

A Socio-Pragmatic Study of the Lebanese Uprising Slogans

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Abstract: This study aims at analyzing and investigating the socio-pragmatic functions of slogans used in the Lebanese Uprising. The study draws on the framework of Politeness Theory (PT) by Brown and Levinson (1982). 202 slogans of the current Lebanese Uprising were collected from different resources during the period between 17th October 2019 and 20th March 2020. The analysis of this study reveals nine socio-pragmatic functions which depict the social, economic and political situation in Lebanon. Expressing insult was the most frequent as it was revealed eight times and expressing persistence, warning, hatred, and despair came last as they were revealed only once each.

Keywords: Lebanese Uprising, politeness, pragmatics, slogans.

1. Introduction

Slogans are words or phrases used repetitively in different contexts, i.e. political, religious, and commercial, in order to deliver intended ideas or purposes. Hare (1991) mentions that the word slogan originated in Gaelic “Slaugh-ghairm which means a clan’s battle-cry.” According to Safire’s Political Dictionary *slogan* means “a rallying cry; catch phrase; a brief message that crystalizes an idea, defines an issue, the best of which thrill, exhort, and inspire.” Hosu and Pavelea (2009) provide four definitions for slogans. The first is specific for elections, as slogans are defined as the statement that provides the reasons for electing a particular candidate. The second, a slogan is a phrase that expresses an intended goal or purpose for political purposes. The third, a slogan is a memorable phrase that expresses a key idea. The last definition, which seems to be the most general, a slogan is an expression related to politics or commerce; it is used to express goals or ideas of a group, individuals, or organizations; it is memorable and easy to use.

Using slogans is a phenomenon that has been used to protest, advertise, and express opinions. In addition, it is one type of social interactions that is considered a building brick of human social structure (Al-Abed Al-Haq and Al-Husseini, 2011). Siraj (2017) argues that

slogans should be linguistically well-formed in order to become a convincing means for the public demands. By way of illustration slogans are used to reach some sociopolitical purposes.

During the last decade, a series of uprisings against the regimes and governments of some Arab countries occurred. These Arab Uprisings were successive revolutions, and rebellions against the oppressive governments in the Arab World, which were called (The Arab Spring). It started in 2010 as a result of the low standards of living, the totalitarian regimes, and the oppressed willing of the peoples. It first started in Tunisia and spread quickly to neighboring countries, Libya and Egypt, and later spread to farther countries, such as Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain (Noueihed, 2011).

In 2019, the Lebanese people gathered in the streets and protested as a result of the government's failure to find solutions to the adverse economic circumstances and the deteriorating political situation in Lebanon. Besides, the government's imposing of more taxes on gasoline and smoking cigarettes, and creating a tax on using phone calls applications like Whatsapp (Al-Jazeera, 2019). The Lebanese protestors have used variant slogans to express their attitudes and demands towards the current political and economic situation in Lebanon as they demand the resignation of the three controlling authorities.

This study aims at answering the following questions:

- 1) What are the characteristics of the Lebanese uprising slogans?
- 2) What are the socio-pragmatic functions of these slogans?

2. Methods and procedures

The data of this study consists of 202 slogans and sayings employed during the Lebanese revolution of 2019/2020. The data of this study were collected during the period between 17th October 2019 and 20th March 2020. The sample of the study consisted of the 30 Arabic and English slogans. These slogans were used by the protestors in Lebanon during their demonstration such as signs, chants, tweets, songs, photos, and wall draws. The slogans were extensively spread by various media sources, notably Social Media, such as Facebook and Twitter, and TV channels, such as Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, NEW TV, LBC and BBC Arabic and various media articles, blogs, and videos. In order to be able to analyze the discourse and function of these slogans, they have been classified into categories, and their usage contextualized within the wider Arab social, political and cultural context. All the slogans will not be adapted or undergone any modifications or corrections, regardless how offending or impolite they are.

The slogans are analyzed within the framework of and Politeness Theory (PT) by Brown and Levinson (1978). The researchers attempt to elicit the functions of the categorized slogans. The researchers choose fourteen slogans from and analyze them according to the Politeness

Theory (PT) framework in order to elicit their functions. Each of the selected slogans is presented, transliterated and translated into English if they are in Arabic. Then it is discussed separately to show what it means, what demand it expresses, and what the function it reveals. Then the researchers analyze the population data quantitatively in order to reveal the functions that have the most and the least number of frequencies.

