Abuja Journal of Humanities

ISSN: 1117-8116

A publication of the Faculty of Arts, University of Abuja

Volume 6 (2025), Article 2, https://doi.org/10.70118/TAJH0002

Politeness Strategies and African Cultural Norms in Cartoon-style Videos on Nigeria's Fuel Price Hike

Mary Temitope Ogunwale,
Adeyinka Olusola Adeoye, PhD
Esther Olajumoke Adeagbo, PhD
All from the Department of English, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo

Abstract

This study investigates the use of politeness strategies in Nigerian cartoon-style videos that critique fuel price hikes during President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration. While cartoons have long served as vehicles for political commentary in Nigeria, their pragmatic features—particularly the deployment of politeness strategies—remain underexplored. Using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, this research examines five representative videos selected from a corpus of eight, focusing on conversational excerpts that reflect socio-political critique. The study adopts a qualitative methodology, integrating pragmatic analysis with multimodal interpretation to assess both linguistic and non-linguistic elements. The analysis reveals the prevalence of four politeness strategies: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Among these, bald-on-record utterances were most frequent, especially in contexts of frustration, urgency, or direct confrontation. Off-record strategies, primarily realised through sarcasm, metaphor, and humour, played a significant role in framing political critique without overt hostility. Positive politeness emerged in interactions where solidarity and familiarity were emphasised, while negative politeness appeared in deferential or apologetic responses. Findings indicate that politeness in these digital texts is contextually and culturally embedded, reflecting African norms of communal facework and expressive resistance. Contrary to Western politeness expectations, directness and sarcasm in Nigerian discourse often serve as legitimate means of protest and public engagement. The study affirms that cartoon-style videos function not merely as entertainment but as complex communicative artefacts that mediate public discourse, critique authority, and construct shared identities. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on digital pragmatics and African discourse strategies, highlighting the importance of cultural specificity in the interpretation of politeness. It recommends further exploration of multimodal politeness phenomena across digital media genres to enhance understanding of political communication in postcolonial contexts.

Keywords: Politeness Strategies, Cartoon-style Videos, Fuel Price Hike, Pragmatics, Nigerian Discourse, Political Satire

Introduction

The recent surge in fuel prices in Nigeria has generated widespread public discontent and intensified socio-economic challenges across the nation. With inflation driving up transportation costs, food prices, and other essential commodities, citizens have turned to digital platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter to express frustration and critique governmental decisions (Ibrahim, 2022). Amid this digital activism, cartoon-style videos have emerged as a potent medium for engaging in political commentary, offering a blend of humour, satire, and socio-political critique. These videos are not only a source of entertainment but also function as informal yet impactful platforms for public discourse and resistance. Cartoon-style videos are a distinctive form of animated content that combine visual satire, caricature, and linguistic creativity to convey complex messages in simplified and emotionally resonant forms (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In Nigeria, the popularity of these videos has surged, particularly among youth populations who use them for political engagement and social commentary (Ogunyemi, 2021). Unlike static editorial cartoons, these dynamic visuals leverage audio-visual elements such as expressive gestures, tonal variations, and exaggerated characterizations to amplify their critical messages. Their increasing prevalence in online discourse marks a shift toward more interactive and multimodal forms of public communication.

Historically, cartoons have served as powerful tools for socio-political commentary in Nigeria, addressing themes such as corruption, leadership failure, and economic hardship (Bello, 2015). However, while numerous studies have explored the semiotic and rhetorical aspects of cartoons in Nigerian newspapers (Adetona, 2020; Omolabi, 2020), there remains a notable gap in the scholarly interrogation of the pragmatic strategies—particularly politeness strategies—deployed in digital cartoon-style videos. This lacuna is especially significant given the culturally sensitive and emotionally charged nature of topics such as fuel price hikes, which directly affect everyday life and spark widespread public outrage. The concept of politeness, as theorised by Brown and Levinson (1987), is crucial in understanding how language users manage face-threatening acts (FTAs) in interactions. Their model outlines four primary strategies: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. These strategies are employed to maintain interpersonal harmony, assert solidarity, or express dissent while mitigating potential conflict. In politically charged discourse, particularly within the African context, these strategies take on culturally nuanced functions. As Nwoye (1992) and Obeng (1997) suggest, African communicative norms often prioritise communal harmony and collective voice, which may sanction directness, sarcasm, or humour as legitimate forms of socio-political engagement, rather than as violations of politeness.

This study is situated within this socio-cultural and theoretical nexus, aiming to investigate the politeness strategies employed in selected Nigerian cartoon-style videos that address fuel price hikes during President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration. Specifically, it seeks to identify the dominant politeness strategies utilised in these videos and discuss how they function within an African socio-pragmatic context to foster or challenge public discourse. Through this inquiry, the study offers a nuanced understanding of how animated media operate not only as artistic expressions but also as pragmatic tools for navigating sensitive political terrain. Despite the pervasiveness of cartoon-style videos on digital platforms, scholarly literature has largely overlooked their pragmatic dimensions. Most existing works have focused on either the visual semiotics (Amore & Atoloye, 2015; Akpati, 2019) or the ideological implications of cartoon narratives (Adeagbo & Oyindamola, 2024). Others have examined humour in newspaper cartoons using Western-centric humour theories such as the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (Osisanwo & Atoloye, 2024). While these contributions have advanced our understanding of visual and textual elements in cartoons, they have not sufficiently addressed how politeness strategies are employed to mediate criticism, negotiate resistance, or preserve social harmony in digital cartoon discourse.

