

# CRITHALYS

*CRITIQUE, THÉORISATION, ANALYSE DE LA LITTÉRATURE,  
DES ARTS ET DE LA SOCIÉTÉ CONTEMPORAINE*

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# CRITHALYS

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## LIGNE ÉDITORIALE



Les enjeux des études actuelles en langue, littérature, art et sciences sociales exigent de faire correspondre les théories et d'engager les experts et critiques à de nouvelles perspectives de lecture. L'idée est d'ouvrir la compréhension des œuvres et des pratiques dans leurs multiples rapports à l'histoire, à l'expérimentation, à la création artistique, aux convergences idéologiques et scripturaires. Saisi sous ce prisme, les défis du développement donnent forme et force à un flux pluridisciplinaire de regards innovants qui travaillent à transformer les sociétés et à penser les humanités selon les perspectives du durable et de la qualité de vie.

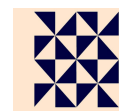
**La Revue CRITHALYS** qui procède des activités du Groupe de Recherche en Critiques et Théories Littéraires Contemporaines (GRECTLIC) de l'UFR Langues et Littérature (Université Alassane Ouattara) s'appuie sur l'expérience et les savoirs autour de la critique et des interactions théoriques pour faire de la production scientifique un levier développementaliste. Revue pluridisciplinaire, **CRITHALYS** veut penser le potentiel théorique et pratique pour l'inscrire dans le jeu de composition, d'expérimentation des œuvres et des réalités sociales pour garantir la meilleure marge possible à leur réception critique. Elle fait bon accueil des propositions originales sous les aménagements de thématiques actuelles et de pointe que la critique universitaire inscrit aux besoins du développement. Les articles subiront la rigueur d'un processus d'évaluation avant publication ; une fois publiés, lesdits articles seront exploitables en *Open Access*.

Ainsi, l'interaction critique assignera à des perspectives qui enrôleront des spéculations constructives. Ces réflexions croisées seront déterminantes pour le dynamisme de la revue, en particulier la maîtrise des objets, l'élaboration de méthodes bien définies, l'évaluation nodale et la visibilité des résultats.

**La Revue CRITHALYS** a pour dessein de libérer tout le potentiel des chercheurs qui partagent la volonté de s'approprier la maîtrise des savoirs et leur divulgation.

Prof. KANGA Konan Arsène  
Université Alassane Ouattara  
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## CONSIGNES DE RÉDACTION

Normes éditoriales d'une revue de lettres ou sciences humaines adoptées par le CTS/LSH, le 17 juillet 2016 à Bamako, lors de la 38ème session des CCI : « Aucune revue ne peut publier un article dont la rédaction n'est pas conforme aux normes éditoriales (NORCAMES/LSH). Les normes typographiques, quant à elles, sont fixées par chaque revue. »

### 1. Les textes à soumettre devront respecter les conditions de formes suivantes :

- ✓ le texte doit être transmis au format document doc ou rtf ;
- ✓ il devra comprendre un maximum de 60.000 signes (espaces compris), interligne 1,5 avec une police de caractères Times New Roman 12 ;
- ✓ insérer la pagination et ne pas insérer d'information autre que le numéro de page dans l'en-tête et éviter les pieds de page ;
- ✓ les figures et les tableaux doivent être intégrés au texte et présentés avec des marges d'au moins six centimètres à droite et à gauche. Les caractères dans ces figures et tableaux doivent aussi être en Times 12. Figures et tableaux doivent avoir un titre.
- ✓ Les citations dans le corps du texte doivent être indiquées par un retrait avec tabulation 1 cm et le texte mis en taille 11.

### 2. Des normes éditoriales d'une revue de lettres ou sciences humaines

**2.1.** Aucune revue ne peut publier un article dont la rédaction n'est pas conforme aux normes éditoriales (NORCAMES). Les normes typographiques, quant à elles, sont fixées par chaque revue.

**2.2.** La structure d'un article, doit être conforme aux règles de rédaction scientifique, selon que l'article est une contribution théorique ou résulte d'une recherche de terrain.

**2.3.** La structure d'un article scientifique en lettres et sciences humaines se présente comme suit:

- Pour un article qui est une contribution théorique et fondamentale : Titre, Prénom et Nom de l'auteur, Institution d'attache, adresse électronique, Résumé en Français, Mots clés, Abstract, Key words, Introduction (justification du thème, problématique, hypothèses/objectifs scientifiques, approche), Développement articulé, Conclusion, Bibliographie.

- Pour un article qui résulte d'une recherche de terrain : Titre, Prénom et Nom de l'auteur, Institution d'attache, adresse électronique, Résumé en Français, Mots clés, Abstract, Key words, Introduction, Méthodologie, Résultats et Discussion, Conclusion, Bibliographie.

- Les articulations d'un article, à l'exception de l'introduction, de la conclusion, de la bibliographie, doivent être titrées, et numérotées par des chiffres (exemples : 1.; 1.1.; 1.2; 2.; 2.2. ; 2.2.1 ; 2.2.2.; 3. ; etc.).

**2.4.** Les passages cités sont présentés en romain et entre guillemets. Lorsque la phrase citant et la citation dépassent trois lignes, il faut aller à la ligne, pour présenter la citation (interligne 1) en romain et en retrait, en diminuant la taille de police d'un point.

**2.5.** Les références de citation sont intégrées au texte citant, selon les cas, de la façon suivante :

- (Initiale (s) du Prénom ou des Prénoms de l'auteur. Nom de l'Auteur, année de publication, pages citées) ; - Initiale (s) du Prénom ou des Prénoms de l'auteur. Nom de l'Auteur (année de publication, pages citées).

Exemples :



- En effet, le but poursuivi par M. Ascher (1998, p. 223), est « d'élargir l'histoire des mathématiques de telle sorte qu'elle acquière une perspective multiculturelle et globale (...), d'accroître le domaine des mathématiques : alors qu'elle s'est pour l'essentiel occupé du groupe professionnel occidental que l'on appelle les mathématiciens(...)».

- Pour dire plus amplement ce qu'est cette capacité de la société civile, qui dans son déploiement effectif, atteste qu'elle peut porter le développement et l'histoire, S. B. Diagne (1991, p. 2) écrit :

Qu'on ne s'y trompe pas : de toute manière, les populations ont toujours su opposer à la philosophie de l'encadrement et à son volontarisme leurs propres stratégies de contournements. Celles là, par exemple, sont lisibles dans le dynamisme, ou à tout le moins, dans la créativité dont sait preuve ce que l'on désigne sous le nom de secteur informel et à qui il faudra donner l'appellation positive d'économie populaire.

