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EFFECTS OF FACE THREATENING ACTS IN FICTIONAL CONVERSATIONS: A STUDY OF AKACHI ADIMORA-EZEIGBO'S *THE LAST OF THE STRONG ONES*

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ABSTRACT
This paper examined effects of face threatening acts (FTAs) in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's The Last of the Strong Ones. This was done in order to find out the nature of FTAs used in the novel and how they contribute to breakdown of social relations among characters as well as to the development of the theme of the novel. The study adopted Brown & Levinson's (1978, 1987) model of politeness theory and used excerpts from The Last of the Strong Ones as data. Both qualitative and quantitative analytical methods were adopted; face threatening texts identified in the novel were analysed in terms of the frequency of occurrence and types of illocutionary acts used to threaten face. A total of 157 FTAs were identified in the novel; 151 (96.2%) of them were verbal and only 6 (3.8%) were non-verbal. The findings revealed that hearers were threatened more than speakers in conversations; that the threats affected more of negative (58.6%) than positive (41.4%) face; that the face threatening speech acts vary, but consist mainly of ordering (19), reminding (18), and challenging (15); and that more than one speech act is assigned to an utterance in conversations in the novel. The study expanded the knowledge of FTAs in fictional conversations, confirmed Brown & Levinson's assertion that FTAs are inevitable in interaction and concluded that unmitigated FTAs adversely affect social interactions among characters in fictional discourse. The study recommends that interactants should explore linguistic elements that carry the illocutionary force that will help to maintain their relationships instead of destroy them.

Keywords: Face, politeness, mitigation, fictional conversations, speech acts, threatening acts.

Introduction

The concept of politeness is a widely researched area in pragmatics. In Haugh's (2012) view, the field of politeness research stems from Chinese folk discourse on interpersonal behaviour. It is from this Chinese discourse that the theoretical notion of face was first developed by Goffman (1955, 1967), and later deployed in accounting for politeness by Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987). Brown & Levinson's theory, which is based on Goffman's face notion and Grice's maxims, states that any linguistic behaviour that attempts to protect the face of the addressee is polite. In other words, any behaviour that does not protect the face of the addressee is not polite and Brown & Levinson term such behaviours face threatening acts (henceforth FTAs). Ezeifeka (2018) explained that a face threatening act occurs when an illocutionary act runs contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or speaker. FTAs can be verbal (conveyed with words), para-verbal (conveyed by characteristic features of speech such as tone, and inflection) or non-verbal (conveyed in gestures and facial

expressions). Brown & Levinson, in addition, opine that FTAs are inevitable in interaction. Human relations would be improved if participants in conversations understand the acts that threaten the face wants of others and avoid them. As a result, this study sets out to study FTAs in *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1996).

The Last of the Strong Ones is the first of the trilogy of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo. It is a novel which centres on a generation of Umuga women and tells the story of a war of sexes. In other words, the story presents fight against patriarchy in pre-colonial Umuga. *The Last of the Strong Ones* has received and is still receiving critical attention (such as Bhattacharji, 2008; Shodipe, 2008; Ima, 2017; etc.) but these have been largely literary and thematic analyses. Bhattacharji (2008), for instance, studied *The Last of the Strong Ones* from a feminist perspective. In his work, he examined the portrayal of women in cross-cultural colonial clash in Nigeria and challenged the colonial myth of the African woman. Basing the research on the theory of neo-feminism, he examined the Igbo woman from the religious, political, and socio-economic contexts. He concluded that, "Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's women are vibrant, vocal individuals, with powerful female genealogies, immersed in independent professions" (p.132). In the same vein, Shodipe (2008) examined *The Last of the Strong Ones*, also, from a feminist perspective. Her paper painted a womanist perspective aimed at enhancing women's self-esteem and helping them to find their voices in a male-dominated social order. She x-rayed the novel in the light of women's leadership which she claimed is a protest against tradition, language and the negotiation of meaning in the novel and concluded that there is significant foregrounding and backgrounding in the novel as well as ideological meaning observed in power configurations. Also, Ima (2017) more recently examined feminine language in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*. He investigated language use in the novel using the feminist discourse approach with particular reference to Elaine Showalter's 'Gynocriticism,' which is the study of women as writers. The study provided critics with four models concerning the nature of criticism of female writers' works and affirmed that in spite of what patriarchy calls the feminine in language use, Ezeigbo, like most other female writers, employs language for distinctiveness and identity to express genuinely female consciousness in a personal and intimate tone.

