

Pragmatic Import of Yoruba Discourse Markers in Casual Interactions

Ganiu Bamgbose

Department of English, Lagos State University, Ojo

Oluwatobiloba Lawal

Department of African Languages, Literatures and
Communication Arts
Lagos State University, Ojo

Abstract

Studies on discourse markers have focused on the translation of such markers from one language to other languages and how the markers help in the creation and communication of texts. Attention has not been given to the pragmatic functions that discourse markers are made to perform in interactions; hence, the gap this study intends to fill. Working with Spencer-Oatey's (2000) rapport management theories, the study shows that Yoruba discourse markers have the pragmatic essence of creating emphasis, appeal and justification. These markers are also used to mitigate face interactions in order to sustain rapport, and to also cater for sociality rights and cultural nuances during conversations. With rapport management techniques such as interpersonal attentiveness, emotion regulation, social attuning, contextual assessment norms and sociopragmatic cum pragmalinguistic conventions, the study shows how discourse markers help in mitigating face attacks and maintaining cordiality in interactions. The study concludes that discourse markers are essential pragmalinguistic strategies in the maintenance of social relationships during interactions.

Keywords: discourse markers, Yoruba casual interaction, rapport management, pragmatic functions

Introduction

Communicative competence in a language demands more than the knowledge of how words are put together to form sentences. Language is both delicate and sensitive and it is tied to contextual and pragmatic influences. This is aptly captured in a Yoruba proverb which says *pèlẹ́ lákọ̀ọ̀; ọ́ láboo*. This literally translates as ‘the expression “sorry” has both male and female variants’ which pragmatically implies that ‘utterances can have a subtle or harsh effect’. Within the Yoruba sociocultural milieu, discourse markers are discursive tools for achieving different pragmatic effects during interactions. Humans do not talk for talking sake. Every interactive session is geared towards achieving some obvious or unstated goal(s); hence, the claim by Drew and Heritage (2006, p. 2) that ‘When we study conversation, we are investigating the actions and activities through which social life is conducted. Discourse markers are, therefore, some kind of gear with which conversations are modulated.

Discourse markers cannot be easily pinned down as a concept as it manifests in different forms and length across languages. Fraser (1999, p. 931) holds that ‘although most researchers agree that they (discourse markers) are expressions which relate discourse segments, there is no agreement on how they are to be defined or how they function’. As a working definition, Schiffrin (1987, p. 31) defines discourse markers as ‘sequentially dependent elements that bracket units of talk, i.e. non-obligatory initial items that function in relation to ongoing talk and text’. Schiffrin (2006) also classifies discourse markers into those which carry propositional meanings such as (e.g., I mean, y’know) and those that do not (such as oh). In the words of Fraser, discourse markers with propositional contents ‘represent a state of the world when the speaker wishes to bring to the

addressee's attention' while other markers are referred to as 'everything else' (Fraser 1996:2). Although Zarei (2013) submits that the term discourse marker is the commonest, other terms such as discourse particles, discourse operators, discourse connectives, pragmatic connectives, pragmatic markers, pragmatic particles, and sentence connectives have all been used to describe these communicative tools.

Discourse markers can be aptly described as linguistic universals. In other words, they are prominent in all well-developed languages. According to Fakoya (2006, p. 80), 'the application of discourse analysis to Yorùbá discourse is expected to add a new perspective to the understanding of the language and its usage in context, and also give the learner or analyst new tools with which to cater for certain pragmatic as well as discourse needs'. He further comments that 'the Yorùbá language possesses its own discourse markers, expressions which appear to be mere utterances but whose linguistic significance is entrenched in their conversational deployment and whose pragmatic meaning derives not from their surface structure but from the attitude or disposition the addressee infers'. This statement suggests that discourse markers are not arbitrarily deployed in Yoruba utterances, but are used to achieve pragmatic intents by speakers in on-going interactions. We do not claim in this paper that discourse markers are features of only spoken language; however, propositional discourse markers, which this study focuses on, are mainly deployed in the spoken mode of communication. In line with the potentiality of discourse markers as communication signals in Yoruba, this study investigates the pragmatic imports of propositional discourse markers in casual interactions. According to Bamgbose (2020, p. 1), casual interaction involves a conversation on ordinary routine topics with no specific thematic foci between or among interactants who are co-present either physically or virtually. The specific research questions of the paper are as follows:

- i. What are the pragmatic functions performed by discourse markers in Yoruba casual interactions?
- ii. What are the rapport management techniques used in maintaining face and social rights in Yoruba casual interactions?

