

# Conflict and Diplomacy: Politeness and Face Management in Olusegun Obasanjo's *My Watch*

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## Abstract

## Original Research Article

This study critically examines Olusegun Obasanjo's *My Watch* through the lens of face management, focusing on the strategic interplay of Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and Face-Saving Acts (FSAs). By analysing several randomly extracted utterances from the text, the research explores how Obasanjo employs language to navigate conflict and diplomacy. His use of FTAs establishes authority and challenges. However, these acts often risk alienating the audience, highlighting the complexities of political discourse. The findings revealed a balance between conflict and diplomacy, demonstrating how language serves as a pragmatic tool to assert authority while promoting unity. This study underscores the importance of politeness and face management in constructing leadership narratives and managing public perceptions. It concluded that effective communication in political discourse requires balancing assertiveness with diplomacy, respecting both positive and negative face needs. The research provides insights into the role of face management in political autobiographies and highlights its relevance in broader socio-political contexts.

**Keywords:** Face-Threatening Acts, Face-Saving Acts, Politeness, Conflict, Diplomacy, Political Discourse, Pragmatics.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In political and autobiographical discourses, the management of face which is an individual's social identity and self-esteem is crucial to understanding how power, identity, and relationships are negotiated. Olusegun Obasanjo's *My Watch* is a compelling case study in this regard as the autobiography captures the life and experiences of one of Nigeria's most prominent political figures. The release of Olusegun Obasanjo's *My Watch* in 2015 has sparked significant controversy and intense debates among literary critics, political observers, and the general public till date (Ajala, 2025). This polarisation arose from the perceived directness of Obasanjo's language, which often lacked elements of pragmatic softening, such as Leech's (1983) politeness principles or Grice's co-operative principles. These pragmatic tools, which include hedging, indirect speech acts, and mitigative strategies, are critical in ensuring effective communication, especially in sensitive political narratives. Their absence or insufficient deployment can heighten tensions, as readers may perceive such narratives as overly confrontational or accusatory. On the other hand, readers'

biases and interpretive frameworks also contribute to the controversies surrounding the book. Misinterpretations of the author's intent or selective reading of the text can lead to distorted conclusions, further exacerbating disagreements. These issues highlight a mismatch between the author's communicative intentions and the audience's reception, underscoring the importance of pragmatic competence in writing and critical interpretation in reading. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by exploring the use of Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and Face-Saving Acts (FSAs) in *My Watch*, analysing how Obasanjo's language both contributes to and mitigates conflicts. By examining the pragmatic dimensions of the text, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the interplay of language, its interpretation, and public perception in political discourse.

*My Watch* is a compelling three-volume autobiography that provides an in-depth exploration of Obasanjo's life, leadership journey, and enduring impact on Nigeria's history. Spanning his early years, military career, political leadership, and post-presidency reflections, the book captures the multifaceted

persona of one of Africa's most influential statesmen. In the first volume, Obasanjo recounts his formative years, highlighting his humble beginnings, education, and rise through the Nigerian military. He reflects on his role in pivotal events, such as the Nigerian Civil War and his tenure as Head of State from 1976 to 1979, during which he oversaw the transition to civilian rule. These narratives underscore his commitment to national unity and governance, setting the stage for his later political career. The second and third volumes delve into Obasanjo's presidency (1999–2007) and his life after office, reflecting on the complexities of his leadership and legacy. The second volume focuses on his role during Nigeria's democratic transition, detailing his economic reforms, anti-corruption initiatives, and diplomatic engagements. It also addresses controversies, including his often-fraught relationships with political allies and opponents, showcasing his direct and unapologetic style. The third volume extends this narrative, highlighting his post-presidency contributions to global peace building and his perspectives on critical national and international issues. These accounts reveal a leader deeply engaged in shaping Nigeria's future, yet aware of the controversies surrounding his decisions.

