

Negative Politeness Strategies in the *Punch* Newspaper Interview Reports on Xenophobic Attacks

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Abstract

This paper considers Brown and Levinson's Politeness theory in the area of negative politeness such as, hedging, and generalization. Using purposive random sampling technique based on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness to select 7 interviews from the punch newspaper reports on xenophobic attack returnee's interview, the paper examined what constitute negative politeness strategies used by interviewers and returnees on xenophobic attack interviews in the Punch Newspaper. Findings show that interviewers and interviewees made use of negative politeness strategies although at various frequencies. Negative politeness strategies were employed to prevent imposition on the hearer and participants used more of hedging which enabled them avoid excessive certainty and achieve tactfulness. The paper recommends that there should be analysis of natural dialogues not on print media which may be devoid of paralinguistic forms of language. More so, Interviewers should have sufficient knowledge of the concept of negative politeness as this will enable them avoid absoluteness.

Introduction

When one is polite, it means that the individual is aware of and regard other people's feelings. On the other hand, "verbal impoliteness is language behaviour figured out by the hearer as threatening his or her face or social identity, and violating the rules of socially correct behaviour that is prevalent in a particular context and among specific conversers, whether deliberately or not" (Holmes et al 2008, p. 196).

Face has to do with what an individual is known for, his self-worth and prestige. It is tied up with an opinion of being embarrassed, ashamed or degraded, or "losing face". Nonetheless, "face wants can be neglected, not only in social breakdown but also in situations of immediate cooperation, or in the interests of effectiveness" (Brown & Levinson 1987 p. 312).

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), face threatening acts (requesting and criticising) are in opposition to the face wants of the hearer and/or of the speaker. Although, threats can be lessened by the use of face saving acts hence the need for politeness strategies: positive and negative politeness strategies (Osisanwo, 2003).

Face and politeness are both theories of pragmatics which is a branch of linguistics. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), "In the circumstance that face (public self-image) is susceptible to attack any reasonable person will try to avoid face threatening acts or use strategies to reduce them" (p. 315). Possible strategies for doing face threatening acts include negative politeness and positive politeness.

In conversations like interviews where questions are asked and answers are given, participants sometimes respect, hurt, offend or embarrass interlocutors with their utterances. On arrival at the Murtala Muhammed Airport, Ikeja, Lagos, some of the September 2019 South African returnees were interviewed (Hanafi, 2019).

The researcher was motivated by the negative politeness strategies used in the South African xenophobic attack interviews. Hence, the paper reviews the extent of negative politeness strategies which were employed during the selected interviews.

Politeness goes beyond social behaviour in that one's choice of words in the course of interaction is crucial as utterances made without awareness of the

other person's desires may affect existing relationships. In conversations it is crucial to protect oneself from offensive words and then show deference to other participants. Study on face and politeness have revealed that interlocutors in discourse sessions impede on each other's face using diverse linguistic elements. Such studies include Izida (2013) on Politeness in Ten Viva Voce Sessions in Two Universities. The xenophobic attack interviews in the *Punch Newspaper* is a discourse session involving interviewers and returnees. This study investigated the language use in these interviews to underscore the negative politeness strategies employed by interlocutors during the interviews.

Objectives

The specific objectives are:

1. To identify the negative politeness strategies used by the returnees in the xenophobic attack interviews in the *Punch Newspaper*.
2. To examine the negative politeness strategies employed by the interviewers in the xenophobic attack interviews in the *Punch Newspaper*.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions guiding the study:

1. What are the negative politeness strategies used by the returnees in the xenophobic attack interviews in the *Punch Newspaper*.
2. What are the negative politeness strategies employed by the interviewers in the xenophobic attack interviews *Punch Newspaper*.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this research is Erving Goffman (1967) and Brown and Levinson's Face and Politeness theory (1987). Erving Goffman's theory focuses on the idea of 'face' which means an individual's public self-image. This image can be destroyed, maintained, restored by words and action and of course everyone desires their face to be intact. On the other hand, two linguists, Brown and Levinson in their politeness theory fuse different politeness strategies which are negative politeness strategies which are used to prevent affront by showing respect and positive politeness strategies which are

applied to prevent confrontation by being friendly. They connected the concept of politeness to Erving Goffman's face

Discourse as a form of social exchange demands interactants to express themselves in a clear and polite manner (Alan & Leibiger, 2009, p. 238). Politeness is an idea "developed by cultures so as to reduce conflict in individual conversations" (Lakoff 1975, p. 64).

