

Face threatening and impoliteness strategies in postgraduate students and administrative staff's interactions in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Uche Oboko & Grace Ikechukwu

Abstract

The study investigates the face threatening and impoliteness strategies employed by postgraduate students and administrative staff at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in interactions. The rarity of work on impoliteness in postgraduate education in Nigeria and the need to investigate whether the employment of impoliteness strategies in interaction leads to communication breakdown informed the choice of the topic. Data for the study were collected using a discourse completion task questionnaire, non-participant observation and a face-to-face unstructured interview. Through a simple random technique, a total of 100 postgraduate students admitted to the university during the 2016/2017 academic session were purposively selected from six faculties: Education, Arts, Social Sciences, Biosciences, Engineering and Management Sciences. Fifty administrative members of staff who interact with the postgraduate students were randomly selected. Data for the study were analysed using Culpeper's (1996 and 2005) theory of impoliteness. Being a qualitative and quantitative study in a mixed paradigm, an interactional textual analysis was employed in the qualitative analysis while a simple percentage was employed in the quantitative data analysis. Findings show the extent of polite and impolite language use by the postgraduate students and the administrative staff. The study also reveals that the administrative

staff studied employed bald on-record, ignoring, shouting, indirectness, obscure and secretive language, interruption among others while the postgraduate students under study employed interruption, bald-on record, negative impoliteness strategy, positive impoliteness strategy and shouting. The study concludes that there is need for orientation on language use among postgraduate students and the members of the administrative staff in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Keywords: administrative staff, face threatening, impoliteness strategies, politeness, postgraduate education

Introduction

Language plays obvious roles in defining, reforming and conditioning people's line of thinking. Adedimeji (2005) explains the importance of language in society and interpersonal relationships. According to him, language plays the role of informing and transforming humans and their society and consequently, brings harmonious relationship. This simply shows that language, perhaps, among other factors is the major tool that influences humans in all facets of human endeavour.

Language can be used in a way that creates peace and mutual understanding and can equally be used to ignite conflicts. Jija (2012) makes it clearer when he comments that language is seen universally as venom that ignites conflicts and also as a panacea for conflict management. On their part, Nnuta and Ezeifeke (2017, p. 48) citing Adedimeji (2004) affirm that 'mere words can make and prevent wars, create understanding or inflame prejudice, form constitutions or destroy them, sell shoddy or superior ideas, justify humanity's worst actions or express their highest ideas'. Since human beings do not live in isolation and

they need to interact with one another constantly, there is absolute need that they employ good and polite language in order to ensure smooth and successful interaction. Good language is synonymous with polite language use. Commenting on what good language is, Adebisi (2015, p.8) citing Barret (1973) holds that it is a language that is suitable and adaptive in a given communicative situation. He goes further to say that it assists communicators to stay focused and not detracted from their thoughts. It helps to unite the speaker, the message and the audience. Similarly, it helps to remove friction, hostility and difficulty in communication as well as gives good opinion of communicators.

On the contrary, Watts (2003, p. 5) believes that much attention has been paid to politeness while slight consideration has been given to impoliteness. For him, attention should be paid more to impoliteness as interlocutors mostly comment on behaviour that is perceived to be impolite or discourteous. In support of the argument, Mills (2003, p. 121) argues that much work has been done on politeness world over but less attention has been paid to impoliteness. According to her, the preference for politeness research is because conversation is seen as an activity that follows the agreement of patterns of communication between participants in a harmonious setting. However, there are situations where speakers intentionally or unintentionally attack or threaten the faces of their hearers rather than protect them, which often times, lead to breakdown in the communication process. Such language use has been observed between postgraduate students and administrative staff at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. It is in line with this gap in knowledge that the present work finds essence.

