

Im/politeness in Muslim Discourse: A Study of Nigerian Friday Sermons

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Abstract

This paper investigated the use of im/politeness in Muslim sermons or *Khutbahs*. The study attempts to show that the Muslim sermon, in its aim to impart various types of religious information to the congregation, is a communicative event that is capable of generating ill-feelings among its various audiences. The Imam is thus expected to make strategic use of politeness elements in his delivery or risk compromising the efficacy of the sermon. To identify these elements, a modified version of Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness was used as an analytical framework. Using naturally occurring data collected from Friday sermons, the study shows that the Imams used several politeness strategies identified in the Brown and Levinson model. Furthermore, the inclusion of data comprising sermons delivered in Yorùbá adduced evidence of the influence of the Yorùbá culture in the linguistic politeness practices of the Imams. In addition, it is shown that although the Imams used the traditional Face Threatening Acts (FTAs), these largely amount to 'conventional aggression' (Harris, 2001) or 'unmarked FTAs' (Dynel 2015). The study concluded that the Imams were characteristically polite in their delivery, and politeness is an important feature in a religious discourse such as the Friday sermon.

Keywords: FTA, aggression, khutbah, sermon, Imam, im/politeness.

1. Introduction

There is no gainsaying that there is an on-going global war on terrorism now; the *Boko Haram* crisis in the northern part of Nigeria is shaking the country, and its socio-political and economic life is seriously being threatened. As a result of these, the Muslims' lives and religion are under serious threats largely because bad images of the Muslims and Islam "have [been] painted in the minds of everyone who reads any newspaper or watches the television, since September 11" (Chang, 2005, p. 313ff). Also, Islamophobic organisations in the United States of America are spending hundreds of millions of dollars to promote prejudices against, and hatred of Muslims and Islam across the world (CAIR & CRG, 2016). Given these situations, there is a special focus on the Muslim scholars and their sermons, particularly in Nigeria in this case, because they are already being accused of various kinds of (meta) impoliteness. The Friday *Khutbah* or sermon is an important rite in the Muslim community, and its purpose is the purification of the individual and societal lives.

2. Statement of the problem

Despite the huge literature on politeness, there are still theoretical problems (Eelen, 2014). Therefore, research on politeness does not stop, and the field of impoliteness too is still rapidly growing (Dynel, 2015). Researchers have pointed out that studies in im/politeness still need to be carried out in many areas in order to have a better understanding of these fields of study that are still not satisfactorily understood despite the huge literature and/or research on them. This paper, therefore, investigates one such area that seems to have been neglected with regards to im/politeness. Bouchara (2015) states that politeness features in virtually all human linguistic exchanges; it is expected, therefore, that the Muslim sermon discourse cannot be an exception.

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There are several studies on the Christian sermons, e.g. Bruce (2006), Martin (2011), Song (2011), Luu-Quang (2012), Hwang (2013), Sims (2015) etc. By contrast, there is little research on the Muslim sermonic discourse, e.g. Ram (1992), Underwood and Kamhawi (2014). This study will contribute to the scholarship on im/politeness by investigating one neglected area, the Muslim sermon. We saw in the introduction of this study that the Muslim sermon is in a hostile environment. Therefore, there is a great need for the use of politeness in the sermon in order to get fair hearing. Besides, our initial assumptions are that the Imams communicate God's wishes and expectations to their hearers; they criticize people's socio-cultural practices that negate such. All these objectives are potential face threats to the hearers and could be considered offensive. That is, they infringe on the face wants of the hearers and/or congregation. In other words, they are face-threatening acts (FTAs). There is also the need, therefore, for the Imams to employ politeness in their sermons in order for those sermons to be receptive to the hearers, and in order not to jeopardise the efficacy of the sermons.

Our aim is to study the Muslim sermon discourse with a view to examining how the Imams integrated im/politeness into their sermons and identifying the various politeness strategies they employed in those sermons. Our data comprise of natural speeches; they were sermons collected in the Yorùbá land, that is, southern part of Nigeria. A modified model of Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978]) is used as our analytical tool. The following research questions will guide our study: Do Imams use Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) in their sermons? If Imams use FTAs, what politeness strategies do they employ? If there are similarities or differences between Yorùbá and English sermons, how can they be explained?

3. Linguistic background of the Muslim sermons in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multi- religious, cultural, tribal and linguistic entity; religion plays a prominent role (Esimaje, 2012) in the socio-political life of the country. Researchers such as Grundy (2008), LoCastro (2012), Odebunmi (2009), Culpeper (2011a), etc. have pointed out that cultural values and beliefs influence the linguistic behaviours of people and that socio-cultural values and beliefs of interactants largely have impact on how they produce and interpret meaning in their daily social linguistic encounters. Culture, in the view of Culpeper (2011a), is "a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioural conventions, and basic assumptions and values that are shared by a group of people, and that influence each member's behaviour and each member's interpretation of 'meaning' of other people's behaviour" (p. 12). Since our data were collected from the south-western part of Nigeria, there is the need to have a good grasp of their cultural values to enable us understand their politeness behaviours. The south-western Nigeria comprises of six states: Èkìtì, Lagos, Ògùn, Òndó, Òsun and Òyó; they are primarily Yorùbá although Yorùbá are also found in Kogi and Kwara in the North-central, and in Edo in the south-south geo-political zones (Adetomokun, 2012; Akinyele, 2006; Falola & Genova, 2006; Opeloye, 2012). It has been noted that Yorùbá form the vast majority in Kwara (Atolagbe, 2012; Odebunmi, 2013; Thani, 2017).

Adebite and Odebunmi (2010) put the population of Yorùbá in south-west of Nigeria at 18 million; going by the National Population Commission of Nigeria, however, their population is 30 million today (Thani, 2017). Islam and Christianity are the two dominant religions in the area. The two religions are rivals who struggle for human salvation; their rivalry has gone beyond the religious domain and extended to the socio-political domains (Thani, 2017).

