

“NO, NO, NO! THERE IS NO CONFLICT”: ENGENDERING PEACE AND SECURITY THROUGH POLITE RESPONSES IN SELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPER POLITICAL INTERVIEWS

Afolabi, A.A.¹; Adegboyega, D.F.²; Oyelakin, G.S³; Olaniyan, O.R.¹

¹ Department of English and Literary Studies,
Osun State University, Ikire Campus,
Osun State, Nigeria.

² Department of English and Literary Studies,
Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

³Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

Abstract

This study looks at how peace and security are engendered through polite responses in communication, looking at political interviews from selected Nigerian newspapers. Previous studies on politeness in communication have not explored newspaper interviews as a source of data but have mostly used questionnaires, which may not be reliable sources of data for actual speech situations. Thus, this study draws data from political interview discourse in the Nigeria print medium, which is a valid source of examples of spontaneous speech situations. Two political interviews each were selected from five randomly selected Nigerian newspapers (This Day, Punch, Leadership Newspapers, Business Day and The Nation) between August and December 2021 to make a total of ten interviews considered in this study. The newspapers were selected based on the availability of their online versions and wide circulation across the country for easy access to readers, while the choice of the time frame is because it is the period when the political space was warming up for the next electioneering activities. Therefore, the different political interviews being churned out in print and broadcast media are bound to yield rich data for this study. The selected interviews were analysed using Brown and Levinson’s (1987) model of Politeness and “face” theory as well as Leech’s (1983) politeness maxims. The analysis shows that respondents in Nigerian newspaper political interviews usually use both positive and negative politeness in their responses to questions posed to them by the interviewer. The reason is that the interviewees are conscious of the fact that they are expressing their views on the matters raised by the interviewers to a wider audience (the public) and not just to the interviewer alone. This, the interviewees do, to avoid imposing their views on the reading audience while at the same time subtly rejecting imposition from the interviewer. Thus, the interviewees make use of linguistic face-saving choices, which will at the same time help them to achieve solidarity, intimacy, and oneness with Nigerians. The study concludes that politeness is a key element in mitigating conflict and engendering peace and security in any communication context, especially within the genre of political interviews.

Keywords: politeness, negative and positive face, peace and security, Nigerian newspapers, political interviews

1. Introduction

It is no longer news that there is insecurity around the world today. There seems to be no part of the world that is not under one security threat or the other, the chief of which is terrorism. For instance, incidents of misuse of firearms abound in the US and other parts of Europe, ISIS and Al Qaeda in the Arab world, among other security issues around the world. Nigeria is not left out in this issue of insecurity. For instance, the *Boko Haram* crisis in northern Nigeria is shaking the entire country, and its socio-political and economic life is seriously threatened (Kareem, 2018). Kidnappings, banditry and ritual killings, religious riots and even political fights and killings have also increased. Most of these crises may have resulted from language use in our day-to-day activities. Language is a unique characteristic through which man communicate with one another (Ativie, 2020). With language, man can interact with others and maintain such to the desired level. However, to maintain such interactions, one must follow some important strategies. Apart from the **Cooperative Principle** postulated by Grice (1978), people observe one other principle in their communication. It is called the **Politeness Principle**. This principle has been developed by several language scholars, which include Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, Geoffrey Leech, and Richard Watts, among other scholars. This principle does not just consider the information or message in a communication activity but also the effect that what is said has on the hearer. This principle is developed to sustain the social balance and cordial relations, which make us believe that other participants in a conversation are cooperative (Leech 1982, cited in Kareem, 2018).

