

A Pragmatic Analysis of Impoliteness in the *Wedlock of the Gods* by Zulu Sofola

Steve E. Oseafiana and Don' Emenike

Department of Languages, School of General Studies, Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwoashi-Uku, Nigeria

Abstract: The purpose of the study is to investigate the impoliteness strategies used in the play *Wedlock of the Gods* by Zulu Sofola. The study applies Culpeper's theory of Impoliteness to the interpretation of selected extracts in order to establish specific impoliteness strategies that are used by the characters to realise the thematic preoccupation of the play. The study shows that such impoliteness strategies such as bald on record, bald on record combined with sarcasm, positive impoliteness and sarcasm and negative impoliteness are used in the play. The strategies are mainly used to achieve affective functions since they are targeted at expressing anger and discontent about the actions of the addressee(s). The study has implication for the understanding of the human emotion and how it triggers the use of impoliteness in communication.

Keywords: drama, pragmatics, politeness, impoliteness, conflict.

I. INTRODUCTION

Though the play, *The Wedlock of the Gods* is relatively old, having been published in 1972, it has continued to attract scholarly attention. The academic enquiry devoted to the play has contributed to the better understanding of human condition and establishing the play as a matrix for the interrogation of African culture in the light of challenges to its observance and enforcement in the new world order that premises its functionality on the respect of individual choices and preferences. Rosemary Asen (2017), for instance, examines the practice of bride price in Africa as exemplified in *The Wedlock of the Gods* and Efua Sutherland's *Marriage of Anasewa* to situate its significance in achieving peace and happiness in the society. Also, Norbert Oyibo Eze and Nelson Torti Obasi (2008) investigate the play from a cross-gender perspective to establish the fact that the forceful marriage of Ugwoma to somebody she never loves is an instance of human right abuse that has consequential effect on the society. Though the study of Stephen O. Solanke (2013) is quite different from others as it tends to explain the characters in the play in terms of mytho-symbolic representations of competing ideological positions that pitches modernism against tradition in the evolution of African culture, it is important to note that the study is still a content study. This means that the studies are devoted to the thematic concerns of the play. From the above, it could be noted that no study has investigated the linguistic resources used in realising the interpersonal relationship of the interlocutor in pursuance of the realisation of the objective of the play, yet these are important for the full understanding of the play. This is a gap in scholarship which the pragmatic analysis of impoliteness in the play seeks to fill.

In any communicative exchange such as that of a play typified by *The Wedlock of the Gods*, interlocutors communicate both ideational and interpersonal meanings. To fully understand a given work therefore, there is the need to account

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Language use generally conveys two kinds of meanings. These are content meaning and inferential meaning. Content meaning is realised by words and sentences that are used in communication. We can say that content meaning is overtly communicated, while inferential meaning in communication is deducible meaning that is covertly communicated. The socio-cultural context that defines the subject matter of discourse, and the role relationship of participant interlocutors most often define inferential meanings. It is this aspect of meaning that pragmatics is concerned with. According George Yule (1996:1) Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a hearer. He goes further to say that the investigation of pragmatics in language use "provide us with some insights into how more get communicated than is said"(1996:127). Further contemplating on pragmatics, Jacob Mey describes pragmatics as: "The science of language seen in relations to its users... real, live people for their own purposes within their limitations and affordances by a listener (or reader): in other words, pragmatics is speaker learner meaning" ((1993:5)). From the opinions expressed above, it could be deduced that a pragmatic investigation gives researchers the opportunity to read beyond the linguistic symbols to give a fuller interpretation of any given communication intercourse, by accounting for implicatures as could be perceived. F. N. Ogoanah and S. N. Kpolugbo (2017) demonstrate this when they examine natural occurring interactions in Nigerian socio-cultural settings. For instance, they argued that "the ability to attribute intentions, attitudes and thoughts to the communicator in a given instance is a necessary condition for effective communication" ((2017:133)). Literary texts, especially a dramatic piece also provide a good opportunity for a pragmatics enquiry. This is because drama enacts and re-enacts everyday experience of the people. According to John Dryden, drama is a "Just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind." (qtd in Ali Asghar Joyo, 2011: n.p). As stated by Dryden, drama reflects human conditions encompassing the challenges, passions and other existential demands. Therefore,

the pragmatic study of the play, *The Wedlock of the Gods* is an undertaking that aims at contributing to a better understanding of human conditions, especially the underlining motivations for the use of impolite verbal behaviour as noticed in the play.

