

Politeness Strategies and Power Dynamics in Interactions Between Characters in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa*

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Abstract

This study examines the portrayal of politeness strategies, specifically positive, negative, and off-record politeness, in Ama Ata Aidoo's play, *Anowa*. The study aims to bridge the gap in existing literature by exploring how linguistic strategies are utilized to explore power dynamics, gender roles, and societal expectations within African communities depicted in the play. Through a qualitative analysis of selected excerpts, the study employs a thematic approach to identify instances of positive, negative, and off-record politeness employed by characters and the narrator. Findings reveal a complex relationship of politeness strategies, with characters employing various linguistic techniques to assert authority, reinforce traditional gender norms, and negotiate interpersonal relationships. Positive politeness strategies, such as expressions of camaraderie and solidarity, are often used to establish rapport and build connections between characters. Conversely, negative politeness strategies, characterized by deference and indirectness, are employed to mitigate threats to face and autonomy. Off-record politeness allows characters to convey their intentions indirectly, providing a means to explore sensitive topics or assert power subtly. The study emphasises the importance of linguistic strategies in shaping interpersonal interactions and social hierarchies within the cultural context depicted in *Anowa*, shedding light on power dynamics and gender relations in postcolonial African society.

Key words: Politeness strategies; Ama Ata Aidoo; *Anowa*; Power dynamics; Gender roles

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INTRODUCTION

Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* is a compelling tragedy that explores the dynamics of love, power, and societal expectations within a Ghanaian community during the colonial era. The play follows the tumultuous relationship between Anowa, a headstrong and independent young woman, and Kofi Ako, a wealthy but morally ambiguous man. Despite warnings from the community and Anowa's mother, Badua, the couple defies traditional norms and marries against the backdrop of societal upheaval and exploitation by European colonizers. As their relationship deteriorates due to Kofi Ako's greed and Anowa's refusal to conform to gender roles, tragedy unfolds, ultimately leading to their demise. Through vivid characters and rich dialogue, Aidoo explores themes of gender inequality, the clash between tradition and modernity, and the consequences of colonialism on African societies. *Anowa* challenges conventional notions of love and marriage while shedding light on the struggles faced by women in patriarchal societies, making it a poignant and thought-provoking work of literature.

Studying politeness strategies in literature is important as it provides valuable insights into the realities of human interaction, social dynamics, and cultural norms depicted within fictional narratives (Jegede, 2020a, 2020b). Politeness strategies serve as linguistic tools used by characters to negotiate power relationships, explore social hierarchies, and maintain interpersonal harmony. By analyzing how characters employ politeness strategies such as positive politeness, negative politeness,

and off-record politeness, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the underlying social, political, and cultural contexts shaping the narrative. Furthermore, studying politeness in literature allows for the exploration of complex themes such as gender roles, identity formation, and societal expectations. Through close examination of characters' speech acts and interactions, readers can uncover subtle nuances and power dynamics that reflect broader social realities. Additionally, analyzing politeness strategies in literature provides a lens through which to examine the author's intentions, narrative techniques, and thematic concerns. Ultimately, studying politeness in literature enriches our understanding of human behaviour, societal norms, and the dynamics of interpersonal relationships depicted in fictional works, offering valuable insights into the human condition across different cultural and historical contexts.

The existing literature on Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* offers valuable insights into various aspects of the play, including its exploration of femininity, cultural consciousness, and postcolonial themes. However, there is a noticeable gap in the scholarship concerning the analysis of politeness strategies employed within the text. While studies such as Djimet and Koussouhon (2020) and Appiah et al. (2021) provide valuable examinations of gender dynamics and cultural themes in *Anowa*, they do not specifically explore the use of politeness strategies by characters. Similarly, works like Sanka et al. (2013) and Rapoo (2020) offer critiques of the cultural context and mobility themes in the play but do not address the role of politeness in shaping interpersonal relationships and power dynamics. Therefore, there is a clear need for deeper exploration of politeness strategies within the context of *Anowa* to provide a comprehensive understanding of the social interactions depicted in the play.