- Le philosophe ivoirien a raison, dans une certaine mesure, de lire, dans ce choc déstabilisateur, le processus du sous-développement. Ainsi qu'il le dit :

le processus du sous-développement résultant de ce choc est vécu concrètement par les populations concernées comme une crise globale : crise socio-économique (exploitation brutale, chômage permanent, exode accéléré et douloureux), mais aussi crise socio-culturelle et de civilisation traduisant une impréparation sociohistorique et une inadaptation des cultures et des comportements humains aux formes de vie imposées par les technologies étrangères. (S. Diakité, 1985, p. 105).

**2.6.** Les sources historiques, les références d'informations orales et les notes explicatives sont numérotées en série continue et présentées en bas de page.

**2.7.** Les divers éléments d'une référence bibliographique sont présentés comme suit : NOM et Prénom (s) de l'auteur, Année de publication, Zone titre, Lieu de publication, Zone Éditeur, pages (p.) occupées par l'article dans la revue ou l'ouvrage collectif. Dans la zone titre, le titre d'un article est présenté en romain et entre guillemets, celui d'un ouvrage, d'un mémoire ou d'une thèse, d'un rapport, d'une revue ou d'un journal est présenté en italique. Dans la zone Éditeur, on indique la Maison d'édition (pour un ouvrage), le Nom et le numéro/volume de la revue (pour un article). Au cas où un ouvrage est une traduction et/ou une réédition, il faut préciser après le titre le nom du traducteur et/ou l'édition (ex : 2<sup>nd</sup>e éd.).

**2.8.** Ne sont présentées dans les références bibliographiques que les références des documents cités. Les références bibliographiques sont présentées par ordre alphabétique des noms d'auteur. Par exemple :

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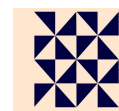
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## SOMMAIRE

### Littérature

1. ZIGUI Koléa Paulin, « *Meu Kossou Kié ngnou Kéi ou la Grande mission* ».....1
2. MENSAH Magdalene, Analyse littéraire des données sur le récit épique de Nana Yaa Asantewaa (textes oraux inédits des noms du clan Asona) .....10
3. ANO Boadi Désiré, Le roman africain francophone, un plurivers en tension : prospectivisme, hégémonisme et addictionnisme technologique.....24
4. KANGA Konan Arsène, L'écriture décoloniale de Gauz : décrier la manipulation, vaincre par les symboles.....34
5. M'BRA Ahou Gisèle, Scènes pratiques et stratégies dans les danses de la chorégraphie de Dobet Gnahoré.....45
6. MELESS Eugue Sédrac Paul, L'écopoétique dans *Il faut beaucoup aimer les hommes* de Marie Darrieussecq.....61
7. KROUWA Jean de Dieu, Poésie orale féminine et poésie féminine : deux visions antithétiques des productions de femmes.....72
8. OUATTARA Badrissa, Les modalités d'ancrage du conte traditionnel oral dans la chanson ivoirienne : l'exemple du *Zouglo* et de l'*Ahossi*.....89
9. FANRAMAN Kinalè Aude, La fragmentation auctoriale dans *Capitale de la douleur* de Paul Éluard.....103
10. DADIÉ Bessou Jérémie, IRIÉ BI Gohy Mathias, Discours mésavenants : le retranchement et la surenchère syntaxiques comme une esthétique et une force linguistique dans la littérature post-moderne .....117
11. DIDÉ Kamondan Vincent, Le mythe baoulé *Sika* : symbolique et expressivité.....130
12. ISSAN Degbeh, Étude de contes africains iconoclastes : cas de la fille rebelle au mariage de KOFFI Kouadio Blomé.....144
13. SANOGO Kagnon Brahim, Chaos narratif et identités plurielles dans *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages* d'Ahmadou Kourouma.....154
14. BAIKORO Soiliho, Du dogmatisme au pragmatisme : une pensée de la transversalité et des paradoxes chez Mallarmé.....171



## Communication

15. N'da Koffi Anderson KONAN, Guy KAUL, Apport de la communication sociale aux politiques sécuritaires : enjeux pour le bien-être des ouvriers du projet routier Zuenoula-Vavoua.....185

## Langues

16. ANDOU Weinpanga Aboudoulaye, SIRO Essobiyou, PEWISSI Atafëï, Article de réflexion et article d'exploration du corpus dans les contextes africains et hispaniques.....198
17. M'BRA Francis Arnaud, Shell-shocked british soldiers: war policy, neurosis and recovery in pat barker's *the regeneration trilogy*.....212
18. Kouame Anzoumana ISSA, Strategies of politeness in conflicts resolution in Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to blame*.....224
19. SILUE Nannougou, War Without Weapons: Polemology, Satire, and Post-Imperial Identity in Daphne du Maurier's *Rule Britannia* (1972) .....242



## SYNTHÈSE DES ARTICLES

Ce deuxième numéro de la revue CRITHALYS se distingue par une argumentation notable du nombre d'articles ainsi que par la qualité des productions scientifiques. Les trois sections - Littérature, Communication et Langues - constituent autant d'espaces de réflexion qui permettent d'aborder diverses thématiques et de les confronter aux exigences du développement.

La section Littérature se structure autour d'un parcours allant des mythes, en passant par des analyses portant sur la syntaxe, la sémiotique et les héritages de la tradition orale. Dans cette perspective, le mythe de « la grande mission » inaugure la réflexion, afin de montrer que les contes, les mythes, les légendes, les épopées et les proverbes sont les incarnations de nouvelles approches éducatives, fondées sur un socle culturel solide et renforcées par de véritables prouesses intellectuelles et créatives. Un récit épique provenant du Ghana célèbre l'héroïne Nana Yaa Asantewaa et les valeurs traditionnelles africaines. Les voies nouvelles du roman africain actuel se tracent dans le prospectivisme, les identités plurielles et les nouvelles écritures décoloniales. Dans le rapport à la scène, la modélisation des danses fait l'objet d'un traitement sémiotique. Ici, l'écopoétique, l'auctorialité, le dogmatisme et la pragmatique sont au goût du jour pour traduire l'expressivité de l'esthétique de certains auteurs, romanciers et poètes occidentaux. Tous ces regards justifient les discours qui donnent force à la langue.

