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Face Threatening Acts and their Mitigation Strategies in Chindali Requests

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Abstract

Understanding how to mitigate face-threatening acts during communication offers valuable insights in the study of unique nature of languages and communities. This paper investigates the strategies speakers of Chindali language use to mitigate face-threatening acts during communication, specifically in expressing politeness while making requests. Since the speakers of Chindali are widely spread, and manifest diverse dialectal differences, this study focuses on the dialect spoken by native speakers of Chindali residing in Kapelekeshi, Kalembo, Ngulughulu and Kafule villages in Songwe Region in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. The study uses text analysis and focused group discussions as methods of data collection. The study is couched in the Linguistic Politeness Theory by Brown Penelope (1987) and Interactional Social Linguistic Theory by John Gumperz (1982). The findings of the current study indicate that three strategies are used to show politeness when making requests. These strategies include apologising structures, joking structures and indirect responses. With one or a combination of the strategies, speakers build, develop and maintain good relationships among themselves. Besides, the findings reveal that as speakers maintain the use of apologising, joking and indirect structures, challenges and misunderstandings that would otherwise occur are resolved by uniting the speech participants and the rest of the community members. This study, therefore, argues that while communication is fundamental in all human societies, communicating effectively requires insights from the culture of the speakers involved in communication.

Keywords: *Face-threatening acts, politeness strategies, interlocutors, conversation, Chindali*

Introduction

Language, as the primary medium of social interaction, is essential in maintaining face and softening face-threatening acts (henceforth, FTAs). Face refers to the positive social value individuals seek to uphold in their interactions, whereas FTAs are actions that potentially undermine the expectations or desires of one's interlocutor (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Similarly, Coupland (2000) notes that FTAs are inherently actions that oppose the face needs of either the speaker or the hearer. Goffman (1967) examines face in terms of how individuals present themselves during social encounters. Lin (1935) further emphasises that face is not a physical attribute but a symbolic one, something that can be bestowed, lost, defended, or offered. It

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is deeply tied to emotional investment and must be continually protected, upheld, or improved throughout interaction. Goffman (1967) considers an individual's face in the context of how a speaker presents himself or herself in social settings and interactions as a complex phenomenon. Goffman (1967) holds that it is not possible to clean or shave an individual's face as if it were a physical object; rather, it is something that can be bestowed or removed, protected or presented as a gift. Thus, an individual's face should be treated as an emotional aspect that can be forfeited, maintained, or enhanced, requiring ongoing consideration in all interactions.

The extent to which an utterance may threaten face depends on factors such as the perceived social distance between participants, the speaker's relative power, and the degree of imposition involved in the act (Ambuyo et al., 2011). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), every utterance inherently carries the possibility of threatening either the speaker's or the hearer's positive or negative face. Such threats can lead to tension, breakdowns in interaction, or even aggressive exchanges. Magashi (2017) adds that without harmonious coexistence and effective communication, members of a society may struggle to focus on various socio-economic activities, ultimately hindering sustainable development. Because harmonious interaction is essential, FTAs must be mitigated through polite expressions; otherwise, communication may deteriorate. This explains the importance of politeness strategies in managing such situations (Ambuyo et al., 2011). Consequently, the findings of this study indicate that the aspects function as effective politeness strategies that interlocutors in Ndali society can use to lessen the impact of face threats caused by requests during interaction.

FTAs can influence any language, although their effects vary because they are shaped by cultural norms. Behaviours viewed as polite in one culture may be interpreted as rude or unusual in another. For this reason, scholars must examine each language independently to gain an accurate understanding of its unique characteristics. Rwakakindo (2021) supports that analysing a speech community on its own provides a clearer picture of its greeting routines, address patterns, and paralinguistic practices.

Nguyen and Gia (2013) argue that requests can pose threats to the hearer's negative face; that is, the freedom of action and freedom from imposition. This depends on cultural factors because a word or structure that threatens people of one community might be a normal utterance to the speakers who belong to another community. Understanding a proper linguistic item employed by speakers of a certain community is therefore integral to minimising the possibility of a request threat on the hearer, protecting the hearer's face and achieving effective communication. This study focuses on the strategies used by the Ndali community to mitigate FTAs while making requests.

Basing on the fact that requests are a common phenomenon across cultures and that they play a significant role in creating FTAs, this study is important as it uncovers the strategies that are used to mitigate FTAs in Chindali.

