LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research, 14(4), 165-180, 2017
ISSN: 1813-222

Face Threatening Acts in Familiar Communicational Space in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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Abstract

As participants in communicative events, we consciously and unconsciously put on a 'face' and do observe the other people's faces. In Pragmatics, the Face Theory has been proposed to account for the role of participants' facial dispositions in the achievement of communicative ends. Sometimes, a participant's 'face' constitution can become a threat to the other and disorient or irritate or undermine them in an interaction. Such a constitution of face is referred to as a Face Threatening Act. This paper studies the face threatening acts in the interactional space among characters in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and establishes how those acts aid or mar the illocutionary goals of participants. The study concludes that the 'face' is inseparable from participants' dispositions in a conversation and a 'knowing' participant adopts face threatening acts or exploits the face of the other to protect their own self-image and to achieve their ends.

Introduction

The concept of 'Face', originally introduced by Goffman (1967) states that everyone has face needs because they are concerned about other people's perception of and intentions toward them. Whether in initiating, accepting, rejecting or sustaining a conversation, people bear a face that determines the direction of the conversation. Face is the self-image that participants in a conversation try to put on (or do put on) to protect or project their interest or self-esteem in the conversation. They do so as social animals who must relate with others but without losing themselves or others. Hudson (2001: pp. 113 - 114) observes that the basic idea of the face theory stems from the fact that:

> … we lead unavoidably social lives, since we depend on each other, but as far as possible we try to lead our lives without losing our own face. However, our face is a very fragile thing which other people can very easily damage, so we lead our social lives according to the Golden Rule ('Do

to others as you would like them to do to you!') by looking after other people's faces in the hope that they will look after ours.

Nevertheless, the claim by Hudson (2001) that we look "after other people's faces in the hope that they will look after ours" is debatable since in many circumstances, there is a higher propensity for us to project or protect our own faces rather than other people's faces.

Robin Lakoff (1973) and Geoffrey Leech (1983) are among linguists who have propounded theories of politeness after Goffman. Brown and Levinson (1987) developed and incorporated Goffman's (1967) original concept into their Politeness Theory, identifying the face that people may put on as positive face or negative face. According to them, positive face is that which reflects the desire to be appreciated and liked. It is the self-image and self-respect that a person bears or projects. Negative face is that which reflects the desire not to be imposed upon and to have freedom. It is the claim to privacy, to freedom of action and other elements of personal autonomy; it reflects the desire not to be undermined or subdued but that to undermine or subdue or subvert the other. A would-be participant in a conversation may put up a positive face so as to be appreciated or liked or they may put up a negative face so as to extract respect from co-participants or even to cow them into submission depending on their intention(s). Again, Hudson (2001) points out that both faces are valuable and he refers to them as 'solidarity-face' and 'power-face' respectively. He states further that "Solidarity-politeness shows respect for the person, whereas power-politeness respects their rights" (2001: p. 114).

For Scollon and Scollon (1995: p. 34), the concept of 'face' is derived from the notions of deference and politeness, proposing that participants in a communication event are aware of their self-image or 'face' and they do protect or would want to protect it. People's 'face' needs account for their tendency to retort where others sound or appear disrespectful or impolite to them. They do not usually lie low sucking up utterances that challenge their self-esteem except where power and social stratification are at work.

The way a person constitutes his/her face is referred to as face work. A person may work up a positive face or a negative one through verbal and non-verbal means. A negative face is tantamount to what has been called a Face Threatening Act (FTA) in the communication process. A Face Threatening Act (FTA) is an instance of the face put on to protect one's own face, to extract submission or concession from the other and/or to disorient

the equanimity or composure of the other for personal gains in the spectrum of interaction. It is intended to threaten the self-esteem or psyche or mindset of the other participant and to cause them to lose their own face, making them somewhat vulnerable to the whims of the person. It is any behaviour put up by a participant in a discourse setting that disregards the face of the other participant(s). It obviously or clandestinely threatens the self-image of the other participants. It may be an act that a participant intentionally uses to mortify or endanger the face needs of others. Someone can threaten another's face with a look, an expression or with a paralinguistic or prosodic act and this may be unavoidable given the tendency by participants in a conversation to be purposive. Brown and Levinson (1987) note that:

> Face threatening acts can be verbal (using words/language), para-verbal (conveyed in the characteristics of speech such as tone, inflection, etc.), or non-verbal (facial expression, etc.). Based on the terms of conversation in social interactions, face-threatening acts are at times inevitable. At minimum, there must be at least one of the face threatening acts associated with an utterance. It is also possible to have multiple acts working within a single utterance.

