

“I Didn’t Know You Are So Idiotic”: Impoliteness Strategies And Verbal Abuse Among Politicians In Selected Print And Online Nigerian Newspapers

Uche Oboko

Madonna University, Nigeria

Abstract

The study examines the employment of impoliteness strategies and verbal abuse among political personages in Nigeria in selected print and online newspaper publications. Data for the study were purposively selected from the news and politics sections of print and online newspapers which include *The Punch*, *The Vanguard*, *The Premium Times*, *The Sun*, *The Daily Trust*, *The Pulse* and *The Guardian*. The study engaged Culpeper’s theory of impoliteness complemented by textual element of Mey’s pragmatic acts in its analysis. Findings reveal that the political personalities employ sarcasm, imposition, associating others with negative aspects, taboo and abusive language, insults, threats, name-calling, ridicule, scorn, use of inappropriate identity marker, belittling, use of animal metaphor among other strategies in a bid to express their opinions. It is evident from the findings that contrary to the ideology that the primary objective of adopting impoliteness strategies is to attack the faces of the hearers, the study reveals that political personages in Nigeria employ impoliteness strategies not only to attack the faces of fellow politicians or other Nigerians but to emphasize their relative powers over individuals considered as being disloyal and unsupportive and to demean the personality of their opponents and their supporters.

Keywords: impoliteness strategies, language, politeness, politics, verbal abuse

Introduction

Language remains a significant means through which the thoughts of a people are influenced. In politics, language plays a major role in fostering friendship and harmonious co-existence and can equally be used to create ill-feelings, bias, acrimony, conflicts, and crisis among politicians. Nzeakor and Osundu (2013, p. 365) quoting Leech (1981) note that language plays a major role in all kinds of conflicts and pressure that arise between individuals or groups especially in the way interactions are played out. This explains why most scholars in political discourse have paid attention to the role of language in politics especially in Nigeria. Ajayi (2018) opines that

politicians, particularly in Nigeria, deploy language extensively in their activities to achieve various purposes. Language can be used to avoid conflicts by employing politeness to maintain the faces of the hearers and can equally be used to threaten the faces of the hearers by deploying impoliteness.

In political discourse, language can be manipulated as an instrument of ‘offence and defence’. Onuigbo (2013) avers that through the instrumentality of language, politicians can split the universe into two halves of “me and you” instead of “you and me”. According to him, the split is achieved when politicians juggle with language to become or achieve

what they want (quoted in Nwobia, 2016, p. 13). Aduradola and Ojukwu (2013), citing Boulton (1978), further confirm that language can be used with a negative intent and is often used, not to communicate, but to deceive which is typical of political and religious language.

In Nigerian politics, language use is usually characterized by verbal abuse and manifestations of impoliteness strategies by politicians who engage in exchange of words among themselves or with those considered as being perfidious. Such style of language use by politicians in Nigeria manifests lexicon of conflict, ridicule and persuasion often with the intention of threatening the faces of fellow politicians. The exchange of abusive words is usually transmitted through face-to-face, radio, television broadcasts, social media platforms and newspapers. The newspaper appears to be a major medium where politicians exchange abusive words without restraint, and which are published verbatim by the reporters. The use of impoliteness strategies or abusive words is usually for the achievement of dominance, supremacy, and assertion of power. The present paper investigates the impoliteness strategies and verbal abuse among personalities in the political circle as reported by some print and online newspapers in Nigeria.

Studies on Impoliteness and Verbal Abuse

There are some scholarly works on impoliteness in different settings within and outside Nigeria that are relevant to the present study. These works include Akinrinlola (2017) which studies the deployment of impoliteness and pragmatic strategies by Goodluck Jonathan and Mohammed Buhari's 2015 campaign speeches. The scholar holds that the two politicians deployed linguistic tools such as

self-justification, expressing intellectual weakness, blaming, spinning, heightening of intellectual ability and reference to history to gain the attention of the electorates. In like manner, Ajayi (2018) examines the impoliteness strategies in the Facebook posts of Nigerian electorates in the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. Findings from that study reveal that Nigerian electorate use different impoliteness strategies which range 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. Akinwotu (2015) investigates the pragmatic strategies of media political encounter. This study shows that politicians employ two types of verbal behaviour (polite and impolite) language use. It further reveals that politicians deploy promising and testimonial argument to depict polite behaviour and also deploy impolite language to categorize and construct one another as corrupt, inept, incompetent, unfit, dishonest and deceitful. Similarly, Aremu (2015) analyses the invective song of Western Nigerian politicians in terms of being politically impolite. He discovers that invective songs were characterized by impolite and belligerent utterances, lexical borrowing, code-mixing, symbolism, direct speeches, paralanguage and use of imagery.

Several studies have been carried out on impoliteness and verbal abuse in the political circle beyond this clime. For instance, Halim (2015) observes that impoliteness strategies such as insults are used by Facebook users in Malaya to attack the face(s) of politicians on social media. Harris (2001) reviews being politically impolite as an extension of politeness theory to adversarial political

discourse using Prime Minister's Question Time in the British Parliament as data. The scholar discovers among other things that negative politeness features co-exist with the performance of intentional threats to the hearer's positive face and that these can only be understood and interpreted in relationship to Parliament as an institution and wider political context. Apriliyani et al. (2019) investigates the impoliteness strategies used by male and female haters of Habib Rizieq and Felix Siauw found in Instagram comments in Indonesia. The researchers discover that haters of the politicians employ bald-on-record, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, and sarcasm.