Archival consideration and problem identification

Previous works on Nigerian universities have focused mainly on challenges in the university system. For example, Arikewuyo (2006) studied the relationship between the authorities of Nigerian Universities in relation to meeting the demands of the staff unions. Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009) analysed the problems militating against the effective management of the university system. Similarly, researches on postgraduate education in Nigeria have focused on problems of postgraduate education in Nigeria. For example, Duze (2010) analysed the problems encountered by postgraduate students. She identified problems such as procedural, socio-political, personal and psychological. In addition, Osaheni et al. (2017) analysed issues and implications in postgraduate studies in Nigerian universities. They discovered that major problems in postgraduate studies include: unqualified and inexperienced supervisors, lack of sound research knowledge on the part of the student and poor relationship between supervisors and students among others. In the same way, Igun (2010) analysed the difficulties and motivation of postgraduate students in selected Nigerian universities. She identified study time, poor use of study time, procrastination and lack of good study space as issues that affect the students. Conversely, previous studies on impoliteness in Nigeria include Ajayi (2018) who worked on impoliteness strategies in the Facebook posts of Nigerian electorates in 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. The researcher discovered that Nigeria electorates use different impoliteness strategies from calling the other names, ridiculing the other, using of taboo to associating others with negative aspects to attack and threaten the faces of major contestants as well as their supporters because they are considered as individuals who lack focus to rule the nation. Similarly, Aremu

(2016) analysed the invective song of Western Nigerian politicians in terms of being politically impolite. He discovered that invective songs were characterized by impolite belligerent utterances, indirect speech acts, politic, confrontational behaviour, lexical borrowing, code mixing, direct speech acts, and use of paralanguage, imagery and symbolism. Similarly, Mullay (1999) examined impoliteness, language and gender in political broadcast interviews. He discovered that gender is not the only salient variable affecting linguistic behaviour. He then suggested the Communities of Practice (CofP) framework as the way forward to approach the complex relationship between language, gender and politics. Finally, Sharafudeen (2018) investigated impoliteness in Muslim discourse using Nigerian Friday sermons. The study revealed that the Imams use several politeness strategies in the delivery of their sermons in order to avoid generating ill-feelings among its various audience.

All the extant studies provide insight into the current research endeavour. However, the present study takes a sharp departure from others by looking at the language use of the postgraduate students and the administrative staff with a view of identifying the face threatening and impoliteness strategies embedded in them. This study will give more insight into the language use of the postgraduate students and administrative staff and help both parties to employ more appropriate verbal and non-verbal codes that will encourage more cordial and harmonious relationship as well as promote learning, intellectualism and academic freedom. In addition, it will contribute to the emerging literature on impoliteness and verbal hygiene in language use in the university setting.

Research questions

The study is guided by four research questions:

- i What is the postgraduate students' perception on the extent to which the members of the administrative staff are polite or impolite?
- ii What are the impoliteness strategies employed by the administrative staff in the university when interacting with the postgraduate students?
- iii. What is the assessment of administrative staff in the university about postgraduate students' language use in terms of being polite or impolite?
- iv What are the impoliteness strategies employed by the postgraduate students in the university when interacting with the administrative staff?

Review of literature

A review of impoliteness

Recently, scholars have paid attention to the study of impoliteness. Scholars like Locher and Bousfield (2008), Culpeper (2005, 2011), Archer (2008), Culpeper, Bousfield and Wichmann (2003), Terkourafi (2008) and others have worked on impoliteness. Usually, interactants consider utterances as being impolite when they run contrary to the face expectations of the hearer and capable of causing conflict and breakdown in communication. Many scholars have viewed impoliteness from different perspectives. In the words of Culpeper et al., impoliteness is 'communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony' (2003, p.1546). Similarly, Culpeper (2005, p.38) presents that impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face attack

intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2). In defining impoliteness, Bousfield (2008, p.72) has this to say:

I take impoliteness to be the broad opposite of politeness, in that, rather than seeking to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs), impoliteness constitutes the communication of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal face-threatening acts (FTAs) which are purposefully delivered:

- i. Unmitigated, in contexts where mitigation is required, and/or,
- ii. With deliberate *aggression*, that is, with the face threat exacerbated, 'boosted', or maximized in some way to heighten the face damage inflicted.

