



CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN NBA PRESIDENT'S APOLOGY LETTER TO NIGERIAN GOVERNOR'S FORUM DIRECTOR-GENERAL (DG)

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ABSTRACT

The way conflict, which is an inevitable part of social interaction, is managed or resolved matters most for the survival and peaceful co-existence of any human society. This study examines the politeness strategies used in the Nigerian Bar Association's (NBA) President's apology letter to the Nigerian Governor's Forum Director-General (DG) over the controversy that ensued from the Association's cancellation of its invitation to Governor Nasir El-Rufai to its national conference. The objectives of the study were to analyse and explore the speech acts and politeness strategies used in the letter obtained from Premium Times. The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse the data. It also adopted Kreidler's (1998) model of speech act and Ruhi's (2002) model of politeness for the examination and interpretation of the data. The analysis of the data reveals the preponderance of verdictive acts and assertive acts; and selective use of directive acts, expressive acts, performative act and commissive act that constitute both face-boosting and threatening acts. The examination of the data shows that the face-boosting acts were used as self-politeness strategies to enhance the face-value of the writer and the sufferer while the face-threatening acts were used as other-politeness strategies to attend to the need of the Governor for public honour and positive association as well as the need of the Association to cancel the Governor's invitation to avoid social disharmony among its members and the public. The study concludes that politeness is an important sociolinguistic strategy that can be used to manage human social conflicts.

Keywords: conflict management, politeness strategies, face-threatening act, face-boosting act, speech act, apology

INTRODUCTION

The way conflict is managed matters most for the survival and peaceful co-existence of any society. The many ways to manage conflicts include compromise, negotiation, integration, accommodation, avoidance, conciliation, domination, obligation, arbitration, etc. (Best, 2006). These ways have given impetus to the concept of conflict management which means how conflict is addressed or resolved. Nicholson (1992) sees conflict management as a way of reducing the negative effects of conflict to maximize its positive impacts. Hence, the essence of the concept is that conflict can be controlled and even made positive for the benefit of social harmony. In social interaction, language, being a tool of communication has always been used to manipulate or influence conflict. Thus, strategically, it can even be used to manage conflicts.

This paper, therefore, examines how politeness is used to manage human conflict. The study particularly explores how politeness strategies were used in the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) President's apology letter to the Nigerian Governor's Forum Director-General (DG) over the controversy that ensued from the former cancellation of the invitation to Governor Nasir El-Rufai to its national conference. The Governor was earlier invited to participate in a panel discussion of the Association scheduled on 26 to 29th August, 2020. But the invitation was cancelled following some protests within the Association. The invitation and its cancellation generated social contention in public discourse in Nigeria; some of which constitutes acts of condemnation, embarrassment, disregard, solidarity, infringement of rights, among other that the letter intended to manage, and this is why it was selected for this investigation.

Politeness and apology

According to Leech (2014), any academic study of politeness requires a proper working definition of the concept. This paper is not an exception. Politeness, as a social feature of human beings, is seen as social behaviour, action, or phenomenon (Goodwin, 2002; Watts, 2003; Leech, 2014). It has also been viewed in two senses: as pure social behaviour and as linguistic behaviour. As a social behaviour, politeness is viewed as good conduct and manners shown to others in terms of respect, courtesy, civility, mannerliness, consideration, obedience, etiquette, diplomacy, etc. (Watts, 2003; Holmes, 2006; Leech, 2014). Politeness, in this sense, is a universal behaviour that is common to all human society because it shares the same characteristics in terms of its feeling and essence which is both psychological and social that is to make somebody feel comfortable and dignified, and its essence is to avoid hurting someone's feelings (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 2014).

Politeness is also viewed as a linguistic behaviour (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Mills, 2003; Johnstone, 2008). As it is common with much social behaviour such as greeting, apology, appreciation, etc., politeness is linguistically expressed or triggered (Mills, 2003). In this sense, its mode of expression may vary from one culture to another because, according to Locher and Watts (2005), there is no linguistic behaviour that is inherently polite or impolite. Arguably, it is only made so by the convention or norms of the people who use it. This, perhaps, explains the reason for the contextual variations and interpretations of even certain pragma-linguistic features such as please, sorry, thanks, excuse, etc. Nevertheless, as a linguistic behaviour, politeness is seen as a means to achieve psychological and social functions of making somebody feel comfortable and unhurt. So, for Leech (2014), politeness being a linguistic or non-linguistic act is considered to be a good thing in any social interaction.