The relevance of this study is multifaceted. Theoretically, it extends Brown and Levinson's politeness framework by applying it to multimodal and culturally specific contexts, highlighting the limitations of universalist models when applied to non-Western discourse communities. Practically, it offers insights into how politeness functions in digital activism, providing a framework for understanding the rhetorical choices of cartoonists and video creators. In politically sensitive environments, where overt criticism can provoke backlash or censorship, understanding these pragmatic strategies becomes crucial for content creators, media analysts, and communication scholars. Moreover, the findings of this study will contribute to the broader fields of media studies, pragmatics, and African communication, serving as a reference for future research on digital discourse and socio-political commentary. In addressing these gaps, this study adopts a qualitative approach to analyse five selected cartoon-style videos from a corpus of eight, chosen for their thematic relevance and richness of content. The analysis foregrounds both linguistic and non-linguistic elements—such as tone, facial expressions, and gestures—to capture the full spectrum of politeness phenomena. By examining these animated texts through a culturally grounded lens, the study elucidates how politeness strategies are employed not just to soften criticism but to perform solidarity, express communal grievance, and foster socio-political awareness. In doing so, it affirms that politeness in Nigerian cartoon discourse is not merely about face-saving but also about face-framing—constructing and contesting identities, values, and power relations in public space.

Literature Review

Politeness has been conceptualised by scholars across linguistic and sociocultural domains, with definitions often shaped by the need to manage social interaction and mitigate potential conflict. Osisanwo (2008) defines politeness as the linguistic means employed to demonstrate awareness of another person's face—their social self-image. Lakoff (as cited in Culpeper, 2011) views politeness as a strategy designed to avoid and reduce interpersonal conflict, while Leech (1983, as cited in Fitri, 2022) describes it as an effort to avoid friction and show respect. Mills (2003) further frames politeness as the speaker's stylistic and strategic presentation of self in interaction, tailored to audience expectations. Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory remains foundational in politeness studies, articulating four principal strategies: bald-on-record (direct speech), positive politeness (solidarity and friendliness), negative politeness (deference and avoidance of imposition), and off-record strategies (indirectness, hints, and sarcasm). Their model has facilitated cross-cultural studies, though critiques have noted its Western-centric bias and limited applicability in communal cultures such as those in Africa (Nwoye, 1992; Anchimbe, 2008).

Cartoons are semiotic and communicative artefacts that combine text and image to critique, entertain, and inform. They may be categorised by form and function into editorial cartoons, comic strips, animated (motion) cartoons, and caricatures. Among these, animated cartoons—especially those distributed digitally—have gained traction for their reach and interactivity (Ogunyemi, 2021). Editorial cartoons, typically found in newspapers, deliver socio-political commentary in a single-panel format, while motion cartoons incorporate sound and narrative to engage audiences dynamically. Ogunyemi (2021) defines cartoons as "a visual and artistic medium that employs caricature, satire, and humour to communicate socio-political messages." Similarly, Adebayo (2018) asserts that cartoons use humour, exaggeration, and symbolic imagery to critique political and cultural issues, simplifying complex realities for broad audiences. Bello (2015) emphasises cartoons' dual communicative and aesthetic functions, describing them as "a powerful communicative tool that merges artistic illustration with satire." Eze (2020) argues that cartoons function as platforms for socio-political commentary, where visual metaphors and linguistic creativity converge to provoke thought and reflect public sentiment. Ibrahim (2022) further underscores the evolving nature of cartoons in the digital era, identifying them as potent instruments for mass communication, particularly in contexts where humour and critique intersect to influence public opinion. Synthesising these perspectives, cartoons—especially in animated digital forms—are best understood as multimodal texts that fuse semiotic, linguistic, and cultural elements to interrogate power, amplify public grievances, and foster civic engagement.

A number of studies have explored the semiotic and discursive strategies employed in Nigerian cartoons. Adeagbo and Oyindamola (2024) examine the socio-political impact of visual and linguistic techniques in political cartoons, revealing their function as vehicles for commentary and critique. Similarly, Amore and Atoloye (2015) adopt a systematic functional multimodal discourse analysis to study cartoons from Nigeria's 2015 general elections, using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Social Semiotics Theory within Hallidayan systemic functional linguistics. Their work underscores how verbal and visual elements encode ideological positions. Extending this approach, Akpati (2019) analyses online campaign cartoons using Machin and Mayr's (2012) multimodal critical discourse framework, showing how verbal and visual strategies coalesce to construct political meaning. Omolabi (2020) applies a sociosemiotic lens to Nigerian newspaper cartoons, detailing how semiotic resources—images, symbols, and text—communicate political critique. Adetona (2020), employing Hermeneutic Theory and Symbolic Interactionism, explores how audiences interpret editorial cartoons, demonstrating the polysemous and context-dependent nature of cartoon discourse. Furthermore, Osisanwo and Atoloye (2024) use Attardo and Raskin's General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) to investigate humour in newspaper cartoons, focusing on techniques such as irony, exaggeration, and absurdity. These studies collectively reveal the multifaceted nature of cartoon discourse and its relevance in shaping political narratives and public consciousness in Nigeria.

