

IMPOLITENESS STRATEGIES IN SELECTED POSTS AND READERS' COMMENTS OF NIGERIANS OVER THE 2023 REMOVAL OF FUEL SUBSIDY

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Abstract

This study seeks to investigate the impoliteness strategies cited in the readers' comments of selected online posts concerning the recent removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria by the present government. Previous studies on impoliteness strategies have focused more on social interviews, television shows, political speeches, courtroom interactions, among many others. However, impoliteness strategies in readers' comments, especially on sensitive issues like the removal of fuel subsidy, have not been adequately represented in linguistic scholarship. Impoliteness strategies are communicative strategies employed intentionally to cause or provoke a social conflict with the addressee. The data for the analysis were sourced from readers' comments on selected online posts on Twitter by Daily Post Nigeria. About 50 readers' comments were downloaded and subjected to linguistic analysis using Culpeper's (1996) Model as its theoretical framework. Impoliteness strategies such as bald on record impoliteness strategy, positive impoliteness strategy, negative impoliteness strategy, and mock or sarcasm impoliteness strategy, were identified. The findings from this research reveal positive impoliteness strategy has the highest usage in the readers' comments and that all the identified impoliteness strategies were used by the masses in their comments as linguistic tools to channel their anger on those in support of the removal of fuel subsidy and to convey a profound message indirectly to the appropriate authority about the issue. Also, some tones of political and ethnic differences were found in some of the readers' comments, which can ignite political and ethnic conflicts. The study recommends that there should be critical vetting of impolite and negative comments by the social

media background check to avoid societal disputes, and confrontations.

Keywords: Impoliteness Strategies, Selected Posts and Readers' Comments of Nigerians over Removal of Fuel Subsidy

Introduction

Impoliteness can be seen as the manifestation of non-cooperation, disapproval, and mutual antipathy through certain communicative behaviours that signal disrespect (Thompson & Agyekum; 2016). Impoliteness strategies refer to the linguistic devices used to convey offence, disdain, or disrespect (Culpeper; 2011). As a communicative strategy, impoliteness is not used without reason. According to Limberg (2009), a speaker may intentionally employ a communicative strategy to cause a social conflict with the addressee. Impoliteness strategies aim at provoking conflicts in conversations. It can come in the form of insults, threats, aggression, hate speech, and so on. An insult for instance, is a communicative exchange where a speaker uses language with the intention of morally hurting an addressee (Allen, 2015). Impoliteness expressions in the form of verbal bullying break social codes and etiquette, often eliciting immediate responses from the target and leading to social unrest or conflict (Gabriel, 1998). These conflicts can ignite societal tensions (Karim; 2023). In the context of readers' comments to online posts, Impoliteness strategies can be employed to challenge opposing views, express frustration, or mobilise support. This study attempts to investigate the impoliteness strategies used in the readers' comments on fuel subsidy removal, exploring their linguistic features and their functions in the context of usage.

Background to the Study

The removal of fuel subsidies has been a controversial issue in Nigeria for several years. In recent times, the government's decision to

remove the subsidy has sparked intense public debate, with opinions divided on its economic and social implications. The fuel subsidy has been in place, benefiting various stakeholders, including consumers, marketers, and politicians. Many citizens view fuel subsidy removal as a necessary evil to address economic woes, while others see it as an attack on their livelihoods. They feel that removing fuel subsidies can bring about a struggling society, causing economic challenges like high inflation, inadequate economic facilities, inefficiencies, corruption, dwindling foreign exchange reserves, and so on. Fuel subsidy removal affects various segments of the society, including low-income households, transporters, and businesses. The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has brought about different opinions and debate among the citizens. Some believe that it is good for the country and will boost the financial economic situation of the country. In contrast, others see it as a plague affecting various sectors in the country.