Researchers such as Bouchara (2015) and Hamady (1960) have averred that religion is largely a source of politeness in the Muslim world. Because Arabic is the language of the scripture of Islam, the two have become so interwoven that it will be very difficult to separate them. The language is central to all Muslims irrespective of their nationalities; it is part of the identity of each Muslim and it is a unifying factor that ties together all the Muslims across the globe (Bouchara, 2015). "In order to fully understand the divine words of their Lord, Muslims often seem eager to make every attempt to understand Classical Arabic language" (Bouchara, 2015, p. 76). There are certain common religious nuances among Muslims which are generally politeness formulae and are an aspect of their shared pragmalinguistic knowledge. Such politeness formulae are part of the linguistic behaviours and culture of Muslims which are unique to them and are actually not found in others. It is very important, therefore, to have a better understanding of this community of practice in order to grasp well how politeness operates in this activity type, Friday sermon, and interpret it correctly. Bouchara (2015) identifies some Arabic expressions which are 'lexicons of religion' and are politeness formulae that are found in daily behaviours, including sermons, of Moroccan Muslims, specifically, in their social interactions, but these are common to Muslims around the world. For example, *barakallahu fīkum/ fīk* means *may Allah bless you or may the blessing of Allah be upon you* (pl/sg).

“When a Muslim wants to thank another person, he/she uses different statements to express his/her thanks, appreciation, and gratitude. One of them is to say *barakallahu fik*” (Bouchara, 2015, pp. 78; see pp. 77-79 for details). *Māsha Allah* literally means “‘Whatever Allah wants/whatever Allah wants to give, He gives’” (ibid). But functionally Muslims use it as a compliment; it indicates pleasant surprise, excitement and happiness over whatever Allah has blessed the hearer with. Bouchara (2015) avers: “This is an expression that Muslims say whenever they are excited and surprised. When they wish to express their happiness. Whenever Allah gives something good to someone, blesses him, honors him, and opens the door of success in business, a Muslim says this statement of *mĒsha Allah* ... It is a sign of thanks and appreciation from the person to Almighty Allah for whatever he/she was blessed with.”

The speaker is using politeness here by communicating his/her pleasure and excitement by thanking Allah on behalf of the hearer for his/her achievement; this turns out to be a compliment to the hearer since it serves as an approval, and encourages the hearer to continue with the behaviour (Fracchiolla, 2011). Another common expression is *inna lillabi wa inna ilayhi rāji’ūn* which literally means ‘to Allah we belong and to Him is our return.’ This expression has dual functions. It is a politeness strategy and it can also be a face-threatening utterance simultaneously. Pragmatically, this expression is used in the face of misfortunes and calamities. “When a Muslim is struck with a calamity, when he/she loses one of his/her loved ones, or when he/she has gone bankrupt, he/she should be patient and say this statement” (Bouchara, 2015, p. 78). It is equivalent to the expressions of condolence that the Europeans give (e.g. ‘I give my condolence over the loss of your father’ said to a friend whose father has just died). However, the expression can be an attack on the positive face of the hearer or a third party; one says this because of the hearer’s or another person’s previous utterance or action. It indicates the speaker evaluates such an utterance or action as a misfortune or calamity. Such a misfortune may be material or spiritual. In some contexts, the hearer may feel embarrassed, especially, if the hearer does not realize he/she has done something of that magnitude.

Subhānallah, which means ‘Glorified be Allah or glory be to Allah’, functions like *inna lillabi wa inna ilayhi rāji’ūn* discussed above. Ordinarily, it indicates pleasant surprise like *Māsha Allah*. It can be used as a compliment such as saying: ‘That’s great!’ That is, when the hearer has done something wonderful, and the speaker shows his/her pleasure, and commends the hearer. On the other hand, it is used for face attack. As such, the speaker may indicate unpleasant surprise at the hearer’s utterance or action or that of the third party; that is often followed by a criticism or condemnation. The succeeding act, whether a criticism, a condemnation or a compliment, is an important clue for determining whether *Subhānallah* functions as a politeness strategy or as an FTA. Such expressions are not limited to any specific activity type; they cut across daily social activities of Muslims. Some instances of these were found in our data. Except one is familiar with this community of practice (Mills, 2003) and how such formulae are negotiated for meaning, it will be difficult to understand and interpret the Muslim discourse, especially sermons, very well.

4. Politeness in Yorubaculture

Our data, as we mentioned earlier, were from among Yorùbá. Research such as Odebunmi (2009, 2013), Odebode and Onadipe (2011), has shown that Yorùbá are very polite; greetings and courtesy are very important aspects of their cultural values. Makoni (2015) supports this assertion by saying that honour and respect are grammaticalized in many African languages and cultures. Leo Frobenius (1913; cited in ‘The Rhythm of shekere’ <http://rhythmsofshekere.org/2014/06/29/the-meaning-of-yoruba-a-consequence-of-amnesia/#comments>), commenting on the Yorùbá courtesy, avers:

... But the salutations are another pair of shoes. Their many variations would seem a striking oddity in Europe. Some of the other Yoruban [sic] tribes may be taken as patterns of politeness in their greeting, which may, as we think, **be considered overdone**.... (Leo Frobenius, 1913; emphasis added)

This shows the complexity of, and the extent Yorùbá culture can go in terms of politeness. Yorùbá are usually elaborate in their affairs, including greetings, and, as Leo Frobenius pointed out, they will be considered over polite, especially, compared to European cultures. In the Yorùbá culture, premium is placed on greetings and politeness; they hold the duo in high esteem (Ajayi & Balogun, 2014). Greetings foster interpersonal relationship among people (Elegbeleye, 2005) and enhance social solidarity (Yuen, 2009). For every kind of imaginable activity, which a person may be doing and at whatever time, the Yorùbá have a greeting for it (Adegbiya, 1989; Adejumo, 2010; Akindede, 2007; Oyetade, 1995); the people take offence if a person does not greet at all or he/she does not greet as they deem it appropriate. Such behaviour is regarded as misconduct (Elegbeleye, 2005) and a shame on the family of the offender, especially the parents.

