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POLITENESS AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS IN RELIGIOUS AND ACADEMIC WHATSAPP GROUP COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines politeness strategies and cultural dynamics in WhatsApp group discourse, within Nigerian religious and academic groups. It explores the influence of cultural norms on politeness strategies, interactional norms, and social harmony across different social and discourse contexts in digital communication. Anchored in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, the research classifies politeness strategies into bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected from two religious and two academic WhatsApp groups in which 30 conversations from each group were analyzed to identify patterns of politeness strategies. The findings reveal that the Religious Group (RG), often shaped by hierarchical structures and moral authority rooted in Nigerian religious culture, employs more direct and authoritative bald-on-record politeness strategies, while the Academic Group (AGs) reflective of Nigeria's intellectual culture takes a softer and more cooperative approach. RG uses negative politeness to reinforce hierarchy and moral imperatives, whereas AG relies on indirectness and polite requests to encourage voluntary engagement. Positive politeness is more pronounced in AG that fosters social bonding through informal, friendly, and inclusive expressions. This study therefore

concludes that communication styles in Nigerian WhatsApp groups are shaped by their purpose and social-cultural norms, with RG using directive and authority-based language, while AG fosters interaction and cooperation through softer and inclusive expressions.

1. Introduction

Language is a structured system of communication that consists of grammar and vocabulary. It is the primary means by which humans convey meaning, both in spoken and written forms, and may also include sign language. Language is also a system of communication based upon words and combinations of words to form sentences. Language could either be verbal or non-verbal. Verbal language can be in form of spoken words such as face to face communication, telephone conversation, television/ radio telecast and video chats. Verbal language is a spoken language that not only includes spoken words but also the tone of communication (O'Grady, John, & Francis, 2011).

Verbal language could be in written form such as essays, articles, books, newspapers, magazines and social media chats like emails, and SMS messages. Non-verbal language is equally a means of communicating meaning. It could be in the form of gestures, eye contact, facial expression, waving of hands, kinesics, oculesics (the movement of the eyes) etc. Through technological innovations, other means of communication are made possible on social media platforms such as Facebook, Zoom, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc. which have added new dynamism in the mode of communication (Gordon, 2003).

Language is an important tool for communication. Through communication, humans are able to express their thoughts, feelings, and aspirations, exercise influence, change attitude, motivate others, as well as to establish and maintain relationships. According to Evans, (2021), and Ogbuehi, (2023), communication relates to the act of sharing and receiving information through various media to different individuals. Communication could take different forms such as one-on-one or between groups of people, it can be face to face or through communication

devices. Communication entails the exchange or sending of information between two or more people. It originates from a sender who initiates the information and sends it to the receiver who decodes the information to make a response. Every communication aims at achieving a goal without which communication may not be effective. To avoid communication breakdown, participants must have shared knowledge and understanding of common concepts which may be shaped by socio-cultural context of the speech event. One of the ways to avoid communication breakdown is through the exhibition of politeness in communication. No matter the type of information being relayed, ability to skillfully handle the speech event politely helps to maintain the flow of conversation. In a bid to translate intention into words and to keep the flow of information, interlocutors must be able to formulate their utterances in such a way that their communicative intentions are recognized and favourably communicated. To foster a free flow of communication, politeness principles are brought into focus to account for consideration of face wants of the interlocutors in a communicative event.

Politeness is one of the social attributes of discourse which has cultural undertone. It is a discourse strategy that accounts for the feelings of interlocutors as to how they should be treated in interactional process bearing in mind the cultural undertone that determines the mode of communication. Politeness can also be seen as a system of interpersonal relation designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human beings (Dzameshie, 1993). In a speech event, both the social status and social relationship that exist between the interlocutors are taken into account for a successful communication to be achieved. Politeness therefore means being respectful in behavior, emphasizing speaker's efforts to maintain civility in interaction. Every effort and linguistic strategy deployed by interlocutors to lessen face threat and ensure a smooth flow of conversation devoid of face threatening act is regarded as politeness. Brown and Levinson (1978) avail that politeness presupposes potential for aggression as it seeks to disarm it and makes possible communication between potentially aggressive parties. They further assert that politeness refers to the act of paying attention to others' "face wants". In choosing the appropriate politeness strategy, one needs to consider the context of speech and principles underlying the use of politeness strategies (Nuryan, 2016).

In a discourse event, there are social cultural indices that influence utterance transactions among interlocutors (Ogbuehi, 2023). Such indices are: age, social status, and power which are culturally determined. To this end, Yule (2003) maintains that a person is expected to be mindful of how he or she speaks according to age, social distance and power, otherwise, he or she will threaten the face of the listener (Brown & Levinson, 1978). In every

speech event, participants are expected to be conscious of these indices which are expected to reflect in their choice of words and attitude while communication takes place. An interlocutor who disregards these indices may be termed uncouth or uncultured which may ultimately lead to breakdown in communication. For instance, in most African culture, a younger person is expected to exhibit some kind of respect while engaging an adult in conversation. In an academic environment, a student is expected to show respect to their lecturers, irrespective of age bracket, while junior staff are expected to show respect to senior staff. In most WhatsApp platforms, one of the rules of engagement is often a warning indicating zero tolerance to uncouth talks.

