

Linguistic Politeness in the Communicative Behavior of Private Primary School Pupils in Ile-Ife, Osun State

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Abstract: This study investigated the possession of linguistic politeness among upper primary school pupils in ten purposively selected private primary schools in one Nigerian town. The study involved one class each of primaries 4 and 5 pupils, from each of the ten purposively selected schools. Equal number of boys and girls were purposively selected from each class, among those whose parents permitted to take part in the study. The sample size was 100, consisting of boys and girls in equal proportion. The instrument used for data collection was a researcher constructed linguistic politeness test, having 14 items with YES or NO response. A different and shorter version of the instrument was administered first and used as correlate for the main test. The results of the tests were analysed using analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results showed that the pupils were familiar with linguistic politeness and that the males were significantly better than the females in linguistic politeness outputs [$F_{(1, 100)} = 6.690$]; $p < .05$]. The results further showed that both class level of pupils and parental occupations did not exert significant influence on linguistic politeness output of pupils. The results were discussed and it was recommended that items on politeness be included in the curriculum of primary schools.

Key words: linguistic politeness, primary school, children, culture, language use

Date of Submission: 15-10-2019

Date of Acceptance: 31-10-2019

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I. Background to the Problem

Politeness is the noun form of the adjective polite. Polite is derived from a Latin word *politus* meaning refined and elegant. Politeness is a social skill which involves showing regard for others as well as courteous manner that is acceptable. It also refers to an aspect of linguistic competence that is learnt through socialisation process required by individuals within certain groups or society in order to behave appropriately, in both oral language and in attitude. Thus, politeness is learned and acquired depending on what the society of the individual deems fit. It, therefore, follows that politeness is culture-specific and is defined by the community of practices that recognises its importance in many of its social engagements. Rules of engagement determine what is expected of individuals with respect to preservation of other's face. In this way, politeness relates to safeguarding face.

The concept of face in linguistics was introduced by Goffman (1967) who noted its commonality in all cultures as the image everyone presents to others. He defined face "[...] as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [sic] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p.5). This makes face to be a mask determined by context. Face is therefore involved in every interaction. This gives credence to Mills' (2003) belief that politeness relates to expression of a speaker's intention which underscores the fact that a face threat is about to be made therefore requisite face saving act should accompany such act in order to 'avoid communicative discord or offence, and maintain communicative concord' (Leech, 2006).

A child's language acquisition is part of the socialisation strategy embedding not only competence in phonology and grammar but extends to include enormous amount of other information about his community, what is considered appropriate or inappropriate. This other information includes pragmatic competence which is about contextual linguistic appropriateness. Since language socialisation cannot be divorced from socialisation through language, children learn both language and social structure simultaneously (Ochs and Schieffelin, 1979). Children learn that social statuses are linked to particular rights, privileges and obligations which manifest in verbal (p.13) and nonverbal behaviour. From the above observations, it will be worthy of attention to investigate children's use of politeness through their imitations in situations where they observe and employ it in enacting relationships and accommodating others in their day to day interactions in the school.

Early child socialisation theories belittle children participation in their world, believing them to be passive recipients of social processes and relationships. However, these theories have been vigorously critiqued (Jenks, 1992). Instead, children are seen as active participants that cannot be manipulated. Nonetheless, such active but immature minds are yet to receive as much nurture as they are expected to have as a buffer as they move to the next level in their verbal and nonverbal development. This situation is impaired by their parents pursuit of materiality to keep the children comfortable to the detriment of proper foundational socialisation.

The impact of parental occupation, income level, social status or education on students' achievement, attitudes including politeness, had been variously investigated in current research work (Ali Shah and Anwar, 2014; Usaini and Abubakar, 2015). Documented research findings show that significant relationships exist between income levels, social status, and academic achievement or attitudes although Ngare, Maronga and Sigei (2016) found that parental occupation and income did not influence children's achievement and attitudes in their study. Recently, Damayanthi (2018) found that parental occupation and status exerted positive influence on students' academic achievement but class level did not.