As a result of that, the Yorùbá culture makes it ‘an obligatory duty on parents to teach their children how to greet and how to use [the] appropriate language’ (Ajayi and Balogun, 2014: 83). And because greetings occupy such high place in the culture, it places the responsibility on the elders available where a young person does not greet to teach such a child. So, it is common to find an old person say: ‘My child! Next time you find people doing something as this, you should greet them as such and such,’ and he/she will teach the child the greeting formula appropriate for such activity type. Adejumo (2010) echoes this when he avers:

“An average Yorùbá has the attribute of politeness. Politeness is even a key part of the socialization process. Yorùbá people have forms of greeting for all occasions. Thus, anybody that fails to greet appropriately cannot be regarded as *omólúàbí* (gentle man and gentle woman).” (p. 8)

Moreover, they often avoid calling people by their names out of politeness and courtesy. This explains why they use a lot of appellations and pet names (Ajayi & Balogun, 2014). Wives use *iyakọ mi* and *baba ọkọ mi* (my husband’s mother and my husband’s father) for their sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law respectively. The husband can be referred to as *bálé mi* or *bálé wa*; that is, my household head or our household head, which is a polite way the wives call their husbands. A wife who calls her husband by his name lacks manners and/or is westernised in people’s evaluation. Another way they show politeness is in the use of honorifics (Ajayi & Oyetade, 2016). Basically, age is a vital social variable in Yorùbá and many African cultures; a younger person must use one honorific or the other to call or refer to an older person (Elegbeleye, 2005). Responding to questions at his book launching recently, Chief Ọbásanjó, a Yorùbá elder statesman and former president of Nigeria, said: “Any Nigerian, that is well-born and well brought-up, will respect two things among others: age and authority” (Ọbásanjó, 2015). By this, Chief Obasanjo was indirectly scolding a questioner for, in Obasanjo’s evaluation, not respecting his age and authority as a result of which the questioner did not use the appropriate honorifics and for not conducting himself well enough, perhaps, as expected of any well-bred Nigerian. This is an indication that Yorùbá value politeness and do not tolerate impoliteness no matter how little because such impoliteness or misconduct does not only put to shame (or attack the face of) the offender alone but his or her family too.

For an elder, the young ones among Yorùbá use the honorific **È^h** or **Èyin^h** (honorific/plural ‘you’) instead of **Ìwọ** (non-honorific/singular ‘you’) or the honorific third person plural **Àwọ̀n^h** or **wọ̀n^h** (they or them) (Ajayi & Balogun, 2014; Ajayi & Oyetade, 2016; Odebunmi, 2013) irrespective of the gender since Yorùbá do not distinguish between male and female in terms of pronouns; to do otherwise is a misconduct or impoliteness. Among people of the same age bracket and close friends, the non-honorific singular **Ìwọ**, **O** or **Ọ** (you) is used and **Ọhun** or **Ó** (he/she, him/her) for the third person singular; an older person also uses the same for a younger one. However, people use the honorific **È^h** or **Èyin^h** for one another, in some cases, irrespective of the age differences, and it is common nowadays in religious circles.

Yorùbá also use consanguine address terms such as ‘father’, ‘mother’, ‘child’ (they usually use *ọmọ* for child; they do not distinguish between ‘son’ and ‘daughter’ lexically, but, of course, they indicate sex), ‘aunt’, ‘uncle’, etc. for politeness reasons (see Odebunmi, 2013). In religious circles, ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ are used, irrespective of age and power, to indicate the spiritual blood tie. All these are necessary for a correct understanding and analysis of the linguistic behaviours of Yorùbá people. Bamgbose (1994) avers that ‘[k]nowing a language well, it is generally agreed, is not only knowing the correct forms of expression in the language but also knowing the appropriate situations in which to use such expressions’ (p. 117). Therefore, if one knows what Yorùbá say and in what context they say it, then one can relate with them easily without any breakdowns and then one can correctly interpret their linguistic behaviours whether that is in English or in Yorùbá.

5. Theoretical Framework

Brown and Levinson (1987) have the most influential model of politeness (Odebunmi, 2009); the model has been theoretically and empirically inspirational for research in the fields of pragmatics (Jansen & Janssen, 2010), socio-pragmatics, and socio-linguistics, etc. Their model is thorough and comprehensive; it particularly provides a firm foundation for theoretical and empirical foundation for studies in politeness scholarship (Locher & Watts, 2005). In fact, Schlund (2014) has argued that the politeness approach of Brown and Levinson (1987) is ‘the most famous and most frequently applied model of politeness’, and it is one of the most cited in im/politeness research (Culpeper, 2011b).

Schlund also argues that '[t]he merit of Brown and Levinson's account is also demonstrated by the fact that their terminology is firmly established in linguistic politeness research' (Schlund, 2014, p. 274). van der Bom and Mills (2015) have also observed that despite the criticisms against Brown and Levinson's model, many researchers "have felt driven back to Brown and Levinson's work". All these indicate that the model of Brown and Levinson is still a veritable theoretical and empirical approach to the study of politeness and impoliteness.

The politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) revolves round two hypothetical Model Persons (MP) who are co-interlocutors; that is, a speaker (S) and a hearer (H). The theory is an integration of the notion of "face" (Goffman, 1967) and Cooperative Principle of Grice (1975). Every MP wants to maintain their face and knows that the other MP too wants their face be maintained. Face is the individual's public self-image and self-esteem; it is an emotional aspect of an individual, and it could be enhanced, maintained or lost. They argue that co-interlocutors attend to the face constantly in their interactions. "In general, people cooperate (and assume each other's cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction, such cooperation being based on the mutual vulnerability of face" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). There are two aspects to the face. The negative face is the individual's want of freedom from imposition and infringement on personal reserves. The desire for the approval and appreciation of others and to be close to them is the positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Any utterance that violates a face want of either the speaker and/or the hearer constitutes a threat to their face. Thus, it is a Face-Threatening Act (FTA).

Brown and Levinson (1987) propose five superstrategies for doing FTA. (1) Do the FTA on-record, baldly unmitigated with any politeness strategy. (2) Do the FTA on-record, mitigated with positive politeness. (3) Do the FTA on-record, mitigated with negative politeness. (4) Do the FTA off-record, and (5) Don't do the FTA (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 316). Going by these FTA strategies, according to Brown and Levinson, (1) has the highest potential threat and (5) the least.

