

Situation-Constrained Language Strategies in Femi Osofisan's *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage*

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Abstract

This paper explores language strategies of marriage-proposal discourses in Osofisan's Farewell to a Cannibal Rage to explicate how its linguistic elements are patterned to achieve goal and the frequency of each one's use. Osofisan's play is a fictional representation of the height of parental influence on their children's spouse choices in the African context. Although the play has garnered many scholarly studies, none has looked into the language strategies of marriage-proposal engagement and conflict to demonstrate how language structure can influence the clarity and impact of a message. Data for the study are nine excerpts that are purposively selected and qualitatively and quantitatively analysed through insights from Brown and Levinson's face-threatening acts and Grice's conversational implicatures. Findings reveal that conversational patterning on the marriage-proposal is as necessity dictates, thus, being constrained by situations. Off-record politeness strategy is the most dominant (66.7%), followed by bald-on-record strategy (33.3%). This distribution indicates that the interlocutors in the play initially prefer indirectness and face-saving strategies, but resort to directness when communicative urgency and emotional intensity require unambiguous expression. The study concludes that situational necessity determines the extent of politeness in African communicative encounters, particularly in socially sensitive contexts such as marriage proposals.

Keywords: *Marriage-Proposal Discourses; Language Strategies; Face-Threatening Acts; Conversational Implicature; Femi Osofisan's Farewell To A Cannibal Rage.*

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between language and context in human interactions is a crucial aspect of human social life whose inquiry will reveal how meaning is negotiated, contested, and constructed through dialogue. Language functions not only as a medium of communication, but also as a site of cultural expression, ideological, and man's struggle to highlighting particular tension between divergent issues. As Halliday (1978) asserts, language is a social semiotic, a system of meanings shaped by and shaping the social context in which it operates. Hence, as African societies continue to negotiate the tension between tradition and modernity, understanding the linguistic dynamics of social necessities and acts remains a vital area for both cultural understanding, preservation, and interpersonal peace.

In line with this, Hymes (1974) emphasizes that communicative competence depends not only on grammatical knowledge but also on knowing when 'when to speak, when not, and what to talk about, with whom, when, where, in what manner.' The institution of marriage in African context is a quintessential cultural element that necessitates understanding for success. Thus,

language use in marriage-proposal discourses, be it during engagement or matrimony, serves as communicative foundation upon which the union is based.

In African societies, marriage is not merely a union between individuals, but a deeply communal institution shaped by culture, values, and social expectations. Mbiti (1990) describes marriage as a duty and a requirement from the corporate society. This shows how the act goes beyond personal choice and reflects communal identity. This is the same in Nigeria where parents' approval for their children's marriage is to a large extent tied to the son/daughter-in-law's background and personality; this approval is repeatedly viewed as an invaluable index of the success of the proposed marriage. To this end, children always bring the expected spouse home and the parents on their part do not readily approve the proposal until after necessary investigations into the background and personality of the proposed partner are ascertained. During the period, polite behaviours, which may be linguistically or socially viewed, also serve as one of the determinants of the success or failure of the proposed marriage and which the people involved are cognizance of and always try to maintain through different communicative means.

Communication is the main essence of language and where it fails, individuals involved in the conversation may be left in the dark and as void of information as before. Also, considering the fact that politeness in interaction is influenced by a number of different factors such as the need to maintain the interlocutors' face want and/or the necessity to make one's message fully understood, reliance on implied meanings for message conveyance in order to be polite may not always work out in some cases like in conflict situations when there may be a need for urgency in communication. Although Grice (1975) contributes to a medium of implicit meaning understanding in indirect language use context, people's understanding of messages may at times still be different from the users' intended meaning and this may not be helpful to the intents of the interlocutors. Grice proposes the theory of implicature and opines that conversationalists are rational individuals that are basically interested in the efficient communication of their messages and as such try to observe the cooperative principle for the effectiveness of their messages. Consequently, he views conversations as being based on a shared principle of cooperation which interlocutors in any conversational situation are expected to take cognizance of. Thus, in opting out of the principle in a bid to be polite, the message of what the speaker utters may not directly be connected to the words or sentences used, and once this happens, the utterance may be uninformative, lack relevance, and/or be confusing to the receivers. This is exactly what happened in the earlier part of Osofisan's play, *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage*, where the characters were avoiding directness in their utterances in order to be polite, but fail in communicating their intentions until their messages are directly and blatantly patterned, that their intentions are divulged and their intents effectively communicated.

