

*'Perdóneme que se lo diga, pero vuelve usted a faltar a la verdad, señor González': form and function of politic verbal behaviour in face-to-face Spanish political debates*



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**ABSTRACT.** Following some previous lines of thought held by the author on the role of politeness and related phenomena in face-to-face electoral debates, this article deals with a series of linguistic devices frequently used by participants in this adversarial genre, and commonly characterized as *mitigated aggression*, in order to determine their main strategic values in the context of both current politics and the mass media spectacle. By making use of a methodology which combines both qualitative and quantitative analysis, it is demonstrated that the meaning and context in which these resources appear in electoral debate often contradict their literal meaning, and hence weaken the moderating function which is operative in non-adversarial genres. This, as well as other structural facts discussed in the article, allows us to understand some apparent contradictions in the fact that more aggressive participants could make the greatest use of both polite and impolite strategies; or that apparently polite strategies appear mainly in the core phases of the debate where aggressiveness and rudeness are the norm, and much less in the peripheral parts, where the dialectic war tones down.

**KEY WORDS:** *face-to-face electoral debate, mitigation, politeness, political discourse, Spain*

## 1. Introduction

A previous study recently upheld the argument that in an openly conflicting scenario, such as a face-to-face political electoral debate, unmarked behaviour is impolite and this inspires most of the participants' interactional activity (Blas Arroyo, 2001). We also rejected the hypothesis that genre expressions such as those contained in Extract 1 might be considered to be *polite* counterweights aimed at easing the disagreements and criticisms between those involved in the debate. In our opinion, expressions such as those italicized in Extract 1 do not refer to linguistic politeness at all, as some authors have claimed, at least the

conception that links this principle with the protection of the face, the interests of the interlocutor and the consequent safeguard of interpersonal communication between the participants. On the contrary, we propose that the systematic use of these kinds of resources represents a clearly egocentric function of *politic verbal behaviour* (Watts, 1992), as it tends to maximize benefit for the speaker while never doing so for the rival (Blas Arroyo, in press).

(1) JMA: . . . porque fijese señor González (FG: entonces usted no sabe lo que es gobernar) *perdón, ¿me quiere usted dejar hablar? Si es tan amable, le pido que sea tan amable de dejarme hablar* (FG: You're within your rights) endo que a usted la crítica le gusta muy poco pero déjeme usted hablar

[. . . Look, Mr González. . . (FG: So you don't know how to govern), *excuse me, would you let me talk, please? Would you be so kind*, I'm asking you to be so kind as to let me talk (FG: You're within your rights) I can see that you don't like to be criticised, but please let me talk.] (II/6)

In this article we delve deeper into politic verbal behaviour in face-to-face political debates, by way of a detailed analysis of a series of linguistic devices used frequently by participants and characterized in common verbal interactions as *mitigated aggression*, in order to determine their main strategic values in the context of both current politics and the mass media. In particular, we aim to demonstrate that:

1. The meaning, but above all the context, in which mitigating resources appear, often contradicts their literal meaning, and hence weakens the moderating function which is operative in non-adversarial genres.
2. Other structural facts which make up the participant and institutional frame of the face-to-face debates also point in the same direction. In this way, we were able to understand some apparent contradictions in the fact that more aggressive participants could make the greatest use of both polite and impolite strategies; or that apparently polite strategies appear mainly in the core phases of the debate where aggressivity and rudeness are the norm, and much less in the peripheral parts, where the dialectic war tones down.

## *2. Aggression and impoliteness in face-to-face political debates*

The genre of face-to-face pre-election debates has been of particular interest in political circles, as well as in the theory of mass media communication in countries with a tradition of televised electoral events such as France and the USA. In these countries, several scholars have gained a broad understanding of the impact of presidential debates about such subjects as the salience of certain campaign issues, the reinforcement of viewers' pre-existing attitudes and candidate preferences or as several studies have shown, the alteration of viewers' voting intentions (Yawn and Beatty, 2000).<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, this situation contrasts with the lesser interest shown up to now from a discourse analysis perspective (not withstanding Adams, 1992; Blas Arroyo, 2000, 2001; Edelsky and Adams, 1990; Fernández, 2000; Trognon and Larrue, 1994).

From a typological point of view, we could include the face-to-face debate within the family of genres belonging to political discourse such as parliamentary debates, news conferences, cabinet meetings and other constitutional institutions. The common denominator for all of them is the belonging to the social domain of politics and its main protagonists, i.e. politicians (see Van Dijk, 2000; for other possible interpretations of the ambiguous concept of 'political discourse', see Landtsheer, 1998 and Feldmann, 2000). In addition, we could define the objective of face-to-face debate as the interchange and confrontation, executed in a persuasive manner and before a plural audience (Albaladejo, 1997), of opinions, arguments and the most diverse postures of political parties representatives (Bordieu, 1981; Martín Rojo, 2000).

As in the case of parliamentary debates – of which we now have a recently increased bibliography (see Harris, 2001; Pérez de Ayala, 2001; Shaw, 2000; Van Dijk, 2000; Wodak and Van Dijk, 2000), political debates may be described as an openly conflictive and non-accommodating speech event marked by the mutual aggression of the parties (Blas Arroyo, 2000; Vion, 1992). As Lakoff and Johnson (1995: 119) remind us, in this discourse genre, the interlocutors often have

... a sensation of being at the battlefield. One holds an important opinion which is rejected by the other party. At least one participant wants the other party to relinquish their opinion and this creates a climate where there is something to win or lose. One feels embroiled in an argument when one's own position is under fire or when one is compelled to attack the posture held by the other person. It becomes a real argument when the two people throw most of their energies into obliterating the position of the other while defending one's own.

Furthermore, other authors remind us that in some western parliamentary traditions, political debate is presented as a clearly adversarial discourse in which the aim is to damage the public image of the adversary and the party he/she represents, while at the same time, scoring points for one's own faction, and hence the behaviour seen in debates is quite expected (Martín Rojo, 2000; Martín Rojo and Van Dijk, 1997; Pérez de Ayala, 2001; Shaw, 2000).

In recent times, the retransmission of election face-to-face debates on television has reinforced the present state in this context, the debate is presented as a true battleground, and even at times, as a boxing ring, where the ability to dialectically 'knock out' an adversary is far more important than logical argumentation. Hence, politicians and their teams of advisers spend a great deal of time fine-tuning points in the days leading up to the face-to-face debate<sup>2</sup> (for a review of the effects of TV on US election debates, see Coleman, 2000).

In the 1993 Spanish general election campaign, from which we obtained the data for this article, a number of analysts pointed out this distinctive feature of face-to-face debates, the first in the recent history of Spanish democracy. In this respect Cocho and Villamor (1993: 99) wrote in a tone reminiscent of sports journalism:

... In the second debate on the 31st of May, this time on Tele 5, Felipe Gonzalez delivered the last blow to Aznar and gave him a crushing defeat, with considerable consequences. He struck last and delivered two blows. The combat – this is how the debates were marketed – ended in a draw; this amounted to saying that a particular section of the electorate granted a slight lead to Aznar as a result of the two televised combats while other citizens were starting to see Gonzalez as *Eternal President* (italics added).

Furthermore, in electoral debates the desire to defeat an adversary may carry the need to ‘torpedo him’ if necessary; it is a victory over an adversary and not one’s own capacity for logic and persuasion which will hold the key to the success of an interlocutor in the light of the multi-media culture of western society. This explains why interlocutors, when criticism is levelled against them, will directly engage in counter-attack rather than logical argument in defence of their own positions (see Trognon and Larrue, 1994; Harris et al., 1986).

To sum up, the possibility that the debate might become an exchange of arguments aimed at convincing the interlocutor himself and the audience of the benefits of the interlocutor’s own promises seems to be doomed almost from the onset. On the contrary, the preferred tactic is to mercilessly discredit the interlocutor’s face – ‘*al enemigo ni agua* [not a crumb for the enemy]’; serious accusations are made and negative associations are cast in the public eye. The opponent’s competency is questioned, a figure of ridicule is created, etc.

In this context, unmarked behaviour is characteristically impolite as the participants not only have no interest in preserving harmony and consensus as the interaction unfolds, but they also seek to inflict maximum damage to the interlocutor’s face (Blas Arroyo, 2001; Culpeper, 1996; Harris, 2001). We are speaking of damage witnessed by millions of spectators–voters upon whom the political future of the candidates depends.

