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**POLITENESS PRINCIPLES IN A MOTHER’S REFUSAL OF EARLY MARRIAGE  
IN TOYIN ABIODUN’S ‘THE MARRIAGE OF ARIKE’**

**Abstract**

*This study explores a triangulation of purpose of future, desire and materialism in Toyin Abiodun’s” The marriage of Arike”. The data consists the utterances made by Bisi, the protagonist and her interlocutors. Descriptive - qualitative approach was adopted as the research methodology for the analysis of the data. The theoretical framework for the analysis of the data was based on Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness strategies. The study established that the Bisi used Positive politeness, Bald on Record politeness and Off Record politeness principles as described by Brown and Levinson (1987) in her refusal of Arike, early marriage. Using this approach, the writer described the politeness principles used by Bisi in her refusal of early marriage of her daughter. The work revealed that politeness principles serve as effective tools for mothers to refuse their girl child early marriage. It also revealed that women tend to be polite when they want their opinions to be aired in discussion with their husbands. It also further brought to light that context is a vital factor that influences the choice of politeness principle. Therefore, this work is relevant for language use among couples and language users.*

**Keywords: Girl-child Marriage, Pragmatics, Politeness, Face and Context.**

## **Introduction**

Literature is the reflection of the happenings in man's society. When literary authors write, their works reflect issues that abound in their immediate environment. This is because they write from the wealth of the experience they have and the issues that are prevalent in their society. Boluwaduro (2020), opines "Literature is the interaction between man and his society, it is the work of art that deal with people, their customs, histories, traditions, nuances, norms, philosophies, religions and culture, and it is the mirror of the society". Toyin Abiodun's "*The Marriage of Arike*" is one of such literary text born out of the happenings in our society (Africa) and the world at large.

African marital history has placed the woman/ wife in the second place of decision making in the family on family matters especially issues that deal with child marriage. God instituted marriage from inception of the world and made man the head of the family to guard and be in the place of authority over it. African traditional culture sees the father as the head of the family who also takes decisions for the family. The father who is the head of the family has been endowed with power to drive the affairs of the family, therefore, traditionally he has the sole power to decides who marries and who does not any of his children. However, some fathers/ husbands have failed and abused the responsibility of authority placed on them to run the day to day affairs of the family. One of such cases is child marriage. Scholars have investigated and have shown in their works the effects of child marriage on the child, the family and the society.

Most African countries with high rates of child marriage have civil laws that prohibit child marriage and, they also set minimum marriage ages. However, certain strong traditional and religious practices make it difficult to enforce the laws (African Union, 2015). Toyin Abiodun's drama text, "*The Marriage of Arike*", is one of the works of literary playwrights that question marriage of the girl-child.

### **Synopsis of Toyin Abiodun's "*The Marriage of Arike*".**

The play chronicles Arike, the daughter of Salami and Bisi. In the play Abiodun casts Arike as a girl-child with a promising future but gets thwarted due to his father's myopic view to girls' right to education. Arike's vision to go to school would have made her a professional, a source of unending wealth to the family and also contribute to the socio-economic growth of her country but was stopped in her early years in life by her father, Salami, who bent on giving her away to suitors from major tribes of Nigeria. Toyin Abiodun's "*The Marriage of Arike*" portrays real life situation with a subject of girl-child marriage that is common to Black nation. It also portrays the pain, emotional breakdown and psychological trauma mothers go through when fathers make decisions to give away the girl-child into early marriage.

### **Background to the Study**

Child marriage is a global issue that cuts across countries, cultures and religions. According to Mughal and Awan (2020), early marriage is one of the major socio-cultural customs that compelled early marriage of school-going girls. From their work, they posit that poor families, guardians don't have assets for bearing the cost of their female children so they wish to wed their little girls as ahead of schedule as conceivable to be mitigated from the duty, this is because, they do not see their future anyplace else with the exception of sending them to their husband' shome. Different from their view, Abdulkadir, Funtuwa and Ibrahim (2021), "say early marriage results from various factors including among others, the search for economic survival, protection of young girls, peer group and family pressure, controlling female behaviour and sexuality, wars and civil conflicts, socio-cultural and religious values". To them, education is the best legacy regardless of any profession, parents or guardians should orientate their children on the importance of education in the nearest future, therefore, they posit that "if there will be early marriage at all, the female students should try as much as possible to finish their secondary school first and then have the mind of proceeding after a while".

