

Examining (Im) Politeness in Nigerian Cyberspace: An Instagram Keyboard Warfare Experience

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Abstract

Cyberspace interactions are characterized by verbal conflicts and disagreements which usually arise from differences in opinions, backgrounds, beliefs, professions and worldviews of participants. These unfortunately, degenerate into impolite exchanges and outright verbal aggressions sometimes. Recent studies have investigated diverse linguistic behaviors in motion: issues of flaming, banter, cyber bullying and impoliteness in the Nigerian cyberspace. However, not so much study has been done in the area of exploring impoliteness in multimodal discourses. This study seeks to identify impoliteness and linguistic aggressive exchanges in a selected Nigerian social media platform- Instagram, the probable cause(s) and characteristics of such exchanges. Data was purposively selected from an Instagram blog post and 16 first line comments were also purposively selected and analysed anonymously using Culpeper (1996)'s (im)politeness super strategies. The study discovers that a face threatening act is a likely cause of linguistic impolite exchange in cyberspace interactions. And the impolite verbal exchanges analysed contain elements of appearance and body shaming, career shaming and insults. There was heavy use of Yoruba language and Nigerian Pidgin English. The study concludes that objectivity, civility and politeness can be achieved in cyberspace interactions if participants pay attention to face saving acts.

Keywords: cyberspace, cyber behavior, (im) politeness, linguistic aggression, multimodal

Introduction

The cyberspace is a beehive of activities from a cocktail of all manner of individuals. The cyberspace attracts millions of people daily, moving through pages and walls: people from different gender, exposure, tribe, political views and affiliations, educational backgrounds, and religious beliefs. Taiwo (2015) explains that: "The Internet and mobile phone have become the

major ways of socializing in the 21st century. These media act as the social lifeline for users."

The makeup of most social networking sites makes it possible for participants in cyberspace interactions to have followers- people who have viewed the participant's profile and are interested in following them up in discussions and interactions, as well as familiar persons who are part of the network

and want to continue with offline friendships and relationships online in social media spaces. An individual's followership is usually a mixture of familiar and unfamiliar people (sometimes friends of friends); it is a large network of connection.

Participants upload content- pictures, stories, opinions, news, wares, etc on their space to share with followers. It is usually at this point of content sharing that interactions are generated. Followers who share the same view with the content originator express so, and those who do not agree, or hold a different view also say so: hence disagreements are imminent in cyberspace interactions, owing to differences in views and opinions which quickly degenerate into arguments and verbal aggressions online.

The growing prevalence of impolite language use and linguistic aggression in cyberspace raises concerns about civility, constructive dialogue and the potential negative impacts of these on social cohesion. This study focuses on impoliteness in Nigerian cyberspace interactions which is often described as keyboard warfare. This warfare manifests in excessive negativity and hostility which is expressed through insults, personal attacks and the use of derogatory language. While healthy disagreement is normal in cyberspace interactions, linguistic impoliteness and verbal aggressive exchanges lead to and contribute to toxic online environments.

The objectives of this study are: to identify the nature of cyberspace interactions; explore the possible cause(s) of aggressive exchanges and examine the characteristics

of linguistic aggressive exchanges in cyber space.

Where is cyberspace?

Taiwo (2021) defines cyberspace as, 'the space or domain provided by the network of computers through satellite and telephone... where there is an interconnection of human beings through computers and telecommunication, without regard to physical geography. It is an intangible, virtual-reality domain.' Lessing (1995) explains that: 'cyberspace is a place. People live there, they experience all sort of things like they do in real space... they experience it in groups, in communities, among strangers, among people they come to know and sometimes like...' Cyberspace is a virtual place where people live in while they are 'here' (offline). They have identities, profiles, reputations they have built, friendships they have formed and ongoing relationships they keep going regularly- all these made possible by internet and technology. The most common spaces to be on the internet are the social networking sites.

INSTAGRAM: What is the social networking site about?

Hu et al (2014) describe Instagram (IG from henceforth) as the fastest growing social media application; a popular photo (video) capturing and sharing mobile application, with over 150 million registered users since its launch in October, 2010. It offers its users a unique way to post pictures and videos using their smart phones, apply 16 different manipulation tools and share them instantly on multiple platforms (e.g X).