Nevertheless, in the analysis of some speech events such as the one we are concerned with herein, some scholars have highlighted that the openly hostile behaviour we have described alternates, almost as a matter of course, with highly formal and moderate language which is mostly identified as politeness. Various arguments have been used to explain the coexistence of these two apparently contradictory sets of behaviour.

First, we could consider completely practical reasons, such as those pointed out by some analysts on parliamentary debate. Pérez de Ayala (2001) reminds us that the aggressive Question Time sessions in the British parliament are only possible if politicians thoroughly adhere to the rules regulating parliamentary language. Non-compliance will result in the Speaker intervening asking the MP to reword his/her criticism of the adversary or simply to formally withdraw his/her words. Hence, ‘Politeness strategies become the linguistic device that helps the system work. When an MP flouts the rules, s/he is often obliged to reformulate the FTA, with face redress’ (Pérez de Ayala, 2001: 143).

Second, the alternating nature of parliamentary politeness and impoliteness represents one of the most distinctive elements of the political profession, a sort of symbol of group solidarity which enables politicians to establish the limits to

criticism, disagreement and discrediting, and that allows them to know what terrain is in store. Therefore, together with the idea by Kienpointer (1997) that parliamentary impoliteness is 'convenient' to adversaries in political debates in that it helps to set out the ideological differences before an increasingly sceptical electorate, Martín Rojo (2000: 35) has added that polite criticism 'plays a vital role in that it enables a context to be created there is an absolute guarantee that any manifestation of dissent or disagreement does not entail the breakdown of the parliamentary function and that it may even foster cooperation' (for a similar line of argument, see also Harris, 2001).

Lastly, some authors have pointed out that compliance with rules of verbal politeness enables the safeguarding of the interpersonal relationships of the parliamentary debators in the face of such high levels of aggression often present in political institutions. In short, we are dealing with 'remedies for the damage inflicted by competition, compensatory mechanisms and strategies for cooperation and acceptance, all of which enhance positive characteristics in the opponent and confirm the belonging and allegiance to a common group: that of politicians' (Martín Rojo, 2000: 135). Or, as it has been remarked by Fernandez (2000: 115) on multisided election debates: 'on "the way towards impoliteness" noticeable in all dialectical battles, there would be sentences that, despite everything, reveal displays of conventional politeness. These are used for framing disagreements and criticisms inherent to the debate, and which represent flagrant violations of some conversational maxims, such as agreement, approval or modesty'.

In short, diverse reasons, some practical, others psychological and yet strictly professional, converge in this kind of *institutional parliamentary politeness* in which 'both FTAs and linguistic politeness strategies. . . (are) typical of social context where special (non-linguistic) politeness is required' (Pérez de Ayala, 2001: 159).

In the following sections we examine the scope of the said institutional politeness in the ambit of face-to-face debates by way of one of the most commonly used mechanisms in ordinary verbal interactions, namely, mitigation. By making use of a methodology that combines both qualitative and quantitative analysis, we aim to demonstrate how the nature of these linguistic resources does not conform to the interactional principle of politeness, understood as the intent to save the adversary's face (not even the appearance of image, see Pérez de Ayala 2001), and ultimately as a way of keeping communication channels open. On the contrary, the use of this politic verbal behaviour corresponds to a purely selfish interest, i.e. maximum self-gain at the expense of the rival, the ultimate explanation of which is to be found in the institutional context in which the speech event takes place.

### *3. The functions of mitigation devices in institutional and non-institutional contexts*

In ordinary conversation speakers usually increase or decrease the potential negative consequences of communication acts by using certain linguistic

resources. These accompany speech acts that are considered threatening for the interlocutor's face, or in any event, the harmony of interpersonal relations (House and Kasper, 1981; Wood and Kroger, 1994). Despite the fact that researchers have not reached agreement about the terms that might be used to identify these phenomena, as a starting point we can acknowledge that both *mitigation* and the opposite procedure, *intensification*, represent formal mechanisms. In the words of Briz (1995: 104), they involve: 'a grammatical and lexical increase of a neutral base and; in a rhetoric sense, a periphrasis or evasive approach, an expressive roundabout method which is, when talking to an interlocutor, skilful in the case of mitigators, and energetic in the case of intensifiers.'

From a functional point of view, and restricting the analysis here to the phenomenon of mitigation, there is general consensus regarding the link between these verbal forms and the phenomenon of politeness. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1992: 194), for example, includes mitigation as one of the forms of negative politeness, following the line of argument put forward by Brown and Levinson (1987). In her opinion, these forms mitigate face-threatening acts (FTA) 'dont la victime est du même coup censée se radoucir'. Likewise, other researchers have also drawn attention to the mitigating effects of these elements in interpersonal relations. For instance, Fraser (1980), criticizes the universalist interpretation of politeness featured in certain theoretical examples. Nevertheless, he believes that the basic function of the mitigating forms (mitigation) may be analysed as a 'strategy' 'for softening or reducing the strength of a Speech Act whose effects are unwelcome to the hearer'. Haverkate (1994) also gives an explicit description of the modifiers as verbal politeness strategies by way of their pragmatic mitigating role.

In Spanish linguistic studies, Briz (1995) has also highlighted the link between mitigation and politeness – mostly along the lines of works by Lakoff (1989) and Leech (1983). In this way, he justifies, for example, the fact that whereas intensification stems from different pragmatic principles: 'mitigation [. . .] is generally based on the pragmatic principle of politeness (be polite)'. Together with cooperation, postulated by Grice, this is a basic principle that controls the social component, the relationship between the participants, subject and object of the utterance: 'do not impose', 'give options', 'strengthen ties with the interlocutor'. Further on, in line with theses by Leech (1983), he specifies that mitigation operates as: 'a type of controller for the maxims' of politeness.

For the purpose of our study it is also particularly interesting to note this author's remarks on how these mitigating mechanisms operate in 'controversial' conversations, and in those where disagreement between the interlocutors emerges at certain stages of the interaction. For Briz (1995), the 'strategically' polite nature of these forms is precisely what helps to conveniently control the interaction and maintain the necessary interactional consensus. Consequently, it ensures that these interpersonal relations are enhanced. However, precisely because privacy and/or solidarity tend to be guaranteed between participants in colloquial conversation, the forms of mitigation are not as frequent as they might

be in other discursive categories. This is because exploiting one of these forms could be interpreted as a display of social distancing. From this, it may be deduced that the linguistic forms under study could be characterized from two different viewpoints: (a) either as displays of verbal politeness or (b) on the other hand, as mechanisms of interpersonal distance that are, thus, contrary to politeness.

A final remark. When commenting about some of the forms of mitigation in colloquial Spanish, Briz (1995) acknowledges that at times they appear exclusively as semantic modifiers for an element of the sentence, 'without us being able to apparently ascribe to it any of the pragmatic values seen up to now.' (p. 120). The conclusion seems obvious – in such cases '(the mitigators) can not be explained by principles such as that of politeness' (p. 120). In short, it is accepted that the value of these expressions – at least occasionally – has nothing to do with politeness. The author, however, offers no additional explanation about the factors determining this apparently exceptional fact.

#### 4. *The corpus*

As some opinion polls had predicted a possible first-time victory for the Partido Popular (PP) over the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), the 1993 election campaign figured as one of the most hard-fought and aggressive in Spain's short democratic history. In this context, the two political parties decided that it would be convenient to organize a series of debates for television. Here, each of the respective presidential candidates could present each party's agenda as well as criticize that of their opponent (Cocho and Villamor, 1993).

There were ample reasons for advocating this type of election debate in that particular historical context. On the one hand, the Partido Socialista saw that its chances of achieving another election victory – the fourth consecutive victory since 1982 – were increasingly under threat. Inevitably this would mean it becoming the opposition party for the first time in eleven years. Nevertheless, its activists hoped that the 'charisma' and voter pulling power of its candidate, Felipe González, would dispel doubts among the many undecided voters the polls had indicated. Specifically, they were confident that their leader would, once and for all, be able to beat the right-wing candidate in a face-to-face debate. Although extremely aggressive, Aznar had always been criticized for using a tough, but at the same time mediocre, brand of politics – a significant limiting factor in the art of oratory. Charisma, on the other hand, was something that Felipe González certainly did not lack. Right-wing strategists were keen to remove the inconvenient label their leader had been saddled with by public opinion. They believed that a debate with his rival in such excellent historical circumstances would help to notably improve their candidate's image.