1.1 Politeness and Culture

Exhibiting politeness in a speech event is one way of showing respect for age, social status, and power relations which is shaped by cultural values. Speaking on this, Austin (1962) affirms that the way we do things with words functionally relates to the culture of the society. Language relates to culture as an instrument for transmission of its norms, rules and mores. Politeness is a manifestation of culturally bound behavior. Sometimes what is considered polite in one culture may not necessarily apply in another culture. For instance, in most African cultures, it is considered inappropriate for a younger person to address an older person by his first name which may not be obtainable in some European cultures. In most African culture, a younger person is often made to address an older person as "brother" or "uncle" for the male folk, "sister" or "aunty" for the female folk. These terms of address do not necessarily indicate blood relationship but rather an indication of reverence as culture demands. It is equally regarded as an insult for a married woman of about sixty years of age to be addressed as "Mrs." but rather as "Mama" by the youths irrespective of the fact that she might not be their biological mother (Ezeifeka & Ojonugwa, 2019). This type of politeness comes out of what is regarded as solidarity face, which is, showing respect for one's values, and behaviors (Brown & Levinson, 1987, Matsumoto, 1988). In a group WhatsApp platforms, despite being a technologically mediated communication, such adherence to politeness principles are equally noticeable, particularly, where differences in ranks and age are recognized. For instance, in an academic group chat, there is respect for management personnel and senior fellows. Both professors and senior fellows are often addressed by their titles such as Prof., Dr., or Doc, Ma, or Madam as the case may be, maintaining the mutual respect among colleagues. This is referred to as power face, that is, respect shown for one's rights as noted by Ifechelobi (2014). This also resonates with Richard and Schmidt (2010) submission that politeness in language study shows how languages express the social distance between speakers and their different social role

relationships. In social media platform, users also observe and apply polite expressions in their interactions, particularly in WhatsApp platforms which is the focus of this study. However, despite the cross-cultural use of WhatsApp, users from different cultural backgrounds may approach politeness strategies differently. This study seeks to examine how cultural norms are reflected in the use of politeness strategies in group interactions on WhatsApp platforms. Specifically, it aims to identify the types of politeness strategies often employ on WhatsApp platforms and their deployments in fostering effective communication that promotes social harmony and avoid communication breakdowns in diverse group settings representing different social and communicative context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Politeness

Etymologically, the English word 'polite' is drawn from the Latin past participle 'politus' from the verb 'polire' meaning polished or made smooth. Politeness is not a definite or concrete concept. It is the communicative meaning of showing that the face, feeling and wants of other people are considered during communication. Beyond linguistics, there might be other non- verbal ways of showing politeness in communication which manifest itself in social interaction.

Politeness can be defined as the ways in which language is employed in conversation to show consideration for the feelings and desires of interlocutors, to create and uphold interpersonal relationships (so-called politic behavior), and to comply with the rules for what society or one's culture considers appropriate behavior (Van Olmen, 2022). It is used to describe the relationship that exists between how something is said and the addressee's judgement as to how it should be said (Grundy, 2008). Politeness puts into consideration not only on what is uttered but also the effect of the utterance on the hearer.

Since language and culture are inseparable, a cultured individual is expected to be conventional in their use of language. In African societies, where communal values and hierarchical respect systems are paramount, politeness is a reflection of cultural propriety. A culturally grounded individual, especially in Nigeria, is expected to modulate speech in ways that uphold social decorum especially when addressing elders, superiors, or religious figures (Adegoju & Osunbade, 2021).

In a speech event, a speaker is expected to have consideration for his hearer when speaking. Every individual has expectation of how he/she wants to be addressed by various categories of people in different speech context. To this end, Grundy (ibid) righty points out that politeness is the study of the way in which these expectations are fulfilled or not in a speech event which may occur through verbal or non-verbal means. Bussman (2006) avails that politeness is the specific ways in which speakers as interactants perform speech acts such as requests, commands, elicitations and offers a reflection of the nature of the relationship between them.

2.1.1 Digital Politeness and Face Work

Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of "face" which is the desires for autonomy (negative face) and acceptance (positive face) is central to understanding politeness in mediated interactions. Recent studies show that these face concerns continue to shape digital discourse. Waziri (2022) emphasizes that digital platforms exacerbate misunderstandings due to the absence of non-verbal cues, making politeness strategies crucial for conflict avoidance and pragmatic clarity. Similarly, Hartini et al. (2023) demonstrate that politeness in social media depends strongly on shared cultural background that affects message interpretation and cohesion. In academic settings, Amadi et al. (2023) analyzed WhatsApp exchanges between students and lecturers in Nigeria, their finding indicate that participants generally adhered to politeness maxims tact, generosity, approbation, sympathy, but also violated them on occasion, reflecting power dynamics and face management strategies.

The concept of 'Face' was originally introduced by Goffman (1967) and it holds that everyone has face needs because they are concerned about other people's perception of, and intentions toward them. "Face work" which is central to the study of politeness is seen as the self-image that participants in a conversation try to protect or project their self-esteem. In speech event, people tend to maintain a face that pilots its direction whether in initiating, accepting, rejecting or sustaining a conversation. They do so as social animals who must relate with others but without losing themselves or others (Agantiem, 2017). Recent studies have shown that interactions on social media and virtual meetings demand different strategies of face maintenance, leading to the concept of "virtual face work" (Chen & Kim, 2021). Furthermore, research has highlighted the role of face work in organizational settings, where managing professional identity is key to maintaining workplace relationships (Hua, 2020).

