

WHEN APOLOGIES ARE NOT SINCERE APOLOGIES *DEPICTING INSINCERITY IN AMERICAN POLITICAL APOLOGIES THROUGH PRAGMATICS ANALYSIS*

PhD Ahmad Kareem Salem Al-Wuhaili

Faculty of Letters, "Alexandru Piru" Doctoral School, University of Craiova
Alexandru Ioan Cuza Blvd., no. 13, 4553380, Craiova, Romania
Phone: + 4 025 141 44 68
ahmad.alsalim3434@yahoo.com

Abstract: In politics, as in everyday life, apologizing is a frequent act sharing the same meaning in both contexts. However, if we look closer, we will see that in politics the act of apologizing acquired the status of an art and sometimes a deeper and/or subsidiary significance. Though, there are situations when what it sounds and looks like a political apology, lacks most of the time sincerity. No matter the aim of the political apology, in order for this act to fulfill its purpose sincerity is required. But are all political apologies sincere? If not, can we depict the aim hidden behind them? By what means can we do that? Our hypothesis is that, as a consequence of the complexity of the political language, many political apologies, despite their declared purpose, lack sincerity, their hidden aim being the reduction or the evasion of the responsibility. In order to find answers to our research question and to test our hypothesis we based our analysis on six excerpts from American political discourses. The study focuses on some apologies used by American politicians in both national and international discourse. We chose as analysis objects for this study some apologies expressed by presidents, ministries, prime ministries, politicians, and the analysis framework is based on Deutschmann's schemas of analysis. The findings of this analysis raised awareness on the importance of decoding the truly meaning of an apology in political discourse that, as demonstrated, lacks sincerity in some cases. The correct decryption of the purpose of a message delivered in the guise of apology may influence the manner of solving the conflict, as well as the manner of continuing the relations between the offender and the offended.

Keywords: American political discourse, political apology, political language, pragmatics analysis.

Résumé: En politique, tout comme dans la vie quotidienne, s'excuser est un acte commun qui partage le même sens n'importe qu'il soit le contexte. Néanmoins, si l'on regarde attentivement, on pourra observer que dans la politique s'excuser peut acquérir le statut d'art et, parfois, un sens plus profond ou une signification subsidiaire. On peut rencontrer des situations quand, ce qu'on entend et ce qui semble être une excuse, manque le plus souvent de la sincérité. N'importe qu'il soit le but de l'excuse, pour que cet acte accompli son but, de la sincérité est requise. Mais est-ce que toutes les excuses politiques sont sincères ? Si non, est-ce qu'on pourra identifier un message caché en derrière ? L'hypothèse de ce projet de recherche est que, en dépit de leur but déclaré, dans les excuses politiques manque de la sincérité, leur but caché étant de réduire la responsabilité. L'objet de l'analyse est représenté par des fragments de texte extraits des discours politiques tenus par quelques hommes politiques américains. L'analyse va se faire en utilisant le schéma analytique de Deutschmann. Les résultats de cette analyse ont révélé l'importance du décryptage correct d'une excuse politique qui va engendrer des conséquences sur la manière de résoudre les conflits et de continuer les relations.

Mots-clés: discours politique américaine, excuse politique, langage politique, analyse pragmatique.

1. Introduction

In politics, as in everyday life, apologizing is a frequent act sharing the same meaning in both contexts. However, if we look closer, we will see that in politics the act of apologizing acquired the status of an art and sometimes a deeper and/or subsidiary significance. Though, there are situations when what sounds and looks like a political apology lacks most of the time sincerity.

The meaning of politics didn't change very much throughout time. In 1997, Mazrui (170) defined politics as a "constant search for methods of resolving conflicting interests". Years later, Chilton (2004:3) identified the reason of conflicts in the struggle for power, defining it as "a struggle for power, between those who seek to assert their power and those who seek to resist it. On the other hand, politics is viewed as cooperation, as the practices and institutions that a society has for resolving clashes of interest over money, influence, liberty, and the like". In essence, what characterizes politics is conflict and cooperation at the same time.

Inevitably, in situations as such, sometimes a political apology seems the best way to end a conflict and to further pursue the cooperation. As the name suggests, political apologies are those apologies conducted by an appropriate political figure, presenting a political content (Sanz, 2012: 15). Political apologies may be both 'intra-state' apologies (Sanz, 2012:10), but also inter-states apologies. In support for the first category, we can mention Bill Clinton's apology for his sexual affair with Monica Lewinsky, or Iraq's Interior Ministry apology for acts committed during the era of the late dictator Saddam Hussein. As for the second category, we can recall Bill Clinton's apology for the failure act of Western during 1994 genocide in Rwanda, France's acknowledgment of Algerian' massacre in 1945 and so on.