Raine, Brenner and Purcell (2012 cited by Dajang and Pam 2021) also describe Instagram as a mobile photo (and video) capturing and sharing service which emerged as a new medium, in recent years. It provides users an instantaneous way to capture and show their life.

Moreau (2018) explains that similar to Facebook and Twitter (now X), everyone who creates an IG account has a profile and news feed. Users customize their profiles by adding their names, profile pictures, a brief bio and web link if there is any. IG is available for free on iOS and Android devices. Apart from photo taking and sharing, IG allows users to have followers. A user is able to follow any number of other users on the app, who in turn can also choose to follow the user back or not. There is a level of privacy that exists on IG that allows a user to put their account on 'private' so that only followers can view the photos and videos posted by a user; it requires permission requests and approval by the user for other users to view content. Followers interact with photos and videos by double clicking on it to like, and also comment under; Users can also tag pictures and videos to geographical locations. Other features of IG include direct messaging, which allows users to send private messages (inbox) directly to their followers or other IG users. There is also the IG stories feature that allows users to upload short videos and pictures for a brief period of time, after which they disappear. The IG social networking site provides a great platform for multimodal studies- the fusion of photos and videos together with comments to make meaning in computer mediated discourse.

Anonymity: the cyberspace 'haven'?

Linguistic aggression on the internet seems to thrive on the 'anonymous' nature of internet discourse. Robin et al (2008) point out that there is power in being anonymous in cyberspace...and in being able to harass a victim anywhere and anytime. Anonymity encourages internet users to engage in all manner of linguistic aggressions, knowing full well that they are hiding behind false identities most times and they will never be held accountable for their actions. Yous (2011) explains that the lack of physical co-presence and face to face communication has led to the existence of uncontrolled conversational strategies, the so-called flaming. Dynel (2015) expresses that: "it is widely acknowledged that Internet users' anonymity instills a sense of impunity and lack of inhibitions in them, whereby it facilitates the occurrence of impoliteness." Crystal (2011) also lends his voice on the issue of anonymity in cyberspace, saying: "The effect of anonymity on linguistic behaviour also needs to be explored. Operating behind a false persona seems to make people less inhibited: they may feel emboldened to talk more and in different ways from their real-world linguistic repertoire... There are obviously inherent risks in talking to someone we do not know, and instances of harassment, insulting or aggressive language, and subterfuge are commonplace." Some of the accounts used to perpetuate these acts are faceless (with no pictures), with fake usernames and details. However, in cases of flaming where heated arguments spring up spontaneously in discussions and degenerate into insults and linguistic violence, anonymity is rarely the

sponsor of such aggressions: participants hold sway on the fact that they are behind the keyboard and can unleash as much aggression they like and get away with it.

Who is the keyboard warrior?

‘The seemingly goldmine cyberspace has been transformed into a battle ground, wrestling ring or predator arena by the “faceless” keyboard warrior, who would detonate clusters of keyboard grenades (hurtful text messages) to their targets.’ (Cassidy et al 2009; Ghazal et al, 2017, as cited by Yusuf 2020). Keyboard warrior is a term that is used to refer to a person who uses the keyboard of a computer or a cell phone to wage “war” with another person or a group of people on the cyberspace. The keyboard serves a dual purpose for the warrior: it is used both as a weapon (for typing out the unpleasant messages) and a shield(providing cover for the warrior, giving some sort of “immunity”- creating invisibility for the warrior and making it easier to get away with the unpleasant acts).

The Urban dictionary reveals some characteristics of the keyboard warrior as follows: carries out the act with no fear of real-life repercussions; acts from a safe and removed environment; identified by unnecessary rage in their written communications and though acts tough is mostly perceived as weak. The term keyboard warrior is closely connected to aggressive people online who release hostility at the drop of a hat.

Empirical review

Linguistic aggression in cyberspace is a behaviour that can be classified as impolite.