Discourse Markers and their Analytical Perspectives

Discourse markers are universal features of language use that manifest in different forms and perform different functions in different cultural environments. Its preponderance in communication has necessitated its inquiry in different languages as enumerated by Schiffrin (1996, pp. 54-55):

Markers have been studied in a variety of languages, including Chinese (Biq 1990; Kwong 1989; Or 1997), Danish (Davidsen-Nielsen 1993), Finnish (Hakulinen and Seppanen 1992; Hakulinen 1998), French (Cadiot et al. 1985; Hansen 1998; Vincent 1993), German (W. Abraham 1991), Hebrew (Ariel 1998; Maschler 1997, 1998; Ziv 1998), Hungarian (Vasko 2000), Indonesian (Wouk 2000), Italian (Bazzanella 1990; Bruti 1999), Japanese (Cook 1990, 1992; Fuji 2000; Matsumoto 1988; Onodera 1992, 1995), Korean (Park 1998), Latin (Kroon 1998), Mayan (Brody 1989; Zavala in press), Portuguese (Silva and de Macedo 1992), and Spanish (Koike 1996; Schwenter 1996; see also section 3 below). They have been examined in a variety of genres and interactive contexts, for example, narratives (Norrick forthcoming; Koike 1996; Segal et al. 1991), political interviews (Wilson 1993), health care consultations (Heritage and Sorjonen 1994),

games (Greaseley 1994; Hoyle 1994), computer-generated tutorial sessions (Moser and Moore 1995), newspapers (Cotter 1996a), radio talk (Cotter 1996b), classrooms (de Fina 1997; Chaudron and Richards 1986; Tyler et al. 1988), and service encounters (Merritt 1984), as well as in a number of different language contact situations (Cotter 1996b; de Fina 2000; Gupta 1992; Heisler 1996; Maschler 1994; Sankoff et al. 1997).

Such robust inquiry into discourse markers was the reason Fraser (1998, p. 301) argues that discourse markers analysis is “a growth market in linguistics.” The investigation of discourse markers has been carried out within three broad analytical perspectives in applied linguistics. These perspectives are determined by the starting points of these markers, their definitions and their method of analysis. The perspectives are Halliday’s semantic perspective on cohesion (Halliday and Hassan, 1976), Schiffrin’s discourse perspective (Schiffrin 1986) and Fraser’s pragmatic perspective (Fraser 1990; 1998). These different perspectives are briefly discussed in this paper.

Halliday and Hassan presented a set of cohesive devices which are used to achieve connectedness of thoughts and ideas in language use. These devices constitute one of the standards of textuality, being elements for achieving texture in text. Although these cohesive devices which are reference, ellipsis, repetitions, substitution and conjunction are not called discourse markers by Halliday and Hassan. Their deployment as interactive cues however has necessitated their classification by scholars as discourse markers. For instance, reference takes care of how aspects of a text relate to one another within and outside sentences and even how elements within a text refer to phenomena that do not even get mentioned in the text. Such communicative mechanisms have been described as discourse

markers within the sematic framework and numerous studies have focused on cohesive ties in different kinds of texts.

Schiffrin's (1987) discourse perspective to the analysis of discourse markers has a sociolinguistic underlining. Working from the perspective of language as a variation in form and usage, Schiffrin considers how forms of language are distributed in discourse. Discourse, in her view, does not just transcend a unit of language to language as a tool in human interaction. Taking both qualitative and quantitative dimensions from within the linguistic and sociological ambits, Schiffrin is interested in accounting for the kinds of markers that are found in different discourse situations and their significance to the nature of the ongoing interaction. She conceptualises discourse markers as 'sequentially dependent elements that bracket units of talk (1987a, p. 31), i.e. nonobligatory utterance-initial items that function in relation to ongoing talk and text'. Aside the word classes described and considered as discourse markers within the Hallidayan perspective, Schiffrin adds lexicalised phrases (such as y'know, I mean) to her list of discourse markers. She proposes that discourse makers can be used to connect language at intra-sentential level which she calls the single plane and at inter-sentential level which she describes as going across different planes. To her, discourse markers can also add meaning to discourse. She observes that the occurrence of the marker 'oh' reveals information as either new or unexpected. This dimension to the investigation of discourse markers is essential for the present study. This is why Schiffrin compares discourse markers to contextualisation cues in her presentation of the conditions that warrant a word to be used as a discourse marker.

Fraser's pragmatic perspective on discourse markers is interested in the analysis of the markers. In contrast to Halliday and Hasan, whose main interest is the cohesion of text, Fraser's theoretical framework concerns the meaning of sentences, specifically how one type of pragmatic marker in a sentence may

relate the message conveyed by that sentence to the message of a prior sentence. Fraser is interested in how discourse markers affect the interpretation of the message embedded in a discourse. In Fraser's approach to the understanding of discourse markers, the pragmatic implicature of the markers are not tied to the semantic meanings that they carry. This perspective is wholly tied to how markers establish relationship between messages. The isomorphic feature of discourse markers suggests that they are grammatically optional and semantically empty. However, discourse markers are pragmatically significant and serve as perspectivisation cues in talks.

