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Research Paper

"I will change it for you now": the pragmatics of threat in boss-apprentice conversations in abuja, nigeria

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ABSTRACT

In professional settings, language serves as a powerful tool for asserting authority and ensuring compliance. In Nigerian workplaces, the phrase "I will change it for you now" or its Pidgin version "I go change am for you" often functions as more than a correction it reinforces hierarchy, asserts control, and implies potential escalation. This study explores such expressions as face-threatening acts (FTAs), revealing complex power dynamics in boss-apprentice interactions. Using Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, it analyzes how these utterances threaten apprentices' positive face (desire for approval) and negative face (desire for autonomy). The qualitative case study involved five boss-apprentice pairs in structured work environments. Data were collected through audio recordings, semi-structured interviews, and observation of non-verbal cues. Thematic analysis was employed, with credibility ensured via triangulation, member checking, and peer review. Ethical standards including informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation were upheld. The study highlights the need for culturally respectful communication in mentorship.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In many African urban centers like Abuja, Nigeria, informal apprenticeship remains a key avenue for economic empowerment and skill acquisition. A typical Nigerian apprenticeship is defined by a clear hierarchy between the boss (often called oga) and the apprentice. While the system is designed to foster

learning and development, the relationship can often be tense, shaped by cultural norms, power dynamics, and especially language use.

Language is not only used to give instructions or share knowledge but also to assert authority and control. It is a tool for establishing who holds power. Adds that "I am the boss, and you will do what I say, and if you don't, just watch!" [1]. Argues that language, though a means of influence, becomes coercive when misused [2]. From offices to police stations, and in workshops and salons, language reveals the fine line between influence and coercion. One-way managers assert authority is through subtle or implicit threats. A phrase like "I will change it for you now" may appear benign but often signals disapproval or a warning in Nigerian workplace culture. It implies consequences without stating them outright. In hierarchical and age-sensitive settings, such expressions carry serious weight, especially when an apprentice is financially dependent and lacks autonomy.

In these apprenticeship environments, threats both serious and playful serve as tools of control. Their meaning depends heavily on context, tone, and the relationship between speaker and listener. Yet, despite their frequency in informal sectors like auto repair, tailoring, and hairdressing, these communicative acts remain underexplored in scholarly research. This study investigates the role of threats in boss-apprentice interactions within Abuja's informal economy. It asks: What forms do these threats take? How are they interpreted in light of cultural and situational factors? How do apprentices respond? And what do these exchanges reveal about deeper power structures in informal training systems?

Grounded in Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory [3], which examines how individuals manage face-threatening acts in social exchanges, this research employs a qualitative methodology. Data are drawn from audio recordings of real conversations in salons, tailoring shops, and workshops across Abuja, supplemented by interviews and field observations. The goal is to identify the linguistic strategies behind threats, understand their function, and assess their impact on workplace culture and relationships. By analyzing these everyday interactions, this study contributes to the field of pragmatics particularly within African sociolinguistic contexts and offers insights for improving communication, reducing verbal abuse, and supporting respectful mentoring practices in Nigeria's informal economy.

2. RELATED WORK

Language as a Means of Power and Dominance

In hierarchical workplaces, language plays a key role in how authority is expressed and maintained, especially in boss-apprentice relationships. In Nigerian contexts, language functions not only as a communication tool but also as a means of showing respect, enforcing hierarchy, and asserting dominance [4]. Managers often rely on specific tones and contexts to direct apprentices and reinforce control by shaping how apprentices experience their training. Directive language is a central tactic. In high power-distance societies like Nigeria, communication tends to be formal and top-down, with limited space for feedback from subordinates [5]. Language within speech communities sets expectations for direct commands and limits negotiation [6]. Beyond words, nonverbal elements such as tone, pauses and facial expressions can significantly shape meaning. Even neutral statements can become intimidating depending on delivery [7]. "Tight" societies as the ones where strong social norms heighten sensitivity to indirect cues, often perceived as authoritative [8]. Understanding both verbal and nonverbal aspects of power is vital for fostering respectful and cooperative communication in informal apprenticeships, where imbalances in status and experience are often pronounced.

