

A Pragmatic Study of Litotes in Trump's Political Speeches

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Litotes is defined as a figure of speech by which the affirmative is expressed by denying its contrary. The current study is concerned with identifying and analysing litotes in Donald Trump's political speeches on pragmatic level. The study aims at identifying the illocutionary force of litotes, the functions of litotes, which maxim of Grice is mainly breached in the production of litotes to produce implicature, and which type of litotes is heavily used by Trump. The analysis is carried out on data consists of four texts from Trump's speeches during being president from 2016 to 2019. The study concludes that the illocutionary force of litotes in most of the times is asserting. Litotes is used mainly to fulfil the function of emphasis, but it can be used to perform the functions of encouraging and inciting. Trump uses contrary litotes in most of his speeches.

Key words: *Pragmatics, Litotes, Illocutionary force, Implicature, Functions.*

Introduction

Politicians use different strategies and devices to convince their audience or gain their support. Figurative language is one of these strategies that are mainly based on the use of certain figures of speech such as irony, euphemism, metaphor, litotes etc. according to Griffiths (2006:81). Understanding figurative language requires a great interaction between semantics and pragmatics. Therefore, to understand the meaning of certain figure of speech a total knowledge of the context is required. The current study is limited to one figure of speech which is litotes. Litotes is defined by Znamenskaya (2004:95) as a kind of understatement by which affirmative proposition is conveyed by negating its contrary. Donald Trump heavily uses this figure. Thus, the data of analysis is Trump's speeches after being president from 2016 to 2019.

This study is limited to analyse litotes on pragmatic level and tries to answer the following questions: (1) What are the illocutionary forces of the litotic expressions? (2) Which functions of litotes are most commonly employed in Trump's political speeches? (3) What is

the most common type of litotes that is used in Trump's speeches? (4) Which maxim of Grice that is mainly breached in the production of litotes?

The study aims at: (1) Identifying the most common illocutionary forces of the litotic expressions in Trump's political speeches. (2) Specifying the functions of litotes in Trump's political speeches. (3) Manifesting which type of litotes that is commonly used by Trump in his speeches. (4) Finding out which maxim of Grice that is mainly breached in the production of litotes.

Accordingly, the study hypothesized that: (1) Trump uses litotes mainly to assert certain issue. (2) Litotes is used to achieve different functions such as inciting, deception, and emphasis. (3) Contrary litotes is mainly used by Trump more than the other types. (4) Quality maxim is the most common maxim that is mainly breached by Trump in the production of litotes.

To fulfill the aforementioned aims the following steps will be followed: (1) Surveying the literature of litotes its types and functions. (2) Analysing the data which is represented by four texts which are taken from Trump's speeches during being president from 2016 to 2019 according to a model developed by the present study.

Literature Review

The Concept of Litotes and Definitions

Logicians agree on the fact that 'two negative make affirmative' and this fact is not being proved by the actual usage of it in some languages. In spite of this fact, their rule sounds to be universalised in most of the languages that double negation make affirmative. Double negation occurs by putting *not* before some words contain or start with a negative prefix. It is important to note that double negation is generally modifying an idea, as a result of the expressed proposition is somehow different from the simple idea that is expressed positively. Thus, *not without doubt* does not express exactly the same as *not with some doubt*; *not uncommon* is weaker than *common*; and *not unhandsome* than *handsome*. Using negative expressions to convey the positive ones is traditionally called litotes. Litotes (double negation) is a figure of speech which involves cases by which affirmation is expressed by negating the contrary. (Jespersen 1917:62)

Perrine (1969:111) clarifies that litotes or understatement is a kind of figurative language that requires saying less than one means, which means people do not exaggerate or say things in their usual way or detail, but tells them rather half truths. According to Perrine litotes is defined an ironical understatement by which affirmative is expressed by negating the opposite. Leech (1969:168-169) sheds light on the fact that litotes is significant in literature,

since it has none of the potential absurdity of the other tropes. Its effect is mainly based on what we know about the situation in which litotes is used. Litotes is reserved for a specific kind of understatement in which speakers use a negative expression where a positive one would have been more forceful and direct.

