# Persuasion, Face-Threatening Acts, and Mitigation Strategies in Southeast Nigeria Haggling Encounters

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**ABSTRACT**
Given the fact that haggling could provide the opportunity for deceit,the seller employs different persuasive strategies to convince the, already alerted, buyer to patronise them. However, despite such persuasive strategies, there could be communication breakdown because of distrust and suspicion among the interactants. Such communication breakdown requires a repair for a successful haggling encounter.This study looks at the main artistic modes and pragmatic strategies of persuasion used in southeast Nigerian markets to identify the pragmatic techniques that are used to mitigate threatened face in market encounters. The data consist of ninety sampled haggling experiences involving wholesalers (15), retailers (15), apprentices (15), and customers (45), taken from the five states that comprise Southeast Nigeria. The data analysis draws on Aristotle's threefold method of persuasion, paying close attention to the *pathos* and *logos* of his rhetorical appeals, and Mey's (2001) theory of pragmatic acts. The analysis shows that there is strong presence of *logos* in the data, with a predomination of the *pathos* component of the rhetorical appeals. The research also indicates that while face-threatening acts are practed through *questioning*, *comparing*, and *doubting*, it is also mitigated through *apologising*, *euphemising* and *blame transfer*.

**Keywords**: haggling, mitigation, persuassion, pragmatic act, rhetoric

## INTRODUCTION

There are so many markets in southeast Nigeria that attract huge numbers of people for exchange of goods and services for money. Most of these markets are not product-restricted as one can find in them anything from Gucci bags to palm kernels. The region is made up of five states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo with over 30 million residents (National Bureau of Statistics, 2017), and about 75% of the entire residents as customers. These markets include Ariaria, Ekeoha, Newmarket (in Abia); Onitsha main market, Ose, Nkwo Nnewi (in Anambra); Abakpa Main Market, Eke Imoha, Kpirikpiri (in Ebonyi); Ogbete, Ogige, Orie Orba (in Enugu) and Afor Ogbe, Ekeukwu, Owerri Market (in Imo). A typical shopping routine in any of these markets requires not less than an hour of undivided attention especially as it involves long walks, lengthy bargaining and frequent interruptions by salespersons in their attempts to woo customers ("prospect" in sales parlance, Humă, 2023) to their shops. The place of haggling in southeast Nigeria is better appreciated when we take into account the fact that the region is occupied by the Igbo who in turn hold a worldview that sees the world as a marketplace and all human efforts for survival as a form of haggling. This, perhaps, lends credence to an Igbo saying that the world is a marketplace (uwa bu ahia). This worldview can be loosely interpreted to mean that the Igbo think that the world is a marketplace because trading is a prominent occupation among the Igbo; it could also mean that a marketplace is the



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epicentre of community and business interactions). That might be the reason why the Igbo weekdays are named after their markets – Eke, Orie, Afo, and Nkwo. Children born on any of these market days often assume the default name as in Okeke or Mgbeke, Okorie or Mgborie, Okafo or Mgbafo, Okonkwo or Mgbonkwo for male or female children, respectively, born on the corresponding market days.

The above substantiates the relationship between language, culture and cognition. For instance, through the language of naming, the Igbo communicate their cultural persuasions and socio-cognitive orientations. This is in line with the views of Sinha (2021) who argues that since cognitive linguists believe that all the linguistic facts of a language, including grammatical facts, are motivated by meaning, and culture is fundamentally about meaning and variations between human groups in their organization of meaning, then a cultural linguistics will be based on the assumption that language, culture, and mind are mutually interdependent, rather than independent. Similarly, the linguistic choices of hagglers in South-east Nigerian markets are representations of their cultural and cognitive realities. It is this connection between language, culture and cognition that aids the (un-)awareness of hagglers as to what constitutes appropriate language for a given routinised social situation such as haggling.

Haggling involves a lot of persuasion. Persuasion is conceived as the production of meaning that is realized when individuals use language and/or visual images to make audiences identify with them (Borchers, 2002) to co-create a state of identification between a source and a receiver (Craver, 2003), or the outcome of individual information processing mechanisms (Humă, 2023). Persuasion has also been viewed by Ionica (2011) as the employment of stylistic devices that make what is said interesting, innovative and gratifying to the audience, such that what is said becomes easily accepted. Aristotle identified three artistic modes of persuasion, derived from presenting the character or the speaker in a favourable light (ethos), awakening emotion in the audience to induce them to make the judgment desired (pathos), and showing the probability of what is said by logical argument (logos) (Kennedy, 2007). For our analysis in this study, attention will be on the last two artistic modes of persuasion: *pathos* and *logos.*

Meanwhile, Miller (1987) views persuasion as situations where attempts are made to influence behaviours through symbolic transactions that are sometimes linked with indirect coercive force to change the initial orientation of the intended persuade(s). The idea of "coercive force" presupposes that the use of persuasion in interactional encounters such as haggling can lead to face-threatening acts which, in turn, require some mitigation strategies to achieve a successful transaction. Erving Goffman (1955) defined “face” as the positive public image you seek to establish in social interactions. Brown and Levinson (1978) used Goffman’s face theory as a foundation for explaining human interactions that revolved around being polite. In developing politeness theory, they expanded and added to face theory by arguing that we have two faces: one based on a desire for approval and acceptance by others (positive face), and the other based on a desire to proceed without being impeded upon (negative face). Brown and Levinson (1978) conceptualize face as something that we want or desire from others. A couple more straightforward definitions of face are presented by Craig, Tracy, and Spisak (1986): “the self-image they present to others (p. 440)” and Cupach and Metts (1994): “the conception of self that each person displays in particular interactions with others” (p. 3).