The study of pragmatics in language communication has developed different theoretical persuasions aimed at giving a more comprehensive explanation to language use in contexts. Some of these pragmatic undertakings are politeness by Geoffrey Leech and Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, Relational works by Loacher and Watts, impoliteness by Jonathan Culpeper and Rapport management by Helen Spencer-Oatey. Scholars using different pragmatic theories have studied dramatic presentations to explain the contributions of pragmatic strategies to the realisation of the artistic creation of a play.

Wale Adegbite studies pragmatic strategies used in Ola Rotimi's play, *Ovoranwen Nogbaisc* to show their roles in the success or failure of diplomatic communication. Applying Brown and Levinson politesse theory and the Gricean cooperative principles, the author identifies some pragmatic strategies used in the play to include deference, use of indirect accusation and paying homage. The author notes that irrespective of the pragmatic strategies adopted in the play, the tragedy could not be averted because of conflict of interest and goal. Related to this study is the examination of Gricean principle and its maxims in Zulu Sofola's plays by Esther W. Ugwu. She identifies the use and violation of the Maxims of quantity, quality, manner and relations by the characters to achieve different ends in the play. She observes that the use of different maxims as noted enhances the overall presentation of the playwright's ideas in the play.

II. METHODOLOGY

The data for the study consist of extracts from the play, *The Wedlock of the Gods*. The choice of the play for this study is because the subject matter is an emotional and a combusive one that details the forceful marriage of a young woman and the attendant consequences. The play is read and re-read to identify relevant scenes and exchanges that illustrate the theme of the study. The analytical procedure involves the identification of impolite utterance. The identified utterances are extracted and studied to identify traces of impoliteness. The instances of impoliteness identified are explained using Culpeper theory of impoliteness. Data presentation and analysis go hand in hand as relevant extracts are presented followed by interpretations that are guided by the theoretical consideration adopted for this study.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study applies the theory of impoliteness as proposed by Culpeper. This has its springboard on Brown and Levinson politeness theory and it seeks to balance the assumptions contained therein. In order to have a good understanding of impoliteness, it is imperative to have a good understanding of politeness because the assertion of one is the denial of the

other as the mere mention of one directly or indirectly instantiates the other. This position has been recognized by politeness theorists such as Geoffrey Leech (2014), Brown and Levinson (1987), Helen Spencer-Oatey (2000, 2005). For instance, Leech says "the best way to start theorizing about impoliteness is to build on a theory of politeness, which is clearly a

closely related phenomenon, in fact, the polar opposite of politeness" (2014: 219). Culpeper (1996) also acknowledges this when he claims that his study of impoliteness is influenced by Brown and Levinson's politeness model. His use of such terms as *bald on record*, *positive politeness*, *negative politeness*, *off-record*, and *don't do the FTA* bears adequate testimony to this fact. Politeness and impoliteness could be understood as one and the same as they operate on the same scale, albeit at different extremes. In the light of the above understanding, it is considered necessary to discuss *politeness* in order to have a good understanding of *impoliteness*.

Some notable scholars of politeness study are R. Lakoff, Leech and Brown and Levinson. R. Lakoff describes politeness "as a means of minimizing confrontation in discourse - both the possibility of confrontation occurring at all, and the possibility that a confrontation will be perceived as threatening" (1989: 102). While Brown and Levinson see politeness in the light of a diplomatic language "... politeness, like formal diplomatic protocol (for which it must surely be the model), presupposes that potential for aggression as it seeks to disarm it, and makes possible communication between potentially aggressive parties." (1987: 1) Characterising the significance of politeness in communication, Leech states that the role of the Politeness is "to maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place. (1983a: 82) Lakoff, Leech and Brown and Levinson have developed different theoretical models for the explanation of the phenomenon of politeness in communication. For instance, Lakoff introduces three principles that include: *do not impose*, *give options and make receiver /listener feel good*. Also, Leech proposes six politeness maxims such as: *the tact maxim*, *maxim of Generosity*, *Approbation*, *Modesty*, *Agreement and Sympathy* (1983:132). According to him, if these are deployed communication conflicts will be minimal in human relations. In developing their politeness model, Brown and Levinson link politeness to face wants. Borrowing the concept of face from Erving Goffman, they state that human beings have a face that can be affected or threatened in course of verbal exchange. Citing Goffman, Brown and Levinson define face as "the particular image we present about ourselves. It is the positive social values a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assumed he has taken during a particular contact." (1987:61) They identify positive and negative face wants that can be claimed or threatened which has implication for achieving (dis) harmonious relationship. In addition,