Politeness Theory (PT) was first proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978) in their book '*Politeness Some Universals in Language Usage*.' The main concept of the theory is redressing the insults to people's self-images in social interactions. This self-image or self-esteem is referred to the concept of face. In our social interaction we try to save our face and attempt to avoid Face Threatening Acts (FTAs), such as insults and requests. There are some main components in the framework of Politeness Theory (PT), the negative and the positive face, face threatening acts, the strategies for doing the (FTAs) and the factors influence these strategies.

3. Background of the study

In the past few years, the study of political slogans has increased. The Arab Spring has given a flourished ground for creating new slogans. This encouraged linguists to dig deeper to analyze the sociolinguistic functions of these slogans.

Based on the analysis of the language four hundred slogans from uprising countries especially Egypt and Tunisia, Al-Abed Al-Haq and Hussein (2011) aim at identifying the linguistic functions of these slogans and detecting the lexical, phonological and syntactic characteristics that they represent. The researches collected the slogans from different resources, such as TV channels (Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya), and different Internet websites. They manage to categorize twenty language functions for slogans. For example, expressing humiliation, expressing public demands, quoting lyrics and many others. The data showed that the least frequent language function revealed from the collected slogans was using proverbs as it constituted one percent of the overall slogans, while the most frequent was expressing humiliation as it constituted more than twelve percent of the overall slogans. The study also revealed six sociopolitical features for the slogans used in the Egyptian and Tunisian uprising, the most important was demanding the president to abdicate and leave the authority, and a call for core change in the governmental institutions.

In more recent study, Harder and Konig (2013) investigate the huge rallying and mobilizing in the Arab Uprising countries and how they persisted in some countries, such as Egypt and how do not in others, such as Bahrain. They argue that the anti-regime coalition is a crucial reason for success or failure of mass mobilization. They conclude that in public revolutions when slogans were not oriented to any political party or group, they facilitated the mobilization of the people toward what was considered a common goal. This is precisely what happened in Egypt. The slogans were not phrased by any political parties, such as Islamist or Leftist and that facilitated a border mobilization against Mubarak's regime.

In a study of the slogans of the Egyptian revolution that were used from January to March 2011 to document a particular period in Egypt, Lahlali (2014) categorizes these slogans into seven categories, such as slogans of a religious nature, hope and aspiration, and a call for reprimand and prosecution. He explains that the slogans used in the Egyptian uprising carried variant political attitudes and the leading participants of the uprising were mainly from the middle class. He justifies that the language used in these slogans was contrary to the expectations. Most of the slogans were written in Modern Standard Arabic, a few were written in the Egyptian dialect and some in English. He considers that using Modern Standard Arabic in the slogans was to drag the attention of the Arab World to their uprising. He concludes that the slogans used in the Egyptian uprising reflected different political perspectives of the uprising's groups, including, secularist liberal and Islamic.

Al-Sowaidi, et al. (2015) study the transcript of a number of slogans which were raised by the protestors in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. The data were collected from different resources, TV channels (Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya and BBC Arabic), media articles, blogs, social networks, and videos. The slogans were in both Standard Arabic and Egyptian Arabic. They find that the slogans dealt with many topics, specially political and social ones. The discussed slogans had their distinctive schematic structures. They gave a good image for the in-group and distort the out-group. Syntactically, the slogans were brief and simple. They were full of metaphors, metonymies and similes.

Denton (1980) investigates a group of slogans that used in movements and campaigns across time in order to identify the features and functions of them. He seeks to find a basis for the classification system of these slogans. He concludes that slogans, as a rhetorical device, have delivered topical backgrounds of the main interests, preventions, and expectations of societies. Besides, they may play a persuading function in election campaigns and be the direct reason for achieving the success. As social devices, they may have influences on the individuals as they unite and divide them. So it is expected that slogans aggravate the situations and cause confrontations.

In a different study on political slogans used in America for political purposes and shaping the opinion of the public, Newsome (2002) surveys the existing literature in an attempt to propose definitions for the political slogans and to investigate their political rhetoric. He finds that the best political slogan should have a meaningful and persuasive message which was built on credibility, emotion and reason in order to elicit the audience actions. He adds that slogans are extremely important means to maintain the dialogue between the public and the government.

