

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Verbal Threat Among the People of Apewosika

Richard Anane Appiah, Lawrence Bosiwah*

University of Cape Coast, College of Humanities & Legal Studies, Department of Ghanaian Languages and Linguistics, Cape Coast, Ghana

Abstract

Verbal threat is a speech act which forms an integral part of human behaviour. It is one of the face threatening acts that confront people in their day-to-day activities. It is a language phenomenon that can generate quarrel, fight and chaos among people. Despite the controversies which verbal threat causes people, it still remains one of the most language phenomenon or speech acts which have not been given much attention in our part of the world, Africa and Ghana to be specific. Pertaining to the use of language among individuals, the way people use language differ as a result of certain social factors which characterize the use of language in every society. This study finds out how sociolinguistic factors such as gender, age and occupational status have any influence on how an individual issues a verbal threat among the Fantes in Ghana using the people of Apewosika in the Cape Coast Metropolis as case study. The research employed a qualitative and a case study approach in collecting of data. In all, 30 participants comprising 12 male adults, 12 female adults, 3 male children and 3 female children were randomly selected using the purposive sampling technique of which their responses from the interview and the observation to the research topic problem were presented to content analysis. The result of the study reveals that among the three sociolinguistic factors which were analyzed, age has much influence on how an individual issues a threat than gender and occupational status and that with respect to gender and occupational status, it is the attitude of the offender in the community and the type of offence committed against the threatener that will show how an individual would be threatened.

Keywords

Threatner, Offender, Direct Threat, Indirect Threat, Gender

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1. Introduction

Verbal threat in any manner when issued out always has some impact on the listener whether negatively or positively (Appiah & Bosiwah, 2015). This means that verbal threat just like other speech act such as warning or refusal always go against the wishes or will of the listener and this always impedes on the face of the listener and as a result of this some scholars like Brown & Levinson (1987) have developed a theory called '*politeness*' to help identify a particular type of face a hearer portrays when certain speech acts are made or uttered. Politeness and impoliteness are two forms of speech event which an individual employs either

one of the two in speaking or interacting with other people. According to Mills (2003), politeness is the expression of a speakers' intention to mitigate face carried by certain face threatening acts toward another. Being polite therefore consists of one attempting to save or protect the face of another person. Brown & Levinson (1987) identify four politeness strategies which deal with face-threat: Bald-on-Record, Negative Politeness, Positive Politeness and Off-Record. As they explained, Bald-on-Record usually does not attempt to minimize the threat on the hearer's face. They add that often using this strategy will shock or embarrass the addressee since there is no attempt to preserve the face of one's listener as the speaker makes use of words which will

* Corresponding author

Email address: richanapp62@yahoo.com (R. A. Appiah), lbsiwah@ucc.edu.gh (L. Bosiwah)

make the listener feel bad. A threatner may use this strategy to address an offender when he/she is seriously affected by the actions of the offender so as to make him/her feel bad and regret for the cause of his/her actions. Further, Positive Politeness Strategy according to Brown & Levinson (1987) seeks to minimize the threat to the hearer's face. Thus, this strategy is used to make the hearer feel good about him or herself. Therefore, using this strategy, the speaker does not make use of words that will impede or damage the face of the listener. Also, Negative Politeness strategy presumes that the speaker will be imposing on the listener and there is a higher potential for awkwardness or embarrassment than in bald on-record strategies and positive politeness strategies. Here, the speaker tries to be autonomous and does not recognize the face of the hearer. In most utterances which involve a threat, the threatners make use of this strategy by ignoring the face of the offender. Off-Record strategy employs an indirect way addressing a listener. It seeks to recognize and respect the hearer's face: It shows little or no threat to the addressee's want of respect and dignity.

On the other hand, impoliteness is simply a form of language that is generally considered anti-social, and is labeled by a wide-range of terms such as impolite, rude, inconsiderable, verbally abusive etc. Therefore, whereas in speech acts such as greetings, thanksgiving, and congratulations polite or inoffensive words are used, abusive and offensive words are mostly used in speech acts such as warning and threat and the speaker does not intend to save or protect the face of the addressee and as a result this sometimes creates fear and unhappiness in the listener. Culpeper et al. (2003:1546) identifies that impoliteness as a communicative strategy is designed to attack the face of the listener, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony. This means impolite words do not create any cordial or smooth relationship among people but it always bring some kind of misunderstanding among people since they come in a harshly and hurting or offensive manner. Culpeper (2005a:38) explains further that impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face attacking of (1) and (2). According to Holmes et al. (2008:196) they also explain verbal impoliteness as a form of linguistic behaviour assessed by the hearer as threatening her or his face or social identity, and infringing the norms of appropriate behaviour that prevail in a particular context and among particular interlocutors whether intentionally or not. According to scholars like Baron and Richardson (1994) as well as Tedeschi and Felson (1994), some words or terms like aggression and social harm/hurt overlap with impoliteness. Baron and Richardson (1994) concur that aggression is any form of behaviour directed towards the goal of harming or

injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment. Most verbal threats also carry this same goal of harming or injuring another living being (human) because they contain impolite or harsh words which affects the offender. Also, Tedeschi and Felson (1994) contend that social harm involves damage to the social identity of target persons and lowering of their status. Social harm as they explain may be imposed by insults, reproaches, sarcasm and various types of impolite behaviour like threat or warning.

Any type of threat issued in whatsoever (Appiah and Bosiwah, 2015) form does not make use of the performative verb 'threat' itself as can be seen in 'I threat you', rather; depending on the manner in which certain words are uttered, they are regarded as threats to the listener. Thus, just like the performative verb 'vow', the term 'threat' is not mostly used or not even used at all when one issues a threat to another person. To support this claim, Halliday (1973) also writes that 'threat' is a semantic phenomenon which can be expressed by different expressions and situations. Al-Ameedi & Al-Husseini (2005) identify two points of view about a threat act. First, the objective view which indicates that the speaker makes a statement with an intention to cause serious harm to the listener. Second, the subjective view which states that the speaker makes a statement of threat to the listener regardless of whether the speaker actually intends to carry out the threat and this draws a distinction between making and posing a threat. Watt et al. (2013) define a threat as a form of expression that communicates some undesirable state of affairs which may befall the recipient or a third party as a consequence of another's purposeful actions. Also, Appiah & Bosiwah (2015) indicate that a threat is an act of one giving the possibility of causing damage or harm to another person if caution is not taken or if one continues to do what another person hates or dislikes. With respect to the issuing of verbal threat, the one who issues out the threat is referred to as the "offended person or threatner" whilst the one to whom the threat is issued is also referred to as the "offender". Appiah & Bosiwah (2015) suggest that before a threatner issues a verbal threat to an offender, then the threatner must have a cause of his action as well as what he/she aims to achieve after issuing the threat. (See also Appiah and Bosiwah, 2015 for more details on the causes, aims and effects of verbal threats).

Continuing, Lakoff (1975) and Yule (1996) in their respective works claim that females turn to show more politeness in speaking than men because they use more prestigious and polite language than men. Beebe et al. (1990) in their study also reveal that Americans in refusing requests from higher, equal and lower status persons usually employ a form of indirect communication whilst the Japanese on the other side of the same coin tend to use more direct strategies if the

respondent were addressing a lower-status person. Climate (1997) indicates that females generally use speech to develop and maintain relationships. Akindele (2007) also indicates deference to some sociolinguistic factors such as age, context situation; gender and time are powerful factors which account for the organization of Sesotho greetings. Hassan et al. (2011) in their study also observed that there is no important difference between males and females refusal strategies among English and Persian participants. They (Hassan et al.) conclude however that Persian groups use more indirect strategies with regard to refusals in interacting with someone with very higher social class than those with lower social status.

