ACCOMMODATION STRATEGIES IN UBESIE'S ỤKPANA OKPOKO BUURU: A SOCIOPRAGMATIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract
Accommodation is a social process through which speakers adjust, maintain, or emphasise their communicative behaviour in response to interlocutors, relationships, and contextual expectations. This paper examines accommodation strategies in Tony Ubesie's Igbo novel, *Ụkpana Okpoko Buuru*, focusing on how convergence, divergence, politeness strategies, and background knowledge shape characters' interactions and social relationships within the novel's context. It adopts a sociopragmatic perspective that brings together insights from Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), politeness theory, and background knowledge. Fifteen communication events selected from the novel are examined qualitatively under seven categories to explore how verbal choices, figurative expressions, conduct, silence, seating, and other context-sensitive behaviours contribute to the management of social relationships. The analysis identifies instances interpreted as convergence, divergence, bald-on-record communication, positive politeness, off-record communication, face management, and adjustments informed by shared background knowledge. The findings reveal that accommodation in Ubesie's *Ụkpana Okpoko Buuru* extends beyond changes in accent, dialect, or speech style to include coordinated action, social alignment, distancing, indirectness, and responses to communal expectations. More than one accommodative process may operate within a single event, demonstrating the complex relationship between communicative behaviour and social context. The study concludes that a sociopragmatic approach integrating Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) and politeness theory provides a useful framework for examining how linguistic choices and social meanings interact in literary dialogue, while recognising that the concepts drawn from these theories are related but not interchangeable

Keywords: Accommodation strategies, Communication Accommodation Theory, Face, Igbo literature, Politeness, Sociopragmatics.

Introduction

Language is a resource for communicating information, expressing feelings, establishing social positions, negotiating relationships, and influencing the conduct of others. These functions are realised within communicative interactions shaped by participants' diverse identities, experiences, expectations, and contextual understandings.

The effectiveness of an exchange therefore depends not only on the linguistic forms selected but also on how participants interpret and respond to the social circumstances in which those forms are used.

Accommodation offers a useful way of examining this relationship between language and social interaction. In broad terms, it refers to adjustments, or deliberate decisions not to adjust, in communicative behaviour in response to an interlocutor or a perceived social context. Such adjustments may involve pronunciation, accent, dialect, vocabulary, and speech style, but they may also concern the degree of directness, politeness, explicitness, or indirectness used to convey a message. Communicative behaviour can include non-verbal conduct and other socially meaningful actions when these contribute to the management of an interaction.

Accommodation has been examined from sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspectives. Sociolinguistic approaches commonly attend to the ways speakers make their linguistic behaviour more similar to or more distinct from that of others. Pragmatic approaches, by contrast, are concerned with how participants adapt their utterances and conduct to communicative intentions, contextual expectations, face concerns, and the requirements of an ongoing interaction. These perspectives overlap, but neither

should simply be treated as a substitute for the other. Their intersection offers a productive basis for sociopragmatic analysis because it brings linguistic variation into dialogue with the social and interpersonal work performed through communication.

This paper investigates accommodation strategies as represented in Tony Ubesie's novel *Ụkpana Okpoko Buuru*. The text presents a range of socially situated events in which characters respond to communal expectations, negotiate affiliation and distance, use figurative language, manage potentially sensitive matters, and act on shared understandings. These events provide material for exploring accommodation beyond a narrow focus on speech-style matching. The paper treats the novel as literary discourse: Its dialogues and narrated actions are analysed as literary representations of social interaction, with attention to how characters' communicative choices reflect and negotiate interpersonal relationships, social identities, and contextual expectations.

The study has three objectives: (1) to identify accommodation strategies represented in selected communication events in *Ụkpana Okpoko Buuru*; (2) to examine how these strategies contribute to communicative purposes and the negotiation of social relationships; and (3) to consider how sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspectives can be combined in an integrative sociopragmatic model. The paper argues that the events may involve several accommodative processes at once and that the interpretation of these processes depends on background knowledge, relationships among participants, and the social setting represented in the narrative.

Literature Review

The Concept of Accommodation

Accommodation, according to Witek (2019), is a process whereby the context of an utterance is adjusted or repaired to maintain the default assumption that the utterance constitutes an appropriate conversational move of a certain type. This implies that speakers adjust or reinterpret the context of an utterance to ensure that it is understood as an appropriate contribution to the ongoing conversation. In communication, the meaning and purpose of an utterance are not always immediately clear, as they depend on the circumstances in which it is produced, the relationship between the participants, and their shared expectations. When an utterance appears inconsistent with these expectations, participants may modify their understanding of the context or reinterpret the utterance to make it fit the interaction. In this way, accommodation helps maintain the flow of communication by allowing participants to understand an utterance as a meaningful and appropriate conversational move rather than as an irrelevant, unexpected, or inappropriate contribution. In the words of Kissine and Pantazi (2020), accommodation is a pragmatic solution to a coordination problem. Accommodation processes are triggered when a speaker uses an expression that requires that the conversational background contain some hitherto unmentioned information. Accommodation, then, is not automatic; it is a process speakers engage in to adjust to the course of conversation.

