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## INDIRECTNESS AS A POLITICAL DISCOURSE STRATEGY IN DONALD TRUMP'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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### ABSTRACT

Much of the meaning we convey during interaction is implicitly stated and this implies that hearers are set on a path to use their cognitive skills in deducing or inferring speakers' meaning or intentions. This strategy that speakers use in conveying meaning in a somewhat vague or roundabout manner is known as indirectness. This study accounts for indirectness in politics as a potent discourse strategy that political leaders employ. It accounts specifically for the forms of indirectness that President Trump employed during the delivery of his inaugural address. Instances of indirectness such as metaphor, circumlocution, and euphemism are identified and discussed in the address to interpret the speaker's hidden meaning behind every utterance. The study puts forward that indirectness does not only function to save or maintain face or as a politeness strategy, but also as a tool for getting the attention of listeners or the audience as well as fostering the personal beliefs and traditions of a political party against its opposition. Finally, the study concludes by asserting that language is not just a tool used to conceal the truth as indirectness suggests, but that it also employed – especially as used by political leaders – to reveal the other side of discourse not explicit to listeners.

### KEYWORDS

Inference, indirectness, utterance, discourse strategy, politeness.



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## INTRODUCTION

This study accounts for the use of indirectness as a prominent political discourse strategy with specific insights on President Donald Trump's Inaugural Address delivered on Friday, January 20, 2017, at Washington, D.C. as retrieved from an online source. Several studies have been carried out centering on political speeches such as Kulo (2009) who studied how language can be used to impose certain moral or ethical values on people using two speeches during the American presidential campaign of 2008 by Mr. Barack Obama and Mr. John McCain; Hernández-Guerra (2013) considered the textual, intertextual and rhetorical features in political discourse: the case of President Obama in Europe, and Al-ARBAWI (2017) studied Indirectness in Political Interviews from a pragmatic perspective. This study will add to existing ones another pragmatic perspective of political speech by carefully examining indirectness as a very necessary discourse strategy. The address that serves as the data for this study will help us understand the inevitable nature of indirectness especially by politicians in the world. It will account for some of the forms that it can be manifested such as metaphor, euphemism, and circumlocution.

One very difficult aspect of interaction is the ability to understand and interpret the speaker's intentions and meanings. Speakers always presume or take for granted that hearers understand what they have said, therefore, they require or expect the most appropriate response. According to Makata, Ongarora and Matu (2016) 'after an utterance has been rendered by a speaker what exists thereafter is its representation in form of a sentence-like structure which can elicit multiple meanings. This reveals the fluid nature of utterance; that an utterance is such a fluid verbal linguistic unit with multiple pragmatic interpretations that a speaker can easily deny some interpretations' (p. 55). When speakers issue utterances with many presuppositions, they have a particular belief and confidence that their listeners share certain background knowledge with them that sets the interactive event on a smooth path. This background knowledge is known as common grounds, and according to Kecskes and Zhang (2009) 'cooperation and common ground are considered particularly important for successful communication' (p. 332). Speakers do not spend unnecessary time and effort explaining the intricacies of all matters in the discourse situation because hearers already have a foreknowledge of the topic. It further implies that discourse participants will always be at home with whatever is being discussed or communicated. Hearers will spend less effort engaging their inferential system to deduce meaning from what is said and what is meant or communicated during an interaction, and it will also result in producing the desired response to the speaker's meaning. As purported by Wałaszewska and Piskorska (2012) 'understanding a message consists in discovering the speaker's intentions by making inferences about the deliberately used stimulus, verbal or otherwise' (p. 1). When hearers engage their inferential system in the process of making meaning, they do that on the path of dwelling only on the issues of relevance as far as the conversation is concerned. Hearers do not always seek to interpret every utterance issued by speakers but are always successful to arrive at understanding the speaker's intentions only by relying on matters of relevance or relation.

