

As it can be seen in Table 2, the candidate who used humor the most was Donald Trump with six humor acts in total. Four out of the six humor acts were attacks of the face of one of his opponents. He was followed by Candidate Christie who used humor as an FTA three times out of the five times he used humor. The remaining candidates used humor once or twice and most of the times the act contained an FTA.

In most of the cases, humor was employed to threaten someone else's face. This suggests that humor in political debates is in fact used as a device to mediate aggressive attacks of an opponent.

Throughout the debates, there seemed to be a pattern of three targets. The first one was attacking opponents from the same party, the second attacking opponents from the Democratic party, which mainly consisted of questioning Hilary Clinton's suitability for the presidency, and third, criticizing Obama's administration. In what follows, a number of representative excerpts are discussed in detail to exemplify the various humorous FTAs for each of the targets listed above.

4.1.1. FTAs Directed Towards Republican Party Opponents.

Some of the FTA used by the Republican candidates were targeted towards the other candidates in their own party. Even though the candidates of the same party share some of the ideals and values common to the Republicans, they do have different action plans and strategies. The attacks in these situations question these plans and strategies as well as the others' past experiences in politics. Next, I present the analysis of three of the six events in which candidates used humor to threaten the face of another candidate from the Republican party.

Excerpt 1

The first example happened in the August 6th debate. Trump gave his opinion on health care. After several attempts, Paul was finally able to question Trump's position on the single payer system.

Paul: So I think you're on the wrong side of this if you're still arguing for a single-payer system.

Trump: (...) I don't think you heard me. You're having a hard time tonight.¹

In this scene, Trump uses humor, even sarcasm, in order to avoid answering the question while simultaneously questioning Paul's performance in the debate. He presents two scripts, the one expected from a candidate which is being attentive (script 1) and the one he is using to attack his opponent, being inattentive (script 2). By doing so, Paul's face is threatened because the audience expects the candidates to have a good performance during the debate and paying attention is part of it. By showcasing Paul, Trump positions himself as a better and superior presidential candidate.

Excerpt 2

This excerpt also happened in the August 6th debate. In this case, Governor Christie was asked whether Governor Huckabee was wrong for saying he could save Social Security and Medicare without taking any of the measures Christie mentioned previously.

¹ NORMAL/ABNORMAL (attentive/inattentive), LM: Juxtaposition, SI: Trump and Paul are having a discussion on health care, TA: Paul (performance), NS: Rebuttal, LA: N/A

Wallace: Governor Huckabee says he can save Social Security and Medicare without doing any of that. Is he lying?

Christie: No, he's not lying, he's just wrong²

Something really interesting happens in this situation. There are two pairs of scripts being opposed but none of them include something positive. When Governor Christie mentions the first part of his answer, the audience expects to hear an affirmation. However, that never happens. The first script implies that Huckabee is a liar which is not a desired characteristic for the future President. Then Christie adds, in the second script, that his opponent is not a liar but worse even, he is wrong, making the audience question whether the candidate is competent or not. This is a dangerous threat for Huckabee's image. Not only was he accused of being a liar, which he was not able to rebut himself, but he was also portrayed as incompetent.

Excerpt 3

On October 28th, Kasich mentioned he was the only one involved in the balancing of the federal budget. In order to make himself look like a more suitable candidate, he started attacking his opponents directly. He questioned whether they had any experience with budgeting. His comments were not welcomed by Trump who, although he had not been attacked directly, took the opportunity to diminish his opponent's credibility.

² SO: GOOD/BAD (Honest/liar and dishonest/wrong). LM: Garden-path, SI: Christie was asked whether Governor Huckabee was lying when he stated he could save Social Security and Medicare, TA: Huckabee (Knowledge), NS: Question-Answer, LA: N/A

Kasich: (..) We cannot elect somebody that doesn't know how to do the job. You have got to pick somebody who has experience, somebody that has the know-how, the discipline (...)