Pragmatic accommodation

Pragmatic accommodation concerns the ways participants shape their language and conduct in relation to the unfolding interaction. Kissine and Pantazi (2020) discuss accommodation as a pragmatic response to constraints on admissible contexts of use, emphasising that it is connected to the interpretation and progression of conversation. From this perspective, accommodation is not merely a mechanical adjustment: it may involve a speaker's assessment of what has been said, what the interlocutor is likely to understand, and what response is appropriate in the circumstances. This study highlights that Pragmatic accommodation can be examined through politeness, as speakers adjust their language and communicative behaviour to maintain harmonious interactions and show consideration for others.

Brown and Levinson (1987) describe strategies by which speakers manage face concerns and address acts that may threaten an interlocutor's social self-image or autonomy. Their framework distinguishes bald-on-record, positive-politeness, negative-politeness, and off-record strategies. These strategies differ in their degree of directness and in how they attend to the relationship between the speaker's communicative goal and the interlocutor's face needs. In the present study, these categories are used to examine the management of directness, rapport, imposition, and indirect meaning in the selected

passages. Similarly, Goffman's (1967) account of face and interaction ritual is also relevant because social encounters involve the presentation and protection of identities. Participants may use words, gestures, facial expressions, silence, or other conduct to sustain a socially acceptable presentation of self and to respond to the identities projected by others. Heritage and Sorjonen (1994), in their examination of conversational practices, further demonstrate the importance of sequential organisation in how participants construct and maintain activities. Taken together, these perspectives show that accommodation is a context-sensitive process shaped by the relationship between speakers, their communicative intentions, and the social circumstances in which interaction takes place. Rather than viewing accommodation as an isolated feature of an utterance, it is important to consider how speakers adjust their language and communicative behaviour in response to the expectations, needs, and reactions of others. Such adjustments may involve the use of polite expressions, changes in directness, or other strategies aimed at maintaining harmonious interaction and achieving communicative goals. However, accommodation extends beyond the immediate context of an utterance to include the ways in which speakers adjust their linguistic choices in relation to the people they interact with and the social identities they negotiate. This broader understanding provides a link to sociolinguistic accommodation, which focuses on how speakers modify their language use in response to the linguistic and social characteristics of their interlocutors.

Sociolinguistic accommodation

Sociolinguistic accommodation concerns how speakers adjust their linguistic forms and styles in response to their interlocutors and the social identities made relevant during interaction. These adjustments can serve to establish social alignment or maintain distinctions between speakers, reflecting the ways in which linguistic choices are used to negotiate relationships and express social differences. Such adjustments may take the form of convergence, through which speakers align their linguistic behaviour with that of their interlocutors, or divergence, whereby they emphasise linguistic or social differences associated with power, economic status, social class, or social position (Gobir & Bello, 2021). From this perspective, language serves not merely as a means of communication but also as a resource through which speakers construct social identities and negotiate interpersonal relationships within specific social contexts. Similarly, Sociolinguistic accommodation can be understood as the adjustment of linguistic and communicative behaviours in response to interlocutors' linguistic needs and communicative differences, to facilitate mutual understanding and effective interaction (Coombs et al., 2023).

The relationship between language use and social identity provides an important basis for understanding sociolinguistic accommodation. Speakers do not make linguistic choices solely to convey information; their choices may also reflect their social affiliations, relationships with interlocutors, and the identities they seek to express or negotiate. In this regard, sociolinguistic accommodation offers a useful perspective for examining how individuals adjust their linguistic behaviour to establish social alignment, distinguish themselves from others, or respond to the expectations of a particular audience. These concerns are reflected in studies that examine the relationship between linguistic variation, audience, and identity.

Studies on pragmatic and sociolinguistic accommodation

Bell (1984) explains style in relation to audience design, while Bourhis, Giles, and Tajfel (1973) connect language use with Welsh identity. Ochs (1993) similarly examines how linguistic resources participate in the construction of social identity. This work indicates that language choices can signal identification with a group, distance from it, or orientation to a particular audience.

