

## **A Pragmatic Reading of Pusonnam Yiri's *Blindness of the Mind*: A Focus on Politeness Strategies Employed in the Text**

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**Abstract:** The paper examines the pragmatic considerations that influence Yiri's linguistic choices in the literary text *Blindness of the Mind*, the politeness strategies employed by the author in the text and how these politeness strategies are used to advance the discourse goals of the text. The study is anchored in Leech's (1983) Politeness Theory. A qualitative research design is employed. Six extracts are selected from the text using non-random purposive sampling and are subjected to textual analysis. The data are limited to three illocutionary acts that occasion the application of Politeness: rejecting offers, advising, and rebuking. The findings reveal that the lexical and syntactic choices made in the text are often motivated by pragmatic considerations of politeness. The politeness strategies employed in the text are predominantly negative consisting in hedging via indirectness, anecdotes, wordiness, conditionals, pragmatic particles and metaphor. These strategies are ushered in as mitigating and face saving devices to weaken the illocutionary force of the utterances and enable the speaker to conceal his real communicative intention by polite obliquity. The study concludes that the effective manipulation of these politeness strategies is instrumental to the fulfillment of the discourse goals of the text.

**Key words:** Pusonnam • Text • Linguistic • Communication and blindness

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Communication is a goal-oriented venture between two or more parties expected to play clear-cut roles to make the interchange realistic. On the one hand, from the plethora of linguistic choices at his disposal, the speaker/writer consciously draws the resources that best advance his discourse goals; on the other hand, the task of the hearer/reader is to work out the meaning of the message encoded as it is meant. Thus, any failure on the part of the receiver to decode the intended message is a mark of pragmatic incompetence. According to Leech, pragmatics involves problem-solving both from speaker's and hearer's point of view. "From *s*'s point of view, the problem is that of planning: 'Given that I want the mental state of the hearer to change or to remain unchanged in such and such ways, how do I produce an utterance which will make that result. Given that *s* has said *U*, what

is the most likely reason for *s*'s saying *U*?' (36). Written and spoken text interpretation, therefore, requires deductive and inferential reasoning to derive the 'meant' from the 'said', as meaning often extends beyond what is explicitly said, that is the actual illocutionary force of an utterance. Working out the intended meaning of an utterance in context (communicative meaning) is thus the prerogative of the hearer or reader as the case may be and the 'how' of this important enterprise falls within the ambit of pragmatics.

Pragmatics is the field of linguistics that studies how learners fill out the semantic structure with contextual information [2]. According to Yule, "Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader)" Akmajian *et al.*, [1]. These definitions imply that for the meaning of an utterance to be completely interpreted, there is often a need to improve on the

expression meaning which is a product of the semantic structure by adding other relevant information which context and encyclopedic knowledge confer on the text. A pragmatic reading of a text therefore gives room for the reader to expand or alter semantic meaning by taking into account the contextual variables that impinge on meaning – these variables being all the resources, linguistic or non-linguistic, at the disposal of the hearer in the discourse context that enable him to construct the communicative meaning intended by the speaker/writer.

The communicative meaning of an utterance is the speech act it is meant to perform in the definite social context. Searle draws a distinction between direct and indirect speech acts. This distinction is based on recognition of the intended perlocutionary effect of an utterance on a specific occasion. He defines indirect speech acts as “cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another” (60). Thus, an indirect speech act is a locution in which there is a discrepancy between the surface form and its illocutionary goal. In Asher and Lascarides’ view: “The relationship between the surface form of an utterance and its underlying purpose isn’t always straightforward” [1]. The implication therefore is that we often have a sentence with a divergent illocutionary goal that is not explicit from the surface form.