Literature Review

Discourse markers have been investigated by linguists from different analytical perspectives such as newspapers (Jauro, Teneke, Bitrus & Moses, 2014), television news broadcast (Jauro, Adamu and Delia 2012), academic report writing (Sharndama and Yakubu, 2014), translations (Alo, 2010) and casual interaction (Fakoya, 2006). In a corpus-based study that adopts a descriptive design, Jauro, Teneke, Bitrus and Moses, (2014) investigate the use of discourse markers in Nigerian newspapers, analysing purposively sampled data from four Nigerian newspapers; *Vanguard*, *Daily Trust*, *This Day* and *The Sun*. Schiffrin's (1987) discourse markers of connectives such as conjuncts: and, but and or; temporal: while, etc., Fraser's (1990, 1993) words such as: since, because, and although and Halliday and Hassan's (1976) conjunction cohesive device such as: additive, adversative, causal and temporal, typified by the words: and, yet, so and then, respectively, were all extracted for discussion in the paper. The researchers reveal that the functional analysis of discourse markers that form the corpus enhances the cohesive links between the units of talk in the text analysed and they recommend that media practitioners should learn the appropriate use of discourse markers in order to communicate effectively to their readers. This

work is clearly a textual analysis of discourse markers and is different from the present study which is pragmatic-oriented.

Jauro, Adamu and Delia (2012) also analyse the use of discourse markers in Nigeria Television Authority and TV Gote, Yola in order to identify the extent to which they serve as text creating linguistic features in Nigerian news report. Three purposively selected articles from a corpus of six texts were analysed based on insights from Schiffrin's (1987), Halliday and Hassan's (1976), Knott's (1996), and Fraser's (1999) approaches to the classification of discourse markers. The study reports that discourse markers are used by TV reporters to convey information about the connection between utterances and conclude that news reporters should be taught the art of effective use of discourse markers in news packaging and delivering for clarity in news reporting or news writing. This, like the first paper reviewed above, is a pure textual analysis that is not anchored on any theory and did not set out to analyse discourse markers in context.

Alo (2010) examines the translation of discourse markers in Yoruba with the aim of identifying their pragmatic functions and the constraints faced in their translation into English. A contrastive analytical approach was used to identify similarities and differences in the use and function of specific discourse markers ('yes' and 'thank you') in both languages. The data was derived from four literary texts namely: three bilingual Yoruba-English plays (*Oba Ko So/The King did not Commit Suicide by Hanging* (1972) by Duro Ladipo; *Omuti/The Palmwine Drinkard* (1972) by Kola Ogunmola; and *Obaluaye* by Wale Ogunyemi), and the fourth text containing extracts of bilingual Yoruba-English translations) is Yemi Elebuibon's *Ifa: the Custodian of Destiny* (2004). The contrastive analysis was anchored on Austin's speech act theory, specifically the concept of illocutionary force. The study submits that translators' choice is constrained by cultural and pragmatic differences between the source language and target language and submits that pragmatic knowledge is essential in the

study and practice of translation. This work which is pragmatic-inclined is different from the present study in terms of focus and data sources.

Similar to the present study is Fakoya (2006) which analyses response-comments elements (RCE) in surreptitiously obtained data while listening to numerous conversations conducted by native speakers of Yorùbá. Although the scholar refers to the elements analyzed as RCEs, they are, broadly speaking, discourse markers. Fakoya demonstrates that RCEs convey two types of information: first, they display the speaker's attitude to the entire (or segments of) ongoing talk; second, they determine the course of the discourse as it goes on (or if it should) through the connections between the utterances. Fakoya reports that the RCEs serve as face-saving elements, markers of negative stance, conversational spurs and markers of concurrence, elements of indexing envisioned outcome and markers of rebuff. This study is similar to the present one in terms of deciphering the pragmatic imports of discourse markers but differs in that Fakoya focuses on these markers as speaking turns. The present study considers the markers not as pragmatic features of achieving different conversational goals in talks. Again, the present paper solely considers propositional discourse markers while Fakoya analysed both markers carrying propositions and others with no propositional contents such as *àkííkà*.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Spencer-Oatey's (2000) rapport management. This theory has been deployed in applied linguistics and interpersonal pragmatics to account for the interactional variables in discourse. Spencer-Oatey & Franklin (2009) define rapport as a subjective perception of harmony or disharmony, smoothness-turbulence and warmth-antagonism in the course of interpersonal communication, a perception that is dynamic and easily affected by the society. Rapport management theory,

therefore, foregrounds the place of social relation during interaction. It concerns itself with how language promotes, maintains or threatens harmony among interlocutors. The need to manage face and sociality right is crucial to rapport management. Sociality rights are fundamental personal and social entitlements that individuals crave during interaction with others. Being the major extension of rapport management to the discussion of face, sociality rights are further talked about in two aspects: 1) equity rights which deal with the urge for personal consideration and the desire to be treated fairly, and 2) association rights; concerns with interlocutors' entitlement to association or dissociation with others. These interactional expectations are greatly sustained through discourse markers as shall be seen in the analysis that will follow soon.