The Act of Speaking

Pragmatics study 'invisible meaning'. In other words it looks at how we are able to consider what is meant by an utterance even when it is not said or written. For a thing like that to occur, it is important for writers and speakers to rely so much on shared assumptions and expectations as they interact. By the time those assumptions are examined, they will give insight concerning how more is shared than said (Yule, 2010). In the interpretation of meaning, context is very key: linguistic context, physical context (Yule, 2010) and common ground (Yan, 2007).

Politeness

"Politeness is significant when it comes to maintaining social association, in communication. It is the heart of social life and conversation and a requirement for human cooperation" (Brown & Levinson 1987, p. 326). Politeness is a means of reducing conflict in discourse (Lakoff, 189).

Saeed (2009) mentioned Paul Grice's four conversational maxims that shape interactions, they include:

1. The maxim of quality: Do not say what you believe is false.
2. The maxim of quantity: Just the exact amount of information should be given.
3. The maxim of relevance: Make your contribution relevant
4. The maxim of manner: Avoid multiple interpretation during interaction

Politeness strategies

Politeness strategies are speech acts that express concern for others and reduce threats to self-esteem in social contexts. They include Positive and negative politeness.

Positive politeness strategies

Positive politeness is a redress (a setting right) which is channelled to the addressee's positive face that his needs should be appreciated. Positive politeness strategies suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987) include:

1. Notice, pay attention to hearer's interests, needs and goods: For example: You must be tired, you've been up since morning. How about having some rest?
2. Overstate interest, approval, sympathy with hearer, exaggerated intonation, stress and intensifying modifiers. Example: How nice!
3. Use in-group identity markers: For example: Address forms: Brother
4. 4. Seek agreement: Use of safe topics and repetition.

Negative Politeness strategy

Negative politeness strategies that bring about softening the effect of a speech are as follows (Brown & Levinson 1987):

1. Be indirect
Strategy 1: Being Conventionally indirect: Could you buy some detergent for me? It is a request which says, buy some detergents for me.
2. Don't presume/assume
The strategy is to prevent the speaker from taking on a position that has to do with the addressee without proof.
Strategy 2: Questioning, Hedge: Could you pass the margarine please?
3. Don't coerce the hearer
Strategy 3: Being pessimistic: I don't think she can make it there tomorrow.
Strategy 4: Minimizing the imposition: Would you just give me some time?
Strategy 5: Giving deference: Sir, can I come in?
4. Communicate the speaker's want not to impinge on the hearer
Strategy 6: Apologizing: I am sorry that I have to ask but could you ...

Strategy 7: Impersonalizing speaker and hearer: It is expected that one should not be careless

Strategy 8: Stating the face threatening act as a general rule: Workers apply for leave

Strategy 9: Nominalization: I am sad at your delayed response

5. Redress wants of the hearer

Strategy 10: Going on record and incurring a debt or as not indebted hearer: I will ever remain grateful if you...

Negative politeness is used to protect oneself because it helps one detach and ultimately lessens disagreement. It is also used to make a request look less violating.

According to Alan and Leibiger (2009, p. 238) “face in politeness theory is connected to the Chinese idea of face. In other words, face has Chinese origin. The phrases Mien-Tzu and Lien merely has to do with one’s physical face in Chinese, however as notions they constitute a person’s different social aspects. Mien-Tzu refers to an individual’s social reputation by other people, and can be affected by the acquisition or loss of wealth, power, or position. Lien which is the ethical or moral value in the eyes of others and every one in a society has it at various degrees. The two types face: Mien-Tzu and Lien show the individual’s reputation and how s/he is seen by other people. Unlike Mien-Tzu that is not constant due to reversal of fortune, everyone is presumed to have Lien (i.e., moral value) except the person’s behaviour go against the expectation of the society. Shame that emanates from losing one’s Lien serves as a strong type of moral societal influence.

Brown and Levinson’s (1987) notion of face is based on Erving Goffman’s (1967). It comprises of two types of needs (face wants) by interlocutors: The want to have freedom (negative face) and The desire to be appreciated or approved of (positive face). Although, how face wants are dealt with in conversation may differ from one culture to another.

