RESEARCH ARTICLE

A pragmalinguistic analysis of Im/Politeness in selected Nigerian Open Letters

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the pragmatic and linguistic aspects of politeness and impoliteness in Nigerian open letters. Its objectives are to: examine how linguistic choices indicate [IM]Politeness and investigate how common ground influences the expression of IM/Politeness in the selected open letters. The study employed the qualitative research method while it deployed the purposive sampling technique to select two open letters written to two sitting presidents in the Fourth Republic between 1999 and 2015. The letters are Wole Soyinka's '*You're Rambo on the loose*', Umar Abubakar Dangiwa's '*The Devil Is It*' and Olusegun Obasanjo's *Before it is Too Late*'. The Presidents were Olusegun Obasanjo and Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. Only the letters that centred on political matters and the state of the nation were considered in this study. The study uses the pragmalinguistic framework of Geoffrey Leech (2014) to analyse how im/politeness is grammticalised in the selected open letters. The analysis showed that iterative lexemes such as 'never', more, many and routine iterative lexemes are deployed with the Irony Principle (innuendo) to activate face threatening acts to attack the recipient's face. From the analysis, it was revealed that the use of the iterative verb 'repeat' presupposes the writers' misalignments with the recipient's allegation of breaching the maxim of quality, i.e., fabricating lies; the adverb 'more' reveals a determination to debunk the allegation of mediocrity, *etc*. The study concludes that the open letters grammaticalise IM/Politeness in such a way that an understanding of the political narrative background prompting the writing of the letters is indispensable.

Keywords: open letter, pragmalinguistics, IM/Politeness, iterative, ironic principle

1   Introduction

Recently, it has been observed that in the Nigerian political realm, letter writing has become a mode of discourse. These letters are written to advise, indict, and\or 'de-market' political opponents. It is also observed that rather than making such a letter a 'private' discourse, which formal letters require, the writers of political letters resort to publicising the letters through the media. Thereby, the writers flout part of the ethics and characteristics of formal letter writing. Such letters that constitute the data for this study. Moreso, historically, the study of political discourse dates back to the days of Aristotle. Daramola (2008) posited that political discourse comprises a class of genres that can be employed mostly by politicians to communicate ideas, interests, and orientations to the heterogeneous public. As a genre of discourse targeted at a heterogeneous audience, political discourse is often intended to 'speak' to a people rather than merely seek attention. Daramola (2008, p. 360), citing Black (1965), observes that "in the last centuries, political theorists, philosophers, and rhetoricians have published extensively on the language of politics". However, in the last four decades, interests in political discourse have extended to a critical level which involve interdisciplinary as well as eclectic perspectives.

Adegbija (1988) could be considered as one among Nigerian scholars that launched the interdisciplinary perspective in linguistics. While analysing Ibrahim Babangida's address to the then Inspector General of Police, Adegbija uses the principles of pragmatics and sociolinguistics to investigate the "factors that help language users to infer meaning vis-à-vis the utterance (Daramola 2008, p. 36). This particular study pioneers interest in the study of political discourse in Nigeria. Adegbija (1988) explored the micro resources of language in the utterance 'My friend, where is Anini' and domesticate his analysis within the socio-cultural context of the utterance. He, therefore, concludes that the "utterance is an indirect speech act" (p. 361).

Furthermore, Adegbija's study submitted that the same utterance uttered by the President will have a completely different meaning in another socio-political context.

Adegbija's study draws criticism from later scholars. Daramola (1992), for example, opined that Adegbija's analysis gave undue emphasis to the textual without a systematic focus on the contextual. Daramola's (1992) study called attention to the assumptions relating to the confusing identity of Anini, the invisibility of Anini, and lastly, the tagging of the utterance as comic relief. Daramola, however, adopted the principles of Systemic Functional Theory (SFT) to analyse the linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts of the utterance. The study, however, did not give attention to the performative value of the utterance which Adegbija's study did. Performativity is essential in political discourse and the analysis of performatives or illocutionary acts of such discourse makes the utterance political in social and political terms.

Since these two studies (*i.e.*, Daramola (1992) and Adegbija (1988)) on decoding the meaning of utterances were carried out, there have been several pragmatic and linguistic analyses of political discourse. The data employed in carrying out these studies range from inaugural speeches, campaign speeches, political or presidential debates, political handbills, or pamphlets to news reports, interviews, *etc.* open letters have not been well explored to assess the peculiarities of their pragmatic implications for politeness and impoliteness studies. The current study adopts open letters as data and subjects them to a pragmalinguistic analysis of im/politeness. Therefore, this study aims to carries out a pragmatic analysis of Nigerian open letters with a specific focus on examining politeness, impoliteness, and facework in the chosen discourse genre. The specific objectives of the research are to examine how linguistic choices indicate [im]politeness in selected open letters in Nigeria and investigate how common ground influences the expression of im/politeness in the selected open letters.