The rapport management theory encompasses rapport management strategies, rapport threatening acts and rapport management competencies. In discussing rapport managing strategies, Spencer-Oatey (2000) believes that every language provides a very wide range of linguistic options that are deployed in managing face and sociality rights, and they are available in every domain of the rapport management, including speech acts, discourse content and structure, behavioral participation, stylistic use, paralinguistic and non-verbal language. Factors such as contextual assessment norms (e.g. differing assessments, sociopragmatic conventions, pragmalinguistic conventions, fundamental cultural values and inventory of rapport-management strategies are essential strategies in rapport management. Rapport threatening acts are verbal and nonverbal activities that threaten the interlocutors' face. Behavioral expectations face sensitivities and interactional needs are factors connected to threatening or saving faces in interactions. The interpretation of rapport management theory revolves largely around rapport management competencies which are contextual awareness, interpersonal attentiveness, social information

gathering, social attuning, emotion regulation and stylistic flexibility. These analytical tools are deployed in the analysis of Yoruba discourse markers and their pragmatic relevance in casual interactions.

Methodology

The data for this study was gathered surreptitiously by the researchers through eclectic approach of observation, surreptitious recordings and note taking. Within a period of six months, July 2020 to December, 2020, the researchers devoted attention to the use of discourse markers in naturally occurring speech situations. All data were collected in casual interactive settings where Yoruba was either being used alone or code mixed with another language. In cases where recordings were made, we listened to them several times to identify the discourse markers and their contexts of use and we returned to our notes in the instances of jottings to extract the instances of discourse markers in the interactions. The personal observation helped to account for the paralinguistic cues characterizing the interactions. The interactions were mainly in Yoruba so the researchers glossed them in the data presentation. The interlocutors are labeled as Speakers 1, 2, nth in the data analysis for the purpose of confidentiality. A total of 25 recorded markers were highlighted and nine with recurrent patterns were purposively selected for this study. A qualitative pragmatic analysis of the discourse markers in their interactive contexts is presented in the data analysis section below.

Data Analysis

The data for this study reveals that discourse markers are injected into interactions in Yoruba for certain communicative reasons which border on the need to maintain face and social relation. Three major implicit communicative functions are identified from the use of the discourse markers gathered. These functions are:

emphasis, appeal and justification. They are buttressed with excerpts in the analysis that follows:

Emphasis

During interactions, interlocutors sometimes need to lay emphasis on their postulations usually to gain other discussants to their side of the discourse. Certain discourse markers help to achieve this purpose in a concise and precise manner, thereby enabling the speaker to avoid verbosity. Instances of such discourse markers in Yoruba are presented below.

Excerpt 1

- Speaker 1: Táyé, ọ̀ré rẹ mà ní kin yá ọ̀un ní owó. Ọ̀ré rẹ Kúnlé.
Speaker 2: Kí wá ló wà n bẹ? Ya to bá ní.
Speaker 3: Yá ta ni? Ọ̀gbeni o ma fowó sófò. Èyi tí mo ya gbẹ̀yìn **D'òla** mi ò ri gbà.

Gloss

- Speaker 1: Táyé, your friend has asked me to lend him money. Your friend, Kúnlé
Speaker 2: What is in that? Lend him if you have.
Speaker 3: Lend whom? You had better not waste your money. The money I lent him the last time; **till tomorrow** I've not been repaid.

Excerpt 1 is an interaction between three friends who are having a drink in a bar. During their interaction, one of them mentions that a common friend had asked for a loan. The direct addressee approves of it while the third interlocutor refutes and strongly warns Speaker 1 against the proposed action. In line with the universal explanatory capacity” (Ran, 2012, p. 5) of rapport management, Speaker 3 encourages disharmony with Kúnlé who had requested a loan from Speaker 1. He threatens Speaker 1's

harmonious social relation by discouraging him from assisting Kúnlé. This disharmony is strengthened through the discourse marker *d'òla* which is used to discourage speaker 1's social identity face through the negation of the association rights between Speaker 1 and Kúnlé. The discourse marker reflects the stylistic feature of hyperbole which has to do with overstatement or exaggeration. The expression, *d'òla* which literally translates as *till tomorrow*, is denotatively fallacious since 'tomorrow' refers to the next day, but it is discursively used to carry the pragmatic import of emphasis. The discourse marker is presented as evidence by Speaker 3 from his own experience and to convince Speaker 1 of the high probability of the loan not being repaid. The discourse marker is, therefore, an indicator of a goal-threatening behaviour showing a contextual assessment norm of differing assessment and expectation.

