Politeness Strategies in Some Lagos, Nigerian Pentecostal Discourses

Daisy BARRO
Department of Languages and Literary Studies
Babcock University, Ogun State, Nigeria
daisy0012@pg.babcock.edu.ng
09044734472

&

Ochulor GOODSEED
Department of Languages and Literary Studies
Babcock University, Ogun State, Nigeria
ochulorn@babcock.edu.ng
08057210335

Abstract
This exploratory study examines the use of bald on-record politeness strategies among Pentecostals in Lagos, Nigeria. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study investigates the frequency and distribution of speech acts, the relationship between age and adherence to Leech's politeness maxims, and the impact of education level on communication style. The findings indicate that most participants use the indirect and polite communication style (59.5%), followed by the bald on-record politeness communication style (41.3%). Age influences politeness, with older adults prioritizing sympathy and tact. The study also reveals that education level does not have a statistically significant impact on communication style. The findings imply that though the demographic employs bald on-record politeness strategies to uphold their beliefs, preference is accorded to the indirect and polite communication style, thus upholding the Christian value of love over conflict. The findings therefore foreground the significance of considering cultural and social factors in understanding politeness strategies.

Keywords: bald on-record politeness, Pentecostal discourse, Lagos, Nigeria, Leech's politeness maxims, communication style.

Introduction

Politeness, a fundamental aspect of human communication, extends beyond superficial courtesy to encompass complex social dynamics. In religious communities, politeness serves as a vital tool for maintaining spiritual cohesion. In Lagos, Nigeria, Pentecostal Christianity has experienced rapid growth, with over 40% of the population identifying as Pentecostal/Charismatic (Pew Research, 2019). This phenomenon has created unique social spaces where spirituality, culture and language intersect. Leech (2014) defines politeness as "a constraint observed in human communicative behaviour, influencing us to avoid communicative discord or offense, and maintain or enhance communicative concord or comity". It can also be defined as the use of language that caters to the ego of self and interlocutors, based on the acceptable cultural norms of the community of practice in question. Language is an attitude. In the realm of social interaction, individuals continually use language to negotiate and manage their identities, reputations, and relationships. Holmes (2013) emphasizes the importance of the social context of language use, arguing that language is not only meant for conveying information, but is also a means via which people construct and negotiate their social identities and relationships; influencing how they perceive themselves in the process.

According to De Kadt (1998), Religious discourse is characterized by a high degree of directness, which may be seen as bald-on-record strategy. Spenser-Oatey (2000) submits that bald-on-record strategies can be effective in achieving communicative goals, particularly in contexts where directness is valued. On his part, Culpeper (2011) argues that bald-on-record strategies can be seen as impolite in certain contexts, but may also be used to achieve specific communicative goals.

According to Goffman (1967) "face" is "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact". Agassi and Jarvie (1969) submit that interlocutors are considered human because of the importance given to "face" and that without it, human dignity is lost.

Christianity is a religion that is centered around love and respect. As human beings, it is normal to have different opinions on issues. Even though research on Pentecostalism abounds, scanty attention has been accorded to studying how Pentecostals handle the delicate balance between being respectful towards other interlocutors and upholding personal belief systems, thus this paper fills this gap. The aim of this exploratory study is to determine the place of the bald On-Record communication style in the discourses of Pentecostals in Lagos, Nigeria. This aim was achieved via the following specific objectives. They are: to investigate the frequency and distribution of speech acts employed by persons in the demographic under study; determining the relationship between the age range of the population and adherence to Leech's politeness maxims and lastly, to ascertain if there is a significant difference between level of education and communication style among Pentecostals in Lagos, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in Brown and Levinson's theoretical frameworks of Face-work (Brown and Levinson, 1987) and the Politeness Principle (Leech, 1983). According to Brown and Levinson (1987) "face" is a person's desire to protect their public reputation (positive face) and to safeguard their autonomy (negative face) - a theory built on the foundations of Goffman Erving's theory (1967) on face and face-work ("actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face"). B&L's face theory was adopted for this study because it provides a roadmap for deciphering how people use language to protect and maintain their face or that of others in various contexts. Leech's politeness theory on the other hand is more speaker-centred, allowing for a focused analysis of the

utterances made by the population under study in a bid to emphasize the strategic use of language to achieve social goals and avoid conflict.

