Research Article

Beyond Politeness and The Rhetoric of Speech Acts: The Igbo Appraisal

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ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the concept of politeness within the linguistic and cultural framework of the Igbo people in Nigeria, challenging the universality of existing politeness theories such as those proposed by Brown and Levinson. By integrating an extensive review of literature with empirical insights, the study examines how speech acts—specifically requests, reprimands, apologies, offers, and thanks—are embedded in and influenced by the unique social and cultural milieu of the Igbo. The paper juxtapose3s the Igbo practices against standard politeness theories, revealing significant deviations that underscore the cultural specificity of politeness strategies. Politeness in Igbo interaction is characterized by a strong community orientation, which contrasts sharply with the individualistic approach often observed in Western contexts. This orientation influences the performance of speech acts, where actions such as making requests or issuing reprimands are governed by communal norms rather than individual autonomy. The study highlights how Igbo speech acts frequently prioritize group harmony and social solidarity, challenging the notion of 'face' as a predominantly individualistic pursuit. Furthermore, the paper critiques the application of universal politeness strategies across diverse cultures, arguing that the Igbo example illustrates the need for a more nuanced understanding of politeness that incorporates cultural variances. Through a methodological blend of discourse analysis and sociolinguistic inquiry, the research not only contributes to the broader understanding of politeness within African contexts but also invites reevaluation of politeness theory as a whole. The findings suggest that while some elements of established politeness theories can be observed in Igbo interactions, there are profound cultural adaptations that necessitate modifications to these theories to accommodate non-Western, communal-oriented perspectives on politeness, face, and imposition. This study serves as a critical reminder of the rich, varied ways in which human societies understand and navigate social interactions.

Keywords: Politeness, Igbo, Culture, Native speaker, Face, Imposition, Conversation, Speech acts

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The ability of the interactant to hold a conversation while adhering to social and cultural conventions that promote smooth communication is highlighted by politeness. Afolayan (1974) defined politeness as a component of group conduct, often a symbol of refinement that typically categorizes individuals on the basis of good manners and elegance. This groundbreaking study established the standard for additional research in this area in Africa and beyond. As a speech strategy, politeness emphasizes the importance of using words or utterances that are not meant to offend or be perceived as impolite by the person being addressed. Similar to this, Akpan (2003) defined politeness as a social behavior feature that is vital to the harmonious coexistence of members and outsiders in a certain community and is primarily characterized by graciousness and civility of speech to express thoughts and subsequently elicit the desired reaction. That is, interactants make an effort to uphold a positive view of themselves by acting responsibly toward

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others in the hopes of receiving the same treatment eventually. On the other hand, Nwoye (1992) defined politeness as an ongoing system and predicted that people who participate in speech are generally aware of and expected to behave in accordance with socially obligatory and acceptable rules of behavior. According to Nwoye, acting politely is more about adhering to social and cultural norms and expectations than it is about trying to cheer someone up or make them feel better. This means that as long as it adheres to the established standards of decent behavior, conversation is a necessary part of daily life and should not always be dependent on the other person's feelings. Thus, politeness is measured by conversational actions including greetings, offerings, apologies, requests, praise, criticism, etc.

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The desire to correct or mitigate offense, which frequently occurs in speech circumstances between interlocutors involving acts that are thought to either annoy or even violate the addressee's face wants, is evaluated by Brown and Levinson's 1978 theory of politeness. These actions that are offensive or go against discourse norms and that the addressee disapproves of are referred to by Brown and Levinson as "Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)". Three basic aspects of this approach are face, face-threatening acts, and politeness tactics. The theory emphasizes the requirement of preserving face with your hearer, refraining from verbal acts of communication that can possibly impose on their face, and finding ways to continue engagement by implementing politeness methods meant to minimize the imposition of the hearer's demands on their face. The authors state that there is a gradient in the level of politeness represented in the following five strategies which are assumed to work well if considered in interaction : (1) Bald on record; (2) Positive politeness; (3) Negative politeness; (4) Indirectness; and (5) Do not do the FTA. In any case, as speakers move up the ladder of strategies from 1 to 5, where 1 is the slightest of the politeness strategies and 5 is the most polite of the strategies, the assessment of the possible influence of a speech is stronger. The idea also implies that these redressive action strategies are primarily accomplished by keeping an eye on three key factors: (i) Social distance (D), which emphasizes how familiar people are with one another; (ii) Sensitivity to the degree of imposition (R), which highlights the interactant's reaction to the degree of infraction, and (iii) Relative power and status of participants (P), which highlights the social hierarchy, position, rank, or class of the speakers. According to the aforementioned hypothesis, certain activities in human relationships are understood to be somewhat unacceptable to the person being addressed, even in situations where they are necessary to be said. Put differently, those who are having discussions or dialogues should use conversational strategies to minimize or avoid imposing themselves.

2.2 LINGUISTIC POLITENESS

Thijitang argues that people should ensure that their needs and identities, as well as those of others, are fully acknowledged, preserved, and enhanced because the choice of words in interaction are influenced by the relationship that exist among interactants. Linguistic politeness provides an explanation of the factors that influence communication, interpersonal relationships, and language use. It involves employing techniques to maintain frictionless social contact. Similar to Hudson's (1996) face theory, it emphasizes the importance of treating people the way that one would like to be treated. Although there are various theories regarding linguistic politeness, the majority of them share common descriptive principles (Sifianou, 39). The most important theory on politeness otherwise termed courtesy among them is the face theory put forth by Brown and Levinson (65). In the analysis of speech acts, it remains a key component in the field (Ji, 1059–1062). Because research particularly speech acts and politeness studies are not done in isolation for reasons of culture diversity and language barrier, and for continuity, the methodologies applied as well as its translation to actual practice, inform this review which does not intend to minimize the significance of the prior research. In addition, the current study is driven by the need to further strengthen the

research trend of the culture-specificity of politeness within the complex world of human interaction which had earlier been controvertibly tagged universal with the Igbo as a focal point. In order to reduce the impact of individual bias, the study shall investigate already existing evidence-based research by triangulation of works (single-language, inter-language and cross-cultural) from various cultures of the world to evaluate reported interactional structure, meaning, interpretation and effect, of utterances in daily routine conversation.