Brown and Levinson introduce such strategies as bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and don't do the FTA) which are explained in relation to impoliteness.

Culpeper defines impoliteness as “the use of (verbal) strategies to affect interlocutors face and create social disruption (1996:8). This definition was however modified in 2005 to account for the speaker’s intentionality, thus Culpeper states: “Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2).” (2005:38). Also, Mills (2005: 268) defines impoliteness as “any type of linguistic behavior which is assessed as intending to threaten the hearer’s face or social identity”. From the views expressed, it could be understood that impoliteness is an observable violation of acceptable behaviour that is open to negative evaluation by the listener and researcher(s). Culpeper considers such linguistic offences to include rudeness, incivility and verbal and face aggravation. N. Aydinoglu (2013: 476) lists some triggers of impoliteness as “anger, a show of power, a dispute, a threat to the face, great sorrow, strong disapproval, desire to provoke, the wish to entertain, etc.” Culpeper (1996) proposed five strategies used in doing impoliteness in social interaction to include the following:

1. Bald on Record Impoliteness: This as a strategy that is used to attack the addressee’s face in overt manners. According to Culpeper, bald on record impoliteness occurs, when “the speaker attacks the addressee’s face in a straight forward obvious unambiguous [manner] (1996: 350). Bald on record is also one of the face threatening strategies recognised by Brown and Levinson
2. Positive Impoliteness: This is a strategy that is used to damage addressee’s posture face want. Both verbal and non-verbal tokens used to realise positive impoliteness, according to Culpeper, to ignore, scorn, fail to acknowledge the other’s presence, exclude from activities, call the other names, disassociate from other, use swear and profane words and others (196:357).
3. Negative impoliteness: This strategy is used to attack the addressee’s negative want, that is, the desire not to be forced or impeded.
4. Sarcasm or mock politeness: This is where the speaker praises the addressee’s in insincere manner. Through this method, the face of the hearers is attacked.
5. Withhold Politeness: This is realised when a speaker deliberately withhold politeness expression when they are obviously necessary. Culpeper gives strategies to achieve this to include failure to use politeness formulae such as thank you, excuse me, I am sorry and others.

Culpeper also identifies the functions of impoliteness in communication to include affective function, entertainment function and coercive functions. Affective function of impoliteness is realised in discourse when the speaker shows negative emotional state such as anger. Usually, this is targeted at the addressee who, in most cases, is responsible for the negative feeling being expressed. The entertainment function of impoliteness is relevant when the speaker uses impoliteness expression to create humour both for the speaker and others. Also, the coercive function of impoliteness shows that exercise of asymmetric power relation. This could be in personal, group or institutional communication where the exercise of power is necessary for the achievement of transactional goal. To demonstrate the usefulness of his impoliteness model, Culpeper applies it to the analysis army recruit training discourse and notes that the asymmetric power relation in the context tends to justify the use of impoliteness. For instance, he notes, “in the context of army, impoliteness is not the haphazard product of, say, a heated argument, but is deployed by the sergeant in a systematic way as part of what they perceive to be their job’ (1996:359). From the above explanation, it could be understood that Culpeper theory of impoliteness provide a rich resources for the interpretation of literary works considering the fact that literature reflects society and shows relationships which enacts and re-enacts human actions. No doubt, this has implication for the understanding of human conducts for the proper management and understanding of human condition. The choice of the theory is considered appropriate because the play treats a sensitive and volatile condition that is highly emotional and disruptive of the existing socio-cultural order.

IV. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This section presents the data followed by the analysis to show the use of impoliteness strategies as noted in the play. Effort would be made to organise the study under the six noted forms of impoliteness by Culpeper.

