PRAGMATIC ACTS USED AS CONFLICT DEPICTION MECHANISMS IN SELECTED BIODUN STEPHEN'S FILMS ON FAMILY DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

Conflict, one of the dominant features of family discourse, is portrayed in Nollywood films as covert and overt actions. Previous linguistic studies on family conflicts focused on gender dominance, ideological differences and spiritual issues as major causes of family conflicts with little attention paid to how pragmatic use of language triggers conflicts in the family. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate pragmatic acts used as triggers of family conflicts in selected Biodun Stephen's films. Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory served as the theoretical framework. Data were garnered from two selected Biodun Stephen's films: Ehi's Bitters and Sista. The films, which have twenty instances of family conflicts, were purposively selected because of their high reflection of scenes depicting family conflicts. Findings reveal that four depictions of family conflict – verbal, physical, sexual and financial are predominantly foregrounded in the films. These depictions of family conflict are necessitated by six (6) pragmatic acts functioning as triggers of conflict within the Nigerian family context. These pragmatic acts are: insulting, mocking, threatening, criticising, ridiculing, and apologising. These acts constitute the linguistic elements that prompt and/or enhance family conflicts as they are embodiments of both verbal and non-verbal pragmatic cues. Embedded in the verbal cues are prosodic features (intonation and emphatic stress), reference (REF), and metaphor (MPH); the non-verbal cues are embedded by physical acts and psychological acts. Pragmatic inferences are largely realised through these (non)verbal cues premised on shared situational knowledge (SSK) between the interlocutors.

Keywords: Family conflicts, pragmatic acts, verbal cues, non-verbal cues, films

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is one of the dominant and inevitable features of family discourse that is often portrayed in Nollywood films as covert and overt actions. Therefore, family conflict is often than not the physical or verbal maltreatment of individuals from a family such that causes agony, misery or injury (Aihie, 2009). It encompasses any abusive treatment of one family member by another which may include verbal insult or assault, battering and other forms of physical assault; consequently, violating the law of basic human rights (Erosa, et al*., 2010*).

The family which is a microcosm and an integral institution of the larger society is to a large extent believed to have come into being so as to foster the friendly relationship that exists between two opposite sexes. Specifically, 'at creation, the family (union of man and woman) was made to be a stable institution where parents (father and mother) and children would live in peace and harmony and fulfil the purpose and injunctions of God' (George and Ukpong, 2013:52). Unfortunately, this friendly relationship is sometimes hampered and jeopardised due to a wide range of factors which could be cultural, hereditary, cheating, financial, linguistic and spiritual factors. These aforementioned factors nonetheless can be said to be the remote causes of family crises of which the linguistic factor could act as both remote and immediate force contributing to family crisis.

Against this backdrop, previous linguistic studies on (family) conflicts such as Tannen (2007), Obi and Ozumba (2007), Mafoya (2013) Lorena (2015), Oluremi (2015), Osunbade and Ononye (2017), Kader and Raman (2018), and Olajimbiti (2018) have, however, focused much attention on gender dominance, ideological differences and spiritual factors as major causes of family conflicts. These studies have not adequately paid attention to how pragmatic

entailments of language use in family discourse create, sustain and resolve conflict within the Nigerian family context. Therefore, the inadequacies of capturing real life family interactions have, therefore, limited this study to investigating pragmatic acts deployed in Biodun Stephen's films on family conflicts, how the pragmatic acts function as triggers of family conflicts and how they contribute to the overall meaning in family discourse.

2. Review of linguistic studies on family conflicts

Research findings within the ambit of discourse and pragmatics have shown that management of language use can foster social harmony and national integration (Ogwudile, 2019). This by extension implies that proper management of language use in family interaction can make the society at large a relatively peaceful domain; as family is said to be the microcosm of the larger society (Ugal and Orim 2009). Incidentally, extant studies on family conflicts have not sufficiently examined how language use in family discourse necessitates family conflicts.

For instance, Tannen (2007) opines that family conflict is necessitated based on the shifts between two frameworks upon which family interactions are premised. From the perspectives of Tannen (2007), the roles and system of interaction in family discourse can be seen to shift between two frameworks: a socialisation framework in which individuals enjoy each other's company, which is egalitarian; and a care setting, where parents take the position of caring for and guiding their children, which is hierarchical. Tannen (2007) discusses how these two frameworks are increasingly at odds as parents may revert to a caregiving framework while children grow up and want to be treated as equals (within socialisation). Obviously, the opinion on Tannen is drawn from the sociological perspective rather than linguistics.