Even though a salesperson’s persuasive ability plays a pivotal role in southeast Nigerian markets especially as to whether a haggling encounter becomes successful or otherwise, linguistic scholarship has paid little attention to the persuasive strategies employed by the salespersons in the region. For instance, available literature shows that linguistic scholarship on haggling has principally focused on code-switching and code-mixing in haggling (e.g., Alo & Sonoye, 2014); the social activity characterising haggling encounters (e.g. Ayoola, 2009); the obligatory stages of interaction in haggling (e.g. Lau & Ting, 2016); and the benefits of haggling to consumers (e.g., Kassaye, 1990). The present work, therefore, fills the above gap by exploring the persuasive strategies employed by salespersons in southeast Nigeria haggling encounters. This is guided by three specific objectives which include identifying the major

artistic modes of persuasion employed in southeast Nigerian markets, examining face-threatening acts in the market encounters and establishing the pragmatic strategies through which threatened face is mitigated.

***Review of related literature***

This review focuses on works on haggling that have principally utilized linguistic-oriented theories for analysis and extends to persuasion and face mitigation which are major concepts raised in the title. Works on haggling include Ayoola (2009), Idowu (2012), Ahmad (2013), Alo and Soneye (2014), and Chakrani's (2007); those on persuasion are Huang (2019), Blankenship & Holtgraves (2005), Arakelyan & Muradyan (2016), Tala'a (2015), Komar (2015), Al-khatib (2015), and Dillard (2014) The works on facing mitigation involve Ugoala (2020), Adebayo, Aremu, and Babatunde (2020), Adekunle and Adebayo (2017), Macaulay (2017), Obasi and Wayas (2010), Adegbite and Odebunmi (2010), and Odebunmi (2009).

Ayoola (2009) focused on the social activity of haggling during service encounters in a typical Nigerian urban marketplace. The data for the study were derived from transactions between meat vendors and customers at meat stalls in some markets in Lagos, Nigeria. The findings revealed that both categories of interactants employed discourse strategies which include humour, dysphemism and euphemism, cajoling, flattery and flirting to achieve their ultimate goal of maximizing profit/bargain during the buying and selling encounters. Idowu (2012) aligned with Ayoola (2009) as both employed linguistic oriented theories for analyses but also differed from it in that while the analytic approach adopted by Ayoola (2009) was largely discursive, the same cannot be said of Idowu (2012) which was predominantly pragmatic. The latter revealed that most transactional encounters involved the six classifications of speech acts: directives, declarations, assertions, commissive, representations and expressive. Ahmad's (2013) work aligned with Idowu (2012) in terms of methods of data collection but also significantly differed from both Idowu (2012) and Ayoola (2009) in that despite the reflection of linguistically oriented terms in the analysis, it was not clearly stated which linguistic theory guided the analysis. Alo and Soneye (2014) aligned with Ayoola (2009) both in theory and method as it adopted a socio-pragmatic investigation of haggling exchanges between vendors and their customers with findings that are similar to those of Ayoola (2009). Chakrani's (2007) work seems to differ from those of Idowu (2012), *Alo and Soneye (2014),* Ahmad (2013), and Ayoola (2009) as its main focus was on the role of cultural context in the interpretation of utterances during haggling encounters. Chakrani (2007) rather aligned more with Kassaye (2006) who pointed out that some cultures do not approve of engaging in haggling, especially if it could result in being socially ridiculed (for either customer or salesperson). He referred to rural China where haggling among relatives was restricted. The researcher observed that the Chinese frown upon haggling between relatives because of the feud it could create.

This review also covers works that border on persuasion. Such works include Huang (2019), Blankenship & Holtgraves (2005), Arakelyan & Muradyan (2016), Tala'a (2015), Komar (2015) Al-khatib (2015), and Dillard (2014). Both Huang (2019), Blankenship & Holtgraves (2005), Arakelyan & Muradyan (2016) and Tala'a (2015) agreed that persuasion was present in virtually all human activities and that a successful transactional encounter or otherwise was contingent on both the salesperson's choice of strategies to adapt to the particular communicative context and the degree of the customer's cooperation, while Komar (2015), Al-khatib (2015), and Dillard (2014) focused in identifying the persuasive strategies that characterized transactional encounters.

As earlier observed, works on face mitigation include Ugoala (2020), Adebayo, Aremu & Babatunde (2020), Adekunle and Adebayo (2017), Macaulay (2017), Obasi and Wayas (2010), Adegbite and Odebunmi (2010), and Odebunmi (2009). A common denominator amongst these works is the attention to Face Threatening Acts (FTA) and Face Saving Acts (FSA) that play up in the data. For instance, Ugoala (2020) examined the various forms of FTA

and (FSA in former Nigeria President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's (GEJ) memoir "My Transition Hours", similarly, Adekunle and Adebayo (2017) analyzed how linguistic politeness is exhibited in eight selected Independence Day Anniversary Speeches delivered by Nigerian Heads of Government between 1960 and 2011. Odebunmi (2009) examined politeness in print media political interviews in Nigeria. However, unlike earlier studies that have examined political discourse with the media from the theoretical angles of face work, or a modified version of face work, Odebunmi (2009) explored print media political interviews in two Nigerian news magazines, TELL and The News, using a revised version of the theory of relational work. Other related works include Macaulay (2017) which examined the question of politeness in political interviews, Adegbite and Odebunmi (2010) which an evaluation of face-threatening acts (FTA) in conversational interactions between medical practitioners and patients in orthodox and traditional medical practice, and Adebayo, Aremu and Babatunde (2020) which focused on the face acts and impoliteness strategies in Obasanjo's letter to former Nigerian President Jonathan titled "Before it is too late" which confirmed the position of Ugoala (2020) that off-record politeness strategy was very effective in redressing threatened face.