Excerpt 2

- Speaker 1: *Ṣé àwọn aráábí ò ní san arrears wa ni, tóri Olórún?*
- Speaker 2: *(rérin) arrears kó, alias ni. Ò gbàdúra kí salary wọlé*
- Speaker 1: *But wọn ní wọn ti ẹ ma san bí méjì na.*
- Speaker 2: *Jé kin pa irọ kan fun ẹ, tí à bá strike, ijọba oní san owó yẹn.*

Gloss

- Speaker 1: *Wouldn't these people pay our arrears for God's sake?*
- Speaker 2: *(laughs) not just arrears, maybe alias. You had better pray for salary.*
- Speaker 1: *But we heard they would pay at least two.*
- Speaker 2: **Let me tell you a lie**, if we don't go on strike, government won't pay that money.

Excerpt 2 presents an exchange between two university lecturers in their institution's staff club. The duo discusses the payment of their arrears by the government; Speaker 2 vehemently expresses his pessimism through his lexical choices and the use of a discourse marker. The excerpt takes care of both face and sociality rights which are the two essential aspects of rapport management. At the level of face, using the rapport management competence of social attuning, Speaker 2 deploys the semiotics of laughter as a rapport threatening act to express his pessimism about the payment of salary arrears. To entrench his pessimistic stance, Speaker 2 uses the mock-impoliteness strategy with the Yoruba socio-cultural habit of distorting an utterance as a way of debunking it, by saying *arrears ko, alias ni*. This mock-impoliteness is achieved through the stylistic feature of punning wherein the similar articulation of *arrears* and *alias* are foregrounded as a right-threatening behaviour to Speaker 1 who anticipates his duly deserved arrears. In the next line, Speaker 1 further expresses his optimism on the payment of the arrears, and at that point, Speaker 2 deploys a discourse marker to also concretise his position.

The expression, *let me tell you a lie*, is a discursively deployed discourse marker to emphasise whatever assertion to follow it. The discourse marker deploys the stylistic feature of irony given that whatever is meant by lie in this context carries the pragmatic import of truth. The marker is therefore a strategy to emphasise strike as the only way to get the anticipated arrears paid.

Excerpt 3

- Speaker 1: Ó jọ wí pé Man-U ló ni league yíí o.
Speaker 2: Bó yá ko lo gbe fún wọn.
Speaker 3: (Ó Kọjù sí ẹnì kejì tò sọrọ) Sé Chelsea ló wá fẹ gbà á?
Speaker 2: Sé a ò wá lè gbà á ni?

Speaker 1: Gbàjàbíàmílà ni. **Láyé; kò jọ ọ!**

Gloss

Speaker 1: It seems this league is Man-U's.

Speaker 2: Maybe you go give it to them.

Speaker 3: (Faces Speaker 2) So will Chelsea then be the winner?

Speaker 2: Can't we be the winner?

Speaker 1: You mean Gbàjàbíàmílà. **In this life (never); not like it.**

The exchange above is an interaction between three friends who are watching a live match and are discussing the ongoing league simultaneously. What is particularly fascinating about the datum is how what appears to be outright Face Threatening Acts (FTA) are well managed by the interlocutors. After Speaker 1's assertion in line 1 that Man-U may win the league, Speaker 2's response that he could go hand it over to them is an indirect speech act which carries the pragmatic import of negation in a somewhat impolite manner. However, the contextual awareness which embodies the communicative activity helps Speaker 1 to dismiss what is ordinarily an FTA and willingly leaves the next turn to Speaker 3 who asks Speaker 2 if he thinks Chelsea will win since he is pessimistic about Man-U chances of winning. The insensitivity of Speaker 1 to Speaker 2's FTA is an instance of emotion regulation in rapport management competencies (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009) which means the nature of the discussion is helping the speakers de-emphasize interpersonal attentiveness where attention is to be paid to others' sensitivities. Speaker 2 asks Speaker 3, as if to interrogate his stance, if Chelsea cannot be the winner. To this, Speaker 1 reacts through a kind of punning in Yoruba casual interaction where the tone of a word in a preceding turn is used to introduce a new word usually as ridicule.

In line 4, Speaker 2 uses the word *gbà* which means to win and speaker 1 activates a punning by punning on the name of a popular political figure, 'Gbàjábíàmílà', whose initial syllable rhymes with the one-syllable word *gbà*. The pragmatic import of the name mentioned is to disaffiliate the speaker from the proposition that Chelsea can take the league and he emphasises this stance through the discourse markers *láyé; kò jọ ọ*. The marker, *láyé*, which literally translates as *in this life* carries the pragmatic import of saying *never*. *Kò jọ ọ*, which though is slangy in nature, is also deployed as a discourse marker to emphasize the unlikelihood of Chelsea emerging as the winner of the league. The two discourse markers, *láyé* and *kò jọ ọ*, carry a more powerful communicative appeal conveying disharmony in the interaction than all other words; thereby making them discourse markers of emphasis.

