

## A STUDY OF IMPOLITENESS IN SELLER-BUYER CONVERSATIONS IN ONITSHA MAIN MARKET, ANAMBRA STATE NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

This research x-rayed impoliteness in the interaction of seller-buyer of Onitsha main market in Anambra state. Its purpose was to bring to limelight the obvious impoliteness strategies applied during transaction discourse. Data for this research were drawn from the discourse of sellers and buyer in Onitsha main market, the data were collected using personal observation and note taking. The theoretical framework was drawn from Culpeper impoliteness strategies. Ten excerpts were systematic selected from the population to ascertain the level of impoliteness in the transactional interaction of sellers-buyers within the market under study. The researcher applied eclectically method to capture both the interactional and social aspect of sellers-buyers in the market. The research revealed that sellers and buyers applied positive impoliteness strategy, negative, bald on-record impoliteness strategy to damage mutual understanding which overtly has negative impact on transaction. The researcher recommended intermittent seminar for traders in order to reduce the level of impoliteness in the market and to maintain social relationship.

Keywords: Impoliteness, strategy, positive, negative impoliteness, interaction

### **Introduction**

Transactional and interactional function of language is always associated with market conversations. In a sociolinguistic setting, social actors negotiate and construct meanings that are obviously interpreted in their utterances and behaviours. Therefore, analysis of language in context allows for an evaluation of outcomes in such setting as under study. Sellers -buyers in the market gather to sell and buy. The buyer comes prepared to bargain, bearing in mind that the seller who expects a bargain will fix a high price on products. Bargaining then enables sellers and their prospective buyers reach a compromise convenient to them as to what rate to sell and to buy the products. In this way several languages together with different behaviours come to play. One of such language- behavior is impoliteness which often leads to unacceptable outcomes. Therefore, it becomes pertinent to x-ray impoliteness in Onitsha market of Anambra state which is one of the biggest markets in the south-east of Nigeria.

The subject of impoliteness is considered to be one of linguistic researcher's most desirable subjects. Several researches have been carried out to analyse the principles of impoliteness used in various ways and or spheres by people. As a linguistic phenomenon with obvious social reflexes, impoliteness has been approached from many and diverse views within linguistic research with an interest in context and socio-cultural matters such as socio-linguistic research, pragmatics, ethnography of speaking, conversation and discourse analysis.

Culpeper (1996) sees impoliteness as "the use of strategies to attack interlocutors face and create social disruption". Impoliteness according to Culpeper in Bousfield and Locher (2008) intends to cause the target's 'face loss'. It disguises itself behind utterances like: verbal abuse, threats and bullying. It has been shown through scientific research that impoliteness is harmful and damaging than physical violence.

Impoliteness varies across region. It has been discovered that notions of what is considered polite or impolite differ between communities in space which speaks same language. Impoliteness abounds in the market and in different linguistic situations not minding its undesirable results. In Onitsha main market where majority of the sellers and buyers make use of Igbo language, impoliteness is overtly observed.

After Brown and Levinson's politeness work, impoliteness that follows is an area of pragmatics discourse which has not gained its needed scholarly attention. In an attempt however, to explore impoliteness, various efforts have been made both in journals and books. In books, Culpeper, Jonathan, *Towards an Anatomy of impoliteness and using language to cause offence* (1996 & 2011); Bousfield, *Dereki's impoliteness in interaction* (2008); Melina Lartinem (2011) *verbal and non-verbal impoliteness in the American hospital and in journal*, Adelina Koh, *the customer is not always king* (2014); Qin Dongxue's *politeness and impoliteness in different culture* (2016); Halin, *Abdul's impoliteness strategy used in a politician facebook* (2015).

It is worthy to note that there have been some works on impoliteness but none has been written on impoliteness on seller-buyer in Onitsha main market; where choice is a result of the that it is one of the biggest markets in south-east, Anambra state in particular. It comprises of good number of citizenries from different multilingual- socio- ethnic backgrounds.

As a pointer for this research, the researcher anchored on the following questions:

1. What are the possible impoliteness strategies in use by seller-buyer in the market under study?
2. At what point do they result to impoliteness?