The studies mentioned above have not considered impoliteness strategies and verbal abuse among political personages in newspaper publications. Perhaps, few scholars like Ojo (2016) carried out the most related study to the present study in Nigeria. The study examines the impoliteness strategies in the utterances of former President Olusegun Obasanjo and Governor Ayodele Fayose as reported in the Nigerian newspapers Adopting Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, the study discovered that politicians' use language as an instrument to achieve political relevance and popularity, among others. In the same way, Nnuta and Ezeifeka (2017), in their study on poor verbal hygiene and ethnic politics in Nigeria in selected print and online newspaper publications, discover that people who usually complain of being insulted by other ethnic groups often use even more hateful words in describing the groups they feel have insulted them. They conclude that the outcome of such poor language use is the widening of the social distance among the different ethnic groups that

make up the country and the exacerbation of crisis in the nation. Finally, Adibe (2012) explores ethnicity, hate speech and nation building in Nigeria. The study holds that hate speech and ethnicity contribute to the widening of the social distance among the different ethnic groups that make up the country and suggests among other measures that media houses should define clearly what constitutes hate speech and impose sanctions on erring members who publish or broadcast hate-laden speech materials.

The studies referred above provide insight to the present study. However, the present study takes a sharp departure from the previous studies to investigate the employment of impoliteness strategies and verbal abuse by public personages in political settings in Nigeria. It promises to make significant contributions to impoliteness and verbal abuse in Nigeria in the political circle.

Impoliteness and Verbal Abuse in Political Discourse

Political discourse usually focuses on power struggle and exercise of authority (Newman, 2004). Politicians principally employ language to dominate or show supremacy over their equals, subordinates or those perceived as being treacherous. Although politicians employ polite language to maintain their faces and the faces of their supporters, most times, they are seen to use words that depict verbal abuse and impoliteness to attack the faces of those perceived as not being supportive or loyal to them. Verbal abuse is observed whenever one of the interactants uses words that cause strain on the hearer to gain undue advantage and the hearer considers the language use as undeserving and disgraceful. Such verbal abuse is usually in the form of insults, face threats,

shaming, shouting, sarcasm, humiliation, discounting, demeaning, personal comments on looks, use of taboo words, name calling or use of animal metaphor, among others. Usually, such verbal abuses are employed to intimidate, coerce, or manipulate the hearer. In political discourse, verbal abuse is mostly expressed through outburst of anger which is expressed through derogatory, demeaning, and negative language to hurt the receiver. Sometimes, the verbal abuse is concealed and expressed in a pleasant form, but the ultimate goal is to damage the face of the hearer. Culpeper (2011) describes such language use as a mock politeness strategy.

Bousfield and Locher (2008, p.3) define impoliteness as 'behaviour that is face-aggravating in a particular context'. Often times, politicians engage impoliteness to offend, threaten and damage the faces of their hearers and which is understood by the hearers. Hence, Holmes et al. (2008, p.198) see verbal impoliteness as the linguistic behaviour assessed by the hearer as threatening his or her face or social identity and infringing the norms of appropriate behaviour that prevail in particular contexts, and among particular interlocutors, whether intentionally or not. However, it may be difficult to place the intention of the speaker given the fact that the hearers may perceive face threats and impoliteness in the utterance of the speaker where impoliteness may not be intended. In line with this, Culpeper et al. (2003, p.1552) argue that speakers' intentions are fundamental to speech act theory but further argue that 'interlocutors do not wear their intentions on their sleeves', and which may make it difficult to define.

Impoliteness is usually witnessed in situations where there is power imbalance as observed by Culpeper (1996, p.354). 'A powerful participant has more freedom to be impolite because he or she can (a) reduce the ability of the less powerful participant to retaliate with impoliteness (e.g. through the denial of speaking right) and (b) threaten more severe retaliation should the less powerful participant be impolite'. This further explains why impoliteness occurs frequently in politics because superior leaders have almost unlimited freedom to threaten the faces of their subordinates. Conversely, such verbal abuses also occur in political discourse among participants on equal power ranking where the interactants refuse to cooperate or maintain each other's faces. Given the mutual vulnerability of faces, politicians tend to retaliate with impolite and abusive language when their faces are threatened to defend their faces.

Methodology

Twenty excerpts that have features considered to be relevant to the present study were selected from the news and politics sections of print and online Nigerian newspapers. The selected newspapers include *The Punch*, *The Vanguard*, *The Premium Times*, *The Sun*, *The Daily Trust*, *The Pulse* and *The Guardian Newspaper*. The choice of many newspapers is to cover a wide range of popular impolite and abusive language which made headline news and which most Nigerians are aware of. The chosen excerpts are considered to have expressions with features relevant to the study. However, after a scrutiny of the newspaper excerpts, only twelve excerpts considered to be representative of the features observed across the twenty excerpts were randomly selected for analysis. The paper adopted an interpretative