S'agissant de la section consacrée à la communication, un article met en évidence la contribution de la communication sociale aux politiques de sécurité, perçue comme un enjeu majeur du bien-être des ouvriers. L'étude vise à redynamiser les politiques sécuritaires par le biais de la Communication sociale, afin de préserver la santé et la sécurité des travailleurs et de promouvoir un environnement de travail sain et sécurisé.

Dans la section - Langues, les premiers contributeurs ont mené une réflexion sur l'ossature des articles scientifiques les décuplant en article de réflexion et article d'exploration. En sus, les autres questions évoquées sont afférentes aux conflits et aux guerres d'intérêt où résonnent des mots comme « *soldiers, weapons, conflicts resolution...* »



## Strategies of politeness in conflicts resolution in Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to blame*

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### Abstract

This study examines politeness as a crucial linguistic strategy employed to avert potential conflicts between interlocutors. Utilizing quantitative and contextual analysis, it investigates the representation of politeness and its functions in conflicts resolution within Ola Rotimi's play; *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. The results underscore the efficacy of linguistic politeness in anticipating and alleviating tensions during interactions between speakers and their interlocutors. Moreover, this research emphasizes that politeness constitutes a fundamental element of Yoruba-and more broadly African-sociocultural norms, aimed primarily at fostering social cohesion.

**Keywords:** politeness, negative politeness, positive politeness, euphemism, conflicts, sociocultural norms, social cohesion.

### Résumé

Cette recherche explore la politesse en tant qu'une stratégie linguistique essentielle visant à prévenir les conflits potentiels entre interlocuteurs. Par le biais d'une analyse qualitative et contextuelle, elle étudie la manière dont la politesse est représentée et son rôle dans la résolution de conflits au sein de la pièce théâtrale d'Ola Rotimi intitulée *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. Les résultats mettent en évidence l'efficacité de la politesse linguistique pour anticiper et atténuer les tensions entre locuteur et interlocuteur lors des interactions. Par ailleurs, cette étude met en exergue le fait que la politesse constitue un pilier fondamental des normes socioculturelles Yoruba et plus largement Africaines dont l'objectif principal est la promotion de la cohésion sociale.

**Mots clés :** politesse, politesse négative, politesse positive, euphémisme, conflits, normes socioculturelles, cohésion sociale.

### Introduction

The topic examines the linguistic and sociolinguistic strategies of politeness employed by characters in *The Gods Are Not to Blame* to handle tensions. It investigates how speech acts, choice of words, tone, and forms of address contribute to mitigating tension, preserving social relationships, and achieving harmony within the socio-cultural context of the play. The topic arises within the literary, sociolinguistic and cultural context that seeks to explore how, in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, characters employ politeness strategies to negotiate power, maintain respect, and resolve interpersonal conflicts, reflecting both linguistic theory and African cultural values.





In term of literary context *The Gods Are Not to Blame* is a Nigerian adaptation of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, set within the Yoruba socio-cultural framework. The play depicts how misunderstandings, accusations, and tragic conflicts emerge from fate, pride, and communication breakdowns. Within this dramatic setting, characters employ various linguistic and cultural forms of politeness-such as deference to elders, indirect expressions, and proverbs-to maintain respect and manage tensions.

As far as the sociolinguistic context is concerned, the topic operates within the field that examines how language reflects and manages social relationships. Politeness as studied by theorists like P. Brown and S. Levinson (1987), J. Culpeper (1996) and G. Leech (1983), is a vital strategy for maintaining 'face' and avoiding conflict escalation. In the play, politeness strategies, serves as tools of negotiation, persuasion, and reconciliation among characters of different social ranks and power positions.

As for cultural context, the play reflects African communicative norms, especially those rooted in Yoruba traditions of respect, hierarchy, and community harmony. In Yoruba and broader African societies, speech is not only a means of expression but also a social instrument for preserving peace and respect. Therefore, the study of politeness strategies in conflict resolution in the play mirrors the African philosophy of communal coexistence and conflict management.

The playwright name is Ola Rotimi. He was born in 13<sup>th</sup> April 1938 in Sapele, Delta State, Nigeria. He was a drama enthusiast. He attended St. Cyprian's school in Port Harcourt from 1945 to 1949, St. Jude's school, Lagos, from 1951 to 1952 and the Methodist Boy School in Lagos, before travelling to the United States in 1959 to study at Boston University, where he obtained a BA in fine arts and died on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2000 in Ile-Ife, Osun State. He was one of Nigeria's leading playwrights and theatre directors. He was one of Nigeria's leading playwrights and theatre directors. He has been called a complete man of the theatre- an actor-director- choreographer- and designer who created performance spaces, influenced by traditional architectural forms. A part from *The Gods Are Not to Blame* and *Kurumni*, he has written many other novels such as *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, published in 1977, *Hopes of The Living Dead*, published in 1988, *Holding Talks* published in 1979, *Ovonramwen Noglobisi*, published in 1974.

Politeness, as theorized by P. Brown and S. Levinson (1987), involves various strategies that speakers use to manage face-threatening acts, balancing the need to express their intentions while maintaining the dignity or "face" of others. In *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, conflicts arise from cultural beliefs, fate, and human actions, all of which create moments of tension that





demand careful management of social decorum. The play, an adaptation of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, transposes the tragedy into a Yoruba cultural context, making it a fertile ground for analyzing indigenous African notions of politeness and respect in communication. O. Rotimi (1971) skillfully employs language to depict how characters negotiate power struggles, resolve disputes, and assert authority without breaching cultural expectations of politeness.

The central conflict in *The Gods Are Not to Blame* turns around King Odewale's tragic ignorance of his true identity and his inadvertent fulfillment of a prophecy that leads to patricide and incest. The tension between face and human agency is heightened by the interactions among characters, where politeness serves both as a tool for maintaining hierarchical relationships and a means of manipulating discourse to conceal or reveal truths. For example, the respectful language used by messengers and chiefs towards the King reflects traditional deference to authority, while the King's own speeches vary from politeness to aggression, depending on his emotional state and perception of treat. These shifts in politeness strategies provide a window into the dynamics of conflict and its resolution within the play.

