
Transitivity & Hedges as Politeness strategy in Political interviews: An analytical study

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Abstract

The study aims at a comprehensive study of quantitative analysis of transitivity process and hedging as a strategy to maintain an interpersonal relationship with the audience in political interviews. Rooted in systemic functional Linguistics Hallidayan transitivity identifies the choice of clauses/sentences by a politician to represent a set of actions of the government. On the other hand, Hedges are used to soften the claims which might draw criticism towards the government. This Paper compare the interviews of two education ministers Mrs. Smriti Irani and Mr Prakash Javadekar. By applying these two linguistic tools (transitivity analysis and Hedges) a comparison is drawn between the two ministers. It is a different and novel study with a new approach.

Key words: Transitivity Analysis, Politeness, Hedges, Political Discourse

1.Introduction

The data for the study is sample of interviews of minister of education talking about education sector in India. The study will focus on the interviews taken by two different media channels. Ministers in Ministry of Education (MoE) are held accountable for the discourse they make

regarding education sector. For this reason, MoE's speech is crucial in the discourse of education sector. The analytical framework for the study in section.1 will be 'transitivity analysis', a framework within SFL delineated by MAK Halliday. Transitivity analysis helps to demonstrate patterns and structures in clauses which further allows data to express itself both qualitatively and quantitatively. Section. 2 talks about the hedges. Politeness in the form of hedges is another aspect of this study that tries to see in the data of interviewees what sorts of hedges they have used during the conversation. Obviously, in most conversations, interviews, discourses, texts, etc., interlocutors use hedges as a politeness strategy. Many studies have been conducted on transitivity though study similar to the present study has not been found. Clubbing Transitivity analysis and Hedges is a different and novel study with a new approach.

1.2 Transitivity

Transitivity studies have seen many schools of thoughts, from grammar to semantics to discourse studies. In SFL "however, it is being used in a much broader sense. In particular, it refers to a system for describing the whole clause, rather than just the verb and its Object (Thompson 2014: 94). "Transitivity is thus being defined in terms of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations in the clause, not by

the classification of verbs as 'transitive' or 'intransitive'. This does not mean that such a classification is irrelevant; the verb classes represent the potentiality on the part of each verb of entering into each of the sets of relations involved". (Halliday, 1967:52). Transitivity analysis has been applied on many form of text or discourse i.e. literary, scientific, political discourse, etc. Previously it has been widely used for literary works.

In Systemic Functional Linguistics Transitivity analysis is applied first at the clausal level by initially identifying the clausal boundaries and further it is classified on the basis of transitivity roles, by identifying the process, process type, participants and circumstances in a clause. **Processes** are the core element of the analysis of clauses in the transitivity system. It becomes the fundamental basis for the analysis and categorization of clauses in a discourse. These are realised by verbal groups headed by the verb. The six process in transitivity system are- Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, Behavioural and Existential.

1.3 Processes

As mentioned above there are six processes in transitivity system. In this section we will give a brief account of each of them. First is Material process, it is the process of doing which includes 'doing' verbs for example *giving, appointing, impacting, playing, running, hitting* etc. It has an actor and a goal as participants in the clause. Actor does something which impacts the goal. There is also Scope which is unaltered by the action. Second is Mental process: It is the process of sensing, conceptualising, reasoning. *Thinking, sensing, liking, craving, imagining* etc. are the verbs which describes this process. The actor is the senser here. Senser cannot be inanimate. Instead of actor and goal this clause type contains senser and

phenomenon. Third one is Relational process: three main types of relation process are 1. Intensive- 'x is a ' 2. Circumstantial- 'x is at a' (where 'is at' stands for 'is at, in, on, for, with, about, along, etc.'). 3. Possessive - 'x has a'. Each of these comes in two distinct modes: a. Attributive 'a is an attribute of x'.

Rest three processes are peripheral. They are Behavioural, Verbal and Existential process. Behavioural Process: The clause pattern of behavioural process consists Behavior and process only. 'These are processes of (typically human) physiological and psychological behaviour, like breathing, coughing, smiling, dreaming and staring. Fifth one is Verbal Process: Verbal process is the process of saying where 'saying' is interpreted in a broader sense. The grammatical function of saying is performed by a 'sayer' which could be both an animate or inanimate entity. Verbal clauses form clause complexes both in quoted and indirectly reported sentences. In both the cases only, the primary clause is taken as a verbal process in addition to sayer, verbal processes have receiver, verbiage and target functioning as participants. Sixth process is Existential process: this process represents that something exists or happens. Existential clauses usually have *there* as the subject. It has existent as participant.