textual analysis method and data were analysed within Culpeper's impoliteness theory and complemented by Mey's textual aspect of pragmatic acts theory.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The paper is anchored on Culpeper's theory of impoliteness and complemented by Mey's textual aspects of pragmatic acts. Culpeper (1996, 2005, 2016) in his works proposes various strategies and sub-strategies of impoliteness theory. Among the strategies is *bold on record impoliteness*. In the strategy, the face threatening act is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimized. Another strategy he proposed is the *positive impoliteness*. According to him, the strategy is designed to 'damage the addressee's positive face wants' (Culpeper, 1996 p.356; Culpeper, 2005, p.41; Culpeper 2016, p. 425). It incorporates strategies like ignoring the other, excluding the other from an activity, being disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic towards others, using inappropriate identity markers for others, using obscure or secretive language, seeking disagreement, using taboo words, and calling others names. He further talks about *Negative impoliteness* strategy. For him, the strategy is designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants. It includes strategies like 'frightening/threatening, condescending, scorning, or ridiculing, being contemptuous, not treating others seriously, belittling the other, invading the other's space (literally or metaphorically), explicitly associating the other with a negative aspect (personalize, use the pronouns "I" and "You") and putting the other's indebtedness on record' (Culpeper, 1996 p.356; Culpeper, 2005, p.41, Culpeper 2016, p. 425). Culpeper also presents *sarcasm*

or *mock politeness* strategy. In the strategy, the face threatening act (FTA) is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus, remain surface realizations. The last of the impoliteness strategy is *withhold* politeness. The strategy has to do with the absence of politeness where it would have been expected (Culpeper, 1996, p.357; Culpeper, 2005, p.42; Culpeper, 2016, p. 425). An example of such impoliteness strategy is failure to thank somebody for a present. Such may be taken as deliberate impoliteness.

The impoliteness strategies above are complemented by Mey's textual part of pragmatic acts. Mey (2001, p. 221) holds that a pragmatic act focuses 'on the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances, such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation, as well as on what is actually being said'. The emphasis on Mey's theory of pragmeme is that a pragmeme is a general situational prototype through which a pragmeme act can be instantiated. The instantiated individual pragmatic act is what he referred to as an *ipra* or an (*allo*) *pract*. The pragmeme is classified into two: the activity part and the textual part (Mey, 2001, p.222).

The textual part embodies context which has features for discourse analysis and interpretation. The contextual elements include INF (inferencing), REF (reference), REL (relevance) VCE (voice), SSK (shared situational knowledge), MPH (metaphor) and M(pragmatic joker). The study did not consider the activity part as it is only the textual elements that are relevant to the study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Text 1: Put the Other's Indebtedness on Record/Personalize, Use the Pronoun 'I' and 'You' (Culpeper, 1996, 2005, 2016)

Pulse.ng Online Newspaper of 15 January, 2020 with the caption, 'Watch Gov. Wike Insults Traditional Rulers during a Meeting'

The reporter credits the following statement to the Governor of Rivers State, Nyesome Wike during a meeting with the traditional rulers in Rivers State in January, 2020.

1. *"This year we are going into will be a serious yea.... stop shaking your head because that's Sycophancy."*
According to the reporter, while the meeting was ongoing, Wike stopped his sentence mid-way and fixed his gaze on a particular traditional ruler and said to him:
2. *"You...stop shaking your head. You are one of those causing problems. They gave you chieftaincy but you are a young boy, so, you don't even know what to do with it. And then when I'm speaking you are shaking your head like this."*

By using the statement 2, Governor Wike has put the other's indebtedness on record. He made the traditional ruler understand that he was made a chief by the State government; but he does not know what to do with it, which puts his indebtedness on record. The same statement 2 reveals that Governor Wike associates the traditional ruler with a negative aspect and identifies him as 'one of those causing problems' in the State in front of other traditional rulers. Again, in African culture, it is seen as an insult to address a traditional ruler as a small boy irrespective of his age which the governor has done. Further, the governor

addresses the traditional ruler directly by using the personal pronoun 'you'. He personalizes the face threat to him by employing the personal pronoun 'you' six times in statement 2 to address him. Such repeated personalized realizations and manner of use constitute an insult (Culpeper, 2010, p.3242). Drawing inference from Mey's shared situation knowledge, Governor Wike's imperative statement to the traditional ruler that he should stop shaking his head while he (Governor Wike) is talking brings to bear the shared knowledge by both that the Governor is higher in status and he (the Governor) can use impolite expressions if he wishes.

Text 2: Belittle the Other (Use Diminutives)/Condescend, Scorn or ridicule – Emphasize your Relative Power (Culpeper 1996, 2005, 2016)

'Rivers Governor Wike Mocked Traditional Rulers for their Choice of Dressing and Everything in Between'

Following from the excerpt above, Governor Wike further berates the traditional rulers for their choice of dressing and compares the dressing of a particular traditional ruler to the 17th Century founder of the Sokoto Caliphate. He was quoted to have said the following:

- 3 *'All fake! Fake!! You just go and wear something that is bigger than you...when someone is looking for power.'*
4. *You'd think he's an elderly person. Very small young man, this boy. I know when I was in school, he was running around us, going on errands.*
5. *Now he's wearing clothes that look like Usman Dan Fodio's clothes, then, he begins to breach protocol. He thinks when*

he's shaking his head like this, I'd be happy. That's fake...that's fake'

In statement 5, Governor Wike employs ridicule to mock the traditional ruler's dressing and compares it to the dressing of Usman Dan Fodio, the 17th century founder of Sokoto caliphate. He personalizes the ridicule further in statement 4 by employing adverbial, adjectival intensifiers, and demonstratives, 'Very small young man, this boy' to show superiority and demonstrate his relative power over the traditional ruler. In African culture, a traditional ruler is never referred to as a small boy irrespective of his age. Therefore, referring to him in such a manner is a strategy to reduce the status of the traditional ruler. Statement 4 illustrates the employment of Mey's reference by Governor Wike to refer to events that took place years ago when they were in school that the traditional ruler was running around them and going on errands for them. A study of statement 3, reveals that the Governor excluded the traditional ruler from the activity by talking about him in the third person even when the traditional ruler is seated in the same hall with him. Culpeper (2010, p. 3241) explains that talking about people in the third person whilst they are standing next to you is an exclusion impoliteness strategy.