Yeboaba (2012) also looked at how social factors such as age, gender and social status affect the way an individual issues a verbal warning among the people of Amamoma and her result concludes that among these three factors, the social factor 'age' has much influence on the way one issues a verbal warning than gender and social status. She adds that adults issue warnings directly to their children whilst children use polite and indirect means when they are offended by the actions of adults. Further, Geluykens & Limberg (2012) reveal in their study that threat responses among native English students are subject to gender variation. Thus, they clearly show that the gender of the addressee has a major influence on the response type of threat chosen, in that the female data showed more compliant responses than the male data and that female English speakers are more likely to comply with a threat than their male counterparts.

Watt et al. (2012) also disclose in their research that male participants of English Speaking listeners assign higher threat and intent ratings than do their female counterparts. Ariff and Mugableh (2013) reveal in their research that women's speech in Jordanian Arabic is inclusive, less direct, and avoids arguments and confrontation. Totimeh & Bosiwah (2015) point out that children employ more politeness strategy in making request to adults among the Akyem people of Ghana. They add also that adults use direct strategy in making request from children in the Akyem Community. Adjei & Bosiwah (2015) mentioned in their research that gender has a great influence on the issuing of indirect strategies such as sarcasms and euphemisms.

Social factors or variables with respect to the use of language could be defined in this research as any factor that in one way or the other have an effect on the way people use language among themselves in a speech community, Habermas (1998:19) states that these social factors can be divided following the participants' attitudes towards success or attaining understanding. This research therefore examines how some social factors such as gender, age and occupational

status affect the way an individual issues a verbal threat.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Yule (1996) suggests that two people growing up in the same geographical area, at the same time, may speak differently because of a number of social factors. He adds that it is important not to overlook the social aspect of language because, in many ways, speech is a form of social identity and it is used, consciously or unconsciously, to indicate membership of different social groups or different speech communities. Yule (1996:23) therefore defines a speech community as a group of people who share a set of norms, rules and expectations regarding the use of language. Adding to this, he indicates that investigating language with respect to social factors is known as sociolinguistics. Thus, this is a branch of linguistics that looks at the relationship which exists between language use and the society. Yeboaba (2012) also clarifies that in any form of address, there are some social factors that influence the speech event. These factors as she explained condition the type of relationship that exists between people in a society and that the existence of such social factors reflects the values and social norms in the society. She indicates also that the social factors have the advantage of ensuring co-existence and peacefulness in the society. Again, Al-Ameedi & Al-Husseini (2005) contend that a threat may be influenced by some social factors which govern the relationship between the speaker and the hearer and such factors involve the relative power of the speaker over the hearer, the social distance between the speaker and the listener, the size of imposition according to the degree of the important action, and the relative rights and obligations between the speaker and the hearer and that is whether or not the speaker has the right to make a particular threat and whether the hearer has the obligation to comply. Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch (2003) concur that one cannot base on just a social factor to determine language use among people rather; different social factors should be considered as simultaneously relevant. In respect of these assertions, this research also finds out whether some social factors like gender, age, and occupational status have any influence on the way an individual issues out verbal threats to the respective offenders.

1.2. Purpose and Objective of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to critically examine the influence of social variables on speech acts and in view of this our specific objective is to analyze how sociolinguistic factors such as gender, age and occupational status affect the way individuals in the Apewosika speech community issue out verbal threats to their respective offenders.

1.3. Research Questions

In order to achieve the above objective successfully, we seek to find answers to the following research questions:

- How could gender influence the way an individual issue a verbal threat to an offender?
- How could age affect the manner in which an individual threatens an offender?
- How could occupational status affect the way in which an individual issues a verbal threat?

1.4. Significance of the Study

Some scholars and researchers such as Yule (1996), Habermas (1998), Lorenzo- Dus & Bou-Franch (2003), Yeboaba (2012) have indicated that the way people use language differ from one person to another because of some social variables/factors that characterize the use of language in every speech community. This means that these social factors determine how people interact with one another. In view of this claim, this present study would enlighten people to know how verbal threat, which is also a form of language, is issued out from one person to another person due to the existence of some of these social variables (gender, age and occupational).

Also, Limberg & Geluykens (2007) as well as Limberg (2012) have indicated that despite the obvious face risks involved in uttering verbal threats, they have received little attention in the literature on impoliteness or relational work. Therefore, this research would help add up to the few works which exist on speech acts as a whole and verbal threats to be specific

Lastly, the research would be used as a source of reference for other researchers who would find the interest to look at how some of these social factors affect other impolite verbal behaviours which relate to this present study.

1.5. Brief Description of Apewosika Speech Community

Apewosika is a Fante speaking community which is located at the North-Western part of Cape Coast in the Central Region of Ghana. Specifically, this community is found at the South campus of the University of Cape Coast. There are about 1,547 people living in the Apewosika community (source- © 2006 Cape Coast Metropolitan Assembly). The people are very united in terms of their culture in that they are binded together by one common language, common naming system, dress and food. Although the people have different religious background, it does not separate them from one another. They see themselves as one people from the same community and as a result of that they support one another in terms of needs or troubles. They live a communal

living and their way of life can be applied to what Mbiti (1991) refers to as “I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am”. This means that among the people of this community, the problems of the individual person are the problems of the whole community and the reverse of this is the case. The people celebrate the “Fetu Afahye” (Fetu Festival) together with the people of Cape Coast. They are basically traders and fish mongers. However, with the establishment of the University of Cape Coast in the community, most of the community folks have had the opportunity of being employed in most of the various sectors of the University as labourers, cleaners, security men and women among others (see also (Appiah & Bosiwah, 2015).

2. Methodology

We employed a case study as well as a qualitative approach to undertake the research. Patton (1990) indicates that a case study is a way of organizing social data for the purpose of viewing social reality. Mariam (1988) sees it to be detailed investigations of individuals, groups, institutions or other social units. A case study approach was employed in undertaking the research because the phenomenon under investigation is a contemporary one and the study is based on a real life situation. We used both the case study and the qualitative research design to undertake this research because this study seeks to reveal the detailed understanding of the phenomenon of issuing verbal threat among a particular group of people in order to find out how some social factors such as gender, age and occupational status influence the way an individual issues these verbal threats to an offender when he/she is offended by the offender’s actions.

We also used a semi-structured interview as a tool to gather our data and with this we had sets of questions to ask the participants. This tool was used because it is very flexible and it paved way for new questions or ideas which were not part of the original questions but was found very interesting to be brought up during the interview as a result of what either the interviewers or the participants said. In addition to the semi-structured interview, we also relied on an indirect participant observation of an interaction among people in the Apewosika community as another tool for gathering data. We also gathered data by recording the responses of the respondents in their L1 (Fante) using an electronic recorder and later transcribed them to the L2 (English Language), however, this tool was used when the individual to be interviewed allowed that because not everyone liked it that their voices be recorded. The reason being is that, some of the participants who were engaged in this study thought that their voices could be used for other purposes apart from the academic intended purpose.

This research involves two main sources from which we gathered our data from and these are: primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data for this study was the responses of the participants which served as the main source of information for the analysis and discussion. The data was collected from the Apewosika speech community, focusing on male and female adults as well as children whereas the secondary sources of data were books, articles, and journals. In all, 30 participants including 12 male adults, 12 females adult, 3 male children and 3 female children ageing between 8 and 56 were randomly selected and interviewed for this research using the purposive sampling technique. The reason for selecting these people is that, they form the majority in the Apewosika community and we realized that they are the very people who are mostly involved in social interaction; hence, they served as the right source of the information needed.