From the above definitions, one understands that impoliteness is a negatively marked behaviour that is geared towards causing and aggravating verbal offence. Again, a common denominator is found in the definitions is the intention to cause offence which is the underlying principle in impoliteness. The intention of the speaker either to support the face of the hearer or to attack it is the demarcating line between politeness and impoliteness. Similarly, Culpeper (2011, p.23) in confirming this position, cites Terkourafi (2001) who avers that impoliteness should be viewed more adequately 'as a perlocutionary effect because it may, but need not rely on recognizing the speaker's intention'. Although, Terkourafi has argued that impoliteness should be viewed from its effect on the receiver(s), there is also need to

consider the intention behind such language use. For instance, a supervisor who has the role of criticising a student's work may use certain words that the student may find offensive or impolite. However, if the intention is not to attack the face of the student but to support it or make a student work harder, such an utterance may somewhat not be judged as impolite. It is important that attention is paid to impoliteness because that is what hardly goes unnoticed and more likely to receive a negative interpretation in interactions. The present study is an attempt to investigate the incidence of face threats and impoliteness strategies in the interactions of the postgraduate students and the administrative members of staff who interact directly with them at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka with a view of determining the extent of face threats and impoliteness strategies.

The concept of face and face threatening acts: A review

Face as used in politeness studies is not the physical face but an image which the individual claims for himself. Simply put, face is the individual's feeling of self-worth and self-image. Goffman expresses it clearly when he says that '[a] person's face clearly is something that is not lodged in or on his body, but rather, something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter [...]' (1967, p. 7). Goffman (1967, p. 5) gives a definition of face which many scholars find apt. He defines face as 'the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Everybody has a face which he or she wants to protect. Although everyone wants to protect his or her face, Goffman (1967) believes that face is not peculiar to any individual but a universal phenomenon which society has bestowed on every individual. In other words, it is not property of the individual but

lent to the individual by society. Gu (1990) recapitulates the same point when he writes that face from the Chinese view point is something that belongs to society rather than to the individual. This presupposes that every individual irrespective of age, race, sex, culture, religion or social status has a face need. Face is further categorized into positive and negative face. According to Brown and Levinson (1987, p.61), negative face is ‘the want of every competent adult member that his actions be unimpeded by others’ while positive face is ‘the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others.’ By implication, every adult member of society who wants to maintain his negative face would not want his freedom to be impinged or imposed upon by others. Similarly, maintenance of one’s positive face entails that the person’s action be liked, appreciated and approved of by others. Inasmuch as face shows the relationship between the individual and society, both the positive and negative faces of an individual face can be threatened or lost where face is not put into consideration. Brown and Levinson (1987, pp.65–66) maintain that actions such as orders and requests, suggestions, reminding, threats, warnings dares, offers, promises, compliments and expressions of strong negative emotions towards the hearer can threaten the hearer’s negative face. More so, speech acts like expressions of disapprovals, criticisms, contempt, ridicule complaints, reprimands, accusations, insults and disagreement to mention but a few threaten an individual’s positive face. Finally, some acts threaten both the speakers’ and hearers’ faces. Such acts include expression and acceptance of thanks, unwilling promises and acceptance of offers. The present study tries to investigate the extent to which the use of language by the administrative staff and the postgraduate students threaten each others’ faces.

Postgraduate education and language use in Nigeria

Education is a viable tool of development in every nation. It helps humans to increase their skills, abilities and competences for personal and professional development. With education, the human mind is liberated from ignorance and consequently, transformed for optimal productivity and improved quality of life. Given the fact that no nation can develop above the level of education of its citizenry, education remains the surest means to national development. Dambazau (2015, p.2) captures the essence of education and more importantly, postgraduate education when he asserts that, 'Education itself is a major tool for human security: it provides the opportunity for creativity, research and innovation, making it possible to improve the quality of life'.

In Nigeria, postgraduate education is for people who are believed to have studied a first course, graduated, completed the mandatory National Youth Service or are exempted and have come to expand the frontiers of knowledge in order to contribute to societal uplift. These set of students are expected to have zeal for research and capable of independent study. It is expected that the completion of postgraduate programmes will lead to social change through the dissemination of knowledge and new ideas which will translate to national development. Nasir Isa, (former chairman of Academic Staff Union of Universities) presents objectively the purpose of postgraduate programmes when he avers that the goal of higher education is defined within the broad framework of contributing to high level relevant man-power training requisite for national development (2015, p. 80). The assertion is in line with Dambazau (2015, p.9) who opines that 'higher education and economic development are inextricably linked to one another, and for any country to be successful in economic development, universities must be key partners

