

## **5. Conclusion**

The use of humor goes beyond entertaining and amusing others. Humor is also used as a device to mediate the interactions among opponents in situations such as political debates. In the cases analyzed previously, the candidates employed humor to indirectly attack their opponents and to decrease their likability while positioning themselves as more suitable candidates for the US presidency. This thesis investigated how these interactions occurred. In the three political debates analyzed for this study, ten out of the thirteen candidates used humor as a tool to attack their opponents during the events. More importantly, seventeen out of the twenty-two uses of humor contained a face threatening act. This suggests that humor as an FTA is an important aspect of the use of funny remarks during political debates.

The first research question was concerned with the use of humor as an FTA in political debates and it was found that humor is used to indirectly attack others. Humor, for example, helps to introduce aggressive comments. Some candidates preferred using sarcasm which has the potential to either soften or strengthen the attack depending on its perlocutionary effect on the hearer and, in the specific case of this study, the audience. Therefore, an attack can be perceived as such by the hearer but not the audience and vice versa. In either case, the utterances analyzed in this study were used with the intention to position oneself or one's own party above one's opponent or the Democratic party by aiming to destroy the public self-image of the other.

The results of the present study also suggest that the candidates preferred to use humor to introduce an aggressive comment in order to save their own face or to gain face while causing their opponents to lose their faces. The use of humor as an FTA has been shown to be an effective choice to attack others. Not only does it amuse the audience, it also is an indirect strategy which does not put at risk the speaker's face as long as the target does not respond back. By softening these attacks, the opponents might not feel the need to respond to them. At the same time, these successful humor acts have the potential to influence the audience's opinion in regards to who they should vote for because who would vote for an inferior candidate? Influencing public opinion is therefore the answer to the second research question which asked why humor is used as an FTA.

In addition, this study identified different patterns of attacking targets. These three patterns serve different purposes. The illocutionary force of the utterances intensifies depending on who the target of the humor act is. The strongest critiques were levelled against those who are not members of the candidates' own party and with whom they do not share ideas or beliefs.

This thesis explored a different dimension of the relation of humor and face threatening acts. The use of humor acts to attack others happens not only in debates but in daily life situations. These attacks are softened by the nature of humor but are still very effective to make obvious that someone is wrong or has certain flaws. The strength of the threats is closely related to the relationship the interlocutors have with one another as well as the culture and context in which the communicative act is taking place.

It should be noted that in order to obtain more accurate results, it is necessary to watch the remaining debates. Of interest would also be the study of the Democratic primary

debates and to compare the use of humor as an FTA across political party lines to investigate whether a particular political party has a preference for a specific kind of humor act or not indicating that the use of humor is also bound by the values of each party. Another study should investigate the use of sarcasm as FTAs to find out whether sarcasm actually causes the attack to become even stronger than a direct FTA. A third investigation could explore the use of humor to save one's face, an aspect that was not looked into in the present study.

In conclusion, direct FTAs can be softened by humor. The use of humor as a communicative strategy can be applied to different contexts and for different purposes. In the specific case of the presidential primaries in the USA, the use of humor as an FTA had the objective of influencing the audience's view by decreasing the opponents' electability and increasing one's own image as a better candidate for the presidency. Therefore, humor has the very serious potential of being a decisive factor in who will receive the final vote in the election of the new US President.