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Unilateral Norm Breaking in a Presidential Debate: Lech Wałęsa Versus Aleksander Kwaśniewski

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This study analyzes the 1995 television presidential debate between Lech Wałęsa and Aleksander Kwaśniewski. We show that the debate's institutional nature was subverted by the former candidate's use of an informal register characterized by joocular tenor, use of marked forms of address, and disparaging metapragmatic comments. Wałęsa's casual style appeared to the other participants in the debate (his opponent, the journalists in the studio, the media, and the viewing public) as a bid to conduct the debate on his own terms, not as a "formal, public" event but as an "informal, personal" one. Such appropriation of the debate was resisted, and ultimately Wałęsa was held accountable for his actions and his style was judged negatively. According to the media reports of the election results, the negative perception of Wałęsa's debating style was largely responsible for tipping the electoral balance in favor of the other candidate.

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Lech Wałęsa and Aleksander Kwaśniewski were the two candidates for the presidency of Poland in the second round of the elections on November 19, 1995. Wałęsa was the incumbent after a term that many commentators did not consider successful (e.g., Paradowska, 1995). His advantage was that he was seen as the candidate who stood for Poland's drive to freedom and independence from Communism and the Soviet Union. Kwaśniewski, his opponent, was associated with the heritage of all that Wałęsa had fought against. Moreover, after Kwaśniewski's party gained a majority in the parliament, his victory would have meant seizure of the key political offices in Poland by the Democratic Left Alliance (DLA, *Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*), the party that was the direct descendant of the rulers of Communist Poland.

The differences between the candidates, however, went much further than the association with the opposing poles of the Polish political spectrum. Kwaśniewski constructed an image of self as an intelligent, educated man whose license to be a politician came not from his being one of the electorate, but rather from being one of the governing elite. Those who supported him, and there were a number of staunch anti-Communists among them (e.g., Drawicz, 1995), described him as a "good communicator," unlike Wałęsa, a politician who was able to speak "proper Polish" and had "something to say." Kwaśniewski was generally seen as a modern, progressive, "quality" politician. In contrast, those who supported Wałęsa's candidacy did so in the name of debarring the former Communist from taking the highest office, as Skalski (1995) put it, regardless of Wałęsa's shortcomings.

The issue of Wałęsa's inappropriate style received considerable attention in the Polish media from the time when he first stood for the Polish presidency in 1990 (e.g., see Walczak, 1991). Little, if any, of such criticism was present when Wałęsa first rose to prominence as leader of the workers' strikes in the Gdańsk shipyard in 1980 or later when he became the leader of the Solidarity trade unions. In the early years, the "imperfections" of his language seemed to fit his role as a folk hero, working-class man, and trade unionist. Wałęsa's language style was accepted then, we argue, because the interactional frame in which he operated in the early years of his public career was on the margins. Of course, his role in the democratization processes in Poland between 1980 and 1990 was hugely important. In addition to being the leader of Solidarity, he was a key player in the "roundtable" talks between the Solidarity-led opposition and the government in 1989. These talks led to the first democratic elections in

post-World War II Poland. Through the 1980s, however, he operated under the constraints of the Communist regime. Solidarity was delegalized, and in 1981 Wałęsa (along with many other democratic politicians) was imprisoned under martial law. During his imprisonment and after his release in 1982, Wałęsa was treated by the government as a “private citizen” and was denied access to the state-controlled media. Even his Nobel Peace Award in 1983 was dismissed by the authorities as an attempt by foreign powers to interfere with and destabilize the Polish political scene. Thus, although Wałęsa was centrally important in Polish political life, he functioned in the underground in unofficial opposition or as a kind of catalyst “patron saint” and facilitator of changes in political processes.

During these early years, Wałęsa was credited with great political intuition, negotiation skills, and power of persuasion. Rarely, if ever, did his communication style come into question. This changed in 1990 when he announced that he was running for the presidency of Poland. Wałęsa’s decision generated considerable criticism about his lack of education, “improper” use of Polish, lack of “good manners,” and so on. It could be argued that Wałęsa’s bid for the presidency was simply the legitimization of his position as the nation’s leader. However, the change of frame from acting on the fringe of the political scene as an (influential) advisor and commentator, to taking center stage as the head of state, with all the institutional paraphernalia, changed the “reading” of Wałęsa’s language and behavior.

In this article, we argue that the reactions to Wałęsa’s ways of “doing” political discourse are due to the other participants’ (his opponent, the journalists in the studio, and the viewing public) perceptions of his style. These others viewed his style as violating expectations about appropriate communicative moves for a formal, public context (here: presidential debate). The analysis to be developed is based on two television debates between Wałęsa and Kwaśniewski held the week preceding the election in November 1995. Each debate was 90 min long and was broadcast during primetime on the main channel of the state-run television station (TVP 1). The debate format required each candidate to answer questions from a moderator and four journalists, two representing each candidate. The candidates were not to address each other directly. The heart of the analysis is a systematization of the interactional style features that led to Wałęsa’s negative evaluation. We focus on the first debate as Wałęsa refrained from using similar strategies in the second debate.

The article proceeds as follows. First, we introduce the theoretical base of the study centered around the conversation analytic work on insti-

tutional discourse and present the aim of this study. Then, we introduce the analytic categories and analyze the debate. Finally, we discuss likely participants' goals and the political implication of the debates.

PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES AS FORMS OF INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSE

Televised presidential debates constitute a form of *institutional interaction* that contrasts with other forms of talk (e.g., casual conversation, poetic talk, or ritual communication) and other types of communicative events (e.g., casual conversations, news interviews, or medical consultations). Institutional interactions involve certain expectations about the conventional "scope of conduct which can make an *oh*, for example, something to be avoided in a news interview (Heritage, 1985) or a medical consultation (ten Have, 1991), and correspondingly noticeable in such contexts when it occurs" (Drew & Heritage, 1992, p. 13). In this analysis, we argue that a set of noticeable discourse features violated the formal, public style expected of debates.

Following Levinson's (1992) work on activity types in interaction, Drew and Heritage (1992, pp. 22–25) proposed three features of *participants' orientations* that are recognizable in different types of institutional talk: (a) orientation of at least one participant toward an institutional goal, task, or function; (b) formal constraints on the type of contributions that the participants can make; and (c) distinctive patterns of inferential processes and procedures. We use this tripartite characterization of institutional talk in this analysis, as it provides a good starting point. Two of the characteristics of the debates (their goals and formal constraints, corresponding to points a and b, respectively) are introduced by the moderator (WW) at the beginning of the first debate (in this case, we quote only the English translation of the text):¹

(1)

WW: [reads from autocue] Ladies and gentlemen the presidential debate takes place in order to find out the ideas of both politicians on the most important questions which interest us the electorate. It also

aims to familiarize us with both politicians' visions of their presidency. It is an exceptional program and it is governed by exceptional rules. These rules have been agreed in the process of difficult long negotiations of both electoral teams. The order of questions, length of answers, topics, all of this has been set in great detail.

This extract includes a statement of the official goal of the debates (presentation of presidential programs by both candidates), and of the communicative rules that both candidates agreed to follow. The third feature of institutional talk (patterns of interactional inferences) is not mentioned by the moderator, as this element of the debates cannot be regulated by any external norm. It is part of the candidates' knowledge or "political competence," which allows them to deploy appropriate strategies of argumentation, reasoning, and inferencing in the debates.

The set of expectations about what the programs were to achieve and how they were going to be conducted provided the formal frame for the debates. We assume that this frame was tacitly accepted by all participants, including television audiences and political commentators. Perceived breaches of a situation's interactive norms typically attract popular and critical attention. For example, an analysis of a 9-min interview of George Bush by Dan Rather on the *CBS Evening News* showed the interview gradually departed from the canonical question-answer turn-taking system and moved toward a more conversational mode (Clayman & Whalen, 1988/89). Rather abandoned the unmarked "neutrality" stance expected of an interviewer, and Bush started pursuing his own agenda and assumed speaking rights that went beyond answering the interviewer's questions. The authors argued that the interactants' departure from the routines and conventions of a news interview (another form of public, media discourse) "can itself become news, and can even overshadow the substantive matters that originally served as the impetus for doing the interview in the first place" (Clayman & Whalen, 1988/89, p. 242).

Likewise, Harris (1991) analyzed an extract from a 1977 television interview between Brian Walden and James Callaghan (then British Prime Minister), in which Walden's questioning sequence seemed "to overstep the bounds of interviewer 'neutrality,' disrupting the structure of preallocated turns and acting as personal assertions in what has essentially become an argument in which participants state opposing views" (p. 81). The inter-

viewer's change of frame from "information seeking" to "argumentative" led to the breakdown of the interview. The media voiced strong public criticism of the interviewer, "suggesting that there are fairly strict limits on the extent to which an interviewer can force a politician to provide what he (the interviewer) considers a satisfactory answer to a particular question" (p. 81). Simply put, the interview breakdown itself became a news event.

As we show next, the first of the two debates between Wałsa and Kwaśniewski drew the attention of the media and general public in a way that went beyond the political issues. The style of Wałsa's debating, his "rhetoric," became the focus of attention. Most commentators (e.g., Dudek, 1997) highlighted this strategic aspect rather than the substantive issues of the debates. For instance, a commentator remarked that Wałsa had a "sharp tone and rhetoric of warring anti-Communism in the first debate" and a "negative" debating style (Bikont, 1995, p. 18). Wałsa's defeat in the second round of the elections by a small margin of votes (Kwaśniewski received 51.72% of the votes, whereas Wałsa received 48.28%) was largely attributed to the effect of the presidential debates:

The end of the election campaign, [and] especially the television debates, did not do much good to the president in office [Wałsa]. *Particularly the first* [debate]—in which he created himself as the conqueror of Communism—was evaluated by the voters as his failure; the opinion polls carried out by RUN for "Gazeta" indicate that (in Warsaw) [Wałsa] lost 12% of support! (Staszewski, 1995, p. 2, italics added)

AIM AND METHOD

Following Drew and Heritage's (1992) three-way characterization of institutional talk, we aim to demonstrate how Wałsa's style in the first debate was geared toward changing the institutionally defined goals of the debate, breaking the understood rules of interaction in the debate, and manipulating patterns of argumentation and inference acceptable in the debate. We argue that, by doing so, Wałsa attempted to gain control over his opponent. At the same time, he sought to enhance his image and damage that of Kwaśniewski. The three discursive strategies used by Wałsa to challenge the institutional nature of the debate were as follows: (a) joking and blatant lying to change the goal of the debate from serious

exchange of ideas and serious self- and other-presentation to humorous chatting, (b) use of marked forms of address to change the formal tone of the debate from one that was distant and respectful with no direct address to one that was familiar and patronizing, and (c) metapragmatic comments that ridiculed others' talk to change the accepted patterns of argumentation and inference.