Goffman (1967) defines "face" as an individual's public manifestation of self-esteem, and proposed that social members have two kinds of face requirements: positive face, or the want for approval from others, and negative face, or the want not to offend others. In

conversation, socio-cultural context of every speech event demands that interactants should be conscious of maintenance of face work for conversation to be successful. Any act that violets face want is regarded as face –threatening act (FTA). It is any behavior put up by a participant in a discourse setting that disregards the self- image of the other participant(s). Brown and Levinson (1987) note that face threatening acts can be verbal (using words/language), para-verbal (conveyed in the characteristics of speech such as tone, inflection, etc.), or non-verbal (facial expression, body movement, hand raising or waving emojis, etc.). The following acts have been identified as acts that are potential threats to face of either the speaker or the hearer: making requests, refusing, disagreeing, advising, warning, complaining, criticizing, preferring, suggesting, accusing, etc, (Unuabong, 2012).

2.1.2 Politeness in Digital Context and Cultural Adaptations

Recent research emphasizes the transformation of politeness in digital communication environments. Locher and Graham (2021) argue that digital platforms such as WhatsApp or Facebook blend formal and informal registers, resulting in novel strategies for expressing politeness. In online Nigerian spaces, users frequently adapt traditional politeness norms to digital tools such as emojis, voice notes, and GIFs—to uphold respect hierarchies.

Hasan (2021) observes that emojis enhance interpersonal communication by mitigating the potential harshness of directives and conveying warmth or humor. For instance, a directive followed by a smiling emoji ("Please submit by noon 😊 ") helps to soften the tone and increase compliance. Similarly, Yus (2021) notes that emojis function as both relational markers and face-saving devices, particularly in cultures where directness may be frowned upon.

GIFs and stickers used as tools of humor, solidarity, or distance are gaining popularity in Nigerian WhatsApp groups, where they often function as "visual proverbs" (Tagg & Seargeant, 2019). Likewise, voice notes, which retain tone and rhythm, are especially meaningful in Nigerian contexts. Okon and Olanrewaju (2020) demonstrate that greetings embedded in voice notes such as *"Ekaaro sir"* (Good morning, sir) carry cultural respect that reaffirms social boundaries between elders and juniors, or superiors and subordinates.

Crucially, digital adaptations do not erase cultural hierarchies but reconfigure them. Adegoju and Osunbade (2021) argue that African respect systems are being recontextualized online through the creative use of language, icons, and speech timing. For example, young Nigerians may still defer to elders on WhatsApp by waiting for their input before replying in a group, using honorifics like *"sir"* or *"ma"*, or ending messages with traditional blessings. Akanbi and Odebunmi (2022) further affirm that politeness in Nigerian digital discourse reflects

a hybrid of modern tech expressions and enduring African values of hierarchy, age-deference, and community belonging. Thus, politeness in the digital age is not only about pragmatic competence but also about cultural continuity and adaptation. African users, especially Nigerians, demonstrate how politeness strategies evolve while remaining anchored in socio-cultural expectations of respect and relational harmony.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Politeness Strategies

This work is anchored on principles of politeness strategy as proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987). According to them, politeness though universal, is influenced by cultural practices. Their theory is based on the concept of face want which includes positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to interlocutors desire to be liked, admired, or included, while negative face focuses on the desire to have freedom of action and to avoid imposition. They further claim that individual acts may damage or threaten another person's face. As such, people usually try to be cautious in everyday interactions because they care about their public self-image. They, however proposed four politeness strategies for managing politeness in interpersonal communication: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record of which this current study will base its research inquiry on. These strategies are particularly relevant to digital contexts, where the absence of non-verbal cues demands heightened sensitivity to face management and interactional meaning.

Additionally, this study draws from Goffman (1981)'s concept of footing which deals with the alignment or stance a speaker takes in communication, and Marwick's (2013) theory of context collapse, which describes the blurring of social boundaries on digital platforms such as WhatsApp. These frameworks help to explain how interlocutors navigate multiple audiences and shifting roles in digitally mediated discourse, often by modulating politeness strategies to maintain social cohesion and avoid miscommunication.

2.2.2 Bald on –record

According to Brown & Levinson (1987), bald on-record politeness strategy is the most direct, clear, unambiguous, and concise way of communicating. It is a direct way of communicating the speaker's needs which may sound blunt and can sometimes be perceived as rude depending on context. The strategy does not attempt to minimize threat to hearer's face. It is often applied by speakers who are familiar to the hearer, either as close friends or family members or a superior to a junior. This can be applied when interlocutors intend to express such acts as showing disagreement (criticism), giving suggestion/advice, requesting, warning, and using imperative forms. The following are examples of bald-on record: "You were not in

class yesterday" (criticism) "Don't come late to this class again" (warning). In digital environments, digital footing becomes significant, as users navigate both immediacy and perceived intimacy. For example, a group admin on WhatsApp might adopt a bald on-record stance to assert authority "Submit your assignments before 5 PM", revealing a shift in footing from peer to enforcer (Goffman, 1981).