Text 3: Withhold Politeness /Unconcerned, Uninterested and Unsympathetic
(Culpeper, 1996, 2005, 2016)

Punch Newspaper of April 18, 2020 with the caption, 'Kano State Governor Umar Ganduje, has Sacked the State's Commissioner for Works and Infrastructure, Mu'azu Magaji, for Celebrating the Death of the Chief of Staff to the President, Abba Kyari

The writer reports that Mu'azu Magaji, the Commissioner for Works and Infrastructure in Kano State wrote in English and Hausa and states as follows:

"Win win... Nigeria is free and Abba Kyari ya mutu a cikin annoba... Mutuwar shahada in Har da Imani mutum ya cika".

The translation of the post reads:

6. "Win win... Nigeria is free and Abba Kyari has died in the epidemic... the death of a martyr... if he is a believer, the person is complete."

In African socio-cultural milieu, it is common knowledge that appalling remarks are not used about the dead. The ideology is that it is inhumane to rejoice or gloat at the death of another person irrespective of ethnic, cultural, religious or political differences. Hence, Africans show sympathy and concern about the dead. Any display or use of uncanny remarks about the dead is seen as showing apathy and withholding politeness. For Brown and Levinson (1987, p.5), politeness has to be communicated where it should be and absence of it is seen as an impolite attitude. Hence, Culpeper (1996, 2005, 2011), considers uncomplimentary remarks about the dead or refusal to show sympathy as an impoliteness strategy.

In the excerpt, Honourable Magaji has deployed unpleasant remarks to mock a dead person.

Drawing inference from Mey's pragmeme, Honourable Magaji has used the statement to refer to the dead, perhaps, as someone who has made some contributions to the present-day administration, and which he considers as not favourable to the nation. Hence, the use of

statement 6: *'Win win... Nigeria is free and Abba Kyari has died in the epidemic.'*

Text 4: Frightening/Threatening–Instill a Belief that Action Detrimental to the Other will Occur (Culpeper, 1996, 2005, 2016)

***The Daily Trust* of February 7, 2019 with the caption, 'Foreigners Planning to Interfere in Nigeria's Election will leave in Body Bags'**

The writer presents the governor of Kaduna State Malam Nasir El-rufai to have warned foreigners against interfering in the 2019 election in Nigeria. The reporter credits the following expressions to the Governor:

7. "Those that are calling for anyone to come and intervene in Nigeria, we are waiting for the person that would come and intervene, they would go back in body bags".

The reporter allegedly reports Governor El-rufai of Kaduna State to have threatened and frightened foreign election observers during the 2019 election that they will leave in body bags. The use of 'body bags', a bag used in wrapping corpses is symbolic. The inference from the statement is that any foreigner who interferes with the election either as a monitor or observer may lose his/her life in the process. From the expression, the author inferentially presents Governor El-rufai as a man who is war ready and all out to win the election. Both the Governor and the foreigners share the situational knowledge of the violent nature of elections in Nigeria. By issuing such threats to foreign observers that an action detrimental will happen to them, the governor has encroached into the freedom of their action.

Text 5: Explicitly Associate the other with a Negative Aspect – Personalize, Use the Pronouns 'I' and 'You' (Culpeper, 1996, 2005, 2016)

***The Guardian Newspaper* of 1 February, 2019 with the Caption, 'Obiano Should Apologise to Nwodo over Unguarded Comment'**

The writer quotes Dr Ugo Patrick Ihikuna, the Plateau State President of the Izu-Umunna Cultural Association of Nigeria (IUCAN) of reacting to the statement credited to the Governor of Anambra State, Chief Dr Willie Obiano. The writer quotes Governor Obiano of using the following words on Nnia Nwodo, the President of Ohaneze and leader of Ndi Igbo:

8. "Nnia, I didn't know that you were so idiotic."

The writer presents the current Governor of Anambra State as explicitly associating the President of Ohaneze, Chief Nnia Nwodo with a negative aspect by using a personalized insulting vocative: 'you were so idiotic' to launch a direct and unmitigated attack on the face of Nwodo. According to the author, Governor Obiano did not only use the word 'idiotic' to insult the man, but employed the intensifier, 'so' to further deflate the value of Nwodo. Such employment of intensifiers does not only deflate the value of the hearer, but also, intensifies the emotional effect of the word on the hearer. Such intensifiers are effective ways of increasing the intensity of impoliteness strategy (Culpeper, 2011, P. 144). Chief Nwodo understands the intensity of the face threat but tries to minimize the employment of impoliteness in his response to the statement. So, in responding to Governor Obiano's comment, Chief Nwodo through the employment of the verb, 'shocked' and the use of the modal, 'can' minimized the expression of impolite beliefs to maintain Governor Obiano's face as shown in the excerpt:

9. "I am shocked that you can be so insolent."