Inferring what speakers mean from what they say requires consideration of what they know (Bergen and Grodner, 2012, p. 1450). Hearers do not have the privilege of deciding how speakers should express themselves during communication, it puts a clog to the wheel of that interaction. This means that hearers are at the mercy of speakers who simply set them in a labyrinth with what they say and how their thoughts are conveyed to decode their communicative intentions. Speakers have the right to imply meaning or explicate their intentions with the assumption that hearers can engage their communication skills to infer or deduce meanings that are not represented in the words uttered. When speakers imply something it suggests that information is conveyed without being stated outrightly (Horn 2012). When they explicate meaning they simply improve the logical forms used to express

their thoughts or propositions (Bach 2016). Furthermore, they possess the right, except as the context demands, to speak directly or indirectly as long as they transfer meaning. Speaking with either form mentioned relates heavily to the issues bothering on politeness in communication. Direct speech withholds no form of verbal or non-verbal restraints as the speaker conveys their message with no consideration to the hearer's face. Also, a direct speech simply accounts for one communicative intention or act in the utterance. In contrast to this, speaking indirectly accounts for the situation whereby a speaker or language user says something but means more than what is represented in the utterance. In an indirect utterance or speech, the speaker conveys two different intentions for the hearer to respond. This is what is referred to as communicating more than what is said with the desire to express politeness.

### *Speaker's Meaning: Intention through Indirectness*

An investigation into meaning from a pragmatic perspective considers meaning as communicated by a speaker and interpreted by a listener. The literal understanding of this is that pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning. This form of meaning analyzes what speakers mean by their utterances than what the expressions mean by themselves. Understanding meaning communicated by the speaker is done consciously by the listener who makes inferences about what is said to arrive at what the speaker intended (Yule 1996). In his words, pragmatics is described thus: "We might say that it is the investigation of invisible meaning. Pragmatics is the study of how more gets communicated than is said." This notion of invisible meaning puts forward that during every communicative event speakers tend to be implicit with utterances and still require their hearers to provide the most appropriate response; speakers feel the need to imply as hearers also infer. This is because the speaker's utterance bears two forms of meaning, one is seen and the other is invisible which is regarded as the primary or intended meaning that the speaker wants the hearer to act on. Searle (1979) refers to this situation while discussing Indirect Speech Acts as a case where a sentence that contains the illocutionary force for one kind of illocutionary act can be uttered to perform another type of illocutionary act. Bach and Harnish (1979) label it indirect illocutionary act to mean 'an illocutionary act that is performed subordinately to another (usually literal) illocutionary act. It is indirect in the sense that its success is tied to the success of the first act. That is, securing uptake requires H to identify the indirect act by way of identifying the first act. This is one utterance with two intentions or meanings.' (p. 70). In trying to decipher this, Searle states that:

The problem posed by indirect speech acts is the problem of how it is possible for the speaker to say one thing and mean that but also to mean something else. And since meaning consists in part in the intention to produce understanding in the hearer, a large part of that problem is that of how the hearer can understand the indirect speech act when the sentence he hears and understands means something else (p. 31).

For Searle, there is a problem of identifying the desired intention of the speaker who has issued an indirect utterance to the hearer because communication accounts for speaker meaning standing as the source or originator of the message transferred. This case of indirectness is captured in the theory of implicature as propounded by Grice. 'what is implicated is what it is required that one assume a speaker to think in order to preserve the assumption that he is following the Cooperative Principle (and perhaps some conversational maxims as well), if not at the level of what is said, at least at the level of what is implicated.' (Grice 1989, p. 86 cited by Saul, 2002, p. 2). Explaining implicature, Horn (2006) describes it as a component of speaker meaning which is an aspect of what is meant in a speaker's utterance without sharing a part in what is said. This means that the intention of a speaker

which is the primary meaning for issuing an utterance is not part of or captured in the words of the utterance. He speaks further:

What a speaker intends to communicate is characteristically far richer than what she directly expresses; linguistic meaning radically underdetermines the message conveyed and understood. Speaker S tacitly exploits pragmatic principles to bridge this gap and counts on hearer H to invoke the same principles for utterance interpretation (Horn, 2006, p. 3).