They proceed to identify four types of FTAs and make statements that exemplify them as follows:

i. Bald on record (No politeness) – *Close your mouth when you eat, you swine*.
ii. Positive politeness – *You have such beautiful teeth. I just wish I didn't see them when you eat.*
iii. Negative politeness – *I know you are very hungry and that steak is a bit tough but I would appreciate it if you would chew with your mouth closed*.
iv. Off record (indirect) – *I wonder how far a person's lips stretch yet remain closed when eating*.
v.

The exemplifications above show that speakers have their 'face' as well as their listeners' faces in mind when they interact, knowing that they can cow or disorient or undermine or please or light up or excite their listeners/decoders 'faces' with the nature of their utterances or face works. They (speakers) can also be cowed, disoriented, undermined or even lightened up by their listeners' face works on responding to the speakers.

Each type of FTA deployed by a speaker would generate its own kind of response from the hearer. The bald-on-record type of FTA is blunt and vexatious and would more likely threaten the hearer than the off-record type. Having first noted that Brown and Levinson's analysis shows that people have a strong interest in preserving *face*, Odlin (1989: p.49) recognizes that individual and social needs often lead to actions that threaten the positive or negative face of other people and suggests that it is important for individuals performing such actions to minimize the sense of threat created by an action (a face).

Howbeit, face threatening acts appear inevitable based on the innate human desire to project and protect self or to extract respect for self or to undo others, even if surreptitiously. In fact, it is likely that every communication act has the potential to threaten another participant's 'face' or even undermine one's own face. Watts (2003) asserts "that linguistic utterances are not inherently polite but, individually interpreted as such and many expressions interpreted as politeness are in fact only formulaic and conventionalized". Among other acts, making requests, refusing, disagreeing, advising, thanking, complimenting, complaining, criticizing, preferring, suggesting etc can each constitute a threat to the face of either the speaker or the hearer. Investigating politeness strategies, Unuabong (2012) lists orders, requests, promises, warnings, accusations and disagreements among FTAs.

This paper studies the deployment of these strategies by characters in Adichie's *Purple hibiscus* in their interactive engagements. The conversations of the characters are randomly sampled for analysis. Narration or the authorial voice is useful in the understanding of the face work of the characters in different situations. Consciously or unconsciously, they put on 'faces' so as to meet their illocutionary goals or to protect/project their self-image.

Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) in *Purple hibiscus*

The story of Adichie's *Purple hibiscus* (henceforth to be referred to as *Ph*) revolves around the family of Papa (Eugene), his wife, Mama (Beatrice) and their two young children, Kambili and Jaja. Papa, a rich businessman, is an overzealous disciplinarian and an incurably pedantic member of the Catholic Church. Mama is his obsequious wife, not working. Kambili, a female child and Jaja, her younger brother are their children, subdued at the whim of their commanding father. With his 'big stick' which he wields at the least

provocation or none, he practically beats his family – wife and two children – into submission. Communication among the family is evidently influenced by the suffocating atmosphere created by Papa until the point of fatal realization and slow but lethal rebellion by these suppressed individuals. There is also the family of Aunty Ifeoma, Eugene's younger sister and her children, Amaka, Obiora and Chima. They are also central to the story and this investigation.

The novel begins *in medias res*. It opens with events of Palm Sunday when "Things started to fall apart at home …" (*Ph*, p. 11). The family has always been under the rigid control of Papa, which makes cordial communication at home rare. The first conversation in the novel is between Papa and his teenage son, Jaja. Papa initiates the exchange after they return from church. With frustration and exasperation at the perceived rebellious action of his young son in not going for Communion that Sunday, he splutters something between a charge and a question in order to disorient the boy, to threaten his 'face' (what has been called self-esteem) and bring him to repentance:

> "Jaja, you did not go to communion," Papa said quietly, almost a question (*Ph*, p. 14).

