

## Reflections on Address Politeness in Igbo Family

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### Abstract

*Politeness here refers to those events and activities which target the social and cultural norms of linguistic communicative behaviour crucial to social relationships, among language performing individuals. It consists in those manipulations and negotiations in language use which are aimed at enhancing satisfactory social relations. Within this paradigm, it is possible to show how linguistic communication events demonstrate recognition of a listener in terms of his rights in a situation, in relation to the linguistic ideologies of speech communities. In its view of language as a social entity, and as an intrinsically complex entity, politeness contributes to insights provided by ethnolinguistics, as it coordinates language structures with appropriate cultural contexts, within which language competence centres on the socio-cultural norms of language performance, targeted at competence in communication.*

*The paper investigates politeness strategies in Igbo, a national language in Nigeria, focussing on address forms within the Igbo family. It discusses how address forms are used in negotiating politeness; and observes that the schemes are governed by social relationships, dominated by age. Drawing from address formulaic expressions, it addresses the texts which make up human communication and the social situations or culture contexts in which they are employed, using the experience of Igbo, one of the world's little studied language communities. It follows after secular sociolinguistics in exploring the correlation between the extra-linguistic variables (of status, age, social networks, etc.) and the language habits of society and societies (Spolsky1998).*

*It examines 'deede' respect formula, kinship terms, honorific appellations, personal names, etc and concludes that age is the dominant social variable, not power, status or so; and that this extends to the wider society as a means of socio-political order and as a cultural grounding for the gerontocracy practised by the Igbo people. Further more, the paradigm of the study includes that politeness is a required linguistic communicative behaviour in the linguistic and cultural ideology of the Igbo people; such that impoliteness is penalised; and the essence is to preserve relationships and to be at peace with oneself and others.*

**Key words:** Address, Respect, Ethnolinguistics, Igbo, Mbieri, Politeness, Family, Gerontocracy

### Introduction

Kasper (2001) defines 'politeness' as "proper social conduct and tactful consideration of others". To be polite means to abide by the rules of relationship (cf. Braun1988), and one is impolite when one violates such rules. Its concern is therefore for the manipulations and negotiations in language use which are aimed at enhancing satisfactory social relations among language performing individuals. Within this paradigm, it is possible to show how linguistic communication events demonstrate recognition of a listener in terms of his rights in a situation, in relation to the linguistic ideologies of speech communities. In its view of language as a social entity, and as an intrinsically complex entity, politeness contributes to insights provided by ethnolinguistics, as it coordinates language structures with appropriate cultural contexts, within which language competence centres on the socio-cultural norms of language performance that target communication competence.

In general, studies on politeness may be concerned with the a number of perspectives, some of which include those strategies for phatic communion, where what is performed counts for social gaps essentially (Abercrombie, 2001); the strategies for face-saving directed at self-approval or self-assertion

(Brown & Levinson, 1987; Scollon & Scollon, 1995); conversational maxims aimed at those linguistic properties which minimise possible expression of impoliteness, and as strategic linguistic actions in pursuit of socio-cultural norms, violations of which earn sanctions (Rash, 2004; Ouafeu, 2006; Spolsky, 1998; Kipacha, 2005; Spencer-Oatey, 2007). The present study assumes the latter. It thus, assumes that the phenomenon of politeness is a required linguistic communicative element in Igbo linguistic and socio-cultural ideology; and impoliteness is construed just at the point this requirement is not pursued or is violated (Braun, 1988). It thus assumes that politeness in Igbo family constitutes a crucial part of the linguistic and socio-cultural ideology of the people and as part of the pragmatic knowledge shared by members of the speech community (Kasper, 2001). As a social norm, it coordinates a complex of the variables which mark age, status and authority as well as those self-negotiations for the sake of integration and smoothened social relationships or face. Accordingly, forms conform to the wellformedness requirements of language structures (Allerton, 1979; Newmeyer, 1980; Kenstowicz, 1994; Marantz, 1995; Chomsky, 1995; Tesar and Smolensky, 2006, etc.) and are appropriate as well to the context of linguistic communicative events at the ethnolinguistic level (Servile-Troike, 1989; Reynolds, 1997; Uwajeh, 2002). The linguistic enunciations for these include certain formulaic, fossilised expressions and proverbs which are stable oral forms handed from one generation to another; and are valuable as vehicles for expressing the culture and history of Igbo people in lieu of written records. With these formulaic expressions, we examine 'deede' respect formula, kinship terms, honorific appellations, personal names, among others, and show that age is a basic determinant of politeness address forms.

