



Political Debatement: Incivility, Contempt, and Humiliation in Parliamentary and Public Discourse

Ofer Feldman (Ed.)

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Focusing on sensationalism rather than substantive discussion, political debatement can be understood as the deterioration of political discourse and behavior, which typically includes the use of inflammatory language, personal attacks, and hand gestures. “The proliferation of debatement and ridicule in political discourse is inexorably linked to a number of interconnected twenty-first century phenomena” (Sengul, 2023, p.108). As an important part of political activities, debatement language is attracting more and more attention, and research on this topic is becoming increasingly popular. The collected volume under review, *Political Debatement: Incivility, Contempt, and Humiliation in Parliamentary and Public Discourse*, edited by Ofer Feldman, assembles the contributions of the first group of pioneers in the study of political debatement from different countries and hopes to shed more light on the forms, functions, and effects of political debatement. The volume has twelve chapters, which are divided into four parts.

The collected volume begins with Ofer Feldman’s introduction to common knowledge about political debatement and the key issues related to it. It reviews the current tendency of uncivil language in politics, which arises from the belief that using rude and harsh language can be more useful for politicians to reach their goals than using positive and civil language. Feldman proposes the definition of political debatement, seeing it as derogatory language used to strongly demean or degrade a certain target involved in political activities. He deepens the conceptualization of debatement by making a practical distinction between debatement, incivility, and hate speech, and pinpoints the specific ways of accessing political debatement and the modes of interaction between debater(s) and their target(s). In the end, the chapter details the defining features of political debatement and identifies some key issues that should be addressed in future research.

Part One contains three chapters devoted to incivility in deliberative bodies. In Chapter 2, Catalina Fuentes-Rodríguez examines the attack on the opposition in Spanish politics using qualitative methods to uncover strategies for attacking the image and identity of political opponents. She elaborates on two forms of debasement language: the direct forms, which include insults, accusations, and intensification, and the indirect forms, such as irony, comparison, indirect illocutionary acts, and fictionalization. The findings indicate that it is more frequent to employ indirect forms to ridicule, accuse, and degrade the image of the opponent, due to the prohibition of aggressive and direct attack in the parliamentary arena in Spain. Chapter 3 delves into the debasing language used by the Members of Parliament in the Malaysian parliament. After analyzing the parliamentary discourse extracted from the scholarly output and media reports from 2007 to 2020, Debbita Ai Lin Tan notes that the Members of Parliament are accustomed to behave with decorum, but the multiple patterns of impolite and discriminatory behavior have their place in the political arena. Debasing language not only fosters racial divisiveness but also reinforces hypermasculine identity, which is exhibited through the use of profanities and sexist remarks. Chapter 4 presents a longitudinal research of incivility in the British parliament. Walter and Poljak investigate the way British Prime Ministers and Members of Parliament use trait attacks and uncivil attacks during Prime Minister Questions (PMQs) in the period between 2010 and 2020. They find that the use of uncivil attacks fluctuates and becomes more frequent when elections draw closer. Although uncivil attacks are common in the speeches of British Prime Ministers and Members of Parliament, female Prime Ministers are less likely to use uncivil attacks than male Prime Ministers.

Part Two brings together four chapters on disparaging officeholders, aspiring politicians, and members of the public. In Chapter 5, Ofer Feldman reveals the nature of debasement language used by Japanese political leaders. Japanese culture values politeness, respect, and sympathy, but many politicians in Japan make controversial, chauvinistic, and even discriminatory remarks on certain issues to spark debates. It is also worth noting that Japan upholds the principle that debasing comments do not lead to “loss of face”, and debasing language is not used in face-to-face communication to avoid face-threatening behaviors. Hongna Miao, in Chapter 6, analyzes the consistency and changes of debasement language in Chinese leaders’ speeches. Chinese traditional culture values politeness and moderation in public speeches, therefore, abusive language is rarely seen in national leaders’ public speeches. However, over

different periods in history and for specific political purposes, debasing language may be used to refer to some undesirable groups of people in national leaders' speeches. Chapter 7, written by Amit Julka, examines the way rhetorical strategies of ridicule and debasing language help Narendra Modi and the Bhartiya Janata Party delegitimize Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. Modi's political speeches rely on a more tacit strategy of innuendo to blame Gandhi for the issues of corruption and dynastic privileges. In Chapter 8, Ivanovic and Vukovic-Stamatovic detail the use of labels and attributes for degrading opponents in Montenegro's political discourse in the light of Critical Discourse Analysis. Delegitimization through lexicalization has proved to be rather explicit in political discourse. The politicians may seek to debase their opponents by identifying their referents and labeling them along semantic and pragmatic lines.

Part Three attends to humiliating, ridiculing, and degrading power holders. In Chapter 9, Marianthi Georgalidou explores Greek parliamentarians' aggressive and impolite language in the attack-defense sequences against adversaries and political crises. Debasing is the culmination of a series of face-threatening acts attacking politicians' ethos in a conversational context, which draws our attention to the interpersonal dynamics and the impact of debasing language on the perceived moral character of political figures. In Chapter 10, Kampka and Molek-Kozakowska reveal that the abusive attacks in Polish politics function as rhetorical and literary devices to garner political capital and reinforce hegemony. Politicians representing the ruling coalition parties use either direct or indirect derision and debasement to discredit the opposition and trigger fear and conflict. Powerful politicians tend to react with derisive comments and avoid engaging in argumentation. Rather, they fight against the critics by straightforward insults, subtly breaking taboos, historical analogies, name-calling, and vulgarity. In Chapter 11, Galanti and Hisherik focus on the political rhetoric of debasement in the discourse of Israel's Likud Party and the National Camp. Humiliation and debasement become popular strategies in the speech on key issues to delegitimize and even dehumanize opponents and institutions. Populist actors draw on the debasing language of their political opponents to deepen the rift in Israeli society and fuel feelings of racism and hatred, as observed by Wodak (2021, p. 6), "we are confronted with widespread and growing normalization of far-right policies, of formerly tabooed topics, wordings, and impolite or shameless behavior". In Part Four, also the final chapter, Sam Lehman-Wilzig constructs the theoretical framework for describing and regulating

debasing language by creating an intensity scale of invective in political debasement ranging from mildest to harshest against which the various debasing terms can be graded from the slightest to the most severe. The nature of political debasement becomes clearer when greater order and graded comparisons are brought to the nuances of invective differences. He endeavors to find specific ways and criteria for examining political debasement from the paradigm of discourse studies, thus laying a strong foundation for making debasing language a new research topic.

This collected volume is innovative, thought-provoking, and educational. It probes into the derogative rhetoric of political discourse and offers a range of interdisciplinary and panoramic studies in transnational, multicultural, and multi-institutional contexts. Debasing language is seen not only as a means of constructing a political identity but also as a force against negative views and criticism from political opponents. These chapters cover a variety of research methods used by scholars around the world, including quantitative and qualitative research, synchronic and diachronic research, and descriptive and interpretive research, with the aim of providing comprehensive and applicable paradigms from which we can derive our future research agenda. Drawing on insights from linguistics and political science, the collection of research in this volume can be used as a kaleidoscope to understand and gain insight into the characteristics of political discourse around the world. Despite all of these inspiring aspects, it is clear that the interlocked bond between debasing language and different political systems could also have been investigated by comparing the influence of ideological or cultural differences on language use. Nevertheless, this volume is an important resource for scholars and practitioners who are interested in political discourse studies.

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