

# (IM) POLITENESS IN ONLINE DISCUSSION ON NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIAN STUDENTS AND NIGERIAN EDUCATION MINISTER'S INTERACTIONS

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## Abstract

This paper examines the discourse (actions and reactions) between Nigeria's Education Minister and Nigerian students as it concerns ASUU strikes. Over the years, language, be it verbal or non-verbal, has served as human beings' tool for expression of ideas, emotions, as well as agitation for their rights. Language of protest has been part of students' survival mechanism in tertiary institutions generally, often triggered by perceived unfavourable conditions of learning and nonchalance on the part of the government to respond to their plights. Bearing in mind that context is a major consideration in utterance meaning and interpretation, this research is hinged on Brown and Levinson's (1978/1987) Politeness Principles while adopting Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and Face-Saving Acts (FSAs) as analytical tools. Using a descriptive research design, the study analysed twenty (20) online comments, purposively selected from Facebook, Nairaland, Youtube and Vanguard.ngr.com respectively, which serve as the data. Findings are that clearly, the actions, verbal and non-verbal, of both sides of the divide, threatened the face of either party. While the Education Minister's act of walking out on the students was both face-saving and relatively, mildly face-threatening. The comments of the students, under reference, threatened the face of the Minister as most of them were enacted baldly on-record. The students went beyond the core issues under discussion to pour invectives on the Minister, maligned his person and brought his tribe and by implication his religion to odium. The study recommends that people should adopt politeness strategies timely, in conflict resolution, for national growth and development. Also, the teaching of politeness principles should be incorporated in the English Language section of the curriculum of General Studies in order to inculcate into every student the need for tactful employment of language in the face of challenges.

**Key Words:** Communication, Language, Context, Politeness Principles and Face

## 1.0 Introduction

Communication has been defined as the transference of information, feelings, ideas and ideals from a communicator to consumers of information, in addition to their subsequent reaction(s) back to the communicator. From the Behaviourists' standpoint, communication involves not just actions but actions and reactions; not just stimulus but stimulus and response(s), communicated through the medium of language.

Language is an indispensable asset for human interaction in a socio-cultural environment. When two or more people come together, there is need to express their feelings about one another or their environment. Thus, language is used to express thoughts, emotions and desires. Keith and Duska (2006, p.3) observe that 'In human interaction and communication, language is a prime factor which serves as a mediator between the interlocutors and gives information which shapes the actions and behaviours of the people engaged in that communicative event.'

While Hayakawa (1981, p.28) asserts that language is important to man as a medium of information and 'effective conveyor of feelings', Orjime (2003, pp. 58 - 59) emphasizes on the 'aura of feelings - pleasant or unpleasant that surrounds practically all words.' However, meaning is central to communication because every speaker wants to make a meaningful statement and every listener (hearer) wants to interpret what a speaker says. Okereke (2014, p. 20) asserts that 'For meaning to be expressed, it must be coded in an utterance which is not only addressed to another but also demands a response from the addressee.' An utterance's meaning is primarily social and heavily dependent on context and participants in the act of communication (Ogbulogo, 2005 cited in Akinwotu, 2016). The 'internal' meaning of linguistic structure cannot make for a holistic interpretation of an utterance without examining the 'situational' meaning given rise to by context. Thus, it is perceptible that meaning can be conveyed not only by the formal properties of words, phrases and sentences but also by the way they are used, by the relationship between the language users and

by the context in which they are used. Ikiddel (2005, p.393) asserts that 'a language does not comprise only in its sound system, vocabulary, its rhythms in speech and writing but pragmatically in the attitudes it inspires in the users and socio-linguistically, in the communicative goals it is deployed to achieve.'

However, different interactants may have diverse means, methods or strategies for presenting their views about one another. As individuals, the use of language is our personal creativity hence we choose to use language to either save or threaten others' face. People cooperate and interact by means of language (verbal or non-verbal) in whatever linguistic communication they find themselves as man always seeks to be heard and understood. Because of this, language users select forms and structures that effectively relay their respective communicative needs. And when such forms and structures are selected, the need arises for the construction/negotiation of meaning out of such by interlocutors. Consequently, consciously or otherwise, we adopt politeness strategies in our communication. Bloomer, Griffith and Merrison (2005, p.108) argue that 'we always have a choice of what we say or write...' Grundy (2008) asserts that the way we say things to each other communicates not just our proposition but also our understanding of the relationship between us, thus, the need to be polite.

When utterances are made, their interpretations are assisted by the generally accepted notion that utterances reveal the speaker's personality, and are influenced by their backgrounds, world-views and social positions. Cameron (2001) says that whatever else we do with words, whenever we speak, we are always telling our listeners something about ourselves. These utterances are also assessed as to what type of face is presented by the speaker (Goffman, 1955; Lim and Browers, 1991). Hence, face presentation explains the behaviours participants display towards one another in terms of degree of politeness and or distance or closeness they want to express.

In interpersonal interaction, interlocutors can communicate verbally or non-verbally. Non-verbal acts express the speakers' emotions

and feelings; define the social relationship existing between participants in a conversational exchange; can be used in place of messages (though to a limited extent); and can also affect the interpretation of verbal cues, that is, they can add to the meaning of the verbal message (Ndimele, 1999). Verbal behaviours are analysed according to the affordances of the social context of the interaction and thus, verbal behaviours may be judged as polite, impolite or politic (See Watts, 2003, p.12; LoCastro, 2012, p.156 and Eelen (2001).