2.3 THE IGBO CULTURE

The inhabitants of the southern region of Nigeria are known as the Igbo. They are a socioculturally varied community with one universal language, Igbo, and a variety of distinct but mutually understandable dialects. Tracing their ancestry is not precisely an easy task. The intricate rituals, traditions, and cultures that define their way of life are deeply ingrained in them as a people. Once more, they are an extremely resourceful, gregarious, friendly, resilient, and strongly group-oriented sect. Uchendu (1965) makes the following claims about Igbo hospitality and sociability and for him, Igbo hospitality, which is loosely translated as cooperation, is conventional and hinged on the reciprocity principle, a belief system based on shared concessions wherein an act of kindness or good deeds is accepted as a sign of good neighborliness and congeniality. Stated differently, these deeds of generosity demonstrate that reciprocal compromises are necessary for living in a society, rather than being an act for the privileged towards the less privileged or vice versa. In traditional Igbo society, eldership is also highly valued, and achievement is a sign of fulfilment and a crucial marker of societal acceptance. Nwoye (1989, 1992) asserts that because Igbo society is classless, there are statistically less linguistic forms in her language that show class stratification that are indicative of reverence and expressions of personal identity or designation. Additionally, Nwoye characterizes Igbo civilization as verbal, with words as key players in the transmission of the Igbo history and culture. Moreover, the Igbo stand out as a people who not only care about one another's well-being but also act as brothers' keepers due to their communal lifestyle, pursuit of inclusivity and cohesion, and utmost value for brotherhood. This is the reason their tie and strength, which are mostly represented in their tongue and word choice, transcend the majority of the rules and guidelines that are thought to regulate speech. The egalitarian Igbo society, as eloquently put forth by Nwoye (1992), is profoundly embedded in mutual kindness, cordial warmth, and unquantifiable reciprocal concession as the kernel for her togetherness; which means prioritizing the wants and needs of the group above those of the individual - her oneness. This further explains how their harmonious coexistence as Igbo makes speech acts like requests, offers, criticism, apologies, gratitude, and reprimands possible because they consistently neither endanger the speaker's face nor place an obligation on the hearer.

2.3.1 The Igbo and Reprimand
Reprimanding is commonplace in the gregarious Igbo culture because, in addition to feeling free to ask for assistance or feel obliged to do so, people also reprimand when someone behaves inappropriately or says something inappropriate during a human interaction with the intention of correcting wrongdoing. Reprimands in Igbo culture can be subtle rather than overt, depending on the offense and the circumstances, according to Nwoye's 1992 recounting of such incidents. The most significant Igbo belief regarding reprimands is that they are typically the result of good intentions to improve a difficult situation for everyone involved, which also explains why, in some instances, gratitude is typically shown in return. In the Igbo culture, reprimands can result from a variety of situations, including: vilification, calumny, depravity, breaking a promise, verbal attack, psychic aggression, and unwarranted pestering, provocation, contravention of regulations, noncompliance, obstinacy, deliberate error, unruliness, defiance, recklessness, and general disruptive behaviour/delinquency. Nwoye did point out that reprimands can be carried out through the use of both the directness and the indirectness technique, but that any attempt to purposefully

substitute one strategy for the other given the clear circumstances surrounding the pursuit of restitution would inevitably result in unintended/unforeseen ugly consequences.

Garcia 1996 whose groundbreaking study on the speech act of reprimanding paved way for additional research in the field examined Peruvian Spanish speakers' role-play exchanges in two scenarios that were typical of a manager-subordinate relationship in the reprimand discourse. The results of the study showed that while reprimanding, individuals preferred solidarity above deference and politeness techniques. However, it was discovered that individuals preferred deference over solidarity etiquette techniques in response to rebuke. The study essentially demonstrated that there were two dimensions to the tactics used for the act of reprimand and response to reprimand. Also, in a similar cross-cultural study, Garcia (2004a), two role-plays with an invariant interactant was used to compare the politeness tactics of reprimands and how to respond to them for Spanish speakers from Peru and Venezuela. The results indicated that, in light of the status symbol index, the groups were more likely to use direct tactics that put their own bad reputations in jeopardy, even though Venezuelans seemed more gregarious when giving and receiving criticism. Again, Garcia (2004b) studied two asymmetrical role-play exchanges between Argentinean Spanish speakers on reprimand and responding to reprimand. The study's findings demonstrated that although males favoured to coerce their interlocutors, females employed negative politeness methods by employing more mitigators to gain their permission. Additionally, it was shown that Argentineans chose to threaten both their positive and negative faces more than their interlocutor's in response to reprimand. In contrast, subjects where more inclined to threaten their own face while protecting their interlocutor's in this scenario. The study came to the conclusion that status symbol and unfamiliarity characteristics were not disqualifying criteria in the speech act of reprimand within the cultural context of the encounters. Similarly, Garcia (2009), using Spencer-Oatey's rapport management approach, looked at intralingual pragmatic variance in the performance of reprimand in Spanish among Peruvian, Venezuelan, and Argentinean individuals. The findings indicated that while all three groups valued having their needs acknowledged, there were still significant differences between them in terms of the observable responses because Argentineans had a rapport-maintenance inclination while Venezuelans and Peruvians displayed a rapport-challenging tendency. Once more, the Argentineans and Venezuelans wanted to preserve their own faces, whilst the Peruvians did not care about their image. Overall, the study found that there can be a communication gap when members of the three different cultural groups are involved in a conditional intra-lingual transaction. However, Frescura (2006) examined the responses of smokers in two hospitals in Northern Italy when they were chastised for openly violating the no-smoking policy. The study focused on a particular context of reprimand through the observation of naturally occurring conversation, and the findings demonstrated the presence of certain reaction behaviours. The study found that there may be a gender difference in the equals' verbal and nonverbal responses to the reprimand. Despite this, the study did point out that social power was likely to influence offenders' cooperation regardless of gender or social distance. Furthermore, Using open role-play and questionnaires as data collecting tools, a study by Ahmadian and Dastjerdi (2010) involving 25 Americans and 35 Iranians examined how the reprimand speech act is perceived in American English and Iranian cultures. According to the survey, Americans did not give a damn about Iranians' preference for the social power component since they thought all people had the same rights. Furthermore, the conclusions demonstrated that, in both Iranian and American cultures, the notion of politeness in reprimanding was not influenced by social distance; rather, those in positions of authority such as guardians and tutors were noted to reprimand more frequently in order to discourage misconduct. Additionally, Dozie and Otagburuagu (2019) explored reprimand linguistic politeness forms as used in English by Igbo native speakers in Nigeria using a discourse completion task (DCT) portraying 10 scenarios of imagined role-play between interlocutors across 2748 participants. Findings showed that reprimands occasioned by misconduct were conversational norms among Igbo native speakers and which by means of L_1 transfer became evident in their conversational English. Also, results demonstrated the Igbo culture reflected observance of context, social status, social distance, severity of offence indices which ultimately informed the choice of