SCHOLARLY STUDIES ON THE PLAY

Femi Osofisan's play, *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage* has triggered many scholarly works both literary and linguistics. For instance, Ajidahun (2014) focused on the English language domestication from the perspective of sociolinguistic to examine the lexical, syntactic, and semantic constructs in the play. Adewumi and Egbuwalo (2014) examined the play from the angle of love being the tool of change between tradition and modernism. It viewed the play as being used to epitomize the defeat of traditional norms by the modern value of love. Kure (2018) was an explication of the drama as a guide to resolving the unending communal and religious crises in Kaduna State.

Other researchers, Oyewumi and Ayobami (2023) studied the drama from the perspective of being a representation of debasement and soiling of the traditional rulers' roles in Nigeria. Thus, the play being used to allegorize the loss of heroism. Another study, Affiah et al. (2023), investigated the role of indigenous events such as songs, games, riddles, and dance as used in the play to sustain the camaraderie between the audience and the actor. In all these studies, except Ajidahun (2014), which is on the English language domestication, all others are outside the linguistic constructs of the text. Hence, this study aims to analyse some selected conversations of the four major characters: Akanbi, Olabisi, Adigun, and Titi that bother on the proposed marriage between Olabisi and Akanbi in order to investigate the language strategies of the discourses, the *a priori* considerations (the payoffs) associated with each of the strategy and which one helps them to achieve their goal. The study also highlights the implicit meanings in each of the selected discourses.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This study uses two theoretical frameworks: Brown and Levinson's (1987) Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) and Grice's (1975) Conversational Implicature Theory (CI). The choice of these two theories is hinged on the fact that both are politeness theories that have relations to each other in their conversational meanings. While CI helps in the understanding of the implicit meaning in the off-record politeness strategy and on-record politeness at non-literal level, the knowledge of the concept of face and its *a priori* considerations in FTAs helps to account for the reason(s) of the choice of each of the chosen strategy.

Brown and Levinson's Face Threatening Acts (FTAs)

One of the great proponents of face in interactions is Brown and Levinson (1987) and their model is Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) in which they claim that individuals in interactional situations recognise a concept in linguistic study called face or face work. In their view, this face work focuses on the use of language to acknowledge or consider the interlocutors' face wants. They state that their notion of face is derived from the treatises of Goffman (1967) which views face as the public self-image that every member of a society claims for himself. This, according to them, comprises two different kinds of individuals' desires in interactions and these are: to be unimpeded in actions known as negative face and one's actions to be approved of in some respects known as positive face.

In their view, participants in every conversational situation recognise the individual's face want and try to maintain it by being cooperative with respect to the mutual vulnerability of face, but it is not always all the time that participants fully satisfy other's face wants. For instance, an interlocutor's face want can be ignored in cases of social breakdown as well as in some requirements of urgent cooperation and efficiency of communication. In this case, individuals in the interaction always try to observe their behaviours in order to mitigate FTAs. As a result of mutual vulnerability of the face, a speaker (S) is concerned about his hearer's (H) face want as a way of maintaining his own face. This is because once the H's face want is impinged on, the H in a bid to defend it will threaten the S's own. Thus, the S can avoid FTAs or simply employ negative or positive politeness strategy as a repair or compensation for performing the act. This, however, will assure the H that the speaker is aware of his face want.

Brown and Levinson (1987) list those acts that threaten both negative and positive faces of S and H. The acts that threaten the H's negative face wants include those ones that potentially show that the S does not indicate his intention to avoid impinging on the H's freedom of action

such as those that put some pressure on the H to do or refrain from doing some acts, for instance, giving orders, suggestions, advice, making requests, warnings and so on. Those that show that the S does not care about the H's desires and emotions such as expression of disapproval, criticism, contempt, irreverence, and blatant non-cooperation in activity. However, interlocutors can choose to avoid these FTAs or adopt some strategies to minimize them but in doing so, will first consider the relative weightings of their wants, for instance the want to effectively convey his messages as well as being efficient or urgent in communicating it. One can adopt any of these strategies: off record or on record. According to Brown and Levinson (1987),