2 Im/Politeness researches: A brief literature review

The roles that language plays in human social engineering cannot be over-emphasised. These roles pin language to its context of use, which has made language, genre, and social practices inseparable, and deserves serious exploration and investigation. Yule (1996) believed that since language, as a system, is rule-governed, the genre as a mode of communication and social practice are contextually constrained in terms of situational and cultural contexts, respectively. This agrees with Hymes' (1964, p.7) submission that "speakers of a language in particular communities can communicate with each other in a manner which is not only correct but also appropriate to the socio-cultural context". Although Hymes emphasises communicative competence while de-emphasising linguistic competence, the linguistic knowledge shared, together with the sociocultural rules, norms, and values that guide the conduct and interpretation of speech, and other channels of communication in a community are mutually dependent and paramount in the exchange and negotiation of meaning (Hymes, 1964).

Consequently, an interpretive approach to language study is required to place 'grammar' on functional analysis and study it as "a reference point for comparing (i) what is expressed in discourse with what is suppressed and (ii) the way something is expressed in text with other available options in the grammar" (Hart, 2004, p. 2). Oha (2004), for example, noted that an appropriate choice of linguistic and semiotic resources that bear face-threatening power is required for the performance of language acts such as satirical drama. The pragmatic approach to language analysis considers pragmatics from the viewpoint of the speaker which relates linguistic forms and the users of the forms who use "shared assumptions and expectations [to...] provide insight into how communication is understood" (Yule, 1996, p. 4). However, the current study has observed that many studies on the examination of politeness had not appropriated the aforementioned indices in their claims to use qualitative and interpretive approaches in doing pragmatics.

Meanwhile, pragmatic analysis of the selected open letters in this study advances Hymes' thesis and reveals that social behaviour and interaction, power struggle, and political relevance, coupled with the clash of political interests and imposition of influence, play fundamental roles in political discourse. The current study does not intend to employ Hymes' sociolinguistics model which he tagged Ethnography of SPEAKING. Its goal is to examine the contextual indices that undergird language usage and carry out the analysis of language which examines how politics is performed through language use. Language usage, according to Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 55), "is part of the very stuff that social relationships are made of; as such, discovering the principles of language usage may be coincident with discovering the principles out of which social relationships in their interactional aspects are construed". In other

words, the focus of this study is to investigate these language-dependent and socially-regulated interactional principles and the political construal of reality in typical human communication.

3   Im/Politeness researches: A brief survey

Politeness and facework constitute the aspect of interactional principles this study aims to investigate. These two principles have gained research attention in pragmatics, most especially, the concept of 'face' which refers to language users' sense of linguistic and social relationships and identity. Further still, there have been several attempts to study facework, face maintenance, politeness, and impoliteness strategies in interactions and political discourse. Oha (2004), for instance, observed that the existing studies on face have focused on its roles in naturally occurring discourse or conversation. He, thus, noted that the concern is shifting to the investigation of face in other domains of discourse where "verbal interaction is implied and which involves much use of politeness strategies" (Oha, 2004, p. 227). Oha (2004) discovered that an indirect speech act draws attention to the extent of the roles of literariness in addressing face. While analysing language use in *From Zia with Love*, Oha (2004, p. 228) revealed that language use in the play acts as "a face-threatening statement on military dictatorship". Essentially, the study examines the effects of direct and indirect speech acts on face-threatening as a characteristic of interpersonal interaction in the play.

Odebunmi (2009) demonstrated that politeness can be achieved when discourse participants in print media political interviews exploit shared knowledge of subjects, shared knowledge of political gimmicks, and shared knowledge of ideological expectations. In this regard, his study emphasises common ground and mutual conceptual beliefs as contextual factors for the study of face/politeness in pragmatics. However, this researcher observes that not much study is in existence on the pragmatics of open letters. Research has shown that besides the fact that open letters are an under-studied genre, most pragmatic analyses of political discourse have not paid close attention to the examination of how language use provides a means to better understand the potential of pragmatics in explaining the evaluative resources in language and how such resources can aid "the negotiations of inter-subjective positions, and open a new area of interpersonal meaning" (Liu, 2010, p. 133).

Therefore, this study aims to carry out a pragmatic analysis of politeness, impoliteness, facework, and face maintenance in Nigerian open letters. Through the investigation of the roles of common ground and politeness principles contained in the selected open letters in Nigeria, the analysis is located within the theoretical framework and pragmatic theory of politeness principles. This will foreground the conceptualization of pragmatics as a branch of linguistics that studies meaning according to use which "expands the traditional accounts, regarding issues of speaker/writer evaluation, certainty, commitment, and knowledge, and also consider how the textual voice positions itself with respect to other voices and other positions in the discourse" (Oteiza, 2017, p. 1).