strategies adopted at any instance. The study concluded that reprimanding was essentially culture-bound.

Reprimand discourse recognises that there is always a chance for inappropriate behaviour throughout human interaction and that the defaulter will always face censure, criticism, or even condemnation for such actions. Reprimands indicate disagreement that conveys or demonstrates stress brought on by strife. Therefore, the inference is that there has been an infraction (Dozie, 2017). The seriousness of the offence is taken into consideration while attempting to censure an offender. This implies that, other factors being equal, a minor offence will draw light censure whereas a serious offence would draw heavy criticism.

2.3.2 The Igbo and Request

In contrast to societies marked by individualism as a norm, the robust and gregarious Igbo culture considers the good of the group and everyone's image to be paramount, hence making requests is a common occurrence free from any trace of imposition. Although the request is handled with ease, the addressee may still experience difficulty or inconvenience. However, in the ever abiding spirit of benevolence, shared life, and societal structure that unite Igbo existence, the request is borne despite the perceived bother. In fact, acts that require assistance and support of people are asked for, and even almost always ordered, from others, as a common prerogative accruing to the person requesting or demanding the act as a member of the society" (Nwoye 1992) is a cultural practice among the Igbo and related groups. It follows that there are symbolic rights and obligations that are recognized by all Igbo people as a way of life and as a means of adhering to societal norms, but which are not explicitly stated or written down.

Nwoye (1989, 1992) whose pioneer research on Igbo and linguistic politeness influenced subsequent investigations and raised a great deal of anxiety in the field, especially over the applicability of the politeness theory examined linguistic politeness in Igbo and the sociocultural variations of the notion of face, respectively. His research explored the concepts of face, politeness, and cultural perceptions of what is considered nice in Igbo society. It concluded that different cultures around the world fundamentally have different perspectives on and interpretations of the politeness phenomenon. Nwoye's analysis of the request act in Igbo made it crystal clear that requests among the Igbo were commonplace and that no community member ever saw the act as offensive; rather, as a social norm, requests were frequently made by anyone in need of assistance in a variety of situations. Furthermore, because society is group-oriented and based on the shared use of commodities and services, requests and responses to them are limited to adherence to social norms, which suggests that people should attend to the needs of others. Nwoye did point out that requests can be made using implicature, either directly or indirectly, but he insisted that, in the context of Igbo culture, directness continued to be the preferred and most successful request method that is unaffected by social boundaries.

Ultimately, the research discovered evidence to further corroborate the assertion made by Brown and Levinson that politeness rules are universally applicable—that is, that politeness is expressed differently in different cultural contexts. Also, Garcia (1993) used role-play interaction in a longitudinal study design with 40 participants in three situations—(1) requesting a service, (2) complying with a request for service, and (3) declining a request for a service—to examine how Peruvian-Spanish speakers make and respond to requests. According to the study, Peruvian Spanish speakers shown deference, respect, and a need to not compel on the addressee when making requests or when they refused them, so the level of involvement largely relied on the circumstances. Additionally, the study demonstrated that when participants were asked to comply with a request, they chose to express unity instead of using deference or politeness. Despite the fact that Garcia's study concentrated on three role-play scenarios, participants' realisations differed widely, representing various speech communities and cultures. Similarly, Njemanze and Ononiwu (2015) affrm that there have been renewed attempts to integrate culture into the commutative curriculum because a language course concerned with culture broadens the scope of learners and improve their skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Integrating culture…, will serve as a bridge

between different social groups that use different languages and language varieties. It will help the learner to view different cultures with apt understanding.