Having established the above background, this paper seeks to explore the various linguistic strategies Nigerian students employed in commenting/protesting on the current Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strikes and the verbal and non-verbal (body) language of the Minister of Education in the on-going saga between the Federal Government and the striking staff of public tertiary institutions in the country. We treat these online comments as reactions/feedbacks to the Minister's verbal and non-verbal actions as news had it that he, the Minister of Education, Malam Adamu Adamu, met with the leadership of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) who were protesting the continued face-off between the Federal Government and ASUU, at the headquarters of the National Universities Commission (NUC) in Abuja. He assured the protesters that the striking members of the Academic Staff union of Universities (ASUU) would soon return to classrooms. Unfortunately, the Minister walked out on them in the deadlocked meeting.

## **1.1 Clarification of Key Concepts**

### **1.1.1 Politeness Principle**

Politeness involves taking into account the feelings of others. It is the use of language to attend to face needs; to maintain smooth interaction and good relationship. Politeness Principle is a pragmatic concept which, according to Leech (1983, p.40), involves 'verbal and non-verbal behaviour which help in maintaining harmonious relations.' Eelen (2001) says that politeness is not confined to verbal language but can also include non-verbal, non-linguistic behaviour.

Udoudom (2013, p.203) asserts that “politeness forms can both be linguistic and non-linguistic (gestural) and determined by the operative culture in the society in question.”

Politeness principles bind cordial relationships between participants firmly and, according to Adegbija (2011, p.52), politeness principle is “the oil that lubricates the channel of communication. Politeness is basically of two kinds – positive and negative. Any action or utterance, however mild, which might conceivably upset the delicate balance of face maintenance is a face-threatening activity (FTA). Examples include shaming, reprimanding, rebuking, preaching and frightening as by-products of corrective behaviour which benefits the target. Kalejaije (2016) observes that one can attack the face of a group of persons by nick-naming them or by name-calling, which is a Blunt Face Threatening Act (BFTA).

Politeness or impoliteness can be determined by the addressee’s evaluation of a speaker’s behaviour (Mills, 2003, p.21; Watts, 2003, p.97, 119) and not necessarily by the utterances alone. Fraser (1990, p. 233) claims that neither is politeness seen as an intrinsic characteristic of certain linguistic forms nor verbal choices: “Sentences are not *Ipso facto* polite, nor are languages more or less polite. It is only speakers who are polite.” He goes on to explain that no matter how im(polite) a speaker may attempt to be, whether he will be perceived as im(polite) ultimately depends on the hearer’s judgment. Politeness is culturally determined. What constitutes positive politeness in one culture may be termed impolite in another culture.

Watts (1989a, p. 135) claims that ‘politic behaviour is a socio-culturally determined behaviour directed towards establishing and /or maintaining in a state of equilibrium the personal relationship between the individuals of a social group, where equilibrium does not refer to social equality but rather to the maintenance of social status quo’. His 2005 work on Linguistic Politeness and Politic Verbal behaviour presents a broader version of Brown and Levinson’s face work by stepping beyond threats and mitigations; it includes behaviour that is simply appropriate or politic even though it sometimes sounds face

threatening. He came up with two dimensions of marked and unmarked behaviours; the former is conceived as polite behaviour because it is not regarded as part of the expectations of the interaction while the latter is considered politic or appropriate, no matter the weightiness of the offence, provided it is accommodated by the context in which it occurs. Ermida (2006, p.848) stresses that “polite language is a language a person uses to avoid being too direct, or a language which displays respect towards or consideration for others.”

### 1.1.2 Context

Context is central to the analysis of any discourse. The situation within which a conversation takes place affects the behaviour of the interlocutors and the interpretation of their utterances. Wales (2011) stresses that context has an important function in determining the actual meaning of words. Context comprises the immediate environment and the linguistic resources (words) which collectively determine the way the text is interpreted.

Linguistic context is concerned with words and their relationship within an utterance or a sentence while social context is realized by the actions (linguistic and other choices) of the participants (Mey, 2001). Furthermore, Leech (1983) explains that context understood in various ways includes any background knowledge assumed to be shared by (speakers) and (hearers) and contribute to the (hearers’) interpretation of what (speaker) means by a given utterance, behaviour/attitude inclusive.

## 1.3 Theoretical Framework

### 1.3.1 Brown and Leech’s (1978, 1987) Model of Politeness

Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987) politeness focuses on the linguistic strategies speakers follow in order to save or maintain face, and they define politeness as redressive action taken to counter-balance the disruptive effect of face-threatening acts. This came as advanced researches on face theory. This model is premised on the notion of face, ‘the public-self-image that every member wants to claim for himself’

(Brown and Levinson, 1978, p.66). The concept of face is emotionally invested, as such, every individual seeks not to lose his/her face during interaction, but to maintain or enhance it. They claim that face, either positive (an individual's desire to be appreciated in social interaction; reduces hearer's face threat, and used by audience fairly known to each other) or negative (an individual's desire for freedom of action and freedom from imposition, as such imposition from a speaker to a hearer makes him/her uncomfortable), can be gained or lost in human interaction. Given that any of these faces could be threatened during a social interaction, and that five strategies, aimed at mitigating or redressing this threat, are divided into on-record (direct), off-record (indirect) and non-performance groups, have been identified by Brown and Levinson namely: Do the face threatening act (FTA) on record without redressive action, Do the face threatening act (FTA) with redressive action (Positive politeness), Do the FTA with redressive action (Negative politeness), Do the FTA off-record; and Don't do the FTA.