Our data thus consist of these forms; and they are drawn from Mbieri, a central Igbo community, situated at the northern outskirts of Owerri. Related materials from adjoining communities are also presented wherever doing so facilitates our exposition. No previous studies on this area of Igbo linguistics are available; and the speech community is yet to benefit from corpus linguistic research. The non-availability of empirical corpora implies that our descriptions are part of preliminary attempts; hence, 'reflections' in the title; and has the advantage of inviting research attention to this hitherto unstudied Igbo community. Kipacha 2005 draws attention to some other imports of such descriptive surveys with respect to virgin communities; namely, that such descriptive ethnolinguistic approach appears suitable to record and document ethically sensitive themes that often preserve much sought language and culture heritages of isolated communities. This study pursues this value. Data are drawn from free talks, live conversations and interviews; and include fixed expressions in synchronic samples (Ugorji, 1990; Ugorji, 2006, etc.).

In presenting the data, adaptations are made to the official orthography, to enable a more faithful representation of forms sourced from regional dialect communities. This is considered necessary in view of dialect communities' linguistic ideological sensibilities (Ugorji, 2005; Emenanjo, 2002). The adapta-

tions include, for the central dialects, contrastive nasality on syllables, **ɛ̃ v**; the ingressive **t̚**, **ɬ̚**, the glottal stop, **q**, the voiced palatal fricative, **z̥** and the (low) mid front vowel, **ɐ**. We also add that Igbo language is tonal; but the convention requires tones to be indicated in written prose only where doing so disambiguates a form.

The Igbo constitute (one of) the most populous ethnolinguistic groups in Nigeria. Its traditional preference for gerontocracy, extended family and communal life coordinated with the belief in God, gods and ancestors are crucial to the definition of the people, as well as the belief in the dignity of labour, self-effort and hard work, as the bases of honour and respect (Nwoga, 1984; Emenanjo, 2000). Igbo language belongs to the New Benue-Congo phylum (Williamson & Blench, 2000). The land, the people and the language are corporately and severally referred to as Igbo, pronounced [igbò].

The study focuses on the family. A typical Igbo family is an extended one, which may include other relations such as cousins (understood as brothers and sisters), parents' own parents and others; and traditional religion believes that ancestors are still part of this family, and are thought to be only 'disembodied' but participate still in the life and activities of the family (Parrinder, 1962). Its parallel is grammatical 'empty categories' or 'ghosts' which result from the application of movement rules, whose influence may not be ignored in a derivation. Concatenations of a number of such families constitute an *úmunnà* 'lineage (group)' or *nìchì* 'kindred'. In the family, relationships and conversational events may be casual, with a shared strong feeling of solidarity, but social roles are taken seriously as part of the cultural ideology.

Greetings and forms of address constitute the major aspects of politeness discussed in the literature; but only address forms and associated mechanisms are discussed in the present study. Greeting epithets are discussed elsewhere (Ugorji, in preparation).