Leech adduces reasons for speaker’s choice of direct or indirect speech act: “Individuals adopt the most direct course of action that is judged to be consistent with the fulfillment of their goals. (This is one way of interpreting the Maxim of Manner.) Hence if a speaker employs an indirect strategy to fulfill a goal, the reason for this is likely to be that *s* wants to achieve some other goal in addition... (39-40).” Customarily, speakers employ direct illocutions in conveying their intentions. As such, when this direct course is jettisoned in preference for the indirect strategy, the apparent reason may be that the speaker/writer is pursuing another illocutionary goal in addition. For instance a speaker/writer may deliberately choose a longer sentence or even a story to convey a very simple locution as a mitigating device to avoid encroaching on the other party’s privacy or rights and to strike a harmonious acquaintance with the person. Leech renders this quest for social equilibrium aptly: “Unless you are polite to your neighbor, the channel of communication between you will break down, and you will no longer be able to borrow his mower” (82). This is the premise on which the Politeness Principle is predicated. These sociolinguistic constraints on usage are germane to text interpretation during reading.

This paper argues that certain linguistic choices employed in Yiri’s text being studied are shaped by the personality of the major character Nachau, the social distance between him and his interlocutors, the mood of the story and the discourse goals pursued. The pragmatic reader or analyst as the case may be, takes into account both explicit and implicit meanings and even extra-linguistic variables that emerge from the discourse context in the task of text interpretation. “The analyst of a pragmatic meaning is viewed as a receiver...who tries to make sense of the content of a discourse according to whatever contextual evidence is available” [3].

**Objectives of the Study:** The objectives of the study are to examine

- The pragmatic considerations that underlie Yiri’s linguistic choices in the text.
- The politeness strategies employed by the author in the text.
- How these politeness strategies are used to advance the discourse goals apparent in the text.

**Conceptual Clarification:** Linguistic politeness is considered the proper concern of ‘pragmatics,’ which is the area of linguistics that accounts for how meaning is attributed to utterances in context or in interaction [4]. The Politeness Theory in linguistics emanates from the Cooperative Principles (CP) and its maxims. Grice was the first to view communication as being inferential thereby involving a kind of mindreading. This view marked a sharp departure from the message model of communication which consists in just encoding and decoding of meaning strictly from the linguistic message. Contrary to this message Model, the inferential approach to meaning holds that the linguistic content merely provides evidence of a speaker’s intention to communicate certain content to the hearer who is expected to recover the speaker’s intention by a rational maxim-guided inferential process using the evidence provided [5]. The maxims of the CP “specify what participants have to do in order to converse in a maximally efficient, rational, cooperative way: they should speak sincerely, relevantly and clearly, while providing sufficient information” [6]. Illocutionary goals are realized by observing the cooperative principles which are opposed to grammatical rules. The CP ensures that speakers do not give their interlocutors either an over- or an underdose of information given that communicative principles operate in a concrete context, rather than in the abstract space of linguistic speculation [7]. Thus, if underdose or overdose of information is given in a text, this could imply that the speaker has another motive,

which could be to achieve politeness due to certain socio-cultural factors in the context that necessitate the flouting of the maxims of the CP.

The two important principles explored in pragmatics, the Cooperative Principle (CP) and the Politeness Principle (PP) are often in conflict leaving the speaker/writer with no choice than to 'trade off' one in order to uphold the other for effective communication. As Leech puts it, some situations require that a maxim should take a back seat and give precedence to another more crucial maxim (82). He draws a dichotomy between the social roles of the two pragmatic principles: While the CP enables the regulation of what is said to ensure it contributes to some assumed illocutionary or discourse goals based on the assumption of cooperation, the PP performs a high regulative role of maintaining the social equilibrium and friendly relations that foster the cooperative assumption. Kasper in Holmes corroborates Leech's view as he believes that linguistic politeness is a matter of strategic interaction geared towards achieving goals such as avoiding conflict and maintaining cordial relations with others. This may take the form of a compliment or an expression of goodwill or camaraderie, or the form of a mitigated or hedged request, or an apology for encroaching on someone's time or space (711-712). Such mitigating devices are employed in communication where there are potential face threatening acts (FTA). According to Brown and Levinson, politeness is deemed positive if it is targeted at fostering friendly relations and negative if the goal is merely to avoid encroaching on the addressee's space. The authors classify the different kinds of politeness strategies: making offers, joking, and giving sympathy (positive politeness strategies) and hedging, apologizing, and giving deference (negative politeness strategies) (102, 131). However, this paper argues that the range of politeness strategies cannot be restricted to the above list. The list can be as diverse as the number of situations that call for politeness.