The tone of his voice that makes the utterance 'almost a question' is deployed as a face threatening strategy. With the hindsight of Papa's irascibility, Jaja needed to sum up courage. He stared at the missal on the table as though he were addressing it. Having done so, his calm reply is first of all, "The wafer gives me bad breath". Then he adds after an interval:

> "And the priest keeps touching my mouth and it nauseates me," Jaja said.
> "It is the body of our Lord". Papa's voice was very low. (*Ph*, p.14).

His face being threatened by his father's initial 'bald-on-record' statement, Jaja is unable to immediately look him in the face to make his response even though the reply comes out defiant – he stared at the missal as if addressing it. This enables him to work up his 'face' so as to ward off Papa's threat. It has been said that in the process of performing communication acts, the participants naturally apply some 'face work'. They usually have their 'face value' as well as the 'face' of the other participant(s) in mind as they talk. They either maintain a positive face or a negative one. In the above, Papa's outburst, though described as quiet, potentially undermines the self-image

of Jaja while projecting his own. The former demands an explanation from the latter although he does so '…quietly, almost a question'. When we demand an explanation, we are forcing the addressee to succumb to our authority. By so demanding, Papa uses a face threatening act to cow Jaja into submission. However, Jaja's response, "The wafer gives me bad breath" ignores the face threat and rather undermines the expectations of his questioner. His use of 'wafer' instead of 'host' for 'communion' is a strategy to reduce Papa's face threat as well as degrade or nullify the sanctity of the communion-taking ritual. Jaja's strategy in choosing 'wafer' conforms to Brown and Levinson's (1987) point that choice of words can be used to threaten the face of an interlocutor. Indeed, that Papa is broken on hearing the word 'wafer' for communion establishes the point that words are effective as a strategy to threaten another's face.

Jaja at this point saves his own self-image and registers his silent rejection of the Catholic values of his family especially against the backdrop of his father's extremist adherence to the values. This is to the chagrin of both Papa and the dormant third participant, Kambili who is shocked and short of what to say or do. When Papa fails to achieve his illocutionary goal, he resorts to physical action: he flings the heavy missal that shatters the ornaments that decorate the house. The shattering of the ornaments is symbolic – it is marks the 'breaking of the gods' and when 'Things started to fall apart…' (*Ph*, p. 11).

It is evident here that every time people start or enter into a conversation, their face needs are on display. Both the initiator of the conversation and the respondent put on a face that is inherently intended to protect their personal needs. Either the initiator or the respondent may have a need to adopt an act that threatens the composure of the other person in the conversation or that is intended to protect their self-image.

In the case under study here, both Papa and Jaja are trying to protect 'face', that is, their self-image through their utterances, voice modulation and non-verbal actions. They are influenced by their relationship of father and son with the underlying expectations of obedience to authority from the one and the desire for freedom from the other. Papa expects Jaja to obey his authority while Jaja desires to be free to act independently. Arundale (2010) observes that "in everyday talk, participants achieve face by interpreting either their relational connectedness or their separateness as co-constituted in the talk". This means that participants in an interaction have their relationships in mind as they talk. They may choose the face to put on according to: i. whom they are interacting with, ii. the time, place, occasion

of interaction iii. the subject of interaction iv. and their temperaments thereof. This is what Spencer-Oatey and Zegarac (2002: p. 80) refer to as "underlying socially based assessments, beliefs and interactional principles among interactants". Here, Papa sought to extract a positive response from Jaja through a face that is reflective of their relational connectedness – that of father and son. But Jaja extrapolates the threat in Papa's 'quiet' request. The narrator brings to the notice of the reader the face constitution of Jaja: *Fear had darkened Jaja's eyes to the colour of coal tar, but he looked Papa in the face now* (*Ph*, p. 15). The fear in Jaja surges from the aura of timidity that pervades the family but which he is now fighting away. Jaja actually shocks Papa with his 'bravery' or effrontery as Papa loses control both psychologically and physically swaying from side to side.