Some of the works reviewed are related to the present investigation in some ways. For instance, Chakrani, 2007 and Kassaye, 2006 relate to the present study in that they adopt the cultural-context approach in the analysis of data. However, they differ significantly from the present study because the present investigation utilizes Mey's (2001) theory of pragmatic acts– a context-oriented theory for analysis while they (Chakrani, 2007 and Kassaye, 2006) prioritized Austin's speech act theory, which is not an action theory, for analysis. Similarly, Ayoola (2009), and Idowu (2012) are related to the present work as they focused on the social activity of haggling during service encounters in a typical Nigerian urban market. However, they also differ from it in terms of method. While the haggling encounters that constitute their data were drawn from southwest Nigerian states such as Osun, Ogun and Lagos states, the present study draws data from southeast Nigerian states. Similarly, while most of the works reviewed focused on the function of persuasion and discourse strategies through which face were mitigated, the present study evaluates the major artistic modes of persuasion employed in southeast Nigerian markets and extends the same to face-threatening acts in the market encounters and pragmatic strategies through which they are mitigated.

***Theoretical framework***

This study is guided by two theories. They are Aristotle's tripartite mode of persuasion with particular attention to the pathos and logos aspects of his rhetorical appeals, and Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory. Aristotle was perhaps the first person to recognize clearly that rhetoric as an art of communication was morally neutral, and that it could be used for either good or ill. In the second chapter of *On Rhetoric,* he says that persuasion depends on three things: the truth and logical validity of what is being argued, the speaker's success in conveying to the audience a perception that he or she can be trusted, and the emotions that a speaker can awaken in an audience to accept the views advanced and act in accordance with them. Modern rhetoricians use terms derived from Aristotle to refer to these three means of persuasion: the logical argument is called *logos*; the projection of the speaker's character is called e*thos*; and awakening the emotions of the audience is called *pathos.*

Ethos, pathos and logos constitute Aristotle's three pillars of persuasive communication. Ethos is an appeal to the authority or credibility of the speaker. It deals with how well the speaker convinces the audience that they are qualified to speak on a subject. However, in this study, greater attention will be accorded to the pathos and logos dimension of persuasive communication. This is because, in southeast Nigeria market encounters, it is rare to see the seller or buyer praising oneself or one's character, which relates to the ethos dimension of the rhetorical appeal.

*Pathos* (plural: *pathea*) is an appeal to the audience's emotions. It refers to the effort to persuade your audience by appealing to their feelings. The terms *sympathy*, *pathetic*, and *empathy* are derived from it. *Logos* (plural: *logoi*) is a logical appeal or the simulation of it and the term *logic* is derived from it. It is normally used to describe facts and figures that support the speaker's claims or thesis. Efforts will be made to highlight the pathos and the logos dimension in the data as instruments of persuasion in southeast Nigerian markets. The complementary theory is Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory (PAT).

***Pragmatic acts theory***

Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory is an action theory that was necessitated by the puncture made in the Speech Act Theory. One of the main criticisms according to Mey (2001) is that the speech act theory concentrates on 'speech' to the exclusion of other phenomena such as writing (and language, which manifests both in the written and spoken forms). Mey argues that "there are no speech acts but only situated speech acts or instantiated pragmatic acts" (p. 218); a general situational prototype is considered as the abstraction of a pragmatic act and Mey calls it a *pragmeme*.

According to Capone (2005, p. 1357), "a pragmeme is a situated speech act in which the rules of language and of society combine to determine meaning, intended as a socially recognized object sensitive to social expectations about the situation in which the utterance to be interpreted is embedded". As an abstract speech act, the pragmeme can be instantiated or realized through individual pragmatic act (the *ipract* or *pract*), and "every pract is at the same time an allopract; that is to say the concrete instantiation of a particular pragmeme" (Mey, 2001, p. 221). According to Mey, a pragmatic act is the product of interplay between elements of what he terms the *activity part* and the *textual part* captured schematically thus:

**Figure 1** **PRAGMEME**

ACTIVITY PART
(INTERACTANTS)
SPEECH ACTS
INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS
CONVERSATIONAL ('DIALOGUE') ACTS
PSYCHOLOGICAL ACTS (EMOTIONS)
PROSODY (INTONATION, STRESS, …)
PHYSICAL ACTS:
BODY MOVES (INCL. GESTURES)
PHYSIOGNOMY (FACIAL EXPRESSIONS)
(BODILY EXPRESSIONS OF) EMOTIONS
…
Ø (NULL)

TEXTUAL PART
(CO (N) TEXT)
INF REF REL VCE SSK MPH 'M' …

**Adapted from Mey, (2001, pg 222).**

Mey (2001) holds that the column to the left in the above scheme captures the various choices that a language user has at their disposal in communicating. Speaking further on the prerogative accorded the language user to either select a few, all or none from the choices before them, Mey (2001) submits that "it (the matrix ) should be considered a feature matrix, whose cells can be filled or empty" (p. 222). If all the cells are empty, the matrix, he insists, goes to zero (Ø), representing the borderline case of 'silence' which, according to Mey, citing Jaworski (1997) and Kurzon (1997), is not the same as zero communication.

The activity part covers speech acts, indirect speech acts, conversational ('dialogue') acts, psychological acts (emotions), prosodic acts and physical acts. Mey (2001) admits that the listing is not complete but maintains that in any ordinary length of a text, most of the elements will be found playing up. The textual part involves context elements: INF representing

"inference"; REF, "Reference", REL, "relevance"; VCE, "voice"; SSK, "shared situation knowledge"; MPH, "metaphor"; and M "metapragmatic joker".

At this point, the researchers consider it necessary to add that part of the gaps in scholarship that this present work fills is theoretical. Most of the existing scholarship around politeness has principally utilized Goffman's (1955) theory of face, Grice's (1975) conversational maxims, Brown and Levinson's (1978) theory of face, Watts (1992) relational work or Bousfield's (2008) face theory. This present research pursues a different theoretical paradigm in accounting for how face is threatened and/or mitigated. In this study, we want to see how face-threatening and mitigation are practed following Mey's (2001) theory of pragmatic acts. This accounts for why we are not discussing face theory as a separate theoretical approach adopted for analysis in this research.