These findings point to gradual shift in responsibility of socialising the children to the school and the teachers who due to the economic situation and large class sizes cannot effectively carry out this assignment thus rendering the school that is supposed to be a corrective institution helpless. This situation ultimately leaves the children at the mercy of their peers who may lack parental care and upbringing. It is not unlikely that such children with the advent of android phones rely on the internet as their source of information even when they have not acquired the act of right discrimination as regard the information they filter. These children may equate impolite language as an offshoot of civilisation thus rendering their pragmatic competence questionable (from their limited exposure to life) as against social expectations. These have brought noticeable changes in the way children conform to expected social norms. From the foregoing, it becomes pertinent to examine the extent the children apply politeness in their engagement with their peers.

2. 1 Review of Related Literature

Scholarly attempts at exploring children's application of politeness in their utterances have brought to the fore the need to investigate how they utilize polite forms. Read and Cherry (1978) explicate that *please* appears early in child's language use. The authors were of the view that children use a greater variety of politeness devices (e.g. please, intonation, interrogative). Other researchers observed the greater use of politeness devices by children with increasing age (Bates and Silvern, 1977). The ability of young children to use and understand politeness in speech at age three had been noted to occur by other scholars (Leonard & Anastopoulos, 1982). This perspective of another may be that of a peer or an adult. The adult may be a caregiver or parents who instruct children to use polite formulas to address family members and others. According to Burdelski (2011) citing Fukuda (2005), Japanese children above two years old use honorifics in role-play activities to mark social distance.

In some other Asian cultures, children are socialised to use honorifics to indicate respect and hierarchy related to age. In Korean American community, mothers instruct children to address grandparents with honorific greetings and requests, thus socialising them to encode respect and deference in their expressions (Park, 2006). In Basotho of South Africa, mothers and older siblings prompt children to greet, respect elders, say thank you and use proper address terms (Demuth, 1986). These studies and a lot more are basically about children not at the terminal classes in the primary schools. This study intends to find out how children at the terminal age classes use the politeness formulas inculcated in their early age while interacting with their peers.

With regard to differences in politeness between girls and boys, Ladegaard (2004) submits that with respect to the use of mitigation, there is no significant difference contrary to earlier findings that girls appear to be more polite than boys. The above mentioned studies and a lot more have been carried out not within Nigeria. Again, these studies are basically about children not at the terminal classes in the primary schools. The present study intends to fill this gap by investigating how children at the terminal age classes use the politeness formulas inculcated in their early age while interacting with their peers.

2.2 Politeness in Yoruba

Every culture has a means of social indexing and contexts where they are applicable. Applying these forms of social indexing in interaction shows that all fingers are not equal. In Ile Ife, a Yoruba town in southwestern Nigeria where this study is carried out, politeness is principally reserved and euphemistic expressions predominate especially when it borders on psycho-social and emotional issues. This implies that the culture aligns itself to the use of indirect illocution. Also, deference as a form of respect is given to others as a result of their higher status, greater age, and economic achievement and so on (Odebunmi, 2013). Yoruba incorporate deference in honorifics which are used to indicate respect when addressing people of higher status or greater age, strangers and so on. Children right from early age are trained to greet elders and their seniors. In conversation, the younger person is expected not to look directly in eyes of an older person. Conforming to this

behavior is a sign of good upbringing while the reverse is a sign of rebellion. To inculcate these social values in children, everybody is involved because raising a child is seen as not only belonging to the nuclear family but to the entire extended family and community at large.

2.3 Politeness and Language acquisition in Children

The acquisition of the culture of politeness by children is believed to start from home and is carried on to the school. In most cultures, parents and the older siblings of children often teach the young ones aspects of politeness, such as greetings, respect for elders and how to thank a benefactor. Politeness could be introduced to children through practical and spontaneous activities such as play, imitation, repetition, demonstration, explanation and reinforcements among others. As children exhibit politeness through these activities they use language. Language is the system of using sounds and words to communicate our thoughts and feelings to others and have same communicated to us by others. Children acquire language through several means: communication, adult encouragement, stimulating environment, and peer influence, level of intelligence among others (Iroegbu and Okuguni, 2018).