To understand the intricacies of Obasanjo's narrative, the concepts of Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and Face-Saving Acts (FSAs), as outlined in Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, offer an analytical procedure for this study. FTAs occur when actions or utterances challenge an individual's positive or negative face (Aporbo, Barabag, Catig and Claveria, 2024; Slman, and Betti, 2020) while FSAs aim to mitigate such threats, preserving social harmony or personal dignity (Agustina, 2021). Obasanjo's *My Watch* employs these pragmatic strategies to assert his perspective on contentious political issues while diplomatically addressing criticisms. This facework underscores his ability to navigate the dual demands of conflict and diplomacy, balancing his authority with reconciliation throughout his autobiography. It is against this background that this study is aimed at analysing the use of Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) in Olusegun Obasanjo's *My Watch*, examining how direct and confrontational language is employed to assert authority, critique political opponents, and address contentious issues and also investigating the application of Face-Saving Acts (FSAs) in the text by focusing on the strategies Obasanjo uses to mitigate conflict, promote reconciliation, and maintain his public image as a statesman. Finally, the study promises to evaluate the interplay between conflict and diplomacy in Obasanjo's linguistic choices, highlighting how his use of face management reflects broader themes of leadership, national unity, and political discourse in Nigeria.

## 2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research design to analyse the linguistic strategies employed by Olusegun Obasanjo in his autobiography *My Watch*. The data for the research comprises 65 (forty-five FTAs and twenty FSAs) randomly extracted utterances from the text, focusing on instances where Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and Face-

Saving Acts (FSAs) are evident. These utterances were selected based on their relevance to conflict and diplomacy, as well as their potential to illustrate pragmatic phenomena like politeness and face management. The analysis is grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, which provides a framework for examining how FTAs and FSAs manifest in Obasanjo's narrative. The theoretical approach is complemented by Leech's (1983) Politeness Principles to explore how Obasanjo navigates social harmony and conflict mitigation through linguistic choices.

The method involves textual analysis, whereby each selected utterance is categorised into either an FTA or FSA and analysed in context. Attention is paid to linguistic devices such as directness, hedging, rhetorical strategies, and mitigative expressions.

## 3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 The concept of Face Management

The most influential theory of politeness was put forward by Brown and Levinson (1978 and revised in 1987) (Thomas, 1995, p. 168). The concept of 'politeness' is an underlying social constraint governing the production and interpretation of utterances. Central to Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness is the concept of 'face' (Goffman, 1967). Goffman (1967:5) defines face as "The positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact." Face is an image of self-delineated in terms of approved social attributes - albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself. Within the politeness theory, 'face' is best understood as every individual's feeling of self-worth or self-image; this can be damaged, maintained or enhanced through interaction with others (Thomas 1995:169). Face is the public self-image that every adult tries to protect (Morand, 2010). According to Tao (2022), Brown and Levinson (1978) identified two types of face: the positive and the negative face. On the one hand, the positive face refers to one's self-esteem, that is, the desire to be liked, admired, ratified and related to positively, noting that one would threaten positive face by ignoring someone. The negative face on the other hand is the want of every "competent adult member" that his actions be unimpeded by others, or the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, right to non-distraction i.e. the freedom of action and freedom from imposition. These two aspects of face are the basic wants in any social interaction, and so, during any social interaction, cooperation is needed amongst the participants to maintain each other's faces (Mill, 2003). In a nutshell, positive face is the desire of members in a conversation for approval while negative face has to do with the demand, tacit or otherwise, for freedom of action and resistance to imposition by the participants in a discourse (Brown and Levinson, 1987:62). Effective communication often requires balancing these aspects to achieve social harmony and avoid conflicts.

However, politeness is the expression of the speakers' intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts towards another (Mills, 2003). According to Mills (2003:6),

politeness refers to “the declaration of the speakers’ intention to lessen face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward another.” Also, Aporbo, Bababag, Catig and Claveria (2024: 413) remark that politeness is very important in any communication and it can be defined as “a fundamental communication ability that promotes positive outcomes in conversations”. Fraser (1990) claims that there are four different approaches through which the notion of politeness can be accounted for in communication. The four approaches identified are the social-norm view, the conversational-maxim view, the face-saving view, and the conversational-contract view. He evaluates each of the approaches by discussing the salient aspects of each of them. Based on his evaluation, though none of the approaches is self-sufficient, the face-saving view is considered as the best approach.

Aporbo *et al.*, (2024) investigate both the face-threatening acts and face-saving acts in classroom interactions. They examine how language is used in the classroom to either threaten or save pupils’ face needs when interactions are ongoing in the classroom. By analyzing data collected from video recordings by researchers from different classroom interactions and discussions between teachers and students at La Filipina National High School in Tagum City, Davao del Norte, the study showed that teachers often used positive face such as insults, disapproval, criticism and intimidation while concerning negative face, they employed reminders, giving suggestions and accepting compliments. The study also demonstrated that teachers sometimes adopted face-saving acts by telling jokes and providing hints to the students. Overall, the study contributed immensely to pragmatics by elucidating knowledge on how teachers could threaten or manage face needs of the students in classroom conversations.