Doing the FTA baldly, without redress, "involves doing it in the most direct, clear, unambiguous, and concise way possible" (Brown and Levinson, 1978, p.74); performing redressive action (Face-saving acts). Using positive politeness involves orienting 'towards the positive face of hearer (H), the positive image he claims for himself' (p.74). When negative politeness is used, the act is 'oriented mainly toward partially satisfying (redressing) the hearer's negative face, his/her basic want to maintain claims of territory and self-determination (p.75). Performing off-record politeness includes giving hints, using metaphors and being ambiguous or vague; and don't do the FTA happens when the speaker does not say something because it looks too potentially face threatening. Bald on record strategy is used by speakers who closely know their audience. The speaker does not attempt to minimize the threat to the hearer's face. Off-record or indirect politeness is the use of indirect language which removes the speaker from the potential of being imposing' (p.75). Brown and Levinson claim that 'the aspect of face is a 'basic want', and assert that three factors: the social distance between

the hearer and the speaker (D), the power the hearer has over the speaker (P) and the rate of imposition (R) determine the intensity of a Face-threatening act (FTA)' (Goody, 1996, p.76).

#### 1.4 Research Methodology

This research is hinged on Brown and Levinson's (1978/1987) Politeness Principles while adopting Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and Face-Saving Acts (FSAs) as analytical tools. Using a descriptive research design, the study analysed twenty (20) online comments of students, which served as data, presented as uttered, purposively selected from Youtube.com, Vanguard.ng.com, Nairaland and Facebook and analysed in that order. However, other comments derived from reactions of the general public on this same subject matter under discussion, culled from other social media platforms, were relied upon as further information in support of the claims of the protesting Nigerian students, and our objective analysis of the texts.

#### 1.5 Review of Literature

There are several scholarly works on social protests and activist movement on the internet. Most of these works agree that the internet and ICTs have become active platforms for communicating to the international community, carrying out protest and to effectively organize not just for mobilizing actions/reactions but also, for the purpose of awareness and advocacy; especially as it concerns the international community (Chiluwa, 2014).

Chiluwa's (2014) 'Online Negotiation of Ethnic Identity' is a computer-mediated discourse analysis study which examines identity in the social media. Data for the analysis comprise 250 blog posts generated mainly from the 'Biafra Nigeria World', viewed and analysed as discourse, with focus on social meaning, identity construction and language structure. The study reveals that the internet is a key site for social interaction, civic engagement and identity negotiation. The study further brings to the fore that various mass protests by workers, trade unions, individuals and social groups around the world constitute some

forms of identity re-negotiation, where the people are spurred to reconstruct and re-establish their cultural ideologies and socio-political rights.

Mauney and Jeon (2014) explored the possibility of new politeness paradigms in computer-mediated discourse on Facebook, examining the discourser expectations, linguistic catalyst for 'face-threatening acts', and mitigations of opinions to maintain 'face' in discourse about politics. The study analysed ten (10) Facebook wall posts containing discourse about politics for norms of linguistic appropriateness, concept of 'face' and other socio-pragmatic aspects. Data analyses suggest that the concept of 'face' is especially important for Facebook, where real names are typically preserved and relationships between interlocutors can be altered based on the conversation at hand.

May, et.al (2015) investigated the language features that are commonly deployed by UITM Kelantan students for conveying politeness, identifying the similarities and differences in politeness strategies in Facebook's wall posts written by male and female students. Using both the qualitative and quantitative designs, samples for the study were 100 wall posts from Facebook selected from male and female students of various Diploma courses in UITM. Data were analysed using 'triangulation technique' via Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory and Lakoff (1975) model. Results show the use of Bald-on record, positive politeness, negative politeness and off record strategies. The study concluded that gender is not the only factor which affects the application of politeness strategies, and that in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), people choose to apply different patterns of language and strategies of politeness based on the context of their conversation.

Ayantayo and Akintola (2017) studied Politeness on Facebook: A Pragmatic Study of Comments on President Buhari's 2016 Independence Day Speech. Data for the study were comments of people gathered on the Facebook timeline of the president. The data were analysed using politeness principles of Brown and Levinson (1978) as a

pragmatic theory. The researchers discovered some politeness strategies such as Face Saving Acts (FSAs), Face Threatening Acts (FTAs), Deference, Off-record and Indirectness in the comments analysed; the instances of Face Saving Acts and Deference show that some people are still loyal and respect the president while instances of Face Threatening Acts and indirectness are examples of negative politeness, which seek to threaten President Buhari's public image, despite his position in the country. Off-record strategy is used by pretenders to be indifferent, yet they also threaten president's face. The researcher recommends that people should observe and respect other people's face in their comments.