Chindali is one of more than 156 Ethnic Community Languages (ECLs) in Tanzania. It is spoken by more than 193,000 people mainly in Ileje District, in Songwe Region in the Southern Highlands (LOT, 2009). According to Botney (1998), Chindali is also spoken in Northern Malawi. Chindali is a typical Bantu language that belongs to Zone M.30 of the *Konde* or *Ngonde* language group of the Niger-Congo language family (Kishindo, 1998).

Literature Review

Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that because face is constantly at stake during social interaction, certain recurring communicative behaviours referred to as "face-threatening acts" (FTAs) pose inherent risks to face. Such acts may undermine the face of either the hearer or the speaker by challenging the desires or expectations of the hearer or the speaker. FTAs may target either negative face or positive face. Acts that primarily threaten negative face include issuing orders or requests, giving suggestions or advice, offering reminders, making threats or warnings, daring someone, extending offers or promises, and expressing strong negative emotions towards the hearer. Conversely, acts that endanger positive face involve showing disapproval, criticising, mocking, or ridiculing someone, as well as making complaints, reprimands, accusations, or insults. They also include contradicting or disagreeing with the hearer, expressing hostility or irrelevance, raising taboo or sensitive issues, delivering bad news about the hearer or good news about

oneself, introducing potentially divisive topics such as politics, failing to cooperate in joint activities, or using inappropriate address forms during initial encounters. Additionally, threats to positive face may arise from loss of physical control, bodily leakage, stumbling or falling, engaging in self-humiliating or foolish behaviour, contradicting oneself, confessing faults, admitting responsibility, or displaying unintended emotional expressions.

It is viewed in the literature reviewed so far, that FTAs are classified on two dimensions, whether they primarily threaten the speaker's or hearer's face, or whether positive or negative face. This classification is at risk because FTAs may overlap, in the sense that some FTAs inherently threaten both types of face. This is why Agantiem-(2017) emphasises the necessity of studying/unalysing FTAs whenever conversation occurs.

Aporbo (2022) reveals that FTAs that damage the hearer's positive face include insults, complaints, disapproval, rejections, bringing bad news, boasting, inattentiveness, non-cooperation, unleashing negative emotions and negative challenges. Conversely, FTAs that damage the speaker's positive face include self-humiliation, acceptance of compliments, and confessions. In addition, FTAs that damage the hearer's negative face include suggestions, promises, requests, threats, challenges, dares, reminders, compliments and offers. Negative FTAs affecting the speaker's face include expressions of negative emotions, accepting compliments and succumbing to the power of the hearer.

Moreover, studies on the strategies used by speakers to mitigate FTA show differences among speakers from community to community. In English and Hebrew, for instance, speakers use indirect speech, modified statements or modal structures to mitigate imposition caused by FTA. Sadeghoghli and Niroomand (2016) point out that one of the ways in which a speaker can minimise the imposition that is likely to occur in a conversation is to select an indirect strategy instead of a direct one, using such syntactically modified sentences as those which express negative or modal structures, hedging devices, and preferring to use conventional indirectness to non-conventional indirectness in requests. This is because indirectness often implies tentativeness on the part of a speaker and optionality to a hearer. Hence, this shows that speakers can apply politeness to balance between two needs; that is, pragmatic clarity and avoidance of coerciveness.

Correspondingly, Nguya and Gia (2013) state that balancing in conversation is achieved only in the context of conventional indirectness, but not in the case of non-conventional indirectness or directness. As such, opting for pragmatic clarity or non-coerciveness can decrease politeness. In Polish, imperatives are commonly used to make polite requests. According to Mills (2003), this is because speakers tend to associate directness with honesty, whereas indirectness can be interpreted as placing a greater burden on the hearer. From this argument, it can be inferred that when speakers maintain morality, mutual understanding can be achieved even if the structures opted to be used have nothing to do with circumlocution.

Moreover, Wong (2022) argues that speakers view the combination of directness and politeness as essential for maintaining relationships, often relying on indirect strategies when requesting something. Basing on these observations, it is reasonable to conclude that what is considered a normal request structure in one community may be perceived quite differently in another. Therefore, linguists must consider how speakers balance pragmatic clarity with the need to avoid coerciveness, as this balance plays an important role in establishing and maintaining relationships. Although Nguyen and Ho (2013) note that when speakers prefer conventional indirectness over non-conventional indirectness or directness in making requests, the level of politeness tends to decrease, and the relationship between indirectness and politeness remains contested. Ogiermann (2009), for instance, challenges the assumption that indirectness necessarily signals greater politeness, arguing that indirect request strategies do not always convey a high degree of politeness. Consequently, how different speech communities mitigate FTA in their requests should be examined individually in order to appreciate their unique communicative norms.