A communicative act is done off record if it is done in such a way that it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to the act. In other words, the actor leaves himself an 'out' by providing himself with a number of defensible interpretations; he cannot be held to have committed himself to just one particular interpretation of his act. Thus if a speaker wants to do an FTA, but wants to avoid the responsibility for doing it, he can do it off record and leave it up to the addressee to decide how to interpret it. (p. 211)

Thus, when an act is done off record, it means that the meaning is negotiable, thus, the S plans to exonerate himself from being held of committing any particular intent. Linguistic realization of this include irony, understatement, metaphor, rhetorical questions and others that S intends to convey without directly doing so, while on record is done when it is obvious to the interactants the communicative intention that led to it. It also refers to doing an act baldly with or without redress. An act is done with redressive action when it gives face to the H, that is, by indicating that no face threat is intended. Such an act takes either negative or positive politeness strategy. Negative politeness strategy is avoidance based. It is oriented towards redressing the H's negative face. Here, the S assures the H that he recognizes and respects his face wants and will avoid any kind of interference. The S redresses the acts with compensations, apologies, deference, hedge and other indirect linguistic structures that exonerate S from the act. The S can also choose to do the FTAs baldly without redress. In this case, the FTAs are done in a most direct, concise, and unambiguous manner. Here, the S does not fear any accusation from the H. He considers the need for the suspension of the demands of the face wants for the interest of urgency and efficiency in conveying his intents. On the other hand, the positive politeness strategy is approach based and is oriented towards the positive face of the H. This, however, indicates to H that the S respects him. Thus, the FTAs do not mean the S's negative evaluation of the H's face wants. Normally, when an act is done baldly on record, it portrays that the S adheres to the specification of Grice's maxims of cooperation, whereas when he chooses off record, it violates these maxims to implicate meaning.

Grice's Conversational Implicature Theory

Herbert Grice (1975) proposes that individuals in a communicative exchange are guided by a principle that determines the way in which language is used with maximum efficiency and effect to achieve rationale communication. He called it Cooperative Principle; he claims that when any of the maxims of this principle is flouted, it triggers additional meaning in the form of an implicature that is to be inferred with regard to the context of use. According to him, cooperative principle has it that one should make one's conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which one is engaged (Grice, 1975).

Since his introduction of the concept of implicature into the field of pragmatics, many scholars have given various but strikingly same meaning definitions of it. For instance, Horn and Ward expound that implicature “is a component of speaker’s meaning that constitutes an aspect of what is meant in a speaker’s utterance without being part of what is said. What a speaker intends to communicate is characteristically far richer than what he/she directly expresses” (2006, p. 3). Mey concedes that “it is something which is implied in conversation, that is, something which is implicit in actual language usage. He further states that “it concerns the way we understand an utterance in conversation in accordance with what we expect to hear” (2001, p. 47). Thus, implicature refers to the meaning which a speaker/writer intends to convey but does not explicitly do so, but which the listener/reader infers from the propositions used together with the situational context. It follows also that language users mean to convey more than they say. Black avers that “the same utterance on different occasions might not generate an implicature, or might suggest a different one. They are rooted in the situation in which they occur, and must be interpreted taking the context into account” (2006, p. 25). She is of the view that implicature is basically tied to the context of the utterance and the situation at hand. One cannot uphold a particular sentence meaning at one situational context to mean the same in another. So important is the consideration of the situational context of the utterance than the words and sentences used in implicature messages. This assertion is in line with Lehtonen’s view on his discussion on language as practical consciousness. He avers that the form in which “language is given to us is already quite advanced, full of tracks left by people throughout the centuries. In this way, language shapes us no less than we shape language” (2000, p. 2).

Grice (1975) provides suggestion or perhaps solution to this advanced stage or tracks which language specialists have taken us into by proposing the conversational maxims which interlocutors consciously or unconsciously observe during interactions. According to him, the cooperative principle is grouped into four maxims. They are:

The Maxim of Quantity: make your contribution as informative as is required and do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

The Maxim of Quality: do not say things that do not have adequate evidence and do not say what is false.

The Maxim of Relation: be relevant.

The Maxim of Manner: be brief, avoid obscurity of messages and ambiguity.

