Pragmatic Study of Verbal Threats among the Fantes: A Case of Apewosika

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Pragmatic Study of Verbal Threats among the Fantes: A Case of Apewosika

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Abstract: Verbal threat is a face threatening acts that confront people. It is a language phenomenon that can generate quarrel, fight, confusion, chaos, etc. This study investigates causes, aims and effects of verbal threat, among the Fantes using Apewosika as a case study. The research employed a qualitative and a case study approach. In all, 30 participants made up of 12 male adults, 12 female adults, 3 male children and 3 female children were randomly selected using the purposive sampling technique of which their responses from the interview and the observation to the research topic problem were presented to content analysis. The results indicate that there are four main causes (ill-speaking/gossiping, insults/invectives, false-witnessing against someone, and wrongly nicknaming someone), for which one issues out a threat among the Apewosika people. Also, the research reveals that there are three main aims for which an individual seeks to achieve when he/she issues out a threat and these are: to prevent the offender from repeating the same mistake, to deter other people from committing similar mistake and to present oneself as very fearful to an offender so as to demand some respect from the offender. Further, the study reveals that verbal threats have some negative effects on individuals. Thus, it breaks the smooth relationship between people, it puts so much fear in an offender and also makes one feel so worried and disorganized. The paper concludes that verbal threats are not meant to preserve the face of an individual since it is a face threatening act.

Keywords: Verbal Threats, Face, Impoliteness, Offender, Threatner

1. Introduction

Apewosika is a Fante speaking community which is located at the North-Western part of Cape Coast in the Central Region of Ghana. Specifically, this community is found at the South campus of the University of Cape Coast. There are about 1,547 people living in the Apewosika community (source- © 2006 Cape Coast Metropolitan Assembly). The people are very united in terms of their culture in that they are binded together by one common language, common naming system, dress and food. Although the people have different religious background, it does not separate them from one another.

They see themselves as one people from the same community and as a result of that they support one another in terms of needs or troubles. They live a communal living and their way of life can be applied to what Mbiti (1991) refers to as "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am". This means that among the people of this community, the problems of the individual person are the problems of the whole community and the reverse of this is the case.

The people celebrate the "Fetu Afahye" (Fetu Festival) together with the people of Cape Coast. They are basically traders and fish mongers. However, with the establishment of the University of Cape Coast in the community, most of the community folks have had the opportunity of being employed in most of the various sectors of the University as labourers, cleaners, security men and women among others.

Generally, the act of threatening can be expressed by the word 'threat' which as Pearsal (1998) points out, originated from an old English word 'oppression'. Austin (1962) aptly states that the verb 'threaten' is a commissive which can be used performatively and explicitly in some contexts. He (Austin) believes that the perlocutionary act of 'threat' is to intimidate the Hearer. Likewise, Hamblin (1987) agrees that threaten can be with the commissive verbs as it is made in the same future-tense form. However, they both believe that this act is mainly expressed implicitly in a conditional form, and the object is to get the addressee to act in a certain way. In this vein, Leech & Svartrik (1975) illustrate that threat can be expressed conditionally by using the conjunctive 'and' which according to them indicates positive condition.

Al-Ameedi & Al-Husseini (2005) identify two points of view about a threat act. First, the objective view which indicates that the speaker makes a statement with an intention to cause serious harm to the listener. Second, the subjective view which states that the speaker makes a statement of threat to the listener regardless of whether the speaker actually intends to carry out the threat. This draws a distinction between making and posing a threat.

Verbal threat in any manner when issued out always has some impact on the listener whether negatively or positively. This means that verbal threat just like other speech act such as warning or refusal always go against the wishes or will of the listener and this always impedes on the face of the listener and as a result of this some scholars like Brown & Levinson (1987) have developed a theory called *'politeness'* to help identify a particular type of face a hearer portrays when certain speech acts are made or uttered. It must be emphasized that every threat issued in whatsoever form does not make use of the performative verb 'threat' itself as can be seen in 'I threat you', rather; depending on the manner in which certain words are uttered, they are regarded as threats to the listener. Thus, just like the performative verb 'vow', the performative verb 'threat' is not mostly used or not even used at all when one issues a threat to another person. To support this claim, Halliday (1973) suggests that 'threat' is a semantic phenomenon which can be expressed by different expressions and situations.