In Tanzania, aspects of politeness in Ethnic Community Languages (ECLs), including Chindali, have received relatively little research attention. Muzale and Rugemalira (2009) attribute this to the authorities' reluctance to legalise the use of these languages in formal settings, such as schools, courts and hospitals,

for more than three decades (from the 1960s to the 1990s), following the introduction of the national cultural policy. The primary concern was that recognising ECLs could promote tribalism and hinder national unity (Kasavaga, 2025). Therefore, this study examines the strategies Ndali speakers employ to mitigate FTAs when making requests.

Theoretical Foundation

This study adopts the theory of Linguistic Politeness proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson in 1987. This theory is based on the assumption that human interactions occur due to politeness, which manifests in two aspects: positive face and negative face. The key difference between them is that while positive face politeness involves a desire for approval and acceptance by others, being liked, admired and validated, negative face politeness relates to each individual's wish to have their actions unimpeded by others. It is maintained that face is revealed throughout interactions. Consequently, an FTA naturally occurs to threaten the face of the addressee and/or the speaker by acting contrary to their wishes and needs. Therefore, three sociological factors were identified as influencing face safety. These are: (i) the social distance between speakers and hearers, (ii) the relative power of the speaker and the hearer, and (iii) the perceived level of imposition within a particular culture. Considering these factors, Brown and Levinson developed a framework of politeness strategies to help interlocutors protect their face. These strategies include bald on record, off record, positive politeness, and negative politeness.

Moreover the theory of Linguistic Politeness provides insights into individuals' rights to freedom of action and protection from imposition. The theory explains how requests function in conversation, emphasising the need for interlocutors to collaborate in maintaining each other's face. It serves as a framework for understanding the social and cultural factors that influence the choice and use of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences in interaction. The theory further maintains that politeness is achieved when speech acts, whether expressed through words, phrases, or sentences, are used appropriately within a given context, functioning as a strategy for avoiding conflict in social interaction.

This study chooses Brown and Levinson's theory of Linguistic Politeness because of the observation that face is a universal feature of politeness, that positive and negative face needs exist across cultures, and that speech acts inherently pose a potential threat to either the speaker's or the hearer's face. In the same way, the theory provides three sociological variables, namely social distance, relative power and the absolute ranking of imposition, which are necessary tools for identifying and analysing the strategies languages, especially ECLs, including Chindali employ to mitigate FTAs.

In spite of the usefulness of the theory of Linguistic Politeness, this study observed that this theory revealed deficits and limitations in accounting for context-dependent FTAs. It was considered inadequate to express geographical and contextual factors that influence social interactions, especially in Chindali.

To bridge this gap, it was necessary for this study to incorporate Interactional Sociolinguistic Framework proposed by John Gumperz (1982). The framework highlights the role of ethnic and geographical contextual factors in shaping interactions. It provides the basis for conceptualising and analysing naturally occurring utterances, FTAs, and the strategies used by ECLs speakers to manage politeness in requests. Thus, the framework underscores the significance of cultural context in interpreting a discourse. Therefore, the frame was relevant in addressing the strategies speakers use to express politeness in requests in the cultural context of Chindali.

Methodology

This study was conducted in four villages, namely Kapelekeshi, Kalembo, Kikota and Kafule in Ileje District, Songwe Region, in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. The study area was selected because it has many native speakers of Chindali. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered through oral elicitation and focused group discussions. For oral elicitation, researchers visited sites where the language is natively spoken and engaged in face-to-face conversations with speakers. These sites included households, farms, bus stops, shops and markets. At households, informants were asked to narrate stories about how family members such as mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers make requests for various items. The aim was to gather information showing current usage and changes in the structures used to make requests in natural settings. Additionally, to ensure consistency in

responses, unstructured questions were used to seek further clarification on previously asked questions. Data were collected from 25 informants until saturation was reached. To eliminate effects related to age, gender and education level, informants with varied demographic and socio-economic backgrounds were included. Audio and written records of the data were made and then transcribed to analyse structures for the study.