Observing the cooperative principle ensures the provision of the right amount of information and that the interaction is done in a more relevant, truthful and perspicuous manner (Grice 1975). In particular, Grice’s theory believes that at some level, the speakers always observing the maxims but observing the maxims at a non-literal level triggers an implicature. This means that if the listener believes the speaker is observing the maxims, but that this is not shown at a literal level, then the addressee infers additional meaning, in the form of an implicature.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs a purposive sampling technique where only utterances concerning the marriage-proposal engagement between Akanbi and Olabisi are extracted and qualitatively and quantitatively analysed. Data for the study comprise nine discourses from four major characters, Akanbi, Olabisi, Adigun, and Titi, that centre on the marriage-proposal issue in the play. The qualitative analysis focuses on identifying the pragmatic implications of the

utterances, while the quantitative aspect helps to determine the frequency of the politeness strategies employed using Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework and Grice's (1975) Conversational Implicature Theory. The choice of the theories is as a result of the fact that both work together for communication and comprehension, helping to divulge the nuances of human relations. Thus, when one goes off record in order to save face, the language structure violates conversational maxim(s) and when this is done, it implicates messages that are used in the interpretation of the implicit meanings in the characters' utterances. Frequencies and percentages are calculated to determine the distribution and dominance of each politeness strategy type.

SITUATION-CONSTRAINED LANGUAGE STRATEGIES IN THE PLAY

This section extracted, from the play, the discourses on the marriage-proposal between Akanbi and Olabisi and analysed them with insights from the FTAs postulates, while interpretations of the implicit messages in the discourses are drawn through insights from conversational implicatures. The implicit meanings in the discourses are italicized for easy identification.

Analyses started with the speech of Olabisi who opened the play after the narrator presented a long monologue on the proceedings of the play. This is done because its nature is the kind that helped to set the readers in the right direction to understanding the plot of the text. In the extract, she soliloquizes as a flashback to what happened the previous night; this is done to divulge the love relationship between her and Akanbi.

Excerpt 1: (Background: Olabisi is at Iloto hill to meet with Akanbi as they planned the previous night, but waited too long before Akanbi was seen)

Olabisi: The night has come with silence, with glow-worms. And here, on this silent hill, I stand alone, alone with the moon and afraid. Oh, where are you, Akanbi! Only yesterday we parted, promising to meet again tonight. Here on this hill of Iloto, where lovers can be together alone. Now the moon has risen, and the night is here and I wait still for you... (p. 5)

The first two sentences in this excerpt flout the manner maxim for obscuring meaning. Olabisi uses figurative language to express her feelings (anxiety) and the environmental situation at the moment when a lover waits alone and too long for the loved one. The night and the hill are qualified with human attributes. With this, she intends her audience to understand her predicament at the hill. It also portrays her frustration and anxiety as she waits endlessly for her lover. The excerpt, implicitly, conveys her relationship anxiety or uneasy feelings about their marriage engagement.

Excerpt 2: (Background: Olabisi, having sensed danger in their marriage engagement, is frantic.)

Olabisi T₁: There's strangeness in your voice, a dark note in the music. Tell me something went wrong?

Akanbi T₂: Bisi, when we parted yesterday, it was to meet again. (pause) But now, I am afraid we have parted forever.

Olabisi T₃: No, don't say that! (p. 5)

Considering the sensitivity and fragility of the topic that they are discussing, Olabisi structures his utterance in T₁ to implicitly convey meaning. This flouts the first sub-maxim of quantity for being under informative, and manner for obscuring meaning. By this, she wants Akanbi to search for additional meaning so as to run less risk of being held responsible for any face damaging interpretation by him. The implicature is that *Akanbi is no longer interested in the marriage engagement*.

Olabisi would have pointedly told Akanbi this, but because this is an assumption, she patterns her language in such a way that the meaning is negotiable. She employs off-record linguistic strategy as a result of her consideration on Akanbi's negative face want. Akanbi (T₂), having understood her consideration of the face want, sought for a redressive way of performing FTAs as a result of his consideration for her own face and the relative weighting of his utterance. He employs on-record with redressive act as partial compensation for performing the act. This he does in order to show her that even at that, he still respects her face wants.

Akanbi T₂ ... (pause) but now, I am afraid we have parted forever.