Leech (1983) makes a distinction between "absolute" and "relative" politeness. According to the scholar, absolute politeness is used to minimize the impoliteness of language that is inherently impolite, and maximize the politeness of language that is already polite. Relative politeness on the other hand depends on the norms of the community of practice in question - a view which reveals the importance of context in determining whether interlocutors are polite or not. Leech places more emphasis on absolute politeness because of its association with speech acts (which are intrinsically either polite or impolite), the current study also places importance on relative politeness due to its bearing on communities of practice; which in this case refers to some Pentecostal churches in Lagos, Nigeria.

Due to the pivotal role of speech acts in Brown and Levinson's as well as Leech's politeness theories, Searle's Speech Act theory (1969) will also be employed to analyze the various utterances used by the population under study before they are analyzed in line with the main theories used in this study. The employment of Searle's Speech Act theory (1969) is necessary, as it can provide insight into the specific speech acts that are used to maintain or threaten the interlocutor's face, and can also be used to analyze how speakers use language to perform polite or impolite acts.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), negative politeness describes language that protects a person's desire for autonomy, freedom from imposition and the need to maintain boundaries and one's independence. The face wants here consist of the wants of self-determination. Positive politeness describes language indicating that a person is socially approved, accepted and admired by others. The face wants here consist of the wants of approval.

As concerns Leech's politeness model (1983), politeness is based on the extent to which interlocutors respect the maxims of tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement and sympathy during a language event. In his General Strategy of Politeness [GSP] (2014: 90), Leech says "in order to be polite, S (*the speaker, self*) expresses or implies meanings that associate a favourable value with what pertains to O (*the addressee*); or associates an unfavourable value with what pertains to S". Bald on-record politeness departs from Leech's submission in that its strategies are often direct, clear, and unmitigated speech acts, which can be face-threatening but are used in the following contexts: where efficiency and clarity are prioritized over face concerns; social relationships are close or symmetrical; cultural or religious norms sanction directness (B&L, 1987).

Methodology

This study employs a methodological triangulation design (mixed-methods approach), combining both qualitative and quantitative data to investigate bald on-record politeness among Christians in Lagos who identify as Pentecostals. The research design involves a sequential explanatory strategy, where quantitative data is collected and analysed first, and then qualitative data is also analysed to provide a deeper understanding of the findings.

The sample size was 50 Christians living in Lagos, Nigeria, and purposive sampling was used for data collection, with the inclusion criteria being Pentecostals within Lagos, Nigeria. Data was collected through 30 questionnaires administered to participants aged 18 and above who identified as Pentecostals, to gather qualitative data and gain a deeper understanding of the participants' linguistic preferences. All participants reported to have received some form of education. Informal interviews (face-to-face) were conducted for participants who would not read the questions themselves, but were willing to provide answers after someone else read it to them. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis to explore themes that could not be captured through quantitative analysis, as well as to contextualize and interpret the quantitative findings. Quantitative data was analysed using

descriptive statistics to identify patterns and relationships, while inferential statistics (chi-square test) was used to test the hypothesis.

By combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study triangulates the data to capture both the depth and breadth of the phenomenon under study to provide a nuanced understanding of the subject matter as it pertains to the demographic.

Data Analysis

Table 1: **Summary of Respondents' Level of Education**

Level of Education	Numb°. of Respondents	%
Secondary School Graduate	9	30
Post-secondary/diploma	7	23.3
Postgraduate Degree	14	26.7
Total	**30**	**100**

Table 2: **Summary of Respondents Age Ranges**

Age Range	N° of Participants	% Population
18-24	5	16.7
25-34	14	46.7
35-44	8	26.7
45-54	2	6.7
55 and above	1	3.2
Total	**30**	**100**

Participants were asked how they would respond in different scenarios. For each question, options were provided aimed at addressing the different facets of this research such as Leech's politeness maxims, bald on-record strategies and speech acts. The results were as follows:

Table 3: **Analysis of Responses**

Serial N°	Question	Response	No. of Respondents	%
Communication Style				
1	Which of the following best describes your communication style in church?	Direct and assertive	10	33.3
		Indirect and polite	15	50
		Context dependent	5	16.7
	Total			**100%**
2	When communicating with	Always	6	20

	fellow church members, how often do you use direct language?			
		Often	6	20
		Sometimes	17	56.7
		Never	1	3.3
	Total			**100%**
3	How important is clarity in communication when discussing spiritual matters?	Very important	27	90
		Somewhat important	1	3.3
		Not very important	1	3.3
		Not at all important	1	3.3
	Total			**100%**
Speech Acts				
4	What kind of speech acts do you typically use when being direct in the aforementioned scenarios? (Select all that apply)	Statement of fact	11	36.7
		Direct orders	1	3.3
		Advice	11	36.7
		Criticism	0	0
		No response provided	1	3.3
		Other (please specify): Statement of facts and advice	6	20
	Total	**100%**		
5	How do you typically express disagreement? (select all that apply)	Direct contradiction/opposition	3	10
		Indirect Suggestion	3	10
		Questioning	16	53.3
		All of the above	1	3.3

		Indirect suggestion & questioning	4	13.3
		No response	1	3.3
		Other (please specify): dialogue; silence	2	6.7
Total				**100%**
Leech's Politeness Maxims				
4	When giving advice or correction, how often do you consider the other person's feelings?	Always	21	70
		Often	1	3.3
		Sometimes	6	20
		Rarely	2	6.7
Total				**100%**
5	Do you think it's important to avoid imposing on others?	Yes	17	56.7
		No	8	26.7
		Unsure	4	13.3
		No response provided	1	3.3
Total				**100%**
Bald On-Record Strategies				
6	In what situations do you think being direct is most appropriate? (Select all that apply)	Correcting doctrine	1	3.3
		Spiritual guidance	13	43.3
		Group discussions with members	2	6.7
		Conflict resolution	2	6.7
		All of the above	6	20
		Other (please specify): Correcting doctrine & spiritual guidance	3	10
		No response	3	10

		provided		
Total				**100%**
7	How often are you direct/not sugar-coating when communicating with church leaders?	Always	9	30
		Often	4	13.3
		Sometimes	8	26.7
		Rarely	4	13.3
		Never	4	13.3
		No response provided	1	3.3
Total				**100%**
8	Do you believe being direct with your fellow Christians helps to promote honesty and transparency?	Yes	22	73.3
		No	4	13.3
		Unsure	3	10
		No response	1	3.3
Total				**100%**

The following are insights gotten from the data:
v. 46.7% hold a degree or higher, indicating a well-educated population.
vi. The age groups of 25-34 (46.7%) and 35-44 (26.7%) dominate, suggesting a relatively young adult population.
vii. 20% always use direct language with fellow church members; 20% do so often and 56.7% use it sometimes.
viii.   33.3% describe their communication style as direct and assertive; 50% as indirect and polite.
ix. 90% consider clarity very important in spiritual discussions.
x. 70% always consider feelings when giving advice/correction.
xi. 56.7% think it is important to avoid imposition in communication.
xii. 43.3% think being direct is most appropriate for spiritual guidance.
xiii.   30% are always direct with church leaders, 13.3% often, 26.7% sometimes.
xiv.   73.3% believe directness promotes honesty/transparency.

Analysis
Speech Acts
According to Searle (1969), speech acts can be classified into
Assertives: These refer to statements that can be true or false.
Directives: Refer to speech acts that aim to get the interlocutor to act and include orders, requests, commands, questions, suggestions, advice, invitations, offers.

Commissives: These allude to threats or promises that can either be fulfilled or unfulfilled.
Expressives: Expressions of emotion or attitude.
Declarations: Speech acts that change the world by creating new facts or circumstances.

According to the data, the following speech act categories can be identified:
i.   **Assertives**: 36.7% of the population express themselves via statements of fact.
ii. **Directives**: 36.7% of the population resort to giving advice when being direct; 3.3% are direct when correcting doctrine; 43.3% are direct when providing spiritual guidance and 53.3% express disagreement by questioning.

Leech's Politeness Maxims
The aim of this section is to determine the relationship between age and adherence to Leech's politeness maxims. Two of Leech's politeness maxims were identified in the data: the maxims of sympathy (which seeks to maximize sympathy between self and other) and tact (minimize cost to other/maximize benefit to other). To address this therefore, the focus shall be on the responses given in answer to questions 6 and 7 respectively: *When giving advice or correction, how often do you consider the other person's feelings? Do you think it is important to avoid imposing on others?* The following table summarizes the responses.