The circumstances surrounding the Muslim sermon discourse make it very difficult for Imams to meet the face wants of their congregations and other recipients because Islam is highly prescriptive; they have very little or no say in the spiritual messages to be communicated to the humanity. In fact, the major communicative aim of the sermons is to convey in clear terms those acts that God says humanity must avoid; therefore, Imams have to criticize, condemn and question several common behaviours and acts. Imams must also tell people those acts that they must do and the behaviours they should imbibe. These clearly violate both the negative and the positive face of the congregation and all those who might hear the sermons outside the mosques (both Muslims and non-Muslims who hear the sermons through the public-address system or in the media broadcast, in some cases). In other words, the Muslim sermons consist of a series of Face-Threatening utterances or FTAs. As a result of this, the last strategy above (Don't do the FTA) does not fit our situation and, therefore, we excluded it from our analysis.

God realizes the potential threat that this task entails and, thus, commands politeness on the part of Imams with regards to their presentations, saying: 'Invite (mankind) to the Way of your Lord (i.e. Islam) with wisdom (i.e. with Divine Revelation and the Qur'an) and fair preaching, and argue with them in a way that is better ...' (Qur'an 16: 125). For this reason, therefore, it is expected that the Imams will employ various politeness strategies as they negotiate meaning through the various messages they put across to their hearers.

Brown and Levinson (1987) provide some positive politeness strategies with which to attend to positive face including: 'Notice, attend to H (his interests, wants, needs, goods)'; 'Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)'; etc. (see Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 101-129). In addition, their negative politeness strategies include: 'Be conventionally indirect'; 'Question, hedge'; 'Be pessimistic'; etc. (ibid.; pp. 129-210). Moreover, Brown and Levinson argue that by violating one or the other of the conversational maxims of Grice (1975), the speaker is able to generate an implicature, and the hearer on the other hand, relying on the assumption that the speaker is being cooperative, and on contextual indices, would be able to infer the message that the speaker is indirectly passing across (off-record strategy). Based on this background, Brown and Levinson (1987) propose some off-record strategies which include: 'Give hints'; 'Give association clues'; 'Presuppose'; 'Understate'; etc. (pp. 211-227).

However, it should be pointed out here that the output strategies, 'Joke' and 'Avoid disagreement' (negative politeness strategies), understatement, overstatement, overgeneralizations, vagueness, ambiguity and contradictions (off-record strategies) do not have a place in the Muslim sermon. Unlike other socio-linguistic encounters, the Muslim sermon has a divine injunction that forbids these strategies. God has repeatedly said that "the duty on the Messenger is only to convey (the message) plainly" (Qur'an 29: 18). Here it is meant that the Imams should convey the message in plain unambiguous terms because God wants everyone to know and understand clearly what is requested of them.

We believe Brown and Levinson's politeness model is adequate as the analytical framework for our study, however, we think some modifications are in order. One of the major criticisms against their approach is the notion of face discussed above. The main contention of the discursive theorists (Culpeper, Bousfield, & Wichmann, 2003; Eelen, 2014; Locher & Watts, 2005; Mills, 2002, 2003; van der Bom & Mills, 2015) here is that face is not static; it is negotiated progressively as the exchange progresses. However, the criticisms do not invalidate the model (Watts, 2003); researchers such as Bousfield (2007) and Culpeper (2005) have stated that face is the best way to understand impoliteness, and politeness by implication since one is considered to be the opposite of the other (Bousfield, 2008) and go together.

Another issue raised, as Dynel (2015) pointed out, is that the on-record FTA strategy of Brown and Levinson (1987) is not the same as impoliteness; others such as Culpeper (1996, 2005), Culpeper et al. (2003), Bousfield (2008), etc. have also argued that impoliteness should be treated independent of politeness. Impoliteness has been variously defined as a general term that covers intentional use of FTA to damage the face of the hearer (Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper, 1996, 2005; Culpeper et al., 2003; Dynel, 2015). It seems that researchers attach intentionality to impoliteness, but the problem is that it is difficult to determine people's intention. Impoliteness manifests at times without the speaker intending to be impolite. This indicates that impoliteness may not necessarily be intentional. That is why Culpeper (2011a) argues that '[s]ituated behaviours are viewed negatively – considered 'impolite' – when they conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be and/or how one thinks they ought to be' (p. 254). Mills (2002) echoes this when she submits that 'impoliteness only exists when it is classified as such by certain, usually dominant, community members, and/or when it leads to a breakdown in relations' (p. 79). It is also corroborated by Dynel (2015) who avers that "the targets of face-threat should also be able to decide what counts as impoliteness i.e. inappropriate behaviour, even if, due to lack of leverage, their evaluations may not overtly impact on their relationships with dominant community members" (Dynel, 2015, p. 334). This implies that impoliteness manifests when it is intentional and/or on the hearer's evaluation. Most importantly, impoliteness still results even in situations of imbalance power relations or in activity type such as the military where subjects cannot raise objection or in the case of the Muslim sermon during which the congregation are forbidden from talking as contained in a prophetic tradition that:

The Prophet said, "Whenever the *Imam* is delivering the *Khutbah* (religious talk), it is essential for the audience to keep quiet and listen. And if a person says to his companion: "Be quiet and listen," even then he is doing something wrong (which will reduce his reward)(Khan, 1997). This tradition and similar ones, according to the Islamic culture, forbid talking during the *khutbah* or sermon and that is why, except if someone is ignorant of it, the congregation do not talk while the *khutbah* is on.

Since the Muslim sermon is monologue in nature, we integrate the discursive approach into that of Brown and Levinson (1987), taking the social context of Friday sermon into consideration in our analysis. We also include impoliteness in order to account for such instances in which Imams damage the face of at least some of their audiences, whether intentionally or otherwise. This is essential for our study of *khutbah* because the Yorùbá culture has the notion of impoliteness which revolves round *ojú* (face). The *ojú* encompasses im/politeness. When they say: *Ó b'ójú mu* (literally, it fits face), they mean it is polite or appropriate, and when they say: *Kò b'ójú mu* (it does not fit face), they are saying it is inappropriate or impolite, whether it is intentional or not. Often times, a bystander will tell an interactant in social situation: *Ìn tóo se n kò b'ójú mú* or *Ìyẹn ò b'ójú mu o* ('Your behaviour is impolite' or 'That is impolite'). In Yorùbá culture, insults and rudeness are regarded as impoliteness. This seems to be the same as what operates in impoliteness scholarship. While researchers such as Beebe (1995); Kasper (1990); Kienpointner (1997) refer to deliberate FTA as 'rudeness', Terkourafi (2008) is of the opinion that 'rudeness' should be used for intentional FTA but impoliteness should be used for unintentional one. Kienpointner (2008) has used 'rudeness' and impoliteness synonymously. We follow the Yorùbá culture in this paper; that is, we will evaluate insults and similar acts of rudeness as impoliteness.

