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Face-Saving Acts in Yoruba Custom: A Pragmatic Investigation of Oba Ajakaye Movie

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ABSTRACT: The primacy of speaking as one of the four language skills is most pronounced in drama, being a genre of literature that is said to mirror life. In order to reach a wider audience, Nigerian local movies are being projected through online digital platforms. In spite of this tilt, many more studies still largely focus on drama written texts with less attention on on-line projected movies as an area deserving of scholarly investigation. To fill this void, this paper, which adopts a qualitative research design, seeks to investigate whether higher social status are honourifics and determinants of politeness strategies employed in Yoruba custom, using Brown and Levinson theory of politeness strategies. A purposive sampling of the online data for this study was conducted. Interlocutors deployed the four politeness strategies postulated by Brown and Levinson. Altogether, fifteen politeness strategies were used in the data analysed for this study. The politeness strategies with the frequency identified in the data are: Bald-on-recordoccurred five times, Off- record occurred five times, Negative and Positive face occurred three and two times respectively. The investigationfound out that higher social statusin Yoruba custom attract honour and deference, and that, bald –on record and off-record are the

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highest politeness strategies used in the data which elicit discourses of Face-Threating Acts (FTA's). The study concluded that social higher status in Yoruba custom served as honourifics and largely accounted for the choice of politeness strategies employed by the interlocutors.

Keywords: *Oba Ajakaye, Honourifics, Yoruba, Oreoluwa, Arilesere.*

Introduction

As it is in most social contexts, language use in dramatic discourse is seldom neutral; it is often largely determined by social relations and power asymmetric arising from socio-economic factors like wealth, income, race, education, ethnicity, gender, occupation, culture or custom and social status of characters in movies. As obtainable in reality, interactions among dramatic personas within the social web of movies reflect face consideration and protection. This is more pertinent when such interactions instantiate social distance among interlocutors. Thus, face consideration as a major thrust of politeness theory in Pragmatics is a fundamental mechanism through which interlocutors in dramatic performances navigate interpersonal relations and mitigate potential conflicts in communication.

Given that each conversational encounter in a movie is potentially prone to Face Threatening Acts (FTA's), part of the social realities dramatically represented in on-line movies are FTA's and the use of different politeness strategies as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978) to mitigate the threats. On this basis, the study aims at investigating whether Yoruba traditional social statuses arehonourifics and the determinant of politeness strategies through a pragmatic analysis of an on-line movie titled "Oba Ajakaye."

This study undertakes the review of relevant literature, presents its methodology within which the theoretical framework is stated; findings, discussion, conclusion, recommendations, limitations and lastly, the references.

Literature Review

This section of the study reviews concepts related to the study. These include Pragmatics, honourifics, politeness strategies and a brief on the Yoruba people. A plethora of opinions have been expressed by scholars on the concept of Pragmatics. In this regard, Levinson

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sees it as the study of those relations between language and context that are gramaticalised, or encoded in the structure of a language (Levinson, 1987, p.9). Similarly, Yule submits that Pragmatics is the study of the relationship between linguistic forms and the users of those forms. He stresses further that the advantage of studying language through Pragmatics is that one can talk about people's intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes or goals and the kinds of actions that they perform when they speak (Yule, 1996, p.4). The submission of Yule (p.4) resonates with the opinion of Levinson (p.10) which places emphasis on functionality of pragmatic approach to the understanding of an utterance. Thus, according to Levinson, Pragmatics is the study of language from a functional perspective as it attempts to explain facets of linguistic structure by reference to non-linguistic pressures and causes (Levinson, 1987, p.7). It is little wonder therefore, that extra linguistic settings that form the basis of a pragmatic analysis of an utterance portray the speaker's different shades of meaning that may be embedded in an utterance; indicating that a pragmatic analysis of an utterance could generate different meanings. This is succinctly captured by Allot as he observes that Pragmatics is concerned with how speakers can mean various things by their utterances, and how hearers can grasp what was meant (p. 94). The foregoing review on the concept of Pragmatics underscores the relevance of context in the interpretation of language use in any human interaction.