From the foregoing, previous analyses on the text have focused on thematic and stylistic use of language. Thus, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, none of the researches on *The Last of the Strong Ones* has dwelled on FTAs in conversations; hence the interest in the current direction. Also, a pragmatic analysis of *The Last of the Strong Ones* would establish that its success as a literary text also largely depends on language use by the characters in the context and environment of their interactions. So, filling the gap in assessing this aspect of the functional use of language in the treatment of the novel as a story set in a cultural setting is a vital significance of this study.

Finally, the discussion in the paper is done in sub sections. The sub sections for the discussion are fictional discourse as data; theoretical review; methodology; data

presentation; discussion of findings and conclusion.

Fictional Discourse as Data

Literature generally evolves from a people's historical and cultural experiences (Ima, 2017). In the view of Abugu (2010), literary works are a reflection of society; thus, creative writers capture man as he engages with life in all ramifications (Nwajiaku, 2013). Oyewole (2013) reiterated that literature is a reflection of the society's values. Also, Nwajiaku (2013) added that the major preoccupation of literature is the presentation of man's endeavours to apprehend the profundity of existence and his reciprocation to its offerings. In addition, Shodipe (2008) reported that one of the directions in which literary texts can be understood is the analysis of literature as the product of social relations. This is because dialogues in fiction provide the best information on colloquial speech (Brown & Gilman, 1989). Knowledge and understanding of the world in fictions are socially constructed through discourse, since Uhunmwanghon (2010) noted that discourse is simultaneously the human method for understanding and interpreting the world and its limits. From the foregoing, communication in literary texts is empowered by language to achieve social relations among the characters. In other words, fictional conversations contribute to the understanding of the social relations that exist in social discourse in the real world.

Participants in a conversation desire to be relevant at all times, and tend to constrain (verbally or otherwise) others who are likely to make them appear less so or share in the relevance. As noted above, language empowers expression in the literary world to achieve communication. Spencer-Oatey (2008) observed that language serves the function of transfer of information as well as an instrument of managing social relations. By implication, the same speech act can be expressed in various linguistic ways (such as more/less directly, with(out) mitigation etc.) in order to pass information as well as shape (in terms of building, repairing, sustaining, etc.) relationships through the use of language. Consequently, interractants can make or mar relationships depending on how they manage their conversations.

This study contends that frameworks of linguistic politeness can be used to shed light on communicative issues that lead to breakdown of social order. As a result, this paper studied conversations in *The Last of the Strong Ones* to find out the nature of the FTAs employed in the development of the theme and how the FTAs of the characters in the novel influence their social relationships.

Theoretical Underpinning

Various theorists have ventured into research in the area of politeness in language study. O'Keeffe, Clancy, & Adolphs (2011), observed that the constituents of polite and impolite language usage are some of the most researched topics in contemporary linguistics. In fact, Odebunmi (2009) opined that about nine theories of politeness have been recognized in literature. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of publications dealing with politeness (Chen, 2001). In the view of Kecskes (2014), politeness theory has been used by scholars since Brown & Levinson's (1978, 1987). The different models of politeness (such as, Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983; Brown &

Levinson1978, 1987; Blum-Kulka 1987, 1990; Ide, 1989; Gu 1990; Kasper, 1990; Fraser, 1990; and Watts, 2003), however, are merely different conceptualizations and formulations of the theory. Lakoff (1973, p.298), for instance, proposed "Rules of Politeness," (namely, "don't impose, give option, and be friendly or make A feel good"), which he claimed guide language use. Leech (1983, p.108) proposed a set of 'politeness principles' but with six maxims (tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy); he focused on 'indirectness' because according to him, indirect illocutions tend to be more polite. Brown & Levinson's model which is hinged on the notion of 'face,' 'face threatening act (FTA)' and 'mitigation,' is geared towards politeness strategies that will save face.