Pragmaticists describe ‘politeness’ as the connection between how we say something to another participant in a conversation and how that person perceives it to have been said (Grundy, 2000). Ativie (2020) sees politeness as a culturally defined phenomenon. He describes it as the application of good manners in social interaction. Thus, it means that politeness considers the feelings of others in any communication encounter in order not to hurt the other person’s feelings. It can be said that language is the only weapon that can be used in communication to perform several functions by human beings in the society. These include being polite to institute unity and reduce discord. According to Ambuyo, Indede and Karanja (2011), people can use language to institute or promote good communication. They believe that people can also use language to prevent or bring about quarrel between participants in a conversation. Therefore, people need to be polite in their use of language to have a successful communication. This is in line with Leech’s (1983) view that the principle of

politeness is developed to sustain the social balance and the amicable interactions, which make it possible for us to believe that other participants in a conversation are being cooperative. Leech further emphasizes the extent to which politeness is important in language when he says that if people are not polite to those around them, it will destroy the communication link between them, which will prevent cordial interactions.

It then means that to have a successful cordial relationship, if any leader and his followers or the members of a family will relate successfully with one other, and if the people in a community or country at large will co-exist in harmony and tranquility, everyone must be polite in the way they use language to interact with one another. Li (2008) also writes that politeness and cooperation are embedded in each other. Every organisation and society recognises the importance of using polite language; hence, politeness is an all-inclusive way of using language correctly. We can say that politeness is when a speaker pays careful attention to the other person when they are having a conversation. In the view of Babatunde & Adedimeji (2008), politeness makes one to consider the “face” of the other person or how we consider the personality of an individual in public. Brown & Levinson (1987) define politeness as a deliberate effort to save "face" and "face" as that image which everyone seeks to showcase and protect in public. If politeness is employed wrongly in social interaction, it could negatively destroy communication. Therefore, we must be polite if we want to pass our intended message across successfully.

The opposite of politeness is impoliteness. Impoliteness is the overall term used to refer to the way people deliberately employ face threatening acts (FTA) to injure the face of the person listening to them (Dynel, 2015; Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper, 2005). Sometimes, people display face threatening acts even when they do not mean to. That is, in some cases, a speaker may exhibit impoliteness when they do not mean to, which may lead to apprehension and bad feelings. This implies that impoliteness is not always deliberate. Nowadays, the reason why people disagree and argue with one another is because they address the other person in a way that makes them appear as if they do not want another to check what they do or say. These people believe that they should not be checked may be, because they occupy a very high position or because they think of themselves too highly than they should, making them feel that everyone else must respect them.

Denham & Lobeck (2013) explain that politeness shows reference for the other person and expects to be referenced in return. Social class does not limit politeness because adults could as well be polite to people younger than they are, the way young people are expected to be polite to adults. Political leaders are expected to be polite to the commonest of their country people anywhere and

anytime they (the political leaders) encounter them (the common citizens), not minding the obvious gap in social class and status. From the foregoing, we can deduce that the use of polite language among interactants in a social situation should be because of reciprocity (Adekunle & Adebayo, 2017). It is on this premise that this paper investigates the effect of polite responses in engendering peace and security in selected Nigerian newspaper political interviews. This is based on the belief that this area has not enjoyed much research even though scholars have investigated politeness in different domains of language use.

2. Previous works on politeness in Nigerian context

Odebunmi (2009) looks at the manifestation of tact maxim in hospital interactions, specifically between doctors and their patients. He discovered that a lot of doctors' utterances showed that doctors are usually polite to their patients, giving their patients maximum freedom of expression while reducing FTA in hospital interaction. We can say that doctors do this because they need their patients to bear out their problems to them for them to be able to diagnose their patients correctly, which will help them prescribe the right and best treatment for such patients. Therefore, they are expected to tactfully elicit information from their patients, including the family, social and religious backgrounds of the patient, as well as the history of the sickness the patient is suffering from. On the other hand, the patient would want to be as polite as possible because they, at that time, see the doctor as the ultimate solution to their health problem. Thus, politeness is expected to be put to play in this context.