The way politeness strategies are employed in utterances is controlled by socio-cultural variables and power dynamics. What may be threatening to an addressee's face or constitute a huge demand on him is thus variable and context dependent. For example, if an employee wants to borrow some money from his boss or express his reservations about a decision taken by the boss, he will most likely employ many negative politeness strategies to mitigate the cost of his request or the effect of the criticism to the superior party. The utterance, in each case, may be unusually long and wordy. Hesitation markers such as 'ehmm', pauses, hedges and repetitions

may be employed. The onus is on the hearer/reader to flesh out the text by recognizing these socio-linguistic variables that impinge on meaning. Competence in this exercise is an essential ingredient for active reading/listening.

Leech's Politeness Principle is majorly focused on how speakers/writers employ indirectness in consideration of their addressee's face. The PP has six maxims which come in pairs:

1. TACT MAXIM (in impositives and commissives): a. minimize cost to other b. Maximize benefit to other;
2. GENEROSITY MAXIM (in impositives and commissives): a. Minimize benefit to self b. Maximize cost to self;
3. APPROBATION MAXIM (in expressives and assertives): a. minimize dispraise of other b. Maximize praise of other;
4. MODESTY MAXIM (in expressives and assertives): a. Minimize praise of self b. maximize dispraise of self;
5. AGREEMENT MAXIM (in assertives): a. Minimize disagreement between self and other b. Maximize agreement between self and other;
6. SYMPATHY MAXIM (in assertives): a. Minimize antipathy between self and other b. Maximize sympathy between self and other (132).

*Self* refers to the speaker while *other* refers to the hearer or a third party. These maxims work with certain speech acts as specified in the brackets.

Scholars differ considerably in their classification of speech acts (Austin, Searle, Akwanya, Amechi, Levinson, Arseneault, [8-11]. Leech's categorization above jibes with Searle's. The assertives, which include stating, suggesting, boasting, complaining, claiming and reporting, commits the speaker to the truth of the proposition made. The directives are acts aimed at producing some effect in the hearer such as commanding, ordering, requesting, advising, and recommending. Such acts usually require negative politeness. The impositives are competitive illocutions such as ordering, asking, demanding, and begging. The commissives such as promising, vowing, and offering commit the speaker to some future action. The expressives are acts which show the speaker's psychological attitude towards a situation. Examples are thanking, congratulating, pardoning, blaming, praising and condoling. These acts are intrinsically polite, except for blaming and accusing which are impolite. Lastly, declaratives are illocutions that cause a change of state when uttered by an authorized person. Examples are christening, naming, resigning, dismissing,

appointing, sentencing, and excommunicating (Leech Cutting) [3, 12]. However, this study is only concerned with illocutions that have bearing on politeness such as directives, assertives, expressives and commissives.

According to Culpeper, Bousfield, and Wichmann, conflictive talk exchanges that may require the application of the PP are rife and often play central roles in varieties of discourse ranging from army training discourse [13], courtroom discourse (Lakoff, 1989; Penman, 1990), family discourse [14], adolescent discourse (Brown, Penelope and Steven C. Levinson) [15], doctor-patient discourse [16], therapeutic discourse (Widdowson, Henry [17], everyday conversation [18] and fictional texts [13, 19, 20]. This study is therefore relevant as it advances studies made in conflictive talk exchanges by examining how the reader plods through the fictional text *Blindness of the Mind* to understand the pragmatic considerations that motivate the linguistic choices made by the writer to achieve his discourse goals.

**Methodology:** This study is a qualitative research consisting in a deliberate selection of relevant extracts from the text for descriptive analysis. Thus, the sampling technique adopted is non-random purposive sampling. The data for analysis are labeled Text A to F to enable easy cross reference in the analysis. Two extracts are chosen to typify three illocutionary acts that occasion the application of the Politeness Principle in the text: rejecting offers, advising, and rebuking.

**Synopsis of the Text:** Nachau Turomale lodges into the Karaki Hotel to enable him to work on the second draft of his book without distraction. The hotel in question has some notorious sex workers in residence who are used by the proprietor of the hotel as money making machines. Felicia stands out as the most patronized of them, a reputation that makes her business colleagues very jealous of her. As soon as Nachau checks into the hotel, the harlots begin their quest for him. Felicia is so certain to win the *contest*. She and her colleagues are shocked to discover that their advances aimed at seducing Nachau do not work.