Trump: (...) And just thirdly, he [Kasich] was so nice. He was such a nice guy. And he said, oh, I'm never going to attack. But then his poll numbers tanked. He has got — that is why he is on the end.³

In this situation, Trump decides to make it obvious that Kasich is not doing well in the polls. Previously in the debate, it was mentioned that the candidates were placed according to their numbers in the polls. By highlighting Kasich's situation, Trump threatens his image as a successful candidate, someone with good numbers. The two opposing scripts are portraying that, first, good candidates have a good position in the polls and second, since Kasich is not doing well, is not a suitable candidate and that, as a consequence, he is placed last. At the same time, Trump is taking the opportunity to highlight his position in the polls and therefore positioning himself as a superior candidate.

Summary

The situations analyzed in this section have something in common. The candidates are not criticizing their opponents' ideas; they are discrediting their opponents by highlighting their flaws as politicians and hence candidates to the presidency. The attacks are not as aggressive as might have been expected but still have the strong potential to damage the opponents' faces for the remainder of the election process. In all the cases analyzed, the

³ NORMAL/ABNORMAL (suitable/unsuitable), LM: Garden-path, SI: while answering a question, Kasich directly threatens his opponents' faces, Trump attacks him back, TA: Kasich (performance in polls), NS: Comment, LA: N/A.

ultimate goal is to position oneself as a better Republican candidate to run for the presidency since the first step in the elections is the election of the one candidate that will run against the candidate of the Democratic party. As a consequence, all the candidates try to position themselves as superior by threatening the others' faces and placing themselves as the best option to represent the party in the upcoming elections.

Even though the Republican candidates are the immediate opponent, there is another adversary, the Democratic party and its own candidates. In the speech acts analyzed, the attacks towards the Democratic party outnumbered the attacks towards their own party members. In the next section, some of the excerpts exemplifying how humor was used to attack the candidates from the Democratic party are discussed.

4.1.2. FTAs Directed Towards Democratic Party Members.

The most common situations found were attacks towards the opponent party and its candidates. In these cases, the Republicans are attacking the opponent party to avoid the election of a member of the other party and to secure the election of one of their own as the next President of the United States. The candidates' attacks go deeper, criticizing characters and ideas as well as questioning every single action by the opponent resulting in sometimes very personal attacks.

Excerpt 4

At some point during the debate on August 6th, the candidates were asked about their opinions regarding their female opponent Hillary Clinton. Clinton is a member of the Democratic party and her candidacy was an important topic during all of the debates. In

most cases, the candidates decided to attack her directly but in some others, the candidates decided to be more indirect and to use humor.

Wallace: If Hillary Clinton is the nominee and she comes at you with that kind of line of attack, how will you take Iraq?

Carson: If Hillary is the candidate, which I doubt, that would be a dream come true.⁴

A suitable opponent is to be feared by his other rivals. In this case, Carson describes Clinton's candidacy as a 'dream come true' which is opposite from what one would expect from a qualified opponent. The script opposition happens by stating that the candidate is unqualified. This is a major threat to Clinton's face as a suitable candidate because it positions her on an inferiority level while positioning all of the members of the Republican party as better options for the position.

Excerpt 5

On October 28th, the candidates were asked to talk about their weaknesses. Yet, most of the candidates focused on their strengths rather than their weaknesses and Christie took this opportunity to highlight some of his opponents' flaws thus avoiding to answer the question and simultaneously attacking his opponents.

⁴ SO: NORMAL/ABNORMAL (qualified/unqualified), LM: Juxtaposition, SI: Carson discredits Clinton as an opponent to be feared. TA: Clinton (candidacy), NS: Question-Answer, LA: NA.

Christie: I don't see a lot of weakness on this stage, quite frankly. Where I see the weakness is in those three people that are left on the Democratic stage. You know, I see a socialist, an isolationist and a pessimist. And for the sake of me, I can't figure out which one is which.⁵

As mentioned previously, Christie took the opportunity to threaten the face of the different members of the opposing party listing values that are highly undesirable of any future leader of the country. Christie's attack is further strengthened by his unexpected implication that each of the candidates has all three of these undesirable characteristics which renders them all as unsuitable for the presidency.