### **Statement of the problem**

Language behaviours that discourage selling and buying are observed in Onitsha main market, moreover, there is a scarcity of literature on such impolite behaviours. The cause of impoliteness, its progress and its effect on sales of products and the strategies employed by interactants in displaying these behaviours are the problems of this research.

### **Objective of the study**

Objective of this study is to find out the various impoliteness strategies used in Onitsha main market.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In the study of impoliteness 'face' is an all-important issue. Face is a linguistic concept originally introduced by Erving Goffman. Face according to Goffman (1967) is self-image reflected in terms of approved social attributes; it is a person which we present in a discourse; the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself. In conversations, sometimes, people's face is threatened. Impoliteness maximises face threats for Culpeper (2011). He perceives impoliteness as a phenomenon which comes about when the speaker communicates face – attack intentionally or the hearer perceives and or constructs behavior as intentional face-attacking or a combination of both. In this research impoliteness is the major term and as such, this study will focus on theorizing the concept of impoliteness

### **Impoliteness In Interaction**

Impoliteness belongs to the other end of politeness and it includes rudeness, aggression and non-verbal behaviours that threaten the face need of individuals. In different opinion of many scholars, 'it is a communicative act which tends to attack face and cause social conflict and disharmony among people' as opined by Culpeper, Bousfield and Wichman (2003);

Kienpointer (1997) and Beeds (1995). A better description according to Cupper is that proffered by Tracy and Tracy according to them, 'impoliteness as communicative acts perceived by members of a social community which is often intended by speaker to be purposefully offensive' (20). Culpeper unpacks this definition and points that impoliteness results when:

1. A speaker communicates face attack intentionally or
2. The hearer perceives and or constructs behaviour as intentionally face attacking or a combination of 1 and 2.

According to Bucholtz (1999) 'It is linguistic indexes that individuals employ to distance themselves from a rejected identity' (211). It is an attempt to exercise power over one's interlocutors whilst simultaneously ensuring that one's interlocutors are overtly offended in the process, Bousfield (141).

Impoliteness is linguistic expressions encoded through language and accorded behaviour, that can be heard or seen. Impoliteness therefore according to Spencer Oatey is people's judgement about the social appropriateness of verbal and non-verbal behaviour (95). It is not per se behaviour that is impolite but impoliteness is an estimated identity of people's behaviour as it concerns their unobjective inference about social appropriateness. Primarily, inferences from people are based on their credence about behaviour in terms of imposed what is given and accepted. Lay down attitude is a behaviour that is considered as legally or socially mandatory. People are mandated to produce and others are expected to accept it. People are compelled to avoid it while others do not have right to experience it at all. Any behaviour that appears in this form is considered impolite according to Kasper (193-218). It is noteworthy from the preceding that troubles can emanate as a result of many variables like choice of language that incorporate power, imposition with particular reference to mood, status, gender, occupation age etc. Impoliteness according to Terkourafi (2008) occurs when the expression used is not conventionlised relative to the context of occurrence. Terkouafi's view suggests that some completely polite behaviours in one context, can be assumed as impolite in another context. This supports Jamet and Jobert (2013) that aware that "in German context, directness is politeness".

### **Impoliteness Strategies**

Culpeper distinguishes five super strategies by which impoliteness can be created and received. They are:

1. **Bald on Record Impoliteness:** This 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, Bousfield, (2008, p.92). Culpeper uses here the concept of face-attack-act (FAA), in opposition to FTA, in order to identify face attack where there is a deliberate intention on the part of the speaker Mullany and Stockwell, (2010, p.71). Wiczorek (2013, p.46) elucidates the difference between Brown and Levinson's bald on record politeness and Culpeper's bald on record impoliteness. While the former is applied in particular situations where the risk to face is minimal without any attention to attack the hearer's face, the latter is used when there is much risk to the and the speaker intends to damage the other's face.
2. **Positive Impoliteness** This strategy is used to damage the hearer's positive face want (his desire to be acceptable) Bousfield and Locher, (2008, p.34). In the incarnation of his model (2005), Culpeper adds a range of sub strategies impoliteness including;  
-Ignoring or snubbing the other  
-denying common ground with the hearer

