



Non-Verbal Communication as Face Acts: A Linguistic Analysis of Selected Television Movies Corpora

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the use of non-verbal communication. To perform face acts (FAs). Non-verbal communication includes laughter, gestures, body movements, etc. The literature of face acts is replete with the use of language in the performance of face threatening acts (FTAs) and face saving acts (FSAs). Presently, we do not know of any study that examines the use of verbal communication in the performance of face acts, even though language philosophers unanimously agree that illocutionary acts can be performed via non-performative formula (extralinguistic means). This study hinges on two theoretical frameworks: the Face Management View and the Pragma-crafting Theory. One of the findings of the study is that non-verbal communication conveys face acts that are determined by different variables including the relationship between the participants and psychological underpinnings.

KEYWORDS: Face acts, non-verbal communication, Pragma-crafting Theory, Face Management View, pragmatics, speech act

INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of non-verbal communication in the communication of the feelings and emotions of discourse participants, is worthy of extensive research. In movies, feelings and emotions of characters are expressed as the plot unfolds. Verbal communication cannot completely reveal total messages in communicative events across genres. Those who watch movies (audience) share in the characters' experiences. Therefore, non-verbal communication of face acts is easily understood by such audience. Participants of discourse consider the possible effects of their non-verbal acts as it relates to contexts. In this regard, certain choices of non-verbal communication take preferences over others for the purpose of pragmatic communication of face acts. Being a cross-linguistic study that draws insights from pragmatics, discourse analysis and semiotics in the investigation of non-verbal communication of face acts, this study essentially fills existing gaps in the literature.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Human communication transcends the use of language (verbal element), even though language is its core. Non-verbal means of communication amplify verbal means. They can be used according to context to convey anger, happiness, disgust, indifference, shock, fear, admiration, etc. Mey [1] posits that "when it comes to assigning the non-verbal

language a role of its own, some have taken their cues from the techniques and insights of conversation analysis (CA). Body moves are seen not as just movements of the body, but rather as moves in a well-scripted play (typically a verbal interaction), just as conversational moves (such as turn-taking) are part of the overall structure of a conversation ...". In movies, non-verbal acts guide the audience in the location and interpretation of the shared knowledge that underpins face threatening acts and face saving acts. The link between non-verbal communication and the background information that convey textual meanings, foregrounds the significance of this study. According to Adegbija [2], pragmatic theory explains that participants' background knowledge (mutual contextual beliefs) does not only facilitate the use of verbal and non-verbal means of communication, but also enhances the interpretation of messages in varied contexts.

FACE ACTS

Face is the public image that an individual desires as a member of a human society. Such acts are immersed in shared knowledge, presuppositions, values and conventions of society; as can be noticed in the use of politeness conventions in the performance of face acts. The literature of face acts reveals the crucial nature of politeness strategies. Such strategies determine the type of face acts performed with language or extralinguistic means. There is pragmatic link between verbal and non-verbal means of conveying



message in a given context; face acts can be understood within this perspective.

The social status of participants impinges on the use and interpretation of face acts. The consciousness that participants have about their personality helps them determine whether or not their face is threatened. Implicature theories and the cooperative principle provide useful insights on face acts because face acts performed in any communicative event is about participants' discourse behaviour and the meanings that can be inferred from such discourse behaviour, in terms of linguistic and extra-linguistic inputs.

In practice, face act is gradable. For example, a threat can be lessened via a non-verbal communication. Studies reveal that shared knowledge plays crucial role in face acts; the participants make the appropriate presuppositions and acknowledgements.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Face Management Act View

The Face Management Act View builds on related predated theories. Face is essentially that public personality that individuals want and ascribe to themselves. Bossan Rita [3] submits extensively that Brown and Levinson:

... see politeness as a cogent and rule governed aspect of communication, aimed predominantly at maintaining social cohesion via the maintenance of individuals' public face. Thus, they identify two types of face: positive face and negative face: Positive face is observed by the individual need to be appreciated and respected by others as well as to maintain positive self-image. To put it another way, positive face has to do with a person's wish to be thought of; the desire to be understood by others, and the desire to be treated as a friend and confidant. Negative face on the other hand involves the freedom of action and the freedom from imposition. That is to say, it has to do with our wish not to be imposed on by others and to be allowed to go about our business unimpeded and with our rights to free and self-determined action intact. Hence in dealing with each other, our utterances may be oriented to the positive or to the negative face of those we interact with.