In the same vein, Oluremi (2015) conducted an in-depth investigation into the pervasive cases, underlying causes, far-reaching effects, and effective management strategies for domestic violence against women in Nigeria. Her study revealed that jealousy, psychological traits, social stress, social learning, and power struggles are the primary causes of rivalry and violence within the Nigerian family unit.

Oluremi's research underscores the significance of addressing the socio-psychological triggers of family conflicts. To mitigate these issues, her study proposes that comprehensive and extensive premarital counseling should be provided to intending couples, equipping them with effective strategies for managing their marital relationships. Furthermore, she advocates for the establishment and funding of counseling centers at the community and local government levels, staffed by professional counselors who can offer support to both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.

While Oluremi's study provides valuable insights into the socio-psychological triggers of family conflicts, it is notable that her research focuses primarily on these aspects, without exploring linguistic factors that may contribute to these conflicts. This oversight highlights the need for further research that integrates linguistic analysis into the study of family conflicts.

Similarly, Kader and Raman (2018) argue that family conflicts are often precipitated by psychological triggers, such as anger and frustration. Their research emphasizes the importance of addressing these underlying psychological factors in order to mitigate the incidence and severity of family conflicts. However, like Oluremi's study, their research does not consider the potential role of linguistic factors in contributing to these conflicts.

The omission of linguistic factors in these studies underscores the need for a more comprehensive approach to understanding family conflicts, one that incorporates insights from linguistics, psychology, and sociology. By adopting a multidisciplinary perspective, researchers can develop a more nuanced understanding of the complex factors that contribute to family conflicts, ultimately informing the development of more effective strategies for conflict resolution and prevention.

For Obi and Ozumba (2007), their study found out that family conflicts are largely stimulated by emotional (re)actions. This major finding can be said to be an aspect of non-verbal cues which prompts verbal and physical conflict as variants of conflict in the family. To this length, Obi and Ozumba's study has focused on non-verbal (an aspect of) linguistic cues stimulating

family conflicts. Another linguistic based study on family conflict is the work of Lorena (2015). Lorena explicitly spelt out the linguistic elements of conflict inherent in family discourse some of which are:

1. Conflict based upon the clumsy use of over emotionalised and highly judgmental language.
2. Conflict based upon the lack of proper appreciation and praise.
3. Conflict based upon the misuse of humour.
4. Conflict based on the unwillingness to move or compromise.
5. Conflict based upon vague, ambiguous language leading to avoidable miscommunications.
6. Conflict based on disagreements over priorities.
7. Conflict based upon character clashes

Osunbade and Ononye (2017) conducted a study that examined fictional conflict discourses in two Nigerian novels, diverging from the focus on family conflicts depicted in Nollywood films. Their research revealed that pragmatic inference plays a crucial role in uncovering implicit meanings embedded within three primary types of conflict: domestic, religious, and ethnic-based conflicts. Notably, these conflicts are intensified by the strategic employment of both figurative and non-figurative expressions.

Osunbade and Ononye's findings underscore the significance of pragmatic inference in deciphering the nuances of conflict discourses. By analyzing the linguistic patterns and expressions used in these novels, they demonstrated how pragmatic inference facilitates the comprehension of implicit meanings, which might otherwise remain obscure.

In a related context, Olajimbiti's (2018) study adopted a context-driven approach, focusing on the representation of family values in Nollywood films. His research identified specific pragmatic acts that arise from expressions of family values, offering insights into the ways in which these values are communicated and negotiated within the cinematic narrative.

Olajimbiti's study contributes to our understanding of how family values are constructed and represented in Nollywood films, highlighting the role of pragmatic acts in shaping these representations. By examining the linguistic and cinematic strategies employed in these films, Olajimbiti's research provides a nuanced exploration of the complex ways in which family values are expressed and negotiated in Nigerian popular culture. While Osunbade and Ononye's study focused on fictional conflict discourses in Nigerian novels, Olajimbiti's research centered on the representation of family values in Nollywood films. Together, these studies demonstrate the importance of considering the linguistic and cultural contexts in which conflicts and family values are represented and negotiated. By adopting a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating insights from linguistics, cultural studies, and film studies, researchers can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics underlying family conflicts and values in Nigerian society.

These acts include: discipline, respect, kindness and evocation of sympathy. This to Olajimbiti could promote family and cultural values; thus, resuscitating cherished Nigerian sociocultural values. To an extent, the paper, being premised on linguistic approach has only focused generally on family values rather than family conflicts. It, therefore, becomes expedient to investigate how pragmatic acts are deployed to perform pragmatic functions that necessitate conflicts in family discourse.