Furthermore, the gap in literature extends to the broader scope of politeness in African literature. While studies on African literature often focus on themes such as identity, colonialism, and cultural heritage, the analysis of politeness strategies remains relatively understudied (Jegade, 2020a; Jegede, 2024; Odamtten, 2004, Owusu et al., 2019). Although scholars like Abu-Mahfouz (2021) and Rouabhi (2022) offer insights into psychological trauma and postcolonial readings of African texts, the examination of politeness as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon is largely overlooked. Therefore, there is a pressing need for research that specifically investigates the use of politeness in African literature, including its role in shaping social interactions, negotiating power dynamics, and reflecting cultural norms and values. Such studies would contribute to an understanding of African literary texts and their portrayal of interpersonal relationships within diverse cultural contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language and the Construction of Gender and Power Dynamics

In "The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo: Polylectics and Reading Against Neocolonialism" by Odamtten (2004), language and gender issues are explored within the context of Aidoo's literary works. Aidoo's writing often addresses gender dynamics and the role of language in perpetuating or challenging patriarchal norms. Through her polylectic style, which incorporates multiple linguistic registers and dialects, Aidoo highlights the diversity of language and its implications for gender representation and power dynamics. Similarly, in "Perceptions of Some Africans about Post-Colonialism as Depicted in Jomo Kenyatta's 'The Gentlemen of the Jungle,'" Owusu et al. (2019) analyze how language is employed to construct gender roles and societal expectations within postcolonial African contexts. Kenyatta's allegorical tale emphasises the intersections of language, power, and gender, illustrating how colonial legacies continue to influence perceptions of masculinity and femininity in African societies. Additionally, Kuenyehia (2001) explores the concept of legal literacy and its relationship to gender empowerment, highlighting how language is used within legal frameworks to either uphold or challenge gender inequalities. Through an analysis of legal discourse, Kuenyehia elucidates the ways in which language can be harnessed as a tool for promoting gender justice and advancing women's rights. Collectively, these studies shed light on the complex relationship between language and gender issues within postcolonial African contexts, emphasizing the importance of linguistic representation and empowerment in challenging patriarchal structures and fostering gender equality.

Language and power dynamics are linked, shaping social interactions, hierarchies, and relationships within societies (Jegade & Adesina, 2020). Frantz Fanon's works, as explored by Bin-Kapela (2022), explore the symbolism of violence as a means of challenging oppressive power structures. Language, in this context, serves as a tool for resistance, allowing marginalized individuals to assert their agency and challenge dominant narratives. Similarly, in Ama Ata Aidoo's play *Anowa*, language plays a central role in negotiating power dynamics within a Ghanaian community during the colonial era. Through dialogue and speech acts, characters assert their authority, explore societal expectations, and negotiate their identities in a complex web of power relations (Aidoo, 2001). Aidoo's portrayal of language reflects the multifaceted nature of power dynamics, illustrating how language can be wielded to reinforce existing power structures or subvert them.

Trauma theory, as examined by Visser (2011), offers insights into the ways in which language can be used

to articulate and process experiences of trauma within postcolonial contexts. Language becomes a medium through which individuals can confront and make sense of their traumatic pasts, reclaiming their voices and asserting their agency. In the context of postcolonial literary studies, trauma theory provides a framework for analyzing how language shapes narratives of suffering, resilience, and healing. Ayi Kwei Armah's novel "Fragments," as analyzed by Okleme (2005), exemplifies how language can be employed to depict the psychological and emotional impact of colonialism on individuals and communities. Through linguistic strategies such as metaphor, imagery, and symbolism, Armah's novel highlights the enduring legacy of colonial trauma and the ongoing struggle for liberation and self-determination.

Furthermore, language plays a crucial role in shaping gender dynamics and empowering marginalized groups within society. Nketiah-Kyeremeh's (2002) study on the contribution of the GHACOE Women's Ministry to the empowerment of Ghanaian women illustrates how language can be mobilized to challenge patriarchal norms and promote gender equality. Through educational initiatives and advocacy efforts, the Women's Ministry empowers women to assert their rights, articulate their needs, and participate in decision-making processes. Language, in this context, becomes a tool for resistance and social change, enabling women to challenge oppressive power structures and assert their agency in the public sphere. Thus, these studies demonstrate the impact of language on power dynamics within diverse social, cultural, and historical contexts, underscoring the transformative potential of language in shaping social justice, equity, and liberation.

REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

In "Exploring Femininity in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* through an Interpersonal Analysis," Djimet and Koussouhon (2020) explore the portrayal of femininity in Aidoo's play, shedding light on how gender roles and societal expectations are negotiated through interpersonal interactions. This study offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of gender representation in *Anowa*, complementing the broader discussion on politeness and power dynamics within the text. Similarly, Appiah et al. (2021) focus on the depiction of the illiterate African woman in *Anowa*, highlighting the intersections of gender, education, and social status within the narrative.