6. Methodology and data

Our data comprise five sermons delivered between March 2014 and October 2015 in south-west geo-political zone of Nigeria. The sermons lasted between thirty-five and fifty minutes. Two sermons were delivered in English and one in Yorùbá, while two combined English and Yorùbá in halves. The sermons were tape-recorded, and we transcribed them; 1668 communicative acts were analysed contextually. For a better transcription, we listened to the tracks several times to ensure we got the Imams correctly.

Where, eventually, we could not pick a word or more, it was indicated and rendered as <X>, and pauses in seconds as e.g. <2.0> (following van der Bom & Mills, 2015). Where a syllable was prolonged than normal, it was indicated with a colon (e.g., a:ll). Also, where the pause was less than a second, we rendered it as (.). Cases where Imams shouted or raised their voices emotionally and where they used emphasis were rendered in upper case letters. The sermons were originally prepared and read in Arabic before they were explained either in English or Yorùbá. Such Arabic texts were often omitted and indicated as [...], except in few cases where we noticed some implication for im/politeness. Moreover, the Yorùbá versions were much more elaborate comprising a lot of analogies and examples rather than ordinary translation. As such, in some cases we had to omit some of these analogies and examples and indicated them as for Arabic texts. For our analysis, the sermons were grouped into two: English and Yorùbá; we then identified im/politeness strategies that Imams employed in each group and compared the two groups in terms of frequency.

As we mentioned earlier, we modified Brown and Levinson's model; our coding scheme for analysing Imams' politeness strategies comprise the first four superstrategies of Brown and Levinson (1987), and impoliteness. Our analysis was largely influenced by contextual factors. Table 1 below shows our research design and a sample analysis.

Table 1: Analysis of politeness strategies of Imams

S/N	FTAs	Bald on-record (BR)	Off-record (OR)	Impoliteness	Politeness Strategy (PS)
178	[...] All praise be to Almighty Allah SubhanahuwaTa'ala.	-	-	-	PP
179	We thank Him	-	-	-	PP: in-group pro.
47	We copy BLINDLY.	✓	-	-	PP: in-group pro.
58	EVERY SECOND you must put up your thinking cap.	✓	-	-	NP: imp. pronoun
531	È jé á gbà pé b'Qlqun Subhanahu wa Ta'ala (.) bó se kádàrá pé yó se wáyé (.) òhun nàà ló se seḷe un. (Let us accept that that was how Allah destined it to happen)	✓	-	-	PP: in-group pro., NP: God
566	<i>A antum Muslimun</i> ; Se Mùsùlùmí ní wá? (Are we Muslims?)	✓	-	-	PP: In-group pro.

7. Findings

In this section, we will look into the various ways in which Imams employed FTAs and the various politeness strategies they used to mitigate the potential threat on the faces of their audiences. Going by our data and scheme, we found nine categories of strategies as follows: Bald on-Record (BR), Off-Record (OR), Bald on-record mitigated with Positive Politeness (BPP), Bald on-record mitigated with Negative Politeness (BNP), Off-record enhanced with Positive Politeness (OPP), Off-record enhanced with Negative Politeness (ONP), Positive Politeness (PP), Negative Politeness (NP), and impoliteness. In what follows we describe the strategies as manifested in our data, starting with English sermons in table 2 below.

Table 2: Distribution of Politeness Strategies in English Sermons

S/N	FTA Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	BPP	154	22.5
2	PP	149	21.8
3	BNP	130	19
4	BR	80	11.7
5	ONP	65	9.5
6	OR	48	7
7	OPP	38	5.6
8	NP	20	3
9	Impoliteness	0	0
	TOTAL	684	100

From the table above, we find that BPP tops the list with a frequency of 154 which is equivalent to 22.5% out of 684 in the English sermons. While Imams used bald on-record FTAs, they often softened them with positive politeness. Several positive politeness strategies abound in the data. We can examine some of them for the purpose of clarity and analysis.

Excerpt 1:

- (a) IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING, **WE** MUST NOT BE VIOLENT.
 (b) IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING, **WE** MUST NOT DESTROY THESE PROPTIES THAT ARE **OURS**.

The extracts in excerpt 1 above are potential threats to the face of the recipients, particularly the congregation. The Imam was aware that, based on past experience, that such a large gathering at the particular special Jumu'ah service or sermon, from which the extracts were taken, could turn violent; he implicated and envisaged this and that was why he imposed on their face baldly, forbidding and condemning violence. There was no better way he could achieve the needed efficacy given the tense situation and, according to him, the fact the he had information that the Christians had been alerted to be prepared for them. Therefore, crisis was imminent, and violence could break out at any slight provocation, and in such cases, property was often destroyed. Thus, he instructed his congregation to keep calm. In (a) and (b) above, the Imam used in-group markers *we* and *ours* as positive politeness to redress any potential threat that could arise from the acts. By using the inclusive *we*, he included himself and showed that that instructions were equally applied to them both as a member of a religious group often wrongly portrayed as terrorists by the press. In this way, the Imam was claiming solidarity with the congregation and showing that his utterances were devoid of power disparity between them; they were equal (Kondowe, 2014) and, therefore, they were not commands as they appeared.

Next to BPP is PP which has a frequency of 149 equivalent to 21.8%. The Muslim sermons are replete with positive politeness. Some examples are given below.

Excerpt 2:

- (1) It is my prayer that Allah in His infinite mercy will give us His true guidance (0.1) THROUGH WHICH we're going to follow His ways in to to.
 (2) And furthermore on the day of resurrection, we're going to earn more of His pleasure.
 (3) May the peace of Allah (.) and His blessings be upon Sayyidina Muhammad, members of his household, all his companions and a:ll those who emulate them till the day of *qiyaamah*.

