je jedino što su tajkuni ikada znali da rade

M hvala idemo sad u debatni deo [...] samo bih voleo da se da se vratimo malo na to gospodin Grbović pa gospodin Biljić S2 naravno opet čujemo optužbe na račun neke bivše vlasti ja moram da kažem Srpska napredna stranka ona nije na vlasti deset godina da bi nam objasnila šta je bilo pre petnaest ili dvadeset [...] opet tražite krivce u drugim ljudima za krizu koja je zadesila naš energetski sektor koja je neminovna ja vas molim da to ne radite dakle vi krivca morate da tražite u svojim redovima i to ne zato što vam ja to kažem ili zato što vas ja za nešto optužujem pogotovo ne optužujem vas lično već zato što to radite sami sebi ja vas molim makar kao vaše mišljenje iznesite [...] to se desilo ne možete da ignorirate te stvari da je to plod neznanja nestručnosti javašluka i nerešavanja nagomilanih problema nemojte u meni tražiti odgovornost ili bilo kome drugom za to jednostavno morate da kažete ko je kriv i taj ko je kriv mora da snosi konsekvence i morate nešto da uradite da biste taj energetski sektor stabilizovali

M =hvala Biljić pa  
Nikolić onda  
[...]

In example (1), almost at the onset of the debate, Speaker 2 issues an FTA by dispraising the environmentally unfriendly activities during the previous period; and exacerbates it by noting the supposed incompetence of party-affiliated human resources responsible for the country's energy-related losses. Although Speaker 2 does not criticize Speakers 3 and 4 directly, the association is made clear by him identifying the persons responsible and calling on Speakers 3 and 4's in-group status. But, in order to preserve his own face and simultaneously cause more damage to their faces, Speaker 2 explicitly denies criticism with excessive politeness and, instead, slightly condescendingly points to the inexperience of Speakers 3 and 4. Following a temporary intervention by the moderator, Speaker 4 picks up on the initial FTA and counters it more forcefully by directly criticizing the actions and presumed financial wrongdoings of the previous regime, as well as explicitly associating Speaker 2 with it, noting his spokesperson/mouthpiece status with condescension. The ensuing move follows the same course of action: the moderator's intervention is completely ignored and Speaker 2 counters the second FTA offensively, with the attack now being aimed solely at Speaker 4, as expected. What is particularly visible from this episode is that (1) there is a relatively quick eruption and progression of impoliteness and (2) in the countermoves there is a sort of mimicking of strategies used in the original move. Likewise, attempts at discrediting the opponent and delegitimizing their stance are manifested in negative other-presentation through expressions such as 'ex/former regime', 'tycoon', 'party-affiliated workforce' (and further on in the debate 'fake/false ecologist', 'thief', etc.), where the other is associated with a negative aspect/entity, as well as in the disassociation from the other by perpetuating the 'us vs. them' and 'you the (former/present) regime vs. we the people' narratives (Blackledge, 2005, p. 95).

(2) [...]

S1 pa pošto je gospodin Marković pomenuo ja samo moram da vam odgovorim na ovo za poslednjih trideset godina nikakvog sistemskog ulaganja zaista nije bilo nije bilo vođenja računa osim sa izuzetkom Saše Radulovića koji je bio ministar nekih par [...] apsolutno se niko nije bavio ni ulaganjem u opremu apsolutno se niko nije bavio sanacijom gubitaka koje imamo imamo ogromne gubitke [...] to znate ekonomista ste tako da nije baš tako kao što kažete ja bih rekao samo još jednu stvar ovo je jako važno pogotovu gospodinu Markoviću jako je važno da taj kontinuitet koji lošeg rada koji postoji punih trideset godina najbolje odslikava činjenica da smenski radnici TENT-a [...] od 2005. godine ne mogu da dobiju svoju naknadu za smenski rad gde se [...] izmenjala se jedna vlast

S3 2005.