## Address forms

According to Rash (2004), the belief among germanophone Swiss is that people may conform to polite greeting practices out of self interest, and more, out of recognition for social cohesion and as a sign of the respect and affection for one's fellow human beings. In this regard, languages may make distinctions in terms of the relative social status of interactants in a discourse; and generally, interaction events are coordinated by sociocultural or extra linguistic rules, in respect to age, authority, status, sex, etc. For age, in Mbieri and other central Igbo communities, the principle is to avoid calling older persons by name, from the family to the wider community. Older persons would have any of the appellations in 1 precede their first name, name being optional, even where the age difference is only one year or so; and these appellations lack referential meaning but mark respect, motivated by age:

1. (a) dee/deede (Chukwuma)
- (b) daa/daada (Chioma)
- (c) dee (Chukwuma/Chioma)
- (d) ndaa (Chukwuma/Chioma)

In 1a, above, the first is a diminutive of the second, which also applies to (b). Also, 1a and 1b are differentiated by gender: whereas 1a applies to males, 1b applies only to female referents. This is common among the Umuahia and Mbaise dialect communities. 1c and 1d are other dialect variants; the dialects appear to have neutralized the gender distinctions. Thus, in a dialect that uses *dee*, the application is to both male and female referents. The relevant dialects include Mbieri and the Orlu dialect clusters (Mbieri pronunciation is *dédē* or *děē*). Similarly, in dialects that use *ndaa*, the appellation is not gender sensitive; and thus applies to either male or female. The Urata Owerre dialect clusters attest this.

For convenience, *dee/daa* may be assumed normative in the present study, and may be represented as D, called 'D form' or 'D appellation'. In the above data, *Chukwuma* is a typical male name and *Chioma* is a typical female name. Where the name of the person in question is not familiar, the speaker may simply address the listener as D if perceived to be older than the speaker. D is also used as some kind of vocative to summon or call attention when the referent or hearer is far away or not attentive. When the name of the referent is familiar as in the case of sibs and the speaker who is younger addresses the referent with D, it may be construed as a deeper sense of respect or reverence. Thus, D + first name (DFN) marks respect, while D without name marks deference at family levels. This form is non-reciprocal: the younger addresses the older with D or DFN and the older responds with FN or some affective like *nwunę* (m) '(my) sibling'. From the family unit, extensions are made to the kindred and the wider community, such that any one perceived to be older than the speaker is addressed with D form. Generally, the culture restricts first names from being used as forms of address by younger people, but this restriction is less for reference in modern times.

It seems apparent therefore, that it is a sign of respect and/or deference not to call older people by name. This is coordinated by other respect attitudes which include that the younger greets first and the older responds; and should respond, otherwise, animosity may be construed. The younger vacates a seat for the elder and would take and obey instructions from the elder. Also, the right hand is the polite hand; and one does not hand in something to another using the left hand, as a rule. This is more serious when the receiver is older. It is considered as an insult or rudeness. In general, any violation of the address requirements offends the culture sensibilities of the society, for which an offender is reprimanded, rebuked or pressurised by the family members, the kindred and the entire community until the expected adjustment in address behaviour is achieved. The mechanism appears a tacit negotiation to achieve positive face, both for oneself and for others in the family, and the community.

These respect forms may not be unconnected with the traditional gerontocracy practiced by the Igbo within which leadership is by elders, suggesting a possible close interrelationship involving authority, age and status as a complex of sociolinguistic variables. In a family (extended family), the oldest man is the head; in the *úmuńńa* 'kinsmen (lineage group)' the oldest heads; and in the wider community, a

committee of elders headed by the eldest. In the elective situations of modern times, the elect heads, and a committee of elders constitute his cabinet. This pattern applies from top to bottom and vice versa in the social rungs, such that in a nuclear family, the oldest child leads among his or her sibs.

This cultural ideology appears quite productive in the maintenance of law and order right from family levels, as members know by bio-cultural dispositions whose turn and right it is to provide leadership at any point in time. Thus, age may subsume authority and perhaps status at this level. In traditional *Mbieri ọgụ ọfọ*, ọfọ asafo 'Mbieri of twenty-eight villages' for instance, villages are named by their progenitors; and it is known customarily ahead of time which of the villages takes turn in providing a person(s) to occupy certain positions or play certain roles; and the turns are taking first by the village whose progenitor was the eldest among his own male sibs in his time, in that order. The twenty eight were sons of one man; hence the popular Mbieri formula of brotherhood and solidarity: *Mbieri nwa ọtụ ọkẹ* 'Mbieri of one man' i.e. all Mbieri (people) are offspring of one man.