Face threatening acts

A face threatening act is an act that challenges the face wants of an interlocutor. Brown and Levinson (1987) states that “an act mean what is intended to be

done by a verbal or non-verbal communication, just as one or more ‘speech acts’ can be assigned to an utterance” (p. 313). Acts that threaten negative and positive face: Acts that threatens the hearer’s negative face needs that shows that the speaker does not intend to avoid preventing hearer’s liberty of action include:

1. Those acts that announce some future act that speaker wants hearer to be part of like command, demand, requests, suggestions, advice and threats.
2. Those acts that assert some optimistic future act of speaker toward hearer (proposals and commitment).

The following are acts that threaten speaker’s face:

1. Those that annoy speaker’s negative face (apology and excuses)
2. Those that clearly harm speaker’s positive face (self embarrassment)

Face saving acts

Face saving is done to try to lessen embarrassment, humiliation or even make one’s self look better in a situation where a person is embarrassed or made to look bad. The intention is to preserve one’s prestige. Some of the ways one can save face include accepting responsibility for things someone or people have wrongly done.

Theoretical framework

Goffman (1959) worked on face and how humans communicate everyday. He discovered that people found out that everybody is interested in what others think about them and as a result they generate an appearance (identity) for others to see. Brown and Levinson (1987) used face to explain politeness. Politeness theory creates a structure to promote social relationship. People try to preserve two face types which are positive face (the desire to be respected) and negative face (the desire to be free from imposition). When there is threat to face, there will not be social harmony. They wrote about the universality of politeness and suggested two face types which are positive and negative face.

Methodology

The design was based on Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness (1987). This framework established how negative politeness strategies result in

softening the effect of an utterance. The data for this research was gathered from a secondary source, the *Punch Newspaper* (2019, September 14). The utterances were collated from interviews with Nigerian returnees from South Africa due to xenophobic attack. The *Punch Newspaper* was used for the data because it contains report on xenophobic attack with structured interviews. The data for analysis was chosen using purposive sampling technique. The chosen data was analysed using qualitative descriptive method and Brown and Levinson's Politeness theory (1987) which are pragmatic tools. A total of 187 people were the official first batch of Nigerian returnees from South Africa due to xenophobic attack in 2019. 55 of them were interviewed and this number constituted the population for the study.

Using purposive sampling technique, one out of every seven interviews was used for the analysis. The total number of selected interviews was 7 and they were qualitatively and descriptively analysed under the frame work of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory.

Data Analysis

The analysis of this study is the 8 exchanges generated from 7 purposively selected interviews on xenophobic attack returnees in the *Punch Newspaper* (2019, September 14). The exchanges are analysed in tables using Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness and discussions followed. The 7 interviews are presented in Datums 1-7 followed by the frequency table.

Datum 1

(The interview between *Punch Newspaper* interviewer and a returnee)

Exchange 1

Interviewer: If you are to estimate what you lost, how much will it be?

Interviewee: I lost up to R200,000 (approximately #5M).

Exchange 2

Interviewer: So why did you leave Nigeria in the first instance?

Interviewee: Actually, Nigerians like travelling. We believe that if you go out, you will make it. But I can see that there is potential in Nigeria. Most of us were wrongly advised before we travelled but such is life. If I see someone travelling,

I will not discourage such a person but they should try to go to Europe...

Datum 2

(The interview between *Punch Newspaper* interviewer and a second returnee)

Exchange 3

Interviewer: What was your experience in South Africa like?

Interviewee: I lost a lot of things...If I could have that money in Nigeria, I'd be a big man....I came back empty-handed. Except for Some of my clothes and shoes.

Datum 3

(The interview between *Punch Newspaper* interviewer and a returnee)

Exchange 4

Interviewer: What was your experience like in South Africa?

Interviewee: Throughout the period, my kids did not go to school-they missed their exams.