This flouts the second sub-maxim of quantity for providing more than the required information. He would have simply answered "yes" for him to fully observe the maxim, but he flouts it because he is cognizant of the mutual vulnerability of face. His use of a hedge 'I am afraid...' is a strategy to compensate for the FTAs, while having his intention conveyed to her. The 'pause' in his utterance is also a redressive device. It portrays a kind of heaviness in him and in uttering those words, his sentiment and emotions towards her and the issue at hand. Olabisi, as a result of the situational context, infers the meaning that, "*despite all odds, he still feels for her, perhaps a force must be behind his actions*". This is why she cries out in (T₃) "no, don't say that" which is her way of acknowledging his effort in maintaining her face wants.

Excerpt 3: (Background: Adigun (Akanbi's uncle) tells Akanbi the reason he will not marry Olabisi; he wants him to swear to him (Akanbi) that he will not continue with the marriage proposal.)

This is another instance where the interlocutors fail to observe the maxims in order to save both the negative and positive face and thereby implicating meanings. Here, Akanbi has heard everything about how Folabi, his father, is killed by Atanda, Olabisi's father and how he, Adigun, avenges the death by murdering Atanda, but he is yet to be convinced by the story alone, so he inquires from his uncle whether Atanda confessed the killing.

Akanbi T₁: Did he confess?

Adigun T₂: It was not necessary¹. I killed him that was proof enough². Well, swear to me now, so I can sleep in peace when next the sunset falls³. Swear so I can ride the boat in calm weather⁴.

Akanbi T₃: Swear?

Adigun T₄: Swear to forget this girl. You will find another, some day. (p. 15)

"It was not necessary..." in T₂ flouts the quantity maxim for being under informative. Grice's cooperative principle stipulates that this type of question (T₁) demands "yes" or "no" answer from the interactant. Thus, Adigun would have adhered to the maxim by simply answering "no" but he wants Akanbi to search for additional meaning so as to run less risk of the consequence of the answer to his own face and intention. The implicature is that *Atanda*

did not confess. At this point in the situational context of the interaction, Adigun, being cognizant of the implication of direct answer makes his meaning to be negotiable. He did this to evade himself any responsibility should confrontation ensues from any face damaging interpretation. This is as a result of his smartness and knowledge of the mutual vulnerability of face in the context, the relative weighting of his wants, and the consequence which might result to his failure to achieve his aim, that is, to convince Akanbi not to marry Olabisi.

The 3rd sentence in T₂ “...well, swear to me now, so I can sleep in peace when next the sunset falls” flouts the maxims of relation and manner. It flouts the maxim of relation by diverting the topic of immediate discussion to demanding that he, Akanbi, swears to him to forget Olabisi. This implicates that: *he, Adigun, does not want to continue with the discussion of the confession issue anymore.*

This shift from the topic authenticates the implicature that Atanda did not make any confession. Again, Adigun’s language patterning here poses a threat to Akanbi’s negative face, but considering the power asymmetries between them and his (Akanbi) tact to understand him (Adigun) better, he structures his T₃ response in order to save Adigun’s face and as a mark of respect. The introductory “well” is a pragmatic marker in the context, a transitional cue between the two subjects and a signal to Akanbi to make an inferential interpretation. It is, also, a cohesive device that is aimed at reducing the abruptness of the question. The 4th sentence flouts the manner maxim; it is a metaphorical language that obscures meaning. The implicit meaning is that: *he, Adigun, will have peace of mind.* ‘Swear?’ in T₃ flouts the maxim of quantity for being under informative. It is under informative in the sense that it is used by Akanbi to indirectly dodge his uncle’s request, but Adigun misunderstands him (Akanbi) to be inquiring for further clarification. This is why he (Adigun), in T₄, repeats the same word with more explanation. The implicature is that: *he, Akanbi, is not ready to swear.*

Excerpt 4: (Background: Titi (Olabisi’s mother) has heard from neighbours that they saw her daughter returning home together with a man. So she engages Olabisi in a conversation to ascertain whether the man, those neighbours saw her with the previous day, is her proposed suitor).

Titi T₁: Well, I won’t argue with you. Just find a husband first.

Olabisi T₂: Mother, I have found the man.

Titi T₃: Yes?

Olabisi T₄: I have found the man I want for husband. (pause) You say nothing?

Titi T₅: What shall I say?

Olabisi T₆: What is wrong? You are sad all of sudden. Yet only now you were joking about it.

