(Im)politeness: norm and context (using the example of Georgian political talk-shows)

Manana RUSIESHVILI & Rusudan DOLIDZE
Tbilisi State University
Department of English Philology
ave. Chavchavadze, 36, 0179, Tbilisi, Georgia
manana_rusieshvili@yahoo.co.uk, rusudan_dolidze@yahoo.com

As is well known, while presenting their political views politicians frequently compare and contrast them to the opposing parties' platforms in order to make their advantages clearly visible to the public. Moreover, the main reasons why politicians participate in political TV debates are to promote their own opinions, their party and their political images, at the same time defaming their political opponents. Thus pre-election debates can be considered to be a platform for political interchanges in which, as noted by García-Pastor (2008: 101), the debaters intend to damage and dominate the opponent by showing the antagonism that underlies and shapes their relationship.

This paper aims to explore the strategies Georgian political leaders used while debating with their opponents in a pre-parliamentary election period. More specifically, relying on the general theoretical framework which will be discussed below, this paper makes the first attempt in Georgia to explore the following interconnected issues: a) how the rules of political shows and verbal duels between the participants (employing both linguistic and extralinguistic means) interact with the (im)politeness norms of Georgian society, b) how "harmless" verbal strategies and structures making up non-face threatening acts on the explicit, verbal level of the language (advice, questions, praise) become face threatening in context and finally, c) how power relationships in
the context of political TV debates are related to impoliteness in Georgian political discourse.

The data for the study are made up of the transcriptions of seven sessions of four hour-long talk shows dedicated to pre-election debates for the Georgian Parliament, with Georgian political leaders (from both government and opposition parties) taking part, and broadcast on Georgian TV channels between January and September, 2012.

2. Theorising the interrelationship between impoliteness and power

It has long been argued that one of the disadvantages of the fundamental model of politeness by Brown & Levinson (1987) is that it does not contain a clear definition of impoliteness except to suggest that impoliteness is an absence of politeness (Eelen 2001: 98-104; Bousfield 2008: 43) or "is equated with failing to use politeness strategies" (Tracy 2008). The post-Brown and Levinson approach to (im)politeness, classed as "contestable" (Harris 2007) or "post-modern" (Terkourafi 2005), departs from the original theory in several aspects. Firstly, it rightly looks at (im)politeness as a form of social practice which is deemed to be contested with participants of the discourse making assessments as to what is polite or impolite (Eelen 2001; Mills 2003; Watts 2003; Harris 2007). Secondly, (im)politeness is looked at as contextually situated, that is, enacted within discourse (Culpeper et al. 2003; Culpeper 2005). In addition to this, post-modern (im)politeness research argues that impoliteness is not inherent in language and needs to be judged against the norms of a community of practice/activity type in a particular context (Culpeper 2008: 20). This clearly means a shift of the focus of analysis from isolated lexical units, propositions or speech acts associated with a traditional Brown & Levinson (1987) approach, towards longer stretches of discourse as well as its prerequisites which are the lead-in set and the response of other participants (Bousfield 2008, 2010). In this respect, (im)politeness has already been explored with regard to the interactions that occur during a number of contexts, such as army training (Culpeper 1996), prime minister's question time (Harris 2001), television quiz shows (Culpeper 2005), political TV debates (Luginbühl 2007), presidential campaign debates (García-Pastor 2008) and so on.

The concept of (im)politeness is frequently associated with two factors: a) intentionality/un–intentionality and b) expression of power in the context. Impoliteness occurs (1) if the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally and (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2) (Culpeper, 2005: 38). However, there is still no final agreement about which term would be the most appropriate to characterise intentionally offensive utterances (Bousefield 2010). Terkourafi (2008) considers the term "rudeness" to be the most
appropriate one to describe such behaviour, whereas Tracy (2008) prefers the term "face-attack". We will adopt the latter term, but emphasise the fact that verbal attack (direct or indirect) is not only intentional in debates between political opponents, but also, permitted and expected.