Sanka et al. (2013) provide a critique of Ama Ata Aidoo's portrayal of Akan culture in *Anowa*, offering a cultural perspective that enriches our understanding of the socio-cultural context in which the play is situated. Additionally, studies such as Rapoo's (2020) examination of mobility and cultural consciousness, as well as Abu-Mahfouz's (2021) exploration of psychological trauma

in *Anowa*, contribute to a holistic understanding of the themes and motifs present in the play. Furthermore, Rouabhi (2022) offers a postcolonial reading of *Anowa*, contextualizing the narrative within broader discussions of colonialism and its impact on African societies. Together, these studies provide valuable insights into different aspects of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* and its portrayal of societal dynamics, cultural themes, and gender roles.

Additionally, in the postcolonial African context, gender roles and representations have been subject to critical examination in literature, as evidenced by the studies reviewed. Ibeku (2015) explores Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* through the lens of feminism, highlighting the complex relationship between patriarchy, colonial legacies, and women's agency in contemporary Africa. Okafor (2002) explores the concept of Beauvoirism in African literature, examining how selected women's actions and writings challenge traditional gender norms and contribute to the feminist discourse in Africa. Sylvester (2009) focuses on Francophone African women's writing, analyzing how masculinity is portrayed through a female lens, offering insights into the construction and deconstruction of gender identities in postcolonial African societies. Strong-Leek (2011) critically engages with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* from a feminist perspective, highlighting the ways in which the novel both reinforces and subverts patriarchal structures, and the implications of this for gender roles in African literature. Collectively, these studies contribute to an understanding of gender dynamics in postcolonial African literature, emphasizing the diverse ways in which writers explore and challenge traditional gender roles and expectations in the context of cultural, social, and historical dynamics.

By drawing on Brown and Levinson's framework of politeness, this study aims to complement the existing scholarship by focusing specifically on the analysis of politeness strategies employed by characters in *Anowa*. Djimet and Koussouhon's exploration of femininity, along with Appiah et al.'s examination of the illiterate African woman, offer important context for understanding the gender dynamics within the play, which can be further elucidated through an analysis of politeness strategies. Similarly, Sanka et al.'s critique of Akan culture and Rapoo's examination of mobility and cultural consciousness provide additional layers of cultural context that may influence the use of politeness in the narrative. Abu-Mahfouz's exploration of psychological trauma and Rouabhi's postcolonial reading offer perspectives on the broader socio-political themes present in *Anowa*, which may intersect with the dynamics of politeness and power within the text. By synthesizing these studies with a focus on politeness, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of social interactions and power dynamics depicted in Aidoo's play.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POLITENESS THEORY

Politeness principles, as proposed by sociolinguists Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson in their seminal work "Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage" (1978), outline the ways in which individuals use language to maintain social harmony and mitigate potential face-threatening acts during communication. These principles are rooted in the notion of "face," which refers to an individual's public self-image or social identity that they seek to maintain during interactions. Face represents one's desired presentation of oneself to others, encompassing aspects of dignity, self-esteem, and social status. Face can be divided into two main components: positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to the desire for approval, inclusion, and solidarity, while negative face pertains to the desire for autonomy, freedom, and avoidance of imposition. Individuals engage in facework, or the strategic management of face, to explore social interactions and preserve their desired self-image while interacting with others. Facework involves employing politeness strategies, managing conflicts, and negotiating social norms to maintain harmony and respect within interpersonal relationships.

Brown and Levinson proposed two main politeness principles, which are positive politeness and negative politeness. On the one hand, positive politeness involves strategies aimed at enhancing the hearer's positive face, or desire for approval and solidarity. This can be achieved through acts such as offering compliments, expressing solidarity, or showing empathy. Positive politeness strategies seek to establish rapport and build a sense of camaraderie between interlocutors, thereby fostering positive social interactions. On the other hand, negative politeness focuses on mitigating the threat to the hearer's negative face, or desire for freedom of action and autonomy. Negative politeness strategies aim to minimize impositions on the hearer's autonomy or self-image by employing deference, hedging, or indirectness. These strategies acknowledge the hearer's right to choose and maintain control over their own actions, thereby preserving their sense of dignity and autonomy.

Both positive and negative politeness principles are crucial for effective communication, as they help explore social interactions and maintain interpersonal relationships. By understanding and employing politeness strategies appropriately, individuals can explore potentially delicate situations with tact and sensitivity, fostering harmonious communication and mutual respect. Politeness principles are not static; they vary across cultures and contexts, reflecting the diverse ways in which individuals negotiate social norms and interpersonal relationships through language.

Brown and Levinson also distinguish between off-record politeness and bald-on-record politeness. To them, off-record politeness, also known as indirect politeness or negative politeness, is a linguistic strategy employed by speakers to convey their intentions or desires indirectly, thereby minimizing potential threats to the hearer's face or sense of autonomy. This type of politeness involves hinting at a request or suggestion rather than making a direct statement, allowing the hearer the freedom to comply or refuse without feeling pressured. Examples of off-record politeness include using hedging phrases ("I was wondering if..."), making suggestions rather than giving orders ("It might be a good idea to..."), and employing questions or hints to convey a request ("Do you think you could...?").