The context of the movie is a fictional one that mirrors Yoruba cultural myth, belief and custom. Yoruba people are renowned for observing deference and politeness and are very respectful set of people. The Yoruba language has adequate resources for face- saving acts and mitigations that ensure peaceful locutionary transactions across every strata of Yoruba society. As native-born speakers who enjoyed sound sociocultural education in Yoruba land while growing up, the researchers are privileged to affirm the movie as representative of the Yoruba culture it mirrors, considering the locutions of the interlocutors.

Furthermore, Yoruba custom has been variously clarified by some linguists and scholars but in this paper the term is understood as the Yoruba habitof social interpersonal interaction in the community. Yoruba people deploy certain linguistic expressions to mitigate FTAs as the current study reveals.

Notwithstanding, this study draws strength from an observation of the paucity of texts and virtual resources that investigate how traditional titles and social distance among Yoruba

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interlocutors elicit any form of politeness and how FTAs are mitigated in Yoruba custom. Aside from some texts on Culture and Customs of the Yoruba (2017), Culture and Customs of the Yoruba (2018), Beginner's Guide: 22 Books on Yoruba Mythology, Indigenous Knowledge; and Literature (2023) and few other titles, there is hardly any study comparable to the current investigation.

Dramatic performance is typically a reflection of social happenings within specific contexts of human interactions. Through the Pragmatic lens, it is possible to understand how meanings are created and negotiated beyond the literal words by paying attention to the context of language use, as typified by a dramatic milieu. Words encode meanings; one of such is honourifics. There exist within the repertoire of all languages of the world some words or expressions by means of which certain individuals are accorded respect and shown politeness. Such expressions are called honourifics. In this regard, Agha posits that all human languages contain a repertoire of relatively localisable devices-pronouns, nouns or noun phrases – the very use of which in designating, addressing or referring to individuals has immediate consequences for the social evaluation of respect or deference to the individual thus identified (Agha, 2004, p.32). Similarly, Lisa submits that honourifics are linguistic forms that are used prototypically to express regard or esteem toward an entity worthy of respect, most typically a person of superior social standing (Lisa, 2005, p.369). In the same vein, Sabah says honourifics are one of the many expressions of respect that may be conveyed in many languages (Sabah, 2018, p. 81).

Arguably, honourifics appear more often together with social status than apart. In fact, the psychological demand of respect and deference associated with social status is first and foremost triggered by honourific element. In his psychoanalytic theory, Sigmund Freud sees ego as the most central part of the mind, which mediates with one's surroundings. Thus, ego comes with a feeling of self-importance and it is a psychological trait inherent in every normal human being. A feeling of self-importance, which ego connotes, always demands social recognition and acceptance (Sigmund, 1960, p. 15).This is affirmed by Adewunmi, the King in excerpt B of the data for this investigation. Accordingly, one of the socio-pragmatic strategies for recognising and maintaining the self-worth of others in communication is politeness. Politeness is a universal want across cultures and languages as humans share basic concern for maintaining social harmony, dignity and mutual respect.

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Elias asserts that during the renaissance period, not only upper class people, but also other people were concerned with the amelioration of social manners and social tact. In this regard, Elias' position aligns with Freudian perspective on the universality of "ego" as an intrinsic property of human being (Elias, 2005, p. 22).

The concept of politeness has been viewed from four major perspectives, which are: the social norm view, the conversational maxim view, the face-saving view, and the conversational contract view. According to Rima, the social norm view of politeness assumes that each society has a particular set of social norms which are explicit rules that guide certain behaviour of people, their state of affairs as well as their way of thinking in different contexts ((Rima, 2021, p.238). It is applicable to this study as it is the concern of Ajibola's mother in excerpt A and the basis for Adewunmi's castigation of Ajibola her lover in excerpt B. In short, the first three view of politeness are manifest in Yoruba custom.