Researchers Locher and Watts (2005) have been interested in ‘relational work’, a term they came up with to “describe the process of defining relationships in interactions.” According to them, the term “does not only refer to polite linguistic behaviour but the entire spectrum of interpersonal linguistic behaviour. The polite, refined and polished language might do a great deal for a person’s identity construction, but so does rude, impolite and aggressive language.” The idea of relational work they postulated explains that interlocutors invest ‘work’ into their ways of communicating, using various resources at their disposal e.g registers and adapting to different speech environments to achieve interactive goals and in the end this work investment is tilted towards identity creation. Whatever investment interlocutors put into their communication, the larger picture is an identity is going to be created, whether positive- when refined and polite language choices are made or negative-when rude, impolite and aggressive language is used.

The concept of relational work then suggests that interlocutors have linguistic choices to make and whatever choice they make affects their identity. In online exchanges, for instance, the choice of linguistic polite and refined language is available, and if an interlocutor decides to make rude linguistic choices, then they are deliberate about creating a negative identity.

Taiwo et al (2021) examined interactional positioning and impoliteness in Nigerian online political forums. The study shows that how people express their attitudes and dispositions to others and the signals they

give on how they wish to relate with others in discourse engagement is closely related to the extent to which impoliteness is expressed in discourse. They conclude that the disinhibition effect of online contexts makes it impossible for participants not to be impolite even when they position themselves with the right attitude. The study is in close alignment with Locher et al's (2005) study reviewed above. The two studies- Taiwo (2021) and Locher et al (2005) examined above reveal that choice is a basic ingredient in discourse engagements. This research aligns with the position of the disinhibition effect on online discourses but seeks to discover what triggers the impolite linguistic choices participants make in discourse engagements online. This study takes a different stand regarding the fact that there may be other face threatening acts that trigger impolite behaviours online; even though the inhibition on cyberspace allows for impoliteness.

Culpeper et al (2014) have also examined the relationship between impoliteness and emotions, trying to expose the different emotions experienced when interlocutors engage in impolite discussions. They opine that: "impoliteness refers to behaviours, non-verbal or verbal, which evoke particular (mental) attitudes- impoliteness concerns behaviours which evoke an impoliteness attitude, or more specifically, judgments that behavior is unexpected, unacceptable and/or unwanted. The other participant in the exchange is usually at the receiving end of the emotional suffering caused by the impolite speaker. Impoliteness is characterized usually by a cause of strong emotional reactions in those other

participants whose impoliteness attitudes have been evoked. They explained that with the notion of face, people feel bad when they lose face in interactions and they conclude that "impoliteness and emotions are intimately connected." They agree that the notion of face is strongly linked to emotions of embarrassment, hurt, and anger.

Al-Tamini (2022) studied the language of violence on social media in the Arab setting. He submits that linguistic violence is inflicted by words and it also occurs within words and that there is no distinction between language use on social media and the actual world: the antagonistic scenes on social media are part of the actual world. He explains that words used in linguistic violence on social media constitute meaning that can have physical effects on the body of recipients who receive these messages and he calls for criminalizing linguistic violence of all kinds.

Theoretical framework

This study adopts Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness theory as a framework for the analysis of data collected. Culpeper built the (im) politeness super strategies majorly on Brown and Levinson (1987)'s politeness theory. This study lays the theoretical framework foundation by first exploring the politeness theory, as a gateway to understanding the (im) politeness super strategies.

The politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987)

Politeness according to Brown and Levinson (1987) is a linguistic action which makes

communication possible between competitive parties because it neutralizes the potential for aggression in social interaction. Politeness can be communicated like any linguistic message. The politeness theory postulated by them puts to light the notion of consideration in interactions, where participants in interactions put up strategies in order to maintain cordial fellowship with each other and also to reduce conflicts as much as possible.

Politeness, according to Brown and Levinson (1987) aims at maintaining and preserving “face” in interactions. “Face”: the public self-image that every member (competent adult of a society) wants to claim for himself. Making reference to her previous works, Locher (2005) describes face as being equated with a ‘mask,’ an image a person gives him- or herself during a particular interaction, and that this face is not fixed, meaning that a person can have different faces or masks, depending on the situation and, interactants always have a face. This invariably implies that a Speaker has choices to make when appearing for an interaction, in order to ensure that face is maintained or not during an interaction.