The two political parties finally agreed to stage two debates between both politicians. These took place over a period of a week on two private TV channels (Antena 3 and Tele 5). Besides the intrinsic political relevance of the debates – they signalled a tradition which until then had been unheard of in Spain – they

served as an example for other political debates. These took place in the same period between lower ranking candidates and were broadcast on various radio stations and national and regional TV channels.

### 5. *Mitigated forms of aggression in the debates*

For explanatory purposes, the following section is divided into two sections that correspond to the traditional kind of politeness strategies defended by Brown and Levinson (1978) and followed by other authors (see Fernández, 2000; Harris, 2001; Martín Rojo, 2000; Pérez de Ayala, 2001) corresponding to:

- resources that apparently point to the interlocutor's negative face – referred to by Fernández (2000) as resources of 'negative politeness' used to express disagreement and criticism, plus
- forms usually geared towards safeguarding the interlocutor's positive face in ordinary conversation.

The first would presumably serve as minimizers in speech acts and impolite utterances, whereas the second would be aimed at making the most of displays of friendliness towards the adversary.<sup>3</sup> As we saw earlier, we object to this interpretation because we strongly disagree that these forms can be considered as displays of politeness in an openly conflictual discourse genre such as political debate. On the contrary, in our opinion these are politic verbal behaviours whose strategic role – although varied depending on the context in which they appear – is always aimed at benefiting the speaker to the maximum, but never the interlocutor. Here we describe in detail the main linguistic–discursive resources that are formally mitigated, the contexts in which they arise, and the functions that can be identified in each case. A more in depth interpretation of these functions is provided in the final section of this article.

#### 5.1. SPEECH ACTS CONVENTIONALLY ASSOCIATED WITH NEGATIVE POLITENESS

Within the resources conventionally associated with *negative politeness*, we may distinguish between:

5.1.1. *Directive speech acts* aimed directly at the interlocutor. In ordinary conversation and in other non-conflict genres, these acts tend to appear as pre-sequences to mitigate the threatening power of certain speech acts that might otherwise inflict damage on the negative face of the interlocutor. It can be deduced from some of the previous examples – and this is considered in greater detail later – that this is generally not the case for face-to-face debates. Within this section we can basically identify two types of resources.

First, *requests for permission*, frequently occurring in the context of interruptions that the speakers are subjected to by their adversaries. Contrary to what might be expected, however, these requests are made by the interrupted partici-



pants, not the interrupters. In this way, the former requests that the interrupter let him carry on talking, as we can see again in Extract 1, which we outline once again for explanatory purposes:

JMA: . . . porque fíjese señor González (FG: entonces usted no sabe lo que es gobernar) perdón, ¿me quiere usted dejar hablar? *Si es tan amable*, le pido que sea tan amable de dejarme hablar (FG: You're within your rights) endo que a usted la crítica le gusta muy poco pero déjeme usted hablar

[. . . Look, Mr González. . . (FG: So you don't know how to govern), excuse me, would you let me talk, please? *Would you be so kind*, I'm asking you to be so kind as to let me talk (FG: You're within your rights) I can see that you don't like to be criticised, but please let me talk.] (II/6)<sup>4</sup>

Apart from these situations, in other cases the speaker uses these forms to introduce new topics into the debate; topics that are not expected to be to his rival's liking. The harsh contrast between the literal meaning of the formulae used – normally polite – and the context in which they are appear, may be seen in Extract 2. Once again, Aznar makes more use of these devices (see Table 1).

(2) JMA: y usted lo comprenderá que usted de fiscalidad y de impuestos no sabe nada y usted *me permitirá que yo* que soy inspector de finanzas de profesión sí que sepa algo más.

[You have to admit that you know absolutely nothing about tax matters, and excuse me for saying so, but I'm a inspector of taxes by profession, and I certainly know a bit more about the subject.] (II/6)

TABLE 1. *Number of sequences containing speech acts and linguistic resources conventionally associated with negative politeness (per participant and debate)*

|  | González      |               |       | Aznar         |               |           |
|--|---------------|---------------|-------|---------------|---------------|-----------|
|  | 1st<br>debate | 2nd<br>debate | Total | 1st<br>debate | 2nd<br>debate | Total     |
| <b>(A) REQUESTS FOR PERMISSION</b>     |               |               |       |               |               |           |
| 1. Conditional sentences:              |               |               |       |               |               |           |
| ● Interlocutor is mentioned directly   | 4             | 1             | 5     | <b>6</b>      | <b>8</b>      | <b>14</b> |
| ● Interlocutor not mentioned directly  | 0             | 1             | 1     | 0             | 2             | 2         |
| Total (a+b)                            | 4             | 2             | 6     | <b>8</b>      | <b>10</b>     | <b>16</b> |
| 2. Interrogative–exclamative sentences | 1             | 0             | 1     | <b>4</b>      | 0             | <b>4</b>  |
| 3. Exhortative forms                   | 1             | 1             | 2     | 1             | <b>4</b>      | <b>5</b>  |
| 4. Conversational routines             | 0             | 1             | 1     | 0             | 0             | 0         |
| <b>(B) APOLOGIES</b>                   |               |               |       |               |               |           |
| Total (A+B)                            | 11            | 8             | 19    | <b>20</b>     | <b>29</b>     | <b>49</b> |

In all the tables most prominent contrasting figures are marked in bold. In this regard, we compare the use of these linguistic resources by the two politicians in both debates.

Second, together with requests for permission, *apology* acts stand out in this section either in isolation or in combination with the previous one. Again, they abound in the sequences where interlocutors interrupt each other, as in Extract 3, or in sequences that serve as introduction to acts of reproachment, as in Extract 4.

(3) JMA: Cuando el señor González afirma que hay que creer en el país, supongo que lo dirá por él, que necesita tener esa creencia, supongo (Felipe González: no no, lo digo . . .) supongo que no querrá decir, supongo que no querrá decir. . . (Felipe González: no hombre, lo digo en realidad porque se oye del discurso, de la propaganda y esto es todo pura negatividad, yo creo que una oposición tiene que ser más constructiva, *pero en fin, perdóneme*

[When Mr González states that we must believe in the country, I suppose he must be referring to himself, it is he who needs to have this belief (Felipe González: no no, I am stating this. . .) I'm assuming he is not wanting to say, not wanting. . . (Felipe González: no Sir, I am really stating this because from what I am hearing, from all this propaganda that is being given – it's all utter negativity; I think that an Opposition ought to take on a more constructive role, *well never mind, please forgive me*).<sup>5</sup> (I/3)

(4) JMA: Mire, vuelve usted y *perdóneme que se lo diga*, porque no se lo quiero decir con ningún ánimo agresivo, ni mucho menos ofensivo, señor González a faltar a la verdad. . .

[Look here, I'm sorry to say this because I do not want to say this in an aggressive way, not wanting to offend in the least, Mr González, when the truth is at stake]. (II/2)

Referring to linguistic resources used by the adversaries to carry out these speech acts, the following are of particular relevance:

- Conditional utterances, which act as a preamble to threatening speech acts. We must at the same time distinguish between (a) those which are verbally directed at the interlocutor, (*si (usted) me permite. . .* [if I may be allowed. . .]; *si (usted) es tan amable* [if you would kindly. . .],. . . *si (a usted) le parece. . .* [if you were to agree. . .]); and (b) others, where the reference is implicit (*si es posible. . .* [if that were possible. . .]) (for a analysis of this conditional structures from the point of view of relevance and politeness theories, see Montolío, 1993 and Chodorowska, 2001, respectively).
- Interrogative exclamatory utterances: (JMA: 'eso no cuesta dinero [that does not cost any money] (FG: pero que, ¿eso qué significa? [And what does that mean?]), eso, eso, cuesta dinero el de los demás [that's it, that's it, it costs money that belongs to others], *¿me deja usted en este momento hablar?* [Could you kindly let me speak now?]' I/11).
- Diverse exhortative forms: we can order these according to the degree of conventional menace for the adversary's face. In this respect, we make a distinction between: (a) exhortative uses of the morphological or periphrastical future (*y me permitirá* [and you will allow me. . .]), *ir a + inf:* (*y me va a permitir. . .* [and you will allow me]; and (b) uses of the imperative (*permítame. . .* [allow me to. . .]).