While these works offer valuable insights into the semiotic and rhetorical functions of cartoons, a significant gap persists in the literature regarding the pragmatic strategies—particularly politeness strategies—employed in cartoon-style videos. Most existing studies focus on print media or static visual forms, with limited attention to animated, digitally disseminated content. Moreover, the intersection between politeness, socio-economic critique, and digital performance remains underexplored, especially in the context of highly emotive issues like fuel price hikes. This study addresses this scholarly gap by examining how politeness strategies are deployed in cartoon-style videos to mediate public discourse on fuel price increases in Nigeria. It extends existing scholarship by incorporating a pragmatic perspective into the analysis of animated political discourse, situating politeness as a culturally embedded and context-sensitive resource for negotiation, critique, and engagement.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory as its analytical lens to explore the deployment of politeness strategies in cartoon-style videos addressing fuel price hikes in Nigeria. Politeness Theory remains one of the most influential models in pragmatics, offering a structured account of how speakers manage interpersonal relationships and face-threatening acts (FTAs) in discourse. The theory is built upon the concept of "face," which Goffman (1959) defines as the public self-image individuals seek to uphold during social interactions. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), individuals possess both positive face (the desire to be liked, appreciated, and approved of) and negative face (the desire to be unimpeded or free from imposition). The theory posits that FTAs occur when a speaker's actions threaten the hearer's face, prompting the speaker to mitigate such threats through politeness strategies. These strategies are categorised into four types:

1. Bald-on-Record – Direct, unmitigated speech acts, often used in contexts of urgency, familiarity, or emotional intensity.
2. Positive Politeness – Strategies that express camaraderie, solidarity, or approval, aiming to satisfy the hearer's positive face.
3. Negative Politeness – Indirect or deferential expressions that seek to minimise imposition and protect the hearer's negative face.
4. Off-Record – Indirect, ambiguous, or metaphorical speech that allows the speaker to imply meaning without committing to it directly.

While this framework is foundational, it has been critiqued for its ethnocentric assumptions, particularly its emphasis on individualistic conceptions of face and communication. Scholars such as Nwoye (1992), Obeng (1997), and Anchimbe (2008) argue that African communicative practices often foreground communal values, social hierarchies, and collective facework. In such contexts, directness or sarcasm may not signify impoliteness but rather function as

culturally appropriate mechanisms for asserting moral authority, solidarity, or public dissent. Consequently, this study complements Brown and Levinson's model with culturally situated insights from African pragmatics. It examines politeness strategies not only as interpersonal tactics but also as socially embedded practices that reflect and negotiate the ideological, economic, and relational dynamics within Nigerian public discourse.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to investigate the pragmatic dimensions of cartoon-style videos on fuel price hikes in Nigeria. The qualitative paradigm is well-suited to exploring language use, social meaning, and cultural nuance, allowing for in-depth textual and contextual analysis (Creswell, 2014). The data for this study consist of eight cartoon-style videos sourced from YouTube, a widely accessed digital platform in Nigeria. These videos were selected purposively based on their thematic relevance to fuel price increases, richness of linguistic content, and popularity among Nigerian audiences. Out of the eight videos collected, five were subjected to detailed analysis. These were chosen for their representational depth, diversity of politeness strategies, and frequency of interactional exchanges suitable for pragmatic interpretation. All videos were created and circulated between 2023 and 2024, a period marked by intense public discourse surrounding the removal of petrol subsidies and subsequent fuel price inflation. The selected videos include content delivered in English and Nigerian Pidgin—the two most widely understood languages in Nigeria's digital communication space. This bilingual context enables a rich exploration of linguistic and socio-pragmatic features.

The analysis is grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, with supplementary insights from African pragmatics to accommodate culturally specific norms. Each video was transcribed and examined for both linguistic and non-linguistic elements. Linguistic analysis focused on lexical choices, speech acts, turn-taking, and markers of politeness. Non-linguistic elements such as tone, facial expressions, gestures, and situational context were also examined to capture the full semiotic scope of the discourse. The analysis identified instances of bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Particular attention was given to how these strategies indexed social meanings such as power dynamics, emotional tension, solidarity, resistance, or satire. Transcripts were annotated for recurring themes, pragmatic markers, and expressive devices, enabling both micro-level and macro-level interpretations of the data.

All data used in this study are publicly available and freely accessible online. However, ethical diligence was observed in protecting the identities of content creators, referencing the videos solely for academic purposes. The study adheres to fair use principles and established guidelines for internet-mediated research. Care was taken to ensure that the analysis neither misrepresented the creators' intentions nor infringed upon their moral or intellectual rights. The scope of the study is limited to videos in English and Nigerian Pidgin, thereby excluding materials in indigenous Nigerian languages. While this ensures broader comprehensibility, it also limits the linguistic diversity of the corpus. Additionally, the study focuses solely on videos addressing fuel price hikes, which may limit generalisability to other socio-political themes. Nonetheless, the qualitative depth and theoretical rigor applied in this analysis make it a valuable contribution to the understanding of politeness strategies within digital political discourse in Nigeria.

Analysis

Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory offers a robust framework for understanding how individuals mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) through various communicative strategies. The theory's four principal strategies—bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record—are particularly salient in high-stakes, emotionally charged conversations such as those depicted in the cartoon-style videos examined in this study. This section analyses five representative video excerpts, focusing on both linguistic and non-linguistic elements of politeness within the socio-economic context of fuel price hikes in

Nigeria. The analysis integrates pragmatic interpretation with cultural sensitivity, recognising that in African contexts, facework is often communal, expressive, and context-dependent (Nwoye, 1992; Obeng, 1997). As such, strategies that might be categorised as impolite in Western frameworks—such as directness or sarcasm—may function differently within Nigerian discourse, serving as instruments of resistance, solidarity, or moral critique.

