

Linguistic Construction of a Winning Apology¹

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Abstract

The study analyzes the apology delivered by the then-democratic Presidential contender in 2007, Senator Barack H. Obama, to the Indian-American community. This apology succeeded in convincing American citizens of Obama's goodwill and clean political standards, which eventually led him to surpass his chief opponent, Senator Hillary R. Clinton and become the President of the United States. The study employs Searle's (1969) speech act theory (SAT) and Holmes's (1990) apology strategies through pragmatics. The study, then, administrates thematic analysis through positive discourse analysis to gain insights from Obama's leadership values. Findings educate readers on the importance of an apology construction and encourage readers to follow the example of a world-class leader's values by having an insight into Obama's leadership.

Keywords: Speech Act; Apology Strategies; Leadership Values; Apology Discourse; Barack Obama; 2008 U.S. Presidential Election

1. Introduction

Alexander Pope, an English poet in 1711 wrote a proverbial phrase, "to err is human; to forgive divine." The prior expression goes to impress that anyone can make a mistake, even a leader. Basford (2012) points out that "at one point in their careers, all leaders err, make poor decisions, or offended their followers" (p. 1). This situation, unfortunately, did become true for Obama during his administration as a growing political leader in the United States. Habitually, the media fixates a majestic

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amount of attention to the mistake committed through various news coverage that leads people to various assumptions. Often, perceiving the offense, followers would respond by viewing the leader as ineffective, losing trustworthiness and credibility in him (Basford, 2008). Acknowledging that his reputation is now at stake, the leader realizes that his image, as a good individual and efficient leader, is threatened. This is because offences committed by leaders trigger consequences that threaten their public image and political career, create chaos and discord, or hurt the individual victim/society at large.

Past studies (Brubaker, 2015; Kellerman, 2006) suggest that leaders are resistant to apologizing in fear that it will reflect weakness and undermine authority. However, when Obama decided not to pass the blame to escape the situation but rather to apologize, it showed that, as an individual, he subscribed to the ethics of truth and care.

As the psychiatrist Lazare (2004) observes, “apologies have the power to heal humiliations and grudges, remove the desire for vengeance, generate forgiveness and relieve the guilt and shame that can grip the mind with a persistence and tenacity that are hard to ignore” (p. 1). He suggested that an apology satisfies significant needs of an individual who has been offended. An authentic apology can restore a victim’s sense of self-respect and dignity and reassure that the offense was not the victim’s fault. This paves the way for both the leader and the follower who has taken offense to put the hurt behind and build to renew the once-tarnished relationship.

A leader has to possess leadership skills and bear leadership responsibilities, in other words, to apologize for a mistake. Psychological researchers show that when people find themselves in such an identity-threatening situation, they resort to a remedial self-presentation strategy—an apology to communicate to others that a mistake, a bad decision, or an offense is not a representation of that individual’s true character (Schlenker & Darby, 1981). They would disassociate the part of self that committed the wrongdoing from the part of self that is remorseful (Goffman, 1971). De Cremer and Schouten (2008) suggest that apologizing is a favorable remedial self-presentation technique because it positively impacts the apologizer’s image and the followers’ reactions. Therefore, these wrongdoings heavily depend on an apology as an effort of damage control. Eventually, followers would use that leader’s apology to arrive at a better assessment of the leader, which is why Luke (1997) regards an apology as “a form of political speech with increasing significance and power” (p. 344).

The values incorporated in an apology and portrayed by the leader himself or herself emancipates positive exemplary leadership. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to construct the apology with immense meticulousness and sensitivity. A

decision to apologize would have potentially a higher risk for a political figure than it would for a commoner. Kellerman (2006) acknowledges that even the wisest of leaders face the complexity of knowing when and how to apologize. As expressed by Kampf (2009), politicians face a hard time to articulate an apology because “apologizing may be perceived as a humiliating act which detracts from the apologizer’s symbolic power” (p. 2).

The significance of this study is to educate readers with the diverse apology strategies that may be applicable in the context of both personal and professional relationships. It is also a useful reference guide to leaders on how to deliver an impactful apology. On a bigger scale, this study will contribute and enrich the literature of public and political apologies made across the world for further linguistic analysis on Obama’s apology. The multifaceted nature of apologies means they are contributions to a larger discourse, thus open to analysis from various perspectives where applied linguistics is concerned.

1.1. Background of Study

Democratic candidates Senator Barack Obama and Senator Hillary Clinton were chief rivals for the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election. During the campaign, Obama’s research team circulated an attack memo entitled *Hillary Clinton (D-Punjab)*; see section 3.6 for memo transcript) to ridicule her as a Senator from the Indian region of Punjab. The memo referred to the former President Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton’s close ties with India, her financial investments in Indian companies, her efforts on fund-raising among Indian-Americans, and outsourcing. The memo implied that, given her close Indian connections, she was better suited to represent the state of Punjab instead of America. According to *The New York Times* on June 19, 2007, “the memo created a furor in the Indian-American community and raised questions about Obama’s claims that he is above attack politics.” The Indian-Americans in this study refer to Americans whose ancestry belong to the many ethnic groups hailing from India. They are legal American citizens and a minority in the U.S., highly educated and socioeconomically successful. Dave Kumar, the spokesman of the South-Asians for Obama group told *The Times* that “the issue people had with the memo was the implication that having close ties with the Indian-Americans in the U.S. is a problem.” As a result, the memo caused Obama’s followers to doubt his pledge to run an attack-free campaign. Before long, Obama’s followers posted a devastating note on the South-Asians for Obama fan page website, saying that they were “shocked and dismayed by the memo” and “less than satisfied” with the campaign’s initial responses. To worsen the situation, the U.S.-India Political Action Committee sent a letter to Senator Obama, accusing his campaign of using racial stereotypes. The letter read:

We have been encouraged by your message of inclusion and your promise to bring a new kind of politics to our country. This is why we are so concerned about media reports indicating your staff may be engaging in the worst type of anti-Indian American stereotyping. (Jeff Zeleny, 2007, retrieved June 16, 2018, from the World Wide Web: <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/16/us/politics/16obama.html>)

As soon as Obama learned of the memo, he disavowed and criticised the memo's content. He quickly apologised and revealed that he was unaware about the existence of the memo. It was reported by news networks from the two press conferences that was organised to clarify the matter (i.e., the editorial board of the *Des Moines Register* and *The Associated Press*) that Obama claimed "It was a dumb mistake on our campaign's part." ". . . it wasn't anything I had seen or my senior staff has seen," and ". . . it didn't reflect my view of the complicated issue of outsourcing. I and my campaign take full responsibility for it and we apologize." Also, Obama released an official written apology for the Indian-American supporters on the website of the South-Asians for Obama at <http://observer.com/2007/06/obama-apologizes-for-dpunjab/>.