throughout the process'. This shows that the essence of education at various levels, and in this case, postgraduate education is to equip citizens with the skills they need in order to contribute their quota to nation building. Postgraduate education has no age limit. Some of the students are relatively advanced in age, and belong to the working class in the nation, while some are young graduates. This set of students understands the nuances and imports of language use. The use of polite and impolite language has obvious effects on the students and the administrative staff. While the use of polite language promotes learning, encourages and imbues confidence, impolite language impedes learning, discourages intellectualism, independability and academic freedom. The current paper does not take away the fact that postgraduate students need constructive criticisms, direction and guidance in order to attain the expected academic level in postgraduate education. The position of the paper is that linguistic purism, verbal hygiene, civility in language use and language etiquette should be encouraged among the administrative staff and the postgraduate students. Crystal (1987, p.13) puts it poignantly when he says that our use of language can tell our listeners or readers a great deal about ourselves. Besides, our language use shapes the psychology and ideology of the hearer. The employment of politeness strategies in postgraduate education will serve as a motivating strategy to encourage the students and administrative members of staff.

Methodology

The population of the study includes all the postgraduate students admitted to the university during the 2016/2017 academic session. Proximity played a major role in the choice of a university in Anambra State. This is sequel to the fact that both

researchers live and work in the State and that made it easy to visit the institution for a period of one year for the study. A total of 100 postgraduate students and fifty administrative staff were purposively selected from six faculties in the University: Arts, Education, Social Sciences, Biosciences, Engineering and Management Sciences. The students selected include masters and doctoral students. The study is only limited to students' encounter with administrative staff who interact directly with the postgraduate students in the selected institution. The set of staff include: departmental secretaries, faculty officers and administrative officers who work at the School of Postgraduate Studies of the institution. The study employed a survey research design where a group of people considered to be a representative of the entire group is studied, (Akuezuilo and Agu, 2007, p.53). The design is considered apt in the study because it studied a group and not the entire postgraduate students and administrative staff population of the selected institution. For the postgraduate students, data were collected using a non-participant observation in which the utterances were recorded and later transcribed, a discourse format questionnaire and a face-to-face unstructured interview. For the administrative staff, data were collected through face-to-face unstructured interview. The information gathered helped in the interpretation of data.

Method of data analysis

The paper considers that not every occurrence of disagreement between the administrative staff and postgraduate students is to be judged as an exercise of power or impoliteness. The pragmatic import of impoliteness thrives on context and not on linguistic expression. Hence, the researchers considered the contexts of such language usage. Locher (2004, p.323) believes that to

qualify an utterance as an exercise of power or impolite that a qualitative analysis should be used to ascertain whether there has been a clash of interest and face threats. In line with this, the study employed an interactional textual analysis by going through the excerpts to extract cases of face threats and impolite language use. Forty excerpts that have features considered to be relevant to the present study were purposively selected. However, after a careful examination of the excerpts, only fifteen excerpts considered to be representative of the features observed across the forty excerpts were randomly selected for analysis. The selected data were viewed through the lens of Culpeper's (1996, 2005) impoliteness strategies. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis were employed in the study.

Theoretical underpinnings

The theoretical framework for the study is Culpeper's impoliteness strategy and sub strategies (1996 and 2005). He presents the theory as follows:

1. Bald on record impoliteness

Bald on record impoliteness is seen as typically being deployed where there is much face at stake, and where there is an intention on the part of the speaker to attack the face of the hearer and/or where the speaker does not have the power to (safely) utter an impolite utterance. That is, the utterance is deployed in a direct, clear and unambiguous manner without considering the face of the hearer.

2. Positive impoliteness

Positive impoliteness, according to (Culpeper 2005, p. 41) involves "the use of strategies deployed to damage the recipient's

positive face wants”. Examples of such strategies from Culpeper (1996, pps.356-8) include:

- i. Ignore, snub the other -fail to acknowledge the other's presence;
- ii. Exclude the other from the activity;
- iii. Disassociate from the other’, for example, deny association or common ground with the other; avoid sitting together;
- iv. Be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic;
- v. Use inappropriate identity markers - for example, use title and surname when a close relationship pertains, or a nickname when a distant relationship pertains;
- vi. Use obscure or secretive language-for example, mystify the other with jargon, or use a code known to others in the group, but not the target;
- vii. Seek disagreement -select a sensitive topic. Make the other feel uncomfortable (e.g. do not avoid silence, joke, or use small talk);
- viii. Use taboo words- swear, or use abusive or profane language;
- ix. Call the other names-use derogatory nominations etc.