Nachau is faced with the big challenge of unraveling the reason for the harlots' choice of life style. He resolves to do everything in his power to change them and their proprietor, but he has to remain friends with them so that he can use every opportunity at his disposal to re-orientate them. He subtly and discretely broaches the sensitive subject. His polite and non-judgmental approach succeeds in transforming everybody that comes in contact with him and gives their lives a new meaning.

## Data Presentation

### Text A: Rejecting Offers (Expressives):

"Hi," Felicia greeted. "Can I join you to reduce your stress?"

"The seats are meant for everybody," Nachau replied with a smile, as he welcomed Felicia to his table. ... "Do you care for something?"

"A bottle of beer will do," Felicia answered quickly.

"I will enjoy your company better if you choose something different," Nachau said. (6)

### Text B: Rejecting Offers (Expressives):

"Can I pay you a visit tonight?" Felicia asked seductively.

"Maybe another time will be better. I will be very busy settling down tonight."

"I need to compensate you for your drink. It is a waste of money to buy a drink for a beautiful lady like me for nothing."

"I will definitely take advantage of it someday, but not today."

"They say time waits for no one," Felicia emphasized.

"I will wait for time since it can't wait for me."

"You are saying that I am not beautiful if you don't let me visit you tonight."

"Time makes a person appreciate a woman's beauty better. That is why I asked for it. If you don't mind, I need to go and rest," Nachau said politely. (7-8).

### Text C: Rebuking (Expressives):

Selemo smiled,... "I have brothers and sisters that could help me, but they are reluctant to do so."

It seems you are angry with them?" Nachau asked.

"I am! They only like giving me a little amount that will not help me start a good business."

"A young lion was pampered by its parents. It had never known hunting experiences. One day, as it was playing with a young antelope, it ran to its mother and cried that it was hungry. The mother looked at it, laughed, and said, 'My son, that little antelope you played with, is food,' Nachua narrated (15).

### Text D: Rebuking (Expressives):

"Do you like what the government did in demolishing your shop?" Nachau asked Felicia.

"I still hate the government for that!"

"You should hate yourself more."

"What do you mean?"

"The business you are doing now is another form of demolition. But this time it is worse than shop demolition." .... "It is called demolition of mind and body. You are the driver of the demolition machinery. That is

why I refused to partner with you in demolishing yourself,” Nachau explained. Felicia remained silent for some time. Tears ran down her cheeks.... “You must be an angel sent by God to me.” “You still have some blocks left. You can build before it is too late” (24).

**Text E: Advising (Directives):**

“Life too has its own faults, just like what happened to this car,” Nachau said. Selemo listened with expectation. “You must always have a backup plan in pursuing your vision, or else you will end up with mechanics....” “Are you saying I should train to be a mechanic?” Selemo asked. “A cat fish found itself in the midst of thorns, and cried to other cat fish for help. When they came, they realized that if they tried to rescue it, they would also be injured. The trapped fish thought of calling a man to help it, but it knew that after being pulled out by man, it would end up in a pot.” “So what happened to the fish?” “It had no option, but to struggle out of the thorns despite the pain and injuries.” “That was a hard thing for the fish to do,” Selemo said. “Every vision has its challenges. Just like the fish, sometimes everyone needs to be the ‘mechanic’ of his problems by the grace of God.” “Now I understand.” (40-41).

**Text F: Advising (Directives):**

“I don’t think I am ready now,” Anano stated. “But He is ready for you,” Nachau emphasized. “Since God is a patient God, I believe He will wait for me until I am ready,” Anano declared. “There was a time we saw a hen at a zoo, in a python’s cage, searching and eating food freely, while the python was having its rest. The hen probably had no idea of the danger around it. After some time, we went to the zoo again, but the hen was not in the cage,” Nachau narrated. (47-48).