No matter the kind of apology, for the politician engaged in such an act acquiring the adequate language is compulsory, since the language itself is considered as a tool of politics. As Van Dijk (1997: 206) states, any use of language in any political institution of social group leads to what is called politics. Furthermore, Spolsky (1998: 58) affirms that the language used in politics is inherently political. Thus, political language refers to different views, struggle, power, opposing sides and interest (ibid: 58). In political institutions, the skillful use of language by the politicians becomes the source of their power. This political skill requires the ability to understand or to encode unspoken messages that exist behind the spoken, the hints and the hidden threats, to state it clearly, the capacity to communicate one thing and apparently saying something else (Baily, 1976: 253-4). When producing their utterances, people are not always sincere about what they say. People have aims in their minds and in order to get their aims they can manipulate their use of acts. However, politicians are not less than the others in this fact. In most of political speeches (which are mostly made by political agents: politicians), we may face that speech act of apologizing can occur in different forms. That means that the speech act of apologizing does not necessarily occur in form of (I + V) simple present, nor in direct way. Regarding our topic and the use of speech act of apology, politicians sometimes not only change the form of the speech act, but they also try to follow some tactics in order to less down their responsibility from the wrong acts they did in a period of time.

As we mentioned earlier, the primary aim of a political apology is to end the conflict and to recommence the cooperation. This first objective is supported by Tavuchis (1991: 109) who stresses that political apologies aim at clearing things and who considers apologies as reconciliation preludes. In order to perform a political apology, sometimes announcements

through the media, declaration documents and public declarations are involved (ibid). The same opinion about reconciliation is supported by Edwards (2010: 61) who refers to one of the most distinct purposes of an apology "overarching purpose". The purpose of apologies, as Edwards states, is "to repair relationships between the victimizer and victim harmed by past wrongdoing"; in other words it is the purpose of reconciliation.

However, the academia identified some other aims of the political apology, such as building confidence among the disputed parties, leading to the instauration of stability. Among the disputed parties there is a high mistrust and the process by which those parties can reach consensus is the glance for assessing peace (Sanz, 2012:12).

One more purpose of the political apology is building identity and nation. Within different communities, apologies help to enact contact for those social communities, but also to strengthen and to draw national identity (Edward, 2010: 63).

No matter the aim of the political apology, in order for this act to fulfill its purpose sincerity is required. But are all political apologies sincere? If not, can we depict the hidden aim behind them? Through what means can we do that? Our hypothesis is that, as a consequence of the complexity of the political language, many political apologies, despite their declared purpose, lack sincerity, their hidden aim being the reduction or the evasion of the responsibility.

2. Methodology. Assuming the analysis framework. Deutschmann's theory

In order to find answers to our research question and to test our hypothesis we based our analysis on six excerpts from American political discourses. The study focuses on some apologies used by American politicians in both national and international discourse. We have chosen for this study as analysis objects some apologies expressed by presidents, ministries, prime ministries, and politicians. More specifically, we have selected six American political apologies given by Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, Jimmy Carter and Donald Trump.

We assume from the beginning the fact that our findings will not have a general applicability, but they will represent a stand-point for further and more complex research, and they will highlight the patterns followed by the American politicians while engaged in this type of speech act. Our analysis is based on Deutschmann's schemas of analysis, developed in 2003 in his book *Apologizing in British English*. Deutschmann's components for minimizing or lessening the responsibility of the politicians' actions will be applied to some selective American political texts and the analysis will be according to the following components:

1- The apology verb without truly apologizing, which can be divided into the following:

A/ Apology verb with several Pragmatic functions.

B/ The speech act as non-performative act which can be divided into three sub categories of acts: (1) the speaker expresses his will or duty to perform his apology, (2) the speaker he/she is promising to do so in order to apologize, (3) the third is by referring to a past action and apologizing for it.

2- The offence from the part of the committed person can be lessened in the following ways:

A/ the apologizer apologizes without admitting his offence to others.

B/ apologizing not for the action he/she did, but rather for the outcome.

C/ apologizing for the use of a specific style and not for the act that was done.

D/ the apologizer apologizes not for the occurrence as it is, but for the specific component that he/she did.

E/ in order to be away from the responsibility, the apologist can play with the syntactic form of his utterance using some lexical means for the same purpose like employing words (incident) referring to the action that was done instead of admitting the offence that was done. For such actions like insulting or slandering, the politicians use the word mistake instead of mentioning the offence. But here the word mistake was considered as a reflection of the responsibility for the action in some discourses, while others (as it will be considered here) saw it as a way of minimizing the responsibility (Meier, 1998). According to Owen (1983), the use of the form *about that* is considered to be another way of minimizing the offender's responsibility and within this study Owen's view will be considered.

