

Rapport Management Strategies in Selected Media Interviews with Mr Peter Obi of Labour Party, Nigeria

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the rapport management strategies employed in selected media interviews with Mr. Peter Obi and to discuss the contextual features that shaped their usage, in a bid to show how social relations are handled in the interviews. A total of six videos of the media interviews conducted between August 2022 and June 2023 were downloaded from the YouTube pages of Arise TV, Channels TV, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Cable Network News (CNN). Ten extracts were purposively sampled from the videos and analysed qualitatively with insights from Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management theory. The findings revealed that the most prominent strategy employed by commenters was the request strategy, which was used by the interviewers to elicit from Mr. Peter Obi his plans for the country and clarifications on misconceptions about him and his Labour Party. Disagreement strategies were predominantly used to openly express disbelief in certain opinions regarding the election. Both Mr. Peter Obi and the interviewers utilized the gratitude strategy to show appreciation for being allowed to participate in the interview and to acknowledge each other's importance. Compliment strategies were also employed to highlight areas where expectations were not met. The analysis also showed that contextual factors such as discussions of past politicians' shortcomings, Mr. Peter Obi's plans for restructuring Nigeria's economy, security, and education sectors, and the socio-political context of the 2023 election shaped the interactions.

Keywords: *Rapport Management Strategies, 2023 Nigerian Elections, Media Discourse, Political Interviews, Mr Peter Obi*

1. INTRODUCTION

Media interview is a form of conversation in which a journalist or reporter asks questions from a person, or group in order to gather information or perspectives that can be shared with the public through various media channels such as newspapers, television, radio, or online platforms. McLean (2005) defines media interview as a discussion involving questions and answers for the purpose of broadcast. It is distinct from an informational interview where one can be asked simple questions to learn the background on a story. The media has the power to influence individual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. The media have wide-ranging implications for democratic governance and political practices. They have radically altered the ways in which government institutions operate and political leaders communicate.

The study of press (media) language is complicated and controversial, its complexity and abstruse functions increase as the time passes. The underlying reasons for this phenomenon could be searched in today's increasing complexity of politics' language and social interactions (Ghassemi, 2019). The link between language and press is undeniable because language either in written or oral form, is a medium to convey the message in the media. Critical Discourse

Analysis (CDA) has been known as a suitable method for analysing the relationship between language and ideology in the discourse of media (Breeze, 2011). Nowadays, the media are widely present in people's lives and affect all aspects of their social lives in different fields. In this process, cultural and political institutions shape the discourse and then over the time, the intended discourses with specific goals and ideology penetrate into society through social institutions in a way that people consider them as something normal and logical.

Haworth (2009) described the interview as a specific genre of the journalistic activity that reflects the overall pragmatic regularities of the dialogue organisation. The interlocutors do not only exchange alternately with the communicative positions of the speaker and the recipient, but also the spontaneous processes of intention expressing and perceiving messages that are associated with the specificity of the addresser and the addressee's language consciousness. Neequaye and Mac (2022) argued that rapport is one overarching factor that is crucial for any qualitative interview. Also, Abbe and Brandon (2014) emphasised that through rapport-building, investigators are able to develop a working relationship with the interviewer.

Dundone and Ryan (2019) defined rapport as involving the exchange of meaningful dialogue and demonstrable behaviours so as to shed light on the social world of those who live and experience the phenomenon being studied. Hoogesteyn (2023) pointed out that rapport is generally built through the use of several verbal and non-verbal behaviours, or tactics. Verbal tactics include, for example, establishing common ground, by which investigators discuss shared interests with interviewees, using similar language as the interviewee, and engaging in self-disclosure, where the investigator shares about themselves. Goudy and Potter (1975) view rapport as 'frank and open discussion' while Blohm (2007) see it as a degree of acceptance or cooperation on the part of the interviewee to a research project. Lavin and Maynard (2001) argue that the concept of rapport is difficult to measure and as such propose a normative interpretation based on the attitudes and behaviours displayed in the interview itself. For Fontana and Frey (2000), such behavioural attitudes ought to connect and engage with the language and culture of the respondents in a way that helps to gain a level of trust.

