
STRATEGIES IN OBITUARY ANNOUNCEMENTS OF MARRIED IGBO WOMEN: A REVIEW

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Abstract

Death is a necessary end for every mortal. Conveying the news of a married woman's death to her ancestral home in Igbo land is a delicate task that requires tact and skills. This work sets out to investigate how the message of the passing of a married woman is conveyed to her ancestral home to find out who breaks the news, the strategies involved in doing so, and the reason(s) behind employing such strategies. Five communities were purposively selected in Anambra State for the study. A mixed-method was used to source data. Face and Politeness theory propounded by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson serves as a guide for the study. Findings reveal that a spokesman from the deceased's marital family or the deceased's children might break the news of their mother/wife's death. The breaking of the news is done stage by stage - from the stage of their daughter taking ill, to the stage of the ill-health being severe and finally leading to death. The stages involve the use of both verbal and non-verbal communications like idiomatic expressions, proverbs, euphemisms, snapping of fingers, and hisses to show members of her ancestral family how important their daughter was to them, the efforts they made to save her life, and indirectly exonerating themselves from complicity in her death. Additionally, a eulogy is outstanding as a rhetorical device in the exchange between the two families. The study concludes that the Igbo attach a high

premium to a wife's ancestral family, hence the tact in conveying the message.

Keywords: death, discourse, deceased, strategies, face, and politeness

Introduction

One of the strongest cultural institutions among the Igbo people of Nigeria is marriage. The reason is that the Igbo believe in a world without end which indicates that *onye a muru ji ugwo imuta ibe ya n'ebe nwoke no, mana n'akuku nwaanyi, ugwu bu nkwanye nkwanye, nwaanyi amuta ibe ya* (every man owes the duty of begetting another man but on the side of the woman, it is a mark of respect that a woman begets another woman). To the Igbo, the journey of life is a relay race; at the appropriate time, the baton changes hand, therefore, the need for marriage and having children. Marriage is seen among the Igbo as an extension of one's family, hence, the saying that *Ogo bu ikwu ito* (An in-law is the third in the line of relations). It is worthy of note that at birth, one's parents are the first in the line of relations, followed by one's paternal or maternal relations, then the in-laws. The relationships are well maintained in most situations among the Igbo.

Another side to the Igbo belief in a world without end has to do with death. Uchendu, notes that:

There is constant interaction between the world of man and the world of the dead; the visible and invisible forces. Existence for the Igbo, therefore, is a dual but interrelated phenomenon involving the interaction between the

material and the spiritual, the visible and the invisible, the good and bad, the living and the dead...¹

The Igbo believe in dual existence, the interaction between the living and the dead, the belief underscores the reason behind the pouring of libations to the dead on different occasions. It is also reflected in the saying that *ndị nwurū anwū na-ahụ uzo* (the dead sees). The saying implies that the dead see how the living runs their lives. The dual existence does not imply that the Igbo do not mind death, or do not sorrow when their loved ones pass on. Onụkawa explains that:

The Igbo consider death as an elusive, mysterious, dreadful, very powerful, un-likable, and unstoppable phenomenon. They are almost tempted to consider it as being more powerful than their Chi (portioned out-life principle), and Eke (an agency of destiny), especially when death strikes in spite of all the people's spiritual and physical efforts, and irrespective of the age, status, wealth, etc of the victims. As a result of the said innate fear of death, the Igbo very rarely mention *Onwu* (death) in their discussions.²

Based on the above, the Igbo express their feelings on death in names such as *Onwuakpaoke*, (death does not discriminate), *Onyekaonwu* (who is greater than death), *Onwuasoanya*, (death is no respecter of persons). All these names are pointers to the fact that death is inescapable. It takes the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the good and the bad people. It is also based on the above belief that the Igbo refer to death as *ome mgbe sọrọ ya*, (the one who acts when s/he pleases) *ogbu*

onye mgbe ndu na-atọ ya utọ (the one who kills when one is enjoying his/her life). Despite the mixed feelings about death - fear, sorrow, and belief in the duality of life, the reality remains that death is inevitable. As Osuagwu, notes “...*ọ b́jara ije nwe ́la; onye ọsọ gbachaa o ruo ́lọ, onye ije adighi atọ n’ama...* (...a visitor has to go home; one goes home after running a race, a traveler does not remain on the street...)”³ One, therefore, has to accept that life on planet earth is not everlasting.

Among the Igbo, it is believed that the living owes the dead a befitting burial ceremony; that is the reason behind the saying that: *ugwọ e ji onye nwuru anwu bu ili na ikwa ya akwa* (what is owed the dead is burial and the burial ceremony). The pre-burial arrangement for men in most parts of Igbo land is slightly different from those of married women based on the fact that a married woman first belonged to her ancestral family before her marital home. There is every need to notify her ancestral home, who gave her out in marriage, of her passing. Nzeako, asserts

*...ndi ozu ahu diiri aghaghi iziga ozi n’ulo nne na nna
nwanyi ahu nwuru anwu, O buru onye na-enweghi
nwanne n’ulo, ha ezigara ndi umunna ya ozi. Ha
aghaghi iburu mmanya wee gaa zie ozi ahu. Odi mkpa
nke ukwu izigara ndi ahu ozi, n’ihi na o bu ha ka umu
nwanyi ahu, ma o bu di ya ga-ebulara ozu. Ndi na-alu
nwanyi adighi eli ozu ya mgbe o nwuru. Nke a bu
omenala.*

(Those who are responsible for the deceased must send a message to the deceased parents’ home; if she has no siblings, they will send the message to her kindred, and they must carry wine as they go to convey the message.

It is very important that they convey the message because they are the ones the deceased's husband or children will carry the corpse to. The tradition is that those who married the woman do not bury her when she dies).⁴

Tradition changes with time. Presently, especially with the advent of Christianity, it is not compulsory in most places and in very peaceful situations for a married woman's corpse to be carried back to her father's house for burial, but the tradition of burial announcement to her ancestral home remains. This work sets out to analyse the discourse between the children of the deceased or their paternal relations with the members of the deceased's ancestral home during such an announcement.

The people engaged in the death announcement differ from one community to another. In most communities, it is compulsory that the husband of the deceased, if he is alive, must go with his children- first son and first daughter, and other male relatives for the announcement. In a situation where the woman is childless, the husband's paternal relations go to her ancestral home for the announcement. It is worthy of note that no stranger joins in such a visit because it is a serious family matter which may end up in arguments, some violence, or very strict instructions. A stranger may destroy or worsen situations if allowed into such a case, for the Igbo has it that: *onye anoghi ebe a nọ lie ozu nwere ike isi n'ukwu bọba ozu* (someone who was not at a burial may start exhuming the body from the wrong side – the feet).