Moreover, the play highlights the limitations of politeness in resolving deeply rooted conflicts driven by destiny and personal flaws. Despite attempts at diplomatic speech, the underlying tension between characters such as King Odewale and Baba Fakunle, escalates due to mistrust and the irreversible nature of fate. The interaction between Odewale and Alaka also demonstrates how misunderstandings can arise when politeness is insufficient to bridge gaps in knowledge and perception. Thus, while politeness plays a pivotal role in managing social interactions, its effectiveness in conflict resolution is contingent upon the broader context of truth, power, and fate.

In analyzing the strategies of politeness in conflict resolution in *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, this study will examine key conversations and confrontations, focusing on how politeness strategies reflect cultural values, social hierarchy, and individual psychology. The paper explores how O. Rotimi's (1971) use of language illustrates the complexities of human communication in conflict situations, highlighting the strengths of politeness as a tool for maintaining harmony. The main objective of this study is to examine how politeness is portrayed and how it contributes to conflicts resolution in the play. This objective generates two (2) specific objectives. The first one is to identify the sociolinguistic features that contribute to expressing politeness in the plays and the second one is to assess how politeness influences the outcomes of communication between characters in the plays. To reach the objective of the investigation the main research question the study will answer is: To what extent does politeness lead to conflict resolution in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*? This question generates





two (2) subsidiary questions which are the following: What politeness strategies are used by characters during conflicts situation in the play? How do these politeness strategies influence the outcomes of conflicts in the play?

This research work embraces a qualitative research method. Since the data are collected from a play that is *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, only thematic analysis is considered. The data analysis method relies on content and context explanation. The work is framed around four (4) parts. The first one deals with the review of prior works about politeness in language, the second one lays a stress on theoretical framework, the third one is centered on methodology of data analysis and the final one on expression of politeness in conflicts solving. The outcome of this analysis contributes to developing culturally sensitive conflicts resolution frameworks applicable in African societies and beyond. Finally it advances the growing field of studies focused on linguistic strategies for resolving conflicts.

### **1. Previous Studies on the Concept of Politeness in Language**

This section involves the delineation of fundamental concepts and critical review of prior scholarly contributions concerning politeness in linguistic usage. The objective is to provide a comprehensive overview of existing discourse, identify principal authors, and elucidate the dominant theories and hypotheses pertaining to politeness.

The notion of politeness is difficult to define because its definition differs from one scholar to another, from one culture to another, from one community to another. For, what is considered to be polite in one culture may be considered as impolite in another culture and vice versa. In so doing there is no doubt on the vague and imprecise aspect of the definition of politeness. In spite of that, many scholars attempt to approach the complex concept of politeness.

The universality theory of politeness was first introduced by sociolinguists P. Brown and S. Levinson in 1978. Thus, A. Wierzbicka's (2003) based his politeness theory on the universality of P. Brown and S. Levinson's (1987). G. Leech (2005, p.1) stated that although the theory of politeness of P. Brown and S. Levinson (1987) was considered as an outstanding and influential theory in cross-cultural and cross-linguistic contrastive pragmatics, it was not without criticism. S. Mills (2003) characterizes P. Brown and S. Levinson's (1987) concept of politeness as encapsulating a restrictive, transmission model of communication (p. 89) which implicitly assumes that politeness is universal, always sincere, and moreover a 'good thing' (p. 59-60). She also states that P. Brown and S. Levinson's (1987) concept of politeness is gender-biased and does not adequately address how politeness functions differently in men's and





women's speech. Similarly, G. Leech (2007) argues that P. Brown and S. Levinson's (1987) model focused too much on FTAs and neglects the role of politeness as a social norm.

According to many linguists, the importance of politeness strategies lies in maintaining a social order. P. Brown and S. Levinson (2000, xiii) conceptualize it as "a precondition of human cooperation". For G. Leech (1983, p. 81) politeness principle is used to "minimize the expression of impolite beliefs". As for R. Lakoff (1989, p.101) he states that the purpose of politeness is to avoid conflicts. P. Brown and S. Levinson (1987) define politeness as a strategy which is used to maintain the hearer's face. So, they distinguish five main types of politeness strategies that are: bald on record, negative politeness, positive politeness, off record-indirect strategy and the final strategy is "do not do the FTA".

D. Hill (1986, p. 349) writes in the same context by stating that "politeness is one of the constraints on human interaction, whose purpose is to consider other's feelings establish levels of mutual comfort, and promotes rapport". D. Hill (1986) theorizes that politeness is an obligation on our behavior so that to reduce conflicts and promote harmony.

According to E. Adegbija (1989, p. 58) politeness can be conceived as: "a property associated with a communicative situation by virtue of which a person speaks or behaves in a way that is socially and culturally acceptable and pleasant to the hearer". E. Adegbija (1989) thinks that politeness is a kind of social communicative contract in which the speaker engages to speak in such a way that he will not frustrate his co-speaker. In other words he engages to speak smoothly and in a comfortable atmosphere in order not to frustrate the hearer. By the same token B. Fraser and W. Nolen (1981, p. 86) explain politeness as a conversational contract between the speakers and the co-speakers in order to make the conversation smooth, civilized. Therefore they state the following [...] In general, speakers operate within the terms of the conventional contract and, in doing so, act in a way which we call polite. To be polite is to abide by the rules of the relationship. A speaker becomes impolite just in cases where he violates one or more of the contractual terms. For them, politeness is a kind of contract signed by interactants; therefore if one interactant speaks in an impolite way, he will break down the contract.

In the same context, D. Crystal (1997, p. 297) believes that politeness, in sociolinguistics and pragmatics, is a term that signifies linguistic features associated with norms of social behavior, in relation to notions like courtesy, rapport, deference and distance. Such features involve the usage of specific discourse markers (please), suitable tone of voice, and tolerable forms of address.





G. Yule (1996, p. 60) states that politeness, within an interaction, is defined as the means employed to show awareness and consideration of another person's face. He then believes that politeness can be treated as a fixed concept, as in the idea of polite social behavior, or etiquette, within a culture (1998, p. 297). For being polite in social interaction within a particular culture, some of general principles can be determined such as being tactful, generous, modest and sympathetic toward others.

For G. Meier (1995, p. 345) there is "disconcerting amount of divergence and lack of clarity concerning the meaning of politeness". G. Held (1992, p. 31) in his turn describes the linguistic phenomenon as "a definitionally fuzzy and empirically difficult area". They have explored various dimensions of politeness, including its cultural variations, linguistic manifestations, and its role in social interactions. These scholars have also examined how politeness strategies are used to mitigate face-threatening acts and maintain harmonious communication in diverse contexts.