In corollary to that, they identify two types of face act: face threatening act (FTA henceforth) and face saving act (FSA henceforth). FTA occurs when one participant says something that represents a threat to another person's self-image. FSA on the other hand is the opposite of FTA. It ensues whenever one of the participants in a discourse says something that lessens the possible threat to another's face. There are three superordinate and one opting out strategies of performing an FTA:

Performing FTA without redress

Do the act bald-on-record. This is observed in speaking directly or very directly, in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible without any

attempt whatsoever to mitigate the illocutionary force inherent in an act, regardless of the rating of the imposition. By implication, the act will be in full conformity with the Gricean maxims: quantity, quality, manner, and relation. For example, an utterance like Leave the house does not say more or less than is required (quantity), is maximally efficient in so far as it is non-spurious (quality), it is relevant (relation) and it avoids ambiguity and obscurity (manner). It is also significant that in performing such an act, a speaker shows little concern for the hearer's face. This is because the speaker in this context will highly likely to focus on the propositional content of the message; thereby provide no effort to reduce the impact of the FTAs, and are likely to shock the addressee, embarrass them, or make them feel uncomfortable. Examples of this strategy abound where the power differential or role relation is asymmetrical, e.g. military setting, law court, and so on. It is also observed in a discourse where the speaker holds high relative power and fears no threat to his own face from the addressee.

Performing FTA with redress

This is when the act is performed with no threat to the addressee's face intended. This can be done in two ways: performing FTA with redress using positive politeness strategy and performing FTA with redress using negative politeness strategy. Performing FTA with redress using positive politeness strategy (which appeals to the addressee's desire to be liked and approved of). It is frequently employed in groups of friends, or where people in the given social situation know each other fairly well. They usually attempt to minimize the distance between interlocutors by expressing friendliness and solid interest in the hearer's need to be respected, in other words, to minimize the FTA. For example, You look nice today. What an elegant suit you are putting ... Other manifestations include where a speaker avoids disagreement, is optimistic, extends praise, gives sympathy, hedges opinion, etc.

In other respects, performing an FTA with redress using negative politeness is obvious when a speaker aims to orient him/herself towards a hearer's negative face – which appeals to the hearer's desire not to be impeded or put upon, to be left free to act as he or she chooses. Generally, negative politeness manifests in the use of conventional politeness markers, deference markers, minimizing imposition, being indirect etc. However, Simpson (1989) modifying Brown and Levinson ... identifies seven major strategies of using negative politeness:

- i. Hedge e.g. I'm sorry but I must ask you to leave my office.
- ii. Indicate permission e.g. The situation in the country is harsh. I will understand if you could not lend me N5, 000.

- iii. Minimize imposition, e.g. I need a little favour from you.
- iv. Indicate deference, e.g. I am ashamed but to have to ask you this favour.
- v. Apologize e.g. I don't mean to bother you.
- vi. Impersonalize, e.g. We regret to inform you.
- vii. Acknowledge the debt, e.g. I would be eternally grateful if ...

Performing FTA using off record politeness

This is observed when ambiguous or vague, sarcastic or jocular. In this case, the utterance bears an implicature that evades clarity and thus can be immediately dismissed because, theoretically, the speaker doesn't commit him/herself to a specific intent ...

Do not perform FTA

Do not perform the act at all. This has to do with "saying nothing" i.e. "opting out" ... all a speaker has to do is resist or renounce his/her wish to make an utterance that risks being face-threatening ... This is especially observed in situations when a speaker decides to say nothing and genuinely wishes to let the matter drop.