The people involved in the announcement are only close relatives, who are very knowledgeable of the Igbo tradition, are also very conversant with the rules of the burial announcement,

and can easily detect where each party may offend the other, and how to make amends. Conflicts sometimes arise in a situation of childlessness, where there is no heir; or where there is the negligence of duty towards a mother, on the part of the children of the deceased. Such a woman, who was not well taken care of, may end up being buried in her father's compound. The negotiation is usually very tough and the deceased's children endure severe humiliation from their mother's ancestral home based on the fact that it will be a big embarrassment and a reference point for generations to come, that they maltreated their mother, hence, her being buried in her father's house. Without the *umunna* (kinsmen) giving their blessings and marking the spot where their deceased sister will be buried, no burial will take place.

During the deceased's marital family's visit to announce her death, the major participants from the deceased's paternal home are the men in the kindred. Women hurry to the scene to find out what happened when they hear cries. They lend their voices to mourn the deceased. The burial announcement of a married woman among the Igbo involves her two families-paternal and marital.

Discourse Strategies

Among sociolinguists, the term 'discourse' is generally used to refer to stretches of spoken or written language which extend beyond an utterance or a sentence.⁵ For Osoba and Sobola, discourse is not just a combination of sentences; it must occur in a particular context and be unified, and convey social meaning. Citing Schiffrin, they explain that discourse is viewed as a system (a socially and culturally organized way of speaking) through

which particular functions are realized.⁶ The definitions reveal that discourse may be spoken or written, occur in a particular context, and reflect social and cultural meanings. Massi avers that:

...discourse is constructed within multiple levels of linguistic and extra-linguistic context. These levels include the participants, the structure of the discourse, its content, its organization, and the associated roles and identities.⁷

The above explanation shows that discourse has both linguistic and extra-linguistic aspects. Osoba and Sobola, throw more light on the above statement by noting that role sharing is one of the features of discourse. They explain that roles are allocated to participants in a social set-up based on age, sex, education, achievement, profession, or social status.⁸ The factors above are used in the allocation of turns in human society. Salient in the above definitions of discourse are the two levels involved in it - the linguistic and the extra-linguistic context. The interlocutors, their identities, and the topic of discussion are also very vital in any discourse. Yule, explains that:

In order to make sense of what is said in an interaction, we have to look at various factors as social distance or closeness tied to such things as age, power, degree of friendliness or imposition. These factors influence both what we say and how it is interpreted.⁹

It can be deduced from the above explanation that social closeness or distance is vital in the interpretation of an utterance. The factors are important in the way conversation goes especially with regards to turn-taking. Mey, remarks that "...obeying the

rules of any game both marks you as a decent kind of person (one who doesn't cheat) and may even give you a chance of coming out ahead of the others.”¹⁰

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted as a guide for the study is the Face and Politeness theory propounded by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson.¹¹ Politeness is a strategy adopted by language users in interaction and serves the purpose of providing deference of the speaker to the hearer or vice-versa. It has to do with mutual respect to maintain a cordial social relationship.¹² The main purpose of politeness strategy in interaction is to save face. In their explanation of face, Brown & Levinson aver thus:

Our notion of ‘face’ is derived from Goffman (1967) and from the English folk term, which ties face up with notions of being embarrassed or humiliated, or ‘losing face.’ Thus, the face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction.¹³

The above explanation makes it clear that the maintenance of ‘face’ is vital among interlocutors. Wardhaugh, explains further by noting, “We are obliged to protect both our own face and the faces of others to the extent that each time we interact with others we play a kind of mini-drama, a kind of ritual in which each party is required to recognize the identity that the other claims for himself or herself.”¹⁴ It is the need to protect ‘face’ that leads to one being polite. Despite the need to protect one another’s faces, Levinson and Brown note that certain kinds of acts intrinsically

threaten faces. By the statement, they refer to ‘those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/ or the speaker.’¹⁵ In their explanation, the act may be done by verbal or non-verbal communication. Face-threatening acts may be equated to acts of impoliteness.

According to these theorists, “...the content of face may differ in different cultures... we are assuming that the mutual knowledge of members’ public self-image or face, and the social necessity to orient oneself to it in interaction, are universal.”¹⁶ Lending credence to the above statement, Wardhaugh, argues that “every social encounter requires face work, and is a constant give-and-take between the two kinds of faces with its goal being the maintenance of as much of each individual’s positive face as is possible.” Continuing, Wardhaugh declares that “when we interact with others, we must be aware of both kinds of face and therefore have a choice of two kinds of politeness.”¹⁷ The two kinds of politeness are positive and negative politeness. Positive politeness according to him, leads to moves to achieve solidarity through offers of friendship, the use of compliments, and informal language use: we treat others as friends and allies, do not impose on them, and never threaten their face. Negative politeness according to Levinson & Brown, is redressive action addressed to the addressee’s negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded.¹⁸

Face and Politeness theory is very useful for the analysis of this work because the study has to do with a discourse in a given society and the attempt by interlocutors to protect their faces to achieve their objectives.

Methodology

The participant observation method was used in this study. The researcher had the opportunity of being in the family house when the death announcement of her aunt was made.

Ritzer, explains the advantages of the above method thus:

...conversation analysts are led to study conversations in naturally occurring situations, often using audiotape or videotape. This method allows information to flow from everyday world rather than being imposed on it by the researcher. The researcher can examine and reexamine an actual conversation in minute detail instead of relying on his or her notes. This technique also allows the researcher to do highly detailed analysis of conversations.¹⁹

The conversation was surreptitiously recorded and later transcribed into the English language. Additionally, four research assistants applied the same method to gather data for the work. The five towns purposively chosen for the research include Alor, Aguleri, Adazi-Nnukwu, Nnewi, and Akili-Ozizor all in Anambra state. The second method that was used for data collection is interviews. The researcher added this method to source more information. A purposive sample of ten males and ten female adults was interviewed. The researcher tried to elicit from the interviewees, the person(s) that break the news of the passing of the deceased, the procedure for doing so, and the reason(s) behind the procedure. Several data were gathered, but based on their similarities; the researcher selected only three outstanding ones

which comprise the death announcement of a young lady, and two old women. The data were analyzed using the Politeness theory as a guide.

Marital Relationships among the Igbo

The Igbo have it that *ije nwaanyi bu ije mmiri, o bughị ije nku* (the path of a woman (marriage) is the one that leads to the stream and not the bush). Aphorism is normally used during prayers and admonition in marriage ceremonies. Oyeka, explains that “a path that leads to the stream is hardly bushy as people frequently go to the stream. This is in sharp contrast with the path to the bush which is usually rough.”²⁰ That a woman was given out in marriage does not imply that she was sold out. The expectation is that the husband, who is referred to as *oggo* ‘in-law’, will continue to maintain a good relationship with his wife’s paternal family. He is equally expected to teach the children same, hence the reference to marriage as the path that leads to the stream. For the Igbo, *Ọgọ ejighi akụ o jiri oluoma* (if an in-law does not have wealth, he should have good manners). This implies that even when an in-law is incapacitated in one form or the other that he could not offer a thing either in kind or cash to his in-laws, he should at least express his goodwill verbally.

