

Apology and Linguistic Politeness Strategies in English among Igbo Native Speakers in Nigeria: an Inter-language Study

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to explore the conversational English politeness strategies used by Igbo learners of English in Nigeria. Through a purposive sampling process, a total of 3000 copies of questionnaire in the form of Discourse Completion Task (DCT) consisting of 10 different apology discourse situations positing extent of familiarity, hierarchy and degree of infraction were distributed to undergraduates of Igbo extraction at seven universities systematically selected from the South-East and South-South zones in Nigeria. In all, 2748 copies of questionnaire representing 92 percent were duly completed, returned, coded and analysed using the quantitative tool for analysis of production data. Findings demonstrated that the samples used politeness strategies very significantly in apology discourse. Also, the study revealed that apologies are conversational habits of Igbo bilinguals as the offenders willingly made an apology regardless of social differences and context which were also reflected in their choice of strategies as there was obvious transfer of the nuances of the first/native language/mother tongue to their target language production. The study established that apology realisation in an interlanguage context i.e. Igbo speaking learners of English necessarily bears the burden of native language transfer into target language. In conclusion, this study showed that because of the Igbo understanding that in human interactions, there are possibilities of instances of affront or outrage Igbo bilinguals adopted mainly the positive and negative forms of politeness strategies in apology discourse as the case may be to accomplish a conversational demand. The study found evidence to further dispute the universality of politeness and argued that politeness is culture-specific.

INTRODUCTION

Conversation is a basic feature of face to face interaction in all human societies. As a way of life, conversation is man's second nature. In all works of life and all spheres of human existence, there is need for effective conversation. Problems arise in human interaction partly because of conversation failure. Leadership problems, family misalignments may equally emanate from conversation breakdown. The need to maintain peace and order and the need to let the society and organisations run effectively have led to the search for effective conversation and appropriate strategies. Scholars have investigated conversation strategies. The field of conversation analysis was started in the United States by Harvey Sacks, an American sociologist, in the 1960's and since then it has grown into a sophisticated field of discourse in language studies and different scholars have postulated different hypotheses and theories about conversation analysis. They have also tried to highlight the discourse features of conversation to include turn-taking, politeness, hedging, adjacency principle, code switching, code mixing, etc as they interplay to make for effective communication.

Politeness emphasises the interactant's ability to engage in conversation observing the acceptable, social and cultural norms that facilitate a hitch-free interaction. Afolayan (1974) whose seminal study set the pace for more research in this discipline in Africa and beyond defined politeness as a part of group conduct, commonly, a mark of refinement, that typically categorizes individuals on the basis of good manners and grace. Politeness as a discourse strategy emphasises the need to use words or make utterances that are not intended to offend or viewed as rude by the addressee. Similarly, Akpan (2003) described politeness as an aspect of social behaviour which is central to peaceful co-existence of members and non-members of a given society marked essentially by civility and graciousness of speech to convey intentions and in turn produce the anticipated response/reaction. In other words, interactants try to maintain a good self image by addressing others appropriately hoping to be treated alike in due course. However, Nwoye (1992) described politeness as a continuing system, and anticipated socially mandatory and acceptable rule of behaviour which individuals engaged in discourse are widely informed about and are expected to

perform in line with the acceptable codes of behaviour. For Nwoye, the aim of being polite is not ultimately to make the hearer feel good, or not feel bad, rather it is of acting in accordance with social and cultural habits and expectations. This is to say that conversation as an aspect of daily living must go on and should not necessarily be hinged on the addressee's feelings provided it meets the expected code of good behaviour. Politeness is thus indexed in such conversational acts as requests, offers, apology, greetings, appreciation, criticism etc.