Bald-on-record politeness is a straightforward and direct approach to communication where the speaker makes a request, statement, or assertion without using softening language or hedging. In contrast to indirect or off-record politeness strategies, which aim to minimize potential threats to the hearer's face or autonomy, bald-on-record politeness prioritizes clarity and efficiency in communication. Examples of bald-on-record utterances include direct requests ("Pass the salt, please"), commands ("Close the door"), or assertions ("I need your help with this"). While bald-on-record politeness may come across as more assertive or abrupt compared to other politeness strategies, it is appropriate in contexts where there is a clear expectation for directness, such as in emergency situations, authoritative settings, or when interacting with close acquaintances who share a high degree of familiarity and informality. However, the effectiveness of bald-on-record politeness may vary depending on cultural norms, social hierarchies, and the nature of the relationship between interlocutors.

The study focuses on positive, negative, and off-record politeness strategies because they are fundamental aspects of interpersonal communication, particularly in the context of navigating social interactions and maintaining relationships while minimizing potential face-threatening acts. Positive politeness strategies, such as expressions of solidarity and compliments, aim to enhance the hearer's positive face and foster rapport. Negative politeness strategies, which involve deference and indirectness, seek to mitigate threats to the hearer's negative face by respecting their autonomy and minimizing imposition. Off-record politeness, on the other hand, allows speakers to convey their intentions indirectly, offering the hearer the freedom to comply or refuse without feeling pressured. By examining how these politeness strategies are employed in communication, the study aims to gain insights into the intricate dynamics of power, gender, and social norms depicted in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa*, contributing to a deeper understanding of interpersonal relationships and societal structures within African communities.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study involves a qualitative research design aimed at analyzing excerpts from Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* to explore power dynamics and gender roles within African society. Data collection will involve selecting relevant excerpts from the play that depict interactions between characters and societal norms surrounding femininity, submission, and the role of women. These excerpts will be examined closely to identify instances of linguistic strategies such as positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies used by characters and the narrator to convey and reinforce cultural norms. Analysis will entail a thematic approach, wherein patterns and themes related to power dynamics and gender roles will be identified and discussed. Through this methodology, the study aims to provide insights into the dynamics of gender dynamics and cultural expectations depicted in *Anowa*, contributing to a deeper understanding of postcolonial African society and its portrayal in literature.

RESULTS

These results highlight how different politeness strategies and off-record strategies are employed by characters in "Aidoos Anowa" to communicate and maintain social norms and power dynamics within the African society depicted in the play.

Positive Politeness

Excerpt 1

"Anowa, stop behaving like a child! You are a woman now. You need to learn to behave like one." - Said by Kofi A, Act 1, Page 5.

In the excerpt, Kofi A utilizes positive politeness by appealing to Anowa's sense of identity as a woman and suggesting that she should conform to societal expectations of adult behaviour. By addressing her directly and acknowledging her womanhood, Kofi A attempts to affirm Anowa's status while also exerting his authority over her. The use of the imperative "stop" and the directive "you need to learn" emphasizes Kofi A's attempt to guide Anowa's behaviour in accordance with his own perception of how a woman should behave. Through this language, Kofi A subtly reinforces the power dynamic between them, positioning himself as a figure of authority whose instructions Anowa is expected to follow. Thus, positive politeness serves as a strategic tool for Kofi A to assert his dominance over Anowa while simultaneously framing his directive as a form of social guidance.

Excerpt 2

"Anowa, why are you so stubborn? Can't you see that your behaviour brings shame upon your family?" - Said by Badua, Act 1, Page 39.

In the excerpt, Badua employs positive politeness by directly addressing Anowa and expressing concern about her behaviour. By questioning her stubbornness and implying that it reflects negatively on their family, Badua attempts to appeal to Anowa's sense of familial duty and social responsibility. The use of the rhetorical question "Can't you see" suggests that Badua assumes Anowa is unaware of the consequences of her actions, positioning himself as someone who has insight into what is best for their family. Through this language, Badua subtly reinforces his authority over Anowa, positioning himself as a figure of guidance and wisdom whose advice she should heed. Thus, positive politeness serves as a strategic tool for Badua to assert his influence over Anowa while also framing his criticism as a form of concern for their family's reputation.

Excerpt 3

"Anowa, you are not like other women. You are too independent, too headstrong." - Said by Kofi A, Act 1, Page 47.