Verbal performance of the host and participants of political shows on TV has been attracting considerable attention. For instance, while discussing forms of conversational violence in political TV debates, Luginbühl (2007: 1374) defines an act of conversational violence as a drastic restriction of the individual's conversational rights which may affect the speaker's conversational efficiency. He also singles out the most common strategies employed by politicians in such debates and argues that in the majority of cases "the arguments presented are secondary; the main issue is the fight" (Luginbühl 2007: 1375). Watts (1991: 58) also maintains that the central meaning of power "involves a conflict of interests rather than a consensus". Moreover, as noted by García-Pastor (2008: 102), politicians discredit their opponents and coerce them into a specific course of action in their interchanges. This gives place to a discursive struggle which evinces the interrelation between impoliteness and power in political debates.

3. The Georgian political spectrum: setting the scene, political parties as CofP

The Georgian geo-political situation, along with the fact that Georgia is a relatively small nation, means that it is often viewed as a bridge between European and Asian cultures, creating a sense of cultural hybridity (Rusieshvili 2010).

The Georgian political community can be looked on as a distinct Community of Practice (CofP) with well-defined political platforms, codes of behaviour and even style and manner of speech (Petriashvili 2009). Moreover, before the Parliamentary elections of 2012 the whole jigsaw spectre of the Georgian Political Community consisted of several small CofPs with distinct roles and arrangements of power variables within each CofP. On the arena of political battles in Georgia, in the pre-election period, active political parties comprised three distinct blocks: a) governmental party; b) a "radical" opposition not taking part in the work of parliament but opposing the government in the majority of economic or political issues and c) a "mild" opposition comprised of politicians known for their desire to constructively cooperate with the government and because of this, accused of being "satellites" by the radical opposition. All these parties have their followers in society as politics is very much rooted in the everyday life of Georgia.

The Georgian language heads a group of Kartvelian languages of the Iberian-Caucasian family and is characterised by a complex paradigm of verbal and nominal systems (Imedadze & Tuite 1992). Another typical feature of a
Georgian verb is the insertion of inflexions denoting grammatical as well as honorific meaning into a verb itself. Thus the use of V/t forms of a personal pronoun is not mandatory. However, when used, normally only V forms are used with plural verb address forms and the t forms are used only with singular verb forms. Clearly, V forms are deferential and distancing whereas t forms express solidarity and familiarity.

4. Data and methodology

As part of the pre-election campaign 2012, debates were considered as a powerful tool presented to the participants of the debates in order to convince the electorate of the advantages of their political platforms over those of their opponents. As the pre-election debates were held between the members of the government and of the opposition, they naturally involved adversarial and face damaging acts which, as argued by Harris (2001), include accusations, criticism, contempt and ridicule and which are not only sanctioned in this discourse but also expected and rewarded. While analysing verbal performance of politicians participating in the political show "Arena", Luginbühl (2007) discusses several strategies employed while defaming the opponent, which include asking a question, giving advice, speculating, etc. and concludes that "although inoffensive on the surface, these speech acts often imply serious attacks on the integrity of the opponents" (Luginbühl 2007: 1374-1376) enabling the politicians to show their capacity for handling political conflicts.

Our primary interest lays in the verbal strategies which are part of a priori non-face threatening acts in the system of the language and thus are not considered to be rude or insulting per se but acquire face threatening connotations in the context. In order to explore such cases, the research embraces the following: it explores a) linguistic and extra-linguistic\(^1\) (paralinguistic) means used in the Georgian context of the political talk show while (directly and indirectly) attacking the face of the opponent; (b) the ways politeness norms are modified in the context; (c) reasons behind the indirect or direct acts of face-attack and their connection to power relationships between the debaters. These issues constitute the main research issues addressed in this article.

The data of the study are based on seven hour-long sessions of four political talk shows belonging to both governmental and opposition parties. Out of the talk shows selected for analysis, one was known as government-oriented, one was classed neutral and two as sympathising with the opposition. Although all

\(^1\) By extra-linguistic (paralinguistic) means we refer to prosodic strategies employed by the speakers (pitch of the voices, tempo, intonation, etc.), which add contextual hints to the stretch of the discourse, as well as to the speakers' facial expressions and gestures.
four shows were monitored by a moderator, they were conducted in two different formats: in two of them the moderator interviewed the participants one after the other, with one of the opponents in the studio and the other(s) participating live from elsewhere, whereas in the other two shows both participants took part in the debate simultaneously. The role of the moderator was quite significant in all shows and included the rights to interrupt the participants and to ask additional questions. The moderators were all female, whereas out of six interviewees three were female and three male, within the range of 35-45 years of age.