Research and experience have shown that conversational breakdown causes conflict and brings about misunderstanding in families, work places and in the wider society. Furthermore, lack of the use of politeness strategies appears to be at the epicenter of conversational breakdown. The integral nature of this concept mandates that failure to appropriate the resources of politeness in dialogues, official routines and in the conduct of the affairs of the nation will result in conflicts at all spheres of human existence. Over the past decades, the study of speech acts has occasioned a lot of interest and concern and quite a number of studies have been carried out particularly on apology speech act in relation to politeness and how different languages and cultures of the world attempt to realize it. However, the fact remains that there has not been to the best of my knowledge any experimental study on apology speech act and its realisation strategy by Igbo speaking learners of English as a second language in Nigeria. This research will thus help bridge the existing gap and expand research on the linguistic patterns and characteristics of Igbo bilinguals. More so, the universality of the politeness theory advanced by Brown and Levinson (1978) which implies that all cultures of the world express politeness and by extension realize the speech act of apology in the same way which is unexplored among the Igbo of south-east and south-south zones of Nigeria has necessitated this investigation. It is therefore against this background that the present study seeks:

- To examine the degree to which Igbo bilinguals use politeness strategies in English language conversational situations as well as discover the specific politeness strategies this group of bilinguals adopts in apology-related discourse in the interlanguage context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The Brown and Levinson's 1978 theory of politeness evaluates the need to remedy/ameliorate offence which often arises in discourse situations between interlocutors involving acts which are believed to displease or even impose on the hearer. Brown and Levinson describe these behaviours which offend or violate the bounds of discourse and which the addressee does not approve of as "Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)". This theory reckons three fundamental tenets; face, face-threatening acts, and politeness strategies. It stresses the need to maintain face with your addressee, not to perform verbal communication acts that will potentially impose on your addressee's face and to find means of maintaining

interaction by adopting politeness strategies aimed at mitigating the imposition to the hearer's face wants. According to Brown and Levinson, these five strategies: (1) Bald on record (2) Positive politeness (3) Negative politeness (4) Indirectness and (5) Do not do the FTA are graduated with respect to the extent of politeness expressed. Thus, the determination of the potential impact of an utterance increases as one ascends the ladder of strategies from 1-5, on the scale of which 1 is the least polite and 5 being the most polite. In addition to these techniques of redressive action, the theory further suggests that these are largely achieved by observing three major factors: (i) Social distance (D) which highlights the extent of familiarity between interlocutors; (ii) Relative power and status of participants (P) which emphasizes the social hierarchy, position, rank or class of the speakers and (iii) Sensitivity to the degree of imposition (R) which stresses interactant's responsiveness to the level of obtrusion/infracture. The above theory elaborately proposes that in all human interactions, some acts are known to pose a threat to the addressee regardless of the circumstance that has necessitated its utterance. In other words, individuals engaged in conversations/dialogue should adopt/apply conversational techniques in order to avert or minimise an imposition.

Explication of Key Term

Igbo bilinguals is used in this study to describe the inhabitants of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States that make up the south-east zone and some parts of Delta and Rivers States of the south-south geo-political zones in Nigeria, whose native language is Igbo and are learners of English as a second language.

Previous Studies

The body of literature on apology speech act may take a threefold dimension which will try to address various instances and or manifestations of the apology speech act and how speakers apply same to the languages at play as well as discourse situations/contexts. In other words, we will consider: interlanguage, single language and cross-cultural studies in the examination of the apology speech act.

Interlanguage studies on apology

Interlanguage studies on apologies focuses particularly on the native speaker's ability to perform the expected act using the target language. The primary concern of interlanguage phenomenon which involves an interaction of two key languages is on the first language or mother tongue influence on target language production which is the language into which translation is done. Cohen and Olshtain (1981) investigated Hebrew speaking learners of English as a second language and how they navigated apology discourse in their target language. The findings revealed that to accomplish the conversational demand, there was a significant transfer of first language features in the target language as a result of fewer linguistic terms to address the discourse in the target language hence the overlap of Hebrew linguistic peculiarities.