Okoro (2011) looked at how the non-teaching staff of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka express politeness to show that everyday communication in the English language is to be peppered with linguistic politeness, to demonstrate different ways in which communication could be face-threatening and to suggest how one could couch speeches and compositions with politeness strategies in order to sustain cooperative communication. The data were analysed based on the age, gender, educational qualifications, years of service, department and nationality of the secretaries who were used as respondents. The study showed that the secretaries used in the said research work did not have enough understanding of what politeness means. In agreement with the researcher, it should be noted that respect is an important characteristic of ethical communication in every culture. This means that secretaries should be polite in the discharge of their duties knowing that their being polite to customers will make the customers leave with a good impression about them and the institution.

Obins (2015) reviewed how Nigerians express politeness, using instances from real-life speech situations of some Nigerians who speak popular Nigerian English in social communications. He discovers that Nigerians are popular with the use of both verbal and non-verbal language for social communication, so it is

very common for Nigerians to express admiration as a mark of polite behavior. This is because they believe that not responding in a conversation is impolite and can lead to a collapse of the communication activity. In his view, most Nigerians are careful about when to talk, when to keep quiet, what to talk about, who to say it to and how to say it to them, especially when it comes to showing politeness. Apart from this, Nigerian cultures demand that older people should be respected. Therefore, Nigerians are usually careful not to flout the dictates of smooth communication. They usually do not want to be seen as confrontational, abusive, blunt, or rude. Though the research is a bit encompassing because it studies how Nigerians express politeness generally in their day-to-day conversations across cultures, its shortcoming is that it did not look at the semi-formal context of communication, especially the political interview context, where the issues concerning the nation is discussed in the question-response format.

Kareem (2018) investigated the use of im/politeness in Muslim sermons or *Khutbahs*. The study attempts to show that the Muslim sermon, in its aim to impart various types of religious information to the congregation, is a communicative event that can generate ill-feelings among its various audiences. The Imam is thus expected to make strategic use of politeness elements in his delivery or risk compromising the efficacy of the sermon. He discovers that the Imams used the traditional Face Threatening Acts (FTAs), and these largely amount to conventional aggression (Harris, 2001) or unmarked FTAs (Dynel, 2015). The study concluded that the Imams were characteristically polite in their delivery and that politeness is an important feature in this religious discourse, such as the Friday sermon. Nevertheless, it is pertinent for us to note that since the September 2011 incident, the Muslims' lives and religion have come under serious threats largely because bad images of the Muslims and Islam have been painted in the minds of everyone who reads newspapers or watches the television. Given these situations, there is a special focus on the Muslim scholars and their sermons because they are already being accused of various kinds of impoliteness. Thus, since the Friday *Khutbah* or sermon is an important rite in the Muslim community, and its purpose is the purification of the individual and societal lives, it is expected that politeness will be displayed, particularly in Nigeria.

Dozie and Otagburuagu (2019) explore the conversational English politeness strategies used by Igbo learners of English in Nigeria. Their findings demonstrated that politeness strategies are very significantly used in apology discourse. Also, the study revealed that apologies are conversational habits of Igbo bilinguals as the offenders willingly made an apology regardless of social differences and context, which were also reflected in their choice of strategies as there was obvious transfer of the nuances of the first/native language/mother tongue to their target language production. The study established that apology realisation in an interlanguage context, i.e., Igbo-speaking learners of English

necessarily bear the burden of native language transfer into target language. In conclusion, the study showed that because of the Igbo understanding that there are possibilities of instances of affront or outrage in human interactions, Igbo bilinguals adopted mainly the positive and negative forms of politeness strategies in apology discourse to accomplish a conversational demand. The study found evidence to dispute the universality of politeness further and argued that politeness is culture specific. However, the researcher gathered his data from questionnaire in the form of Discourse Completion Task (DCT) consisting of 10 different apology discourse situations among undergraduates of Igbo extraction at seven universities systematically selected from the South-East and South-South zones in Nigeria. In the first instance, the method of data collection is not a representation of actual language use. Secondly, the responses are premeditated and not spontaneous, meaning that people may not be sincere enough in their responses to the questions raised in the questionnaires. Also, the data are only drawn from a small part of the country; therefore, the claim that politeness is culture-specific may not be representative enough.