5. Analysis of the examples

Below we report several extracts which illustrate the employment of both indirect strategies, which indirectly attack the opponent's face (general questions, advice, insincere regrets, metaphorical language), and direct strategies, which reveal direct opposition (requests for clarification, misused address forms and direct attack on the opponents's face).

5.1. Indirect strategies of face-attack (general questions and advice) combined with direct face-attack

Extract 1 (A: opposition party; B: representative of the city hall)

1. A: By the way, talking about the budget of Tbilisi, I do not think that
2. the budget for the last year was adequately planned because a lot
3. of (. ) projects, (. ) a lot of projects (. ) failed.
4. B: Really? Please, let me ask you – are you familiar with the
5. budget?
6. A: What do you [mean]?
7. B: [I mean] have you read it?
8. A: Sure I have, (. ) Let's now discuss the project about insurance (. ) and
9. the project about old-[age pensions].
10. B: [Do you not think] it would be a good idea to
11. learn more about the latest developments in this respect and most
12. importantly, (. ) Have you read about that? If not, perhaps you should!
14. B: Then we are talking about two different attitudes toward the
15. projects of insurance and old age pensions. The media have given a
16. lot of positive attention to them. Have you noticed that?
17. A: By the way, we also read newspapers and watch TV. What I mean
18. is that in reality the projects were bluff!

2 The examples have been translated from the Georgian language (Georgian versions are given in appendix 1). The sentences in bold indicate relevant strategies for the extract. The following transcription conventions have been used: (.) indicates a pause of two seconds or less; (-) indicates a pause of three seconds and more; [ ] closed brackets indicate simultaneous speech; SORRY - text pronounced loudly.
In this discussion taking place between two male speakers (a government official representative of the City Hall (B) and an opposition leader (A)), the face attack performed by A was quite explicitly felt from A's turn in lines 1-3 on and became especially direct in the final utterance (line 18), when Speaker A openly refers to the projects in question as bluff. On the other hand, Speaker B also attacks his opponent's face by means of Yes/No questions. Altogether, such questions in this extract are asked four times by both speakers, once by Speaker A (line 7) and three times by Speaker B (lines 4, 12 and 16). Obviously, both Speakers use this strategy and a friendly act of advice (with hidden irony) (line 12) in order to embarrass their opponent and make the viewers, prospective voters, see that the embarrassed opponent cannot answer their questions.

On the extra-linguistic level Speaker A seemed increasingly uncomfortable as he had failed to produce the exact statistical data and at the end of the debate, he felt (and looked) trapped in an embarrassing situation, which was well-used by his opponent who further attacked him by restricting his conversational space (lines 6-7). In order to save his face, Speaker A was forced to regain his position by employing an ironic remark ("by the way, we also read newspapers and watch TV") as well as by making the final accusation (lines 17-18).

Thus in the above extract Speaker B succeeded in making the viewers realise that Speaker A was not confident enough by employing non-face threatening verbal strategies on the explicit level, such as Yes/No questions and advice. However, both of these strategies served as instances of indirect face attack in the context.

Overall, Speaker B was more powerful not only socially (being a government representative), but contextually as well, as he managed to win the battle employing verbal strategies combined with interrupting the opponent and restricting his conversational rights.

5.2 Direct face-attack combined with insincere regrets and an appeal to the opponent for honesty

Extract 2 (A: opposition party; B: Government party)
1. A: The Government did not manage to overcome the fear they had towards
2. the opposition,(.) but now they will have to do so and conduct
3. democratic elections(-). All the other parties but ours belong to the
4. "pseudo-opposition", your satellite parties and (-) if your leader is
5. afraid of a competitive atmosphere, it is his problem (.).
6. B: You mentioned the word "fear", yes, someone is afraid, but
7. it is not the President, it is an absolutely different person, your
8. leader, who is genuinely terrified of people learning that he
9. doesn't have followers left; if these elections are conducted in a
10. competitive atmosphere (.)yes, they will be beaten, shamefully(.)
11. [and one more]
12. A: [I am sorry, but here], you are leading the viewers into a mistake
13. as a safe election environment is the demand of the law and does not
14. depend on anybody's personal decision. It is a shame that you should
15. think that this process is a child's play and the issue could be
16. sorted out by some politician publishing some letter and everything
17. will depend on someone's wish to sign it or not. [It maybe] (-).
18. B:
19. you, unfortunately, assume so. I am sorry that you think so, but we
20. should be honest with our voters and tell them straightforwardly
21. what's happening in reality.