Text 1

Transcript
Speaker A: Look Rufus, since I enter your car you have been angry and battered, your face dey scare me o. What's wrong now?
Speaker B: What's not wrong? No, tell me, what's not wrong? Shey you no see fuel price don high? Do you know how much I bought fuel today? I've been watching you since you entered this car. You don sit down comfortably, balanced like say na you buy the fuel.
Speaker A: My guy—
Speaker B: (Cuts in) Who be your guy?
Speaker A: How you want make I sit down now?
Speaker B: (Frowns) Sit down like you're not happy. Sit down like say you're tired of life. Sit down like you don lose hope. Sit down like you're not enjoying the car.
Speaker A: E don do, e don do. Drop me, I beg.

This interaction reflects a highly confrontational exchange where politeness strategies are minimal and often overridden by emotional expressivity and sarcasm. The scene unfolds in the confined space of a vehicle—an intimate yet tension-prone setting—against the backdrop of Nigeria's ongoing fuel crisis. Speaker B's discourse, in particular, exemplifies a dual strategy: overt directness paired with off-record sarcasm. The conversation opens with a bald-on-record expression by Speaker A: "Look Rufus, since I enter your car you have been angry and battered…" This direct remark is unmitigated and constitutes a face-threatening act (FTA), particularly the phrase "your face dey scare me o," which challenges the hearer's positive face. Speaker B intensifies the directness with rhetorical repetition: "What's not wrong? No, tell me, what's not wrong?"—a strategy that conveys frustration and invites confrontation rather than solidarity.

Speaker B then shifts subtly into off-record politeness by using sarcasm: "You don sit down comfortably, balanced like say na you buy the fuel." Though veiled in humour, the statement indirectly accuses Speaker A of insensitivity, allowing Speaker B to express displeasure without outright blame. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of indirect speech as a face-saving mechanism, though here it functions more as a socially sanctioned critique. Speaker A's use of "My guy" attempts to re-establish rapport through positive politeness, invoking informal solidarity. However, Speaker B promptly rejects the attempt with another bald-on-record interjection: "Who be your guy?"—a rhetorical challenge that negates the assumed closeness. Later, when Speaker A asks, "How you want make I sit down now?" the question reflects negative politeness, signalling deference and a willingness to accommodate the other's emotional state.

> Tone and Intonation: Speaker B's tone is presumably harsh and elevated, reinforcing the forcefulness of his utterances. In contrast, Speaker A's tone becomes increasingly defensive.
>
> Facial Expressions: The description of Speaker B's "battered" face suggests visible anger or exhaustion, which visually intensifies the linguistic tension.
>
> Body Language: Speaker B's imagined ideal of sitting "like say you don lose hope" indicates exaggerated gestures or body postures used to dramatise frustration. Speaker A's eventual resignation—"Drop me, I beg"—signals withdrawal, accompanied by a likely sigh or downward gaze.

Contextual Background: The high cost of fuel functions as a socio-political trigger that transforms a routine interpersonal exchange into a site of ideological expression and collective frustration.

The interaction oscillates between direct confrontation and indirect sarcasm, with bald-on-record strategies dominating the discourse. Speaker B's communicative stance reflects a culturally grounded norm of expressive resistance—where verbal aggression is a channel for emotional release and social critique. Although politeness theory categorises such speech as face-threatening, within the Nigerian context it may function as an acceptable form of venting and solidarity-building in response to shared hardship (Anchimbe, 2008). This exchange exemplifies how interpersonal dialogue in everyday settings becomes a microcosm of broader socio-economic grievances. It also underscores the importance of expanding politeness theory to account for culturally specific forms of resistance, where the maintenance of face may be less about preserving harmony and more about asserting shared indignation.

Text 2

Transcript
Speaker A (Attendant at filling station): Welcome sir, welcome sir.
Speaker B (Car owner): How are you?
Speaker A: I'm fine sir. How is family? How is everybody?
Speaker B: Fine. Give me fuel.
Speaker A: Okay, Oga. How much fuel you want?
Speaker B: Ehh... let's say—just fill the tank.
Speaker A (Soliloquises): Awon ritualists don come buy fuel today. God, ritualists don patronise our filling station.

This dialogue unfolds in a transactional context between a service provider and a customer, where traditional hierarchies and expectations of politeness are at play. The interaction showcases a blend of politeness strategies, moving from formulaic hospitality to direct transactional demands, and ending with off-record sarcastic commentary The exchange begins with an emphatic repetition—"Welcome sir, welcome sir"—which serves as a positive politeness strategy. It demonstrates attentiveness, deference, and recognition of the customer's social standing. The use of the honorific "sir" reinforces hierarchical respect. Speaker A's follow-up inquiry—"How is family? How is everybody?"—is a culturally appropriate act of solidarity-building common in Nigerian service encounters (Nwoye, 1992). It functions less as an information-seeking question and more as a ritualised expression of goodwill.

Speaker B's curt response—"Fine. Give me fuel"—marks a transition to a bald-on-record strategy, signalling a prioritisation of the transactional purpose over social pleasantries. The lack of softeners or elaboration reflects a utilitarian orientation, common in hierarchical service interactions where the customer holds authority. Speaker A, however, maintains politeness through the respectful address "Oga," a Nigerian Pidgin term denoting seniority and deference. While the question "How much fuel you want?" is bald in its structure, it remains polite by virtue of the context and choice of address term.

Speaker B's next utterance—"Ehh… let's say—just fill the tank"—introduces hesitation and indirectness. The filler "ehh" and tentative phrasing exemplify negative politeness strategies, suggesting that the speaker is aware of the imposition implied in filling a full tank amidst fuel scarcity. This momentary pause also signals internal negotiation and softens the directive.