For status, some Indo-European languages show preference for the use of the second person plural pronoun in the context where the referent occupies a higher social rung, is unfamiliar, socially distant or so: *Sie* for German and *vous* for French, in lieu of grammatical *du* and *tu* respectively. English may use *sir* for similar purpose. In Igbo, two factors of social distance appear crucial as distinguishing variables, namely age and relative social status. The former is stronger, as already noted. No adaptations of grammatical items may be required; instead, specific lexical items pre-qualify the relevant personal names, usually first names, which are however optional. For status, certain honorific epithets or respect forms appear productive. When status is not the question, affection may be implied; and they are largely derivable by semantic adjustments made to their more basic conceptions: consider 2, below. As already observed, respect and affection formulae appear a bit fiendishly intertwined; thus, we present for the present purpose a simplification, considered together as polite forms.

2.	item	gloss	honorific gloss
	Nna anyi	our father	master/boss
	Nna anyi/m ukwu	our/my big father	master/boss
	Nne anyi/m ukwu	our/my big mother	mistress/boss

These honorific forms thus seem to express regard for status or authority and not age, to mark respect and/ or deference; but the derivations from father and mother figures might situate them with age instead, that is, coordinated by age not power or authority; and they include *nnā anyi ukwu* 'master', *nne anyi ukwu* 'mistress'. In other words as *nnā* and *nne* ('father' and 'mother' respectively) contained in the honorifics contain the information of 'parent', the reference to parents as a possible source of the items may not be devoid of age considerations. *Nne* which stands for 'mother', biological mother, may especially mark affection or endearment in addition, when used outside the biological context of mother. This applies equally to *nnā*, except that *nnā* may also be in colloquial use by peers to refer to their male pals. One of such contexts of affectionate use of *nne* is when it is suffixed to first names as follows:

3. Ugonne(m)  
 Chiomanne(m) or more affectionately, Chiichiinne(m) or Chiinne(m)  
 Onyinyenne(m) or more affectionately, Onyiinne(m)  
 Chinedunne(m) or more affectionately, (N)edunne(m)

Whereas the suffixation involving *nne* may have either male or female name as its stem, similar suffixations involving *nnā* may select only male names (i.e. names whose referents are males) as its stem. The following are illustrations:

4. Ugonnā  
 Edunnā  
 Ejikennā  
 Jem(i)snnā (Jem(i)s = James)  
 Jọnonnā (Jọn(ụ) = John)



Apparently, *-nne* in the affectionate forms derives from *nwanne* which translates brother or sister. This in turn consists of *nwa* 'child' and *nne* 'mother' as *nwa nne* 'child of mother/mother's child'. This derivation explains why *-nne* selects either male or female names as stem. On the other hand, *-nna* derives from *nwannā* which stands for kinsman; and men readily call one another *nwannā*; its plural is *umunna* or *umunnā*. A female may call a male *nwannā*, but the reverse may equally not apply: females are not ordinarily addressed as *nwannā* as a general tendency, except when qualified as in *nwanne/nwannā nwaanyi* 'female *nwanne*' (i.e. sister or kinswoman) which is however mainly heard among evangelical Christians, as a religious register which translates 'brethren' in the English of the Authorized King James Bible. This bible is the favourite version for such Christians.

Other forms that mark affection include *nwanne m*, *oko m*, *nna m*, etc. The latter stands for 'my dear' also; notice the prosodic difference. Also *nwanne/nwunne (m)*, when used as an address form carries the meaning of endearment; and *nwa Ugooji* 'son of Ugorji' may serve additionally for subtle praise as well as a means of avoiding mention of addressee's name. *nwa Dédé* (Mbieri equivalent of D) serves a similar purpose.