The following is not an exhaustive survey of politeness models. Rather, it is a sample of some of the applications. A valuable contribution to the analysis of politeness in literature is Lakoff's (1973) Rules of Politeness. Lakoff capitalized on the work of Grice and looked at politeness from a "decidedly pragmatic" perspective (Eelen, 1999, p.10). In propounding her politeness framework, Lakoff proposed three principles of politeness – don't impose; give options; and make 'A' feel good. One of the central questions in her work is whether or not (and how) women are more polite than men.

Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle is a "complementarist" model where communication is seen as problem solving. His position corresponds with negative and positive politeness, though it differs from Levinsonian perception of the concept. Hence, Leech's preference for pos-politeness and neg-politeness: while pos-politeness assigns positive values to the hearer, neg-politeness mitigates possible causes of infraction with the hearer. Leech postulated six maxims to account for polite linguistic behaviour. These are the tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy maxims. In addition, Leech identified social distance as a crucial factor in determining politeness behaviour. Determining social distance involves considering the roles people take in relation to one another in a particular situation, as well as how well they know each other. Thus, a teacher might say to a student "Get that essay to me by next week," but not "Make me a cup of coffee" (Leech, 1983, p.126). According to him, politeness is always sensitive to the context where it occurs.

More so, the foregoing revealed that there is a long list of politeness theorizers. This study, however, focuses on the politeness model of Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987) which is considered apt for the study because of its explication of the face-threatening acts (FTAs). Brown & Levinson's model is built on the metaphor of face from Goffman's (1955) Face-work and Grice's (1975) Co-operative Principles. Brown & Levinson (1987) defined face as the public self-image that every member of society wants to claim for himself; they divide face into positive face (the need for enhancement of a positive self-image) and negative face (the need for freedom of action and freedom from imposition). According to them, despite these aspects of face, speakers essential needs are the same – everyone wants people to like them – and this need impacts on their linguistic behaviour. In addition to face, Brown & Levinson emphasises rationality as a second human trait in their account of

politeness (Leech, 2014). With the assumptions of the universality of face and rationality, Brown & Levinson (1978, p.65) opined that certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face. 'Act' to them means what is intended to be done by a verbal or non-verbal communication. Also, they note that one or more 'speech acts' can be assigned to an utterance. They warn, however, that there could be overlap in the classification of FTAs, because some FTAs intrinsically threaten both negative and positive face.

Brown & Levinson proposed intrinsic FTAs. These are, the acts that threaten the addressee's or hearer's (H's) negative-face want, by indicating that the speaker (S) does not intend to avoid impeding H's freedom of action: those acts that predicate some future act A of H, and in so doing put some pressure on H to do (or refrain from doing) the act A (e. g. orders, advice, reminding, threats, warnings, dares, etc.); those acts that predicate some positive future act of S toward H, and in so doing put some pressure on H to accept or reject them, and possibly to incur a debt (e. g. offers); those acts that predicate some desire of S toward H or H's goods, giving H reason to think that he may have to take action to protect the object of S's desire, or give it to S (e. g. compliments, expressions of strong (negative) emotions toward H etc.); the acts that threaten the H's positive-face want, by indicating that the speaker does not care about the addressee's feelings, wants, etc. such as, those acts that show that S has a negative evaluation of some aspect of H's positive face (e. g. expressions of disapproval, criticism, ridicule, accusations, insults, disagreements, challenges, etc.); those that show that S does not care about H's positive face (e. g. expressions of violent emotions, boasting, raising of dangerously emotional or divisive topics, use of address terms and other status-marked identifications in initial encounters, etc.);those acts that offend S's negative face (e. g, expressing thanks, excuses, acceptance of offers, responses to H's faux pas, etc.); those acts that directly damage S's positive face (e. g. apologies, acceptance of a compliment, breakdown of physical control over body, self-humiliation, confessions, admissions of guilt or responsibility, emotion leakage, non-control of laughter or tears, etc.) (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The different models of politeness have been criticized. Leech's (1983) Politeness Principles, for instance, is criticized for taking a maxim-based approach following the maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP); the term maxim is sometimes criticized because of its suggestion of a prescriptive approach. In addition, Brown & Levinson (1987 p. 4), complain,

> …if we are permitted to invent a maxim for every regularity in language use, not only will we have an infinite number of maxims, but pragmatic theory will be too unconstrained to permit the recognition of any counter-examples.