- Conversational routines: stereotyped formulas used in the expression of routine speech acts: petitions, asking for permission, apologising, etc. (*tenga la bondad, por favor* [Please be so kind as to. . .]) (see Table 1).

5.1.2. *Acts revealing attitudes* Together with the speech acts considered earlier, there are other acts worth considering because, apart from being conventionally aimed at redeeming the negative face of the interlocutor, they reveal certain additional *attitudes* on the part of the speaker (see more reliable). Haverkate (1994) considers this type of expression to be stereotyped formulas that introduce or qualify (metafocalization) the speech act about to be executed by the interlocutor. They generally appear in the form of presequences (*lamento estar en desacuerdo* [I regret to be in disagreement. . .], *no me gusta tener que decir* [It pains me to say that. . .]; *no quiero* [I don't want to. . .], *no vea en mis palabras* [Do not find in my words. . .]) that come immediately before criticism and disagreement, as in Extract 5.

(5) JMA: . . . y crea además, se lo insisto, *no vea usted en estas palabras una actitud agresiva*, tome usted la decisión de crear una comisión de investigación para investigarles a ustedes, a ustedes. . .

[. . . and believe me, I insist *do not find an aggressive attitude in my words*. Go ahead and decide on the setting-up of a commission to investigate your own people, yourselves.] (I/5)

An evident insincerity is often a striking characteristic of these expressions. The speaker is obviously in a cynical frame of mind when he refers to the sorrow his own criticism – always scathing – gives him. This generates an ‘ironic’ contrast that in our view, disables these utterances as transmitters of politeness. Yet this is precisely the interpretation given by Fernández (2000: 116) in his study on political debates mentioned earlier. In his opinion, expressions such as: ‘*lamento estar en desacuerdo*’ [I beg to differ] and ‘*no puedo estar de acuerdo*’ [I can't agree] are negative politeness strategies which reflect the regret of the speaker for having threatened the face of the interlocutor. In a similar manner – though without reference to a specific discourse genre – Haverkate (1994: 122) affirms that ‘the politeness of these expressions is based on the speaker's empathy towards the interlocutor because apologies for certain verbal behaviour are anticipated. In other words, the speaker takes pains to explicitly concede that he is invading the cognitive or intentional territory of the other’.

Nevertheless, in our corpus benevolent attitudes and intentions in relation to the interlocutor are dismally absent (Table 2). In this sense, our interpretation of these verbal forms falls in line with what Agha (1997) termed *tropic aggression* in a study on political debates in the US (Clinton–Dole 1996). In the opinion of this author, the participants of the debate have a gold-mine of strategic resources when they make use of certain expressions which, in spite of having an evident aggressive goal, take on a veiled form under some tropic mechanism: ‘I will say that two pragmatic effects have a “tropic” relationship to each other when they

TABLE 2. Number of sequences containing speech acts conventionally associated with negative politeness and which furthermore reveal the speaker's attitude in relation to his own acts (linguistic resources per participant and debate)

|                                 | González      |               |       | Aznar         |               |           |
|---------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-------|---------------|---------------|-----------|
|                                 | 1st<br>debate | 2nd<br>debate | Total | 1st<br>debate | 2nd<br>debate | Total     |
| (A) Displeasure                 | 6             | 2             | 8     | 7             | 1             | 8         |
| (B) Sincerity                   | 0             | 0             | 0     | 2             | <b>3</b>      | <b>5</b>  |
| (C) Minimizing negative actions | 2             | 2             | 4     | <b>4</b>      | 1             | <b>5</b>  |
| Total (A+B+C)                   | 8             | 4             | 12    | <b>13</b>     | 5             | <b>18</b> |

are distinctly reportable in contrasting metapragmatic descriptions of the same activity' (p. 461). Agha (1997) makes a precise assessment when he affirms that in spite of the impression of politeness that impregnates the whole debate, it is essentially quite superficial; Agha argues that even though aggression and politeness 'are not mutually exclusive features of action, *they are mutually opposed descriptions of acts*' (emphasis added).

To sum up, the participants in the face-to-face debate make use of mechanisms that are conventionally associated with negative politeness in order to be more damaging when criticizing and disagreeing with their adversary.

From a conceptual point of view, it is possible to classify these utterances as a function of the type of attitudes they reveal but we have seen earlier that in most cases the participants are insincere. Following on from this we can distinguish between:

1. Expressions which reveal the displeasure of the speaker at the criticism received. The speaker is forced to retort abruptly. We are dealing with utterances in which there is a contradiction between the conventional meaning of the utterances and the (impolite) value they acquire in the context within which they are produced:

(6) JMA: me parece sencillamente ridículo, se lo tengo que decir y se lo digo además sin ningun animo ofensivo

[It seems just ridiculous to me, I'm afraid I really must tell you without wanting to be discourteous. . .:](I/5)

2. Utterances which supposedly express the sincerity of the speaker even though it may be harsh for the adversary to take:

(7) JMA: mire señor González tengo un problema *y se lo quiero decir francamente*, aunque yo quisiera, aunque yo quisiera. . . yo no estoy aquí para engañar a los españoles

[look Mr. González I've got a problem *and I want to be frank with you*, even if I wanted to, even if I wanted to. . . I am not here to deceive Spaniards] (II/15)

5.1.3. *Other pragmatic mitigation resources for aggressive actions* As occurs in the cases seen earlier, we are now dealing with mechanisms that in ordinary conversation are normally aimed at mitigating acts that may threaten the (negative) face of the interlocutor. In this section, we distinguish between various linguistic resources which are hereunder described.

Mitigated performative illocutions.

Following on from Fraser (1975) and Haverkate (1994) among others, these utterances imply a pragmatic modification of the propositions appearing immediately after. The modification is based on the pseudoperformative character of the verbal expressions as there are often deontic representations (*tengo que [I have to]*), or representations of volition (*quiero. . . [I want to]*) or hypothetical cases (*puedo [May I, Can I. . .]*). Haverkate (1994) argues that it is precisely these modifications that give rise to the mitigation of the corresponding speech acts. He adds that often in debates and discussion groups, there is a tacit delivery of the speaker's opinion in such a way that the point of view defended seems to be more acceptable to the interlocutor: 'the syntactic space that is created serves as an iconic resource which the speaker makes use of in order to avoid engaging the listener with contents that are indeed debatable; in other words, this proposition is inherent in a mitigated metalinguistic utterance' (p. 21).

In the corpus, the performative illocutions of this genre can be initially distinguished according to whether they are directed explicitly to the interlocutor. In the first case, more frequent in the dialectic arsenal of Mr Aznar (20) than that of Mr González (3) (see Table 3), this type of utterance usually performs the function of pre-sequences to accusations, reproaches and criticism fired at the interlocutor. Often as in Extract 8 they are used to highlight the sheer contrast between facts and past assertions by the interlocutor:

(8) JMA: *Yo quiero recordarle que usted durante la anterior campaña electoral en 1989 (. . .) dijo 'vamos a seguir creando durante estos años mil empleo diarios'. La realidad en este momento señor González es que en España se destruyen diariamente 2.950 empleos (. . .). Yo quiero recordarle que usted comprometió un crecimiento económico del 4% y que en este momento la economía española no sólo decrece sino que tiene una tasa de crecimiento negativa. Yo quiero recordarle, en definitiva, que usted desde el comienzo tuvo un magnífico caudal de entusiasmo ciudadano, jamás un gobernante ha tenido. . .ha tenido el apoyo que usted ha tenido. Y eso al final se ha despilfarrado inútilmente*

*[I would like to remind you that during the last election campaign in 1989 (. . .) you stated 'we are going to continue to create in these coming years one thousand jobs a day'. The truth at present Mr González is that 2,950 jobs are destroyed in Spain every day (. . .). I would like to remind you that you promised a growth rate of 4% and right now the Spanish economy is not only slowing down but has a negative growth rate. I would like to remind you, in short that at the very beginning, you enjoyed great support from the citizenry; never has any democratic head of government had the support you have had. And this has been laid to waste.] (I/2).*

TABLE 3. Number of sequences containing pragmatic mitigation resources (per participant and debate)

|  | González      |               |           | Aznar         |               |            |
|--|---------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|------------|
|  | 1st<br>debate | 2nd<br>debate | Total     | 1st<br>debate | 2nd<br>debate | Total      |
| 1. Doxastic predicates                                 | 21            | 24            | 45        | <b>31</b>     | 25            | <b>56</b>  |
| 2. Mitigated performative illocutions                  |               |               |           |               |               |            |
| ● Interlocutor is mentioned directly                   | 0             | 3             | 3         | <b>6</b>      | <b>14</b>     | <b>20</b>  |
| ● Interlocutor not mentioned directly                  | <b>18</b>     | 9             | 27        | 10            | <b>16</b>     | 26         |
| Total (1+2)  | 39            | 36            | 75        | <b>47</b>     | <b>55</b>     | <b>102</b> |
| 3. Resources for the depersonalization<br>of criticism | <b>45</b>     | 12            | <b>57</b> | 10            | 12            | 22         |

From our point of view, in examples such as the previous one, the iconic space to which Haverkate (1994) refers, is unable to mitigate aggressive speech acts. Furthermore, the contrast between the conventional meanings of the illocutions and of the contexts in which they appear augment their aggressive impact.