Dukor (1998, p. 283)) anchors the assessment of the role of the media in politics on the "fundamental right to receive and impart information". The history of elections in Nigeria generally has provided an opportunity for the assessment of the divergent roles of the media in Nigeria political process within the framework of the national political goal. Aghamelu (2022) acknowledged that the mass media has a very important role to play in channelling electioneering campaigns to serve the goal of national development. This is because the mass media is described as "a pivot of social interaction, seeking to use the power of mass information to solve the problem of national cohesion and integration, which are both critical to the growth of healthy electioneering campaigns" (Agba, 2007, p. 69).

Studies on media interviews from the linguistic point of view have been on the dimension of a language in the media, the new media role in politics, and rapport management in investigative interviews. These studies from different dimensions have found a link between language and media, political media as a means of communication, rapport as an open and frank discussion and the degree of acceptance or cooperation in an interview. However, the management of rapport in Nigerian media interviews, especially the strategies deployed to manage social relations in this important genre of discourse, has not enjoyed any serious scholarly attention. Spenser said that rapport is affected by management of three main factors: face sensitivity, social rights and obligations and interactions goals. When one or more of these factors are not handled effectively, rapport can be threatened (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Rapport

threatening acts are the illocutionary acts that inherently threaten the face needs of the interlocutors.

Out of the many studies that have been carried out on media interviews, attention has been focused mainly on stylistic features, politeness in print media interviews, and ideological stances in media interviews. However, the management of rapport in media interviews has not enjoyed much scholarly attention. An examination of the strategies deployed for rapport management is crucial to our understanding of the management of interactions between interviewers and interviewees. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine rapport management strategies employed in selected media interviews with Mr. Peter Obi, the candidate of the Labour party during the 2023 Nigeria presidential elections. This will help to showcase the sociocultural peculiarities that characterise the management of rapport in the interviews.

2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to examine the rapport management strategies employed in selected media interviews with Mr. Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of the Labour Party in the 2023 Nigerian general elections. The specific objectives of this study are to:

- i. Identify and describe rapport management strategies that manifest in selected media interviews with Mr. Peter Obi.
- ii. Examine the contextual features that are inherent in the interview.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Studies on Rapport Management Strategies

Different researchers have engaged rapport management strategies in various contexts of language use. For example, Reski (2018) examines rapport management strategies used in classroom interactions involving students of the English Education Department of Unsulbar in two different classes. The study identifies Spencer-Oatey's five strategies used in social interactions. The strategies are request, compliments, apologies, gratitude and disagreement. It shows that the most prevalent rapport management strategies applied. The study concludes that the students tend to apply rapport management orientation in their classroom discussions to maintain interpersonal relations and ensure harmonious relationship with their fellow participants in the classroom discourse.

Similarly, Abdulsalam and Ja'afar (2021) investigate the impact of racial humour posted on Twitter on the rapport between interlocutors at both the interpersonal and intercommunal levels. It addresses the potential lack of awareness among English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) users regarding racially sensitive issues and how to handle them in online intercultural communication. The study tries to understand how the social and technological contexts of Twitter shape the perception and evaluation of racial humour in terms of politeness and impoliteness. From the analysis of a dataset consisting of racial jokes and user responses, the study finds that racial jokes can either enhance or challenge rapport, depending on their (im) politeness implications. The repetition of certain expressions via racial jokes does not necessarily communicate offensive connotations but contribute to closer rapport among specific groups or associations. Interpersonal rapport enhancement is facilitated by a close relationship between in-group followers, utilising colloquial and conversational language that minimises face threats. However, racial rapport challenging involves offensive implications

that create gaps among individuals and attack relations in conversational interactions. The study emphasises the role of language in conveying human ideas and minds, analysing the implied notions and senses communicated by joke makers.

Culpeper (2017) investigates the communicative styles of peer mentors in the context of online language learning. The authors employ an innovative approach using keyword analysis, which allows them to identify distinctive communicative styles exhibited by the mentors and how these create and maintain rapport between mentors and students. By linking the features identified to rapport orientations, such as enhancement, maintenance, neglect, and challenge, as proposed by Spencer-Oatey, the study sheds light on how mentors create and maintain rapport with students. The findings of the study demonstrate the importance of rapport enhancement in fostering active student participation and positive perception. Mentors who employ strategies such as self-effacement, positive expressions, and building common ground are shown to stimulate higher levels of engagement among students.