Communication Accommodation Theory, associated with Giles and subsequent researchers, provides a framework for explaining why, when, and how people adjust communicative behaviour and what social consequences such adjustments may have. Two widely discussed processes are convergence and divergence. Convergence refers to adjustments that make communicative behaviour more similar to that of an interlocutor; divergence involves accentuating differences. The social meanings of these processes depend on context: convergence may express affiliation or facilitate interaction, whereas

divergence may assert identity or mark distance. Neither process should automatically be assumed to indicate goodwill or hostility; interpretation requires attention to the participants and the circumstances. Research on phonetic convergence, such as Pardo (2006), illustrates how interlocutors may become more similar in aspects of their speech during interaction. The broader account of accommodation outlined by Giles (2016), as well as the review by Gallois, Ogay, and Giles (2005), situates such adjustments within wider interpersonal and group processes. For the present analysis, CAT offers a useful starting point, although a literary text may represent accommodation through social actions and pragmatic choices that do not take the form of measurable changes in pronunciation or accent.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that linguistic choices are closely connected to audience orientation, social affiliation, and identity construction. However, while previous research has examined how language use reflects social identities and relationships, further attention is needed to understand how these processes are manifested through accommodation strategies in specific sociocultural contexts. In particular, the ways in which speakers employ linguistic convergence and divergence to negotiate social relationships, establish group affiliation, or mark social distance, and how these strategies intersect with politeness and shared background knowledge, warrant closer examination within literary representations of everyday interaction. Politeness strategies may shape how speakers adjust their linguistic behaviour to maintain rapport, show respect, or manage interpersonal relationships, while background knowledge informs how such adjustments are interpreted in relation to shared cultural norms, social expectations, and contextual assumptions. This study therefore examines how sociopragmatic accommodation strategies are represented in Ubesie's *Ụkpana Okpoko Buuru*, focusing on how characters' linguistic choices, politeness strategies, and background knowledge interact in the negotiation of social identities, interpersonal relationships, and social differences within the novel's sociocultural context.

Sociopragmatic model of accommodation

Sociopragmatics, which integrates perspectives from pragmatics and sociolinguistics, offers an analytical framework for investigating how social relations, cultural conventions, and contextual variables influence language use in communication. Terkourafi and Delbar (2023) acknowledge this interdisciplinary integration as forming the foundation of sociopragmatics. Also, Nurdiyanto and Resticka (2021:29-30) believe that sociopragmatics is an interdisciplinary approach that examines how language use is influenced by the social and cultural dynamics of a community, investigating how pragmatic choices reflect shared norms, values, and social expectations, and also highlighting the role of language as both a means of interpersonal communication and a resource for negotiating social relationships and maintaining cultural conventions.

The exploration of various accommodation studies in this paper reinforces the richness and complexity of communication dynamics, throwing more light on the strategies employed in diverse social interactions. The review of sociolinguistic and pragmatic accommodation studies in this paper highlights the presence of diverse theories, such as the theory of phonetic convergence, communication accommodation theory (CAT), and politeness theory, each addressing specific facets of accommodation strategies. Notably, CAT emerges as a singular theory that addresses both sociolinguistic and pragmatic accommodation concurrently, distinguishing itself from others that focus exclusively on speech/verbal or nonverbal communication. This paper emphasises the pivotal role of background knowledge in influencing language use and communication strategies, which play an important role in the interpretation of language because understanding an utterance often requires more than knowledge of its grammatical structure and literal meaning. It involves drawing on previously acquired knowledge, personal experiences, cultural practices, and assumptions about the world to infer meanings that may not be explicitly expressed. In pragmatic communication, such knowledge helps interlocutors interpret speakers' intentions, resolve ambiguity, and establish connections between linguistic expressions and the contexts in which they occur.

As Fisher, Frey, and Lapp (2012) assert, background knowledge forms the foundation of a person's existing understanding of a topic, thereby shaping communication strategies. An illustrative scenario involves an invitation from a man to his old-time school friend to attend his housewarming party. The