3. Pragmatic act theory

The Pragmatic act theory is a linguistic analytical framework that "attempts to explain what the speaker means by performing linguistic, extra-linguistic and psychological acts in discourse (Emike, 2015:21). In other words, it is a theoretical framework that is used to investigate what a speaker means which transcends sentence meaning. Odebunmi and Unuabonah (2014) also corroborate that the Pragmatic act theory is a social-cultural theory which emphasises the priority of socio-cultural and social factors in meaning construction and comprehension. It is therefore "a theoretical framework which exposes the strengths and weaknesses of the existing pragmatic theories such as Speech act theory and methodologies which are applied

in the analysis of discourse" (Emike, 2015:21). The theory is divided into two parts as shown in figure 1 below:
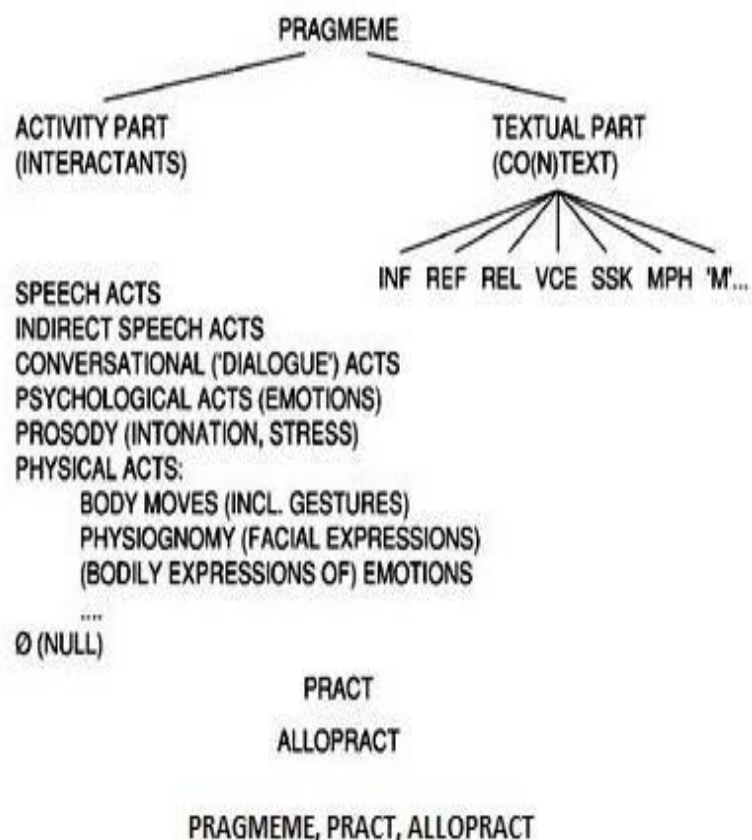
Figure 1: Mey's Pragmatic Act Model
Source: Mey (2001:222)

The activity component pertains to the roles of the discourse participants, while the textual component pertains to the contextual variables that affect discourse situations. According to Mey, the theory focuses on the environmental limitations that determine what can and cannot be said in communicative events (Emike, 2015:22). As seen in Figure 1, Osisanwo and Akintaro (2024) emphasise that Inference (INF), Reference (REF), Relevance (REL), Voice (VCE), Shared Situation Knowledge (SSK), Metaphor (MPH) and Metapragmatics ('M') are what Mey (2001:222) refers to as 'contextual features that influence communication'. Mey (2001) buttresses that INF means inference that a speech recipient makes in a conversation. REF means a linguistic channel by which a speaker establishes reference. REL is premised on how significant a speaker's act (verbal or non-verbal) is to the topic being discoursed. VCE is the component which caters for the speaker's voice pitch. SSK means shared situational knowledge that exists between speakers. MPH caters for metaphorical expressions embedded with pragmatic meanings. 'M' means a 'metapragmatic joker' (a constituent that directs the interlocutor's attention to something happening on the metapragmatic plane). These components of Mey's textual part enrich the interpretation of data garnered for this study. They serve as contextual markers through which presupposition is made and speaker's intention is known (Osisanwo and Akintaro, 2024).

This study places importance on both the activity and textual components since it seeks to determine the speaker's intention through reference, shared knowledge, inference, and other items in the activity component. This framework serves as a linguistic tool to help interpret the speaker's intended meaning, as Capone (2005) argues that comprehending pragmeme depends on the societal dimension of utterance interpretation. To this end, this theory is sufficient to mark out pragmatic acts deployed in Biodun Stephen's films on family conflicts.