2.2.3 Negative Politeness

Negative politeness is a kind of strategy which focuses on softening any action that attack or threaten the hearer's negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It is expressed by the desire of communicants not to impose or interfere. It is oriented toward the interlocutor's negative face, by establishing carefulness and distance. It is a kind of strategy that indicates distance and formality (Nuryan, 2016). In this type of strategy, according to Nuryan, indirect constructions are preferred to direct ones. Interrogative speech constructions, the use of subjunctive and implicit expressions are deployed by interlocutors in speech events instead of imperative and declarative statements. For instance, instead of using the imperative mood to give a strict order "Shut the door behind you", the interrogative construction would be preferred in the form of " Will you, please, shut the door behind you?" or the use of subjunctive mood for a higher degree of politeness such as "Would you please shut the door behind you?". On WhatsApp, this strategy is often used in professional or multi-group chats where participants are not equally familiar. The digital footing often shifts between formal and informal stances that prompt users to adopt negative politeness to maintain professional distance while still engaging.

2.2.4 Positive Politeness

According to Brown & Levinson's theory, in order to avoid acts that can potentially threaten one's face or their interlocutor's face, people employ either positive politeness strategies, which emphasize familiarity and similarity in order to minimize social distance or negative politeness strategies. In a bid to express positive politeness, the speaker shows the hearer that their interests are being considered for in a communicative event. The interlocutor's positive face is maintained through expressions of friendship, indication of common ground, and use of inclusive language. The positive politeness strategy commonly aims to improve the speaker and interlocutor's closeness by demonstrating affection, warmth and reciprocity.

The form of this strategy is the use of inclusive pronoun "we": "Let's shut the door". Or "We really should close the door". Inclusive pronoun "we" can be used in speech acts of prohibition: "We don't want to park here, do we?" As positive politeness, the plural form of

pronoun denoting address can be used: "Give us a hand, son" (Renkema, 1993, p 78). Positive politeness utterances are employed to express common ground, engagement, ratification, and appreciation. The speaker uses it as a social indicator to express wants to come closer to the hearer. In online interactions and social media platforms such as WhatsApp, positive politeness plays a vital role to foster community building and strengthen relationships among users. Lee and Jin (2021) maintain that WhatsApp's group settings, encourage the use of positive politeness, as users employ strategies like compliments, inclusive language, and expressions of solidarity to maintain group cohesion. In these contexts, humor and emoticons often serve as tools for reinforcing politeness, adding an emotional tone that compensates for the absence of non-verbal cues (Johnson et al., 2019). One key finding is the frequent use of hedging and mitigating language on WhatsApp to soften requests or opinions. This practice reflects users' attempts to avoid imposing on others and maintain a friendly atmosphere, which is especially crucial in mixed groups involving colleagues and personal acquaintances (Zhou & Zhao, 2020). Another emerging trend is the reliance on multimedia such as images, GIFs, and voice messages to enhance the positive face of interlocutors, making conversations feel more personal and supportive (Nguyen and Oliver, 2022). According to Goffman's digital footing, users often switch between affiliative and distanced roles depending on how much they wish to engage or align with the group (Goffman, 1981).

2.2.5 Off-Record.

The final politeness strategy outlined by Brown & Levinson (ibid.) is off record strategy. This strategy uses indirect language and removes the speaker from the potential of being imposed. It enables a speaker to intentionally allow the hearer to decode the intended meaning of an utterance. It is the hearer who decides how to interpret the meaning of the utterance (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Personal pronouns together with cognitive verbs is a form of off-record politeness strategy that enables a speaker to express personal opinions so as to avoid lack of full commitment to assertion which shield the speaker from confrontations and direct criticisms (Ogbuehi, 2021). Since off record strategy gives clue and hints to meaning interpretation of utterance, the hearer is left to give his own perspective of the interpretation. It is often used when a speaker does not want to be quoted, as well as when the speaker wants his comment to be kept confidential by the hearer.

A speaker goes off record by being tactful and avoiding responsibility for utterances made. On WhasApp platforms, users often employ non-committal expressions that allow the sender to retract or deny an interpretation if need be. Silva (2021) affirms that on WhatsApp platforms, off-record politeness is employed to make request or ask for favor implicitly without

directly stating it such as "It would be nice if someone could help with this," which leaves the addressee room to decline without feeling obligated. The use of statements characterized by vagueness or ambiguity, that allow for multiple interpretations is another form of off-record politeness found on WhatsApp platform. Chen & Gupta (2022) maintain that users tend to avoid direct confrontation by couching statements in humor or using non-specific language such as "I guess someone might want to proffer a better solution to it". Moreover, context collapse as advanced by Marwick, (2013) complicates digital politeness. Sometimes audiences on platforms like WhatsApp may include friends, colleagues, and superiors simultaneously, users often default to off-record strategies to navigate this blended audience safely. This helps them manage their "digital face" without offending any particular subgroup.

These frameworks all together highlight the complex interplay between face concerns, digital context, and communicative intention. Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies offer a foundational typology, while Goffman's footing explains how roles and relationships shift dynamically in conversation especially online. Marwick's context collapse highlights the added pressure of maintaining multiple "selves" in overlapping digital spaces that prompts users to layer politeness strategies for safer, socially acceptable communication.

These theoretical grounding provides a lens through which this study will analyze Nigerian digital discourse, with a focus on how users strategically employ politeness in text-based interactions to navigate culture, identity, and social expectation in the WhatsApp-mediated communication space.