Brown & Levinson (1987) point out that most of the time there are certain behaviours in an interaction like threats or warning that always underrate or undermine the face of the interlocutor because such actions always go against the wishes of the hearer and they deemed this as "Face Threatening Acts (FTAs)". This means that the performative verb 'threat' does not preserve or maintain the face of the offender. They opine that, emotionally face is invested or created and it can be lost depending on the power relation and the choice of words used for an interaction among individual persons. Brown & Levinson (1978) however argue that every face has the potential to be threatened because in the course of an interaction, the speaker is likely to say something to threaten his or her face or that of the hearer. They also point out that a person's positive face is threatened when a speaker or hearer is not concerned about the hearer's want or desire to be appreciated. They further explain that the negative face is also threatened when the speaker does not prevent the obstruction of the hearer's freedom of action. To lose face therefore is to publicly suffer a diminished self-image. Maintaining face is accomplished by taking a line while interacting socially and a line is what a person says or does during an interaction.

The theory of face as propounded by Gofman (1959) indicates that everyone has a social face, image or prestige that he or she would want to protect or preserve. For this reason, one does not take it lightly at all when negative impressions are created about him/her by others or when that fellow realizes he or she is not being treated fairly or being cheated upon and this always call for the issuing of verbal threats or sometimes just warning among people. Goffman (1959) defines face as everybody's self-esteem which he or she wants to preserve or protect. Totimeh & Bosiwah (2015) also contend that face relates to how people interact and perceive each other in their daily lives.

Watt et al. (2013) define a threat as a form of expression that communicates some undesirable state of affairs may befall the recipient or a third party as a consequence of another's purposeful actions. Also, some lexicographers such as Collins (1987), Pearsall (1998) and Hornby (2000) also define threat as "a declaration of an intention to inflict pain, injury, damage or other hostile action on someone in retribution for something done or not done". Therefore, the speech act "threat" is defined in this work is an act of one giving the possibility of causing damage or harm to another person if caution is not taken or if one continues to do what another person hates or dislikes. Gales (2012) asserts that a threat can either be direct, indirect, veiled or conditional. This means that a threat could be issued using one of these types identified by Gales (2012) depending on the relationship involved between the interlocutors or the type of offence committed against the threatner.

With respect to the issuing of threat, the one who issues out the threat is referred to as the "offended person or threatner" whilst the one to whom the threat is issued is also referred to as the "offender". Thus, the offended person is the one who something wrong has been done against by another person and as a result issues the threat whereas the offender is the one who has done something wrong against another person and as a result of that receives a threat from the offended.

Verbal threat is a language phenomenon that exists between individuals in every speech community no matter how gentle and harmonious people would want to live their lives. This is because so far as people cannot avoid offending or wronging other people, individuals will always continue to issue out threats to others so as to protect their happiness and self-image. In this regard, this research critically examines the use of verbal threats among the people of Apewosika in order to reveal the main causes that bring about these threats, the main aim(s) which one seeks to achieve when such threats are issued out, as well as the effects of these threats on an individual.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Verbal threat is a form of speech act which forms an integral part of human behaviour. Brown & Levinson (1987) indicate that verbal threat is a face threatening act which seeks to cause damage or does not seek to preserve the face of the hearer. Austin (1962) also indicates that a threat is a commissive speech act because it issuance commits oneself to the performance of a future action. He however claims that for a particular speech act such as threat to be realized as such, it must not deviate from what he refers to as the 'felicity condition'.

Verbally threatening someone is an intrinsically highly offensive and impolite social activity and must therefore be

regarded as a potentially very damaging 'face threatening act (Limberg & Geluykens, 2007). Some scholars such as Heilman & Garner (1995), Song (1995), Limberg & Geluykens (2007), and Limberg (2012) have indicated that despite the obvious face risks involved in uttering verbal threats, they have received little attention in the literature on impoliteness or relational work. Also, Asher (1994) contends that committing oneself to a future cause of action is a type of verbal behaviour which has only a minor role to play in many non-Western societies. This means that there is relatively few works which exist on speech act such as warning and threat in our part of the world (Africa, and Ghana to be specific). It is in view of this left-out language phenomenon that we seek to critically examine the use of verbal threat among the people of Apewosika in other to bring out what may cause one to issue out a verbal threat, to identify the main aims or reasons for which one issues out these threats and to finally point out some effects these threats have on an individual.