3- In order to minimize his/her responsibility, the actor can use the *if* conditional to place under the mark of uncertainty the idea of the existence of offended victims, and also the selection of a specific victim from a group. Hiding the real identity of the offended victim can be added to the tactics used by the politicians.

4- By using this tactic, the offender may deny and reject the responsibility for the offence that was done and also blur and delete the agent. As Fairclough (2000) stresses, this is one of the vital tactics for releasing oneself from the responsibility. The reader has to take into consideration that the above given tactics are not exclusive and that the study may reveal different tactics.

3. American Political Apologies Analysis

Text 1

Bill Clinton Apologizes for His Role in America's Prison Epidemic

"I signed a bill that made the problem worse. And I want to admit it. In that bill, there were longer sentences and most of these people are in prison under state law, but the federal law set a trend. And that was overdone; we were wrong about that."

(<http://www.esquire.com/news-politics/politics/news/a36476/bill-clinton-apologizes-sentencing-laws/>)

In (1), Clinton used in his speech the syntactic and lexical formula *wrong about that* which, as we have stated earlier, is considered as one of the components to minimize his responsibility for his action when he signed a bill that helped to ensure his re-election. Clinton's utilization of this component is placed at the end of his speech as he was trying to refer to his offence but in most of the cases it was specified to be used at the beginning of the speech. In order to be considered an apology, it has to be placed in the first clause (as in most of the cases). Clinton's speech could have been more accurate if it was (*we were wrong about that. I signed a bill*). In this case we may face an occurrence for describing his offence.

Text 2

Bill Clinton Apologizes to Rosie O'Donnell for "Cheapening" the Oval Office!

"I'm sorry for all the men who ever hurt you, I'm sorry that I hurt you. Everything you've said to me, I've said to myself, and I hope one day you can forgive me, and I hope I can forgive me."

(<http://allwomenstalk.com/bill-clinton-apologizes-to-rosie-odonnell-for-cheapening-the-oval-office>)

In (2), Clinton offers his apology to Rosie O'Donnel by using a verb which has different pragmatic functions. In most of pragmatists' works, the use of forms which have different functions makes the study of speech act difficult to be identified (Lakoff, 2001, 201). Clinton's utilization of the verb *sorry* instead of *apologize* gave his speech more than one function. In this case the function was to save him from the conflict and to release him from the responsibility towards Rosie O'Donnel.

Text 3

Hillary Clinton Apologizes for Email Setup as Secretary of State

"I do think I could have and should have done a better job answering questions earlier. I really didn't perhaps appreciate the need to do that", Mrs. Clinton told ABC News. "What I had done was allowed, it was above board. But in retrospect, as I look back at it now, even though it was allowed, I should have used two accounts. One for personal, one for work-related emails. That was a mistake. I'm sorry about that. I take responsibility."

(<http://www.wsj.com/articles/hillary-clinton-apologizes-for-email-setup-as-secretary-of-state-1441745045>)

According to (3), Hillary Clinton finally offers her speech apologizing after repeatedly declining for not having used two E-mail accounts, a private one and a work-related one. In fact she did not offer an apology because in her speech she said "What I had done was allowed", which means she did not admit her offense and that what she did was allowed. Even before offering what was considered as an apology, Hillary Clinton repeated that again "even though it was allowed". Hillary Clinton expresses her offense as a mistake and the use of this noun as an excuse to ease her responsibility. One more tactic is the use of the multiple function verb *sorry* along with a syntactic and lexical way of blurring her offense using *sorry about that*, which means "sorry about the mistake".

Text 4

John Kerry apologizes for insulting the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces.

"I sincerely regret that my words were misinterpreted to wrongly imply anything negative about those in uniform, and I personally apologize to any service member, family member or American who was offended... As a combat veteran, I want to make it clear to anyone in uniform and to their loved ones: My poorly stated joke at a rally was not about, and [was] never intended to refer to any troop."

(<http://www.perfectapology.com/political-apology.html>)

In (4), Kerry reduces his responsibility by blurring the offence. In his speech Kerry instead of mentioning the act (even if the act was an utterance) he refers to his act by using *words* which mean that the whole action was done by him. In his speech Kerry offers his regret because his words were misinterpreted. That means he denied his responsibility. Furthermore, Kerry said (*I personally apologize to any service member, family member or American who was offended*), trying to hide or blur the identity of the offended victim, which means that Kerry expresses his apology to more than one identity; service members, family members, and Americans. To connect with Kerry's earlier speech (*I sincerely regret that my words were misinterpreted*), why should someone offer an apology (as in Kerry's case "I personally

apologize...") if he/she is sure that his/her act did not carry any kind of offence or misinterpreted?