Excerpt 6

During the debate on the 6th of August, the candidates also discussed the military and foreign policies. Some candidates questioned the decisions that have been made by Obama's administration and most of them agreed that they would take different measures. Even though Hillary Clinton was the main target of the following attack, Walker took the opportunity to also implicate the current administration under President Obama.

⁵ SO: GOOD/BAD (suitable/unsuitable) LM: Garden-path, SI: All candidates were asked about their weaknesses, TA: Democratic party members (Suitability), NS: Monologue, LA: NA.

Baier: Governor Walker, as President, what would you do if Russian President Vladimir Putin started a campaign to destabilize NATO allies Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, mirroring the actions Putin took at the early days of Ukraine?

Walker: Well first off, for the cyberattack with Russia the other day, it's sad to think right now, but probably the Russian and Chinese government know more about Hillary Clinton's e-mail server than do the members of the United States Congress.⁶

Walker's attack has three targets: first of all, Walker insinuated that foreign governments have much more information about the US government than the American population. That is a threat towards the present administration, which supposedly should be transparent. Also, it implies foreign governments are conspiring against the US and its politics. Most importantly though, Walker uses the opportunity to threaten the face of Democratic party member Hillary Clinton. As part of the US government, one's information should be known within the country, not all over the world. This situation puts national security at risk. A candidate that allows this to happen is not the best option for the presidency. The situation is humorous because one would expect the government to be transparent with its population (script 1) but the truth is that the government doesn't share the information, that other governments apparently have no problem obtaining.

⁶ SO: NORMAL/ABNORMAL (Transparent/Corrupt), LM: Juxtaposition, SI: Other countries have more insight into US government information, TA: Clinton (primary), Obama's administration (secondary), and other governments (third), NS: Question-Answer, LA: NA.

Summary

These scenarios exemplified how the candidates were threatening much more than a person *per se*. Their attacks were directed towards the other party and the different set of values and ideas of its members. Although humor was also used in these situations, the attacks were stronger and the face threats appeared more direct as well. In sum, all of these FTAs served to decrease the suitability of the opponent party's candidates, Clinton in particular, and, consequently, to position their own party and candidates as a much better option for the upcoming elections.

4.1.3. FTAs Directed towards Obama's Administration.

The last pattern of FTAs is directed towards the current administration of President Obama. This type of attack, however, was not as frequent as the other two because Obama does not represent a threat; his administration is almost over and he cannot be reelected.

Excerpt 7

Again on the topic of foreign policy, in the debate on August 6th, the questions were about General Qassem Soleimani and his trip to Russia violating the UN Security Council's resolution. Trump was asked how he would respond in case he was the President. As expected, Trump used the opportunity to threaten the image of the current President by stating he would do the opposite.

Baier: So, Mr. Trump, if you were President, how would you respond to this?

Trump: I would be so different from what you have right now. Like, the polar opposite. We have a President who doesn't have a clue. I would say he's incompetent, but I don't want to do that because that's not nice.⁷

Trump aggressively attacks Obama when he says that the President 'does not have a clue'. The audience might expect him to provide reasons for his judgement but Trump continues by stating he would not say the President is incompetent when he already did so. The humor arises because he is explicitly calling the President incompetent while also arguing that it is not appropriate to explicitly express such an opinion. What is even more sarcastic is that Trump is known for not being 'nice'. His claim of wanting to be 'nice' is therefore hypocrisy at its best causing an effective opposition of scripts and thus humor. It is also a threat targeted towards Obama and his performance as President. In this situation, Trump is directly comparing himself to the current Chief of State and positions himself as more suitable than Obama.

⁷ SO: NORMAL/ABNORMAL (explicit/implicit), LM: Juxtaposition, SI: What Trump would do different about foreign policy, TA: Obama's administration, NS: Question-Answer, LA: NA.

Excerpt 8

The US has been known worldwide as a powerful military force, a fact that a considerable proportion of the US population take pride in. When this subject came up on August 6th, Huckabee directly attacked the decisions that were made under Obama's administration. After several direct attacks, he used humor with two potential effects: to soften the attacks (which is unlikely) or to actually strengthen them by being sarcastic.