This study was not restricted to only the elites but it also included the illiterates. In view of this, we used the oral as well as written consent form where participants who could not read and write, we took our time to read and explain to them the purpose of this study so as to seek their interest and readiness to willfully participate in the interview. Those who could not speak English were interviewed using the L1 (Fante) and they were also allowed to give their responses in their L1 (Fante) which we later transcribed the L1 to L2 (English language).

3. Discussion of Findings

In order to access and understand their general knowledge on the questions which we used as our interview guide for the collection of data, the table below gives some background information about the respondents who were engaged in this study. It captures their gender, age and educational background. However, because the respondents did not allowed their names to be taken, we decided to name and identify them as respondent 1, respondent 2 and so on. See Table 1 below:

Table 1. Showing some demographic information about interviewees.

Respondents	Gender	Age	Educational Background
Respondent 1	Female Adult	42	Basic
Respondent 2	Female Adult	26	Basic
Respondent 3	Male Adult	25	Secondary
Respondent 4	Female Child	11	Primary
Respondent 5	Male Adult	43	Basic
Respondent 6	Male Adult	54	Basic
Respondent 7	Male Adult	26	Secondary
Respondent 8	Female Adult	38	None
Respondent 9	Female Child	16	Junior High
Respondent 10	Male Child	15	Junior High
Respondent 11	Female Adult	33	Basic

Respondents	Gender	Age	Educational Background
Respondent 12	Male Adult	29	Basic
Respondent 13	Male Child	13	Upper Primary
Respondent 14	Female Adult	48	Basic
Respondent 15	Male Adult	49	Basic
Respondent 16	Male Adult	56	None
Respondent 17	Female Child	14	Upper Primary
Respondent 18	Male Child	8	Lower Primary
Respondent 19	Female Adult	29	Basic
Respondent 20	Male Adult	36	Basic
Respondent 21	Male Adult	45	Tertiary
Respondent 22	Female Adult	40	Tertiary
Respondent 23	Male Adult	53	Basic
Respondent 24	Male Adult	27	Secondary
Respondent 25	Female Adult	26	Basic
Respondent 26	Female Adult	47	Basic
Respondent 27	Male Adult	49	None
Respondent 28	Female Adult	31	Primary
Respondent 29	Female Adult	48	Basic
Respondent 30	Female Adult	28	Basic

Source: Appiah and Bosiwah (2015)

3.1. How People Perceive Threat

It became clear during our interview with the respondents that about 98 percent of the interviewees have knowledge about what the speech act. “threat” means. In their local language (L1), the people refer to threat as “ihubɔ” which is made up of two morphemes – {ihu-} (fear) and {-bɔ} (hit). They indicated that the speech act “threat” is sometimes referred to as “ihunahuna” (act of threatening) and they explained this as indicated in illustrations 1 and 2 below:

[1] “When we talk of threatening someone, it means that, the person has done something wrong against you which you are not happy about and because you want that person to stop that thing, you either say or show some action that is very fearful or scary to that person so as to stop or prevent the person from repeating that mistake” (Respondent 6).

[2] “Threatening someone means that you are putting fear into the person who has done something wrong against you by saying something which is very fearful or scary to the person so as to stop the person from repeating the same wrong act” (Respondent 30).

Thus, from illustrations 1 and 2 above, it could be realised that the people of Apewosika believe that one best way to quickly prevent someone from doing something which one dislikes is to issue a serious threat to the person so as to scare him or her off from continuing with that act which is seen as very wrong or offensive. Some of the respondents shared their view that sometimes no matter how a person may be offended by another person’s action; the threatner tries to calm down in issuing the threat due to certain social relationship that may exist between the threatner and the offender. However, such people indicated that this is not always the case because not everyone needs to be treated as

such. For this reason, we discuss in section 3.2 how individuals in this community issue threat among themselves by looking at how social factors such as gender, age and occupational status affect the issuance of these threats.

3.2. The Influence of Gender, Age and Occupational status on Verbal Threats

In our day to day activities and interaction with other people there are certain things which may prompt us to behave differently towards other people. Thus it must be made very clear that there is no way an individual person can treat every other individual persons equally, meaning the way we treat other people are not static rather, it is dynamic. To support this claim, Al-Ameedi & Al-Husseini (2005) indicate that some social relationship exists between a speaker and a hearer and this determines how an individual behaves towards another person. Culture is therefore one major factor which comes into play when we try to deal with other people. These behaviours are mostly factored on the culture or norms of a community. Therefore, by working within the scope of culture with respect to language, so many factors are taken into consideration because language is also affected by culture. Yule (1996:239) contends that two people growing up in the same geographical area, at the same time, may speak differently because of a number of social factors. In this regard, Habermas (1998:19) states that these social factors or actions can be divided following the participants' attitudes towards success or attaining understanding.

Verbal threat just like any other communicative event or speech acts also comes under the influences of some sociolinguistic factors like age, gender and occupational status. On this account, Al-Ameedi & Al-Husseini (2005) indicate that verbal threat may be influenced by some social factors which govern the relationship between the speaker and the hearer and such factors involve the relative power of the speaker over the hearer, the social distance between the speaker and the listener, the size of imposition according to the degree of the important action, and the relative rights and obligations between the speaker and the hearer. As it has been indicated already in this research, Social factors or variables with respect to the use of language can be defined as any factor that in one way or the other has an influence on the way people use language among themselves in a society.

Lorenzo- Dus & Bou-Franch (2003) concur that one cannot base on just a social factor to determine language use among people rather; different social factors should be considered as simultaneously relevant. In this respect, this research also finds out whether some social factors like gender, age, and occupational status have any influence on the way the members of Apewosika issue out verbal threat to the respective offenders.

3.2.1. Gender and Verbal Threat

Gender is regarded as one of the main social factors which can have an influence on how an individual issues out a verbal threat. Lakoff (1975) sees gender as the social construct that enables society to place certain people into the category as either male or female. She adds that gender can be differentiated from sex which is the biological construction of individual and thus, it is society which determines who should be a male or a female. However, we find it difficult to agree with her that it is the responsibility of the society to determine who to be a male or female because to be a male or female is a natural thing which occurs naturally from birth and as a result when one is born a male or female, the society can never change the sex of that individual from being a male or female to the reverse of these respectively. Coulmas (2006) makes it clear that a person's gender may affect his/her language. This means that gender compels individuals to use language differently.

Among the people of Apewosika, verbal threat with respect to gender is issued out from a male to another male, male to female, female to male, and female to another female.

(i) Male to Male Verbal Threat

In almost every society in the world, males are regarded as very strong, quick tempered, uneasy to convince, brave and a few to mention. As a result of this when a male encounters a fellow male in any kind of misunderstanding; each tries to exhibit his manly influence or power over the other and so none is ready to give in so easily. Because of this when two males are involved in some kind of exchange of words, people around begin to separate them thinking they might end up in a fight. To augment this claim, Yule (1996:242) stipulates that men are more competitive and concerned with power via language.

Yeboaba (2012) also contends that male to male interaction can sometimes be so aggressive that it can even lead to bloodshed as they tend to get angry very quickly and may end up fighting. In male to male interaction, some abusive words are mostly used and so there is nothing like respect for each other. This means no form of politeness is entertained in male to male interaction, rather, each tends to be impolite towards the other. As a result of this it was revealed in the analysis of data which was gathered for this research that sometimes male to male verbal threats results in a fight especially when the threatner realizes the offender is trying to deny the truth of the matter or when the offender also realizes the threatner tries to use some kind of abusive words which he is not happy about.