The conversational maxim view of politeness derives from the work of Paul Grice in the theory of implicature and the Cooperative Principle. Fraser observes that the superior principle in interpersonal conversation according to Grice is the Cooperative Principle. It holds that one should make one's contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by accepted purpose or direction of the talk in which one is engaged (Fraser, 1990, p.14). In this study, this is found to be so.

The Face-Saving View of politeness is attributed to the Theory of Politeness by Brown and Levinson (1992) and is saidto be the most influential of all other theories of politeness; having attracted countless number of reactions, applications, modifications, critique, and revision. Foad (2023) in his revision of Brown and Levinson' theory confirmed that it is '… considered the standard model.' He also stated that the theory '…can account…for peoples' choice of politeness strategies… and that power relations, social distance and rank of imposition are influential factors in the degree of politeness. The current study corroborates this statement as it is established by the data analysis. The assertions above reflect the suitability and applicability of the theory to this investigation.

In addition, this paper notes that scholars interest in the theory since its debut till now remains warm as recent literatures establish; Said (2024), Hossein & Masoumeh (2016) and many more continue to give attention to the theory.

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Furthermore, according to (Ending, 2013, p.92), Brown and Levinson see politeness in terms of conflict avoidance. The central themes are rationality and face, which are acclaimed to be universal features that are possessed by all speakers and hearers.

The idea of 'face' above is beyond the literal meaning of mere physical visage; it is used as a symbolic representation of the social value an individual personality commands and for which the sensibilities of such individual may be offended, if respect to him as a social decorum is ignored. To shed more light on this, (Atsushi, 2003, p.6) observes that in their universal politeness theory, Brown and Levinson (ALA, 1992) suggest five possible strategies to alleviate a-face-threatening act (FTA) which include: One, by saying it as it is (bald on record) two, by going off- record; three, by positive politeness, four, by negative politeness and five, by not doing the face-threatening-act. These are found suitable for the analysis of the current study for being explicit. Similarly, the conversational contract view of politeness is linked to the theory of politeness by Leech. His theory of politeness situates politeness within a framework of interpersonal rhetoric. The major purpose of politeness principle, he (Leech, 1983, p.67) posits, is to establish and maintain feelings of comity within social groups. Furthermore, he avers that politeness principle regulates the social equilibrium and friendly relation, and it enables us assume that our utterances are being cooperative. The theoretical framework shall be discussed.

This study is predicated on Brown and Levinson's Theory of Politeness as indicated above. The theory is one of the most influential pragmatic frameworks for explaining how interlocutors manage social relationships through language. It accounts for how speakers use utterances to maintain social harmony, manage interpersonal relations, and minimize conflict in interaction. Central to this theory is the idea of face, viewed as the good public self- image which every competent adult of a society wants from others. Brown and Levinson (p.66) identify two types of face: positive face and negative face. The positive face is an emotional desire by individuals to be appreciated, liked or admired in social interactions while the negative face is an interlocutor's desire to act freely without imposition, coercion or interference.

All social interactions among individuals predispose them to Face Threatening Acts (FTA's). Face Threatening Acts is any communicative act that inherently threatens the hearer's or speaker's positive or negative face. Brown et al. (1992, p.66) argue that most

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speech acts are potentially face -threatening and therefore speakers must choose strategies to mitigate the threats.

Furthermore, in the context of this study, Brown and Levinson theory of politeness is relatively more appropriate in determining the politeness strategies employed among interlocutors in the data analysed for this study. The cultural context of the datafrom the movie (a hypothetical Yoruba kingdom) exemplifies the three sociological variables of social distance, relative power and rank imposition (Brown et al, 1990). These variables typically symbolize a vertical society where people and groups are arranged hierarchically in terms of access to power, authority, prestige, and resources. The Yorubas (contextually represented in the movie) as a cultural people naturally accord elders much respect and much more of such gestures to people of higher status. This indicates the recognition of the vertical nature of human society to which the Yoruba people belong and which Brown and Levinson theory of politeness recognises.