TABLE & TABULAR ANALYSIS OF DATUM 1 (EXCHANGE 1-2) (Brown & Levinson 1987)

<i>Exch.</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Negative Politeness Strategies</i>
1.	Interviewer	Being conventionally indirect: The interviewer indirectly made a request <i>How much have you lost?</i> This strategy here could give the interviewee the liberty of speech. Pessimism: The interviewer used the conditional <i>if</i> to express uncertainty about the outcome of his question.
	Interviewee	Hedging: The interviewee approximated his loss by saying <i>I lost up to ...</i>
2.	Interviewee	Hedge: (a) <i>Actually</i> -The interviewee weakened his claims with <i>Actually, Nigerians like travelling...</i> (b) <i>We believe that if you go out...</i> (c) <i>But I can see that there is potential in Nigeria ...</i>

(d) *Most of us were wrongly advised ...* (e) *But such is life...*

(f) *I will not discourage the person...* The interviewee is certain

(g) *I will not discourage such a person but they should try to go to Europe...* is a verbal defence as this will reduce the interviewer's intrusion concerning the utterances that follow.

Pessimism: *If at all* -The interviewee does not want to sound absolute

General rule- He used the *general rule Nigerians like travelling* to distant or separate himself from the face threat that emanated from the interviewer's question.

Impersonalization-The interviewee employed *impersonalizing strategy* to distant himself from harm in his utterance *Most of us were wrongly advised before we travelled.*

**TABLE & TABULAR ANALYSIS OF DATUM 2 (EXCHANGE 3)
(Brown & Levinson 1987)**

<i>Exch.</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Negative Politeness Strategies</i>
3.	Interviewer	Don't presume/assume: The interviewer did not assume anything about the interviewee hence he asked <i>What was your experience in South Africa like?</i>
	Interviewee	Hedging: (a) <i>I lost a lot of things...</i> The interviewee did not want to be exact in his claims. (b) <i>I came back empty-handed, except for some of my clothes and shoes.</i> The interviewee mentioned an indefinite quantity of clothes and shoes. Pessimism: <i>If I could have that money in Nigeria, I'd be a big man.</i> The interviewee assumed in his utterance that having the amount of money he lost, he would be a man of great status and influence in Nigeria.

**TABLE & TABULAR ANALYSIS OF DATUM 3 (EXCHANGE 4)
(Brown & Levinson 1987)**

<i>Exch.</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Negative Politeness Strategies</i>
4.	Interviewer	<p>Being conventionally indirect: The interviewer indirectly asked <i>What is responsible for the attacks on Nigerians....</i> He used this strategy to be less imposing.</p> <p>Hedging: The interviewer said, <i>What do you think is responsible...?</i></p>
	Interviewee	<p>Hedging: (a) <i>I believe it is just out of jealousy.</i> The interviewee showed that she did not intend to be accountable for the truth of the speech she uttered (b) <i>just out of jealousy.</i> The interviewee used <i>just</i> to lessen the threat the interviewer posed by requesting her to say <i>what is responsible for the attacks on Nigerians and other foreigners.</i></p> <p>(c). <i>So, when they see other people creating jobs for themselves and making it...</i>The interviewee was tactful hence she did not specify who <i>other people</i> referred to.</p>

Discussion of Datums 1-3

In exchange 1 the interviewer used *being conventionally indirect* to make a request so as not to appear imposing and *being pessimistic* while the interviewee used *hedging* to make his claims more acceptable. In exchange 2 the interviewee expressed certainty using *hedging* and avoided absoluteness using *pessimism* and then used *generalization* and *impersonalization* to distant himself from any possible face threat that may occur as a result of his utterance. In exchange 3, the interviewer did not *presume/assume* hence he asked the interviewee. While the interviewee was not exact in his claims expressed using *hedging* and *pessimism* and in exchange 4, the interviewer used *being conventionally indirect* and *hedging*.

Datum 4

(The interview between *Punch Newspaper* interviewer and a fourth returnee)

Exchange 5

Interviewer: What kind of business are they doing there?

Interviewee: They accused them of selling drugs. Another reason why they killed some Nigerians was that they alleged that they saw a Nigerian man raping their lady. This allegation has yet to be proved.

Datum 5

(The interview between *Punch Newspaper* interviewer and a returnee)

Exchange 6

Interviewer: Now that you are in Nigeria, what is your next plan?

Interviewee: I do not know yet. I am very confused right now. Anyway, I will see what I can do. I did not know I was coming to Nigeria so soon. I don't know how things are right now in Nigeria. I hope I will be able to cope and get something to do.

Datum 6

(The interview between *Punch Newspaper* interviewer and a returnee)

Exchange 7

Interviewer: How are you missing your friends in South Africa?