Situmeang (2015) used Leech's (1983) politeness maxims to analyse the lecturer's utterances in a functional grammar classroom. The study employed a qualitative method with Miles and Hubberman's data analysis technique to analyse 461 utterances. It was discovered that the tact maxim (56.83%) was prominently used by the lecturer with the implication of maximising benefits to others in classroom interaction. Jewad, Ghapanchi, and Ghazanfari (2020) used the six maxims of Leech to examine the kinds of politeness maxims used in conversational verses in three surahs from the Holy Quran. "An Analysis of the Violations of Politeness Principles Used in English Conversation in Donald Duck Comic" was the title of Prihatini's (2006) work. Prihatini (2006) adopted a pragmatic approach to identify the many forms of politeness violations as well as the intentions behind them. He identifies six types of Politeness Principles out of which the agreement maxim is the most common. There are also eleven speaker's goals, according to the study. The most prevalent intention is to refuse. Wijayanto (2009) carried out an analysis of politeness principles in the expressive act used in the movie of Pearl Harbor. Her research attempts to classify the politeness principle of expressive utterances, as well as examine the different forms of expressive utterances and their intentions. The study showed that (1) there are 10 different forms of expressive acts in the Pearl Harbor film and (2) there are five different politeness patterns. These studies and many more indicated the influence and contributions of Leech's politeness theories.

However, these works have based their analysis on the pragmalinguistic imports of politeness by following Leech's (1983) assumption that politeness can be absolute and context-free. As observed by Watts (2003) and Tanaka (2017), many studies have found it difficult to "apply

the terms 'polite' or 'impolite' to linguistic phenomena" (Tanaka, 2017, p. 512) because of the misunderstanding generated by Leech's distinction between 'absolute' and relative politeness – two terms which he later replaced with 'pragmalinguistics' and 'sociopragmatics'. Leech (2014) himself noted that pragmalinguistics, the linguistic interface in pragmatics, is "the way a language (both polite and impolite forms) is used in politeness" (Klegr, 2016, p. 67). Pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics are both preferably considered important in Leech's later politeness theory. While pragmalinguistics is absolute and context-indifferent politeness, sociopragmatics is relative and context-sensitive politeness (Leech, 2014; Klegr, 2016). Leech (2014, p. 15) admitted that he had earlier *unwisely* adopted 'absolute' politeness after criticisms by Mills (2003), Watts (2003), Locher (2006), and Locher and Watts (2008) who had argued that no utterance can be adjudged polite or impolite out of context (Leech, 2014). The politeness principle is, therefore, conceived as "a constraint observed in human communicative behaviour, influencing us to avoid communicative discord or offense and maintain or enhance communicative concord or comity" (Leech 2014, p. 87).

In speech events, avoiding communicative discord or maintaining comity requires that discourse participants have a grasp of their illocutionary act. Leech (2014) categorised speech events in relation to their illocutionary functions into:

(1) competitive speech event which relates the goal of an illocution to a competing social goal, e.g. ordering, asking, demanding, begging;

(2) convivial speech event that shows an agreement between illocutionary goal and social goal, e.g. offering, inviting, greeting, thanking, congratulating;

(3) collaborative speech event which indicates the indifferent relationship between the illocutionary goal and social goal, e.g. asserting, reporting, announcing, instructing; and

(4) conflictive speech event that relates to a conflict between the illocutionary goal and the social goal, e.g. threatening, accusing, cursing, reprimanding (Leech, 1983, p. 104).

The illocutionary goal and the social goal are the significant elements of speech events. These two determine the politeness strategies to be activated in any speech event. Leech (2014) argued that competitive and convivial speech events are deeply involved in politeness and they are respectively subject to neg-politeness and pos-politeness "since the illocutionary and social goals are identical" (p. 89). Collaborative speech events do not involve politeness because there is no reason for it since the discourse participants do not compete nor do they contribute to the social goal. Meanwhile, conflictive speech events do not ordinarily involve politeness unless irony is involved because "there is no reason to be polite when the nature of the speech event is to cause deliberate offense" (90). In this present study, Nigerian open letters are collected for a pragmatic analysis and the focus is on the investigation of how im/politeness and facework are entrenched in the selected samples of Nigerian open letters.

4   Methodology

Intersubjective positioning emerges from the pragmatic intention of the speaker (*S*) and has to do with the relationships between perspectives formed by "individuals, groups, or tra*DIT*ions and discourses, and they can manifest as both implicit (or taken for granted) and explicit (or reflected upon)" (Gillespie & Cornish, 2009, p. 22). In other words, perspective-taking in the open letter discourse can involve the expression of subjective opinions which are presumably constative. However, the performative essence of such expressions may be undoubted. This is so because this study believes that the presumable constative nature of perspectives or opinions may have perlocutionary effects on the targeted co-interactants *i.e.* the hearer (*H*) or the reader (*R).*

This study employs a qualitative approach in its pragmatic analysis of open letters. The open letters that were written by different Nigerians to sitting presidents in the Fourth Republic are sampled. The open letters sampled are those written between 1999 and 2015. These letters are considered veritable for a pragmatic study because they are considered one of the emerging features of democracy which guarantees the citizens' freedom of expression that had been annihilated by the many years of military intervention in the country. A total of three open letters written to former sitting presidents were collected from the internet through Google search. These letters are Wole Soyinka's ' *You're Rambo on the loose*', Umar Abubakar Dangiwa's '*The Devil Is It*' and Olusegun Obasanjo's *Before it is Too Late*'. For ease of reference, the letters are referred to as *YRL*, *DIT*, and *BTL* respectively in the analysis section. Meanwhile, the Nigerian presidents who are the recipients are former President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) and former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (2010-2015). Also, the political trajectory of the

letters makes them veritable for consideration in this study.