In the excerpt, Kofi A utilizes positive politeness by acknowledging Anowa's uniqueness and individuality. By addressing her directly and highlighting her independence and headstrong nature, Kofi A attempts to flatter Anowa and differentiate her from societal norms regarding women's behaviour. The use of the comparative "not like other women" suggests that Kofi A sees Anowa as exceptional, which could be interpreted as a form of admiration or praise. Through this language, Kofi A subtly reinforces his authority over Anowa by positioning himself as someone who recognizes and appreciates her qualities. By appealing to Anowa's sense of self-worth and individuality, Kofi A attempts to establish a rapport with her and exert his influence over her decisions and actions. Thus, positive politeness serves as a strategic tool for Kofi A to assert his dominance over Anowa while simultaneously flattering her and fostering a sense of connection between them.

Excerpt 4

"Anowa, why do you insist on defying tradition? Can't you see the consequences of your actions?" - Said by Badua, Act 1, Page 71.

In the excerpt, Badua employs positive politeness by addressing Anowa directly and expressing concern about her actions in relation to tradition. By questioning her defiance and implying that it may lead to negative consequences, Badua attempts to appeal to Anowa's sense of responsibility and awareness of societal norms. The use of the rhetorical question "Can't you see" suggests that Badua assumes Anowa may not fully grasp the implications of her actions, positioning himself as someone with insight into the potential outcomes. Through this language, Badua subtly reinforces his authority over Anowa, positioning himself as a figure of guidance and

wisdom whose advice she should heed. Thus, positive politeness serves as a strategic tool for Badua to assert his influence over Anowa while also framing his criticism as a form of concern for her well-being and adherence to tradition.

Excerpt 5

"Anowa, remember your place. You are just a woman, and women have no power in our society." - Said by Badua, Act 1, Page 103.

In the excerpt, Badua utilizes positive politeness by directly addressing Anowa and reminding her of societal expectations regarding gender roles. By asserting that women have no power in their society and implying that Anowa's actions may be exceeding her rightful place, Badua attempts to assert his authority over her. The use of the imperative "remember" suggests that Badua expects Anowa to adhere to these expectations, positioning himself as someone who has the authority to dictate her behaviour. Through this language, Badua subtly reinforces the power dynamic between them, positioning himself as a figure of dominance and control. Thus, positive politeness serves as a strategic tool for Badua to assert his influence over Anowa while simultaneously reminding her of her subordinate position within their society.

Negative Politeness

Excerpt 1

"Anowa, don't you see? As a woman, your destiny is tied to that of your husband. You must follow him wherever he goes." - Said by Badua, Act 1, Page 22.

In the excerpt, Badua employs negative politeness by indirectly addressing Anowa's behaviour and emphasizing societal expectations regarding women's roles. By framing his statement as a question ("don't you see?"), Badua attempts to express concern about Anowa's understanding of her place in society, positioning himself as someone who is offering guidance rather than giving a direct order. The use of the conditional "you must" suggests that Badua is appealing to Anowa's sense of obligation to conform to these expectations, rather than outright commanding her. Through this language, Badua subtly reinforces the power dynamic between them, positioning himself as a figure of authority whose advice Anowa is expected to heed. Thus, negative politeness serves as a strategic tool for Badua to assert his influence over Anowa while maintaining a veneer of politeness and concern for her well-being.

Excerpt 2

"Anowa, you cannot defy tradition. You must accept your role as a wife and conform to societal expectations." - Said by Kofi A, Act 1, Page 31.

In the excerpt, Kofi A employs negative politeness by indirectly addressing Anowa's actions and emphasizing the importance of tradition and societal norms. By framing his statement as a declaration of what Anowa cannot

do, Kofi A attempts to express the severity of deviating from established customs without directly ordering her. The use of the modal verb "must" suggests that Kofi A is appealing to Anowa's sense of obligation to adhere to these expectations rather than issuing a direct command. Through this language, Kofi A subtly reinforces his authority over Anowa, positioning himself as someone who dictates the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. By framing his statement in terms of societal expectations rather than his personal preferences, Kofi A attempts to maintain a semblance of politeness while still asserting his influence over Anowa's actions. Thus, negative politeness serves as a strategic tool for Kofi A to assert his dominance over Anowa while preserving the appearance of respect for tradition and societal norms.

Excerpt 3

"Anowa, do not speak out of turn. A woman's voice should be soft and gentle, not loud and defiant." - Said by Kofi A, Act 1, Page 63.