The writer of the article quotes Chief Nwodo of reminding Governor Obiano of what he (Chief Nwodo) has done previously for him and which gave him relevance in the Nigerian political scene (Mey's relevance). In statement 11, the reporter presents Chief Nwodo giving instances of his assistance to Governor Obiano to show that he does not deserve to be called 'an idiot'. Nwodo was quoted to have said:

10. "History will judge who among us is idiotic. If standing with the popular wish of Ndigbo makes me idiotic, I am happy to be called an idiot."

11. "I am sure that I was not idiotic when I addressed your State House of Assembly asking Anambra people to disregard Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB)'s boycott order of your election, nor was I idiotic when I pleaded with the Commander-in-Chief to restore your security details."

By reeling out what he has done for the governor to support his administration and for telling him that history will judge who is idiotic, Chief Nwodo has put Governor Obiano's indebtedness on record.

Text 6: Condescend, Scorn or Ridicule
(Culpeper, 1996, 2005, 2016)

***The Punch Newspaper* of 5 December, 2018 with the Caption: 'Obasanjo Inviting God's Punishment for Supporting Atiku' –Oshiomole**

Oshiomole was quoted by the writer to have used certain expressions to ridicule the former President Olusegun Obasanjo for expressing support for his Ex-Vice-president, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar in his presidential ambition. The

writer quotes Oshiomole to have used these expressions:

12. "People are now going to look at the character. Nobody has ever say (sic) Buhari is a thief. But who said the other person is a thief? It was his boss."

13. "When you are working with me and I say you are a thief, God will punish me if I support you'. And when you are confused because your supply line has been chopped off, you now turned around to support the same person."

14. "That God that you called with your mouth to punish you if you support the person is about to go to work."

15. "And HE will go to work in February and HE will punish him thoroughly and the person he is supporting, in favour of Nigeria."

In statement 12, the former Governor of Edo State, Honourable Adams Oshiomole, in expressing support for his party's presidential candidate, President Buhari, deployed ridicule to mock and deride his opponent, Alhaji Abubakar. The former National Chairman of the ruling party, All Progressive Congress (APC) indirectly refers to Alhaji Abubakar as a thief who does not have any credibility to rule Nigeria. He further buttresses his point that President Buhari is a better option than his opponent in terms of credibility by mentioning that nobody has ever called the President a thief. He further alleges that Alhaji Abubakar was called a thief by his former boss, Ex-President Obasanjo who worked with him when he was the president of Nigeria and Alhaji Abubakar was the vice-president. Drawing insights from Mey's reference, Honourable Oshiomole's reference to Ex-President Obasanjo and Alhaji Abubakar's administration means that for the Ex-President to have called him a thief means that he was

talking out of his experience as Alhaji Abubakar's boss. The writer presents the former National Chairman of the ruling party saying scornfully in statement 12 that voters will now look at the character and integrity of the contestants to decide who is more eligible before voting for them. In statements 13 and 14, Honourable Oshiomole used ridicule to mock Obasanjo further for supporting his former vice-president whom he had earlier described as a thief. According to the writer, quoting Honourable Oshiomole, Ex-President Obasanjo has turned around to support his former vice-president because 'his supply line has been chopped off' and he turns around to speak well of the same person he had publicly criticized as being not qualified to rule the nation.

It would be recalled that the administration of Ex-President Obasanjo and Alhaji Abubakar was marked with so much rancor, animosity, ill-will and conflict of interest to the point that it was reported that the former president swore that he would never allow his vice-president to become the president of Nigeria. Then, turning around to support him again seems a betrayal and renegeing on one's words. Still deploying ridicule and frightening that an action detrimental will happen in statement 15, Oshiomole derided Ex-President Obasanjo by telling him that God whom he called with his mouth to punish him if he ever supports the former vice-president is about to punish him and that he will punish him thoroughly with the person he is supporting in favour of Nigeria in February when the election will be held.

Text 7: Do not Treat the Other Seriously / Belittle the Other (Use Diminutives)
(Culpeper, 1996, 2005, 2016)

***The Premium Times* of April 19, 2018 with the caption, 'Buhari Criticizes Nigerian Youths as Lazy, Uneducated'**

The writer reports President Muhammadu Buhari of criticizing the attitude of some Nigerian youths, 'saying they were only hustling to get on the gravy train' The reporter further credits the following statements to the President:

16. "More than 60 percent of the population is below 30, a lot of them haven't been to school and they are claiming that Nigeria is an oil producing country; therefore, they should sit and do nothing, and get housing, healthcare, education free."

The statement number 16 is credited to President Buhari during a panel appearance with world leaders at the Commonwealth Business Forum in London.