(a) *Bald on Record*

This is where the speaker attacks the addressee’s face sensibilities in a straight forward manner. The study below shows this.

Extract 1

IBEKWE: There are teeth among us here which are rotten inside even though they are white outside. It was Okolie who led certain evil segments of this family to strip my father of pride and respect. He led those people to destroy my father’s house, refused my mother’s entry into my father’s compound and even made us look like strangers in our father’s house.

OKOLIE: You should not leave the front of the yam and start digging the back. Your father did not leave a wall standing for himself. He did not even clear path to be called his own
...

IBEKWE: There are some people unto who wickedness was born and there is nothing anyone can do to wash them clear ...

OKOLIE: You should have been told what a useless thing your father was ...

IBEKWE: Okolie leads the wicked group of this Onowu family. His wickedness smells so much that it makes him vomit. (Act 2 scenes 1)

There are two types of impoliteness strategies used in the above exchanges. These are bald on record and negative impoliteness. Ibekwe attacks the hearer's (Okolie) face in a straightforward manner when he says "it was Okolie who led certain evil segment of this family to stripe my father of pride and respect" Ibekwe goes further to say about the addressee "Okolie leads the wicked group of this Onowu family; his wickedness smells so much." In the above expression the face of the addressee is attacked on bald record as the attack is clear and on target. Also notable is the response of Okolie who counters offensively as he responds "you would have been told what a useless thing your father was..." The impoliteness strategy employed and the response perform affective functions as both characters express deep rooted sentiments that have been suppressed over time. The bald on record strategy is reinforced by negative impoliteness.

(b) *Bald on Record and Sarcasm*

Extract 2

ODIBEI: I am ordering you out of my son's house.

ULOKO: I will not leave this house until Ogwoma goes home with me.

ODIBEL: Young man you make me laugh with pity for you.

ULOKO: You should pity yourself first.

ODIBEI: What man of respect would find the house of a woman in morning inviting? Is it to see her shaven head or her body in ashes that you have come? Or is it to see what dwells within her?

ULOKO: You are not ...

ODIBEI: Did you find what you were looking for? Did you, eh?

ULOKO: You are wicked.

Act 1 Scene 1 (p. 15).

Extract 2 above records the scene where Odibei finds out the illicit sexual relationship between her daughter-in-law who is in mourning and another man. The exchange that characterises the scene is that of pain, anger, resentment and hatred and the impoliteness strategies adopted reflect this.

In the beginning of the exchange, the speaker uses negative impoliteness strategy when she issues a command to the addressee by ordering him out of her son's house. The statement is an attack on the hearer's negative face want as he

seeks to cohabit and enjoy the sexual pleasure from a bereaved woman in mourning. The response tended towards accepting the impoliteness in an unreasonable manner by making an impossible and unconscionable demand, that is, he will only leave the house of another man on the condition that he leaves with the (late) man's wife who was still in ashes. This demand is followed by another form of impoliteness in the nature of argumentation. Here, the speaker puts the debt of the hearer on record by asking a rhetorical question: "what man of respect would find the house of a woman in mourning inviting?" This is followed by sarcasm that shows anger and disappointment with the shameful conduct of the addressee. The sarcasm is realised in the following expression targeted at doing maximum face damage "Did you find what you were looking for? Did you, eh?". The response of the hearer is to counter offensively that shows his understanding of the emotion being expressed.

(c) *Positive Impoliteness*

Positive impoliteness strategy aims to damage the addressee's face wants so that he/she would lose respect in the estimation of right thinking members of the society. It involves the use of smear words, failure to acknowledge, denial of association, calling of names and many others. Some of these impoliteness strategies are notable in the play.

Extract 3

OGWOMA: God is on my side if one says yes to his prayers God will hear him. I have prayed long enough and God will make us one.

OGOLI: (Bursting into the house unexpectedly) where is that shameless goat that wants to take all I have from me.

OWASIA: (to Ogoli) Nne, what is the matter?

OGOLI: I could not sell a grain of salt in the market because of this dog.