The most nuanced pragmatic move occurs in Speaker A's soliloquy: "Awon ritualists don come buy fuel today. God, ritualists don patronise our filling station." This off-record comment, muttered under the breath, is not addressed directly to the customer but functions as a veiled critique. The exaggerated reference to "ritualists"—a hyperbolic term suggesting mysterious or morally suspect wealth—signals incredulity at the customer's ability to afford a full tank. The comment combines humour, irony, and sarcasm—hallmarks of off-record politeness. It allows

Speaker A to express frustration without overt confrontation, maintaining professional decorum while voicing social critique.

> Tone and Register: Speaker A's tone during the greeting is likely warm and deferential. The soliloquy, in contrast, may be delivered in a sarcastic, lowered tone to avoid being overheard.
>
> Facial Expression: Likely includes a forced smile during service, followed by a smirk or subtle eye-roll during the soliloquy.
>
> Body Language: Speaker A may gesture submissively during interaction, then exhibit slight head-shaking or muttering to signal discontent.

This exchange contrasts sharply with the emotional intensity of Text 1. Here, politeness is shaped by institutional roles and asymmetrical power dynamics. While Speaker B adopts a functional bald-on-record style, Speaker A modulates between positive politeness and off-record sarcasm, embodying the dual pressure of customer service and personal sentiment. From an African pragmatics perspective, the soliloquy serves not as a breach of politeness but as a culturally embedded mechanism for restoring moral balance in an unequal interaction. By couching critique in humour and metaphor, Speaker A maintains face while resisting perceived economic inequality. This dialogue exemplifies how politeness strategies in Nigerian discourse are context-sensitive and ideologically loaded. Indirect sarcasm becomes a form of socio-political commentary, allowing speakers to navigate hierarchy, express solidarity, and critique economic conditions within accepted norms of public interaction.

Text 3

Transcript
Speaker A: It's nice to stroll around.
Speaker B: Elder Apo TAEng! Elder Apo TAEng!
Speaker A: Oh! What is it?
Speaker B: There's another fuel price increase.
Speaker A: Really? But don't worry.
Speaker B: Why?
Speaker A: 'Cause you have your own oil supply.
Speaker B: Huh? How?
Speaker A: Because you have an oily face!

This dialogue illustrates a shift in tone from initial seriousness to playful humour. Unlike previous interactions that focused on conflict or hierarchical encounters, this exchange takes place in a casual, peer-level setting. The interplay of bald-on-record statements, positive politeness, and off-record humour reflects a communicative environment that balances serious socio-economic commentary with comedic relief. The opening utterance—"It's nice to stroll around"—is a simple, declarative sentence that serves as scene-setting rather than face-threatening. Speaker A uses a bald-on-record strategy without any mitigating markers, but within a neutral context, it carries no impoliteness. It establishes an informal tone and a relaxed atmosphere.

Speaker B's repetition—"Elder Apo TAEng! Elder Apo TAEng!"—functions as an affectionate, respectful greeting. The use of a title like "Elder" and the repetition of the name exemplify positive politeness strategies common in Nigerian peer discourse. It acknowledges social recognition and intimacy, signalling familiarity and in-group bonding (Nwoye, 1992). The declaration—"There's another fuel price increase"—marks a return to serious discourse, delivered via a bald-on-record strategy. It reflects the gravity of the situation without hedging or softening, typical of interactions that foreground urgency or mutual concern. The straightforwardness is not impolite in this context because it is shared information among equals.

Speaker A responds empathetically with, “Really? But don’t worry.” This phrase functions as a positive politeness strategy aimed at comforting the interlocutor. It mitigates the severity of the previous statement and reaffirms a shared perspective of resilience. The use of "don’t worry" reflects a culturally common formula for diffusing anxiety and expressing solidarity. The most prominent pragmatic feature in this interaction lies in the concluding joke:

- *Speaker A*: “'Cause you have your own oil supply.”
- *Speaker B*: “Huh? How?”
- *Speaker A*: “Because you have an oily face!”

This wordplay constitutes an off-record politeness strategy through humour and metaphor. The ambiguous phrase “your own oil supply” hints at wealth or exemption from hardship, while the punchline resolves the ambiguity with a visual pun—“oily face.” The humour is indirect, requiring inference, and serves to lighten the mood while drawing attention to the absurdity of the economic condition. This indirectness provides plausible deniability, allowing the speaker to critique the situation humorously without overt offence. In Nigerian cultural contexts, such humour is not merely entertainment but a pragmatic tool for social commentary and face negotiation (Eze, 2020).

> Tone of Voice: Likely shifts from a serious or neutral tone to a more playful, exaggerated delivery during the joke.
>
> Facial Expressions: Speaker A may smirk or laugh during the punchline, while Speaker B may display initial confusion followed by amusement.
>
> Body Language: Speaker B’s repetition of the name may be accompanied by hand gestures or nodding, and Speaker A may gesture toward the face to emphasise the joke.
>
> Contextual Setting: The outdoor or leisurely setting of a “stroll” provides a relaxed backdrop that allows for humour to diffuse socio-political tension.