The Pragmatics of Threat in Boss-Apprentice Conversations

From a practical standpoint, a threat is more than a declaration of intent it's a strategic act meant to influence behavior by implying negative consequences. Its effectiveness often lies less in the words used and more in tone, context, and authority. Implicit threats are powerful due to their ambiguity: "The strength of an implicit threat lies in its duality; it can be denied as a threat while still imposing psychological pressure" [9]. In pragmatics, meaning often depends on when, how, and by whom something is said.

Threats in professional hierarchies are usually indirect and rely on contextual cues [10]. Power is embedded in everyday workplace communication [11]. In insecure job settings, such as informal apprenticeships, bosses may issue commands that, though neutral on the surface, are perceived as threats. Even mild corrective statements can cause anxiety among apprentices facing uncertain job stability [12]. A phrase like "I'll change it for you now" could mean help or hint at incompetence, depending on tone and relationship. Understanding such corporate threats requires close attention to language, power relations, and the subtle emotional undercurrents shaping workplace communication.

Power Dynamics and Hierarchical Structure in Communication

Power structures and hierarchies significantly shape communication styles in the workplace, influencing relationships, idea-sharing, and conflict resolution. Power is likened to energy in physics, describing it as the fundamental medium of human interaction [13]. Scholars emphasize how authority, prestige, and language intersect to shape workplace dynamics. Words influence how events are perceived and responded to, stressing the importance of how language and action interact [14]. Similarly, communication systems reflect their users, conveying culture, identity, and values not just serving as tools of connection [15]. Leadership is rooted in language, which is used not just to convey information but to build legitimacy and reinforce power [16]. Leaders tend to use direct speech to assert authority, while subordinates often soften their language to avoid confrontation [17]. These patterns reveal and reinforce hierarchical structures.

Cultural norms, particularly power distance is linked to workplace communication [5]. In high power-distance societies like Nigeria, communication tends to be formal and top-down. Muschalik observes that power is often maintained through subtle means indirect threats or veiled criticisms rather than explicit commands [10]. Psychological toll of power-heavy communication, arguing that it can cause stress and hinder creativity among subordinates when messages emphasize authority over collaboration [12]. These insights underscore the profound impact of power on workplace interaction not just in what is said, but in how it's said, by whom, and under what conditions. Ultimately, power dynamics shape not only the tone and content of communication but also its broader emotional and organizational effects, making it crucial to understand how language sustains, challenges, or reshapes authority in professional settings.

The Part of Tone, Context, and Task Delivery

The context and tone in which messages are delivered play a crucial role in determining whether they are perceived as supportive or threatening. In hierarchical settings, power dynamics amplify the effect of tone, timing, and setting on communication. A direct order from a fair supervisor may feel encouraging, while the same from a critical one may seem threatening [18]. In timing and location matter, a public reprimand can feel humiliating and coercive, while private feedback may be supportive [19]. Implicit threats rely on tone and context to exert psychological pressure while maintaining deniability [9]. Nonverbal cues like body language and facial expressions also influence perception. Even identical words may be read differently based on delivery [10]. Vague statements in power-imbalanced settings can cause anxiety [12]. Threat often lies not in the words but in how they are delivered [7]. Understanding the roles of tone, context, and nonverbal signals is essential for interpreting workplace communication. Language conveys both information and social meaning [20]. Awareness of these elements helps reduce conflict and build mutual respect.

Emotional and Psychological Effects of Threats

Perceived threats can have deep psychological effects on apprentices, impacting both their personal well-being and overall organizational performance. Studies show that both explicit and implicit threats increase stress, anxiety, and defensiveness, which can hinder learning, job satisfaction, and productivity. In "tight" cultures where social norms are strictly enforced threats produce greater anxiety due to fear of social or professional consequences [8]. This cultural context intensifies emotional responses, especially in hierarchically rigid environments.