On the part of the children, much is expected of them, especially the first sons and first daughters who hold key positions in Igbo culture. The children refer to their maternal uncles and aunts as *ndị nna/nne ochie* ‘old fathers/mothers’. They sometimes contrast it to *ochie* ‘old’ to refer in some cases, to both sexes. On the other hand, the children are referred to as *nwa/umụdiana* ‘child/children of the land’ by their maternal uncles and aunts. The Igbo have it that *Ọso chuba nwa, o gbanaa ikwunne ya* (A child runs to her maternal ancestral home when he encounters a

hot pursuit). A child is protected in his/her maternal ancestral home more than in any other place, hence, the Igbo saying that *ikwu ka na nne* (maternal relations are greater). Ogbalu, confirms that '*nwadiala nwere nnukwu onodu n'ala ma o bu obodo a muru nne ya. A na-enye ya nnukwu nsopuru. Adighi emesi ya ike n'ikwu nne ya*' (A maternal grandchild has a great place in his/her mother's ancestral home. S/he is highly respected. S/he is not maltreated in his/her maternal ancestral home)."²¹ The above conditions notwithstanding, there are certain expectations to be met to benefit maximally from one's maternal ancestral home. The Igbo has it that *onye gbuterani bu alaje ikwunne ya* (He who kills a game carries same to his maternal home). The above statement means that when one kills a game, one hand of the game must go to his maternal ancestral home. In other words, one should always remember them. Another Igbo aphorism has it thus: *onye na-akọ Ji, ya na-eru ikwunne ya maka na ọsọ chụba ya, ọ gaghị ezo n'ikpo Ji* (When one cultivates yam, he should be visiting his maternal family-to give them part- because he will not hide behind a heap of yam when he encounters a hot pursuit). The saying is demonstrated in Achebe's work, where Okonkwo and his family had to flee to his motherland, Mbanta when he had a challenge in his paternal home.²²

In the children's duty towards their mothers, it is expected that they should be taking good care of them to continue to enjoy the goodwill of their mothers' relations. The Igbo believe that *Oguru kaba nka nka ya anuba ara umu* (When a specie of rat-Oguru - starts getting old, it sucks its children's breasts). This is to say that one depends on one's children for survival in old age. On the contrary, when a child neglects his duty both to the mother and her people, s/he suffers it. The following maxims buttress

what a child encounters if he fails in his responsibility towards his mother. They are: *e zuo ezuo kwanye nwanwa n'olulu, onaghi awa n'afa* (when there is an agreement on a harsh measure to be taken against a grandchild, there is safety) and *Ke okene so obara, o so ogbankolo?* (If shedding of blood is forbidden for a maternal grandchild, is strangulation also forbidden?) The maxims imply that there must be a way of handling an intricate situation. The fact that a maternal grandchild is taken good care of, and is forbidden to bleed to death, does not make him to forbid strangulation. A strangulated person does not bleed. It is based on the discussed belief that an in-law or *nwa/umudiani* receive (s) commendation or condemnation from their wife's/ mother's ancestral home.

The need to humbly take care of one's parents and in this case, a mother, and also maintain a good relationship with her people cannot be overemphasized. An interviewee narrated a situation where the deceased's children did not do the needful in carrying their maternal uncles along in the burial preparations of their mother. Their uncles kept calm till their sister's body was taken to her marital home for burial. The uncles sent young men to the house and carried her body back to her ancestral home until the children came to settle matters with them. There are other forms of punishments given to *nwa/umudiani* by their maternal families but all these depend on the magnitude of the offence committed. Some offences attract floggings from *ndi nna/ nne ochie* while some attract walking on one's knees or much delay in listening to and granting the request of the *nwa/umudiani* or a combination of the two or the three punishments. It all depends on the town involved.

Among the Igbo, one of the major reasons why a woman is given out in marriage is to propagate the human population. It

does not in any way mean that she is no longer valuable to her paternal family. Her paternal family seeks her welfare even as a married woman, for she remains their sister. It is based on a married woman's paternal family's concern for her, that her children or husband gives them reports about her welfare. It is equally for the same reason that the children/ marital family go to them to break the news of her demise. In some cases, when a woman becomes very old and feels that her time to depart from this planet earth has come, she usually sends for her paternal relations. The relations do not hesitate in answering such calls as that was usually the time she gives them detailed information on her marital journey. She reveals some secrets about her children, the way they took care of her, and how she would have her people treat her children when she dies. Sometimes, she uses the opportunity to tell her people how she would want her burial ceremony to be.

Interviewees reveal that the breaking of the news of her demise to her people is done stage by stage. In earlier years, the visits were done on three or more different occasions, based on the relationship between the two families. The time between the visits allows the paternal family to find out if their daughter died a natural death or not. It gives them room to prepare for the response they will give their *nwa/umudiani* /in-laws if they are not satisfied with their findings. There are some modifications at present. The announcement is now done on a day, especially when there is a peaceful relationship between the two families. It only lingers for more days where there is conflict. Whether the announcement takes a day or more, the stages must be followed, and the paternal family of the deceased still does the needful by finding out all they need to do immediately after their sister dies.

They prepare themselves very well as soon as a middleman informs them of their *nwa/umudiani* /in-laws' visit for such news.

The stages for the announcement are ways of preparing the minds of her relatives to accept her death without much shock. Every stage involves a middleman who relates information to the two families. The first stage is telling the family that their daughter is sick. A sick person may or may not recover from ill-health. In the second stage, the family is told that the sickness is very serious. This is to further prepare their minds. The last stage is to announce her death. A day was chosen for each stage in time past. At present, the different days are marked by about thirty to one-hour intervals for each stage. The modification came with the changes in society.

Literature

There exist several written works on death among the Igbo. Most of these works are general discussions on death and burial among the Igbo (Nzeakor²³, Osuagwu²⁴ & Ogbalu²⁵). Onukawa²⁶ 's work is on onomastics and death among the Igbo as it relates to gender. The work of Nwosu, Njemanze & Ekpechi²⁷ is on cultural beliefs on death and mourning. Ojiakor, Etodike, Chukwuemeka & Obayi²⁸'s research has to do with gender and burial rites among the Igbo. Their work concludes that there is a wide range of discrepancies in burial rites. They opine that the rites favour the male gender more than the females. Ikwubuzo²⁹'s study is on the traditional Igbo and Christian notions of death in names and creative works. His study shows that Igbo thoughts and emotions about death are reflected in death-related names. More so, some poets show the great influence of Christianity in their representation of the death motif in their creative works.