### **1.6 Data Presentation/Analysis**

In evaluating the reactions of the general public, and maybe particularly those of students of Nigerian tertiary institutions who are the direct victims of the actions or inactions of the government, one should invariably reflect firstly on the conduct of the Minister in walking out from the meeting with the leadership of NANS. Doubtlessly, the insensitive and incompetent handling of the education sector by those on whose shoulders the administration of education in Nigeria is laid should naturally be a cause for anger by those whose future and in fact, life, are treated with levity. The aberration of a truncated tertiary education system seems to have been accepted as natural by these administrators and therefore no effort whatsoever is made to ensure that this perennial evil is curbed. It is no surprise then that the youths (students) whose interests are being so lightly treated react with unrestrained anger against anyone or authority associated with the near collapse of the education system in Nigeria.

Their anger is heightened and made more venomous by the fact that it is common knowledge that none of those who brought problems to education have their children or wards in Nigerian public universities. A Nigerian government official was ingloriously reputed to have said that education is not for the poor. Even though the said official was condemned by all and sundry, but the reality of the actions

and inactions of the government and her officers laden with the responsibility of fashioning out the education policies of the nation and seeing to the implementation of those policies, are in tandem with that excoriated pronouncement. The poor of the nation see the trivialization, neglect, if not total abandonment of the public tertiary institutions in Nigeria, as an onslaught against their quest for intellectual advancement.

### 1.6.1 Textual Presentation and Analysis from Youtube.com

TEXT 1 - "It appears that whenever they are in such a post, they feel that they are superior to the citizens and not responsible to them." (Comment by abiodun mike)

The above comment is a criticism in an accusative tone and as such a face-threatening act, although the use of the linking verb 'appears' reveals the student as being considerate; not totally indicting, which in itself is a face-saving act. The pronoun 'they' refers to public office holders who see themselves as 'Lords' who must be revered, and not as servants. It is an objective assessment of the reality of the Nigerian Public Service and it accords with our introductory opinion. Firstly, truth be told, the academic welfare of these students is at the core of the Minister's portfolio. It is hard to imagine the relevance of a Minister of Education in the absence of university students. Moreover, if the Minister had considered himself a servant of the people, he would have realized that the body of Nigerian Students (NANS) constitutes a huge chunk of the voting populace and for which reason, he, the Minister, would have accorded it, NANS, the deserved respect.

TEXT 2 - 'The minister needed to apologize for his conduct, it shows sense of irresponsibility.' (Comment by Akinyemi Olujobi)

This is another instance of a Face-threatening act since a subordinate/an inferior (student) is making a very high and 'unrealistic' demand on his superior (A Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria). It is regarded as unrealistic because of the uncivilized mentality of our

leaders in this part of the world. Again, the comment is condemnatory. The commentator does not apply discretion strategy by not using the word ‘irresponsibility’, which implicitly or explicitly contradicts and embarrasses the positive claims made by the Minister. He rather brings out the fault/weakness of this present administration more glaringly by adversely commenting on the Minister’s non-verbal action – staging a walk-out. This comment is outrageous, disrespectful or antithetical to our culture. One would not be surprised to considering the mentality of the average Nigerian politician and public office holder to find that the Minister, his cronies, and apologies consider the comment under reference, an insult. This is because the public office holder sees himself as a Lord of Manor, and not a servant; the king who ought to be obeyed.

TEXT 3 - ‘The so called minister should be ashamed of himself’ (Comment by Osas Osasco)

This particular commentator demeaned the Minister by the insinuation that he is not in fact one deserving of the high office he occupies as he refers to him as ‘The so called minister’. This is a blunt face-threatening act (BFTA) enacted on-record baldly. The use of the declarative statement is to convey in very clear and direct terms, the exact gravity of the intended threat to the positive self-image of the Minister. Also, the cliché that respect begets respect is apposite in considering the comment. One who occupies such lofty office such as a Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria ought to be exemplary in conduct. The Minister of Education, as the father of all the students in Nigeria, ought to exhibit thoroughness, patience, accommodation and ability to persuade and moderate a family discussion appropriately.

TEXT 4 - ‘You don’t give what you don’t have...that’s what you will always get when you appoint illiterate as a Minister of education. Pple who don’t have respect for education.’ (Comment by Ever G)

This commentator spoke out of anger and frustration, spitefully, maliciously and disdainfully insulting the Minister, just to reflect his mood. His/her anger could be pardoned if one takes into

consideration that the ineptitude of the government in its handling of the strike action by ASUU is a threat to the future of the commentator. It is again common knowledge that by the operation of anger, facts and truth are usually distorted. We say so because the Minister of Education cannot, by any stretch of imagination or logic, be said to be an illiterate. However, when one, through his verbal or non-verbal behaviour threatens himself by the line he has taken, that is by the self-image he has presented to the public, to disappoint his audience' expectations of him, he becomes an object of caricature and ridicule. The Minister did not apply tact in handling this all-important (sensitive) issue in the lives of students, who are interested in resettling in their classrooms to continue with their future academic pursuits, and this recklessness earned him insults from quarters he least expected, being in an asymmetrical relationship with the commentator. There is an Igbo adage which says that 'the gray-haired man that fails to live up to his age risks being dragged to the mud by children'. Moreover, this student resorted to insulting the Minister, an instance of Blunt Face-Threatening Act effected baldly on-record. The commentator also indirectly mocks the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria who appointed the Minister in the first place. The commentator used a declarative statement to state the obvious, and to have his comment affirmed by fellow students from whom he/she sought understanding and cooperation. The comments evoke sympathy from the masses in their plight.