All the above extracts in excerpt 2 are positive politeness strategies that Imams employed in their sermons in English. The Imams employed supplications or prayers as positive politeness strategies. These fall under the major strategy of Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 129): 'Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation).' The Imams know that their congregations desire prayers; they often meet Imams privately and request Imams to pray for them. That was why the Imams gave this immaterial gift of prayers as positive politeness, indicating that he knew and attended to their face wants and needs, and perhaps in order to secure a better hearing. We need to point out here that although prayers are used as positive politeness in these cases, the same are also used to mitigate threat to face in some cases. It should be noted also that Imams combined two positive politeness strategies in each of these cases. The use of in-group pronouns ('we' and 'us' in extract (1) and 'we' in (2)) is a positive politeness strategy ('Include both S and H in the activity') and all these are combined with supplications. The extract in (3) is a positive politeness from different perspectives. The Imam also fulfils the positive face want of his congregation by praying for Prophet Muhammad because Allah commands that all Muslims should pray for and seek Allah's blessings on His prophet (Qur'an 33: 56). Muslims generally do this and they so much love others to do so. On the other hand, they detest greatly that a person should blaspheme him; that constitutes a threat to their positive face. By using kinship terms to address them, the Imams was consolidating solidarity with them. Bald on-record mitigated with negative politeness (BNP) has the third highest frequency of 130 which is equivalent to 19%. These are cases where the Imams infringed on the autonomy of their congregations and/or hearers; they imposed on their negative faces. We give few examples of these below.

Excerpt 3:

- (1) And this wealth should be distributed among each category of people enumerated (.) also in Suratu Tawbah, Qur'an 9 verse 60.

- (2) Those who are in bondage, give them.
- (3) Everybody should do it at EVERY time.
- (4) Don't see anybody as a perfect man. ANYBODY.

All these FTAs baldly impose on the negative face of the congregations by telling them to give part of their wealth in charity. However, the Imams have sufficiently softened the potential threats with a combination of strategies. In extracts (1) and (3), the Imams use modality as a negative politeness; they use 'should' (in place of *must* which is really the case) to give the impression of necessity since the congregation themselves know that it is obligatory. From (1) to (3), the Imam uses impersonalization ('Impersonalize S and H: avoid the pronouns I and you') and he cites a reference as the third negative politeness strategy in this combination. In extracts (d) to (f), the Imam displaces the hearers (negative politeness) by not mentioning the objects of the bald commands. Although this is easily negotiated in context, the Imam is smart enough to leave the hearers to determine that themselves. And he combines another negative politeness, impersonal 'you' ('your life' rather than 'your lives').

Lastly, also worth mentioning under this section are ONP with a frequency of 65 which is equivalent to 9.5% and OPP with a frequency of 38 which is equivalent to 5.6%. It is not the frequency that interests us in these cases but that these run contrary to the proposal of Brown and Levinson (1987). Going by their theory, the off-record superstrategy is appropriate and/or polite and, therefore, there is no any threat to be mitigated. But we found in our data instances in which the Imams still enhance off-record FTAs with either positive politeness (OPP) or negative politeness (ONP). Some examples of these are provided below.

Excerpt4:

- (1) But, if the trial comes the other way round [...] He's not that rich. Allah restricts his provision. All he has is what he's going to feed himself ...
- (2) They will tell you no. the reality on ground (.) is acceding to the fact that there is no way anybody can survive without usury.
- (3) A Muslim is a wherever he finds himself is a unique individual.
- (4) He doesn't do things because people are doing it.
- (5) He will do things because Allah has commanded him to DO IT.

In the extracts (1) to (5), the Imams use the off-record superstrategy; (1) and (2) are indirect condemnations of those behaviours mentioned. Because the Imams know such behaviours are common among people, he uses off-record in order that the congregation would not feel threatened. The Imam quotes a verse of Qur'an that condemns such behaviour as a negative politeness. And he impersonalizes the FTAs by using 'he', 'himself', and 'they' and impersonalized 'you' (negative politeness strategies). Extracts (3) to (5) are indirect threats on the negative faces of the hearers, but that the Imam uses the off-record superstrategy (these are indirect commands; for instance, he could say *you must be unique individuals wherever you find yourselves as Muslims*). But other than that, the Imam still uses a negative politeness; he impersonalizes by using 'A Muslim', 'he' and 'himself'.

We now examine the politeness strategies that the Imams used in their Yorùbá khutbahs. First, we present below table 3 showing the distribution of their strategies.

Table 3: Distribution of Politeness Strategies in Yorùbá Sermons

S/N	FTA Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	PP	243	27.7
2	BPP	183	21
3	BNP	158	18
4	BR	118	13.5
5	OR	61	7
6	OPP	49	5.6
7	NP	26	3
8	ONP	26	3
9	Impoliteness	12	1.4
	TOTAL	876	100

In the Yorùbá khutbah, positive politeness (PP) has the highest frequency, which is 243, equivalent to 27.7%, while bald-on-record superstrategy softened with PP has the second highest frequency with 183 which is equivalent to 21%. The examples of both are below:

Excerpt 5:

- (1) Èyin omọọya mi ònú ẹ̀sìn àsinlà ní ọ̀kúnrin àti ní obirin!
My brethren in the religion of salvation men and women!
- (2) Akí ‘rawa ní kíkú t’ọ̀là.
We greet ourselves with greeting of salvation.
- (3) Oore Rẹ̀ lóri èmiù rẹ̀ (.) wallahi ọ̀ pò tí ‘í se diẹ̀.
His blessings on you (sg) and me are too numerous to be counted.
- (4) Èyun-ùn ni ò sí fún a (.) t’áwọ̀n ẹ̀yàn fí ùsọ̀ ‘sọ̀kúsọ̀ lóri àwọ̀n tó tán sí Hajj.

That is what we lack that makes people to say trash because of those who died in Hajj.