The manner in which the concept of politeness is conceptualized by scholars reveals a lack of consensus regarding its precise definition. Politeness has been variously characterized as formality, deference, indirectness, appropriateness, etiquette and tact. Many researchers conclude that politeness is used to avoid conflicts. Thus, G. Leech (1983, p. 104) conceptualizes politeness as those forms of behavior which are aimed at the establishment and maintenance of comity i.e. the ability of participants to engage in interaction in a comfortable and harmonious atmosphere.

Speaking about G. Leech's (1983) politeness maxims, A. Wierzbicka (1991) argues that G. Leech's (1983) politeness maxims are not universally applicable, emphasizing that, concepts of politeness vary significantly across cultures. By the same token, G. Yueguo (1990) contends that G. Leech's (1983) model does not adequately account for politeness phenomena in non-western cultures, using Chinese as a case study. Similarly, I. Sachiko (1989) critiques G. Leech's (1983) model for its western-centric perspective, suggesting that it overlooks culturally specific aspects of politeness, particularly in East Asian contexts. G. Leech (1983) introduced the "*politeness Principle*" which complements Grice's "*Cooperative Principle*". He proposed maxims such as Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement and Sympathy to explain how politeness operates in language. These maxims help elucidate how speakers manage interpersonal relationships through language use.

By the same token, R. Lakoff (1990, p. 34) conceives politeness as "a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange". He then sees politeness as those forms





of behavior which have been “developed” in societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction “thus indirectly claiming politeness universality (1995, p. 64). He also speaks about appropriateness saying: “to be polite is saying the socially correct thing (1995, p.53).

Several scholars have challenged R. Lakoff’s (1973) concept of politeness, particularly her linking of politeness with indirectness. G. Leech (1983) argues that politeness is more complex than indirectness and proposes the Politeness Principle, which includes maxims. P. Brown and S. Levinson in their (1987)’s concept of politeness challenged R. Lakoff’s (1973) approach by developing their concept of face (based on E. Goffman’s (1955) work) and arguing that politeness is better understood through positive and negative face rather than just indirectness. S. Mills (2003) critiques R. Lakoff’s (1973) work from a feminist and sociolinguistic perspective, arguing that her model does not adequately address gender and cultural variations in politeness strategies.

The overall previous works and conceptions on politeness in language allow mastering the concept of politeness. This mastery bypasses the elements which favor its different manifestations such as the characteristics, meanings, ambiguity, pervasiveness and the ways speakers use it during interactions to make communication familiar, respectful and cooperative. This study is different from the previous studies on politeness even if it highlights the use of politeness strategies in conflicts resolution. This investigation lies in studying politeness with a focus on conflict resolution. In other considerations, the focus is on the analysis of politeness usage in *The Gods Are not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi from its capacity to solve conflict. The gaps between this study and the previous studies are numerous. In terms of cultural and linguistic gap, this study challenges and expands P. Brown and S. Levinson (1987) universality claim by highlighting culture-specific politeness. This study fills also a crucial gap by applying politeness theories to African dramatic literature, offering a fresh perspective on how politeness functions within Yoruba- influenced English discourse in theatrical settings. These reasons make this study worth doing.

The different studies on politeness suggest politeness in language as a solution to this model of communication. Similarly in this study the analysis of utterances confirmed that politeness is a social tool used to show respect, consideration, and sensitivity to others’ feelings and social norms. It helps facilitate smooth and harmonious communication by managing interactions in a way that minimizes conflict and maintains positive relationships. It helps ensure that interactions are cooperative and harmonious, even in situations that could be potentially awkward, confrontational or sensitive.





## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theory that is used throughout the work is the theory of politeness. The theory of politeness intends to explore how people in the play manage their language to maintain social harmony and avoid conflicts in communication. The different studies conducted on politeness suggest the following: P. Brown and S. Levinson's (1987) developed a comprehensive theory of politeness based on the concept of "face" drawing from E. Goffman's (1955) work. They identified two aspects of 'face': 'positive face' (the desire to be liked and approved of) and 'negative face' which is the desire to be autonomous and free from imposition. Their framework outlines strategies individuals use to mitigate FTAs to maintain social harmony. G. Leech (1983) introduced the '*politeness Principle*' which complements Grice's '*Cooperative Principle*'. He proposed maxims such as Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement and Sympathy to explain how politeness operates in language. These maxims help elucidate how speakers manage interpersonal relationships through language use.

R. Lakoff (1973) emphasized that politeness is governed by pragmatic rules that facilitate smooth communication. She proposed three rules: (1) Don't impose, (2) Give options, (3) Make the addressee feel good. These rules highlight the role of politeness in maintaining social equilibrium and preventing conflict. S. Mills (2003) critically examined the intersection of gender and politeness, challenging the notion that women are inherently more polite than men. She argued that perceptions of politeness are influenced by societal expectations and stereotypes, and that both gender and context play significant roles in how politeness is enacted and interpreted. P. Grice (1975) introduced the "*Cooperative Principle*" suggesting that effective communication relies on speakers adhering to conversational maxims: Quantity, which consists in providing the right amount of information; Quality, which consists in being truthful; Relation, which implies to be relevant, and Manner, which consists to be clear. Why not solely focused on politeness, his work laid the foundation for understanding how implicatures arise in conversation.

## 3. Methodology

In this study, data are collected after reading *The Gods Are Not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi, then, utterances are extracted for analysis. These data are collected firsthand; therefore, they are primary data. This study is qualitative and the data collection method relies on context analysis. It adopts a feature of thematic research. Thematic analysis of data is a qualitative research method used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns or themes within a dataset. It is





particularly useful in sociolinguistic studies, where the researcher seeks to uncover underlying meanings in language use, social interactions, and communication strategies.

#### 4. Expression of Negative Politeness in Conflicts Solving

Politeness in language serves a crucial function in the prevention of conflict by enabling individuals to manage potentially confrontational interactions with sensitivity and respect.

##### Act 2 Scene1

Baba Fakunle: *"The truth that you are the cursed murderer that you seek"*.

Odewale: *"Do you feel better now"?*

Utterance (1): Second Chief responds to Odewale: *"My Lord, let him go, our elders say, he who drums for a sick man is himself a sick man"*. This utterance is respectful and carries a metaphorical message. By addressing Odewale this way, the Second Chief uses a formal and deferential tone to calm the co-speaker down. In other words, this datum is conflict avoidance strategy. In fact, the Second Chief attempts to deescalate the situation by using a proverb rather than directly addressing King Odewale's anger. By invoking traditional wisdom *"he who drums for a sick man is himself a sick man"*, the Chief subtly discredits Baba Fakunle's words without directly challenging either the King or the diviner. This allows him to express disapproval while maintaining respect for both parties, reducing the likelihood of further conflict.