Secondary data were gathered from written texts to complement the data obtained through oral elicitation. The New Testament Chindali Bible, 'Ulwitikano Ulupya' by the Tanzania Bible Society, was analysed to acquire the data. Triangulation was employed to verify the collected data. Data collection was conducted in line with the argument of Creswell (2018) that collecting data on a specific aspect using more than one method ensures that the limitations of one method are balanced by the strengths of another method.

To validate the collected information, six participants were purposively selected basing on their resourcefulness demonstrated during the oral elicitation to participate in a focus group discussion. This allowed reseachers of the current study to verify the quality of the data before analysing and presenting the data descriptively to gain deeper insights. This method corresponds to Bernard (2000), who states that making an in-depth descriptive analysis of information gathered in the field using more than one method is achieved when the investigation is presented descriptively.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the current study show that requests are linked to FTAs in the Ndali community. Such requests occur in different situations like when a Ndali speaker wants to borrow something due to scarcity, when the borrowed item is not returned on time, when requests are made frequently, when the borrowed item is damaged, or when the request exceeds the capacity of the person asked to fulfill the request. This aligns with Searle (1969), who states that requests are directives in which a speaker wants a hearer to perform an action in the future. Therefore, since the speaker's desires limit the hearer's freedom of action, requests threaten the hearer's negative face.

Borrowing Something that is Currently Unavailable

Ndali people value harmonious and cooperative relationships. Helping one another in times of need is seen as essential to sustaining communal well-being. Therefore, members of Ndali community are aware that FTAs may arise during conversation. Interview responses revealed that making a request that places pressure on the addressee is often viewed as threatening one's reputation. This was evident when a 60-year-old woman described how she responded to someone who requested a basket at her house. She explained that if she has what is being requested, she provides it willingly; however, if the item is not available, she cannot assist because she has no alternative. Her response illustrates that politeness is often associated with fulfilling requests, as doing so allows both the requester and the requested to feel satisfied in such that the expectations have been met. Conversely, FTA is perceived to affect both parties when the addressee is unable to provide what is requested, even if they genuinely wish to help. In such cases, the addressee may worry that the requester doubts the truthfulness of their explanation and suspects that the refusal is intentional. This concern emerged when the addressee remarked:

Linga gwati mwaghona, ingila mu nyumba kuti karibu ichitengu gwikale linga ikala popo kuti uhobhokele ndi ni bhutulwe bhuki? Pamu nisa pa kukopa indalama lumo bhufu lumo mashabhala lumo malima. Linga ghwati nafimo popo akubhukagha. Jumo akushaghania jhumo kabhibhi pakuti ghwamwima.

'After greeting, you invite the guest to enter the living room and offer him or her a seat. Once they are seated, you often say, 'I am sorry, I have a problem' and ask, 'which problem?' Maybe I have come to borrow some money, or flour, or groundnuts, and sometimes beans. If you say the item is unavailable, they can understand, but others can think you have denied them the item.'

Misunderstandings can easily arise if a requester mistakenly believes that their request has been deliberately refused. In such cases, the speaker's face may be threatened because the requester assumes intentional non-compliance, while the hearer's face may also be at risk if they feel mistrusted. The data

further revealed that interlocutors often rely on negative politeness strategies to minimise these potential threats, thereby maintaining harmonious relationships within the community. For example, before making a request, a speaker typically begins with an apology, using expressions such as *Nasobha* ('I am sorry'), before proceeding with the request itself.

The findings indicate that offering an apology encourages the hearer to receive the request in a friendly and non-resistant manner. In turn, the hearer often reciprocates this politeness by attempting to maintain harmony, for example, by inviting the speaker into the house and offering a seat so that the speaker feels comfortable speaking. As illustrated in lines 3 to 4 of the conversation presented below, the analysis shows that the hearer may also empathise with the speaker by putting themselves in the speaker's position.

Extract 1

- i. C: <*na-shimagha::po a-ka-kasu*> = *ningelo-ngujha-ku-chalo*
1SG-borrow-3SL-PREF-DIM-small-hoe-tomorrow-1SG-go-PREP-farm
'Please, lend me a small hoe; I will go to the farm tomorrow.'
- ii. F: *mwe::ndagha:: a-ma-kasu twa-gha-lekite ku-chalo muma-subha*
1PL-sorry-3PL-PREF-PREF-hoes-1PL-left-ADV-farm-yesterday
'I am sorry, the hoes were left on the farm yesterday.'
- iii. C: *i-kasu lyangu limo li-posokite*
3SG-hoe-POSS-one-PERF-broke
'One of my hoes is broken'
- iv. F: *u-ka-mutwalile U-mutafya=a-ku-tendekesha kisa leka*
3SG-FUT-send-PREP-Mutafya-PREF-PREF-repare-DEG-nicely
'Send it to *Mutafya*; he repairs very nicely.'