The Pragma-crafting Theory

Certain components of the Pragma-crafting Theory are relevant to this study:

- setting: This is the physical context of the communicative event;
- theme: This is the topic of a communicative event;
- extralinguistic acts:
 - a.) sociolinguistic variables (age, race, relationships, ethnic background, gender and social status);
 - b.) semiotic particulars (dressing, contextual objects, body marks, etc.);
 - c.) silence;
 - d.) laughter;
- iv. implicatures (linguistic implicature and behavioural implicature);
- v. shared contextual knowledge (available pieces of information available to participants of the on-going discourse for effective communication).

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

In this section of the paper, the corpora selected from the movies (Datum 1 to Datum 4), are analyzed. The settings, participants and non-verbal elements of communication are first presented before the textual analyses.

Datum 1

Setting: an office

Participants: boss, secretary and visitor

Non-verbal Communication: The boss walks into the secretary's office, and gazed at her for some seconds without saying anything, even though the secretary greets him. The visitor immediately walks out. The secretary stands up from the chair and requests to know what had happened. The boss hits the table and flings an envelope on the secretary's face. It was a sack letter. The secretary hissed; it was a lengthy hiss. Then she picked her hand bag and walked, out leaving the boss standing. The computer she was operating was still working. She did not touch the envelope, not to talk of reading its contents.

Analysis

When a person greets another, and gets no response, a face threatening act (FTA) is performed; however, this is not the case in Datum 1, because the person who failed to greet, is a boss to his interlocutor. Shared knowledge between the participants on this relationship lessons (reduces) the FTA. The psychological context (the issue at hand) is the course of the boss's attitude. This same psychological context induced the non-verbal act of the visitor – walking out of the office. The visitor was not comfortable with the mood of the boss and his secretary. He infers that their bad mood can hinder him from achieving his mission (implicature). Language (verbal act) is not the source of the pieces of information we get from the analysis of Datum 1. We get the information from the non-verbal elements of communication. The secretary greets the boss to minimize the face threatening acts. The greeting does not yield expected sequel. The cause of the friction is an emergent context that was not anticipated. Before the emergent context, the relationship between the participants was good. Acheoah [4] submits that an emergent context is a sudden development (occurrence) that does not only change linguistic and extra-linguistic acts of participants, but also impinges on how such acts are decoded in a communicative event. In Datum 1, the emergent context changes the boss's attitude, and that is the reason why the secretary requests to know what had happened. Unfortunately, the secretary does not get the expected answer. She gets an FTA performed with imposition. Non-verbal communication reveals emotions of participants of discourse. By "hitting the table and throwing an envelope on the secretary's face", the boss conveys his fury and status-consciousness (ego). The secretary's retaliation is informed by the boss's impolite disposition (FTA). The boss expects the secretary to be shocked and worried about the sack letter. He expects the secretary to hurriedly read through the letter. But to the boss's surprise, the opposite is the case. To communicate her strong resolve and refusal to be relegated to nothingness, the secretary retaliated with a lengthy hiss, picks her handbag, and walks out of the office,

leaving the boss standing alone. At this moment, the boss is possibly in sober reflection. The computers were still working. The boss turns them off himself – performing the task of his secretary. This is a big blow from the secretary.

Datum 2

Setting: a sitting room

Participants: husband, wife, two of their daughters and their paternal grandmother

Non-verbal Communication: A woman was sitting on a chair with her husband, looking at the ceiling and shaking her legs. This action was sustained for some seconds. As the husband touches her shoulder, she shifts position a little. Grandmother noticed it, but pretends not to, as she continues plaiting her son's daughter's hair. The husband shifts closer to his wife, and the wife stands up and began to complain about family issues. Grandmother tries to interrupt, but her son-in-law raises his two hands, but did not give Grandmother a gaze; he was looking at the floor. His daughter picked up the plaiting materials and leaves the sitting room. Grandmother goes into her room, shuts the door and locks it.