Furthermore, Spencer-Oatey (2000, 2002, 2008) proposes that rapport management includes face management and social rights management. The former refers to the quality face which is related to individuals and social identity face while the latter refers to the equity rights and association rights in interpersonal communication. Therefore, rapport management theory includes both personal perspective and social perspective, usually involving face management, sociality rights, obligations and interactional goals, etc. Spencer-Oatey (2000) believes that every language provides a very wide range of linguistic options that can be used for managing face and sociality rights, and these permeate every domain of the rapport management, including speech acts, discourse content and structure, behavioural participation, stylistic use, paralanguage and non-verbal language. The insights in the studies reviewed are considered salient in that they provide the necessary theoretical and operational grounding for the present study.

3.2 Linguistic Studies on Media Interviews

Ghayadh's (2021) work explores how messages are encoded by the interviewee, how his/her linguistic choices are stylistically constructed, and how his arguments are logically arranged. The study also takes into account the interviewer's role, particularly in using certain loaded questions as strategic manoeuvring to harmonise and accommodate for effectiveness. It is hypothesised that media discourse can be analysed according to the criteria of stylistic approaches. Drawing extract from a political interview, the findings indicate that the application of stylistic approaches of analysis reveals to what extent that stylistic analysis is effective in revealing the hidden meanings of linguistic structures. From a media perspective, the target is the audience. Most of the time the audience is considered as part of the discourse mechanism whom the media is planning to reach for a considerable time, the audience were recognized as passive consumers.

In discussing the relationship between media and stylistics, Lambrou and Durant (2014, p. 503) further argued that "linguistic analysis of media discourse is often described as 'media stylistics.'" Media linguistic analysis can be realised as a process which is not assigned to a particular type of genre. Trager and Smith (1951, p. 54) portrayed it as "the recognition of the recurrences and distributions of similar patterns and sequences". To put it concisely, each utterance as a linguistic choice (stylistic choice) or has a set of linguistic choices that work as a stimulus for activation of the recipient's repertoire to negotiate with the text to understand what the message is. Toulmin's (1958) theoretical model, which consists of more than one

component: claim, data, warrant, backing, rebuttal, and qualifier is used for the analysis. The study argues that linguistic choices awareness, as a stylistic process, whether it belongs to the interviewee or the audience, plays a vital role in conveying persuasive messages. Media stylistic analysis detects how effectively and sufficiently the content of utterances and intentions (messages) of the interlocutors (interviewer and interviewee) are transferred, and how, cognitively, the linguistic choices (stylistic choice process) help in figuring out the content.

Odebunmi (2009) examines political interviews in two Nigerian news magazines, TELL and The News, using a revised version of the theory of relational work. The study analyses interviews published between 2000 and 2004, and integrates the concepts of relational work, face work, and contextualization theories to understand politeness strategies used by participants in the interviews. The analysis demonstrates that participants in the interviews employ various verbal behaviours, such as confrontations, veils, condemnations, and accusations, to achieve politeness. These behaviours are influenced by contextual beliefs, including shared knowledge of subjects, political gimmicks, and ideological expectations. The study concludes that the revised theory of relational work provides a clearer understanding of media political interviews and highlights the beliefs and tendencies employed by participants.

Gazizov and Dementieva (2020) explores the field of media linguistics, by analysing both written and spoken language in the media. The study examines internet portals and public pages of regional media, specifically analysing the popular newspaper "Stolitsa S" and its presence on the social network VKontakte. The researchers conducted a content analysis of over 500 media texts and a qualitative analysis of 100 materials. The study employed systematic, hierarchical, and complex analysis as the conceptual framework. The findings indicate that regional publications are successfully adapting to the new information space, with the development of platforms on social networks and messengers. They also submit that the number of subscribers is consistently increasing. Attention-grabbing techniques, stylistic diversity, and the use of "vulgarity and naive cynicism" in the texts were observed to have contributed to attracting the audience.

Peng (2020) presents a study that investigates the influence of media exposure and language attitudes on the grammaticality judgments of Mainland Mandarin speakers regarding syntactic constructions in Taiwanese Mandarin. By conducting an extensive online survey that combines acceptability judgments, attitude tasks, viewing habits, and demographic questions, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of the complex relationship between media exposure, language attitudes, and the perception of grammatical acceptability. The findings challenge traditional sociolinguistic notions by revealing that individuals who are exposed to Taiwanese TV programs are more inclined to viewing Taiwanese Mandarin constructions as grammatically acceptable. Moreover, through the use of Principle Component Analysis (PCA), the study identifies key personality traits associated with Taiwanese Mandarin, which further contribute to the effects of media exposure. These results shed light on the intricate nature of the relationship between media exposure, language attitudes, and variation in grammatical acceptability, highlighting the importance of considering these factors in sociolinguistic research. Overall, this research significantly advances our understanding of how media exposure and language ideologies shape language variation and offers valuable insights into the interplay between media, attitudes, and grammatical judgments.