Two examples from the data which we recorded as a form of threat coming from a male to another male are presented in

illustrations 3 and 4

[3] “Hey you idiot, my fiancée has complained to me that anytime you meet her you want to molest her because you proposed to her and she told you she does not love you since she has me. Stupid guy, if you try that nonsense again I swear on my own life that I will crash your head” (Respondent 24).

[4] “Idiot, do you think the last time you called me a fool in front of that girl that I didn’t mind you it didn’t pain me? Don’t you dare try that your stupidity this time because if you do, you will never like what I will do to you this time” (Respondent 3).

Illustrations 3 to 4 indicate a male to male verbal threat. In illustration 3 the respondent 24 issued out this threat to a male offender also around the same age of the threatner who according to the threatner tries to worry his fiancée to accept his proposal anytime and wherever he (the offender) meets the lady. Also, illustration 4 is a threat which came from respondent 3 to a male offender and the threatner issued this threat when the offender wronged him by insulting him. In these threats above, it could be seen that the threatners make use of abusive and impolite words like “stupid guy”, “nonsense” and idiot and this shows how a male could be impolite to his fellow male when it comes to the issue of one offending the other and the offended issuing a verbal threat to the offender. Hence, these examples of verbal threats confirm the Claims of Lakoff (1975) and Yule (1996) that males make use of impolite words in their speeches more than females. Since the threatners make use of only abusive words, it means they do not recognize the faces of the respective offenders and as such have no respect for them. Also, this finding is likened to the finding of Watt et al. (2012) who also disclose in their research that male participants of English Speaking listeners assign higher threats when threatening an offender. It also confirms the finding of Yeboaba (2012) who also identifies that, males in the Amamoma community issue out verbal warning to their fellow male offenders in a harsh and impolite manner without recognizing the faces of the offenders. These threats could therefore be categorized under the bald-on-record and negative politeness strategies identified by Brown and Levinson (1987) since in both threats, the threatners make use of impolite and abusive words that will embarrass and make the offenders feel bad emotionally.

(ii) Male to Female Verbal Threat

Yule (1996:242) points out that in some cultures there are much more marked differences between male and female speech. What this means is that the way each of these genders make use of language in speeches is distinct from each other. Females are naturally seen to be very soft and polite than men in terms of language use and so they easily

get sad or bored when they are spoken to in a manner which they don’t like. Some females end up crying when they receive some words which are very fearful or abusive either from the opposite sex or same sex. As a result of this, most people especially men, are asked to treat and talk to females in a way that they may like so as not to threaten their faces.

However, some males in the Apewosika community believe that there are some females who are very lousy, rude and annoying and so when they offend them and they do not threaten them in a way which will put some fear in them and calm them down, they will spoil their (males) self-image. For this reasons, they threaten females with preference and base on the offence committed. Thus they threaten females who are seen as very annoying and troublesome and commit serious offence differently from those who are seen as very calm and portray good attitudes in the community but commit unserious offence.

Two examples of male to female verbal threats from the data which were gathered are shown in illustrations 5 and 6 below:

[5] “My dear lady, why don’t you save yourself from this matter? In fact, I respect you so much in this community because of how you respect me and I never want to have any issue with you. Please, I beg of you, never do anything that will make me show you the wrong side of me” (Respondent 3).

[6] “For me, I don’t care about anything ok. Do you think I am like Kweku who wouldn’t mind you when you insult him, why don’t you respect yourself as a lady? The next time you try that nonsense again, I will beat you severely that you will never forget it in your life time, village girl like your type” (Respondent 12).

The illustration 5 signals a male to female threat which was issued out by the second respondent of the male to male threat in section 3.2.11 above. According to this threatner, he respects females so much that he never wants to show himself indecent to any female unless such female does not respect herself or others. He explains that, a particular lady he respects so much in the community once decided to bear false witness against him and so he politely issued the threat above to her. It could be realized from this threat that even though the threatner is offended by the actions of the offender, he threatened the offender (female) in a very polite way for her to stay out of the matter so as not to compel him reveal himself indecently to her.

This could be seen in his threat when he makes use of some polite and decent words like “My dear lady”, “I respect you so much”, “please” and “I beg of you”. It could therefore be inferred that it is not always the case that every male tend to use impolite and harsh or non-prestigious languages just as it

is not always the case that every female make use of polite or prestigious languages as claimed Yule (1996) and Lakoff (1975) although males are characterized so.

However, from illustration 6 above, the threatner who is also a male indicates that he will never take it very softly with a female who offends him. He indicates that he will issue out a serious threat to that person the same way he would do to his fellow male when he offends him. He complains that most females do not show respect when one tries to solve issues amicably with them and so he does not consider anything like “respect for ladies” when a female offends him. He exhibits this in his threat when he makes use of an abusive word like “nonsense” and “village girl”. However, he reveals that the only condition that will compel him to issue out a polite threat to a female is when that female is far older than him.

When these findings are compared to existing literature like Hassan et al. (2012) who observed no significant differences between males and females’ refusal strategies among the English and Persian, this study has revealed that some little difference exist in male to female verbal threat in that some males in the Apewosika community behave differently towards females by considering the offence committed, age of the offender as well as the attitude of the offender in the community.

(iii) Female to Female Verbal Threat

It has been mentioned earlier that females are seen as very soft, weak and calm people as compared to men, this characteristics sometimes have effects on them naturally in the way they approach issues. In this vein, Lakoff (1975) clarifies that females show much politeness more than males and they tend to apologize a lot. Yule (1996:242) also supports that female speakers tend to use more prestigious forms of language than male speakers with the same general social background. However, we realized during our gathering of data and interview that it is not always the case that all females behave or interact with their fellow females in a very gentle or polite manner. This is because, how a female in the Apewosika community may be offended shows the manner in which the person issues out a verbal threat. This means some females tend to use impolite words when they are seriously offended by the actions of others.

Illustrations 7 and 8 indicate female to female verbal threats:

[7] “You stupid lady, let me make it clear to you that if you don’t respect yourself as a female, I also don’t respect myself as such. If you try to make my life difficult for me in this community by gossiping about me to other people, I will eliminate you from this earth (Respondent 8).”

[8] “My husband loves me alone so if you think you can be showing him pictures of that your half-way buttocks for him

to leave me for you, then you lie bad. Don’t you ever try to send to him again those your prostitute pictures! Because if you try that your nonsense again I promise you that, I will personally upload them on the internet for the whole world to see how prostitute you are. ‘Prostitute like you” (Respondent 11).

In illustration 7, respondent 8 threatens another female who goes around to gossip about her. Here, the female who issues out this threat does so in the direct way without hiding what she intends to do to the offender. In illustration 8, respondent 11 also issues this threat to her fellow female who tries to impose herself on her (offended person) husband. In these threats though the offended persons who issue the threat are females, they do not make use of polite words in their threats and they issue the threats in a harsh and hurting manner. Thus, in these threats, the threatners cause damage to the social identity of the offenders because of the impolite words they use in their threats. They make use of the bald on-record as well as the negative politeness strategies because they use words which will make the offender feel very bad and embarrassed. The manner in which these threats are issued therefore contradicts the claim of Lakoff (1975) as well as Yule (1996) that females make use of polite and prestigious words in their speeches.