In political and autobiographical discourses, such as Olusegun Obasanjo’s *My Watch*, face management plays a pivotal role in navigating sensitive topics and maintaining credibility. Politicians often use FTAs to assert authority, challenge adversaries, or critique policies, but they also rely on FSAs to soften criticisms, foster reconciliation, and appeal to broader audiences. The strategic use of face management allows individuals to project a desired persona while addressing contentious issues effectively. Face management is not limited to individual interactions but extends to larger social and cultural contexts (Gruber, Hargittai, and Nguyen, 2022). It shapes how relationships, power dynamics, and identities are negotiated. By analysing face management, researchers can gain insights into the pragmatics of communication, the interplay between language and social behaviour, and the mechanisms through which conflicts are managed or exacerbated in discourse.

## 4.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) are actions or utterances that challenge an individual's positive or negative face (Aporbo, et.al, 2024). For example, criticism, commands, or

disagreements can threaten positive face by undermining an individual’s desire for acceptance while interruptions or imposing requests may infringe on negative face. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the first decision to take is whether to perform the FTA or not. If the speaker decides to perform the FTA, there are four possibilities: three sets of ‘on-record’ super strategies (perform the FTA on-record without redressive action (bald-on-record), perform the FTA on-record using positive politeness, perform FTA on-record using negative politeness) and one set of ‘of-record’ strategies (Thomas 1995, p.169).

### 4.1 Strategies for Performing Face-Threatening Acts

- **Bald-on-Record (Executing an FTA without Redress):** At times, external factors necessitate speaking in a direct and unmitigated manner, adhering strictly to the Gricean maxim of communication (Thomas, 1995, p. 70). For example, this approach may be used during emergencies, under significant time constraints, or when communication channels are limited. Bald-on-record strategies typically do not aim to mitigate the potential threat to the hearer’s face. This approach can shock or embarrass the recipient and is most often employed in contexts where the speaker shares a close relationship with the audience, such as with family or close friends. Additionally, a speaker may opt to forgo redressive actions if they intentionally aim to be maximally offensive (Ajala, Adeyanju and Adebago, 2022).
- **Positive Politeness (Performing an FTA with Redress):** Positive politeness strategies are employed to preserve the hearer’s positive face in situations where face-threatening acts are unavoidable or intentional. These strategies aim to minimize the impact on the hearer’s positive face by making them feel appreciated, valued, or affirmed. Such techniques are often used among individuals who are relatively familiar with one another. Positive politeness may involve hedging to reduce conflict, as well as expressions of friendship, solidarity, or compliments to foster goodwill and ease the interaction (Ajala, et. al. 2022).
- **Negative Politeness:** Negative politeness strategies are directed toward safeguarding the hearer’s negative face, emphasizing the avoidance of imposition. These strategies operate on the assumption that the speaker is intruding upon the hearer, creating a higher risk of discomfort or embarrassment compared to bald-on-record or positive politeness approaches. They typically involve indirectness and respect for the hearer’s autonomy to soften the impact of the imposition (Ajala, et. al. 2022).
- **Off-Record (Avoiding the FTA):** Brown and Levinson’s final strategy, “Do not perform an FTA,” is straightforward. As Thomas (1995, p. 175) explains, “there are times when something appears so face-threatening that you simply don’t say it.” This

approach involves choosing silence rather than risking significant face damage. Bonikowska (1998) refers to this as the “opting-out choice” (OOC), where a speaker refrains from making a statement but still aims to achieve the intended effect of the unspoken speech act. Tanaka (1993, pp. 50–51) further categorizes these strategies into two types: OOC-genuine, where the speaker intentionally leaves the matter unresolved and has no desire to achieve the perlocutionary effect, and OOC-strategic, where the speaker strategically refrains from speaking but still hopes to elicit the intended reaction indirectly.