In the excerpt, Kofi A employs negative politeness by indirectly instructing Anowa on how she should behave based on societal expectations of gender roles. By framing his statement as a directive to avoid speaking "out of turn," Kofi A attempts to assert control over Anowa's speech without directly commanding her. The use of the imperative "do not" implies that Kofi A expects Anowa to conform to these expectations, appealing to her sense of obedience to societal norms. Through this language, Kofi A subtly reinforces his authority over Anowa, positioning himself as someone who dictates the appropriate mannerisms for women. By framing his statement in terms of how a woman's voice "should" be, Kofi A attempts to guide Anowa's behaviour while maintaining a semblance of politeness. Thus, negative politeness serves as a strategic tool for Kofi A to assert his dominance over Anowa's speech and behaviour while preserving the appearance of respect for traditional gender roles.

Excerpt 4

"Anowa, you must learn to submit to your husband's authority. It is the way of our people." - Said by Kofi A, Act 1, Page 79.

In the excerpt, Badua employs negative politeness by indirectly instructing Anowa on the expected behaviour for women within their society. By framing his statement as a necessity for Anowa to learn and adhere to, Badua attempts to assert the importance of submission to her husband's authority without directly commanding her. The use of the phrase "you must learn to submit" implies an expectation for Anowa to conform to this societal norm, appealing to her sense of duty to uphold traditional values. Through this language, Badua subtly reinforces his authority over Anowa, positioning himself as someone who dictates the proper roles and behaviours for women. By framing his statement in terms of the collective "our

people,” Badua attempts to convey that this expectation is deeply ingrained within their culture and should be respected. Thus, negative politeness serves as a strategic tool for Badua to assert his dominance over Anowa’s behaviour while preserving the appearance of respect for cultural traditions.

Excerpt 5

“Anowa, why do you rebel against your own nature? A woman’s place is in the home, not out in the world.” - Said by Badua, Act 1, Page 87.

In the excerpt, Badua employs negative politeness by indirectly questioning Anowa’s actions and emphasizing societal expectations regarding women’s roles. By framing his statement as a query about Anowa’s rebellion against her supposed inherent nature, Badua attempts to express concern about her behaviour without directly ordering her. The use of the rhetorical question “why do you rebel” implies that Badua expects Anowa to conform to traditional gender roles, appealing to her sense of obligation to adhere to societal norms. Through this language, Badua subtly reinforces his authority over Anowa, positioning himself as someone who dictates the appropriate roles for women. By framing his statement in terms of a woman’s place being in the home, Badua attempts to guide Anowa’s behaviour while maintaining a semblance of politeness and concern. Thus, negative politeness serves as a strategic tool for Badua to assert his dominance over Anowa’s actions while preserving the appearance of respect for traditional gender expectations.

Off-record Strategies

Excerpt 1

“A woman’s worth is often measured by her ability to produce offspring, especially sons, to carry on the family name.” - Narration, Act 1, Page 18.

In the excerpt, the narrator utilizes an off-record strategy to convey societal expectations regarding the value of women in their culture. Rather than explicitly stating a directive or expectation, the speaker indirectly communicates the prevailing belief that a woman’s worth is tied to her reproductive capabilities, particularly in bearing sons to continue the family lineage. By framing the statement as a general observation about societal norms, the speaker subtly reinforces the existing power dynamic wherein women are primarily valued for their roles as mothers and caretakers within the family unit. This off-record strategy allows the character to convey deeply ingrained cultural beliefs without overtly imposing them on others, thus maintaining the appearance of respect for tradition while reinforcing the existing power structures that prioritize male lineage and perpetuate gender inequality.

Excerpt 2

“In our society, women are often seen as property, to be traded and controlled by men.” - Narration, Act 1, Page 27.

In the excerpt, the narrator utilizes an off-record strategy to convey a societal norm regarding the status of women. Rather than explicitly stating a directive or belief, the speaker indirectly communicates the prevailing attitude that women are treated as commodities, subject to the control and ownership of men. By framing the statement as a general observation about societal attitudes, the speaker subtly reinforces the existing power dynamic wherein women are viewed as subordinate to men and subject to their authority. This off-record strategy allows the character to convey a deeply ingrained cultural belief without explicitly endorsing or enforcing it, thus maintaining the appearance of respect for societal norms while perpetuating the existing power structures that prioritize male dominance and perpetuate gender inequality.

Excerpt 3

“Men hold all the power in our society. Women are merely expected to obey and serve them.” - Narration, Act 1, Page 42.