Similarly, Bengesai, Amusa, and Makonye (2021) argue that whatever the reasons for marrying off young girls, child marriage is a human right violation, with far-reaching consequences, child marriage robs young girls of their childhood and is a significant setback

for development. They further note that it hinders their full participation in society as well as efforts to achieve gender equality broadly, early marriage also confers risks to sexually transmitted diseases (STIs), including HIV and AIDS, early childbearing and the associated health hazards. There is also evidence that child brides are more likely to become domestic violence victims and grow up feeling disempowered. (Bengesai, Amusa, and Makonye, 2021) Further, Mim (2017) states that child marriages hinder the opportunity of girls to be educated and push them back to not being empowered in the patriarchal society. Ghosh (2011) in Modak (2019), child marriage is one of the most prevalent forms of sexual abuse and exploitation, especially among adolescent girls, it serves as a means of perpetuating power imbalances between men and women, both at home and outside". Nwonu and Oyakhromen (2014) in their research on child marriage note that lack of political will coupled with multiplicities of laws accounts for non-apprehension and prosecution of offenders thereby allowing them to hide under religion and continue to perpetrate crime against humanity. From the works of scholars, it is clear that child marriage violates the right of the child to education and also distorts the future of the vulnerable children who are forced into early marriage.

### **Statement of Problem**

This study was designed to investigate politeness principles in a mother's refusal of early marriage because the girl child marriage has become a global issue that cuts across countries, cultures and religions, especially African society. Therefore, this research deems it necessary to investigate the politeness principles in a mother's refusal of early marriage in Toyin Abiodun's *The Marriage of Arike*. Several researches have been done in the past decade to explain the phenomena of girl child marriage and politeness principles. In spite of all these however, not much has been done on politeness strategies in mothers' refusal of the girl child marriage to show mothers plights when the girl child is sold into early marriage. This is the gap which has been left open in what this research intends to fill. To this end, this study is aimed at finding out the use of politeness strategies in a mother's refusal of early marriage via pragmatics a subfield of Linguistics.

## **Theoretical Framework and Review of Related Works**

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the politeness principles propounded by Brown and Levinson (1987). Politeness theory, proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, centers on the notion of politeness, construed as efforts on redressing the affronts to a person's self-esteems of effectively claiming positive social values in social interactions. Such self-esteem is referred as the sociological concept of face (as in "save face" or "lose face") to discuss politeness as a response to mitigate or avoid face-threatening acts such as requests or insults. Notable components in the framework of the theory include positive and negative faces, face threatening act (FTA), strategies for doing FTAs and factors influencing the choices of strategies. (Njuki & Ileri 2021)

One of the fields of language that studies how language is used within a context is Pragmatics. Pragmatics is a sub-field of Linguistics, which emerged in the 1970s. In linguistics and related fields, pragmatics is the study of how context contributes to meaning. The major proponents were philosophers, who took the position that when we make utterances, such utterances are used to perform certain acts (Austin, 1962 and Searle, 1969). Mbisike (2001) posits that Pragmatics is “a theory of communication which deals with meaning in use”. According to Akhimien (2019) in his work *On Defining Pragmatics*, he defines Pragmatics from two different school of thoughts. First the Anglo-American school of thought, according to him, this school of thought sees Pragmatics as the study of meaning in context or contextual meaning. Their definition arrived out of a means to find a space for Pragmatics in the trichotomy division of Linguistics, i.e. Phonetics, Syntax and Semantics. Secondly, Akhimien, from the Continental school of thought sees it as the science of language use, the study of language. i.e. how speakers of language use language. According to this school of thought, Pragmatics is interested in both the production and interpretation of language. Akhimien further, claims that “Pragmatics studies the mechanism and motivations of language users, and that any definition of Pragmatics should cover the variables that constrain or govern speakers’ choices in verbal interaction and the effect such interactions have or are intended to have on the hearers”. Therefore, as a subfield of linguistics, Pragmatics includes various concepts such as, speech acts theory, talk in interaction, conversational implicature, politeness and studies the ways in which context contributes to meaning.

Language use often demands some form of politeness in order not to sound “too pointed”, “uncultured” or “rude” (Chiluwa & Ofulue, 2014: 169). According to them, politeness is not just about showing some compliments, it is rather the exercise of language choice to create a context intended to match addressee’s notion of how he or she should be addressed. Politeness is a linguistic research theory that describes how social dynamics are reflected in our everyday speech or verbal discourse (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Leech (1983) in Culpeper (2011), states that the role of the Politeness Principle is to maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place. Politeness can also be defined as a means of minimizing confrontation in discourse - both the possibility of confrontation occurring at all, and the possibility that a confrontation will be perceived as threatening. (Lakoff 1989 & Culpeper, 2011).