Unlike the confrontational tone of Text 1 or the hierarchical dynamics of Text 2, this dialogue reflects camaraderie and levity. The speakers negotiate shared discontent through humour, using off-record strategies not to obscure meaning but to bond over collective frustration. In African pragmatics, such humour serves a dual role: reinforcing solidarity and providing an acceptable outlet for critique (Obeng, 1997). The indirect sarcasm is not evasive but socially intelligible, enabling critique without aggression. Moreover, the metaphorical construction of “oily face” subtly ridicules the perception of immunity or privilege in times of national hardship. Thus, humour here is more than an expressive choice; it is a discursive strategy embedded in cultural norms of facework and communal identity. It shows that in informal Nigerian discourse, politeness is often relational, performative, and collaboratively constructed.

Text 4

Transcript
Speaker A: Ahh, see Notcoin that I ignored earlier, Opay again—what do they mean by banning all crypto transactions? Anyway, what’s my own?
Speaker B: Brother, I’m very sorry.
Speaker A: First Notcoin, then Opay, now you as well. Are you just bad luck?
Speaker B: Sorry indeed.
Speaker A: Sorry what? Will your sorry bring back my wasted fuel? Anyway, the solution is simple—even if your father is Elon Musk—I’ll certainly sell this ball no matter what.
Speaker B: Brother, pleeease.
Speaker A: All these stupid children. Fuel is now ₦800, Notcoin has launched, and you people are still playing. Don’t you go and find how to sell on the black market or find a phone and start mining coins? Keep playing.

This dialogue is characterised by sustained confrontation and minimal politeness. Speaker A is emotionally charged, shifting between bald-on-record attacks and sarcastic off-record strategies.

Speaker B adopts a submissive stance, employing negative politeness and apology to reduce tension. The exchange demonstrates the fragility of politeness norms in emotionally volatile interactions tied to socio-economic frustration. Speaker A's opening—"Ahh, see Notcoin that I ignored earlier…"—introduces a litany of grievances, expressed baldly and emotionally. The rhetorical question, "What do they mean by banning all crypto transactions?" exemplifies direct complaint. The phrase "Anyway, what's my own?" serves as an off-record expression of detachment, common in Nigerian discourse to imply frustration masked by feigned disinterest. Speaker B responds with a negative politeness strategy—"Brother, I'm very sorry"—attempting to soothe Speaker A through apology and the use of a kinship term. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of redressive action aimed at protecting the interlocutor's negative face by minimising imposition.

Rather than de-escalating, Speaker A intensifies the conflict: "First Notcoin, then Opay, now you as well. Are you just bad luck?" This bald-on-record accusation, framed rhetorically, directly threatens Speaker B's positive face. The sarcastic question implies blame for events beyond Speaker B's control. Speaker B's "Sorry indeed" appears to reinforce the apology but contains a subtle undertone of defensiveness or resignation. The addition of "indeed" introduces an ironic inflection, hinting at emotional fatigue. Speaker A continues with an aggressive retort—"Will your sorry bring back my wasted fuel?"—a bald-on-record rejection of Speaker B's conciliatory effort. This is followed by the exaggerated assertion: "Even if your father is Elon Musk, I'll sell this ball no matter what." Here, off-record sarcasm and hyperbole coalesce to critique perceived entitlement. The reference to Elon Musk—a symbol of excessive wealth—functions as a cultural metaphor for privilege and unrealistic expectations.

Speaker B's elongated plea—"Brother, pleeease"—is a classic example of negative politeness, designed to minimise imposition and elicit sympathy. However, Speaker A dismisses it with renewed aggression: "All these stupid children…" This is a bald-on-record insult, targeting Speaker B and generalising irresponsibility to a group. It serves as a public moralising act—an FTA that constructs Speaker A as a voice of authority or rationality. The exchange concludes with sarcastic rhetorical questions: "Don't you go and find how to sell on the black market…?" These utterances employ off-record strategies through irony and mock suggestion. Speaker A's sarcasm implies that Speaker B's actions are frivolous in the face of economic crisis. Though indirect, the speech acts are clearly face-threatening and intended to shame.

> Tone: Speaker A's tone likely shifts between accusatory, sarcastic, and disdainful. Speaker B's tone is subdued, signalling submission.
>
> Facial Expressions: Speaker A may display furrowed brows, scowls, or mocking smirks; Speaker B might exhibit downcast eyes or imploring gestures.
>
> Gestures: Speaker A's gesturing could include pointing, shrugging, or throwing hands in frustration. Speaker B may use clasped hands or lowered posture to seek appeasement.
>
> Context: The discussion about fuel costs and cryptocurrency reflects broader national anxieties about economic instability, rendering personal frustration a proxy for public critique.

Compared to earlier texts, Text 4 reveals a more volatile emotional register and a marked breakdown of politeness norms. Bald-on-record insults dominate the exchange, and Speaker B's repeated use of apology and pleading fails to de-escalate the conflict. Importantly, Speaker A's aggression is interlaced with humour and metaphor, aligning with culturally intelligible modes of expression in Nigerian discourse. Sarcasm and exaggeration, while ostensibly impolite, function here as performative acts of protest and moral instruction (Anchimbe, 2008; Obeng, 1997). The referential use of Elon Musk and cryptocurrency heightens the tension between economic aspiration and lived hardship. In this context, impoliteness is not merely a breakdown in decorum but a communicative strategy rooted in social commentary. It reflects how public anger about governance and inflation becomes localised in interpersonal exchanges, dramatising macro-level issues within micro-level interactions.

Text 5

Transcript
Speaker A: Uncle BAT, how did you start the plan of this suffering?
Speaker B: I removed the fuel subsidy.
Speaker A: Okay, I see. How about the fuel price that people are complaining about? I heard that fuel price has now increased again to ₦1,300 in some places and even more. Is that true?
Speaker B: We've just started.
Speaker A: But you know that it's the price of fuel that always causes the price of everything to increase in this country. Don't you think this new fuel price will make things more difficult?
Speaker B: I don't care.
Speaker A: Wonderful! I love that. I told you, you are a very good president.