In another research, Ativie (2020) identifies and describes politeness strategies in Nigerian Pidgin service encounter settings: restaurants, hair dressing saloons, fuel stations, boutiques, market stalls and supermarkets. The study shows that the most frequently used strategy is the positive politeness strategy of greeting while the least used are seeking agreement and promises. For negative politeness, it is shown that deference strategies constitute the most used strategies while apologies are the least used. However, while we can say that the research made use of actual speech communication, the result is specific to informal situations and the case of one person (service provider) seeking the patronage and approval of the other (customer). Also, data collection was restricted to Warri, a cosmopolitan city in Delta State, Southern Nigeria. Thus, the result may not be the same as the case of the context and data used in this study.

The previous research reviewed in this study reveals politeness as an integral part of communication. All of them show that politeness is used by Nigerians except one – Okoro (2011) – which shows that the subjects from whom the data used for the research are drawn have inadequate knowledge of the concept of politeness, indicating that they use impoliteness in communication. However, it should be noted that focus of this study is not only to look at the use of politeness in discourse but to explore how politeness can be used to engender peace and security among the people in a community and the nation at large, considering the rising spate of insecurity and unrest in the society. Politics and political leaders are at the centre of the security situation in any society; hence, the choice of political interviews. The journalist (the interviewer) in this context represents themselves, their newspaper outfit, and the public, and therefore, poses questions relating to the Nigerian people at large to the political interviewee. In this case,

the respondent, the political interviewee, is also expected to represent themselves first as a citizen of the country, then as a leader. They are also expected to represent their political party and the country at large. This means that the journalist asks questions on their behalf and the public, while the political interviewee also responds on behalf of themselves, their political party and the general public. Thus, both the interviewer and the interviewee are expected to put on different roles at the same time, which will obviously affect the degree or type of politeness to be displayed in this context. This further justifies the essence of looking at polite responses in political interviews in Nigerian newspapers as a medium of peace and security.

3. Methodology

3.1 Analytical Framework

Brown & Levinson's (1987) model of politeness is the most encompassing theoretical and experimental motivation for research in the fields of linguistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, socio-pragmatics, etc. (Odebunmi, 2009; Jansen & Janssen, 2010). It especially provides a solid substructure for theoretical and experimental research in politeness because it is very inclusive (Locher & Watts, 2005). According to Schlund (2014), as cited in Kareem (2018), Brown & Levinson's (1987) model of politeness is the best known and so it is the most used model of politeness. As a result, it is about the most cited in scholarly works on im/politeness (Culpeper, 2011b).

In Brown & Levinson's (1987) model of politeness, there are two co-interlocutors whom he referred to as Model Persons (MP). These two are the speaker (S) and the hearer (H). The model incorporates Grice's (1978) Cooperative Principle and the concept of "face" (Goffman, 1967, cited in Kareem, 2018). Brown & Levinson (1987:61) explain "face" to be the public self-esteem and self-image of a person, which could be "enhanced, maintained or lost." The model believes that each of the MPs desires that their face is maintained and that co-interlocutors cooperate to maintain each other's face in the communication activity.

Brown & Levinson (1987) postulate two types of face: the positive face, which represents a person's wish to be appreciated and accepted by people, and the negative face, which represents a person's wish to be free from domination and violation of their personality. They explain further that there is a threat to the face whenever there is an expression that contravenes the face-want of either the speaker and/or the hearer. This, Brown & Levinson called Face-Threatening Act (FTA). Brown and Levinson further propose five ways of performing FTA: (a) Do the FTA off-record; (b) Do the FTA on-record, baldly unmitigated with any politeness strategy; (c) Do the FTA on-record, mitigated with negative politeness.

(d) Do the FTA on-record, mitigated with positive politeness (e) Do not do the FTA (1987:316).

