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Interpersonal relationships in the televised electoral debate

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Abstract

The present study is devoted to the analysis of the interpersonal relationships induced by the adversarial verbal exchanges that characterize a televised electoral debate. The studied electoral debate opposed the presidential candidates Ségolène Royal and Nicolas Sarkozy. It was broadcast in France, in May 2007. In keeping with the French tradition, the format allotted a generous space to the face-to-face interaction between Royal and Sarkozy. Each candidate had the opportunity to direct aggressive questions to the interlocutor. This is the reason for which this media event has been selected for this research. At the same time, the important number of interrogative utterances launched in the debate by all the participants present in the studio justifies the careful scrutiny of questioning in adversarial environments.

A consistent section of the chapter presents the main concepts derived from the theories that articulate the foundation of the proposed empirical investigation. Thus, the configuration of the adversarial context is essential to the analysis of the televised electoral debate. The broadcasting of the electoral debate is interpreted as cause and explanation of the increased tension between the politicians engaged in a zero-sum game.

The adversarial context is the frame within which the candidates choose the target of their verbal attacks, namely, the public image of the political adversary. The image of self is both exposed and vulnerable as it represents the main concern for all the participants in the broadcast. Relying on statistics, specialized literature demonstrates that presidential candidates are mainly appreciated for their efficacy in the battle on image, rather than for their argumentative competence.

In order to explain image attacks the researcher needs the interpretive apparatus and the analytic instruments offered by the theories of impoliteness. That clarifies the interest for their evolution from the Goffmanian concept of “face” to the premises of the recent theories of im/politeness and relational work. The classic theory of linguistic politeness created by Brown and Levinson (1967) is duly described as inspirational for impoliteness analysts such as Culpeper, Bousfield or Kienpointner.

The core of the research is the study of questions. That is why the chapter contains descriptions of several formal classifications, according to different principles. Likewise, the questioning speech act is explained as initiative turn in face-to-face interaction, forcing the interlocutor to provide an answer. Other theoretical considerations consist in comparative approaches of formal types of questions, without neglecting the functions specific to them. The aim of their inclusion in the chapter is to emphasize the features that questions receive in various environments. Analysts agree that, in established adversarialness, they become a means of imposing power (Wang 2006), a disaffiliative activity (Steensig and Drew, 2008) or even a challenge (Koshik 2003).

This is one of the main ideas that underlie this empirical research. The objective of the research is to order the questions in the data base according to their potential as impolite speech acts. They are analysed as manifestations of off-record impoliteness (Bousfield 2008).

There is a double research hypothesis: as the questions are subject to three criteria of classification, the most numerous class members according to each criterion will coincide with the most impolite types of questions. At the intersection of the results of the three measurements, there must be the prototype of the most impolite question in the corpus.

Keywords: adversarial questions, (im)politeness, debate mediator, presidential candidate, discourse

Interpersonal relationships in the televised electoral debate

Ruxandra Boicu

1. Introduction

The empirical research that I propose investigates the interpersonal relationships between the political candidates who participate in a televised electoral debate. The electoral debate is essentially a face-to-face interaction between two categories of actors. First of all, in the institutional framework, the TV journalists who host the broadcast are involved in a question-answer interaction with the politicians.

Secondly, there is a direct interaction between the candidates too. Their verbal exchanges are usually watched by millions of TV viewers who expect to receive both information and entertainment from this media event. This is the reason why the broadcast is conceived and perceived as a zero-sum game in which the winner is rewarded with the citizens' votes.

The candidates treat each other as adversaries whose verbal attacks should have the force of undermining the other's public image. One important means that they use to this effect is questioning each other. It is the focus of this study to classify the candidates' questions according to their damaging force.

The questions composing the corpus were formulated by the presidential candidates, Ségolène Royal and Nicolas Sarkozy, during the electoral debate that was broadcast in May, 2007. The selection of this debate for the analysis was decided by the fact that, within the format, a generous space is devoted to the question-answer interaction between the candidates. Likewise, the important number of interrogative utterances present in the debate and launched by all participants justifies the careful scrutiny of the question-induced interpersonal relationships.

The aim of this discourse analysis is to correlate the study of the questions with the interpretation of their relational effects, within a process in which forms and contents are associated to various degrees of impoliteness.