##### Act 2 Scene 2

Baba Fakunle: *"Again you force words from me [hotly] you force words from me again. You bedsharer"!*

Odewale: *"What was that"?*

Baba Fakunle: *"I said you...bedsharer"!*

Utterance (2): Chiefs [Restraining Odewale] *"My Lord- Your highness, peace, will you listen to this"?* *Patience my Lord!*". The utterance can be interpreted as a conflict avoidance expression influenced by politeness in language. It employs respectful and deferential language, starting with the honorifics *"My Lord"* followed by *"your highness"*, which set a tone of reverence and signals an attention to maintain calm and avoid escalation, possibly to ensure a constructive interaction. In other words, the Chiefs's utterance *"My Lord- Your highness, peace, will you listen to this"* is a conflict avoidance strategy. Indeed, by using *"peace"*, they explicitly call for calm, attempting to soothe King Odewale's anger and urge him not to give in to Baba Fakunle's provocation. The use of double honorific *'My Lord'* and *'Your highness'* consecutively in the same utterance emphasizes the Chiefs deep respect and subservience to





King Odewale. Each title highlights his royal status and superior social position. Using both forms consecutively reinforces the hierarchical distance between them and King Odewale.

In terms of P. Brown and S. Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, this is an example of negative politeness strategy. The Chiefs are showing deference and avoiding imposition on the King's authority. The doubling of titles intensifies their politeness, showing they are speaking cautiously and with full acknowledgment of his power. The phrase "*will you listen to this*" is also a form of mitigation, as it politely requests his attention rather than imposing or challenging his authority outright. This reflects an indirect and deferential approach, which aligns with politeness strategies aimed at maintaining harmony and avoiding direct confrontation between Odewale and Baba Fakunle.

The terms "*peace*" and "*Patience, my Lord*", are a conflict avoidance data influenced by politeness in language. It uses respectful language. Addressing the listener (King Odewale) with the exalted term "*my lord*" conveys deference. By using "*patience*", chiefs subtly advise restraint or calmness, possibly to prevent an escalation of tension or to manage the situation diplomatically. In other words, the Chiefs' utterance "*patience my Lord*" is a clear conflict avoidance strategy. By urging patience, they seek to appease the tension between King Odewale and Baba Fakunle. The phrase is brief but effective in calming the situation, as it appeals to Odewale's sense of self-control and dignity as a ruler. Additionally, the use of "*My Lord*" as a respectful address reinforces politeness and deference, making it a strategic move to prevent further conflict.

## Act 2 Scene 2

Odewale: "*I do, do I? Very well then, tell me this: 'Bedsharer'. You heard it. Didn't you? That blind bat who calls himself Seer says I am a 'bedsharer'. What does that mean? Sharing a bed with whom? Ojuola, Aderepo's mother? In other words, I have no right to be King. What do you think of that? You don't answer*"?

Utterance (3): First Chief responds to Odewale: "*The seer is too old, my Lord, he does not know what he is saying*". The utterance is a conflict avoidance one, shaped by politeness in language. By addressing the listener (King Odewale) as "*my lord*", the speaker (the first Chief) shows deference and respect, softening the critique of the seer. It allows the speaker to present a counterpoint without deeply challenging the seer thereby avoiding potential conflict while maintain a respectful. In other words, this utterance is conflict avoidance strategy. The First Chief attempts to diffuse the tension between King Odewale and Baba Fakunle by attributing the seer's offensive words to old age rather than malice. By saying "*he doesn't know what he is saying*", the first chief downplays Baba Fakunle's statements, making them seem unworthy of





the King's anger. Additionally, the honorific "my Lord" maintains a respectful tone, reinforcing politeness.

### Act 2 Scene2

Aderepo: "Do as you wish I [turns his back to him]"

Odewale: "Listen to that rudeness"!

Utterance (4): Ojuola appeases the tension and addresses Odewale as follows: "My Lord, pray cool your anger". This polite suggestion shows deference and respect, acknowledging the authority of Odewale. This mitigates potential offense and softens the tone. Ojuola is using negative politeness markers such as "my lord" which is deferential address term and "pray" which is a softening device, meaning please in this context to calm King Odewale down. Ojuola uses an indirect and respectful request, making it more likely that Odewale will respond without further aggression. This aligns with politeness strategies that mitigate confrontation, particularly when addressing someone of higher status. The utterance seeks to calm a potentially volatile situation by appealing to Odewale's reason and self-control. It aims to defuse tension and prevent escalation of conflict between Odewale and Aderepo. In sociolinguistic terms, this is a negative politeness strategy, showing deference and reducing the imposition while promoting harmony.

### Act 2 Scene 4

Ojuola: "My Lord, will you eat something now"?

Odewale: "I thought you were leaving with your son, Aderepo".

Ojuola: "[Kneeling] It is you I married, your highness, not my son".

Odewale: "Hm! Great woman. Indeed, who says women have no heads? She is a foolish wife who sides against with her son against her own husband"

Utterance (5): Being kneeled Ojuola states the following to calm her Husband down: "[Kneeling] It is you I married, your highness, not my son". By addressing Odewale using the honorific 'your highness' and 'kneeling', Ojuola displays deference and respect, key markers of politeness in sociolinguistic terms. The non-verbal and verbal politeness helps soften the tension in potentially volatile situation. The statement redirects Odewale's anger or suspicion away from confrontation. Rather than challenging or arguing, Ojuola uses calm reasoning to clarify her loyalty ("It is you I married") and to avoid escalating the situation. Her utterance preserves the relational harmony between her and her husband and between Odewale and Aderepo, son of Ojuola. This utterance exemplifies negative politeness as conceptualized by P. Brown and S. Levinson (1987). It shows respect, deference, and indirectness-all intent to mitigate conflict and save the interlocutor's face. This utterance from Ojuola to Odewale so





greatly calmed Odewale's anger down that he called her a great woman. In this context by "great woman", he is expressing deep admiration and respect for her wisdom, emotional intelligence, and calmness.