2. Methodology

Interviews of Mrs. Smriti Irani (26 May 2014- 5 July 2016) and Mr Prakash Javadekar (5 July 2016- 30 May 2019) have been taken for this study. Unfortunately as an education minister Smriti Irani was embroiled a few controversies and had to be replaced by "Mr. Prakash Javadekar in between her tenure. Newspapers also wrote Mr Javadekar, seen as non-confrontational and reportedly handpicked by the party leadership for the complete contrast he provides to his aggressive predecessor

Smriti Irani, said he would use his experience as a student leader to initiate "good dialogue" with students to prevent protests and clashes on campuses" (2016, NDTV).

In this study we have tried to see what is the difference between the verbal expression of both the ministers through transitivity analysis and hedges. Interviews that are taken are from- *Think Edu Conclave*, The New Indian Express and *Lets' talk*, MOJO in association with The Week from YouTube channels. Speech is converted into text through manual transcription.

Table 1. Transitivity Analysis of Prakash Javadekar's interview

Process	Material	Mental	Relational	Verbal	Existential	Behavioural	Total
Number	122	20	44	12	17	2	217
Percentage	56%	9%	20%	6%	8%	1%	100

Table 2. Transitivity Analysis of Smriti Irani's speech

Process	Material	Mental	Relational	Verbal	Existential	Behavioural	Total
Number	80	40	35	28	7	3	193
Percentage	41%	21%	18%	14%	4%	2%	100

3.1 Results & Conclusions

Table 1 & 2 is a quantitative representation of the distribution of different types of processes in Javadekar's & Irani's interview along with the corresponding percentage. The Number column provides the count of each process type and the percentage column gives their relative frequency. In Table1 the total count of clauses are 217, there are 122 instances of material processes which account for 56% of the total processes, next is relational process with 44 instances, accounting for 20%, instances of mental process is 20 which takes up 9%, then there is existential processes having 17 clauses accounting for

3.Section.1

The data is analyzed at the clausal level. Processes are tagged according to classification given by Halliday and Matthiessen 2014 & Thompson 2014. At many places decision had to be made intuitively. The entire speech of both the Ministers of education is analyzed and tagged accordingly. The occurrence of each Process type in numbers and percentage is calculated quantitatively. Quantitative analysis of Prakash Javadekar and Smriti Irani's interview is shown in Table. 1 and 2 respectively.

8% of the data, verbal processes having 12 instances accounting for 6%, and lastly 2 instances of behavioural processes which only 1% of the total count. In Table 2 total count of the clauses are 193. There are 80 instances of material process which accounts for 41% of all the processes, instances of mental process are 40 with the frequency of 21%, then there is relational for having 35 clauses and accounting for 18%, next is verbal process having 28 instances in the data accounting 14% of the data, existential process has 7 instances accounting for 4%, and last is behavioural process having only 3 instances, accounting for only 2% of the data set.

The table provides insights of predominant and subordinate action chosen in context of education in India. For example behavioural process only constitutes 1% and 2% of the data it means that its representation of small portions indicate, description of behaviour is not significant in the context of education. On the other hand the most predominant process is material (actions, event, activities) accounting for 56 % and 41% of the data indicating that a significant portion of their discourse involves the actions taken by the government in education system to bring out changes or transformations in existing policies or implementations of new ones. It is obvious that an education minister wants to talk about all the majors that a government is taking for the growth of a sector. The third process that has similarity is the use of relational clauses which is related with identity of a thing/process. Relational process are of two value-identity or carrier-attribute type. They show positive or negative connection between the entities. It also tells us what qualities an entity possess, what are their characteristics. After material process this process makes a substantial portion of speech i.e. 20% and 18% respectively from both the speakers. This suggests that defining the relationship between entities, siting their value, describing the quality of work or development etc. is an important aspect of education discourse. There is a huge gap in the use of mental clause between both the ministers. Javadekar uses it only 9% of the time while Irani uses it 21 % of the time. This shows that Irani emphasises on cognitive function, her thinking/perception or government's thought process or wish or visualization of the future. If we see verbal process Smriti Irani's use of verbal clauses accounts 14% of her communication while Javadekar uses it only 12 times which accounts for only 6%

suggesting that in Javadekar's speech, communication is less central in education discourse i.e. instances of direct communication has not reflected in the interview much. Last one is existential process which expresses the existence of entities, policies etc. of the government which is there or will be there in future. Javadekar has used material clauses 8% of the time while Smriti Irani has used it 4% of the time in her discourse. The percentage shows that discussion on the existence of the things form a minor part of discourse.