Horn (2001:303) defines, the rhetorical figure, litotes as kind of understatement in which affirmative is being by negating the contrary, for example:

1. It is not bad

It is noticed that understanding litotic expressions such as *not bad* is contextually and intonationally determined. Taking it literally, *not bad*, leaves large range from indifferent to excellent, and may mean either. Its interpretation is based on intonation, circumstances and context. *Not bad* with 'a terminal fall-raise' damns with a faint praise, stating that this is the best or more positive evaluation the speaker can muster, whereas *not bad!* with 'an intonation of surprise' means very good-phrasing. ((Stern,1939:312, Bolinger, 1972:115) cited in Horn,2001:356). Horn manifests that the two inferences of *not bad* are result of 'Grice maxims clash', so that implicature is produced (ibid:357).

Dascal (2004:615) agrees with Horn (2001:357) when he states that all figures of speech involve inferences in their understanding. In terms of Grice maxims, a maxim is breached and implicature is created. Dascal (2004:616) differentiates between irony and litotes, the former which means meaning the opposite of what one says, the latter means understating what one says to intensify its effect. In addition, Dascal mentions that litotes can be changed to irony by omitting the negation, for example:

2. He is no Adonis. (litotic use)
3. He is an Adonis. (ironic use)

In case of 2, we can think through a scale of values, while in case of 3, there is a confrontation and qualification with an apparent reality. In the case of litotic use the direction is dominant; in the case of ironic use one does not want to bring about a sudden turnabout, but one wants the mind to take note of the ridicule arising from the incompatibility.

According to Znamenskaya (2004:95) litotes is defined as an understatement for specific effect, in which affirmation is delivered by the negating of the contrary. Cruse (2006:186) supports Znamenskaya's definition when he explains litotes in terms of understatement. He defines litotes as a type of figurative language which involves statement of intensity, or quantity, or seriousness of something is less than what is found in the real case, for specific

rhetorical effect. The effect is either to de-emphasis something or to emphasise certain intentions.

The Types of Litotes

Yuan (2017:256-258) classifies litotes to three types. His classification is based on Aristotle's interpretation of opposition. The philosopher says:

"Things are said to be opposed to each other in four ways: as contraries or as relative or as privation and possession and or as negation and affirmation. Examples of things in opposition, to make the idea clear, are as relatives, the double and the half; as contraries, the bad and the good; as privation and possession, blindness and sight; as negation and affirmation, he is not sitting and he is not sitting".

From the four cases of oppositions, three types of litotes are derived: contrary, contradictory, relative. This three from- four derivation is a result of the fact that Aristotle's third case of opposition, possession and privation, can be put down easily under the second type, thus sight and blindness are special case of contraries, like ugliness and attractiveness. Based on this classification of opposition, three types of litotes are derived/ "negation of its opposite" contradictory litotes (negation + negation), contrary (negation + antonym), relative (negation + correlation/meronymy).

A. Contradictory Litotes (negation + negation)

4. Thus, I consent, sir, this Constitution, because I expect no better, and because I am not sure that it is not the best.
5. It is not without satisfaction that I recognise my own handiwork in great cut under his right eye and a considerable discoloration round the socket.
6. His wife was not always out of humor, nor his home always uncomfortable; and in his breed of horses and dogs, and in sporting of every kind, he found no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity.

These examples show the way in which contradictory type of litotes is formed. In (4) litotes is structured by using a negator like *not, no, nor*. (5) Which indicates contradictory opposite, is usually formed by using a negator *not* and negative\privative preposition like *without*. (6) Contradictory litotes is formed by using a negator paired with negating affix as *un, in, dis, less*.

B. Contrary Litotes (negation + antonym of a lexeme)

7. My guardian will be awfully keen for you to come and stay with us. He is not half bad when you know him.
8. Chomsky is no idiot.

Contrary litotes can be structured by using different parts of speech (that carry negative meaning), but adjectives are commonly used to form such type of litotes in English.

C. Relative Litotes (negation + correlation\meronymy)

9. The class in chaos, but it is not the student's fault.
10. I just made moderate suggestion, as my position was not to lead.
11. Not all teachers of English are experienced.
12. This plant is not to be found everywhere.