Appeal

The communicative function of a number of Yoruba discourse markers is to create appeal. Some utterances might be considered as face threatening and to reduce such effect, discourse markers are deployed in such interactive situations.

Excerpt 4

- Speaker 1: Ọ́gá time wo la fé lọ síbẹ̀ yẹn?
Speaker 2: Èmí wò pé bóyá tí tí Two, àbí?
Speaker 1: Two na wa okay na. a dé bè tí tí Three.
Ọ́gá e jọ ọ́, mi ọ́ tó rán yin nişẹ́. Ẹ bá mi
pass marker ẹgbẹ́ yín yẹn.
Speaker 2: Oh okay.

Gloss

- Speaker 1: Boss, what time do we leave for that place?
Speaker 2: I am thinking of say Two. Is that fine?

- Speaker 1: Two is fine. We will be there about
Three. Boss, please, I dare not not send
you an errand, please pass the marker
beside you to me.
- Speaker 2: Oh okay.

The exchange above takes place between a senior and a junior colleague within a university environment in the former's office. The colleagues are heard discussing an outing and trying to reach an agreement on the appropriate time for it. Most evident in the excerpt is the asymmetric power relation which plays out in the lexical and pragmatic choices deployed throughout the exchange. The lexical item, *ògá*, used by Speaker 1 in her first turn is the Nigerian English equivalent of *boss*. Given that the interlocutors are spatially close, one would want to assume that having to still say *ògá* is communicatively redundant. On the contrary, the word is a linguistic marker of interpersonal attentiveness wherein Speaker 1 tries to be sensitive to Speaker 2's social status and identity. In speaker 1's next turn, she deploys a discourse marker to make a minor request from her boss. The marker which literally translates as *I dare not send you an errand* is an indirect speech act which carries the pragmatic import of appeal. Basically, expressing that she cannot send her boss on an errand should have meant that she would not do so. But on the contrary, the marker has become a formulaic expression particularly deployed when one hopes to do otherwise. It is a way of registering that one is mindful of the cultural, ethical or professional distance but is, however, constrained to seek such help.

Excerpt 5

- Speaker 1: Ọ̀rọ̀ Nigeria yíí ti sù mí.
Kí Nigeria má lẹ̀ taa gbogbo ọ̀nà.

- Speaker 2: Ọrò ọ̀nà lá n' sọ yíí. À ní kí wọ̀n tiẹ̀ sẹ̀ iná nìkàn. Ghana lásán n' lo iná dédẹ.
- Speaker 3: E wò ó, **mo fi owó àti ọmọ dí yín lẹnu.** Igba wo ni Congress?
- Speaker 2: Ó dà bí pé Wednesday ni.

Gloss

- Speaker 1: I am fed up of this country Nigeria.
Why would Nigeria not be able to tar her roads?
- Speaker 2: Should we even be talking about roads?
Let them fix only power. Even Ghana has constant power.
- Speaker 3: **See, I seal your mouth with money and child.** When is congress?
- Speaker 2: I guess it's Wednesday.

Excerpt 5 is set in a pub where three men are seen having drinks. The conversation contains two different discourse issues; the first being a deliberation on the state of the country in terms of the unavailability of social amenities. This ongoing interaction between Speakers 1 and 2 is to be interrupted by Speaker 3 for a supposedly urgent reason and such interruption is an instance of smoothness-turbulence in communication flow which is not only a face threat but also a cultural violation. This is in line with Spencer-Oatey's (2000) definition of culture as a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioral conventions, and basic assumptions and values that are shared by a group of people, and that influence each member's behaviour and interpretations of the meaning of other people's behaviour. It is culturally rude in Yoruba to abruptly interrupt an ongoing discourse. However, given the urgency of Speaker 3's question, the interruption becomes inevitable so the speaker deploys the discourse marker, *mo fi owó àti ọmọ dí e lẹnu*, as a pragmalinguistic convention to

mitigate the effect of the interruption. Although the direct translation of this discourse marker into English or any other language does not convey its communicative relevance, the utterance is idiomatically shared by all well-enculturated Yoruba as an appeal for interrupting a talk. The shift of ground by Speaker 2 who obliges Speaker 3 by providing a response to his inquiry is an indication that the discourse marker achieves its pragmatic import of appealing.

Excerpt 6

- Speaker 1: Kúnlé, bá mi mú òbẹ wá ní kitchen.
Speaker 2: Mummy, òbẹ náà rè é.
Speaker 1: Osé oko mi. **Maa ní mo n dà é lààmú**, bá mi fi ike bu omi wá

Gloss

- Speaker 1: Kunle, get me knife from the kitchen.
Speaker 2: Mummy, here is the knife.
Speaker 1: Thanks, my husband. Do not say I'm disturbing you, help me get water in a bowl.