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

**Rejecting Offers (Texts A and B):** In text A analysis *S* stands for Felicia and *H* for Nachau. *S*’s utterance “Can I join you to reduce your stress?” being a request falls under a directive speech act. *S* offers to keep *H*, a total stranger, company under the pretext of reducing his stress when in actual sense her real communicative intention is to seduce *H*. According to Leech, “Speakers often mean more than they say” (9). *H* is able to infer this implicit

illocution by taking the contextual parameters into account. His encyclopedic knowledge of the implication of a lady making such overtures to a stranger in a brothel enables him to derive the implicature: *S* want to be intimate with *H*. By preferring a simple sentence “The seats are meant for everybody” in response to a yes/no question, *H* is obviously employing a hedge. This is a negative politeness strategy. The implicature is that *H*’s acceptance of the offer is strictly driven by politeness considerations, not affection. The choice of the impersonal pronoun *everybody* in *H*’s response validates this implicature; it implicates that *S* holds no personal appeal to *H*, so should not think the acceptance means *H* has fallen for *S*. Furthermore, when *S* requested a bottle of beer, *H* does not like the idea of a woman drinking alcohol but cannot voice his disapproval explicitly to avoid flouting the approbation maxim: minimize dispraise of other. He couches his dispraise in polite obliquity to mitigate the effect on *S*, thus the response “I will enjoy your company better if you choose something different.” This utterance which shows *H*’s psychological disposition towards *S* belongs to the class of expressives. The choice of a complex sentence in response is obviously driven by pragmatic considerations of politeness. The hedged syntactic structure serves to mitigate the cost of *H*’s refusal of buying beer.

Widdowson corroborates this view thus: The communicative import of an utterance depends not only on the formal syntactic and semantic properties of the corresponding sentence but also on contextual factors such as the relationship of the addresser and addressee, the social situation in which the utterance is made, and so on. Contextualization thus involves a consideration of what sentences count as when they are used in the actual business of social interaction (74). *H*’s choice of a hedged illocution serves to maintain social equilibrium between him and *S* in conformity with Leech’s belief that “Unless you are polite to your neighbor, the channel of communication between you will break down, and you will no longer be able to borrow his mower” (82). Outright condemnation of *S*’s crave for alcohol can sever their acquaintance and block the pursuit of *H*’s ultimate communicative goals. This sort of politeness is negative.

Text B is another example of negative politeness strategy employed in rejecting offers. The talk exchange opens with a polar question from *S* requesting to visit *H* that night. The question simply requires a yes/no response. When contextual variables are invoked into the discourse, the reader simply infers that *S* wants *H* to have sex with her that night. *S*’s next sentence validates this inference. *H* is not interested in the offer but saying no

outright will be deemed impolite to *S*. It is socio-culturally humiliating for a lady to offer herself to a man without request, and turning her down is even more disgraceful.

Saying 'yes' to a request is easier and simpler than saying 'no'. Conveying a no necessitates certain pragmatic considerations to soften the perlocutionary effect on the party involved. These pragmatic constraints affect the structure and content of the utterance. 'No' is often conveyed with lot of information to back it up, which makes the sentence structure more complex. Other features associated with no may be wordiness, pauses, hesitation, repetitions, prosodic features and even extralinguistic features such as flushing and trembling. The above observation is evident in *H*'s response: "Maybe another time will be better. I will be very busy settling down tonight." The use of 'maybe' is deliberate. It conveys a note of uncertainty to underscore subtly that even the better time being promised is improbable. The two-sentence response meshes well with the wordiness characteristic of negative responses. Supporting the foregoing, Levinson says, "... whenever I avoid simple expression in favour of some more complex paraphrase, it may be assumed that I do not do so wantonly, but because the details are somehow relevant to the present enterprise' (109).

In *H*'s response above, there is apparent conflict between the maxim of manner (of the CP): specifically be brief, and the politeness principle. Being brief will necessitate a bare 'no', but that will infringe on the Tact maxim of the PP. With these two maxims in direct conflict, a trade off relationship becomes inevitable. The tact maxim is therefore as a matter of necessity given priority over the maxim of manner. Thus, *H* hedges his illocution to weaken its force because it is costly to *S*. Leech believes that "the PP is not just another principle to be added to the CP but an essential complement which rescues the CP from serious trouble" (80).