## METHOD

A total of 90 hagglers participated in the study. The hagglers included wholesalers (15 participants), retailers (15 participants), apprentices (15 participants), and customers (45 participants) amounting to a sum total of 90 participants. Among the participants, there were 51 females and 39 males. The haggling encounters were recorded, and the participants were interviewed in three selected markets in each of the five states that make up southeast Nigeria. These markets include Ariaria, Ekeoha, Newmarket (in Abia); Onitsha main market, Ose, Nkwo Nnewi (in Anambra); Abakpa Main Market, Eke Imoha, Kpirikpiri (in Ebonyi); Ogbete, Ogige, Orie Orba (in Enugu); and Afor Ogbe, Ekeukwu, Owerri Market (in Imo).

### *Procedure*

Before the commencement of the research, the research team visited 7 markets in the southeast, taking note of the interactional patterns of the hagglers. This was to understand if each of the markets visited would be included in our study. The conditions for inclusion include: (i) must be a daily market, (ii) must be located in the southeast, (iii) must have a population density of at least 2000 hagglers, (iv) must be a market that comprises wholesalers, retailers, and apprentices. The markets that were excluded from this could not satisfy the inclusion criteria. During the visitation, the research team met the hagglers and advertised for their participations. Those that accepted to participate gave oral informed consent. Following this, the research team, with the help of research assistants, was assigned to different markets that met the eligibility criteria for our study. One research assistant was assigned to each researcher, totaling three research sub-teams (two per team). Each research sub-team was assigned to five markets. The aim was to interview, observe and record the hagglers. Each interview session lasted for 30 minutes simultaneously with observation. The interview sessions were implemented based on three specific themes, which include artistic modes and pragmatic strategies of persuasion, face-threatening acts, and pragmatic strategies of mitigation in the haggling encounters. The audio recordings were later transposed to writing.

### *Analysis*

A content analysis of the persuasion (pragma-rhetoric) features was done to classify the interactions according to their specific strategies for ease of analysis. This was followed by a qualitative analysis of the form and functions of each of the strategies therein. While Aristotle's theory of rhetoric is adopted in x-raying the major artistic modes of persuasion, Mey's (2001) theory of pragmatic acts is utilized in examining face threatening acts in market encounters and establishing the pragmatic strategies through which threatened face is mitigated. Of the seven analytic categories provided in the *textual* part, six were found relevant to the present study. They include the following context elements: INF representing 'inference'; REF, 'Reference', REL, 'relevance'; VCE, 'voice'; SSK, 'shared situation knowledge' and MPH 'metaphor'. Similarly, out of the ten analytic categories that make up Mey's (2001) *activity* part, three categories were found to be adequate for, and are utilised in

the analysis. They are the following interactant elements: 'conversational acts', 'indirect speech acts', 'body moves' and 'physiognomy.' Next are findings and discussion.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Following Aristotle's theory of rhetoric, findings reveal that the major artistic modes of persuasion employed in southeast Nigerian markets are the *pathos* and the *logos* aspects of the rhetorical appeals. These major artistic modes of persuasion are further realized through a major persuasive strategy which is *appeal to emotion*.

### *Appeal to emotion as a persuasive strategy in Southeast Nigerian markets*

Appeal to emotion as a persuasive strategy is achieved through two specific rhetoric strategies which include: reference to the salesperson's dilemma, and eulogizing the customer. Reference to a salesperson's dilemma occurs when the salesperson begins to paint a gloomy picture of their condition as orchestrated by low patronage from customers. In utilizing this strategy, the salesperson usually links the situation to the likelihood of not being able to feed their children should the situation persist. The above is exemplified in the following exchanges as shown in Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1

*Customer* *: How do you sell your yam?*
*Salesperson* *: Madam please patronize me. I have not made any sales since morning.*

From the above exchange, we can see that the customer is made to feel that they are the one to save the salesperson from such imminent danger. At such point, the discourse is strategically and ideologically moved from a casual salesperson versus customer context to a morally defined context where the customer is brought under a moral obligation to patronize the salesperson. This strategy, however, may not yield a positive result at all times as some customers do not easily succumb to moral narratives and emotional blackmailing. This is instantiated in the above exchange as the customer threatened to leave if the salesperson refused to sell at a price convenient to her, more especially as it was already getting dark. Next is eulogizing the customer as a strategy to appeal to the customer's emotions.

*Eulogizing the customer*

Eulogizing the customer is found to be a dominant strategy in appealing to the emotions of the customer. This strategy features prominently in Excerpt 2, 8, and 13 as shown below:

Excerpt 2

*Salesperson* *: Baby girl come and buy Mama Chiamaka's Okpa*
*Customer* *: I need the one that contains vegetable*

Here, the salesperson establishes the interactional exchange by calling the customer "baby girl". There is a world of difference between addressing the customer as "girl" and/or "baby girl". The salesperson may have called her "baby girl" to achieve a desired end ─to elicit patronage from her─ without minding whether she was still within the age bracket of "girl" let alone "baby". The salesperson is a woman and she seems to understand the psychology of women in her clime especially when it has to do with age. Several ladies in southeast Nigeria, it seems, maintain a diametrically opposing ages which could be termed their chronological and their mental ages. Their chronological ages are their real ages while their mental ages are the ages they chose for themselves where they are never older than 19. The salesperson seems to be exploiting the above situation as a rhetorical strategy to have the "baby girl" patronize her. A sub-strategy playing up in the above excerpt, though not preponderant in the data is *branding*. This could be seen in the phrase *Mama Chiamaka's Okpa*. There must be something

notorious about *Mama Chiamaka* and her *Okpa* that made her choose it instead of other options available to her. For instance, she could have simply said "Come and buy *Okpa* from me. Her preference for *Mama Chiamaka's Okpa* instead of *me* underscores the former's socio-pragmatic significance in eliciting patronage from customers. A similar rhetoric strategy relating to appealing to the emotions of the customer is observed in Excerpt 8.