Brown and Levinson categorized Face into two related aspects:

- (i) Negative face: basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non- distraction- i.e to freedom of action and from imposition, actions be unimpeded by others.

- (ii) Positive face: the consistent self-image or “personality” (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated or approved of) claimed by interact ants. That their wants be desirable to at least some others.

Negative face, with its derivative politeness of non-imposition, is familiar as the formal politeness that the notion ‘politeness’ immediately conjures up. But positive face, and its derivative forms of positive politeness, is less obvious. (62)

They derive the notion of face from Goffman (1967) that ties face up with notions of being embarrassed or humiliated or “losing face.” Face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost or maintained, or enhanced and must be constantly attended to in interaction. They also believe that face is vulnerable and as such, it is best that interactants: Speaker (S) and Hearer (H) maintain each other’s face. They explain that there are acts that are potentially threatening to one or both sides (positive and/ negative) of a person’s face. These acts are called face threatening acts (FTA) and any “rational agent” will seek to avoid these face-threatening acts, or will employ certain strategies to minimize the threat. (68)

The possible strategies are represented in a schema as follows:

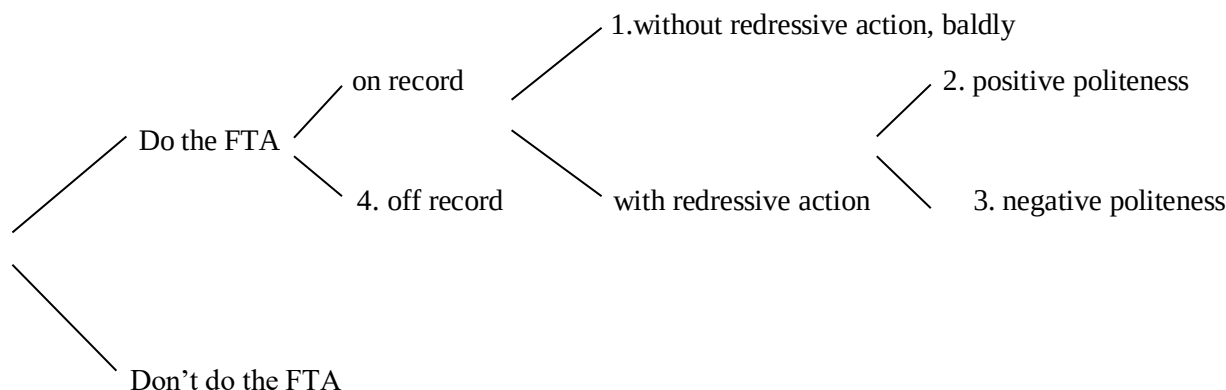


Figure1: Face threatening acts adopted from Brown and Levinson (1987)

Leech (2014) gives an overview of theories or models of politeness and explains that the Brown and Levinson strategies of politeness are ordered bottom- up according to the estimated increase of risk of face threat.

- (i) Bald on record strategy: this is the most direct strategy. Example: *Give me a lift to the train station.*
- (ii) Positive politeness: there is a use of endearment (dear) to boost the positive face of the hearer. Example: *Give me a lift to the station dear.*
- (iii) Negative politeness: this strategy aims at reducing the face threat by mitigating the force of imposition. Example: *Could you possibly give me a lift to the train station?* Here the speaker has options of expressing the request as a hypothetical question, giving the hearer the option to decline the request.
- (iv) Off record politeness: example: *Oh dear, I'm late for my train again! Or Are you going to be driving to the station, by any chance?*
This is illustrated by hints. Where the hope is hearer would give speaker a lift without having been overtly asked.

- (v) Do not do the FTA: not to ask for a lift at all, thereby avoiding all the face threat and missing the train.

The impoliteness theory (Jonathan Culpeper 1996)

Culpeper (1996) built an impoliteness (strategy) framework based on Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies. He defines impoliteness as: a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by (a group of) expectations, desires and/ or beliefs about social organization, including in particular how one person's groups' identities are mediated by others.