Another difference between the two ministers is that Javadekar's main focus is on the actions of the government and establishing relations between the entities, giving attributes to the government rest all the process form minor part of the discourse. While Smriti Irani definitely focuses more on the actions and events taking place in education discourse but she also pays attention to the mental activities going on in her mind or government bodies regarding education, on establishing relations, she also focuses on communication and dialogues in her speech. All the six processes in the transitivity system are present in the speeches of both the ministers of education. However behavioural process is almost negligible in both speeches it means that that the emphasis is lowest on behavioural actions related to education system. Generally speaking, material processes and relational process dominate the discourse of Prakash Javadekar followed by low occurrences of mental, existential and verbal Process. In Smriti Irani's Speech material process dominate the discourse followed by Mental and Relational and verbal processes while behavioural processes and existential processes are seldom used. If compared Smriti Irani besides using material clause tends to focus more on her individual/government

decisions and cognitive function as an education minister while Prakash Javadekar tries to focus more on actions and events taking place in education sectors

4. Section II

Besides conveying some information, language is also used by the two candidates to interact with audience, to establish and maintain certain relationships with people, to influence others' behaviour, to make clear their viewpoints. This section will discuss briefly about the politeness strategies in the both the interviews in form of Hedges.

4.1 Politeness strategies in the form of Hedges

Like many other politeness strategies hedging is used to minimize the strength of proposition. Two main functions of Hedging is to show fuzziness or uncertainty and politeness in speech. Depending on the context it is used to show both positive and negative politeness . In political discourse especially in interviews the politician has to use both positive face and negative face. (See, Brown & Levinson, 1987, p- 61-62). Because at one hand they have to show solidarity with the common mass, mutual understanding in an interview , familiarity with the challenges etc. and at the other hand they have to avoid questions pertaining to addressing the issues, implementation of policies etc. in order to hide any inefficiency of the government at the given point of time.

Virtually any linguistic unit can function as a hedge. It depends on pragmatic factors. Taking this view we will give a few examples from both of these interviews how using hedges ministers make the conversation moderate and more polite and at the same time evasive.

Example of Hedges from Interview 1:-

1.This the psychology is of **some** people. ('Some' implies that a larger lot are not of this psychology).

2.**we believe** in autonomy. ('We believe' others might not).

3.**if you have taught them** the value system, **if you have taught them** how to think, how to act and how to conduct then you must trust them. (Conditionals here are used to put a responsibility on guardians instead of government).

4.**if you call me** for a tea or for or some function, I will come **otherwise** it's your institute. (Use of hedges here suggests the speaker leave the decision on institute)

5.there will be no government representative, **barring** our one secretary. (Polite way to convey that one representative will be mandatorily there).

6.**Within** next one or two months we will be ready with the rules which will define all autonomy. ('Within' suggests a range of time rather than a specific deadline).

7.that will happen but **still** without controls. ('Still' and controls makes the sentences less emphatic).

8>You **must** give correct marks ('must' implies obligation to provide accurate marks).

9.**Otherwise**, they are completely free to expand, (otherwise shows there is some condition).

10.I **recollect** when I was student in 70s there were grace mark. ('recollect' suggest speaker is not certain about memory and it might be not that correct).

11.prime minister **was not only** telling that don't take tension. (Here hedge suggest that there is some additional meaning).

12.It (Digital education) is **a way** of giving interesting education. (Here minister escapes from making direct statement that digital education is interesting).

13.There **may be** practical problems but as universities are autonomous, we don't **dabble** into it **unless** people come to us and ask. (Hedges in the sentence is lessening the freedom of the autonomy here).

Examples of hedges in interview 2

1.**I am of the opinion** that I am here to be grilled as always, in his mighty presence. (Here there are hedges of personal belief).

2.I am hopeful that this dialogue today that will ensue, will give an answer to a many a question that have arisen in the past or **likely to arise** in the future. ('I am hopeful' and 'likely to arise' both suggests speaker is not certain).

3.There is an assumption that there is **something** un-Indian about the education system that we have. (Hedge of uncertainty).

4.One of the biggest challenges students faces. (Hedge suggests there are other challenges).

5.We (Government) are hoping. (Hedge of uncertainty on the part of government).