Lu (1999) examines the relationship between the political slogans used in China and their impact on the Chinese ideology. He studies the political slogans from 1960s to 1980s in China. He concludes that the political slogans helped in changing the understanding of the reality of the economic situation in China. He adds that the slogans used in the 1960s and early 1970s increased the hostility and violence in the Chinese community. While the 1980s' slogans encouraged selfishness and self-esteem in the Chinese community. These findings designate that the slogans of the 1960s and early 1970s were major factors in destroying the cultural principles

of China. On the other hand, the slogans of the 1980s and 1990s provided an ideological shift and encouraged moving China to embrace a pragmatic way of thinking.

Vaes, et al (2014) examine the persuasive possibilities of emotions in political slogans. They test ninety one Italian participants from different political attitudes. All the participants were voters, their ages ranged between 18 and 65. They were divided into two groups according to their coalition they belong to (right-wing coalition and left-wing coalition). They create a fictitious candidate who was introduced to the participants of one of the two groups as representing left-wing coalition, and to the other group as representing right-wing coalition. Thirty five slogans were introduced to the participants as the fictitious candidate campaign's slogans. Twelve slogans were shown every participant. Six of them were neutral and the other six contained emotions. They find that when the slogans had human emotion, the potential voters had tendency to follow and vote for the fictitious candidate who they think that he was from their coalition rather than voting for any other candidate from a different coalition. While the potential voters had no difference in conformity to any of the candidates when the slogans had more primary emotions. This means that the voters preferred to vote for a candidate from the same political group rather than to vote for a candidate from a different political group, when the slogans express secondary emotions. However, they tend to become neutral when the slogans express primary emotions.

4. Results and discussion

Slogans has gained an important position in the political world and has become an important issue in expressing demands and attitudes, as well as an effective means for persuading and rallying the audience in particular concept or idea. According to Oxford Dictionary impoliteness means "behaviors or comments that are not polite" which means having bad manners, rudeness and discourtesy. Culpeper (1996) defined impoliteness as the intentional face-threatening Act. His model of classified five strategies: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm, and withhold impoliteness. One of the face-threatening acts which is used to express impoliteness is dysphemism. According to Oxford Dictionary 'Dysphemism is the opposite of Euphemism'. It is an expression that connotes offensiveness to the hearer mainly by using taboo words. It is motivated by emotional states, such as anger, hatred, envy, or fear. According to Allan and Burridge (1991) Dysphemism is using taboo words in an attempt to insult, expletive and epithet.

Impoliteness is reflected in a range of slogans that appeared in the Lebanese streets. Some were on signs and walls, some were chanted, and some in interviews. This section analyzes the functions of some slogans that have impoliteness content. First, the examples are presented, transliterated and translated into English if they are in Arabic.

1) TFEH عليكن

/tfeh ʕali:kun/

We spit on you.

2) حلوا عن طيزنا

/ħilu ʕan ti:zna/

Get off our asses.

3) مش مزبوظة يحكمونا ولاد شرموظة

/miʃ mazbuʔa juħkmu:na wla:d ʃarmu:ʔa/

It is not right, that we are ruled by sons of whores

4) اعطي خبزك للخباز لو اخذ نصو وما تعطي ثقتك لوزير حتى لو نزل مصو

/aʕti xubzak laxba:zu ħata law akal nuʃu wma ʔaʕti ʔiqatak lawzi:r ħata law nizil maʃu/

Give the dough for the baker even if he eats half of it, and don't trust a minister even he sucks your cock.

5) عطي خبزك للخباز لو اخذ نصو وما تعطي صوتك لنانب حتى لو نزل مصو

/aʕti khubzak lakhbazu ħata law akal nuʃu wma ʔaʕti ʃuʔak lanaʔib ħata law nizil maʃu/

Give the dough to baker even if he eats half of it, and don't vote to a representative even if he sucks your cock.

6) ثورة يا عرصات

/θawra ja ʕarʃat/

Panders, it is a revolution.

7) Karma is a bitch, it's time for pay back.

8) هيدي اشرف منكن (الاشارة الى بنت ليل معروفة في لبنان)

/ħajdi ʔaʃraf minkun/

This wore (they refer to a famous slot in Lebanon) has chastity more than you.

9) فيكن تحطوا ضريبة عالشرمطة

/fikun tuħtu ʔaribih ʕalfarmata/

Can you put taxes on prostitute!

10) I should be at home cuddling my girlfriend but instead I'm here fighting for my land.

11) شلع..قلع..كلهم حرامية

/ʕaliʕ galiʕ kilhum ħaramijih/

You must be uprooted, because you are thieves.