As the exchange progresses, the reader observes *S*'s desperation in wooing *H*. Although she has not explicitly demanded sex, she has used a hinting strategy. Communication thrives on economy: given that the speaker expects the hearer to know *x* as part of *y*, the speaker in conveying *y* naturally omits *x* by assuming that *x* is underlying part of the encoded *y*. *S* is aware that *H* would draw the inference from her statements. "Knowing that their listener will flesh out their utterance with inferences gives speakers the freedom to imply something rather than state it" [2]. This gives *S* the confidence to accuse *H* of not finding her sexually appealing: "You are saying that I am not beautiful if you

don't let me visit you tonight." The sexual appeal is not overtly stated in the exchange but is implied as the real communicative intention. Instead of denying the accusation, *H* prefers to explain it away: "Time makes a person appreciate a woman's beauty better. That is why I asked for it. If you don't mind, I need to go and rest," Nachau said politely. He indirectly tells *S* that sleeping with her on first acquaintance is not a proof that he appreciates her beauty but quality relationship is built gradually as the parties know each other better.

Furthermore, the use of the conditional "If you don't mind, I need to go and rest" is a negative politeness strategy aimed at weakening the cost of refusing to oblige *S*. The conditional sentence makes *H*'s desire to take his leave an option, rather than an imposition of his will on *S* and is employed on the grounds of maintaining a harmonious relationship with *S* despite *H*'s reservations.

**Rebuking (Text C and D):** Text C typifies a case of rebuking and blaming, which are forms of expressive speech act. Selema, *S* for short, blames his unsuccessful life on his siblings, who he claims have refused to give him enough money to start a good business. He voices his anger explicitly. His contribution certainly observes the Quality Maxim of the CP: "Make your contribution one that is true" [7, 2]. In direct conflict with this maxim is the Approbation Maxim of the PP: "Minimize dispraise of other". *S* cooperatively informs Nachua (hearer *H*) that his siblings have been unfair to him. His goal in saying this is to exculpate himself from being blamed for his poverty or low business profile. *H* holds a contrary view that a man should not depend on others for his survival. But expressing his revulsion for *S*'s dependence on what his siblings dole out to him rather than making the most of what he has on ground (a taxi) will amount to saying unpleasant things about *S*. He thus employs a hedged performative, an anecdote, to politely mitigate and weaken the illocutionary force of his criticism on *S*. *H*'s contribution carries no grammatical items related to *S*'s utterance. Thus, it seems to flout the Maxim of Relation of the CP: make your contributions relevant. However context tells us pragmatically that *H*'s anecdote is a relevant contribution as it teaches a moral lesson that condemns *S*'s dependence on others for his survival. The illocutionary force of the utterance is derived by pragmatic implicature. "... [implicature] provides some explicit account of how it is possible to mean (in some general sense) more than what is actually 'said' (i.e. more than what is literally expressed by the conventional sense of the linguistic expression uttered" [3, 6].

Text D captures an exchange between Nachau (*S*) and Felicia (*H*). *S* draws a striking analogy between the government's demolition of *H*'s shop and *H*'s self demolition. *S* paints a metaphoric imagery of a building under demolition to represent the harm *H* is causing herself by being a sex worker. The analogy which brings to the fore the imagery of destruction forcibly is evoked to politely soften the effect of the rebuke. The lexical item 'demolishing' is foregrounded, having occurred six times in the extract. Perhaps, without this apt analogy, the perlocutionary effect of Nachau's rebuke would have been anger rather than the compunction that ensued. Another metaphoric hedge employed is the use of 'blocks' to presumably represent the time and opportunity still available for *H* to retrace her steps before the calamities associated with such a lifestyle befall her. Metaphor in this case is viewed as "what makes us think of one thing as another" [11]. The interpretation of the metaphorical 'blocks' is derived pragmatically from encyclopedic knowledge of the world rather than from the semantic features of the lexical item. This kind of meaning arises from what Levinson calls the 'connotational penumbra' of the expression (150). After all, "unloading the 'loaded weapon' of language by deconstructing its metaphors is thus an appropriate task of pragmatics" [7]. The use of metaphor in the context is a creative way of flouting the maxim of manner which states "avoid obscurity" [2]. But this obscurity is embraced as a mitigating device motivated by politeness.