### 1.6.2 Textual Presentation and Analysis from Vanguardngr.com

TEXT 5 - 'Does it mean the students can't mobilise themselves from the whole states, storm in Abuja and converge at Aso rock, possible stay there for days. Nobody is gonna shut any one. Buhari and Adamu Adamu are clueless.' and 'More proof that your 'elders' are useless. They do not deserve our respect. If they will not get out of the way for there to be progress then you need to push them.' (Comments by Berto and Barnaby 04's (Facebook)).

These comments are subtle suggestions that are very appealing on a face value yet inciting. There is a perceived pressure on fellow students to act, and a direct question on the ability of Buhari and Adamu Adamu to even know what to do at the moment. All the promises by the Minister, the students have come to interpret as deceptive dispositions since they, the Federal Government and its education administrators, never keep to Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) signed in the past. Thus, the students see them as liars, express doubt and disenchantment at the indefiniteness of the Minister's proposal. Actuating/inciting comments such as these can cause a group and their supporters to embark on destructive actions with attendant negative consequences; ignite dispute, violence casualties, and can degenerate into total system collapse if ignored. From the comments, the speakers have poise, skill, confidence, and the greatest weapon in life - effective words - as they stress, 'No body is gonna shut any one' and 'They do not deserve our respect. If they will not get out of the way for there to be progress then you need to push them', thereby allaying the fears for uniform men who may attack them (students) should they decide to act as suggestive of the comments. Thus, they embolden fellow students by making absolute statements, arrogating power to themselves while denigrating the public self-image of the Federal Government. The speakers leave the decision to stage a physical protest at Aso rock, the seat of power, to readers (other Nigerian students) by the subtle question; an off-record strategy which removes them from the potential of being imposing. The commentators even go as far as telling fellow students why they need to act fast: 'Buhari and Adamu Adamu are clueless', and this means huge consequences if nothing is done urgently. This last utterance of the first commentator arouses suspicion, mistrust in fellow students, against the Federal Government, urging them not to relax thinking that the Federal government is working behind the scene to end the ASUU strike. They make a fool of the President and the Minister without mincing words. Such persuasive expressions can motivate other students more than any other facility by stimulating their minds in order to retaliate against the injustices in the nation. The commentators continue to put up condemnatory and antagonistic behaviours aimed at defacing the

Minister and Buhari, who it is believed are acting in pretence. The deployment of rhetorical question is to raise the consciousness of his fellow students to the grave consequences of keeping quiet at such a time – arousing their sensibilities, if asleep – to face the canker headlong, and on time too just to salvage/redeem an already bad situation. Through this strategy, the commentators protest, intentionally disagree with the Federal Government whose modus operandi in solving the on-going crisis is not clear to students. This comment does not translate to abuse or disrespect for anyone to air his opinion with respect to the performance of a public officer, given the context. ‘Clueless’ is the word that APC officials as members of the opposition party introduced into the political lexicon of Nigeria in their trenchant criticism of Goodluck Jonathan, the then President of Nigeria. No one, therefore, should be castigated for associating the present government and its high officers with the same word.

The second commentator addresses the ruling class as ‘elders’, whom he categorizes as ‘useless’. The ‘elders’ are equally perceived as stumbling blocks to national progress, and they have refused to ‘get out of the way’. Foregrounding the word, elders, in inverted commas open and close, is for satirical effect; a mockery which is made more painful by the adjective, useless. This is a pure indicator of impolite linguistic act. He goes on using rude expressions – ‘They do not deserve our respect’ – to convince his readers not to feel bad about his altercations but to embolden them, and impress it upon them that they are fighting the same cause with him. This is reflected in his use of the pronoun ‘our’; an inclusive term to create a sense of oneness/purpose. His last statement is inciting and persuasive in that it is a deliberate ploy to instigate and pitch the students against the government; thus, declaring war. The idea of pushing elders out of the way is derogatory too, although the ‘push’ is informed by the elders’ perpetual greed for power, and their unwillingness to accommodate the youths, even after singing that youths are the leaders of tomorrow. Thus, the commentator’s utterances threaten the face of the Minister who is seen as a ‘useless elder’ who should be relieved of his duty for failure to bring progress in the education sector.

TEXT 6 - 'Your President is about to go for 2 weeks' vacation while students are locked out of classrooms...'  
(Comment by Dexter Hugos)

The commentator is actually surprised at the priority of the President. The insensitivity of the president to so many other critical issues that impinge on the wellbeing of the common people should have informed him, the commentator, that the plight of Nigerian students and their parents/guardians pales into insignificance in comparison to the personal needs/desires and interests of the president. The proposed two-week vacation may be for enjoyment (sight-seeing), bed rest, health check-up, etc., while destinies of students are destroyed, who are Nigeria's future. Moreover, through the use of the possessive pronoun 'Your', the speaker sarcastically excludes himself from being part of the people that President Buhari leads.