In the sense of 'mutually defining antonym', (9, 10) are hypothetical examples. They are reciprocal or correlative type. *Student*, here is the opposite of *teacher*; *lead* opposite of *follow*. In addition, there are many others of such pairs as *cause* and *effect*, *parent* and *child*, *doctor* and *patient*, these lexical pairs are depend on reciprocal determination. Besides noun and verb correlative pairs, adjective or adverb can also be added such as *academica(lly)*, *administrative(ly)*, but nouns should be active in such relationship. (11 and 12) exemplifies meronymy or whole-part relation, *all* is the opposite of *some*; it is also includes cases of *everywhere\somewhere*, *everyone\someone*, *entirely\partially*, *always\sometime* and so on.

The Functions and the Structure of Litotes

Bergann (1988:105) points out that by using certain rhetorical device called litotes; to express their intentions people describe the object by negating its opposite. Thus, litotic expression is formed by negation plus adj or noun.

Horn (2001: 357) refers that litotes is rhetorical figure that contains a specific use of negative constructions. Inserting not to adjective or adjective with negative affix or noun serves to accomplish a positive merit in a person or thing. However, the positive merit is somehow reduced in quality as compared to the positive expression making a straightforward assertion of positive merit. This is illustrated in the following examples:

13. It is not a bad thing. It is a good thing.
14. He is no coward. He is a brave man.

Really "*not bad*" is not always equal to "*good*" though the two expressions seem to be synonymous. The same thing can be said of *coward* and *brave*. In the two cases the negative

structure is weaker than the affirmative structure. But, it does not mean that the negative structures make a less effect than the affirmative ones.

In his analysis and classification of litotes types, Yuan (2017: 357-358) clarifies all the ways by which litotes can be formed, of course, the structures differ according to the types of litotes. Therefore, there are three constructions, they are:

- a. contradictory litotes (negation + negation)
- b. contrary litotes (negation + antonym of a lexeme)
- c. relative litotes (negation + meronym\correlation)

The second part of this section concentrates on the functions of litotes. Some functions are described by scholars, and others are the researcher goals. Leech (1969:170) refers that litotes expresses an overt lack of commitment, thus implies a desire to suppress or conceal one's true attitude. Putri (2011:22) says that speaker or writer use litotes to enhance the effect of the expressed idea. The use of litotes (negative construction) has a strong impact on hearer or reader than the positive one. Therefore, the hearer or reader must be alert to link between what is implied and what is said. Thus, litotes has a stylistic effect, and considered a stylistic device.

Harya (2016:50) agrees with Cruse (2006:186) that litotes is used to achieve a rhetorical effect, the effect is either to emphasise or de-emphasise depending on the speaker or writer intention and the context of situation. Osmankadic (2017:44) mentions that (Horn, 1991) presents certain motives to use double negation. And one type of litotes (contradictory litotes) is formed by using double negation. Therefore, certain functions of litotes can be derived from these motives. From the quality motive, the function of uncertainty is derived: the speaker is uncertain as to whether a certain proposition is truthful or is certain that is not. The second motive is politeness: the speaker knows or he is sure that a proposition is correct, but he is too polite, modest or cautious to say it directly. The third is irony: the speaker performs as if he were uncertain, modest or reluctant, even if this performance has been assumed for the occasion. Finally, impressiveness of style: as stated earlier litotes is a stylistic device that is used to make speech more impressive and expressive.

The Model of Analysis

The present study develops a model to analyse litotes pragmatically which basically depends on Horn model (1989, 1991). Horn's model analyses litotes on two levels semantics and pragmatics. The semantic level is limited to distinction between contrary and contradictory litotes, while the pragmatic level is limited to Grice's maxims breaching and producing implicature. To these two dimensions the present study adds the types, the illocutionary

forces are classified according to Searle 1975, and the functions of litotes. Therefore, the analysis will start with types and ends with implicature.

Data Analysis and Findings

It is important to be mentioned that because of the limits of this study four situations that includes litotic expressions are tackled to test the workability of the model developed by the present study.

Text 1

"Iranian people are rightly outraged that their leaders have embezzled billions of dollars from Iran's treasury, sized valuable portions of the economy, and looted the people's religious endowments, all to line their own pockets and send their proxies to wage war. Not good".