The first of these strategies challenged the overt aims of the debate (i.e., the presentation of the candidates' programs). We stress here that it was the *explicit* or *stated* goal, because we agree with Benoit and Wells (1996) that the primary, although *implicit*, goal of most political debates is combative, not informative. That is, candidates seek to gain the advantage over the opposing candidate through foregrounding the positives of one's political program or personality and discrediting the program or personality of the opponent. In other words, debates aim to present a positive self-image and damage the reputation or identity of the other candidate. In this debate, both parties seemed to tacitly subscribe to this combative goal (cf. Jaworski & Galasiński, 1998 for an analysis of Wałęsa's and Kwaśniewski's strategies of self- and other-presentation in these debates). However, as we illustrate in the next section, Wałęsa made the implicit goal explicit by going on record with personal, disparaging comments about his opponent.

The second strategy challenged the formal constraint proscribing direct address of the opposing candidate (e.g., using vocatives to address the other) and breached the formality of address expected between the ratified interactants. Again, Wałęsa showed greater initiative in this respect, using 20 vocatives (of the type *Sir*, *Mr. Kwaśniewski*) to address Kwaśniewski over the two debates. Kwaśniewski used only 6 vocatives to address Wałęsa, and the vocatives he used were less marked than those used by Wałęsa (see Jaworski & Galasiński, 2000, for details).

In the third strategy, Wałęsa challenged the acceptable patterns of argumentation and inferencing vis-à-vis Kwaśniewski's contributions. Although challenges of the type, "you didn't answer my question," are part and parcel of the debating banter, Wałęsa's metapragmatic comments about his opponent's contributions came across as dismissive and insulting.

In the course of this analysis we also demonstrate how Kwaśniewski and other participants of the debates reacted to and challenged Wałęsa's norm breaking. Interestingly, by resorting to silence, ignoring Wałęsa's moves, and carrying on with the debate in predetermined terms, the other parties underscored the inappropriateness of Wałęsa's style.

FRAME NEGOTIATION AND INTERACTIONAL POWER

Jocular Key of Speaking

On a number of occasions, Waśsa introduced to the debate playful banter by teasing or ridiculing Kwaśniewski. Extract (2) is a typical example. The extract follows the moderator's light-hearted comment that both candidates share the appreciation of de Gaulle's style of presidency (lines 1–3). To this, Waśsa responds, interrupting the moderator, with a mock-serious face that he heard Kwaśniewski single out Brezhnev as his favorite politician (line 6):

(2)

1 WW: dzi“kuj” bardzo na razie wszystko zgodnie z planem
2 przebiega jedyne zaskakujące ustalenie to to óe si“
3 panom de Gaulle podoba. tego nie przewidzieliśmy.

4 W: ((unclear)) myślałem

5 WW: ((to Waśsa)) słucham?

6 W: ja o Breżniewie słyszałem óe si“ podoba.

1 WW: Thank you so far everything has been going well. The
2 only surprising finding is that you [both] like de
3 Gaulle. We have not anticipated that.

4 W: ((unclear)) I thought

5 WW: ((directed to Waśsa)) Pardon?

6 W: I heard of Brezhnev that he was [the one

7 Kwaśniewski] liked.

The remark introduced by Waśsa in line 6 ridicules Kwaśniewski as *liking* the last of the long-reigning Secretaries General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev. Brezhnev, especially in the years just before his death, was the subject of a series of jokes in Poland that made fun of his ignorance, stupidity, and finally, his inability to stay alive without a portable life-support system. Frequent references were made to Brezhnev's loss of any link with surrounding reality. Thus, Waśsa's remark about Brezhnev placed Kwaśniewski within the political tradition from which, throughout his campaign, Kwaśniewski attempted to dissociate himself. And more locally, the remark can be seen as seeking

to redefine the situation as one in which joking and suspension of formality and seriousness were appropriate.

The ensuing exchange is revealing as to which level of Wa«sa's discourse was directly addressed by different participants. Consider the rest of this exchange in extract (3):

(3)

- 1 WW: nie.
 2 W: no jak? przecieó
 3 WW: wszyscy usyszeliñmy nazwisko de Gaulle'a i
 4 Mitteranda.
 5 K: ((calmly)) ja proponuj«óby pan mówi» we wasnym
 6 imieniu. tak b«dzie wygodniej
 7
 8 WW: |prosz«panów|prosze panów
 9
 10 W: | |a jaczekam óby mnie pan
 11 | |preprosi» to chamstwo przecieó.
- 1 WW: No.
 2 W: What [do you mean, no]? But [he did say that]
 3 WW: We have all heard the names of de Gaulle and
 4 Mitterand.
 5 K: ((calmly)) I suggest that you speak on your behalf.
 6 |It'll be more convenient.
 7
 8 WW: |Gentlemen|gentlemen
 9
 10 W: | |and I am waiting for your apology.
 11 | |you're being [so] boorish.