Titi T₇: Yes, but I was hoping it wouldn’t be him. (p. 39)

In this extract, Titi, having heard that Olabisi and Akanbi returned to the village together, suspects Akanbi to be the man proposing to marry her daughter. And being so eager to ascertain the truth engages her in a conversation on finding a suitor. She (Titi) does this to authenticate her suspicion. She, however, tactfully structures her language use so as to avoid face damage on Olabisi’s negative and positive face wants, thereby flouting quantity and relation maxims.

The language patterning in T₁ is Titi's indirect way of getting information about the man Olabisi returned home with the previous day. T₃ and T₅ flout the maxim of quantity for its failure to provide the required information. Apparently, Titi's response seems to be pointless or have no communicative value to the conversation since it simply utters something irrelevant to the discussion at literal level, but is loaded with inferential meaning. By uttering it, she intends to save her interlocutor's face while conveying her message. Thus, she wants her to infer meaning relying on the shared knowledge of the cultural background and situational context that when such issue as marriage is being discussed by parents and their children, the parents are supposed to be happy for their children, but if otherwise, it implies their rejection of the proposal. Normally, in a situation or discussion such as this, Titi is supposed to be happy that her daughter is finally settling down with a man, but in this case the reverse is the case and Olabisi infers the message. The implicature is that: *she (Titi) does not support her (Olabisi) choice of husband.*

T₇ flouts the maxim of quantity for being less informative. She does this to save Olabisi's face wants. She would have (observing the maxim) told her blatantly that she does not approve of the man. "I was hoping..." is a hedge, a redressive act to performing the FTA in "...it wouldn't be him". The implicature is that: *Titi does not support her spouse choice thereby informing her that Akanbi is not suitable for her.*

Excerpt 5: (Olabisi is still inquisitive to know if her mother knows Akanbi and if she really disapproves of their marriage proposal)

Olabisi T₁: You know him?

Titi T₂: You arrived together yesterday.

Olabisi T₃: But how did you...

Titi T₄: Oh it wasn't so difficult to know...

Olabisi T₅: You disapprove of him?

Titi T₆: (evasive) Come, let us go inside. Your breakfast must be cold.

Olabisi T₇: Don't run away, mother. Tell me everything now, why you think my choice is wrong.

Titi T₈: Beautiful is the morning. My daughter, look, the sun is in your hair. I am happy today. This morning and my daughter warm my heart with unspeakable joy. Today, Olabisi, I don't want to be sad. Let this day, the only one we shall have together after so many years and seasons. Let it be for sweet things. (pp. 39 - 40)

All of Titi's responses in this extract flout quantity maxim. That is, T₂, T₄, T₆ and T₈ flout quantity maxim for being under informative and T₆ is also irrelevant to the subject of discussion, therefore, flouting the relation maxim as well. All the responses except T₆ indirectly answer Olabisi questions as a result of the mother's recognition of the risk of the potential face damaging interpretation. She avoids blatant bald-on-record answers that may incur face damage at the stage. What happens in T₆ is as a result of her mother's tactfulness to dodge more questions from her which might have some consequences on her face want at the time. This is why her response in T₈, that she is happy that morning and will not like to be sad. The implicature in all of the responses is that: *she does not support the marriage and therefore it will not work for both of them.*

Excerpt 6: (Akanbi overheard Olabisi swearing to her mother that she will not marry him.)

Olabisi T₁: Never, mother, I shall never marry him now, never!

Titi T₂: For my sake, for every one of those foul moments on Iloto. For his sake, for your dead father, for the murder still unavenged.

Akanbi T₃: So you swore to her!

Olabisi T₄: She had grown suddenly old. For his sake... for her sake. She went in, and her words danced in my heart like the centre of a whirlwind, she went in, her shoulders heavy with those recollections. My heart was a whirlwind.

Akanbi T₅: So you swore to her!