The above works focus on different aspects of death among the Igbo. Aremu³⁰'s work, which is on Social Pragmatic Analysis of Obituary Announcements in English in Nigeria, is the only work the researcher could lay her hands on concerning death announcements. Though his work cuts across three major ethnic groups in Nigeria- Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, the main focus of his work is on texts of obituary announcements and not specifically on married women or the Igbo. The present study differs from the reviewed ones, as it has to do specifically with the way a married woman's death is conveyed to her ancestral home among the Igbo.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Here, the three selected samples of the data collected are carefully presented. The Igbo version is followed immediately by an English translation. The samples represent the discourse between two families - marital and ancestral - in announcing the death of a young woman and two old women. In the first data, the marital family who went to break the news of the demise of their wife to her ancestral home chose a spokesman to do the announcement for them because the children of the deceased are still very young. The spokesman will be represented with 'SM' in the discourse while the paternal family of the deceased will be represented with 'PF'.

Sample 1

Death Announcement of a Young Wife

SM – *Ndị ọgọ anyị , daalụkwọnu.* 1.
(Our in-laws, greetings)

- PF -- (Zaa n'otu olu) Nnọọnu. 2.
(Responds in unison) (Welcome)
- SM - Biko, nekwọnu ihe ayi jiri bja ifu unu (Gosi ha oji na mmanyanya) 3.
(Please, see the things with which we came to see you -presenting kola nuts and kegs of palmwine)
- PF - Daalunu, mana nke a ihu unu di etu a, udo o dikwo? 4.
there is peace?)
SM - Udo di mana m ...nwaayi unu kponyere anyi ka anyi bjara igwa unu na ahụ esichahọ ya ike. 5.
(There is peace but erm ...we came to tell you that the woman you gave us in marriage is not in very good health)
- PF (1st Response) - Unu ya-agbanu mbọ bulu ya gaba nnukwu unogwu. 6.
(Make efforts and take her to a big hospital)
- PF (2nd Response)- Mmili abakwọnia nti maka na ahụ zulu ya oke oge anyi kponyelu unu ya. 7.
(Do not tell us any unpalatable story because she was very healthy when we gave her out to you in marriage)
(The deceased's marital family left to 'take her to the hospital' and returned to her parental family after some minutes of 'taking care' of her)
- Re-Entrance**
- SM – Ndi ogo anyi daalunu. 8.
(Our in-laws, we greet)

- PF - Nke a unu chighakwara ozo taa, o na-adabakwo n'anyia? 9.
(For you to come back today, hope all is well?)
- SM – O na-adaba mana mmm... 10.
(Things are going well but mmm...)
- PF - Mana ginị? 11.
(But what?)
- SM – Oya a jitusikwalunụ ya ike. 12.
(She is seriously sick)
- PF (1st Response) - Bulununie gbaba India. 13.
(Rush her to India)
- PF (2nd Response) - Dinụ shoo na ha nelu ya anya very well.
14.
(Make sure that they take good care of her)
(The deceased's marital family left to 'take her to the hospital in India' and returned from 'India' to her parental family after some minutes)

Re-Entrance (cries and wailings, with some kegs of palm wine)

- PF (1st Response) - Kedụ nke na-emenu? 15.
(What is happening?)
- PF (2nd Response) - Uzụakwa ginị na-asho? 16.
(Why the shouts and wailings?)
- SM – Okwonu na ihe a na-afu apiaana... ukwa a na-
api enwehozi mkpuru...ya bu mmanu
kwafunahuru ayi. 17.
(Our effort turned out fruitless)
- PF - I si na ginị mere? 18.
(What did you say happened?)

SM – Nwunye anyị bụ ada unu nwaayi ajuna nni.
19.
(Our wife, who is your daughter has rejected
food (kicked the bucket))

**(Cries, snapping of fingers, tapping of feet, shaking of heads,
sighs...)**

PF- Unu ga-ejenu bunata ya ka e nie ya ebe a na-
eni nwookpu. 20.
(You have to go and bring her corpse so that
she will be buried where the daughters of the
family are buried)

SM– Bikonu ndị ọgọ ayi, ayi na-ayo ka unu hapuru
ayi ya ka ọ ka nọdobe umu ya. 21
(Please our in-laws, we plead that you leave her
for us - allow us to bury her in her marital
home - so that she stays close to her children).

PF - Mmmuu...unu aya akwakwa ya akwa?
22.
(Mmmuu...hope you will do a burial
ceremony for her?)

SM – Ayi ga-emezulie ihe niile a na-emelu nwaayi
jelụ ije di. 23.
(We will fulfill every rite of a married woman
for her)

PF- Ọ di mma, unu ga ne-ezilu ayi ozi ka ayi malu
etu unu si akwado. 24.
(It is good; you continue to communicate with
us so that we know how you are preparing)

SM – Daalunu. 25.
(Thank you)

In the above conversation, the spokesman, who represented the deceased's marital home, tried to establish and uphold a good relationship by the way of his greetings and presentation of drinks as evident in lines one and three. The strategy the spokesman employed falls in line with positive politeness. The in-laws reciprocated the gesture. The question: *Daalunụ, mana nke a ihu unu dị etu a, udo o dikwọ?* (Thank you. But considering your looks, hope there is peace?) posed in line four clearly shows acceptance. It is only when there is a good relationship that one will have the time to look at another's face. The spokesman did not go straight to break the news. The non-linguistic approach he employed by his looks and those of the people that went with him made more room for him to introduce the topic of their visit, which was to tell the paternal family of the deceased that their daughter was sick as seen in line five: *Udo dị mana m ...nwaayi unu kponyere anyi ka anyi biara igwa unu na ahụ esichahọ ya ike.* (There is peace but erm ...we came to tell you that the woman you gave us in marriage is not in very good health). Here, the spokesman used the euphemism *ahụ esichahọ ya ike* (not feeling very fine) in place of *ahụ adighi ya* (she is sick), to cushion the adverse effect the latter would have had on the hearers. The actions mark recognition and respect both for the deceased and her paternal family. It is a way of carrying them along in things concerning their daughter. Despite the face threatening acts from the deceased paternal home in lines six and seven which came in form of commands: *Unu ya-agbanu mbo bulu ya gaba nnukwu unogwu* (Make efforts and take her to a big hospital) and *Mmili abakwonia nti maka na ahụ zulu ya oke oge anyi kponyelu unu ya* (Do not tell us any unpalatable story because she was very healthy when we gave her out to you in

marriage), the spokesman maintained a positive face in his response. Although there was no verbal response, his action of leaving the house to take their wife to the hospital said much. The Igbo has it that *Ọ gbalụ nkịtị kwelu ekwe* (s/he who is silent gives his/her consent).