Gender also played a role, as there were noticeable discrepancies in the tactics utilised by men and women. In addition, Takezewa (1995) utilised the Discourse Completion Task to gather production data from native and non-native Japanese speakers while studying request in Japanese as a second language. The study discovered that although the Canadian respondents only employed honorifics, the Japanese subjects expressed politeness and toned down an offence by using nominalizers, incomplete sentences, and honorifics, among other sociolinguistic tactics. According to the study's findings, honorifics are used to show politeness in formal request contexts. However, more subdued language devices like nominalizers and incomplete sentences are also employed to reduce the severity of infractions and foster belief of understanding and empathy between the requester and the requestee. Similarly, Umar (2004) used the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) as a data collection method to compare the request techniques employed by Arab English language learners with those employed by native English speakers. The study's findings showed that while speaking to their peers or those of a higher rank, both groups employed similar indirectness techniques. The native English speakers' requests seemed more courteous due to their employment of more semantic and syntactic modifiers in the act, whereas the Arabic subjects used more straightforward request alternatives for addressees of lesser status. Also, Felix-Brasdefer (2005) used formal and informal role-play scenarios to study politeness and indirectness in native speakers of Mexican Spanish while making requests. The findings indicated that directness was more common in scenarios where there was a close relationship between the interlocutors and that indirectness was more common when requested in scenarios that projected + Power or + Distance. The study also noted that the Mexican individuals saw direct or on-record demands as a societal norm, not in a rude manner, and that they depended on the circumstances. In the same vein, Jalilifar (2009) conducted a cross-sectional study utilising the (DCT) to collect information about the request methods of 10 Australian native speakers of English and 69 BA and MA Persian EFL learners. Though lower level learners mostly used direct request techniques and typically used indirect requests with midlevel learners, the results showed that participants' usage of direct request strategies was dramatically reduced as they grew in English proficiency level. In daily interactions, they also chose and employed a notably greater variety of usual and unusual request tactics. Moreover, Shahidi-Tabar (2012) studied the case of requests in the Persian and Turkish speech of Iranian speakers using a Discourse Completion Test with 10 scenarios as a data collection method. This study focused on the realisation of cross-cultural speech acts. The study's conclusions showed that participants' choices of politeness methods in comparable situations varied depending on whether they were Persian or Iranian. It has also been shown that compared to male respondents, female subjects used more direct methods in Turkish and fewer direct strategies in Persian. Based on socioeconomic factors, the study found that men tended to choose certain tactics, which indicated that they were using status symbols or hierarchies in the request act. In an interlanguage study, Memarian (2012) examined the request tactics used by Persian graduate students in English in order to identify any instances of pragmatic transfer from the target language to the native tongue. The author sampled one hundred (100) graduate students as well as two groups of native speakers of Persian and British English through a Discourse Completion Task. The results showed potential evidence of interlanguage transfer and development by Persian subjects, as well as the necessity of teaching students how to choose tactics that prioritise status and familiarity factors. However, Yazdanfar and Bonyadi (2016) examined request tactics used by Persian and English speakers in casual conversations by watching and recording requestive speech in English and Persian television shows. The study found that whereas Persian speakers employed more non-conventionally indirect tactics in discussions, English speakers employed more conventionally indirect strategies. Nevertheless, both language groups chose the direct level as their most commonly utilised strategy. The findings also showed that American English speakers employed more mitigators than Persian speakers in their day-to-day interactions with friends and family. Also, Dozie, Chinedu-Oko, Anyanwu, Egwim and Otagburuagu (2022) investigated linguistic politeness strategies used by Igbo English speakers of south-East and parts of South-South

Nigeria in making requests using the (DCT) with guided options designed to elicit appropriate data from 2748 subjects. The results showed that the Igbo bilinguals naturally adopted the directness strategy in making requests as that was in line with their cultural expectations as Igbo knowing that certain acts are demanded of others regardless of the prevailing circumstance which underscores the brother's keeper potential that characterized their daily living. The study equally pointed to hierarchy and familiarity as variable that play vital roles in the choice of strategies.

Request discourse involves making a formal or courteous demand for something. It is only normal that in human existence and relationships, one may occasionally need the help, support, or assistance of another in everyday interactions or exchanges. This assistance may be verbal, material supplies and provisions, or still bodily assistance to lessen a load. As it appears typically difficult to forecast the circumstances that might lead to a request and nearly impractical to predict whose aid or support one may seek in situations of pressing need, a request is that a symbolic gesture that transcends the moment of exchange. The reality that everyone depends on one another in life's affairs which is often a give and take mostly accomplished by asking; remains a fundamentally important truth.

2.3.3 The Igbo and Apology

Apology for the healthy and expressive Igbo culture is a natural show of regret, remorse, repentance, penitence and guilt from an offender to the offended for a wrongdoing or misconduct upon acknowledgement of a wrongful act. Quite like many cultures of the world, particularly those who easily find an infraction in interaction or exchange, apologies are offered regardless of social status which is indicative of the deep social belief and acknowledgement that it is only human to err and after which follows an apology. Apology for the Igbo cuts across the margins of familiarity, age, rank etc and that explains why in the event of an offense, an elder apologizes to a younger person and vice versa just like a boss apologizes to a subordinate and vice versa. Acts requiring apology are usually borne in the spirit of restoring stability and equilibrium in the relationship which is synonymous with the Igbo communal life and living. The implication is that whether a speaker or hearer feels threatened by the act of apology, the Igbo recognizes the need to maintain oneness and apology remains a factor in human co-existence which is marked by disagreement, rancor etc.