As Mama walks into the altercation, she undertakes to douse the rising tension. She utters what sounds like an advice to the dumbfounded on-looking Kambili by saying, "*Nne, ngwa*. Go and change" (*Ph,* p.16). Mama adopts a face-saving strategy, an off-record act, by her statement directed at the dormant participant. As she further informs Papa that "Your tea is getting cold" in the same breath and without reference to the incident, she allays the mutually face threatening acts between Papa and Jaja.

Mey's (2001: p. 68) Communicative Principle states partly that people talk with the intention of communicating something to somebody, that when people want to communicate, what they do communicate depends on what they can communicate, given their circumstances, and on what they must communicate, given their partner's expectations (Mey, p. 70). The participants in the exchanges above are deploying tactics to communicate what they must, given their circumstances and their partners' expectations – Papa wants to sustain his authority; Jaja wants to break the authority; Mama wants to maintain the peace; and Kambili in her muteness respects the status quo.

Therefore, participants in a communication are unavoidably influenced by circumstances and intentions in their deployment of face. Their face constitution is tailored toward the achievement of their illocutionary goals. Having just had the altercation and now on their dining table, with the newly produced juice to drink and comment on, an opportunity is given for reconciliation or so some of the participants here think. Quickly taking a sip of the juice, the hitherto dormant participant, Kambili, offers a compliment: "It's very good, Papa", followed by more compliments by Mama: "It tastes like fresh cashew", continuing, "Just like white wine" (*Ph*, p. 21). With these,

the speakers are adopting a positive face to allay the threat in the situation. But their illocutionary goal – to placate Papa – fails because Papa would rather hear Jaja's compliment which he does not get being instead threatened by Jaja's silence. Thus, one can deduce here that silence can become a face threatening act. In fact, the claim is that almost every speech act, including non-verbal ones such as silence, has the potential to threaten a face.

According to an online source:

> Face threatening acts include acts other than spoken or written. Very often we can threaten others' face by a look, an expression or some other non-verbal communication. Staring at someone is often perceived as an FTA for no other reason than it can be so unnerving. (www.http://sdhanel.com/pragmatics/ftactsesp.html)

Jaja's threatening silence elicits an obvious FTA from Papa's question: "Jaja, have you not shared a drink with us, *gbo*? Have you no words in your mouth?" (*Ph*, p. 21). Jaja's response accentuates the initial threat to Papa's face: "*Mba*, there are no words in my mouth". Jaja may be seen to have completed his cycle of threat to Papa's face on this occasion, registering his growing defiance of fatherly authority. The narrative voice observes that: *There was a shadow clouding Papa's eyes, a shadow that had been in Jaja's eyes. Fear. It had left Jaja's eyes and entered Papa's eyes* (*Ph*, p. 21). Observably, in many situations, one face threatening act begets another: there is a chain of such acts in the form of utterances and non-verbal actions in this scenario. Having defiantly said his mind, he walks away from the dining room, an action that he was taking for the first time. Being an FTA, this action takes a perlocutionary effect on Papa, the target and on the other somewhat passive participant, Kambili. Papa gets up and slumps back on the seat while Kambili chokes and begins coughing. The reaction of Kambili demonstrates the fact that FTAs can impact on those to whom they are not outright directed but are part of the communication context.

The FTAs by Jaja are pronounced because there are coming from an almost obsequious child to an authoritarian father for the first time but this shows that there will always be a turning-point in the nature of relationships and interactions among people. Interactants begin to re-evaluate the relational

variables between them as they get along. Circumstances, actions and reactions between them over time begin to influence their deployment of speech or use of FTAs. Feelings of mutual respect or disrespect, friendliness or antagonism, trust or mistrust, admiration or jealousy, as the case may be, can develop and begin to determine the nature of their interactional space and the kinds of utterances and gestures between them.