2.3 Empirical Studies

Many research investigations have been carried out on the politeness principles and strategies employed in WhatsApp group platforms to facilitate harmonious conversations. Some of these works are reviewed here to examine their relatedness to the present study.

Nguyen and Oliver (2022), in their study, explored how multimedia elements, such as images, GIFs, and voice messages, enhance politeness and foster positive communication on WhatsApp. They highlight these tools as essential for supportive online interactions. Similarly, Zhou and Zhao (2020) examined the importance of hedging and mitigating language in WhatsApp group chats. Their study emphasized the role of politeness strategies in maintaining a friendly atmosphere, especially in mixed groups that blend personal and professional contacts.

On the other hand, Silva (2021) investigated the use of off-record politeness strategies in WhatsApp communication and discovered that users prefer indirect expressions when making requests. This approach allows addressees to decline without feeling pressured, which promotes face-saving. Additionally, Lee and Jin (2021) examined the use of positive politeness

in WhatsApp group settings. They noted how users employ compliments, inclusive language, and expressions of solidarity to maintain group cohesion and a positive environment.

Ogbuehi (2023) investigated phatic exchange as an instrument of social construction in WhatsApp discourse. Drawing on the framework of phatic devices proposed by Jumanto (2014), the study explored how linguistic elements such as greetings, titles, names, opening remarks, and apologies foster friendship, harmony, sympathy, and solidarity. These devices help maintain an atmosphere of sociability, interpersonal contact, and relationships within WhatsApp interactions.

The above reviewed studies highlight the deployment of politeness strategies by WhatsApp users to maintain effective communication and interaction on the platform. However, none of these studies specifically examine cultural influences on the deployment of politeness strategies across different social groups. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how users of diverse sociocultural groups approach politeness on WhatsApp and identifying variations in its deployment across different contexts.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research approach in which various types of politeness strategies used in group platforms representing two distinct sociocultural and linguistic contexts, namely religious and academic social groups, were analysed in comparative form to determine their various usage and deployment. A simple percentage statistics is used to quantify their frequency distribution and percentage calculations to ensure objective results.

The data for this study was purposefully selected from four WhatsApp group platforms, consisting of two religious groups and two academic groups. A total of 30 conversations from each group, containing politeness strategies, were chosen for analysis, making up a total of 60 conversations. The researcher, being a member of all the selected groups, had easy access to the data. Permission was obtained from each group administrator to use the data, ensuring the anonymity of group names and individual identities.

Data were collected via selected WhatsApp group chat platforms capturing conversations and interactions among members of the group. The primary data collection method was independent observation conducted using Techno Pop 4 Pro Android phone. This approach aligns with Majumder et al. (2020) submission that independent observation of WhatsApp group chats provides valuable insights into naturally occurring real-time

conversations that offer an unfiltered perspective of group dynamics. Additionally, it minimizes biased responses and sentiments such as social desirability or recollection inaccuracies often associated with survey and interview methods (McNeill & Chapman, 2005). In the process of collecting the data, the researcher observed the WhatsApp groups to extract actual utterances demonstrating politeness strategies. These conversations were subsequently transcribed for analysis.

3.1 Method of Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a quantitative research method. Brown and Levinson's theories of politeness principles and strategies were applied to identify and compare instances of positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on-record, and off-record strategies in the selected WhatsApp conversations. In the analyses, the researcher tabulated the observed politeness strategies to determine and compare their frequency and percentage occurrence across the two social groups.

4. Data Analysis, Presentation and Discussion of Result

4.1 Data Analyses

A Comparative Analysis of Bald-on record, Negative Politeness, Positive Politeness, and Off-record Politeness Strategies used in Religious and Academic WhatsApp Group Platform.

The following notations are used:

AG = Academic Group

RG = Religious Group

Table 1

Bald-on Record Politeness Strategies (Direct, Clear, No Minimization of Face-Threat)

Forms of Bald-on Record Strategies		Various realization from the two groups	Frequency	Percentage
Command	RG	i. Treat with urgency. ii. The deadline for submission of individual form is 12am on Monday, January 27, 2025 unfailingly. Compliance is advised in this regard.	2	15%
	AG			
Requesting	RG	i. Forward yours immediately	1	7.6% 8

	AG	i. Help with this play, *I will marry when I want*. ii. Check the dates.	2	15%
Instruction	RG	i. All House Fellowship Leaders to meet RO on Sunday (10/11/24) by 10a.m. ii. Exactly. Men should stand up to their responsibilities. God will help them. iii. These matters must not be overlooked. iv. Treat with urgency.	4	30.7% 31
	AG	i. Just tap on the year on the calendar, it will bring out only years for you to select. ii. Do go through the timetable and forward your observations to me. Don't pay to publish your research if you don't have funding.	3	23%
Directive	RG	Mobilize attendance to these events	1	7.6% 8
	AG		0	
Total			13	100%