Therefore, the purposive random sampling technique is employed for data gathering. This is to take care of the uniformity of topics in the selected open letters. The open letters are, in this study, conceived as a political letter and a genre of discourse in which power struggle, power play, clash of interests, and control of public knowledge on politics and political intrigues constitute the themes of the contents. It is, therefore, the analysis of the performative essence of the expression of intersubjectivity or pragmatic intentions in the open letters that form the crux of this study. For example, positioning strategies can be through the evaluation of a subject (the addressee) rather than the object or topic of the discourse. Politeness, as argued by Leech (2014), is related to "affective or attitudinal elements of meaning which are often implicated rather than overtly expressed" (pp. 51-52). Hence, pragmatics and grammar of evaluation which is described as a "system of semantic resources for reacting emotionally, judging, and evaluating aesthetically (appreciation)" (Hart, 2014, p. 44) are combined to form a unified systemic approach to the analysis of the selected open letters.

5   Data analysis and discussion

5.1   Grammaticalisation of [im]politeness in the open letters

Impoliteness and politeness converged at the threshold of language. Language users' use of words in conversation reveals the personality and the attitude shared about a subject. According to Jeffries (1998, p. 4), "meaning and language are in a simple relationship where language reflects some 'given' reality". The relationship between meaning and language is often grammaticalised in a way that indicates form-content relations. In this section, data are drawn from Soyinka's '*You're Rambo on the loose*', Umar Abubakar Dangiwa's '*The Devil Is It*' and Olusegun Obasanjo's *Before it is Too Late*' for analysis. The letters are referred to as *YRL*, *DIT*, and *BTL* respectively. In the open letters sampled in this study, the linguistic choices that are deployed to make politeness and impoliteness discursive are analysed. The grammatical tools that is identified for analysis are the iterative lexemes in the selected open letters.

5.2   Iterative lexis/expressions

Iterative lexis/expression expresses habitual, persistent, recurrent, or routine actions or events. Iterative lexical items are used in the English language and, in the data under analysis, they are employed as a means of foregrounding particular meaning. Beyond this, iterative implies the expression of politeness or impoliteness.

5.3   'Never' as iterative lexis

Iterative lexis can serve as a textual rhetoric for understanding the attitude, whether positive or negative, the writer has towards his subjects. The iterative lexis under consideration presently is the iterative adverb '*never*'.

5.3.1   Common ground

The shared knowledge between the letter writer and the recipient is initiated in the first paragraph of datum *YRL* where the writer uses the pronoun 'our' to include the recipient, and their mutual friend Ojetunji Aboyade.

> Dear OO!
> This is how our mutual friend, Ojetunji Aboyade and I generally evoked your presence in our discussions. [*YRL*]

In all the samples above, the iterative 'never' provides the common ground that allows the extended addressees, *i.e.* the public readership, to understand the interpersonal relationship that exists between the writer and the recipient.

5.3.2   Interpersonal rhetoric

The use of 'never' in the extracts implies that the action, for example, 'giving . . . full support', 'urging . . . to give you support' has been consistent as seen in 'That is why I have *never* had any hesitation in giving you my full support, and urging people who think like me and hold generally the same position as I have to give you support. . . ' [*YRL*, para. 6]. In the

case of the present data, the writers and the direct recipients are counter-addressees as both are reacting to and arguing against mutual allegations and projecting 'chequered' relationships (see the following extracts).

> 'I insert this deliberately because, you see, I *never* hesitate to point in your direction those whom I think might help you in your mission' [*YRL*, para. 11].
> I have *never* mounted the slightest pressure on you over any suggested names. [*YRL*, para.]

This use of iterative indicates that the writer is a counter-addressee who uses iterative to launch a positive relational work in his efforts to uphold the 'Agreement maxim', which states that "minimize disagreement between *S* and *O* [and maximize agreement between *S* and *O*." But, the writer flouts the agreement maxim by maximizing disagreement with the recipient in 'Nigerians, you must be told, have *never* experienced this level of social distress and dislocation' [*DIT*, para. 3]

5.3.3   Presupposition

The writer recounts the maintenance of politeness with the receiver through the presuppositional meaning of "consistent commitment" which the iterative lexis 'never' indicates in 'That is why I have *never had any hesitation* in giving you my full support. . .' [*YRL*].

The iterative lexis 'never' has 10 occurrences in *BTL*. In the instances of its occurrences, the iterative adverb 'never' provides the textual entry for understanding its politeness imports in the open letter. The letter (*i.e.* in *BTL*) uses a face-threatening act by pointing out the weaknesses and faults of the recipient's administration. The letter attacks the face of the recipient by alleging him of promoting acts that undermine national unity and the 'fledgling democracy of the nation. Also, *BTL* deploys the iterative with the Irony Principle (innuendo) to activate face-threatening acts through impoliteness to attack the recipient's face. For example, the writer insinuates that the recipient is 'possessed' and 'a supporter of evil'. However, while maximising dispraise of the recipient, the writer maximises praise of himself; therefore, upholding the approbation maxim with an intended threat to the former.