Address inversion may also be employed. Within its frame, a woman for instance, may address her daughter as *nne m* or a man address his son as *nna* or *nna m* for affection or endearment. A more robust practice however is an 'honorific inversion' (so called for want of a better expression): a woman may address her son or any male younger than herself as *nna m* 'my father', *di m* 'my husband' or D; and a man may address a girl or any younger female as *nne (m)* 'my mother'.

It should be noted in general terms that trying to present these thoughts in English involves intercultural linguistic exchange with associated difficulties in sourcing translation equivalents, since even synonyms within a language may hardly be synonymous. For example, *nna m ukwu*, translates English 'master'; and whereas the Igbo form carries the implication of fatherhood and affection, the English one derives from a slave-master situation (cf. Nwoga1984). *i bọọna* is only roughly equivalent to 'good morning' as *ka chi bọọ* is to 'goodnight'. Similarly, *ada nne*, which translates as 'mother's (first) daughter' i.e. 'sister' loses the effect of intimacy to shortcomings in translation. Where *ada* is a personal name, appending *nne* makes it equivalent to the examples in 3, above, involving (deeper) affection or endearment. We also add that generally, *ada(mma)* is a default name for first-born daughters and *ulu(mma)* for second born daughters; but all girls are *bébi* by default and all boys are *bomboi/iboi* by default. Elsewhere in Igboland, default names derive from market days within which a child is born: for *eke* market day, there are *nweke*, *okeke*, *okereke*, etc., for males and *mgbeke* for females. For *orie/oye* market day, there are *nworie/nwoye*, *okorie/okoye*, etc for males and *mgborie*, *orie*, *nwaanyi orie*, etc for females, and so on. The latter appears to represent older forms; but in Mbieri, the market-day based names are not attested, an indication that they are now extinct, if they existed.

The language preserves these ideologies of regard for age and status as part of the principles required for linguistic communication to be appropriate. The following expressions further illustrate the fact:

5 a) *qa hapuu ishi akpoji olu* 'the head is not skipped to snap-break the neck in a dive' i.e. things follow in defined order.

It figures a dive in which the neck is broken, and implies that that must impact on the head and in order, head first.

*onye fẹẹ ẹzẹ, ẹzẹ eru ye n'aka* 'one that serves a ruler gets a turn to rule' the information is that one should be faithful when in service to others, as such is the path to the top or to obtaining service from others.

*nwaqa ʔulie nna ya elu ọgọdọ ayọchĩe ye anya* 'if a child throws his father up, wrappers will obliterate his vision'

The reference to wrappers is to a dress code for men which constituted of wrappers, which are usually large; and casting a full-fledged man into the air above one's head (as one would while playing with a baby), would cast the large wrappers over one's eyes. The message is that one should not toy with one's father, leader or elder (as context makes appropriate), but should regard and honour them.

5a draws attention to the fact that respect should be accorded to whomsoever it is due. While b demands a show of humility and submission, c warns that it may be dangerous not to treat respect for older people with the seriousness it deserves.

One's in-laws are usually considered part of one's family. There is a formulaic expression that states that *oggo wu nwunye* 'one's in-law is his sibling'. Thus, in-laws may not call one another by name as a general tendency even though the names are clearly known long before the marriage is contracted. This is construed as deference; and this observance commences as soon as the parties consent to the marriage, a principle which has however declined in modern times. The following expressions are employed instead;

- 6        a)        *oggo m nwokę* 'my father/brother in-law'  
              *oggo m nwii* 'my mother/sister in-law'

Thus, male members of one party in the marriage are referred to and addressed by 6(a), above while female members are referred to and addressed as 6(b) and vice versa irrespective of age. The bride's parents refer to the groom's parents as *oggo m nwoke/nwii* and vice versa; and both grooms' and bride's relations may follow similarly. The brides' parents may however call the groom by first name but the practice is not wide. Also, grooms' parents call the bride *nwie nwa m* 'my son's wife' or by her first name. When she is pregnant, she may be addressed as (*nwa*) *agadi* 'the aged', for endearment. A toddler may also be addressed as *okii* 'the old' for endearment.