The reporter gives details of Nigerian President, Mohammed Buhari using belittling comments on Nigerian youths by referring to them as 'lazy and uneducated youths' who are not ready to do anything but wanted to get everything free. The President saying this to world leaders obviously projects Nigerian youths as an unserious set of people, and who should not be treated seriously. By belittling and describing them as 'lazy and uneducated youths', the President has not only belittled the youths but has also attacked their freedom of action. The meaning of the Presidents' utterance and the true reality of youths in the nation appears contradictory. Such is what Mey's pragmatic act captures as a 'metapragmatic joker' (Mey, 2001, p. 222)

Text 8: Be disinterested, Unconcerned, Unsympathetic (Culpeper, 1996, 2005, 2016)

The Daily Post of January 19, 2018 with the caption, 'God Created Herdsmen to value Cows more than their Own Lives'

The member representing Dukku/Nafada Federal Constituency of Gombe State, Honourable Aishatu Jibril Dukku has been reported to be in support of the Fulani herdsmen. The writer reports that Honourable Dukku during the plenary on herdsmen attacks did make the following statements:

17. "Fulani herdsmen value lives of their cows more than their own lives."
18. "Too much consumption of maggi has made Nigerians so impatient to their problems."
19. "You can't sit down and make conclusions on herdsmen. Yes, they value life of their cows more than even their own lives because that is how God has created them."
20. "Nigerians have become so edgy these days, maybe because of the food we eat, maybe because we eat too much of maggi."
21. "We have become so impatient that's why we don't listen to each other."
22. "We don't want to proffer solution that will be workable to our country."

Nigerians have witnessed spate of killings from herdsmen in the country. For instance, *The Buzz Online Newspaper* has it that from 1996 to 2006, 121 persons lost their lives in Bauchi and Gombe states as a result of conflicts between herdsmen and farmers. In January 2016, about ten Agatu communities in Benue State suffered unprecedented hardship in the hands of Fulani herdsmen where about five hundred villagers lost their lives. In April 2016, scores feared death in Uzo-Uwani in Enugu State as a result of Fulani herdsmen attack. Many communities in Nigeria have had

their unpalatable share of killings from the Fulani herdsmen attack. A Sahara reporter on 9 April, 2018 has it that over two thousand Nigerians have been killed in farmers-Fulani herdsmen attack. Despite the worrisome situation, the law maker is quoted to have used statements 17 and 19, 'Yes, they value life of their cows more than even their own lives because that is how God has created them.'

Through the language use, Culpeper's strategy of being disinterested, unsympathetic and unconcerned is observed. Moreover, the unsympathetic and unconcerned strategy is further reflected in statements 18 and 20 that: 'Nigerians have become so over-sensitive these days, maybe because of the food we eat or maybe because we eat too much of maggi. The reference to maggi, an ingredient used in cooking is figurative. It is believed that maggi contains Monosodium glutamate (MSG) as an active ingredient and too much consumption of it may not be too healthy. According to the reporter quoting the law maker, Nigerians' consumption of too much maggi has affected their sensibilities and accounts for their condemnation of the activities of the Fulani herdsman. With the statement credited to her, the law maker has ridiculed the hearers and emphasized her relative power. Again, the use of inclusive 'we' does not represent things that are owed or owed together in the real sense but has been used in a rather ideological sense. The employment of inclusive 'we' in sentences 21 and 22 to include herself as a member of the National Assembly looks sincere on the surface but has an underlying impoliteness overtone. Yule (2002, p.61) understands such use of inclusive pronouns when he explains that 'we' is used when speakers want to adopt a face-saving act as noticed in the lawmaker's language use. With the strategy she has

strengthened the social bond between herself and other law makers but has attacked their faces as intended.

Text 9: Call the Other Names – Use Derogatory Nominations (Culpeper, 1996, 2005, 2016) *The Sun Newspaper of 17 October, 2017 with the Caption, 'I will Vote Willie Obiano'*

The reporter described a scenario where Honourable Nwoye was quoted to have used these words:

23. "Willie Obiano is a thief," shouted Tony Nwoye."
24. "His wife also is a thief." He mouthed this abuse for the second and third times.

In sentence 23, the writer quotes Honourable Nwoye, a former gubernatorial aspirant in Anambra State as expressing vote of no confidence on the Governor of Anambra State, Chief Willie.

Obiano. According to the writer, Nwoye will not cast his vote in favour of Governor Obiano in his second term bid as the Governor of Anambra State. In Sentences 23 and 24, Honourable Nwoye associates the Governor and his wife with negative aspects by calling them thieves. He describes the duo as thieves and people who lack the moral pedigree to rule the state, and as such, are not qualified to earn his vote. Mey's inference is observed when Honourable Nwoye refers to the activities of the Governor during his first tenure where it is alleged that the Governor misappropriated the State's funds. The fact that Nwoye called the Governor and his wife thieves up to three times suggests that he (Nwoye) was not ready to seek redress of the hearers' faces, hence, he launched a full attack on their faces.

Text 10: Use Inappropriate Identity Markers/ Sarcasm or Mock Politeness (Culpeper, 1996, 2005, 2016)

Pulse.ng Online Newspaper of March 2, 2017 with the caption, 'You belong to the Trash Bin' Omokri tells Rotimi Amaechi

The writer reports about the verbal abuse between Mr Reno Omokri, one of the staunchest critics of the All Progressive Congress (APC) –Federal Government led administration and the Minister of Transport, Honourable Rotimi Amaechi. The statements were made when Omokri disproved the statement made by Amaechi that the Goodluck Jonathan led administration misappropriated funds meant for the country's development. In the context of exchange of words, Omokri used the following statements to describe the Honourable Minister of Transport, Mr Rotimi Amaechi:

25. 'A decorated monkey only loyal to his stomach'
26. 'Amaechi's duty post is supposed to be at the Lagos State Waste Management Authority (LAWMA)', "Rotimi Amaechi: Leave Trash for LAWMA.'
27. 'Amaechi is as irrelevant as the P in Psychology by spending his time making false allegations instead of fulfilling the mandate given him to improve Nigeria's transport infrastructure.'
28. 'Why should I respond to the trash that Rotimi Amaechi has thrown at me? Out of the fullness of the heart, a man speaks. He has trash within him so he always vomits trash.'
29. 'Rotimi Amaechi, with his pot belly and ill-fitting designer clothes is trash. My dear minister, here is the address of Lagos State Waste Management Authority, LAWMA: No. 3 Iddo - Yard, Ijora Olopa, Lagos

State. You can report for duty there since it is your natural habitat!’