TEXT 7 - 'That's what happens when you have brain dead mallams up north at the helms of rulership, idiots that didn't emerge through education but rigging and imposition.' (Comment by Jimrau Stanley Jones)

The above comment is an outright and intentional abuse; it shows insult and disrespect for the Minister, and the government he represents, and as such a face-threatening act enacted baldly on-record. It is one that should not have been made more so because it has the capacity to exacerbate the situation. Criticisms are geared towards eliciting positive changes from the one criticized but this particular one will most likely have the opposite effect. The commentator uses blame, complaint, name-calling/global label (...brain dead mallam...idiots...) strategies to deface the Minister, and by extension, Mr President who appointed him. It pragmatically echoes disloyalty to and disapproval of politicians generally, and the President in this particular context, for appointing public officers without merit into offices, as a way of compensating/settling them for the various roles they played in installing him into power; thus, slamming the President for the misuse of the power of incumbency, questioning his morality in fighting

corruption when he is corruption personified. The speaker nonchalantly addresses the present government in this manner because it has acted and is still acting unreasonably having allowed the strike to go on in the last three months and still counting. He blames students' misfortune and woes (being the victims) totally on the government, and brings to the fore their obvious weaknesses/ineptitude in order to run down its public image. We strongly believe that where there had been cordial relationship between ASUU and the Federal Government, which would automatically translate into hitch-free academic calendar in the past, students would not have let their mouths run wild. At least, they would have considered the past dealings between the 'two elephants' and not be incorrigible. '...brain dead mallams up north...' is an expression used to demean the Minister, and by extension, an attack on his ethnic affiliation, which is condemnable as hate speech. It also brings to mind the idea of recycling 'old men' in Nigeria's political space, who have outlived their years of usefulness; painting pictures of them as ineffective, incapacitated 'vegetables' who daily constitute nuisance and place undue burden on the poor masses who merely tolerate them.

### 1.6.3 Textual Presentation and Analysis from Nairaland.com

TEXT 8 - 'Well it is clearer that the abokis are out to destroy western education in Nigeria. Thank God we did not have them rule for long. 2023 just at the corner.' 'As long as we hand our country over to illiterate abokis that don't have any regard for education, we would continue to suffer. 2023 is coming and what are the people trying to do again? Hand the country over to another deadwood' and 'When you make a moro-nic dingbat your minister of education.' (Comments by Mofere, Iceberg3 and Senomii, 28 February, 2022 by 4:23pm).

These commentators employ the language of blackmail and prayer statement to threaten the positive face of the government, and

to win the sympathy of fellow students. Pragmatically, they campaign for freedom from the stranglehold of a wicked/insensitive government. They present the government as agents of destruction and the people as victims in bondage. They quickly sensitize the people to liberate themselves come 2023 pools. Name-calling is also another strategy employed by the commentator to haul insults and show disrespect for the people in governance. The word 'abokis' used by the commentators is one that is used in derogative sense by non-northern Nigerians, and as such face-threatening. It alludes to ignorance and in-exposure. Again, the reference to the disposition to destruction of western education in Nigeria most probably stem from the ideology of the Boko Haram terrorist group (Western education is evil). This reference, therefore, groups the Minister with the Boko Haram sect. The consequences for disregarding education in Nigeria, according to the commentator, will be suffered by everyone, both rich and poor, small and mighty, leaders and the led, etc.

However, the commentators bemoan the peoples' inability to elect credible leaders into offices where they can effectively function. 'Hand the country to another deadwood' implies that the country is already in the hands of a 'deadwood', indirectly pointing an accusing finger on the incumbent - President Buhari - whom he refers to as 'deadwood', a face-threatening act, and protesting that the people do make the mistakes of choosing the wrong people. The academically deprived student rains insult on the Minister, by calling him a 'moron' and a 'dingbat'. His description of the minister as a very stupid person and a 'scatter brain' implies that the minister is not qualified to be the nation's Education Minister, hence the academically deprived student rains insult on the Minister, by calling him a 'moron' and a 'dingbat'. His description of the Minister as a very stupid person and a 'scatter brain' is a face-threatening act targeted at the minister to make him lose face. These comments are highly insulting, derogatory and abusive; revealing the level of disregard the students have for the minister whom they regard as a stooge/lunatic.

TEXT 9 - 'Na pride go kill Nigeria officials, they want to turn the whole country to almajiris.... Na go stil feel the heat.' (Comment by Elianawalker)

The commentator accuses the Federal Government officials of pride, arrogance and of the ulterior motive of turning the whole country to 'almajiris'. 'Almajiris' are children basically of the down-trodden; the poorest of the poor, of the northern region, whose primary concern is getting the opportunity to eat even once a day. These are children without the least contact with western education. And their degrees of illiteracy and ignorance make them vulnerable to manipulation and indoctrination by both politicians and terrorists. It is this pool of children that ultimately constitute a menace in one form or the other to other classes of citizens. The reference, therefore, to the 'almajiris' and 'feeling of heat' is one that pragmatically and graphically brings to the fore the consequences of not treating education with the seriousness it deserves. That is to say that when the government, by its actions or inactions, turns the generality of the Nigerian youths into lethal zombies, they, the government officials, will be victims of their own dereliction of duties. This may seem like a threat but the reality and logic of it are inescapable.

TEXT 10 - 'Why walk out on them? It seems he isn't told that it is a privilege he has to serve in the capacity he's serving.' (Comment by GboyegaD)

The commentator started with a rhetoric statement; a protest against the Minister. He simply disapproves of his conduct before the students' representatives. However, his use of the linking verb 'seem', often used when an interlocutor wants to say something in a more careful or polite and less direct way, softens or reduces the face-threat already done on the minister by the interrogative used earlier; thus, a Face-saving/mitigating act. He manages the situation by giving the minister a soft-landing, although in a caricature manner. He employs tact in reacting to the minister's action since he is conscious of the minister's self-esteem hence his use of the question, 'Why walk out on

them?’ and the linking verb, ‘seems’, is consciously packaged to favour the minister’s negative face with regards to the power difference and factors of distance between them.