Also, scholars (like Ide, 1989; Wierzbicka, 1991, etc.) hold the position that Leech's model is Western biased in that it emphasizes individualist ethics as against group orientation.

Lakoff's Rules of Politeness are accused of being overshadowed by her interest in who is more polite: men or women (Mazid, 2008). Though many of her findings sound like truisms, some of them

are still debatable. For example, her insights on language-and-gender issues are described as "potentially revolutionary" (West, Lazar, & Kramarae, 1997 p.128), Also, Hendry (1995) drew attention to the negative side of the argument that women are more polite than men and observe that female politeness is an expression of inferiority and lack of power.

Brown & Levinson's model is also readily attacked. One line of criticism is directed at the "universal" claim of their politeness theory as highlighted in their subtitle *Some Universals in Language Usage* (Mazid, 2008). According to Hofstede & Hofstede (2005), it has been objected that Brown &Levinson's model cannot claim to present a universal theory applicable to all languages and cultures due to its Western bias. Another line of criticism is on their focus on face; Brown &Levinson are criticized for their undue prominence to (FTAs), that their whole understanding of politeness concerns the strategies for dealing with FTAs (Mazid, 2008).In spite of the criticisms, the researcher chose Brown and Levinson's model because the substantial critiques, revisions and modifications of the model have only helped in elaborating and improving it (Watts 2003).As such, Brown & Levinson's model of politeness remains the most influential in the area. It "has attained canonical status, exercised immense influence, and is still the model against which most research on politeness defines itself" (Harris, 2003 p.27-28). Mazid (2008), also, notes that their model is an explicit and detailed model of linguistic politeness, hence the attacks.

Research Method

This study explores face threatening acts(FTA) in the text: *The Last of the Strong Ones*. The text is patterned to have taken place in pre-colonial Nigeria, so formal education has not been introduced in Umuga where the novel is set. This study concentrates on the identification and analysis of conversations in the text which threaten the face of the interlocutors; different FTAs are isolated and analysed. Thus, data for the study are obtained from various excerpts from the text under study. Brown & Levinson's (1978, 1987) model of politeness theory is utilized. Qualitative and quantitative analytical approaches are followed. Quantitative analysis caters for frequency and percentage distribution of speech acts that threaten face instantiated in the text, while qualitative approach is employed for the analysis of the excerpts from the text to show the instantiated face threatening acts employed.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Identified FTAs in the novel are presented in the tables below. The tables represent the frequency of verbal FTAs that damage H's face, S's face, and non-verbal FTAs (all identified non-verbal FTAs in the novel damage H's face); the frequency of FTAs to negative and positive face; and the speech acts that threaten both negative and positive face.

Table 1: Frequency of FTAs in the novel

FTAs	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Verbal FTAs to Hearer (H)	111	70.7%
Verbal FTAs to Speaker (S)	40	25.5%
Non-verbal FTAs (to H)	6	3.8%
Total	**157**	**100**

Table 1 above show that out of the 157 FTAs found in the novel, 151 (96.2%) are verbal while 6 (3.8%) are non-verbal. 111 (70.7%) of the verbal FTAs damage H's face while 40 (25.5%) damage S's face. All the 6 nonverbal FTAs damage H's face.

Table 2: Frequency of FTAs on negative and positive faces

FTAs	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
FTA to Negative Face	92	58.6%
FTA to Positive Face	65	41.4%
Total	**157**	**100**

Table 2 show that out of the 157 FTAs, 92 (58.6%) are negative FTAs while 65 (41.4%) are positive FTAs.

Table 3: Negative face threatening acts (FTAs)

NEGATIVE FTAs	(N)
Ordering	19
Reminding	18
Intimidating	11
Threatening	10
Complimenting	8
Daring	8
Warning	6
Advising	3
Excusing	3
Requesting	2
Cruelty	2
Response to faux pas	2
Total	**92**

Table 3 shows the speech acts that threaten negative faces. FTAs that threaten negative are mostly ordering (19), reminding (18), intimidating (11), and threatening (10). Others are complimenting (8), daring (8), warning (6), advising (3), excusing (3), requesting (2), cruelty (2), and response to faux pas (2).

