

The "corteous Attack": an interactional model between politeness and impoliteness

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Theoretical frames

Theoretical frame our group research on verbal violence since 2004 (Fracchiolla, Moïse, Romain, Auger 2013a, b, c ; Moïse, Auger, Romain, Fracchiolla, 2008a, b).

In this particular frame of research that consider impoliteness (more especially by the gendered parameter of interactions, Mills, 2008; 2012).

Working on the French Royal Sarkozy presidential debate (May 2nd 2007), I defined a certain kind of structural attack mode :

“l’attaque courtoise” I.e. “the courteous Attack”.

I first described it as typical of a gendered interaction because it happened during a debate between a woman and a man (1st presidential debate of its kind in the French political history : Fracchiolla 2008 ; 2011).

The Courteous Attack

I would now like to rediscuss this structure to show :

1/ it not only applies to gendered interactions, but can be found in the political field generally speaking, as soon as there are two persons debating publicly

2/ it can be used as a model structure,

3/ such a model may show useful to describe and name a certain type of interactions, framed by certain facts and constraints outside the political sphere.

I will therefore describe and explain of the “courteous attack” works, and why it can be useful, especially in the discourse analysis domain.

General and Theoretical Frames

General Frame :

Public space – defined for now as any interaction happening in presence of at least 3 persons (2 interacting and a 3rd as a (non)participating actor.

→ Verbal Violence & Agression researches (especially Fracchiolla, 2013 ; Fracchiolla & Romain, 2012, 2013, 2014) :

Politeness – as avoiding impoliteness

→ faces implied (Goffman, 75 ; Brown & Levinson 78)

→ Appearance of politeness can be « a trick to keep social inferiors in their place » (Mills, 2003:7)

La courtoisie – courtois

At first – and why I named it this way :

la « courtoisie » - art of court /of « doing court » – (faire la cour à)

Corteous Love (also called *fin'amor*) is the regulated and codified way to try to seduce a woman of quality without offending her and while reciting poetry. Littérature and Poetry of the Middle Age has some examples, and the 17th century is a revival of it through the movement of « Préciosité »

The expression of « Corteous Love » has been created in 1883 by Gaston Paris, a well known historian of medieval poetry. The medieval occitan expression is the one of *fin'amor*.

It generally designates the attitude to be held in presence of a woman of high society. The corteous love being a certain type of vassal relation between a man and a woman.

The Royal Sarkozy Debate :

1st definition of the Corteous attack

So the « corteous attack » was indeed defined in the context of a gendered

.No woman has, yet, been elected President in France – first time it could have happened

debate : my point is that in this particular type of context, it shows very clearly how it works because,

.the most powerful linguistic tools used for « attacking » where gendered oriented (female AND male) (Fracchiolla, 2011; 2008)

The Royal Sarkozy Debate :

1st definition of the Corteous attack

-However, now we have seen it at stage, we can better see it also is a frame of many types of verbal violence situations where politeness, especially, is used as a cover (harassment, manipulation, double bind, etc.)

« Women, because of their role in the order, are seen as appropriate recipients of all manner of social judgments in the forms of compliments... the way a woman is spoken to is, no matter what her status, a subtle and powerful way of perpetuating her subordinate role in society »

-(Wolfson, 1984:243, quoted by Holmes 15 in Coates 1998: 107)

The Royal Sarkozy Debate :

1st definition of the Corteous attack

Some illustrations of what a corteous attack looks like:

1/ SR: I know your techniques, you position yourself as a victim as soon as you are attacked /NS: but with you, Madam, it would be as a consentant victim /SR: perfect (tant mieux): so at least there will be pleasure!

2/ NS « Madame, will you suffer that I can speak a sentence... »

3/ NS insists on the respect he has for her:

A/ J'ai trop de respect pour vous pour vous laisser aller dans le mépris

B/ madame Royal le sait très bien, que je respecte son talent et sa compétence

The Royal Sarkozy Debate :

1st definition of the Corteous attack

4/ "Vous venez de dire une série d'erreurs, cela peut arriver, mais il faudra que vous révisiez un peu votre sujet", lui a-t-elle lancé. "Vous n'avez pas besoin d'être méprisante pour être brillante / **you don't need to be contemptuous to be brilliant**» (NS)

.Over all, during the whole debate:

.Madame : used 115 times by Sarkozy (as a reminder of womanhood but also of « ma dame » (my lady) (vs : only 6 times « Monsieur » toward NS

→ Here, **excessive politeness + hypercorrectiveness leads to verbal violence without being perceived as such** (Rosier, 2006)

The Royal Sarkozy Debate :

1st definition of the Corteous attack

Other types of Process : NS tries to play a game where he insists on her incompetence, and lost of temper (implicitly related to the fact she is a woman) – and it worked... (her conclusion...)