4. METHODOLOGY

Data for the study are garnered from two purposively selected Biodun Stephen's films – *Ehi's Bitters* and *Sista*. The two films which belong to the family film genre are selected because of their copious reflection of conflicts in the context of Nigerian homes. Altogether, the films have twenty (20) instances that depict issues relating to family conflicts. Similarly, the choice of films for this study is premised on the position of Christine (2016:194) that "the Nigerian home videos are reflections of the happenings in the Nigerian homes and the society at large". Biodun Stephens is indeed a renowned film producer, internationally recognized for her outstanding contributions to the Nigerian film industry (Christine, 2016). Her work has gained global recognition, and she has been celebrated for promoting Nigerian culture and storytelling through her films. The pragmatic approach utilised in the work is grounded in Mey's (2001) Pragmatic act theory while a descriptive research design was adopted. The predominant goal of investigating language use in the selected films is to examine how pragmatic acts function as triggers of conflicts in family discourse.

5. Data Analysis

Predominantly, four (4) depictions of family conflict – verbal, physical, sexual and financial are foregrounded in the films. While verbal and physical conflicts are overtly based, sexual and financial are covertly based. These depictions of family conflict are necessitated by six (6) pragmatic acts functioning as triggers of conflict within the Nigerian family context. These pragmatic acts are: insulting, mocking, threatening, resenting, ridiculing, and apologising. Apparently, these acts constitute the linguistic elements that prompt or enhance family conflicts as they are embodiments of both verbal and non-verbal pragmatic cues. The pragmatic acts (practs) are, therefore, examined below:

5.1 Insulting pract used by mother to reprimand

To a large extent, it is cultural for most African mothers to deploy insulting pract as part of their parenting measures to reprimand or discipline a child. This could be expressed verbally or through physiognomic acts (facial expression). Verbal form of family conflict is, therefore, realised when the chastised family member is unable to tolerate the insult, thereby, giving a counter reaction as explicated in excerpt 1 below:

> **Excerpt 1**
> Background: The conversation that ensues below is between a single mother (SM) and her daughter (Soje). Prior to the conversation, Soje had lied to her mother's suitor that she (Soje) is a maid. She believes telling a lie will help save her mother's marital relationship. Incidentally, the suitor gets to know the truth and then puts an end to the relationship. SM therefore deploys insulting pract to reprimand Soje.
> 1. SM: you this girl have done it again…*OGBANJE* girl
> 2. SOJE: mummy, what have I done this time around? (sobbing)
> 3. SM: you are the source of my problem. Is it because I have a child, I shouldn't have a man in my life? Ah, Soje…God will punish you. FOOL! God will punish you, God will punish you.
> 4. SOJE: mummy please, please
> 5. SM: you have chased him away again. You this evil child; *Ogbanje*. EVIL CHILD! THAT IS WHO YOU ARE. GET OUT. I DON'T WANT TO SEE YOU.

6. SOJE: (summoning courage) Enough is enough! If you insist that I leave, I would leave but don't bother to look for me.

<div align="right">
Source: *Ehi's Bitters*
Time: 08:20-08:55
</div>

The opening parts (turns 1 and 2) of the conversation above presuppose a shared situational knowledge between the two interlocutors. The mother's statement 'you this girl have done it again…' implies that there has been excess reoccurrence of similar incident, this which is corroborated by the daughter's response 'what have I done this time around?' The pragmatic entailment of this response shows how uncomfortable and insulting Soje (the daughter) has always been anytime her mother accuses her or shift blames on her (as a way of reprimanding the daughter). To complement further, the mother's preponderant use of metaphors (MPH): '*ogbanje*' (meaning evil spirit that would deliberately plague a family with misfortune), 'fool' and 'evil child' are insulting enough to trigger a counter verbal banter in turn 6 where Soje says: 'Enough is enough! If you insist that I leave, I would leave but don't bother to look for me'. This therefore implies that excess accusation coupled with derogatory metaphors in family discourse is enough to pract insult which thereof triggers family conflict.

5.2 Mocking pract used by wife to prompt financial conflict
One of the regular depictions of family conflict is financial conflict. From the data garnered, such conflict is to a large extent preponderant within middle class families that are not financially buoyant. In the African culture, the husband is to a large extent culturally constrained to take financial responsibilities of the family. The husband, however, makes an inference of mockery in a family discourse that centres on his incapability to perform his financial duties. Excerpt 2 below complements this:

Excerpt 2
Background: A very young couple who got married out of wedlock finds it hard to cater for the needs of the family comprising the husband, the wife and a two year old kid. The wife who has been highly supportive and forbearing has just informed her husband about her pregnancy test which came out positive.
1. HUSBAND: so, how did it go?
2. WIFE: (hands him a paper) here it is…I am pregnant
3. HUSBAND: ah ah…how? How come?
4. WIFE: what do you mean by how come?
5. HUSBAND: but I have been pulling out now…
6. WIFE: so, who now says pulling out means hundred percent guarantee? You don't have to deny the baby. In fact, that's a very big insult on my character o. that's a very very big insult on my character, and I won't take that, Fola!
7. HUSBAND: okay, SORRY, SORRY!
8. WIFE: sorry for yourself!
9. HUSBAND: but I don't need this now (0.3) we…we don't need this now. I have a professional exam I'm preparing for; I will go for service in one month. A baby does not fit into this picture at all. We already have one that we are struggling to take…
10. WIFE: Hmm hmm hmm…**NO NO**…Fola wait. YOU MEAN THAT THE CHILD I AM STRUGGLING TO TAKE CARE OF. Feeding you, the baby and me. PAYING FOR YOUR SCHOOL FEES (complementing her verbal cues with bodily moves as seen in plate 1)

11. HUSBAND: (infers mockery as seen in plate 1) wait wait wait… so, I have not been doing anything? I have not been doing anything *abi*? So I am useless *abi*? (Following this scene, the husband decided to abandon the family and look for a greener pasture).

Source: *Sista*
Time: 19:10-21:23

The conversation above explicates how financial strain necessitates mood disorder which thereof prompts financial conflict (as an aspect of family conflicts). Largely, it is considered marital blessing to have a child or children. By implication, the couple is expected to be happy with the pregnancy test which came out positive. The husband who knows the financial implications would rather see no succinct reason for his wife to get pregnant, thereby, shifting the blame on the wife through indirect speech – 'ah ah…how?' and 'but I have been pulling out now…' in turn 3 and 5 respectively. These statements are indirect ways to tell the wife that he (the husband) is not responsible for the pregnancy and that the pregnancy is not wanted, therefore, she should get rid of it. The wife however, feels uncomfortable with her husband's excuse. She therefore, persuades her husband in turn 6 (so, who now says pulling out means hundred percent guarantee? You don't have to deny the baby) to rather accept the pregnancy. The husband, rather not yielding to the persuasive strategy, had to clearly make his true intention known in turn 10. By so doing, the wife becomes confrontational by raising her voice (VCE) and by complementing her utterances with physical acts (see plate 1) that threaten the husband's face – '**NO NO**…Fola wait. YOU MEAN THAT THE CHILD I AM STRUGGLING TO TAKE CARE OF. Feeding you, the baby and me. PAYING FOR YOU SCHOOL FEES' (turn 11). The husband, in turn 11, however, infers a mocking pract from his wife's confrontational statement. He believes his wife has considered him useless because of his inability to perform his financial duty as husband. Consequently, the husband absconds from the house in pursuance of a greener pasture. It is therefore, suffice to say that the conversational act from turn 9 to 11 is such that is dominated by pragmatic prompters of (financial) family conflict.

5.3 Threatening pract used by step-father to instil fear leading to sexual conflict
Threats are considered inevitable in everyday human interaction. It is a negative expression of intent to inflict pain on an individual. A threatening act is capable of undermining one's physical and emotional safety and could be actualised through spoken and or unspoken words. A threatening act in the family context therefore implies a situation where a family member makes use of commissive speech act to frighten other family member if such family member failed to do what he or she wants. It is a detrimental force that breaks family ties. This is so because the individual that is being threatened believes that such home has become an insecure arena for him or her. Usually, the utterances of the character (who is making a threat) is preponderantly marked with a pronoun (I or You) coupled with a modal auxiliary verb or 'do' verbs. Also, utterances embellished with threatening act is often accompanied with a face-threatening act and flexion body moves as explicated in Biodun Stephen's *Ehi's Bitters*:

Excerpt 3

Background: A stepfather (SF) has made several futile sexual advances to his stepdaughter (SD). He, therefore, decides to induce the stepdaughter by using threatening acts which results in sexual conflict as the stepdaughter tries to prevent her stepfather from doing so.

1. SF: You can run from me but YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO FIND ANYWHERE TO HIDE.
2. SD: (fidgeting) please, please sir.
3. SF: (Becomes confrontational as he pushes SD) NOW, listen… if you allow me, I will make it quick and it won't pain you. For your information, there is no one here to rescue you.
4. SD: (Tries to restrain him by pushing SF as seen in plate 2)

Source: *Ehi's Bitters*
Time: 54:04-55:09

The opening part of the conversation above begins with a verbal act showing threat – 'You can run from me but YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO FIND ANYWHERE TO HIDE' (turn 1). It presupposes that there is a shared situational knowledge between SF and SD as seen in the perlocutionary act of SD in turn 2. By implication, SF has deployed a threatening verbal act to begin the conversation because he believes he can only get what he wants by making threats as other diplomatic strategies have proven futile. Consequently, the conversation becomes confrontational (turns 3 and 4) and as such, resulting in sexual conflict realised through physical acts as seen in plate 2 and commissive speech act **– '**if you allow me, **I will** make it quick…there is no one here to rescue you'. Eventually, SF is able to have canal knowledge of SD as against her wish. Subsequently, SD develops hatred for SF.