This interaction exemplifies high-stakes political discourse rendered through animated satire. The speakers use rhetorical strategies to dramatise economic frustration, employing a mixture of bald-on-record statements, irony, and sarcasm. Speaker A, in particular, adopts a performative and sarcastic voice that critiques power while navigating face-threatening acts. Speaker B, representing a caricature of political authority, responds with blunt indifference, intensifying the confrontational tone. The dialogue begins with a bald-on-record accusation masked by mock respect: "Uncle BAT, how did you start the plan of this suffering?" The use of "Uncle BAT" (a colloquial nickname for President Bola Ahmed Tinubu) adds a layer of familiarity and irony, while the phrase "plan of this suffering" transforms a policy decision into an intentional act of harm. This opening move is a face-threatening act (FTA) cloaked in performative mockery—an off-record strategy meant to critique governance under the guise of inquiry.

Speaker B responds with an unmitigated bald-on-record statement: "I removed the fuel subsidy." The lack of explanation or apology signals defiance. This aligns with a political persona characterised by stoicism or disregard for public discontent. The response presents a striking contrast to the emotional charge of Speaker A's opening, and its minimalism functions rhetorically as indifference. Speaker A's next utterance—"Okay, I see. How about the fuel price that people are complaining about?"—employs a combination of negative politeness and off-record strategies. The speaker distances himself from the critique by attributing it to "people," thereby softening the face-threatening nature of the question. However, the phrase "I see" and the qualifying statement "I heard…" function as hedges, signalling awareness of imposition while preserving the right to challenge.

Speaker B's response—"We've just started"—reasserts a bald-on-record tone that is both provocative and dismissive. It implies future hardship and trivialises the current suffering. Non-verbally, this line likely pairs with deadpan delivery or a smirk, reinforcing the speaker's detachment from social consequences. Speaker A attempts to appeal to Speaker B's logic and empathy: "But you know that it's the price of fuel that always causes the price of everything to increase…" This is a complex utterance combining assertion with a rhetorical question—"Don't you think this new fuel price will make things more difficult?" The question marks a shift toward negative politeness, inviting reflection rather than confrontation. However, given Speaker B's role as a political caricature, the question invites ironic tension rather than sincere deliberation.

Speaker B's retort—"I don't care"—is the most overtly face-threatening act in the dialogue. It dismisses not only the question but the suffering implied. This utterance, while brief, encapsulates the perceived callousness of leadership and exemplifies the use of bald-on-record speech to construct character within satire. Speaker A's response—"Wonderful! I love that. I told you, you are a very good president"—is steeped in sarcasm. The exaggerated praise, in direct contradiction to the preceding critique, functions as an off-record strategy that mocks rather than flatters. The phrase "very good president" is clearly ironic, and the performative tone likely includes gestural and tonal cues (e.g., mock applause, eye-rolling) to underline the duplicity.

Tone: Speaker A uses rising intonation, exaggerated emphasis, and sarcastic inflections to convey mockery. Speaker B's tone is likely monotone or dismissive.

Gestures: Speaker A may gesture dramatically—widening eyes, placing hands on hips, or gesturing to an audience—to enhance the satire. Speaker B's body language may remain still, conveying emotional detachment.

Facial Expressions: Sarcastic smiles, furrowed brows, or feigned admiration likely accompany Speaker A's ironic praise.

Contextual Layer: The dialogue reflects public disillusionment with government policies, using cartoon performance to transform political commentary into digestible humour.

This interaction is the most overtly political of the dialogues analysed. Unlike previous cases where humour and sarcasm diffused tension or critiqued peers, Text 5 uses satire to target institutional authority. The politeness strategies employed—particularly off-record irony and bald-on-record confrontation—align with culturally sanctioned modes of public dissent in Nigerian discourse (Anchimbe, 2008; Obeng, 1997). Speaker A's sarcasm functions as both critique and performance, engaging the audience in a collective act of resistance. The cartoon thus becomes a mediated space where political critique is not only permitted but expected. Speaker B's indifference is rendered as caricature, reinforcing the satirical frame. Across the dialogues, we observe that politeness is not a fixed formula but a dynamic, culturally embedded tool. Whether through confrontation, humour, or ritualised address, Nigerian cartoon discourse illustrates that managing face involves both resisting and reinforcing social norms—especially in times of political and economic strain.

Summary of Findings

This study identified and analysed the use of four core politeness strategies—bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record—in selected Nigerian cartoon-style videos addressing fuel price hikes. Employing Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, the study revealed how these strategies were pragmatically and stylistically deployed within multimodal, socio-political discourse.

Bald-on-record strategies were the most prevalent across all five texts, often used in contexts of emotional intensity, urgency, and public frustration. These direct speech acts frequently indexed confrontation and criticism, particularly in dialogues that portrayed citizens reacting to economic hardship or engaging with political figures. While bald-on-record strategies typically constitute face-threatening acts, in these videos, they served as expressive tools for highlighting systemic discontent, thus reflecting a culturally sanctioned mode of resistance rather than interpersonal aggression. Positive politeness emerged primarily in peer interactions and service exchanges, where speakers used informal address terms, greetings, and familial expressions to build rapport and signal solidarity. Such strategies helped to soften criticism and reinforce communal bonds, especially in conversations depicting everyday Nigerians coping with inflationary pressures.