3. **Negative impoliteness**

Negative Impoliteness, according to (Culpeper 2005, p. 41) involves “the use of strategies deployed to damage the recipient’s negative face wants”. Examples of such strategies from Culpeper (1996, pps. 356-8) include:

- i. Frighten - instill a belief that action detrimental to the other will occur;
- ii. Condescend, scorn, or ridicule - emphasize your relative power. Be contemptuous. Do not treat the other seriously. Belittle the other (e.g. use diminutives);

- iii. Invade the other's space - literally (e.g. position yourself closer to the other than the relationship permits) or metaphorically (e.g. ask for or speak about information which is too intimate given the relationship).
- iv. Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect - personalize (use the pronouns "I" and "You"), put the other's indebtedness on record.

4. Off-record impoliteness

This super strategy was introduced by Culpeper (2005: pps43–44) as a replacement to the 'meta-strategic' nature of sarcasm. 'Off-record impoliteness' is one where the offence is conveyed indirectly by way of an implicature and could be cancelled (e.g. denied, or an account, post-modification or other type of elaboration offered, etc.)

5. Withhold politeness

Withhold politeness involves keeping silent or failing to act where politeness work is expected. Culpeper (1996: 357) notes that impoliteness may be realized through, "... the absence of politeness work where it would be expected." Culpeper (2005: 42) gives the example that "failing to thank someone for a present may be taken as deliberate impoliteness".

Data presentation and analysis

Research question 1: Postgraduate Student's perception on the extent of politeness or impoliteness of administrative staff of the university

Table 1: Responses on the extent of politeness or impoliteness of administrative staff at Nnamdi Azikiwe University

Always Polite	Polite	Impolite	Always impolite	Undecided	Total
9 (9%)	24 (24%)	35 (35%)	19 (19 %)	13 (13%)	100

Field survey, 2019

Results from the table show that (9%) out of the total population agree that members of staff are always polite, (24%) responded in the affirmative that they are polite, 35 students representing (35%) show that they are impolite, 19 students which represent (19%) confirm that they are always impolite and (13%) do not have any opinion.

Research question 2: Impoliteness strategies employed by members of administrative staff when interacting with the postgraduate students

Text 1 (Bald-on record impoliteness strategy)

(A married and middle aged female PhD student who came to hand in her soft bound dissertation to a middle aged administrative staff in one of the Departments in Social Sciences)

Student: Good afternoon, madam.

Officer: Good afternoon.

Student: (Hands in the soft bound copy of her dissertation)

Officer: So, you cannot spell the Dean's name correctly at this level?

Student: I didn't look at it.

Officer: You see how careless you are even as a PhD student.

By using the utterance, 'so, you cannot spell the Dean's name correctly at this level', and 'you see how careless you are even as a PhD student', the member of staff has communicated

impoliteness in a direct, clear or unambiguous manner given the fact that both interactants are within the same age bracket. Culpeper (1996, p.356) describes bald-on record impoliteness strategy as a situation where the speaker attacks the face of the hearer and the hearer does not have the power to utter an impolite utterance. Besides, (Leech 2014, p. 230) describes such language use as quasi- vocatives where ‘you’ is followed by an offensive nominal phrase and which seen almost like a verbal analogue of missiles thrown at the addressee.

Text 2: **Shouting**

Students: (Postgraduate Students of varying age range clustered in a particular office at the PG School waiting to be attended to)

Officer: All of you should leave this place! (Shouting). ALL OF YOU SHOULD LEAVE HERE!

Shouting is usually louder than is necessary for efficient communication to take place. Culpeper (1996, p.358) holds the view that ‘...shouting and avoiding eye contact, for example, could be a means of conveying impoliteness’ corroborating the position, Leech(2014, p.231) equivocates that shouting is a sign of anger while snarling or growling is a sign of disgust. It is clear that a person who is shouting in anger wants his or her hearer to be aware that his or she is angry. By shouting, the person also invades the space of the hearer. As such, it can be used as a mechanism for conveying impoliteness and anger. Besides, in African socio-cultural setting, shouting at people who are of the same age bracket or older suggests impoliteness.