Interlanguage Studies on Apology - Research on apologies in interlanguage studies mostly concentrates on the native speaker's capacity to carry out the required act in the target language. The effect of the first language, or mother tongue, on the creation of the target language—the language into which translation is performed—is the main focus of the interlanguage phenomenon, involving the interplay of two important languages. The study conducted by Cohen and Olshtain (1981) examined how learners of English as a second language who spoke Hebrew handled the discourse of apology in their target language. The results showed that there was a substantial transfer of first language features in the target language to meet the conversational demand since there were fewer linguistic terms needed to address the discourse in the target language, which explains why Hebrew linguistic idiosyncrasies overlapped. However, House (1988) noted in the study that German students learning English were seen apologizing in a foreign language and the results indicated that German expressive styles and linguistic patterns were transferred to the target language. Also, Bergman and Kasper (1993) examined how Thai English language learners perceived and performed in native and non-native apologies using a DCT. The outcome demonstrated a strong correlation between the pragmatic translation of Thai into English and the realisation of extremely large differences in apology. In addition, Al Zumor (2011) studied the idea of apology in Arabic and English from a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural standpoint. The research, viewed through the lens of interlanguage pragmatics, demonstrated the existence of L1 transfer to the target language, presumably as a result of the L1's strength and reduced exposure to the target or second language. By the same token, Dozie and Otagburuagu (2019), observed the conversational English politeness strategies used by Igbo learners of English language in Nigeria while making an apology. The authors noted that the study participants willingly apologised irrespective of societal differentiation

and situation acknowledging that human interaction are fraught with cases of disrespect and outrage which can only be smoothened or restored by apology. Participants were found to adopt majorly the positive and negative forms of politeness strategies to realise the apology discourse. However, the study noted the burden of L1 transfer into the L2 as the Igbo bilingual tried to accomplish the task. In other words, the reflection of mother tongue/first language/L1 variance in target language output has been highlighted by interlanguage research on apology, most likely due the following factors: retention of one's cultural or linguistic identity, a propensity for a certain approach, or a lack in the target language.

Single language studies on apology - The single language studies examined one-language apologetic techniques, mostly focusing on the content of the apology but also examining individual interactions, research, role-playing, and even reports on the use of a single language. Vollmer and Olshtain (1989) used a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) methodology based on the factors of status, distance, and degree of transgression asked in various discourse settings to analyse the language of apology in German. The reports showed that while the subjects admitted their mistakes and apologized, the elements of status, distance, and severity of the offence had a significant impact on their apology. Again, Holmes (1989) reported that while both sexes were found to use the same strategies, women were found to apologize more across borders than men in an investigation on sex differences and apologies among New Zealand men and women that attempted to measure their communicative competence in apology discourse while taking gender and various social variables into consideration. Also, Demeter (2006) conducted a practical study on Romanian apologetic techniques with University of Romania English majors as subjects and a television show adaptation as a study tool. According to reports, there were various ways that Romanian apologised in conversation, just like in other languages. By and large, studies focusing on a single language have discovered strong evidence that, due to the fact that languages are different from one another, their pragmatic manifestations also differ significantly because there is no transference, influence, or interference between them.

Cross-cultural studies on apology - When given the same constraints of familiarity, social rank, degree of infringement, etc., cross-cultural studies on apology examine the varied ways that different languages and cultures carry out the apology speech act. Garcia (1989) which examined the politeness techniques employed by native and non-native English speakers when they apologised revealed that native speakers, on the other hand, chose the negative politeness technique. Non-native speakers, specifically Venezuelans, primarily used the positive politeness techniques to demonstrate camaraderie. While Olshtain (1989) used a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) with identical circumstances and social variables to analyse apologies in several languages, with an emphasis on how Australian English, Hebrew, German, and Canadian French conducted the speech act of apology. The results showed a consistency in the language choices they made to realise the apologetic speech act amongst these individuals with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. According to the study, there's a good possibility that different languages will apologise in a recognisable way when faced with comparable circumstances. Also, Sugimoto (1997) examined different approaches taken to accomplish the conversational aim in order to compare the apologetic styles of American and Japanese pupils. The study's observation of cultural differences in their realisation of atonement serves to further illustrate the idea that apology speech acts are fundamentally influenced by culture. In the same vein, Suszezynska (1999) reviewed various approaches used by various languages in apologetic discourse scenarios, with a focus on written responses to the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) in English, Polish, and Hungarian. The findings showed that language and strategic decisions can have an impact on how differently people produce apologies. The English, Polish, and Hungarian cultures all have different techniques, therefore context and cultural preferences were important factors to consider when classifying the strategy used by research participants. Again, Thijittang (2008) used a Discourse Completion Task questionnaire and interview questions to examine the pragmatic methods of English for Thai university students. According to the investigation's reports, Thai people adopted positive politeness strategies while English-speaking cultures adopted negative politeness strategies, taking into

account all relevant parameters and social variables that were present in all situations and had an impact on apology realisations. Also, Al Zumor's (2011) study that looked at apology in Arabic and English revealed that cultural differences had a significant impact on people's realisations of apology because participants assessed the imposition of different levels of control in the same event, and they naturally behaved and reacted accordingly. Culture is a people's way of life, and by extension, culture is the people and the people spread culture. Because various cultural norms and presumptions present themselves in their politeness routines in discourse, cross-cultural research on apology have thus demonstrated that culture plays a major role in apology realisation.

The apology discourse assumes that during human interaction, there may be moments of slight, rage, or even unhappiness that are either speaker- or hearer-generated and that, in turn, will necessitate an expression of regret or remorse, which is known as an apology. Apologising is likewise based on how serious the offence was; in other words, some offences may be deemed serious or severe, while others may be deemed moderate or not at all.

2.3.4 The Igbo and Thanking
In the Igbo language, saying "thank you" with a single word, such as "dalu / deme / imeela / ndewo / kaanka / anwuna," is a sufficient verbal expression of appreciation (Nwoye 1992). In the Igbo culture too, the concept of gratitude encompasses not just topics of direct concern and benefit but also acts of compassion, pledges, best wishes, and favors received. For instance, in the spirit of unity and a strong conviction that welcoming a baby is an addition to mankind energized by God and made possible by the labors of childbirth, the Igbo prefer to say "thank you" to a woman who has just given birth to a child rather than "congratulations." Furthermore, it is normal for the Igbo people to express gratitude for a good deed done for someone else as a social duty; this is evidence of conformity rather than the individualism that permeates other cultures worldwide. Once more, the Igbo have sophisticated ways of expressing thanks that are known to their interlocutors, even though they do not always explicitly state the deed that calls for the act. They are equally known to express their gratitude in extremely complex and or albeit overdone ways, which often reeks of sarcasm and even insincerity usually triggered by an established "messianic attitude" of the benefactor's. This is realistic due to the highly structured nature of the Igbo culture, which demands and expects particular behaviors from one another in the spirit of sodality. Therefore, anything that deviates from these expectations is seen negatively by the Igbo strong sense of social conscience.