Abdulkadir (2023) uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and rhetoric as analytical tools to examine ideological stances conveyed through linguistic expressions in political interviews with Nigerian politicians. The study analyses two interviews conducted by Channels Television, using van Dijk's socio-cognitive aspects of CDA and rhetoric. The findings reveal that politicians in the selected interviews employ language as a strategy of domination and supremacy, utilising lexical items and strong imperatives to impose their views on others. They create power imbalances by presenting their own group as privileged ('we', 'us') and the opposing group as less privileged ('they', 'them'). The study identifies various rhetorical and ideological strategies, such as actor description, polarisation, burden, categorisation, etc., which are implicitly used to project different ideological positions.

The literature review revealed several studies that focus on rapport management strategies and linguistic analysis in media interviews. These studies explored various aspects such as classroom discussions, racial humour on Twitter, intercultural email communication, and political interviews. The findings emphasise the importance of rapport management strategies and linguistic choices in shaping interpersonal relationships and conveying ideological positions. However, there is a lack of studies which specifically investigated the use of rapport management strategies in media interviews of Mr. Peter Obi. Therefore, study aims to fill this gap by examining the rapport management strategies employed in selected media interviews with Mr. Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of the Labour Party in the 2023 Nigerian general elections. By analysing these dimensions of the interviews, this study seeks to broaden our understanding of how rapport is managed in the context media interviews in Nigeria.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Analysis of data in this study is hinged on Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management theory. Rapport Management is the term that is used by Helen Spencer-Oatey to define the management of social relations which is an aspect of language use. In the theory, Spencer-Oatey develops Brown and Levinson's politeness principles that only focus on face into what she calls the three interconnected rapport management which are the management of face, management of sociality rights and obligations and management of interactional goals.

Face is a concept that is related to notions such as esteem, regard, worth and dignity and is what is claimed or protected by a person in a communicative act (Robinson et al, 2015). From Spencer-Oatey's (2005, 2008) work, face comprises three identities, individual identity, group or collective identity and relational identity. In those three identities, people consider themselves to have certain characteristics, such as personality qualities, physical characteristics, beliefs and so on. These characteristics are either perceived positively (talented, smart), negatively (uninteresting, ugly) or neutrally. In most circumstances, people want others to perceive their characteristics or attributes positively and avoid having a negative perception of their qualities. Face is associated with these effectively sensitive attributes (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Sociality rights and obligations are concerned with social expectancies and reflect people's concerns over fairness, consideration and behavioural appropriateness (Culpeper, 2017). Interactional goals are the third factor that can influence interpersonal rapport. These goals are what people want to achieve in their interactions with others. The goals can be relational and transactional.

Hence, face, sociality rights and obligations and interactional goals are the three important factors in rapport management. Since rapport management is an aspect of language use that includes these three complex and interconnected factors and it is the management of social relations as well, it is very important to find out the strategies of managing the rapport in social interactions. The strategies in managing rapport that are applied by social interlocutors may have significant effect on the rapport orientation and vice versa.

A number of studies regarding the strategies of managing rapport have been conducted and these provide valuable insights. There are five strategies based on Spencer-Oatey (2008) that the interactants apply in social interactions. The strategies are request, compliments, apologies, gratitude and disagreement. For Beebe and Takahashi (1989), disagreement strategy is divided into seven types: explicit, negative, question, alternative suggestion, positive remark, token agreement and gratitude. Emmons and McCullough (2003) have explored the psychological and social benefits of gratitude strategy. Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2003) found that rapport is clearly managed through multiple domains, particularly the discourse and non-verbal domains. Robinson et al (2015) considers the three bases of rapport management as important factors in undertaking problem based learning.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is done by descriptive qualitative method to identify the strategies Mr. Peter Obi and his interviewers employ to manage interpersonal rapport in the selected interviews. A total of six videos of interviews sessions that were downloaded from the YouTube pages of Arise TV, Channels TV, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Cable Network News (CNN) constitute the data for the study. The downloaded interview sessions cover the period from August 2022 – June 2023. From the videos, nineteen extracts were purposively selected for analysis.