The exchange in excerpt 6 is between a mother and her son. The former asks the latter to get her a knife and when the son brings the knife, the first rapport management device seen in the extract is stylistic flexibility where the meaning of the word 'husband' is extended to mean a son. Such is a cultural feature among the Yoruba. A mother could refer to her son as her husband for series of pragma-cultural reasons which could include extension of gratitude to the son and a device of subtle request. Speaker 1 refers to her son as her husband in her second turn as a linguistic device for extending gratitude. Within the same turn, the mother requests the son to do another thing for her. The task, being one the son could have carried out simultaneously with the first,

compelled the mother to appeal to the child for what could be described as stress. This appeal is conveyed through the discourse marker, *máà ní mo ní dà é láàmú* as a pragmatolinguistic convention. In explaining this pragma-linguistic convention, *Spencer-Oatey, (2000)* explains that when an apology is recognized as necessary in a certain situation, members from one cultural group may deliberately include an additional explanation for the fault. This is achieved in Yoruba through discourse markers as seen in the excerpt above.

Justification/Excuse

Some Yoruba discourse markers serve as justifications of actions, inactions or reactions. They are used to either mitigate face attacks or demand face want. This is revealed in the excerpts below and their analysis.

Excerpt 7

- Speaker 1: Sister Bísí, *ẹ jò ọ sẹ ẹ bá mi rí chocolate lóri table yìí?*
Speaker 2: *Sé tó ní blue nylon bá yìí?*
Speaker 1: Exactly.
Speaker 2: Ah, *má bínú èmi ni mo jé.*
Speaker 1: But *ẹ sẹ ma je nńkan tí ọ kń sẹ tiyín?*
Speaker 2: *Mo sá ti ní ko má bínú*
Speaker 1: ***Mi ọ tó rín yín fín*** but *ìwà ọ̀sì le hù yẹn.*

Gloss

- Speaker 1: Sister Bisi, please did you find any chocolate on this table?
Speaker 2: Is it the one with a blue wrap?
Speaker 1: Exactly.
Speaker 2: Ah, don't be offended I've eaten it.
Speaker 1: But how could you eat what is not yours?
Speaker 2: But I have said I am sorry.

Speaker 1: **I am too young to disrespect you** but that was a foolish act.

The interaction in excerpt 7 is between two female siblings where the older has eaten the younger sister's chocolate. Speaker 2, who is the elder sister, deploys the pragmalinguistic convention of fault acknowledgement in her second turn by apologising for eating her sister's chocolate without her consent in order to manage the rapport and manage it from degenerating. The younger sister considers her negative face threatened. This negative face, according to Brown and Levinson (1977), is one's desire for his or her freedom and self-autonomy to not be imposed on by others. This face threat makes the younger sister deploy the interrogative act to question her sister's right to eat what does not belong to her, and the sister admits to have done something wrong by emphasizing that she is sorry to have done so. The younger sister, who is still not satisfied, goes ahead to further threaten her sister's positive face, which is one's desire for one's positive self-image to be appreciated and approved. The Yoruba culture places premium on age differences which is often reflected in their lexical choices exemplified by the use of honorifics. This cultural expectation makes it culturally unacceptable for the younger sister to insult the elder one. However, rather than adhere to this cultural expectation, the younger sister opts for the option of rather mitigating the effect of her cultural aberration than forgoing it. In doing this, she appeals to the cultural assessment norms through the emboldened discourse marker where she admits and confesses the existing distance between her and the other interlocutor in terms of age, but yet she deploys the contrastive marker 'but' to threaten the elder sister's face by describing her act as *foolish*. The discourse marker carries the pragmatic import of justification by subtly establishing that notwithstanding the cultural expectation which should guide the rapport of the two

siblings, Speaker 1 has justifiable reasons for expressing her anger the way she does.

Excerpt 8

Speaker 1: Màmá Kúdí, *sé è fẹ sán owó mi ni?*
Speaker 2: Mi ò kúkú gbàgbé. *È sá maa bíńú. Owó ló pò lówọ mi*

Gloss

Speaker 1: Kudi's mum, don't you want to pay my money?
Speaker 2: I have not forgotten. Please don't be offended. It is because **I have got much money at hand.**

The single exchange in except 8 carries a face attack from Speaker 1 to Speaker 2. Speaker 1's interrogative sentence has the subtle effect of implicitly accusing Speaker 2 of not wanting to pay Speaker 1 for whatever transaction or agreement which the researchers could not cover. Speaker 2 rather employs the emotion regulation device of rapport management which has to do with managing criticism or embarrassment when things go wrong. Speaker 2 interprets the interrogation as a genuine request for payment rather than construct it as a face attack. In Speaker 2's turn, she mentions that she has not forgotten her debt and apologises for not paying up promptly. She, however, deploys a discourse marker as an excuse for her inaction. Although this discourse marker does not convey the literal meaning of not having money to pay, it is in line with the Yoruba cultural convention of avoiding a negative declaration upon oneself. The expression is, therefore, an indirect speech act which is used to imply the direct opposite of what it means. The discourse marker is a pragmatic cue for avoiding conflict by attempting to give an excuse for a failed promise or agreement.