Leech's (1983) Politeness Principles and Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) intersect with Grice's Conversational Maxims in the realm of pragmatic communication, aiming to ensure effective and socially harmonious interactions. Grice's (1975) maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner emphasize the cooperative principle, guiding speakers to be truthful, relevant, clear, and appropriately informative. However, these maxims do not explicitly address the social or emotional impact of language on interlocutors' "face," as defined by Brown and Levinson. However, Leech's (1983) extends Grice's framework by introducing principles like Tact, Generosity, and Agreement, which prioritize minimizing face threats and maintaining social harmony. For instance, an FTA such as criticism may flout Grice's Maxim of Manner (e.g., being blunt) but can be softened by Leech's politeness strategies, like hedging, to reduce its impact. Thus, Leech's principles complement Grice's maxims by addressing interpersonal sensitivity, ensuring that communication is not only cooperative but also respectful and face-conscious.

Conversely, Face-Saving Acts (FSAs) are strategies aimed at mitigating face threats. Face-Saving Acts (FSAs) and Leech's Politeness Principles intersect in their shared emphasis on maintaining social harmony and preserving the interpersonal dignity of individuals during communication. FSAs, rooted in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, aim to mitigate potential threats to an individual's face both positive (the desire for approval) and negative (the desire for autonomy). Similarly, Leech's Politeness Principles advocate for minimizing discord and enhancing goodwill in interactions by adhering to principles like tact, generosity, and modesty. When employing FSAs, strategies such as hedging, offering apologies, or using indirect language reflect Leech's tact principle, which prioritizes minimizing imposition on the hearer. Additionally, FSAs often align with the agreement principle, as they foster understanding and avoid confrontation. By integrating FSAs with Leech's principles, communicators effectively navigate sensitive exchanges, ensuring both the preservation of face and the promotion of cooperative and respectful dialogue.

## 5.0 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

### 5.1 Face Threatening Acts

In every social interaction, the negative, positive or both faces at the same time, are sometimes subject to threat. This is because face threatening acts are sometimes

inevitable based on the terms of conversation. For instance, Obasanjo uses face threatening acts to damage the faces of some of his referents by acting in opposition to their wants and desires. As shown in the following extracts, Obasanjo's face threatening acts are directed at his ideological opponents as follows:

**Extract 1:** One critic I admire for his gift is Wole Soyinka.... His friends and loved ones will always be right and correct no matter what they do.... He is surely a better wine connoisseur and a more successful Aparo- hunter than a political critic not talk of what he would be as a politician.

**Extract 2:** That Abacha was not able to complete and conclude his self-succession programme was again nothing short of divine intervention. He cowed, suppressed, oppressed, imprisoned, maimed and killed to carry through his programme.... There were five political parties, each of which was sponsored, bought or cowed into submission by Abacha so that they all nominated him as their presidential candidate.

**Extract 3:** The sudden, quiet and effortless removal of Abacha was an act of God beyond any imagination.

#### Extract 4:

- i. In Nigeria, some sections of the media still cannot be credited with integrity and objectivity in their comments and reactions to issues, or in their critics. Hence, they do incalculable damage to the media in general and to themselves in particular.
- ii. Most practitioners or the media foot-soldiers are ill-educated, ill-informed, poorly remunerated, unmotivated, indolent and mischievous with a great propensity for corruption, malice, distortion, stigmatisation and character assassination.
- iii. Some reports in the media must be checked and crosschecked. Some must be taken with a pinch of salt and yet some others with a bag of salt.
- iv. For quite some time, I did not believe the story of “brown envelope” for Nigerian journalists and media staff, just as I did not believe the existence of corruption in the judiciary.
- v. Some criticisms are so patently ridiculous and illogical that they should evoke nothing more than laughter.



**Extract 5:** I came to realise that some people dominate the media to perpetrate falsehood, half-truths, and outright lies and mischief which they keep repeating until those lies and half-truths begin to acquire some semblance of credibility and take a life of their own.... Most of these unfair portrayals were engineered and fabricated by political competitors, opponents and adversaries acquired....

**Extract 6:** When they could not get anything adverse to write.... They manufactured lies, saying that I had driven a family out of their official quarters.

**Extract 7:** With my native intelligence and native education, I knew I had to keep my distance from Umaru Yar'Adua after he was sworn in as the president.

**Extract 8:** Not only is Adeniyi a poor apologist, but he also did not do a good job of denigrating Obasanjo. Rather he showed his principal as an ingrate, mean, petty, vindictive, unfocused and rudderless; hypocritical and a man who easily buckled under pressure

**Extract 9:** The present administration has failed to live up to its campaign slogan of continuity and what is more, it has jettisoned its manifesto and it failed to perform up to expectation, and therefore has betrayed the mandate of the people.