The Interviews were analysed qualitatively using Spencer's rapport management theory. The interviews were carefully watched and extracts culled from them were examined, analysed, and described to account for the strategies that Mr. Peter Obi and the interviewers used to maintain interpersonal rapport during the interviews. These were categorised under rapport maintaining strategies such as requests/orders, compliments, disagreement, and gratitude. The contextual features inherent in the interview of Mr. Peter Obi were discussed, since they played a role in shaping the dynamics of the interview and influencing the rapport management strategies employed by the parties in the interviews.

6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Rapport Management Strategies in the Interviews

The analysis of the interview sessions between Mr. Peter Obi and the interviewers uncovered four rapport management strategies, which include: request, disagreement, gratitude, and compliment strategies. These rapport management strategies are discussed in the sections hereunder.

6.1.1 Disagreement Strategy

Following Beebe and Takahashi's (1989) division of disagreement strategies, only explicit disagreement strategies were observed in the interview. In Extract 1, Mr. Peter Obi utilises an explicit disagreement strategy to refute the accusation of buying his way to get the ticket of his party. The statement made by Mr. Peter Obi represents an explicit disagreement strategy as

defined by Beebe and Takahashi (1989). According to their framework, explicit disagreement involves directly contradicting or opposing a statement or accusation. By highlighting the free and fair nature of the primary and mentioning Professor Pat Utomi's resignation, Mr. Peter Obi directly denies the accusation of buying his way to the ticket. This is evident in Extract 1.

Extract 1

Interviewer: Now, let's get some clarity in some of the things that you have done. There are accusations on how you got the ticket, some people even accuse you of buying your way through to get the ticket.

Mr. Peter Obi: Seun, we had the freest primary in Labour. Remember the frontliner in the Labour Party was Professor Pat Utomi who before everybody, every delegate in that election primary resigned and said he is stepping down.

In the ensuing interaction, the interviewer raised the issue of allegation of buying the ticket of his party against the interviewee who uses explicit disagreement strategy to debunk the allegation.

Similarly, in Extract 2, Mr. Peter Obi employs an explicit disagreement strategy in responding to the question about the party's performance in the election. It exemplifies an explicit disagreement strategy as Mr. Peter Obi directly opposes the notion of having huge support in Osun. Mr. Peter Obi's response challenges the assumption of significant support by emphasising the realistic situation and the pre-planned nature of the elections in Osun and Ekiti State. His responses in Extract 2 indicate this shows this strategy.

Extract 2.

Interviewer: These are your supporters, you could hear a huge support for Peter Obi and the Labour Party only if that could materialise to the kind of vote your party could have garnered in that election, how come your party did not perform well in that election?

Mr. Peter: Seun, there was no huge support in Osun as we were going into that election, let us be realistic. The Osun and Ekiti election is an election that has been planned for months.

The utilisation of disagreement strategy in Extracts 1 and 2 aligns with the framework provided by Takahashi and Beebe (1989) and the definition of disagreement as a face-threatening verbal behaviour (Liu, 2004).

Also, in Extract 3, Mr. Peter Obi employs an explicit disagreement strategy in responding to the interviewer's question about borrowing and the impending debt crisis. Mr. Peter Obi directly challenges the notion that borrowing is inherently problematic and asserts that it is essential to consider how borrowed funds are utilized. This represents an explicit disagreement strategy, as defined by Beebe and Takahashi (1989).

Extract 3

Interviewer: We are borrowing to service debts; we have impending debts crisis. What sort of funding models will you be looking out for because the borrowing is not sustainable?

Mr. Peter Obi: There is nothing wrong in borrowing, absolutely. It is what you use what you borrowed to do. No country of the world I know that is not borrowing money.

By highlighting that borrowing is a common practice in countries worldwide, he opposes the premise that borrowing itself is a cause for concern. The manifestation of disagreement strategy in Extract 3 aligns with the notion that disagreement occurs in human interaction (Liu, 2004).

Moreover, Goffman (1967) discusses face-saving strategies in social interactions, highlighting how individuals employ various techniques to maintain their positive social identity. Mr. Peter Obi's use of explicit disagreement strategy in the extracts can be seen as a face-saving strategy, and an attempt to counter the negative allegations raised him in order to presents a different narrative that upholds his integrity and that of his party. By employing explicit disagreement in his responses, Mr. Peter Obi aims to counteract the potential damage caused by the allegations and prevent any negative perceptions from taking root. This strategy allows him to maintain his credibility and reputation while confronting and refuting the accusations made against him.