TEXT 11 - ‘FG should settle this Amicably...there’s already heated tempo around the Globe.... Now is Time for Nigeria to take Advantage of Oil and reshape economy and rejuvenate our dying image...Utopian Nation is now. Kleptomania has clouded their sense of reasoning. They cannot think towards that direction.’  
(Comment by Kosoco,)

The commentator appeals to the Federal Government to resolve the issues on ground. The use of the auxiliary modal verb ‘should’, which is a politeness marker, indexes respect and recognition for constituted authority. This is a face-saving act aimed at redeeming the already battered public-image of the government. Even though he tried not to be rude but his last comments, ‘Kleptomania has clouded their sense of reasoning. They cannot think towards that direction’ are condemnatory and accusative in nature. He brands the government officials as ‘thieves’ who are obsessed with excessive/insatiable greed to amass wealth they do not even need, thus their insensitivity. Therefore, these comments are both face-saving and face-threatening acts.

TEXT 12 - ‘Adamu Cow Adamu’ (Comment of Cmanforall)

The above comment is highly provocative and denigrating. Much as the conduct of the affairs of government in Nigeria is sufficient to provoke anger in the citizenry, it is expected that youths who are being groomed to make the desired difference in the system should express themselves with decency. Addressing someone as ‘Cow’ is defamatory and thus, a blunt face-threatening behaviour.

TEXT 13 - ‘Your protest is of no use, if you still vote Al-Qaeda people’s Congress apc in 2023, n Nigerian students alone can vote out this evil party from the centre come 2023, it’s now or never let the real protest be at the polling

unit of 2023, not after protesting now, you go back and collect 5k to vote incompetent and insensitive people, all sector of Nigeria has suffered from this blood sucking party since 2015, may God never allow Nigeria see anything like APC again, in Jesus name Amen.’ (Comment by Anaerobi)

Still expressing disaffection for the ruling class, Anaerobi uses global label/name-calling strategies to deface the ruling party by rebranding it ‘Alqaeda people’s congress’, ‘blood sucking party’ and calls them ‘incompetent and insensitive people’. This is a deployment of common ground strategy which has to do with some perceived shared background information, knowing what the ‘Alqaeda’ sect stands for in the world. He uses emotive language to foreground the party as parasites, having spared no sector, while the masses are its (prey) victims. He also lambasts fellow students of compromising and selling their ‘birth rights’ for the paltry sum of 5k during elections while using a prayer statement to wish nothing like APC meets the people again. Disaffection/dissatisfaction are having free flow from youths that are being frustrated by the system, and as such, anger is on rampage.

TEXT 14 - ‘Good for nothing and irresponsible fools. Their own children are in various best universities abroad studying and living big. The only language they understand is violence, protest just like that of End SARS...Until you give it to them.’ (Comment by Prophet777)

The above excerpt is another face threatening act emanating from an aggrieved and helpless student and targeted at our old leaders described as ‘good for nothing and irresponsible old fools’ whose children are out there enjoying life while Nigerian students are locked out of classrooms. According to the student, ‘the old fools’ only understand the language of violence and protest. Raining of insults and embarrassing remarks typify face threatening acts. In Nigerian society, the young person is expected to demonstrate respect for the elderly even by way of speaking. It seems caution has been thrown to the wind as

the student speaks to the elderly, because of their failure to be responsible as well as protect the students' interest.

He calls on fellow students to rise to the occasion by using the tools of violence and protest, which he claims the government understands, to fight back. He uses shared background information – 'End SARS' – to spur them into action. These are blunt face-threatening acts; an intentional attack on the public-image of the ruling class without any redressive act.

#### **1.6.4 Textual Presentation and Analysis from Facebook.com**

TEXT 15 – 'Adamu is a symbol of the systemic decay, acts of irresponsibility and callousness that is inherent in this our Country Nigeria. It must be dealt with.' (Comment by Ogedengbe Ola-tope Testimony)

This is an unequivocal statement, uttered in anger and frustration; a true portrayal of the Nigeria state. He authoritatively incites fellow students to deal with this mess from his statement, 'It must be dealt with.'

TEXT 16 – 'What did you expect a Malam to do, a man that lack understanding of what a school system should be, he find it difficult to see students questioning their teacher, if he had been a teacher or a Lecturer he would have known that students have right to ask questions, but unfortunately he's a MALAM.' (Comment by Uche Jane Henry)

Uche Jane Henry, from the above comment, resorts to name-calling strategy to threaten the face of the Minister. Foregrounding the word 'Malam' in capital letter is to bring to the fore the Minister's level of stupidity in walking out on the students who were exercising their rights, and the intensity of the threat to his face; thus, subjecting him to public ridicule.