Text 3: (**Interruption**)

(An elderly male PhD student in one of the departments in Management sciences who had issues with his name wrongly

spelt on the remitta form by one of the commercial banks on campus)

Officer: But I told you to go back to the bank.

Student: Yes, I went there but...

Officer: (Interrupts the student and takes over the conversation floor)

By interrupting and not allowing the student to explain or finish his conversational turn, impoliteness has been transmitted. Brown and Levinson (1987, pps. 232-3) posit that 'turn taking violations (interrupting, ignoring, selection of other speakers, not responding to prior turns are all FTAs in themselves, as are violations of opening and closing procedures'. Similarly, Leech (2014, p. 228) comments that interruption of someone's turn is a violation of politeness. By interrupting and taking over the conversational turn of the student, a negative impoliteness strategy as captured by Culpepper (1996, p. 358) has been used.

Text 4: **Bald-on (Intonation conveying rudeness)**

(A middle aged male student pursuing his master's degree in one of the departments in the Faculty of Education and a middle-aged administrative officer)

Student: (Came to make an inquiry) Excuse me, I wanted to know if you have an idea on when we shall start lecture?

Officer: Wait outside you are distracting me. (In a rude manner)

Just as observed in the text, the intonation used conveyed impoliteness which the middle aged student interpreted as rudeness. From most of the data collected, intonation played a

major role in the conveyance of impoliteness which postgraduate students recognized as rudeness.

Text 5: Positive impoliteness that shows unconcerned behaviour

(A young male PG student in one of the departments in the Faculty of Management and a middle aged Administrative staff)

Student: Sir, I took the course four years ago but we couldn't find the result in the Department, I don't know if we can find a copy of the result in your office?

Officer: 'I am not responsible for your case. Please leave my office'.

The text shows an instance of unconcerned behaviour where face threats are conveyed in a direct manner without efforts to mitigate the face of the hearer- 'I am not responsible for your case. Please leave my office'. Such an utterance is captured within the positive impoliteness linguistic strategy of being uninterested, unconcerned and unsympathetic (Culpeper 1996, p. 357).

Text 6: Use of obscure or secretive language

(A middle aged female PhD candidate in one of the Departments in Biosciences and a female official)

Student: Madam good afternoon.

Officer: (Speaks some words in Igbo)

Student: I don't understand the language. I am not Igbo.

Officer: (mutters some obscure words in Igbo language which excludes the student from the conversation)
You should better go and learn the language.

By using a language which the student could not understand to exclude the student, the officer has communicated impoliteness.

Culpeper (1996, p.357) defines such use of an obscure or secretive language as a positive impoliteness strategy

Text 7: Off-record

(A young married Administrative officer at the School of Postgraduate and a young male post graduate student)

Student: Madam, we wrote our names in the morning and later some students came to write a second list. May be you start from the first list.

Officer: You are the oga (boss). So, tell me where to start from.

The response of the officer is an off-record and indirect way of telling the student that he does not have the power to tell her what to do or which list to start from. Besides, the clause, ‘You are the oga (boss)’ which is used for the student shows obvious insincerity and close to what Leech (1983, pps.82, 142) describes as irony. In Igbo cultural setting, the Administrative officer calling the student, ‘oga’ is a tactical way of letting the student know that he does not have the right to tell her what to do. The member of staff did not give an outright impolite response but communicated her position using a mock politeness strategy that is insincere and thus remain surface realizations to make the student feel good (Culpeper, 1996, p.356) The strategy is a meta-strategy where politeness is used for impoliteness.

Text 8: Off-record premature thanks

(A middle-aged MSc postgraduate student and a middle-aged Administrative officer at the School of Postgraduate Studies)

Student: Aunty, you are still looking for the document. Let me help you to look for it?

Officer: Thank you. If I needed your help, I would have told you.

The use of ‘thank you’ when an action has not been performed is an indirect way of telling the student that she does not need his help. Leech (2014, p. 198) citing Searle (1975) refers to this as premature thanks. He goes further to say that such expression cannot be regarded as a true expression of gratitude because they contravene the normal understanding that thanks are not to be given unless the action which it directed towards have been performed. The premature thank was immediately followed by the statement: ‘If I needed your help, I would have told you’.