Even subtle threats can create persistent fear, lowering morale and trust, particularly among lower-ranked employees [21]. This fear-based environment often leads to reduced engagement and creativity. Threats disrupt workplace harmony and cooperation, leading to isolation and breakdowns in team unity. Chronic exposure to criticism or bullying can lead to burnout, turnover, and loss of institutional knowledge [19]. Statements like “I will change it for you now” may cause apprentices to overcompensate or self-censor, stifling innovation [12]. The ambiguity in indirect threats can increases anxiety through uncertainty, leading to second-guessing and eroded trust [7]. The importance of balancing empathy with authority in hierarchical communication is to avoid unintended harm [9]. Without this balance, even well-meant comments may damage workplace relationships. Language is fluid and adaptive, particularly in boss-apprentice dynamics where it is used both to instruct and to assert control [22]. Understanding these subtle dynamics is essential for developing healthier communication practices. Organizations must be mindful of how language is perceived and strive for respectful, clear communication that promotes psychological safety, creativity, and trust.

3. METHODOLOGY

Focusing on the statement "I will change it for you now," this study adopts a qualitative research methodology to investigate the pragmatic impact of face-threatening language in hierarchical workplace interactions. Employing a case study approach, it provides an in-depth analysis of boss-apprentice dynamics across diverse workplace settings. Data collection integrates non-participant observations by attending to non-verbal cues such as tone, facial expressions, and body language with semi-structured interviews of both supervisors and apprentices, as well as audio recordings of real-time interactions. Anchored in Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory, the research explores how language reflects power relations, authority, and nuanced interpersonal dynamics by unpacking the subtle linguistic strategies employed in these interactions. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, purposive sampling is used to select five boss-apprentice pairs from varied professional environments, including vocational workshops and office settings, capturing a range of communication styles and cultural contexts. The study underscores the importance of contextual factors, relational histories, and cultural norms in understanding face-threatening acts (FTAs). Ethical protocols such as voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality are strictly observed. Data credibility is enhanced through member checking, triangulation, and peer review. This approach enables a nuanced exploration of how expressions like "I will change it for you now" serve as assertions of power while also posing potential relational threats, thereby shaping interpersonal dynamics and workplace hierarchies. Nevertheless, the study acknowledges limitations. Observer effects influence participant behavior, and cultural or geographic variability may constrain the generalizability of findings. Despite these challenges, this qualitative inquiry offers a rich understanding of the linguistic, contextual, and relational dimensions of face-threatening speech in boss-apprentice exchanges.

Table 1. Conversation Transcripts for Boss-Apprentice Contexts and Interpretations

Context	Verbal Exchange	Non-Verbal Signals	Interpretation
Scheduled shop sweeping (Task correction and feedback session)	Boss: O boy you tidy this area today? Apprentice: Yes, oga Boss: What brought all these filths here? Apprentice: I don't know Boss: Silence; you whine me? Apprentice: Sorry, sir; I no lie you. Boss: I will now modify it for you.	The Boss yelled and ran to strike the Apprentice but stopped.	Saying 'I will change it for you now' suggests the apprentice is lacking. It highlights the superior-subordinate dynamic in a task correction scenario and threatens the apprentice's good face.