invited friend leaves an instruction to his undergraduate children, asking them to dress a bit more conservatively than their normal hip-hop mode of dressing, as an accommodating behavioural and nonverbal gesture, as a result of the background knowledge he has of the host's identity as a pastor. In recognising the multifaceted nature of communication events, this paper introduces a Sociopragmatic model of accommodation. This model aims to address the varied communication features present in the analysed novel, *Ụkpana Okpoko Buuru*, which were not entirely encompassed by CAT. The proposed Sociopragmatic accommodation model seeks to bridge gaps in accommodating both sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects in different social interaction phases captured in the novel. By incorporating accommodation strategies such as Bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, convergence, divergence, and positive face, among others, derived from sociolinguistic and pragmatic studies, this model provides a more holistic framework for analysing and understanding diverse communication scenarios.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts an eclectic sociopragmatic framework drawing principally on Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) and politeness theory. CAT, proposed by Howard Giles (1973), provides the concepts of convergence and divergence for examining alignment and social distinction. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework informs the analysis of bald-on-record, positive-politeness, negative-politeness, and off-record strategies. Erving Goffman's (1967) account of face supports the interpretation of efforts to secure approval, preserve autonomy, and manage social identity. These concepts are brought together under a sociopragmatic orientation that considers the social context and the communicative work performed by the event as a whole.

The framework uses the following analytical distinctions. First, convergence is identified where a character's conduct is represented as aligning with another person or group, or with a shared course of action. Second, divergence is identified where a character or group emphasises distance from another group, identity, or position. Third, politeness strategies are identified according to how a communicative act is delivered: bald-on-record communication is relatively direct; positive politeness attends to affiliation and approval; negative politeness attends to autonomy and the avoidance of imposition; and off-record communication conveys meaning indirectly, leaving some interpretive work to the addressee. Fourth, face-related conduct and background-knowledge-based responses are analysed where the passage supports these interpretations.

The proposed sociopragmatic model is integrative rather than a claim that all the categories are theoretically identical. One communication event may contain several layers: a direct utterance may perform a social act, while other participants' seating, silence, or reactions signal alignment or distancing. Accordingly, the unit of analysis is the communication event or relevant excerpt, not only an individual sentence. Each excerpt is considered in relation to its textual context, the participants involved, the communicative action, the strategy or strategies proposed, and the social significance supported by the passage.

Methodology

The data consist of fifteen selected communication events extracted from Tony Ubesie's *Ụkpana Okpoko Buuru* (Ubesie, 1975). The excerpts include dialogue, figurative expressions, narrated behaviour, and collective responses. The selection captures different forms of communicative adjustment represented in the novel.

Each excerpt is presented in Igbo as expressed in the novel, with an English translation. The analysis groups the communicative events into seven categories and interprets each in relation to the local context presented in the text.

The procedure is interpretive rather than quantitative: the study does not measure the frequency of accommodation strategies across the entire novel, nor does it claim that the selected events are statistically representative of all the interactions in the work.

To provide a context for the analysis, a brief synopsis of Ubesie's *Ụkpana Okpoko Buuru* is presented below. It highlights the major events, principal characters, and sociocultural setting of the novel, helping to situate the interactions examined in this study. This background provides a basis for understanding how the characters use language to negotiate relationships, express politeness, and draw on shared knowledge, as well as how convergence and divergence emerge in their interactions.

Synopsis of the Igbo novel *Ụkpana Okpoko Buuru*.

Ụkpana Okpoko Buuru is an Igbo novel by Tony Uchenna Ubesie that explores crime, social responsibility, moral integrity, and the consequences of wrongdoing. The story is set in Ifite-Amaeke, a community divided between people who uphold moral values and a group known as the Odogwu, whose members glorify criminality and present stealing and other unlawful activities as signs of courage and power.

At the center of the narrative is Mazị Obijiọfọ, a respected orator, skilled hunter, and defender of justice. Troubled by the criminal activities of the Odogwu group and the damage they cause to his community's reputation, he approaches the traditional ruler, Obi Udeaja, to condemn their behaviour and urge him to act. Through eloquent speeches, proverbs, and persuasive reasoning, Obijiọfọ challenges the community's distorted understanding of bravery, arguing that criminality should not be celebrated as a sign of strength.

His public criticism, however, attracts the hostility of the criminals, who begin to threaten and plot against him. As their influence grows, the community experiences further insecurity, violence, and political instability. The conflict eventually leads to Obijiọfọ's death at the hands of the Odogwu group, while the wider struggle leaves lasting consequences for the community and his family. His children eventually return to their homeland, which becomes known as Amaeke.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The fifteen excerpts are grouped into seven categories to examine how accommodation and politeness are represented through speech, figurative language, group alignment, social distancing, silence, and coordinated behaviour. Related examples are analysed together, with attention to the contextual evidence supporting each interpretation.

Category 1- Convergence through behavioural alignment and shared action

Excerpt 1

Onye ikwu ya nwụrụ ma o soghị gaa, ọ dị ka ọ bụ ya gburu onye nwụrụ anwụ. O wee bilie gawa na ibe ya na-aga. Ln 19-21; pg 6

'If the one who loses his kin does not attend, it will look like he killed the dead. He got up and went because others were going.'