**Advising (Text E and F):** Texts E and F depict directive speech acts in which Nachau (*S*) is advising Selema (*H*) and Anano (*H*) respectively. In both cases, he employs a short story as an indirect strategy not only to drive the point home but most importantly to maintain a harmonious relationship and social equilibrium between him and his interlocutor. Advising, being a directive speech act, may be misconstrued as encroaching on the other party's space and freedom of choice. It can also be face threatening as it suggests that the one giving the unsolicited advice is claiming to know better than the recipient and is imposing one's belief on the latter. Giving advice is therefore deemed costly to the hearer. Thus, in line with the Tact Maxim of the Politeness Principle: minimize cost to other b. Maximize benefit to other, *S* employs an indirect strategy to weaken the cost of his illocution to *H* respectively. As observed by Leech, indirect illocutions tend to be more polite for two reasons: they increase the degree of optionality and secondly the more indirect an illocution is the more diminished and

tentative its force tends to be (108). Thus while advising the respective hearers, *S* still allows them the free will to take or jettison the advice, but at the same time, considering the importance of the advice, *S* has to present it in a manner that will make the benefit maximized to the other party while concurrently weakening the cost to him. Although the anecdote aptly rebukes *H* for taking God's patience for granted by delaying to repent from her harlotry, the indirectness employed in the story is a negative politeness strategy which serves as a mitigating device to soften the illocutionary force of the rebuke. According to Leech, the PP is employed to meet two conditions: "standing features such as the social distance between participants interact with dynamic features such as the kind of illocutionary demand the speaker is making on the hearer... to produce a degree of politeness appropriate to the situation" (12).

## CONCLUSION

The study reveals that the syntactic and lexical choices made in a text are often motivated by pragmatic considerations of politeness. This observation provides the opportunity for the pragmatic reader to be actively involved in co-wording with the writer in a bid to get a handle at meaning. Supporting this stance, Holmes observes that "meaning is co-constructed, and hence politeness is a matter of negotiation between participants.... Interaction is regarded as a dynamic discursive struggle..." (717). As such, the meaning of a text is what a reader makes of it. Thus, the task of a critic is to "provide normative criteria to back up one's reading". A reader's interpretation of a text is therefore a contextual wager which may vary from person to person and is shaped by the clues found in the text [3].

The politeness strategies employed in the text are predominantly negative consisting in hedging via indirectness, anecdotes, wordiness, conditionals, pragmatic particles and metaphor. These strategies are ushered in as mitigating and face saving devices to weaken the illocutionary force of the utterances. The politeness devices enable a speaker to conceal his real intention by polite obliquity believing that, if the assumption of being cooperative is preserved, the hearer will work out the implicature of the utterance and perform the speaker's desired action. Without the effective manipulation of the politeness strategies, the protagonist Nachau's major illocutionary goals of condemning harlotry and indolence as means of livelihood and re-orientating the sex workers and other disgruntled

characters towards decency, hard work, self reliance and purposeful living without infringing on their human rights and dignity would have been abortive.

In sum, the study underscores the fact that the meaning of utterances employed in a talk exchange is derived from a strong assumption of participants' cooperativeness. This assumption of cooperativeness leads the active reader or participants in a talk exchange to make inferences. Thus, whether a speaker says more than is semantically encoded or otherwise, meaning is expected to be intact. The only twist however is that the hearer/reader is expected to look beyond the array of linguistic symbols by fleshing out the proposition with background knowledge to derive the speaker's actual intention "More than just a common language is required to enable the hearer to identify the speaker's communicative intentions on the basis of the speaker's utterances. A shared system of beliefs and inferences must be operating, which function in effect as communicative strategies" (Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish 369-370). Possession of this system of beliefs is not the hearer's prerogative but is a collective responsibility shared between the encoder and the decoder – a phenomenon which prompts the speaker to anticipate with a great deal of certainty that the hearer would enrich the encoded message with his wealth of background knowledge. Thus, language does not exist in a vacuum, but is a product of people's culture; its learning and use lead to the accumulation of world knowledge and beliefs which are inseparable from language users' interpretative faculties.

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