Moreover, House (1988) observed apologising in a foreign language of German students as learners of English language. Findings showed a transfer of German linguistic patterns and expressive styles in the target language. Also, Bergman and Kasper (1993) analysed perception and performance in native and non-native apology of Thai learners of English using a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The result showed that very significant difference in apology realisations was linked to pragmatic transfer of Thai into English. Similarly, Al Zumor (2011) explored interlanguage and cross-cultural concept of apologies in Arabic and English. The study revealed from the interlanguage pragmatics perspective that there exists a transfer of the first language to the target language ostensibly as a consequence of the power of the first language and less contact with the target/second language.

Interlanguage studies on apology have highlighted a reflection of mother tongue/first language variations in the target language production presumably as a result of any of the following factors; preservation of cultural/language identity, inclination to various strategy orientation or target language deficiency.

Single language studies on apology

The single language studies investigated apology strategies based on one language drawing perspectives essentially from the content of the apology as well as individual encounter, study, role-play and even reports targeted on a single language use. Vollmer and Olshtain (1989) evaluated the language of apology in German by means of a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) based on variables of status, distance and degree of infraction posed in different discourse situations. Reports demonstrated that subjects took responsibility for their actions and apologized but expressing apology was notably influenced by the status, distance and degree of offence factors. Again, Holmes' (1989) investigation on sex differences and apologies among New Zealand men and women which attempted to measure their communicative competence in apology discourse considering gender and various social variables revealed that even though both were found to use the same strategies, women apologised more across borders than men. However, Demeter (2006) did a pragmatic study of apology strategies in Romanian using English major students at the University of Romania as subjects with an adaptation from Television Show as study instrument. Reports showed that quite like other languages, there were different manifestations of apology discourse strategies in Romanian.

Single language studies on apology have found substantial evidence to prove that since languages differ from one another, its pragmatic manifestations equally differ largely because there is no interference or transfer or influence of one on the other.

Cross-cultural studies on apology

Cross-cultural studies on apology deals with the various ways different languages/cultures perform the apology speech act given the same parameters of familiarity, social status, measure of infraction etc as the case may be. Garcia's (1989)

seminal study which compared politeness strategies used by native and non-native speakers while apologising in English showed that whereas non-native speakers (Venezuelans) adopted mainly the positive politeness strategies to show camaraderie, native speakers however adopted the negative politeness strategy. Again, Olshtain (1989) examined apologies across languages focusing on how Australian English, Hebrew, German and Canadian French performed the speech act of apology using a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) posing same scenarios and social variables. Findings indicated that across these diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds there was a similarity in their linguistic choices for realizing apology speech act. The study established that faced with similar circumstances, chances are that diverse languages will accomplish apologies characteristically alike. Furthermore, Sugimoto (1997) compared Japanese and American students' style of apology by examining various strategies used to fulfil the conversational goal. The study noted that there were cultural distinctions in their apology realization which further portrays that apology speech act is essentially tied to culture. In the same vein, Suszczynska (1999) analysed different strategies pursued by different languages in apology discourse situations focusing particularly on English, Polish and Hungarian by way of written responses to Discourse Completion Task (DCT). Results depicted that there exist differences in the production of apology responses derivable from strategy arrangement and linguistic choices. In trying to categorize strategies adopted by subjects in the study, cultural inclinations as well as context played major roles as strategies varied distinctly according to English, Polish and Hungarian cultures. Again, Thijittang (2008) studied the pragmatic strategies of English for Thai University students using a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questionnaire and interview questions. The reports of the investigation illustrated that considering all parameters in place as well as social variables posited in all situations which impacted on apology realisations, Thai adopted positive politeness strategies while the English speaking cultures adopted the negative politeness strategies. By the same token, the cross-cultural aspect of Al Zumor's (2011) study which investigated apologies in Arabic and English, reports pointed to the fact that cultural differences greatly influenced realisations of apology as subjects were found to assess the degrees of imposition to the same scenario, differently and of course responded accordingly.

Culture represents the way of life of a people and by extension, culture is the people and the people propagate culture. Therefore, Cross-cultural studies on apology have established that culture plays a key role in apology realization as different cultural values and assumptions manifest their politeness routines in discourse.