Exposing Nigerian Children to polite behaviour can be done through language acquisition processes. Adodo and Agbayewa (2011) had shown that the studies of class level behaviour of school children could be used to positively influence their academic, attitudes and social attainment. They further indicated that researchers such as Veldman and Sanford (1984) had documented similar findings.

In the traditional African setting, especially Nigeria, politeness in children could be inculcated through age grade activities in play, cultural activities, festivals, singing, dances and drama for children using language and participatory activities. In this type of situation the children are spontaneously corrected by knowledgeable adults when a deviant behavior happened. Ways of inculcating politeness in Children through language acquisition may include the following:

1. Politeness could be achieved through metaphorical spoken story, cartoons and songs (Goofy Gophers, 2017)
2. Bedtime music and lullabies
3. Acting plays and dramatization
4. Story telling: Story telling by a parent, teacher or a caregiver (Fowowe & Melekeewe 2017)
5. Songs and Rhymes by the teacher at school or care center
6. Community age grade activities such as play group and camp

2.4 Statement of the Problem

Politeness in interaction in relation to children has received a lot of scholarly international attention. These studies include among others Axia and Baroni (1985) who examined politeness in request using children at different age levels; Pedlow, Sanson and Wales (2004) investigated the production and understanding of politeness as children interact with vending machines; Ladegaard (2004) examined children's pragmatic competence using Danish children to see how they use of politeness; Brumark (2006) explored in Swedish family dinner regulation activity with respect to age of children, number of participants and different contexts of conversation; Burdelski (2011) looked at socialisation of children into politeness in Japanese culture where politeness is encoded in both linguistic and non linguistic resources; Altinkamis (2017) paid more attention on how politeness are inculcated in children through child directed speech. The opposite is the case in Nigeria because not much has been done along these lines. This study therefore tries to investigate the level of linguistic politeness among boys and girls at higher classes of primary school, whose parents belong to different occupational groups.

2.5 Research Questions

Three research questions were investigated in the course of this study. They were as follows:

1. Does the gender of pupils affect the level of their linguistic politeness outputs?
2. Does class level of pupils affect the level of their linguistic politeness outputs?
3. Does parental occupation affect linguistic politeness outputs of primary school children?

II. Methodology

The study observed the participants in their verbal settings and activities; and noted how the children's verbal and nonverbal strategies encode politeness in their interactions. A total number of one hundred (100) pupils were purposively selected from five equivalent private primary schools in Ile-Ife town for the study. These pupils were purposively selected on the basis of their early exposure to English language from home and from the terminal classes of Primary 4 and 5. These pupils were believed to have certain level of experience with understanding the use of English language and a relatively good grasp of societal expectations as regards politeness in their expressions. Pupils in these classes were expected to be between 9-12 years of age, male and

female, whose parents engage in different occupations that might influence the level of politeness in pupils. The distribution of learners was as follows:

Table 1: Distribution of learners in the sample

Factor	Variable	N	Total
Gender	1.Male	50	100
	2. Female	50	
Occupation of parents	1.Public service	34	100
	2. Trader	36	
	3. Farmer	30	
Class of pupil	1. Primary 4	50	100
	2. Primary 5	50	

3. 2 Instruments

The instruments used for data collection were: A researcher constructed questionnaire, having fourteen items and requiring yes or no answer from respondents and an observation schedule use to collect data in the participants’ verbal setting. The bio-data section of the instrument required the pupils to indicate their parents’ occupation and gender of pupil. The items were scored 1 mark for correct response or zero mark for incorrect response. The instrument was validated by administering it in another state different from the one where the study took place. The instrument yielded a test retest validity of .78. The test was administered on 20 pupils from each of five purposively selected private primary schools. Equal numbers of boys and girls were randomly selected from each school consisting of ten pupils from each of primaries four and five. The resulting data was analyzed using analysis of variance (ANOVA).