5.3.4   Common ground

The shared knowledge between the letter writer and the recipient is initiated in the first paragraph of *BTL* where the writer positions himself as a watchman and an experienced statesman. The title of the letter 'Before it is too late' indicates a warning to the sitting President on the state of the nation. The first paragraph is cited below:

> I am constrained to make this an open letter to you for a number of reasons. One, the current situation and consequent possible outcome dictate that I should, before the door closes on reason and promotion of national interest, alert you to the danger that may be lurking in the corner. Two, none of the four or more letters that I have written to you in the past two years or so has elicited an acknowledgement or any response. Three, people close to you, if not yourself, have been asking, what does Obasanjo want? Four, I could sense a semblance between the situation that we are gradually getting into and the situation we fell into as a nation during the Abacha era. Five, everything must be done to guard, protect, and defend our fledgling democracy, nourish it, and prevent bloodshed. [*BTL*, para. 1]

5.3.5   Interpersonal rhetoric

The use of 'never' in the extracts above positions the writer as a keen observer of events that has enough ground to put the 'buck' on the table of the recipient. The open letter alleges the recipient of 'deceit and deception' but absolves the writer and others of complicity. In this case, the iterative adverb is used to indicate a counter-addressor relationship with a negative relational work. The letter flouts the agreement maxim by maximizing disagreement between the writer and the recipient.

5.3.6   Presupposition

The iterative lexis 'never' presupposes that the relationship between the writer and the recipient is hostile. This provides the basis for the impoliteness in the use of language.

There are only two instances of occurrence of the use of the iterative lexis 'never' – one in

YRL and another in *DIT*. These are presented below.

> As a patriotic Nigerian, I have *never* hidden my desire to do what is just in this regard even to the extent that I have incurred the wrath of illegal bunkers and vandals. [*DIT*] Nothing else matters to them. To this group, you can *never* be wrong. You are infallible. [*DIT*]

This particular letter adduces praise to the writer in the projection of its cordial relationship with the recipient.

5.3.7   Common ground

YRL and *DIT* operate within the common ground that the President, in the discharge of his democratic duty, knows and listens to certain people. Hence, 'never' is deployed as an iterative to project a positive face for the writer. In the present instance, the iterative 'never' is used for positive politeness.

5.3.8   Interpersonal rhetoric

The interpersonal rhetoric promoted in this data, unlike in *BTL*, is that 'never' is employed to patronise the President. 'Never', therefore, is used as a means of maintaining the maxim of generosity.

5.3.9   Presupposition

The use of 'never' presupposes a condescending act as the writers use the iterative adverb for an interpersonal pragmatic end to navigate an entry into the main purpose of the letter.

5.4   'Repeat' as iterative lexis/expressions

The letter writers and the recipients do not always share the same values and political opinions which are recurrently reiterated in their correspondences.

5.5   'Repeat' as an iterative lexis in the data

The iterative lexis, 'repeat', occurs in all the data with 'repeating' used only in datum *YRL*, *BTL*, and *DIT*. The following extracts are drawn.

> I *repeat*, indeed I insist that there is a nest of killers within the PDP. [*YRL*, para. 16]
> I *repeat* my warning that even you also once extended to me, *in one of your rare moments* of selflessness and genuine concern for others: Watch your back! [*YRL*, para. 17]
> Again, let not history *repeat* itself here. [*BTL*, para 34]
> I recall, and *repeat*, the opening salvo "Mr President, I don't know how you would take this, but there is no nicer way of putting it - Nigeria is going down. [*DIT*, para. 2]

5.5.1   Common ground

The shared knowledge in these extracts can be drawn intra-textually. The iterative lexis, 'repeat' and its variant 'repeating', is used in the extracts above to interpose the arguments between the writer and the recipient's allegation and 'misjudgements' as highlighted in paragraph 12 of the letter and cited thus below:

> ... To insinuate, *as you did in your second letter* - ... that my attacks on your governance and style have become more virulent because you failed to place my 'nominees' in your list is unworthy of you. This is the real abyss of perfidy, cheap blackmail intended to inhibit my criticisms of you. [*YRL*]

The italicised clause, 'as you did in your second letter', is iterative and judgemental.

5.5.2   Interpersonal rhetoric

The iterative verb 'repeat' in the extracts is intended to disabuse the recipient's insistence that the writer lies against him ('fabricated'). The interpretation becomes more evident in paragraph 16 as cited below.

> "*Fabricated*! It is you who have *fabricated*, from sheer vapour, a cause for conflict. I must now exercise my mind to unravel why! What is behind this smokescreen? *What*

> *forces scramble your mind and cynically exploit your notorious weakness against those who wish you well*?" [*YRL*]

This furthers the negative relational work as the writer continues to counter the allegation of 'wanton attacks' by the recipient. Therefore, the flout of the 'Agreement maxim' is sustained to attack the face of the recipient. See the extract below.