On other occasions, the mitigated performative predicates do not appear in sequences aimed directly at the interlocutor, but rather in phases of the debate in which the speaker expounds his programme and may even establish differences with respect to the adversary. In such cases, the lack of direct reference to the interlocutor diminishes his threatening and impolite power. In this respect, we can compare the previous example and the following fragment (Extract 9) which corresponds to one of the first interventions by Felipe González in the first debate; here the socialist politician implicitly establishes a comparison between his own behaviour and his adversary's:

(9) FG: Vamos a ver, yo no quiero, repito.. no quiero caer en ningún tipo de eslogan, quiero hacer razonamientos que sean políticos y que sean inteligibles para los ciudadanos.

[Lets see now, I don't want to I repeat I do not want to fall into slogans; I want to put forward arguments which are political in content and which are meaningful to citizens.] (I/4)

It is interesting to observe that – in contrast to the performative illocutions preceding speech acts directed at the interlocutor, far more frequent in Aznar's discourse – the use of these are now far more balanced (FG: 27 versus JMA: 26), although its distribution is clearly more skewed in relation to the whole series of debates. We find that González uses far more resources of this kind in the first face-to-face (18 versus 9) – we must not forget the debate where the lesser aggressiveness of the presidential candidate was plainly evident – than in the second, while the proportions offered by Aznar are more balanced (10 versus 16).

Doxastic predicates.

Haverkate (1994: 123) includes these predicates among the lexical resources useful in the manipulation of truth value of propositions. Formally speaking, we are dealing with either: (a) composed utterances which include a noun clause which depends on such verbs as 'creer' [believe] or its synonyms: 'me parece, pienso, imagino. . .', [it seems to me, I think, I would imagine. . .]; or (b) simple utterances modified by discourse markers located at the beginning of the phrase, of the kind 'en mi opinión, a mi juicio. . .' [in my opinion, in my judgement. . .].

From a pragmatic point of view, doxastic predicates 'express that the subject has good reason to consider that what is described by the subordinate does not correspond to factual reality' (Haverkate, 1994: 123). Givón (1982) points out that certain assertions may be rejected by the listener due to excessive argumentative force and that this would encourage the speaker to modify them by way of the said mitigating resources. Furthermore, Hooper (1975) pointed out that these kinds of weak assertives carry the speaker's attitude with respect to the truth of the assertions.

From the recipient's point of view, doxastic predicates 'avoid giving the impression that [the speakers] are imposing their opinion on the interlocutor' (Haverkate, 1994: 124). This author goes on to say that precisely because of this 'he [the interlocutor] (. . .) is given an opportunity to formulate a divergent opinion in such a way that none of the parties sees their respective positive faces threatened'. This is the same as saying that the doxastic strategy is applied above all in cases where the speaker is not sure of whether the listener will adopt the speaker's point of view. *An illustrative example can be when instances of censure or reproach is directed at the interlocutor* (italics added).

Nevertheless, we maintain that in the openly conflictive context of the face-to-face debate, the use of these utterances is linked, as is the case on other occasions, to the strategic intention of the speaker wishing to present a politic verbal appearance (see later in section 5) rather than wishing to modify the aggressive force of his claims and criticisms, and even less so, to avoid the imposition of his speech acts.

Doxastic predicates are mainly used in two contexts. The speaker may sometimes make use of these resources when presenting the political programme he is defending. Here we are dealing with utterances that occur mainly in peripheral interventions of the debate. An example would be Aznar's first intervention in the second debate; here there is a succession of doxastic utterances ('creo que. . .' [I think that. . .]) which the PP leader makes use of in order to justify the measures he would introduce if he were elected:

(10) Yo *creo que* los españoles ya sabemos que nuestro país vive una crisis muy profunda, extraordinariamente profunda [. . .] y yo *creo que* ya sabemos los españoles pues que exista un clima de corrupción bastante general [. . .] Yo por eso *creo que* ante un gobierno agotado, sin ideas, desanimado merece la pena porque ha llegado la hora de un cambio. . .

[I think that Spaniards are well aware that our country is going through a bad crisis,

extraordinarily bad [. . .] and I *think that* Spaniards know too well that there is a climate of widespread corruption [. . .] And that is why I *think that* with the prospect of a worn out government, without ideas, it's worth considering that the time has come for a change. . .]

We can observe that, in cases such as this, the intended recipient is not the adversary but rather the audience. In this situation it is not surprising that any politician would want to present his programme in the most moderate manner possible, distancing himself from any image that might be interpreted as authoritarian or haughty. In short, if these utterances carry any vestige of politeness, they are produced in a very egocentric manner and they are not aimed at safeguarding the face of the interlocutor. What the speaker is hoping to do is to seduce the audience and in order to do so he must use his dialectic weaponry with restraint.

An additional argument which supports this interpretation comes from the second context in which doxastic predicates appear in the corpus. We find that, together with peripheral sequences, and less aggressive in general, these kinds of utterances also have an important strategic function at points of the debate where the dialectic tussle is quite tense. Let us look at an illustrative example.

Extract 11 corresponds to one of the most tense moments of the second debate, in which Aznar responds to a harsh accusation by the socialist politician. According to González, the conservative leader had established throughout his last period in parliament, a kind of behaviour that was scarcely democratic, i.e. asking that the head of government, democratically elected by the majority of Spaniards, leave his job 'Váyase, Señor González' [Step down, Mr González] and hence going against the will of the people. Aznar, noticeably upset by this accusation, responded during his intervention in the following manner:

(11) JMA: cuando se dice a unas personas que se vayan ¿de dónde se van a ir señor González?, ¿se van a ir del gobierno!, ¿de dónde se tiene que ir usted señor González?, usted se tiene que ir del gobierno, ¡del gobierno se tiene que ir! (Felipe González: ¿por qué no respeta a los ciudadanos?) y *yo creo que la mayoría de donde quiere que se vaya es del gobierno señor González pero ¿de qué tienen ustedes miedo señor González?*

[when we speak of asking people to leave, what are you going to leave? You are going to leave the government! What is it that you need to leave Mr González? You need to leave the government. It is from the government that you need to depart! (Felipe González: Why don't you respect the citizens? And *I think that the majority of people think that it is from the government that you must leave.* But, what are you all afraid of?]  
(II/7)

Let us take note of the strategic move that is characterized by the inclusion of the doxastic predicate in the context where it was inserted. After bombarding the interlocutor with a relentless use of repetition of epistemic predicates ('usted se tiene que ir del gobierno. . .') [you must leave the government. . .] and the use of rhetorical interrogation ('¿de dónde se tiene que ir. . .?') [What is it that you must leave?], Aznar skilfully concludes his argument by using a doxastic utterance. Notwithstanding this, the aim of this predicate is not to mitigate the effects of his criticism on the receiver, but rather to justify his role as spokesman for a social



majority. In this fashion, the transition between Aznar's personal ideas about when the government's time is up and those of that social majority the conservative politician claims to represent, is made more smoothly, given the risk of a later rejection by this collective. By forecasting 'yo creo que la mayoría de donde quiere que se vaya es del gobierno' [I think that the majority think that it is from the government that you must leave], the conservative candidate keeps his options open should such an event occur; the speaker would always be able to argue that he acted according to his interpretation of the wishes of that social majority.