The rapid display of impolite expressions and confrontations among Nigerians on societal issues like the case of fuel subsidy removal is fast becoming alarming. There has been a growing body of literature on Impoliteness strategies in various works observing Impoliteness in a number of several domains such as social interviews (Abbas & Al-Majdawi, 2016), courtroom interaction (Kryk Kastoysky, 2006), in TV shows (Culpeper, 2005), in political speech conflicts (Kienpointner 2008, ; Akineinola 2017, ; Cahyono, 2018), and in email exchanges (Haugh, 2010) among others. Despite this growing body of literature on impoliteness strategies, however, little attention has been given to the analysis of impoliteness strategies in public opinions, especially in the masses' comments on online posts about fuel subsidy removal. Since research on Impoliteness is a multidisciplinary field of study which has been fundamentally grounded in discourse of politics, law discourse, workforce discourse, as stated above, it should also consider the Impoliteness strategies adopted by Nigerians in their comments on the posts about fuel subsidy removal. Therefore, this study aims to fill this

gap by examining the impoliteness strategies and features employed by the masses in their comments, the pragmatic acts of these strategies, and the functions these strategies perform based on their context of usage. The notion of impoliteness deserves a serious, concentrated study because it has profound implications for interpersonal communication and society (Culpeper, 2013). All these notions above gave birth to this present study.

Literature Review

This chapter includes the definition of key concepts, the theoretical framework, and other related empirical studies on Impoliteness Strategies and fuel subsidy removal.

The Concept of Impoliteness

The concept of impoliteness has become increasingly popular as an object of linguistic investigation in recent years. However, little work has been done on communicative strategies for attacking one's interactors and causing disharmony. One notable study that has tackled the concept of impoliteness is Culpeper (1996), which defines the term impoliteness as a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts. His series of studies (1996, 2003, 2005, 2010, and 2011) ascertain that impoliteness is a communicative strategy designed to attack face and thereby cause conflict and disharmony. It is sustained by expectations, desires, and beliefs about social organization, including how others mediate one person's or group's identities mediate one person's or group's identities mediate person's or group's identities in interaction. He thinks that negative utterances have emotional consequences on the addressee since they are pressured to offend. Various factors can determine how offensive an impolite behaviour is taken to be, including whether one understands a behaviour to be strongly intentional or not (Culpeper 2010: 3233).

Still on the notion of impoliteness, Talib (2021) states that the interlocutors value the seriousness of face-threatening acts based on three factors: the social distance between the speaker and the hearer, the power that the hearer has over the speaker, and the absolute ranking of impoliteness in a particular culture. He further states that due to these three factors, the weightiness of impoliteness determined.

Also, Lachenicht (1980) and Bousfield (2008) see impoliteness as irrational attempt to hurt or damage the addressee in each conversation. The Concept of Face Many researchers incorporate the notion of face in their definitions of Impoliteness (Lachenicht 1980; Culpeper 1996, ; Bousfield 2008). The concept of face is a central concept central in studying linguistic politeness and Impoliteness (Acheampong 2021). According to Goffman (1967), face is the positive social value a person claims or assumes he has taken during a particular contact. According to him, it is an image of self-delineated in terms of approved social attributes. Building on this, Culpeper (1996) describes impoliteness as the use of strategies designed to attack face and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony (cited in Bousfield and Lacher 2008, p. 131).

Impoliteness Strategies

Culpeper empowers his model and makes it more reliable by distinguishing five super strategies, namely:

Bald on Record impoliteness

his strategy is employed when there is much face at risk and when a speaker intends to damage the hearer's face, and thus the impolite utterance will be performed directly and clearly. This is when there is a deliberate intention on the part of the speaker to damage the hearer's face.

Positive impoliteness: It is the strategy designed to damage the positive face e.g., ignoring the other, excluding the other from an activity, being disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic, using inappropriate identity markers, using obscure or secretive language, seeking disagreement, using taboo, profane or swearing words, calling the other names, and so on.

Negative impoliteness: The use of this strategy is considered to damage the hearer's negative face wants. Negative face is the need for freedom of thought and action. There are output strategies in negative impoliteness such as frightening, condescension, scorn or ridicule, putting the other's indebtedness on record, explicitly associating the other with a negative aspect, and invading the other's space.

Sarcasm or Mock impoliteness: This face-threatening act (FTA) is the use of strategies that are obviously insincere and thus remain surface realizations. Culpeper's sarcasm or mock impoliteness is closely related to Leach's (1983) conception of irony, which states, "If you must cause offence, at least do so in a way that doesn't overfly conflict with the politeness principles but allows the hearers to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of an implicature" (1983, p. 82).

Withholding politeness refers to the absence of politeness where it would be expected. For example, failing to thank somebody for rendering a self-less service may be taken as deliberate impoliteness. 7 Recently, studies on impoliteness strategies in political data were carried out. For instance, Ajayi (2018) investigated the use of impoliteness strategies in Facebook posts/comments of selected Nigerian electorate. Findings from the study reveal that the Nigerian electorate uses different forms of impoliteness strategies like negative name-calling, ridicule, use of taboo words to attack and threaten the faces of major contestants, as well as their supporters, because they are

considered individuals who lack political expertise and forthrightness to rule Nigeria.