Extract (2), which is a debate between two female leaders (Speaker A, an
opposition leader, and Speaker B, a representative of the government), starts
with a direct attack on the opponent's group face (lines 1-2). In addition, it
shows two instances of using the formula I am sorry (lines 12 and 19), which
is typical of the speech acts of apology and regret and sounds cooperative on
the explicit level. However, the illocutionary meaning of the first case implies
neither regret nor apology. More specifically, in the first example (line 12), I am
sorry is used by the opposition leader as a strategy introducing the appeal for
her opponent's honesty. On the other hand, in the second case, this formula
as a linguistic realization of regret is combined by the government
representative with the negative assessment of the opponent's acts (line 19)
and a reference to their dishonesty (line 20). In both of these cases the
opponents desire to strengthen their position by attacking the opponent's face.
For instance, Speaker A employs the formula (line 12) and direct accusation to
defame their political rivals by referring to their dishonesty. On the other hand,
to achieve a similar aim, Speaker B, on her part, tries to retaliate by employing
not only negative assessment of the opponent's acts and reference to their
dishonesty (lines 19 and 20), but also a paralinguistic one, a raised voice (the
same line).

However, overall, Speaker B staged her responses better than Speaker A
which was suggested by the even tone of her voice as well as an open and
honest facial expression. By gradually restraining her opponent's speaking
time and forcing her to retaliate by losing confidence she displayed at the
beginning of the extract, she appears to be a more powerful participant of the
duel.

5.3 Usage of figurative language (irony & metaphor)

Extract 3 (Speaker A: opposition party, Speaker B: government party, Speaker C:moderator)
1. A: You are a *serious* politician, kalbatono B
2. all means, set tomorrow

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3 A deferential honorific used when addressing a woman. For instance, Kalbatono Katty (Mrs/Madam Keti).
3. B: And it will rise the day after tomorrow, by all means. By the way, are you trying to avoid answering my questions?
4. A: If I had to answer your accusations, I would look as 'serious'
as you are, but, fortunately, I do not have to do so, as they are nonsense.
5. C: Please, respond to them, kalbatono A
6. A: If I did so, I would be like kalbatoni B and I am not burning with the desire to be like her. At one of her interviews, I noticed tears in her eyes and I am not going to debate with weak women.

This extract is taken from a dialogue between two female readers (Speaker B representing the government and speaker A representing the opposition) and a moderator (C, line 8) and it combines both indirect and direct ways of face-attack. We find the extract interesting for several reasons relevant to our research. First, as was mentioned, it combines two strategies of indirect face-attack frequently employed by politicians (including Georgian politicians: irony and metaphor). Specifically, the ironical remarks (lines 1 and 5) combined with the direct face-attack regarding how face-damaging it would be for Speaker A to be like Speaker B (lines 5 and 8) and with the prediction that the opponent's party will lose next day (general elections day) expressed by an idiom (your sun will set, line 1). The opponent (Speaker B) interprets the idiom correctly and enriches it by combining two readings actualised simultaneously (line 3): on the day of the elections, the sun will set not due to the defeat of their party in the elections (as implied by the opponent, Speaker A), but due to the general truth that the sun always sets in the evening. However, according to the speaker B, their sun will rise by all means the day after tomorrow, which implies that their party will win the elections.

In addition, the extract continues by the opponent's accusation of Speaker B being weak as being a woman; indeed, she had been seen with tears in her eyes at one of the interviews. Apparently, although a tear in a woman's eye seems to be a natural thing, female politicians are expected not to behave in this way.

In this extract, despite being a representative of the opposition, and thus the less powerful participant of the debate, Speaker A is definitely a more powerful participant as she directly attacks both her opponent's group face and her personal face and, by doing so, uses an opportunity she may not have in other social contexts.