This explains that the wealth of an utterance is found not in the linguistic meaning that has been directly expressed, but in the speaker meaning that has been indirectly or implicitly stated. It also implies that for speakers to make indirect utterances they simply exploit certain pragmatic principles; for hearers to interpret correctly they must also exploit the same principles. Yus (1999) puts forward that 'a certain percentage of success in human conversational interaction is the hearer's in supplying the missing elements in the speaker's utterance.' (p. 487). This means that when speakers imply their meanings, hearers by way of inference deduce interpretations to understand invisible meanings.

By inference, we mean the cognitive processes by which participants figure out meaning beyond what is said (Haugh 2012). The cognitive processes employed by hearers for the interpretation of speakers' communicative intentions are understood through the Inferential Model of Linguistic Communication. This model accounts for the fact that as long as the connection between a speaker's communicative intention and a sentence is not one of conventional coding of the message into the sentence via its meaning, it is simply inferential. Hearers deduce or infer meanings because the conventional coding of messages during interaction has been violated. This implies that inference is not required in decoding conventional patterns of communication because they simply apply the direct form of meaning transfer. When hearers employ cognitive processes for utterance interpretation it is because what is said does not hold adequate features to account for meaning that the ongoing communicative event puts forward. Furthermore, the basic reason for resorting to the inferential strategies to determine the speaker's intention is because both discourse participants possess a system of shared beliefs and assumptions which are heavily relied on during interaction. This system of shared beliefs is largely hinged on context which directs the process of meaning construction from the very beginning (Requejo 2007, p. 169). Sperber and Wilson (1986) classify a context as a combination of features such as expectations about the future, religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, and beliefs about the mental state of the speaker; these play a major role in utterance interpretation not only the immediate physical environment or preceding utterances. It is enough to believe that speakers automatically take for granted certain truths and information about interaction that guide what they select to say and how they intend what they say to be interpreted.

A hearer makes inferences on the speaker's utterances based on the information they have already stored in their memories about the world. Inferences are made as a result of both the old and new information that is stored and they are only accessed when they are needed in the ongoing discourse. Speaking on relevance and ostensive behavior, Sperber and Wilson put forward that unless the information is required for the performance of a particular cognitive task, it is not worth processing at all. They explained that:

When these interconnected new and old items of information are used together as premises in an inference process, further new information can be derived: information which could not have been inferred without this combination of old and new

premises. When the processing of new information gives rise to such a multiplication effect, we call it relevant (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, p. 48).

This stance purports that the process of inference making as a cognitive task requires that the hearer combines both old and new knowledge stored in the memory to arrive successfully at the most relevant form of meaning that the speaker has stated implicitly. The merging of the old and new gives rise to new information which is the speaker's intended meaning. The means of understanding what a speaker has spoken indirectly or implicitly is through the hearer's inferential skills supported by the non-linguistic features of language presented in the discourse in the utterances issued. The basis for these non-linguistic features is the context of interaction which informs why speakers issue utterances and are less mindful about how their hearers process them because they rest on certain assumptions that help them believe that they (hearers) already have more than an idea regarding the meaning or intention of each utterance.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analysis of Trump's Inaugural Address will be to identify and discuss the various forms and instances of indirectness as employed such as euphemism, circumlocution, and metaphor. Indirectness as discussed above under the aegis of speaker meaning, inference, and implicature is a feature of pragmatics that accounts for how utterances mean more than what is said which is left for hearers to infer as speakers have implied. Aside from these forms functioning as indirectness they also serve the purpose of politeness in the sense that speakers employ them to achieve or maintain deference and save face, especially in the public. The three forms have been employed in the inaugural address as discourse strategies and would be discussed with the help of inference and implicature.