Brown & Levinson (1987:101-210) postulated that the positive face can be accentuated using positive politeness strategies, such as Exaggeration (i.e., endorsement of H, interest and sympathy with H), Notice (i.e., attend to the needs, wants, interests, and goods of H), etc.; the negative face can be accentuated using negative politeness strategies, such as: edges, indirect statements, questions, pessimism, etc. In addition, Brown & Levinson (1987) claim that going against any of Grice's (1975) conversational maxims which demands that the hearer (H) infers the message that the speaker is indirectly passing across gives rise to Brown and Levinson's off-record politeness strategies, which include: Give association clues, Understate, Give hints, Presuppose, etc. (1987:211-227).

Indeed, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model can sufficiently take care of the analysis of our data; however, some additions will help make it better. Therefore, the politeness maxims of Leech (1983) will be combined with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model to improve our data analysis. We believe that these two politeness models will be able to take care of the intricacies of the current research since the data to be analysed are interviews where the social status of both participants in the communicative activity and other related issues would have to be considered.

Leech (1983:131) explains that politeness concerns the connection between two co-participants in a conversation: the self (S) and the other (H). Leech (1983:132) identifies seven politeness maxims and their sub-maxims:

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| 1) Tact maxim: | a) Minimize cost to other | b) Maximize benefit to other |
| 2) Generosity maxim: | a) Minimize benefit to self | b) Maximize cost to self |
| 3) Approbation maxim: | a) Minimize dispraise of other | b) Maximize praise of other |
| 4) Modesty maxim: | a) Minimize praise of self | b) Maximize dispraise of self |
| 5) Agreement maxim: | a) Minimize disagreement between self and other | b) Maximize agreement between self and other |
| 6) Sympathy maxim: | a) Minimize antipathy between self and other | b) Maximize sympathy between self and other |
| 7) Pollyanna principle | | |

3.2 Collection of data

This study draws data from Nigerian print political interview discourse, which is a valid source of examples of actual speech situations. Two political interviews were selected from five randomly selected Nigerian newspapers (*This Day*, *Punch*, *Guardian*, *Business Day* and *The Nation*) collected between August and December 2021 to make a total of ten interviews considered in this study. The newspapers were selected based on the availability of their online versions and

wide circulation across the country for easy access to readers while the choice of the time frame is because it is the period when the political space was warming up for the next electioneering activities. Therefore, the different political interviews being churned out in print and broadcast media are bound to yield very rich data for this study.

3.3 Analytical procedure

The data for this study is analysed using Brown and Levinson's (1987) face theory and politeness model, as well as Leech's (1983) politeness maxims to see how they have been used to threaten or save the faces of their audiences. Generally, in any interview session, the interviewer's positive face is usually threatened because they will want their questions answered, and appropriately too, by the interviewee. Thus, if the interviewee refuses to answer the question, whether directly or indirectly, it constitutes a threat to the interviewer's positive face. On the other hand, the interviewee's negative face is threatened because no one wants to be imposed upon or impeded, and so will desire his freedom to choose whether to answer the interviewer's question or not; thus, if the interviewee has no choice than to respond to the interviewer's questions, whether directly or indirectly, their negative face has been threatened. Therefore, it behooves both parties to display politeness in posing and answering questions to mitigate the face-threatening acts (FTAs). It is on this background that expressions that further display FTAs are what we shall be considering in this paper.

This study focuses on the political interviewees' responses to the questions posed by the journalists (the interviewers). Where the response is very lengthy, only the first three to five sentences in the response to the questions are considered. However, the journalist's question, which prompts the response in the first place, is first written out to determine the FTA to the political interviewee. The politeness strategies used in the questions posed by the interviewers and the responses given by the interviewees are then identified and categorised accordingly to see how they have been used to threaten or save the other person's face and the face of the reading public at large. The sociological factors that may likely affect the choice of politeness strategy and the seriousness of the face-threatening acts are identified. Finally, the effects of the politeness strategy used are explained in terms of engendering peace and security in the nation.

4. Findings

In this section, we shall look at the various ways in which politeness have been used in the questions posed by the interviewers and the responses given by the interviewees, although our focus is on the responses of the interviewees.