METHODS

Approaches in the Investigation of Speech Acts

Language and speech act studies may be investigated using any of the three established data collection methods namely: observation of real/natural discourse, role plays

and discourse completion task (DCT) since each method can influence the reliability and validity of results bearing in mind their many advantages and disadvantages (Cohen 1996; Hoza 2001; Jung 2004; Kasper and Dahl 1991; Rose 1992; Wolfson 1983; Wolfson, Marmor and Jones 1989). Considering that the DCT method is a veritable model and system of collecting large amount of data in a short period and can equally provide a guided context for speech acts, in addition to providing great help in categorizing identifiable strategies and features of naturally occurring speech, it was adopted as the production data collection method for the current research. The choice of this method for the present study therefore took into account: the vastness of the study area, the study population, linguistic background of the targeted samples as well as data collection for the specific speech act under investigation.

Study Design

This study was a cross-sectional structured questionnaire (DCT) based survey. The study focused on politeness strategies in English language as employed by Igbo learners of English as a second language referred to in this study as Igbo bilinguals.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study participants were undergraduate students; males and females, aged between 17 and 25 years purposively drawn from various federal and state universities in the five core Igbo-speaking states that make up the South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria, namely Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo state and the Igbo-speaking areas of Delta and Rivers States in the South-South geo-political zone. These institutions which were selected through a Systematic Sampling Process (SSP) included: Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike (MOUAAU) Abia State, Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU) Awka Anambra State, Ebonyi State University (EBSU) Ebonyi State, University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) Enugu State, Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO) Imo State, Delta State University (DELSU) Delta State and University of Port-Harcourt (UNIPORT) River State. Similarly, in the choice of faculties represented for all institutions of study, the SSP was also applied. Furthermore, using a self-designed balloting strategy, the various disciplines in the faculties were selected. A total of three thousand (3 000) respondents were studied by means of the structured questionnaire. Five hundred (500) participants were drawn from each of the five institutions that make up the core Igbo speaking states of the South-East zone. Similarly, two hundred and fifty (250) participants were drawn from each of the two institutions in the South-South zone.

Study Instrument

Data were collected by means of pretested and validated 10-item apology discourse questionnaire. This study focused on the English language conversation of Igbo native

speakers particularly as they employed politeness strategies in apology discourse which are largely affected by sociolinguistic variables as hierarchy, familiarity and cultural variations. Also, variables such as gender, as well as English proficiency level were considered. The ten situations were designed to provoke politeness strategies in form of apology responses by a modification of those situations used in earlier politeness speech studies by Thijitang (2008). Every item on the questionnaire was followed by three guided options marked alphabetically from A – C. These options were structured to show that every possible option was polite but at varying degrees. Hence all option A was polite, all option B was more polite and all option C was most polite. The participants were required to choose options which best typified their own in similar situations. The Discourse Completion Task (DCT) represented diverse situations simulating the conceived role-play between possible interactants. Thus, sociolinguistic variables like rank or hierarchy of speakers, extent of familiarity between speakers and scale of the infringement in question were posited in each situation.

Data Collection

Data collection took place at the seven (7) institutions selected for the study during the second or rain semester of the 2016/2017 academic session using the pretested and validated structured questionnaire. In a study of this nature which worked human subjects, ethical concerns were considered in collecting data as informed verbal consent was sought and obtained before commencement. The objective of the study was elucidated and participants were guaranteed of the privacy of their responses and use for only research purposes for which they were sought hence the questionnaire remained anonymous. The participants completed the task taking approximately 15 minutes.

Data Analysis

A quantitative analysis was used to evaluate and analyze the expressed opinions of respondents which were presented in frequency tables and simple percentage calculations were used to represent the respondents' opinions on various items. Details of data analysis were as follows: (1) assessment of success in questionnaire distribution, (2) gender distribution of respondents, (3) respondents' English proficiency, (4) summary of respondents' responses on apology discourse and (5) assessment of respondents' responses on apology discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Data Analysis

Assessment of success in questionnaire administration

Table 1 summarises the distribution of questionnaire according to the institutions of respondents and level of returns recorded. The highest percentage of returns was FUTO (95.6%). This was followed by EBSU and UNIPORT that had 92.8% returns, while the least return of questionnaire was 88.0% by MOUAAU.