In the sentences, speaker C is borrowing a hoe from F. To do this, he or she begins by apologising to the hearer. Hence, he or she mitigates FTA before requesting to borrow the hoe by saying 'I am sorry'. Then, he or she makes the request. In other words, one can say that the speaker knew that asking for things is associated with causing some disturbance. Therefore, this should be preceded by an apologising structure to reduce FTA. The hearer considers the speaker's feelings, takes the problem as his own by offering a permanent solution rather than simply providing the requested hoe. In F, the hearer advises the speaker to send the broken hoe to the person who could fix it. Hence, the strategy used reflects positive politeness that is employed when a listener is sympathetic. Brown and Levinson (1987) admit that everyone has a face that must be considered because the refusal of requests could threaten a hearer's face. So, to minimise FTAs, maintain relationships and achieve effective communication, one should use structures which are polite, as Austin (1962) states that in saying something, speakers do something for each other. This shows that, apart from the requests people make, another way to help each other and maintain harmonious relationships is through considerate communication. Yet, Sembiring, Marudut, Simanjuntak, and Tarigan (2013) argue that it is important to understand how to put oneself in the shoes of a listener because it helps to make them feel their dignity is cared for and they are becoming part of the community. This implies that applying an appropriate amount of exaggeration at the right time makes the listener feel understood. The Ndali were observed trying to maintain harmony whenever they communicate, regardless of the situations influencing the minds of the persons making requests or the persons to whom items are requested. However, Donaghue (2021) elucidates that face is an emergent, situated relationship, co-constructed by both participants, and also shows that participants are willing to risk face-threats to achieve their goals. This supports the view that face-threat is rational and common and indicates that criticism, account requests, and disagreements are acceptable norms in post-observation feedback. In this context, the threat can be created intentionally for a specific purpose.

When the Requested Item is not Returned Promptly

Among the Ndali community, borrowing items is common. However, problems can arise when a borrowed item is not returned promptly. Usually, once someone lends an item to another person, they expect it to be returned soon after the borrower has finished using it. If this does not happen, the lender may feel burdened by the task of retrieving it. This often leads to FTA. This was demonstrated when speaker C borrowed a hoe from speaker F. Then, speaker F refuses the request, claiming that all the hoes were left at the farm. This conversation is presented in Extract 2 below as it was quoted.

Extract 2

- i. C: <na-shimagha::po a-kakasu> = *ningelo-ngujha-ku-chalo*,
1SG-borrow-3SL-PREF-DIM-hoe-tomorrow-1SG-go-PREP-farm
'Please, lend me a small hoe; I will go to the farm tomorrow.'
- ii. F: *mwe::ndagha:: a-ma-kasu twa-gha-lekite ku-chalo muma-subha*
1PL-sorry-3PL-PREF-PREF-hoes-1PL-left-ADV-farm-yesterday
'I am sorry the hoes were left at the farm yesterday.'
- iii. C: *mughone:: nandane u-kubhuka*
3PL-goodbye-1SG-let-start-going
'Goodbye, let me start going'
- iv. F: [*ughone::*]
1SG-goodby
'Goodbye'
- v. D: [*ughone::*]
1SG-goodbye
'Goodbye'
- vi. A: *a-bhandu bhanda: pa-kujhaghata*
3PL-people-started-go-PREP-farm
'People have started to go to the farms.'
- vii. F: *linga-a-shima a-kandu: = a-kupa i-mbombo-jha-kukonga-sona:*
COND-3SG-borrow-PREF-thing-3SG-give-PREF-task of returning
'If he borrows an item, you have a task to follow it.'
- viii. D: *u-mundu-iso -ujho ↓ u-ta-kumupa*
2SG-person-PREP-type-2SG-NEG-give
'You do not give to that type of person.'