Also, comparing these findings to that of Ariff and Mugableh (2013) who indicate that women’s speech in Jordanian Arabic is inclusive, less direct, and avoids arguments and confrontation, this research has revealed that females in the Apewosika community confronts and issue out threats to their respective offenders in a direct and a very harsh or angry manner by going to the extra mile of sometimes using impolite words which are not pleasant to hearing. This means that some forms of impoliteness are sometimes present in female to female verbal threats just as it happens in males to males’ verbal threats when an individual is seriously offended by another person’s actions. Yeboaba (2012) also reveals that females in the Amamoma community act harshly and impolitely when an individual seriously offends them without considering the gender of the offender and this research confirms this claim. Further this finding also contradicts the finding of Climate (1997) that females generally use speech to develop and maintain relationships. Thus, in these threats the females involved do not seek to develop or maintain any cordial relationship.

(iv) Female to Male Verbal Threat

As it has been announced earlier, Lakoff (1975) writes that females show much politeness in their speeches more than males and they tend to apologize a lot. However, just as in the Apewosika speech community males do not regard females who do not exhibit good attitudes so do females also

not respect males who do not show good attitude no matter how very fearful those males may present themselves to the females. To such females, they indicate that if the person respects himself then there is no way he will offend them and so they will issue out verbal threats base on the attitude of the offender and the offence committed without considering the gender of the offender.

Illustrations 9 and 10 are two examples of female to male verbal threats which we gathered during the data collection are illustrated below:

[9] “You idiot, don’t you ever call me by that name again, because if you do I will slap and disgrace you that you will never believe I’m the same person” (Respondent 2).

[10] “I don’t like it at all when somebody takes my phone without first informing me. Never let this repeat itself again because I am going to insult and call you a thief the next time you repeat this” (Respondent 1).

The threat in illustration 9 was observed as it was given by respondent 2 to a male offender. She issued this threat because she said the offender has been calling her with a nickname which she does not like. In this threat, she issues it in a direct form and employs some impolite form of words. Here, although the offender is a male, the threatner does not concern about his gender rather, she is much concerned about the offence committed against her and so does not recognize the face of the offender.

In illustration 10 also, respondent 1 issues this threat to a male offender who took her phone without informing her. She complains that people always take her phone and download some credit from it without her knowledge and so she does not take it lightly at all when anyone tempers with her phone. That is why she also issues the threat in a direct and angry manner without taking into consideration the self-image of the offender.

Comparing these findings of verbal threat in the Apewosika community to that of Yeboaba (2012), it becomes clearer that both males and females in the Apewosika community as well as those in the Amamoma think that in dealing with situations like someone offending another person, they will act according to the offence committed as well as the attitude of the offender towards them without considering the gender of the offender. Therefore, whereas Geluykens & Limberg (2012) revealed in their research that threat responses among native English students are subject to gender variation, this present study just like Yeboaba (2012) has revealed that there is not such gender variations in making or posing a threat or warning among the Fantes. Also, these findings confirm the finding of Hassan et al. (2011) who observed no important differences between males and females refusal strategies

among the English and Persian participants. Thus, with respect to verbal threat among these, group of people, both males and females threaten offenders without considering their gender. However, the people indicated to us that it is only when the offender is much older than the offended person that he/she may not react because they respect the aged person.

It must therefore be concluded at this point that gender has no influence on the way an individual issues a verbal threat in the Apewosika community since offenders are always concerned with the type of offence committed as well as the attitude of the offender towards other people in the community and not his or her gender.

3.2.2. Age and Verbal Threat

Depending on the norms and culture of every community, language use differs across age. Thus, the way a particular group in a particular community may use language will differ from how other groups in other community with respect to age also use language. This means that language use varies across cultures. This argument can be supported by Yule (1996:246) who writes that many factors which give rise to linguistic variation are sometimes discussed in terms of cultural differences. For instance, when watching an American setting movie, it could be realized that an elderly American man or woman do not see anything wrong when a younger person or child greets him or her with the left hand, however, in most of our Ghanaian societies; we see everything wrong with regards to greetings as a form of language when a youth or child greets an elderly person with the left hand. Not only this, a child is also seen as very impolite in most of our Ghanaian society should the child be the first person to ask a grown up person “how he/she is doing” whereas that might not be the case in other parts of the world.

We believe that in our Ghanaian culture, it is the older person who should rather be the first to ask the child how he or she is doing. Such children are referred to as “*mpaninsem*” in Akan (an ethnic group in Ghana)-meaning someone who behaves like an elderly person even though he or she is young. Therefore, with respect to language and age, most Ghanaians base on a quotation in the Bible which ask children to obey their fathers and mothers so that their lives may be long on earth (Ephesians 6:1-3). In this regard, a child is regarded as very disrespectful when he or she speaks harshly or impolitely to an adult, however, when this happens in the other way round, people do not see anything wrong with that. Age therefore factors a lot when it comes to the use of language in our Ghanaian societies.

The data collected and analyzed shows that among the people of Apewosika, verbal threat is issued out across all categories

of age: Thus, from Adult to child, child to adult, adult to adult and from child to child.

(i) Verbal Threat from Adult to Child

Yeboaba (2012) simply defines an adult person as someone who is seen to be matured and has enough sense or knowledge to take decisions as whether good or bad. In this vein, we will also define a child as someone who is not matured or knowledgeable enough to be able to distinguish clearly between something which is right from wrong. Base on our definition, we will want to categorize children between the ages of 8 to 16 years old since those below year 8 are regarded as infants.

In the Apewosika community, whereas some adults think that children should not be bothered with any serious threat because they do not have any sense, others say that when the child commits a crime and one does not warn or threat him or her, he or she might think that the bad thing which he/she did was good that is why the offended person did not mind him or her and so such people conclude that, children, no matter their age must seriously be threatened to stop doing whatever wrong thing that they do. But they indicated that impolite words should not be encouraged when threatening them since it might have some negative impact on them

Two examples from the data gathered and analyzed are presented illustrations 11 and 12 below

[11] “You this boy, sometimes I wonder if I really gave birth to you. Why are you so stubborn like that? How many times should I warn you that never play games with my phone again? If you touch this phone again, you will never get any money from me to school again” (Respondent 26).

[12] “Why should I say my 13 year old daughter is a child and so when she does something wrong, I wouldn’t threaten her? For me, if I send her to fetch water for me to bath and she doesn’t go, I will either beat or strongly threaten her that I will never pay her school fees again because beating or threatening her as such will make her go and fetch it the next time I send her” (Respondent 23).

From illustration 11, respondent 26 indicates that she has been warning her 14 year old son on several occasions not to play game on her cell phone because there has been frequent light-out and besides playing game on the phone weakens the battery. But, she claims that anytime she returns from the market she realizes her son has played game on the phone and so she issued out this threat. She believes that threatening not to give her son a pocket money to school can save the situation by putting some fear in her son so as not to go anywhere near the phone. This threat when compared to the claim of Baron & Richardson (1994:37) can also be regarded as a form of aggression since it is meant to harm the offender

emotionally so as to stop the offence committed. Thus, the child realizing he can lose his pocket money to school and go hungry will not continue with his act.

From illustration 12, respondent 23 indicates that he would not hesitate to strongly threaten or beat his 13 year old daughter if he asks her to do something and the child refuses. According to him, he does not see the reason why if he is paying for the school fees of her daughter and also providing other basic needs for her, she too should not comply with his request. As a result of this, he believes that beating the daughter can threaten her not to refuse his request the next time he sends her to do something for him. From these threats, it could be inferred that the respective adults who issue these threats does so using a direct form, hence this finding conforms to that of Yeboaba (2012) who declares that adults in the Amamoma community warns their children in a direct manner without hiding their intents. It also confirms that of Totimeh & Bosiwah (2015) who also indicates that adults in the Akyem community of Ghana make request from children using the direct strategy without hiding their intentions.