### *Euphemism*

Euphemism is a mild expression that is employed to substitute and describe a harsh situation. It is used to achieve politeness and indirectness by reducing the force or impact of a harsh truth or concept. By inference, it is less offensive, this means that as time changes more euphemisms are created to substitute others as they might gradually become offensive too. Burridge (2012) asserts that euphemisms are sweet-sounding and least offensive alternatives that speakers or writers prefer to use in executing a particular communicative intention on a given occasion. In very plain words, a euphemism is employed to disguise reality, especially an unpleasant one. This specifically accounts for its use to achieve indirectness as a political discourse strategy because there abound issues and situations that naturally would require offensiveness and vulgarity; politicians resort to disguising or reducing the impact or force or even making beautiful something that is termed unpleasant. A typical instance of this expression is seen in Trump's words:

*We will get our people off of welfare and back to work....*

By inference, this expression portrays the need to restore sanity to the nation through involving the workforce of the citizens of America. Certain words in this utterance have been used to replace certain unpleasant terms as they are known to the public. The phrase 'our people' has been employed to substitute for the reality of the destitute or the homeless or those under care as a result of the hard drugs. This use is employed to establish a relationship beyond the president-citizen level. The use of 'welfare' also accounts for the avoidance of asylum or as generally known, 'rehab' for the rehabilitation center. Welfare implies that they are under the care of the government. Similarly, 'back to work' also accounts for providing them with jobs that will enable them to take care of themselves and live responsibly henceforth; this is accounted for on the deeper level of meaning. On the surface

level, 'back to work' can mean back to their right senses, cured and therefore free of the negative effects of hard drugs. Considering the presence of very distinguished personalities at the inauguration, and listening ears of the entire world, it would be discourteous for Trump to speak very directly concerning such matters.

### **Circumlocution**

This is another form of indirectness as a political discourse strategy. It is the use of evasive language or a large number of words to talk around a particular subject. It is the use of many words to express an idea that might be expressed by few. The prefix 'circum' means round movement; therefore, it refers to the use of words to go around a subject rather than addressing it directly in very few words. Goffman stated that "circumlocution enables senders to make their responses vague and in this sense, they can sustain the face" (quoted in Al-arbawi 2017). Also quoted in Al-arbawi (2017), Obeng mentioned reasons why politicians resort to circumlocution which are protecting themselves or the governments that they represent, clinging to power, staying from hazards and difficulties, keeping their careers, to sustaining their self-image as well as that of their government. The use of circumlocution is a perfect instance where the maxim of quantity by Grice is violated. This strategy is utilized by Trump in his address as expressed below:

*The oath of office I take today is an oath of allegiance to all Americans. For many decades, we've enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry; subsidized the armies of other countries while allowing for the very sad depletion of our country; We've defended other nation's borders while refusing to defend our own; And spent trillions of dollars overseas while America's infrastructure has fallen into disrepair and decay, We've made other countries rich while the wealth, strength, and confidence of our country has disappeared over the horizon. One by one, the factories shuttered and left our shores, with not even a thought about the millions upon millions of American workers left behind. The wealth of our middle class has been ripped from their homes and then redistributed across the entire world.*

These roundabout expressions are capable of being expressed as a very simple idea in a few words. Trump simply intends to say that the economy of America has favored other countries of the world more than itself. By these circumlocutory expressions he portrays the fact that previous presidents have not properly and adequately utilized the resources of America to the benefit of its citizens, and this has led to the backwardness of the economy. In very clear terms, it is only when the citizens of a nation prosper that the nation itself can flourish in all aspects. It is worthy to note that however indirect Trump sounded, contextual or background knowledge of the state and welfare of the nation will aid the audience in deciphering explicitly the intention of every utterance issued.

### **Metaphor**

The use of metaphor has been identified and described as pervasive in the human cognitive processes. It is not only a figure of language or speech or a device that is employed to beautify speech made by orators or politicians, rather it is a major function of our thought processes that is very inevitable. The metaphor also functions as a form of semantic change or meaning extension in the sense that the sense of a word is extended beyond the basic or denotative or conceptual level to the figurative level, and this accounts for the reason why every communicative activity is termed successful or healthy only when interlocutors must have arrived at every form of meaning expressed in each utterance. It is important also to note that there are no figurative or metaphorical words but that words are used

metaphorically by speakers; this means that the focus of a metaphor is the word that has been used metaphorically.