4.1. Politeness Strategies in the responses of the interviewees

The data shows the politeness strategies used by the political interviewees because of the preceding FTA. These have been analysed and explained below:

(i) Journalist: *Sir, there is crisis in the various political parties ahead of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. What is really the problem?*

Politician: It is 2023 now! The quest for power. It is always like that any time it is getting close, everybody... different forces want to take control of the party,

and in doing that, it becomes very vicious. It has always been so. (*Sunday Independent*, 2021, August 15, pp.2)

In extract (i) above, the politician makes use of tact to minimize threat to the positive faces of the perceived people (politicians) causing the crises in the various political parties. Therefore, he uses indefinite pronoun *everybody* instead of mentioning particular names. He also indicates that the problem did not just start with the crop of politicians presently in the party when he says *It has always been so* so that the Nigerian people will not blame them. This is done to make the perceived political actors believe that he is protecting their interest and at the same time advising them on the better way to go about the current situation in order to put an end to the crises. He also does it to prevent the Nigerian populace from taking sides with any politician and shifting the blame on the other, thereby worsening the crises. This is the use of negative politeness enhanced by tact maxim to mitigate threat to the positive face of the supposed political actors in order to engender peace among them and the Nigerian people.

(ii)Journalist: *What is the way out of these various crises in the parties?*

Politician: The way out is to continue to be vigilant about the rules. There is nothing wrong with ambition or aspiration. What we don't want is cutting corners and violating rules that we all set for ourselves. One of the biggest problems that the Nigerian political class has is to obey rules, even their own rules. Obeying even their own rules is a difficulty. (*Sunday Independent*, 2021, August 15, pp.2)

In extract (ii) above, the politician makes use of tact maxim to reduce threat to the negative face of the people (politicians) causing the crises. Therefore, he uses plural nouns to minimize the imposition of his views on the perceived political actors in each political party and the Nigerian people at large. *What we don't want ... rules that we all set for ourselves*. His use of inclusive plural pronouns *we* and *ourselves* indicates that the politician is speaking on behalf of everybody and not just expressing his own view, reminding them of the agreement they all had earlier about how to avoid crises like the present situation in each political party. This is negative politeness enhanced by tact and agreement maxims. This is also done in order to engender peace among the politicians and the Nigerian people.

(iii)Journalist: *Will this crisis (sic) not negatively affect the country's democratic process?*

Politician: No, no, no! There is no crisis. What is the crisis? There is no crisis! As a matter of fact, you can see that the democratic process is now even more stable than it was previously. (*Sunday Independent*. 2021, August 15, pp.2)

In extract (iii) above, the politician makes use of tact maxim to enhance threat to the negative face, this time, of the journalist, the actors in each political party and even every Nigerian at large. He has little or no desire to maintain their faces because the political interviewer is desperate to make the journalist and

everything, he represents realise that the crisis in the political parties will not negatively affect the country's democratic process. Thus, he makes use of exclamatory expressions: *No, no, no! There is no crisis!* rhetorical question *What is the crisis?* and obviating structure. *As a matter of fact*, to drive home his point. This is bald on-record politeness enhanced with tact and agreement maxims.

(iv) Journalist: *What inspired you to aspire for the National Chairman of APC?*

Politician: I have been going around the country, making consultations and discussing with leaders of the party before I will come formally to tell the world my intention and aspiration to the office of the National Chairman. You know you cannot do that without the Press Corps of our own party because whatever you decide to do will go a long way to making decisions for the party men and women because you are the first bus stop of our party. (*Business Day*. 2021, October 3, p 10)

In extract (iv) above, the politician makes use of tact to enhance his own negative face already threatened by the Journalist's question. He indirectly circumvents giving the Journalist his expected response, meaning that he is trying to avoid imposition from the Journalist. Instead, he begins to explain the efforts he has been making so far to make his political aspiration known to members of his party: *I have been going around the country, making consultations and discussing with leaders of the party*. Thus, he has implicitly told A that he is impolite. This is negative politeness enhanced by tact and Pollyanna maxims.