Table 4: Positive face threatening acts (FTAs)

POSITIVE FTAs	**(N)**
Challenging	15
Self-humiliation	11
Boasting	8
Ridiculing	7
Apologising	5
Criticizing	5
Disagreeing	3
Accusing	3
Seeking approval	2
Self-pity	2
Expressing violent emotion	2
Admitting failure (of responsibility)	2
Total	**65**

Table 4 shows the speech acts that threaten positive faces. FTAs that threaten positive faces are utterances of challenging (15), self-humiliation (11),boasting (8), ridiculing (7), apologising (5), criticizing (5), disagreeing (3), accusing (3), seeking approval/acceptance (2), self-pity (2), expressing violent behaviour (2) and admitting failure/responsibility (2).

Discussion of Findings

The research findings reveal a glaring discrepancy between the number of FTAs threatening the hearer's (H) face (74.5%) and those threatening the speaker's (S's) face (25.5%). This is due to the fact that there is a certain degree of pressure upon the hearer to perform or not to perform particular actions, namely to agree with the speaker, obey a directive, etc. It also explains a greater number of negative FTAs, because the negative FTAs try to influence ones behaviour and threaten ones feeling of independence and control. Most occurring negative FTAs are ordering, reminding, intimidating, and threatening. The positive FTAs are mostly utterances of challenging, self-humiliation, boasting, and ridiculing. Excerpts of utterances displaying FTAs in the novel are discussed here. For ease of analysis, the speech acts that threaten face of interlocutors in the novel are presented in dialogue form always indicating the speaker before the utterance. The discussion is done in four sections: acts that threaten H's negative face, acts that threaten H's positive face, acts that threaten S's negative face, and acts that threaten S's positive face.

Acts that threaten H's negative face

Excerpt 1: Onyekozuru: Your words lack sense if you are saying that I have a hand in Orizu's treachery. I dare you to prove it! (p. 79)

Onyekozuru dares Abazu in Excerpt 1 above. Her utterance threatens Abazu's negative face want by impeding his freedom of action. Brown & Levinson refer to this as a bald; S spoke on-record without down toning or mitigating her utterance.

Excerpt 2: Abazu: I will not sit here and be insulted by a woman even if that woman is *Oluada*. Watch your words, woman. (p. 79)

Abazu's (S) warning to Onyekozuru (H) in Excerpt 2 indicates that S would take an/some action(s) if H does not watch her words. Also, the warning threatens H's

(Onyekozuru's) face want of desiring to be respected as an *Oluada* (voice of the daughters).

Excerpt 3: Onyekozuru: … Did you not hear Abazu accuse me of betraying Umuga I… Onyekozuru, a traitor? My ancestors will destroy anybody who accuses me falsely! Our goddess, *Isigwu*, will purnish every false accuser! (p. 80)

Excerpt 4: Mgbeke: … I will not do Okorie's work for him in this compound any longer. I do not see the sense in his remaining in Igedu. … (p. 94).

In text Excerpt 3 above, S issues a threat to H (Abazu). The speech act (threatening)impedes on H's negative face. Also, in Excerpt 4 Mgbeke (S) threatens Okorie (H) and puts pressure on H to refrain from travelling back to *Igedu* because S *will not do his work for him … any longer*.

Excerpt 5: Ejimnaka: It is enough, Onyekozuru! (p. 80)

The order issued by S impedes on the negative face of H. By giving an order to H, S impedes on H's freedom of wanting to continue an action (to keep insulting Abazu).

Acts that threaten H's positive face

In Excerpt 6 below, S ridicules H:

Excerpt 6: Iwuchukwu: I have been very patient. My ancestors know I have tried. *I do not want to continue to live with a person whom I cannot say is male or female* (p. 107).

Iwuchukwu (S) withholds politeness from H to belittle and ridicule her. S shows that he does not care about H's feelings. The utterance is an unmitigated FTA to H's negative face, as Brown & Levinson explained, there is no hedging word to soften the effect of the utterance on H thus, H is ridiculed by the utterance.

Non-verbal behaviour (FTA) such as unintended emotional action (laugh) can also be used to ridicule H. The non-verbal FTA in excerpt 7 below ridicules H.

Excerpt 7: Chibuka: I had stopped attending (the *Umuada* meeting) the day another member whom I disagreed with over an argument called me fish-bone.…and I resented the way some other *members burst into laughter* (p. 144 - 145).