The impoliteness super strategies built by Culpeper are as follows:

- (i) Bald on record impoliteness: the face threatening act is direct, clear and unambiguous in circumstances where face is not relevant or minimized.
- (ii) Positive impoliteness: use of strategy to damage the addressee's positive face wants.

- (iii) Negative impoliteness: the use of strategies to damage the addressee's negative face wants.
- (iv) Sarcasm or mock politeness: FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere.
- (v) Withhold politeness.

He suggests a provisional list of some output strategies for positive and negative impoliteness, stressing that the list is not exhaustive and that the strategies depend upon an appropriate context to be impolite.

Positive impoliteness output strategies:

Ignore, snub the other - fail to acknowledge the other's presence. Exclude the other from an activity Disassociate from the other - for example, deny association or common ground with the other; avoid sitting together. Be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic Use inappropriate identity markers - for example, use title and surname when a close relationship pertains, or a nickname when a distant relationship pertains. Use obscure or secretive language - for example, mystify the other with jargon, or use a code known to others in the group, but not the target. Seek disagreement - select a sensitive topic.

Make the other feel uncomfortable - for example, do not avoid silence, joke, or use small talk. Use taboo words - swear, or use abusive or profane language. Call the other names - use derogatory nominations. Etc.

Negative impoliteness output strategies:

Frighten - instill a belief that action detrimental to the other will occur. Condescend, scorn or ridicule - emphasize

your relative power. Be contemptuous. Do not treat the other seriously. Belittle the other (e.g. use diminutives). Invade the other's space - literally (e.g. position yourself closer to the other than the relationship permits) or metaphorically (e.g. ask for or speak about information which is too intimate given the relationship). Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect - personalize, use the pronouns 'I' and 'you'. Put the other's indebtedness on record etc'(358)

This study adopts Culpeper's impoliteness theory as a framework for the analysis of data collected.

Methodology

The data for this study is an Instagram (IG hereafter) public post created on the 13th of December, 2020 by a popular Nigerian Blogger Linda Ikeji L.I (the initials will be used interchangeably with the 'author' hereafter). Data is an analysis of comments made by IG users in response to a video posted by Cindy Sanyu a Ugandan musician. 16 first line comments were selected. The blog post was purposively selected for the study because it contained linguistic elements of impoliteness and verbal aggressive exchanges. The 16 comments selected which contain impolite elements will be grouped into 4 categories and analysed anonymously using Culpepper's (1996) (im) politeness super strategies.

Data presentation

L.I reported an incident (Fig 1) of a Nigerian singer: Omah Lay (O.L hereafter)

who held an illegal music concert in a province in Uganda during the COVID 19 lockdown, previous days earlier. The concert attracted crowds of people and violated the COVID 19 protocols put in place by the Ugandan government at the time. O.L and his co- convener were

arrested by the Ugandan government, arraigned in court and charged with ‘doing

acts that are likely to cause the spread of COVID 19. They were later released and sent home via the intervention of the Nigerian embassy and the chairman/ CEO Nigerians in Diaspora commission.



Fig2: Nigerian singer, Omah Lay

A Ugandan musician and celebrity, Cindy Sanyu made a video in response to the incident shortly afterwards in her car as shown in Fig.3, which she shared on her IG page; in that video, she called the Nigerian artiste an ‘idiot’ for posting about his ‘successful’ concert online while her colleagues are starving and broke amid COVID 19 lockdown that had restricted their shows and invariably affected their means of livelihood. Cindy expressed seemingly genuine concerns about the hardships Ugandan artists and performers were going through during the COVID 19



Fig 3: Ugandan musician and celebrity

lockdown, but she employed positive impoliteness strategy when she sought disagreement, by selecting a sensitive topic of challenging the government of Uganda for allowing a foreigner hold a concert during the lockdown. She also used the positive impoliteness strategy of name calling- using a derogatory nomination ‘idiot’ to describe the foreign musician.