(v) Journalist: *It is taken for granted that every politics is local, meaning that you must have a strong base to push your aspirations. Your state is Borno and your geopolitical zone is the North-East. We know in APC the Governor is the leader of the party in the state. The Governor, Babagana Zulum is the creation of Kashim Shettima. Shettima by the grace of God you brought him to political limelight. The question now is you and Shettima are not in good terms, have you done consultations with your Governor and Shettima to sell your aspiration?*

Politician: Everybody in Borno State today without any contradiction is, apart from Zulum who is not my product because he was in the academic, he was not a politician, everybody in any position today in Borno in one way or the other, I am instrumental to what he or she is today. And I have no problem with anyone of them. Maybe it is just a perception. Everybody in Borno, including Shettima that you are talking about, I discussed with all of them about my ambition. I talk to them one on one. (*Business Day*. 2021, October 3, pp 10)

In extract (v) above, the politician uses tact to minimize the threat to his negative face because of the Journalist's question. His response shows that he dislikes some aspects of the Journalist's question, especially the part where the Journalist implies that the politician is no longer the political godfather of Shettima and must consult Shettima to get his approval to become the party Chairman. His response shows that he has little or no desire to maintain the negative faces of both the journalist and everyone the journalist thinks the politician should

consult. Thus, he is desperate to make the journalist and everything he represents realise that he is still a political godfather in his state. This is why he bluntly says: *...everybody in any position today in Borno in one way or the other, I'm instrumental to what he or she is today...* This is bald on-record politeness enhanced by Pollyanna maxim.

(vi) Journalist: *You said you have been visiting some states concerning your aspiration. What kind of response are you getting from those states?*

Politician: That is not for public consumption. Whatever any Governor decides to talk to the public on television, those statements you hear them but what I discussed with them is not for public consumption. (*Business Day*, 2021, October 3, pp 10)

In extract (vi) above, the politician uses tact to minimize the threat to his negative face because of the Journalist's question. He is expected to be able to give a reply since his failure might result in a loss of face. Therefore, he bluntly responds with "*That is not for public consumption*" to show that he is not under obligation to answer the Journalist's question. He could have revealed their discussions, but that may not be in the interest of the governors concerned. Thus, he declines to answer the Journalist's question in a bid to protect the negative face of the governors he has met with. This is bald on-record politeness enhanced with tact and generosity maxims.

(vii) Journalist: *How has it been running the affairs of Kwara State?*

Politician: I took an oath to serve the people of Kwara State. I am focused on service delivery to the greatest number. To serve well, you must be a good listener. And that is one of my strongest attributes. I talk less and listen more. It takes a humble person to listen. We're not shouting about what we're doing. So, that's why it's like we're not doing anything, but the people are feeling the impact. I started with where we're coming from. (*The Nation*, 2021, November 4. Pp. 9)

In extract (vii) above, the politician uses tact to minimise threat to the negative face of Kwara people because of the Journalist's question. Thus, he circumvents the question by responding that he is focused on delivering on his oath to the people instead of saying how difficult to govern them. This response shows that he is taking responsibility for the people instead of painting them in a negative light, thereby saving their negative face. To further mitigate threat to the face of Kwara people, the politician switches from the first-person singular *I* to the inclusive plural pronoun *We*. The reply, however, did not provide any information pertinent to the question which demands a definite elaboration of how it has been so far governing the affairs of the people. This is negative politeness enhanced by tact maxim.

5. Discussion of findings

The politicians in the political interviews used as source of data for this study made use of tact politeness maxim in all their responses to the Journalists'

questions. This is because they are aware that the Journalist represents not just himself but also the newspaper outfit he works for as well as Nigerians – the reading populace. Therefore, they are aware that that the Journalist is asking the questions on behalf of not just himself but also on behalf of his newspaper outfit and the reading populace. On the other hand, the politician knows that they are expected to answer the questions not just on their behalf but also on behalf of their political parties and every Nigerian, something the politician knows that the Journalist is also aware of. Therefore, the politician will want to show a level of politeness even when they feel that their negative face is threatened. Since the politician is expected to put on different roles at the same time, it will obviously affect the degree or type of politeness strategy and maxim they will exhibit in their responses to endear the Nigerian people to their political leaders and also among Nigerian people themselves.