> Let me *repeat* that as far as the issue of corruption, security, and oil stealing is concerned, it is only apt to say that when the guard becomes the thief, nothing is safe, secure nor protected in the house. [*BTL*, para. 27]

The writer heightens the force of his assertion through the use of the iterative lexis 'repeat' that the recipient, as 'the guard', is a 'liar'. This interpretation is given validity in 'I *repeat*: ALL the above quoted and the passages you insist are 'fabricated' attest to, and complement one another. [*YRL*, para. 11]' and in 'I invite you to recall those instances of your misjudgements, the result of a chronic impetuousness, and a lack of respect for truth, and stop *repeating* the errors of the past. [*YRL*, para. 14]'.

BTL indirectly attacks the recipient's face by insinuating that the addressee is a 'thief'. See the following extract: 'Let me *repeat* that as far as the issue of corruption, security, and oil stealing is concerned, it is only apt to say that when the guard becomes the thief, nothing is safe, secure nor protected in the house' [*BTL*, para. 27]. 'The guard' in the foregoing extract is the direct addressee. This further provides the basis for the understanding of the presupposition as presented below.

5.5.3 Presupposition

The use of the iterative verb '*repeat*' in the samples presupposes that the writer misaligns with the recipient's allegation of fabrication by pointing out ['*I repeat*'] and reasserting the verity of allegations and the evaluative potential of the text. With the iterative verb used in the extracts, the writer produces the intent to threaten the recipient's face by countering the latter's submission that the maxim of quality has been breached to spite his person.

However, the writer uses the "off record impoliteness" strategy which involves implicature (Bousfield, 2010, p. 121) to counter what he argues as lies (perfidy and cheap blackmail) and weak evaluation of the writer and his political actions as seen in '[T]his is the real abyss of perfidy, a cheap blackmail intended to inhibit my criticisms of you'.

5.6 'More' as iterative lexis

'More' is one of the iterative lexis that is frequently used in the open letters sampled for this study. The pragmatic imports of 'more' and its implication for (im)politeness are examined below. The naira has lost *more* than 50% of its value in the last 4 years. [*DIT*]

5.6.1 Common Ground

The common ground is that national issues prompt the writing of the letters. This is besides the aged animosity between the writers and the recipients in some instances, as exemplified in datum *YRL*, paragraph 1 thus:

> That is how our late mutual friend, Ojetunji Aboyade, and I generally evoked your presence in our discussions. O.O stood for many things that reflected our reactions toward your latest act or conduct at the time - fondness, optimism, indulgence, exasperation, battlement, despair, anger, *etc*. It also stood for OO as in 007, but minus the scripted finesse, *more* the Rambo type who shoots first and thinks later. [*YRL*]

'More' is understood within the common ground that, as an iterative word, it is deployed to emphasise the political and ideological conflicts between the letter writers and the recipients.

5.6.2 Interpersonal rhetoric

The iterative adverb 'more' in the letters is used to debunk the allegation of mediocrity. This iterative lexis foregrounds the persistent effect of the 'alleged attacks' which the writer argues against. A look at the iterative lexis 'more' as a Keyword in Context using the AntConc software reveals that it projects a negative relational work. 'More' is used to flout the 'agreement maxim' and 'sympathy maxim'. From the extracts cited below, one can understand that the writers have evaluated the recipients and take the position that the goevrment has lost its popularity among

the citizens.

> Mr. President, I must be bold to tell you that nobody believes in your anti-corruption war any*more*. [*DIT*]
> While some of us will certainly end up in jail between now and 2007, the Bode George, who has learnt well how to massage your ego, will collect *more* national honours, the Nigerian Ports Authority probe notwithstanding. [*DIT*]
> To insinuate, as you did in your second letter – that of July 14th – that my attack on your governance and style has become *more* 'virulent' because you failed to place my 'nominees' in your list is unworthy of you. [*DIT*, para. 11]

For example, the writer uses a directive act to admonish the recipient. As seen in '. . . you will have *more* than enough to keep your retirement busy; *stop this third-term evil today*' [*DIT*]. 'More' sounds sympathetic, at first, but the Ironic Principle *i.e.* imperative clause helps the readers to understand the covertly intended impoliteness.

5.6.3 Presupposition

The implication of the iterative lexis, 'more', for presupposition in the texts is that they help the writers to expose the interpersonal rancor between the writer and the recipient who are counter-addresses to each other. In other words, the participants in open letters position themselves as political adversaries, critics, *etc.* Some contextual collocates of 'more' in the data are discussed in the succeeding paragraph.

The collocates of 'more' in the data connote negativity in the evaluation of the political performance of the recipients. For example, 'more bloodbath', 'more bloodshed', 'more complicated', 'more dangerous', 'more firepower', 'more horrifying', 'more sickening', 'more unfortunately', 'more unfortunate', and 'more unstable' make the open letters analysed in the study a type of discourse that requires lesser politeness regardless of the status of the receivers, the Presidents of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Therefore, 'more' gives force to the opinions of the writer which is considered as "potentially offensive, especially to superiors" (Leech, 2014, p. 97).

