

A STUDY OF LITOTES AND HYPERBOLE AS IMPOLITENESS TOOLS

Aytemiz Abbas Abbasova

Candidate for a degree,
Azerbaijan University of Languages

Abstract

This paper studies the ways in which litotes and hyperbole can be used as impoliteness tools, but very little or no study has been done relating to this topic. My research will explore the vivid classification of litotes and hyperbole and their use in speech. We will see interlocutors', especially listeners', interpretations of examples of litotes and hyperbole and their functions, especially features of expressing impoliteness.

Keywords: *litotes, hyperbole, exaggeration, impoliteness, context, figurative meaning*

There are a lot of definitions for litotes. A unique classification for all ones is litotes, denoting double negation. The feature denoting double negation is interpreted differently by linguists. According to O. Jespersen, litotes is a figure of speech in which differentiation is expressed by negating the contrary [Jespersen 1917, p. 62]. For example, not unhandsome means "handsome, not bad, etc.

Horn's classification relating to litotes is the same as Perrine's definition. Horn explains his classification through examples. It is not bad. In this sentence, "not bad" is interpreted contextually by intonation. When it is pronounced with a falling-rise tone, it expresses faint praise, which is the best evaluation of the speaker, whereas "not bad!" with an intonation of surprise means very good phrasing [Horn 2001, p. 356].

We note that the expression "not bad" can be interpreted as impoliteness. In this case, it is based on expectation. Such as, "The result is not bad". When it is related to displeasure, it is used in an impolite way.

Dascal makes a distinction between litotes and irony, in which he distinguishes irony with the opposite meaning of what is said, while litotes intensify the effect of understatement. Moreover, Dascal notes that litotes can be changed to irony by omitting the negation. For example:

He is no Adonis. (Litotes is used.)

He is an Adonis. (Irony is used.)

In the first sentence, there is a confrontation, whereas in the second example, one doesn't want to make a sudden turnabout, but one wants the mind to take note of the ridicule arising from incompatibility [Dascal 2003, p. 615]. According to Cruse, litotes is classified as an understatement for a specific effect. That effect is either to de-emphasize something or to emphasize certain intentions. For this feature, this term is also used as a figure of speech for impoliteness. So Cruse claims that the effect in relation to litotes is either to emphasize or de-emphasize, depending on the speaker's or writer's intention and the situation [Cruse 2006, p. 186]. Osmankadic explains litotes for certain function: The function of uncertainty is based on the speaker's uncertain opinion about the reality of a certain aspect. It denotes impoliteness. The function of politeness is to let the speaker know that the proposition is true. The third is irony. It means that the speaker is uncertain and reluctant, even if this performance has been assumed for the occasion. In this case, there is impoliteness, so the speaker has a reluctant, uncertain feeling about reality.

Hyperbole is a powerful rhetorical form when used properly, but a terrible distraction when used improperly [Brendan McGoogan 2008, p. 13]. It is based on figurative meaning, so readers or listeners should take care to understand these expressions not literally but in their figurative meanings. This meaning is derived from the context. Hyperbole is an exaggeration of the expression. The important factor is that balance must be maintained in the use of exaggeration by the speaker or writer. Otherwise, the interlocutor's or the writer's credibility may become weaker for the listeners or readers. If its use reaches the highest level, a loss of truthfulness happens, and it describes unreality. In this case, impoliteness happens. This kind of impoliteness is evaluated as mock impoliteness. For instance, your weight is one ton. In this sentence, "one ton" is hyperbole. His or her weight is exaggerated. So it is evaluated as mock impoliteness. Mock impoliteness is not real; it is inherent impoliteness, and it is used among people who are close-knit.

According to Cruse, hyperbole is a figure of speech implicating an intended exaggeration for rhetorical effect [Cruse 2006, p. 80]. Such exaggerations may be negative or positive. In both cases, hyperbole does not have a literal meaning.