According to Obims (2015), Nigerians are known to use titles and honorifics at the beginning of statements and they repeat such throughout a communicative activity as an indication of politeness, explaining why people use expressions, such as Mr., Sir, Mrs., Ma, Uncle, Aunty, Oga, Your Royal Highness, Your Excellency, Honorable, Professor, Doctor, Engineer, among others, especially if the conversation involves people of unequal social status. The person with the lower social status is often the one repeating the titles of the one with the higher social status (supposedly, superiors and subordinates at work and other social situations) to show their respect for the person with the higher status. However, in this study, the political interviewee perceives himself as being the one with the higher social status than the Journalist and so is not expected to use honorifics and titles in his responses and this does not mean that he is being impolite. At the same time, the politician will want to present himself as acting or doing everything on behalf and in the interest of the Nigerian people. This explains why the political interviewees studied in this data used more of negative politeness and bald on-record politeness strategies mitigated by tact politeness maxim than they used other types of politeness to achieve their desired conversational outcome. We can explain this to mean that the politician wants Nigerians to see him as doing all he can to make life better for them in a bid to maintain peaceful coexistence among the citizens of the country and between the citizens and their political leaders.

Bavelas *et al.* (1990 cited in Li, 2008:32) argue that politicians in political interviews habitually equivocate and their utterance by nature is always ‘ambiguous,’ ‘vague,’ ‘wishy-washy,’ ‘indirect,’ and ‘obscure.’ Again, this is not the case in this study, as most of the responses of the political interviewees are unequivocal. Based on their responses, it is evident that the main objective of the politicians is to present the best possible face for themselves, for the party they represent and for the Nigerian people, even though at the expense of their

political opponents' face. In fact, in the political interviews used in this study, the politicians do not think of their individual face as important as that of the people they represent, especially when they are asked to comment on issues that concern the Nigerian people.

The complexity of the multi-ethnic situation of the country, as well as the complex relationship between the politician's political party and the other opposing political parties, contribute to the complication of politeness phenomena in Nigerian political interviews. The Nigerian politician is aware that failure to give a direct, explicit, and satisfactory response to the Journalist's questions would result in a loss of face of the political party the politician represents as well as the Nigerian people he claims to be serving rather than that of the politician's individual face; therefore, though they used indirect expressions to display, they were not ambiguous in their responses. Thus, Nigerian politicians use more of negative and bald on-record politeness strategies because those strategies provide good means and opportunities for them to distinguish themselves, maintain a positive image for their political parties, the country as well as the Nigerian people to avoid arguments, disagreements, fights, lack of collaborative and collective effort while improving social interaction between them and the Nigerian people and among Nigerians themselves.

Conclusion

This study has shown that contemporary Nigerian politicians seem to have learned that, in most cases, a speaker may exhibit impoliteness when they do not mean to, which may lead to apprehension and bad feelings. Therefore, they are not assertive in their communication. They may also have learned that if politeness is employed wrongly in social interaction, it could negatively destroy communication, and so they must be polite if they want to successfully pass their intended message across. Thus, to avoid disagreements, rejection and lack of cooperation from the masses, they do not speak in such a way that will make them appear as if they should not be checked because they occupy a very high position or as if they think themselves too highly than they should, and so, everyone else must respect them. They also do not want to be seen as being forceful, assertive, imposing, domineering, commandeering, aggressive, dictating and harsh. To make it very easy for them to mobilize and coordinate the people towards greater and common good, Nigerian politicians have resorted to using tact, agreement, and generosity maxims to enhance politeness in the selected interviews for this study.

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Appendix

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