Gender distribution of respondents

Table 2 shows the gender binary of respondents according to institutions of the study. In general, there is a preponderance of females (58.0%) in the population of the study. While FUTO and DELSU recorded the highest percentage of females (69.0%), UNN recorded the highest percentage of males (58.0%).

Table 1. Distribution of questionnaire and response rate

Institutions	No of questionnaire distributed	No (%) of questionnaire returned
MOUAU	500	440 (88.0)
NAU	500	461 (92.2)
EBSU	500	464 (92.8)
UNN	500	446 (89.2)
FUTO	500	478 (95.6)
DELSU	250	227 (90.8)
UNIPORT	250	232 (92.8)
Total	3000	2748 (92)

MOUAU=Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, NAU=Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, EBSU=Ebonyi State University, UNN=University of Nigeria Nsukka, FUTO=Federal University of Technology Owerri, DELSU=Delta State University, UNIPORT=University of Port Harcourt

Table 2. Respondents according to gender per institution (n=2748)

Institutions	Males		Females	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
MOUAU	200	45.5	240	54.5
NAU	198	43.0	263	57.0
EBSU	204	44.0	260	56.0
UNN	257	58.0	189	42.0
FUTO	148	31.0	330	69.0
DELSU	70	31.0	157	69.0
UNIPORT	76	32.8	156	67.2
Total	1153	42.0	1595	58.0

MOUAU = Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, NAU = Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, EBSU = Ebonyi State University, UNN = University of Nigeria Nsukka, FUTO = Federal University of Technology Owerri, DELSU = Delta State University, UNIPORT = University of Port Harcourt

Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to level of proficiency in english

Level of proficiency in english	Frequency	Percentage
Weak	23	0.8
Fair	700	25.0
Good	1320	48.0
Very good	604	22.1
Excellent	101	4.1
Total	2748	100

Respondents' english proficiency level

Table 3 indicates respondents' self-assessment of proficiency level in English Language. Results show that the highest percentage (48.0%) was of the good proficiency level while the least percentage (0.8%) was of the weak proficiency level.

Responses on apology discourse

Table 4 shows the frequency of respondents' responses on apology discourse considering the situations projected by different scenarios and taking into account the guided options provided.

Assessment of overall respondents' discourse on apology

Table 5 Shows that 61.33% of the males chose option A which is the polite option, 55.23% of the males also selected option B which is the more polite option and 30.98 chose the most polite option C. On the other hand 37.96% of the females chose option A, 44.77% chose option B while 69.02% selected the most polite option C.

DISCUSSION

Apology discourse presupposes that in the course of human interaction, there may be instances of affront, anger, or even displeasure which may be either speaker or hearer-generated and which will in turn call for an expression of remorse or regret otherwise referred to as apology. The act of apologising is equally dependent on the severity of offence that is to say that some offence may be considered mild or not severe while others may be judged grave or severe. According to Leech (1983), apology is a conscious effort to right an established wrong between interlocutors brought about in the course of interaction upon realisation that the speaker/offender/apologizer has verbally bruised the ego of the hearer/offended. There is clear indication from data obtained that it is only human that in interactions, there may be instances of anger, affront or displeasure and to restore equilibrium, the offender expresses regret and takes responsibility for the offence in the form of an apology. The results show that apologies are habits born out of simple courtesy and are conversational routines of Igbo bilinguals more so in their English language conversation as they were found to willingly make an apology at the instance of a perceived infraction or imposition even though there is an appreciable transfer of the nuances of their native or first language into the target language. Our finding regarding this native or first language transfer is corroborated in earlier reports that most interlanguage studies present linguistic features of the native speakers into the target language (Cohen and Olshtain, 1981; House, 1988; Bergman and Kasper, 1993; Al Zumor, 2011; Dozie, 2017). This obvious language transfer has been attributed to the domineering power of the native or first language and less contact with the target/second language which loosely translates to target language incompetence.