Methodology

A qualitative research design was adopted for this study. The data, purposively sampled, were collected from a Yoruba Movie titled "Oba Ajakaye," sourced from VidMate, a popular on-line platform where African movies are downloaded for personal consumption. The presentation of the data collected from the movie was done in a tabular form. The first column indicated the traditional title of a character or the name of a character without a title. The second column presented the Yoruba version of locutions made by the interlocutors. A translated version of the characters' locutions was presented in the third column of the table while the politeness strategies employed by each interlocutor in the movie were indicated in the fourth column. Each interlocutionary scenario was analysed with particular focus on how the use of language reflected the honour and respect attached to social status and other esteemed persons in the data. For each of the two excerpts presented, the politeness strategies employed by interlocutors involved were pointed out and explained along the socio-cultural dynamics within the data that accounted for their uses.

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Excerpt A: An Altercation between Ajibola (suitor to Adewunmi, the proposed King) and Ajibola's mother

Characters	Yoruba language conversation	English language version of the conversation	Politeness strategy employed
Ajibola's mother Datum 1	Ajíbólá, o kòlèfe, kòsíàníàní. O kòlè fé òrìsà.	Ajibola, you can't marry her; that is final. You can't marry a deity	Bald- on-record
Ajibola Datum 2	Adéwùnmíniorúkorè, kìí se òrìsà?Báwo ni o se jéòrìsà?	She is Adewunmi by name not a diety; how is she a diety?	Negative politeness and off record
Ajibola's mother Datum 3	Adéwùnmínitélètélè, sùgbónbáyíì, ó ti di òrìsànítoríwípé ó ti di enití a tirópèlúoògùn. Ó yá so fún mi, tíìyàwóre bájé oba, oyèwo niìwoyóò je? Okùnrinkìí je olorì. Tún so fún mi, tíàwonolóyèlàáfinbádòbálèlátijúbàfún oba, séyóòrorùnfún elátinàró. Irúoko wo niyóòmá adòbálèfúnìyàwórèlójojúmó? O ò níféAdéwùnmíníojú mi. Oríkòní di ìdínínúebítèmi.	She was Adewunmi before but now a deity who must have been fortified with charms. Now tell me, when your wife is crowned as King, what title will be conferred on you? A male cannot be conferred with "Olori title', that is meant for a woman. Tell me again, if the palace chiefs prostrate to honour Adewunmi, can you afford not to prostate too? What manner of husband prostrates to his wife every day? You can't marry Adewunmi, not when I am alive! Not in my family will the head turn buttock.	Bald-on – record and off-record politeness
Ajibola Datum 4	Màmá, ę fi gbogboàròyéyísílè, òrò ìfé làhúnsọyí,tíabádéibiigi á ò mòibitígígùnrèyíòtibèrè. Séàpólékóniyíòjèfún ìdílé wawípé èmiAjíbólá jęọkọolórí ìlú wa?	Mother, spare me all this talk; what is at stake here is love. When we get to the bridge, we'll cross it. Will it not be an honour to our family that I marry the head of this town?	Negative politeness and positive politeness

Excerpt B: A Heated Conversation between the King (Adewunmi) and Ajibola (the king's suitor)

Conversation between Ajibola and Adewunmi	**Yoruba language version of the conversation**	**English language version of the conversation**	**Politeness strategy employed**
Adewunmi (the king) Datum 1	Jèkíèyíjé ìgbàìkeyìntímàá fi ojúmíkán è; kílódétí ò hún fi wáyà ìbánisòrò ę dàmí ní àámú? Séoròwípé o rorùnlátì se adarí ìlú bíitiwayíini?	This should be the last time I would set my eyes on you. Why do you always disturb me with your phone calls? Do you think it's easy to rule over a town like ours?	Bald-on-record politeness