This research may help the TV audience who enjoy watching electoral debates to understand the mechanisms of the confrontation and to evaluate the candidates' performances knowingly. In addition to that, it may be

useful to students of political communication and media studies in their future jobs as political journalists, TV journalists, electoral staff advisors or political analysts. It is equally intended to contribute to the specialized literature on the European models of debate. Actually, there is abundant analytic material referring to the US debate model. It mainly approaches the candidates' argumentation, image or defense strategies (Benoit 1997; Carlin 2001; Aime and Benoit 2004; Hinck and Hinck 2002; Kaid 2004; Trent 2004, *inter alia*). Other studies on US electoral debates have explored the relational or (im)politeness aspects that are implied in the mediator-candidate interaction exclusively (Locher 2004; Garcia Pastor 2008). In contrast, there has not been a similar analytic interest in the candidates' direct exchanges. It is explainable, if we think that, in the US model, there is little space for the direct confrontation between the candidates.

Concerning the European models, the qualitative analyses devoted to Spanish political debates (Blas-Arroyo 1999; 2001; 2003) focus on the aggressiveness of the candidates' verbal exchanges. In Blas-Arroyo (2003), the author signals the lack of interest in the debate interaction" from a discourse analysis point of view" (396).

The literature on the French televised electoral debates has mainly provided insights into the history of the genre in France, insisting on journalistic practices and sociological issues (Ockrent 1988; Nel 1990; Thoveron 1996; Ghigliione and Bromberg 1998), with an emphasis on notorious verbal conflicts between the politicians during the debates. A notable exception that is also mentioned by Blas-Arroyo (2003) is the conversation analysis of the debate interaction proposed by Trognon and Larrue (1994).

2. Theoretical considerations

This section introduces the main concepts that underlie the experimental research. The first issue concerns the **adversarial context** that is specific to the televised electoral debate. Analysts agree that it is the contemporary broadcasting of the presidential confrontation that has added considerable pressure on the candidates who have to demonstrate that they meet the presidential role expectations of millions of viewers. That explains why the electoral debate has become «the purest elementary confrontation,... [it is] more than a debate, it is a fight, a duel» (Thoveron 1996: 171). Blas-Arroyo (2003: 397) compares the debate with "a true battlefield" and even "a boxing ring" where a candidate is more appreciated for the ability "to dialectically knock out an adversary" than for the quality of logical argumentation. Under these circumstances, the interlocutors engage in verbal attack and counter-attack as instrumental for maintaining or

improving their self-image (Trognon and Larrue 1994). Instead of deliberating, the political actors are asked to engage in a “ritualized” disagreement (Thoveron 1996). It seems paradoxical that “candidates are required to disagree in ways that persuade audiences to perceive them favourably” (Hinck and Hinck 2002: 238).

Dealing with disagreement in family discourse, Muntigl and Turnbull (1998) demonstrate that it is the concern for **face** that influences the conflict produced by disagreement. In a sequential, turn-by-turn analysis, the authors consider that the challenge implied in questioning is the second most face-threatening linguistic resource, after the accusation of irrelevance. According to them, the challenging question is:

”the specific type of disagreement by which a speaker questions an addressee’s prior claim and demands that addressee provide evidence for his/her claim, while suggesting that the addressee cannot do so” (Muntigl and Turnbull 1998: 230).

The concept of face was introduced by Goffman (1967). “Although Goffman (1967) mainly focused on face-saving activities, he did highlight that face-work can be put to ‘aggressive use[s]’” (Archer 2009). Drawing on Goffman’s inspiring work, Brown and Levinson (1987) created the concept of linguistic politeness and developed the theory of ‘face’. Face is “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” (1987: 61). It must be constantly attended to in interaction, as it may be maintained, enhanced but also lost. Brown and Levinson distinguished between positive face, associated with the individual’s wants to be accepted and respected by the others, and negative face that underlies the individual’s freedom of acting independently. In terms of politeness strategies, positive politeness is performed through the speech acts that express solidarity with the recipient, while negative politeness is characteristic of the speech acts that impose a relational distance between the speaker and the hearer.

In 1983, Leech raised politeness to the rank of Politeness Principle that has to regulate interactions in terms of tact, modesty, etc. He also classified speech acts in keeping with these general desiderata. For example, he included questions in the category of imposing speech acts that infringe the norms of social harmony.