From this conversation, it can be observed that Speaker F is not comfortable with Speaker C's request to borrow a hoe. Although he knows he is not telling the truth, Speaker F responds by saying that all the hoes were left at the farm. After Speaker C leaves, Speaker F complains that once Speaker C borrows items, they are rarely returned, which ends up costing him time and effort to go after them. This aligns with Al-Natour et al. (2025), who emphasise the importance of considering cultural and linguistic backgrounds when using refusal speech acts. The statement also indicates that the rainy season had just begun, as noted by Speaker A, who explained that farming tools, especially hoes, are likely to be used more frequently during this period. Therefore, delaying the return of a borrowed item, such as a hoe, will ultimately compel the provider to retrieve it. Considering the background, the requested person applied a positive politeness strategy by responding to Speaker C with, "I am sorry; the hoes were left at the farm." Although Speaker F does not actually offer the hoes, the apology reflects an attempt at positive politeness. Nevertheless, the requested person uses a white lie by giving a false reason for refusing the request. These strategies are used to avoid unnecessary confrontation or misunderstanding between the interlocutors. The requested person appears to have a genuine reason for not complying. While deception can be seen as a face-threatening act, in this context, it is used to lessen potential harm and help the other speaker feel respected.

This is evident in Speaker C's reaction; despite being deceived, he does not feel offended because the response is framed politely. The situation could have been more damaging had Speaker F responded more directly, for example, by saying, "You often do not return things on time". Telling the truth in such a direct manner could have threatened Speaker C's face and harmed the relationship. Therefore, using apologetic structures helps mitigate the refusal, promote understanding, and maintain harmonious relations among the speakers.

To further explore how a request can function as a face-threatening act, informants were asked to explain why Speaker F used a particular structure when responding to the request to borrow a hoe. This was investigated through follow-up interviews.

'Ugwe kuti koni ko u F amula ulyo bho C akumwashima ikasu?' 'Why do you think Speaker F responded in that way when he was asked to lend a hoe?' The response was:

umenye, linga ghwamwashima umundu akandu kako jhikulondighwa akughalukishile, manye sona ukongag he kwake. Jhikubha mbombo jhingi ku kandu kako ko ghwijhulite. Sasa umundu ghwe atakughalusha, utakumupa sona.

'When you borrow something, you should return it soon after you finish using it. Having to follow up to get items back usually bothers the owners and makes them feel troubled by the effort required to retrieve them. This, in turn, leads them to reject requests from people who are irresponsible with borrowed items.'

It was also shown that positive politeness can be demonstrated by telling white lies to someone who requests something. This acts as a roundabout way of speaking because, instead of directly telling recipients that you are unhappy with their tendency not to return items on time, the person being asked chooses not to tell the truth. This was confirmed when they replied that the hoes were left at the farm. Therefore, deception is used as a strategy to maintain understanding and harmony among interlocutors. Similarly, Edi (2016) affirms that employing a positive politeness strategy that redresses FTAs can have a positive effect on the speaker's request. The reason is that speakers do not feel threatened directly and show a willingness to humble themselves and avoid threatening the hearer's face.

When a Request is Made Repeatedly

Although the Ndali community is cooperative, excessive borrowing of belongings is not acceptable. People observe that it causes owners to feel tired and bored with borrowers. During the discussion, it was revealed that borrowing is a common practice. However, problems arise when it happens excessively. This was confirmed by the following response:

Mtu anapoazima kitu mara kwa mara inachosha sana. Mtu anaazima karibu kila siku. Juzi aliazima ulimpa, jana tena ukampa, leo anakuja tena. Aaaa mi naacha kumpa. Namwambia nae akanunue kwa sababu hicho kitu kwake ni cha muhimu. Mfano kisu kina matumizi mengi. Utaazima mara ngapi?

'Borrowing often becomes tiring. When someone borrows every day, he requested it the day before yesterday, you lent it to him, then he asked yesterday and today! I am fed up, so I refuse to lend any more. I suggest he buy it because it seems essential. For example, a knife has many uses. How many times are you going to borrow it?'

Another informant responded by saying:

Mtu anaazima mara kwa mara nikichoka kumpa nitakua namwambia tunakitumia kile anachoazima. Yeye mwenyewe ataacha kuja kwa sababu atatambua kuwa nimemnyima.

'I plan to confront the frequent borrower by informing them that the item they borrowed is currently in use. He will stop borrowing because he will understand it is a refusal.'