Chibuka might not have minded the name calling by the member she disagreed with but the emotional action of laughing by the other members of the group exhibited lack of acceptance and ridicule by the group. Subsequently, the action led to Chubuka's avoidance of the meeting for many years afterwards.

Excerpt 8: Abazu: You claim you know him well. Look at what he did; and you say you are surprised? And you want us to believe you? (p. 79)

Excerpt 9: Abazu: What have I said that is not true? The ground will not break if the truth is pronounced. You brought us a dishonest man who has caused us trouble. (p. 79)

Abazu, speaking in Excerpts 8and 9above refuses to believe Onyekozuru and accuses her of lying. His utterances indicate that he does not intend to avoid impeding H's (Onyekozuru's) face want of desiring to be right by rejecting her version of the story.

Excerpt 10: Ejimnaka: I know a letter writer from Umukokwa who has great skills. We can hire him (p. 22).

Excerpt 11: Durunnu: From Umukokwa?... I have heard of one who is said to be a native of Akwaihedi… They said he is an expert of that language (p. 22).

Excerpt 12: Obiatu: We will ask questions from the two towns, it will not be difficult to find either of them… (p. 22).

Excerpt 13: Onyekozuru: Do we have time to start asking questions? This matters requires (sic) very urgent treatment (p. 22).
Excerpt 14: Abazu: *What do you suggest?*... What we need now is action, not long talk (p. 22).

Abazu throws a challenge at Onyekozuru in Excerpt 14. He (Abazu) disapproves and indicates that he feels that Onyekozuru's contribution (Excerpt 13) in the on-going conversation is out of place. Also, Durunnu in Excerpt 11 expresses disapproval of Ejimnaka's suggestion in Excerpt 10 with the rhetorical question he throws. By that he (Durunnu) indicates that he neither likes nor trusts Ejimnaka's contribution.

Excerpt 15: Onyekozuru: … Abazu,… Who are you to talk to me like that? … For more than thirty years I kept your secret. I did not betray you. Now you call me a traitor. I did not tell the world that you are an empty shell. You are only a big drum that is hollow inside. Yet, you have the temerity to talk when men talk. You are not a man. Now your secret is out. What will you do? (p. 80-81).

Excerpt 16: Ejimnaka: Onyekozuru, hold your tongue. Donot offend the ancestors (p. 81).
Excerpt 17: Onyekozuru: … Let me clip Abazu's wings… you are not a man. Your strength displays itself only in appearance; in reality it is like air. It is as hollow as the inside of a bamboo (p. 81).

In her expressions, Onyekozuru in Excerpts 15 and 17 shows that she is indifferent to H's (Abazu's) positive face. Onyekozuru damaged his positive face thirty years ago when he revealed a secret about himself to Onyekozuru. She was out of control and even when Ejimnaka tries to deter her by the warning in Excerpt 16.Her expressions are completely embarrassing to H. Further, as Brown & Levinson observe, one or more 'speech acts' can be assigned to an utterance, Onyekozuru's utterance in Excerpt 15 is also a challenge (… *what will you do?*).

Excerpt 18: Chibuka: My in-laws in Agbaja will be most willing to help us to buy riffles. Who has not heard of the family of the late Igwe Anoka, the strong man of Agbaja? The family have their branch in my household and will cooperate if we approach them… (p. 154)

The expression of Chibuka above is a case of bringing of good news (boasting) about her perceived achievement of having a branch of the late Igwe Anoka in her household. She indicates that she is willing to cause distress to her audience, and/or does not care about their feelings.

Acts that offend S's negative face

Excerpt 19: Abazu: you are all witnesses to this mad woman's abominations. Her eyes will see her ears by the time I finish with her (p. 81).

In response to the grave embarrassment by Onyekozuru [see Excerpts 15 and 17], Abazu makes the threatening statement (Excerpt 19). From every indication, he is discomfited but chooses to pretend not to be.

Excerpt 20: Aziagba: You are not sleeping here tonight (p. 46).
Excerpt 21: Okoroji: Why not? (p. 46).
Excerpt 22: Aziagba: Because I do not want you to (p. 46).
Excerpt 23: Okoroji: But I have told my wife I will not be home this night. She knows I am with you (p. 46).