President Donald Trump, 25 September, 2018, Trump's Statement to the United Nations General Assembly

The type of litotes in the underlined sentence is contrary litotes that is structured by *not* plus *antonym*. Litotes is used for emphasis as well as an incitement. Trump emphasises the fact that "Iran represents a great danger that must be stopped". He incites both the Iranian people and the world governments to put an end to that danger. In the underlined sentence the subject and its verb are deleted as they are clear from the context. The original sentence is "it is not good". "Not good" really means "bad". Concerning speech act theory, the locutionary act is represented by uttering "not good". The illocutionary force is inciting. The perlocutionary effect is not clear as the audience does not make any attitude.

Trump's speech has two implications. First Trump accuses Iran of supporting militias with money and weapons in the Middle East, thus that is a great danger and must be stopped. Second, Trump's incites the Iranian people to repeal against their government because the politicians are rich and the people are starving. Therefore, people are suffering because of the government policies. With respect to Grice's maxims, the quantity maxim is breached. Trump's contribution is not as informative as required since he presents not enough information. The quality maxim is observed because rigid systems represent a great danger on their people and other countries. Thus, Trump says the truth. The manner maxim is breached because Trump speech is ambiguous. The relation maxim is observed since Trump's speech is related to what has been said earlier.

Text 2

"We will defeat this crisis, we will protect our beautiful children, and we will ensure that tomorrow is better, brighter, stronger, and greater than ever before. Because as long as we have trust in our citizens, pride in our country, and faith in our God, we will not fail. (Applause.) Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you very much. Thank you very much".

President Donald Trump, 19 March, 2018, Remarks on Combating the Opioid Crisis.

The type of the litotes in the underlined sentence is relative litotes which consists of *not* plus *correlation/meronymy*. Litotes is used to emphasise the fact that "the Republican will fulfil their promises". In terms of speech act theory the locutionary act is represented by uttering "we will not fail". The illocutionary force is promising. Trump promises his people that they will success. The perlocutionary effect is represented by the audience clapping. "Not fail" means " success", thus, Trump's implied meaning is that " his government will end this dilemma which is represented by "opioid material" because it ends the lives of many people, therefore, we will not stop until our people will be safe". Concerning Grice's maxim, the quantity maxim is breached because Trump's contribution is not as informative as is required. The quality maxim is observed because opioid materials cause crimes therefore; it must be stopped by the government. So, Trump says the truth. The manner maxim is observed since Trump speech is clear. The relation maxim is observed, Trump's speech is related to the whole topic which is "Opioid Crisis".

Text 3

"Now they don't like guns. You know why? They're not painful enough. These are animals. They cut people. They cut them. They cut them up into little pieces and they want them to suffer. And we take them to our country because our immigration laws are so bad". (Applause)

President Donald Trump, 23 February 2018, Remarks at the Conservative Political Actions Conference.

The type of litotes is contrary litotes that is achieved by adding *not* to *antonym*. Litotes is used to emphasise the fact that "these people are thirsty for blood and they don't suffice by killing people, but they intend to make them suffer". " Not painful" nearly equals " painless". Concerning speech act theory, the locutionary act is represented by saying "they're not painful enough". The illocutionary force is asserting. Trump asserts that those people are very dangerous and must be stopped. The perlocutionary effect is represented by audience

applauding at Trump's speech. The implied meaning is that "these killers enter America illegally and they are kept safe because of the immigration laws. Therefore, such laws are against life and must be modified or changed, since they are exploited by criminals". With respect to Grice's maxims, the quantity maxim is breached. Trump's contribution is not as informative as required. The quality maxim is observed because those criminals get pleasure when they torture their victims. Therefore, Trump says the truth. The manner maxim is breached, because Trump's speech is not direct. The relation maxim is observed since Trump's contribution is related to what has been said earlier.

Text 4

"This is a common sense compromise both parties should embrace. The radical left can never control our borders. I will never let it happen. Walls are not immoral. In fact, they are the opposite immoral because they will save many lives and stop drugs from pouring into our country".

President Donald Trump, 19 January 2019, Remarks about the US Southern Border.