4.1 Analysis of Results and Discussion

The descriptive statistics is shown in Table 2 for post test and gender

Table 2:Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Posttest score of pupil

Gender of pupils	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	10.0000	1.42857	50
Female	9.0400	1.81783	50
Total	9.5200	1.69658	100

Table 2 shows that the mean post test scores of male and female pupil were 10.00 and 9.04 marks respectfully. In order to verify the significance of the difference in mean score between the gender types, the data were further subjected to the analysis of variance in Table 3 in order to answer research question 1.

Table 3: Analysis of variance of post test scores using pretest scores as covariate

Dependent Variable: Posttest score of pupil

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	45.528 ^a	2	22.764	9.222	.000
Intercept	461.419	1	461.419	186.933	.000
Pretest	22.488	1	22.488	9.110	.003
Gender	16.514	1	16.514	6.690	.011
Error	239.432	97	2.468		
Total	9348.000	100			
Corrected Total	284.960	99			

a. R Squared = .160 (Adjusted R Squared = .142)

4.2 Research question 1 demanded to find out whether the gender of pupils affected the level of their linguistic politeness. The data in Table 3 revealed that the effect of gender on linguistic politeness of pupils is significant [$F_{(1, 100)} = 6.690$; $P < .05$]. This result implies that the difference in mean score between male and female pupils did not occur due just to chance. As a consequence comparison of mean scores in pairs was conducted. The result is contained in Table 4.

Table 4: Pair-wise comparisons of mean post test score for gender

Dependent Variable: Posttest score of pupil

(I) Gender of pupils	(J) Gender of pupils	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^b	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^b	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Male	Female	.821 [*]	.318	.011	.191	1.452

Female	Male	-.821*	.318	.011	-1.452	-.191
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Based on estimated marginal means

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (equivalent to no adjustments).

The data in Table 4 shows that the males were significantly higher achievers in linguistic politeness in this study [Means score for males – mean score for females = .821]. The result of the difference is positive, showing the males achieved significantly higher mean score than the females. This result differs from the one documented by Ladegaard (2004) who found no significant difference in linguistic politeness among boys and girls when mitigation was employed.

4.2 Research question 2 sought to find out whether class levels of pupils affect their linguistic politeness outputs. The responses by pupils to questions/situations requiring exhibition of linguistic politeness were statistically analyzed to find out whether in addition to gender, class level and parental occupation affected the pupils’ linguistic politeness outputs observed in this study. The result is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Analyses of linguistic politeness score of pupils according to class level and parental occupation

Dependent Variable: Posttest score of pupil

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	35.432 ^a	6	5.905	2.201	.050
Intercept	373.444	1	373.444	139.184	.000
Pretest	16.114	1	16.114	6.006	.016
Class	1.538	1	1.538	.573	.451
Parentoccupation	2.456	2	1.228	.458	.634
Class * Parentoccupation	2.589	2	1.295	.482	.619
Error	249.528	93	2.683		
Total	9348.000	100			
Corrected Total	284.960	99			

a. R Squared = .124 (Adjusted R Squared = .068)

The data in Table 5 reveals that the effect of class level of pupils was not a significant factor in influencing linguistic politeness: [$F_{(1, 100)} = .573$; $p > .05$]. This result implies that class level of pupils did not affect their linguistic politeness.

4.3 Research question 3 sought to find whether parental occupation affected school pupils’ linguistic politeness outputs. Table 5 reveals that parental occupation did not influence the pupils linguistic politeness score in the current study [$F_{(2, 100)} = .458$; $p > .05$]. These results showed that both class levels of pupils and their parents’ occupations did not influence the linguistic politeness outputs of pupils in this study, but gender influenced the pupils’ linguistic politeness outputs as obtained in Table 3. These results are similar to that obtained by Ngare et al.(2016) who found that parental income or occupation did not influence children’s politeness outputs. However, the results contradict the one documented by Damayanthi, (2018) who found that parental occupation positively influenced children’s politeness outputs. and the males showed significantly higher linguistic politeness outputs than the females.