### Act 3 Scene 2

Odewale: *"Enough! Will you give me time to think? What is the matter with you all, anyway?"*  
Ojuola replies in utterance (6): *"Kneeling, I beg of you, my Lord, I didn't mean to make you angry"*. Through this utterance, Ojuola employs multiple politeness markers to deescalate King Odewale's anger. First, she uses a non-verbal deference (*"kneeling"*) which is a physical act of submission and respect, which helps to soothe Odewale's temper. Then, she uses a supplicatory phrase (*"I beg of you"*). This reinforces humility and acknowledges Odewale's authority, making it less likely for him to react harshly. Moreover, she uses honorific address (*"my Lord"*), a respectful term, which softens the interaction and aligns with traditional deference strategies. Finally, Ojuola minimizes the offense when she states the following (*"I didn't mean to make you angry"*). By clarifying that there was no intent to offend, Ojuola is employing a face-saving strategy to prevent further conflict.

### Act 3 Scene 4

Odewale: *"[matchet raised], Old one, you provoke me with your delays!"*

Gbonka responds in utterance (7) to appease the tension between him and King Odewale: *"Pray have mercy, I meant you no wrong, I only tried to spare your life. My Lord I meant no harm, they ordered me to kill you in the bush, but I took pity"* is a statement by old Gbonka to Odewale. It is a conflict resolution one. Indeed, his words and demeanor suggest an attempt to soothe the situation and prevent violence from King Odewale. He begins the conflict avoidance by a plea for mercy (*"Pray have mercy"*). It is a direct appeal to Odewale's sense of compassion. Then, he denies of wrongdoing (*"I meant you no wrong, I meant no harm"*) which consists to clear himself of blame to reduce hostility. Additionally, he engages himself in a justification to avoid confrontation (*"I only tried to spare your life"*). Indeed, he explains his past actions to portray himself as an ally, not an enemy. Ultimately, he uses a submissive tone and body language (*"Gbonka subdued"*) which suggests surrender, showing no intent to fight back.

## 5. Expression of Positive Politeness in Conflicts Resolution

### Act 2 Scene 2

Aderepo: *"Do as you wish I [Turn his back to him]"*

Odewale: *"Listen to that rudeness"*





Ojuola: *"My Lord, pray cool your anger"*

Priest going to Aderepo: *"Son, you go away, when tempers calm down, we shall talk"*.

In utterance (8) *"Son, you go away, when tempers calm down, we shall talk"* is a conflict-avoidance utterance. In this context, the Priest is deescalating tension by using a kinship term, *"son"*. This creates a sense of familiarity and reduces hostility. The Priest is reducing tension by giving a directive in a softened manner. In fact, instead of forcefully commanding Aderepo to leave, the Priest frames it as a temporary measure (*"when tempers calm down, we shall talk"*), implying that the discussion is not being shut down entirely. The Priest is deferring confrontation by postponing the conversation until emotions have settled. By doing so, he is preventing the situation from escalating further. The politeness strategy used by the Priest to calm Aderepo's temper and avoid potential conflict between him and King Odewale is positive politeness expressed by the word *"son"*.

### Act 1 Scene 1

Third woman: *"I boiled mine longer- a long time. I even added dogo-yaro leaves to it"*

Odewale: *"And how does the body feel"?*

Third woman: *"Not as well as the heart wishes, my Lord"*.

Odewale replies: *"Our talk is about illness sister, to get fully cured, one needs patience. The moon moves slowly but by daybreak it crosses the sky. Keep on drinking the medicine; one day, you will see change, patience"*.

In utterance (9) *"Our talk is about illness sister, to get fully cured, one needs patience, the moon moves slowly but by daybreak it crosses the sky. Keep on drinking the medicine; one day, you will see change, patience"*. King Odewale is not confronting the anger and desperation of the third woman directly, but rather diffusing tension politely. He uses kinship address *"sister"* to soften his authority and bring a sense of solidarity. By saying *"our talk"* instead of *"my talk"* or *"this talk"*, Odewale draws the woman into a shared frame of discussion. It reduces the distance between the King and subject, suggesting that the issue is collective rather than imposed unilaterally. The inclusive *"our"* helps de-escalate tension by signaling that the conversation is jointly owned. This diffuses the sense of confrontation and frames the dialogue as cooperative. Our expresses solidarity, inclusiveness, and polite attempt to transform individual grievance into a collective concern, thereby supporting conflict resolution.

### Act 3 Scene 4

Aderepo: *"[Prostrating himself], Your highness"*.

Odewale: *"My brother, I have done you much wrong with my grave suspicions"*.

Aderepo: *"It is nothing, your highness...it is the way the gods mean it to happen"*.





Utterance (10): Odewale addresses Aderepo in a brotherly manner and with remorse: “*My brother, I have done you much wrong with my grave suspicions*”. This utterance can be interpreted as a strong case of positive politeness strategy for conflicts resolution, where Odewale uses self-blame and kinship terms to restore harmony, mitigate previous hostility and re-establish trust. It demonstrates how acknowledgement of guilty, couched in respectful language, functions as a repair strategy in social interaction. In fact, the King openly acknowledges his error “*I have done you much wrong*”, which is a direct act of conflict repair. The kinship address “*my brother*”, reflects Yoruba cultural norms where kinship terms sustains solidarity. It reduces hierarchical distance and reaffirms communal ties, softening the earlier offense. Admitting fault lowers the threat to Aderepo’s positive face, his need to be respected. This shifts the interaction from accusation to reconciliation.

### Act 2 Scene 1

Ogun priest: “*Ha! Enough ha-ha [noises subsides]. The King speaks. You have had your say now. Pray the King speaks. Ha! [Complete silence]*”

Odewale replies in utterance (11): “*My people. Children of our fathers, Sickness is like rain. Does the rain fall on one roof alone? No, does it fall on one body and not on another? No. whoever, the rain sees, on him it rains. Does it not? It is the same with sickness. You do me great wrong, therefore to think that*”. Odewale’s utterance can indeed be considered a conflict avoidance one. In fact, instead of reacting angrily to the townspeople’s complaints, who implicitly accuse him of being responsible for the sickness, Odewale responds calmly with a proverb and analogy. This shift from accusation to reasoning reduces direct confrontation. He then uses inclusive language to address his citizens. Expressions like “*My people, children of our fathers*” establish solidarity and shared identity, so a positive politeness strategy.