Hyperbole and litotes violating the conversation principle are linguistic means of politeness as well as impoliteness. In pragmatics, they are investigated within the politeness and impoliteness categories and their strategies. Initially, we have to pay attention to the matter of truthfulness. We evaluate reality as not always being a case of making a direct choice between truth and falsehood. From this aspect, hyperbole refers to exaggeration, and litotes are in contrast to this definition. According to Leech, "hyperbole" refers to a case where the speaker's description is stronger than it is warranted by the state of affairs described, and "litotes" refers to the converse of this [Leech 1983, p. 165]. These linguistic tools violate the maxims of quality and quantity. For instance, "It made my blood boil." In this sentence, hyperbole relates to the violation of the maxim of quality; another example is "I wasn't born yesterday," which violates the maxim of quantity. In some cases, hyperbole relates to overstatement and litotes to understatement. In contrast to this opinion, Leech claims that both hyperbole and litotes aren't the same as these terms (overstatement and understatement) because overstatement and understatement are aimed at deceiving the addressee. Hence, hyperbole and litotes are patterns of conversational implicature, i.e., indirect ways of expressing utterance [Leech 1983, p. 165]. As they have the function of implicature, they are significant in expressing impoliteness or politeness. The analysis of politeness in the utterances in which hyperbole or litotes are used has already been done; at present, polite cases are investigated in the examples of hyperbole and litotes. Naturally, overstating an utterance is polite, and understating belongs to impoliteness. For example, *that was a delicious meal!* This sentence is interpreted as praising another person. In this case, it is evaluated as a politeness strategy. Depending on the situation, this utterance about a meal can be impolite, especially mock impoliteness. However, some sentences expressing overstatement and understatement can possibly be used as impolite strategies or polite categories. They are easily analyzed because they are used in criticism, evaluation, or praise. For example, *"Her speech didn't impress me very much"* conveys criticism; therefore, it is evaluated as an impolite tool. The sentence, which is expressed in a positive evaluative form, conveys a negative implicit meaning. This case is based on implicature. For instance:

That wasn't such a bad meal that I cooked.

That wasn't such a bad meal that you cooked.

The compliment expresses self-evaluation in the first sentence, but it is accepted as impoliteness in the second sentence because it conveys criticism. So, the phenomenon of implicature has an important role in analyzing sentences. Hyperbole and litotes enhance not only politeness but also impoliteness in interaction. Expressions used in overstatement, such as *"I have been working my fingers to the bone"* and some idiomatic expressions used in the exaggerated way of universal quantifiers, for example, *"I'm completely broke"*. The majority of these references relate to the extremities of scales. Such phrases as *"Her eyes nearly popped out of her head"* are used in relation to the level of surprise. Another example: *"It made my blood boil"* means to the highest point on the scale of anger [Leech 1983, p. 165]. We note that these kinds of expressions are grouped into two forms. The first form denoting gratitude, positive evaluation, and pleasant notions can be used as a politeness tool. The second group conveys contempt, anger, insult, etc., which may be expressed as impoliteness.

Litotes and hyperbole are related to irony. This can occur in one sentence or in different forms of the same sentence. In this situation, word choice, intonation, stress, word order, and other linguistic phenomena are important. So, this occurrence can be realized through phonetic, syntactic, and lexical means. We need phonetic, lexical, and syntactic means; they are considered stress, intonation, word order, and converted sentences from one type to another (from declarative to imperative). For instance:

You are a fine friend [Grice et al., 1975, p. 5].

This sentence expresses either polite or ironic interpretations, especially impolite interpretations. This statement also violates the maxim of quality and denotes the opposite form of friendly relations, or friendship. When we convert the word order of that sentence, it is specialized for an ironic interpretation. Such a *fine friend you are!* In this case, this sentence expresses irony directly; when we use elaboration and exaggeration, such as *"a fine friend,"* hyperbole may occur. If we add the negative particle "not", such as *"You are not a fine friend,"* litotes can happen.

References

1. *Brendan, McGuigan. Rhetorical Devices: A Handbook and Activities for Student Writers. Prestwick House, Inc. USA. 2008*
2. *Cruse, A. A Glossary of Semantics and Pragmatics. Edinburgh University Press Ltd. Edinburgh, Scotland. 2006.*
3. *Dascal, M. Interpretation and Understanding. John Benjamins B.V. Amsterdam. 2003.*
4. *Grice, H. P. Logic and Conversation. New York: Academic Press. 1975.*
5. *Horn, L. R. A Natural History of Negation. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. The USA. 2001.*
6. *Jespersen, O. Negation in English and other Languages. Cornell University Library. USA. 1917.*
7. *Leech, G. Principles of Pragmatic. Longman Linguistic Library, 1983.*
8. *Perrine, L. Sound & Sense. An Introduction to Poetry. Third Edition. New York. Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1969.*