The spokesman maintained a good relationship in their second visit despite the way the first visit ended. The ‘second visit’ actually took place the same day; only that it was marked by about thirty minutes intervals from the first visit. The visit was possible based on a good relationship between the two families. The spokesman understood the rules of the game and maintained a positive face. To the Igbo, *Ọgọ bụ chi onye* (one’s in-law is his/her personal god). One’s personal god should be honoured. The positive face he maintained is revealed in his greeting *Ndị ọgọ anyị daalụnụ* (Our in-laws, greetings). His repeated use of ‘our in-laws’ shows respect and efforts to maintain solidarity. Nothing stops him from saying only *daalụnụ* (greetings). The in-laws still exhibited face threatening acts in the questions they posed with harsh voices in line nine: *Nke a unu chighakwara ọzọ taa, ọ na-adabakwọ n’anyia?* (For you to come back today, hope all is well?) Culturally, what is expected of the paternal family is to respond to the greetings from their in-laws and not to pose a question to them. The same thing applies to line eleven: *Mana gini?* (But what?) Here, what is expected of them is to hear the spokesman out and not to cut into his speech with their question. The deceased’s paternal family still exhibited face threatening acts in lines thirteen and fourteen: *Bulununie gbaba India* (Rush her to India). *Dinụ shọọ na ha nelụ ya anya* very well (Make sure that they take good care of her). Ordinarily, it is expected that they find out more about their sister’s ill health, make a better suggestion and contribution towards her recovery but they rather

gave instructions. Salient in their instruction is an intrasentential switch which they used to bridge a communication gap.

The actions did not deter the spokesman from maintaining a positive face as seen in his responses in lines ten and twelve. The path he chose in breaking the news marks him as a good spokesman. First is in his hesitation in line ten: *Ọ na-adaba mana mmm...* (Things are going well but hmmm...). Nothing would have stopped him from telling them out rightly that their daughter was seriously sick but he chose to apply wisdom thereby maintaining a positive face. Worthy of mention is his choice of word in line twelve. Instead of saying that *Ọya a jisi ya ike*, he said *Ọya a jitusikwalunụ ya ike* (She is seriously sick). Both expressions have the same meaning but the choice of *jitusikwalunụ* instead of *jisi* evokes pity and serious concern. The spokesman and his group continued to maintain a positive face as revealed in their actions at the end of the second visit. They left to take their wife to India, which in this context represents the highest accessible hospital. The fact that their in-laws did not even ask if they had enough money for flight to India, not to mention the money they will use to pay the hospital bill did not dissuade them from action. Their action shows that they were ready to make the ultimate sacrifice for their wife's recovery from ill health.

In the last visit, the deceased's paternal family responded to both verbal and non-verbal communication marked by cries and wailings. Their responses came in form of questions in lines fifteen and sixteen: *Kedụ nke na-emenụ?* (What is happening?) and *Ụzụakwa gịni na-ashọ?* (Why the shouts and wailings?) By the cries and wailings, the marital family tries to show their in-laws that they were overwhelmed by the loss of their wife to the

extent that they could not hold themselves to gently break the news. The spokesman maintained a positive face. Consider the way he broke the news in lines seventeen and nineteen: *Ọkwọnu na ihe a na-afu apiaana... ụkwa a na-apị enwehozi mkpuru...ya bu mmanu kwafunahuru ayi* (Our effort turned out fruitless); *Nwunye anyi bu ada unu nwaayi ajuna nni* (Our wife, who is your daughter has rejected food {kicked the bucket}). Here, he employed euphemisms to say the same thing in four different ways. The repetition in this context is not for emphasis but a show of grief. The last phrase *ya bu mmanu kwafunahuru ayi* literally means (the oil got spilt). Every Igbo knows the importance of oil. When there is no food at home, one is advised to take a little oil for sustenance. The spilling of oil stands for a great loss. The spokesman maintained a positive face throughout the conversation that even when the paternal family requested that the deceased body be brought to her paternal home in line twenty, it was a plea, not an argument from him in line twenty-one, that she be buried in her marital home. He also agreed that they will fulfill the burial rites for a married woman for her. Ofomata, submits that:

Ndi Igbo kwenyesiri ike na o buru na a kwaghi onye nwuru anwu akwa na onye ahu anaghi alaru ebe o kwesiri ilaru. Onodu di otu a ga-emekwa ka onye ahu waba n'afa ma nyebekwa ndi nke no ndu nsogbu. Olileanya onye obula bu onye Igbo bu na o nochaa ndu ya n'uwa ma were nwuo, ka ndi o hapuru n'uwa gbaa mbo kwanyere ya ugwu ikpeazu site n'ikwa ya nke oma di ka otu o siri kwesi.

(The Igbo believe strongly that the dead do not reach his/her final destination unless the burial rite is performed for him/her. Such a situation makes the

person to show up in divination and disturb the living. The expectation of every Igbo is that whenever he/she passes, that the people he/she left behind will put in every effort to honour him/her by giving a befitting burial ceremony).³¹

The spokesman by his actions and plea showed how important the deceased was to them, hence, their (paternal family) obliging his request. Ogunsiji, avers that “for effective communication to take place between interlocutors, there is the need for competence, understanding and the appropriateness of language to the setting or context in which it is used.”³² The spokesman understood the situation of things and employed appropriate language all through the discussions.

Sample 2- Death Announcement of an Old Woman (1)

Here, the children of the deceased are adults. They paid the visit in the company of their paternal uncles. DsC will be used here to represent the deceased’s children, while MU(s) will stand for their maternal uncle(s).

- DsC- Ndi ochie, anyi egbukwa oo. 1
(Our grand uncles, we kneel before you oo (in respect))
- DsC (1st Son) - Okpu adiokwo m n’isi. 2
(I have no cap on my head/ I doff my hat (further mark of respect))
- MUs- (N’otu olu) Umudiani, nnonu. 3.
(In unison) (Welcome, our grandchildren)
- DsC (1st Son)- Ndi ochie, ndi a bu mmanya anyi bu bja(gosi ha mmanya.) 4.
(Our grand uncles, these are the drinks we came with (presenting drinks))

- MUs- Daalunu...ije unu n'etiti ehie a... 5.
(Thank you, for your visit this afternoon...)
- DsC (1st Son)- Ihe niile di mma. O bu nne anyi si ka anyi sie
unu ka unu bia neta ya na ahụ
esichaghi ya ike. 6.
(All is well. Our mother sent us to tell you to
come and see her for she is not very strong)
- 1st MU - Unu asi na ahụ esichaghi Ada anyi ike? 7.
(Did you say that our daughter is not feeling
very strong?)
- 2nd MU- Hummm, na o si anyi bia hu ya? Unu
ebujegokwonu ya hospital? 8.
(Hummm, that she said we should come and
see her? Have you taken her to the hospital?)
- DsC(2nd Son) - Anyi buie gbagaba nnukwu unogwu ozigbo o
kwuru na o nwere etu ahụ di ya. Ha na-eleru ya
anya nkeoma. 9.
(We took her to a very big hospital immediately
she complained of ill-health. They are taking
good care of her)
- MUs- (N'otu olu) Ngwa, gabanu. Gwanu ya na ndi be
nnaia zuru ezu wee na-abia. 11.
(In unison) Ok, go. Tell her that her entire
father's house is coming)
(The deceased's children left to pass 'the
message to their mother' and returned to their
uncles after some minutes).
- Re-Entrance (cries and wailings, with some
kegs of palm wine)**
- 1st MU- Chelukwo, o dika m na-anu uzu akwa... 12.
(Wait, it appears I hear some cries...)
- 2nd MU- Okwa olu umudiana anyi... 13.
(It is the voices of our sister's children)