The above Table 1 is a reflection of the nature and structure of bald-on record politeness strategy used in religious group (RG) and academic group (AG) platforms interactions. The table categorizes these strategies into four forms: Commands, Requests, Instructions, and Directives, with examples from two groups labeled RG (Religious Group) and AG (Academic Group). Commands have 2 occurrences, constituting 15% of the total instances, and both are from RG interactions. There is no instance of Command in AG. Requests occur in 3 instances, representing 23% of the total strategies. RG contributes one instance (8%), while AG accounts for two instances (15%). Instructions are the most frequently used strategy, appearing in 7 instances (54%). RG uses instructions more frequently (4 occurrences, 31%) than AG (3 occurrences, 23%). Directives appear in only one instance (8%) and are exclusively used in RG. There is no directive in AG communication. This result suggests that RG interactions have a preference for direct and authoritative communication. Commands emphasize urgency and strict compliance, while requests are expressed directly and often expect prompt compliance. Instructions provide guidance with moral undertones, whereas directives show collective participation. In contrast, the AG group exhibits a more neutral and less authoritative approach

in its use of bald-on record politeness strategies. It fosters slight softening that appears more cooperative rather than authoritative in expressions.

Table 2

Negative Politeness Strategy (Minimizing Imposition, Showing Deference)

Forms of Negative Politeness Strategies		Various realization from the two groups	Frequency	Percentage %
Indirectness	RG		0	
	AG	i. This document contains the guidelines for setting questions. Please let's abide by the instructions. ii. Does anyone have questions and answers for the new Jamb text *The Lekki Headmaster*?	2	12%
Cautious Advice	RG	i. Let us not dabble into the controversy of traditions of origin and migrations. ii. It will not divide us.	2	12%
	AG			
Polite disagreement	RG	i. Not well understood sir.	1	6.5%
	AG			
Polite Request	RG	i. Ma, will they attend to someone who is in need of eye surgery? ii. Daddies, can we please spare a few minutes to listen to this?	2	12%
	AG	We need to proofread our write-ups before posting. Please help a colleague. Please let's abide by the instructions Please check the dates, I think something is wrong there. Kindly update flyers with available programmes to assist with publicity. Graciously give me what I solicit for, if you have it.	6	38%
Hedged question	RG	i. Is this in addition to the documents we submitted before?	1	6.5%
	AG		0	
Acknowledgement	RG	i. God bless you.	1	6.5%
	AG	i. Thank you for the correction.	1	6.5%
Total			16	100%

The Table 2 above reveals different types of speech constructions used as negative politeness strategy by the two groups on their WhatsApp platforms. The strategies are categorized into six forms: indirectness, cautious advice, polite disagreement, polite request, hedged question, and acknowledgement with examples from the two groups labeled RG (Religious Group) and AG (Academic Group). Polite requests, with 8 occurrences, constitute the highest proportion (50%) of the strategies employed, with AG contributing 38% and RG 12%. Indirectness appears twice, accounting for 12% of the total occurrences exclusively found in AG's communication. Similarly, cautious advice appeared once (12%) and was solely employed by RG. Polite disagreement and hedged questions each appeared once contributing 6.5% each to the total strategies. Acknowledgements occur twice, one from each group, each accounting for 6.5% of the total strategies, equally distributed between RG and AG.

The above distribution of these strategies illustrates distinct communicative tendencies. The RG tends to use strategies that emphasize collective responsibility, hierarchy, and moral imperatives, as evidenced by cautious advice and direct yet respectful requests. In contrast, AG adopts a more facilitative and cooperative approach, with a greater reliance on indirectness and polite requests which enhance voluntary engagement and interactive discourse. The findings suggest that while both groups employ negative politeness to mitigate imposition, their stylistic choices reflect differing underlying values and communicative goals.

Table 3: Positive Politeness Strategy (Reduce Social Distance - Solidarity, Friendliness, and Mutual Respect)

Forms of Positive Politeness Strategies	Various Realizations of the two groups		Frequency	Percentage %
Agreement, solidarity and Approval	RG	i. On point	1	4.5%
	AG	i. 100% well said. ii. Great. That is the solution.	2	9%
Expressing gratitude, Appreciation, and Goodwill	RG.	i. Thank you Ma. ii. This is unbelievable and amazing.	2	9%
	AG	i. Prof. God bless you for this. ii. Thanks for sharing, massively appreciated. iii. Thank you for the constant update Dr iv. Thanks a lot. v. Remain blessed	7	32%

		vi. Thank you for your cooperation. Thank you all for the best wishes. I sincerely appreciate.		
Inclusiveness	RG	i. Daddies, can we please spare a few minutes to listen to this	1	4.5%
	AG			
Greetings	RG	i. Good morning family and have a blessed Sunday. ii. Happy Sunday to you and your family sir and ma.	2	9%
	AG	Good morning my great colleagues.	1	4.5%
Acknowledgement	RG	i. This is deep and informative. In fact, it's worth sharing across all platforms. ii. Thanks for sharing, massively appreciated.	2	9%
	AG	Well done	1	4.5%
Wishes, and encouragements	RG		0	
	AG	i. Happy birthday. May God's grace continuously shine upon you. ii. Congratulations, more wins.	2	9%
Compliment	RG		0	
	AG	Wow! This is lovely.	1	4.5%
Total			22	100%