The above-mentioned typologies of speech acts as face-work resources have determined the appearance of recent theories of impoliteness (Culpeper 1996, 2005; Culpeper et al. 2003; Bousfield 2008). They relativize judgments on (im)polite behaviour and provide insights into the mechanisms of conflictive talk. For instance, Kienpointner (1997) makes the distinction between impoliteness and rudeness and recommends that

im/politeness should be approached as a continuum. In Culpeper et al. (2003: 1546), impolite acts are defined as “communicative strategies designed to attack face” while Bousfield (2008: 132) adds more traits to impoliteness when he explains it as “intentionally gratuitous and conflictive” verbal behaviour. Generally speaking, the theorists of impoliteness follow Brown and Levinson’s distinction between off-record and on-record politeness, reversing face-work polarity, within more or less synthetic typologies of impolite speech acts.

Im/politeness and related phenomena constitute the analytic framework in which Blas-Arroyo (2003) undertakes a discourse analysis of some televised political debates. Actually, even in a previous study, Blas-Arroyo (2001) upheld the argument that impoliteness is the unmarked behaviour in the electoral debate assimilated to an “openly conflicting scenario”. On the other hand, Harris (2001, 2003) reveals the importance of im/politeness theories in the studies of power in institutional settings. She points out that, in political interaction, inflicting damage to the interlocutor’s face is a frequent verbal behaviour that deserves specialized attention.

Finally, Boicu (2008) applied the theories of im/politeness to modality, to study verbal interaction in the electoral debate. Dealing with the same context, in Boicu (2009), she explored the politician’s ethos in adversarial interaction.

The key-concept of this investigation is **questioning**, as a speech act whose force and functions vary in special circumstances.

Conventionally, a question is defined as “a form of social action, designed to seek information and accomplished in a turn at talk by means of interrogative syntax” (Heritage 2002: 1429).

In social practice, questioning is done “even with the absence of both the interrogative form and the information-seeking function” (Tracy and Robles 2009: 134).

As far as the formal differences among questions are concerned: “the most common categories are [...] yes–no questions, wh-questions, declarative questions, tag questions, and alternative questions” (Tracy and Robles 2009: 134).

In the specialized literature, there is consensus over the fact that the above-mentioned categories of questions lose their ordinary information-seeking function, in cases of established disagreement. In such cases, they become a means of imposing power (Wang 2006), a disaffiliative activity (Steensig and Drew 2008) or even a challenge (Koshik 2003).

When questions challenge something that the interlocutor has said or done, it is crucial to admit that “asking a question is not an innocent thing to do” (Steensig and Drew 2008: 7).

Exploring questions as a means to exercise power both in institutional and in informal forms of interaction, Wang (2006) explains that questions

enable the questioner to temporarily control the interaction through turn-taking and topic choice. The author provides the interpretation of topic treatment in relation to the formal classification of questions:

“questions restrict, constrain and ratify the topic of a response – the referential content of a conversation – through three major forms. Wh-questions can select and constrain topics through interrogative pronouns like ‘why, what, when, where’ and so on. Alternative questions can sift topics by way of alternative choices and Yes/No questions can confirm and ratify topics” (Wang 2006: 533).

What is also worth mentioning is that Wang distinguishes between wh-questions and yes/no questions in terms of power: “relatively speaking, Yes/No questions constrain an addressee to a greater degree than wh-questions” (Wang 2006: 545).

I consider this distinction to be a complex issue that refers to the truth value at the level of the questioned syntactic component. If the whole propositional content is questioned, then the question is total. If the question aims only at one component, then the question is partial. Formally, this dichotomy may be reduced to the presence or absence of interrogative words. Pragmatically, there are different degrees in which the questionee’s freedom of replying is affected (the two types are also distinguished as open and closed questions); relationally, the lack of freedom results in the questionee’s domination by the more powerful interlocutor. In terms of impoliteness, the most constraining type is the most impolite.

A classification of questions in adversarial contexts is also drawn by Clayman and Heritage (2002), in a comprehensive study of the US journalists’ questioning practices. The questions in the data base had been directed to two American presidents, during some selected press conferences. Although the authors announced their intention of using question design as the basic criterion against which to show the difference between deferent and adversarial questions, sometimes they abandoned this formal criterion in favour of content analysis (especially when the demonstration reached the category of “accountability questions”).

On the other hand, an important clarification was made by Clayman and Heritage (2002), about the problem of indirectness, when conventionalized “polite” phrases preface the questions: “It has been proposed that such indirectness functions as a ritual display of politeness that reduces the magnitude of forcefulness of the imposition (Brown & Levinson 1987). This has been amply supported by experimental and survey studies demonstrating that conventionally indirect forms are indeed perceived as more polite” (Clayman and Heritage 2002: 759).