Agreed that there are various forms of FTAs, from bald-on-record to off-record, in everyday communication which "by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 65), often, a domineering participant can almost always constitute the threat to others' positive or negative face needs. This is the case with Papa where he dominates the communicational space in the family with instructions, directives, orders, questioning, pontification etc, until the turning point on Palm Sunday. Instances abound where his utterances are bald-on-record FTAs. Ugochukwu (2017: p. 180) thinks that bald-on-record FTAs are "used among intimates, family and friends". When Kambili takes an impressive second position in her class terminal examination instead of her usual first, rather than encourage her, she is pointedly cowed with bald-on-record face threatening acts by Papa who takes her to school to know Chinwe Jideze, the girl who came first:

> "Where is Chinwe Jideze?" Papa asked...
> "She is the girl in the middle," [Kambili said].
> "Look at her," Papa said. "How many heads does she have?"
> "One."
> "Look in the mirror." "Look in the mirror". "How many heads do you have, *gbo*?"
> "One." (*Ph*, p. 54)

This child is completely disoriented and intimidated by her father's threats to her self-esteem. The disorientation comes to reflect in her interactions with her mates in school and elsewhere. She loses her selfhood and is withdrawn causing her peers to see her as a '...backyard snob because [she doesn't] talk to anybody...' (*Ph*, p. 58). They do not realize that she always has 'bubbles of air' in her throat 'keeping the words back, letting only a stutter at best' (*Ph*, p. 153) as a result of her disorientation.

The face threatening acts from Papa are a combination of word-choice, prosody, language choice (he chooses to speak English or Igbo depending on

the level of indignation), paralanguage and brutalization. He whips wife/mother and children (see *Purple hibiscus*, p. 110, p. 153, p. 201, p. 216, p. 253, etc). His brutalization of his family is to the point of insanity leaving them threatened, timid, injured, dumbfounded and unable to hold a normal conversation. Therefore, in almost all their communication acts, their (Mama, Kambili, Jaja) faces are vulnerable, placing them at the receiving end of the threats from others. With Amaka, her cousin and age-mate, Kambili mostly mumbles weak responses to her bald-on-record face threatening acts:

> "Is this how you wash plates in your house?" She [Amaka] asked. "Or is plate washing not included in your fancy schedule?" (*Ph*, pp. 148 – 149).

Kambili's face being threatened by the questioning, she timidly offers no answer but Amaka's composure is equally threatened having been angered as her non-verbal actions show: she glared at Kambili for a moment, walked away and said nothing else until in company of others. Thus, while a speaker may threaten a hearer, a hearer can also unsettle a speaker in the process even by a disappointing reaction which may be called perlocutionary failure. Thomas (1995: p. 174) has noted that silence or 'opting out choice' where there is an expectation of a response can be in itself a massive FTA. Amaka's conclusion about Kambili and Jaja is that they are abnormal – "Something is not right with them" (*Ph*, p. 150). Hearing this said of them aggravates the threats to Kambili's already battered selfhood (face).

In what seemed to be a joke, Ade Coker, the editor of Papa's newspaper, had observed and told Papa of the possible danger of Kambili and Jaja's taciturnity nay timidity:

> "Imagine what the *Standard* would be if we were all quiet" (*Ph*, p. 66).

This is an instance of negative politeness. The speaker indirectly undermines the integrity of the upbringing these children are exposed to by the addressee. Because the face of the addressee (Papa) is threatened by this utterance, he does not laugh over the seeming joke along with others. The relational variables between Papa and Ade Coker offer the latter the ground to make the observation in the way he did.

Interlocutors of equally domineering dispositions would freely deploy face threatening acts (FTAs) in order to establish each other's position. For

instance, Papa and Aunty Ifeoma, his lecturer-younger sister, are both domineering characters. According to the narrative voice, Aunty Ifeoma spoke in a flippant tone that '*did not seem to recognize that it was Papa, that he was different, special*' (*Ph*, p. 85). She calls Papa by name almost irreverently each time they chat. When people call others by their names as they converse or argue, they try to wear a mask of superiority or equality with them:

> "Eugene, let the children come out with us!" Aunty Ifeoma sounded irritated; her voice was slightly raised. "Is it not Christmas that we are celebrating, eh?..."
> "Okay. They can go with you, but you know I do not want my children near anything ungodly. If you drive past an *mmuo*, keep the windows up."
> "I have heard you, Eugene," Aunty Ifeoma said, with an exaggerated formality (*Ph*, pp. 85 - 86).