**Extract 10:** A former minister of mine from the North, who became governor of his State, went to Aso Villa to see the president, and the CSO to the president had the audacity to say to him "why are you here? You should go and see your president in Ota farm."

**Extract 11:** Since last year, Mr President, a lot of water has passed under the bridge. More lives have been lost. The menace is gradually but steadily taking a sectarian nature.... The Boko Haram issue has been turned into an industry on all sides. (Jonathan)

**Extract 12:** A leader must have the knowledge, vision, understanding, will, competence, integrity, courage and transparency and engender trust, confidence, and respect to lead the team without fear, favour or undue familiarity. (Jonathan)

**Extract 13:** The president will pay any price, make any sacrifice and dump anything or anyone he regards as not important. With the 2011 elections, heavy financial prices were paid to Lagos and Ondo state opposition political leaders to secure the votes for the president against the interest of PDP at the state level.... One of our party chieftains described him to me as "The party leader who pursues only Goodluck

Jonathan's interest and not the party interest". How can he be trusted? (Jona

**Extract 14:** What I saw and heard from him disgusted me to no end. It was, "This one will not support me, this one's interest will be against my interest, this one said something against me". How can the president classify some governors belonging to his party as enemies because they hold contrary views to his? (Jona

**Extract 15:** It was sickening how Tanimu and Kingbe used government instrument at their disposal to settle personal scores. Adeniyi told us Yar'Adua did the same.

**Extract 16:** I was made to know that the three openly most influential people to him were James Ibori, Bukola Saraki and Tanimu Yakubu. They all pushed for policy reversals for their personal aggrandisement against the interest of the country and to take vengeance on Obasanjo. Most times they met, they did so to discuss Obasanjo.

**Extract 17:** All the PDP governors and leaders of the zone stood solidly together, except Gbenga Daniel, the governor of my state, who by all we know of him is shift, dubious and believes he is the "cleverest human being on earth.

Obasanjo directed FTAs at his perceived enemies and people he considered to be his ideological opponents. Examples of these opponents are Wole Soyinka (extract 1); General Sanni Abacha (extracts 2 and 3); the Nigerian media (extracts 4, 5 and 6) and his acquired political opponents like Yar'Adua (extracts 7, 8 and 9), Goodluck Jonathan (extracts 11, 12, 13, 14); Tanimu, Kingbe, James Ibori, Bukola Saraki and Gbenga Daniel (extracts 15, 16, 17 among others). According to Grundy (2000), the computations of power distance and imposition are involved in the choice of which politeness strategy is used in conversation. Certain choices in the analysed sampled extracts however indicate a disregard for these factors and proceed to do the act badly and without any redress. In such instances, Obasanjo is consumed by the passion for what is to be said and as such, he has no time for pleasantries and courtesies.

### 5.1.1 Face Threatening Acts without Redressive Action:

Obasanjo threatens the negative and the positive faces of his perceived wrongdoers by using a bald-on-record face threatening act when he so decides not to use a redressive action because he deliberately chooses to be maximally offensive. For instance, Obasanjo directly insults Bola Tinubu, attributing his bad manners to his bad background and upbringing, lambasts Gbenga Daniel and calls him a political animal and his daughter, Iyabo Obasanjo as childish and unwise in extracts 18 to 20 respectively

**Extract 18:** None of the PDP governors in the south-west or Edo and Delta ever insult me except Bola Tinubu whose actions I see as a product of his birth, upbringing, education and character.

**Extract 19:** Gbenga Daniel was in the same boat with Tinubu. I used to describe him as being completely fake in everything except in being a human being.... He was a different political animal in 2004.... One must give him that.

**Extract 20:**

- i. I got a warning that this administration was attempting to induce two of my daughters, including Iyabo to do a dirty job. I warned them both against it, but because of her character, the influence of her mother and attitude, Iyabo succumbed.
- ii. Iyabo was childish and unwise enough to allow herself to be used.

Addressing Goodluck Jonathan's political administration, Obasanjo believed it was characterised by corruptions, Boko Haram insurgency, kidnapping, election rigging, malpractices and social instability as shown in the extracts below:

**Extract 21:** Election rigging and malpractices can begin from the registration of political parties, drawing up of electoral laws and regulations of voters, distribution of polling stations, availability of electoral and voting materials and counting and collation, recording and announcement of results. In all these, Africa must be the architect of its own fortunes.