6.1.2 Request Strategy

Spencer-Oatey's theory of rapport management theory caters for the use an indirect request strategy. According to her, an indirect request involves hinting at the desired action or using other strategies to elicit compliance. In Extract 4, the interviewer uses an indirect request strategy to inquire about the interviewee's thoughts on the issue of security. Rather than directly asking, the interviewer provides the context and information, implicitly expecting the interviewee to offer their opinion voluntarily.

Extract 4

Interviewer: Give us a sense of what this means and some of the story we are hearing is the federal government asking schools, unity schools to be shut down because of security concerns. What are your thoughts about the issue of security?

Going by Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, indirect requests can be employed as a politeness strategy to mitigate face-threatening acts and maintain positive social relationships. By using an indirect request, the interviewer avoids putting direct pressure on the interviewee and allows him the freedom to express his thoughts on the security issue without feeling compelled or prompted directly. Moreover, the indirect request strategy employed by the interviewer can be seen as a way of enhancing rapport and creating a more relaxed and open atmosphere during the interview. This approach can contribute to a more fruitful and meaningful exchange of ideas. In this case, the interviewer hints at their desire to know the interviewee's thoughts by providing background information and framing the question within a broader context.

Overall, the use of an indirect request strategy in Extract 4 allows the interviewer to inquire about the interviewee's thoughts on the issue of security in a subtle and non-confrontational manner. This approach promotes politeness, rapport, and a more open exchange of ideas during the interview.

According to Spencer-Oatey (2008), direct requests involve explicit and unambiguous statements, leaving no room for misunderstanding. In Extract 5, the interviewer employs a direct request strategy to inquire about the process through which the interviewee obtained the ticket and whether any payment was involved. The use of direct requests involves explicitly asking for specific information or actions without relying on hints or indirect strategies. The direct nature of the request leaves little room for ambiguity or misinterpretation.

Extract 5

Interviewer: Can you tell Nigerians and come clean to them about the process in which you got the ticket? Did Obi pay anything?

The instance in the extracts is consistent with Spencer-Oatey's theory on rapport management strategies, which identifies direct requests as the most straightforward type of request. In addition, the direct request strategy in Extract 5 aligns with the notion of "face-threatening acts" proposed in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. By directly asking about the process and potential payments, the interviewer is potentially challenging the interviewee's credibility or integrity. However, the direct request may be justified in this context as it pertains to public accountability and transparency. Furthermore, by explicitly mentioning "come clean to them," the interviewer emphasises the importance of honesty and openness in addressing the concerns of the public. Overall, the use of a direct request strategy in Extract 5 demonstrates the interviewer's intention to obtain specific information related to ticket acquisition and potential payments. This straightforward approach allows for a direct and unambiguous exchange of information, which is essential in matters of public interest and accountability.

In Extract 6, the interviewer uses an indirect request strategy to inquire about the interviewee's emotional response to the election results. By framing the question in terms of the emotional angle and how the interviewee is handling the results, the interviewer indirectly requests information about the interviewee's feelings and reactions. According to Chen (2017), using indirect request strategies can help minimise imposition and maintain the hearer's face. By not directly asking about the interviewee's emotions, the interviewer allows the interviewee the freedom to disclose or withhold their emotional response, reducing the potential intrusion on their autonomy or vulnerability.

Extract 6

Interviewer: In terms of emotional angle, how are you handling the results of the elections which goes against perhaps what you anticipated?

Furthermore, Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) and Daskalovska et al. (2016) note that a speaker might hesitate to make direct requests for fear of revealing a need or causing the hearer to lose face. In this case, the interviewer's indirect request strategy may be influenced by a desire to avoid directly asking about the interviewee's potentially sensitive emotions and instead provides an opportunity for the interviewee to share his thoughts voluntarily. Overall, the use of an indirect request strategy in Extract 6 allows the interviewer to inquire about the interviewee's emotional response to the results of the election in a subtler and polite manner.