- 3rd MU- Kedu nke na-eme? Ada anyi o na-ekuzikwo
ume? 14.
(What is happening? Hope our daughter is still
breathing?)
- DsC (1st Son)- Nne anyi ebulaala akwukwo ooo. 15.
(Our mother has passed)
- MUs- Umuaka a asi na ginii mere Ada anyi? 16.
(What did these children say concerning our
daughter?)
- DC- O si na ike agwula ya, ka o gaa zuo ike.
17.
(She said that she is tired and needed to go
and rest)
- MUs- Hija! Mmili anaa n'ohia zoo! Ugonnwa!
Ugonnwa!! Ugonnwa!!!
Agunwaanyi! Adaejiejemba! Akataaka
nwaanyi! Adaugo!... 18.
(Hija! What a waste! Ugonnwa! Ugonnwa!!
Ugonnwa!!! (Eagle woman) Lioness!
Outstanding daughter! Powerful woman!
Beautiful woman!...)
**(Cries, snapping of fingers, tapping of feet,
shaking of heads, sighs...)**
- MUs- Kedu oge o ga-anata? 19.
(When is she coming home?)
- DsC (1st Son)- Anyi na-ele anya n'onwa nke asaa. 20.
(We are considering the seventh month)
- MUs- Daalunu na mbo nine unu gbara. Unu ga na-
eziru anyi ozi. 21.
(Thank you for your efforts. Keep us informed)
- DsC- Ndi ochie, daalunu. 22.

(Our grand uncles, thank you)

In the above burial announcement, the sequence of the conversation between the children of the deceased and their uncles shows that they have a cordial relationship. The general greeting in the first line and the presentation of drinks mark great respect for their maternal relations. Worthy of note is the greeting from the first son in line two: Okpu adiokwọ m n'isi (I have no cap on my head). The expression marks the highest level of respect and honour to his maternal uncles. Their maternal uncles reciprocated by showing a social closeness as marked in line three Umudiani, nnoonu (Welcome, our grandchildren). If there was a social distance, they would have answered only nnoonu (welcome). The question in line five: Daalunu...ije unu n'etiti ehie a... (Thank you...your visit this afternoon...) delineate that their grandchildren do visit them only that they went at an odd hour on that particular day. The odd hour in the context outlines that there was something unusual with their visit, for that time of the day was to be for rest after a hard day's work in the morning. All the same, the question created room for the deceased's children to relate their mission. Just like the first sample, tact was employed in breaking the news.

The trend of the conversation in lines six to ten shows that both parties maintained a positive face. It is only where there is a cordial relationship that a woman will send her children and not a stranger on an errand to her father's house. Secondly, asking that her people visit her shows that she enjoys their goodwill. The cordiality of the relationship between the two parties did not stop their uncles from asking a vital question about their taking their sister to the hospital in line eight: ... Unu ebugokwonu ya hospital? (... Have you taken her to the hospital?) It is also based

on the good relationship which they enjoy with their sister and her family that they responded that all of them will go to answer her call.

The responses from their uncles in lines twelve to thirteen strengthen further, the social closeness between the two families. The uncles did not only hear cries and wailings, they recognized the voices to be their grandchildren's. Their grandchildren did not take the closeness for granted. They still employed tact by their use of euphemism to break the news thus in line fifteen: *Nne anyi ebulaala akwukwo ooo* 'Our mother has passed ooo'. They watered the ground more through their response in line seventeen, by letting their uncles know that it was their sister's choice to go and rest. The deceased's paternal relations accepted fully, that their sister had gone to rest and eulogized her by calling her great names in line eighteen. Uchendu, declares that "... death which occurs at a ripe age is a cause of joy, being an index of high status among the ancestors."³³ The eulogies did not stop the children and women from mourning as seen in the cries and wailings that followed.

The uncles made no demands on her body because they were fully satisfied with the way her children took care of her as seen in the last stage of the discourse. The children were rather asked when she would come home, referring to when the burial would take place, and requested that they be informed of the plans. It simply shows that the deceased's children have their uncles' blessings. Part of the blessings was expressed verbally in line twenty-one: *Daalunụ na mbọ nine unu gbara. Unu ga na-eziru anyi ozi.* (Thank you for your efforts. Keep us informed). Here, they thanked their grandchildren for their efforts in taking care of their sister. Breaking the news did not take much time or protocol

as a result of the deceased's age and the cordial relationship between the families. To both families, she has only gone to rest.

Sample 3- Death Announcement of an Older Woman (2)

Here, the children of the deceased are adults just like the earlier data. They paid the visit in the company of their paternal uncles (PU(s), hereafter). 'DsC' will also be used here to represent the deceased's children, while 'MU(s)' will stand in for their maternal uncle(s).

- DsC- Ndi ochie, anyi egbukwaa. 1.
(Our grand uncles, we kneel before you (in respect))
- MUs- Anyi amakwofu ndi unu bu? 2.
(Do we really know who you are?)
- DsC- Anyi bu umu Ada unu nwaanyi... 3.
(We are your sister's children...)
- MUs- Anyi amaghikwa ndi unu bu. Unu ga-abia laba. E
mechaa unu akowaa onwe unu. 4.
(We do not know who you are. You have to go.
Later, you tell us who you are).

(The deceased children went home and went back after a few days to see their maternal uncles.)

- MUs- Kedu ndi anyi na-enegara anya...werenu ikpere
unu were na-abata n'obi a. 5.
(Who are we beholding from afar...enter this
outhouse on your knees)
- DsC- Ndi ochie, bikonu. 6
(Our grand uncles, please...)
- MUs- Biko gini? 7.
(Please for what)
- DsC- Ndi ochie, ndi a bu mmanya anyi bu bia (gosi ha
mmanya). 8.

- MUs- (Our grand uncles, these are the drinks we came with (presenting drinks)).
Mhụm. Onye gosiri unu uzo? 9.
(Mhụm- who showed you the way?)
- DsC- Bikonu, gbagharanụ...Anyị sị ka anyị bịa gwa unu na ahụ esichaghị nne anyị ike. 10
(Please, forgive us... We came to tell you that our mother is not very strong)
- MUs- Unu wee mezie gini? 11.
(What then did you do?)
- DsC- Anyị ebugago ya ụnọgwụ. 12.
(We have taken her to the hospital)
- MUs- Unu ga-anabagodu ka unu gaa nedo ya anya. 13.
(You have to go home and take care of her)
- DsC- Daalunụ. 14.
(Thank you)
(The deceased's children left to 'take care of their mother' and returned to her parental family after some minutes of 'taking care' of her.)