(ii) Verbal Threat from Adult to Adult

It has been indicated that adults are believed to be matured and knowledgeable persons who are expected to behave and do something in a matured way (Yeboaba, 2012). In this regard, it became very clear that most adults in Apewosika conform to this fact and as a result they behave maturely towards each other. Thus, when these adults are offended by their fellow adults, they find a way to make their feelings known to the offender rather than behaving impolitely towards one another. The people however indicated to us that sometimes too the bad attitude of the adult will determine how he/she would be threatened when he/she commits a serious offence against another person in the community

Below are two illustrations (13 and 14) showing how an adult will confront and threaten a an adult offender

[13] “I don’t see the reason why I should stand in public and argue with someone who is matured like me when the person commits any crime against me. The best thing I will do is that I will get another matured person like me in my company and I will go and say to the person that I wasn’t happy with what he or she did at all so he/she shouldn’t repeat that again because if he/she does that again, I will call him/her before the elders in the community” (Respondent 6).

[14] “When a matured person like my age offends me by calling me with a name which sounds unpleasant to me, I will not exchange words with him/her publicly but I will indirectly say something that will indicate to him/her that I don’t like that name and I will make sure that I will not use

any abusive word which will present me as an indecent or immature person to the person or other people” (Respondent 14).

From illustrations 13 and 14, both respondents 6 and 14 indicate that that arguing with a fellow matured person in public does not show a sign of maturity. Their reasons are that when one does something like that, he/she will only be selling himself/herself to other people in the community and this can make one loses his/her self-respect or image in the community. Thus, these respondents want to create positive faces for themselves and so will not do anything that will tarnish their images in the community. Kouper (2010) indicates that "face" is the positive public image of oneself that is constructed and negotiated in day-to-day interactions. Therefore, respondent 6 and 14 believe that approaching a matured person in a polite and matured manner when the person commits any offence can save the situation. Here, looking at Hymes (1974) acronym of speaking, it could be realized that the threatners would want to achieve their 'Ends' in a polite way without using harsh or impolite words. This finding also confirms that of Yeboaba (2012) who indicates that adults in the Amamoma community approach other adults who offend them in a polite and decent manner.

(iii) Verbal Threat from Child to Adult

Children are required to show respect to everyone, especially to adults or older persons and so in most of our Ghanaian societies, even when an adult or older person commits a wrong act against the child, the child is expected to just keep quiet and suffer without complaining. In the Apewosika speech community, a child who is seen speaking harshly to an adult can even be beaten or shouted at to keep quiet by sometimes the adult who has offended the child or even another adult who passes by. As a result of this, the children who were interviewed for this research indicated that sometimes although they wish to express their thoughts and feelings whenever an adult commits a serious crime against them, they cannot do so because, people around which even sometimes include their own friends will begin to throw insults at them and regard them as disrespectful. They however indicate that even if they will approach such adults or older people, they will do so in an indirect and polite manner in order to avoid being rebuked.

Illustrations 15 and 16 are two examples from the data gathered indicating some of the responses some children in the Apewosika who were engaged in this research gave.

[15] “Hmm, you know how our country is, we children are always subjected to obey or bear anything even if it doesn't work in our interest or favour. What can I therefore do when someone very older than me offends me? I will just keep quiet and leave everything to God to judge it by Himself

because if I am to complain or talk back, I will be regarded as a disrespectful child” (Respondent 9).

[16] “When an older person insults me, I will not say anything to him/her at all so that people will say I don't respect elders. I will report the issue to my mother so that she can go and talk to the person that I wasn't happy about the insult” (Respondent 13).

In illustrations 15 and 16, the respondents 9 and 13 indicate that, they will never say anything to an elderly person (adult) who wrongs them because the moment they do speak back or complain about that offence committed against them by an adult person, they will be seen as disrespectful children and people will begin to insult or rebuke them. However, they believe that leaving the situation in the hands of God or reporting to another matured person will be the best solution. Thus, respondent 9 thinks that God is the only right Judge who can judge and punish the offender perfectly on her behalf. Also, respondent 13 believes that reporting the situation to another matured person can help save the situation.

Comparing this finding to existing literature, it could be realized that just as Totimeh and Bosiwah (2015) indicate that children in the Akyem community make use of indirect strategy in making a polite request from adults, this research has also revealed that children in the Apewosika community also make use of an indirect form of threat given by Gales (2012) to issue out a verbal threat to adults by either not minding the adult who offends them or reports such adult to another adult for the threat to be issued on their behalf in a polite way. Thus, in the child to adult verbal threat, the self-image of the offender is much regarded and that there is more politeness in these threats. Also, the finding confirms that of Yeboaba (2012) who indicates that children in the Amamoma community of the Cape Coast Metropolis use indirect means by making their feelings known to adults when they are offended by the actions of such adults without making use of impolite or harsh words. This can therefore be based on the claim of Brown and Levinson (1978) that in making utterance speakers calculate the weight of their speech from the culture ranking of the speech act to know how to interact with a person.

(iv) Verbal Threat from Child to Child

Children behave differently towards each other because they are not matured enough. Most children do not take it lightly at all with their fellow children when they offend them. In most cases, children misunderstand each other and therefore do not want to tolerate any negative action or behaviour from their fellow children. In this regard, children all the time engage in a fight when they realize their colleagues want to do something which they detest. The children of Apewosika

are therefore no exception to this claim. They indicate that, when their friends wrong them they will first warn them to stop and if the person continues, they will either fight or do something that will harm the person.

Illustrations 17 and 18 are two examples which we recorded from some children in the Apewosika community who were engaged in this research.

[17] “For Me, when my friend takes my pencil at school without telling me and he/she later brings it, I will threaten him/her that I don’t like that and so he/she should never do that again because if he/she does that I will beat him/her. But if he or she refuses to listen to me and take it again, I will slap him/her and push her away (Respondent 18).”

[18] “When my friend commits an offence against me by calling me a nickname which I don’t like, I will threaten him/her to stop calling me by that name or else I will do something that will hurt him/her. However, when he or she refuses to comply with my threat and still continues to call me by that nickname, I will not hesitate to insult and disgrace him or her for him/her to realize that I don’t like what he or she is doing” (Respondent 17).

In illustration 17, respondent 18 indicates that he will first threaten his friend who takes anything that belongs to him without first informing him not to do that again but when the friend does it again, he would issue any warning or threat to him/her again but he will cause a serious harm to the person without recognizing him/her face because he believes that it is only a thief who takes something without informing the owner and so even when his teacher calls to find out the cause of his action he will tell him that his friend stole his pencil that is why he too did that. His action is what Al-Ameedi & Al-Husseini (2005) calls an objective view of a threat act because here the respondent intends to cause a serious harm to the offender. In these threats it could be realized that the children involved would want to issue their threats using a direct form without hiding their intentions and this confirms the finding of Yeboaba (2012) who claims that children in the Amamoma community use direct means to issue verbal warning to other children who offend them. Also, it confirms that of Totimeh and Bosiwah (2015) who indicate that Children in the Akyem Community use a direct strategy in making request from fellow children.