In the excerpt, the narrator employs an off-record strategy to convey a societal norm regarding gender dynamics and power distribution. Rather than explicitly stating a directive or belief, the speaker indirectly communicates the prevailing understanding that men dominate positions of authority and influence, while women are relegated to subordinate roles of obedience and servitude. By framing the statement as a general observation about societal power structures, the speaker subtly reinforces the existing power dynamic wherein men hold privileged positions and women are expected to acquiesce to their authority. This off-record strategy allows the character to convey a deeply ingrained cultural belief without overtly endorsing or enforcing it, thus maintaining the appearance of respect for societal norms while perpetuating the existing power structures that prioritize male dominance and perpetuate gender inequality.

Excerpt 4

“Women who dare to challenge the status quo are often ostracized and labeled as troublemakers.” - Narration, Act 1, Page 51.

In the excerpt, the narrator employs an off-record strategy to convey a societal consequence for women who deviate from established norms. Rather than explicitly stating a directive or belief, the narrator indirectly communicates the prevailing attitude that women who challenge traditional gender roles or societal expectations face social repercussions, such as ostracism and labeling as troublemakers. By framing the statement as a general observation about societal reactions, the narrator subtly reinforces the existing power dynamic wherein women are discouraged from challenging the status quo and are instead expected to conform to prescribed roles and behaviours. This off-record strategy allows the narrator to

convey a deeply ingrained cultural belief without overtly endorsing or enforcing it, thus maintaining the appearance of neutrality while perpetuating the existing power structures that prioritize the maintenance of traditional gender norms and social hierarchy.

Excerpt 5

“Women are expected to prioritize the needs of their families above their own desires and ambitions.” - Narration, Act 1, Page 35.

In the excerpt, the narrator employs an off-record strategy to convey a societal expectation regarding the role of women. Rather than explicitly stating a directive or belief, the narrator indirectly communicates the prevailing attitude that women should prioritize their familial responsibilities over their personal aspirations. By framing the statement as a general observation about societal norms, the narrator subtly reinforces the existing power dynamic wherein women are expected to sacrifice their individual desires and ambitions for the well-being of their families. This off-record strategy allows the narrator to convey a deeply ingrained cultural expectation without overtly endorsing or enforcing it, thus maintaining the appearance of objectivity while perpetuating the existing power structures that prioritize the preservation of traditional gender roles and familial obligations.

Excerpt 6

“In our society, women have little control over their own lives. Their fate is determined by the men around them.” - Narration, Act 1, Page 75.

In the excerpt, the narrator employs an off-record strategy to convey a societal observation regarding gender dynamics and power distribution. Rather than explicitly stating a directive or belief, the narrator indirectly communicates the prevailing understanding that women have limited autonomy and agency, with their lives and destinies largely dictated by the men in their lives. By framing the statement as a general observation about societal norms, the narrator subtly reinforces the existing power dynamic wherein men hold privileged positions of influence and decision-making authority, while women are relegated to subordinate roles and have minimal control over their own lives. This off-record strategy allows the narrator to convey a deeply ingrained cultural belief without overtly endorsing or enforcing it, thus maintaining the appearance of objectivity while perpetuating the existing power structures that prioritize male dominance and perpetuate gender inequality.

Excerpt 7

“Women are often blamed for the failings of their husbands and children, regardless of their own actions.” - Narration, Act 1, Page 83.

In the excerpt, the narrator employs an off-record strategy to convey a societal observation regarding gender roles and accountability. Rather than explicitly stating a

directive or belief, the narrator indirectly communicates the prevailing understanding that women are unfairly burdened with responsibility for the shortcomings of their husbands and children, irrespective of their own actions. By framing the statement as a general observation about societal norms, the narrator subtly reinforces the existing power dynamic wherein women are held accountable for the actions and failures of others within their familial sphere. This off-record strategy allows the narrator to convey a deeply ingrained cultural belief without overtly endorsing or enforcing it, thus maintaining the appearance of objectivity while perpetuating the existing power structures that prioritize male authority and perpetuate gender-based scapegoating.

Excerpt 8

“In our society, women are expected to sacrifice their own dreams and aspirations for the sake of their families.” - Narration, Act 1, Page 91.

In the excerpt, the narrator employs an off-record strategy to convey a societal expectation regarding gender roles and familial obligations. Rather than explicitly stating a directive or belief, the narrator indirectly communicates the prevailing understanding that women are obliged to prioritize the well-being and needs of their families over their own personal goals and aspirations. By framing the statement as a general observation about societal norms, the narrator subtly reinforces the existing power dynamic wherein women are expected to subjugate their individual ambitions in service to their familial responsibilities. This off-record strategy allows the narrator to convey a deeply ingrained cultural expectation without overtly endorsing or enforcing it, thus maintaining the appearance of objectivity while perpetuating the existing power structures that prioritize the preservation of traditional gender roles and familial harmony.