Analysis

There must have been a family issue that generated the wife's non-verbal act (mutual contextual beliefs); the wife's action is simply a feedback. In certain situations, feedbacks given through gestures, can function as a face threatening act. Mey [1] opines that "... feedback can be linguistic ... or be given by a movement of the body (in the widest sense of the term, incorporating gestures but not limited to them). The term 'body language' is often used to denote this aspect of interaction. It is usually thought of as an accompaniment to the more important verbal signal. Recently, however, researchers have come to realize ... that body language is a powerful tool in communication, because it may restrict (constrain) the delivery of speech signal and facilitate the choice between the different interpretations that are open to the listener." In Datum 2, the husband knows that it is impolite to disregard a person's feelings; in certain situations, it is rude not to show concern. Therefore, by tapping his wife on the shoulder, the husband explores a politeness strategy. Consequently, an FTA (from his wife) was what the husband gets in return; the wife shifts away from the husband who was trying to reconcile. Grandmother's action is that of "a decision not to perform any face act at all". Nevertheless, her silence is communicative. Acheoah [4] presents "silence" as an extralinguistic act of communication. By "raising his two hands and looking at the floor without giving his mother any gaze, the husband communicates a clear message which is that "his mother should not intervene or intrude in his own family's affairs, even though he is her son." Non-verbal elements of communication are sometimes used alongside their applicable amplifiers. For example, as the husband "raises his two hands", he also "looks at the floor steadily" to communicate his resolve to his mother – a face threatening

act performed without redress. The psychological context is tense, and the daughter is no longer comfortable. She conveys her discomfort through a non-verbal act – "picking up the plaiting materials and leaving the sitting-room. Similarly, her grandmother can no longer cope with the tense atmosphere. Therefore, she reacts with an FTA ("getting into her room and locking the door instead of merely closing it"); within the framework of the Pragma-crafting Theory, this FTA is a behavioural implicature (BI). At this point, her son understands that his mother is angry and does not permit him to enter the room."

Datum 3

Setting: a football field

Participants: referee, players of two opposing teams

Non-verbal Communication: A player pushes another player and kicks the ball over the goal-post. The referee runs to meet the payer, and frowns at him with a steady gaze. The player removes his jersey, hangs it on his shoulder and walks out of the field. Then he stands at a spot, singing and nodding his head. His team mates point accusing fingers at him.

Analysis

A football match scene is uncommon in a movie. In Datum 3, the scene is informed by the content/subject of the movie; the movie is about a young man whose bad parental upbringing destroyed his football career, and made him a drug baron.

In a football match, the goal-post is the expected target of any footballer who kicks the ball towards that direction. In Datum 3, a non-verbal act and its accompaniments are performed as a face-threatening act (FTA) without redress. The act is informed by an unacceptable occurrence; it is a responsive speech act. The referee's facial gesture communicates his awareness that one of the players has flouted a rule of the game. There are regulative and constitutive rules that operate in a game of football. Being engaged in the game presupposes simultaneously obeying its constitutive rules. Social institutions are part of non-verbal communication of face acts, because such institutions regulate human behavior. Grice [5] posits that there are constitutive and regulative rules that are part of the conventional behaviour of participants of discourse. Therefore, "pushing an opponent and kicking the ball over the goal-post" generates an implicature. Under normal circumstances, it is a referee that orders a misbehaving player to go out of the football pitch (felicity condition) as in Austin [6]); the player has no right to do so. In this datum, the player's action counts as "hedging" because he prevents the referee from taking the next appropriate action. In this sense, the player minimizes imposition. To show his anger and insubordination, the same player who flouts the rule of the game removes his jersey and walks out of the football pitch. The attitude of the player is condemned by his team mates via a non-verbal FTA; that is, they point accusing fingers at the player. Non-verbal acts

are performed in accordance with the psychological and situational contexts of a communicative event. For example, if this player scores a goal, his team mates praise him by using the appropriate non-verbal communications; they do not accuse him. From our world knowledge, we understand that the player's attitude violates politeness principle. Thus, non-verbal elements of communication have universality and discourse participants understand this view as a basic underpinning in the use and interpretation of face acts. According to Papafragou A. and Musolino J. [7] "one of the properties of pragmatic inference is its universality: since implicatures are motivated, not arbitrary, we expect them to arise cross-linguistically in much the same way."