5.4 Requests for clarification with misused address forms

As was mentioned above, the Georgian language distinguishes between V/t forms of personal pronouns. The data revealed their frequent misuse. For instance, in the following extract which discussed whether one of the key figures of the elections should have been given Georgian citizenship, the
debate between Speaker A (representative of the government) and Speaker B (member of the opposition) unfolded in the following way:

**Extract 4 (A: representative of the government, B: member of opposition)**

1. A: The fact is that a person can become a citizen of Georgia either by birth or by naturalisation. If a person has accepted the citizenship of another country, they automatically lose Georgian citizenship. So, as batoni X has done so, the only way back would be to renounce French citizenship and in this case he will get Georgian citizenship back.

2. B: So, YOU (t) tell me that batoni X can get Georgian citizenship only if and when he renounces French citizenship? The person who has done so much for [Georgian people]....

3. A: [Not me, the LAW says that] ....

*T* forms of the personal pronoun are classed as a solidarity form and thus suggest friendlier and more familiar relationships. In this case Speaker B uses them as a "deprecating strategy" of a direct face-attack and emphasises the contrast between Speaker A and the person they are talking about, stressing the latter's contribution to the country's welfare. Extra-linguistic means employed in this example add to the general effect and make the process of adequate decoding easier. For instance, Speaker B sounded and looked indignant whereas Speaker A was definitely amiable, smiling and pleased that he could rely on the law. This reliance on the law allowed him to interrupt Speaker B thus restricting his speaking rights. One and the same extra-linguistic strategy, the raised voice (lines 7 and 10), serves two different purposes in this example: in the first case (line 7) it is the opposition leader who raises his voice to express his annoyance, whereas in the other case (line 10) the government official's raised voice sounds triumphant.

**6. Discussion and conclusions**

The aim of this study was the identification of (a) linguistic and extra-linguistic means used in the Georgian context of the political talk show while (directly and indirectly) attacking the face of the opponent; (b) the ways politeness norms are modified in the context; (c) reasons behind the face-attack and their connection to power. It was maintained *a priori* that extra-linguistic means, including facial expressions and gestures, add contextual hints to the stretch of discourse. This research revealed that Georgian politicians employ strategies outlined in other works discussing linguistic behaviour of politicians (Luginbühl 2007) and singled out additional instances which proved to be frequently used in the Georgian political discourse. More specifically, while performing indirect face-attacks, Georgian leaders address a number of strategies (general questions, friendly advice, indirect metaphorical language) in which seemingly harmless verbal, linguistic strategies become face-damaging in the context, combined with extra-linguistic means including
interruption of turn-taking in the debate, aggressive tones, raised voices, ironic facial expressions, sarcastic smiles. Indirect face-attack is frequently combined with direct strategies (accusations, appeal for honesty). It is also worth mentioning that government leaders expressed their power by predominantly using indirect strategies of face-attack whereas opposition leaders, less powerful participants of the debates, were more consistent than their more powerful opponents from the government in using confrontational strategies relying on direct face-attack.

Harris (2001: 466) argues that in political discourse systematic impoliteness is not only sanctioned but rewarded as the main role of the opposition is to oppose, i.e to criticise, challenge, ridicule, subvert, etc the policies and positions of the government. Luginbühl (2007) maintains that conversational violence is part of the political role and life of politicians nevertheless their status.

The data analysed in this article revealed that Georgian political shows can be considered to be one of the places (besides street meetings, etc) where systematic (im)politeness in the form of ritualistic face attack is practised. Naturally, in order to persuade the electorate to vote for them, political leaders have to convince the voters that they are sound enough and strong enough to fulfil their expectations and keep their pre-election promises.

As noted by Locher (2004: 323), to qualify as an exercise of power it is necessary to establish whether there has indeed been a serious conflict and clash of interests between the participants of discourse. Certainly, the participants of the political debates are generally known for having serious disagreement over political matters and for the desire to use that in their personal as well as in their party's favour.

In order to achieve this, the participants of the debates employed both linguistic and extra-linguistic strategies in order to pursue short-term and long-term goals. The short-term goals can be identified as the desire to win the battle and, considered in accordance with Beebe's (1995) classification of conversational management, to make the interlocutor talk, stop talking, shape what they say or to get the floor. On the other hand, long-term goals of the debaters are based on their winning the war, which in this case, would make them Members of Parliament.