Table 4: **Relationship between Age and Adherence to Leech's politeness maxims.**

Age Range	Frequency	Leech's Politeness Maxims Identified				
		Sympathy	**Occurrence (%)**	**Tact**	**Occurrence (%)**	
18-24	5	Always = 2	40.0	Yes = 2	40.0	
		Often = 1	20.0	No = 2	40.0	
		Sometimes =1	20.0	Unsure =1	20.0	
		Rarely =1	20.0	No response =0	0.0	
		Never = 0	0.0			
25-34	14	Always =13	93.0	Yes =8	57.1	
		Often = 0	0.0	No =3	21.4	
		Sometimes = 1	7.0	Unsure=1	7.1	
		Rarely = 0	0.0	No response (NR)=2	14.4	
		Never =0	0.0			
35-44	8	Always =3	37.5	Yes =4	50.0	
		Often =0	0.0	No =2	25.0	

		Sometimes=4	50.0	Unsure =1	12.5
		Rarely =1	12.5	NR=1	12.5
		Never =0			
45-54	2	Always =2	2	Yes =2	100.0
		Often =0	0	No =0	0.0
		Sometimes=0	0	Unsure =0	0.0
		Rarely =0	0	NR=0	0.0
		Never =0	0		
55 and above	1	Always =1	1	Yes =1	100.0
		Often =0	0	No =0	0.0
		Sometimes=0	0	Unsure =0	0.0
		Rarely =0	0	NR=0	0.0
		Never =0	0		0.0
Total		**30**			**100%**

From Table 4:
i.   93% of the population between the ages of 25-34 always uphold the sympathy maxim when giving advice or correction, while 57.1% of this same population uphold the tact maxim with regards to imposing on others.
ii.   50% of the population between 35-44 years sometimes upholds the sympathy maxim when giving advice or when correcting others, while 50% of them always uphold the tact maxim during communication.
iii.   100% of the population between 45-54 as well as 55 and above always upholds the sympathy and tact maxims in both contexts of communication.

Bald On-Record (BOR)
The section exposes the relationship between age and the respondents' self-determined communication styles identified in the data which are: a) Direct and assertive (BOR); b) Indirect and polite c) Context dependent which are responses to the question addressing the tact maxim (*Which of the following best describes your communication style in church?*)

Table 5: **Analysis of the Relationship between Age and Communication Style.**

Age Range	Distribution of Respondents (30)	Communication Style					
		Direct & Assertive (BOR)		Indirect & Polite		Context Dependent	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
18-24	5	2	40.0	3	60.0	0	0.00
25-34	14	3	21.4	7	50.0	4	28.6
35-44	8	5	62.5	3	37.5	0	0.0
45-54	2	0	0.0	1	50.0	1	50.0
≥55	1	0	0.0	1	100.0	0	0.0
% Average			41.3		59.5		39.3

According to the above table
i.   The indirect and polite communication style is the most popular across all age groups averaging at 59.5%.
ii. The BOR (direct and assertive) approach to communication is next, with an average percentage of 41.3%.
iii. The context-dependent communication style is favoured (on average) by 39.3% of the population under study.

Hypothesis:

The hypothesis to be tested is if there is no significant difference between level of education and communication style among PCs in Lagos, Nigeria. After testing the hypothesis, the null hypothesis is accepted, meaning there is no significant difference between level of education and communication style among Pentecostals in Lagos, Nigeria

Table 6: **Results from Hypothesis Testing**

Level of Education	Communication Style			Total	Df	P-value	X²	Critical value	Decision
	Direct & Assertive (BOR)	Indirect & Polite	Context Dependent						
Primary	0	0	0	0	6	0.05	4	12.59	Accepted
Sec.	4	4	1	9					
Post-sec.	3	4	0	7					
≥Degree	3	7	4	14					
Total	**10**	**15**	**5**	**30**					

Discussion

On BOR Politeness Strategy

According to the data, the BOR politeness strategy is not the most popular approach (41.3% average), ranking second. Nonetheless, it is consistently present across age groups, indicating a significant portion of the population prefers direct and assertive communication.

BOR's relatively high percentage (41.3%) indicates a substantial segment values directness and assertiveness. More specifically,

i. Indirect and polite communication (59.5%) dominates, suggesting a cultural or social preference for tact and consideration.

ii. Context-dependent communication (39.3%) is notable, showing adaptability in communication styles.

iii. Communication style is diverse, with no single approach dominating entirely.

iv. Age groups exhibit varying preferences, but indirect and polite communication remains consistently popular.

v. BOR's significant presence suggests a balance between directness and tact is necessary.