Excerpt 8

| | |
|---|---|
| *Salesperson* | *: Excess beauty! My baby! What do you want? Which one should I give to you? It is your type that I want to be patronizing me every morning.* |
| *Customer* | *: Please do you have Kings Groundnut Oil?* |

Here, the customer assumes a new name: *Excess Beauty*. It may not matter if the customer is beautiful to the degree of the adjective being used to describe her. What is important to the salesperson is that she is patronized and this, she believes, could be achieved through flattery. Whether the customer understands it to be flattery is another thing but in most cases, ladies take such encomiums as genuine compliments. Beyond this, the customer also says 'It is your type that I want to be patronizing me every morning.' This latter statement has a socio-cultural significance. Amongst the Igbo of southeast Nigeria, who are largely traders, there is this belief that the first person to make purchases from a seller's shop has some spiritual significance regarding the number of sales the salesperson will make for the day. This first patronage for the day is called *aka ahia* and the act of this first patronage is *igba aka ahia*. It is believed that if the first person to patronize the seller has *ihu oma* (one who is accompanied by a benevolent spirit), such patronage would literally open the doors of patronage for the seller (the salesperson) for the entire day. It is believed that a salesperson who enjoys such first patronage from a customer accompanied by a benevolent spirit would sell and get tired of attending to customers for the day and would even have some customers that would buy some items at exorbitant prices ─something like mentioning high price for a particular item and the customer paying without much haggling ─ because the prices are not tagged on the items.

Conversely, it is also believed amongst the Igbo that if the first person to enter a salesperson's shop has *ihu ojo* (one who is accompanied by a cruel spirit), the salesperson will struggle all day and wouldn't record reasonable sales. This situation is believed to remain true whether the person with a cruel spirit who first entered the shop made any purchases or not. It is in understanding the above context that one fully appreciates the socio-pragmatic significance of the utterance "It is your type that I want to be patronizing me every morning." which the customer would simply interpret to mean "come and patronize me because I am aware that you are accompanied by a benevolent spirit." Next, we turn to pragmatic strategies and linguistic forms in southeast Nigerian markets.

***Pragmatic strategies in Southeast Nigerian markets***

Pragmatic strategies, simply put, are concerned with the use of adequate interaction strategies to communicate a speaker's intended meaning as determined by the situations surrounding the interaction. The situation surrounding the interaction is simply known in the literature as context. The context of an utterance is a source of clues that aid the hearer in working out what the speaker intended to convey. Following Mey's (2001) theory of pragmatic acts, attention is paid to three specific practs that play up in the data *viz*: pract of price alarm, pract of face threatening, and pract of face mitigation. We shall take them in turns.

*Pract of price alarm*

Pract of price alarm is associated with situations where the salesperson quotes the cost prices of their goods as a way of making the potential buyer believe that they are not making much profit from each of the items being sold to them. It is a shared situational knowledge (SSK) between the salespersons and the buyers that the buyers risk the chances of being fleeced by the, especially about the prices of goods. Haggling being a process of price formation

through which both buyers and sellers negotiate and eventually establish acceptable prices is prone to price inflation, commonly referred to as 'cheating' in the context of southeast Nigerian markets. Consequently, many salespersons consider it relevant (REL) to mention the purchasing prices of their goods before the customer so that the customer can do the necessary plus and minus and be in the know as to how much constitutes the profit of the buyer from the item they are purchasing. In some cases, the salesperson having mentioned the cost price and the selling price goes further to mention what should be their profit, not waiting for the customer to work it out, should the transaction go through. Two categories of price alarms have been identified including: purchasing price alarm and price volatility alarm.

*Purchasing price alarm*

Purchasing price alarm has to do with a deliberate mentioning of the purchasing price of an item by the salesperson to persuade the potential buyer to patronize them. A major challenge with purchasing price alarm is authentication. The addressee has little or no means of establishing the authenticity or otherwise of such claims. This could explain why some salespersons go as far as making the purchasing invoice available for the customer to go through to believe that the salesperson is sincere. This approach is effective in convincing the customer that the salesperson is sincere but the conviction is not always guaranteed. Such display of the purchasing invoice fails to convince the customer when they suspect that the salesperson may have connived with the distributor (from whom he bought the items) to issue two invoices for the same items, inflating one and leaving the other as genuine and authentic copy. Under such an arrangement, salesperson keeps the genuine invoice for their consumption and guide while they brandish the inflated copy for the customer to go through to convince them that they are not making many gains from them. This act, captured above, is fraudulent and if the potential buyer suspects such a foul play, it could threaten their face and lead to a breakdown or unsuccessful haggling encounter. Instances of purchasing price alarm abound in the data as shown in Excerpt 10 and 24, as shown below:

Excerpt 10

*Seller : Madam! Madam! Good afternoon. Is it Mangara or Stockfish?*
*Buyer : I want Stockfish. How much?*
*Seller : For the head, we have those of ₦2000 and ₦6000*
*Buyer : What is the last price for that of ₦6000?*
*Seller : That is the last price. Stockfish is scarce. I bought at the rate of ₦5900 each. I only make a profit of* ***₦100*** *per one. My transport money is not there oo!*

Excerpt 24

*Seller : Fine girl pick what you want.*
*Buyer : I want Nivea Cream*
*Seller : It is ₦2700*
*Buyer : Your goods are always costly. Maybe you don't want me to be coming to your shop any longer.*
*Seller : Nooo, why say that…as a matter of fact, my profit in this thing is just ₦100. A Dollar now sells for ₦560…it may get to ₦600 before the end of the year.*

Two kinds of purchasing price alarms have been identified in the data. They are Minus Trigger Purchasing Price Alarm (─TPPA) and Plus Trigger Purchasing Price Alarm (+TPPA), relating to excerpts 10 and 24, respectively. A ─TPPA occurs when an interlocutor resorts to purchasing price alarm without a prior discussion signaling the need for such, while a +TPPA refers to a situation where there is a linguistic or pragmatic signal for purchasing price alarm.