- selecting as sensitive or understandable topic to talk about
  - using in appropriate identity markers
  - being disinterested and unsympathetic with the hearer
  - looking for disagreements
  - using obscure language and inserting secretive words with the discourse
  - using taboo words, cited in Mullany and Stockwell, (2010, p.72).
3. Negative Impoliteness: This strategy is designed to attack the hearer's negative face want (his/her desire to be free from imposition) Thieleman and Kosta (2013, p.239). Negative impoliteness, in accordance with Culpeper's (2015) involves the following sub-strategies as cited in Mullany and Stockwell (2010, p.72)
- scorn
  - frighten
  - ridicule

And invade the hearer's space literally or metaphorically.

4. Mock Impoliteness: In this strategy the speaker performs the FTA using politeness strategies which are clearly insincere, Thielemann and Kosta, (2013, p.239). In other words, sarcasm means the use of one or more sub-strategies which are (2008, p.95).
5. Withhold Politeness: This strategy occurs when the speaker does not perform politeness where it is expected as in keeping silent when the speaker is supposed to thank the hearer, Thielemann and Kosta,(2013, p.239).

### **Types of Impoliteness**

Culpeper proposes three types of impoliteness in his up-to-date books, impoliteness (2011). They share the function of contradicting interpersonal relationships, identities and social norm, thus;

1. Affective Impoliteness: This type of impoliteness is where the speaker expresses his anger towards the hearer and his consequently generates a negative emotional atmosphere between the speaker and the hearer, Huang, (2014, p.150)
2. Coercive Impoliteness: This variant of impoliteness raises realignment between the speaker and the hearer so that the speaker can gain profits at the expense of the hearer. Culpeper believes that this impoliteness type takes place to a greater extent in situations where the speaker belongs to a higher and or more powerful social level than the hearer's level. In a nutshell, coercive impoliteness is a means of getting power via language, (2011, p.252).
3. Entertaining Impoliteness: This type of impoliteness is generated when the speaker pokes fun at the hearer and utilizes the target feelings to obtain amusement.

### **FTA-Face Threatening Acts**

Intrinsic FTA: The assumption of the universality of face and rationality is intuitively the case that certain kind of acts intrinsically threatens face, namely: those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and or of the speaker. By 'act' we have in mind what is intended to be done by a verbal or non-verbal communication, just a one or more 'speech acts' can be assigned to an utterance.

First Distinction: Kinds of Face Threatened: We may make a first distinction between acts that threaten negative face and those that threaten positive face. Those acts that primarily threaten the addressee's negative face want, by indicating that the speaker does not intend to avoid impeding another's freedom of action include:

1. Those acts that predicate some future act A of H, and in so doing put some pressure on H to do the act A:

- a. Orders and requests
  - b. Suggestions, advice
  - c. reminding
  - d. threats, warning ,dares
2. Those acts that predicate some positive future act of S towards H, and in so doing put some pressure on H to accept or reject them and possibly to incur a debt:
    - a. offers
    - b. promises
  3. Those acts that predicate some desire of S towards H or H's goods, giving H reason to think that he may have to take action to protect the object of S's desire or give it to S:
    - a. Compliments, expression of envy or admiration
    - b. Expressions of strong emotions towards H.

Those acts that threaten the positive-face want, by indicating that the speaker does not care about the addressee's feelings, wants etc—that some important respect he doesn't want H's wants include:

1. Those that show that S has a negative evaluation of some aspect of H's positive face:
  - a. Expression of disapproval, criticism, contempt or ridicule, complaints and reprimands, accusations, insults (that he doesn't like/ want one or more of H's wants ,acts ,personal characteristics ,goods, belief)
  - b. Contradictions or disagreement, challenges.
2. Those that show that S doesn't care about H's positive face:
  - a. Expression of violent
  - b. Irrelevance, mention of taboo topics including those that are inappropriate in the context
  - c. Bringing of bad news about H or good news about S.