	Apprentice: Apologies, Sir		
Carpenter shop assignment (Task correction and feedback session)	Apprentice: Sir, I have no 2-inch nails in the bag. Boss: Check it thoroughly. I store it there. Apprentice: I check tire. Perhaps you have it stored somewhere. Boss: I go transform am for you. You believe I lack sense based on this.	The apprentice walked toward the bag and scratched his head.	The threat calls the apprentice's intelligence into question and damages their positive face. The non-verbal submission of the apprentice highlights the power disparity.
Purchasing of shoe materials and lack of documentation (Task correction and feedback session)	Boss: Now you dey return? Market you go since. Apprentice: Na serious holdup around Maraba/Nyanya area. Boss: You buy that woman shoes the Nora and macco? Apprentice: Indeed, I purchase anything you send me. Boss: Change no remain? Apprentice: No. Boss: How you go talk say no update dey? This afternoon I will update it for you. Apprentice: I no eat your money. I used everything you give me.	The boss stayed silent; his eyes angry and his face tense.	The boss suggests the apprentice is not truthful. His quietness and fierce gaze magnify the danger and increase power dynamic tension.
Loss of basic clothing (Questions – feedback session)	Boss: Yesterday I left two materials here; what happened to them? Apprentice: I don't know Sir Boss: Is a chair the one I am speaking to? Apprentice: I found no material. Boss: Look at your reaction. I will transform it for you right now. Apprentice: I didn't see any material.	The Boss circled, nodded her head, and applauded her hands while sighing.	The repeated threat targets the apprentice's good face, raises tension with dramatic actions, and thereby strengthens the emotional weight of the allegation.
Giving little f attention and indolence (correcting task and getting feedback)	Apprentice: Oga, you know there's sun Boss: what do you mean? Apprentice: I didn't say anything Boss: I will change it for you now.	With a sharp glare, boss frowned.	The boss adops threat to control the apprentice's liberty of being tired. The nonverbal signal boosts the commanding tone.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Deeper study of Table 1 above provides more interesting observations on the intersection of language, power, and cultural dynamics in boss-apprentice contacts Nigerian workplaces.

Understanding the Statement "I Will Change It for You Now"

As indicated in Table 1 above, the idea of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory in the expression "I will change it for you" denotes a person's preferred self-image in social interactions. Highlighted in Table 1, within the context of a boss-apprentice relationship, the words "I will change it for you" poses a double threat to positive and negative face.

Undermining Positive Face (Desire for Acceptance and Acknowledgment):

The statement subtly implies the apprentice's effort is inadequate, casting doubt on their ability and dampening enthusiasm. For apprentices seeking validation, such indirect rejection can be psychologically draining, leading to self-doubt, reduced confidence, and reluctance to take on new tasks.

It suggests they lack the competence to meet expectations, which may cause shame or discouragement. In hierarchical settings, this dynamic reinforces power imbalances, leaving apprentices feeling exposed rather than motivated, and potentially hindering their growth and engagement.

Negative Face Infringing: Desire for Autonomy and Respect

In addition to casting doubt on the apprentice's ability, the term asserts authority in order to deprive the apprentice of control over the situation. The apprentice loses the chance to resolve the issue on her own when the boss decides to "change it" without getting permission. In addition to removing any defense or viewpoint the apprentice might wish to express, this reinforces a top-down communication style in which their voice is not given much weight. This deprives the apprentice of the independence required for education and career advancement by reinforcing their lower status in the hierarchy.

Seemingly simple corrective remarks serve practical purposes while reinforcing authority, limiting apprentice agency, and shaping their role perception. Viewed through Politeness Theory, such language reveals deeper power dynamics and the lasting impact of communication in hierarchical professional settings.

1. Nigerian Pidgin's Pragmatic Force and Implicit Meaning

As noted in Table 1, the Nigerian Pidgin term "I go change am for you" has more pragmatic weight than its English counterpart. Despite the fact that it is being distant from a mere proposal to correct the wrong, it actually shows some conflicts underlying and provides suggestions for an unspoken caution.

A. Emerging Indicator:

This statement typically denotes a shift in the speaker's tone from one of discontent to one of authority or punishment, both in formal and informal settings. It gently conveys that the apprentice's errors, hesitancies, or constant defenses are no longer acceptable.

Assertion of Control

The term expresses the speaker's authority and indicates a shift toward impatience, going beyond simple correction. It implies that the boss has reached a tipping point and needs to act to regain discipline and control in addition to fixing the error.

Layered Emotional Meaning

A phrase's impact and meaning are significantly influenced by how it is spoken. It could be taken as a quick reprimand if it is delivered in a firm or flat voice. Sarcasm or sharpness in speech can come close to in both professional and casual contexts, this statement generally signals a change in the speaker's tone from dissatisfaction to one willing to take charge or enforce punishment.