S1 pa druga pa treća pa četvrta vlast vlada još uvek ra smenski radnici TENT-a nisu dobili naknade za smenski rad

M =hvala Mar Marković pa Nikolić pa  
Grbović

S3 znate kako ovaj kada govorimo o našem elektroenergetskom sistemu ne bih se složio da je on u takvom stanju i ne bih se složio da je takva situacija

S1 sve je amortizovano

S3 mi mi

S1 sve

S3 mi mi mi

S1 čekajte

S3 znate kako mislim da je dobro što je Elektroprivreda Srbije u državnom vlasništvu mislim da je dobro da mi imamo državnu kompaniju koja je ovako jaka mislim da je dobro da imamo kompaniju koja je uspela da proizvede dovoljnu količ količinu električne energije na godišnjem nivou [...] i mislim da ne bi trebali na ovaj način pogotovo ne u javnosti da da napadamo jedno ovakvo preduzeće

S1 ko ga napada

S3 kada je u pitanju

S1 ja ga ne napadam pobogu

S3 kada je

S1 pa ja ne napadam EPS

S3 kada je u pitanju

S1 pokušavam

da vam skrenem pažnju izvinjavam se

[...]

Example (2) presents another interesting episode. Following Speaker 1's FTA issued by criticizing the poor energy production capacity, lack of investment, and workers not being paid regularly in the last thirty years, Speaker 3, who has significant face investment given the wider political context (i.e., the party he's a representative of participating in almost every government during that period), responds by seeking disagreement. However, expressing it with some moderation leaves him somewhat exposed and, so, his FTA is immediately met with a countermove via repeated interruption, that is, with Speaker 1 hindering/blocking him communicatively. Speaker 3 then has no choice but to respond to the aggravated face threat with criticism, by patronizingly instructing Speaker 1 on what he shouldn't do. This is again an attempt to present the self in a positive light and concurrently attack the face

of the other, but it also provides justification for the subsequent reaction of Speaker 1. Knowing that the scales of power are not tipped in his favour, Speaker 1 hinders Speaker 3, first by issuing a challenge in the form of a question, then explicitly seeking disagreement, only to finally offer an explanation and apologize for his impoliteness in an attempt to preserve face. With Speaker 1 thus defeated, at least in this episode, Speaker 3 is free to continue holding the floor and controlling the topic, and subsequently even make a slightly sarcastic comment directed at Speaker 1.

(3) [...]

S1 tri minuta pričaju recimo tri i po il ili koliko već ovo je stvarno previše ali da se nadovežem na monopol ako građani već nisu za zaboravili nakon odgovora Milice katastrofalna je situacija u kojoj u jednoj državi suverenoj državi imate monopol u energetsom sistemu od strane stranih privatnih kompanija to je katastrofalna situacija po državne i nacionalne interese [...] dakle država je ta koja mora da u potpunosti stoji iza svih energetskih sistema ne mogu privatne kompanije da dovode državu u bilo koji položaj zavisnosti posebno ne da imaju kao što je Pavle lepo primetio monopol [...] nažalost to je ta politika koju zastupate svi ovde čini mi se osim mene to je ta globalistička politika u kojoj faktički prepuštamo suverenitet države stranim uticajima i bespogovorno slušamo apsolutno svaki nalog koji nam dolazi iz nazovite ga kako god hoćete i inostranstva Evropske unije ili kako god

M

=Nikolić pa Grbović pa onda

Marković

S4 baš suprotno u Srbiji koju vodi predsednik Aleksandar Vučić ne odlučuje niko osim naroda i

S1

pa

S4 nismo mi ti koji se izvinjavaju strancima nismo mi ti koji od na njih traže učešće nismo mi ti koji od njih uzimaju novac to pitajte ove predstavnike bivšeg režima

S1 pa je l' vam imaju monopol nad vetroparkovima

S4 oni slede stavove Viole Fon Kramon koja kaže da treba zatvoriti telm termoelektrane i ostaviti rudare na ulici gladne oni slede te stavove a ne mi u Srbiji koju predvodi Aleksandar Vučić pita se narod

S1 onda promenite politiku

M

u redu Pavle

S1 nemojte više tu politiku da sprovedite i sve je super

[...]