Also, Cahyeno (2018) identified the most frequent types of impoliteness strategies performed by President Donald Trump and the findings of the study showed that four strategies occurred in his speech and confirmed that Trump portrayed his power to attack the hearer. Furthermore, Shinta et. al (2017) investigated the impoliteness strategies used by supporters and detractors of Ahok and the finding shows that the bald-on-record strategy of Impoliteness has the highest usage in the research. To sustain interaction, all languages have developed complex sets of verbal and non-verbal tools aimed at keeping the communicative channel open. Some of these tools serve ostensive communicative purposes. Among the various tools humans use for social interaction through language, Impoliteness strategies stand out for their potent reinforcement of communicative intent. This can take the form of insults, hate speech, threats, aggression, and so on. These are primarily aimed hurting the addressee (Ajayi, 2018).

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Several studies have harm that words can inflict on targeted individuals. According to Waldron (2012), he opines that hate speeches pose harm to one's dignity and he defines dignity as "the social standing, the fundamentals of basic reputation that entitled, and he defines dignity as "the social standing, the fundamentals of basic

reputation that entitle persons to be treated as equals in the ordinary operation of society”.

Contextual Functions of Impoliteness Strategies Also, Culpeper proposes three functions of Impoliteness in his up-to-date book, "Using Language to cause Offence (2011)". These types of Impoliteness share the functions of contradicting interpersonal relationship, identities, and social norms. They are:

Affective impoliteness: In this kind of Impoliteness, the speaker exposes his anger towards the hearer, and this consequently generates a negative, hostile emotional atmosphere between the speaker and hearer (Huang, 2014, p. 150).

Coercive impoliteness: According to Culpeper, coercive Impoliteness is a means of gaining power through language (Culpeper, 2011, p. 252). He thinks that the Impoliteness takes place, to a greater extent, in situations where the producer belongs to a higher and more powerful social level than the hearer's level. For instance: Shut up or I'll smash your head! (Huang 2014, p. 150).

Entertaining impoliteness: This kind of Impoliteness is generated when the speaker speaks fun at the hearer and utilizes the target's feelings to obtain amusement.

Having examined the effects that impoliteness strategies have on the targeted person(s), it is evident that the use of hurtful words against others can be harmful and cause serious harm to those targeted by such speech (Mutunga, 2023).

Linguistic Representation of Impoliteness

Culpeper (2011) identifies the most frequent linguistic ways of causing Impoliteness, which include the following:

- (1) Vocatives: E.g., Moron, plonker, duckhead, you fucking, dirty, rotten, fat, bastard, etc.
- (2) Personal negative evaluations: E.g. You are stupid, You are nuts, You can't do anything, etc.
- (3) Dismissals: E.g. Get lost, piss off, Fuck off, etc.
- (4) Silencers: E.g. Shut up your mouth, Shut the fuck off, etc.
- (5) Threats: E.g. I'll smash your head/ your face/ box your ears/ bust your fucking head, etc.

Empirical Review on Removal of Fuel Subsidy

A series of linguistic reviews on the removal of fuel subsidies has been carried out. For instance, Mohammed (2018) conducted research on online audience comments regarding the 2016 subsidy removal in Nigeria, using a case study of Premium and Sahara reporters. The researcher employed the propositions and guidelines of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and discursive psychology to analyse the comments. The study reveals that negative comments had the highest proportion of all the comments analyzed. It was also found out that some comments were fragmented in ethnic, political, and regional tones. The study recommends that online media should use more online vetting of comments to ensure positive exploitation and use of the platforms by the audience.

In summary, we can therefore say that Impoliteness is the use of language either in written or spoken context, to attack the face of the hearer or reader explicitly and unambiguously, which is clear to both the speaker and the hearer in the context of use. All the reviews of the literature above are relevant to this study. However, since little attention has been given to Impoliteness strategies in the posts and readers' comments of Nigerians over the 2023 removal of fuel subsidy, this study will investigate the Impoliteness strategies used by selected Nigerian Celebrities, the linguistic Representation of these strategies, and their functions based on the context of usage.