These efforts paid off well. According to *The New York Times*, the spokesman of the South-Asians for Obama group, Dave Kumar, said that the community was satisfied that Obama was sufficiently and sincerely upset about the memo's content. In the election that followed, *BBC News* reported that an impressive 84% of the 2.85 million of the Indian-American community voted for Obama in the 2008 Presidential Election. Eventually, America also witnessed a growth in the Indian-American population. The U.S. Census recorded a 2.8 million of American-Indians in 2010 to a 3.1 million of American-Indians in 2013. Therefore, it is evident that this apology has made its reparation well and was successful in convincing the Indian-Americans of Obama's goodwill and America's clean political standards.

1.2. Aim and Objectives

This study aims to explore a successful apology of Obama that elevated him from the State House as a Senator to later the White House as the President. This research is an attempt to study this critical apology through the lens of pragmatics and thematic analysis. The analysis explores the apology strategies used to frame the apology and the leadership values displayed from this construction. Based on this prospect, the study is an essential endeavour to explore the underlying leadership virtues of Barack Obama, who, through beliefs, value, and attitudes that he shared with his masses and communicated with, flourished in fashioning his iconicity as one of the most important global figures. Despite the fact that there is an intensive

research conducted on this leader, there is scarce research conducted on the linguistic insights of the apology discourse of this leader. The majority of studies on Obama revolves around his biracial heritage, childhood upbringing, educations and career in law, leadership charisma, and the rhetorical power in his ideology. Therefore, the concern of the present study is to linguistically examine the strategies and values embedded in one particular text from his apology discourse. Studies on leadership from the linguistic perspective are insufficient in the literature, despite language being acknowledged as an important component in leadership performance (Schnurr, 2009). According to Mayfield and Mayfield (2018), “many leadership communication problems are not intentional, but a reflection of educational deficit which can be corrected” (p. 19) in the area of language and leadership. Although discourse has long been acknowledged as a crucial aspect of leadership performance, only in recent years have studies begun to examine leadership from the perspective of language use. Schnurr (2009), for instance, notes that “discourse is more than simply an ancillary aspect of leadership performance—it affects leaders’ effectiveness on various levels and it lies at the heart of the leadership process” (p. 2). In fact, she says that “imagining leadership outside of language is all but impossible” (Schnurr, 2009, p. 2). Also, Mayfield and Mayfield (2018) believe that leadership communication constraints can be lifted when leaders mindfully expand and enrich their linguistic ranges. The current study addresses the following objectives:

1. To analyse the speech acts that constitute the apology,
2. To examine the strategies that constitute the apology,
3. To explore the values that emerge from the apology.

2. Literature Review

A decision to apologize or not has potentially higher stakes for a political figure, than it would for a commoner in everyday life. A well-meant apology might have the benefit of producing a positive sentiment amongst the recipient, but a refusal of apology might cost a political career. Brubaker (2015) specified that organizational leaders especially often choose to avoid apologizing to protect themselves. In the *Harvard Business Review* article, Kellerman (2006) acknowledges that even the wisest of leaders have the difficulty of knowing when and how to apologize. After analysing a few situations, she makes an effort to address this dilemma by presenting a framework of apology leading to favorable and unfavorable outcomes. Her findings reveal that characteristics of an effective apology should include an acknowledgement of the wrongdoing, acceptance of responsibility by the offender, an expression of regret, and a promise that the offense will not be repeated.

Likewise, studies by Hargie, Stapleton, and Tourish (2010), Hearit (2010), and Roberts (2007) have attempted to produce similar situation assessment tools to guide leaders in apologizing. Hargie et al. (2010) was a study of high-profile public apologies of banking CEO's to the Banking Crisis Inquiry of the Treasury Committee of the UK House of Commons in 2009. Following a gradation list of apology strategies, Hargie et al. (2010) claimed that the bad apologies of the CEOs lacked the two prime necessities of an apology: blameworthiness and regret. This finding supports Darby and Schlenker's (1982) most influential study on the defining features of apology, which are "admissions of blameworthiness and regret for an undesirable event" (p. 742). The analysis of CEO apologies depicted a context of blame attribution, avoidance of responsibility and heightened public anger. Proposing a resolution, the authors suggest a model for the CEO apologies to include explanation of the misfortune, statement of complete responsibility, and a direct request for pardon. In addition, the CEO apologies should have a denial of intentionality, a self-rebuke at the error committed, and description of personal remorse for the damage caused.

One well known early study that is often cited regarding the importance of an expression of regret in an apology is by Fraser (1981). However, Fraser reckoned that the offender has to both admit responsibility for committing the offending act and express regret for the offence caused. This is because a statement of responsibility shows that the offender is alert of the violation of social norms and so will be wary of committing such offence henceforth. Also, it implies that the wrongdoing should not be related to the personality of the offender because it was not the true self that committed the offense. Similarly, Edwards (2010) found that regret and responsibility are the main ingredients of a political apology. Edwards examined the collective apologies by U.S. President Bill Clinton, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper for historical wrongdoing. The findings revealed a few commonalities in the three leaders' apology: expressions of regret, acknowledgement of wrongdoing, mortification, and corrective action (pledged to prevent recurrences). Acknowledgement of wrongdoing is done by discussing the crimes committed and the victims of those crimes. Mortification in this context is the acceptance of responsibility for the crime committed and an expression of remorse in the aftermath. Finally, in the effort of preventing recurrences, the offender offers solutions to rectify and repair the damage of the crimes.