Mansoor (2018), on the role of politeness in social interaction and conversation, opines that to be polite, the speaker adopts specific strategies to cope with the hearer's face wants during any social interaction. To him, choosing appropriate strategies is determined by some factors that affect how and what is said in an interaction since they are associated with social distance and closeness. Wangia & Otunde (2020), posit that although the politeness phenomenon is universal, with many expressional similarities, each language possesses norms and ways of expressing politeness within a given cultural context. To them, politeness forms are an integral and significant part of language use, therefore, politeness strategies have to be acquired/learned so as to be used appropriately in a given context.

According to Park (2006), the phenomenon of linguistic politeness is prevalent in daily social interaction. To him, such linguistic behavior underscores the fact that linguistic politeness is a critical component of human communication. He further explains that speech participants utilize linguistic politeness to avoid and reduce social friction and enhance each other’s face, or public self-image, during social interaction. He further states that “it is face-work that underlies the interpersonal function of language use and encompasses all verbal and nonverbal realizations that bring forth one’s positive social value, namely, face. Face-work is founded in and built into dynamic social relations; these social and cultural relations and context directly affect the enactment of face-work”.

Many researchers have studied politeness as a fundamental part of social behavior. The most influential theory to date, as much for the criticisms it has received as for its widespread acceptance, has been that proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the concept of public face has two facets: the positive face and the negative face. The *positive face* is that which the individuals have of themselves, which individuals desire that the rest of the members of the group will recognize by way of respect towards them. The *negative face* refers to the desire of individuals not to have their actions restricted by others; that is, that their actions remain unimpeded and that, as a consequence, their right to intimacy is strengthened. In other words, the negative image is the need to be independent and the positive image is the need to be connected with others through empathy or unit. (Njuki & Ireri 2021)

Politeness has been given different definitions by different linguists, yet what unifies their definitions is the concept 'face' which is agreed to be the most relevant concept in the study of politeness. (Mansoor, 2018)

### **Research Methodology**

The approach that was used in this study was descriptive - qualitative approach. In this approach, the writer described the politeness strategies used by Bisi, Arike's Mother in her refusal of her daughter's early marriage in Toyin Abiodun's *The Marriage of Arike*. Utterances made by Bisi in conversation with interlocutors were analyzed. A discussion on the use of the politeness strategies during her conversation with other interlocutors especially her husband was done. The data for this study was from the Toyin Abiodun's *The Marriage of Arike* drama text. Utterances expressed by Bisi while talking to Salami her husband during conversation formed the data used for analysis in this study. This study particularly, concentrated on the utterances that had politeness strategies used by the mentioned character.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

In this section, we examine issues that represent politeness as used by Bisi in Toyin Abiodun's *The marriage of Arike*.

#### **Bisi's use of Positive Politeness Principles**



Positive politeness principle as propounded by Brown and Levinson (1987) is a politeness strategy that seeks to minimize threat to hearer's positive 'face' and makes hearer feel good about him/herself. (Njoki & Ileri, 2021). This is exemplified in the excerpt below:

### **Excerpt 1**

[Bisi enters with Salami's food on a tray. She places the food on a stool and places the stool near the sleeping Salami by the sofa] [Salami wakes up slowly] He opens his eyes and sees Bisi's attractive backside as she arranges his food]

Salami: [ suddenly wide awoken] Bisi! Come here!

Bisi: Ha!

Salami: I say come here!

Bisi: [becomes coy] for what now? Heehee.

Salami: [gets up and grabs her] come here, my friend! Did I not pay your bride price? [ he tries to remove her wrapper]

Bisi: Ha! Haha!

Salami: What does "haha" mean? Is this your first time? [he tugs at Bisi wrapper]

Bisi: What, Salami! Wait! Promise me first.... Promise me Arike will continue to go to school

Salami: [careful] Hehnn... Well... Why not?

Bisi: Promise me you will marry her off and collect her bride price only after she finishes her schooling.