Text 9: Negative impoliteness (Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect – through the use of ‘I’ and ‘You’ which puts the other’s indebtedness on record)

(A married middle-aged woman and a middle-aged Administrative officer from one of the Departments in the Faculty of Arts)

Student: Please we need the key to the seminar room.

Officer: Make sure you clean the place after your seminar because that is how all of you students are.

Associating the student with other students who do not clean the seminar room after use and the use of personal pronoun, you, is captured within the framework of impoliteness strategy described by Culpeper (1996, p. 358) as a negative impoliteness strategy. Besides, the statement threatens the positive face of the hearer as it shows disapproval of the actions of students who do not clean the seminar room after use which she has associated the student with and of course, puts the student’s indebtedness on record.

Text 10: Positive impoliteness (Ignore, snub the other, failure to acknowledge the other's presence)

(A Master's student in one of the departments in the Faculty of Engineering walked into the Head of Department's Office to meet a middle-aged official)

Student: Well done.

Officer: Looks up and continues with what she was writing without saying a word to the student who was still standing in her office.

The student stood for about two minutes and left her office.

Indeed, such cases of ignore and snub were common across most of the data. The researchers randomly selected some instances. From the excerpt, the administrative officers employed the strategy of ignore and snub the other. Culpeper (1996, p. 357) asserts that one of the positive impoliteness strategies is failure to acknowledge the other's presence. Bousfield (2008, p.101) explains that 'snubbing' an interlocutor not only show disapproval, but also impedes the interactant from conversing further with the snubber as noticed from the excerpts. Besides, the positive face of the snubbed is threatened as it creates a feeling of not being wanted.

Research question 3: Administrative staff's perception on the extent of politeness or impoliteness of postgraduate students in the university

Table 2: Responses on the extent of politeness or impoliteness of postgraduate students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University

Always Polite	Polite	Impolite	Always impolite	Undecided	Total
8 (16%)	19 (38%)	11 (22%)	5 (10 %)	7 (14%)	50

Field survey, 2019

Results from the findings show that (16%) of the respondents agree that postgraduate students are always polite, 19 respondents representing (38%) hold that they are polite in their language use, (22 %) claim that they are impolite, 10% agree that the students are always impolite while 7 respondents representing (14%) do not have any opinion. From the result, the majority of the administrative staff agree that the postgraduate students (54%) are polite in their language use.

Research Question 4

What are the impoliteness strategies employed by postgraduate students in the university when interacting with the administrative staff?

From the responses, 16 members of the administrative staff representing 32% agree that postgraduate students employ impoliteness strategies. The researchers further interviewed the respondents to find out the type of impoliteness strategies the students employ. From their responses, the following strategies were indentified:

Impoliteness strategy 1: Negative impoliteness strategy (Interruption)

Culpeper (1996, p.358) classified interruption as a negative impoliteness strategy. On her part, Holmes (1995, p. 52) aptly describes ‘interruption as a disruptive turn in the discourse.’ For Mills (2007), interruption implies impolite connotations as it

denies a speaker who has not reached a completion point in a conversation the right of the floor. The respondents opine that ‘some postgraduate students are always in a hurry and would interrupt you even when you are discussing with a colleague without apologies.’

Impoliteness strategy 2: Bald-on record (Starting a conversation without a greeting)

Often, postgraduate students dispense with greetings in short conversations or situations where enquires are made. Li wei (2010, p.57) citing Qian (1996) comments that greeting is a conversational routine which is considered a repertoire of linguistic politeness. He further asserts that they are ‘tools of polite behaviour and their use is guided by polite norm’. When postgraduate students fail to greet the administrative staff before initiating a conversation, they view it as an impolite act. The respondents gave instances like:

Madam, is this the Dean’s office?

Aunty, is the H.O.D. around?

The administrative staff views such acts as an impoliteness strategy.

Impoliteness strategy 3: Negative impoliteness strategy (Belittle the other)

Impoliteness is usually interpreted in social interactions when words or utterances that signal impoliteness are used. Zimmerman, D. & West, C. (1975) argue that impolite words are mainly expressed when words are used in a way that they have psychological harm on the hearer. The respondents agree that they use impolite words often in response to uncanny comments/

remarks from the postgraduate students. They gave instances with these expressions:

‘I am a doctorate student.’