In sentence 25, Mr Omokri uses some inappropriate identity negative markers to describe Honourable Amaechi. He describes Amaechi as a ‘decorated monkey who is only loyal to his stomach’. Using a past participle ‘decorated’ to qualify a monkey shows the identity he attaches to Amaechi’s personality. Ezeifeka (2018, p. 193) citing Charteris-Black, (2004), explains that metaphorical expression is ‘any word or phrase that causes semantic tension at the linguistic, cognitive and pragmatic levels, resulting in a shift in domain use’. The use of animal metaphor (a decorated monkey) as used by Mr Omokri shows a negative impression of the target it is ascribed to. The semantic tension has the capacity of building strong persuasive potential and influencing opinions and judgment. Omokri further relates Amaechi to trash in sentences 26 and 28. By associating Honourable Amaechi to trash inferentially suggests that Amaechi has nothing good to offer to the people as the minister of transport in the country. In furtherance to his perception of Honourable Amaechi as a good for nothing fellow, he refers to him as being irrelevant as ‘p’ in psychology in sentence 27. The inference from the excerpt drawing input from Mey’s pragmeme is that Amaechi has not fulfilled the mandate given to him to improve the transport infrastructure in Nigeria as the minister of transport. Mr Omokri apparently reinforces his opinion of Honourable Amaechi as trash and only loyal to his stomach by describing him further as a potbellied man in ill-fitting designer clothes in sentence 29. A critical engagement of the excerpt further reveals the employment of sarcasm. Using the honorific ‘my dear’ in sentence 29 to refer to Honourable Amaechi is a surface realization of politeness

as it was immediately followed by a statement directing the same Amaechi to the address of the agency in charge of trash in Lagos and telling him that it is his ‘natural habitat.’

Text 11: Threaten/Use taboo– Swear, or Use Abusive or Profane language

***The Premium Times* of 14 July, 2016 with the Caption: ‘Why I Abused, Threatened Tinubu’s Wife– Dino Melaye’** (Culpeper, 1996, 2005, 2016)

30. “Look, this is not Bourdillion (referring to the famous Lagos residence of Mrs Tinubu’s husband). I will beat you up, impregnate you and nothing will happen”.

In sentence 30, Senator Melaye issued a threat and employed sarcasm in his language use: ‘*I will beat you up, impregnate you and nothing will happen*’ to threaten and attack the face of a female legislator, Senator Oluremi Tinubu. By threatening a married woman, Melaye has intentionally impeded and interfered with her freedom of action and power. The sentence further shows that Senator Melaye employed taboo language. In African and in Yoruba socio-cultural context, it is a taboo for a man to tell another man’s wife that he will impregnate her when her husband is still alive. By using taboo language, Senator Melaye has not only threatened the female Senator’s positive face but has expressed strong dislike and lack of respect for her and her husband. In addition, the mentioning of Bourdillion in the sentence is symbolic. Senator Melaye implores Mey’s shared situational knowledge to refer to Bourdillion as a place where the former Governor of Lagos State, Senator Ahmed Bola Tinubu, and husband of the female Senator has his ‘own seat of government’ and, where many politicians who need political favour throng in for political assistance. By using the statement

at the floor of the Senate, Honourable Melaye implies that the senate floor is a common ground where they are all equal and none deserves respect more than the other.

Text 12: Call the Other Names– Use Derogatory Nominations (Culpeper, 1996, 2005, 2016)

According to the writer, Honourable Melaye in defense of his action and choice of language explains that his statement was because of Senator Oluremi Tinubu's utterances which he (Honourable Melaye) considers offensive and abusive. The writer quotes Melaye to have said this:

31. "For reasons only known to Senator Remi Tinubu, she got up and the first thing she said was that she was being harassed in this chamber by Senator Melaye.
32. She went ahead to say I cannot come here and be threatening senators and there was a large chorus from senators.
33. At that point, I was still calm. She got up again and said that this thug must be tamed.
34. At that point, I got up and told her that she was very stupid. The next statement from her was 'you are a dog'. She called me a dog, and when she called me a dog I stood up and reacted".

The writer presents the female Senator as quoted by Honourable Melaye to have used derogatory nominations on him. According to Senator Melaye, Senator Oluremi Tinubu referred to him as 'a thug which must be tamed' in sentence 33. By using the word, 'tamed' obviously suggests that the target (Melaye) is wild and should be tamed. Further still, Mrs Tinubu in employment of Mey's metaphor, refers to Melaye as 'a dog' in sentence 34. Obviously, the use of animal metaphor signals an impolite remark.

In African culture, reference to a dog when it is used for a person is derogatory. Leech (2014, p. 230) posits that animal metaphor can be offensive and have well-known insulting overtones when referring to a human being. Senator Melaye was also quoted to have used an abusive language on Mrs Tinubu when he told Senator Oluremi Tinubu that 'she is stupid' in sentence 34. The engagement of disparaging words by the two senators shows that impoliteness strategies can be deployed among politicians on equal power pedestal.