3. Case presentation

The Royal-Sarkozy electoral debate is moderated by two prestigious TV journalists, Patrick Poivre d'Arvor (TF1) and Arlette Chabot (France 2). There is no public present in the studio.

According to the agreed format of the debate, at the beginning, the moderators introduce four extensive fields of political issues to be commented on. Afterwards, they invite the candidates to take the floor alternatively. The moderators limit their interventions to individual times announcing. Two clocks are present on the setting, to show the TV audience the candidates' individual times. The candidates may use their time almost feely. They are sitting face-to-face, which visually contributes to the intensity of verbal confrontation and conflict.

In terms of propositional content, the candidates' questions attack the counter-candidate's professional competence, as well as her/his skills in leadership, in communication or in relational work.

Within the Royal-Sarkozy debate, the moderators do not attack the participants' faces (except for the asymmetries implied in the institutional role, according to which they are supposed to supervise the application of the agreed format rules). They respect the function that questions have in non- adversarial interaction: that of requiring useful information for the TV audience. The moderators' questions are not limitative, they enable the candidates to approach the selected political issues ad libitum.

Moderator 10: *L'éducation, la famille. Que faire pour qu'un enfant ait des chances égales, dans sa famille, à l'école, et un accès égal à la culture ?*

[Education, family. **What is to be** done for a child to have equal chances in family, at school, and equal access to culture ?]

Generically addressed questions, as shown in the example, have a deliberative nuance, in contrast with the conflictive questions that the candidates ask each other.

4. Methodology and data

The debate transcript contains 27,431 words and proportionally, it covers almost equal contributions of the candidates.

The analysis of the questions in the data base is only applied to direct speech acts. It leaves out the various indirect speech acts underlying these questions, and, conversely, the various assertive acts that are indirect acts of questioning.

Consequently, the question markers taken into consideration in the quantitative research are the following:

- reversed syntactic word order of verb and grammar subject
- syntactic and lexical morphemes (“Qu’est-ce que...; Est-ce que...”)
- conventionalized politeness phrases
- punctuation

The only exception is the category of indirect style questions which was included in the first classification. The quantitative analysis consists in applying three criteria of classification to the same lot of 75 questions. The criteria are: the presence or absence of preface, the reply permissivity and the semantic content. The class members are ordered on three hierarchical scales of impoliteness. There is a double **research hypothesis**: the most impolite class members are the most numerous, according to each criterion applied and, at the intersection of the results of the three measurements, there must be the prototype of the most impolite question in the corpus.

4.1. Data analysis

4.1.1. Criterion of classification: prefaced versus unprefaced questions

The question preface is of two types: introductory verbs, characteristic of the indirect style, and conventionalized polite formulas. This formal criterion has relational consequences, as, in both cases, we have to do with longer utterances that are perceived as less intruding than the shorter formulation of the unprefaced question..

- Unprefaced question:

(1) **N.S.28**: *Celles qui sont à 32 heures, combien sont-elles payées ?*
[The 32-hour programmes, **how much are they paid?**]

- Question prefaced by introductory verbs:

(2) N.S.4: *Très bien, alors expliquez-nous pourquoi le groupe socialiste n'a pas voté les créations de la loi de programmation de 2002...*

[Very well, then **explain to us why the socialist group did not vote the effects of the 2002 law...**]

In example (2), the use of the first person plural of the pronoun “nous” increases the force of the directive act. Sarkozy includes the other debate participants in the reference of the pronoun “nous”. In this way, he intends to isolate Royal, so that the public should perceive her as common adversary.

- Question prefaced by conventionalized politeness formulas:

(3) N.S.113: *...J'aimerais que vous m'expliquiez, Madame, comment Areva pourra construire EPR en Finlande...*

[**I would like you to explain to me, Madam, how Areva could build EPR in Finland...**]

As against the degree of impoliteness implied in (2), where the imperative mood “expliquez-nous” intensifies the force of the impositive act, in (3), the questioner asks a less impolite question, prefaced by the conditional of the verb “aimer”, followed by the subjunctive of the verb “expliquer”.