For the purpose of research and clarity on what obtains in different situations and settings, Eisenstein and Bodman (1993) carried out four experiments using naturally occurring data gathered from field notes and audiotapes were used to study the expression of thankfulness in American English. According to the authors, when native speakers express gratitude for a gift, they do it by saying whatever they choose, indicating that they use the tactic of expressing gratitude even when it is not necessary. Similarly, Aijmer (1996) adopted the London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English; the study examined the purposes and tactics of expressions of thankfulness. Like other researchers, Aijmer described saying "thank you" or "thanks" as an expressive speech act with illocutionary energy. She also found that out of all the thanking routines, "thank you" was the most commonly employed. Correspondingly, Morsi (2010) examined the use of naturally occurring thanks and responses to thanks in the subjects' daily conversations gathered from two New York City neighbourhoods to study the speech act of thanking in the Egyptian Arabic dialect. According to the study, Egyptian speakers are courteous when they use formulaic phrases like "thanks a million," "don't mention it," or blessings like "bless your hand," "bless your heart," or "may God reward you." They can also be polite by using other nonreligious phrases like "may we hear good things about you." While older individuals expressed thanks in longer forms than younger ones, they were shown to adopt tactics that showed acceptance, rejection of favour, and even complimenting the thanker in response to being thanked. In that order, Al-Khwaldeh and Zegarac (2013) evaluated how gender affects the expression of gratitude in everyday interactions in Jordan through the use of oral interviews with twenty Jordanian students. The eight circumstances that were projected were the

subject of the study, along with the manner in which participants expressed thanks to people of the same and opposite gender, and the potential rationales underlying their decisions. The results demonstrated that Jordanian men and women, when interacting with people of higher status, employ appropriate politeness methods. However, women were seen to express thanks more frequently to other women than to men, and men to women more frequently than to one another. Also, Altahi (2014) studied Hijazi ladies' thank-you speech acts and replies using a corpus of naturally occurring data. The findings demonstrated that the samples responded to and expressed gratitude for a low-imposition favour using a variety of techniques. Additionally, Hajazi women primarily employed the "Bald" thanks method when expressing gratitude for gifts and meals, out of a restricted pool of thanking and response strategies. The study came to the conclusion that participants' thank-you behaviours were culture-compliant. Again, Yusefi et al. (2015) employed a discourse completion task (DCT) to elicit data from 117 participants in order to conduct a pragmatic analysis of thanking techniques among Kurdish speakers of Ilam based on gender and age. The study's findings showed that, participants, both male and female, showed gratitude using techniques such as good emotions, thanking others, and showing appreciation. However, it also showed that female participants expressed thankfulness more frequently than male participants did. The survey also showed that although everyone was motivated to thank others for favours received, women were found to be more demonstrative than men. Furthermore, using Spencer-Oatey's rapport-management approach, Garcia (2016) examined the cultural preferences of Peruvian Spanish speakers for expressing thankfulness. Data from 20 adult participants—ten male and ten female, with average ages of 33 and working as professionals—were gathered through open role-play encounters. Results showed that, in order to accomplish their interactional goals, respondents aligned with interpersonal relationships and prescribed behaviour in the socio-cultural context, according to the model for analysis. In other words, given the circumstances, the subjects conveyed their thanks by utilising formulaic expressions or by responding in a detailed, enthusiastic, and effusive manner. They also apologised for any impositions they may have made, acknowledged their debts, and pledged to make repairs as long as culture and context permitted. In addition, Haddad (2022) employing the role-play method to gather data, twenty Iraqi EFL students examined genderlect and thanks, focusing on the tactics they use in the speech act. According to the study's findings, participants were more linguistically courteous than men because they consistently employed direct rather than indirect methods to communicate. Likewise, Faqe et al. (2019) investigated the most popular thanking techniques among Kurdish EFL students at Soran University using data provided by DCT from fourteen randomly chosen Kurdish EFL students studying English. The study found that the participants employed both straightforward and complex thank-you techniques, which was suggestive of Kurdish society's socio-cultural responsibility to meet needs for communication as they emerged. Similarly, Dozie, Chinedu-Oko, Anyanwu, Madu, Egwim and Otagburuagu (2022) in a cross-sectional survey, explored politeness and expressing gratitude in English among Igbo native speakers in Nigeria by observing social distance, status, power etc as variables that impelled the choice of one strategy or the other. The study depicted that the Igbo accomplished the interactional goal as a routine but not without the possible transfer of the inherent distinctions of their first L1 into the L2. The findings go a long way to demonstrate how deeply the Igbo people's culture is ingrained with thankfulness, which is evidenced by the analysis that is given as a verbal display of the native speakers' value system externalised through kind words of profound appreciation for all kinds of thoughtfulness. The research's conclusions clearly show that Igbo bilinguals frequently express thankfulness in their language, especially in interactional English and everyday communication. Overall, the data supported the idea that Igbo bilinguals are aware of their debt and are able to articulate it by carefully selecting various language phrases based on various contextual backgrounds in order to meet this communication demand. The Igbo have been found to adequately satisfy this conversational demand (thanking) in past investigations by Nwoye (1992) using single-word expressions, the most recognisable of which is "thank you."