Cindy Sanyo’s video was reposted by L. I (Fig 3) on her public page and some Nigerians were provoked; the video had 198, 307 views. L.I also shared the

Ugandan singer's IG handle and shortly afterwards, the 'keyboard warriors' from Nigeria- Nigerian musicians, celebrities, IG users and 'patriotic Nigerians' visited the page to unleash linguistic aggression to counter attack- express their displeasure for the insult. The Nigerians employed negative impoliteness strategy, of invasion of the 'other's space', by visiting Cindy's IG page to condescend, scorn and ridicule her in retaliation.

Cindy performed an act that threatened the face of the Nigerian musician and his national identity. That act of 'impoliteness' was what sparked off the 'keyboard war' that unleashed negative linguistic aggressions. A face threatening act is a likely cause of aggressive and impolite linguistic exchanges in Cyber space (study objective 2).

Discussion of Findings

The qualitative analysis contains a video (the original post by the Ugandan musician), shared by L.I on IG, pictures (L.I's report on O.L) and verbal representations (the comments); it is multimodal. Comments were retrieved manually, not using any application. The comments- 16 in total, accessed and anonymously analyzed are 'first order' comments, that is, initial comments and not replies to comments. The time frame of this analysis is 6months after the original post was created with comments being made few hours after the post was initially made. The post author participated by giving the video caption.

Most of the commenters took the insult by the Ugandan musician seriously and felt the face of the Nigerian music industry- 'the giant' of Africa and a country endowed with musicians who are globally recognized was being threatened by a Ugandan artiste, whom they felt was no match to her Nigerian colleagues in the music industry; most of the comments were aggressive in nature while some just expressed amusement at the show of solidarity by Nigerians to one of their own; others expressed surprise at not even knowing the Ugandan musician and considered her not important enough and thereby not wanting to make her significant in celebrity matters. Aggressive comments were purposively selected, in order to analyze their characteristics.

The following sub-sections will illustrate the characteristics of the linguistic impoliteness and verbal aggression the IG users (keyboard warriors) employed in the 'keyboard warfare (study objective 3) lexical items and phrases conveying impoliteness have been underlined in each extract:

1. Appearance and bodyshaming:

some of the comments debased appearance and body to reduce the poster's value, by insulting her in regards to her body and how she looks.

(i) A.P (Female): sponge wig... u want to fly (19hours, 2205 likes, 165 replies)

(ii)T.O (Female): see her sponge wig (7hrs 567likes 17replies)

(iii) S.G (Female): Aunty ode (fool)... old mama, olosho(prostitute) with your leg like who

carry yam. (7hrs 588likes 35 replies)

(iv) D.X (Female): you go dey jam talk abi? With your 5k make up (7hrs 73 likes 15 replies)

(v) T.E (Male): BOMBOCLAT WHAT ARE YOU WEARING? No swag!! Jealousy will not kill you. #FreeOmalay #FreeTems (6h. 2983 likes 351 replies)

All the examples above refer to C.S's appearance and body feature. They express negative evaluation of her hair and body. 'Sponge wig' (i, ii & v) depict that the wig is ugly and of low quality. Sponge – an object commonly used for washing plates or bathing is used as a metaphor to describe her wig. '5k makeup' (iii) comment evaluates her facial makeup and dressing, insinuating they are cheap and not befitting for a supposed celebrity. 'Yam leg' (iv) makes reference to her body part-leg- describing her leg as yam, a derogatory remark about a person's body part. The comments here employed positive impoliteness output strategies of using taboo words- swear, abusive and profane language and name calling.

2. **Career shaming:** some of the comments attacked career and deliberately make points to express lack of progress or total failure in that regard, undermining the poster's years of performance and creative input in the music industry.

(i) I.F (Male): see upcoming artists for 15 years. (18hrs 1239 likes)

(ii) D.D (Female): low budget Celine Dion... (18hrs 696 likes 104 replies)

(iii) E.G (Male): Omo just leave music. What's this? Focus on another career path werey

(mad woman) (18 hrs 140 likes 16replies)

(iv) A.K (Male): see where the mumu(fool) dey do concert with 38 people, Buhari sef get fans you Your song no even sweet na why una dey jealous the glorious kids.(7hrs 66 likes 16 replies)

(v) S.I (Female): Deadbeat artist... wtf are you singing? (7h 482likes 16replies)

The comments above make snide, questioning remarks about C.S's music career. The comments make it clear that she is not good at what she does, she has not excelled in the music industry, and her fan base is poor, suggesting she changes her path to something. The comments employ the negative impoliteness output strategies of condescending, ridiculing and belittling the poster's music career.