Leadership values such as trust (Savolainen, Lopez-Fresno, & Ikonen, 2014), visionary, credibility, and integrity are pertinent in any leader-follower relationship (Mussig, 2003). This is, in fact, the practice of transformational leadership, whereby a leader leads and inspires his or her followers with higher-order values. According to Basford (2012), humility and transformational leadership are

important mediators of trust in the relationship of followers to the leader. Followers who appraised their leader's apology as sincere perceived their leader as humble, which, in turn, generates positive follower reactions. This helps to reject feelings of resentment and dissatisfaction towards the leader. Besides that, expressions of regret by political leaders may encourage a transformation in the relationship dynamics between communities where the relationship moves forward from victimizer/victim to one built on common grounds (Edwards, 2010). Fraser (1981) considered that the apologizer has to both admit responsibility for committing the offending act and to express regret for the offence caused. A statement of responsibility shows that the transgressor is aware that social norms have been broken and so will be able to avoid committing such a transgression in the future. Harris, Grainger, and Mullany (2006) suggest that apologies which minimize responsibility and blame are often perceived as insincere and have higher chances of generating further public controversy and debate. Therefore, the value of responsibility and accountability should come hand in hand in a leader for him or her to demonstrate effective leadership at its full potential.

3. Theories and Methods

3.1. Theories

The underlying theories of this study are the speech act theory (SAT; Searle, 1969) and the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). SAT belongs to the field of pragmatics relating to the ways in which words can be used not only to present information but also to carry out actions. Apologies belong to the Expressive category of SAT; however, they also function through the other categories of SAT. This is supported by Valkova (2013) who stated that more than one speech act can participate in the act of apology. This notion is demonstrated by the examples below:

➤ Representative:

I apologize for my behavior earlier, but I have a valid reason for behaving so.

➤ Directive:

Sir, will you please accept my sincere apology for the way I behaved earlier?

➤ Commissive:

I hereby give my word of honour to never commit this mistake again, and with deep [Expressive] regret I apologize.

Researchers have developed a variety of strategies to comprehend complex speech acts like apologies over the years such as Fraser (1981), Blum-Kulka and

Olshtain (1989), Olshtain and Cohen (1983), Trosborg (1987), Abadi (1990), Meier (1992), Deutschmann (2003), Brown and Attardo (2005), and Marrus (2007). This study employed Holmes' (1990) apology strategies classification as a key theoretical apparatus to carry out the analysis of the apology with the support of SAT (Searle, 1969).

In addition to this, the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) is also employed for it has "specific procedures for data collection and analysis which are conducted through thematic analysis" (p. 6). The thematic analysis is used to analyse values in the apology. The values are the themes that emerge throughout the apology. The values derived are closely related to values such as responsibility, trust, sympathy, and others that a leader should uphold as a good example. The researcher functions as a grounded theorist who interacts with the data to discover emerging themes from the data and, then, analyses the relationships between the key themes. These recurrent themes help the researcher to conceptualize open-ended interpretations to flexibly explain the data.

3.2. Research Design

The research was qualitative in nature. Corbin and Strauss (2008) believe that qualitative methods are recommendable for textual analysis, for they allow a thorough in-depth probing. The research employed pragmatics and positive discourse analysis as approaches to discourse analysis. Pragmatics is concerned with the use of language in social contexts, relating to ways in which people produce and comprehend meanings through language. Within pragmatics, apology strategies (Holmes, 1990) supported by SAT (Searle, 1969) were employed to analyse the apology text. Positive discourse analysis is an approach that constructively and optimistically values a social context in a positive perspective. Within positive discourse analysis, the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to perform a thematic analysis of leadership values from the apology text using coding techniques (Fairclough, 1995; Halliday & Hassan, 1976). Therefore, the apology model by Holmes (1990) was the central theoretical approach of this study, assisted by the other two approaches (i.e., SAT and thematic analysis) because they provide analytical support to the apology model.

In this study, the analysis was dependent on perception. Perception is how the researcher consciously interprets and understands the environment, and it stems from his or her own individual and collective experiences. They retrieve input from the environment, and through a sensory process, form ideas/beliefs not necessarily denoting true knowledge, but rather their own interpretation determining reality (Cachon, 2005; Choi & Rainey, 2010). Therefore, the researcher exposes and

sensitizes himself or herself to the background of the case that is being studied to obtain a clear and unbiased judgement.

3.3. Method for Analysis of Speech Acts

The first research objective employed Searle's (1969) illocutionary speech acts. The text was analysed to find representations of the categories of speech acts based on Table 1:

Table 1. *Searle's (1969) Five Categories of Illocutionary Speech Acts*

Categories of Speech Acts	Descriptions
Representatives	The acts that the speaker believes to be true or false, such as to affirm, to deny, to explain, to deduce and to estimate.
Directives	Intentions of the speaker to the hearer to do something, including the acts to command, to beg, and to request.
Commissives	The acts when the speaker expresses a commitment for future action; for example, to promise, to guarantee, to threaten, and to pledge.
Expressives	All acts that expresses the speakers' psychological state. Examples of expressives are to thank, to apologize, and to congratulate.
Declaratives	The acts refer to the immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs; for instance, to appoint, to marry and to resign.

3.4. Method for Analysis of Strategies

The second research objective employed Holmes's (1990) apology model. Holmes modified Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) taxonomy because she believed that it was necessary to rearrange these strategies in order to make them clearer. Thus, she divided apologies into four main categories, each category having subclassifications. Whereas most of these strategies are present in other taxonomies as well, one can note that the subcategories in the "acknowledgment of responsibility" group are unique to Holmes (1990, pp. 155-199).