A woman may not call her husband by name but refers to him and addresses him simply as *di m* 'my husband' and/or use any of the following:

7.        a)        *Nna anyi*                                'our father'  
              b)        *Nna anyi ukwu*                        'our master'  
              c)        *Nna m*                                        'my father'  
              d)        *Nna m ukwu*                                'my master'  
              e)        *Mpa/Papa/Nna X* (where x is the name of the first born child)  
              f)        *Deę/deęde*

Notice that in (f) the D appellation may be literal (as in 1, above,) because a man usually got married to a woman who is younger than he. A man may therefore call his wife by first name in view of this, as in 8(d), below. This may still be a further indication that age ranks highest among all social variables noted. D form is non-reciprocal as already shown. Auspiciously however, no egalitarianism may be permitted between a man and his wife, as suggested by the non-reciprocity in the use of the D forms. The general norm at societal levels point to respect being reciprocal according to this proverb: *ugwu wu nkwij nkwij* 'respect is reciprocal' but with a rider, namely *nwii lelia di je, ike akpoo ya nku* 'if a woman looks down on her husband, her buttocks will dry up' i.e. if a woman fails to pay her due respect to her husband, she will suffer'. Thus, the obligation of reverence or perhaps respect may not be mutual as such, at nuclear family realms at least.

A man may address and refer to his wife by any of the following:

8.        a)        *Nwinga m*                                'my wife'  
              b)        *Nne*    'mother'  
              c)        *Mma/Mama/Nne X*                        'x's mother'  
              d)        First name  
              e)        Mouth whistled tune  
              f)        *Onyenga m*                                'my wife'

Notably, *nwinga*, *onye nga* for 'wife' may not be unconnected with the culture's own way of compensating the woman for leaving her parental home to make another with her husband, going by the literal meaning of these terms from where they seem to be derived; and this may be summed in a formula, namely:

9.        X, the owner of place (where x is a wife)

For example:

10. a) *Nw̄inga* 'woman of place/house (woman owner of place)'  
 b) *Ọnyẹ nga* 'person of place/house (person owner of place)'

Also a free variant involves the wife's first name; examples are:

11. a) *Ada nga Emeriaa* 'Ada of Emeriaa's place/house (Ada the owner of Emeriaa's place/house)'  
 b) *Magi nga Ehirim* 'Magi of Ehirim's place/house (Magi the owner of Ehirim's place/house)'  
 c) *Emili nga Ayọziẹw̄wa* 'Emili of Ayọziẹw̄wa's place/house (Emili the owner of Ayọziẹw̄wa's place/house)'  
 d) *Akụndụ nga Ashjegbu* 'Akụndụ of Ashjegbu's place/house (Akụndụ the owner of Ashjegbu's place/house)'

Note that *Ada* is a female name as well as *Emili*, *Magi*, and *Akụndụ*. *Magi* is a diminutive of Margaret. Thus, the culture attributes honour and dignity to womanhood, as it presents her as 'owner of the place/house/home or simply family', or owner of the place/house once identified with *Ehirim*, *Emeriaa*, *Ayọziẹw̄wa* or simply some man, who has become the woman's husband.