OGWOMA: I am not a dog ... (Act 1 scene 2)

In the scene, Ogwoma and her friend, Anwasia are together in the house when Ogoli, the mother of Uloko burst into the house. In the exchange that follows, Ogoli calls Ogwoma names, such as *goat* and *dog*. She uses the expression to express her anger and disgust about the abominable conduct of Ogwoma who involved herself in a sexual relationship while still in mourning, having lost her husband, Adigwu. This is considered a taboo and a shameful act in the community and it has its repercussions. The words, especially, *dog* has a metaphorical meaning that shows unrestrained and aggressive sexual desire that is offensive to societal morals. The expression has affective function and it tends to damage the face wants of Ogwoma to be loved and respected. The response of Ogwoma is that of a weak denial. This shows a partial acceptance of the impoliteness, but only to the rejection of the name *dog*, but not to the conduct that instigated the emotional outburst of Ogoli.

Extract 4

ODIBEI: ...I suspected this dog when her people were hawking her for any available man. I protested enough but my husband saw her as Adigwu's wife. So we took her in and took upon us a curse.

OGWOMA: It was I who hated you and your son. God has delivered me and I will leave your house for you (*Odibei laughs bitterly*).

ODIBEI: One does not play with Odidbei like that

UKOKO: What do you mean?

ODIBEI: I do not allow anything to end in my hands. I suspected this dog a long time ago. It is now clear that my son died as a result of taboos that harlot broke (Act 1 scene 2).

Extract 4 above also show the use of positive impoliteness strategy that is realised by name calling. Here, Odibei, Ogwoma's mother-in-law having discovered the illicit liaison between her mourning daughter-in-law and Uloko calls her *dog* and *harlot*. This also damages the face wants of Ogwoma as it serves to express the anger and disappointment of the speaker towards the conduct of the addressee. Also notable is the response of the addressee who countered offensively. In the extract, there is also another instance of impoliteness strategy that is of the variant of negative impoliteness. In this case, the speaker uses expression that tends to frighten the addressee. This is shown when Odibei utters the following expression, "one does not play with Odibei like that." This sounds like a threat to frighten the addressee. The threat embedded in the statement did not go unnoticed as the response from Uloko shows.

(d) *Negative Impoliteness*

Extract 5

ANWASIA: You must tell no one until we ...

OGWOMA: Until what?

ANWSIA: Don't you see anything wrong in a woman being pregnant for another man while she is still in mourning for dead husband?

OGWOMA: (*Still putting things away*) until what?

ANWSIA: Until we do something about your pregnancy.

OGWOMA: Is that your problem?

ANWSIA: Ogwoma, it has never be heard that woman in mourning has done what you have done (A8)

The extract above illustrates the use of negative impoliteness strategy. The speaker uses indirect accusation to attack the face want of the addressee and the addressee counters offensively by putting the debt of the speaker on record. This is done by stating in a specific manner the reprehensive conduct of the speaker and her counterpart. The impoliteness

strategy performs affective function as the parties involved in the exchange show their disappointment with each other.

Extract 6

NNEKA: I heard everything and I cannot walk on the road (silent resentment from *Ogwoma*). Did we do anything that the land forbid? Is it not as others give their daughters away to husbands that we gave you away?

OGWOMA: No, it is not the way others are given away to their husbands that you and father threw me away to Adigwu. No, mother, you and father were so hungry for money that you tied me like a goat and threw me away to a man I hated.

NNEKA: Your tongue is bad and hearts a rock. Any good daughter with a dying brother would have told her parents to give her away to a husband and use her bride wealth to cure her brother....

OGWOMA: ... You gave me away to him and received whatever money he could bring. But no, you were hungry for money because you had never seen money before.

(Act 1 Scene 2)

Extract 6 is an exchange between two friends Ogwoma and Anwasia and the subject matter of discussion is the pregnancy of Ogwoma who is mourning in the exchange Anwasia uses negative impoliteness strategies to damage the face want of Ogwoma by using indirect accusation. The addressee reacts by pretending not to be bothered. The impoliteness strategy used serves affective function since the speaker expresses disappointment and surprise as the addressee fails to realise the magnitude of her action.

Extract 7

UDO: Your recent abominable activities with Ogwoma have disturbed a lot waters recently ...

Uloko: And what do you expect me to do about that.