Olabisi T₆: (She sits down) I sat down on a stone. I wanted to cry, but no tears came to my eyes, only the heart aching and aching. I sat my head hung low, remembering, unable to cry. (p. 57)

In the extract, Titi has just finished narrating to her daughter, Olabisi, how Akanbi's uncle murdered her father in retaliation of Akanbi's father's death, consequently, Olabisi becomes too emotional and touched by the story, therefore, swears to her mother that she will never marry Akanbi for the reason; immediately, Akanbi enters the scene and overhears her. Thus, Olabisi's responses in T₄ and T₆ are as a result of her acknowledgement of the recognition of the mutual vulnerability of each other's face at the moment. She knows the implication of a direct response, therefore, sought for an off-record strategy. She becomes cooperative in order to avoid the impingement that will damage not only Akanbi's face, but also hers. She adopts the strategy to show off her regard to Akanbi's face want thereby leaving her answer to be negotiable so as to avoid being hold responsible for any damage that may occur from Akanbi's interpretation of her messages. Hence, the responses violate relation maxim for providing answers that are irrelevant to the subject of discussion. The questions in T₃ and T₅ require 'yes' or 'no', but T₄ and T₆ rather explain the mental states of the characters (Titi and Olabisi) that are responsible for her (Olabisi) action. What come below are instances where the characters adopted blatant, bald-on-record politeness strategy though while some are at literal level, few others are at non-literal level, but lack politeness and thereby implicating direct responses as well. The excerpts occurred at, the last stage of the play when the characters have realized that the use of off-record politeness strategy in their conversations has failed them in resolving the issue at hand; they employ bald-on-record politeness strategy to make their intentions better communicated and understood. The implicatures of the non-literal structures are interpreted for messages.

Excerpt 7: (Background: Olabisi tells her mother that she loves Akanbi and therefore will marry him despite her mother's effort to convince her that Akanbi will not be a better spouse for her.)

Titi T₁: A leopard's son will also have spots.

Olabisi T₂: A fine dancer, mother, can spring from a hunchback.

Titi T₃: When shall you see him?

Olabisi T₄: Tonight, at Iloto.

Titi T₅: Perhaps I shall come.

Olabisi T₆: Mother, you will come. (p. 59)

The extract shows Titi and her daughter in a blatant and direct exchange of words. Hence, the characters, having noticed that relying on politeness strategy and pragmatic inference to passing on their messages have failed them in the proper communication of their intent and considering the relative weighting of their intention at the moment sought for direct and blatant language use notwithstanding the social status and power asymmetries.

For instance, all of Olabisi's responses to her mother's questions are direct, no hedging, no redressive measures and thus, no consideration of the relative waiting of their positive face.

Excerpt 8: (Akanbi tells his uncle, Adigun, that he is leading him astray and therefore will not follow his route.)

Adigun: Enough! Nonsense! You feed me with arguments, and obedience is what I demand.

Akanbi: You will be well obeyed, when you have ordered well.

Adigun: Since when was it the custom, for the tail to teach the head?

Akanbi: Whenever the head lost himself in a calabash.

Adigun: Does a child instruct his father on how to wield a cutlass?

Akanbi: No, but the child can still tell when the cutlass is not in demand

Adigun: Young man, you try my temper. When the old command, it is not for the young to talk back.

Akanbi: Nor is it for the old to talk wrong and lead the young into needless despair.

Adigun: I warn you! I shall not give my consent.

Akanbi: I shall leave without it.

Adigun: (outraged) Without my blessing!

Akanbi: Give your blessing, before it becomes unnecessary to ask. (p. 63)

In the extract, all of Akanbi's responses to his Uncle, Adigun, are done baldly without redressive acts. Even when the uncle reminds him in case he has forgotten who he is speaking with, he keeps to his stand. This is because he has noticed that all the while that he has been polite, it has not helped him to convince him, Adigun, to give his consent to the marriage.

The implicature is that *he, Akanbi, is determined to marry Olabisi with or without the uncle's consent.*

Excerpt 9: (Background: the parents (Adigun and Titi) and children meet together to decide the final take on the marriage proposal. It is after this encounter that the characters understand each other's intent and the marriage proposal is consented to.)

Akanbi: I shall speak for myself. Bisi may be a serpent, but if she will have me, I am ready to marry her.

Titi: She will not have you hyena.

Olabisi: Mother, if Akanbi is a hyena, then my husband shall be a hyena.

Adigun: hyena! He is a mere antelope, his prowess is not in strength or honour, his prowess is only in running.

Akanbi: Adigun, you insult me, but the matter is past abuse.

Titi: Bisi, you go against me?

Olabisi: Mother, your counsel is death.

Adigun: I spit on the ground.

Akanbi: Spit on, fading legend.