It subtly indicates that the apprentice's mistakes, hesitations, or repeated justifications are not acceptable anymore.

B. Greater Employment Connotations

The repeated use of phrases like "l will change it for you now" can significantly affect workplace communication and the general organizational mood in contacts between managers and apprentices.

Encouragement of Obedience and a Fearful Environment

When remarks are consistently perceived as subtle threats or criticism, apprentices may operate from fear rather than a desire to learn. This focus on avoiding mistakes stifles creativity, initiative, and problem-solving. A manager's quick intervention may unintentionally halt the learning process, preventing apprentices from gaining independence.

Supports Hierarchical Distances

Persistent use of face-threatening language reinforces rigid hierarchies, discouraging open communication and feedback. Phrases like “I will change it for you now” or its Nigerian Pidgin equivalent “I go change am for you” act as subtle but powerful control tools, reinforcing dominance and limiting apprentices’ growth into confident, competent professionals. Knowing the practical weight of these everyday phrases gives one a useful perspective on how power is applied and perceived in professional interactions, and how this affects morale, trust, and the quality of personal communication over time. In Nigerian workplaces, where authority is often claimed in direct or commanding terms, such language can help to create a communication style marked by conflict, silence, and suppressed development.

2. Language as a Means of Preserving Hierarchy in the Boss-Apprentice Relationship

The hierarchical power relationship between a manager and an apprentice in Table 1 is much more obvious. However, it is not just the job titles that differentiate this hierarchy as language is critical in sustaining that power dynamic. This is done by bosses, who often employ direct gming, biting or commanding tones and may fluctuate between friendly and authoritative as required. Now, none of this is random, these changes solidly underline their superiority and are a gentle reminder to the noob of their inferior standing.

A. Power and Control in Linguistic Usage

The Table 1 above indicates that the boss’s forceful tone showcases control. In many Nigerian workplaces, leaders steer talks entirely, leaving subordinates little chance to question or challenge. Instead of polite requests like “Can you work on this?” they bark, “Go and do it now” or “Fix this nonsense.” Blunt critiques “This work no make sense,” “You no sabi anything” further assert dominance. Such unfiltered language dismisses apprentices’ feelings, shuts down dialogue, and continually reminds them of their lower status within the hierarchy.

Control Tools: Colloquial and Comedic Sayings

Phrases like “You dey wine me?” (Are you joking with me?) Or “No go fall my hand o!” (Don't embarrass me) let workplace contacts be informal. Still, these words sometimes serve as discreet disciplinary tools rather than as means of fostering mutual understanding or intimacy. They express disappointment or disapproval in a manner which publicly humiliates the pupil hence strengthening the boss's authority.

Mechanism of Control: Mockery

In informal Nigerian workplaces, phrases like “You dey wine me?” or “No go fall my hand o!” appear casual but often serve as subtle disciplinary tools. Beneath the humor, they highlight mistakes without direct confrontation. However, their public delivery can humiliate apprentices, reinforcing the boss’s authority quietly. Rather than fostering connection, such humor and sarcasm often expose errors, maintaining hierarchical order and signaling disapproval in a socially acceptable but psychologically impactful way.

The language Asymmetry of Information Dissemination

While bosses often flow between broken demeanor and Pidgin English without challenge, apprentices are rarely afforded the same leeway. If an apprentice takes the same nonchalant or comical attitude, they risk being labelled disrespectful. Even in talks that appear informal on their face this unbalanced bidirectional play still sustains the heels-over-hats hierarchy design.