But, as a sociolinguistic concept, politeness has been linked to other social phenomena such as cooperation, power, culture, ideology, gender politics, conflict, transaction, etc. (Watts, 2003; Holmes, 2006). It is also linked to the concept of conflict management based on the understanding and the conceptualisations of the concept by many scholars. For example, Lakoff (1975, p. 64) points out that politeness is "a notion developed by societies in order to reduce friction in personal communication". For Leech (1983, p. 19), politeness is "a strategic conflict avoidance that can be measured in terms of the degree of effort puts into the avoidance of conflict situation". Likewise, Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 1) consider politeness as "a complex system for softening face threat". Similarly, according to Goldsmith (2009, p. 756), politeness refers to all various strategies for doing FTAs. Thus, reviewing the definitions of politeness by these scholars, Al-Hindawi and Alkhazaali (2016) conclude that all the scholars who defined politeness considered it as a way of avoiding threat or conflict. However, in this paper politeness is not only seen as a way of avoiding conflict but also a means of managing conflict for continuous social harmony.

Meanwhile, politeness can be expressed in many acts such as apology, request, gratitude, appreciation, etc. An apology is seen as a way of seeking an amendment to a wrong done

intentionally or inadvertently to somebody. According to Akinwotu (2020), an apology is the act of expressing regret for something one does that might have in one way or the other harmed the hearer. Hence, it is also an act meant to pacify the offended person in order to continue to enjoy social harmony with them. Moreover, for Leech (2014), an apology is a face-enhancing act whereby someone acknowledges their faults and mollifies the other. Although this study considers an apology as a face-enhancing act like in Leech, the study does not ignore the strategic use of apology in making face-threatening acts as shown in Brown and Levinson's (1987) study.

Pragmatic analysis of politeness

Pragmatics is the study of language use and its meaning to speakers and hearers-users (Mey, 2001; Leech, 2014). It is concerned with the mode of expressions in interaction. For this, it also deals with issues of language use in relation to interaction such as the appropriateness of language structure to its context, purpose of communication, and participants. It also considers flouts in interaction and strategies for their repairs. Hence, it deals with all aspects of human interaction and communication that include the study of politeness which is one of the popular areas identified and studied in pragmatics by many scholars (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Cuppeper, 2011; Leech, 2014).

Meanwhile, it is instructive to note that pragmatic researches on politeness have been grouped into two distinctions: first and second-order (Watts, 2003; Leech, 2014; Ononye, 2020). The first-order deals with the identification, description and evaluation of various forms of politeness expressions used in everyday interactions. The second-order focuses on theoretical postulations or rules formation for universal understanding and application of politeness in making threatening acts, avoiding conflict or maintaining social harmony (Leech, 2014). For instance, the rapport management theory developed by Spenser-Oatey (2008) is one of the theories of politeness in pragmatics that postulates principle for harmonious interpersonal communication and interaction.

Considering the foregoing, pragmatics does not only view language as a means of information sharing in interactions but also as a means of managing human social relations (Spencer-Oatey, 2008; Ononye, 2020). It is in line with this that the study examines politeness as means of conflict management.

Theoretical framework: Speech act and politeness theories

This study adopts Kreidler's (1998) model of speech act and Ruhi's (2002) model of politeness to analyse and examine the speech acts and politeness strategies used in the letter in order to manage the conflict that ensued in the Nigerian Bar Association from the cancellation of Governor Nasir El-Rufai's invitation to its national conference. Kreidler's model is selected to identify and analyse the speech acts used in the letter. However, since speech act theories do not adequately explain whether an act constitutes politeness or not, Ruhi's (2002) model of politeness is used to account for the

politeness strategies embedded in the speech acts used in the letter. Besides, the two theories are chosen as they view linguistic acts as a form of social action whose meaning and force depend on context of use and not necessarily in form. This is based on the observation by Ajiboye (2020) that the illocutionary force and the context of an utterance are what determine whether a speech act is a threat or boost.

Kreidler's model of speech act is a modification and expansion of Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) models of speech act which view speech acts as a way of doing something such as requesting, commanding, promising, apologizing, naming, etc. with words or expressions. According to Akinwotu (2020), Kreidler agrees with Searle that all linguistic forms involve speech acts and every speech act has three components: locutionary act, which is the form of linguistic expression uttered by a speaker; illocutionary act, which is a speaker's intention or force for the production of an utterance; and perlocutionary act, which is the effect of an utterance on a hearer or reader that is hearers' intended or unintended response to a speakers' force of an utterance. Furthermore, Kreidler (1998) accepts Austin's and Searle's proposition that meaning is not necessarily in form but in use, and expands the proposition by arguing that a linguistic form may have different functions in different situations. For instance, in Kreidler's argument, a person could use a question not to seek for information but rather for confirmation as in the case of rhetorical questions. As such, for Kreidler (1998), the only possible way to determine the meaning and force of an utterance is through the context of use. Based on that, Kreidler (1998, p.183) cited in (Akinwotu, 2020, p.15) clarifies that for an utterance to achieve its force:

The lexical content of the utterance must be appropriate, the social situation in which it occurs must be appropriate, the speaker must be sincere in what he says, and the hearer(s) accept the utterance as having that purpose.