**Extract 22:** The three major threats to security in Nigeria are militancy, oil and product stealing in the Niger Delta, kidnapping in the South-East initially and subsequently nationwide, and so-called Boko- Haram... I strongly objected to how Yar'Adua and Jonathan's administration set about and pursued it.

**Extract 23**

- i. Nothing illustrates how bad the issue of kidnapping has become in Nigeria more than the kidnapping of the mother of the minister of finance- Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala from her husband's place.
- ii. Wole Rotimi's wife was kidnapped in Ibadan the same week that Ngozi's mother was kidnapped. Also, the former deputy- governor of Anambra state, Dr Chidi Nwike was kidnapped and later killed, apparently because the #30 million ransoms demanded for his release was not paid.... The most worrisome security threat is Boko – Haram.

The extracts above (Extracts 21 to 23) are examples of extracts that feature instances of directness (direct speech

acts) which indicate on-record acts without any form of redress. This however, was aimed at damaging the positive face of Goodluck. Obasanjo's illocutionary acts, however, present Goodluck as an ineffective and incompetent leader.

### 5.1.2 Face Threatening Act with Redressive Action (Negative and Positive Politeness)

At the center of the spectrum lies negative politeness, which is slightly more direct than an off-record act. Here, the encoder makes an effort to acknowledge the other person's negative face needs, such as their desire for freedom and lack of imposition. Negative politeness corresponds to Goffman's (1986) avoidance rituals, as they try to avoid conflict, yet must openly address the face-threatening act. Positive politeness is the opposite of the negative politeness in that they are strategies used to formulate messages in order to save the referent's positive face when face-threatening acts are inevitable and desired by the addresser. For instance, in Extract 10 above, which is repeated below for emphasis, contains an indirect illocutionary act of presenting Yar'Adua's CSO as a bad-mannered man; a negative polite manner (on Obasanjo's part) of restricting the CSO's freedom of speech regardless of his position as the CSO to the President.

**Extract 10**

A former minister of mine from the North, who became governor of his state went to Aso Villa to see the president and the CSO to the President had the audacity to say to him, "Why are you here? You should go and see your president in Ota farm

Obasanjo however, minimizes the threat to his critics who used media platforms as an instrument of their criticism by using a generic reference (a collective term to lessen face threat) as evident in the use of "some people" for perpetrators who dominate the media to disseminate lies in Extract 5 above. Other instances of positive politeness are evident in the extracts below:

**Extract 24:** The sudden, quiet and effortless removal of Abacha was an act of God beyond any imagination.

**Extract 25**

When the situation is negative and trying, I have a number of passages in the bible that I constantly refer to "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance of the Lord [...]" Exodus 14: 13-14 (NIV)... "Do not be afraid or terrified because of them [...]" Deuteronomy 31: 6 (NIV); you will not have to fight this battle... The Lord will fight for you... 2 Chronicles 20: 17 (NIV).

**Extract 26**

In South Africa in 2009, a presiding electoral officer was caught filling the ballot box with the marked ballot papers of a particular political party.

The offending officer was arrested and charged to court. But some observers wanted to make a mountain out of the mole hill of that isolated minor event. Since this was not a common occurrence during elections, it should be mentioned in passing only....

Nevertheless, indirect reference and indirectness are the two main devices used by Olusegun Obasanjo to mitigate the threat to his referents' faces. These devices are thus explicated below:

**i. Indirect Reference:** By this, the encoder appears to distance the referents from the issue at hand by using generic references (rather than being definite); an indefinite reference to government officials, past presidents and Heads of State, present political high post holders, respected icons in the society, etc. Instances of this usage include "the present administration" (Extract 9) while the caricature of Yar'Adua is involved; "The CSO to the president" (Extract 10) not mentioning the CSO's name. Also, the use of "Some people" (Extract 5) and "Nigerian media" in Extract 27 below

#### Extract 27

In totality, the Nigerian media, since independence has done more harm than good to individuals and to the corporate existence and interest of Nigeria. Things have gone progressively worse as politicians court the media people and tempt them with money, land allocations, travels and political appointments.

not mentioning particular names of persons or media houses where articles to dent another person's image were published and disseminated and "The president will pay any price, make any sacrifice and dump anything or anyone he regards as not important" (Extract 13) where "the president" and 'He' stand for Goodluck Jonathan as well as "Since last year Mr. president, a lot of water has passed under the bridge" (Extract 11) where "Mr. president" also stands for Goodluck Jonathan among other utterances in the text.