REFERENCES


Appendix 1

Extract 1
1. A: sxvata shoris, rotsa tibilisis biujetze vlaparakobt, ara mgonia
   gasuli tslis biujeti argad kopiliko dagemgili radganats bevri..
   proekti ....chavarda
2. B: martla? neba mometsit gkitxot, itsnobot ki am
   budgets?
3. A: ras gulixmobot?
4. B: me vgulixmobot.tsakixuli gakvt biujeti?
5. A: ratkma unda, makvs,... vtkvat,dazrvevis shesaxeb proekti...
   an proeqti pensiebis shesaxeb.
6. B: ikneb sjobdes ufro meti tsagekitxat am tvalsazrisit ra moxda bolos
7. ufro mnishvnekowania, ...tsakixuli gakvt ki
8. amis shesaxeb? tu ara, ikneb tsakixot.
10. B: mashin chven or gansxavebul midgomaze vlaparakobt
dazrvevisa da pensiebis shesaxeb. mediashi bevri dadebiti
11. gamoxmeureba iko matze. es shegimchnevlat?
13. realoobaa is, rom es proektebi tkuli iko!

Extract 2
1. A: mtavrobam ver moakherkha daedzialia shishi
2. opozitsiisadmi(.) magram axla moutsevt, rata
demokratiuli archevnebi chaataron.(-).kvela sxva partia chven
3. garda ekuyvnis "psevdo-oppositsias", tkbem sateitur partiebs da tu
4. tkevn lidera eshinnia konkurentsiiisa, misi problemaa(-)
5. B: (-) tkven axsenet sityva "shishi", diax, vighetas eshinia,magram,
es ar aris presidenti,es aris absoluturad sxva adaminai,tkveni
6. lidera,romelsats namdvilad eshinnia, rom xalxi mixvdeba, rom mas
   aghar hkavs mimdevrebi; tu es archvnebi chatardeba konkurentul
   garemoshi,(-) isini tsagebem, samartxvinod(-)
7. [and one more]().
8. A: [vtsuxvar, magram aq], makureblebi shetsdomashi shegkavt
   tavisufali archevnebi kanonis motxovnaa da ar aris damokidebuli
   vinmesde pirad gadatskvetilebaze. samtsuxaroa, rom pikrobt,
   es procesi bavshvis tamashia da motsesridgeba vinme politikosi
   da kvelaferi damokidebulia vinmes survilze
9. xeli moatseros rame tserils sheidleba (-).
10. B: [me ara magram tkven](-)
11. tkven, samtsuxarod, ASE GGONIAT. [vtsuxvar ase tu fikrobt]magram
12. chven pinnatelini unda vikot chven amomrchevlbtan da pirdapir
13. vutxrat, ra xdea sinamdvileshi.
**Extract 3**

1. A: tkven "**seriousúli**" politikosi xart, kalbatono B and tkveni mze
2. autsileblad chaesveneba xval
3. B: da autsileblad amova zeg
4. sxvata shoris, ratom aridebt tavs pasuxis gatsemas?
5. A: Tkven braldebebes rom vupasuxo, tkvennari "**seriozuli**"unda viko
6. magram, sabedniero, ar momtsevs, radganats braldebebi
7. sisulelea.
8. C: gtxovt, upauxet, kalabtono A.
9. A: ase rom gavaketo, **kalbatoni B-savit unda viko da ara makvs didi**
10. survili the masavit viko.intervius ert natselshi mis tvalze
11. tsremli shevamchnie da arvapireb debatebshi shesvlas sust kalebtan

**Extract 4**

1. A: paktia, rom sakartvelos mokalake sheidlzeba gaxdet an
2. dabadebit, an naturalziastiit. tu pirovnebam miigho sxva kveknis
3. mokalakeoba, igi avtomaturad kargavs sakartulvelos mokalakeobas.
4. ase rom, radganax batoni X ase moiktsa, ertaderti gza rcheba
5. safrangedti mokalakeobis uarkopa da am shentxvaveashi igi
6. daibrunebs sakartvelos mokalakeobas.
7. B: ese igi, shen (t) **meubnebi**, rom batoni X can mxolod im shentxvevashi
8. miirebs sakartvelos mokalakeobas, rodesats igi uars itkvis
9. safrangetis mokalakeobaze? katsi,romelmats amdeni gaaketa for
10. [Georgian people](.)
11. A: [me ara, kanoni ambobs ase](.)