For analysis, Kreidler (1998) identifies seven types of speech, which are modification and expansion of Searle's classification of illocutionary speech acts.: assertive, performative, verdictive, expressive, directive, commissive, and phatic. Kreidler (1998, p.183) cited in Akinwotu (2020, p.15) explains them as thus;

- i. Assertives are acts in which speakers and writers use language to state facts, as in stating, reporting, claiming, etc.
- ii. Performative acts bring about the state of affairs they name, as in, naming, accepting, resigning, arresting, etc.
- iii. Verdictive acts make an assessment or judgement about the act of others, usually the addressee, as in assessing, ranking, appraising, examining, etc.
- iv. Expressive utterances spring from the previous action- or failure to act- of the speaker, or perhaps the present result of those actions or failures, as in, apologising, congratulating, thanking, etc.
- v. Directive acts are those in which the speaker tries to get the addressee to perform some act or refrain from performing an act, as in, requesting, pleading, demanding, etc.
- vi. Commissives are prospective acts that have to do with the speaker's commitment to a future action, as

- in, promising, offering, warning, etc.
- vii. Phatic are utterances that express the feelings of the speaker, as in, greeting, giving farewell, welcoming, etc.

The second theory applies in the study is Ruhi's (2006) model of politeness. This model is said to have been built on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness and its weaknesses which views politeness as a way of preserving the face value of a receiver where a face-threatening is observed (Ajiboye, 2020). Ruhi (2006) points out that Brown and Levinson's (1989) politeness theory does not only claim a universal existence of face but also claim that all utterances are potentially face-threatening which requires to be redressed. Ruhi argues that speech acts are not always performing face-threatening but also face-boosting. Ruhi finds face-threatening used in Brown and Levinson inappropriate and she proposes face-sensitivity act that could be face threatening or boosting. According to Ajiboye (2020), Ruhi's face threatening acts are those that damage the face value of interlocutors such as insult, criticism, imposition, rejection, command, etc. while face boosting acts are those that attend or enhance interlocutor's need for appropriate amount of association and dissociation and equity in interaction. Also, Ajiboye notes that face boosting acts contribute to expression of positive evaluation in utterances such as agreement, compliment and greeting, apology, etc. Generally, Ruhi's model of politeness is developed from balance principle which says: "If a breach of face respect occurs, this constitutes a kind of debt that must be made up by positive reparation if the original level of face respect is to be maintained" (Ruhi, 2006, p.236). This gives birth to her concept of self-politeness and its strategies that constitutes self or other face enhancement and protection such as displaying of competence, confidence and individuality.

Methodology

This study analysed a number of thirty-two utterances used in the NBA President's letter of apology obtained from the Premium Times (Ezeamalu, 2020) using both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. The letter was considered for the study because it was written in the context of a conflict and its management. In the letter, speech act was used as the unit of analysis and it was identified and classified into locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts; and further into various illocutionary acts. The quantitative method of data analysis was used to obtain the frequency of the speech acts and politeness strategies used in the letter in order to get the entire overview of the data and to complement its qualitative description. A simple percentage analysis was used for the quantitative analysis. The examination of the data was conducted and interpreted using Kreidler's (1998) model of speech act and Ruhi's (2002) model of politeness respectively as indicated in the theoretical framework.

Data analysis

The data of the study and its analysis is presented in the table1. The table contains 32 utterances and they were analysed into locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. The speech acts in the illocutionary acts were further identified and classified accordingly. The table also indicates the evaluation of the politeness strategy in the acts. For the

analysis of the data, the President of Nigerian Bar Association is referred to as writer; and the Governor Nasir el-Rufai is referred to as sufferer.