Huckabee: The military is not a social experiment. The purpose of the military is to kill people and break things (...) A lot of the B-52s we're flying, we've only got 44 that are in service combat ready, and the fact is, most of them are older than me.⁸

Huckabee indirectly made fun of himself in order to attack the military decisions made by the current government which threatens the face of Obama's administration. First, bombers are supposed to be updated but they are not. Second, he is comparing the age of the bombers with his own implying, sarcastically, that the bombers are old. By stating that the bombers are older than him, he is pointing out that the US Army is outdated. This implicates that the US is no longer a strong military force to be recognized worldwide because of its lack of modern equipment.

⁸ SO: NORMAL/ABNORMAL (new/old), LM: Simile, SI: B-52s should be in ultimate conditions but they are old, TA: Obama's administration (priorities), NS: Monologue, LA: NA.

Excerpt 9

The last excerpt occurred on October 28th. Carson was asked about his opinion on the price raising of life saving drugs in the pharmaceutical industry and whether the government should be involved in this situation. After answering the question, Christie elaborated on the topic. He argued that the US does not need new laws or price regulations.

Christie: And to expand Dr. Carson's question, (...), does anybody out there think that giving Washington, D.C., the opportunity to run the pharmaceutical industry is a good idea, given how well they have done running the government?⁹

Christie decided to use humor to attack the current administration. His utterance includes a rhetorical question that one might answer positively. However, given the growth of the national debt, which he implies, he is indirectly pointing out how bad the situation really is. Therefore, the function of his question is to actually attack the performance of the current government.

Summary

This last pattern was not as common as the other. Yet, pointing out the flaws of the current administration gives the Republican candidates the opportunity to increase their own suitability and electability. By using FTAs with humor, the candidates claim that they would do a better job if elected President.

⁹ SO: GOOD/ BAD (good performance/poor performance), LM: Juxtaposition, SI: US government involvement in pharmaceutical prices , TA: Obama's administration (performance) , NS: Comment, LA: NA.

4.1.4. FTAs Against the Media

One FTA, however, did not follow any of the previously discussed patterns because it was directed towards the media.

Excerpt 10

One of the most heated moments in the October 28th debate was when some of the candidates suggested that the media was not being fair to the candidates because some of the questions were asked with the purpose of harming the image of the members of the Republican party. Cruz used this moment to attack the media while trying to save his own face and also attacking the face of his opponent party.

Quintanilla: Does your opposition to it show that you're not the kind of problem-solver American voters want?

Cruz: You know, let me say something at the outset. The questions that have been asked so far in this debate illustrate why the American people don't trust the media. (...) The contrast with the Democratic debate, where every fawning question from the media was, "Which of you is more handsome and why?"¹⁰

Cruz attacked the media by implying it is not being fair. He states that the media is constantly attacking the Republican party members. He also used this as an opportunity to attack his opponents' faces by highlighting that the media is asking difficult questions of the Republican candidates while the Democratic party candidates are only asked easy, even

¹⁰ SO: NORMAL/ABNORMAL (presidential characteristics/superficial characteristics), LM: Juxtaposition, SI: Media is asking questions that have the potential to threaten the suitability of the Republican candidates for the presidency, TA: Media (primary) and Democratic party members (secondary), (fairness), NS: Question-Answer, LA: NA

trivial, questions. This affirmation threatens the image of adequate candidates. The future President of the United States is supposed to be more than looks and with his comment, Cruz is questioning whether they have what it takes to be President. In this case, the scripts are opposing because the media is supposed to ask questions about politics that are challenging and not superficial ones about appearances. Thus, he is not only attacking the media for their unfairness but also implies that the Democratic candidates lack the characteristics of a President.

Summary of the Chapter

Each of the patterns identified and discussed above serves a different purpose. The first one, threatening their fellow party members, might position one of them above the rest which consequently might lead to the nomination of the Republican party and, perhaps, to becoming the next President of the USA. By threatening the other party, the second pattern, the candidates are assuring that the Republican party is a better option to run the government. Finally, by attacking the current government, the candidates position themselves as superior and therefore more suitable competitors than the Democratic candidates to send the strong message to not elect another Democrat as the next President to the voters.