UDO: Shut up your mouth!

Uloko: I will not shut up my mouth

UDO: Shut up your mouth, I say. Let good sense come into your head for once ... (Act 2 scene 1)

Extract 7 also shows the use of negative impoliteness strategy. The scene is where an elderly member of the community accosted Uloko to address his infelicitous conduct in going into sexual liaison with a woman in ashes. The speaker goes about this by putting the hearer's debt on record. This is done by reminding the addressee about his abominable conduct and the social disruption it has occasioned. The strategy has affective function in the sense that it expresses the speaker's discontent. The response of the addressee is to counter offensively by pretending not to understand the enormity of the impact of his misbehaviours. This is followed by the repeat of the same negative impoliteness by putting the debt of the hearer's offence "on bald record" in the following

words “you committed a crime with a man’s daughter and you ask such a senseless question.” No doubt, the latter statement aims to do maximum face damage, but the addressee counters defensively by making allegation. This is followed by a rebuke that serves to drive home the shock and disgust about the conduct of the addressee. It is noted that the impoliteness expressed is consistent with the behaviour of the addressee, and the repeated use of negative impoliteness strategy in the exchanges is used to reinforce each other to show how offensive the conduct of the addressee is.

(e) *Sarcasm and Positive Impoliteness*

Extract 8

OKOLIE: Edozie’s sickness could only hear sacrifice to our God. But that was not all, brothers, the Oracle stated clearly that before Edozie fully recovered he must be initiated into manhood even when at his age of ten. Ibekwe had not enough money for all this. But rather than lean on our backs he decided to give his daughter away. It is true a man’s daughter is his source of wealth, but never have our people supported such action when there is another way to solve the problem. Diokpa Ata, I say that Ibekwe ignored his family and so should be left to stand alone in the rain.

IBEKWE: (*Standing*) Diokpa Ata, members of Onowu family, welcomes. The tortoise say that his problems are his problems and therefore cannot be crushed by them, so he carries his problem on his back wherever he goes, (Act 2 scene 1)

In extract 8, two forms of impoliteness could be identified. These are sarcasm and positive impoliteness. The speaker, Okolie in the exchange shows mock politeness. At the beginning of the statement, he presented facts that could be construed to be sympathetic to the addressee, by acknowledging the peculiar circumstances of the addressee such as the sickness of Edozie and the sacrificial demands of the ancestral God. But towards the end, he upbraided the addressee for solving his problem the wrong way. This shows that the concern earlier shown is feigned and insincere. The show of mock politeness is further accentuated by positive impoliteness when the speaker seeks disassociation with the addressee when he states: “... I say that Ibekwe ignored his family and so should be left to stand alone in the rain”. The mock politeness extended to the addressee that did not go unnoticed as the addressee responded by accepting the impoliteness when he states “the tortoise says that his problems are his problems and therefore cannot be crushed by them ...”. The impoliteness noted performs affective function as it shows deep seated resentment about the conduct of the addressee who literally sold his daughter on the guise of collecting bride wealth.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

One important observation is that impoliteness strategies are not easily separable as theorized by Culpeper (1996) as it could be seen in the analysis that different strategies could be

used in a stretch of utterance. This is supported by the findings of Mirhosseini, Monir, *et al* (2017:221). The study also shows that a sustained use of impoliteness strategies in the play, *The Wedlock of the Gods*. This tends to complement the thematic preoccupation of the play that is centered on the violation of personal and communal sensibilities. The effective marriage of the style and theme contributes to the artistic enhancement of the play as the noted impoliteness strategies help to generate and sustain the tempo of the play to achieve a climax.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study investigates impoliteness in the play, *The Wedlock of the Gods* by Zulu Sofola. It employs Culpeper’s theory of impoliteness for the analysis of selected extracts. The study identifies notable impoliteness strategies used in the play. These are bald on record, bald on record combined with sarcasm, positive impoliteness and sarcasm and negative impoliteness. The study shows that the choice of the identified impoliteness strategies is motivated by the subject matters of discussions which are highly sensitive and emotional. The choice of the noted impoliteness strategies is considered appropriate in the context of the play as they reflect the subject matter and contribute to the realisation of the objective of the play.

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