The character's decision to join the others is interpreted as convergence because his behaviour aligns with the prevailing communal expectation. The adjustment is not primarily phonological or lexical; it is enacted through participation in a socially expected activity. The passage suggests that the character's decision is influenced by the group's conduct and the reputational implications of failing to attend. In this sense, convergence is represented as behavioural alignment and a way to avoid conspicuous separation from the community.

Excerpt 2

Mgbe ha lawara na be ha, otu onye odogwu mechiri ahụ na-eso ha. Jideọfọ bu ụzọ hụ ya, wee gwa nwa nne ya bụ Obiọra. Mgbe ha abụọ batara n'ime ụlọ, ha bidoro mesiwe mkpọtụ ike ka ndị mmanya jisi aka ike. Ln 12-15; pg. 22

'On their way home, a member of the Odogwu group was following them. Jideofo notified his brother Obiora, and immediately after they entered their house, they started making noise and acting drunk.'

In this event, the brothers' coordinated behaviour is interpreted as convergence because their actions are organised around a shared plan. Unlike the alignment with communal convention in Excerpt 1, the convergence here is strategic and collaborative. Their coordinated performance depends on shared knowledge and a common objective. The example broadens the analysis from similarity in speech to

coordinated conduct, although the label 'convergence' is most persuasive when the relationship between the shared plan and the relevant social target is made explicit.

Category 2- Divergence, group identity, and social distance

Excerpt 3

Ha chiri Mazị Okoye eze, sị na ọ dịghị ihe jikọrọ ha na ndị Ifite-Amaeke ọzọ, n'ihi na ndị Ifite-Amaeke bụ ndị 'na-atụ egwu', ma ha bụ ndị 'Odogwu'. Ln 28-30; pg. 9

'They made Mr Okoye king and disassociated themselves from the people of Ifite-Amaeke, calling them cowards while they called themselves the Odogwu group.'

The Odogwu group's explicit disassociation from the people of Ifite-Amaeke constitutes a clear representation of divergence. The contrast between the labels used for the two groups constructs an identity boundary and presents the Odogwu group as distinct from those it characterises as cowardly. The passage illustrates that divergence may be accomplished through explicit verbal positioning as well as through differences in speech style. It also demonstrates that divergence can intensify social division rather than facilitate mutual understanding.

Excerpt 4

Obodo ebidola gbajuwe maka ichi Mazị Ezekwe 'Ekwueme'. Ndị odogwu bịa, ha anọrọ otu akụkụ. Ndị ọzọ bịa, ha anọrọ n'akụkụ ebe Mazị Obijiọfọ nọ. Ln 17-19; pg. 12

'The village was getting full because of the Ekwueme title to be bestowed on Mr Ezekwe. The Odogwu group were seated at one corner, while the other villagers were seated at the same corner as Mr Obijiofo.'

The seating arrangement at the event suggests how the characters position themselves in relation to one another. The villagers who sit with Obijiofo appear to identify themselves with him, as sitting together may express solidarity and a sense of belonging. Their choice of seating can therefore be understood as a form of convergence, since it brings them together socially and visibly associates them with Obijiofo. The Odogwu group, however, sits apart from them, creating a clear distinction between the two groups. This separation can be interpreted as divergence, as it sets the Odogwu group apart from Obijiofo and the villagers around him.

The arrangement is significant because it shows how convergence and divergence can occur at the same time. While the villagers' decision to sit with Obijiofo suggests an association with him, the Odogwu group's separate seating distinguishes it from that association. In this way, the characters' positions help to reveal the social relationships and divisions present at the event. Although the seating arrangement does not, on its own, establish the characters' intentions, it becomes meaningful when considered alongside the wider context of the novel and the relationships among the groups.

Excerpt 5

Mgbe ọ batara kụọ aka, Mazị Obijiọfọ turu ya 'Ekwueme'. Ọ za ya sị ya etukwala ya oke aha ahụ na-egbu nwa nkịta. Ln 23-25; pg. 15

'When he entered and knocked, Mr Obijiofo hailed him 'Ekwueme'. He responded and asked Mr Obijiofo to desist from calling him that controversial name.'

The addressee's rejection of the name 'Ekwueme' is interpreted as divergence because it signals a wish to distance himself from the identity or association carried by the label. The response shows that forms of address are not merely referential: they may invoke social affiliations and public evaluations. Refusing a name can therefore function as a stance toward the group with which that name is associated. This interpretation is context-dependent and is supported in the novel by the character's relationship to the Odogwu group.