5.4 Resenting pract used by child to sustain family conflict

Resentment is a profound and acrid emotional response that arises when an individual perceives that they have been treated unjustly or unfairly. This sentiment can manifest in various contexts, including family discourse, where it can have a significant impact on interpersonal dynamics and relationships. In the context of family discourse, resentment often emerges as a perlocutionary effect, which refers to the emotional or behavioral consequences that arise from an utterance or action. In this case, the family member who feels resentful,

typically the subordinate, may respond with a strong counter-reaction, characterized by high voice pitch, emotional outburst, and negative physiognomic acts.

These reactions can create a toxic atmosphere within the family, leading to further conflict, misunderstandings, and damage to relationships. Understanding the dynamics of resentment in family discourse is essential for developing effective communication strategies, conflict resolution techniques, and emotional intelligence, all of which can help mitigate the negative effects of resentment and foster a more harmonious and supportive family environment. This pract is explicated in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 4

Background: A single-mother (SM) who had once maltreated her child paid the child (Soje) a visit after many years. The child's response to her mother's visit is such that is dominated with resenting acts of warning and retribution.

1. SM: My chi…
2. SOJE: DON'T YOU DEAR FINISH THAT WORD (0.2)…because if you do, I will SLAP you. YES, I will slap you. I don't know how you found this place but leave here and never set your feet here again because if you do, I WILL TURN EVERY PART OF YOU INTO PIECES. (She complements her verbal act with resenting physiognomic and physical acts (pointing of index finger) as seen in plate 3 below).

Source: *Ehi's Bitters*
Time: 1:28:34-1:30:01

As a way of showing retribution, Soje deployed a resenting pract in excerpt 4 above. This pract is realised through commissive speech act (of warning) as seen in turn 2 – '… if you do, I will slap you…YES, I will slap you…and never set your feet here again because if you do, I will turn every part of you into pieces'. The use of this speech act is premised on the shared situational knowledge which exists between SM and Soje. It is easy for Soje to infer the intention of SM right from the opening part of the conversation because the two interlocutors have lived together for some years back. During this time, SM has always denied Soje to be her child. It however becomes absurd for Soje to hear her mother referred to her (Soje) as 'My

child' in turn 1. Soje infers that her mother has come to apologise for the way she has maltreated her (Soje) in the past. Soje therefore, unapologetically warns her mother never to come to her place again and that her mother is not welcomed. Coupled with the commissive speech act used in showing resentment, Soje also sustained the conflict between her and SM by raising her voice to her mother (which is culturally disrespectful) and by complementing her act with resenting physiognomic and physical (pointing the index finger as seen in plate 3). Soje's actions therefore show how family conflict is sustained through language use.

5.5 Doubting pract used by mother to show jealousy

When a character in family discourse is characterised with feelings of suspicion, their expressions are often enriched with doubting practs. It thereof triggers family conflicts when the fellow discourse participant infers that s/he is being considered a liar or untrusted family member. This pract is explicated in the conversation below:

Excerpt 5

Background: A single-mother (SM) gets jealous of her two children who suddenly get attached to their father who has once abandoned them. SM believes the father has won the heart of her children by buying ostentatious goods for them. By implication, SM feels emotionally unsecured and antagonises her children each time they talk about their father.

1. CHILD 1: (excited) mummy, mummy…guess what
2. SM: Your father bought you something again?
3. CHILD 1: no no…I just got admission to SSP academy. Mummy see, see…
4. SM: Leave me! Call me Fola. CALL ME YOUR BROTHER
5. SM: So, Fola, what happened to your admission?
6. CHILD 2: See, mummy, dad wants us to study in Europe.
7. CHILD 1: Mummy, we are going together.
8. SM: GOOD…when are you people going?
9. CHILD1: that should be next year
10. SM: ANOTHER YEAR? That would be too far. You people should go now.
11. CHILD 2: Mummy, but we are going together now…
12. SM: EH EH! YOU PEOPLE SHOULD GO NOW! THAT YOUR FATHER SHOULD COME NOW AND TAKE YOU OUT OF THIS HOUSE! GO TO YOUR FATHER'S HOUSE. Ungrateful children.