B. The Tension Greetings Establish Between Authority and Familiarity

For apprentices in Table 1, the strategic mix of casual and authoritative language creates the illusion of camaraderie in the workplace that could be deceptive. While the relaxed demeanor suggests candor, any slipup in performance exposes the rigid power dynamics at play. A key aspect of these interactions is the one-sided nature of how the manager communicates with his client, with implicit demands embedded in it. These serve as a privilege to provide an avenue of negotiation, liberty, and make positive contribution. Important approaches follow:

Demand for Absolute Obedience

Frequently, orders are given by superiors that leave no room for debate or explanation. Statements such as "Make I no talk this thing again!" (I no suppose repeat am) or "If you no fit do am, comot!" (If you can't do it, leave!) The deadline creates a sense of urgency and something for the apprentice to respond to now or face dire consequences.

Little Room for Justifying

Apprentices attempting to justify their behaviours or rectify mistakes struggle with being interrupted or told: "I no wan hear excuses" (I don't want to hear excuses) in front of classmates. This robs them of the chance to provide context for their work, thus mutes their voice, and reinforces their subordinate position in the status hierarchy.

Ambiguous Threats' Usage

In the saying "If you fuck this up, you go see" (If you fuck this up, you'll pay for it), managers sometimes rely on implicit threat to further increase their power through control, in other words. These kinds of comments are slightly unclear, however they create a lot of psychological stress. In the Nigerian workplace, language functions not just as communication but as a tool for maintaining hierarchy, where managers use assertive or casual speech to reinforce dominance, restrict apprentices' agency, and preserve power structures by discouraging questions and enforcing obedience.

3. Nonverbal Cues Supporting Authority

The interactions in Table 1 above shows that non - verbal cues are a big part of making a person look powerful and in command in a given conversation. This can make a message sound stronger (especially when someone is trying to show supremacy). Gestures, expressions, and tone of voice can all be used to further amp up this feeling. When a boss uses these cues, it forces employees to feel they must follow orders.

Fast Movements and Clapping Hands

What are some specific non - verbal signals to look for? Pacing or tapping your fingers are quick movements to show that you're impatient or irritated. For example, if a boss is moving quickly then this can give them the feeling of urgency to get something done quickly. Also, when they sound very loud this sends the message that not making any decisions is unacceptable. This combination of movement and sound leads to more stress and pressure and leads to employees obeying because they feel like they're going to ruin the situation somehow.

Yelling and Strong Eye Contact

Another way to show you have power is to yell and look someone in the eye. When the boss stands up and shouts things, their emotions are heightened, and they are showing a lot of frustration. If they sound this loud it can be harder for employees to respond or defend themselves. However, strong eye contact also shows you have control. It sends out the clear message that you are the boss. When you mix yelling and strong looking, the situation gets very overwhelming. Employees may start to feel like they are in the way and need to give in order to prevent further fights.

Quietness and Serious Face Language

Authority can be powerfully conveyed through silence. A manager's quiet, combined with pursed lips, arched brows, or a firm gaze, often signals unspoken displeasure. This passive expression of anger creates anxiety about possible consequences, making silence more unsettling than loud corrections. Its ambiguity leaves apprentices unsure of what follows, heightening emotional tension. Often, the mere presence of silence compels apprentices to actby offering apologies or making corrections to ease the discomfort and avoid potential conflict. In such moments, silence becomes a strategic tool of control, shaping behavior without words and reinforcing hierarchical authority in a subtle yet impactful way. Table 1 shows that when mixed with verbal FTAs such non-verbal signals can significantly enhance the power of the authority figure in exercising control. Non-verbal communication is crucial in determining power dynamics, both visually (clapping and yelling) as well as audibly (silence and penetrating gazes). Authority figure deliberately uses these non-verbal signals to convey not only their power but also to make sure that the subordinates are internalizing and responding to their expectations