2.3.5 The Igbo and Offers

Quite like other speech acts namely; reprimand, request, apology, thanking etc - An offer is a speech act that signals a proposal which expresses one's willingness to do something for another. Offers come in diverse forms which may include the following: invitation to join at the table (to eat), to help with a luggage, to have a second helping, to give a ride, invitation to be present at an occasion, etc. these instances of offer are made in utmost sincerity by the Igbo naturally without fear of imposition and the hearer equally feels obliged because it is a way of life for the Igbo. While certain cultures of the world according to Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) consider offer as an imposition because the hearer feels forced or controlled to act in a way he/she may not have acted if the act was not performed, however, there is no element of obtrusiveness arising from the act among the Igbo and this accounts for the ideological differences that mark each culture out. Hence, in the unreserved Igbo society, offers are indeed anticipated even among strangers. Although the hearer may honour or decline such invitation, it is hardly viewed as an infraction and the speaker equally understands that responses to offers could go either way or that the hearer is at liberty to choose to be or not to be.

According to Searle (1975), offers are commissive acts which stem from a speaker's proposition and in turn rely on the hearer's response to actualise its purpose. In other words, offers commonly go in adjacency pairs (Almusallam 2023) as an action is expected to evoke a reaction between parties in talk exchange. Also, in the light of linguistic politeness as viewed by (Leech 1983, Sifianou 1992) offers are considered in various cultures as naturally polite speech acts made to strengthen bonds and reflect solidarity as reported in earlier studies including Persian (Koutlaki, 2002) and Igbo cultures (Nwoye, 1992; Dozie, Chinedu-Oko, Anyanwu, Ojilere, Ihejirika and Otagburuagu 2020). However, Grainger et al., (2015) explained that much as offers were generous actions, they were not necessarily ways of establishing great and cordial relationships with others but were in keeping with the ideals and moral code of the Arab society. Conversely, Brown and Levinson (1987) have reported otherwise citing the face-threatening potentiality of offers as they are believed to impose on the hearer and ultimately cause infraction and affect the illocutionary force of such acts. Based on further classifications, a few studies (Barron, 2005; Pohle, 2009) have reported that offers are accomplished as speech act sequences rather than as single-utterance speech acts arising from initiative offers and reoffers. Similarly, insistent offers which has been reported as a reoffering as a result of the refusal to the initiative offer is an expectation in certain cultures, including the Iranian (Teleghani-Nikazm, 1998), Chinese (Hua et al., 2000), Irish (Barron, 2005), British and Libyan (Grainger et al., 2015), Moroccan (Alaoui 2011; Bouchara, 2015), Greek (Bella, 2016; Sifianou, 1992), Arabian (Migdadi 2003) and Jordanian (Al-Khatib, 2006) cultures. Furthermore, in exploring the interactional features of offer negotiations using combined quantitative and qualitative analysis for politic offering behaviour among female friends in real spoken discourse, Almusallam (2018) and Almusalam and Ismail (2022) discovered that cases of insistence sequences in the forms of elaborated offers, embedded and collaborative offerings were common in Saudi Arabic corpus than the British English speakers. They concluded that variations in realization of offers across cultures may be difficult for L_2 users of the language as they struggle the sociocultural norms that characterize and define different languages. Also, using a DCT composed of 10 hypothetical situations in daily interactions of Arabic offers for data collection; Haddad (2022) studied the linguistic strategies and patterns of Jordanian Arabic offers and concluded that considering the socio-pragmatic constraints that characterize and influence offers, the direct offers strategies were more polite than indirect offers. In yet another study on offers in Saudi EFL talks focusing on the learners' pragmatic competence in interactions, Almusallam (2023) investigated the interactional structure of offers in natural conversations by nine Saudi learners of English (SEFL) when interacting with a British English native speaker. The study established that although the SEFL interactional tools were not native-like however, they were found to adopt a pattern of direct offers by using elliptic forms or conveying the offer nonverbally and were similar to the British English

speakers in their insistence; a strategy that foresees imposition on the addressee closed in two adjacency pairs.

Offers are natural verbal propositions and consequences of human interaction often made as a mark of unity, solidarity, reciprocity, obligation etc which has an effect on the persons involved and which in causes them to act, think or respond in particular ways. As a speech act, and considering culture variance, several societies of the world accomplish the act differently leaning more on the dictates of the prevailing circumstance i.e. context of interaction as well as the cultural mandates for the gesture. In essence therefore, offers are an externalization of goodwill and generosity which may be subject to acceptance or rejection but certainly in line with social expectations and individuals are at liberty to react to this social construct as they desire.

3. THE IGBO AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF FACE AND IMPOSITION

Notions of the universality of face and imposition are often interwoven, exaggerated and hastily generalized as previous studies (Brown and Levinson 1978; 1987; Garcia 1996; Ahmadian and Dastjerdi 2010) have made it abundantly clear that daily interactions where speech acts were made manifest, be it in the forms of request, reprimand, apology, appreciation, greeting, offer etc were replete with face-threatening acts (FTAs). Face and imposition are so mixed up that one begins to wonder where to draw a line but to accommodate this overlap, let us extend this conversation to x-ray the view of the Igbo on the subject matter. Whereas the above appears to be true among certain cultures of the world, same does not apply to the Igbo society largely characterized by brotherliness and in which case, acts which are considered a major violation are commonplace among the Igbo. In fact, the Igbo culture which is profound in group-orientation and communal living, entitles her people to: request without reservations, apologize without humiliation, reprimand without regrets, thank without hesitation, greet without disregard and offer without expectations in conformity to social norms consequently these acts do not in any way fray the ties that bind interactants during conversation in the Igbo culture. In other words, 'face as a body-based metaphor' (Nwoye, 1992) and imposition seem to have no place in Igbo cosmology.