Ayoob (2007) put forward that "when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction" (p. 56). According to Black, a metaphor is structured based on a focus and a frame that shares very distinct differences. The frame is what is to be described using a focus, therefore the focus acquires a new meaning when used with a frame in a new context of interaction. The use of frame and focus is what Lakoff and Johnson referred to as the source and target domains. Trump utilized metaphor quite appropriately in his address to show indirectness as represented in the senses of solidarity and togetherness, struggle for peace and progress despite any odd. The very first use is thus: *We share one heart, one home, and one glorious destiny.*

The basic sense of 'share' is splitting into parts something tangible to several individuals. The focus of the word in the context of heart, home, and glorious destiny is to explain what the speaker and the hearers have in common. He does not mean that they share one heart but that they have a common or mutual goal or aim or mission and vision that drives them to the same destination. This further implies that with this mutual goal to achieve, they must work together and weather every storm that might arise to hinder their desires for a 'glorious destiny'.

Another use of metaphor is expressed thus: *I will fight for you with every breath in my body....*

Using the source and target domains we can simply infer that BREATH IS A WEAPON to mean that 'breath' is the frame and 'weapon' is the focus. Some of the weapons known to our world are a sword, spear, bow and arrow, gun, machete, and so on. But Trump desired to use his breath as a weapon to mean that he would use everything he has to fight for the citizens of America even to the point of death. He does not see his life as something to hold on to when his followers are suffering in their land. For him, there cannot be any form of pleasure or satisfaction derived in the office of the president when he cannot defend and front the cause of the citizens. He saw his office or the affairs of the nation as compared to a battle or war to be fought and won. Furthermore, he shows much concern for the nation by advising the citizens on the right attitude when he said: When you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice. The word 'open' basically collocates with senses that concern tangible or concrete terms and concepts such as a house, container, etc. with terms that are also visible such as humans, tangible contents such as water, grain, and so on. The above metaphorical use explains that the heart is likened to a house or a container and prejudice is as a person or a tenant. Thus we can put forward that:

THE HEART IS A HOUSE/CONTAINER

PREJUDICE IS A TENANT/SUBSTANCE

For the progress or advancement of the nation, the citizens are enjoined to let their thoughts revolve around patriotism – love for the nation – and never give a chance to prejudice that can hinder major developments. It is by allowing patriotism to rule their heart and affairs that every form of preconceived notion which is contrary to transformation can be put away.

Trump again uses another metaphorical expression to state and convey his thoughts about issues that concern the heart of the citizens towards oneness and development as seen in: *...they look up at the same night sky, they fill their hearts with the same dreams....* This expression also viewed the heart as a container that can hold a substance firmly. The substance that the citizens have inside their heart is

the same dream that can cause a stir towards a positive change and heal every form of division that seek to confuse all people in the nation. He implies that the dream of having a well-developed nation filled with lots of opportunities for its citizens should constitute a strong desire and passion in their hearts.

In concluding his address he states thus: *“Your voice, your hopes, and your dreams, will define our American destiny. And your courage and goodness and love will forever guide us along the way.”* A guide can be a person, a map, a compass, or anything visible for the traveler not to miss their way. But Trump uses abstract qualities to refer to a guide; this means that it is the good conditions of their heart that has been filled with the qualities of courage, goodness, and love that can serve as a guiding light to the nation getting to its desired destination or height. The courage to face all challenges and obstacles and the love for one another are forces that can direct the affairs of the nation towards its determined goals.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Accounting for indirectness as a political discourse strategy concerns the dexterity of language users in knowing what to say and how to say or convey their intentions in the most appropriate context. The ability to regulate the intentions and thoughts of a language user is simply the function of the context of interaction. The general idea of President Trump's Inaugural Address is to convey to the citizens of America and the whole world that he can serve and perform better in his use of euphemism, circumlocution, and metaphor as various forms of discourse strategies. His use of euphemism is not just to sweeten or disguise reality but to show respect, veneration, and admiration for the citizens who have allowed him to serve and cause definite changes to the entire affairs of the nation. Therefore, he employs 'our people', 'welfare', and 'back to work' to show his utmost concern for everyone irrespective of color or their current physical, social, and mental state. The euphemistic expression also heightens part of his agenda for the nation which is to restore sanity to America and reduce the rate of indiscipline; these have also been stated indirectly.