In line 1, the moderator WW contradicts Wa«sa at the level of the propositional content of what he said. This plays into Wa«sa's hands as he continues to maintain his incredulous claim (line 2). WW continues, in line 3, to argue with Wa«sa by stating the "evidence" that the names which Kwañniewski mentioned earlier in the debate were those of de Gaulle and Mitterand. WW falls victim here to Wa«sa's joking without seemingly noticing it. This allows Wa«sa to carry on with his ridicule of Kwañniewski. That is, Wa«sa seeks to redefine the debate as an informal

verbal duel in which outrageous, blatantly untrue insults are an acceptable part of the game (cf. Labov, 1972).

Kwańniewski, who continues to speak calmly, is visibly irritated by this exchange. Kwańniewski does not argue with the proposition, as it is too improbable to be taken seriously, but addresses the (covert) metadiscursive strategy in Wańsa's original remark. He then tells Wańsa that he should adhere to the rules of the formal debate and not put words into his mouth (lines 5–6). In this way, Kwańniewski positions himself as the candidate who adheres to the prearranged rules of the debate, thereby delegitimizing Wańsa's interactional disruptiveness.

Interestingly, Wańsa retorts with another metapragmatic bid demanding an apology from Kwańniewski for the latter's alleged involvement in the smear campaign against Wańsa in this election campaign (line 10). Wańsa reintroduces this theme here (it first occurs at the beginning of the debate; see extract 12). The comment lacks semantic relevance in the ongoing exchange but matches the metapragmatic challenge of Kwańniewski in lines 5 through 6. Moreover, Wańsa continues to ridicule Kwańniewski by describing his behavior (i.e., no offer of apology) as *chamstwo* "boorishness," a word that has very strong connotations of rude and unprincipled behavior.

Kwańniewski's rebuttal of Wańsa's claim in the previous extract is reminiscent of Goffman's (1974) discussion of frame reversal. A social actor against whom a frame has been changed reverses it back in an attempt to restore the status quo without letting the other know about it. Similar restoration of the formal key of the debate is particularly employed by Wańsa's questioners after an insult. Witness one such example, extract (4), which relates to Wańsa's antiabortion stance. In this extract, Wańsa speculates on how the viability of the debate might have been affected had abortion in Poland been legalized:

(4)

- 1 W: tak prosz" pana i gdyby gdyby gdyby by»o inaczej to
 2 ja bym z panem nie rozmawia» bo prawdopodobnie wie
 3 pan pan by pop»yna» gdzieńtam Ćciekami. bo pan by»
 4 w trud
 5 |
 6 AK: |dziekuj" bardzo.
 7 W: trudnych warunkach.

- 1 W: Yes sir, and if if it had been different I would
 2 not be speaking to you [now] because you would have
 3 probably flown down the gutter. Because you were in
 4 {diff
 5 {
 6 AK: Thank you very much.
 7 W: difficult conditions.

This particular exchange was made to the press the day after the debate, and Wa«sa was strongly criticized for hurling such insults at his interviewer (i.e., implying that he would have been aborted as a fetus had Polish law been different—obviously, an irrelevant and historically inaccurate remark). Interactionally, what is interesting here is that AK’s calm, somewhat ironic response to Wa«sa’s insult, *dziekuje bardzo* “thank you very much [for your contribution?]” (line 6), counters the insult by ignoring it. Any direct retort from the journalist would have implicitly adopted Wa«sa’s key with an effect of legitimizing it.

In a related manner, Wa«sa reframed the debate as casual conversation through evading answers by joking or blatant humorous lying. In extract (5), for example, one of the journalists representing Kwa«niewski (AK) asked Wa«sa to respond to the unfavorable comments that appeared in *The Guardian* after the first round of the presidential election. Wa«sa dismissed the legitimacy of the question by suggesting that the article was published “on suggestions from Urban” (line 9). Wa«sa refers here to Jerzy Urban, the infamous spokesman of the last Communist government, well known and remembered for his attacks on Solidarity and Wa«sa himself. After the political changes in Poland in 1989, Urban became a financially successful owner and editor of the controversial weekly *Nie* “No,” in which he remained Wa«sa’s most ardent critic.

(5)

- 1 AK: w dwa dni po pierwszej turze wyborów londyński the
 2 Guardian (.) siódmego listopada napisa» (.) jako
 3 prezydent Lech Wa«sa sam by» swoim najwi«kszym
 4 wrogiem.
 5 [five lines omitted]
 6 dlaczego pana zdaniem tak pisze o panu jeden z
 7 najbardziej wp»ywowych dzienników zachodnich?

- 8 W: dlatego óe to jest to jest korespondent ktòry ktòry
 9 od od prawdopodobnie na na sugesti“ Urbana napisa»
 10 ten tekst. to sie zdarza. (..)
 11 WW: dziekuj“ za odpowiedzi.
- 1 AK: Two days after the first round of the election the
 2 Guardian in London on the seventh of November wrote
 3 (.) as president Lech Walesa was his own greatest
 4 enemy.
 5 [five lines omitted]
 6 Why in your opinion does one of the most influential
 7 Western dailies write about you like that?
 8 W: Because it is it is a correspondent who who from
 9 from probably on on suggestions from Urban wrote
 10 that text. It happens. (..)
 11 WW: Thank you for your response.