6.I feel prabhu ji that one needs to understand and give credit to even their emergence to centres of excellence. (Hedge of personal feeling and belief).

7.My **endeavour** is to address these challenges within not only the IITs, IIMs in conjunction with the institutions. (Hedge suggest an aspiration rather than any guaranteed outcome).

8.It is **essential** that we take along the citizen's view. (Hedge showing importance).

9.I am sure when you went to college..... (Hedges 'I am sure' and 'when' suggests personal belief and assumption).

10.that **let's say** there, if a child wants to not study economics. ('let's say' hedges the statement as hypothetical scenario and not a fact).

11.Education was **looked at as** silos. (Hedge phrase suggests that this is subjective interpretation).

12.I **wouldn't want** to have a negative connotation to that. (Hedge phrase here shows hesitation and the speaker is concerned about the possible interpretation).

Here also Javadekar's Interview is referred as Interview 1 and Irani's interview as Interview 2. The interpretations of the hedges are given in the brackets along with the examples. It can be seen hedging is used in the interview to show self-belief assumptions, opinion, uncertainty, conditions, hypothetical scenarios, hesitation, personal beliefs also on part of government/ government bodies, subjective interpretation etc. All these examples show that "Using hedges could save "face" if an addresser hedges the proposition s/he

makes it as provisional or not completely certain, thus allowing the addressee time to acknowledge and agree to it as s/he wishes (Varttala, 2001:72) sited in (Habeeb, 2019). All these strategies are used to sound mild, less emphatic but more polite. Hedges in example 1 and 4 appear more diplomatic and respectful towards larger gentry and institute respectively. By showing uncertainty which also shows negative politeness in the sentences in Ex 2, 14, 15, 19 the interviewee has left the option for possible interpretations and opinion for the audience. It means the speaker is not imposing his/her opinion on the audience and leave room for their own understanding and opinions. Lakoff(1975:53) represents a broader explanation of politeness i.e., saying that to be polite is saying the socially correct things.

Another thing to mention here is that both the ministers have used different hedging strategies. Javadekar in his interview mostly uses conditional 'If'. While Irani mostly uses the hedges like- I or we believe/think/feel/ and in my opinion etc. most of the time. It can be said that Irani uses negative politeness more than Javadekar. However, there are only a few examples regarding positive politeness like Ex 22 'I am sure' which shows the accountability on the part of Smriti Irani and can have positive face from speaker and addressee.

5. Conclusion

Its common that government officials are asked about the functioning of the government regarding implementation of certain policies, their achievement, shortcomings and future. During elections political parties overcommit a lot of things in certain time frames to seek votes from public. But after forming government it becomes difficult to fulfil all of them. Since the manifesto, budget, speeches of politicians everything remains very much in

the public domain it becomes difficult to shy away from the pertinent issues regarding different sections of the society. Public speech might show more examples of positive politeness as the speech is one-sided and no one is asking about the accountability right there. In interview setting, the interviewee is responding to the interviewer and he/she has to respond to the questions regarding the functioning of the government policies on education through the interviews and press conferences. Therefore, interview format leaves less scope for positive politeness and more room for negative politeness if the promises are not met in time and politicians have to opine about them.

Coming back to Javadekar and Irani if we compare their discourse on education by applying these two linguistic tools Javadekar covers 56% of his discourse with actions and events taking place in education sector and 20% with establishing relation between entities or attributing them. Thus 76% of his conversation is only about functioning of the government and describing entities which are present. This itself leaves less scope for giving his opinion or establishing communication with the audience through verbal process. Irani also covers 41 % of her discourse by happenings and going on in education sector but her use of mental process constitutes 21% of the discourse and use of verbal process accounts for 14%. In total 35% of the discourse on education by Irani is about establishing communication with the audience and sharing her thinking and perception. It itself leaves more scope for using hedges in her interviews while Javadekar's use of mental and verbal process only constitutes 15% of his discourse leaving less scope for personal point of views. Here it can be said that Javadekar's choice of processes might be strategical to help him to escape from

expressing his opinions or personal statement on discourse on education while on the other hand Smriti Irani chooses to opine herself which leads her to express with less certainty in interviews when asked about the

Unfulfilled promises. Thus, politeness and hedges are crucial and unavoidable aspects of the conversation, especially in interviews. We can find many studies on politeness and hedges, but this study tries to club transitivity and hedges as a politeness strategy together; therefore, it is a different and novel study with a new approach. A more comprehensive study with a large corpus might establish a better connection between these two linguistic tools and bring out more linguistic features.

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