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Ajibola Datum 2	Adéwùnmí, ìnjé ò mọwípé èminimowà ní wàjú ẹ?	Adewunmi, do you realize I am the one before you?	Off-record politeness
Adewunmi (the king) Datum 3	Momò wípé ìwoni, okòtó ìkan nínú àwọnẹ́sómínínú àafin.	Yes, I know, you are not as important as any of my guards in the palace.	Bald-on-record politeness
Ajibola Datum 4	Lódódóni, míkòkín se ìró pèlú àwọníṣọọrẹníààfin,tórì wípé ọkọ àfésónànièmijè. Èmiàti ẹ tiníàbásepòníòpólopòigbàníàyèorísirisitíkòsémáà fi enusọ. Ṣèníisíyìntí ò tí di Ọbamí ò níànfànílátibá é sòròg̣eg̣ebiokoàfésìònàmọ?	You are right; I am not comparable to your guards because I am your husband-to-be. We've made love with each other several times in many places, some of which are awkward scenes. Now that you become a King, does it mean I can't talk to you again as my wife-to-be?	Positive politeness Off-record politeness
Adéwúnmí (the king) Datum 5	Pà ẹnu rẹ mọ; kílòfún ẹ ní ígbòyá? Mótídí Òrìṣà.	Shut up your mouth! How dare you? I am a diety!	Negative politeness strategy
Ajibola Datum 6	Ó sọwípé Òrìṣà.Ìwọnímòhún rí níwájú mí,kíìṣè Òrìṣà.	Deity you said? I can only see you before me, not a deity.	Off-record Politeness
Adewunmi(the king) Datum 7	Ótihànsímibáyì pè ò hún rí mìfíng̣eg̣ebí Ọba. Látí ìsìyí lọ, ogbódò máàbù òwò fúnmíníàyèkayè,ósìgbọdọ máàpèmípèlú gbólóhùnìteríba.	I can now see a tone of disrespect in the way you address me; henceforth, you must accord me high respect anywhere and make reference to me with honour.	Bald-on-record politeness.

Findings

Findings of the study showed that higher social status and honourifics in Yoruba custom attracted high esteem and deference.The study revealed that the King was equated with a deity in Yoruba land. This much was confirmed by Ajibola's mother and the King herself. Thiscontributed to achieving the aim of the study, which sought to ascertain whether social status in Yoruba land commandedhonourifics. Likewise, the social distance between Ajibola and his mother constrained him to mitigate FTAs that could assault her positive face.

The investigation showed that social distance and power relations in Yoruba custom influence the use of politeness strategies as portrayed in the two excerpts. Data in this study indicated that the four politeness strategies propounded by Brown and Levinson were used in "OBA AJAKAYE." In addition, the tilt in some of the strategies in favour of one

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against the other in terms of frequency of occurrence was dictated by the relative status of the interlocutors and their discourse at a point in time. Negative politeness strategy occurred more in the discourse involving the symbols of authority and interlocutors who did not carry such authority. Much of this could be seen in excerpts involving the King and Ajibola. More nnegative politeness strategy was recorded in the conversation between Ajibola and his mother who strove hard to save her son from the embarrassment of having to marry a female King who mightstrip him of his authority as a husband in the palace. Bald –on record politeness strategy wass used in discourses where the interlocutors chose to present their feelings on some issues the way they saw them, regardless of what fellow interlocutor feltabout them. Off-record or indirect politeness was used to express something general or different from the speaker's true meaning and itrelied on the hearer's interpretation of the speaker's illocutionary act. The strategy was used by some interlocutors to avoid saying potentially face -threatening acts altogether. On the whole, the study indicated that the relationship of the interlocutors and their relative social status dictated the choice of the politeness strategies used.