The quantitative analysis of the questions according to the first criterion resulted in the following figures:

Table 4-1: Unprefaced vs. Prefaced Questions

Questioner	Total	Unprefaced Questions	Prefaced Questions
Ségolène Royal (S.R.)	28	21	7
Nicolas Sarkozy (N.S.)	47	42	5

As shown in Table (4-1), unprefaced questions are significantly more numerous than the prefaced ones, being more adequate to the debate constraining context. They are shorter and clearer. To conclude this stage of the analysis, the unprefaced/ direct questions which are less polite than the prefaced/indirect ones (Cf. Clayton and Heritage 2002) are more numerous than the latter, as anticipated in the hypothesis.

4.2. Criterion of classification: degrees of permissivity

This criterion differentiates the open-ended questions from the closed-ended (yes-no) questions.

a. Open questions (wh-questions) are more permissive since they enable the questionee to find more possibilities of replying. In this category, the least impolite seems to be the question prefaced by the interrogative adverb “why”. The utterance in the following example is semantically charged with a dominant extra value of suggestion, criticism, reproach or protest :

(4) **N.S.53** : *C'est une précision bouleversante. Vous ne pouvez pas dire un chiffre ?*

S.R.55 : *Non. Je ne peux pas vous dire un chiffre, pourquoi?*

N.S.54 : *C'est votre droit.*

[N.S.53: It's an outrageous remark. You **cannot provide a figure?**

S.R.55: No, I cannot provide a figure, **why?**

N.S.54: It's your right.]

Nicolas Sarkozy has asked Royal to be more specific as to the amount of an important tax. Royal's answer was: “S.R.54 : Mais ma taxe, elle sera au niveau de ce qui sera nécessaire pour faire de la justice sociale. [Well my tax will be as high as it will be necessary to do social justice.]”

Speculating on the lack of precision of Royal's answer, Sarkozy expresses an act of on-record impoliteness, qualifying Royal's answer as “outrageous”. He explicitly attacks Royal's positive face, her competence, when he half concludes, half answers: “You cannot provide a figure?”. Royal partially admits her weakness, but then she counter-attacks with the “why” question, implying that the tax amount in itself is not important. She strategically responds that it is the solution to the problem that is worth considering.

b. Closed questions (Yes/No Questions) trigger the limitation of the questionee's response possibilities. In order to be “satisfied” (Trognon and Larrue 1994; Kerbrat- Orecchioni 2001), closed questions should receive

either an affirmative or a negative answer. In example (4), Sarkozy asks a closed question, which Royal answers negatively, but she ends her turn with a difficult counter-question. The “total” question is more constraining than the partial or open one. It doesn’t give options to the addressee (Lakoff 1973).

c. Alternative questions cannot be answered either affirmatively or negatively. Since their satisfaction supposes the exact repetition or the paraphrase of one of the alternatives, the most frequent reactions to them are evasions. It is Royal’s way of replying to the alternative questions that are specific to Sarkozy’s discourse.

(5) **N.S.104** : *Est-ce qu'on continue le choix du nucléaire ou est-ce qu'on arrête ?*

S.R.106 : *On augmente la part des énergies renouvelables.*

[N.S.104: **Shall we continue the nuclear choice or shall we stop it?**

S.R.106: We should increase alternative energies.]

Instead of echoing one of Sarkozy’s alternatives, Royal gives a different response. She avoids taking a firm stand on the nuclear problem. Her attempt to counter-balance the relational asymmetry through a counter-proposal is actually an evasive answer, interpretable as an impolite refusal to cooperate (Kienpointner 1997).

The figures in the following table show the frequency of open and closed questions.

Table 4-2: Questions according to the degree of permissivity

Questioner	Total	Closed Quest.	Alternative Questions	Open quest.
S.R.	28	19	-	9
N.S.	47	27	5	15

Table (4-2) data indicate that, numerically, the closed questions prevail over the open ones. Once again, the research hypothesis is validated by the quantitative analysis. I consider that the following is the appropriate order, from the least to the most impolite type of question:

- The open “why” question (the fewest occurrences)
- The open question prefaced by the other interrogative pronouns, adjectives and adverbs (average number of occurrences)
- The closed question (the most numerous occurrences)
- The explicit alternative question (Sarkozy’s idiosyncratic usage)

4.3. Criterion of classification: question propositional/semantic content

Depending on the question object, the following categories of questions may be distinguished:

a. Questions concerning the debated themes, more specifically, the policies envisaged by the candidates:

(6) N.S.6 [...] *Ce qui est très important, c'est que vous avez parlé de cet abominable viol dans le parc de Bobigny. Si vous devez faire raccompagner toutes les femmes fonctionnaires chez elles la nuit, il faudra dire, il y aura une fonction publique au service des Français et une autre fonction publique des fonctionnaires qui rentrent.*

S.R.6 : *Mais cela ne m'amuse pas cela, ce crime abominable... Vous avez une autre solution ?*

N.S.7: *Si vous me permettez de répondre, la solution n'est pas de mettre un garde du corps à chaque fonctionnaire femme qui rentre chez elle, la solution est de réprimer les délinquants pour qu'il n'y en ait plus ou moins. Qu'est-ce que je propose ? D'abord, je propose qu'il n'y ait plus un seul délinquant sexuel...*

[N.S.6 ...What is very important is that you have spoken about this abominable rape in Bobigny park. If you must have all police women accompanied home at night, we'll have to say, there will be a public function to serve the French and another public function to serve the police women going home.

S.R.6: But I don't find it funny at all, this abominable murder... **Have you got another solution ?**

N.S.7: If you'd let me answer, the solution is not to hire a bodyguard for each police woman going back home, the solution is to annihilate the delinquents so that there will be no more or less. What do I suggest? First, that there will be not even one sexual delinquent]

In example (6), Sarkozy reacts to an issue that Royal has raised earlier, namely that police women are in danger when they go home at night. She evokes the example of a raped woman, a case that has had an echo in French society. It is an explicit accusation, as Sarkozy was the Minister of the Interior at the time of the rape. He really feels concerned, so that he takes over the issue and counter-attacks with an ironic comment about the necessity of doubling the police forces in order to have police women accompanied, when they go back home late at night.

Royal comes up with a quick reply and validates Sarkozy's act type: it is perceived as an attempt at turning the case into a funny matter.

That is why she contrasts “amusing” to “abominable murder”. Moreover, she challenges her adversary asking him to give his solution in order to make the police both efficient and safe. The implication, again, is that he was not able to do that while he headed that department. In the hierarchy of impoliteness realizations, this type of questions is the most destructive (see *infra*). And as Royal has anticipated, Sarkozy restates his already famous “solution” of eradicating sexual delinquency: “the zero-tolerance” solution. Actually, Royal’s next response will refer to it ironically, since her question was conceived to be a trap in which Sarkozy did fall.

b. Questions concerning the adversary’s public and private image:

(7) **S.R.76:** *Vous ferez un débat avec François Hollande quand vous le souhaitez.*

N.S.75: *Vous n’êtes pas concernée ?*

S.R.77: *Voilà...*

N.S.76: *Cela ne vous engage pas?*

S.R.78: *Non.*

[S.R.76: You shall have a debate with François Hollande whenever you wish.

N.S.75: **You are not concerned?**

S.R.77: That’s right...

N.S.76: **Are you not committed?**

S.R.78: No, I’m not.]

The verbal exchange in example (7) is provoked by Sarkozy’s reference to socialist policies concerning the state special regime pensions and François Hollande’s stand on this issue. Hollande was the former leader of the French Socialist Party and Royal’s ex-life partner at the time of the debate. It is Royal who leads the party at present and Sarkozy attacks her faces by forcing her to express an opinion on Hollande’s political convictions. It is a delicate issue for her, since it concerns both her private and her professional life. She avoids answering Sarkozy’s question, suggesting he should have first-hand information from Hollande himself. It is the moment for Sarkozy to insist on Royal’s private and professional life. The tension between the interactants is escalated when Royal refuses to take a stand and is reluctant to cooperate. Her short and cutting responses are intended to put a final stop to the exchange. Example (7) is a highly impolite exchange, as Sarkozy attacks his adversary with “yes/no” questions and Royal counter-attacks with clear-cut rebuttals.

c. Turn-taking negotiating questions:

These questions are indirect requests. In most of the cases, the candidates manage the interaction themselves. When the moderators do not intervene, they do not give up their turns willingly:

(8) S.R.132: *Non, pas quand il y a des injustices. Il y a des colères qui sont parfaitement saines parce qu'elles correspondent à la souffrance des gens.*

N.S.133 : *Est-ce que vous me permettez de dire un mot ?* **S.R.133 :** *Il y a des colères que j'aurai même quand je serai présidente de la République*

N.S.134: *Cela m'inquiète...*

[S.R.132: Not when there are injustices. There are perfectly helpful angers, because they match people's suffering. N.S.133: **Would you allow me to say a word?**

S.R.133: There are angers that I shall have even when I am the President of the Republic

N.S.134: That worries me...]