This appeal to communal unity softens the tension between him and the townspeople. The use of proverbial and metaphorical strategy like the comparison- “*Sickness is like rain. It does not fall on one roof alone*”, reframes the issue of collective natural misfortune, not an individual fault. This rhetorical strategy diverts blame and diffuses hostility, both of which are key conflict avoidance techniques. As a whole, Odewale’s utterance serves to calm the situation, preserve social harmony, and avoid direct confrontation, making it a clear example of a conflict avoidance utterance within the sociolinguistic and pragmatic framework of politeness.





## 6. Expression of Euphemism in Conflicts Management

### Act 2 Scene 1

Baba Fakunle: “[yelling] King Odewale, King of Kutuje, go sit down in private and think deep before darkness covers you up...think... think...think”!

Ojuola (seeing First Chief alone) “Balogun, what is the matter”?

First Chief: “Haste your husband, woman”.

Second Chief: “He needs rest”.

First Chief reacts in utterance (12) to appease the tension: “*It is old age: that is why I fear to think of ageing*”, the First Chief is attempting to diffuse King Odewale’s anger by attributing Baba Fakunle’s harsh words to his old age rather than any ill intent. This redirection helps to deescalate the situation by shifting the focus away from the insult and onto the natural effects of aging. Making it seem less personal. The first chief frames the statement around “*old age*” and the natural fear of aging, which softens the message and avoids direct blame. By speaking in a roundabout and non-confrontational way, the First chief redirects attention from the anger and tension between King Odewale and old Gbonka. The utterance acts as a subtle reminder that encourages reflection rather than confrontation. In Yoruba society, indirectness, respect for elders, and careful language are value strategies for maintaining social harmony. The Chief’s phrasing aligns with cultural norms, making it both a polite and socially effective way to manage conflict. The utterance aligns with politeness strategies in sociolinguistics, particularly the use of mitigation and indirectness to maintain social harmony.

### Act 3, Scene 4

Gbonka: “*Many people hunted deer in the bush of Ipetu*”.

Alaka: “*Ijekum boy, I mean an Ijekum boy from the village of Ishokun near Ikoti, the village of your wife*”.

Odewale: “*You waste time*”!

Alaka replies smoothly in utterance (13) to calm Odewale down: “*The man’s brain is aged, my lord and it needs to be prodded little by little to bring forth remembrance*”, Alaka prevents potential confrontation, sustains cultural politeness norms, and facilitates smoother communication between Odewale and the old man Gbonka. This utterance is a euphemistic conflicts resolution strategy through respectful softening of words and indirect explanation. As a matter of fact, instead of bluntly calling the old man “*forgetful*” or “*senile*”, Alaka uses the polite euphemism “*the man’s brain is aged*”. This avoids direct offense and maintains respect for the elderly, consistent with Yoruba cultural norms. By using the expression “*needs to be*





*prodded little by little to bring forth remembrance*”, Alaka frames the old man’s forgetfulness as something that requires patience, not ridicule. The utterance protects the old man’s positive face (dignity and respect) while also calming the King’s negative face (desire for control and quick answers). This helps reduce potential conflict between the King, who is desperate for answers, and the old man, who is struggling to remember.

### Act 3 Scene 2

Ojuola: “*Baba Fakunle? Baba Fakunle called you murderer*”?

Odewale: “*And bedsharer, ask the Chiefs*”.

Ojuola responds in utterance (14) to appease the tension: “*And my Lord takes him seriously; the old man’s mind is not sound*”. *My Lord should not take his words seriously. Why, was it not this same Baba Fakunle who...[changes her mind]. My Lord must not take him seriously*”. Ojuola balances respect for her husband with indirect criticism of Baba Fakunle. by choosing the expression “*mind is not sound*”, she mitigates the potential confrontation and maintains harmony in a tense situation. Instead of bluntly calling Baba Fakunle “*mad*”, she says “*his mind is not sound*”. This euphemistic phrasing softens the negative judgment, showing cultural sensitivity toward the elderly. Ojuola’s aim is to protect Odewale from being misled by Baba Fakunle’s accusations, without directly blaming him (Baba Fakunle) in a way that could escalate tension. The euphemistic expression reduces the risk of conflict between the two parties: the King and Baba Fakunle.

Politeness emphasizes a shared goal, aligning the speaker with the listener’s potential priorities and reducing room for disagreement. It acknowledges the listener’s authority and shows respect and avoid confrontation. This result is in congruence with the works of P. Brown and S. Levinson (1987, p.1) when they assert that “politeness has a socially basic role: it can control potential conflict and maintain social harmony among communicators”. Similarly, G. Kasper (1990, p.193-218) reviews various theories of politeness, including its role in strategic conflict avoidance. By the same token, G. Leech (1983, p.1) outlines his politeness maxims, which are designed to minimize conflict and enhance cooperative communication.

G. Leech’s (2005) politeness rules are in congruence with this result, when he stated that Politeness rules or principles limit human communicative behavior, by influencing people to avoid communicative discord or offence and maintain communicative concord. G. Leech (2005) means that politeness rules shape human communication by guiding individuals to steer clear of discord or offense aiming instead to uphold harmony in communication.





## Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that politeness in language is not superficial ornament of communication, but rather a fundamental linguistic and sociocultural strategy for the management of human interaction. In Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, politeness emerges as a mechanism through which characters navigate moments of tension, avert potential conflicts, and restore social equilibrium. By employing strategies such as euphemism, indirectness, deference and respect forms, interlocutors succeed in mitigating face-threatening acts while preserving interpersonal dignity. This analysis confirms that politeness is both a sociolinguistic tool and a cultural marker deeply embedded in Yoruba communicative norms where communal harmony takes precedence over individual assertion.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce the idea that dramatic texts do not merely entertain, but also function as mirrors of societal values and communicative practices that lead to conflicts avoidance. Rotimi's play highlights how linguistic choices are inseparable from social structures, particularly in context of hierarchy and authority. The study therefore contributes to the broader sociolinguistic discourse by illustrating the ways in which African dramatic literature encodes politeness as a resource for conflict resolution and community cohesion.

Ultimately, politeness, as portrayed in this play, goes beyond its role as a conversational strategy to become a cornerstone of Yoruba and African social life. It promotes respect, solidarity, and collective well-being, while simultaneously serving as a reminder that language remains one of the most effective instruments for negotiating power, preserving relationships, and sustaining cultural identity. Future research will build on these insights by comparing the representation of politeness strategies across other African playwrights or by examining how contemporary performances reinterpret these norms in modern sociolinguistic contexts.

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