Table 2. *Holmes's (1990) Apology Strategies Classification*

1. An explicit expression of apology: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) An offer of apology/IFID: (e.g., <i>I am sorry!</i>) b) An expression of regret: (e.g., <i>I was wrong!</i>) c) A request for forgiveness: (e.g., <i>Pardon me!</i>)
2. An explanation or account: (e.g., <i>It was raining heavily.</i>)
3. An acknowledgement of responsibility: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Accepting the blame: (e.g., <i>It's all my fault.</i>)

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- b) Express self-deficiency: (e.g., *I was confused.*)
 - c) Recognize H (hearer) as entitled to an apology: (e.g., *You're right to feel outraged.*)
 - d) Express lack of intent: (e.g., *I didn't mean it.*)
 - e) Offer repair/redress: (e.g., *I'll make it up to you.*)

4. A promise of forbearance: (e.g., *It will never happen again.*)

3.5. Method for Analysis of Values

For the analysis of values, the study drew from the acknowledgement that emotions can be investigated through language use. According to Ghonsooly and Mazaheri (2010) “language and emotions are two related systems in use, in that one system (emotions) impacts the performance of the other (language)” (p. 50). Both emotions and language share their functionality in communication and an illustration of this link is captured by Mayfield and Mayfield (2018) who emphasize that when leaders communicate, they incorporate empathy or emotional bonding with their followers into their speech through the use of empathetic language. They explain that empathetic language involves being polite, understanding, accepting, and emotionally supporting the followers through communication. The present study relied on inductive thematic analysis in order to retrieve the values that emerged in the apology text. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a reliable method to encode qualitative information in analysing textual patterns of meaning because it is directly data-driven. Linguists affirm that lexical repetition of nouns and adjectives, meaning relations of synonymous and antonymous nouns, and adjectives are established cohesive tools in discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Halliday & Hassan, 1976). Al-khafaji (2005) states that repetition in a written text or verbal speech involves repeating an expression to invoke emotion. It is employed by speakers to enhance the dignity of the text and to emphasize an outlook, belief, or fact.

Therefore, the analytical method of this section was based on investigating the vocabulary, specifically lexical repetition and meaning relations, as a device to uncover the underlying leadership principles and values which are important in organizing, orienting, and shaping themes in discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Halliday & Hassan, 1976). Additionally, Fairclough (1989) notes that over-wording, which requires a high degree of wording, involves expressions that have nearly similar meanings. Hence, lexical repetition is a functional tool to reveal the embedded leadership themes in Obama's apology discourse. For this reason, this study was an attempt to search the content of vocabulary by focusing on meaning relations, synonymy (sameness of meaning), antonymy (oppositeness of meaning), and hyponymy (inclusion of meaning). This analytical method was also successfully challenged by Faris and Paramasivam (2016) to uncover the underlying ideological

themes in the discourse of Mandela. Their study produced a rather strong and consistent interpretation of the findings based on the analysis that was conducted. A few steps were taken as the procedure of the data analysis: Firstly, the words were coded using the lexical analysis (repetition and meaning relations); secondly, the codes were established independently; and thirdly, they were associated to leadership values.

3.6. Transcript of Apology

The apology text is as below:

- 1 I wanted to respond personally to the concerns you expressed regarding the recent research memo that our
- 2 campaign put into circulation.
- 3 I believe that your concerns with the memo are justified.
- 4 To begin with, the memo did not reflect my own views on the importance of America's relationship with India.
- 5 I have long believed that the best way to promote U.S. economic growth and opportunity for American workers
- 6 is to continually improve the skills of our own workforce and
- 7 invest in our own scientific research, technological capacity and
- 8 infrastructure, rather than to try to insulate ourselves from the global economy.
- 9 More importantly, the memo's caustic tone, and its focus on
- 10 contributions by Indian-Americans to the Clinton campaign, was
- 11 potentially hurtful, and as such, unacceptable.
- 12 The memo also ignored my own long-standing relationship to—and support from—the Indian-American
- 13 community.
- 14 In sum, our campaign made a mistake.
- 15 Although I was not aware of the
- 16 contents of the memo prior to its distribution, I consider the entire campaign –
- 17 and in particular, myself—responsible for the mistake.
- 18 We have taken appropriate action to prevent errors like this from happening in the future.
- 19 Please feel free to share this letter with other members of your
- 20 organization or leaders in the Indian-American community.
- 21 I look forward to our continued friendship and exchange of ideas—during the
- 22 course of this campaign, and beyond.
- 23 Sincerely,
- 24 Barack Obama

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Analysis of Types of Speech Acts

There are three types of speech acts found in this text as presented below:

1. Representative speech act

Throughout the text, the representative speech act is used in majority. The representative speech act is also known as the assertive speech act because it signifies the speaker's belief by assertion. This speech act is utilized by the speaker to draw the listener to believe the truth of what he or she uttered. The assertive speech act is strongly similar to Austin's (1962) constative utterance. The speaker asserts a proposition that represents a condition or a state of affairs that, in principle, could be true or false. Assertive speech acts are statements of fact, getting the viewer to form or attend a belief. Here, the speaker's words reveal his or beliefs and he or she is uttering about the external world. According to Searle (1969), the objective of the assertive class is to obligate and commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. Rolf (1990) states that the performance of this speech act is to question *What is (in fact) the case?*, whereby he notes the communicative purpose of the assertive is for the hearer to know the point of utterance. The sole function of this speech act is that the speaker, when making a claim or statement, is interested that the representation of the state of affairs given by him or her be accepted or shared by the hearer. This is most likely to be the case when the hearer believes that the world is as the speaker says, given the direction of fit (Searle, 1976)—word-to-world, whereby the speaker attempts to make the words fit the world. The psychological state expressed is belief (that p). Searle (1976) symbolizes this class as follows:

$$\vdash \downarrow B(p)$$

Thus, the speaker will want to bring about a corresponding belief or conviction of an expressed proposition on the part of the hearer (Rolf, 1990). English verbs that function as explicit assertive include *report, predict, inform, accuse, testify, confess, state, swear, criticize, complain*, and so on. The various verbs differ from one another by force or strength of the assertion. According to Searle (1983), "each speech act category serves a social purpose that goes beyond the expression of the sincerity condition. For example, the primary extralinguistic purpose of assertives is to convey information" (p. 187). As identified below, Obama has used the assertive speech act to transmit a piece of information that was used to correct the audience's knowledge and expectations of the word.