Re-Entrance (cries and wailings, with some kegs of palm wine)

- DsC- Ndị nna ochie, arụ emee anyị ooo. 15.
(Our grand uncles, something evil has befallen us ooo)
- MUs- N'ụdị gini? 16.
(In what manner?)
- DsC- Nne anyị ooo! Nne anyị ooo!! Nne anyị ooo!!! 17.
(Our mother! Our mother!! Our mother ooo!!!)
- MUs- Mere gini? 18.
(Did what?)
- DsC- Nne anyị ahapugo. 19.

- MUs- (Our mother has left)
Jebe ebee? 20.
(Went to where?)
- DsC- Nne anyị anwunahuna anyị. 21.
(Our mother has died)
- 1st MU- Mmuughu? 22.
(Mmuughu?)
- 2nd MU- I nụkwọlu ihe ụmụazị a na-ekwu? 23.
(Did you hear what these children are saying?)
- DsC- Ndị ochie, nkụ gwụkworụ n'ohịa ebe atanị na-afụ
ọkụ. 24.
(Our grand uncles, we really did our best)
- 1st MU- Gịnị wee mezie? 25.
(And what happened?)
- 2nd MU- Abjamam! Unu na-akọlu ndị ọbịa. 26.
(I hear! You are telling visitors)
- DsC- Mana mm... 27.
(But mm)
- MUs- Mechieghu ọnu! 28.
(Keep your mouth shut!)
- MUs- Kpọọ ụmụokorobịa aka kara aka ka ha zuo ha zuo
ha ike n'ahụ. 29.
(Bring in able-bodied men to roughen them up -
teach them a lesson)
- DsC- Bikonu gbagharanụ ebe anyị emetachaghị. 30.
(Please, forgive wherever we fell short)
- MUs- Zugodunu ha ike n'ahụ. 31.
(Give them a thorough beating)
- PU- Ghaluzianụ ndị ọgọ m, a ma nọ ọbughị ubosi
nwata kwafuru mmanụ ka a na-eti ya ihe mana ka
a ghalu iji iwe oke suo uno ọkụ. 32.

- MUs- (Forgive my in-laws; we know that a child is not given a beating the day s/he spills palm oil but let us not throw away the baby with the bathwater)
Kedụ onye n’ime unu kpojere ya unoogwu?33.
(Which of you took her to the hospital?)
- DsC (1st son)- Ochie, akpojere mie unoogwu ozigbo o kwuru na ahụ esighi ya ike. 34.
(Granduncle, I took her to the hospital immediately after she complained of ill health)
- MUs- I kpojie hapụia koo netaba onweie. Kedụ nwanne gi nwaanyi? 35.
(You took her to the hospital and left her to take care of herself. Where is your sister?)
- DsC (1st daughter) – Ochie. 36.
(Granduncle)
- MUs- Kowaa ka I si ne nne gi anya. Anyi nuru noo akwa o yi naa be di ka o yigidere wee naa. 37
(Explain to us how you took care of your mother. We learned that it was the cloth she wore to her husband’s house the day she married that she wore till she went home- died)
- DsC(1st daughter) - Mba. Ochie, egoolu m akwa di ichiiche. Juo umunne m ndi ozo. 38.
(No, grand uncle. I bought different kinds of wears for her, verify from my siblings)
- MUs- Nyegodunu anyi ohere. 39. (Excuse us)

The above data is the longest of the three samples. The conversation reveals that the visit was done by the deceased children and their uncle. Salient in the conversation is the fact that there was a strained relationship between the two parties. In the first line, the deceased children presented a positive face in the manner they greeted their uncles: Ndi ochie, anyi egbukwaa. (Our

grand uncles, we kneel before you). There was no reciprocation to their act. It was rather an embarrassing question in line two: Anyị amakwofu ndị unu bu? (Do we really know who you are?) The question delineates a social distance between the two parties. Despite the introduction in line three, that they are the children of their sister, their maternal uncles maintained their stand and demanded that they leave the house in line four: Anyị amaghikwa ndị unu bu unu ga-abia laba. E mechaa unu akowaa onwe unu. (We do not know who you are. You have to go. Later, you tell us who you are). The claim by the maternal uncles that they did not recognize them was a way of showing displeasure based on their attitude. They could not achieve what they would have done in one day as a result of their attitude. The face-threatening act from their uncles gave them no room to proceed. They rather went home.

In the second visit, the deceased's paternal family still threatened the face of their grandchildren when they sighted them from afar as revealed in line one: Kedu ndi anyi na-enegara anya...werenu ikpere unu were na-abata n'obi a. (Who are we beholding from afar...enter this outhouse on your knees). The demand that the deceased's children walk on their knees was not as a mark of respect to them but it was a form of punishment. It will be recalled that age, culture and social status are among the things that play major roles in discourse. Culturally, among the Igbo, the paternal uncles hold greater power and the children of the deceased must obey them, age and status notwithstanding. The deceased's children still tried to show a positive face through pleas and presentation of drinks in lines six and eight despite the way the first visit ended and the humiliation they were already being subjected to in their second visit. The question from their uncles in line nine: Mhum. Onye gosiri unu uzo? (Yes. who

showed you the way?), shows that there was no cordial relationship between the parties. Their grandchild hardly visits to pay homage to them as tradition requires. The deceased's children still pleaded that they be forgiven and from the way things were unfolding, they immediately chipped in their mission in line ten which was to tell them about their mother's ill health. Their uncles who threatened their face all through the conversation still asked the needful by demanding an answer on what they did concerning their mother's ill health in line eleven: *Unu wee mezie giṅi?* (What then did you do?) A positive face was maintained in the reply by their grandchildren in line twelve. Their uncles threatened their faces through the tone of the instructions given them in line thirteen: *Unu ga-anabagodu ka unu gaa nedo ya anya.* (You have to go home and take care of him)'. Despite the tone, the grandchildren still thanked them and took action by taking their leave to take care of their mother.