Extracts (1) and (2) above are all positive politeness, with (2) and (3) combining two strategies. By using kinship term of address, the Imam attends to and appeals to the positive face of his congregation, claiming solidarity with them. In (2), Imam greets the congregation (PP) and asserts (by using in-group pronoun which is another positive politeness strategy) that they too greet him; he is sure they would respond to his greetings were it not for the norm of this community of practice. Glorifying Allah is a meritorious act that every Muslim loves to do all the time and in every situation. They like people to glorify and praise Allah and, by contrast, they do not like anybody to blaspheme Him (see, Rafiq, 2015, p. 8). Thus, glorifying Allah is a positive politeness and including the hearers in the act is another (of course, he would not have committed any offence if he had said ‘I glorify Allah’, which is PP in its own right). By way of gratitude to Allah, the Imam employs a bald-on-record FTA in (3), but he mitigates any potential threat that could arise. While he baldly acknowledges the enormity of Allah’s blessings on himself, he displaces the hearers by using the impersonalized ‘you’, (i)rẹ̀ (negative politeness). Combination of positive and negative strategies in this act supports Brown and Gilman (1989) who posit that both strategies could combine to redress an FTA. Extract (4) has two FTAs (people are accused of lack of right thinking and criticised or accused of saying trash). Positive and negative politeness strategies (in-group pronoun ‘a’/‘we’, and indefinite noun, ‘people’) are also utilized to mitigate those threats.

Similarly, bald on-record softened with negative politeness (BNP) have the third highest frequency with 158 which is equivalent to 18% followed by stark bald-on-record without any mitigation (BR) with a frequency of 118 which is equivalent to 13.5%. We give some examples of these below for the purpose of analysis.

Excerpt 6:

- (1) Èyin ẹ̀rùsìn Ọ̀lọ̀un! Ibi tí ẹ̀yàn tán sí, sáábàbí n tó tán lé lóri n ni ká mọ̀ọ̀ wò. Kí se n tó sokùnfà n tó fí tán.
Oh you servants of Allah! Where a person ended his/her life, the act on which he/she died are what we should always consider, not the cause of his/her death.
- (2) ... N ló fí jẹ̀ pé táa bá fẹ̀ b’arajẹ̀, ẹ̀ jẹ̀ á b’arajẹ̀ mọ̀ níwọ̀n.
That is why if we want to grieve, let us take it easy.
- (3) Ní gbogbo ‘ghà tẹ̀ẹ̀ bá tí ríi t’áwọ̀n ẹ̀gbẹ̀ẹ̀ yín t’ọ̀n ùsẹ̀ n tí ọ̀ daa, ẹ̀mọ̀ SÈSÈ TI WỌ̀N.
Whenever you (pl) see your colleagues doing an evil act, you do not copy them.
- (4) [...] Òdodo ni ikú.
Death is real.

Extracts (1) and (2) are from a sermon on the stampede which occurred at 2015 Hajj causing loss of several lives; these FTAs baldly threaten the negative face of some members. However, the Imam mitigates the potential threat with a combination of strategies. He uses a vocative which is a lexicon of religion (RL). Muslims love to be called servants of Allah and they refer to themselves as such because Allah calls them with that name in the Qur’an (e.g., Qur’an 39: 53), particularly, in contrast to the Christians who refer to themselves as children of God. This distinction is necessary given the context of the sermon in which the two religions are rivals. In addition to that is the use of the in-group pronoun ‘we’. Two politeness strategies are also used in extract (2): reason (that “Allah and His messenger have promised them paradise anyone who dies during the rites of Hajj ...”) and the in-group pronoun ‘we’.

Extracts (3) are unmitigated bald face-threatening utterances, where (3) attacks the higher institution students, who are the targets and directly addressed here; the use of prominence in (3) seems to intensify that threat. In (4), he threatens them by telling them that death is certain although he knows that Yorùbá fear it (Osanyinbí & Falana, 2016). In addition, just as was the case with the English versions, there are also instances where the off-record superstrategy is enhanced with positive politeness (OPP) and negative politeness (ONP). Some extracts on both these types are given below.

Excerpt 7:

(1) Kín la wá fé fi wé ra wọn ẹni tí wọn ní s'òdún Ọsun tó kú síbẹ àti ẹn tó kú sí ààyè yẹn?

How can we compare a person who died while they were celebrating (idolatry) River Ọsun and a person who died in that place (Arafah during Hajj)?

(2) [...] *Mo wá 'sò wá sódò 'nọ Ọlọrun kúò níbi aburu òru ñgbàa gbogbo è bá pa lólóló.*

I seek refuge in You Oh Allah from the evil of darkness of night when everything is silent.

(3) Lópòlópò gbà àdámọ ọmọ ẹdà ẹyàn ni pé, ẹẹ t'Ọlọrun ò se láá mọ sáábà sọ.

In most cases we human beings complain about that which God has not given us.

(4) Ẹẹ tó bá se, a ń sáà ká kún.

We do not usually value that which He has done for us.

All the extracts above are off-record utterances, but they are yet enhanced with politeness. We should remember that the off-record strategy gives room for multiple interpretations of an FTA, and permits the speaker to escape being held responsible for any ensuing face threat (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Thomas, 2013) and, as a result, it requires no politeness or redress. In (1), the Imam implicates that a person who died during Hajj and the one that died at the idolatry celebration of River Ọsun should not be compared, indirectly condemning Ọsun worship; he, notwithstanding, includes himself by using the in-group 'we' (positive politeness). Extract (2) is striking in a sense. The Imam includes only himself and yet he quotes a reference (Qur'an 113: 1-3), which is a negative politeness strategy. Ordinarily, he could have said: 'Say: I seek refuge ...' as the Arabic text he quoted reads in which case the hearers would have clearly accepted that the command is directed at them by the scripture, albeit on-record. Extracts (3) and (4) are indirect condemnations or criticisms (off-record) although they could be interpreted as request to abandon such behaviours since the off-record strategy permits multiple interpretations (Brown & Levinson, 1987). However, the Imam still uses positive politeness by including both himself and the congregation in the act.

Lastly, also found in the Yorùbá data is impoliteness. Impoliteness constitutes 1.4% of Yorùbá khutbahs. Because impoliteness, which is at the negative end of the continuum (Watts, 2003) of its politeness counterpart, is employed strategically in interactions, and at particular context it is deemed appropriate, Yorùbá Imams, despite being polite in their khutbahs, employed impoliteness in certain instances. Some examples of such uses are presented below:

Excerpt 8:

(1) Kódà níbi tiwa tún tó tún burú fún a dé, k'Ọlọrun má jé ó burú fún a nílú 'í. Bẹẹ tún sọrọ òsèlú ní másálásí, wọn o tún take yín up pé irú imamu wo leléí tí wá ní preach másálásí!