- [lines 3-9] *I believe that your concerns with the memo are justified. To begin with, the memo did not reflect my own views on the importance of America's relationship with India. I have long believed that the best way to promote U.S. economic growth and opportunity for American workers is to continually improve the skills of our own workforce and invest in our own scientific research, technological capacity and infrastructure, rather than to try to insulate ourselves from the global economy.*

The assertive illocutionary force is realized in lines 3-9 where Obama clarifies his belief that was previously perceived negatively. He asserts in the imperative manner that the content of the memo did not reflect his belief of America's relationship with India. He further emphasizes what he believes by stating each of them down in order to provide a clearer view for the audience to understand him from his perspective. The structure of his sentences strictly follows the representative syntactical structure that Searle (1976) has identified:

Formula: *I verb (that) + S.*

V

S

- line 3: [I] [believe] (that) your [concerns with the memo] are justified.
- lines 4-7: [I] [have long believed] (that) the [best way to promote U.S. economic growth and opportunity for American workers] is to continually...

V

S

An intense reflection of Obama's self-agreement and self-disagreement along with the use of strong verbs such as 'did not reflect my own views', 'I have long believed', 'ignored my longstanding relationship' and 'I consider myself responsible' is portrayed in Obama's representatives. These firm statements are straight forward and not long-winded; they do not run-around-the-bush and create confusion. This helps to provide clarity and assertion to the readers of Obama's standing in this matter.

- [lines 10-12] *More importantly, the memo's caustic tone, and its focus on contributions by Indian-Americans to the Clinton campaign, was potentially hurtful, and as such, unacceptable.*
- [lines 13-14] *The memo also ignored my own long-standing relationship to—and support from—the Indian-American community.*

2. Commissive speech act

The illocutionary goal of commissive speech act is to commit the speaker to perform some future action. This speech act is categorized as an intended act with the

purpose to convey that there is a promised action in the future. Likewise, commissives involve the act of pledging, vowing, refusing, promising, threatening, and guaranteeing. Commissives have the world direction of fit. The direction of fit is world-to-words and the sincerity condition is intention. The propositional content is always that the speaker S does some future action A (Searle, 1969). If the illocutionary is satisfied, the world is transformed to fit the propositional content. Given C as the member of this class, the symbolism for commissives is:

$$C \uparrow I (S \text{ does } A)$$

According to Searle (1983), the communicative purpose of commissives is that the hearer shall be orientated as to a certain future behavior of the speaker. He further adds that the social purpose of the commissive category, which he regards as extralinguistic, is to create stable expectations of people's behavior. This is depicted in the lines of the apology excerpt:

- [line 19] *We have taken appropriate action to prevent errors like this from happening in the future.*
- [lines 22-23] *I look forward to our continued friendship and exchange of ideas—during the course of this campaign, and beyond.*

Commissives carry the future tense and use words that refer to the future, as depicted in line 19 “. . . *happening in the future*,” and in lines 22-23 “*I look forward, and beyond*.” A hint of responsibility is applied in the prior part of sentence 19-20, “*We have taken appropriate action . . .*,” with assurance given in the latter lines of 19-20, “. . . *to prevent errors like this from happening in the future*” sounds like a genuine promise. To assure (in the commissive use) is to commit oneself to something with the perlocutionary intention to convincing someone who has doubts. The presupposition of these doubts is a preparatory condition and the attempt to try to have the hearer ‘feel sure’ of the commitment is, as in the assertive use, a special mode of achievement in giving assurance.

3. Directive speech act

The occurrence of a directive speech act is when the speaker expects the hearer to do a favour for him. This act can be issued from the speaker by asking a question, making a request, or extending an invitation. Rolf (1990) suggests that the question of the directives is *What shall the hearer do?*, which directs to the domain of relevance, where the future behavior of the hearer is. The communicative purpose as that the hearer shall do the request. The primary extralinguistic purpose of directives is to get people to do things (Searle, 1983). According to Searle (1976), “the illocutionary point of these consists in the fact that they are attempts (of varying degrees, and hence, more precisely, they are determinates of the determinable which

includes attempting) by the speaker to get the hearer to do something” (p. 11). They may be very modest attempts as inviting or suggesting you to do something, or they may be fierce attempts as insisting or forcing you to do it. The symbolization for commissives are:

!↑W (H does A)

The direction of fit is world-to-words and the sincerity condition is want (for wish or desire). The propositional content is always that the hearer H does some future action A.

- [lines 20-21] *Please feel free to share this letter with other members of your organization or leaders in the Indian-American community.*

The above lines are voiced as a request for assistance. According to Vanderveken (2009), “a request is a directive illocutionary act which allows the option of refusal. It differs from ‘direct’ only in the rather polite mode of achievement which is expressed in English by the modifier ‘please’” (p. 189). This justifies Obama’s utterance that began with a *please*.

4.2. Analysis of Strategies

The apology strategies are identified using Holmes (1990) apology model (see section 3.4). The strategies are presented in linear sequence as they occur in the memo. The references are provided:

- A. Acknowledgement of responsibility: Recognize H (hearer) as entitled to an apology

(lines 1-3)

This strategy will be chosen by the speaker only when he recognizes responsibility for the offense and is genuinely concerned for the hearer. This move is more of an initiative that stems from a person’s good conscience, perhaps from the side of them that is remorseful of the wrongdoing. This concept is also in line with Schlenker and Darby’s (1981) original work on understanding the reasons behind an apology. In contrast to this idea, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) argue that in attempt to please the hearer, the speaker often chooses to take on responsibility for the offence which created the need to apologize. Such recognition of one’s fault is face-threatening to the speaker and intended to appease the hearer. This requires strong self-humbling on the speaker’s part. Thus, the acceptance of responsibility would be viewed by the hearer as an apology, whereas the denial of responsibility would be intended as speaker’s rejection of the need to apologize.