12) We are all sexy models, pay us 16 millions

13) حرقنوا دين البلد، بكفي

/ħaraqtu di:n albalad bikafi/

It is enough, you burnt the religion of the country

14) طلعت ريحتكم

/iilʕat riħitkum/

Your ugly smell spreads

The previous examples show patently the prevalence of impoliteness in some slogans that were used in the Lebanese uprising. All of the displayed slogans used taboo words without any consideration of the public. The protestors, males and females as well violated the traditions by using sexual words in expressing their demands. According to Arabic culture, whether Arab Muslims or Christians, these words are unacceptable because using taboo words scratches the public modesty. For example, in (4) and (5) seem similar and use the same expression especially the second half '*suck your cock*', this expression shows absolute impoliteness by using taboo words '*suck your cock*.' The protestors used taboo expression to express their anger, the lost trust in politicians and the politicians' infidelity and cheating. Accordingly the first function for using impoliteness is expressing anger and frustration of current political regime in general, as Lebanese have been waiting long time for a real change in the political system of their country, a change that amends all the social, economic, religious, national, international and political defaults that have been made by the previous political regime. Also, they are looking for a better life and future and overcoming all differences.

Moreover, they used taboo words and expressed humiliation. Humiliation means the degradation of self-importance, which creates indignity or leads to a state of being shamed and chastened or feeling of lowliness (Klein, 1991). Humiliation can occur by swearing words. Cursing and swearing are face-threatening acts as they attack the negative and the positive face of the hearer. It is obvious from the examples, (3) and (6). In slogan (3) '*It is not right, we are ruled by sons of whores*' a direct humiliation to the political leaders as they were called (*sons of whores*). The committed the FTAs by cursing the political system. The word *bitch* is used in the Arab World and culture as a kind of indignity and shame for the hearer. And in the slogan number(6) '*Panders, it is a revolution*' again the protestors committed the FTAs by cursing or using in an attempt to humiliate and shame the political leaders as the word *panders* is used to bring indignity, shame, and lowliness.

In slogan (2) '*Get off our asses*' the protestors expressed their despair of any improvement in the deteriorating economic circumstances. Despair according to Merriam Webster means the loss of hope and a cause for hopelessness. They used the taboo word (*ass*) which expresses the huge hopelessness that the protestors had. Dysphemism is used here to show that things must be changed and the circumstances cannot be stood anymore. Also the political leaders will not be tolerated anymore, they must abandon their political position and give the chance for a new hope with new leaders.

In slogan (1) '*TFEH عليكن*' expressed the protestors' hatred to the political leaders by using bald on record impoliteness as (TFEH) which literary means (we spit on you); it is a direct FTA to the addressee. Spitting is a universal sign of anger, hatred and disrespect. It is considered taboo in the Arabic culture and is not used unless the speaker reaches the highest level of hatred, disrespect and despising in order to show the addressee that they are disgusting and do not worth even to be addressed by words anymore and they should leave.

Using impoliteness, especially dysphemism (bald on record) is used as a kind of threatening. It means according to Merriam Webster ‘expressing threat, harm, or danger, or a possibility of approaching troubles or danger.’ In slogan (7) ‘*Karma is a bitch, it’s time for pay back*’ the protestors threatened the political leaders that they are going to be punished. The protesters used the word (*bitch*) which is a taboo word in Arabic culture. They called Karma as a bitch. Karma which is according to Hinduism and Buddhism is ‘the sum of a person's actions in this and previous states of existence, viewed as deciding their fate in future existences.’ It also means ‘good intent and good deeds contribute to good karma and happier rebirths, while bad intent and bad deeds contribute to bad karma and bad rebirths’ (Halbfass, 2000). By calling it bitch they meant that they did not believe that the punishment would come so they would judge and punish those who caused harm for them and for their country.

In slogan (8) ‘*This whore (they refer to a famous slot in Lebanon) has chastity more than you*’, the protestors used impoliteness by referring to a slot who is famous in Lebanon to insult the political leaders in Lebanon. An insult is using a rude or scornful expression or statement in order to offend the addressee’s feeling. Goffman (1972) points that insult is a comment which is considered as a comeback. Allan and Burrige (1991) defined it as the disrespect the addressee’s face and damage the social harmony. By doing this the protestors considered themselves the toppers, the dominants and the political leaders were inferior to them.