Conclusion

The paper considers the deployment of discourse markers in Yoruba casual interactions with a view to determining the pragmatic functions and communicative significance of such fillers in talks. The study which is anchored on Spencer-Oatey's (2000) rapport management theory finds that discourse markers in the interactions analysed perform three functions which are: emphasis, appeal and justification. These markers are also used to mitigate face in interactions in order to sustain rapport, and cater for sociality rights and cultural nuances during conversations. Rapport management techniques such as interpersonal attentiveness, emotion regulation, social attuning, contextual assessment norms and sociopragmatic cum pragmalinguistic conventions are used to maintain cordiality in interactions.

This study extends knowledge on discourse markers in Yoruba from the ambit of pragmatics and reveals that they are essential communicative devices in interactions. As a contribution to knowledge, this study argues that studies in communication and linguistics should foreground functional dimension of language use by enlightening language users on the linguistic, pragmatic and communicative devices for achieving cordiality in interaction. Since language use is instrumental to the existence of interpersonal and societal peace and can help prevent social unrest, knowledge of how to successfully manage interaction without saying less on the one hand and without distorting relationships on the other is a prerequisite in the Humanities. This study, therefore, makes an important contribution to the study of the pragmatic interpretation of discourse markers and the use of language for the maintenance of social relationships in the Yoruba socio-cultural contexts.

References

- Alo, M.A. (2010). A pragmatic appraisal of the translation of Yoruba discourse markers into English. *African Journal of History and Culture* Vol. 2(4), pp. 55-63.
- Bamgbose, G. (2020). Register as a discursive strategy of humour in casual interactions among Southwestern Nigerian undergraduate students. *Covenant Journal of Language Studies*. Vol. 8 (2), 1-14.
- Brown, P. and Levinson, S.C. (1987) *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Drew, P. & Heritage, J. C. (1992). Analyzing talk at work: An introduction. In Paul D. & John C. H. (Eds.), *Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings*. Cambridge University Press. 3-65.
- Fakoya, A. A. (2006). Response-comment elements in Yorùbá conversational discourse. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*. 15(3), 277–295.
- Fraser, B. (1990). An approach to discourse markers. *Journal of Pragmatics* 14, 383–95.
- Fraser, B. (1998). Contrastive discourse markers in English. In A. Jucker and Y. Ziv (eds), *Discourse Markers: Description and Theory*. Benjamins, 301–326.
- Fraser, B. (1996). Pragmatic markers, *Pragmatics*, 6/2: 167-190.
- Fraser, B. (1999). What are discourse markers? *Journal of pragmatics* 31, 931-952.
- Halliday, M. & R. Hasan (1976) *Cohesion in English*. Longman.
- Jauro, L.B., Adamu, M., Delia, T.T. (2012). Discourse markers in Nigerian television news broadcast. *British Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 8(1), 44-56.
- Jauro, L.B., Teneke, G.G., Bitrus, I., & Moses, I.V. (2014). An evaluation of the use of discourse markers In Nigerian newspapers. *New Media and Mass Communication*. Vol 23, 25-29.

- Schiffrin, D. (1986). The functions of *and* in discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 10(1), 41–66.
- Schiffrin, D. (1987). *Discourse markers*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Schiffrin, D. (2006a). Discourse marker research and theory: Revisiting “and”, in Fischer, K. (ed.) *Approaches to Discourse Particles*. Elsevier, p. 315-338.
- Schiffrin, D. (2006b). Discourse markers: Language, Meaning, and Context. In Schiffrin, D., Tannen, D. & H. E. Hamilton (eds). *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Spencer-Oatey, H. (2000) Rapport management: A framework for analysis. In H. Spencer-Oatey (ed.), *Culturally speaking: Managing Rapport through Talk across Cultures*. Continuum, 11-45.
- Spencer-Oatey, H. & Franklin, P. (2009). *Intercultural Interaction: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Intercultural Communication*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Unuabonah, F. O. (2020) “So you know ehn ... ” The use of bilingual interjections in Nigerian English. *Intercultural Pragmatics*. 17(2), 151–176.
- Zarei, F. (2013). Discourse Markers in English, *International Research Journal of Applied and Basic Sciences*, 4/1, 107-117.