

Lying innocently and using indirectness to avoid disagreement in discourse. An investigation on Nigerian students in Southeast Nigeria and Southern Italy

Abstract

In discourse, individuals function within a framework that necessitates congruence between the discussants' publicly proclaimed wants and beliefs. They achieve reciprocity of viewpoints and a mutually agreeable objective through institutionally regulated and culturally accepted communication procedures, or sometimes through a change in communication pathways (Kecske and Zhang, 2009). Thus, we explore the concept of white lies and the use of indirectness to avoid disagreement in conversations among Nigerian students in Southeast Nigeria and Southern Italy. The study answers questions bordering on possible variations on how select Nigerian students in Southeast Nigeria and Southern Italy avoid disagreement and negotiate common ground during interaction, the diverse ways white lie and indirectness are used by the students, and the pragmatic function(s) they perform, especially concerning conflict avoidance (Lakoff, 1973). We adopt a content analysis research design (Bengtsson, 2016) to determine the presence of white lies and indirectness strategies in the transcripts of recorded naturally occurring talk-in-interaction and semi-structured informal interviews and consider social variables such as age and gender and socio-pragmatic variables such as power and social distance in the analysis of the data drawn from four informal interactions of two groups of eight Nigerian students in Nigeria and Italy, respectively. Framed by politeness theory and conversation analysis, the study demonstrates that both groups of students distinctively use in-group terminologies and language, implication, code-switching, hedging, and questioning as strategies to permeate white lies and indirectness in conversation.

Keywords: conflict avoidance, white lie, indirectness, culture, politeness

References

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