Discussion

Excerpt A above was a scene within the movie that depicted the altercation between Ajibola and his mother. The altercation centred on the refusal of the mother to approve of a matrimonial arrangement between Ajibola and Adewunmi. Adewunmi was the oracle-chosen successor to the throne in Ajakaye town. As shown in the table, datum 1 of excerpt A was an example of the use of bald-on-record by Ajibola's mother. The datum conveyed the use of authoritative prohibition from the mother on why Ajibola would not marry Adewunmi. By declaring, "Ajibola, you can't marry her," the mother gave a direct command with no element of mitigation in the utterance. To foreclose any room for negotiation, the mother sounded a note of lack of compromise through the expression in the datum "that is final." The finality of the mother's disapproval was justified by reference to Adewunmi as a "deity" in the datum. The unmitigated declaration constituted a strong FTA against Ajibola's negative face as his freedom to choose was threatened.

Datum 2 of the excerpt was a response from Ajibola to his mother's disapproval of his intended marriage to Adewunmi. Datum 2, as indicated in the table, contained a blend of negative politeness and off –record politeness. By saying "She is Adewunmi by name, not

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a deity…" Ajibola used negative politeness strategy to avoid direct contradiction of what the mother said. For instance, it could have been a direct threat to the positive face of the mother if instead he had said, "Mother you are wrong." In addition, Ajibola used off-record politeness to challenge the mother through a rhetorical question "how is she a deity?" This was used to minimize the responsibility for a potential face-threatening act of having the mother to explain why Adewunmi was regarded as a deity.

Datum 3 of excerpt A was used by Ajibola's mother to double down on her disapproval of a matrimonial union between Ajibola and Adewunmi. The disapproval was conveyed through a combination of bald-on –record and off-record politeness. The first segment of the tone of disapproval, which exemplified bald-on- record politeness, was contained in "**She was Adewunmi before but now a deity who must have been fortified with charms**". Reference to the use of charms for Adewunmi's fortification was a direct way of creating fear in Ajibola and a threat to his positive face. The second segment of the datum which accounted for off-record politeness were two questions raised by her: (1**) "Now tell me, when your wife is crowned as king, what title will be conferred on you? (2) "…if the palace chiefs prostrate to honour Adewunmi, can you afford not to prostate too"?** The two questions indirectly challenged the masculine sensibility of Ajibola and represented a threat to his positive face. They both imply social humiliation and gender role mismatch in Yoruba typical matrimonial settings. The face threat was further heightened in the datum through the use of the metaphorical expression **"Not in my family will the head turn buttock."** It was an indirect way of saying Ajibola's marriage to Adewunmi amounted to giving the headship of a family to the wife.

Datum 4 of the excerpt, as shown in the table contained the use of negative politeness and positive politeness. It was part of Ajibola's responses to his mother. The use of the word "Mother" in the expression "Mother, spare me all this talk; what is at stake here is love" was a mark of respect to mitigate negative FTA of the remaining part of expression "…spare me all this talk…." Ajibola also used the metaphor "when we get to the bridge, we will cross it," signalling a deferment of the conflict and an appeal to the positive face of the mother. This was love-induced optimism on his part. In addition, through the use of another positive politeness strategy framed in the expression, **"Will it not be an honour to**

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our family that I marry the head of this town?" Ajibola used this strategy to frame what appeared to the mother a taboo as a prestige to his family.