From illustration 18, respondent 17 also confirms that when any of her friends at school calls her with a nickname which she hates, she will cause a social damage to the person by insulting and disgracing him or her without considering the face of the offender. Her action is what Tedeschi and Felson (1994:37) refers to as social harm or hurt which means causing damage to the social identity of a target person and lowering their status by imposing insults on such person so as

to make the person feel bad or embarrassed.

It must be concluded at this point that when we consider the issuance of verbal threat among the people of Apewosika with respect to Age, it could be realized that threats from “Adult to Adult” and “Child to Adult” come in a more polite manner than the other categories because in these categories, all the respondents indicate that they will politely and indirectly approach the offenders involved without making use of abusive or impolite words.

3.2.3. Occupational Status and Verbal Threat

In most Ghanaian societies, we have it that respect is reciprocal and it is given to whoever that deserves it. The Fantes have this as: “Fa enyidzi ma nyia enyidzi se no”- (meaning, respect is reciprocal) As a result of this people who other people give much respect to are also required to produce back that same level of respect. In this regard, most people believe that it becomes difficult talking anyhow to someone who respects him/herself and respect others as well. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), they assert that speakers calculate the weight of their speech acts from three social variables; the perceived social distance between the speaker and the hearer, the perceived power difference between them and the culture ranking of the speech act.

However, with respect to the social factors age and occupational status which influence the way an individual will issue a threat, majority people of the Apewosika community regard the aged person and accord much respect to him/her than the one with high occupational status. They only believe that the person with a high occupational status must exhibit a good attitude toward others so as to be accorded the kind of respect needed, but, if the person has a negative attitude in the community then they resort to one of their usual sayings that “obiaa nye obiaa.” Thus to them if one is with a high occupational status and he/she does not respect or show a good attitude towards others, nobody regards or respects such person and that such person can be talked to anyhow.

In this community, a threat could be issued from a “higher occupational status person to a lower occupational status person”, or the reverse of this. Also, it could be issued among people with equal occupational status:

(i) A Threatner with Higher Occupational Status than Offender

Most people who are with high occupational statuses tend to be the final commandant or speakers in everything that they are involved in without others questioning them about anything. They always want what they say (whether good or bad) to be accepted without any argument because they think

with their high valued occupations or money they can influence or manipulate others. It therefore became clear during our interview and data collection that such people speak with authority and pride especially when they address people who have very lower occupational status than theirs. In most cases; such people try to make references to their statuses in the work field so as to silence the one being spoken to. This people sometimes do not recognize the face of their interlocutors or show any politeness towards them.

Illustrations 19 and 20 are two responses some respondents with higher occupational statuses than offenders gave when we interviewed them:

[19] "If a person like a mere cleaner tries to talk to me anyhow at my work place, I will not delay to say to the person that, look, I am not your play group so don't you dare try that nonsense, because you can never reach where I have gotten to. If you joke with me, I will make your life miserable for you" (Respondent 21).

[20] "I will severely threaten a common street hawker who decides to insult me because I ask for the prices of her commodities and I didn't buy one. If such person dare try to raise an insult on me, I will make him/her regret for his or her actions which he/she will never forget in his/her life time (Respondent 22)."

Illustrations 19 and 20 were two responses which we recorded from our respondents 21 and 22 respectively. In both responses, the respondents who have higher occupational status indicate that they will issue out a serious threat to lower occupational status offenders who offend them by talking to them anyhow or insulting them. In both responses, the respondents try to exhibit some form of power, impoliteness and pride from the way they address the offenders as "mere cleaner" and "common street hawker respectively". Thus, the respondents indicate that they will issue a direct threat to lower class people so as to demand some respect from them. Therefore, in these two responses, the respective threatners prefer to use the bald on-record as well as the negative politeness strategies to embarrass and make the offenders feel very bad within.

Comparing these findings to that of Beebe et al. (1990), it could be realized that just as Japanese respondents use direct strategies in refusing invitations from someone with a lower social status without considering the self-image of the requester, people with high occupational status in the Apewosika community also issue out a direct and impolite threat to lower occupational status people without regarding the face of the offender. Therefore, Brown and Levinson's (1978) assertion that perceived power difference influences the way speakers speak is significantly evidenced among the people of Apewosika because the higher occupational status

persons try to influence and intimidate their lower occupational offenders by making use of the bald-on record as well as the negative politeness strategies without regarding the self-image of the offenders.

(ii) Verbal Threat Among People with Equal Occupational Statuses

According to Yeboaba (2012), she indicates that people who are of equal or same status tend to behave towards each other in ways or manner they deem appropriate. She adds that between people of equal or the same status, there is what she refers to as "*you do me I do you*" and "*I don't carism*". This means among these groups of people, individuals within this category do not take in an offence but they just retaliate without any fear when they feel offended. Thus, there is "tit-for-tat" among this category of people. We realized during our interview and discussion that, among the people of Apewosika, people with equal occupational status conform to this claim, they do not see the reason why they should hesitate to make their colleagues see their wrong act if they are offended by their actions.

Illustrations 21 and 22 are two responses which we recorded as indicating how a verbal threat could be issued among people with equal occupational status.

[21] "If any of my colleagues in this saloon try to go near my fiancé then it will be a do or die affair. I will first seriously threaten her to stop following him or else I will harm her; but if she refuses to hear me out and still insists then she will either kill me first or I kill her because I will make sure I damage the person totally" (Respondent 19).

[22] "I am a fisherman and I work with my net to gain my daily bread so if my co-worker comes for my net without alerting me, I will be very angry with him and I will say to him that you, I don't like it when you take my net without telling me first so If you do that again, I will let you buy me a new net by force" (Respondent 27).

The response in illustration 21 was recorded from respondent 19 who is a hairdresser. She mentions that she will not encourage any patience when her co-worker offends her by tempering with her fiancé. She states that she will issue a serious threat to the offender and if the offender refuses to comply with the threat she will cause a violent harm to the offender by executing the perlocutionary effect carried in the threat she may issue out.

Illustration 38 was also a response given by respondent 27 and he too claims that he will not say because the offender is his co-worker he will not take any action against him. He will issue out a serious threat that will make the offender not joke with something that he works with to earn a living in the community. In both responses, it could be seen that the

threatners prefer to use the direct form of threat given by Gales (2012) without hiding their intentions to the respective offenders. Also, these responses confirm that of Yeboaba (2012) who reveals that people of equal status in the Amamoma community also issue out verbal warning directly to offenders without considering the face of the offender. However, in all these instances, the only factor that will let the threatner issue the threat in a polite and indirect manner is when the offender is much older than the threatner.

(iii) A Threatner with Lower Occupational Status than Offender

It has been established earlier that the people of Apewosika indicate that the status of an offender means nothing to them. Rather, they state that it is the offence committed and the attitude of the offender that will show how an offender will be threatened. They further clarified that if a person has a higher occupational status and he/she does not exhibit any good attitude or character in the community, he or she would not be spared if he or she commits any wrong act against an individual with a lower occupational status. However, the only exception which was given here was that, they will only be polite and gentle to the offender only if the offender is their benefactor or much older than them.

Illustrations 23 and 24 show two responses which we received during our interview with the people illustrating how an individual would threaten a higher occupational status person.