**ii. Indirectness:** Apart from the use of indirect reference in mitigating face threat, the encoder's sampled utterances revealed that the other forms of indirectness such as saying something to mean another thing (which were extensively used by the encoder's use of irony, symbolism, euphemism, circumlocution and ambiguity) were also be used as ameliorative devices. For instance, extract

25 is a typical example of indirectness where Obasanjo uses a chapter in Exodus to indirectly tell his readers that even though he has so many enemies, he remains untouchable because the Lord always fights his battle for him (the Bible passage is symbolic).

## 5.2 Face Saving Acts

The analysis of the sampled utterances revealed that at one time or the other, Obasanjo uses excuses based on the existing common ground, face repair mechanisms, self-clarification and self-defense strategies, protective strategies and indirectness to mitigate the results of a face-threatening act. Schlenker (1980) hypothesized that as the severity of the face-threatening act increases, the offender would be more likely to create an elaborate account and spin it in their favour (p. 147). This hypothesis holds true for the studied memoir in that one of the primary intentions of the encoder (Obasanjo) is to justify his actions as an individual or collectively as a group. For example, Obasanjo justifies all his actions during his reign as the Head of State and the President of Nigeria; denying some allegations leveled against him by using the face-saving act strategies. Schobach (1985) sees this feat as face negotiation, an act whereby the offenders use an aggravating form of an account when they are severely approached for their behaviour (facework).

## 5.3 Cooperative Principle

The Cooperative Principles describe how effective communication is achieved in common social situations. That is, how the encoder and the decoders act cooperatively and mutually accept one another to be understood in a particular way. Paul Grice introduced "try to make your contributions true"; "make the contribution as informative as required"; "be relevant" and "be perspicacious"; a prescriptive command and principle describing how interlocutors should normally behave in interacting with others in the process of communication. Grice's (1975) conversational maxims (quality, quantity, manner and relation) are thus the guiding principles for explaining how people conduct the way they use language. Baker and Ellece (2011, p.23) submit that the maxims can be best considered to be the "expectations that people have about how conversations will normally be carried out". The assumption here is that an effective encoder in a communicative act will make effort to conform to the maxims.

**Table 1: Distribution of Hedges in the Extracted Utterances of Olusegun Obasanjo**

S/N	Purpose for Hedging	Frequency	Percentage
1	Avoid Verbosity (Maxim of Quantity)	20	33.9%
2	Uncertainty of Information (Maxim of Quantity)	19	32.2%
3	Face Maintenance (Maxim of Manner)	11	18.6%
4	Concordance (Maxim of Relation)	9	15.3%

The sampled utterances indicated that the encoder (Obasanjo) at one time or the other flouted the Gricean maxims. This is because some of the information to be passed across is face-threatening, yet, the message has to be delivered. In situations like these, the encoder hedged in order not to flout the conversational maxims. Consider the extracts below:

#### Extract 28

Success often brings envy, opposition and critics, and they are part and parcel of democratic dispensation. Expect opposition as you progress and succeed in life. *Certain people* will stand against you, including professional critics or self-styled social critics who constantly complain or give unsolicited and unwanted advice, those who want to be close but find themselves estranged, martyrs who are forever the victims and are racked with self-pity, wet blankets, who are pessimistic, sadistic, and habitually negative, steamrollers who are blindly insensitive to others, gossips who spread rumours, mischiefs and are constantly intriguing.... (emphasis, mine)

In Extract 28, "certain people" and "Some sections of the media" in Extract 4(i) above are used by Obasanjo to avoid direct affront in order not to flout the maxim of manner. 18.6% of this type of hedges was employed by the encoder for the purpose maintaining face. Also, the encoder (Obasanjo) hedged when his message on a particular matter is lengthy, but needs to be brief to avoid unnecessary prolixity. This type of hedges has the highest frequency (33.9%) distribution in the analysed utterances. This is so because the encoder tries to avoid violating the maxim of quantity which he preaches succinctness at all times.