Interviewee: I miss my friends and I miss many other things.

Datum 7

(The interview between *Punch Newspaper* interviewer and a returnee)

Exchange 8

Interviewer: Some South Africans have blamed their actions on the activities of Nigerians doing drugs in their country, do you think that is the only reason for the animosity?

Interviewee: Admittedly, some Nigerians do drugs but they are few ...

**TABLE & TABULAR ANALYSIS OF DATUM 4 (EXCHANGE 8-11)
(Brown & Levinson 1987)**

<i>Exch.</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Negative Politeness Strategies</i>
5.	Interviewer	Don't presume/assume: The interviewer did not want to take any position concerning what the interviewee pointed out hence he asked <i>What kind of business are they doing?</i>

Interviewee **Impersonalization:** The interviewee distant herself from the business other Nigerians do in South Africa in her statement *They accused them of selling drugs.*

TABLE & TABULAR ANALYSIS OF DATUM 5 (EXCHANGE 12)
(Brown & Levinson 1987)

<i>Exch.</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Negative Politeness Strategies</i>
6.	Interviewer	Being conventionally indirect: The interviewer used a strategy that is non-offending to request what the interviewee's plan was.
	Interviewee	Hedge: (a) <i>I do not know yet...</i> (b) <i>I will see what I can do</i> (c) <i>I did not know I was coming to Nigeria so soon</i> (d) <i>I don't know how things are right now...</i> The interviewee does not want to be committed to her utterance. Being pessimistic: The interviewee was confused and uncertain from her response, <i>I hope I will be able to cope.</i>

TABLE & TABULAR ANALYSIS OF DATUM 6 (EXCHANGE 13)
(Brown & Levinson 1987)

<i>Exch.</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Negative Politeness Strategies</i>
7.	Interviewer	Being Conventionally Indirect: The interviewer did not want to be direct by asking the interviewee <i>Are u missing her friends?</i>

TABLE & TABULAR ANALYSIS OF DATUM 7 (EXCHANGE 16)
(Brown & Levinson 1987)

<i>Exch.</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Negative Politeness Strategies</i>
8.	Interviewer	Being conventionally indirect: The interviewer avoided asking direct questions about the reasons behind the animosity against Nigerians. Hedging: The interviewer asked for the interviewee's opinion <i>do you think that...</i>
	Interviewee	Hedging: The interviewee was flexible in his utterance ... (a) <i>but they are</i> (b) <i>few....</i> He gave an indefinite number.

Discussion of Datum 4-7

In exchange 5 the interviewer used *being conventionally indirect* and the interviewee employed the use of *impersonalization*. Also in exchange 6, the interviewer was *being conventionally indirect* while the interviewee used *hedging* and *being pessimistic*. In exchange 7 the interviewer was *being conventionally indirect*, in exchange 8 the interviewer used *being conventionally indirect* and *hedging* while the interviewee used *hedging*.

Summary of findings

The study discovered that interviewers and interviewees used negative politeness strategies in their utterances. The table below contain the data:

<i>Face Acts & Politeness Strategies</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Hedge</i>	21	60
<i>Being Pessimistic</i>	4	11.4
<i>Minimizing the Imposition</i>	-	-
<i>Generalization</i>	1	2.9
<i>Impersonalization</i>	2	5.7
<i>Don't Presume/Assume</i>	2	5.7
<i>Being Conventionally Indirect</i>	5	14.3
TOTAL	35	100

From the above table, hedging occurred 21 times with 60%, being pessimistic occurred 4 times with 11.4%, minimizing the imposition did not occur. Generalization occurred once with 2.9%, impersonalization 2 times with 5.7%, don't presume/assume 2 times with 5.7% and being conventionally indirect 5 times with 14.3%.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that the interviewers and interviewees made use of negative politeness strategies although at various frequencies. Negative politeness strategies are employed to prevent imposition on the hearer. It lessens the risk of face threat. (Brown & Levinson 1987). The participants used more of hedging which enabled them avoid certainty and achieve tactfulness. The

paper recommends that; analysis should be carried out more on natural dialogues not on print media which may be devoid of paralinguistic forms of language. Finally, interviewers should have sufficient knowledge of the concept of negative politeness as this will enable them avoid absoluteness.

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