Similarly, the famous apology speech act model by Olshtain and Cohen (1983) recognizes this strategy as the third formula: an acknowledgement of responsibility. There are four subformulas under this strategy, and lines 1-2 expresses the third subformula, which is the following: to recognize the other party as deserving an apology. This is depicted with the referrals of “I” as the offender and “you” as the victim. Obama put out his intention with “*I wanted to respond personally . . .*” as an initiation of a responsible move because the matter was concerning “you,” the victim. Line 3 brings about an emotional appeal with the word *justified*. With the use of this word, Obama acknowledges the right of the Indian-Americans to feel outraged and upset with him. He indirectly says that he understands their feelings and is nowhere in the place to judge them or ignore their cry even if he has a logical reason to defend himself against the existence of the memo. Thus, the offender will be able to win over the victim because the victim will feel that the offender is sympathetic andm therefore, is serious in offering the apology.

B. An explanation or account

(lines 4-14)

According to Trosborg (1987), “a complaineé may try to mitigate his guilt by giving an explanation or account of the situation” (p. 151). Various kinds of mitigating circumstances serve as indirect apologies and may be put forward on their own or in addition to a direct expression of apology. In an explanation or account, the offender admits that what he has done was undesirable and tries to lessen the blame which can be attached to him by referring to mitigating circumstances that may excuse his behavior. Thus, an explanation or an account serves as an excuse for a committed offense. The excerpt shows Obama giving an explanation of what he believed in, which was, unfortunately, portrayed in contrary to the truth. Lines 4-14 are a repeated assertion that Obama used to his defence, the idea that the memo failed to display his honest perception of America-India.

Again, Obama uses the emotional appeal to engage with the victims who were hurt. In lines 10-12, Obama uses the word *caustic* as a descriptive adjective to give a picture of how the memo was a mordant sense of humour. He tries to convey that the memo was produced without a cautious outlook of the danger that it might cause in the future. He later uses the word *hurtful* to describe the damage caused to the hearer’s feelings, which is a wise choice of word to express his feelings of empathy. Obama, then, as the head of his campaign passed the judgement of finding the memo *unacceptable*, instead of tolerating the immature act of his campaign in defence of his image and reputation. He criticizes the action and does not negate, deny, or give face to his campaign staff.

As lines 10-12 express the wrong done to the people, lines 13-14 express the wrong done to Obama as a candidate for presidency, which indirectly has tarnished his image. The idea of being victimized along with the people gives the readers the benefit of the doubt for Obama. Lines 13-14, as voiced by Obama, “*ignored my long-standing . . .*” paint a picture of his frustration for being misunderstood after he has invested in a long-term relationship with India. He uses “*to . . . and from*” to impress a concept of a give-and-take relationship and an equally shared bond with the affected community. This helped the victims to give Obama the benefit of the doubt because he has expressed to them that he also was equally done wrong to. This helps to provoke a thought for the victim that Obama was not behind this wrongdoing because it has brought him no benefit but more misfortune to his political career. It shows that one has to be wholehearted in going out of the way to apologize on somebody else’s behalf.

- C. i. Acknowledgement of responsibility: Express lack of intent
- ii. An explicit expression of apology: An expression of regret

(lines 15-18)

In lines 15 to 18, Obama acknowledges the mistake twice and holds himself, in particular, responsible. Although the mistake was not performed first-hand by him, he chooses not to disclaim the mistake or divert the attention solely to his campaign staff who was guilty for the act committed. In line 16, Obama expresses his lack of intent with “*I was not aware . . .*,” explaining that the existence of the memo escaped his knowledge. On a sentence level, the word *although* in “*Although I was not aware*” frames a picture of a person’s willingness to share responsibility though he is not the culprit. The phrase “*and in particular myself*” speaks about the person’s kind consideration to take the totality of the blame. Obama zooms the weight of the wrongdoing on himself, in particular, and holds himself responsible. On the whole, lines 15-18 appear to be an expression of regret. The confession in these lines fits a distressed apologizer who has received the penalization throughout the process of the unfortunate incident. Regret, as proved by past studies (Fraser, 1981; Edwards, 2010), is a strong weapon that symbolises remorse. Victims who hear of the offender’s remorse over the wrongdoing has a higher tendency to lean in to forgiveness.

- D. i. A promise of forbearance
- ii. Acknowledgement of responsibility: Offer of repair

(lines 19-21)

According to Trosborg (1987), “with respect to future behavior, an apologizer can promise either never to perform the offense in question again, or to improve his behavior in a number of ways” (p. 152). This is a description fit for both

strategies above. It relates to a case where the offender could have avoided the offense but did not do so, or it could be a promise to never allow the same mistake to repeat in the future. According to Scher and Darley (1997), a promise of forbearance increases the effectiveness of an apology by assuring hearers that the speaker will not repeat his transgression. If the function of an apology is to remedy the social breach and bring the transgressor back in the fold, then it is important for social interactants to feel that the transgressor is aware of the violated rule and will strive to follow the rule henceforth. Also, a promise of forbearance shows the character of the leader, whereby followers will be able to judge for themselves in the long run if the leader is trustworthy of his or her word or vice versa.

The tone of the statement above is authoritative and legal. A hint of responsibility is applied in line 18, “*We have taken appropriate action . . .*,” with assurance given in the latter lines of 19-21, “. . . *to prevent errors like this from happening in the future.*” Obama kept his word and issued a new policy for campaigning purposes. *Fox News* reported that this new policy requires every document irrespective of its purpose has to first be authorized by senior researchers before being released to the press or the public. Through this policy, a recurrence of a similar situation would be impossible in the near future. It has been argued that expressions acknowledging responsibility can fulfil the function of an apology in any context (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Vollmer & Olshtain, 1989); therefore, this strategy is highly recommendable to make amends for the wrongdoing.

E. An explicit expression of apology: A request for forgiveness

(lines 22-23)

Obama, in the above, calls for reconciliation. The above lines are voiced as a request for assistance. The request above will only be able to be fulfilled if the victims have agreed to spread the word of the apology and also grant forgiveness for a continuity of friendship. Lines 22-23 show a hopeful—yet confident—Obama for a continuity in the relationship “*during the course of this campaign, and beyond,*” given the reason for a continuous “. . . *exchange of ideas . . .*” impresses a win-win relationship, a give-and-take, where both parties are equally in need of each other, not one party exercising dominance on the subordinate other.