Datum 4

Setting: an election rally ground

Participants: politicians, party supporters and party opponents

Non-verbal Communication: A party candidate climbs the podium, raises the broom that he holds, and acts as if he is sweeping. Although the speaker is Hausa, he dresses like a typical Ijaw man. This is because the campaign is in Bayelsa State of Nigeria. As the speaker continues the speech, some of the listeners make facial gestures of disapproval, while others raise their hands, praising him. He speaks for a very few minutes – far less than the specified time for the speech. During the speech, the population of the audience continues to reduce.

Analysis

By acting as if he "was sweeping the floor", the speaker demonstrates one of the party's objectives, which is to wipe off corruption if the forthcoming election is won by the party.

The speaker's dressing is a semiotic signification of party cohesion; without using language, this message is clearly conveyed through pragmatic presupposition, thus accentuating the potency of non-verbal acts in the communication of FTAs and FSAs. Pragmatic presupposition plays crucial role in face-threatening acts. Levinson [8] opines that "pragmatic presupposition is the relation between a speaker and the appropriateness of a sentence in a context." Acheoah [4] views "dressing" as an extralinguistic element of communication. Facial gestures reveal the psychological states of discourse participants. For example, to show approval or disapproval, certain facial gestures are appropriate. By leaving the stage one after the other shortly after the speaker began his speech (a face threatening act), the audience discourages the speaker from allowing the speech to continue. This means that perlocutionary acts also concern non-verbal communication. The speaker can lessen the FTA by ending the speech before the arena becomes too scanty. If this strategy is used, a face threatening act is performed. In this paper, we contend that a face threatening act is not only performed from one person to another, but is

also performed by a person to himself/herself. In this datum, the audience's action – leaving the stage shortly after the speaker begins the speech – is an "emergent context". Within the framework of the Pragma-crafting Theory, this action is a behavioural implicature (BI) because it communicates the feelings of the performers.

In relation to the context of communication, participants of discourse consider the possible effects of their non-verbal acts on their interlocutors. In this regard, certain choices of non-verbal or paralinguistic elements of communication take preferences over others in the communication of intended messages.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As a field of language study, discourse analysis operates between grammar and non-verbal (or paralinguistic) communication. Participants of discourse are aware of the non-verbal communicative strategies that convey face acts. For example, in certain psychological contexts, non-verbal accompaniments are skillfully deployed to convey politeness and minimize friction or imposition. According to Jo Roberts [9], "when taking another person's feelings into consideration, people speak or put things in such a way as to minimize the potential threat in the interaction. In other words, they use politeness. Politeness theory posits that the use of politeness increases in three variables which can be combined additively: distance, power, and threat (known also as risk of imposition or extremity ...)." Discourse participants are conscious of their social status, and do not want the other participants to disdain them as doing so amounts to attacking a person's public image – face threatening act. Indeed, discourse participants explore the relationships they have with their interlocutors in the use of non-verbal communication. The relationship is essentially about distance (formality or informality). In this study we show how participants' relationships in terms of differences in status determine the use and interpretation of non-verbal communication. Jo Roberts [9] posits that "... distance refers to the horizontal and social familiarity of ... people. Familiars usually are more casual and more polite with each other. Less distance may occur between superiors who at one time were team teachers or who are also friendly neighbors. Distance may also consist of elements of affect, or liking, and interactive closeness."