A close look at the excerpts reveals that in excerpts 10 the salesperson had no trigger for her purchasing price alarm. She only raised such alarm as a persuasion strategy to make the potential buyers patronize her. The situation is not the same with excerpt 24 where the salesperson has a trigger for his purchasing price alarm. The trigger is a linguistic construction of accusation and doubt. This is captured in the expression "Your goods are always costly. Maybe you don't want me to be coming to your shop any longer". It is a shared situational knowledge (SSK) between the interactants that if a salesperson becomes notorious for/ or is designated as one whose prices of goods are always high, such a salesperson is very likely to enjoy low patronage from intending buyers. The seller, in the context of the above utterance, infers (INF) the socio-pragmatic implication of such observation and appreciates the relevance (REL) of deconstructing such notion. This further explains why he has to explore different pragma-linguistic strategies in convincing the buyer that he did not, without a cause, set out to place high prices on his goods. Next is the price volatility alarm.

*Price volatility alarm*

While purchasing price alarm relates to price volatility alarm in that they all have to do with raising alarm, by the seller, which relates to the prices of goods, they differ in one significant way. For the benefit of emphasis and clarity but at the risk of repetition, a purchasing price alarm has to do with a deliberate mentioning of the purchasing price of an item by the seller to persuade the potential buyer to patronize them while a price volatility alarm deals with the seller pointing out that the item they are selling to a potential buyer has the potentials of price increase without a prior information from either the whole-seller or the manufacturer. Price volatility alarm is a potent instrument of persuasion, more effective than purchasing price alarm, in southeast Nigerian markets. The pract of price volatility is realized through such allopracts as projecting and lamenting. We see the use of a price volatility alarm in Excerpt 34.

Excerpt 34

*Buyer* *: It is a Turkey shirt that I want. How much for one?*

*Seller* *: It goes for ₦15,000 per one. (Raising one)You will wear it until you are tired of wearing it. This is the original Turkey shirt.*

*Buyer* *: is it not ₦10,000?*

*Seller* *: I am not even sure that I will get it at the rate of ₦15,000 when I go back to make more purchases from Lagos. As the price of dollars is going up, so are the prices of these items.*

Instances of *projecting* as an allopract of price volatility alarm are captured in expressions like "A Dollar now sells for ₦560…it may get to ₦600 before the end of the year" (Expt.24), and "As the price of Dollar is going up, so are the prices of these items… (Expt.34). On the other hand, *lamenting* as an allopract is instantiated in the following "A Dollar now sells for ₦560…. We pay high for shop rent here, we pay for "Business Premises"… it is close to ₦6000 now. (Expt.24). We see from the above that the exchange rate, especially, the U.S. Dollar exchange rate holds a functional centrality in both instances of *projecting* and *lamenting* as allopracts of price volatility alarm. It is a shared situational knowledge (SSK) among the discourse participants that since Nigeria, basically, depends on imported goods, the movement of the U.S. Dollars determines the prices of goods in Nigeria. Consequently, the potential buyer should be able to draw the necessary inferences (INF) from the seller's reference (REF) to the U. S. Dollars. Amidst these bargaining encounters, the chances of threatening face remain high.

***Pract of face threatening***

Face-threatening acts may include orders, requests, suggestions, pieces of advice, warnings, offers and promises, all of which are possible constituents of haggling in southeast Nigerian markets. In our data, face-threatening act is practed through *probing*, *comparing*, and

*doubting*. It is instructive to note that face threatening is not an exclusive reserve of any of the discourse participants as it could be practed by both interactants, i.e. the salesperson and/or the customer. We shall take them in succession.

*Probing*

Probing occurs when any of the haggling participants/interactants ask a question that does not bother precisely with the price of items and how to sell/purchase them. In probing, one of the discourse participants infers (INF) some sort of intrusion into their privacy. Such intrusive interrogations are face-threatening acts. Such acts, as observed in the data, could be performed by either of the discourse participants. This is exemplified in excerpts 3 and 9.

Excerpt 3

*Buyer : Dear, are you the one in the shop today? Where is your wife?*
*Seller : Is it my yam you want to buy or my wife?*

Excerpt 9

*Seller : My customer, what do you want?*
*Buyer : Mama, Good afternoon*
*Seller : Good afternoon dear*
*Buyer : I need beans*
*Seller : We have Potisko, Iron beans and Guzo. What do you intend to use the beans to cook? Is it yam?*
*Buyer : (Frowning.) How is it your business what I intend to cook it with?*
*Seller : Oh, sorry my dear!*

In excerpt 3 above, we see the use of excessive probes and how they threatened the buyer's face. The seller's choice of words led to the avoidable face-threatening act. For instance, the interactants share a cultural knowledge (SCK) that in southeast Nigeria, men are not to keep close relationships with married women. It is considered taboo to see a man sleeping with a married woman, and any action that suggests that there is a trace of such a relationship is frowned upon. One, therefore, does not expect the intending buyer to have started asking after the wife of the man whom he met in the shop. The buyer ought to have thought about the possible inference (INF) from his question which could be that he is lusting after the woman and avoid asking such a question. This threatens the seller's face being the husband of the woman in question. Little wonder he responded rudely: Is it yam you want to buy or my wife? In the above response, the seller commoditized both the yam and his wife. He presents the yam and his wife as transactional objects, probably to make the potential buyer appreciate the implicatures there are in his interrogation.