It is interesting though to note that in spite of the guided options, some social variables were also taken into

Table 4. Summary of respondents' responses on apology discourse

Situation	OPTION A										OPTION B										OPTION C									
	POLITE					MORE POLITE					MOST POLITE					POLITE					MORE POLITE					MOST POLITE				
	MOUAU	NAU	EBSU	UNN	FUTO	DELSU	UNIPORT	MOUAU	NAU	EBSU	UNN	FUTO	DELSU	UNIPORT	MOUAU	NAU	EBSU	UNN	FUTO	DELSU	UNIPORT	MOUAU	NAU	EBSU	UNN	FUTO	DELSU	UNIPORT		
1	90	92	95	93	100	44	45	321	337	339	326	349	166	169	27	28	28	27	29	14	14	27	28	28	27	29	14	14		
2	2	4	1	5	0	3	4	385	403	406	390	418	199	203	55	58	58	56	60	29	29	55	58	58	56	60	28	29		
3	19	20	20	17	21	10	10	388	406	409	393	421	200	204	33	35	35	34	36	17	17	33	35	35	34	36	17	17		
4	3	1	2	3	0	6	3	49	51	51	49	53	25	26	391	410	413	397	425	206	206	391	410	413	397	425	202	206		
5	142	151	152	142	158	69	74	26	27	27	26	28	13	14	269	282	283	272	292	142	142	269	282	283	272	292	139	142		
6	31	33	33	28	34	16	17	42	44	45	43	46	22	22	366	384	386	371	398	193	193	366	384	386	371	398	189	193		
7	30	32	32	31	33	16	16	10	11	11	10	11	5	5	400	420	422	406	435	211	211	400	420	422	406	435	207	211		
10	1	2	0	4	0	0	5	49	51	51	49	53	25	26	391	410	413	397	425	206	206	391	410	413	397	425	202	206		
8	9	9	11	10	11	5	5	15	15	16	15	16	8	8	415	435	438	421	451	219	219	415	435	438	421	451	214	219		
9	148	155	156	150	161	76	73	214	224	225	216	232	110	113	78	82	83	79	85	41	41	78	82	83	79	85	40	41		
Total	475	499	502	483	518	245	252	1499	1569	1580	1517	1627	773	790	2425	2544	2559	2460	2636	1278	1278	2425	2544	2559	2460	2636	1252	1278		

MOUAU=440, NAU=461, EBSU=464, UNN=446, FUTO=478, DELSU=227, UNIPORT=232, TOTAL=2748

Table 5. Assessment of respondents' responses on apology discourse (n=2748)

Situation	Social status	Social distance	Severity of offence	OPTION A						OPTION B						OPTION C					
				POLITE			MORE POLITE			MOST POLITE			MORE POLITE			MOST POLITE					
				Freq	%	%	Freq	%	%	Freq	%	%	Freq	%	%	Freq	%	%			
1	S=H	OSD	-	559	18.80	347	11.67	212	7.13	2007	21.45	1101	11.77	906	9.68	167	1.10	51	0.34	116	0.77
2	S=H	OSD	-	19	0.64	9	0.30	7	0.24	2404	25.70	1312	14.02	1092	11.67	344	2.27	92	0.61	252	1.66
3	S=H	OSD	+	117	3.93	65	2.19	44	1.48	2421	25.88	1262	13.49	1159	12.39	207	1.37	53	0.35	154	1.02
4	S=H	OSD	+	18	0.61	15	0.50	7	0.24	304	3.25	169	1.81	135	1.44	2444	16.1	710	4.69	1734	11.44
5	S0H	-SD	-	888	29.86	505	16.98	337	11.33	161	1.72	91	0.97	70	0.75	1679	11.08	467	3.08	1212	8.00
6	S<H	-SD	-	192	6.46	123	4.14	73	2.45	264	2.82	145	1.55	119	1.27	2287	15.09	673	4.44	1614	10.65
7	S<H	OSD	+	190	6.39	114	3.83	72	2.42	63	0.67	45	0.48	18	0.19	2501	16.50	825	5.44	1676	11.06
10	S<H	OSD	+	12	0.40	6	0.20	5	0.17	304	3.25	187	2.00	117	1.25	2444	16.13	789	5.21	1655	10.92
8	S>H	+SD	+	60	2.02	39	1.31	23	0.77	93	0.99	71	0.76	22	0.24	2593	17.11	792	5.23	1801	11.88
9	S>H	OSD	+	919	30.90	601	20.21	349	11.74	1334	14.26	784	8.38	550	5.88	488	3.22	242	1.60	246	1.62
Total				2974	100.00	1824	61.33	1129	37.96	9355	100.00	5167	55.23	4188	44.77	15154	100.00	4694	30.98	10460	69.02