In the following examples the protestors employed impoliteness to express the corruption of the political leaders in Lebanon. Corruption means dishonesty and deceitfulness. Political corruption is when a government pretends to be righteous while it uses the public to gain benefits for particular group. In (9) ‘*Can you put taxes on prostitute?*’ and (12) ‘*We are all sexy models, pay us 16 millions.*’ The idea was nude the government and to show that the protestors were aware and knew where the people’s money was spent. The protestors used bald on record strategy by using the word (*sexy*) in (12) and (*prostitute*) in (9) which are both taboo words and not accepted in Arabic culture. (*Prostitute*) in (9) and (*sexy models*) in (12) are indicators that show that most of the income of Lebanon is spent on prostitution, and those in power are indulged in prostitution and their own main concern is their own pleasure. This is a critique of the Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri who paid about \$16 million to South African model, who had an emotional relationship several years ago according to New York Times. This is a direct critique to the Prime Minister for paying money to a bikini model rather than investing this money in poor country.

The protestors also expressed persistence by using dysphemism as in slogan (10) ‘*I should be at home cuddling my girlfriend but instead I’m here fighting for my land.*’ Persistence means to continue with determination and patience. This slogan showed that the protestors left their most desired things and stayed in streets to overcome the repression and the regime and to gain their country back. Using the word *cuddling* is taboo in Arabic culture and is not used in public.

Yet, it was used in public and violated the cultural norms to show the importance of staying in streets and fighting the corrupted government to regain Lebanon.

In slogan (11) '*you must be uprooted, because you are thieves*' the protestors used bald on record impoliteness strategy as using the word (*thieves*), this word was used to express infidelity, disloyalty and betrayal. Using a taboo word with the verb *take off* indicated the public's desire to get rid of the government and the people in charge as a result of being disloyal and infidel. So the slogan was a call for a deep hang in the political system. Slogan (13) '*It is enough, you burnt the religion if the country*', which is a call for political freedom and democracy. The protestors also used a taboo word (*religion*) which is unnecessary addition to the slogan, but to show the horrible degree of destruction and the need for change. Slogan (14) '*Your ugly smell spreads*' was also a call for a deep change in the political system. The use of the taboo word (*your ugly smell*) showed the deep desire for the change because the protestors cannot stand the politicians' actions so they used the word (*smell*) to indicate that the situation was no more bearable.

According to table 1 below the analysis of the selected slogans reveals eight different linguistic functions and ways for using the language. Expressing insult was the most frequent linguistic functions as it was revealed eight times in different slogans with 26.66%. Expressing anger came second as it was revealed seven times in different slogans with 23.33%. Expressing humiliation came next as it was revealed six times in different slogans with 20%. Expressing corruption came in fourth as it was revealed three times in different slogans with 10%. Expressing change came fifth as it was revealed twice in different slogans with 6.66%. the least frequent functions were expressing despair, expressing hatred, expressing warning and expressing persistence as they was revealed once each in different slogans.

Table (1) Frequency of the socio-pragmatic functions of slogans used in the Lebanese Uprising

	Functions	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Anger	7	23.33%
2	Corruption	3	10%
3	Humiliation	6	20%
4	Despair	1	3.33%
5	Hatred	1	3.33%
6	Warning	1	3.33%
7	Insult	8	26.66%
8	Persistence	1	3.33%
9	Change	2	6.66%
	Total number	30	100%

Conclusion

This study aims at investigating and analyzing the socio-pragmatic functions of the Lebanese slogans. The most prominent difference that was clear in this study was depending on dysphemism by the protestors to express their demands. They employed taboo words as a part of their language. Using taboo words and expressions is against the culture, norms and traditions of Muslim and Christian in the Arab World. The Lebanese employed dysphemism to express nine functions; expressing change, expressing anger, expressing corruption, insulting, humiliating, expressing persistence, warning, and expressing despair. The study finds that the Lebanese break the barriers of using taboo words and expressions as they used them in different contexts and situations. Also, it finds that females equated males in employing dysphemism in expressing their demands and feelings as many of the slogans that had taboo words and expressions were raised by females. Besides, the study finds that both Muslims and Christians used dysphemism in the slogans that they raised in the current Uprising. Moreover, the younger protestors as well the elderly used dysphemism in the raised slogans. The study provides insight into how the Lebanese protestors succeeded to employ dysphemism and using taboo words and expressions in expressing their political, economic, personal, and social demands.

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