Source: *Sista*
Time: 1:10:50-1.11:54

From excerpt 5 above, SM's use of doubting pract is premised on the shared situational knowledge that exists among the interlocutors. SM's prior knowledge about her (ir)responsible husband who only cares for his two children is enough to make SM disbelief CHILD 1 between turn 7 and 8 when CHILD 1 says – 'Mummy, we are going together'. SM believes her husband has successfully won the hearts of her two children she singlehandedly raised when their father absconded. Thereof, SM persistently rebuffs her children through doubting pract complemented by tone of jealousy and bitterness (turn 12) despite CHILD 2's reaffirmation that they are all going to Europe together. This therefore, portrays the latent/covert stage of family conflict and as well shows how doubting pract stimulates jealousy which is one of the major bedrocks upon which family conflicts lie.

5.6 Apologising pract intended to be used by husband to resolve family conflict

In the context of family discourse, apology acts are often utilized as a conflict resolution strategy, particularly when the conflict is still in its nascent stages and has not yet escalated into more severe forms of conflict. This implies that not all types of conflicts necessitate an apology, and the deployment of apology acts is typically reserved for situations where the conflict is still manageable and has not yet reached a boiling point.

Apology acts are often demanded when the conflict is still at the level of verbal sparring or physical confrontation, which is typically characterized as the early overt stage of conflict. At this stage, the conflict is still relatively contained, and the parties involved may be more receptive to apologies and conciliatory gestures.

However, it is surprising to note that some apologies can actually perpetuate family conflicts rather than resolving them. This paradoxical outcome can occur when the recipient of the apology infers that the apology is insincere, based on the pragmatic entailment and physiognomic acts that accompany the apology. In other words, the manner in which the apology is delivered, including the tone, body language, and facial expressions, can convey a sense of insincerity or lack of remorse, which can exacerbate the conflict rather than resolving it.

This highlights the complexity of apology acts in family discourse, where the intentions behind the apology may be misinterpreted or misunderstood, leading to unintended consequences. It also underscores the importance of considering the pragmatic and physiognomic aspects of apology acts, as these can significantly impact the effectiveness of the apology in resolving family conflicts. It is therefore suffice to posit that insincere apology stimulates family conflict as explicated below:

Excerpt 6
Background: From the husband-wife conversation, the poor husband blames his (always supportive) wife for being responsible for 'an unwanted' pregnancy. The husband's blame shifting culture therefore gets the wife annoyed and then, indirectly demanded for an apology.
1. HUSBAND: so, how did it go?
2. WIFE: (hands him a paper) here it is…I am pregnant
3. HUSBAND: ah ah…how? How come?
4. WIFE: what do you mean by how come?
5. HUSBAND: but I have been pulling out now…
6. WIFE: so, who now says pulling out means hundred percent guarantee? You don't have to deny the baby. In fact, that's a very big insult on my character o. that's a very very big insult on my character and I won't take that, Fola!
7. HUSBAND: okay, SORRY, SORRY!
8. WIFE: sorry for yourself!

Source: *Sista*
Time: 19:10-21:15

From excerpt 6 above, the wife feels insulted at the point where the husband tries to shift the blame of getting pregnant on the wife. Therefore, the wife indirectly demanded for an apology in turn 6 'that's a *very very* big insult on my character and I won't take that, Fola'. By implication, the husband is able to infer the wife's demand for an apology. The ego in him however makes him to unapologetically deploy an apology pract which is void of sincerity. The husband's use of a direct speech act having an illocutionary force of apology coupled with high voice pitch of sobriety and non-verbal apologetic act in turn 7 (SORRY, SORRY!) is enough for the wife to make inference of insincerity. This therefore necessitate the wife's response in turn 8 – 'sorry for yourself' (meaning that the husband's apology is not accepted and the conflict continues).

6. Analytical model
This study on conflict as portrayed in Nollywood films on family interactions can be applied as a therapeutic measure towards ensuring a relatively peaceful coexistence among family members based on the following observed stages of communicative patterns:

Establishing common ground

Rendering apology acts   **Avoiding communication gap**

Understanding speaker's intention

STAGE 1

Establishment of common ground: Establishing common ground is essential in family interactions as it helps to build trust, foster empathy, mitigate conflicts, promote effective communication, strengthen relationships, and encourage cooperation. When family members feel heard and understood, they are more likely to trust each other. Common ground helps family members to see things from each other's perspective, promoting empathy and compassion. Establishing common ground facilitates open and honest communication, helping family members to express themselves clearly and avoid misunderstandings. Common ground helps to create a sense of unity and shared identity among family members, strengthening their bonds and relationships. When family members have a shared understanding and common goals, they are more likely to work together and cooperate. In essence, establishing common ground can help to reduce tension and stress within the family, creating a more peaceful and harmonious environment. In other words, when common ground is reached, family members can resolve conflicts more effectively, as they are able to focus on shared interests and goals.