TEXT 17 - 'These thieves we call leaders are not leading anyone or do anything to help but all are in full scale business of milking the Nation. It's only in Nigeria I have seen where private schools are better than public schools, only in Nigeria lecturers go on strike for months, if not years. I know, the deliverance is on the way, when masses will have no option than to fight back. Until that happens things will continue I pray, may God bring that day to pass when powers will change hand and new things will spring up in this country. God bless Nigeria!' (Comment by Umar Izuafah)

The above commentator insinuates and labels Nigerian leaders 'thieves' and exploiters/extortionists, who milk the nation dry in his comments: He weeps up sentiments as he laments of the frustrations students face in public schools, using a prayer statement to wish things change for good while invoking God's blessings on Nigeria.

TEXT 18 - 'I love this move, solidarity forever. This Fulani man doesn't worth being a ward councillor let alone a minister. Nigeria is a joke.' (Comment by Seun Aromire)

The above commentator shows solidarity with NANS Representatives by his comments, 'I love this move, solidarity forever'. By addressing the minister as 'this Fulani man', this commentator takes this fight down to the ethnic group of the minister, which is derogatory and thus condemnable as hate speech.

TEXT 19 - 'Both parties must embrace the spirit of national interest as superior to their respective targets. We must be educated.' (Comment by Ismail Bala Duguri)

This commentator first admonishes both parties (that is NANS Representatives and the Education Minister), condemning them of being unpatriotic, and insists that both should have behaved in a manner befitting of their educational background.

TEXT 20 - ‘Why should we have this clone as minister of education’, ‘You could imagine the name of the minister of education “Adamu” I see why education is no longer relevant in Nigeria. Minister of education should be given to a professor or academia not a cattle rearer’, ‘Old men in Agbada forming minister of education’ & ‘That minister is a disgrace to his office, these are the end result of appointing sycophants into sensitive public office.’ (Comments by Chinedo Kingslot, Ola Philips, Boluwatife Olaleye and Nene Felix respectively)

These comments are blunt face-threatening acts. The commentators resort to name-calling strategy - ‘this clone’, ‘cattle rearer’, ‘Old men in Agbada’, ‘sycophants’ - to deface and mock the minister as an individual, and his portfolio, and by extension, the president and his cronies who go about ‘forming’ (according to the commentator) to become what they are not, and cannot be. Ola Phillips goes as far as making a caricature of the Minister’s name which he foregrounds in inverted comma, “Adamu Adamu”.

### 1.7 Discussion of Findings

Findings are that the generality of the comments are more of Blunt Face-Threatening Acts effected baldly on-record, although we can unequivocally say that given the context of the backlashes, they are politic behaviours. However, there are few Face-Saving Acts. The discursive analysis of the comments of these students shows that beyond the use of polite and impolite behaviours which Brown and Levinson’s politeness strategies rightly express, instances of politic verbal behaviours are also discovered in the data. Outright face-threatening acts (insults, use of invectives/rude, derogatory expressions, blackmails, name-calling, and other indicators of impolite linguistic acts, etc.) can be seen as appropriate within the ambits of the social context. These face threatening acts are reflections of the mood of the speakers. Some

of them deployed persuasive utterances, some inciting utterances via poise strategy to embolden fellow students, some emotive utterances, all with a view of causing something to be done to salvage their situation. Some employed contextual cues, such as emoticon, shift in spellings and punctuation markers just to pragmatically echo their mood of resentment and frustration in the hands of the ruling class. Language of suspicion, lack of trust, disagreement, deployment of rhetorical questions, declarative statements, prayer statements and blame/complaint strategy were preponderant in most of the comments. Some of the students, through their comments, used inclusive terms to show solidarity, while one commentator used the possessive pronoun 'your' as an exclusive term to dissociate himself with this current administration of President Buhari.

The minister, staging a walk-out on the students, a non-verbal behaviour which in itself is a potential face threatening act is pregnant with so much meaning. This behaviour is disrespectful, revealing his insensitivity to the plight of the students, and lack of commitment and responsibility, firstly to his duty as minister of Education, and secondly as the father of Nigerian students. Moreover, by staging a walk-out on students, the Minister is able to suppress and conceal any tendency to become shame-faced, should he continue with the students in the interaction. So, this is a face-saving act aimed at making his failure less significant. Through this non-verbal behaviour of the minister, he self-threats himself by the line he has taken; that is by the self-image he has presented to the public, but disappoints his audience' expectations of him, thus becoming an object of ridicule.

The rage and indignation this non-verbal behaviour of the Minister left the students with no other means but to vent out their misgivings openly via social media platform. However, we discovered that most of the comments can be classified as hate speech being that they were targeted not just to the minister alone but his ethnic and religious affiliations. These altercations were geared towards criticizing and defacing the minister.

## 1.8 Conclusion

In summary, we have stressed the place of language (verbal or non-verbal) in communicative events, and man's liberty to choose whatever linguistic forms to express his feelings towards co-conversationalists, not forgetting to categorically state that man is controlled by emotion; and speech gives expression or triggers emotion.

Undoubtedly, the non-challant conduct/attitude of the minister is provocative enough to inexorably attract reactions, which he or the government he represents may find unpalatable. The minister ought to have considered that students and even their parents have feelings that could be injured before he took the action he did. An Igbo adage says, 'one does not have the right, power or authority to both spank a child and command the child not to cry'. By this analogy, it is our contention that Nigerian students, having been severely spanked by the minister, are merely exercising their rights to howl and wail. This is more so when one considers that the students are deprived of any other avenue of expression of their grievances or of ameliorating the situation that has been foisted upon them by the government that the minister represents.

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