Table 1: Data presentation and analysis

| S/n | Locution (Face Sensitivity Act) | Illocutionary act | Perlocutionary act | Politeness Evaluation |
|-----|---|--|--|--|
| 1. | Further to our telcon (Okauru/Usoro) this morning on the above subject matter, let me once again, through your good offices, tender my unreserved apologies to His Excellency, Mallam Nasir El-Rufai, Governor of Kaduna State, for the unintended embarrassment that may have been caused him by the decision of the Nigerian Bar Association (“NBA or the (Association”) National Executive Committee (“NEC”) decision at its meeting that was held yesterday, 20 August 2020, to dis-invite him as a Panelist in one of the Sessions scheduled for the upcoming NBA Annual General Conference (“AGC”). | Directive act and expressive act:apologising | Seeking for forgiveness and reconciliation from the sufferer and to pacify him | Face boosting act to the sufferer/ Face threatening to the writer |
| 2. | As the NBA President, I take full responsibility for the unintended embarrassment and tender my regrets and apologies. | Performative act and expressive act: accepting blame and apologizing | Exonerating the sufferer and seeking for forgiveness | Face threatening act to the writer/ Face boosting act to the sufferer |
| 3. | As I explained to you during our telcon, the initial decision to invite HE Nasir El-Rufai was made by the AGC’ Technical Committee for Conference Planning (“TCCP” or “the Committee”) without any input from NEC as a body. | Assertive act: Reporting | Seeking for receiver’s understanding | Face threatening act to the sufferer/ Face boosting act to the writer |
| 4. | The TCCP is itself an organ of NEC is itself an organ of NEC and was constituted by NEC at its meeting in December 2019. | Assertive act: describing and reporting: | Seeking for receiver’s understanding | Face boosting act to the writer |
| 5. | It is in all respects answerable to NEC and has a mandatory duty to report its activities to NEC’s quarterly meetings one of which was held yesterday. | Assertive act: describing and reporting | Seeking for receiver’s understanding | Face boosting act to the writer |
| 6. | As an elected National Officer of the Association, I am personally answerable to NEC and cannot overrule its decisions even if I have totally different viewpoints and positions in regard thereto. | Verdictive act: appraising his view point | Expecting positive judgement | Face threatening act to the writer |

| | | | | |
|-----|--|----------------------------|---|---|
| 7. | TCCP, as an NBA organ, is in precisely the same position and the same applies to all other Committees of the NBA. | Verdictive act: appraising | Expecting positive judgement | Face boosting act to the writer |
| 8. | Indeed, I need to mention that a standard agenda item for the Quarterly NEC Meeting is the Report from the various NBA Sections, Forums and Committees. | Assertive act: stating | Seeking for receiver’s understanding | Face boosting act to the writer |
| 9. | To the extent that the NBA Committee’s works, and activities are on the NEC Agenda, NEC members are at liberty to raise questions, demand clarifications, discuss and give mandatory directives and directions on those works and activities and the Committees are bound by those directives and directions of NEC. | Assertive act: stating | Seeking for receiver’s understanding | Face boosting act to the writer |
| 10. | As I also explained to you, the statutory membership of NEC is made up of all Past Presidents and General Secretaries and 3 (three) members each from of our 125 Branches. | Assertive act: reporting | Seeking for receiver’s understanding | Face boosting act to the writer |
| 11. | There are also about 120 co-opted members. | Assertive act: stating | Seeking for receiver’s understanding | Face boosting act to the writer |
| 12. | NEC was deliberately made that large by the framers of the Association’s Constitution to accommodate all shades of opinion and thoughts. | Assertive act: reporting | Seeking for receiver’s understanding | Face boosting act to the writer |
| 13. | As I further mentioned to you during our telcon, the invitation of Mallam Nasir El-Rufai was brought up by NEC members at yesterday’s meeting when the TCCP’s arrangement for the 2020 AGC was placed on the agenda for discussions and the preponderance of opinion was that His Excellency should be dis-invited | Assertive act: reporting | Seeking for receiver’s | Face damaging act to the sufferer |
| 14. | There was indeed a motion that was moved that was moved and seconded to that effect. | Assertive act: reporting | Seeking for receiver’s understanding and acceptance | Face threatening act to the sufferer |
| 15. | Those who spoke in favor of his attendance, including me, were in the minority. | Verdictive act: assessing | Expecting positive judgement | Face threatening act to the sufferer and the writer |
| 16. | I was personally placed in a very difficult and problematic position. | Verdictive act: appraising | Expecting positive judgement | Face threatening act to the writer |