And, finally, in example (3) a similar patterning of impoliteness emerges, but it involves more complexity and so reveals additional specificities. Namely, after implicitly criticizing the moderator for the mismanagement of floor time, Speaker 1 issues an FTA aimed at all his opponents and does so by combining several strategies. He directly dispraises Speakers 2, 3, and 4 on account of their globalist politics, which he associates with supposed foreign entities that jeopardize the country's sovereignty and monopolize its economy. The explicit association of the others with a negative aspect runs in line with Speaker 1's disassociation from them. Additionally, he uses inappropriate identity markers by referring to Speakers 2 and 4 by their first names when a distant relationship between them pertains. Speaker 4, who may feel their face to be most under threat when Speaker 1's utterances are

interpreted against the backdrop of the current political situation (i.e., the party she represents being in power for the last ten years, during which time it has established connections with various international entities), counters it immediately by repeatedly expressing disagreement with his position, and then seizes the opportunity to redirect the face threat. As before, a verbal power struggle ensues where Speaker 4 issues an FTA explicitly associating Speaker 2 with a negative entity and calling on his in-group status to dispraise the actions of the previous regime, whereas Speaker 1 repeatedly hinders her, first by challenging her on the veracity of the allegations, and then sarcastically suggesting a different course of action. As expected, after the moderator's interruption, Speakers 2 and 3 follow up on the initial FTA and the patterning of impolite turns continues.

What these episodes and the data overall demonstrate is that impolite moves and counter-moves form proper negativity cycles of reciprocal FTAs, which illustrate the attack–defence/defence–attack dynamics and all-or-nothing, high-stake nature of political debates. The impoliteness of negativity cycles escalates rather quickly and requires a dominant third-party intervention. The reciprocity in negativity cycles is a way for political opponents to ‘do’ power communicatively by interchangeably tipping the power balance to their side. At a content level the power struggle is enacted through these FTAs that force the opponent into a predetermined course of action, and at a structural level through topic control and floor holding as conversational means of accumulating power (García-Pastor, 2008, pp. 111–112).

## 5. Concluding remarks

In this paper we have outlined the complex patterning of impoliteness and investigated its interplay with power in political debates. Overall, the research confirms that power is relational, dynamic, and contestable, as well as that impoliteness, as an intentional exercise of power, breeds impoliteness in social interaction. As it is case-based, more extensive research into how impoliteness is realized in Serbian is obviously needed. Future comparative and contrastive studies should also explore variations in impoliteness strategies and their context sensitivity in different communicative situations, not just within political discourse. The intricate anatomy of linguistic impoliteness is a pressing research area, and it is necessary to fully explicate its role in power negotiation in discourse and society. This is especially important given that the knowledge of the functions of impoliteness, as well as of the effective linguistic defence options available in a particular confrontational situation, is a powerful tool for a social actor.

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**Milica Bacić**

## **MEĐUPOVEZANOST NEUČTIVOSTI I MOĆI U SRPSKIM POLITIČKIM DEBATAMA – STUDIJA SLUČAJA**

Rezime: U radu istražujemo višedimenzionalnu povezanost lingvističke neučtivosti i moći u političkim debatama na srpskom jeziku. Osnovni cilj je da identifikujemo specifične strategije za nanošenje štete licu koje politički protivnici upotrebljavaju u konverzacionim koracima da bi stekli nadmoć jedan nad drugim. Takođe nastojimo da objasnimo zbog čega i kako nastaju, razvijaju se i razrešuju ove neučtivre razmene. Studija slučaja je sprovedena na jednočasovnoj televizijskoj debati o energetskej stabilnosti Srbije u kojoj učestvuju četiri sagovornika. Analiza pokazuje da sagovornici započinju verbalne borbe za nadmoć tako što ciljano koriste i kombinuju ograničeni broj prevashodno ofanzivnih strategija, sa takvom učestalošću da ovo konfliktno ponašanje onemogućava konstruktivnu debatu. Uočljiva je tendencija pojedinačnih sagovornika da biraju određene strategije, koje realizuju ponavljanjem istih ili sličnih izraza i ponovnom kontekstualizacijom reči prethodnog sagovornika, a sve kako bi sebe predstavili pozitivno ili češće tog drugog negativno. Ponavljanje služi intenzifikaciji neučtivosti. Osim toga, ovi koraci i kontrakoraci obrazuju svojevrsne cikluse negativnosti koji se sastoje iz uzajamnih činova ugrožavanja lica, što ilustruje dinamiku napada i odbrane političkih debata u kojima se 'igra' na sve ili ništa. Uopšteno posmatrano, istraživanje potvrđuje da je moć relaciona, dinamična i osporiva, te i da neučtivost, kao namerna primena moći, proizvodi samu sebe u društvenoj interakciji.

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