Excerpt 9

“Women who refuse to conform to societal norms are often punished, sometimes even physically.” - Narration, Act 1, Page 99.

In the excerpt, the narrator employs an off-record strategy to convey a societal consequence for women who challenge or deviate from established norms. Rather than explicitly stating a directive or belief, the narrator indirectly communicates the prevailing understanding that women who resist societal expectations face punitive measures, including physical punishment. By framing the statement as a general observation about societal reactions, the narrator subtly reinforces the existing power dynamic wherein women are discouraged from challenging the status quo and are instead coerced into compliance through the threat of punishment. This off-record strategy allows the narrator to convey a deeply ingrained cultural belief without overtly endorsing or enforcing it, thus maintaining the appearance of objectivity while

perpetuating the existing power structures that prioritize the maintenance of traditional gender roles and social order.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The analysis of excerpts from Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* reveals a complex relationship between societal expectations, gender roles, and power dynamics within African communities. Through various linguistic strategies such as positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies, characters and the narrator convey and reinforce cultural norms surrounding femininity, submission, and the role of women in society.

Positive politeness is evident in statements like "Anowa, you are not like other women. You are too independent, too headstrong" and "Anowa, stop behaving like a child! You are a woman now. You need to learn to behave like one." These statements, made by characters like Kofi A and Badua, use flattery and appeals to societal norms to reinforce their authority over Anowa, positioning themselves as figures of guidance and wisdom.

Negative politeness is employed in statements like "Anowa, you cannot defy tradition. You must accept your role as a wife and conform to societal expectations" and "Anowa, why do you rebel against your own nature? A woman's place is in the home, not out in the world." These statements, also made by characters like Kofi A and Badua, indirectly instruct Anowa on the expected behaviours for women, reinforcing traditional gender roles and societal expectations while maintaining a veneer of politeness.

Off-record strategies are utilized by the narrator to convey societal observations such as "Women who dare to challenge the status quo are often ostracized and labeled as troublemakers" and "In our society, women are expected to sacrifice their own dreams and aspirations for the sake of their families." These statements indirectly communicate cultural beliefs and norms regarding women's roles and the consequences of deviating from them, reinforcing existing power dynamics that prioritize male authority and perpetuate gender inequality.

The findings of this analysis relate with previous research on Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* and its exploration of gender dynamics and cultural identity. Djimet and Koussouhon (2020) explore the interpersonal dynamics within the play, shedding light on how characters negotiate femininity and power relationships. Similarly, Appiah et al. (2021) focus on the depiction of illiterate African women, which intersects with the societal expectations placed on women in *Anowa*. Sanka et al. (2013) critique the representation of Akan culture in the play, providing insights into the cultural context that shapes characters' behaviours and beliefs. Rapoo (2020) explores themes of mobility and cultural consciousness,

which are reflected in the characters' struggles with societal constraints and expectations. Abu-Mahfouz (2021) examines psychological trauma in *Anowa*, highlighting the impact of societal pressures on individual psyche. Finally, Rouabhi (2022) offers a comparative analysis of *Anowa* with another postcolonial text, providing further insights into the cultural and colonial contexts shaping the narrative.

In a nutshell, the findings of this analysis contribute to the ongoing discourse on Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* by elucidating the power dynamics and societal expectations surrounding gender roles and femininity within African communities. By contextualizing the study within existing research, we gain a deeper understanding of how the play reflects and critiques cultural norms and power structures, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of identity, agency, and resistance in postcolonial contexts.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of excerpts from Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* provides valuable insights into the relationship of power dynamics, societal expectations, and gender roles within African communities. Through linguistic strategies such as positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies, characters and the narrator convey and reinforce cultural norms surrounding femininity, submission, and the role of women in society. These findings relate with existing research, including studies on the interpersonal dynamics, cultural identity, and psychological trauma depicted in the play. By contextualizing the study within this broader literature, we gain a deeper understanding of how *Anowa* serves as an exploration of the dynamics of postcolonial African society. The play sheds light on the struggles faced by women as they explore societal pressures, patriarchal norms, and the tension between individual agency and collective expectations. As such, *Anowa* not only provides a window into the cultural and social realities of its time but also offers enduring insights into the enduring challenges and resilience of women in the face of systemic oppression. Ultimately, the study emphasises the importance of literature as a tool for critiquing and interrogating societal norms, challenging dominant narratives, and advocating for social change. Through continued analysis and engagement with texts like *Anowa*, we can further illuminate the dynamics of gender, power, and identity in postcolonial contexts, contributing to ongoing efforts to promote gender equality and social justice.

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