6.1.3 Gratitude Strategy

The gratitude strategy is one of the five rapport management strategies identified by Spencer - Oatey (2008). The strategy involves expressing appreciation and thanks to the other person. This can be done verbally, through actions, or through gifts. When used effectively, it can help to build rapport and trust between two people. It can also help to create a positive and supportive atmosphere that can be beneficial to parties involved. In Extract 7, the gratitude strategy is employed by the interviewee in response to expressions of gratitude from the interviewer. The extract begins with the interviewer expressing gratitude to Mr. Obi for joining the interview. Here, the interviewer acknowledges Mr. Obi's presence and expresses appreciation for his participation in the interview. In response to the expression of gratitude,

Mr. Obi acknowledges the interviewer's gratitude and signals that he is about to reciprocate with his own appreciation. The use of "thank you once more" is notable in this response. It serves as an intensifier, emphasizing Mr. Obi's appreciation and indicating politeness. This intensifier conveys that he not only values the initial invitation but also wants to express his gratitude again, highlighting the significance of the gesture. Aijmer (1996) discusses the use of intensifiers as a strategy to maximize politeness in gratitude expressions. In this case, Mr. Obi's use of "once more" aligns with Aijmer's proposition. It adds emphasis to his gratitude, highlighting his heightened appreciation for the invitation extended to him. Furthermore, his response fosters a level of conviviality and social harmony. By reciprocating the appreciation, he maintains a positive and respectful rapport with the interviewer.

Extract 7

Interviewer: Thank you so much Mr. Obi for joining us tonight and I must say...

Mr Peter Obi: Well, Seun, thank you once more for inviting me

Extract 7 exemplifies the gratitude strategy which manifests in the interaction between the interviewer and Mr. Peter Obi. The use of the intensifier "once more" in Mr. Obi's response emphasizes his appreciation and aligns with Aijmer's (1996) notion of intensifiers as a means to maximize politeness.

In Extract 8, the interviewer expresses gratitude to Mr. Obi for being with them on the show. The interviewer's statement demonstrates his appreciation of Mr. Obi's presence and sets a polite and friendly tone for the conversation. His response acknowledges the interviewer's expression of thanks and he reciprocates with his own appreciation. By using the expression "Thank you for inviting me," Mr. Peter acknowledges the kind gesture of the invitation and expresses gratitude for being included in the morning show. While Mr. Obi's response in Extract 8 may not include explicit intensifiers or special prosodic patterns, it still reflects politeness through his choice of words and overall demeanour. Aijmer (1996) explains that maximizing politeness in gratitude expressions can involve the use of intensifiers, special prosodic patterns, or emphasis through repetition or combination of strategies. In this case, Mr. Peter's polite response aligns with Aijmer's notion of gratitude expressions aiming to maximize politeness.

Extract 8

Interviewer: Good morning, Mr. Obi, thank you for being with us. Welcome to the morning show.

Mr. Peter Obi: Good morning. Thank you for inviting me.

Overall, Extract 8 showcases the gratitude strategy in action, where the speakers engage in reciprocal acts of gratitude. The interaction reflects the function of gratitude expressions in fostering a convivial atmosphere for maintaining politeness and harmonious relationships in interactions.

There is also a demonstration of the gratitude strategy in Extract 9, as the interviewer expresses appreciation to Mr. Obi for returning to the show. This reflects the social value of appreciation mentioned by Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) and Norrick (1978) as an acknowledgment of benefiting from the actions of another person. Mr. Peter's expression of thanks also aligns with Leech's (1983) suggestion that thanking creates a friendly and polite atmosphere. By addressing the interviewer as "my dear brother" and using the honorific "Dr Reuben," Mr. Obi tries to go personal to show respect, which contributes to maintaining a

harmonious relationship. The use of the term "dear brother" reflects the social function and the importance of gratitude.

Extract 9

Interviewer: Mr. Obi it's good to have you back on the morning show

Mr. Obi: Thank you, my dear brother, Dr Reuben

Overall, Extract 9 exemplifies the gratitude strategy by showcasing reciprocal acts of gratitude and the creation of a friendly and polite atmosphere. The use of personal terms and honorifics in Mr. Obi's response reflects the significance of expressing gratitude in communication. Furthermore, the mention of online and offline environments by Pishghadam and Zarei (2011) reinforces the idea that gratitude is not limited to face-to-face interactions but can also be expressed in computer-mediated communication (CMC). Regardless of the communication medium, expressing gratitude through words of thanks, appreciation, and praise remains a significant social practice.