In this extract Wa«sa looks for a suitable answer, buying time by hesitating (evidenced by repetition). Finally he comes up with a blatantly untrue proposition (line 9) about Urban’s role in writing the article. After Wa«sa finishes, there is a perceptible pause, and Wa«sa smiles ironically. A moment later, the producer of the debate shows AK looking in disbelief at his colleague (the other journalist representing KwaŃniewski). It takes the moderator’s intervention to restore the debate frame by thanking Wa«sa for his response (line 11) as if it were a perfectly valid contribution to the debate. This “thank you” is similar in its force to AK’s in extract (4), line 6, and it is promptly followed by the moderator’s request for the next question for Wa«sa (not included in extract 5).

As evidenced by these examples, Wa«sa’s flippancy is not reciprocated. Not only is he the sole instigator of the shift of key from formal to jocular, but the attempts are resisted or ignored by the other participants.

Manipulation of Distance Through Marked Forms of Address

One of the most obvious linguistic means that marks and establishes the type of a relationship between interactants is in the use of terms of address. In the context of a formal TV debate, the unmarked (or expected; Scotton & Wanjin, 1983) forms of address between the main participants are *panie prezydentcie* “Mr. President” to Wa«sa and *panie przewodnicza-*

cy “Mr. Chairman” to Kwańniewski. The unmarked *V* form (the *T* and *V* notation being used here after Brown & Gilman, 1960) is *pan* “sir,” used with the third-person singular forms of verbs (all participants in the debates were men). Wańsa, however, resorted to a variety of marked or unexpected forms of address rather frequently.

(6)

- 1 W: w¶asciwie ¶adnego nadzoru zadnej kontroli nic
 2 mam
 3
 4 K: |a ile
 5 ustaw w tej sprawie |pan zg¶osił?
 6
 7 W: |prosz¶ pana zaraz zaraz ustawy
 8 to inna sprawa mo¶emy m¶wi¶ o ustawach i zaraz panu
 9 poka¶ ile=
 10 K: =ile ustaw pan zg¶osi¶?=
 11 W: =panie ja panu nie
 12 przeszkadza¶em. ma pan kultur¶ pan m¶wi¶ ¶e ma pan
 13 kultur¶ i wykszta¶cenie. a pan nie ma ani ani
 14 jednego ani drugiego (.) tylko papierki pan ma o
 15 jakim¶ tam wie pan (.) o wykszta¶ceniu. prosz¶ pana
 16 wi¶c nie opowiadaj pan dyrdyma¶ow bo to taka jest
 17 prawda. w uk¶adzie obecnym (.) wańciwie prezydent
 18 opr¶ecz opr¶ecz symboli i hase¶ nie ma nic i pan stara
 19 si¶ ¶eby nie mia¶ nic
- 1 W: In fact I have no supervision no control I have
 2 |nothing
 3
 4 K: |And how many acts [of law] did you |propose?
 5
 6 W: |Sir, hold on a
 7 second legislation is a different matter we can talk
 8 about legislation and I will show you how many=
 9 K: =how
 10 many acts did you propose?=
 11 W: =Mister I didn't
 12 interrupted you. You say you have culture you say

- 13 you have culture and education. And you have neither
 14 one nor the other (.) only papers you have about
 15 some you know sir (.) some education. So don't you
 16 [2nd person sg.] talk rubbish because that's the
 17 truth. In the present set-up (.) the president
 18 actually apart from symbols and slogans has nothing
 19 and you are doing everything so that he has nothing.

Before extract (6) starts, Waśsa had been talking about his limited powers to control the armed forces and the police. Kwaśniewski challenged him (twice) and asked him how many legislative acts (pertaining to national security) he had proposed during his term as president. Kwaśniewski's direct questioning and interrupting of Waśsa constitute a violation of the explicitly stated rules of the debate but maintain the official debate goal of candidates exchanging views on their policies. As a number of studies of news interview discourse have shown, not all departures from the canonical structure of interviews lead to the breakdown of the framework (e.g., see Clayman, 1992; Greatbatch, 1992; Harris, 1991).

In extract (6), despite breaking the no-address rule, Kwaśniewski's intrusions remain distant and formal. In line 11, however, Waśsa alters the tenor of his talk from "debate" to "rebuke." The opening form of address *panie* "Mister" introduces here an element of a casual, working-class vernacular, which stands in contrast with the formality of the debate.

In his brief discussion of typical Polish forms of address, Miodek (1991) did not even mention the form *panie* "Mister" (used by Waśsa in line 11) but suggested that the most typical (vocative) form for distant or formal addressees is *prosze pana/pani* [lit.] "please, sir/madam." The form *panie* "Mister" is, of course, used in Polish; however, it has strong connotations of working-class usage and informality. The way it is used by Waśsa in the debate is reminiscent of a cross between the English "pally," "mate," and the impersonal "hey you!" and lacks the expected formality and distance. Moreover, the change of key is emphasized by Waśsa's change of topic. He embarks on the rather elaborate rebuke of Kwaśniewski's manners and contrasts Kwaśniewski's pretense of good education and cultured behavior with his own dignity as a "simple man."