'More than' is ranked as having the highest frequency in the data with the highest number in *YRL*. This shows that 'more than' has varying implications for (im)politeness in the data. In datum *BTL*, the extract 'merciful and compassionate to me and He has done *more than* I could have ever hoped for' shows the writer as 'self-praising' himself by giving a high value to self while giving a low value to the other (the recipient). See the extract below:

> I have also always told you that God has graciously been kind, generous, merciful, and compassionate to me and He has done *more than* I could have ever hoped for. I want nothing personal except that you should run the affairs of Nigeria not only to make Nigeria good, but to make Nigeria great which I have always pleaded with you and I will always do so. And, it is yet to be done for most Nigerians to see. [*BTL*]

5.7 'Many' as iterative lexis

'Many' is another iterative lexis with serious pragmatic implications for indictment and impoliteness in the open letters. However, the contextual collocates to 'many' bear unprecedented evaluative value for the analysis of politeness and impoliteness in the open letters.

5.7.1 Common ground

The use of 'many' involves a common ground that the state of the nation needs reevaluation. The open letters are written to nudge the presidents to responsibilities. As seen in the following extracts. The use of 'many', as an iterative lexis, reveals that the writers' knowledge of the state of the nation precipitates the need to engage the recipients in the discourse. There is a shared common ground between the writers, the direct recipients as well as the media audience.

The iterative, 'many', provides the linguistic context for understanding the gravity of the issues. In '. . . anomaly in your *many* beautiful speeches and promises', '. . . subversion of those very dreams by *many* of your actions', '. . . make life more bearable for Nigerians so bestially violated by *many* years of military rule', *etc.* 'many' gives a sense of recurrence of events or situations that are envisaged to be better. In many instances of the data, 'many' accounts for the gravity of the problems of the nation and their perpetrators. Hence, the extracts below are drawn for illustration.

The purpose of that letter (just like that of its predecessors) was to call your attention to *the dangerous gap between the high ideals of statesmanship you profess and low realities of your actual practice; the lofty dreams you stack up for Nigeria and the subversion of those very dreams by many of your actions*. When I wrote that letter in 2004, you had just "won" a second term, and your party, a promiscuous behemoth called the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, had just "consolidated" its stranglehold on the country. [*DIT*]

*May you also need to know that **many** party members feel disappointed in the double game you were alleged to play in support of party gubernatorial candidates in some States* where you surreptitiously supported non-PDP candidates against PDP candidates in exchange for promises or acts of those m PDP Governors supporting you for election in the past or for the one that you are yet to formally declare. [*BTL*]

5.7.2 Interpersonal rhetoric

'Many' is used to evaluate the interpersonal relationship between the presidents and other political actors within and outside the latter's political party as well as to recount the descending fortune of the nation. As such, the writers attack the face of the recipients and therefore, resort to face-threatening acts through impoliteness. For example, the following indicates the negative relational work existing between the writers and the receivers of the letters. From these extracts, 'many' can be adjudged as an 'indicting evaluative iterative' lexis in the data. 'Many' is indicting because it is used to quantify the many misgivings of the recipients. Some extracts are drawn to support the foregoing argument.

> This poor infrastructure has necessitated the closure of *many* of our industries. [*DIT*]
> In fact, *many* now find your exhortations as a plain insult to their intelligence. [*DIT*]
> Unlike what *many* critics believe, Nigeria is not degenerating into a one-party state, but rather into a one-person malevolent dictatorship. [*DIT*]
> I must, however, warn you Mr. President that when a person continues to show signs of prosperity despite his *many* transgressions, he gets tempted to become reckless and heedless as he attributes his seeming success to God's support and approval. [*DIT*]

These examples are face-threatening as they minimise praise of the addressees; therefore, aggravate the the face of the presidents.

5.7.3 Presupposition

The presupposition derivable from the use of 'many' can be related to the common ground wherein the writers of the letters take it for granted that the receivers will accept their evaluation of the state of the nation as the truth. However, in the in *BTL* that gets a response from the recipient, Goodluck Jonathan's response to Olusegun Obasanjo's 'Before it's too late' (which is not a part of the data for this study), the latter vehemently disagrees with the writer's point by point.

5.8 'Routine' lexis as iterative

There are many iterative words and phrases that indicate routine actions, events, situations, *etc.* in the data. These include: 'daily routine', 'no longer', 'once again', 'usual', 'twice in the past', 'always', 'consistently', *etc.* Some of these iterative lexical items are used in the extracts below.