Even ours is so worse, **may Allah not let ours be worse in this country**, if you (pl) discuss politics in the mosques, some people will take you up, challenging you that which kind of Imam is this who preaches politics in the mosque!

(2) ... òhun ni Ọlọrun rán láti wá yọ àwọn ńnú àjàgà, ńnú ọfin t'áwọn ẹni 'bi tí wọn kó wá sí. Àwọn òsìkà, ẹgbẹ òsìkà, ẹgbẹ asebi, tí wọn kó wá sí, òhun l'Ọlọrun rán.

... he [President Buhari] is the one that Allah sends to liberate us from the trouble and chaos which the party of wicked people, party of evildoers put us in.

(3) Lára àwọn ẹsùn ẹsẹ tí wọn fi kan General àti ìran rẹ, mo mọ pé General yó tí mọ kaa (1.0) ẹẹhìn Gbólúngbórò nínú *The Nation*, ohun ní mọ sọ ọrọ yẹn yanya tí ò l'ójúti ...

Among the allegations against General [Buhari] and his tribe, I know General himself would have been reading it, er Gbólúngbórò in *The Nation* is the shameless person who says it baldly ...

All the three acts in excerpt (8) contain impoliteness. The targets of the utterance were members of the congregation. The Imam had been challenged for discussing politics in khutbah and he got angry, as he said himself; he was making reference to that indirectly here. Of course, the congregation knew that, and many people tend to find it inappropriate or impolite for Imam to side with a political party as he appears to be.

Despite that, his saying ‘*Kòdà ìbí tíwá tún tó tún burú fún a dé*’ meaning ‘even ours is so worse’ is definitely impolite in the perspective of an average Yorùbá person. It was for his acknowledgement of this that he promptly redressed it with the supplication, which is an ideal way of redressing such in Yorùbá culture.

The Imam had baldly condemned some members in the extract in (2). He had called them bad names without any redress. Although many people may find this impoliteness justified due to the extent of the damage the said party did to the country, members of the party among the recipients would find it offensive and deliberately face attacking. Similarly, the Imam had said in (3) that the columnist of *The Nation* Nigerian newspaper, *Gbógunghòrò*, had no shame, which is impoliteness by Yorùbá standard. Even though *Gbógunghòrò* might have gone against the Yorùbá norm of decency in speech and covering deficiency, many member, especially from the opposition party, tend not to be comfortable with this because they might not see anything wrong in what he was doing; he was only saying clearly people’s mind. Therefore, they tend to feel offended.

8. Discussion

We have seen how the Imams employed various politeness strategies to soften and enhance the face-threatening utterances they used in their Friday sermons. We find some striking similarities between the English and the Yorùbá versions. Table 4 below shows a comparison between the two.

Table 4: Politeness used in Sermons in percentage

S/N	Politeness Strategies in English		Politeness Strategies in Yorùbá	
1	BPP	22.5	PP	27.7
2	PP	21.8	BPP	21
3	BNP	19	BNP	18
4	BR	11.7	BR	13.5
5	ONP	9.5	OR	7
6	OR	7	OPP	5.6
7	OPP	5.6	NP	3
8	NP	3	ONP	3
9	Impoliteness	0	Impoliteness	1.4
	TOTAL	100	TOTAL	100

From table 4 above, it is evident that the first four highest strategies are common; only that the first and second interchange. In the Yorùbá versions, positive politeness is the highest strategy, while BPP is the highest in the English version. The reason for this seems to be that the Imams tilt towards the Yorùbá politeness culture, and that PP is higher in the Yorùbá version because it has more supplications, reflecting Yorùbá’s belief in the efficacy of prayers. Also, this supports the assertion that Yorùbá are very polite; a non-native may consider them over polite as Leo Frobenius (1913) states. Also closely related to this is that in both cases we find that the off-record strategy which does not require any politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987) is also enhanced with politeness strategies. This seems to be another evidence of Yorùbá influence, and an indication that it is more polite than many European cultures.

Another striking discovery of this research is that, though the Imams were found to be very polite, impoliteness does manifest in certain few instances. This indicates that the Imams do not sacrifice truth for politeness; they use impoliteness in particular context they deem it appropriate, such as when the rights of the masses are being trampled upon by those entrusted with authority.

Furthermore, this research has shown that Imams use combinations of politeness strategies in their progressive negotiation of their own face and that of the congregations. This supports earlier studies (Jansen & Janssen, 2010; Manno, 1999) which find that combination of politeness strategies are used in business letters and refusal letters to job applicants, and Brown and Gilman (1989) who collapse the two strategies. In addition, the research shows that the notion of face in Yorùbá culture appears to tend towards that of Chinese and Japanese; it is a collective culture (Gu, 1990; Ide, 1989; Lin, 2005; Mao, 1994).

Lastly, the research reveals that the Imams, like any other Muslim across the world, use lexicons of religion (RL) and invoke (the name of) Allah as a politeness strategy, in support of Bouchara (2015); they also use quotations from the Qur'an and the tradition of Prophet Muhammad and his companions (which we termed reference) as politeness strategies.

Moreover, we have seen that the Imams employ a number of face-threatening utterances in their khutbahs. This necessarily has to be the case because the activity type demands high level of clarity, directness and vividness in order not to give room for misconception. The congregations seem not to evaluate these as threats. As a result of this, such face-threatening utterances are at best regarded as *unmarked FTAs* in Dynel's (2015) terminology or what Tracy (2008) calls *reasonable hostility* in local government meetings; Harris (2001) refers to similar FTAs in British House of Commons as *conventional aggression*.

9. Conclusion

This paper has explored how Imams manipulated im/politeness in their Friday khutbahs or sermons using a modified version of Brown and Levinson's approach. It was discovered that apart from the fact that the Imams used the first four FTA superstrategies of Brown and Levinson (1987), they used some other combinations such OPP and ONP which the model does not cater for. It was also discovered that Imams combined politeness strategies, as revealed by earlier studies in business and refusal letters. It could be concluded, therefore, that this study supports the assertions that the Yorùbá culture is very polite. It is also evident that the Imams are sufficiently polite enough in their khutbah delivery. Yorùbá Imams investigated did not preach violence, hate, tribalism, etc., which are all metaimpoliteness.

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