In summary, in a genre like electoral debate, doxastic predicates do not, in the majority of cases, correspond to the conventional value that is assigned to them in ordinary conversation or in other non-conflictive genres. On the contrary, they play a role as marked choices with a highly strategic value; their purpose is to obtain maximum benefit for the speaker in the form of politic verbal resources.

Resources for the depersonalization of criticism.

A whole section is needed to address a series of syntactic and lexical resources that share a common denominator: the generalization and impersonalization of criticism, reproaches and disagreement between adversaries. This mechanism for pragmatic distancing and mitigation, which directly affects the role of the participants in the enunciation, is achieved by way of various linguistic resources such as (a) the silencing of the pronominal deictics referring to the interlocutor; or (b) the impersonalization of *yo* (the speaker), by way of resources such as impersonal utterances with *se* (Briz, 1995), the indefinite pronoun *uno*, or its integration in a collective reference, *nosotros* [we/us] which holds diverse pragmatic and ideological values highlighted in a previous research by Blas Arroyo (2000) (see also Harris, 2001). Often, this may occur by combining various resources, as in Extract 12 which corresponds to an intervention by Felipe González in the second debate:

(12) FG: Aunque *tenemos*, y *hablaremos* de eso a lo largo del debate, una democracia joven, es importantísimo que recupere impulso y que recupere un clima de aire fresco sin la contaminación que *a veces se produce* por la mentira y *que a veces se produce* también por la corrupción

[Even though *we have* and *we'll speak* of that as the debate progresses, for a young democracy it is vital that it's momentum be recuperated and that there be a climate of fresh air without the pollution *at times produced* by lies and *at times produced* also by corruption.] (II/1).

Here we see an accumulation of some of the impersonalization resources. Together with the use of the first-person plural (the first *we have* includes the audience, the second *we will speak*, refers only to the participants of the debate) our attention is drawn to an impersonal structure with *se* when criticizing the opposing candidate and the party he represents; it is a sentence modified in its turn by a time adjunct (*a veces*) [at times]. In this way, the reproach directed at the interlocutor becomes formally linked to a strategy of generalization.

It has often been pointed out that such forms of distancing, involving elements of personal deixis, can be used by the speaker to convey politeness. This has been the perception of various researchers, whose theoretical conception of verbal politeness may at times reflect different interpretations, such as Brown and Levinson (1987), Fraser (1980), Haverkate (1984, 1994), and House and Kasper (1981). Haverkate includes these mechanisms – and others which we will not make reference to herein – within the scope of deictic strategies used for the pragmatic manipulation of the truth value of the proposals, and in particular in those cases in which the person is actually the ‘deictic centre’. Haverkate calls the main function of these kinds of strategies *defocalization* as they are directed at ‘reducing or minimising their own role [the speaker’s] or of the listener’s in what has been described’ (1994: 131). Finally, he points out some speech acts which are particularly appropriate, as in the case of reproaches and censures which damage the ‘positive face of the listener’ (p. 132).

In relation to our corpus, the use of this type of strategy has a rather irregular distribution. From the data given in Table 3 we can see that there are considerable differences in the use of these resources according to (a) each debate in itself, (b) the structure of these, and (c) the dialectic idiosyncrasy of each participant.

In relation to the first aspect, we can immediately see a very revealing pattern: in the second debate – the most openly aggressive – the use of depersonalization and generalization resources by González is much less (22) than that by Anzar (57). Furthermore, the correlation between this factor and the data given by each speaker is highly significant and fits in with other data referred to in different sections of this article. We find that, whereas the use of these distancing mechanisms by Anzar is quantitatively similar – and rather scant – in both face-to-face debates (10 versus 12 sequences), Felipe González produces only one quarter as many examples of this type in the second debate (12) as in the first (45)!

In summary, the participants of the debate are reluctant to mitigate their criticism and reproaches by using the defocalization strategy. In fact, the participant who resorts to this type of resource at the beginning, is compelled to make a drastic rectification in the second – and final – opportunity that is available to him.

An additional piece of evidence is generated by the analysis of these resources in the various phases of the first debate when Felipe González was speaking. The data in this respect are quite conclusive (see Table 3): Of the 57 times it occurred, three-quarters (42) correspond to the first 9 interventions, which made up the first part of the debate, compared with only 15 in the second part. As pointed out previously (Blas Arroyo, 2001), the socialist leader gave an uneven performance during his first dialectic duel. For almost the whole of the first part, González seemed to skirt around the norms of the media event. He presented a ‘positive’ image to the audience and often avoided directly criticizing – let alone being scathing about – his adversary. His performance was precisely the opposite of Anzar’s, whose aggressiveness grew *in crescendo* throughout the face-to-face debate and which undoubtedly undermined the confidence of the government

candidate in his initial strategy, as pointed out by many commentators in the days following the debate (Cocho and Villamor, 1993).

How can we explain then that these are the only resources linked to negative politeness where Felipe González was a clear winner over José María Aznar? Why does the conservative leader make frequent use of doxastic predicates, mitigated performative illocutions, and other resources, such as those analysed here, but, by contrast, makes scant use of deictic defocalization strategies? In short, what do the differing behaviours vis-à-vis distancing mechanisms in the two debates in relation to Felipe González, and particularly in the first depend on? In our view, this is because there is clearly a lesser 'strategic yield' compared with the rest of the resources analysed to date.

Mitigation, even if formal, presented by the other resources, offers a model of urbanity, restraint and politeness to the speaker while affording him self-confidence. A politician that is skilled in combining criticism, even harsh criticism of the adversary if necessary – and this is almost always the case – with politically correct behaviour is a complete *Homo politicus*. Moreover, the use of some of these *polite* formulas will often allow an ironic interpretation that the speaker will direct at the final receptors – the audience. Nevertheless, the possibility of effectively carrying out this interpretation is made more difficult by depersonalization techniques. The concealment of direct responsibility of the interlocutor with respect to the object of criticism, reproaches, etc. is far too obvious and, in short, is much more mitigating than the other strategies analysed to date.

## 5.2. POSITIVE POLITENESS?: POISONED RECOGNITIONS

Here we refer to certain resources whose common denominator consists of – and here they diverge from the matter considered up to now – representing dialectical shifts which apparently show a reinforcement of the positive face of the interlocutor. We are dealing with a strategy also pointed out in the analysis of other political debates, such as Question Time sessions in the British parliament (see Harris, 2001: 465), and for some authors represents 'procedures aimed at' (finding) a rapprochement based on solidarity, a gesture that, in spite of the inherent threat, the speaker, to a measure, looks up to his interlocutor, his ideas and objectives, etc. (Fernández, 2000: 116). To our way of thinking, this premise does not correspond to the logic of the conflictive genre that is the face-to-face political debate.

First, as shown by the data in Table 4, there is a reduced frequency of these resources in the overall corpus. A comparison of these data and those offered in the earlier tables shows that this kind of procedure is far less common in face-to-face than in openly impolite utterances, or even in those utterances conventionally associated with negative politeness (see Tables 1–3).

From a strategic point of view, the mechanisms belonging to this section can be classified according to the following categories, ordered according to a greater or lesser appreciation of the positive face of the adversary:

TABLE 4. Number of sequences containing speech acts conventionally associated with positive politeness (strategies per participant and debate)

|                                     | González      |               |          | Aznar         |               |           |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------|---------------|---------------|-----------|
|                                     | 1st<br>debate | 2nd<br>debate | Total    | 1st<br>debate | 2nd<br>debate | Total     |
| (A) Eulogies to the interlocutor    | 2             | 0             | 2        | 2             | <b>2</b>      | <b>4</b>  |
| (B) Searching for "common ground"   | <b>5</b>      | 1             | <b>6</b> | 3             | 1             | 4         |
| (C) "yet ... but" syntactic schemas | 7             | 2             | 9        | 6             | <b>6</b>      | <b>12</b> |
| (D) Concessions to the interlocutor | 4             | 1             | 5        | 5             | 2             | <b>7</b>  |
| Total (1+2+3+4)                     | <b>18</b>     | 4             | 20       | 16            | <b>11</b>     | <b>27</b> |

1. Explicit eulogy directed at the rival by acknowledgement of his achievements in certain spheres of his political activity.