Excerpt 6

Ihe m ji bịawa be gị bụ na nna anyị ha na-anụkarị ihe agadi na-ekwu, karịa nke ndị ọzọ. Rịọrọ m ha arịrịọ, si ha na m esila n'ọhịa pụta sowe ụzọ. Ln 8-10; pg. 16

'I came to your house because our forefathers grant audience to the elderly more than anyone else. Please, beg them, tell them I have left the wrong path and joined the right path.'

The speaker declares a change of direction and asks for the elders' intervention. This is classified as divergence from a previous course of action. More precisely, the passage represents a repositioning: the speaker explicitly distances himself from past conduct and expresses a desire to align with a socially approved path. The excerpt thus suggests that divergence and convergence may be relational rather than absolute; the same act can mark separation from one identity or behaviour while preparing for affiliation with another.

Category 3- Direct and the bald-on-record strategy

Excerpt 7

Ebe a kọrọ akụkọ ịkpa arụ, a kpọwa ndị be anyị. Ugo tụpụ abụba ya, ebee ka mma ya dị? Ọ gbara nkịtị ka ọ mara ihe bụ uche ndị obodo. Ụfọdụ na-ama ọsọ, ụfọdụ na-atanwụ ihu ha; ụfọdụ na-ele nwunye Mazị Okoli anya, ma mmadụ dị ka Mazị Obijiọfọ nọ otu ebe, na-agbọ ka mmiri ọkụ. Ln. 3-8; pg.6

'Whenever they mention evil deeds, our people will be called. If an eagle pulls its feather, what is left of its beauty? He kept quiet to figure out the thoughts of the villagers. Some were hissing, some were frowning, some were looking at Mr Okoli's wife, but someone like Mr Obijiofo was seated at a place, boiling like hot water.'

The source analysis identifies a direct, bald-on-record element in the denunciation of the group's reputation and divergence in the villagers' reactions. The excerpt contains both verbal evaluation and non-verbal responses, including silence, hissing, frowning, and visible anger. These reactions contribute to the social meaning of the event by displaying disapproval and differentiating the participants' positions. This passage falls well within this group because it shows how one event can combine direct language with embodied reactions.

Excerpt 8

Echichi a a na-akpọ 'Ekwueme' bụ oke ihe, ma ihe anyị na-atụ anya n'aka onye chiri echichi a bụ ka ọ na-ekwu, na-emekwa ezi ihe, ka ọ ga-abụ anyị gaa obodo ọzọ anyị ejiri onye ahụ na-etu ọnụ. Ln 31-34; pg. 13

'The Ekwueme title is a great responsibility, but the title holder is expected to be a straightforward person, someone we can be proud of outside our community.'

The speaker states the expectations associated with the title directly. The passage can be read as bald-on-record communication because the standards for the title holder are expressed plainly rather than through extensive mitigation. Its function is not simply to transmit information: it publicly articulates the moral and social responsibilities attached to a prestigious position. The example illustrates how directness may serve an interactional purpose when expectations need to be made explicit.

Category 4- Indirect, figurative language, and off-record communication

Excerpt 9

A gwa ntị ma ọ nụghị, e bere isi, ntị esowe ya maka na ụkpana okpoko buuru, ntị chiri ya.

Ln 16 ;pg.6

'If the ear refuses to heed the warning, then once the head is cut off, the ear will go with it because a grasshopper captured by the noisy bird is a deaf one.'

The proverb conveys a warning through figurative rather than fully explicit language. The hearer must infer the intended lesson from the image of an ear that fails to heed a warning and suffers the consequences. The strategy is therefore interpreted as off-record or indirect communication. Its force depends on shared knowledge of proverbial expression and on the context that makes the warning relevant. The example also illustrates why literal translation alone may not fully capture the pragmatic work of an Igbo proverb.

Excerpt 10

Mgbe ha tachara ọjị, Mazị Obijiọfọ jụrụ ya sị 'Nke a ị bịara ụdị ije a na be m, ị chọrọ ịlụ ada m?' Mmadụ nile chịrị ọchị n'ihi na Mazị Obijiọfọ amụtaghị nwa nwanyị. Ln 29-32; pg.15

'After eating the kola nut, Mr Obijiọfọ asked, This one, you came to my home in this manner; do you want to marry my daughter? Everyone laughed, knowing that Mr Obijiofo does not have a daughter.'

The question is not intended as a straightforward request for information because the narrative explicitly notes that the speaker has no daughter. Its humorous effect arises from the discrepancy between the literal question and the shared knowledge of the participants. The question can thus be read as indirect, playful communication that opens space for the addressee to infer a possible underlying purpose without the speaker stating it directly. The laughter indicates that the audience recognises the incongruity. This example makes background knowledge central to the interpretation of the strategy.