The seller considers it relevant (REL) to use linguistic resources available to him, crafted and delivered as an orientational metaphor, to inform the buyer of his negative inferencing (INF) of his interrogation. If the seller had utilized other lexical options probably by substituting “buy” for “to see”, we would have had a response like “Is it yam you want to buy or to see my wife?” This response does not commoditize the wife and would have been differently inferred (INF) by the potential buyer. A more friendly response, devoid of linguistic signals of suspicion is also possible. For instance, another syntactic option, available to the seller, would be to have done away with the holophrastic “it” and introduced an interrogative operator like “Do” to initiate the question. Such would leave us with an option like “Do you want yam or to see my wife?” This sounds more like a literal response devoid of implicature and other pragmatic signals available in the seller’s response.

Excerpt 9 captures a similar instance of probing. However, unlike excerpt 3 where the potential buyer practed the face-threatening act through probing, in excerpt 9, it is the seller that initiated the probing. As the interactional exchanges lasted, the seller literally transcended

the boundaries of haggling context by asking an implicature-triggering question "What do you intend to use the beans to cook?" Obviously, she was probing more than is required, flouting Grice's maxim of quantity and relevance at the same time. From the periphery, one may wonder how and why the question “What do you intend to use the beans to cook?” should threaten anybody’s face, but a deep reflection on it explains the how and the why. For instance, a reflection on the contextual coordinate of the utterance shows that the seller and the potential buyer are wide apart in terms of age. The seller should be in her early 50s while the potential buyer is in her early 20s. Consequent to the above, the potential buyer could infer (INF) from the interrogation that the older woman holds a negative appraisal of her (the potential buyer's) culinary ability, especially about knowing the combinable items. The older woman could have meant no harm in asking the question but given the age disparity, the chances of the younger one drawing a negative inference (INF) from her interrogation is high. The above discussion highlights *probing* as one of the allopracts through which face threatening is practed. Next is *comparing.*

*Comparing*

Comparing occurs in the data when any of the discourse participants begin to compare one item to another or the price of certain items to others. This also manifests when one of the discourse participants begins to label certain goods belonging to a particular individual positively, and other goods belonging to other individuals, negatively as shown in excerpt 16 below:

Excerpt 16:

*Seller : Do patronize me dear.*
*Buyer : How much is this fish (pointing at Tilapia)?*
*Seller : ₦1,200*
*Buyer : The price is outrageous. I bought this kind of fish, the same size and shape, at the rate of ₦500 four days ago in this same market.*
*Seller : It’s like they sold a baboon to you in the name of a monkey.*
*Buyer : (addressing the seller) Madam, you are irritating. Please tell me the last price let me get out of here!*

From the above exchange, one can see that it is the potential buyer who first adopted the *comparing* act. Her line of argument holds the potential to threaten the seller's face. This is not just because the potential buyer made the above remarks but because she had concluded that the price was outrageous, even before referring (REF) to the fish she had bought days back in the same market. The seller is very likely to infer (INF) from the potential buyer's submission that she wants to neutralize her (the seller's) marketing power and strategy. The seller therefore considers it relevant (REL) to raise a counter notion against the potential buyer's claims and submission. This time, her response holds a stronger potential to threaten her face as she says "It's like they sold a baboon to you in the name of a monkey". The above is an idiomatic expression that suggests that the seller lacked the required perspicuity to distinguish good species of fish from bad ones. This obviously threatened the potential buyer's face as shown in her last remarks before leaving the shop. She observes "Madam, you are irritating". The use of this negative linguistics would have been avoided should the potential buyer not have adopted *comparing* as a pragmatic strategy in the haggling encounter. We turn to pract of face mitigation in southeast Nigerian haggling encounters.

***Pract of face mitigation***

In southeast Nigerian markets, faces are threatened and attempts are made to mitigate same. Basically, face mitigation is practed in the data through such allopracts like apologising, euphemising and blame transfer as exemplified in Excerpt 9, 12, 25.

*Apologising*

Apologising is a face mitigation strategy that happens when any of the discourse participants adopts a direct apology as a way of cushioning the effects of their previous utterances or acts in other to save or mitigate face. The seller or the potential buyer could be seen apologising since it is not the exclusive reserve of any of the discourse participants. This is exemplified in Excerpt 9 captured above.

The last comment by the seller is an instance of apologising. With the physiognomic act of the potential buyer (frowning) and the comment that followed: How is it your business what I intend to cook it with? The seller is able to infer (INF) that the potential buyer's face has been threatened. She (the seller), at the same time, understands the relevance (REL) of *apologising* which accounts for why she does not waste time in saying "Oh, sorry dear". At this point a shared situational knowledge (SSK) between the discourse participants, which is that the seller is way older than the buyer, is suspended. The seller's age becomes immaterial as what is relevant (REL) is to make sales, accounting for why she is the one tendering apology and not the other way round. Face mitigation is also practed through euphemizing.

*Euphemising*

A euphemism is an innocuous word or expression used in place of one that is deemed offensive or suggests something unpleasant. In pragmatics, to euphemize is to present politely, through pragmatic acting, a situation that has the potential to threaten interlocutors' faces. This is exemplified in Excerpt 25.