Children do not call their parents by name, as a general constraint. This is quite understandable following the rules in respect to age and status at least; and this sustains the point that the norms of language behaviour are serious even when relationships are casual, intimate or so. The following are applicable forms:

- |    |    |                     |               |
|----|----|---------------------|---------------|
| 12 | a) | Mpa/Papa/Dad/Daddie | 'father'      |
|    | b) | Mma/Mama/Mum/Mummie | 'mother'      |
|    | a) | Mpa m               | 'my father'   |
|    | d) | Mma m               | 'my mother'   |
|    | e) | Nnaa                | '(my) father' |
|    | f) | Nne                 | 'mother'      |

With increase in urbanisation however, *Daddie* is gradually supplanting *Papa* and *Nna* for 'father' in address, and *Mummie* is taking the place of *Mama* and *Nne* for 'mother'. *Nn̄a* and *nne* are already near complete extinction. Curiously however, towards the northern communities, children may call their fathers and mothers by first name, at least in reference. By extension, older people generally may be addressed by their first name or as x's father/mother if offspring is known. The D forms appear lost in those communities. This appears to derive from westernisation or the egalitarianism tendencies of modern times or both.

Notwithstanding, it seems largely evident from the communities under study that family harmony is built up and maintained in the community by coordinating respect with age and relative social status. This harmony applies to the community and the wider society by extension. Notably, this harmony is achieved without recourse to egalitarianism, at the nuclear family level, since wife, as it were, owes respect to husband; children owe it to parents, and younger child owes it to the older. If this relationship between respect and harmony is accepted, then order and hierarchy should be thought superior to egalitarianism. Also, if the nuclear family is considered the nucleus of human society as well, non-reciprocity of respect and deference may be primordial and probably the more natural of the two, at least for the Igbo nation; but evidence from one community is not sufficient to yield a universal generalisation.

## Conclusion

The study has concerned itself with politeness in the family with respect to forms of address. It has no doubt provided useful insight into the cultural ideology of politeness, investigating the Igbo family. It is noted that relationships are casual and intimate at the family level, but norms of politeness in communication are serious and required as part of social roles. It reveals how interestingly politeness constitutes a vital part of the norms of linguistic communication which are crucial to the building and maintenance.

nance of social relationships. The main strategies for this accomplishment include the rich stock of respect forms, as well as greeting epithets (not discussed here). The stock is rich particularly as one considers its manifest variety of forms; namely, deede' respect formula, kinship terms, honorific appellations, personal names, among others.

They all constitute part of the linguistic negotiations for harmonious living in the family. They are required as part of the sociolinguistic and cultural ideology of the people. They are part of the norms of linguistic behaviour internalised by natives in socialisation. In other words, the achievement of these norms is required for linguistic behaviour to be judged appropriate. They may fill social gaps or play affective functions instead of being referential or informative; they are engaged in to save face, avoid communication breakdown, to avoid suggesting disaffection, rudeness, animosity or incurring social sanctions, and so on

The respect forms appear motivated by social hierarchy, with age at its apex. They process social relationships and coordinate social harmony and integration. They are, in other words, vital linguistic strategies for negotiating integration and harmony at family levels; and at societal levels, by extension. These strategies are together moderated by the social variables of age, relative social status and authority; and it is apparent that these variables constitute a complex of variables that are complicated, but may be ranked. In other words, these variables lend themselves to some kind of ranking, in their implementation; and within the relations, age ranks highest and is relatively dominant. This seems more clearly illustrated in the family relations between husband and wife. Here, honorific and endearment formulae may be suspended in preference for age, in view of which a wife uses D for her husband, both in address and in reference.

The insight which such patterns of politeness provide in the intuition of native speakers appears productive in the maintenance of social order from family to community realms. At family realms, egalitarianism is not pursued; instead, the respect for age is propagated as a fundamental instrument of family harmony to achieve positive face and social order. This pattern also characterises the kindred and the wider community; such that turns to stools and rights are coordinated by the ages of persons or their forbears or progenitors. In other words, the result is that turn-taking may be predicted through communities' bio- social roots. It appears convincing to assume that since the Igbo preference for age and social hierarchy, which appears primordial, is productive in maintaining social order, it might be useful to explore it as a model for peace and order in cases of (inter-)communal suspicion or conflicts.

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