Excerpt 11

A mara ụta a ga-ata nkịta riri akwa ọkụkọ sị tawa ndị nwe ya ma na nkịta ha na-eri akwa ọkụkọ ma hapụ ya, ọ na-aga na mpio ọkụkọ. Ln 13-15; pg. 18

'Any blame due to the dog that ate an egg should be apportioned to the owners of the dog who are aware that it eats eggs and left it to stray.'

The speaker uses a figurative comparison to communicate a judgment about responsibility. Rather than directly naming the person or people being criticised, the speaker frames the point through the relationship between a dog, its behaviour, and its owners. This supports an off-record interpretation because the audience must map the figurative scenario onto the social issue under discussion. The strategy can allow criticism to be delivered without an explicit accusation, although the exact target and face implications depend on the surrounding context.

Category 5- Positive politeness, face, and relationship management

Excerpt 12

Mazị Obijiọfọ wee bilie, legharịa anya, hapụ ọfọ a sị ya gọwa, bido kwuwe okwu. Ln 25-26; pg.13

'Mr Obijiọfọ stood, looked around, and started advising instead of saying the prayer he had been instructed to conduct.'

The expression here is interpreted as positive politeness because the speaker chose a different mode of address, offering advice rather than directly confronting the group through *ịgọ ọfọ*. The event indicates a shift from the expected ritual speech act to a different form of address. The proposed politeness interpretation depends on whether the advice is framed in a way that preserves rapport or avoids embarrassing the audience. The excerpt can therefore be interpreted as a strategic attempt to preach reasoning through the use of reflective and conciliatory language, which encourages those present to reconsider their actions, without directly challenging the expectations of the participants, especially the bad eggs.

Excerpt 13

Okwu ya metụrụ mmadụ nile n'obi. Ha wee kwe ya n'aka, kelee ya ekele maka ndụ ọhụrụ o kweere na ya ga-ebido biwe. Ln 11-12; pg. 16

'His words touched them; they shook his hands and thanked him for agreeing to turn a new leaf.'

This event is interpreted in terms of positive face: the character's words lead to acceptance and approval from others. The handshake and expressions of thanks represent recognition of the character's stated intention to begin a new life. Rather than treating face as an isolated strategy, the passage demonstrates how a person's bid for social acceptance may be ratified by the responses of others. The sequence thus links a verbal commitment, communal evaluation, and an affiliative response.

Category 6- Autonomy, silence, and negative-face concerns

Excerpt 14

Mgbe ha nọ n'ụzọ, Mazị Obijiọfọ wepụtara ukpoo e ji-egbu azụ, tinye na mmiri. Jideọfọ chọrọ ka ọ jụọ ya ihe nke a ọ na-eme, ma ọ tụgharịrị, lee Jideọfọ anya n'ihu... Jideọfọ mechie ọnụ.

Ln 3-6; pg. 29

'On their way, Mr Obijiofo brought a fishing hook and put it into the river. As Jideofo wanted to ask what he was doing, he turned and looked Jideofo in the face … Jideofo closed his mouth.'

The expression here classifies the event as a negative-face strategy because the older (*Mazị Obijiọfọ)* or more authoritative character's look prevents further questioning, which *Jideọfọ* understood and kept quiet as a way of respecting *Mazị Obijiọfọ's* desire to have freedom of action, maintain independence, and avoid being imposed upon. The observed outcome is that Jideọfọ remains silent, an act analysed as a non-verbal means of regulating participation and limiting a possible imposition.

Category 7- Background knowledge and collective response

Excerpt 15

Mgbe a nọrọ ọtụtụ oge, opi ike dara ugbo anọ, mmadụ nile wee mechie ọnụ. Ln 4; pg.5

'After a long while, the trumpet sounded four times, and everybody kept quiet.'

The collective silence following the trumpet signal is interpreted as a response based on shared background knowledge. The participants appear to recognise the signal and adjust their conduct without needing an explicit verbal instruction. This example is important to the sociopragmatic model because it shows that accommodation can be prompted by a culturally or socially recognisable cue. The behaviour is collective and context-dependent; it is therefore more appropriately understood as a form of coordinated contextual adjustment informed by shared knowledge.