Excerpt 25

*Buyer : How much is your pumpkin leaves*
*Seller : A bundle of it is ₦100. How many do you want?*
*Buyer : I want 3 bundles but you have to slice them*
*Seller : Is that how your mother trained you? I am sure I am old enough to be your mother and here you are, asking me to slice pumpkin leaves for you.*
*Buyer : Old woman, do what I said, I have no time and besides, the services is part of what I am paying for.*
*Seller : (Expressing shock) My goodness! What does this little girl take me for?*
*Buyer : (Smiling) Mama the Mama! Mama the Mama! Don't be angry oo. I didn't mean to insult you.*

The seller's face is threatened in the above conversation. However, the seller is the first to pull the trigger. It is hardly wrong that the potential buyer demanded that the pumpkin leaves be sliced. Such practices are not strange. The seller's response "Is that how your mother trained you? I am sure I am old enough to be your mother and here you are, asking me to slice pumpkin leaves for you" is a harsh one for the demand made by the potential buyer. The cracks in the interlocutors' exchanges point to interpersonal considerations. The seller, a woman of about 45 years or more, was involved in a haggling encounter with a girl of about 17 years of age. It is a shared situational knowledge (SSK) between the interlocutors that the seller is old enough to be the potential buyer's mother. Consequently, the seller infers (INF) the potential buyer's demand as an insult leading to her rash response. In consideration of the interpersonal function of age disparity, the potential buyer has to mitigate the seller's face through a metapragmatic ('…M') joker. The expressions "Mama the Mama! Mama the Mama!" hold strong metapragmatic significance in the context of its utterance. A metapragmatic joker points to particular metapragmatic activities. Central to it is "indexicality" which, at the pragmatic level, demands good knowledge of the context of the utterance made. A metapragmatic joker points to particular persons who utter them and the conditions that necessitate their utterance. Looking at the potential buyer making the above metapragmatic signal, the seller would see that she is

smiling and such physiognomic activity is most likely to mitigate the seller's face. Another allopract through which face mitigation is practed is blame transfer.

*Blame transfer*

Blame transfer is a face mitigation strategy in haggling where either of the interlocutors apportions blames to external object or person, thereby making the discourse participants free from such blame. Blame transfer occurs only when an interlocutor's face has been threatened. The discourse participants, at such point as this, cleverly move the causative agency status to a force that is not present, thereby mitigating the face that is hitherto threatened. When there is agency transfer, the interlocutors are linguistically moved to a deictic centre where they see themselves, not as foes but, as collective victims of the external agent's activities. This, usually, creates a sense of conviviality among the interlocutors, leading to a successful haggling experience. We see this in Excerpt 35.

Excerpt 35:

*Buyer : How much is the bed cover (pointing at one)?*
*Seller : It is ₦4000*
*Buyer : You are not serious. Is ₦4000 for both the bed and the bed cover?*
*Seller : (Frowning.) If you want to buy, buy. I am not here to be interrogated as though I am in a law court.*
*Buyer : Calm down dear! Things are so hard. I teach in a private school where I am paid ₦8000 as my salary. If I use ₦4000 to buy a bed cover, it will be difficult for me to feed.*
*Seller : (Smiling.) Things are hard in this country and our leaders are busy stealing our money. God will save us.*

Blame transfer could be co– or mono-constructed. It is co-constructed when all the interlocutors assign blame to external agents but mono-constructed when only one of the interlocutors assigns blame to an external agent. From the above excerpt, we see a co-constructed blame transfer. It is a shared situational knowledge (SSK) between the interlocutors that the Nigerian government in general, and southeast governors in particular, do not allocate reasonable funds to education. The lecturers and teachers in government-owned institutions are not well remunerated. The above situation is even worse in privately owned schools. The seller, therefore, can infer (INF) the socio-pragmatic significance of the reference (REF) that the potential buyer makes to his place of work. The reference (REF) that the potential buyer makes to his place of work becomes relevant (REL) at this material time because in making the reference (REF) the potential buyer is also transferring blame to his place of work, at the micro context, and to the overall government's apathy towards funding education, at the macro context. As a co-constructed blame transfer, the seller lends credence to the potential buyer's claims by also transferring blame to Nigerian leaders with the response, "Things are hard in this country and our leaders are busy stealing our money". With the above co-constructed blame transfer, the interlocutors find themselves at a discourse (deictic) centre where they believe that they are not the cause of their problems and should not lose face as a result. Blame transfer, therefore, is a very effective allopract through which face mitigation is practed in southeast Nigerian market encounters.

## CONCLUSION

The study is guided by three specific objectives which include to identify the major artistic modes and pragmatic strategies of persuasion employed in southeast Nigerian markets, examine face threatening acts in the market encounters and establish the pragmatic strategies through which threatened face is mitigated. The research identifies that the primary artistic modes of persuasion utilised in southeast Nigerian markets are pathos (appeal to emotion) and

logos (appeal to logic). Among these, pathos is notably predominant, indicating that emotional appeals are crucial in influencing customer decisions during haggling encounters. Appeal to emotion is achieved through reference to the salesperson's dilemma, and eulogizing the customer. Salespersons employ emotional appeals by referencing their dilemmas and eulogizing customers to create a moral obligation for patronage. While these strategies can be effective, they may not always yield positive results, as some customers resist emotional manipulation.

The study identifies three key pragmatic acts: price alarm, face threatening, and face mitigation, which are crucial in haggling encounters. These acts reflect the shared knowledge and situational context that influence the dynamics of negotiation between buyers and sellers. Price alarm strategies involve sellers disclosing purchasing prices to persuade buyers and mitigate the risk of perceived cheating. Two types of price alarms are identified: purchasing price alarm and price volatility alarm. The study further reveals that face-threatening acts can be initiated by either party, often through probing or comparing, which can lead to negative inferences and conflict. However, face mitigation strategies identified in the analysis include apologizing, euphemizing, and blame transfer, which help to restore harmony in interactions after face-threatening acts.

By examining the specific rhetorical strategies employed in haggling, such as emotional appeals and flattery, the study enriches the discourse on persuasion and its role in mitigating conflict during negotiations. The findings underscore the cultural nuances of haggling in southeast Nigeria, differentiating it from haggling practices in other regions, thus providing insights into the socio-pragmatic aspects of communication in diverse cultural settings. Overall, the paper serves as a valuable resource for future research on communication strategies in market settings.

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