This context should discourage them from asking to borrow again, as they will realise that their requests were denied. According to Yule (1996), context (i.e., the physical environment where communication occurs) is one of the essential elements of communication, and from it, structures are used to get meanings. Understanding the utterance of the language relies on making the context an important focus. Failure to define the context of communication may lead to misinterpretation and misjudgment of messages. Al-Natour et al. (2025) argue that competent

communication requires careful navigation of these sensitive, pragmatic tasks, employing suitable refusal strategies to avoid offending the hearer. Interlocutors must understand the appropriate forms, functions, and strategies in the target language to navigate specific contexts effectively. Moreover, both bald on record and off record strategies apply in speakers' conversations. Bald on record occurs when a hearer decides to tell a speaker directly to buy an item, rather than relying on the borrowed one, while off record occurs when a speaker is told repeatedly that the needed item (i.e., a hoe) is in use to discourage reliance on borrowed items in the future.

When the Requester has Previously Damaged the Requested Item

Among the Ndali community, a borrowed item can be ignored by a hearer. This is evidenced by borrowers who often return items in a damaged condition. This behaviour was confirmed when one of the respondents was asked why some members of the community refuse to lend things to others, and his response was:

Watu wengi sio watunzaji wazuri wa vitu. Mi nilimuazima mtu pampu yangu ameiharibu hata mimi nashindwa kuitumia. Hivi nataka nikipata hela niipeleke Isongole ndio kuna fundi mzuri.

'People can be careless. The person who borrowed my pump has damaged it, and now I cannot use it. Once I have the money, I will take it to Isongole, where there is a skilled pump technician.'

The same question was asked to a respondent who was around 60 years old and responded thus:

Bhatakulonda ukumwashimisha umundu ujhu mubhwafu. Abhandu bhatakusengula akandu ko ghwabhashima. 'In our community, some people dislike lending items because borrowers can be careless. They often fail to take care of what they borrow and may cause damage.'

From these statements, we can see that if a borrower is careless and does not take care of the borrowed items, they cannot be offered the requested items due to fear of destroying them. The hearers did not specify why they refused to lend items to some people, likely to avoid confrontation. This aligns with the literature suggesting that refusal is a dispreferred act that threatens both the positive and negative faces of interlocutors; that is, both the one who initiates the act and the one who declines it. However, Shekarab (2025) states that refusals, as speech acts, are linguistically complex, involving a mix of politeness strategies, social dynamics, cognitive processes, and cultural influences. They are important tools for managing social interactions, asserting personal boundaries, and handling sensitive situations. Among the Ndali, telling white lies is used to lessen FTAs. As a result, this has become a form of positive politeness, aimed at avoiding disagreement. Both speaker and hearer are aware of the truth; nonetheless, the hearer's face is protected by not having their request openly refused.

When the Need cannot be Met by the Requested

The findings show that making requests beyond the hearer's ability to perform demonstrates FTA within the community. This can be clearly illustrated in Extract 3.

Extract 3

- i. B: *keghe: i-chinanda: kwa Ndwele*
1SG-keghe-1SG-chinanda-CONJ-Ndwele
'Bring the trumpet from Ndwele.'
- ii. E: *u-hobhokele bhabha^o °:: ↓jole ndi-tite:: sona ni sala jhikumbabha leka^o °*
1SG-sorry-father-1SG-tired-and-DEG-hungry

'I am sorry father; I am tired and hungry.'
- iii. B: *<kwa Ndwele apo>she:: ↑ popo uti nditite:: ¿*
CONJ-Ndwele-DEM-place-get-tired
'To Ndwele there! Is it a place to get tired?'

iv. E: (going outside to bring the trumpet)

In Extract 3, there are two speakers: speaker 'B' and speaker 'E'. They engage in vertical communication that involves a top-down flow of information. Speaker B requests speaker E to bring a trumpet from a neighbour called Ndwele. Unexpectedly, speaker E refuses, responding '*uhobhokele bhabha lole nditite sona ni sala jhikumbabha leka*' [I am sorry father, I am tired and hungry]. This response leads speaker B to perceive speaker E as disobedient. Consequently, speaker B tries to justify himself by pointing out that the trumpet was not far away, implying that the hearer could easily have fetched it despite being tired, by saying, 'Is it a place to be tired?' Speaker E then attempts to calm speaker B (i.e., his father) from reacting negatively by rushing out to bring the trumpet. Brown and Levison (1987) highlight that the choice of strategy to avoid performing a speaker's request depends on the assessment of the size of FTA. A speaker gauges the size of FTAs based on three factors: the parameter of power (P), distance (D), and the rate of imposition (R). Applying a positive politeness strategy, speaker E uses an indirect refusal: 'I am sorry, father; I am tired and angry.' Instead of outright refusing, speaker E expresses his feelings to demonstrate the impossibility of fulfilling the request, considering his authority over him as his father. The power relation prevents him from refusing requests from his father. Therefore, this aligns with Almoabdi's (2022) argument that social distance significantly influences the choice of politeness strategy.