3. **Counter Attack On Country:** some of the comments were made to save the face of the country(Nigeria) that was perceived attacked by a Ugandan. Attacking the poster's country, not her post.

(i) A.M (Male): Uganda and Nigeria are not mates oo (7hrs 302 likes 23 replies)

(ii) J.D (Female): Just one person will buy your whole country, we putting

y'all on the map and you're saying shit, my last born can't even drive that kinda car your driving lmao. Y'all so local. (7hrs 142 likes 5 replies)

(iii) I.G (Female): what was that nonsense video you did about foreign artist coming to Uganda? (8hrs 1255 likes 4 replies)

(iii) M.T (Male): @omah_lay is bigger than whatever you could achieve in life. (7hrs 125 likes 4 replies)

These comments were aimed at stating that Nigeria is bigger and better and there is no basis for comparison in terms of size and achievements, especially in the music and entertainment industry. The comments employ the negative politeness output strategies of condescending the poster's country and belittling through the use of diminutives.

4. **Insult:** some of the comments are derogatory; the use of insulting words- most of which are in Yoruba language, addressed directly at the poster.

(i) B.C (Female): Oponu (useless person), oloshi (tout), oloriburuku (someone with bad luck) agbaya (big for nothing) (7hrs 247 likes 80 replies)

(ii) ZZ (Faceless): oloriburuku (someone with bad luck) omoale (bastard) (7hrs 322likes 4 replies)

(iii) BLV (Male): your papa and mama join (7hrs 136likes 50 replies)

(iv) XS (Male): you don't have sense... (1hr 482 likes 16replies)

(v) D.C (Faceless): Olosho (prostitute) OMOALE (bastard)!! Razooo(18hrs 1225likes 46 replies)

(vi) F.K (Female): See this old foolish thing oh (18hrs 350likes 3replies)

These derogatory and insulting comments were aimed at the poster directly (i, ii, v &vi) and also make reference to her parents (v). Comment (iv& vi) made reference to the poster's intelligence, suggesting that she is not a sensible person. In all the comments in this section, the individuals withhold politeness totally; they also engage the positive impoliteness output strategy through the use of obscure and secretive language (Yoruba) that is not known to the target, and also the use of swear abusive and profane language as well as name calling.

Unlike in other sections, section 3 - 'counter attack on country' reveals that there are some comments (ii and v) made with IG accounts without pictures(faceless); this suggests that the accounts were probably created just to engage in this 'keyboard warfare' and the users were being deliberate about their anonymity.

There is a heavy use of Nigerian Pidgin English and Yoruba Language, which is ironic because the poster being attacked is neither Yoruba nor a Nigerian, the comments did not seem to care about that but just wanted to aggressively counter attack the poster for attacking the face of a Nigerian musician.

Conclusion

“Cyberspace is an argumentative place where people argue passionately, creatively and compulsively.” Taiwo et al (2018). Since the cyberspace has become very volatile, with a lot of ‘land mines’- active and ready to explode, how then should participants “dress” for cyberspace appearances? Officially, or Spartan-armour bearing style all charged up and ready for the unpredictable? It is worth noting that participants in cyberspace interactions come mostly readily equipped for an exchange, or learn overtime to fight; not a fist fight here, but a linguistic fight: a fight of words.

Cyber space interactions have birthed friendships, business affiliations, romantic relationships and even marriages and have also potentially bred battle grounds for aggressions. Even though anonymity can be regarded as a second nature of cyber space interactions, it is left for participants to be deliberate in their linguistic choices, to ensure that they save face during interactions and also maintain positive self-image on cyber space. Objectivity, balanced thoughts, civility, politeness, harmony and unity can be achieved on cyberspace if participants pay attention to face saving acts. Learning to ignore divergent views if participants are unable to engage cordially will help maintain “peace” in the cyber space.

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