° "Qu'est-ce que vous changez sur les 35 heures, on n'y comprend rien", lance-t-il. "Vous avez une capacité à surfer d'un sujet à l'autre avec quelques généralités", insiste-t-il. **"C'est d'une précision bouleversante"**, ironise-t-il à propos des régimes de retraite. Ségolène Royal a dit vouloir consacrer "tout ce qui sera au-dessus de 2,5% de croissance" au désendettement et s'est engagée à réformer les régimes spéciaux de retraite.

NS demande à SR de **"se calmer"** talking about handicap: **"Pour être président de la République, il faut être calme"**, (...) **"Vous sortez de vos gonds avec beaucoup de facilité"**.

SR: **"Je ne m'énerve pas, je me révolte"**

NS: **"Qu'est-ce que ça doit être quand vous êtes énervée!"**, raille-t-il alors. "Pichenette", relativise l'intéressée.

http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/sarkozy-royal-entre-courtoisie-et-virulence_464304.html#eyErEYZEJOeER5yr.99

The political debate frame

Since 1974, the Presidential debate between the last 2 candidates has become a ritual in France

The only time it did not happen was when Chirac refused to face Jean-Marie Le Pen in 2002 (and won with 82% of the votes)

So the best examples I have come from the Presidential debates

However, i believe it is a process and a frame that makes sense in all the public debates and situation where power is at stake

The political debate frame

So, for instance, it applies in other political debates like the « primaries » or when the candidates face each other through other speakers like Sarkozy/Fabius a few months before the presidential election (Fabius represented Hollande)

It shows to be based on the rhetorical figures of **implicite** and **irony**

A) « you are Primeminister » – not the Président

In 1988, after two years of cohabitation, the debate opposed Mitterrand and Chirac. Each candidate had 50 minutes to speak, with an additional 3 minutes conclusion at the end of the show. During the most famous moment of the debate, Jacques Chirac declared to Mitterrand:

- *"Allow me to say that this evening, I am not the Prime minister, and you are not the President of the Republic: we are two candidates... equals... and that submit themselves to the judgment of the French... the only one that counts. You will therefore permit me to call you Monsieur Mitterrand!"*
- A request to which Mitterrand famously responded:
- *"But you are perfectly correct, Monsieur le Premier ministre!"*

The political debate frame

Being mainly implicit, it shows not to be clear as an *Attack* (no verbal violence apparently)

It mainly has the pragmatic effect of making one's adversary appear as the weak one by implicit comparisons, especially creating positive representations of oneself while at the same time implying the adversary is *not* such (→ the « original » one being : « you are a woman », often repeated and reminded, « and I am not » (Royal/Sarkozy debate)

Example : Hollande vs Sarkozy (2012) « Moi Président, je... »

« *Moi président de la République, je ne serai pas* le chef de la majorité, je ne recevrai pas les parlementaires de la majorité à l'Élysée.

Moi président de la République, je ne traiterai pas mon Premier ministre de collaborateur.

Moi président de la République, je ne participerai pas à des collectes de fonds pour mon propre parti, dans un hôtel parisien.

Moi président de la République, je ferai fonctionner la justice de manière indépendante, je ne nommerai pas les membres du parquet alors que l'avis du Conseil supérieur de la magistrature n'a pas été dans ce sens. ETC.

The political debate frame

.So that it better reveals itself in « second readings » (thanks to retranscriptions) show there is one – verbal violence is present, while it is just perceived as meaningful in the heart of action (while listening to the debate)

.Plays on cultural popular implicits, categorisations, stereotypes, on social roles (les femmes sont, a good leader is...)

The courteous Attack, so, doesn't have to be creative, but only plays on what people generally have been told to think

→ **it can contribute to circulate old thoughts and discourses**

As a conclusion...

My wonder is if this pragmatic frame of attack that I named « the courteous attack » is particularly « French », or if it means something in other parts of the world?

And if it does, under what rhetorical/argumentative forms ?

And in which particular contexts (political although?other?gendered attack only?)?

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