4.3. Thematic Analysis

The following values were induced after the text was coded from lexical repetition and meaning relations portrayed in the apology. See Appendix for the description of the codes:

Table 3. *Leadership Values in Obama's Apology*

Leadership Values	Analytical Techniques
Responsibility, Accountability	Corresponding lines: <i>I wanted to respond personally to the concerns you expressed</i> (line 1) <i>Our campaign made a mistake</i> (line 15) <i>I consider the entire campaign—and in particular myself—responsible for the mistake</i> (lines 17-18) <i>We have taken appropriate action to prevent errors like this</i> (line 19)
LR (Mis) LR (ProN-I)	<u>Lexical Repetition</u> Admitting it as a mistake: <i>mistake</i> (lines 15 & 18), <i>errors</i> (line 19) Usage of 1 st person pronoun: <i>I</i> (lines 1 & 17), <i>myself</i> (line 17), <i>our</i> (line 15), <i>we</i> (line 19)
MR (Hyp-Rb)	<u>Meaning Relations</u> Hyponyms: 1. Responsibility: <i>I wanted to respond personally</i> (line 1), <i>I consider the entire campaign—and in particular myself</i> (line 17), <i>we have taken appropriate action</i> (line 19)
Relationship	Corresponding lines: <i>The memo did not reflect my own views on the importance of America's relationship with India</i> (lines 4-5) <i>The memo's caustic tone, and its focus on contributions by Indian-Americans to the Clinton campaign, was potentially hurtful, and as such, unacceptable</i> (lines 10-12) <i>The memo also ignored my own long-standing relationship to—and support from—the Indian-American community</i> (lines 13-14) <i>Share this letter with other members of your organization or leaders in the Indian-American community</i> (lines 20-21) <i>I look forward to our continued friendship and exchange of ideas</i> (line 22)

LR (Rt)	<u>Lexical repetition</u>
LR (ProN-I)	Relationship: (lines 5 & 13) 1 st person emphasis: <i>my own views</i> (line 4), <i>my own long-standing relationship</i> (line 13), <i>I look forward</i> (line 22)
MR (N-Emo)	<u>Meaning relations</u> Cause-and-effect nouns: <i>caustic tone</i> (line 10), <i>potentially hurtful</i> (line 11), <i>unacceptable</i> (line 12)
MR (SyAd-Emo)	Synonymous adjectives: <i>caustic tone</i> (line 10), <i>potentially hurtful</i> (line 11)
MR (Hyp-DisAg)	Hyponyms
MR (Hyp-Rt)	1. Disagreement: <i>The memo did not reflect my own views</i> (line 4), <i>unacceptable</i> (line 12), <i>The memo also ignored my own long-standing relationship to—and support from—the Indian-American community</i> (lines 13-14) 2. Relationship tolerance: <i>importance of America's relationship with India</i> (lines 4-5), <i>contributions by Indian-Americans to the Clinton campaign</i> (line 11), <i>my own long-standing relationship to—and support from—the Indian-American community</i> (lines 13-14), <i>our continued friendship and exchange of ideas</i> (line 22), <i>share this letter with other members of your organization or leaders in the Indian-American community</i> (lines 20-21)
Visionary	Corresponding lines: <i>prevent errors like this from happening in the future</i> (line 19) <i>I look forward to our continued friendship and exchange of ideas—during the course of this campaign, and beyond</i> (lines 22-23)
LR (ProN-I)	<u>Lexical repetition:</u> Usage of 1 st person pronoun: <i>I</i> (line 22), <i>our</i> (line 22)
MR (SyN-F)	<u>Meaning relations</u> Synonymous nouns: <i>in the future</i> (line 19), <i>I look forward</i> (line 22), and <i>beyond</i> (line 23)
MR (Hyp-F)	Hyponym

Future vision: *prevent errors like this from happening in the future* (line 19),
I look forward to our continued friendship and exchange of ideas—during the course of this campaign, and beyond (lines 22-23)

4.4. Discussion

Obama, in line 1, recognizes the other party as deserving an apology in the representative speech act. Obama puts out his intention with “*I wanted to respond personally*” because he feels accountable and wants to take responsibility. Besides the first lines addressed, the apology, on the whole, made a heavy use of the first-person singular. This shows personal accountability. Leaders who are accountable are trusted and respected by their followers to keep their word. Accountability also displays humility because the leader has to put aside his or her pride to admit to a mistake. Lines 15-18 are the heart of the entire apology. Uttered in the assertive tone, Obama acknowledges the mistake twice and holds himself responsible, although the mistake was not performed first-hand by him. He used the strategy of ‘acknowledgement of responsibility: lack of intent’ to show that it was not his intention to hurt his followers. Line 15 shows that leaders who take responsibility for their actions focus on making the situation better, taking initiative to influence the outcome. This allows everyone to move on and focus on the end goal, rather than the problem. Even though Obama in line 16 admits that he was unaware of the contents of the memo, he does not try to mitigate the blame; rather, he takes responsibility for not being aware of the memo.

The next sentence that follows in the apology text is Obama informing the readers that they have taken appropriate action to prevent such an error as this from occurring again, which is the strategy of ‘a promise of forbearance.’ This is regarded as self-awareness, which according to Twain (2014), is an excellent form of strategy for an individual to identify his or her strengths and improve his or her weakness. Truly enough, as a lesson from this incidence, a new policy has been established, whereby all materials prior before its distribution to the public has to be, first, reviewed by senior staff. This example of Obama’s action shows how improvement can be made from a mistake, which will indirectly have a positive influence on his followers. These statements in the assertive tone of the representative speech act confirm that he was determined to keep his word till the outcome was accomplished.