4. Background in Pragmatics and Cultural Context

Cultural norms and practical practices significantly influence the nature of work-related interactions in Nigeria, which are defined from cultural bases of authority, language use and conflict resolution that turn communication not only into a transfer of information but also into an expression of social values and expectations. In Nigerian workplaces, respect for authority is deeply ingrained, with apprentices expected to revere bosses as ultimate figures of control. Harsh, confrontational language is culturally accepted as a tool for discipline rather than abuse, seen as a sign of moral responsibility overriding personal discomfort. Nonverbal cues like silence, gestures, and stern expressions further reinforce this power dynamic. Pidgin English plays a crucial role in these interactions, serving as a practical, culturally resonant tool to convey layered meanings warnings, commands, or emotional cues. Phrases like "I go change am for you" or "You dey hear me so?" carry implicit threats and assert authority while preserving a shared cultural code of communication and dominance. In Nigeria workplace pragmatics revolve mostly around the tendency to avoid open confrontation with the authorities. Even when one feels betrayed, subordinates apprentices or junior workmates use both verbal and nonverbal pressure to silence, resent, or behave as though the situation are not disturbing them. A higher social norm is that respect for the restraint and fairness of relations is more important than individual expression. When one has an offence or contradiction, one can consider one's actions insulting or disobedient. This is why the management of offices may negotiate conflict through euphemisms (comedies, private complaints, and even one-time shrugging) to avoid interfering directly with the authority dynamics.

5. More General Consequences in Workplace Communication

In Nigerian apprentice-master relationships, communication reflects power, not equality. Bosses often use direct, face-threatening language to assert authority, valuing discipline over politeness. Apprentices are expected to accept this without emotional support, revealing how hierarchy and efficiency take precedence over politeness in informal workplace interactions, as explained by Politeness Theory.

Face-Saving Techniques of Apprentices

As depicted in Table 1 above, for instance, when considering the interplay of communication dynamics in hierarchical Nigerian office systems, apprentices respond, although usually at the receiving end of face-threatening acts (FTAs), to different modes of protecting their own face and avoiding direct confrontation. Usually these answers form into three major groupings:

1. Silence is both a passive form of resistance and a means of actually trying not to escalate things in any way. Not answering shows humility of the apprentice while still respecting boss' authority. It's also a sign of humility - acceptance of criticism but utterly disregarding it.
2. You could approach it with verbal apologies such as "sorry" or " I go fix am ". These kinds of apologies don't really calm the conflict (students might not really agree with the critique they're getting) but get them through it a little better.
3. Typical ways in which apprentices feel that they're submissive to authority include jumping to conclusions and making gestures (like "OK boss"), doing what's right or just saying to be done by, "Okay boss, " or some variation of the former. Not only does this increase workplace hierarchies, it also conforms with how people in society generally view subordinated employees: that they should respect and follow the superior unreservedly.

Workplace communication often reflects power imbalances, where apprentices use face-saving strategies like silence and compliance to navigate managers' impolite remarks and uphold cultural norms of respect and authority.

6. Face-Threatening Interactions: Psychological and Relational Consequences

Frequent face-threatening acts in hierarchical workplace communication reinforce power imbalances and can have lasting psychological and relational effects on apprentices, negatively shaping their motivation, self-perception, and attitudes toward authority.

A. Erosion of Self-Confidence and Worth

Frequent face-threatening interactions, such as harsh criticism or public reprimands, can erode an apprentice's confidence and sense of competence. When effort is overlooked and feedback is one-sided, apprentices may become passive, fearful of mistakes, and reluctant to take initiative. This constant pressure undermines autonomy, leading to stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. Over time, motivation and job performance decline. Beyond individual effects, repeated face-threatening acts harm workplace relationships, stifling trust, collaboration, and a supportive learning environment. Ultimately, such communication practices hinder both personal development and collective productivity within informal apprenticeship settings.

B. Compliance on the Surface as Opposed to Hidden Resentment Resistance:

To protect their jobs, apprentices often comply outwardly with superiors, but hidden resentment may lead to passive defiance and reduced commitment. Fear of harsh criticism discourages open communication, creating a cycle where mistakes go unreported and interaction breaks down, leading to inefficiencies and workplace risks. This communication void, reinforced by top-down authoritarianism, fosters a toxic work culture that apprentices may replicate when they become leaders. The result is a system that prioritizes fear and compliance over respect and innovation. This study highlights the urgent need to temper authority with empathy to foster healthier, more productive workplace relationships.