Negative politeness was less frequent but evident in contexts where speakers hesitated, hedged requests, or adopted deferential tones to reduce imposition. These strategies were employed to manage hierarchical relationships, particularly in transactional settings or moments of pleading and apology. Off-record strategies—especially sarcasm, humour, metaphor, and rhetorical questions—were integral to the pragmatic texture of the dialogues. These strategies enabled speakers to veil critique, express moral judgments, or mock socio-political contradictions without direct confrontation. In particular, off-record humour functioned as both a coping mechanism and a rhetorical device, allowing cartoonists to challenge authority while maintaining plausible deniability. The analysis also foregrounded the role of non-linguistic elements—including tone of voice, facial expression, gesture, and situational context—in reinforcing politeness strategies. These multimodal features amplified communicative intentions, shaped the emotional tenor of interactions, and deepened audience engagement.

Importantly, the study showed that while Brown and Levinson's model offers a useful typology for analysing politeness, its emphasis on individual face management requires recalibration in African contexts. In Nigerian discourse, politeness is often negotiated communally, contextually, and performatively. Acts considered impolite in Western frameworks—such as direct confrontation or sarcasm—may instead signal moral clarity, group solidarity, or justified dissent (Nwoye, 1992; Obeng, 1997). Ultimately, the findings affirm that cartoon-style videos do more than entertain; they serve as pragmatic instruments of social critique. Through their strategic use of politeness, these cartoons articulate collective disaffection, critique economic policy, and foster civic awareness in a manner that is both culturally resonant and rhetorically sophisticated.

Conclusion

This study examined the deployment of politeness strategies in selected Nigerian cartoon-style videos addressing fuel price hikes, using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory as its analytical foundation. The findings underscore the complex interplay between linguistic choices, multimodal cues, and socio-cultural norms in shaping public discourse through animated satire. The analysis revealed that politeness strategies function not only to manage face in interpersonal exchanges but also to perform ideological work in politically charged environments. Bald-on-record directness and sarcastic off-record remarks were shown to escalate tension or dramatise frustration, while positive and negative politeness strategies were used selectively to maintain social harmony, express solidarity, or mitigate imposition.

However, the study also demonstrated the limitations of applying universalist models of politeness to African communicative contexts. In Nigerian discourse, facework is often communal, expressive, and grounded in cultural expectations of resistance, solidarity, and relational negotiation. As such, seemingly impolite strategies may serve socially appropriate functions, especially when used to contest injustice or expose institutional contradictions. Cartoon-style videos, through a blend of humour, animation, and linguistic creativity, offer a potent medium for voicing public sentiment and critiquing state policy. Their strategic use of politeness not only reveals the communicative competence of cartoonists but also the socio-pragmatic logics that govern digital discourse in Nigeria.

Future research should explore politeness phenomena across other African digital genres, including memes, skits, and social media commentary. Additionally, there is scope for further multimodal analysis of how visual and auditory cues reinforce or subvert politeness strategies in digital political communication. Such inquiries will deepen our understanding of how African societies harness the expressive affordances of digital media to navigate socio-political challenges and foster participatory discourse.

References

Adeagbo, A., & Oyindamola, O. (2024). *Visual and linguistic strategies in Nigerian political cartoons*. Lagos Press.

Adetona, T. (2020). Audience perception of newspaper editorial cartoons: A hermeneutic and symbolic interactionist perspective. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 12(4), 101–113.

Adebayo, T. (2018). Cartoons as satirical devices in political communication. *Nigerian Journal of Semiotics and Communication*, 6(2), 55–70.

Akpati, G. (2019). Multimodal discourse analysis of online campaign cartoons from the 2015 presidential election. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 18(2), 221–243.

Amore, D., & Atoloye, T. (2015). Ideology in multimodal political cartoons: A semiotic analysis. *International Journal of Language Studies*, 9(3), 35–52.

Anchimbe, E. A. (2008). *Linguistic identity in postcolonial multilingual spaces*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* (Vol. 4). Cambridge University Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence*. Cambridge University Press.

Eze, M. (2020). Cartoons as social commentary in Nigerian digital media. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 12(1), 88–106.

Fitri, L. (2022). Pragmatic politeness strategies in Indonesian media discourse. *Pragmatics and Society*, 13(2), 174–192.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Doubleday Anchor.

Ibrahim, S. (2022). Digital cartoons and political discourse in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of New Media and Communication Studies*, 3(1), 44–62.

Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Lakoff, R. (1973). The logic of politeness: Or minding your p's and q's. *Papers from the Ninth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, 9, 292–305.

Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis: A multimodal introduction*. SAGE Publications.

Mills, S. (2003). *Gender and politeness*. Cambridge University Press.

Nwoye, O. G. (1992). Linguistic politeness and socio-cultural variations of the notion of face. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 18(4), 309–328.

Obeng, S. G. (1997). Language and politics: Indirectness in political discourse. *Discourse & Society*, 8(1), 49–83.

Omolabi, A. (2020). Sociosemiotic analysis of selected political cartoons in Nigerian newspapers. *Journal of African Cultural Semiotics*, 2(1), 60–78.

Osisanwo, A., & Atoloye, O. (2024). Humour techniques in Nigerian political cartoons: A pragmatic perspective. *Studies in Humor and Communication*, 5(2), 114–132.

Ogunyemi, D. (2021). Digital cartoon-style videos as tools for political engagement among Nigerian youth. *Journal of Visual Communication in Politics*, 4(3), 190–205.