[23] “If someone has a higher occupational status than me then I expect that person to respect himself/herself and respect me as well. But if not and the person wrongs me by insulting me whilst I haven’t done anything wrong against him/her, I will issue out a serious threat to that person that he or she either stops insulting me or I will insult him/her some because if it is not the person who provides for me then why should I watch him/her speechless to insult me?” (Respondent 24)

[24] “I expected you to respect yourself because you are a banker; if you don’t know and you try to call me a village woman again, I will insult and disgrace you in public. Do you think because you are a teacher and I am an Ice water seller, you can behave anyhow towards me and go scot free?” (Respondent 30)

In illustration 23, respondent 24 who is a barber indicates that he will never let a person to use his/her occupational status to intimidate him. He points out that he will issue a serious threat to such person if the person insults him. Illustration 24 was also a verbal threat which was observed as the respondent 30 who sells ice water in the Apewosika community issued out to a 29 year old pupil teacher.

According to her, this teacher proposed love to her and she did not consent to the proposal and as a result, anytime the teacher sees her around he tries to make mockery of her by calling her names and so in order to stop this act, she threatened the teacher as indicated in illustration 24. In both instances, the respective threatners mentioned that status or class of an individual means nothing to them because to these people, everyone has his or her own standard and so the fact that an individual person has a higher occupational status than them does not guarantee that they should let the person go scot free if he/she wrongs them.

Comparing these findings to that of Yeboaba (2012), it could be realized that members of the Apewosika community just like the members in the Amamoma community, do not allow one’s occupational or social status to influence the way they will issue out a verbal warning or threat respectively. Thus, just as Yeboaba (2012) revealed that the only situation in which a social status can have an influence on a the way a lower social status person issues a verbal warning is when the offended benefits from the offender who has a higher social status, this research has also confirmed this claim and not only this; but the attitude of the offender as well as if the offender is much older than the threatner. Thus, these are the only situations that will compel an individual with a lower occupational status in the Apewosika community to politely and indirectly issue out a verbal threat to a higher social status person. These findings therefore contradict the finding of Hassan et al. (2011) who found out that with respect to refusal strategies, individuals among the Persian group with higher social status are given much reverence and respect than those with lower social status.

3.3. The Attitude of an Individual

We want to emphasize that the case study as well as the qualitative research design which we used in undertaking this research opened door for us to come out with one interesting finding which did not form part of our research questions but we found it as very interesting to discuss at this point since it also guarantees how an individual or offender is threatened. This interesting finding is the ‘attitude of an individual’.

During our interview and discussions, the people revealed to us that they do not consider the gender or occupational status of an individual when issuing out a verbal threat but it is the attitude of the individual as well as the offence committed which will show the manner in which one should be threatened in their community.

The people believe that a self-disciplined person will never do anything to the detriment of others but he or she will respect himself and respect others as well and so threatening such person in a harsh way will be a bit difficult. Salifu &

Agbenyega (2012) see a self-disciplined person as someone who has self-controlled, restraint, respect for him/herself and respect for others. In this vein, most of the people identified that it is very difficult to talk anyhow to a self-disciplined person than someone who has lost respect for himself and for others no matter the status of that person. They clarified however that, even if a person has a lower occupational status and that person exhibits a good attitude towards others, the person is being approached and threatened in a polite and indirect manner than the one with higher occupational status but has lost respect for him/herself and others as well.

Illustrations 25 and 26 show how an individual is verbally threatened in the Apewosika community as a result of an offender's attitude:

[25] "Foolish guy like your type; why don't you call your father by that name? I will give you a hard knock on your head the next time you call me by that name. Do you think the fact that you work in an air-conditioned office makes you not to respect everyone in this community (Respondent 24)."

[26] "In fact, I respect you so much in this community that I never want to have any issue with you at all. Please, I beg of you help me maintain that respect I have for you. Never refer to me by that name again because I don't want you to see the wrong side of me (Respondent 24)"

The threats in illustrations 25 and 26 were issued by respondent 24 to different offenders. In both illustrations, although the offenders commit the same crime against the offender, the threatner threatens them differently by considering their attitudes towards him in the community. It could therefore be seen in the threat in illustration 25 that the threatner has no respect for the offender because of his negative attitude towards him in the society. He shows this by using impolite words like "Foolish guy" to address the offender. Hence, the threatner does not seek to minimize the threat on the offender's face since he makes use of a negative politeness strategy.

However, it could be realized from the threat in illustration 26 that although the threatner is offended by the action of the offender, he tries to hide it and present his threat in a polite and indirect manner because he sees the offender as someone who is of good attitude in the society. He therefore recognizes the face of this offender and shows him some respect by issuing the threat in a very polite and softly manner. This can be seen when the threatner makes use of some courtesy markers such as "I respect you very well", "please" and "I beg of you". Therefore, in both threats the threatner chose different 'Key' identified by Hymes (1974) to communicate his threat depending on the attitudes of each of the offenders who have wronged him.

It is therefore justifiable from the above threats that, the attitude of an individual in the Apewosika community shows how the person will be threatened verbally.

4. Conclusion

In this research, we sought to find out how the social factors, gender, age and occupational status influence the way individual issues a verbal threat in the Apewosika community.

First, with regard to gender, the results of this research showed that whereas Geluykens & Limberg (2012) revealed in their research that threat responses among native English students are subject to gender variations, this present research has revealed that there is not such gender variations in making or posing a threat among the members of Apewosika. This finding therefore confirms that of Hassan et al. (2011) who in their study also observed no important differences between males and females' refusal strategies among the English and Persian participants. It again confirms the finding of Yeboaba (2012) who also did not find any gender variation with respect to the issuing of verbal warning among the people of Amamoma

Secondly, with respect to the social factor age, the data gathered and analyzed pointed out that among the three social factors which were considered, age has an influence on how an individual issues out a verbal threat in the Apewosika community than gender and occupational status and this result also corresponds with that of Yeboaba (2012) who also showed in her research that among all the three factors she sought to look at, the social factor 'age' had much influence than gender and social status on the way one issues out a verbal warning in the Amamoma community. Also, our result confirms that of Totimeh & Bosiwah (2015) who claim that age factors much in the way an individual makes polite request among the Akyem people of Ghana.

Thirdly, concerning the social factor occupational status, the result of this research contradicts the finding of Hassan et al. (2011) who found out that with respect to refusal strategies, individuals among the Persian group with higher social status are given much reverence or respect than those with lower social status. Thus, in this research, the researchers identified that people with higher occupational status are not given such reverence or respect when they seriously offend a person with a lower occupation. Therefore, such people would be threatened in a harsh and angry manner using either the bald on-record or negative politeness strategies. However, our finding confirms the finding of Beebe et al. (1990) who indicated that Japanese respondents use direct strategies in refusing invitations from someone with a lower social status without considering the self-image of the requester. Thus, people with higher occupational status in the Apewosika

community also issue out a direct and harsh or impolite verbal threat to lower occupational status people without regarding the face or self-image of the offenders. It must be emphasized at this point that, the only situation in which gender or occupational factors influence the way an individual issues a threat in this community is when the offender is much older than the threatener or the offender portrays good attitude in the community as well as if the offended person benefits from the offender in one way or the other.

Recommendations

We want to make it clear at this point that although some scholars and researchers have tried to work on how social variables affect language use. Not much attention has been focused on how these social variables influence the impolite verbal behaviours like insult, teasing, verbal warning and even verbal threat itself. Therefore, we still feel within our spirits that there are still more to do on these impolite verbal behaviours. In view of this assertion we want to make these recommendations to other researchers who would find the interest to research on some of these impolite verbal behaviours by looking at the sociolinguistic aspects.

- i. Find out how other social factors such as ethnicity, religion, educational status, etc affect/influence the use of any of these verbal behaviours.
- ii. Other researchers could reconsider the social factors we used in this research on other speech community with respect to verbal threat to find out the credibility of our findings.

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