Conclusion

The paper has examined impoliteness strategies in language use, particularly, as it relates to the political personages in print and online popular Nigerian newspapers. The data collected were viewed through the lens of Culpeper's theory of impoliteness and Mey's textual aspects of pragmatic acts. The study observes that the political personages employ threats, taboo, swear, profane language, sarcasm, insults, name-calling, derogatory nominations, ridicule, instilling of fear that action detrimental to the other will occur, scorn, use of metaphor and animal metaphor as impoliteness strategies. In addition, strategies like withholding of politeness, putting the other's indebtedness on record, using inappropriate identity markers, belittling others through the use of diminutives, showing unconcerned behaviour, being uninterested and unsympathetic, and explicitly associating others with negative aspects through personalized use of pronouns are the impoliteness strategies identified in the newspapers studied. Finally, further studies may attempt to investigate impoliteness and verbal abuse among religious personages in political discourse in online and print newspaper publications in Nigeria.

References

- Adibe, A. (2012). 'Ethnicity, hate speech and nation building'. <saharareporters.com/2012/08/26ethnicityhate-speech-and-nation-building-jideoforadibe>
- Aduradola, R.R. and Ojukwu, C.C. (2013). Language of political campaigns and politics in Nigeria. *Canadian Social Sciences* (9) 3.
- Ajayi, T.M. (2018) Impoliteness strategies in the Facebook posts of Nigerian electorates in 2019 presidential election. *Journal of Linguistics and Language in Education*, 12(1), 72–92.
- Akinrinlola, T. (2017). Impoliteness and pragmatic strategies by Goodluck Jonathan and Mohammed Buhari's 2015 campaign speeches. *Journal of West African Languages*, 4(1), 113– 127.
- Akinwotu, S.A. (2015). Vision for sustainable development: Pragmatic strategies of media political competitiveness encounter. *International Journal of Language and Literature*, 3(2), 134– 143.
- Apriliyani, V., Hamzah, M.A. and Wahyuni, D. (2019). Impoliteness strategies used by male and female haters of Habib Rizieq and Felix Siauw found in Instagram comments. *E- journal of English Language and Literature*, 8(1), 158– 167.
- Aremu, M.A. (2016). Being politically impolite: A community of practice (CofP) analysis of invective songs of western Nigerian politicians. *International Journal of Society, Culture and Language*, 4(1), 103– 116.
- Brown, P. & Levinson, S. C. (1978). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge.
- Culpeper, J. (1996). Towards an anatomy of impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 25, 349–367.
- Culpeper, J., Bousfield, D. and Wichmann, A. (2003). Impoliteness revisited: With special reference to dynamic and prosodic aspects. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 35, 1545– 79.
- Culpeper, J. (2005). Impoliteness and entertainment in the television quiz show: The weakest link. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 1, 35-72.
- Culpeper, J. (2010). Conventionalised impoliteness formulae. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 42, 3232–3245.
- Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence*. Cambridge.
- Culpeper, J. (2016). Impoliteness strategies. In A. Capone & J.L. Mey (Eds.), *Interdisciplinary Studies in Pragmatics, Culture and Society* (pp. 421– 445). Springer.
- Ezeifeka, C. (2018). *Discourse analysis: Concepts and approaches*. Awka.
- Halim, S.A. (2015). Impoliteness strategies used in a politician's Facebook. Masters dissertation, University of Malaya.
- Harris, S. (2001). Being politically impolite: Extending politeness theory to adversarial political discourse. *Discourse and Society* 12(4)
- Holmes, J. Marra, M. and Schnurr, S. (2008). Impoliteness and ethnicity: Māori and Pākehā discourse in New Zealand workplaces. *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behaviour, Culture* 4(2), 193– 219.
- Leech, G. N. (2014). *The pragmatics of politeness*. Oxford.
- Locher, M. A. and Bousfield, D. (2008). Impoliteness and power in language. In D. Bousfield and M. A. Locher (Eds.), *Impoliteness in language studies on its interplay with power in theory and practice*. (pp.1–13). Mouton de Gruyter.

- Mey, J. L. (2001). *Pragmatics: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Malden.
- Newman, S. (2004). The place of power in political discourse. *International Political Science Review*, 2 (28), 139–157.
- Nnuta, M.C. and Ezeifeke, C. (2017). Verbal hygiene and ethnic politics in Nigeria: A study of selected newspaper print and online publications. *Ogirisi: A New Journal of African Studies* ,(13), 46–69.
- Nwobia, N. E. (2016). Political manipulation in Nigerian presidential discourses. *British Journal of English Linguistics*, 4 (4), 12–23.
- Nzeakor, N .C . and Osundu, P.A . (2013). Language, a tool for conflict resolution and nation building: The Nigerian example. In K. Nwadiakor, L. Nkamigbo, C. Nweke, and N. Obi. (Eds), *Humanities and nation building* (pp 364– 379). Awka.
- Ojo, A.S. (2016). Doing politics with words: Pragmatic analysis of news report on Obasanjo and Fayose's fracas. *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 2 (4), 1027–1037.
- Yule, G. (2002). *Pragmatics*. Oxford.
- **Uche Oboko** is of the Department of English, Madonna University, Nigeria. She can be reached at: oboko@madonnauniversity.edu.ng .