Apart from the use of the informal form of address *panie* in line 11, Waśsa uses a less marked form, *prosze pana* "sir" (line 15), only to slip back (line 16) to the marked address in *nie opowiadaj pan dyrdyma* «ów

“don’t you mister talk rubbish.” The use of the second-person singular pronoun (the *T* form) together with the polite *pan* (the *V* form) is marked in this example as it further claims informality and implies the two are “mates.” Furthermore, it marks Waśsa’s occupational and social background. Throughout his political career, Waśsa kept stressing that he was a mere electrician. In this way, Waśsa not only attempted to manipulate distance between himself and Kwańniewski but also worked to pull Kwańniewski into his working-class ethos. The informal rebuke that Waśsa introduced is further reinforced by his use of the word *dyrdyma*, which is glossed in the English translation as “rubbish,” although the word is better rendered by terms such as *drivel*, *twaddle*, or *mumbo-jumbo* (we return to his use of this word in the next section).

In other parts of the debate, Waśsa used other marked vocatives, e.g., *panie* + last name (LN) “Mr. + LN,” which “for many members of intelligentsia, forms of the type *panie Kowalski* [Mister Kowalski], *pani Jabłońska* [Mrs./Miss Jablonska] are unacceptable (and for some even border on boorishness!)” (Miodek, 1991, p. 34).

Pisarkowa (1979) seconded this claim and argued that surnames are not used as parts of forms of address in Polish. She practically ruled out such usage for the type of context with which we are dealing. Judged by our native intuitions, the *panie* + LN form is strongly associated with working-class speech, in which it is the unmarked form of address conveying respect and distance. Waśsa’s use of *panie Kwańniewski* during the debate is not so much disrespectful as distancing, reinforcing an image of Waśsa as a worker conducting the debate on his own terms.

Deliberately and quite consistently, Waśsa discursively positioned himself as a worker. In a press interview (Osiatynski, 1994), when asked about a well-documented instance of what was described as his rude behavior toward a prominent, elderly, and highly respectable public figure, Waśsa stated, “I regret the way [I talked to him] because he is a man of great class. This shouldn’t have happened. But I am a worker. I move straight on and solve problems” (p. 8).

As seen here, Waśsa sought to redefine political debates as “platforms for action,” where a departure from the convention of public discourse was legitimized by his being a *worker*—a man of actions, not words (see extract 10).

Waśsa also uses overly familiar and condescending forms of address. For example, in extract (7), he addresses Kwańniewski and his party (DLA) as *wy* “you” (plural; bolded):

(7)

1 W: z **wami** si“ wspòpracowa**f** nie da. bo **wy** tworzycie
 2 pałstwo koleśi i pałstwo postkomuny i ma i chcecie
 3 albo mnie wci•gn•**f** w to a moja moja etyka i: moje
 4 s**u**óenie narodowi nie pasuje do tego albo chcecie
 5 mnie pokona**f**.

1 W: It's impossible to cooperate with you. Because you
 2 create the state of buddies and the state of post-
 3 commune and you want to draw me into this but my
 4 ethics my serving to the nation does not fit in that
 5 or you want to defeat me.

“The [Polish] pronouns of familiar address are *ty* (to one person) and *wy* (to more than one person)” (Stone, 1981, p. 56). However, the familiarity of relationship invoked by Waśsa in the previous extract through his repeated use of *wy* (in addition to the mention of the DLA government as “the state of buddies” and “the state of post-commune”) signals condescension. The primary condition for *wy* to signal familiarity is that it has to be used reciprocally; otherwise, as Brown and Gilman (1960) argued, nonreciprocal use of a familiar pronoun of address signals unequal status within a dyad. Indeed, Kwańniewski did not reciprocate the *wy* form to address Waśsa and his supporters. It seems plausible that Kwańniewski did not use *wy* to deny that the informality introduced by Waśsa was legitimate. Equally important, Kwańniewski refrained to not use the proform with strong connotations of the former Communist Party usage (*wy* was the prescribed pronoun of address among party members together with the title *towarzysz* “comrade”).

Finally, a degree of overfamiliarity that smacks of a condescending attitude to the journalists representing Kwańniewski is exemplified in Waśsa's frequent use of terms of endearment. In extract (8), Waśsa resorts to a term of endearment *bardzo kochani dziennikarze* “[my] very dear [lit.: beloved] journalists” when he denies having said something attributed to him by the questioner.

(8)

1 W: bardzo kochani dziennikarze nigdy czegoń podobnego
 2 nie powiedzia**ę**m. wybaczam wam pomy**ż**ki ale prosz“ o
 3 sprawdzenie tych spraw.

- 1 W: [my] very dear [lit.: beloved] journalists I have
- 2 never said anything like that. I forgive you your
- 3 mistakes but ask you to check on these matters.

In extract (8), Waśsa's tenor is reminiscent of parent-figure talk gently telling off a child. The term of endearment in line 1 serves as a softener of his criticism, and it is reinforced by an act of "forgiveness" in line 2. Treating his interviewers in a childlike manner puts Waśsa in a position of authority and makes it relatively easy for him to contradict his interviewer (cf. "I have never said anything like that"). At the end of Waśsa's turn, the journalist reformulates his question (not included in the extract), but he does not reciprocate the familiarity of address introduced by Waśsa.

In sum, throughout the debate, Waśsa used forms of address that treated the discussion as a casual conversation and relegated his adversaries to an unequal position. He knew that his interlocutors could not reciprocate these forms of address (and they did not). These forms do not constitute part of the understood middle class or "intelligentsia" repertoires. As in the previous section, then, we see that Waśsa's unilateral efforts to introduce informality into the debate were not successful due to other participants' lack of cooperation in its upkeep.