The utterances of Salami in the above excerpt are cases of Negative FTAs on Bisi's Negative Face. Those utterances are orders placing pressure on Bisi to perform Salami's emotional desire. In order for Bisi not to sound rude or impolite to her husband, she in turn uses FTAs which threatens her husband's Negative face. Her 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> utterances in response to Salami's request are the use of Positive Politeness principle, Strategy 14: **Assume or Asser Reciprocity**. According to Brown and Levinson, using this strategy, S

asks H to cooperate with him/her by giving evidence of reciprocal right or obligation between S and H.

The incident in this Scene as illustrated by the excerpt above is an example of Bisi's use of positive politeness principle. Salami was excited when he heard that Arike, his daughter has started menstruating, this news led to his drunkenness after he has danced with the drummers and female dancers and he later fell asleep. Bisi playing her duty as a married woman brought Salami's food. She places the food on a stool and places the stool near the sleeping Salami by the sofa. Salami, seeing his wife's attractive backside as she arranges his food feels sexual urge and decides to have sex with her. Bisi chooses to use this politeness strategy to offer sex to her husband and use it to her advantage by persuading him not to marry her daughter off into early marriage until she finishes her schooling. Bisi uses this strategy to satisfy her husband positive face and also for him to approve her wishes. Considering the incidents that happened before now, Salami does not deserve to be served food nor offer sex since he refused to provide money for the house keep couple with the fact that he wanted to send Bisi out of her matrimonial home and even the offence of using cutlass. Therefore, we will interpret Bisi's use of the above positive politeness principle as context determined. Bisi sees it as an opportunity to persuade her husband of his plans of marrying their daughter into early marriage. The context informs her use of the politeness principle.

### **Bisi's Use of Bald on Record Politeness Principles**

Bald on Record is applied where an action is stated clearly, concisely and directly. It is the least polite strategy as it involves stating something as it is without caring about the hearer's face. (Njuki & Ileri, 2021). Bisi as a true African/Yoruba woman, is not supposed to talk or interrupt her husband when he talks to people and since on Arike's marriage her opinions are not considered that is why she uses Bald on record politeness strategies in the instances where she uses them. The context has also determined their use here as shown in the excerpts below:

#### **Excerpt 2**

[Bisi, seeing that Salami's face brightens at the mention of the sum, goes to quickly pull Alhaji to one side]

Bisi: Look, Alhaji, if you marry my daughter, she must go to school in your house. You understand me?

Alhaji: [nods rapidly] Aaaah. I see.

The utterances are made in page 37, when Alhaji come to marry off Arike and he offers to pay N100,000 for her to be his wife. Bisi's use of politeness principle here is the case of Bald-On-Record without Redress Action, Strategy 1: *Case of Non-Minimization of the Face Threat*. Her use of this strategy indicates that she does not fear retaliation or non-cooperation from her hearer (Alhaji) nor her husband that may want to stop her. She uses this at this point because the situation calls for urgency therefore, no redress is necessary. Even though she is helpless at this point, she uses the opportunity to still press her point to Alhaji laying emphasis on Arike's education which must continue even in her marriage. As a woman, she thinks she has lost the battle of restraining her husband from marrying their daughter off to an early marriage but still makes her views known to Alhaji. Therefore, the context demands the use of the politeness principle. This leads us to the next excerpt.

### **Excerpt 3**

Bisi: Ha! [ to AJETUNMOBI] Baba oko mi, Ajetunmobi. Are you leaving? Wont you tell your brother that, these days, girls go to school and many of them are bread winners for their families? Tell your brother to let my daughter finish her schooling. Please. Baba oko mi joo. Don't let him give her away. [she kneels]

Ajetunmobi: [from the aisle] Woooo, Bisi- the girl is his daughter. Let him do as he lke. I need my money.

Bisi: Your three daughters are undergraduate at the University of Lagos. It's not fare

Ajetunmobi: This has nothing to do with my daughters. Both of you should get my money ready. I will come and collect it tomorrow.

The utterance "Baba oko mi" Bisi uses is a positive politeness principle **Use In-group Identity Markers**(the use of in-group language or dialect) this she does to show her

positive politeness. However, her 2<sup>nd</sup> utterance in the excerpts is a **Bald on Record** politeness principle. Her brother-in-law response to her plea led to its use. She chooses to use it here to show to him that his decision on her daughter's marriage is not right since he has his three daughters in the University and he does not care if hers is married off into early marriage without first completing her education. She was direct without Redress Action, *Case of Non-Minimization of the Face Threat*.