Second distinction: Threats to H's face versus threats to S's secondly:

We may distinguish between acts that primarily threaten H's face and those that threaten primarily S's face. To the extent that S and H are cooperating to maintain face, the later FTA's also potentially threaten H's face. FTAs that are threatening to S include:

- 1. Those that offend S's negative face**
  - a. Expressing thanks
  - b. Acceptance of H's thanks or H's apology
  - c. Excuses
- 2. Those that directly damage S's positive face:**
  - a. Apologies
  - b. Acceptance of a compliment
  - c. Break down of physical control over body, bodily leakage, stumbling or falling down.
  - d. Self-humiliation, covering, acting stupid, self-contradiction.

Culpeper's model is one of the most comprehensive efforts in impoliteness theory but Ige, cited in Nwabunwanne (2007) that Eelen, Haris and Mullany criticized it as been insufficient in terms of universal application. Mullany argues that "all the adequacies found in Brown and Levinson's model of politeness are also applicable to Culpeper's theory of impoliteness such as: over-generalisation, emocentric norms and the limitation of the use of the term face". According to Koh Adelina in Nwabunwanne (2017) Culpeper's model is plausible because it aligns with classical and discursive approaches to impoliteness. Where the classical approach emphasizes some shared conventions of meaning and the discursive approach have the level of analysis at the interpretations of the interactants.

## Research Method

The researcher made use of qualitative method of data analysis in this descriptive research. Qualitative data according to Bogdan and Biklen (1982) “is a process of collaborating, arranging, dividing data into feasible components, integrating it, looking for the design, finding what is important and what to add to knowledge and finally taking decision on what the researcher will tell others”

The data for this research are conversations between the sellers and their prospective buyers in a natural speech situation in Onitsha main market, Anambra state between May, 30<sup>th</sup> and September, 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The researcher collected data informally by using notes, recorder and personal observations. Data containing polite and impolite exchanges were collected and through a purposive sampling method nine interactions with impolite utterances were identified and separated for further study and analysis.

## Presentation of Data And Analysis

The data for this study featured by a specific turn-taking strategy, where buyer and seller carefully select turns. Interactants carefully listen to one another to understand and decode their message before responding. This free turn-taking formula helps to prevent unguarded interruptions as well as overlaps. During interaction, the period where they resorted to impoliteness were observed and highlighted, and was analysed using Culpeper’s impoliteness strategies.

**Excerpt 1:** A woman goes to buy painter of dawa in the market and the interactions were observed;

Seller: customer good morning.

Buyer: good morning ma.

Seller: what do you want to buy?

Buyer: give me one painter of dawa.

Seller: it’s (#3500) three thousand five hundred-naira oo

Buyer: Eee! Maka ginizi? ( Haba! Why naah, does it contain egg?) is it not (#2000)

Seller: mtchew (sighed) do I look like a farmer?

Buyer: we are not quarreling ma. This is market

Seller; She angrily stepped out and said, check another place. I’m not selling.

Buyer: (hisses) so you can walk out on your customer like this?

In the above conversation, the seller in the course of bargaining tends to down rate the product jokingly using negative impoliteness, inform of interrogative remark, (why naah, does it contain egg?). Immediately the seller who understands impoliteness strategy employs positive impoliteness ‘mtchew’ as a response to the buyer. The buyer tried to explain the intention of her question but, the seller got more tensed up and negates the buyer with a face threatening act ‘... check another place’ I’m not selling and walked away.

## Excerpt 2:

A woman called a young boy hawking telephone accessories, he parked his barrow expecting her to make her order but she asked him if he has change, showing him (#1000) one thousand naira note. Then the following conversation was observed:

Seller: ma which one do you want?

Buyer: pls do you have change?

Seller: so na change you want and called me, do I look like bank?

Buyer: don’t be angry my son, after repeating

Seller: looked at her disrespectfully without a word and drove off.

In the above scene, the seller parked his barrow only for the prospected buyer to ask him for a change of one thousand naira. At the face level it could be seen that the buyer made an enquiry, considering the polite utterance 'pls', with which the question was asked. But the circumstance that led to the question makes it unacceptable and thus impolite. The buyer should have shown at least some consideration for the seller and his goods before asking or making her intention known. This strategy employed by the buyer is a positive impoliteness which tends to damage the seller's positive face want. The seller seemed neglected which he pointed out through response 'so na change you want and called me'? The buyer neglected him: negative impoliteness strategy and further exercise her authority as an elderly woman, by repeating the same question. Pls do you have change? Her neglect to the feelings of the buyer and not to accept blame leads to a silence (impolite) and the seller drove off.