Metapragmatic Comments About Other Talk

In extract (8), we showed how Waśsa manipulated the debate metadiscursively by challenging the legitimacy of his interlocutor's question ("I have never said anything like that"). However, such challenges are not atypical in political discourse (e.g., Harris, 1991). Both Waśsa and Kwańiewski were equally accused by their questioners of providing evasive answers.

What is of interest, though, is that Waśsa not only challenged his questioners but also dismissed his opponents' political discourse as unworthy of attention, labeling it as trivial and blatantly mendacious. He called Kwańiewski's program *wiersze* "poems," *bajki* "fairy tales," and *dyrdymały* "drivel," "twaddle," or "mumbo-jumbo." Consider the following two examples:

(9)

- 1 W: ja nie wiem (.) jeŃi komuna b"dzie tak i postkomuna
- 2 w t• stron" sz•a to nie uratuje (.) nie uratuje

“People’s Tribune.” Also here, it seems, he strayed from the formal style of the debate. The similes were hardly aimed at conveying information about Waśsa’s opponent’s contributions. Rather, they were designed to sling an insult at Kwańniewski. Consider the following example:

(11)

W: no prosz“ pałstwa no (..) czy nie mam racji óe jest to Trybuna Ludu jak jak słuchamy takich wierszy?

W: Well ladies and gentlemen well am I not right that this is Trybuna Ludu when we listen to such poems?

Extract (11) occurs after Kwańniewski’s long turn on Poland’s foreign policy, a turn completely devoid of any references to the sentiments of the totalitarian regime with which he was once associated. Rather unexpectedly, Waśsa followed Kwańniewski’s turn by a rhetorical question with the intended meaning of “I told you so,” which dismissed Kwańniewski’s preceding argument, framing it as fiction (“such poems”) and as Communist fabrication and propaganda (“this is Trybuna Ludu”).

Strategies discussed with reference to Extracts 9–11 do not only illustrate Waśsa’s relabeling of his opponent’s discourse but also point to his continuing attempts to construct Kwańniewski as a man of the past, belonging to the discredited Communist *nomenklatura*. By doing so, he invokes his knowledge schema (Tannen & Wallat, 1993; shared with a large proportion of the Polish electorate) of Communists being the “bad boys,” selfish and tyrannical rulers of Poland. Presenting Kwańniewski as a “man of the past” through the trivialization of his contributions allowed Waśsa, again, to claim interactional power by positive self-presentation as an anti-Communist and negative presentation of the other as an apparatchik and Communist who was not worthy of a debate.

CONCLUSION

Waśsa’s rule breaking in the debate has at least three dimensions. First, Waśsa used it to discredit his opponent and damage his image. For example, he ridiculed Kwańniewski or showed his own superiority by addressing the other in a nonreciprocal, nonstandard, and overly familiar manner. Waśsa’s

metapragmatic actions set Kwaśniewski up as a candidate who was not worthy of a serious exchange. Through these moves, Kwaśniewski became a candidate whom Wałęsa was not honoring with a “real” debate. Indeed, right at the beginning of the first televised meeting, Wałęsa explicitly questions the possibility of engaging with Kwaśniewski in a serious debate. He began by demanding an apology from Kwaśniewski for insulting the president (i.e., Wałęsa) and his family during the negative election campaign:

(12)

1 W: jeŃi chcemy rozmawiać poważnie to chciałbym aby pan
2 jednak przeprosił za obrażenie prezydenta (.) za
3 takie stwierdzenia paŃskich ludzi że wstydz• si• za
4 prezydenta i tak dalej wie pan (.) wtedy b“d“ z
5 panem poważnie rozmawia•(..) bo inaczej to uważam
6 że pan jest niepoważnym politykiem i w zwi•zku z tym
7 nie wiem waŃciwie o czym b“dziemy rozmawiać.

1 W: If we want to talk seriously I would still like you
2 to apologize to the president (.) for such
3 statements of your people that they are ashamed of
4 the president and so on. You know (.) then I will
5 talk with you seriously (..) Because otherwise I
6 think you are not a serious politician. And thus I
7 don't actually know what we are going to talk about.

Kwaśniewski's image was under attack not only because of what Wałęsa said, but because of Wałęsa's metadiscursive manipulation of interaction. Wałęsa decided the debate should be suspended to allow Kwaśniewski time to offer him an apology (as in extract 12). These conversational actions could be rekeyed as a joke or construed as an unequal encounter (by the use of marked forms of address).

Second, Wałęsa's informal register aimed to enhance his own image. By employing shocking, unexpected language, his idiosyncratic style reflecting a working-class background stood in sharp contrast to the intellectual, middle-class discourse of Kwaśniewski. Wałęsa sought to create a new context for the debate to give his own voice a platform. He used this informal register as a strategy of managing discourse and to create a political self-image of “one of us,” or as Wałęsa put it during one of his pre-election meetings, *Ja jestem my, a nie oni* “I am we, not they.”