With the introduction of the concept of face into social communication by Goffman (1967) analyzing the ritual elements of social interaction, face gained ground particularly within socio-pragmatic, linguistic and allied studies as a holistic depiction and representation of human dignity. However, the applicability of the concept of the universality of face as self image which must be preserved and protected according to Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) within politeness theory, amplified and further popularized the 'face' and generated controversy across cultural lines (Matsumoto, 1988; Ide, 1989; Nwoye, 1992). In fact, Nwoye's (1992) extensive research on face and imposition in the Igbo culture addressed pointedly the ambivalence that seemed to surround the concepts and the extent to which they apply and or overlap in human interactions vis-à-vis politeness – linguistic and non-linguistic alike. He reiterated that the Igbo society marked by apparent regard for communal living highlights group face because matters of deep and great concern i.e. impropriety threaten the group face. This is so because it is an integral part of the culture of the Igbo to collectively raise persons of good behaviour and anything short of that is viewed as failure on the society at large hence the emphasis on group face. Again, on the notion of imposition, Nwoye made it abundantly clear that acts which are otherwise regarded as impositions in most cultures of the world are not so regarded in the egalitarian Igbo society and in effect, these acts are considered benefits by virtue of reciprocal sociocultural validity. Also, studies (O'Driscoll, 1996; Bravo, 2008; Hernandez-Flores, 2008; Bogdanowska-Jakubowska, 2011) have established that cultures differ in their view of face which further buttresses the fact that different cultures of the world have their interpretation of face and what applies in one culture does not necessarily affect the other hence the culture-specificity of the face as opposed to its universality. Similarly, (Earley, 1997 and Ishihara & Lee, 2021) have found evidence to believe that culture is the epicenter of the understanding and interpretation of face as certain variables such as personal values, self-identity,

rights, role expectations, normative constraints, and obligations of interactants plays a vital roles in assigning meaning to face. Furthermore, Bergiela-Chiappini (2003) delineates that while some cultures view face as a significant, nay dominant factor that determines interpersonal behaviour, others place notions of discernment, respect and deference as premium to face. The order therefore remains a matter of cultural bias which validates its applicability as the case may be. In addition, O'Driscoll (2011) draws a clear line of visible distinction between 'face' and 'politeness' and succinctly described 'face' as "something interactants have" while 'politeness' as "something interactants do". The implication is that politeness is only palpable and shared in the course of interaction and face remains with the interactants themselves as a phenomenon whose interpretation is more individualistic (personal) than collective (general) thus transcending the prescriptive but capturing the descriptive nature of human interactions. Still on the matter, Spencer-Oatey (2002) explained that face is connected to both personal/independent and social/interdependent values and that the different views of the concept were culture/context-bound while imposition remained as a component of independent value of face. In this regard, Spencer-Oatey succeeded in isolating terms or variables that constitute personal / private /individual face which show respect for one's private space from group /general/ collective face which show how an act by an individual leads to a loss of group face thereby accommodating the tenets of cultures where they thrive. Based on the existing analogy of the concept of face, O'Driscoll noted the problematic and awkwardness of group face which he disagreed with, contending the possibility of a group taking part in the same encounter since face exists only in interaction and by extension taking the fall/bearing the brunt of an individual's interactive action/inaction. By the same token, Almusallam (2022) considered face in the context of Saudi culture as the entryway to an individual's personality which is not limited to an image tangentially constructed in the interaction but extends also to an individual's or group's valuable possessions that can change across interactions largely based on the norms of the society.

Face and imposition are intricately woven into the structure of human interaction with politeness and speech act at the very core of the broad spectrum of conversation analysis. The defining role and interpretation of each finds expression within the very culture of operation where inhabitants by virtue of principle and practice, theory and model, assign workable meaning to acts that reflect the distinctive characteristics of that speech community. In other words, culture defines utterance which is a substantiation of thought and by which meaning is assigned to linguistic and non-linguistic elements. Therefore, meaning/interpretation is tied to culture and cultural variation only validates the specificity of face and imposition as opposed to the claim of universality advocated by Brown and Levinson (1987).

4. CONCLUSION

The length and breadth of the workings of human conversation within which speech acts, politeness and face are subsumed in Igbo society shows that Igbo concept of politeness differs from politeness in other societies of the world. A number of corresponding studies in the last decade including those of (Grainger et al. 2015; Bouchara, 2015; Yusefi et al. 2015; Yazdanfar and Bonyadi 2016; Bella, 2019; Dozie and Otagburuagu 2019a; Dozie and Otagburuagu 2019b; Faqe et al. 2019; Haddad, 2022; Dozie et al. 2020; Njemanze and Ononiwu, 2015, Almusallam, 2022; Dozie et al. 2022a; Dozie, et al. 2022b; Almusallam, 2023) etc have extensively addressed across cultures the translational notions of politeness and speech acts as a culture-specific phenomenon. These concepts have been perceived and manifested in different ways in the cultures examined by various authors as relational art because every aspect of the study on politeness/speech act has been tied to the culture of the people under investigation. With politeness and face as attendant components of speech act strictly defined by culture which generally advocates that interactants speak without being offensive, listen without being defensive and leaving one another with their dignity remains the kernel of the human interaction. Therefore, single language, interlanguage and cross-cultural research continue to point to the operational diversity in the notions of politeness and face as opposed to earlier controversial claims of universality. The paper highlights key differences in how Igbo speakers

handle: Requests - Seen as normal within the communal spirit of Igbo life; Reprimands - Delivered for correction, not shaming; Apologies - Focused on restoring balance in relationships; Offers - Seen as expressions of solidarity, not imposition. The ebb and flow of politeness and speech act research as well as face and imposition have elaborately shown that these conversational cues manifest and are interpreted differently in the Igbo culture and as such its accomplishment and realization vary greatly from those of other cultures of the world.

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