Quite unlike what happened in samples one and two where the deceased's paternal family members responded to cries and wailings from their daughter's marital family, the paternal family of the deceased did not respond to the cries in this sample. Their silence was face-threatening. The children of the deceased had to gradually make known to them that something evil befell them in line fifteen: *Nḍi nna ochie, aru emee anyi ooo.* (Our grand uncles, something evil has befallen us ooo). The kind of response they received was more of a nonchalant one which came in form of a question in line sixteen: *N'udi giṅi?* (In what manner?) The grandchildren's response which came in form of repetition of 'our mother' in line seventeen did not evoke the sympathies of their uncles; it was rather a very short and more embarrassing question from them in line eighteen: *Mere giṅi?* (Did what?) The

euphemism the children of the deceased employed in line nineteen in telling them about their mother's passing was a plain one everyone understands but the uncles pretended that they did not understand what they meant based on the question they posed in line twenty: *Jebe ebee?* (Went to where?) So far, their uncles threatened their faces despite every effort their grandchildren had put in to save their faces. The children in line twenty-one spoke clearly in a plain language, though, laden with sorrow that their mother had passed: *Nne anyị anwụnahụna anyị.* (Our mother has died). Their choice of expression: *anwụnahụna* instead of *nwụrụ* shows the kind of pains they feel for the demise. Their uncles did not even wait to take turns in the conversation as they did earlier. Their responses in lines twenty-two and twenty-three show that they were not moved by their grandchildren's explanations not to think of changing their stance as a result of that. All these are ways of expressing their anger. Their grandchildren's use of an idiomatic expression to buttress their efforts in saving their mother's life in line twenty-four did not meet a favourable response from their uncles. It rather earned them another question in line twenty-five: *Gịni wee mezie?* (And what happened?) and an aspersion in line twenty-six: *Abịamam! Unu na-akọlụ ndị ọbịa.* (I hear! You are telling visitors.) The statement shows clearly that their Uncles were well informed about the way they took care of their mother. The statement explains better the reason behind their anger which is evident in the way they treat their sister's children during their visit.

The explanation so far shows a tense atmosphere. The effort from the deceased's children to explain things away in line twenty-seven did not scale through; it rather earned denigration in line twenty-eight that they should shut up. The scene continued in line twenty-nine, where the uncles gave their first verdict- their

grandchildren should be beaten by able-bodied men: Kpọọ ụmụokorobia aka kara aka ka ha zuo ha ike n'ahụ. (Bring in able-bodied men to roughen them up - teach them a lesson). Despite the grandchildren's plea in line thirty, that their uncles should please forgive their shortcomings, their uncles maintained that they should first of all be flogged before further discussions. The research assistant explained that the flogging was done, with each of the grandchildren receiving four strokes of the cane. It took the intervention of the deceased children's paternal uncle to mellow their maternal uncles in line thirty-two: Ghaluzianu ndi ogo m, a ma no obughi ubosi nwata kwafuru mmanu ka a na-eti ya ihe mana ka a ghalu iji iwe oke suo uno oku. (Forgive my in-laws; we know that a child is not given a beating the day s/he spills palm oil but let us not throw away the baby with the bathwater). Here, the deceased children's paternal uncle used proverbs to condense the misdeed of the deceased's children and also plead on their behalf.

Even though the whole story of their sister was before them, the maternal uncles still posed more face-threatening questions to their grandchildren in lines thirty-three and thirty-nine, where they demanded an explanation on who took their sister to the hospital and how she was taken care of over there. The grandchildren maintained a positive face in their answers. The direct question to their sister's first daughter in line thirty-seven was also face-threatening. Her response in line thirty-seven shows a positive face. She did not only answer the question she was asked; she points them to the fact that her siblings are witnesses and could attest to all she did. The questions and answers were more like telling them where they got things wrong. Aremu, admits that "speakers of an utterance often mean more

than they say through their speeches since our utterances are always elastic and ambivalent in meaning.”³⁴

The grandchildren knew the purpose of their visit and what they stood to lose if they did not endure the humiliation to the end, hence, they maintained a positive face all through the conversation. The maternal uncles did not give the deceased’s children a direct answer to declare their stand on their sister’s burial ceremony. They rather asked that they be excused for further discussion in line thirty-nine. The most important part of this work is covered - the news has been broken.

Discussion

The three samples show the announcements of the death of the three different women in their ancestral homes. The common factor in the three samples is the report that the deceased is sick, and the question from the deceased’s paternal family on efforts towards her recovery. The Igbo continue to put in efforts to save a life until it is very clear that the person is dead. It is based on the efforts that the Igbo say thus: *Adìghì atufu so na o mebiri* (You do not throw away till it spoils). That is the reason behind the ancestral homes demanding that even the very old women in the data should be taken to the hospital and looked after.

One cannot help but wonder why people should go through the stress of making such an announcement when both parties already knew that the woman has passed. The reason lies in the morals behind the culture. First, the deceased’s family uses the opportunity to show how important their sister is to them. Secondly, they use it to teach the younger ones about the need to honour and respect their mothers even at old age. Thirdly, they use it to teach the need for a cordial relationship between the grandchildren and their maternal families. As revealed in the three

samples, the announcements were easier and faster in samples one and two where the two families had a cordial relationship. It took them one day to do the announcement but the reverse was the case with the third sample where the two families had a strained relationship. It did not only take the grandchildren two days to break the news but they received some punishments as a result of their misdeeds. This is not to say that maternal families wait until their sister's death before they handle any issue their sister had with her children. Maternal families call their erring grandchildren to order once they notice or get a report on any misbehavior but the climax of the discipline comes when such grandchildren go for a burial announcement.

In the three samples, the deceased's paternal families presented negative faces immediately after they were told about their sister's ill health. Such attitudes are only ways of showing the seriousness of the matter and the need to take immediate action. On the part of the deceased' marital home, they maintained a positive face. Such actions show solidarity.

Conclusion

This study examined the strategies used in announcing the death of a married woman in her ancestral home. The discourse shows that the breaking of the news is done in stages and with great tact. It starts with informing her people that she was sick, with the ill health being very serious thereby leading to death. The tact is used in breaking the news to prepare their minds, and tell them how their daughter is valued and the unequal efforts made in saving her life. The intervals between the announcements give room for the two parties to prepare themselves. On the part of the ancestral family, it allows them to make the necessary inquiry

about their daughter and the level of care she was given. On the other hand, the marital family takes their time to prepare to play their cards very well by the way of their presentation. All these precautions are taken to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

The Study reveals that a spokesman breaks the news if the bereaved is childless or if her children are still very young. In a situation where the woman has grown-up children, the deceased's husband if he is alive, their first son and first daughter, and any other of their children, in the company of their paternal relations pay such visit(s). The trend of the announcement is largely determined by the way the deceased was taken care of and also the cordiality of the relationship between the two families. The deceased's family is culturally authorized to discipline their deceased's sister's children as shown in sample three. All these are done not out of hatred but to teach morals, especially to the younger ones. It is culturally required that children take good care of their parents especially when they are old and cannot do much for themselves. On the part of the deceased's children, they endure every humiliation to get the required result which is having their maternal uncles' blessings, the permission to bury their mother in their paternal home, and their consent to come on the said date to mark the spot where she will be buried. Without all these in place, no burial takes place. The tradition is strong in most places among the Igbo.

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Notes

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