S=Speaker, H=Hearer, SD=Social Distance, <=Lower; =equal; >=higher; 0=not established, +=close; -=distant; 0=neutral, severity of offence (+=severe=-not severe)

consideration i.e. social status and social distance. These social variables posed instances where (a) the interactants are equals (situation 1, 2, 3, and 4) (b) the interactants' statuses are not established (situation 5) (c) the speaker is lower than the hearer (situation 6, 7 and 10) and (d) the speaker is higher than the hearer (situation 8 and 9). Again the severity of offence was a significant variable which informed the depth of apology expressed in every situation. It is therefore indicated that the offences of situations (1, 2, 5 and 6) were not severe while the offences of situations (3, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10) were severe. Data from the study also indicate a certain level of variance in the act of apologising in the English language conversation of the Igbo bilingual considering the social status/social distance factors and most importantly the severity of offence criterion which is used to approximate the contriteness or obduracy of an apology. This fact is corroborated in earlier studies by Butler 2001 who argued that the act of apologising for second language learners is a complicated and intricate one. Butler further noted that an apologiser who does not meet the communicative goal required of him in an apology situation may come across as unapologetic since it is believed that for an apology to yield the desired result, it should convey true feelings. In line with Butler 2001, it is not out of place therefore that the study participants who are second language learners of the English language may encounter some difficulties in expressing apology in the second language as a result of native language and second language as well as culture incompatibility/influence and transfer, but their choices of options convey appropriate linguistic terms and politeness strategies for apology. In any case, result of the study shows that the Igbo bilinguals in these situations regardless of social differences admit to violation of standards of behaviour and apologise irrespective of social disparity. This finding is a confirmation of previous studies by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984 that apologies as a speech act are usually subsequent to an earlier act of indignity or affront through which a speaker tries to restore balance with his/her addressee having realised that his/her verbal actions may have been out of line and threatened the addressee's face-wants. Thus, the act of apologising entails speaker's deference to the hearer at cost to the speaker. Apology speech act therefore provides an opportunity particularly for the sample population to remedy an already bad situation.

Again, the severity of offence posed in the situations projected by different scenarios show that the grave offences of situations (3, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10) generated predominantly the most polite option C responses in which case the speakers adopted the positive politeness strategy or redressive action. This indicates that Igbo bilinguals willingly admit to causing displeasure and take responsibility for their actions by: (i) acknowledging that the addressee is justified to be upset by the breach; (ii) showing eagerness to make things right again with the addressee by offering repair; (iii) use of formal terms that portray great respect for the addressee. This significant observation agrees with Vollmer and Olshtain's (1989) and Dozie's (2017) earlier studies that subjects eagerly took responsibility for their actions and apologized but expressing apology was largely influenced by status, distance and degree of offence factors. On the other hand, the mild