> Yet, while power outages are a *daily routine* here, Niger enjoys an uninterrupted power supply. [*DIT*, para. 1]
> . . . that he is now in Niger and *no longer* in Nigeria as was *once* supposed. [*DIT*, para. 3]
> In the testimony, you *once again* engaged in your *usual blasphemous chest-beating*. [*DIT*, para. 4]
> I also speak as one who has cried out *twice in the past*, at great personal peril, when I perceived dangerous clouds gathering in our national firmament. [*DIT*, para. 3]
> Due to mismanagement, your government is *always* short of funds even though the price of oil has *consistently* been well above the budgeted figures. [*DIT*, para 3]

5.8.1 Common Ground

The iterative expression 'daily routine' in extract 'i' above provides a basis for the understanding of the shared knowledge that it is a leadership problem that impedes development in Nigeria. In '. . . power outages are *daily routine* here', the iterative expression 'daily routine'

makes electricity power interruption a common experience '*here*', *i.e.*, in Nigeria. This common knowledge can be applied to interpreting and understanding the intention that motivates the writing of open letters in Nigeria.

5.8.2   Interpersonal rhetoric

The use of 'daily routine' lends credence to the title of the letter '*The Devil it is, Mr. President*' which the writer explicates in paragraph 13 thus:

> Today, while your flock is suffering on account of your bad leadership, you are busy attributing your misdeeds to the good Lord. Those of us who are able to discern, know that *you are mistaking the devil for the Lord.* (*DIT*, para. 13)

This indicates that the writer is countering the claim of political achievements that the recipient claims. In other words, the iterative expression shows that the writer projects a negative relational work towards the recipient as the former flouts the maxim of modesty which specifies that a speaker minimises praise of self; and maximises dispraise of others.

5.8.3   Presupposition

The use of the iterative expression 'daily routine' presupposes that Nigeria prioritises the comfort of the citizens of the Niger Republic while it condemns Nigerians to perpetual darkness. The various 'routine' iterative lexical items used in *DIT* include 'once', 'once again', 'twice in the past', 'always', 'consistently', 'always', 'always', 'consistently', 'always', *etc.* These iterative lexical items are adverbials that are used to presuppose adversarial position. They are textual rhetoric for understanding the opposing stance of the writer. In connection to the title of the letter, '*The Devil it is, Mr. President*', the iterative expressions show the writer's lack of deference for the recipient's worldviews.

5.8.4   Interpersonal rhetoric

The interpersonal rhetoric projected by the routine iterative lexis used in the data is that of negative relational work. The iterative expressions have interpersonal significance in that they are often used to reveal the habitual abuse of power by the recipient. For example, in 'In the testimony, you *once again* engaged in your *usual* blasphemous chest-beating', 'once again' indicates that the direct addressee is an avid blasphemer. In sum, the iterative expression shows that the writer flouts the agreement maxim which specifies that a speaker manimises disagrees between S and O, and maximises agreement between S and O.

5.8.5   Presupposition

The presupposition derived from the iterative expressions in the above extracts is that the writer confronts blasphemy. This interpretation is buttressed by the extracts below.

> He needs to *constantly* remind you of the import of Mathew 6:4, which says, "*Your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you*" [*DIT*, para. 13]
> Mr. President, I beseech you to return to the Lord God. It seems you have parted ways *since* your merciful release from prison. [*DIT*, para. 14]

The use of 'constantly' and 'since' in the two extracts above is to caution the addressee to stop his act of blasphemy. While blasphemy is considered a sin against God, datum b employs iterative lexis to reveal that the economy suffering the government of the recipient imposes on the citizens is worse the the blasphemy. The extracts below are drawn for illustrations.

> The result *has been* a worsening of our situation. [*DIT*, para. 6]
> Theoretically, you had some of the best plans for economic recovery. But insincerity and ineptitude ensured that such plans remained mere paper tigers as the economy *continued* to nosedive. [*DIT*, para. 7]
> Education is *apparently* not one of your government's priorities. [*DIT*, para, 8]
> For example, while you had *consistently and routinely* drawn budgets that were grudgingly passed into law by the National Assembly, your government circumvented them and illegally adopted other ways and means of misappropriating public funds. [*DIT*, para. 7]

The iterative lexical items used in datum *DIT*, also include 'has been', 'continued', 'apparently', and 'consistently and routinely', respectively. These items indicate a discrepancy

between the economic situation before and during the recipient's administration. The understanding of this discrepancy provides the common ground for interpreting the letter. The iterative lexical items identified above are textual rhetoric for understanding the negative appraisal of the economic situation instigated by Obasanjo's administration.

6   Conclusion

The study concludes that the open letters grammaticalise im/politeness in such a way that an understanding of the political narrative background that prompted the writing of the letters is indispensable. Locher (2008, p. 509) argued that "when engaging in linguistic interaction, people never just exchange factual information but also always reveal information about themselves and their perception of roles in a particular context". Language is "not a matter of neutral codes and grammatical rules, because each time we send messages, we also make a cultural choice" (Trosborg, 2010, p. 2); it provides a myriad of discursive strategies that its users employ and manipulate for the effective achievements of their set communicative agendas or aims. These discursive practices or strategies strike pragmatists as deserving analytical attention. According to Trosborg, pragmatics, as one of the linguistic levels of analysis, needs to probe the role that language plays in the struggle for power and political relevance, and it needs to explore the place of language in the use of pragmatic elements in performing culture and politics in political discourse.

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