The excerpt above presented a heated conversation between Ajibola and his mother. The crux of their discussion was the love affair between Ajibola and Adewunmi, the proposed king. A critical look at the flow of the conversation between the two revealed some psychological tension in them. Whereas Ajibola's mother was diametrically aversed to the idea of her son (Ajibola) getting married to Adewunmi whom she claimedhadbecome a deity while Ajibola insisted that the marriage wouldgo as planned as his fiancée still remainedAdewunmi and not a deity. The conversational encounter in the excerpt revealed a lot about the degree of honour and respect accorded the holder of kingship title in Yoruba land. In its generic sense, deity referred to divinity or a supernatural divine being. By referring to Adewunmi as a deity, in the context of their argument, the mother assigned to the regent (Adewunmi) the status of a goddess and culturally speaking, goddesses were worshiped as a mark of honour and respected because of the inherent spiritual powers they were thought to possess. Her point of argument from the excerpt was that by getting married to the regent, Ajibola risked the chances of "forfeiting" his dignity as a man in his matrimonial home. By implication, the conversation revealed that ascending the throne in Yoruba land would transform the title holder into deity-like status and this, as indicated in the excerpt, necessitated much deference to the title holder from the chiefs as well as all the King's subjects, including Ajibola the would-be husband. It was a deference symbolically demonstrated by prostrating. Ajibola's concluding remarks in the excerpt betrayed his implicit recognition of the honour which the King commanded. Thus, while still insisting on getting married to the King, all he had to say in relation to the likelihood of subordinating his role in the marriage was "When we get to the bridge, we'll cross it." The bridge here metaphorically referred to the King's status and its corresponding demand of honour and respect from all of the King's subjects including himself, her would-be-husband. Culturally, in Yoruba land, if a female ascended the throne and was coronated, she transformed and she would be addressed as the King, meaning "Oba" in Yoruba.

To be ready to cross the bridge in its context of use in the excerpt was more of an evasive readiness on the part of Ajibola to do what the Yoruba tradition demanded in relation to how a King in Yoruba land should be honoured. This was more evident when he

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rhetorically asked the mother if being the husband of the King would not bring honour to their family.

Excerpt B was a heated confrontation between Ajibola and Adewunmi, the new King of Ajakaye Town. The verbal confrontation was about how the new status of Adewunmi impacted on the love affair relationship between them. Also, it indicated how the new status of Adewunmi influenced her use of language in the conversation and it determined the politeness strategies employed. Datum 1, as shown in the table, was a case of the use of bald –on-record politeness by Adewunmi. The use of the datum, **"This should be the last time I would set my eyes on you.**" was a categorical warning devoid of any tinge of FTA mitigation and a direct threat to the positive face of Ajibola. These questions within the datum: **"Why do you always disturb me with your phone calls? Do you think it's easy to rule a town like ours?"** were not mere questions but accusationand reproaches targeted at him.

Datum 2 of the excerpt by Ajibola was a rhetorical question meant to appeal to Adewunmi's sense of shared history of love relationship. It was an exemplification of off –record politeness as Adewunmi was expected to interpret the question herself based on their previous shared amorous experience. This was meant to indirectly invoke intimacy without asserting entitlement and to achieve minimal threat to Adewunmi's authority. Datum 3 of the excerpt, as shown in the table, was another example of bald-on-record politeness. It was a direct case of deliberate face threatening as Adewunmi explicitly downgraded Ajibola's status, framing him as lowerin status compared to the palace guards: **"Yes, I know, you are not as important as any of my guards in the palace."** This represented an extreme damage to Ajibola's positive face and demonstrated intentional politeness withdrawal. The withdrawal could only be explained by status elevation due to Adewunmi's currentperception of everybody around as her subject, including Ajibola with whom hitherto, there had been a strong emotional attachment.

Datum 4 above depicted a use of positive politeness by Ajibola to reframe his intimacy with Adewumi. By saying, **"You are right,"** Ajibola showed apparent agreement with the King and softened resistance while at the same time, by saying, "**I am not comparable to your guards because I am your husband-to-be**" attempted to recover Adewunmi's positive face without open confrontation but an appeal to their shared emotional bond. To

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further refresh Adewunmi's memory of their amorous relationship, Ajibola in the datum said, "**We've made love with each other several times in many places, some of which are awkward scenes**." This was a case of off-record politeness, an indirect way of reminding Adewunmi of their shared intimacy in the past to justify the necessity to gain access to her, now the King. Datum 4 triggered the use of bald –on-record politeness by Adewunmi in datum 5, which read, "**Shut up your mouth! How dare you? I am a deity!"** As can be seen, Adewunmi clearly hauled insult at Ajibola and she demonstrated a complete removal of his positive and negative face on the basis of her sacred self-identification of being a deity.