The type of litotes in the underlined sentence is contradictory litotes that consists of *not* plus *word start with negative prefix*. Litotes is used for emphasis as well as for motivation. Trump emphasise the fact that " the importance of walls to have safe country especially the walls between America and Mexico which is a must". Trump's speech also motivates the audience to support Trump's decision to build that wall. Regarding speech act theory, the locutionary act is represented by uttering "wall are not immoral". The illocutionary force is asserting. Trump asserts that walls are important to keep America safe. The perlocutionary effect is really vague because the audience do not make a clear attitude. The implied implicature is that "some Democrats object the Republican suggestion about the southern border and they say walls are immoral". " Not immoral" means " moral", thus Trump's speech indicates "walls are moral because they prevent drugs, illegal migrants, and criminals to get access into America". With respect to Grice's maxim, the quantity maxim Trump's contribution is not informative as required. The maxim of quality is observed since borders will make a secured country so his speech is true. The manner maxim is breached since it is not clear what makes wall immoral. The relation maxim is observed as Trump's contribution is related to the whole speech that is concerned with " Southern Border".

Results of Analysis

The findings of the analysis of the present study are summarised by the following tables:

Table 1: Occurrence of the Types of Litotes

Types of Litotes	Frequencies	Percentage %
Contrary	2	50
Contradictory	1	25
Relative	1	25
Total	4	100

Table 2: The Results of Grice's Maxims' Breaching

Grice's Maxims	Frequencies of Maxims' breaching	Percentage %
Quantity	4	100
Quality	0	0
Manner	3	75
Relation	0	0

Table 3: Occurrence of the Illocutionary Forces of Litotes

Macro-speech act classification	Micro-speech act classification	The frequencies	The percentage %
Representatives	Asserting	2	50
Expressives	Inciting	1	25
Directives		0	
Commissives	Promising	1	25
Declaratives		0	
Total		4	100

In most of his speeches, Trump uses litotes with its different types, but he uses contrary litotes more than the other types. Contrary litotes is used 2 times in most of his speech and relative and contradictory litotes only once. Trump uses litotes to assert certain issues and therefore, in most of litoteic expressions the illocutionary force is asserting (representative speech act). It is found that to produce the implied implicature the quantity maxim is mainly breached. Therefore, litotes is classified as quantity trope.

Table (2) shows that the quantity maxim in all the selected texts is breached. The percentage is 100%. The quality maxim is always observed in all the texts. The manner maxim is breached 3 times to reinforce the quantity maxim's breaching in the production of implicature. The relation maxim is observed in all the selected texts.

Conclusions

On the basis of the analysis conducted previously, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The verification of the fourth hypothesis implies that the production of litotic expressions is mainly based on Grice's maxims breaching especially the quantity maxim. As a result, the quantity maxim is breached in all the examples of litotes. The percentage of the maxim's breaching is 100%.
2. The produced implicature is generally based on the quantity maxim breaching. Thus, Trump uses little details by producing the litotic expression, while a complete message behind the litotic expression can be drawn from the context in which it is located.
3. The analysis reveals that the manner maxim is also breached to reinforce the implied implicature. It can be noted that Trump's speech seems to be vague, not clear and not direct.
4. During the production of the litotic expressions the quality and the relation maxims are observed in most of Trump's speeches.
5. Trump uses representative speech acts mainly while producing the litotic expressions. The speech act of assertion is commonly used by Trump in the production of litotes. Expressive speech acts are used such as inciting and the percentage is 25%. Commissive speech acts are used especially promising and the percentage is 25. Directive and declarative speech acts are not used during the production of the litotic expressions.
6. Litotes is fundamentally used for emphasis, therefore, in most of the examples Trump uses litotes for the purpose of emphasis to focus on certain issue.
8. In addition to emphasis, concealing one's true attitude, and modesty, litotes can be used to achieve other functions such as inciting and encouraging in specific contexts. If it is located in other contexts new functions can be explored. So the second hypothesis is verified.
9. It is concluded that Trump uses litotic expressions especially contrary litotes very heavily. This implies that Trump knows such expressions are workable to deliver his intended meaning (implicature). Trump uses contrary litotes 2 times whereas the other two types relative and contradictory only once. And the percentages are 50%, 25%, and 25% respectively.
10. The verification of the fourth hypothesis signals that litotes is quantity figure of speech that is basically based on the quantity maxim breaching. Thus, in all the analysed examples of litotes it is found that the quantity maxim is breached. So that large amount of information can be delivered by saying few words.



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