In example (8), Royal is very furious with the solution that Sarkozy supplies for the disabled children's education in special schools. She responds with S.R.132, showing her emotional reaction, and playing on it in her following turns. She monopolizes the discourse, so that Sarkozy interrupts her and makes a turn-taking request, prefaced by a very polite formula. It is not only an attempt to take the turn, it is also a defensive move that should have resulted in a topic change. Royal ignores his request which is perceived as an attack on Sarkozy's both faces. He tries to win points with the final, sarcastic remark "That worries me", hinting at Royal's nervous outburst, unsuitable for a presidential candidate.

The following table shows the proportions among the above-mentioned categories, in absolute figures:

Table 4-3: Question objects

Questioner	Total	Policies	Image	Turn-taking negotiation
S.R.	28	23	2	3
N.S.	47	39	6	2

According to Table (4-3), of all the questions formulated by Royal, over 80% refer to political issues, and with Sarkozy, 79%. The prevalence of the questions on policies confirms the analysts' opinion that, in televised

electoral debates, the real confrontation field is that of policies¹. The hypothesis is validated again, as the candidates' behaviour in this field has a global impact, while the questions on the other topics have only a local impact.

4.4. The profile of the most impolite question in the data base is expected to result from the intersection of the three previous criteria. It consists of the quantitative analysis of the questions on policies in the terms of the first two criteria: prefaced vs. unprefaced questions and reply permissivity questions.

Table 4-4: Unprefaced vs. Prefaced questions on Political Issues

Questioner	Total	Unprefaced questions	Prefaced questions
S.R.	23	20	3
N.S.	39	37	2

Table 4-5: Open vs. Closed Questions on Political Issues

Questioner	Total	Open questions	Closed questions
S.R.	23	7	16
N.S.	39	13	26

The data of tables (4-4) and (4-5) confirm the already noticed discrepancies between the most and the least impolite questions. Summarizing the features of the most impolite categories of questions, both in form and in content, we can infer the prototype of the virtual question that cumulates the following features:

- It concerns the envisaged policies
- It is a yes/no (closed question)
- It is an unprefaced question

The prototype may have various realizations, depending on the seriousness of the issue it questions. From this point of view, it may be compared with the "accountability question", specific to the context of press

¹ See, for instance, *Glenn J. Hansen and William L. Benoit, American Behavioral Scientist 44, The Role of Significant Policy Issues in the 2000 Presidential Primaries, (2001), 2082-2100.*

conferences (Clayman and Heritage 2002).

5. Conclusions

The questions asked by Royal and Sarkozy during the 2007 presidential debate have been studied both quantitatively and qualitatively. At the same time, both their form and their content have been taken into consideration. Given the acknowledged truth that in adversarial environments questions are realizations of impoliteness, the objective of the research was to order the questions in the data base according to their potential as impolite speech acts. They have been analysed as manifestations of off-record impoliteness (Bousfield 2008).

The results of the quantitative analysis, interpreted within the framework of relational and face-work, have revealed that the cumulative effect of the enuntiative forces released by the candidates' questions reverberates over their interpersonal relationship and over their image as they are perceived by the TV audience,

According to the format rules, Royal and Sarkozy had equal chances to win the competition. As soon as they assumed the role of the questioner, the supposed symmetrical relationship between them is transformed into an asymmetrical one, as they temporarily take over the traditional institutional role of the moderator. I consider that it is the mutual denial of this institutional role that increases discourse adversarialness in the studied electoral debate.

Likewise, the transfer of the questioning function from the journalists' to the candidates' practice has a crucial impact on the evolution of the debate format.

It is equally worth mentioning that the question-answer interaction between the presidential candidates contributes to the popularity of this media genre.

Clayman and Heritage (2002) signal that specialized journalists ask ever more adversarial questions in press interviews and press conferences. Further research might be extended over the role of rhetorical questions in the practice of journalistic questioning.

On the other hand, this chapter has not insisted on the differences of national and gender cultures that influence the format design and the questioning function. Culturally speaking, I have briefly mentioned the notable discrepancies between the U.S. and the French debates. Maybe, further research will approach more subtle cultural differences and interferences in the ways electoral debates are organized in various European countries.

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