Also, when it is difficult to be accurate and specific, the encoder uses adjectives like "some" as seen in extracts 4 and 5 above and "most" as seen in Extract 4(ii). This type of hedging constitutes 32.2% of the total attitude of the encoder. This attitude is also manifested when the authenticity of what the encoder intends to write is not certain, but wants to be fair in his judgement. Instances of this hedging are found in Extract 16, "I was made to know" and "for me" in Extract 29 below.

#### Extract 29

For me, Ribadu deserved every special promotion given him. He was courageous and intrepid and I fully backed him up. He was even poisoned at one time; only God saved his life.

Another cogent reason for hedging is for the purpose of concordance (in conformity with the maxim of relation). This type of hedging has the lowest frequency distribution. It is used by the encoder (Obasanjo) when there is need for digression from one line of topic of discussion to another and when he is conscious of the expectation of his characteristic mode of acting. This manner of hedging is however in line with Allot (2010:48-49) who claims that hedging in conversation is a milder variant of opting-out, giving advance notice that one knows or suspects that one's

contribution will not meet the standards set by one or more of the maxims and perhaps preventing the hearers from attempting to preserve the assumption of cooperation by hypothesizing (unintended) implicatures.

## 6.0 DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

The analysis of Olusegun Obasanjo's *My Watch* highlights the strategic interplay between Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and Face-Saving Acts (FSAs) in political discourse. Obasanjo employs FTAs to challenge adversaries, assert his authority, and critique political systems he perceives as flawed. Direct confrontations, such as criticisms of past leaders and administrations, reflect his use of bald-on-record FTAs without redress, particularly when addressing perceived incompetence or corruption. This approach underscores his commitment to honesty and accountability but often risks alienating his audience.

Conversely, FSAs in the text demonstrate Obasanjo's skilful use of linguistic strategies to mitigate conflict and promote reconciliation. These acts are evident in his use of hedges, indirect references, and narratives emphasizing shared values, which help soften the impact of his criticisms and foster solidarity. For instance, generic terms like "some people" or indirect allusions enable him to address sensitive issues while preserving social harmony. The findings also revealed a nuanced balance between conflict and diplomacy. While Obasanjo's FTAs project a strong, authoritative image, his FSAs reinforce his role as a unifying statesman. This duality exemplifies the pragmatic complexities of political autobiographies, where language must simultaneously convey strength and promote unity. The results underscore the importance of face management as a tool for navigating contentious political landscapes and shaping public perception.

Face management in Obasanjo's *My Watch* reflects the strategic use of language to navigate personal image, authority, and social relationships within a politically charged narrative. He employs Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) to challenge opponents, expose misconduct, and assert his authority. He achieves this by using direct criticism and bold claims to project strength and credibility. These acts serve to solidify his legacy and discredit detractors who he believes undermine his contributions to Nigeria's progress. Obasanjo also employs a mix of assertive and conciliatory linguistic strategies, reflecting his dual roles as a statesman committed to national unity and a politician defending his legacy.

In addressing conflicts, Obasanjo uses direct and often confrontational language to assert his stance and counter perceived misrepresentations of his actions. This deployment of Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) is a deliberate affront to give a contrary impression. However, this assertiveness is often tempered by rhetorical devices that emphasize his intentions as being in the nation's best interest. Conversely, diplomacy emerges through Obasanjo's use of Face-Saving Acts (FSAs), including mitigative expressions and narratives of reconciliation. These strategies are evident when he discusses



his efforts to resolve political tensions or mend relationships with former adversaries. His language often balances accountability with empathy, framing his decisions as necessary for Nigeria's development. Thus, Obasanjo's linguistic choices in *My Watch* embody a complex negotiation of conflict and diplomacy, revealing the pragmatic intricacies of political discourse.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrates how Olusegun Obasanjo employs face management strategies in *My Watch* to navigate conflict and diplomacy. His use of FTAs asserts his authority and critiques adversaries, while FSAs mitigate conflict and emphasize reconciliation. This dual approach underscores the critical role of language in constructing political narratives and managing public perception. The study concludes that politeness is very crucial in every conversational exercise, particularly in sensitive contexts like political discourse. It could also be concluded from the study that communicators could address contentious issues effectively while preserving interpersonal relationships. For political leaders and communicators, the research underscores the need to balance assertiveness with diplomacy. Employing linguistic strategies that respect both positive and negative face needs can enhance credibility, foster unity, and ensure effective communication in polarized environments. Future studies should explore how face management strategies differ across cultural and political contexts to provide a broader understanding of their applicability.

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