(13) JMA: En aquellos años entramos en la Alianza Atlántica, entramos en el Consejo de Europa y eso es una política que luego ha tenido también otros saltos, no me importa en absoluto reconocer, porque es lógico hacerlo, que bajo el gobierno del señor González se han culminado algunas de esas operaciones como fue el ingreso de España en la CEE.

[In those years we entered the Atlantic Alliance, we entered the Council of Europe and that is a policy move that has led to other advances, I have no problem in recognizing, because it is logical to do so, that under the government of Mr González we have seen the successful achievement of some of these major operations such as Spain's entry into the EEC.] (II/19)

2. The search for 'common ground' between the speaker and his interlocutor. Even though the political adversaries hold different opinions on so many matters, it is logical to think that there are points of common agreement in the interpretation of certain topics.

(14) FG: . . . va a ser capaz y va a ser capaz con. . . con este gobierno y con la confianza de los ciudadanos que han depositado, *tiene razón en eso el Sr Aznar*, en mayor medida que nunca en un responsable político democrático con confianza en mí.

[(Spain) will be able, will indeed be able (to get ahead) with this government and the mandate of the people, *you are right on that Mr Aznar*, more than ever has a trust in a democratic leader, in me, been shown.] (I/3)

3. Strategies which imply a partial acknowledgement of certain 'achievements' associated with the adversary in an initial stage of the utterance, as preludes to the disagreements and the criticism that follows. This is done by way of adversative schema ('sí. . .pero' [yes. . .but]) or concessive 'aunque. . .' [even though] syntactic schemas (in spite of the fact that one of these connectors may sometimes not be explicit in the sentence). Harris (2001) studied a set of strategies similar to those used in the British Parliament and focused on the

speed with which the speaker moves from a position of solidarity to one of conflict and the manner in which this change takes place (there are similar examples for the Spanish situation in Martín Rojo 2000). Extract 15 reflects the said strategy in relation to our corpus:

(15) JMA: *claro que* hay más alumnos en la enseñanza media, y claro que hay más alumnos en la Universidad y *claro que* hay menos alumnos por razones evidentes y obvias en la EGB [PERO] Estamos hablando señor González de gestión, estamos hablando de calidad, estamos hablando de contar con los profesionales. . .

[*of course that* there are more pupils in middle-tier education and *of course that* there are more students at university and *of course that* there are less pupils for obvious reasons in primary schooling [BUT] we are speaking Mr González, of management, we are speaking of quality, we are speaking of working with professionals. . .] (II/13)

#### 4. Concessions to some topics emphasized previously by the interlocutor:

(16) FG: *Y es verdad que estamos en una crisis económica*, no sólo nosotros, Alemania o Francia o Gran Bretaña, otros muchos países.

[*And it is true that we are in an economic crisis*, not only ourselves Germany or France or Great Britain and many other countries.] (I/1)

As we can see from the data in Table 4, the presence of these procedures in the corpus is not only scant in general, but is even more so in expressions that hold greater eulogy for the interlocutor. An example of this is the contrast between the figures corresponding to straightforward eulogy of the interlocutor (barely six sequences of this type in five hours of debate!) and those of restrictive schemas ('*si. . .pero*') [*yes. . .but*], where the recognition directed at him precedes the formulation of criticism and disagreement.

In practice, the majority of these resources are used as a preamble to ideas that contradict to a greater or lesser extent the concessions and the recognition of the adversary. This is the case even in the most aseptic manifestations which initially carry the least danger for the face of the rival as seen the last set of examples above. Hence in Extract 13, which is one of the few instances of Aznar's recognition of his rival's policy achievements, we find that is masked within a context in such a way that it minimizes the 'real' achievements of González. As pointed out by the conservative candidate, there is nothing to praise in the government's policy enacted over recent years; he states that we must not forget that the first and most important steps towards major advances in the international sphere were accomplished by governments that preceded González's and which were ideologically closer to the opposition party than to the present government.

Furthermore in Extract 15, Aznar's recognition that in 1993 there were more youngsters at school in Spain than before the arrival of the socialists is immediately conveniently manipulated, even before the criticism is formulated in the second part of the sequence. The 'obvious and evident reasons' alluded to by Aznar refer to the fall in the birth-rate in Spain and hence it follows that the merits of his rival are rather less than he deserves.

Finally, in Extract 16 the admission by González that Spain is going through an economic crisis can be placed within a larger framework, in such a way that the prejudice against this admission is the least possible: Spain is going through an economic crisis, it is true, but this is also occurring in the most powerful countries in Europe, and hence personal responsibility for the causes and consequences of the said crisis is avoided.

On other occasions, resources of this kind invite a clearly ironic, if not sarcastic, interpretation. Here we are dealing with utterances which contain praise or recognition that is authentically insincere, and which generally adopts a concessive-restrictive schema that we have referred to herein. Let us refer to the example in Extract 17 in which Aznar – a frequent user of this resource – is intervening once more:

(17) JMA: Mire usted, es verdad que hay más infraestructuras en el país, se han construido fuera de plazo en algunas ocasiones, y a triple de coste, pero es verdad que hay más infraestructuras.

[Look here, it is true that there is more infrastructure in the country, they have been built with considerable delays at times and at triple the cost, but it is true that there is more infrastructure.] (I/11).

The opposition syntactic structure provides a framework for two scathing attacks on the manner in which a feat has been achieved, a feat which the interlocutor considers to be a success; effectively there are more infrastructures in Spain but these are often completed with great delays and, what is worse, at a final cost way above the initial budgetary provisions.

Lastly, it is rather striking that in these debates there is an absence of other strategies of the genre pointed out by authors who have analysed other similar speech events. In this vein, Martín Rojo (2000: 132) refers examples of ‘positive politeness’ in the Spanish parliament as ‘those strategies which have as their objective the demonstration to the interlocutor that she/he is being accepted and that in spite of deep divisions, there are some common points of agreement; . . . we also have the concessions of optimism in relation to the unimportance of the degree of dissension. . . (or) the use of an inclusive “We” (the members of the House), as well as all those elements which indicate the existence of common ground’. None of this appears in our face-to-face debate; there is no acknowledgement of the adversary, or any scaling down of the magnitude of dissension, or any ‘we’ of group solidarity (on this latter aspect see our analysis on personal deixis in Blas Arroyo, 2000).

## *6. Final thoughts: On politic verbal behaviour*

Even though the debates analysed in this article are likely to contain a greater degree of aggression than others in western parliamentary tradition, all debates have a number of elements in common, among them, the use that is made by the adversaries of certain strategies which are conventionally associated with lin-

guistic politeness. In the preceding sections, we have been concerned with a detailed analysis of the most outstanding whose unmarked function in ordinary verbal interactions is to act as a mitigation strategy to save the interlocutor's face and the interpersonal communication between the participants. Nevertheless, in our corpus, linguistic mitigation almost never moderates aggressiveness within the dialectic battlefield, among other reasons because formally mitigated utterances often betray their literal meaning.

Hence the question we have to deal with is: how can we interpret formally mitigated enunciations, which are less frequent than clearly impolite ones, but nonetheless continue to stand out among the rhetorical weaponry used by adversaries? Is it a question, as some authors believe, of attempting to save the interpersonal relationships with the interlocutor from the attacks sustained at other points of the interaction? In our opinion, an affirmative answer goes against intuition. Resources that we described earlier, and which some writers see as politeness, are really the systematic exploitation of the rules that govern politic verbal behaviour in the speech community set up to benefit the speaker. Notwithstanding this, how are we to interpret this self-benefit? What are the underlying reasons that push a speaker to behave in such a way?

Martín Rojo (2000: 124) pointed out that one of the most distinguishing features of political debates in parliament is its high performative 'as it is not just about persuading but as a result of these debates, legislation is enacted and a nation is governed'. In our view, we could say something similar about face-to-face electoral debates. The debate with a politician's main adversary is one of the high points of the entire election campaign, but also has a great bearing on the future of the political professional; this helps us understand why in a country with scant democratic tradition such as Spain, politicians tend to shed their responsibilities using the most diverse arguments. Not surprisingly, a number of studies has shown that the debates can often play a decisive role in the audience's decision of who to vote for (for a review of the effects of these debates on various audiences, see Coleman, 2000; Hellweg et al., 1992; Jorgensen et al., 1998). In some cases the debate serves to reinforce the face of the preferred candidate, but in others, it cools the sign of these preferences, especially when her/his performance has not been the most desirable and has suffered a setback at the hands of his/her rivals. And, finally, there are other cases in which the debate helps take a final decision to millions of undecided voters upon whom not only the election outcome, but also the futures of the candidates rest, in the tricky world of politics.