Although the Face Management View is not immersed in non-verbal communication, the theory captures (explains) the communicative potentials and dynamics of using non-verbal elements of communication in conveying face acts in any discourse genre, including movies. Austin [6] acknowledges that an illocutionary act can be performed with a non-performative formula (non-verbal/paralinguistic communication). Like verbal communication, non-verbal elements of communication generate implicatures, and function as cohesive devices. In addition, they are culture-bound. For example, Ming-Chung Yu [10] reports that "Searle

(1975), supporting Austin's (1962) claim that speech acts are semantic universals and hence not culture-bound, maintains that across languages and cultures there are general norms for realizing speech acts and conducting politeness behaviour, and that while the forms embodying these norms may vary from one language to another, the cross-cultural differences are not that important." The performance of face acts is about the mental states of discourse participants. Chilton [11] rightly notes that "cognitive pragmatics is defined as a study of mental states of the interlocutors, their beliefs, desires, goals, and intentions ... produced and interpreted by human individuals interacting with one another ... If language use (discourse) is, as the tenets of CDA assert, connected to the construction of knowledge about social objects, identities, processes, etc., then that construction can only be taking place in the minds of (interacting) individuals."

This study is immersed in semiotics (a wide field of language study that embraces almost every aspect of human interaction). Within this perspective, it is instructive to note that face acts are transmitted beyond the non-verbal means used by the participants in the data analyzed in this study. Scholars believe that face acts are conveyed through the languages of gesture, posture, clothing, social context, etc. Acheoah et al. [12] corroborates the claim that semiotic inputs facilitate the understanding of the message of a text. Acheoah [12] is an analysis of a school interaction where semiotic particulars (contextual objects) amplify textual meaning: classroom building, school hall, the Nigerian national flag, a report card and a whip. The participants are a parent, a school pupil (Yemi) and a teacher. The whip that the teacher holds helps the reader to infer that Yemi is crying because she is being beaten by the teacher. The whip is a semiotic representation of authority. In the text, no student is laughing. Therefore, the communicative event is a serious one (psychological context). The psychological context of a communicative event is important for a meaningful interpretation of the event. The text also shows that the flag is positioned high above the students, thus making the readers ponder on nationhood, patriotism and other ethics of society which they are often taught in schools (civic education). The setting, participants and contextual objects are in tandem with the world knowledge of the target audience. In other words, pragmatic communication was facilitated. In the text, pragmatic communication would be hindered if:

- a. the pictorial illustration presents a young girl as Yemi's mother;
- b. the students on the assembly ground are not facing their teachers;
- c. the picture shows a football pitch (revealing goal-post, football, etc.). The text is taken from Act One Scene One of Akintayo Oluyinka's [13] *The Greatest Mistake*. The linguistic expressions that align with the semiotic include:

a. *Students of Academy International College standing on the assembly ground for morning devotion* (p. 1).

b. *Yemi's mother, Tomilola drags her daughter to the assembly* (p. 1).

c. *She must be punished seriously* (p. 1).

d. *Her mother brought her to school in order to report her* (p. 1).

e. *This is the report card she altered* (p. 3).

In the performance of face acts, non-verbal communication does not add super-imposed meanings to the communicative event. Its meanings reflect textual message (theme) as we can see from the above linguistic expressions (a-e) that are used with the non-verbal communication. In the use of gestures and other means of non-verbal communication, participants of discourse subtly explore the five senses of "touch", "sound", "sight", "smell" and "taste"; the success of doing this depends on how the performed face act or face threatening act makes the receiver invoke these five senses in relation to the psychological context of a communicative event. For example, in Datum 4, the speaker is made to invoke the senses of "sound" and "sight" as the arena gradually becomes desolate; less voices and the view of empty seats convey the disapproving feeling of the audience about the speaker. Therefore, face acts are not used incidentally. They are products of participants' pragmatic choices that convey different facts about discourse participants, including information about their moods.

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