Datum 6, as indicated in the table, typified the use of off –record politeness. It was off –record because instead of simply saying directly to Adewunmi "You are a liar," Ajibola said, **"Deity you said? I can only see you before me, not a deity."** The datum signified Ajibola's final resistance and a challenge to Adewunmi's authority, which by implication was a threat to her positive face. In datum 7, as shown in the table, Adewunmi used bald –on-record politeness to assert her authority as the King. Adewunmi's use of **"I can now see a tone of disrespect in the way you address me…"** showed her perception about the status distance currently existing between her and Ajibola. In Adewunmi's estimation, Ajibola was yet to come to terms with her new status as the King; he was still psychologically cast in their past relationship from which Adewunmi appeared to have outpaced. The reality of the new psychological distance between the lovers prompted Adewunmi's use of bald-on record politeness in "…**henceforth, you must accord me high respect and make reference to me with honour**." This was meant to restore Adewunmi's positive face and impose strict limits on Ajibola's negative face. The context of the datum showed the intersection between intimate relationship and institutional authority, the latter was made to take precedence over and above the former.

In excerpt 5 above, it was particularly striking that there was not a single case of positive politeness strategy observed. The reason for this might not be far from the "battle of wits" between the King and Ajibola over their love affair, which appeared ruptured due to the new status attained by Adewunmi, the King. The predominant politeness strategies (bald-on –record and negative politeness) in the excerpt indicated a psychological sense of higher status associated with Kingship and that explained why much of the strategy

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characterized the King's utterances. This aura of importance and honour as evidenced in the excerpt typified the custom of deference and high regard for higher social status occupant in Yoruba land. It then meant that the idea of being a deity, upon ascending the throne as a King in Yoruba land, was a popular one in the people's mind-set. It was a fact that largely explained why the office holders were treated with much deference. Though the spiritual rites associated with the installation of Adewunmi as the King were said to be for fortification against adversaries and all forms of mundane attacks, her carriage in the interlocution with Ajibola as a suitor underscored the far reaching psychological impact the notion of being a deity has had on her. She sounded so "inflated" that her previous amorous relationship with Ajibola counted much less. She seemed prepared to place their love relationship below her status as the King of Ajakayein order to uphold the custom of Kingship in her domain.

Conclusion

Power relations and social distance in Yoruba custom serveas honourifics and so they elicit the use of politeness strategies amongYoruba interlocutors. Face saving politeness strategies that are elicited by social distance and power relations in Yoruba custom ensure that communication among interlocutors does not break down; rather, they mitigate potential FTAs.

It is crucial to note that social interactions and communication either formal or non-formal, with Yoruba old generation, elderly and socially upper class interlocutors, require face-saving politeness strategies to lubricate verbal discourses devoid of unintended offence or confrontations. It ensures that one avoids being considered ill-bred and discourteous. Adherence to the deployment of efficient face-saving politeness strategies is a core value of the 'Omo luabi' ethics, particularly among the very elderly Yoruba people of Nigeria. It is similar to pragmatic tact in discourse.

Recommendations

Arising from the foregoing, this study suggests to media practitioners, television hosts, interviewers and medical personnel such as nurses and doctors to deploy efficient face-saving politeness strategies during encounters with socially upper class, title holders, traditional rulers and very senior Yoruba citizens of Nigeria. The findings of the study

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inform that professionals in the communication and allied industries need to be culturally informed and sensitive to the background of their interlocutors.

Limitations

In view of globalisation, the gen Z culture, cross-cultural communication and interaction which the internet and information communication technology have brought about, the findings of this study may suffer certain further researchable limitations.

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