In other instances:

> "Did you want the rice to get cold, Eugene?" (*Ph*, p. 104).
> "Eugene, you must let the children come and visit us in Nsukka," Aunty Ifeoma said. "We don't have a mansion, but at least they can get to know their cousins" (*Ph*, p. 105).
> "Eugene, I asked you not to come".
> "Eugene, our father has fallen asleep".
> "Ifeoma, did you call a priest?"
> "Is that all you can say, eh, Eugene? Have you nothing else to say, *gbo*? Our father has died! Has your head turned upside down?..." (*Ph*, pp.194 - 195)

Questioning and requesting for information are generally seen as FTAs because the addressee is expected to satisfy the speaker's illocutionary need. Nonetheless, in return, the addressee can reject to meet the need of the speaker thereby performing another face threatening act of 'saying no' in the process. In many instances of their interaction, Aunty Ifeoma fearlessly places Papa at the receiving end. She fundamentally disagrees with Papa's principles and she is unequivocal about this through her deployment of FTAs. Consequently, each of the two puts on a face to browbeat the other. They adopt verbal and non-verbal acts including word-choice, posture, movement, tone etc. Mondala (2009) notes that, "in face to face conversations, sequences of utterances are characterized by intense body activities in space, through which participants achieve their social and spatial convergence". Aunty Ifeoma keeps a straight face, gesticulates assuredly, Papa looks around, moves uncertainly, and so on.

In addition to her tone and 'intense body activity', Aunty Amaka sometimes uses explicit performative verbs to emphasize her stance. Discussing how things are at the university in Nsukka with Papa, she accuses him of not calling her on the phone to know. In the course of the discussion, the following utterances are made:

> "Have you ever picked up the phone and called me to ask me that question, eh, Eugene? Will your hands if wither away if you pick up the phone one day and call your sister, *gbo*?"
> "I did call you, Ifeoma".
> "…I **ask** you – how long ago was that?" (*Purple hibiscus,* p.106). *Emphasis mine*

Aunty Ifeoma's utterances given above have an explicit performative verb 'ask'. Before she utters her invectives, her 'face constitution' reveals her indignation. Her tone bears resoluteness and though Papa makes no further response to that, the perlocutionary effect of Aunty Ifeoma's utterances is felt as a long, tense moment envelops everybody in the setting. Papa's 'face' is that of self-mockery which Arundale (2010) says a participant takes on for overcoming momentary embarrassment. Papa pragmatically ends the discussion on that matter by making no further argument in a face-saving strategy. His action is a concession which is useful to relationships. Adegbite (2005: p. 1476) notes that: "Concession is … a vital pragmatic feature, a kind of tact that can be employed to enhance successful communication where the parties in an interaction have strong opposing interests".

By using explicit performatives, a speaker cows a hearer into submission preventing them from maintaining their own face in the conversation. Thomas (1985: p. 767) posits that: "The dominant participant effectively denies his/her interlocutor the possibility of escaping into indirectness and 'pragmatic ambivalence' of leaving the precise illocutionary intent of an utterance diplomatically unclear". Papa does what Thomas (1985) observes to his family as evidenced in some of their interactions cited above.

Irrespective, even without the explicit performative verbs, a dominant participant's utterances come forth forcefully bearing on the hearers. Papa's and Aunty Ifeoma's utterances without the verbs are often face threatening because they dominate their environments just like Amaka's in her interactions with the withdrawn Kambili. The sparing use of performative verbs affirms the fact that we need not always use them except, of course,

the felicity conditions compel their use. Fromkin and Rodman (1983: p.189) aver that:

> "Language is full of implicit promises, toasts, warnings and so on. *I will marry you* is an implicit performance of a promise and, under appropriate circumstances, is as much a promise as *I promise I will marry you*".