#### **Excerpt 4**

Bisi: [ to Army General and Alhaji]

Both of you, leave my daughter alone! You want to kill her? [ takes Arike away from them]

The sample is also a case of *Non-Minimization of Face Threat*. Bisi is not ready to lose her daughter into early marriage neither would she allow anyone to injure or kill her child because Alhaji and the Army General pull her hands to show who marries her.

To Brown and Levinson (1987), cases of Non-minimization of the face threat are used in situation that calls for urgency. If the speaker and the hearer know that maximum efficiency is important, no redress is necessary.

#### **Excerpt 5**

Bisi: Salami!

Salami: Hehn

Bisi: You promised

Salami: "Promised"?

Bisi: Yes, "promise". You Promised Arike will finish school before you marry her off.

Salami: Emi? I? Promised? When did I do that?

Bisi: Yesterday- [ she points to the sofa area] When we were there.

Salami: Ha! Promised ke? [ he laughs] [ goes to the audience] Did I Promise?...

The incident happened when Ajetunmobi, Salami's elders brother comes to collect his money Salami owes him. Bisi overheard her husband telling his brother he will pay him when he collects Arike's bride price that day or the next.

Bisi's utterances are that of criticism. She uses Positive FTAs to inflict damage to her husband's face by denoting the lack of appreciation and approval for her feeling, want and desire. By using the above politeness principle, it shows her helpless state a woman who does not have a say on the father's decision of the child's marriage. Salami, her husband, has concluded and has even informed his elder brother, Ajetunmobi, about it. Ajetunmobi did not disagree with Salami's decision because that will make him pay up the debt he comes to collect. Since the matter is concluded by the family, Bisi does not have an upper hand in the matter as a female gender and a wife, therefore, she does not fear directly to her husband with fear of retaliation. All the instances where Bald of Record were used are context induced.

### **Bisi's Use of Off Record Politeness Principles**

The Off strategy use indirect language and removes the speaker from the potential to be imposing on the hearer.

#### **Excerpt 3**

Bisi: Who is that man with the agidigbo player:

Salami: A suitor.

Bisi: But Salami, Arike's schooling will...

Salami: You too! Don't say anything.

Bisi's second utterance in the exert above is an example of Off Record politeness principle, strategy 15: *Be incomplete, use Ellipsis*. By eliminating some part of the utterance, Bisi leaves the conclusion or interpretation of what she means or says to her husband because both of them have common knowledge of the topic. Bisi uses the utterance to tell her husband, we have an agreement concerning our daughter schooling and marriage but she does it by means of implicature. The elliptic part of the utterance depicts Bisi's use of Off Record politeness principle

## Summary and Conclusion

This study has provided evidence of politeness principles in a mother's refusal of early marriage in Toyin Abiodun's "*The Marriage of Arike*". In African culture and tradition, and Yoruba culture which the play centered on, the mother has no or limited right over her child, the girl child, when it comes to who she marries once the father approves one. The mother agrees with the father on whoever he deems fit for the girl. Therefore, Bisi use of politeness principles here is to show her helplessness and that of other women on girl child marriage decisions. There were situations where she was polite and others where she needed to be direct when the context calls for them. While Bisi seeks good future for her daughter, Salami seeks the money he will get from Arike's marriage to satisfy his present needs to the detriment of his daughter's future. Bisi use of politeness principles to get her daughter educated before marriage portrays Abdulkadir, Funtuwa and Ibrahim (2021) stand on child marriage, that education is the best legacy regardless of any profession, which is why they encouraged parents or guardians to orientate their children on the importance of education in the nearest future, and that if there will be early marriage at all, the female students should try as much as possible to finish their secondary school first and then have the mind of proceeding after a while. This is Bisi stand in her use of politeness principles. Her character in the drama text shows African women's plights when their girl children are forcefully sold off into early marriage.

Therefore, the study established that the Bisi used Positive politeness, Bald on Record politeness and Off Record politeness principles as described by Brown and Levinson (1987). Using this approach, the writer described the politeness strategies used by Bisi in her refusal of early marriage of her daughter. The work revealed that politeness principles serve as effective tools for mothers to refuse their girl child early marriage when they speak with the husbands or relatives during marriage decisions. It also revealed that women tend to be polite when they want their opinions to be aired in discussion with their husbands. They can use every means to persuade their husbands to get what they want. It also further brought to light that context is a vital factor that influences the choice of politeness principles, this shows that no matter the knowledge of the right politeness strategies language users know, context determines the choice of politeness strategies to be employed by them, because

context is key to the use of language in the field of pragmatics. Thus, this work is relevant for language use among couples and language users.

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