Third, by manipulating the register of the debate, Wa«sa could be said to make a bid for interactional power. Thornborrow (1991) argued that in an asymmetrical encounter, the powerful party may determine whether to depart from the procedural norms of interaction. For example, in the data she analyzed, Thornborrow demonstrated how two (male) police officers, who examined an alleged (female) rape victim filing a formal complaint, shifted the register of the examination from information seeking to accusatory and blame apportioning. The police officers accused the victim of being frightening (rather than frightened), challenged her claims, and dismissed her accounts of the events as a “load of bollocks” and “fairytale” (cf. extract 10). Being socially and institutionally more powerful than the victim, they assumed and executed their “right to enforce particular types of representation (i.e., of discursive practice). In this case, regardless of the ‘true facts’ of the story, the effect of these practices is a trivialization of rape and of women’s reactions to it by a process of insult and of ridicule” (p. 603).

Of course, Wa«sa cannot be said to have had greater institutional power within the debate than his opponent. As the moderator stated at the beginning of the debate (see extract 1), at least in terms of speaking rights, both politicians were equal and both were expected to adhere to the procedural norms of the debate that had been negotiated by their teams. Thus, Wa«sa’s register selection cannot be seen as an execution of his *right* to enforce his preferred style of debating (as the police officers in Thornborrow’s data), but as an act of *usurping* this right and an active bid for power. This is analogous to Hopper’s (1992) example of how telephone salespeople dramatically enhanced their hegemony as callers by bypassing a number of stages in the “default” telephone service conversation. That is, they reformatted their calls so that they are meant to resemble an informal chat with an acquaintance rather than a formal business call.

This, we argue, was similar to the actions taken by Wa«sa. By changing the register within the debate frame, he made a bid to conduct it on *his* terms and, at the same time, construed himself as the one who had the right to do so. From an institutional point of view, an attempt to change the discursive practice of an event by one of the participants without prior negotiation has to be interpreted as an interactional bid for power.

As already mentioned, the debates did not tip the electoral balance in Wa«sa’s favor. Rather, some of his former supporters decided not to vote, withdrawing their backing for Wa«sa yet declining to vote for Kwa«niewski (Beylin, 1995). Wa«sa was not happy with the outcome of

the first debate. During an election rally on the day before the second debate, he announced that he would adopt a “new style” in an attempt to “knock out” his opponent. Waśsa argued that in the first debate he had been “provoked” by Kwaśniewski to adopt an “unpresidential-like” style that “disgusted educated people” (Anonymous, 1995, p. 4). In fact, Waśsa started the second debate by reading a statement in which he apologized to the viewers for his conduct in the first debate.

In most of this analysis, Kwaśniewski appeared to be a bit of a nonentity. Given that the focus of our analysis was on “rule breaking,” this is not surprising: Kwaśniewski did not initiate or maintain any of the stylistic unorthodoxies introduced to the debate by his opponent. With one exception, a side remark about tax returns, Kwaśniewski did not appear to transgress the prescribed debate frame.² This was evidenced by his reactions to Waśsa’s “jokes” in extracts (2) and (3), his noninvolvement in extracts (4) and (5), and lack of reciprocation of heavily marked forms of address and disparaging metapragmatic comments.

Our data suggest that Waśsa approached the debate in his typical guise as a charismatic, if somewhat maverick, politician whose credibility depended more on his status as a folk hero rather than a member of the political establishment. However, the political scene had changed. Waśsa no longer was able to play the role of a lone fighter against Communism: He *was* part of the political establishment. Waśsa apparently could not stop himself from being “rude” and “colloquial.” Consequently, his interactional style deviated from the behavioral norms expected in a presidential debate. Waśsa did not seem to realize that his opponent had changed from a Communist to a Social Democrat and that he had become part of the political establishment. His failure to adapt to the new political scene was perceived by the media commentators as an attempt to reframe the political debate as a personal game. The concerted rejection of Waśsa’s debating style by Kwaśniewski, journalists, and the viewing public meant that Waśsa was held accountable to the dominant frame and was judged negatively.

Many earlier studies of mediated, political discourse have found verbal interaction to be a dynamic, coconstructed enterprise (e.g., Clayman, 1992; Clayman & Whalen, 1988/89; Greatbatch, 1992, 1998; Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991). This study further supports this view by offering a negative example. In this debate, Waśsa’s jokes failed as jokes and his insults were ignored. As this analysis demonstrates, strategic norm breaking of discursive procedures can only be successful when met with certain kinds

of responses. Without the forecasted uptake, interactional meanings that emerge are likely to be different than a norm breaker intends.

NOTES

- 1 In the transcripts, W is for Waśsa, K is for Kwaśniewski, WW (Wiesław Walendziak) was the moderator, and AK (Andrzej Kwiatkowski) was the journalist representing Kwaśniewski. All translations from the Polish (transcripts, press quotes, etc.) are our own and have been aimed to render the original flow of the speaker's discourse, and thus may occasionally seem disjointed to the English reader. Transcription is a simplified version of the Jeffersonian system. In Polish, all words with the exception of proper names are lowercase. The following symbols differ from CA transcription: (.) indicates a pause, (..) indicates a long pause, underlining is for added emphasis, and nonverbal and other contextual information are indicated by brackets [text]. In the English translation, capitalization and punctuation were added to aid readability.
- 2 Kwaśniewski started the first debate with a declaration of making his tax return available to Waśsa and his team (in response to earlier allegations of Kwaśniewski's cover-up of some of his wife's financial operations) and thus stepping out of the prescribed debate frame.

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