The above Table 3 presents an analysis of the positive politeness strategies employed in two WhatsApp group chats constituting the data for this study: the Religious group (RG) and the Academic group (AG). The strategies are categorized into seven forms: Agreement, solidarity and Approval; expressing gratitude, appreciation, and goodwill; inclusiveness; greetings; acknowledgement; wishes and encouragements; and compliments, with examples from the two groups. From the table, the most frequently employed strategy is Expressing Gratitude, Appreciation, and Goodwill, accounting for 41% (9 occurrences) of all instances. The AG group dominates this category, contributing 7 occurrences of 32%, while the RG has 2 occurrences accounting for 9%. This suggests that AG participants engage in more explicit expressions of gratitude and appreciation, possibly reflecting a culture of recognition and camaraderie. Agreement, Solidarity, and Approval is the second most common strategy, comprising 14% (3 occurrences). The AG group leads with 2 instances constituting 9%, The

RG has one instance contributing 4.5% of the strategies. Greetings and acknowledgment each account for 14% (3 occurrences). The RG contributes two instances of 9% to the greetings category, while the AG has one instance accounting for 4.5%. Similarly, in the acknowledgment category, the RG has 2 instances of 9%, while, AG has one instance of 4.5%. The wishes and encouragements, and compliments categories have fewer occurrences, collectively making up 14% of 3 instances. The AG is responsible for all instances in these categories. Inclusiveness is the least used strategy, contributing 1 instance of 4.5%, exclusively from the RG. This analysis suggests that AG participants use positive politeness strategies more frequently (14 instances, 64%) compared to the RG (8 instances, 36%).

This analysis indicates that there is higher engagement in social bonding through language among the AG participants. While both groups utilize expressions of gratitude, greetings, and acknowledgments, the RG appears to incorporate a more formal and faith-based communication style such as "Thank you Ma" and "Remain blessed," In contrast, the AG participants tend to use more informal and collegial expressions such as "Well done" and "Good morning my great colleagues," reflecting a professional environment that encourages camaraderie. Additionally, both groups offer praise and encouragement, with the AG expressing congratulations and birthday wishes, while the RG includes deeper acknowledgments like "This is deep and informative." The analysis of this table demonstrates that positive politeness strategies are essential in strengthening group cohesion, promoting goodwill, and maintaining respectful and supportive communication in different social contexts.

Table 4

Off-record Politeness Strategy (Indirect or Implicit Statements)

Forms of Off-record Politeness Strategies	Various Realizations of the two Groups		Frequency	Percentage %
Indirect suggestions and hints	RG.	i. KILLER MARAUDING INVADERS in Town! Happened in Lagos! ii. Please let's be vigilant as nowhere is safe now.	2	17%
	AG	Striving to improve Wow! I thought it was for easy access that's why our parents cook it that way, interesting. iii. It seems we have turned to a citadel of Motivational Quotes.	3	25%

Avoiding direct confrontation and conflict	RG	Obedience and fear of God, not anointing, keep God resident in his temple in our body, works in us and with us.	1	8%
	AG	i. I'm sure. You can verify. ii. Let us not dabble into the controversy of traditions of origin and migrations. It will not divide us. We are all sons of one man	2	17%
Implicit acknowledgement	RG	Noted sir.	1	8%
	AG			0
Indirect request	RG	i. Please watch. / Please listen to this video ii. Not well understood Sir.	2	17%
	AG	i. *Marriage of Annensewa* and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead,* help us please.	1	8%
Total			12	100%

The above Table 4 presents an analysis of Off-record politeness strategies employed in the two WhatsApp group chats under study. The strategies are categorized into four sets of forms: Indirect suggestions and hints, avoiding direct confrontation and conflict, implicit acknowledgement, and indirect request, with examples from the two groups labeled RG (Religious Group) and AG (Academic Group). Indirect suggestions and hints account for 42% of the total strategies used, making it the most frequently employed form of off-record politeness. The RG has 2 instances of this occurrence constituting 17%, while AG group has 3 occurrences, constituting 25%. This shows that AG utilizes this strategy more frequently than RG. Avoiding direct confrontation and conflict category constitutes 25% of the total strategies. In RG, avoidance of direct confrontation is expressed through religious or moral framing which occurs once, accounting for 8% of this strategy. In contrast, AG employs explicit yet diplomatic statements to prevent conflicts, which appears twice (17%), indicating AG's emphasis on social harmony. Implicit acknowledgment is the least employed strategy, making up only 8% of the total occurrences. In RG, implicit acknowledgment is seen in brief confirmations appearing once (8%). However, AG does not exhibit this strategy. Indirect requests account for 25% of the strategies. RG employs polite requests which appears twice constituting 17% used to maintain a respectful and formal tone, while in AG, indirect requests are embedded within broader discussions, which occurs once (8%) showing that requests in AG tend to be more integrated into conversational exchanges.

This analysis reveals distinct communication styles. The RG group maintains a formal, instructive, and cautionary tone that utilizes religious or moral references to convey indirect suggestions, avoid conflict, acknowledge messages, and make requests. It employs dramatic and urgent language, such as "KILLER MARAUDING INVADERS in Town! Happened in Lagos!" to raise awareness. It also frames discussions around religious and moral values, as seen in statements like "Obedience and fear of God, not anointing, keep God resident in his temple in our body, works in us and with us," which conveys guidance indirectly. Indirect requests in RG are in form of polite suggestions or calls for attention, such as "Please watch" and "Please listen to this video" Acknowledgments are brief, as in "Noted sir."