Summary of the analytical patterns

Across the selected events, accommodation is represented through several connected processes. Convergence appears in behavioural alignment and coordinated action; divergence appears in group distancing, the rejection of a socially marked label, and the reorientation away from a former course of conduct. Directness and indirectness are represented through plain statements, proverbs, figurative comparisons, and humorous questions. Face-related processes appear in bids for approval, the management of possible offence, and the regulation of participation through non-verbal conduct. Finally, the trumpet signal illustrates how shared knowledge can coordinate behaviour without an explicit instruction.

The analysis also demonstrates that a single event may involve multiple interpretive layers. In Excerpt 7, for example, direct verbal evaluation co-occurs with visible reactions that signal disapproval. In Excerpt 4, alignment with one participant is accompanied by distance from another group. Such cases support an integrative approach, provided that each category is justified by the evidence and that distinctions between accommodation, politeness, face management, and broader social action are maintained.

Discussion of findings

1. The analysis supports the central proposition that accommodation in the novel cannot be reduced to adjustments in accent, dialect, or speech style. The selected events represent communicative adjustment through speech, figurative language, social positioning, coordinated conduct, silence, and responses to ritual cues. This finding extends the analytical focus from linguistic form to the wider interactional event. It does not mean that all conduct in a social setting should automatically be classified as accommodation; rather, non-verbal or behavioural acts become relevant where the text shows that they respond to interlocutors, shared expectations, or a communicative situation.
2. A second pattern is the co-occurrence of strategies. Convergence and divergence can operate together when a character aligns with one person or group while distancing from another. Likewise, a direct utterance can occur alongside non-verbal signs of disapproval, and an indirect expression can depend on shared cultural knowledge for its interpretation. This complexity makes the communication event a useful unit of analysis, as it enables the researcher to consider how verbal and non-verbal elements work together rather than forcing each excerpt into a single category.

3. The role of background knowledge is especially evident in the proverbial and ritual examples. In Excerpts 9 and 11, the intended message is mediated by figurative language; the audience must infer the social lesson from the image presented. In Excerpt 10, the humour depends on knowledge that the speaker has no daughter. In Excerpt 15, the communal response to the trumpet assumes recognition of the signal's significance. These cases suggest that accommodation and interpretation are situated within a shared social world. Background knowledge does not simply provide extra information; it helps participants recognise what a communicative act is doing in a particular setting.

4. The analysis reveals the usefulness of combining different theoretical approaches. Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) helps explain how speakers adjust their language or behaviour to align with others or maintain differences, while politeness theory sheds light on how they manage face and the degree of directness in interaction. A sociopragmatic perspective further connects these processes to the social expectations and cultural conventions reflected in the novel. However, these concepts should not be treated as interchangeable. Positive face, for instance, concerns a person's desire for acceptance and appreciation; it is not an accommodation strategy in the same way as convergence. Similarly, silence or seating arrangements do not, on their own, indicate convergence or divergence. Each interpretation must therefore be supported by specific evidence from the interaction, contextual backing, and a clear explanation of how that evidence justifies the classification, as evident from the analysis.
5. Finally, the literary nature of the data is both a strength and a limitation. The novel allows close examination of socially meaningful exchanges and narrative representations of cultural

life. At the same time, the events are mediated by the author and cannot be treated as direct recordings of spontaneous speech. The paper's contribution is consequently best framed as a sociopragmatic account of accommodation as represented in an Igbo literary text. Further work could apply the model to naturally occurring interactions or to other literary texts to examine its explanatory reach.

Conclusion

This paper has examined accommodation strategies in Tony Ubesie's *Ụkpana Okpoko Buuru* through an integrative sociopragmatic approach. Analysis of fifteen selected communication events suggests that accommodation in the novel is represented through linguistic choices, indirect and figurative expressions, group alignment and distancing, face-related conduct, coordinated behaviour, and responses informed by shared background knowledge. The events also indicate that more than one strategy or interactional process may be relevant to a single communicative episode.

The paper's principal contribution is its analysis of accommodation as a feature of the wider communicative event rather than limiting it to speech-style matching. Bringing CAT and politeness theory into a sociopragmatic framework makes it possible to consider how social identity, directness, face concerns, cultural expectations, and contextual knowledge shape the interpretation of characters' actions. The analysis nevertheless emphasises the need to distinguish between theoretically separate categories and to ground each interpretation in textual evidence.

The study is limited by its reliance on selected passages from a single literary text and by the interpretive nature of the classifications. The proposed model should therefore be treated as a framework for further testing rather than as an exhaustive account of accommodation. Future research could apply it to additional Igbo literary works or naturally occurring interaction, with particular attention to how cultural knowledge and non-verbal conduct contribute to accommodation. Such research would help clarify the scope of sociopragmatic accommodation and its value for the study of language, identity, and social relationships.

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