Research Methodology

A qualitative approach to data analysis was employed in this study. The data for the study were sourced from selected posts and readers' comments on the removal of fuel subsidies on Twitter. The relevant data which depict impoliteness strategies, were identified, downloaded, and analysed in line with the theory. The content of the data portrays distinct features such as impolite expressions, confrontations, bullying, threats, conflicts and so on for various reasons. The data were analysed based on Culpeper's (1996) model of Impoliteness. The study employs qualitative method of analysis because it is explanatory and investigative in nature.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is Culpeper's (1996) Model of Impoliteness. Culpeper maintains in this theory; impoliteness is intended to produce disharmony between interlocutors in social interactions. Although his model is based on Brown and Levison's politeness theory (1987), Culpeper refutes their view of impoliteness as "marginal" to everyday conversation. He asserts that understanding the notion of impoliteness is impossible without comprehending the impoliteness phenomenon and thereby, the analytical framework of impoliteness needs to be improved and receive due consideration. Culpeper's model of impoliteness is important to this study because it introduces a list of impoliteness strategies used to attack face and cause disruption rather than to promote face and foster relationships. These are the strategies analysed in this study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

To make the analysis process highly organised and directed to achieve comprehensive results, the analysis procedure is guided by the aim and objectives the study tries to achieve.

Text 1

Post: Seyi Law hails Tinubu over Fuel Subsidy
(Post by Daily Post Nigeria on Twitter)

In the text above, Seyi Law a notable Nigerian comedian, hails President Ahmed Tinubu for the removal of fuel subsidy. Below is a table, revealing the comments on the post above, the analysis of the impoliteness strategies adopted by readers in their comments, the pragmatic inferences or acts, and the functions of the identified strategies based on the context of usage. All these are clearly stated in the table below:

S/ N	Comments	Impoliteness Strategies	Pragmatics inferences/acts	Functions of Strategies based on their context of Use
1.	God punish you	Positive Impoliteness	Swear words and abusive language	Affective: expression of anger towards the addressee
2.	Bastard	Positive Impoliteness	Negative name calling	Affective: used as an insult
3.	Tadpole	Positive Impoliteness	Negative name calling	Affective: to ridicule and reduce the addressee to the level of an animal
4.	Backscratcher	Positive Impoliteness	Personal negative evaluation of personality	Affective: used as an insult
5.	Stupid Yoruba boi	Positive Impoliteness	Negative name calling with a tone of tribal discrimination	Affective: expression of anger, used as an insult to ignite tribal conflict

6.	Olodo	Positive Impoliteness	Negative name calling	Affective: used as an insult
7.	Swear they follow Seyi Law already	Positive Impoliteness	Swear words and abusive language	Affective: used as an insult
8.	Na him type dey look for popularity...Nigerians refuse to recognize you	Bald on Record Impoliteness	Negative evaluation of personality	Affective: used as a form of ridicule on the addressee
9.	Abi Ogun fe pa Seyi Law	Positive Impoliteness	Swear words and abusive language	Affective: used to pronounce a negative declaration on the addressee
10.	Irrelevant thing called Seyi or Law is trying to be relevant...please ignore the thing	Bald on record Impoliteness	Negative evaluation of personality	Affective: to ridicule the addressee and to reduce his personality by comparing him to a "thing"
11.	E ni to o gbadun (meaning a crazy fellow)	Positive Impoliteness	Negative name calling	Affective: used as an insult

The table above contains eleven (11) comments out of which nine (9) are positive Impoliteness strategies and two (2) are bald on record Impoliteness strategies. Positive Impoliteness strategy is a strategy designed to damage the positive face of an individual e.g. by ignoring, excluding the individual from an activity, using inappropriate identity markers, using obscure or secretive language, seeking disagreement, using taboo, profane or swearing words to qualify the individual, calling the addressee a negative name and so on. Most of the strategic outputs in the above comments fall under swear words and abusive language, negative name-calling, and negative evaluation of

personality on the addressee, all because of the commenters expressing their anger and grievances on the issue of the removal of fuel subsidy. For instance, the commenter refers to the addressee as a "bastard," which is a derogatory term to address people who are stupid, irritating, or ridiculous. In comment 3, the commenter refers to the addressee as a "tadpole" " which means a larval frog or toad. Here, the commenter reduces the personality of the addressee to an animal, which is such a derogatory statement to make on a person because it can mar the feelings of such an individual and can ignite conflicts and disagreements. One should be able to express his or her thoughts and opinions constructively and objectively without hurting the other person's feelings. Also, the comments are filled with a lot of unfavourable evaluations about the addressee's personality. For instance, comment 4 four above states that the addressee is a "backscratcher". A backscratcher is willing to trade favours or services for mutual understanding. Negative evaluations of personality can be used as a form of ridicule to spite the personality of an addressee.