### **Excerpt 3:**

Another conversation between a wine whole seller in his shop and a prospective buyer:

Buyer: good afternoon

Seller: good afternoon, (kedu ihe ichoro?) what do you want?

Buyer: how much is carton of Rose wine?

Seller: original rose wine is #30,000

Buyer: you are a thief

Seller: I am not ooo, na tinubu wahalla oo

BUYER: how much is the last price?

Seller: tins de put money my brother I'm not the cause, pay #29,500.

Buyer: your market is too cost.

Seller: ok, no problem, you can check another place (chekie ebe ozo)

Buyer: it's ok let me go and check.

Seller: mute.

In this exchange the prospective buyer within conversation introduced bald on-record impoliteness strategy 'you are a thief'. "A strategy that is direct, obvious, unpretentious and daring according to Culpeper (1996). The speaker used it to attack addressee's face in a straight forward and unambiguous way, in situation where the face is stake". The seller who appears to have a sound understanding of the process of buying and selling did not attend to the attack of the face threat. Rather he offers a discount but the buyer keeps on complaining. The seller loses interest in trying to win him and choose at last to be silent, a sub-strategy of positive impoliteness that means ignoring or snubbing the other according to Culpeper (1996:40). The application of silence by the seller has employed all he could to win the buyer but all to no avail.

### **Excerpt 4:**

A young girl went to buy food stuffs and the following interaction was observed:

Buyer: good afternoon ma, how much is one painter tomatoes better seed oo?

Seller: (#2000) two thousand naira.

Buyer: elee oo (shouted) madam is not (#1300) one thousand three hundred?

Seller: ozugbu! Eze ahia! Puo ebea . (market killer, king leave this place)

Buyer: (you are thief) Umunna gi ona azu tomatoes- is your kinsmen buy tomatoes?

Seller: you children of last generation are thieves

Buyer: hissed! I heard you onye wayo.

Seller: muttering word and left.

In the interaction above, the seller appears to be in a hurry to let her prospective customer go. The seller introduces face threatening acts in the process of haggling through the use of tag 'eze ahia' which means king of market. The buyer perceives the impoliteness and refutes

immediately. The seller who acknowledges the buyer's negative response continues in her face threatening acts till the buyer left. It is observed that some buyers by their unreasonable bargain makes a seller to use impolite expressions, but for a seller to call a prospective customer a thief is not appropriate for the context.

#### **Excerpt 5:**

A woman walked in a fairly used clothes shop and the following conversation was observed;

Buyer: How much is this belt? (pointing at a black belt).

Seller: (#2000) two thousand naira only.

Buyer: This thing, okirika kwa? (fairly used) is it not (#1000) one thousand naira?

Seller: (shouts) pls (#1,950) one thousand nine hundred and fifty is the last price.

In the above conversation, the buyer thinks that the belt has reduced value without putting into consideration the seller's 'face', employs mock impoliteness to under value the seller's product, by referring to the belt as 'this thing, okirika kwa'. The seller in an abrupt final remark brought the conversation to a close. The shout is an impoliteness strategy which the seller employs to display a negative emotional state towards the buyer.

#### **Excerpt 6:**

A lady went to the market to buy foot wear and this conversation was recorded:

Buyer: good morning madam, how much (picks one sandal from the table) is this cutiner?

Seller: yes only (#4000) four thousand naira only)

Buyer: let me pay (#2000) two thousand naira.

Seller: you think I stole it. Stupid! (ignored her and continue arranging her store like no one was there, neglecting the buyer)

Buyer: starred at her and left after some minutes.

In the conversation above, the seller employs bald on-record impoliteness strategy in one of her turns. Bargaining is a feature of the market. The seller who rather responding to bargain but resorts to name calling 'stupid' is not conventional. It threatens the addressee's face but no face threatening interaction is attributed to the speaker by the hearer. Then the seller having denied the buyer common ground further ignores her and continues arranging her shop-positive impoliteness strategy. The buyer starred with a surprise and walked away.