| | | | | |
|-----|--|----------------------------|---|---|
| 17. | MallamNasir El-Rufai is a friend that I have known as long ago as the early 1980s and we do have some other very close mutual friends. | Verdictive act: appraising | Expecting positive judgement | Face boasting act to the sufferer |
| 18. | And yet, I am bound, as an elected President of the NBA, by decisions and directives of NEC to whom I am answerable in my official capacity. | Assertive act: reporting | Seeking for receiver's understanding and acceptance | Face boasting act to the writer |
| 19. | There truly was nothing that I or the TCCP could do in the face of NEC's decision of yesterday. | Verdictive act: assessing | Expecting positive judgement | Face threatening act to the writer and the sufferer |
| 20. | In concluding, I must clarify two critical issues. | Assertive act: clarifying | Seeking for receiver's understanding | Face threatening act to the writer |
| 21. | First, NEC's decision yesterday had no ethnic or religious coloration howsoever and whatever. | Verdictive act: assessing | Expecting positive judgement | Face boosting act to the sufferer and writer |
| 22. | In discussing the issue at NEC, nobody talked about religion or ethnicity. | Verdictive act: appraising | Expecting positive judgement | Face boosting act to the sufferer and writer |
| 23. | As I recall, there were no more than 3 (three) advocates for retaining the invitation of the NBA to HE Nasir El-Rufai (not including me) and two of these three gentlemen are from the South of Nigeria and one is a reverend gentleman. | Verdictive act: appraising | Expecting positive judgement | Face boosting act to the sufferer and the writer |
| 24. | Conversely, some of those who spoke against his attendance share the same faith with MallamNasir El-Rufai and some others come from the Northern part of Nigeria. | Verdictive act: appraising | Expecting positive judgement | Face threatening act to the sufferer |
| 25. | The second point that I must clarify is that, NBA NEC, by its decision was not passing any judgement on MallamNasir El-Rufai. | Verdictive act: appraising | Expecting positive judgement | Face boosting act to the sufferer |
| 26. | NBA NEC is not in a position to pass such judgments without having all the facts and hearing from all the sides and it did not set out to pass any such judgement. | Verdictive act: appraising | Expecting positive judgement and acceptance | Face boosting act to the sufferer |

| | | | | |
|-----|--|--|--|--|
| 27. | NEC merely made a judgement that it was not in the best interest of the Association to be engulfed in the controversy that trailed the invitation of Mallam el-Rufai for the Conference and that it was best if the safety-valve of dis-inviting the Governor was applied. | Verdictive act: appraising | Expecting positive judgement | Face threatening act to the sufferer |
| 28. | Indeed, NEC did not howsoever or at all discuss the substance of the issues that have been raised against the Governor by the different clamor in that regard. | Verdictive act: appraising | Expecting positive judgement | Face boosting act to the sufferer |
| 29. | I perhaps need to mention that, prior to the NEC meeting I had personally taken urgent and strident steps, working with the TCCP, to douse the clamor, but we had no success. | Verdictive act: appraising | Expecting positive judgement | Face threatening act to the sufferer and the writer |
| 30. | I truly would appreciate your bringing this letter to the attention not just of HE Nasir el-Rufai but also to all the other members of the esteemed Nigerian Governor's Forum and in particular, the Chairman of the Forum, He (Dr) Kayode Fayemi. | Directive act: requesting | Seeking for reconciliation | Face boosting act to the sufferer |
| 31. | Please, assure Their Excellences that the Nigerian Bar Association holds all our Governors, including HE Nasir el-Rufai, in the highest esteem and would do nothing intentionally to embarrass them collectively or individually. | Directive and verdictive act: requesting and appraising Commissive act: promising | Seeking for forgiveness and reconciliation from the sufferer and to pacify him | Face boosting act to the sufferer and writer |
| 32. | Once again, I offer my sincere and deepest apologies and regrets for the unintended embarrassment that may have caused to HE Nasir el-Rufai by the afore-referenced decision of the NBA NEC and would appreciate your passing on my regrets and apologies to him personally. | Expressive act: apologizing Directive act: requesting | Seeking for forgiveness and reconciliation from the sufferer and to pacify him | Face boosting act to the sufferer and face threatening act to the writer |

(Researcher's analysis of speech acts used in the letter)

Analysis of illocutionary acts

The illocutionary acts express the writer's intention or purpose for the production of the utterances. These are contained in the various illocutionary acts used in the letter. Table 2 below indicates the frequency of illocutionary speech acts used in the letter.

Table 2: Frequency of illocutionary speech acts used in the letter

| Speech acts | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------|-----------|------------|
| i. Assertive | 12 | 32.4% |
| ii. Performative | 1 | 2.7% |
| iii. Verdictive | 16 | 43.3% |
| iv. Expressive | 3 | 8.2% |
| v. Directive | 4 | 10.8% |
| vi. Commissive | 1 | 2.7% |
| vii. Phatic | 0 | 0% |
| Total | 37 | 100% |

Table 2 above shows the frequency of illocutionary acts used in the letter. It shows that the letter contains assertive acts (32.4%), performative acts (2.7%), verdictive acts (43.3%), expressive acts (8.2%), directive acts (10.8%), commissive acts (2.7%) and phatic speech act (0%). This indicates that more verdictive acts were used in the letter than other speech acts. This was followed by assertive acts. The phatic speech act was not used. The verdictive acts were used to appraise the writer's position in the Association and the basis of the Association's decision, on one hand and the writer and his Association's perception of the sufferer in regard to the decision, on the other hand. For instance, in the utterance (6), the verdictive act was used to appraise the writer's position and limit of his office using the underlined affirmative and negative evaluations:

As an elected National Officer of the Association, I am personally answerable to NEC and cannot overrule its decisions even if I have totally different viewpoints and positions in regard thereto (6).