Text 2

Post: I feel your pain, sacrifice a little more - Tinubu beg Nigerians.

(Post by Daily Post Nigeria on Twitter)

The post above discusses the president of Nigeria, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, appealing to Nigerians to bear the pain and make a little more sacrifice. The following table presents the comments of readers and an analysis based on the type of Impoliteness strategies adopted in the comments, as well as the pragmatic acts and their functions in the context of their usage.

S/N	Comments	Impoliteness Strategies	Pragmatics Inferences/actions	Functions of Strategies based on their context of Usage
12.	Na that sacrifice go kill you...	Positive Impoliteness	Swear words and abusive language	Affective: expression of anger towards the addressee
13.	Nah only the poor people go dey sacrifice for corrupt leaders abi every time...	Bald on record	- Negative evaluation of personality - The addressee also expresses his comment using rhetorical question	Affective: used to indirectly question and oppose the authority of the addressee
14.	What sacrifice are those in government going to make? Don't be silly	Positive Impoliteness	Swear and profane language	Affective: expression of contempt and disagreement with the addressee
15.	In the history of Nigeria, the poor are the only ones sacrificing lol...never seeing the rich sacrificing anything.	Positive Impoliteness	Sarcasm	Affective: to mock the addressee's statement
16.	Where are you feeling it from? The same rubbish Buhari was always telling Nigerians...	Positive Impoliteness	Rhetorical question	Affective: to spite the addressee
17.	Your head isn't correct, after una don steal finish,	Bald on record Impoliteness	Negative evaluation of personality	Affective: expression of anger

	it's now the already suffering Nigerians that will suffer the brunt and still sacrifice a little...Do and get out from that seat.			
18.	Oh the wickedness of APC and BAT	Bald on record Impoliteness	Negative evaluation of the identified political party and personality	Affective: strategy was used to express pain and grievances
19.	He should use his children	Positive Impoliteness	Negative proclamation	Affective: expression of anger
20.	Tinubu ode	Positive Impoliteness Abusive language		Affective: used an an insult
21.				
22.	@AsiwajuTinubu, but I insist that a man without personal hygiene is not the right fit to be our president in 2023. What type of a man, with all his money, stands by and allow his teeth look like eBola virus? And you want to be my president?	Mock or sarcasm impoliteness	-Sarcasm -Rhetorical question	Entertaining: poses fun at the addressee to obtain amusement

23.	Tinubu ode	Positive Impoliteness	Abusive language	Affective: used as an insult
24.	This man took drugs b4 that broadcast	Bald on record Impoliteness	Negative evaluation of personality	Affective: to spite and ridicule the addressee
25.	The drug lord feels your pain	Bald on record Impoliteness	- Negative evaluation of personality - Irony	Affective: to ridicule the personality of the addressee by calling him a "drug lord"

The table above contains fourteen (14) comments out of which eight (8) are positive Impoliteness strategies, five (5) are bald on record impoliteness strategies, and one of them is a mock or sarcasm impoliteness strategy. The strategies come in the form of abusive words used to insult the personality and status of the addressee (the President). For instance, we have expressions like "your head isn't correct in comment 17, the word "rubbish" in comment 16 are all abusive words on the president. Some of the comments also contain negative evaluation of the personality of the addressee, for instance, he is termed as being corrupt (comment 13), a thief (comment 17), wicked (comment 18), a drug lord (comment 25). All these terms are used to pass a negative judgment on the addressee and to indirectly pass a message to him concerning the issue of the fuel subsidy.

Conclusion

The following conclusion can be drawn from the findings. Impoliteness strategies like bald on record, positive impoliteness, mock or sarcasm politeness are found in the readers' comments in the form of insults, ridiculing, criticizing, using foul words, swear words, and profane expressions, and so on. Furthermore, the study concluded that 16 these impolite expressions were used to express their anger towards the removal of fuel subsidies. They were also used to spite and ridicule those in support of the removal of fuel subsidies and to indirectly pass

a message to those in authority, like the political leaders. It was also discovered that some of the comments express tones of political and ethnic differences, which can lead to political and ethnic conflicts. The study suggests that there should be a check on negative, hostile, and impolite expressions on the Internet to avoid conflicts and disagreements between interlocutors.

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