Figure 1 presents a pragmatic analysis of the utterance "I will change it for you now" across five Abuja workplace settings: Workshop, Carpentry, Shoe-Making, Tailoring, and a General Office. It illustrates how the phrase functions as a face-threatening act challenging apprentices' competence or autonomy. Each context highlights verbal and non-verbal apprentice reactions (e.g., silence, apology, nervous gestures) and boss behaviors (e.g., clapping, glaring, and shouting). The diagram visually maps how tone, delivery, and hierarchy shape meaning, emphasizing the power imbalance and relational tension in these exchanges, offering valuable insight into workplace communication and sociocultural dynamics.

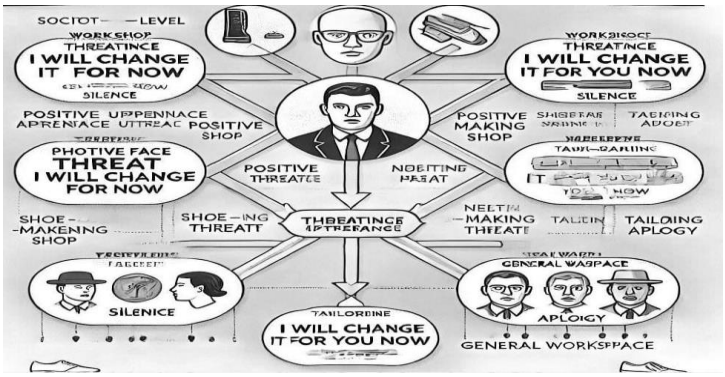


Figure 1. Structural Boss- Apprentice Interaction Diagram

Results/Findings

This study reveals how language, culture, and non-verbal cues reinforce power in Nigerian boss-apprentice interactions. The phrase "I will change it for you now" and its Pidgin form "I go change am for you" act as face-threatening acts, challenging the apprentice's competence (positive face) and autonomy (negative face). The absence of politeness and the boss's tone reflect irritation and assert dominance. Non-verbal signals like glaring, clapping, and silence intensify authority and emotional tension, limiting the apprentice's ability to respond or negotiate. Deep-rooted respect for hierarchy in Nigerian culture legitimizes the boss's bluntness, while Pidgin often conveys the seriousness of the message. Apprentices typically respond with silence, apologies, or compliance to avoid conflict, even at personal cost. These dynamics can undermine confidence, reduce motivation, and strain workplace relationships. The findings underscore the importance of recognizing how communication practices shape power and emotional well-being, advocating for more respectful and balanced interactions in hierarchical work settings.

5. CONCLUSION

Linguistic conventions that stress deference to authority validate the direct and combative tone of these exchanges. Still, the absence of politeness techniques and continuous face threats might sap apprentices' enthusiasm and confidence as well as upset their relationships at work. The research emphasizes the importance of balanced communication toping relational respect above authority. Promoting bosses to use constructive criticism and empowering apprentices to speak up without fear of retribution will help to create better more efficient work environments. The study concludes by highlighting the need to improving communication strategies that will strike a compromise between organizational efficiency and individual well-being in culturally varied settings.

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Author's Contributions Statement

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
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C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
So : **So**ftware
Va : **Va**lidation
Fo : **Fo**rmal analysis
I : **I**nvestigation
R : **R**esources
D : **D**ata Curation
O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft
E : Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition

Conflict of Interest Statement

The researcher declares no conflict of interest. The study was conducted independently and objectively, with no influences that could affect the findings.

Informed Consent

Participants gave informed consent, and all data were collected with respect for their privacy and anonymity.

Ethical Approval

This study received ethical approval from the appropriate review body. The research followed ethical standards, posed minimal risk, and ensured voluntary participation without coercion.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study consist of transcripts and field notes collected during workplace observations. Due to confidentiality agreements and to protect the identities of participants, the raw data are not publicly available. However, excerpts relevant to the analysis are included in the study, and additional anonymized data may be made available upon reasonable request to the researcher.

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