Similarly, verdictive act was used in utterance (7) to appraise the status of the unit of the Association that took the decision to invite the sufferer using positive comparison:

TCCP, as an NBA organ, is in precisely the same position and the same applies to all other Committees of the NBA (7).

Furthermore, the verdictive acts were used in utterances (21) and (25) to evaluate the basis of the decision of the Association using negative dissociation:

- i. First, NEC's decision yesterday had no ethnic or religious coloration howsoever and whatever (21).
- ii. The second point that I must clarify is that, NBA NEC, by its decision was not passing any judgement on Mallam Nasir El-Rufai (25).

In the letter, the assertive acts were used to report information concerning the controversy to bring the issue to the light of the readers: "As I explained to you during our telcon, the initial decision to invite HE Nasir El-Rufai was made by the AGC' Technical Committee for Conference Planning ("TCCP" or "the Committee") without any input from NEC

as a body (3)"; to state fact the writer know about the issues: "Indeed, I need to mention that a standard agenda item for the Quarterly NEC Meeting is the Report from the various NBA Sections, Forums and Committees (8)"; and to clarify notion misinterpreted about the association of the Association: "In concluding, I must clarify two critical issues (20)".

Also, in the letter, the directive acts were used to make polite request to the recipient of the letter and to extend the apology to the sufferer. This is expressed in the utterances (30) and (32) below:

- i. I truly would appreciate your bringing this letter to the attention not just of HE Nasir el-Rufai but also to all the other members of the esteemed Nigerian Governor's Forum and in particular, the Chairman of the Forum, He (Dr) Kayode Fayemi (30).
- ii. ... and would appreciate your passing on my regrets and apologies to him personally (32).

Furthermore, the expressive acts were used in the letter to express an explicit apology to the sufferer. This is expressed in the utterance (32) below:

Once again, I offer my sincere and deepest apologies and regrets for the unintended embarrassment that may have caused to HE Nasir el-Rufai by the afore-referenced decision of the NBA NEC and would appreciate your passing on my regrets and apologies to him personally (32).

The performative act was used to accept the responsibility for the embarrassment that the cancellation of the invitation might have caused the sufferer: "As the NBA President, I take full responsibility for the unintended embarrassment and tender my regrets and apologies". (2) However, according Kreidler (1998), before the performative act is effective, it must be performed by the right person at the right place. In the context of the letter, the writer possesses the authority as the President of the Association to admit the blame that the cancellation might have caused. Lastly, the commissive act was used in the letter to commit the writer to the protection of the sufferer from any future embarrassment as a result of the cancellation of the invitation. This is contained in the explicit declaration below:

Please, assure Their Excellences that the Nigerian Bar Association holds all our Governors, including HE Nasir el-Rufai, in the highest esteem and would do nothing intentionally to embarrass them collectively or individually (31).

Perlocutionary acts analysis of the illocutionary acts

Perlocutionary acts are usually the intended or unintended effect generated by an utterance. From the analysis of illocutionary acts, different perlocutionary effects are interpreted. In the acts of assertion, the readers are informed from the report, explanation and clarification given in order to get their understanding and to convince them to accept the writer's position on the matter. For example, in the assertive act in the utterance (13) below, the readers' understanding and acceptance would be achieved as the writer reported how the Association reached the decision to cancel the sufferer's invitation:

As I further mentioned to you during our telcon, the invitation of Mallam Nasir El-Rufai was brought up by NEC members at yesterday's meeting when the TCCP's arrangement for the 2020 AGC was placed on the agenda for discussions and the preponderance of opinion was that His Excellency should be dis-invited. (13)

The perlocutionary effect of the verdictive acts used in the letter can be interpreted as the positive evaluation and exoneration of the Association and the sufferer from the blames and embarrassment associated with the controversy. For instance, in the verdictive acts in the utterances (22) and (28), the readers would be made to clear the cancellation of the invitation from any of the insinuation that could be projected by some quota of the public:

- i. In discussing the issue at NEC, nobody talked about religion or ethnicity. (22)
- ii. Indeed, NEC did not howsoever or at all discuss the substance of the issues that have been raised against the Governor by the different clamor in that regard. (28)

For the directive acts, the readers are expected to act based on the need of the writer. The directive acts were used as a polite strategy to seek for the sufferer's forgiveness and reconciliation. For example, in the utterance (1), inclusive directive was used as a polite request to seek for the sufferer's forgiveness, and also in the utterance (32), polite request marked by 'please' and 'would' was used to extend the apology to the sufferer:

- i. ...let me once again, through your good offices, tender my unreserved apologies to His Excellency, Mallam Nasir El-Rufai, Governor of Kaduna State, for the unintended embarrassment that may have been caused him by the decision of the Nigerian Bar Association ... (1)
- ii. Please, assure Their Excellences that the Nigerian Bar Association holds all our Governors, including HE Nasir el-Rufai, in the highest esteem and would do nothing intentionally to embarrass them collectively or individually... (31).