III. Discussion of Results

This study was conducted to find out whether boys and girls in upper classes of the primary school, (primaries 4 and 5), have the same or different linguistic politeness outputs; and whether class levels (primary 4 or 5) and parental occupations have similar or different effects on the pupils linguistic politeness outputs. The results reveal that the males exhibited significantly higher politeness outputs than the female pupils. This result runs contrary to expectations, since it is generally believed that girls show more politeness than boys. The result also appears to contradict the one documented by Ladegaard (2004) that found no significant difference in politeness outputs among boys and girls when mitigation was employed. Culturally, in Nigeria, women do not talk where men are discussing certain issues unless called upon to give their own opinions or explain some point. When that is the case, the woman acts under protection and excuse.

At present, the situation has changed; women now work closely with men, take up responsibilities and take decisions on important issues affecting both men and women. The present situation laid foundation for women assuming equality with men this probably has affected the result of this study. Again, Children are trained to be polite to the elders whether teachers, parents, or other members of the community, as such they see their mates as equals and do not necessarily need to be conscious of their choice of words when interacting. Both the boys and girls seem to understand that they can take liberty from being friends and so not much

attention is paid in manipulating words to attend to face needs. Thus, they demonstrate that they can linguistically and contextually use polite expressions relative to different situations. Also, the girls seem to understand their equal status with the boys and that is probably the reason why the boys in the study are more polite than the girls seem not to be more polite than the boys.

It is, therefore, encouraging to find that young children at the primary school level have understanding of the importance that the African culture attaches to politeness. It is even more encouraging to find that boys could attain a greater level of linguistic politeness than girls of the same age level and class. Going by Tomasello (2014), it then means that by this age the children have acquired the various capabilities that enable them to negotiate social realities in their interactions leading them to attending to their peers and their own social face and face needs. Pedlow, Sanson and Wales (2004) note that much of children's initial exposure to politeness is connected to every day usage such as showing appreciation and greeting rather than how to relate socially with their peers during interaction. By being more polite than the girls, the boys show that they are able to interact with their peers from different family backgrounds. This indicates that the boys have been able to graduate from using politeness for just voicing appreciation and greeting to applying it as a strategy that promotes cordial relationship.

Another finding that class level and parental occupation did not influence linguistic politeness is remarkable in this investigation. This finding is similar to the one documented by Ngare, Marronga and Sigei (2016); Damayanthi (2018) that parents occupation and status or class did not influence academic and affective outcomes of the children in terms of its transformability. Further researches of this type need to be conducted with children in other classes and other locations in the country to give a more focused conclusion on linguistic politeness outputs of Nigerian primary school children.

IV. Conclusion

The results of this investigation lend credence to the opinion that children acquire some level of politeness from home, the society around them and from interactions with peers. Since politeness is not taught in school as a subject in Nigerian schools, it is most likely that these children acquired the level of politeness that they possessed from their homes and society and also from peers. The results suggest that with deliberately planned instruction, Nigerian primary school children could be profitably groomed to be more polite than what is obtainable in the society today. This study was designed to find out the level of politeness among the primary school children as it is without any intervention. It is therefore credible to believe that if organised training could be structured into the curriculum of primary schools in Nigeria, later primary school leavers will show greater politeness than what obtains today.

V. Recommendation

Based on the results of this study, the researchers made the following recommendation:

That the primary school teachers should deliberately introduce some measure of linguistic politeness in their school lessons in order to improve the level of politeness possessed by these school children. This will help the society to increase the number of humane, responsible and non-deviant school leavers in later years.

Primary Schools should introduce some additional social studies topics that may help inculcate in children discipline, respect and obedience to constituted authority. This recommendation is considered important when viewed against the level of disrespect, hatred and acrimony that exist in the Nigerian society today.

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Iroegbu. "Linguistic Politeness in the Communicative Behavior of Private Primary School Pupils in Ile-Ife, Osun State". *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)* , vol. 9, no. 5, 2019, pp. 56-62.