STAGE 2

Avoiding communication gap: Avoiding communication gaps in family interaction is crucial for maintaining healthy and loving relationships. Here are some strategies to help bridge communication gap in family interactions:

a. Practice active listening: Pay attention to each other, maintain eye contact, and ask clarifying questions.
b. Use clear and concise language: Avoid using complex or ambiguous language that can lead to misunderstandings.
c. Show empathy and understanding: Try to see things from each other's perspective and validate each other's feelings.
d. Avoid assumptions: Don't assume you know what others are thinking or feeling; instead, ask open-ended questions to clarify.
e. Use "I" statements: Instead of blaming or accusing, use "I" statements to express thoughts and feelings.
f. Schedule regular family meetings: Hold regular meetings to discuss important issues, share feelings, and resolve conflicts.
g. Practice non-verbal communication: Use non-verbal cues like body language, facial expressions, and touch to convey emotions and show affection.
h. Avoid distractions: Turn off electronic devices and minimize distractions during family interactions.
i. Show appreciation and gratitude: Express gratitude and appreciation for each other to foster a positive and supportive environment.

By working together and practicing effective communication, families can bridge the communication gap and build a stronger, more loving relationship.

STAGE 3

Understanding speaker's intention: Understanding the speaker's intention in family interaction is crucial for effective communication, conflict resolution, and building strong relationships. Findings from this study point to the fact that family interaction is often contextualized; therefore, interactants should consider the situation, tone, and non-verbal cues to understand

the speaker's intention. Additionally, attention to the speaker's words, tone, and body language to grasp their intended meaning should be paid attention to. Furthermore, implicit messages should be recognized as speakers may convey implicit messages, such as emotions, attitudes, or underlying concerns. Hence, as a way of mitigating family conflicts, family members should be aware of inconsistencies between the speaker's words and actions, which can indicate underlying intentions.

STAGE 4

Rendering apology acts: Rendering apology acts in family interaction is essential for maintaining healthy relationships, resolving conflicts, and promoting emotional well-being. As pointed by Ogwudile (2019), it should be emphasised here that apology acts are of different categories. Expressive apology focuses on expressing remorse and regret for the hurtful action. Instrumental apology focuses on making amends and offering restitution for the hurtful action. Hybrid apology combines elements of both expressive and instrumental apologies. To this end, ensuring effective apology acts in family interactions involves taking ownership of the hurtful action and express remorse using "I" statements. Most importantly, the pragmatic entailment of the apology acts should be complemented by empathetic actions in form of emotive and/or physiognomic acts. It is however disheartening that family member(s) may struggle with pride and ego, making it difficult to apologize. Apologies can make family members feel vulnerable, which can be uncomfortable. To wrap it up, family conflict becomes cyclic when apologies are influenced by power dynamics within the family, making it difficult for some members to apologise. This therefore may be tagged insincere apology which could further trigger family conflicts. By understanding the importance of apology acts in family interaction and being aware of the challenges that may arise, family members can work towards creating a culture of empathy, forgiveness, and healing.

7. Conclusion

This study undertakes a comprehensive examination of the role of language in creating, sustaining, and managing conflict within the Nigerian family context. By analyzing the linguistic patterns and communication dynamics portrayed in Nollywood films, this research aims to shed light on the complex ways in which language use contributes to family conflicts. A key finding of this study is that impolite language use, whether verbal or non-verbal, serves as a primary linguistic marker of conflict within the family. This suggests that the way family members communicate with each other can either mitigate or exacerbate conflict, highlighting the critical importance of effective communication in maintaining family harmony.

Nollywood films, which often depict family conflicts as a reflection of broader social issues, provide a unique lens through which to examine the intersection of language, culture, and conflict. By portraying family conflicts as triggered by language use, these films underscore the significance of communication in shaping family dynamics and, by extension, societal relationships. This study offers a compelling reminder that a peaceful society is achievable when family members prioritize tranquility, tolerance, clear communication, and empathy. By recognizing the family as an indispensable unit of society, this research emphasizes the need for individuals to cultivate healthy communication habits, avoid blame-shifting and hypothetical assumptions, and strive for mutual understanding. Ultimately, this study posits that when families are at peace, the larger society is more likely to be a safe and harmonious place. By promoting effective communication, empathy, and conflict resolution within families, we can create a ripple effect that contributes to a more peaceful and cohesive society.

Abbreviations

REL	Relevance
SSK	Shared situational knowledge
REF	Reference
INF	Inference
VCE	Voice
MPH	Metaphor

Conflicts of Interest

The authors (Seun Akintaro and Sunday Oyetunji) declare no conflict of interest.

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