Text 5

Former U.S. president Jimmy Carter to U.S. Jews: Forgive Me for Stigmatizing Israel

"We must recognize Israel's achievements under difficult circumstances, even as we strive in a positive way to help Israel continue to improve its relations with its Arab populations, but we must not permit criticisms for improvement to stigmatize Israel. As I would have noted at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but which is appropriate at any time of the year, I offer an Al Het for any words or deeds of mine that may have done so".

(<http://www.haaretz.com/news/jimmy-carter-to-u-s-jews-forgive-me-for-stigmatizing-israel-1.1609>)

In (5), within the field of politics, it seems like everything is possible. In the U.S. Former president Jimmy Carter speech to U.S. Jews we can realize a new tactic which involves the blending of a word from the non-dominant language in U.S. (Hebrew) to his dominant language. More specifically, Carter borrowed the word *AL HET*, a word which refers to the confession of sin, including it in his utterance, and this tactic may satisfy one part on the account of others. Carter could have been clearer if he had not made use of code mixing, because that involves bilinguals in order to realize his act and, as we can see, that was the aim behind this, in order to make his speech less generally and more specifically. Instead of referring to his sin directly, Carter used another word from another language to refer to it, in order to evade or minimize his responsibility.

Text 6

Donald Trump Apologizes To John McCain In Song

John McCain – I apologize

I see strength when I look in your eyes

I got in deep with my big mouth

And I put my foot in it

John McCain's my hero baby

He went through a lot of pain

He is brave and he's courageous

John you take my breath away

John McCain – I apologize

Sometimes the words just spill out of my mouth

I hope you see – I am so sorry

I am the leader of the GOP

John McCain's my hero baby

He went through a lot of pain

He is brave and he's courageous

John you take my breath away

"John McCain's My Hero, Baby"

(<http://www.breitbartunmasked.com/2015/07/20/donald-trump-apologizes-to-john-mccain-in-song/>)

In (6), Trump did his apology through an informal way of apologizing. Negash (2006) asserts that in order for an apology to be successful it has to be formal. That means that asserting an apology may correspond to some rituals or decorum. Trump was not self-conscious when he offered his regret. To consider an apology as successful, the need for facial expressions and gestures come into account. Not even the other utterance expresses his sincerity (I hope you see - I am so sorry), as we have stated in the other examples that the verb (*sorry*) has various pragmatic functions. Moreover, Trump's apology does not carry any truth-telling, accountability, or truth acknowledgement to succeed in his apology. We shall consider this as being another tactic of reducing the responsibility from acknowledging sincere apology.

4. Results and interpretation

Our analysis led us to finding an answer to our research question, so we can assert that indeed, not any political apology is a sincere one and that behind some attempts of apologizing in the political field there can be identified a hidden purpose, which is related to the offender, not to the offended. More precisely, one of these purposes, as the analysis showed, is to reduce the responsibility of the offender.

Therefore, our hypothesis was tested by analyzing the complexity of the language, more exactly, the political language, which is the instrument of the politicians (American politicians) for disguising exculpation in an apology.

We have identified some strategies used by the American politicians in their speech acts of apology in order to minimize their responsibility. The use of syntactic, lexical, semantic, stylistic and pragmatic means was obvious in this study. Based on the six apologies used by American politicians, we have identified some tactics they used, as described in Deutschmann's schemas. The analysis revealed the use of syntactic and lexical means in (1), (3), (5) in order to blur the offense; the use of the construction *to be sorry* with different pragmatic functions as in (2), (3); the use of the word *mistake* in (3); blurring the offense by referring to the offense as *words* and hiding the identity by referring to more than one identity as in (5). So these kinds of equivocal constructions are the consequences which politicians use to directly inhibit apologies as Lakoff (2000, 2001) and Bavelas (2004) argue.

Two other strategies were identified, namely the borrowing of a word from another language, in Jimmy Carter's speech, and the use of informal apology in Donald Trump's speech.

5. Discussions and Conclusions

We have stressed from the beginning that we can't assume the general character of this analysis findings, since the object of the analysis was very restraint. However, as asserted, it can represent a starting point for more extensive analysis.

Nevertheless, the present analysis carries importance. It raised awareness on the importance of decoding the truly meaning of an apology in the political discourse that, as demonstrated, lacks sincerity in some cases. The correct decryption of the purpose of a message delivered in the guise of apology may influence the manner of solving the conflict, as well as the manner of continuing the relations between the offender and the offended. The study has also showed that the language complexity (the use of symbols, phrases, words, sentences or codes) can sometimes make the decoding difficult, but not impossible. This pragmatic analysis revealed many strategies of hiding the insincerity used by the speakers while delivering an apology. For an unspecialized listener or reader, the decoding is difficult to realize, but a broader analysis and inventory of these tactics might help the offended to successfully decrypt the message.

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