Together with this elevated performative, there is another decisive idiosyncratic hallmark of election time debates which has noticeably increased in recent times. We refer to the debate's growing conception as a mass media spectacle before TV cameras; a spectacle that draws the attention of millions of people including those who normally have little interest in politics. Proof of this phenomenon is that, together with the dialectic abilities of the adversaries, the respective election teams leave nothing to chance as, over the course of many weeks, they come to agreements on all sorts of aspects aimed at improving the face of the teams's

candidate, or at least not worsening it (see note 2). The debates we have analysed here were watched by more than twelve million people and the ratings were among the highest ever in the history of Spanish television.

In this sense, the verbal performance of the participants in electoral debates should not only be interpreted in the institutional context of contemporary democracy – this would somehow justify a greater degree of rudeness and impoliteness than in other adversarial genres – but also the participants should be seen as having to ‘fit in’ with other essential characteristics of the face-to-face debate outlined earlier. In practice, all this exerts enormous pressure on the candidates who are nonetheless obliged to ‘have good manners’. In this respect, we must consider that in a genre such as public debate, the speaker is highly restricted by the rules of urbanity which regulate formal and institutional communicative acts. As observed by Ghiglione (1989), although the face-to-face debate may allow a degree of aggressiveness inconceivable in other discourse genres, there are certain norms which cannot be violated by the speakers; i.e. they are not allowed to use coarse insults,<sup>6</sup> or to use honorifics different to those which are expected (*usted*, never *tú*) in that communicative event, nor can they use vernacular registers or styles of language. Summing up, this is no free-for-all: conventions do count and must be maintained.

Complimentarily, the adaptation to politic verbal behaviour norms requires an emotionally cool and skilful speaker who is able to control the dialectic war within restrained and civilized parameters in such a way that the speaker’s face will acquire an enhanced sheen. In practice, one of the main functions of face-to-face debates is to show the public, and in particular one’s followers, the leader’s strategic and dialectic skills which can defeat the adversary or weaken his argumentative armour. All this must be attained in a cold-blooded fashion because, to the contrary, the leader’s electoral chances would be jeopardized. As pointed out by Harris (2001: 467) on debates in the British parliament: ‘for the Prime Minister to allow himself to become overtly angry during the course of the debate would be seen by both the Opposition and by his own party as a significant loss of face, and his most effective course of action is not to engage in an exchange of insults at all, which tends to heighten the sense of the debate as a political game in which he has more to lose than to gain’.

In this sense, such behaviour also plays a role which has been noted for other strategies such as the use of irony. As Dews et al. (1995) have pointed out, a speaker who uses irony conveys a less irritable image but she/he may not necessarily be less competent in delivering criticism. Similarly, those who are capable of alternating bitter dialectic blows together with expressions usually associated with verbal politeness, will be lauded due to their control and resilience in difficult situations. And the same could be said of the resort to humour, a strategy often used with a double ploy; on the one hand, it contributes to the ridicule of the adversary, whereas on the other hand, it reveals to the audience the dialectic skills of the orator (see also Harris, 2001).

Proof of the importance given to the control of emotions is shown in those



extracts where there is an attempt to show the adversary as overwhelmed by the situation and unable to stick to the rules that govern the communicative act. This occurs on some occasions on which the interruptions are sanctioned by the speaker with this argument (see Blas Arroyo, 1998, 2001, in press). We can see an example in Extract 18: following an interruption by González, Aznar turns successively to the moderator and his rival, demanding that the latter behave himself appropriately and respect the norms of civilized debating:

(18) JMA: yo le rogaría señor moderador si es posible, que le sugiriese al señor González que se tranquilizase (moderador: les, les. . .), es conveniente que se tranquilice señor González le veo esta noche especialmente impaciente (moderador: les ruego, les ruego que no se interrumpen para que además así sus mensajes), si tiene usted sus tiempos de hablar señor González tranquilícese, tranquilícese. . .

[I would ask of you Mr Moderator, to suggest to Mr González that he calm himself (moderator: I ask of you, I ask of you. . .), it is important that you calm down Mr González, I see that you are particularly impatient tonight (moderator: I ask you not to interrupt each other; that way your messages), you do indeed have your speaking time allotments, Mr González, calm down, calm down. . .] (II/8)

All things considered, the benefits to be had from politic verbal behaviour are not totally apparent here. These rhetorical devices can also be used as iconic resources that allow for a reading of the message that is different to the literal one and which can even be ironic at times. Earlier, we saw how speech acts asking for permission, requests, apologies, etc., in sum, many of the speech acts and pragmatic devices that are conventionally associated with politeness in Spanish, are not in fact what they seem as they do not comply with the rules of idiosyncratic usage. In other words, *they are petitions, apologies and requests for permission which are clearly insincere*; this is also true of recurrent utterances such as mitigated performative illocutions or doxastic predicates which are normally used in ordinary conversation to mitigate the assertive force of messages and the possible damage to the face of the interlocutor. . . but this has not been the case in our corpus. It is also no less striking in this respect that use made in discourse of interactional strategies and linguistic resources that offer a lower potential benefit to the speaker is diminished. This occurs in certain procedures aimed at the depersonalization of criticism or with conventional strategies of positive politeness which imply an acknowledgement, however partial, of the merits of the interlocutor.

Finally, the quantitative analysis of the data offered by the corpus, brings to light further arguments which support the egocentric interpretation of politic verbal behaviour in debates. Following on from this, our attention is drawn to a greater number of instances of mitigated verbal aggression in the second debate, the most aggressive and controversial (Aznar), as well as in the central sections; or the fact that it is almost always the conservative candidate who outweighs his opponent not only in terms of openly impolite behaviour, but also in the forms which have been considered throughout this article.

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## NOTES

1. See a recent international survey on this kind of televised debate in Coleman (2000). For an in-depth analysis of the main face-to-face sessions in the presidential elections of the USA – a country where such genre of debate has had far-reaching implications since the first debates in 1960 – see two excellent re-appraisals in Hellweg et al. (1992) and a more recent one by Schroeder (2000).
2. As occurs in countries with several decades' experience of televised political events, the representative of political parties come to a prior agreement on a number of points concerning the proposed debate; i.e. whether the debaters will be standing or seated, with notes at hand or not, who will start off and who will make the closing remarks of the debate, the distance of the studio cameras, the breaks for TV commercials, the kinds of shots to be taken. Some of them will be used as weaponry aimed at inflicting damage on the opponent's performance in a manner which concerns us herein (for more details about these matters in the two debates analysed in this article, see Cocho and Villamor, 1993: 100–1).
3. In relation to Goffman's concept of *face*, a number of different interpretations have flourished in an attempt to overcome the limits inherent in the original model by Brown and Levinson (1987). In this respect, of noteworthy interest is the debate on cultural differences when defining the meaning of this principle (see Mao, 1994; for some Spanish speech communities, see the approaches taken by Bravo, 1998 and Hernández-Flores, 1999) or the distinction between different kinds of face (public vs private) in certain institutional contexts, as in the case of political discourse (see Gruber, 1993, Pérez de Ayala, 2001).
4. The number of intervention during the course of the debate is given in brackets.
5. This is one of the few examples in the whole corpus in which the formula for apology actually coincides with the literal meaning while appearing in an awaited context, i.e. the interruptor had had it prepared to use as an apology for his intromission during the interlocutor's turn to speak.
6. Another matter is the growing perception *as insult* of certain speech acts such as criticism, reproach, disagreement, accusations, etc. even though they are not insult per se but which in a political context serve as arms to be used against adversaries. Furthermore it seems that it is always the other party who resorts to insult (for an interpretation of this type in the 1996 election campaign, see the newspaper article by García Escudero, 1996). For a discussion about the importance of insults in recent Venezuelan election campaigns, see Bolivar, 2001a, 2001b).


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