The basis for the use of circumlocution aside indirectness is to state in clear terms all the ills and features of the past administration that have caused major setbacks to the nation. It is not enough to simply state that American citizens have suffered while other nations have prospered, it is also necessary to highlight specific areas that they have been disadvantaged such as reduced production in industries, depletion of the military, defenceless borders, decay and disrepair of infrastructure, lack of wealth, strength and confidence of the nation, shuttering of the factories, and wealth being ripped from the middle class. Trump's recourse to circumlocution is not to make his response or concern vague but to clearly state that citizens of America have been plundered by the previous administrations, and most importantly that other presidents have only been interested in favoring the outside world to the detriment of their nation. That is a major form of misdirection of administration.

The pervasive use of metaphors in the address also accounts for a great interest in developing the psychological well-being of the citizens and also awakening their emotional senses to the need to pursue and accept his ideas for the proposed change of administration he is introducing. He simply employs metaphor to stress that driving or piloting the affairs of America is not the duty of the president alone, but it also requires the consciousness and deliberateness of the citizens towards an all-round development. President Trump's indirect use of metaphor is to put forward that even though he is the leader of the nation, there are certain places that he cannot reach directly to influence; it is at such points that the citizens are also to be aware that they also have their responsibility of fostering the dreams and interests of the nation towards the height of progress.



A general outlook of the address and the analysis gives us the idea that the main point of its indirectness is that the previous administration as well as the political party it represents has promoted their agenda which has not been favorable to the economy and the affairs of the nation. In very simple and clear words, the immediate past president – Barack Obama – did not perform well. This is expressed the Trump's words below:

*We will no longer accept politicians who are all talk and no action – constantly complaining but never doing anything about it. The time for empty talk is over. Now arrives the hour of action. Do not let anyone tell you it cannot be done. No challenge can match the heart and fight and spirit of America. We will not fail. Our country will thrive and prosper again.*

This stance is clearly expressed also in his use of antithesis – the juxtaposition of contrasting words or ideas to give a feeling of balance. Antithesis as also represented in the address spoke further of bad governance of the previous administration that also contributed to the depletion of its citizens. Trump spoke thus:

*Washington flourished – but the people did not share in its wealth. Politicians prospered – but the jobs left, and the factories closed. The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of our country.*

## CONCLUSION

This study has purported the idea that our everyday interaction is inherently laden with all forms of meaning conveying and deductive devices not just in the realm of politics. We do not just engage in interaction for the fun of it, rather it is an activity that involves the entire consciousness of the human mind. Speakers issue utterances with lots of implicit meanings with various intentions which can be either to show politeness or conceal certain truths from their listeners. On a general note, it is to show the already existing contextual relationship that exists between them that amounts to taking for granted that they are aware of certain information. Listeners, on the other hand, do all they can to deduce the concealed intentions of speakers to give the right response to every utterance. They try to arrive at the most important aspect of meaning known as relevance which guides them in deducing or inferring the speaker's meaning.

Regarding political discourse, we can also state that indirectness helps a great deal in achieving not only politeness but also other features that can bring the masses closer to their political leaders such as empathy, solidarity, enacting of relationships, fostering their political interests and desires, as well as countering the efforts of the opposition party. It is very evident that when politicians use language in their discourse, they tend to employ more discourse strategies that can heighten or project their intentions such as those identified in President Trump's address instead of speaking in very plain language. However, indirectness avails political leaders as well as all language users the opportunity to veil certain bitterness or grievance they have been nursing in their hearts and also tone down the high impact that speaking directly might have on listeners. We do not use language to hide truths alone, we use it to reveal the other side of the discourse situation.

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