#### **Excerpt 7:**

A young boy goes to market to buy beef for her mother as a surprise for her cooking, he approaches a meat seller and the following interaction was recorded;

Buyer: sanu, malam (greeting in Hausa language)

Seller: yowaa! Sanu. (responds accordingly)

Buyer: nawa? (how much, pointing at a meat on the table)

Seller: aboki na (#5000) five thousand naira. (pidgin)

Buyer: brings out from his pocket (#2000) two thousand naira, take.

Seller: Haba! Leef mai table, don't insult me. You think I de manufacture meat.

Buyer: the young boy reluctantly left after being embarrassed by the seller.

The buyer opens the interaction with a Hausa language to win the seller,

which is greeting to an elderly person and the seller happily responds, 'yowaa, sanu'! in Hausa too. It is then observed that in a market like one under study cod-switching sometimes occur. This is as a result of different people from different tribes that come to sell and buy goods. The seller in his final turn uses bald on-record impoliteness, though the interaction started with friendly tone and polite note. Having denied common ground with the customer, he uses a FTA that is obvious and direct, 'you think I manufacture meat', this obscure expression was intended and used for further impoliteness. The seller here, fails to understand that bargaining may or



may not end on a common ground. Most at times, the transaction may end up with the seller selling goods while other times, it may end up abruptly as the buyer leaves the store.

**Excerpt 8:**

A boy went to market to buy beans and the following discourse ensued between him and the seller;

Buyer: good morning ma.

Seller: morning, nnaa kedu? (how are you son).

Buyer: madam ego ole ka ina ama beans (pointing at a brown beans) (how much do measure measure beans)

Seller: (#3000) three thousand, one painter.

Buyer: madam it's too much ooo

Seller: mtchew... (sighed)

Buyer: why are you sighing?

Seller: you sef no that things are costly now, stupid boy, you are asking me question.

Buyer: as you de course me because I want to buy from you, measure two painters let me go.

In the discourse above, the seller reduces the price (from the price she told him) for a painter of beans but the buyer goes on to bargain. Then the seller uses impolite utterances to disapprove the negotiation. The buyer having understood impoliteness formulae quickly enquired the reason for the impolite utterance. In an attempt to explicate the reason for sighing by the seller yet resorts to another impolite utterance. The buyer perceives the impoliteness in the seller's use of language and finally complained.

**Excerpt 9:**

A prospective customer walks into a book shop and the following discourse was recorded;

Buyer: customer pls give me a pure white exercise books: 40, 60 and 80 leaves. My son is entering secondary school.

Seller: na 80 leaves de now, (pidgin) come back tomorrow.

Buyer: guy you are not serious, how do you want me to come back here tomorrow, you are mad!

Seller: oya take these ones but not too white.

Buyer: you no well, is this white?

Seller: give me chance make I sell to another person (nyere m efe).

In the above interaction, the buyer's use of the expression, 'you are mad' appears impolite. However, it is not intended for impoliteness but a joke. Hence, the seller does not respond to it as impolite rather, he renders an utterance for the buyer's need/choice. The buyer feels that the alternative doesn't suit his choice; and refuses common ground in a yet insulting manner. The seller immediately perceives the buyer's impolite and belittle him (negative impoliteness strategy) by leaving him to attend to another customer.

**Conclusion**

It is evident from this research that impoliteness as a negative behaviour, hinders communication goals and yields unpleasant results. Culpeper (1996) outlines five impoliteness strategies, thus: bald on-record, withheld politeness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness and mock impoliteness strategies. All of these strategies were identified in this study bringing to fore negative attitudes that delay sales of goods as well as waste buyer's time in the market under study. Discussions from this study can impact on language use as some of the findings could be harnessed in planning and organizing appropriate in-training for traders to help achieve improved services and results.

### **Recommendation**

To minimize the constant occurrence of impoliteness between buyers and sellers in Onitsha main market, the researcher suggests among other measures, seminar for traders, less use of high tones during bargaining, application of small jocular talks, time conscious and positive politeness.

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