In contrast, the AG group adopts a more conversational and reflective approach that reflects engagement, curiosity, and inclusivity. Instead of urgency, it employs inquisitive and engaging expressions, such as "Wow! I thought it was for easy access that's why our parents cook it that way, interesting." Requests are embedded within a general discussion, rather than explicitly demanded, as seen in *"Marriage of Annensewa and Sizwe Bansi is Dead,* help us please*."* The AG group also seeks to maintain harmony by avoiding divisive topics, as reflected in statements like "Let us not dabble into the controversy of traditions of origin and migrations. It will not divide us. We are all sons of one man." This shows that RG employs a formal, morally-driven, and cautionary tone to convey messages indirectly, while the AG favors a conversational, inclusive, and reflective style that emphasize engagement and social harmony. These variations highlight how group norms, culture, and objectives influence communication styles and politeness strategies.

4.2 Summary of Research Findings

This research examined the use of politeness strategies in religious and academic WhatsApp group interactions. It focuses on bald-on record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record politeness strategies. The results indicate that the religious group (RG) tends to employ a more direct and authoritative language that emphasizes urgency and strict compliance in its use of bald-on record politeness strategies. The bald-on-record strategies, especially the exclusive use of commands and directives in RG, suggest that RG discourse tends to be more authoritative and strict. Requests occur 22.6% of the time, with AG contributing more than RG. This is an indication of AG's attempt to balance directness with politeness. Instructions are the most frequently used strategy (53.7%), with RG accounting for 30.7% and AG for 23%, indicating both groups' reliance on explicit communication. However, RG's higher use of direct strategies suggests a more authoritative tone, while AG tends to moderate directness with politeness.

Positive politeness strategies are more prevalent in the AG group, comprising 64% of the 22 instances, compared to RG's 36%. The most frequent strategy is expressing gratitude, appreciation, and goodwill (41%), with AG contributing 32% and RG 9%, highlighting AG's focus on social bonding. Agreement, solidarity, and approval are also more common in AG than RG, while greetings and acknowledgements are evenly distributed but with RG being more active. Less frequent strategies like wishes, encouragements, and compliments appear only in AG, whereas inclusiveness is exclusive to RG, indicating AG's stronger emphasis on affirming relationships. These results suggest that AG participants prioritize relationship-building through positive politeness strategies by demonstrating stronger engagement in affirming and socially reinforcing communication. In contrast, RG participants use fewer such strategies, indicating a comparatively lower emphasis on fostering camaraderie and social cohesion. These research findings align with Hussein, & Rashid (2023) study on the subtle use of politeness strategies to foster closeness and maintain harmonious relationships.

The analysis of off-record politeness strategies reveals varying approaches to indirect communication. Off-record politeness strategies are more commonly used by AG, with its frequent deployment of cautionary and morally framed statements that emphasize indirect and tactful communication. Indirect Suggestions and Hints are the most frequent, with AG using them more than RG, which reflect AG's nuanced approach. Avoiding Direct Confrontation and Conflict is also higher in AG than RG, while Indirect Requests show a slight RG preference over AG, indicating RG's inclination toward formality. Implicit Acknowledgment is the least used which is found only in RG, suggesting occasional subtle affirmations. AG's consistent use of off-record strategies highlights its preference for non-confrontational discourse. These findings indicate that AG relies more on off-record politeness strategies that utilize indirect, and tactful communication to maintain social harmony. In contrast, RG, while also using indirectness, shows a greater tendency toward formality and respect through indirect requests and subtle acknowledgments.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals distinct differences in the use of politeness strategies between the Academic Group (AG) and Religious Group (RG) WhatsApp groups that reflect their socio-cultural communication norms within the Nigerian context. RG employs more direct and authoritative language, as seen in its higher use of bald-on record strategies like commands and

directives that reinforce a structured and compliance-driven discourse. In contrast, the academic group (AG) encourages interaction, cooperation, and knowledge-sharing through softer directives, explanatory instructions, indirect and inclusive expressions that reinforce social bonding. Furthermore, AG shows a stronger preference for off-record politeness that rely on subtle and tactful communication to maintain social harmony, whereas RG maintains formality and respect through indirect requests and implicit acknowledgments. These findings indicate that politeness strategies are not uniform but adapted based on the group's sociocultural structure and communicative needs. This study, therefore, concludes that communication styles in WhatsApp groups are influenced by the purpose and social-cultural norms of the group.

These findings align with broader trends in digital communication, where politeness strategies are shaped by the group's function, institutional identity, and socio-relational expectations. For instance, workplace digital interactions often mirror AG's strategies by promoting collegiality, consensus-building, and indirectness to preserve professional rapport. Similarly, religious digital spaces, like RG, tend to reproduce offline hierarchies and moral authority online, using direct and deferential language to maintain order and reverence. Thus, this study affirms that online communication styles are not arbitrary but are deeply rooted in the group's offline social structures and communicative goals. It concludes that politeness in digital discourse is both adaptive and context-dependent, often shaped by the interplay between platform affordances and the sociocultural identity of the group.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on these findings, religious groups are encouraged to adopt more inclusive and participatory communication techniques. This can promote open dialogue while still upholding their moral and authoritative stance. Academic groups should continue to foster interactive communication, while also ensuring clarity and decisiveness to maintain structure and efficiency. Additionally, both groups can improve their communication by balancing directness with politeness, thereby creating a more respectful and effective environment that promotes members' autonomy and active participation.

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