offences of situations (1, 2, 5 and 6) led to the adoption of the negative politeness strategy which shows that however mild an infraction, Igbo bilinguals take responsibility for their actions and inactions and find means to show remorse and express regret. Our finding regarding the choice of strategy as well as Sugimoto's (1997) earlier reports indicate that various strategies may be used to fulfil the conversational goal as cultural distinctions are essential to apology realization. However, result arising from situation (9) indicates that in spite of the severity of the offence as presented, the speaker (university lecturer) avoided overt expression of apology ostensibly for social status and threat to his/her face. These findings support earlier studies by Thijitang 2008 that when apologising, an addresser is perceptive to the addressee's social rank. As such, speakers in lower position tend to avoid offending individuals in higher position and of course show deference to them. Also, speakers of equal status preferred accepting the blame in severe offences as it is believed that there is every possibility that they will encounter one another again thus the need to repair the damage done and recreate balance in the relationship. While speakers of higher rank find it difficult to express apology to those of lower rank because they considered it a threat to their face on the grounds of social inequality. Similarly, Suszczyńska's (1999) and Al Zumor's (2011) studies further substantiate that culture as well as context and degree of imposition plays a vital role in apology realisations as samples were found to weigh these variables and responded accordingly.

Conversely, in situation (5) where the social variables between interlocutors were not established, results show that responses tilted towards the most polite option C which is a clear indication that expressing politeness in apology discourse among Igbo bilinguals is not limited to familiar faces but cuts across the unfamiliar margins. This angle of unestablished social variables between interlocutors remains an aspect of the Igbo culture which elaborately defines their relationships with people generally. Although this dimension has not been investigated in other cultures considering available literature for the study, the result further confirms prior studies by Nwoye 1989 that, the Igbo society is a classic depiction of an open and unrestricted community and as a result, members enjoy being treated fairly. As opposed to some other societies of the world marked by segregation and divisions into various groups/elements, the Igbo society supports a group orientation with its primary concern for togetherness, which underscores the Igbo team spirit and the need to be a brother's keeper.

Like other social variables, gender binary statistics indicate that male respondents (61.33%) were more inclined to option A (polite) responses unlike the female respondents (69.02%) who showed preference to option C (most polite) responses. Granted that all options show a degree of politeness but they are graduated to imply that while Option A is polite, Option B is more polite and Option C is the most polite of the responses. The choice of the most polite Option C by the majority of the female respondents indicates the females in the study sample yield more to linguistic politeness principles which is an indication of a very important quality of better linguistic propriety in females than males. This

finding is corroborated by previous studies (Holmes 1995; Subon 2013) that females show a remarkably distinct use of expressive politeness strategies than their male counterparts.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that Igbo bilinguals use politeness strategies in English language conversational situations. It has also established specific politeness strategies this group of bilinguals adopts in apology-related discourse in the interlanguage context as either the positive or the negative politeness strategies to fulfil a conversational demand. More specifically, the role of politeness in this context as a transcendent concept for the Igbo bilingual in Nigeria is to achieve a communicative goal. Apologies therefore are conversational habits of Igbo bilinguals as the offenders across relationships - vertical, horizontal and diagonal portrayed in various situations willingly make an apology regardless of social difference. Notably so, socio-cultural perceptions largely influenced the need to show politeness as well as strategies employed for its realisation in conversational circumstances among the study participants. It therefore follows that to attain linguistic competence in an interlanguage context/setting, appreciation of the nuances of the target language remains exceedingly crucial as there is an obvious interplay of languages and cultures.

The findings of this study are restricted to various situations investigated in the research for only Igbo bilinguals in Nigeria. Similar study across other languages in Nigeria need to be carried out for a much wider coverage as Nigeria is a multilingual nation. Also, for an extended and more comprehensive future research, the findings of this study can be used to evaluate findings from related studies to know the area of similarity as well as difference existing across languages and cultures. In addition, related studies involving smaller samples should be carried out adopting principally the observation of naturally occurring discourse and or the role-play methods.

It is recommended that to achieve communicative competence in the language a learner is attempting to acquire (target language), there is need to integrate the key findings of the study into syllabus for a much rounded pedagogy.

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