‘I am also a lecturer in another institution.’

‘I also work in another institution.’

According to them, such language use tends to elicit the use of impolite expressions from the administrative staff in reaction to the comments of the students.

Impoliteness strategy 4: Positive impoliteness strategy (Use of inappropriate identity markers)

Culpeper (1996, p.357) classified the use of inappropriate identity markers as a positive impoliteness strategy. Similarly, Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 67) comment that the use of address terms in an offensive or embarrassing way intentionally or accidentally is a strategy that threatens the positive face of the hearer. The respondents report that some postgraduate students use address forms in an embarrassing way as in addressing an unmarried lady with the honorifics of ‘madam’ or ‘mama’. Such use of honorifics may not be intentionally as the students may not know the marital status of the officer; yet, the administrative staff views such as an impolite act.

Impoliteness strategy 5: Shouting

Shouting is usually louder in pitch than the normal tone in a conversation. Just as the students identified shouting as an impoliteness strategy employed by the administrative staff, the administrative staff equally identified shouting as a strategy which the students employ when talking to them especially when the interaction involves some payments which the students have to make. Culpeper (1996, p. 358) observes that shouting could

be a means of conveying impoliteness. Jay (1992) claims that a person who shouts in anger is both making sure that the hearer is aware of his/her anger as well as invading the space of the hearer (cited in Bousfield 2008, p. 137). He further cites Grice 1975 who opines that shouting in effect, flouts the maxim of manner with respect to volume and creates an interpretable implicature.

Discussion on findings

From the excerpts, it is clear that not all the administrative members of staff in the university are impolite and not all the postgraduate students are equally impolite. Findings show that 9% of the respondents believe that the members of staff are always polite, 24% agree that they are polite, 35% of the respondents hold that they are impolite and 19% agree that they are always impolite. The perception of the students shows that not all the members of staff are impolite. Similarly, from the results, (16%) of the administrative staff agree that postgraduate students are always polite, 19 respondents representing (38%) hold that they are polite in their language use. (22 %) claim that they are impolite, 10% agree that the students are always impolite while 7 respondents representing (14%) do not have any opinion. From the result, the majority of the administrative staff agreed that the postgraduate students (54%) are polite in their language use. Findings also revealed that the administrative staff of the institution employed bald-on, failure to acknowledge the other's presence, shouting, positive impoliteness of ignore and snub, the use of obscure or secretive language, positive impoliteness that show unconcerned behaviour, negative impoliteness that associates others with a negative aspect and personalized use of pronouns like I and you which puts the other indebtedness on record. On the other hand, findings also revealed that the students

employed interruption, bald-on record (starting a conversation without a greeting), negative impoliteness strategy (belittle the other), positive impoliteness strategy (use of inappropriate identity markers) and shouting. These strategies of impoliteness obviously hinder the establishment of genuine and effective communication between the interlocutors.

Conclusion and recommendation

The work examined the face threatening and impoliteness strategies employed by the administrative staff and postgraduate students in their interactions at Nnamdi Azikiwe University. It revealed the strategies that both parties employ during interactions. The study holds that politeness is indispensable in interpersonal communication as interactants always expect their faces to be maintained. Postgraduate students would expect that the administrative staff working with them should employ politeness strategies and the members of the administrative staff, in turn, expect that postgraduate students should avoid words that could threaten their faces. The maintenance of each other's face will help to create an enabling atmosphere for studies and reduce the incidences of face attack and anxiety. The study therefore recommends that there should be an orientation on language use among the members of administrative staff and postgraduate students in the university. However, where there is a structure already in place for members of the administrative staff to abide by, there is need for proper implementation. Inasmuch as it may be completely difficult to avoid impoliteness in interpersonal communication depending on what hearers perceive as impoliteness, the principle of politeness (PP) should be exploited. In other words, the hearer should arrive at the offensive point indirectly or through implicature. Leech, summarizes the point

succinctly in these words: ‘If you must cause offence, at least, do so in a way which doesn’t overtly conflict with the PP, but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark through implicature’ (1983, p.82).

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Uche Oboko is a lecturer in Department of English, Madonna University Okija, Nigeria.

Grace Ikechukwu is a lecturer in Department of English, Madonna University, Okija, Nigeria.