Our understanding of the pragmatic factors and felicity conditions informs us to be implicit or explicit in our speech acts. In other words, our awareness of the context of utterance is acutely important to our performance of and reaction to speech acts. Indeed, there is a preponderance of indirect speech acts in our daily use of language which however can constitute FTAs. Indirect as some utterances may be, they bear the force of directness since speech generally performs an act (Searle, 1975). According to Leech (1983:p.181): "The performative, far from being something which underlies every single utterance, is something highly unusual in itself; it occurs, understandably enough, when a speaker needs to define his speech act as belonging to a particular category". And Mey (2001:p.109) declares:

> Since performativity is all over the verbal spectrum (albeit primarily residing in a small set of institutionalized verbs), we clearly do not need a (particular) SAV to perform a (speech) act, and in many cases, we cannot even properly perform the very speech act that is 'officially' expressed by the verb by making explicit mention of the appropriate verb.

Papa's utterances without performative verbs achieve their illocutionary goals on his hearers, members of his family in particular. Even when he says "Pass the salt, please" (*Ph*, p. 20), a sort of plea, the utterance bears the illocutionary force that makes his two children plunge toward the salt shaker. ("Pass the salt, please" by Papa calls to mind the recurring illustration of speech act types by many linguists including Searle, 1975; Leech, 1983; Fromkin and Rodman, 1983; Levinson, 1983; Palmer, 1996; Mey, 2001; Spencer-Oatey and Zegarac, 2002; Yule, 2003 etc. They have separately given and analyzed 'Can you pass the salt?', 'Pass the salt!', 'Pass the salt, will you?' etc). Papa's "Pass the salt, please" is a direct speech act requesting for action, not so much a plea as far as his family being used to his directing is concerned. Their reaction is to a command. Mey (2001: p. 75) points out that

in a family situation, bald imperatives such as that are frequent which corroborates Ugochukwu's (2017) thought referred to earlier. This is especially so where family communication is regimented as with the Achike's in the story here.

Conclusion

The numerous communication acts by the characters that people Adichie's *Purple hibiscus* show that face threatening acts are necessarily a part of human linguistic behaviour. Language use can hardly be devoid of them. The characters' utterances at different settings confirm the unavoidability of these acts in human interactions as many linguists, in particular, pragmaticians have observed. The characters consciously and unconsciously adopt strategies which undermine the face of their co-participants in conversations or which are intended to project/protect their own image. It is conscious when they have illocutionary goals to achieve such as to extract a certain response or reaction from their hearer(s), to sway them to their side, to attain freedom of action etc. The speech acts which reflect this consciousness include orders, directives, instructions, advice, reprimands by dominant participants. Others include refusals, objections, silences, dormancy etc. It is unconscious when in reaction to an initial face threatening act, hearers make utterances or use non-verbal action to protect themselves or to return the threat; or when an otherwise innocuous locution such as advising or thanking or complimenting turns out to damage the face of the hearer. These instances have been found in the communicative interactions among the characters of *Purple hibiscus*.

The face that participants in a conversation put on is determined by such factors as their relationship with each other, their intentions and temperaments in the engagement, the interactional space and other socially relevant conditions. As head of family, Papa's obsession with rectitude and Catholicism and the reverence by his wife and children for him make his pronouncements at home face threatening most of the time. Wife and children would often adopt various politeness strategies in their communication with him until the opening of Jaja's eyes to freedom of action. The deployment of FTAs is different between other characters judging from their relational connectedness. For instance, Kambili shudders at what she considers the effrontery of Aunty Ifeoma in the fearless way she speaks to Papa; she squirms at the flow of interaction both among Ifeoma's children and with outsiders.

The occurrence of FTAs in communication among the characters of this text is a reflection of social discourse in the real world upon which the story is based. It reflects the nature of communication due to relationship, familiarity, position, environment, the dialectics of self-protection and the target of illocutionary goals. Communication abilities and strategies become a response to prevailing social circumstances and they are likely to be adjusted as things change, may be from timid to vociferous and vice-versa.

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