On Leech's Politeness Maxims

The data suggests the following with respect to the sympathy maxim:

i. Strong adherence among younger adults (25-34): 93% always uphold.

ii. Decreased adherence in mid-adults (35-44): 50% sometimes uphold.

iii. Universal adherence among older adults (45-54 and 55+): 100% always uphold.

The data also suggests that the following is true as pertains to the tact maxim:

i. Moderate adherence among younger adults (25-34): 57.1% uphold.

ii. Increased adherence in mid-adults (35-44): 50% always uphold.

iii. Universal adherence among older adults (45-54 and 55+): 100% always uphold.

The findings on Leech's politeness maxims have the following implications:

i. Age influences politeness, as older adults prioritize sympathy and tact more consistently.

ii. Younger adults prioritize sympathy over tact, indicating empathy is valued.

iii. Mid-adults exhibit varied adherence, potentially due to life experiences or social roles.

iv. Sympathy Maxim is more important in advice-giving/correction.

v. Tact Maxim gains importance with age, reflecting increased social awareness.

vi. Older adults master both sympathy and tact, indicating polished communication skills.

vii. Younger adults are direct, empathetic, and sometimes tactful.

viii.   Mid-adults are developing tact, balancing empathy and assertiveness.

ix. Older adults are consistently polite, empathetic, and tactful.

On Speech Acts

The fact that assertives (36.7%) and directives (36.7%) were the speech acts preferred by the population, with both having the same frequency of occurrence points to the fact that:

Assertives:

i. 36.7% of participants have confidence in expressing their thoughts and opinions.

ii. There is a willingness to take a stance or make declarations.

iii. There is an orientation towards clarity and directness.

Directives:

i. Respondents show an intent to influence or guide others' actions.
ii. They also display their need to provide instructions or advice.
iii. Employing this speech act also points to a focus on achieving specific goals or outcomes during communication.

On the Tested Hypothesis

After conducting the Chi-square test, the null hypothesis was accepted, indicating that there is no statistically significant relationship between level of education and communication style among Pentecostal Christians in Lagos, Nigeria. This implies that:
i. Level of education does not influence communication style significantly within this demographic.
ii. Other factors, such as cultural background, age, or work experience, might play a more crucial role in shaping communication style.
iii. Politeness strategies might be universally adopted, regardless of education level.
iv. Tact, sympathy, and other maxims may be valued equally across educational backgrounds.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to determine the place of the bald on-record (BOR) communication style in the discourses of Pentecostal church members in Lagos, Nigeria. BOR strategies highlight the tension between efficiency and face-maintenance because while they prioritize clarity and directness, they risk threatening the hearer's face. However, the success of BOR strategies depends on the context and the relationship between interlocutors (Spencer-Oatey, 2000). Brown and Levinson (1987) also argue that BOR strategies are often used in contexts where social relationships are robust enough to withstand potential face threats. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the communication patterns of this demographic.

Notably, assertives and directives emerged as the predominant speech acts, employed by 36.7% of the participants. This indicates a confidence in expressing thoughts and opinions, as well as an intent to influence others. Furthermore, the study revealed a significant relationship between age and adherence to Leech's politeness maxims, with older adults consistently upholding sympathy and tact maxims.

The BOR politeness strategy, while not the most popular, was found to be relatively prominent, with 41.3% of participants employing this approach. Even though 73.3% of the population believes that directness promotes honesty/transparency, the BOR politeness strategy still ranked second after the positive politeness strategy (indirect & polite). The findings imply that though the demographic employs bald on-record politeness strategies to uphold their beliefs, they prefer to communicate using the indirect and polite communication style of communication – upholding the Christian value of love over conflict. The present research therefore highlights the need for balance between directness and tact in communication. In addition, the data also reveals that education level has no significant impact on communication style.

The study's findings contribute significantly to the understanding of politeness strategies in Nigerian Pentecostal communities. This research addresses crucial gaps in existing literature, providing insights for effective communication and interpersonal relationships within this demographic, and demonstrates the complexity of communication among Pentecostals in Lagos, Nigeria. By recognizing the importance of age, speech acts, and politeness strategies, interlicutors can foster more effective and harmonious interactions. Future research could continue to explore the nuances of communication in diverse contexts, promoting inclusive and empathetic interactions. This study underscores the significance of adaptability and cultural awareness in religious communication, emphasizing the need for sensitivity and understanding in all interactions.

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