In Excerpt 23, Okoroji (S) gives an excuse for his need to pass the night in Aziagba's

hut. He felt he had a good reason not to go back to his wife that night. Instead of helping, his excuse further adds to his shame.

Acts that directly damage S's positive face

Excerpt 24: Obiatu: Ejimnaka, look at me! (p. 41).

Excerpt 25: Ejimnaka: Forgive me! … Forgive me! Obim! (p. 41).

Excerpt 26: Obiatu: Yes, yes, I forgive you (p. 42).

Excerpt 27: Ejimnaka: Oh, my husband. How good you are! (p. 42).

By rendering the apology in Excerpt 25, Ejimnaka obviously regrets an earlier action she took, thus, her face want is damaged. Obiatu's utterance in Excerpt 24 reveals that Ejimnaka is shame-faced.

Excerpt 28: Obiatu: I have neither wife nor children… does that surprise you? (p. 64)

Obiatu, in Excerpt, 28 admits that he had neither wife nor children thereby threatening his positive face by admitting that his failure in the fulfilling the responsibility that nature and tradition has bestowed upon him.

Excerpt 29: Onyekozuru: Let somebody correct me if I am wrong… but have we not settled this problem of warrant chiefs for good? (p. 9)

Onyekozuru (S) admits that she is ignorant of an information that she is expected to know.

Speakers do FTA to themselves by seeking for approval from others. See text (30) below:

Excerpt 30: Ejimnaka: … Kosiri put an obstacle across the path of our life and we shall not rest until we clear it… do I have your ears daughters of our land? (p. 7)

In communication, speakers sometimes seek approval from others. Ejimnaka (S) is making a speech and broke off to seek approval to continue from other *Umuadas* present. Brown & Levinson call it FTA to S's positive face because it ultimately damages the face want of the speaker to be approved by others.

Excerpt 31: Chieme: I am not against your taking a second wife. But let me stay with you (p. 106)

Chieme (S), in Excerpt 31, inherently damages her self-image by begging her husband to keep her in the house despite his decision to marry a new wife and send her packing. Her plea is self-humiliating thus her positive face is impeded upon.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored FTAs in *the Last of the Strong Ones* (*TLSO*). Specifically, the study examined the kinds of threatening acts used by the author to develop the theme of the novel as well as the faces threatened by the FTAs. The study revealed that characters can use various FTAs (both positive and negative) in their interactions and that substantial majority of the FTAs are directed towards the hearer than to the speaker. Also, FTAs which place pressure on the speakers' negative face are by far greater than those that threaten the positive face of the speakers. The negative FTAs in the novel stem from the war of sexes that exist in pre-colonial Umuga while the positive FTAs are as a result of the desire of the speakers to identify with their immediate families and the larger society. The novel, as earlier stated, is set in Umuga community which is a close knit community where everyone looks out for the other. This shows that positive face as Brown & Levinson described it is evident

in the communal living found among Umuga people in *the Last of the Strong Ones*. Thus, the novelist used diverse FTAs to develop the theme of the novel. For instance, the 'challenge' that Onyekozuru threw at Abazu [texts (15) and (17)] was birthed by a secret that Abazu revealed about himself to Onyekozuru (impeding his positive face) many years ago (*TLSO*, p.61); and as the plot progressed, it led to Abazu's attempt to kill Onyekozuru (*TLSO*, p.160) and thereafter committing suicide (*TLSO*, p.177).The findings further revealed that both verbal and non-verbal FTAs are employed to impede the face wants of the participants as seen from the analyses of samples of speech acts from the novel. Non-verbal FTAs are however only 6 (3.8%) in number while the verbal FTAs are 151 (96.2%).

Conclusively, the study confirmed Brown & Levinson's assertion that FTAs are inevitable in interaction. Also, the study concludes that FTAs adversely contributes to breakdown of law and order among interactants. In addition, the study gives a clearer view of the knowledge of FTAs in fictional conversations. Thus, it has contributed to scholarship and is therefore, relevant to scholars as well as the general public. Hence, the study recommends that interactants should explore linguistic elements that carry the illocutionary force that will help to maintain their relationships instead of destroy them.

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