Another value that Obama emphasizes is the importance of the relationship between a leader and his or her followers. The apology depicts Obama emphasizing on the relationship between him and the Indian-Americans. Whenever he mentions them, he indicates how appreciative he is of the relationship. “*To and from,*”

“*longstanding relationship*,” and “*support*” are among the catchphrases that Obama used to show the healthy relationship that both parties shared prior the incident. Lines 10-12 project the empathy through the strategy of ‘owing an explanation’ that Obama feels towards his followers who felt hurt as the result of the memo. By using adjectives such as “*caustic tone*,” “*justified*,” and “*hurtful*,” he recognizes the victims’ emotions. He shows that he understands their feelings, feels remorseful of the mistake, and wants to build rapport. Lines 20-21 express a request in the directive speech act to help Obama share the apology with all the other Indian-Americans who missed out the apology to repair the tarnished relationship. The strategy ‘offer of repair’ here is the magnitude of the apology itself to the victims. In lines 22-23, Obama shows that he values the relationship that he had with the Indian-Americans prior to the incident and requests for a reconciliation of that close relationship. According to a doctorate holder and teacher in *Leadership Studies*, Maxwell (1998) declares that connection and rapport are vital in any healthy communication. The law of connection claims that the stronger the relationship and connection is, the more likely the follower will want to help the leader. A classic example is President Ronald Reagan who was fondly called *daddy* by his White House staff, as an indication of the affection they felt from the connection he had with them. He was known as the Great Communicator for his ability to immediately connect with any audience. This trait was exemplified by Obama throughout the incident which, as a result, may have led the Indian-American community to be forgiving and accepting of Obama’s campaign.

In addition to the above, an added value that Obama portrays as a leader is his vision of the future. He uses the commissives which use the future tense to speak his vision for the people. Vision is essential in leadership because it radiates optimism, whereby a future outcome is anticipated for people to participate as partners in flourishing the expected outcome. Lines 22-23 show how positively Obama speaks of the future with the American Indians. He promotes a continued social interaction between both parties within a give and take concept. This is shown in the phrase “*exchange of ideas*.” With the usage of “*future*” and “*I look forward*,” Obama is hopeful and pushing for a reconciliation and renewed friendship to take place. This is an indirect manner of the strategy ‘an explicit expression of apology: a request for forgiveness.’ This is seen as he emphasizes continuity in the long-lasting relationship with the phrase “*during the course of this campaign, and beyond*.” This shows the positivity of a visionary leader.

In summary, the above sums up Obama as a leader who practices transformational leadership. The analysis shows that Obama utilized all of the strategies by Holmes (1990). Also, the findings of the analysis show that the apologetic statements were uttered in the representative speech act, which shows the

determination and seriousness in his apology. Obama used the ‘acknowledgement of responsibility’ strategy three times which is a winning choice and a single use of an expression of regret. This duo helped to promote an effective apology, as confirmed by previous researchers such as Kellerman (2006), Hargie et al., (2010), Fraser (1981), and Edwards (2010).

5. Conclusion

The current study analyzed “leadership as it happened” (Fairhurst, 2007, p. 25) in the apology context and showed that leadership is a discursive phenomenon, involving a leader’s dynamic and versatile skill in apologizing through the blend of speech acts, strategies, and values to inspire others. To be a good leader, one must be able to perform the speech act of apology well. A leader should know how to apologize effectively because in doing so, he or she will be able to bind themselves well in good rapport with his or her followers, which creates unity in the relationship. Apologies when done right bring about reconciliation and forgiveness. Therefore, leaders should not be ignorant or have an egoistic attitude by avoiding the rightful act to apologize having committed a transgression. Obama used speech acts such as representatives, commissives, and directives to emphasize his beliefs, promise future action of reparation, and request the cooperation of his followers to trust him as a leader. He also used diverse strategies to facilitate a well-meant apology that helped to reduce the dissatisfaction of his angered followers. Each of his apologetic sentences utilized several strategies to convey many genuine intentions without sounding repetitive or redundant. Obama demonstrates that leadership is a moral undertaking and a response to human wants, as they are expressed in human values. The style of this leadership is to be charismatic and inspiring. “The concept of moral leadership is proposed as a means for leaders to take responsibility for their leadership and to aspire to satisfy the needs of the followers” (Stewart, 2006, p. 9). Obama, in this apology, illustrates that leadership is highly situational and requires a flexible approach, especially in the face of a crisis where an apology from the leader is highly required to make amends. Leadership is a consistent communicative performance which, by influencing others, facilitates acceptable outcomes and which maintains harmony within the team or community of practice (Holmes, 2005). Leadership is, therefore, seen as a process or an activity. The focus is on the “interpersonal interaction processes and the communication which takes place between people, rather than simply on what a leader achieves” (Holmes, 2005, p. 1780). Evidently, Obama’s goal in this apology was to communicate to his followers that their relationship was worthy to him. A leader’s apology should be able to tap on values that are important and that matter to people. By practicing values such as responsibility, visionary, positivity, humility, and empathy, Obama has marked himself as a man with morals and leadership potential. This demonstrates a

transformational leadership style, whereby leaders inspire followers to be leaders themselves by practicing leadership behavior to inspire others. As a reward of his persistent leadership of values, he managed to redeem a good reputation after the damage with the truth behind the incident that took place. This study has demonstrated how the language of apology is a noble act that displays leadership through it. It is crucial for leaders to understand that apology is an important leadership behavior and practice (Brubaker, 2015).

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Appendix

Codes	Description
LR (Mis)	Lexical repetition: The word <i>mistake</i>
LR (ProN-I)	Lexical repetition: The pronouns in the 1 st person reference
LR (Rt)	Lexical repetition: The word <i>relationship</i>
MR (N-Emo)	Meaning relation: The nouns that relate to emotion
MR (SyAd-Emo)	Meaning relation: The synonymous adjectives that relate to emotion
MR (Hyp-DisAg)	Meaning relation: The hyponyms of disagreement
MR (Hyp-Rb)	Meaning relation: The hyponyms of responsibility
MR (Hyp-Rt)	Meaning relation: The hyponyms of relationship tolerance
MR (SyN-F)	Meaning relation: The synonyms nouns of the future
MR (Hyp-F)	Meaning relation: The hyponyms of a future vision