For the expressive acts, the perlocutionary effect can be interpreted from the expressions of apology and regrets in the utterances (1) and (32) used to seek for forgiveness and reconciliation from the sufferer as a way to pacify him. The performative act used in the utterance (2) could exonerate the sufferer from any embarrassment that the cancellation of the invitation could have caused as the writer would have seen to bear the blame or burden by the performative act: "As the NBA President, I take full responsibility for the unintended embarrassment and tender my regrets and apologies" (2). Lastly, the effect of the commissive act used would be interpreted as an emphasis or modifier to further pacify the sufferer to accept the apology offered by the writer, as in utterance (31): "...and would do nothing intentionally to embarrass them collectively or individually".

Analysis of politeness evaluation

Politeness is the act of face enhancement and protection in any act of face sensitivity which can be interpreted as either act of threatening or boosting to any of the participants in an interaction (Ruhi, 1998; Akinwotu, 2020). Table 3 below indicates the frequency of politeness evaluation used in the letter.

Table 3: Frequency of politeness evaluation used in the letter

| Politeness evaluation | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| i. Face boosting acts to the writer (FBW) | 14 | 32.6% |
| ii. Face boosting acts to the sufferer (FBS) | 12 | 27.9% |
| iii. Face threatening acts to the writer (FTW) | 9 | 20.9% |
| iv. Face threatening acts to the sufferer (FTS) | 8 | 18.6% |
| Total | 43 | 100% |

Table 3 above indicates the frequency of the politeness evaluation used in the letter. It shows that the letter contains FBW (32.6%), FBS (27.9%), FTW (20.9%) and FTS (18.6%). This shows that in the letter more FBW's were used than FBS's, FTW's and FTS's. In the letter, FBW's were found in the assertive acts in utterances (3, 6-12) where the writer presented facts about the Association's compositions and procedures in order to make justification and clarification on how the Association reached the decision to cancel the invitation of the sufferer. These explanations and clarifications constitute in group compliments and regards to the writer who serves as its President. The FBS's in the letter were found in the apology offered, positive association and negative de-association that constitute face repairer and enhancer to the sufferer. This can be found in the expressive acts (utterances 1 and 32), performative act (utterance 2), verdictive acts (utterances 17, 21-29), directive acts (utterances 1 and 32) and commissive act (utterance 32). Meanwhile, the FTW's were contained in the expression of apology in directive and expressive acts (utterances 1 and 32) and acceptance of responsibility for the embarrassment done to the sufferer in performative act (utterance 2) as well as in some expressions of explanation, clarification and evaluation in assertive acts (utterances 19) and verdictive acts (utterances 6, 15, 16, 20 and 29) respectively. The FBW's were used to attend to the need of the sufferer for exoneration from accusations and personality attacks, and by extension the need for positive association. However, the FTS's to sufferer were contained in the expressions of evaluation or appraisal in verdictive acts (utterances 14, 15, 24, 27 and 29). The FTS's were used to attend to the need of the Association to cancel the sufferer's invitation in order to avoid social disharmony among its members and the public. For instance, the utterance (27) below contains verdictive act that constitutes FTS that attends to the need of the Association to cancel the sufferer's invitation in order avoid social disharmony:

NEC merely made a judgement that it was not in the best interest of the Association to be engulfed in the controversy

that trailed the invitation of Mallam el-Rufai for the Conference and that it was best if the safety-valve of dis-inviting the Governor was applied (27).

Discussion of the findings

This study examined and explored the speech acts and politeness strategies used in the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) President's apology letter to the Nigerian Governor's Forum Director-General (DG) over the controversy that emerged from the Association's cancellation of its invitation to Governor Nasir El- Rufai. As such, the letter was examined within the context of conflict and its management.

The analysis of the speech acts used in the letter in table 2 reveals the preponderance of verdictive acts (43.3%) and assertive acts (32.4%); and selective use of directive acts (10.8%), expressive acts (8.2%), performative act (2.7%) and commissive act (2.7%). The verdictive acts were used in utterances (21) and (25) to evaluate the premises of the decision of the Association using negative dissociation to dispel negative interpretation. They were also used to create positive evaluation and to exonerate the Association and the sufferer from the blames and embarrassment associated with the controversy. Also, in the letter, the assertive acts were used to report and clarify certain information concerning the controversy in order to bring the issue to the light of the readers. In such acts of assertion, the readers were informed from the report, explanation and clarification in order to get their understanding and to convince them to accept the writer's position on the matter. For example, in the assertive act in the utterance (13), the readers' understanding and acceptance were sought as the writer reported how the Association reached the decision to cancel the sufferer's invitation.