Adigun: Take care, my spittle can burn like fire!

Titi: I turn my back, my daughter is dead!

Olabisi: Turn and turn away.

Adigun: I am Adigun. My name thunders across six borders like a rumour of war.

Akanbi: An old man. No longer a threatening fist. No longer the barrel chest!

Adigun: I am Adigun, and I order you...

Akanbi: I refuse.

Titi: Bisi, pity your mother...

Olabisi: You stuck by your husband, let me stay by my love.

Titi: So you desert me?

Olabisi: It was you who turned your back.

Adigun: Akanbi, listen to me!

Akanbi: Your words are tiresome.

Adigun: Insolent, you cannot dishonor me or your name. I'll kill you first!

Akanbi: Old man. My life is beyond you. (pp. 65 - 66)

A look at the excerpts showed that the four characters are together and in the war of words. All the discourses are baldly and blatantly uttered without redressive acts. No one cares for each other's face wants, social status or power asymmetries.

Their main focus here is clarity and getting their intentions communicated as a result of the need for efficiency and urgency in communicating them. It is through this language structure that they are able to effectively communicate and understand each other's stand on the issue. They embraced this as a result of the urgency and necessity to have their intention communicated.

Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Politeness Strategies in the Nine Excerpts

Politeness Strategy	Frequency	Percentage %
Off-record politeness strategy	6	66.7%
Bald-on-record without Redress	3	33.3%

The table above indicates that off-record politeness strategy predominates in the interactions between the characters, accounting for two-thirds (66.7%) of the total strategies identified. This dominance suggests that the participants in the play are highly conscious of social norms, interpersonal respect, and the preservation of face, especially in culturally sensitive discussions such as marriage proposals.

The use of indirect language, hedges, and implicatures reflects an effort to avoid confrontation and maintain harmony.

However, the occurrence of bald-on-record politeness strategies (33.3%) shows moments when indirectness fails or when situational urgency, emotional strain, and conflict resolution necessitate direct and unambiguous communication.

Thus, the findings reveal that linguistic politeness in Osofisan's drama is dynamic, shifting from deference and subtlety to assertiveness and clarity as the interactional demands evolve.

CONCLUSION

This paper investigates the language strategies of four major characters in Femi Osofisan's *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage* in order to ascertain the linguistic structures that help in the proper communication of their messages and the resolution of the marriage-proposal conflict in the play. It examines the patterns through which the contents of these conversations are communicated, the *a priori* considerations (the payoffs) associated with each of the patterns adopted, and which one helps in achieving their goal.

The findings authenticate Brown and Levinson's face work theory, which postulates that different situations call for different strategies; thus, the participants' face want can be ignored in cases of social breakdown, when there is a need for urgent cooperation and efficiency of communication (1987). Hence, as ascertained from the play, bald-on-record is employed at the time when there is social breakdown among the participants and when there is the need for effective communication of the characters' intention.

At the initial stage of the play, the characters, having recognised their culture and the importance of maintaining face wants in order to save face, deliberately flout maxims. This is done with purposes: the parents (Adigun and Titi) use it (off-record) in time when their intention is to convince their children on the reasons to cancel the proposed marriage, while the children (Akanbi and Olabisi) use it as a result of a show of respect, power asymmetries, and cultural values.

The analyses reveal that off-record with negative and positive politeness strategies and bald-on-record with redressive action are mostly used by the characters to convey messages so as to save face, as face saving line of escape, as a repair, and compensation for performing the FTA(s), therefore flouting the quantity, relation and manner maxims, while bald-on-record without redressive action constitutes the least and is used at the last stage by the four characters, when they have seen the need for the urgency and efficiency of their messages.

Hence, the characters having noticed that relying on pragmatic inference (implicature) to communicate their messages has failed them in better communication of their intents, and having realized the urgency in the proper communication at the time resort to bald and blatant language use. This strategy, however, helps in the resolution of the marriage-proposal conflict as it helped in the proper communication and understanding.

The study, therefore, concludes that although African's language behaviour is often rooted in culture, there are times that these cultural values and their dictates are flouted, particularly, when it has to do with the clarity of the messages.

It shows that politeness is not static but contextually adaptive, and in African interpersonal discourse, speakers negotiate between respect and expressiveness to achieve social balance and communicative success.

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