Furthermore, the bald on-record politeness is also demonstrated by speaker B's statements to speaker E. Since speaker B is a father to speaker E, he is inevitably respected by his son. Bald on-record politeness seems to have been used because the threat to the hearer's face is minimal, as Culpeper (1996) affirms that a bald on-record politeness strategy should be employed when the threat caused by the speaker to the hearer's face is minimal. Moreover, this strategy can be utilised in certain situations where interactions are characterised by power over the hearer.

The in-group identity marker 'father' was also identified as a way to resolve FTAs. This was demonstrated through the communication relationship established between the interlocutors. After speaker B's reaction, speaker E uses hedges by silently rushing to bring the trumpet. This suggests that, as he cannot argue against his father's opinion, he shows respect towards him. Therefore, since politeness varies across cultures, this behaviour seems to be unique to the Ndali, as respect is expressed differently in other communities. For example, in the Karonese community, speakers demonstrate respect through direct communication. Brown and Levinson (1987) confirm that it is common for the Karonese to use direct statements because their community is not diplomatic.

Furthermore, it is maintained that positive politeness is focused on the positive face of recipients, the positive self-image they claim for themselves. It enhances the face of recipients by suggesting that, in some respects, the speaker values the recipients' wants (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 70). In the Ndali community, this was evident when a man asked a friend to accompany him to the shop to buy fertilisers by saying '*Une utulundi tukumbabha sebho*'. 'My legs are aching, my friend.' Therefore, a response indicated that saying this was seen as a disturbance. When asked why he did not accept the request, the response was the following:

'Akabhalilo aka, abhandu bhajhaghatite mukubyala, atalikwo umundu ughwa kutagha akabhalilo ka kushindikila umunyako? Kwani atakumenyekwo kwo bhakulisha imbolea.

This is the planting season; everyone is busy planting and cannot afford to spend time escorting a friend. Don't you know where you can buy fertilisers?'

The same question was posed to an elderly female respondent, but her response was almost identical to that of the previous respondent, despite the different structure. The female respondent said:

Bhakushindikilana abhana abhakeke bho bhata ni mbombo nyingi. Linga jhali ko kufwa ama po lole kuleka nalinga ghwambhombagha imbombo?

'Only the youth who are free can accompany each other, but if it were a funeral, all tasks could stop.'

This demonstrates that the hearer indirectly refused the request to accompany his fellow by pretending to be unwell, thus avoiding FTA. This was achieved by giving the requester some hints, hoping he would interpret what he really intended to say. Al-Natour et al. (2025) support this by stating that indirectness is often used in cultures where maintaining social harmony is highly valued. The primary way to do this is through an off-record politeness strategy, which serves as a means of inviting conversational implicatures by violating the Gricean Maxims of effective communication. The hearer explained that his legs were aching, so that the speaker could understand that he could accompany him if he were okay. Consequently, this aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1978) assertion that a conversational implicature depends on the salient aspects of the participants' contexts. The response was not explicitly relevant, prompting the hearer to search for an interpretation of its possible relevance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis of the data presented in this paper has offered plenty of evidence regarding the strategies employed to mitigate FTAs in the Ndali community's requests. Specifically, the analysis has shown that speakers use three structures, namely apologising, joking, and indirect statements, to mitigate FTAs while making requests. The use of these strategies was shown to contribute significantly to developing and maintaining good relationships among members of the community. Besides, interlocutors (i.e., speakers and hearers) do not seek to harm each other's face; the community maintains a harmonious life, making life complications and challenges lessened. Similarly, the interlocutors were shown to avoid threatening the hearer's face by using a structure associated with a bald-on-record strategy, thereby speaking directly to the point. This was observed clearly when speakers said things exactly the way they expected them rather than saying them in a roundabout way. Yet, it was realised that there were times when speakers went off-record to commit an FTA; thus, giving statements whose meanings could be interpreted in more than one way. This explains why one cannot be quoted or be on record for committing an FTA using conversational implicatures. So, given the fact that the strategies employed by speakers to mitigate FTA are shown to be a more community-based phenomenon, this study recommends further research on the same subject of FTAs for other Tanzanian ethnic community languages because, according to Muzale and Rugemalira (2008), ECLs in Tanzania are less studied.

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