Also, in the letter, the directive acts were used as a polite strategy to seek for the sufferer's forgiveness and reconciliation. For example, in the utterance (1), inclusive directive act was used as a polite request to seek for the sufferer's forgiveness and reconciliation, and also in the utterance (32), polite request marked by 'please' and 'would' was used to extend the apology to the sufferer.

The expressive acts were used in the letter to express an explicit apology to the sufferer. They were used in the expressions of apology and regrets in the utterances (1) and (32) to amend relationship with the sufferer. The performative act was used in the utterance (2) to exonerate the sufferer from any accusation that the cancellation of the invitation could have brought: "As the NBA President, I take full responsibility for the unintended embarrassment and tender my regrets and apologies" (2). Lastly, the commissive act was used in the letter to commit the writer to the protection of the sufferer from any future embarrassment as a result of the cancellation of the invitation. It was used as an emphasis or modifier to further pacify the sufferer to accept the apology offered by the writer, as in utterance (31): "...and would do nothing intentionally to embarrass them collectively or individually". The analysis of the speech used in the utterances affirms Kreidler's (1998) proposition that utterances are speech acts which certain verbal actions are performed.

Furthermore, the analysis of politeness evaluation in table 3 reveals the frequent use of FBW (32.6%), FBS (27.9%), and FTW (20.9%) and FTS (18.6%). In the letter, FBW's were found in the assertive acts which presented facts about the Association's compositions and procedures as self-politeness strategy to the writer. The FBS's in the letter were found in the expressive acts, performative act, verdictive acts, directive acts and commissive act that constitute regards and exonerations to the sufferer. Meanwhile, the FTW's were contained in the expression of apology in directive and expressive acts and acceptance of responsibility for the embarrassment done to the sufferer in performative act as well as in some expressions of explanation, clarification and evaluation in assertive acts and verdictive acts respectively. The FBS's were used as other politeness strategies to attend to the need of the sufferer for exoneration from accusations and personality attacks, and by extension the need for positive association. However, the FTS's were contained in the expressions of evaluation or appraisal in verdictive acts, they were used as self and other politeness strategies to attend to the need of the Association to cancel the sufferer's invitation in order to avoid social disharmony among its members and the public. To sum up, the politeness evaluation shows that the writer used the face boosting acts for self and other politeness to save his face and that of the sufferer from public embarrassment while admitting some face damaging acts to attend to need of the sufferer for public respect and positive association as well as the need of the Association to avoid social disharmony. Thus, the speech acts in the utterances in the letter constitute both face boosting and threatening acts, and this is in agreement with Ruhi's (1998) concept of face sensitivity act that proposes the possibility of a speech act to be either a threat or booster but in disagreement with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory that considers speech acts as potential threats. Similarly, the distribution of politeness strategies in the speech acts used in the letter to attend to the face value of the writer and the recipient of the apology is an indication that the balance principle is maintained in the apology letter. This is an attestation to Ruhi's (1998) proposition that if a breach of face occurs, there would be a need to attend to the face reparation through politeness strategies in order to restore a relationship. So, politeness strategies are acts of amendment for a threatened relationship. The study also justified Leech's (2014) view that an apology is a face enhancing strategy that is used to save the face of the offended. By and large, the apology letter is an act of expressions of regrets, information, solidarity and authority displayed in order to seek for forgiveness, understanding, reconciliation, and thus, resolution of a conflict. Therefore, the study does not only agree with the view of many scholars such as Lakoff (1975), Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987) who formulated the concept of politeness as a way of mitigating or avoiding conflict in social interaction, it also provides good justification for politeness to be seen as means of conflict management.

Conclusion

The search for social harmony has always been part of pragmatics. This study examined and explored how politeness strategies were used to manage the controversy in Nigerian Bar Association following the cancellation of

Governor Nasir El-Rufai's invitation to its national conference. It identified the cancellation and its companion criticisms, disagreements and condemnations as acts of conflict that threaten not only the face value of the Governor but also the peaceful co-existence of the members of the Association and the public. In the context of this conflict, the NBA President's apology letter was examined in order to explore the speech acts that constitute the politeness strategies for face boosting or threatening acts. The examination of the data shows that the face boosting acts were used as self politeness strategies to enhance the face value of the writer and sufferer while the face threatening acts were used as other politeness strategies to attend to the need of the Governor for public honour and positive association as well as the need of the Association to cancel the Governor's invitation to avoid social disharmony among its members and the public. In conclusion, the study establishes the fact that politeness strategies are not only ways of avoiding threat or conflict but also a way to manage conflict.

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