6.1.4 Compliment Strategy

In Spencer-Oatey (2008) theory of rapport management, the compliments strategy refers to a communicative approach used to enhance and maintain rapport by expressing positive evaluations of others. Compliments are employed to acknowledge and appreciate someone's qualities, achievements, or actions, thereby fostering a sense of validation, recognition, and goodwill. In Extract 10, Mr. Obi's compliments himself on his political achievements. He does this by recounting his victory in the 2003 gubernatorial election in Anambra State, Nigeria, despite the odds against him then. He uses the words "miracle" and "impossible" to emphasise the difficulty of the circumstances under which he won then, to suggest that it was only possible through his own determination and skill. This type of self-compliment can be seen as a form of showing off, which is a compliment strategy that is often used by people who are confident in their abilities and achievements (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). In the context of Extract 10, Mr. Obi's self-compliment is likely to be seen as effective by his audience. He is speaking to an interviewer, and he is trying to make a positive impression in order to gain support for his political campaign. By showing off his political achievements, he is showing the interviewer that he is a capable and successful leader.

Extract 10

Mr. Obi: Since I started this political journey, my achievement and rewards have all been miracle. They have all been miraculous. If you check, I ran for governor in a party that was less than one year old when I started in 2003. I won the election, they declared somebody else. I went to court, everybody said it is impossible, there is no way, it has never happened before. After the years the court declared me the winner.

Interviewer: Mr. Peter Obi, thank you so much for being with us, you are certainly the most popular presidential candidate in Nigeria right now among young people. There is so much momentum behind you.

Mr. Obi: Niger State have fertile land that I can compare to the best in the world.

Spencer-Oatey (2008) identifies three main types of compliment responses: acceptance, rejection, and deflection. In Extract 10, Mr. Obi used deflection strategy. He is not directly accepting the compliment, but rather redirecting the attention to something else, in this case, the fertile land of Niger State. In this case, he may be deflecting the compliment because he

wants to focus on the potential of Niger State, rather than on his own accomplishments. By deflecting the compliment, Mr. Peter is avoiding making a direct claim about his own accomplishments. His deflection of the compliment can be considered as a strategic move, which may strike a chord of modesty and endear him to the audience.

The compliment strategy deployed here falls under the category of positive other assessment (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), which involves expressing a positive evaluation of the other person's qualities, characteristics, or accomplishments. Positive other assessments can be effective in building and maintaining rapport. In Extract 10, although the interviewer compliments Mr. Obi by stating that he is the most popular presidential candidate among young people in Nigeria, he chose to deflect that by talking about the vast arable land in Niger State.

6.2 Contextual Features that are Inherent in the Interview

The contextual features that shaped the interview include the shortcomings of politicians and the ineptitude that characterised governance in Nigeria. The interviewers raised questions on the failures or inadequacies of political leaders and past administrations in Nigeria. This provided an opportunity for Mr. Peter Obi to showcase his stance and differentiate himself from those past politicians. It allowed him to present his plans and ideas for addressing the issues and challenges faced by the country.

Another contextual feature is the clamour for the restructuring of the political machinery of the country. The interview then provided the interviewee the opportunity to unveil his plans for restructuring Nigeria's economy, security, and education sector. These plans formed a central theme of the interview, with the interviewers seeking clarification, elaboration, and insights from Mr. Peter Obi. This context influenced the rapport management strategies employed as both parties aimed to engage in a constructive dialogue, exchange ideas, and showcase competence and expertise.

Issues on the broader socio political context of Nigeria, particularly the 2023 elections, also influenced the rapport management strategies deployed in the interview. The interviewers sought Mr. Peter Obi's views on the results of the elections and his reactions to them. This context provided an opportunity for him to express his opinions, beliefs, and vision for the future of Nigeria.

7. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine the rapport management strategies deployed in selected media interviews with Mr. Peter Obi. The results showed that the most prominent strategy employed by commenters was request strategy which was prominent in the interview. This strategy was utilised by interviewers to engage Mr. Peter Obi on his plans for the country if he emerges victorious in the 2023 elections and also to seek clarifications on some misconceptions about him and his political party, the Labour Party. The predominance of request strategies can be attributed to the importance of engagement during conversation which is an important feature of the interview.

In addition, disagreement strategies, which manifest in questions, were also frequent in the data. The gratitude strategy was employed by Mr. Peter Obi and the interviewers to show appreciation to one another. Furthermore, compliment strategy was used to highlight the popularity of Mr Obi among the young population in Nigeria. The study also showed that certain contextual features shaped the interview and the rapport management strategies deployed. These include issues on the broader socio political context of Nigeria, the popular

clamour for the restructuring of the political machinery of the country and the shortcomings of politicians as well as the ineptitude that characterised governance in Nigeria.

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