1.2. Purpose and Objective of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to critically examine the use of verbal threat among the Apewosika people in Cape Coast. Based on this, below are our specific objectives:
- To critically examine what may cause an individual to issue a verbal threat.
- To analyze the aims/objectives for which one issues a verbal threat.
- To identify the effects of verbal threat on an individual

1.3. Research Questions

To help us achieve the objectives above, this research finds answers to the following questions:
- What could be the main causes of verbal threats?
- What does one intends to achieve when verbal threats are issued out?
- What could be the effects of verbal threat on an individual?

1.4. Significance of the Study

It has already been stated that some scholars such as (Heilman & Garner 1995; Song 1995; and Limberg & Geluykens, 2007) have indicated that despite the obvious face risks involved in uttering verbal threats, they have received little attention in the literature on impoliteness or relational work. In view of this assertion given by these scholars, we believe that this research will help give more knowledge and insight to people on the use of verbal threat in that the research seeks to bring out some of the main causes for which one issues out a threat as well as the main aims/objectives which one seeks to achieve when verbal threat are issued. Also, the research will help people to have a fair knowledge on some of the effects which verbal threat has on an individual.

Finally, this research will help to fill the gap on speech acts such as threat which has not been given much attention as

claimed by these scholars. It will also serve as a source of reference to other researchers who would find it very interesting to also research into other speech acts topics related to verbal threat.

2. Methodology

In this study, we relied on a case study as well as a qualitative approach to undertake the research. Patton (1990) indicates that a case study is a way of organizing social data for the purpose of viewing social reality. Mariam (1988) sees it to be detailed investigations of individuals, groups, institutions or other social units. A case study approach will be employed in undertaking the research because the phenomenon under investigation is a contemporary one and the study is based on a real life situation.

We employed both the case study and the qualitative research design to undertake this research because this study seeks to reveal the detailed understanding of the phenomenon of making threat among a particular group of people in order to find out how and why they make such threats.

We used the semi-structured interview as a tool to gather data and with this we had sets of questions to ask the participants. We employed the semi-structured interview because it is very flexible and it paved way for new questions or ideas which were not part of the original questions but was found very interesting to be brought up during the interview as a result of what either the interviewers or the participants said. In addition to the semi-structured interview, we also relied on an indirect participant observation of an interaction among people in the Apewosika community as another tool for gathering data.

We also gathered data by recording the responses of the respondents using an electronic recorder. However, there were certain times that we were denied the opportunity to record the people's voices so we had to resort to manual writing of the responses. The reason being is that, some of the participants who were engaged in this study thought that their voices/responses would be used for other purpose apart from the academic intended purpose.

This study involved two main sources of data, deemed primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data includes the responses of the participants which was the main source of information for the analysis and discussion of this research. The data was collected from the Apewosika speech community, focusing on male and female adults as well as children whereas the secondary sources of data were books, articles, and journals. In all, 30 people including 12 male adults, 12 females adult, 3 male children and 3 female children ageing between 8 and 56 were randomly selected and interviewed for this research using the purposive sampling technique.

The reason for selecting these people is that, they form the majority in the Apewosika community and we realized that they are mostly involved in social interaction; hence, they served as the right source of the information needed. This study was not restricted to only the elites but it also included

the illiterates. In view of this, we used the oral as well as written consent form where participants who could not read and write, we took our time to read and explain to them the purpose of this study so as to seek their interest and readiness to willfully participate in the interview. Those who could not speak English were allowed to speak the L1 (Fante). We then translated the L1 to L2 (English language).

3. Results and Discussion

To be able to access and understand their general knowledge on the questions which were used for the gathering of data for this research, the table below provides some background information about the respondents who were engaged in this study. However, for the fear that their responses would be used for other purposes apart from the academic intended purpose, the respondents did not allow their names to be taken and so we decided to number them as respondent 1, respondent 2 and so on. See Table 1 below:

Table 1. *showing some demographic information about interviewees.*

Respondents	Gender	Age	Educational Background
Respondent 1	Female Adult	42	Basic
Respondent 2	Female Adult	26	Basic
Respondent 3	Male Adult	25	Secondary
Respondent 4	Female Child	11	Primary
Respondent 5	Male Adult	43	Basic
Respondent 6	Male Adult	54	Basic
Respondent 7	Male Adult	26	Secondary
Respondent 8	Female Adult	38	None
Respondent 9	Female Child	16	Junior High
Respondent 10	Male Child	15	Junior High
Respondent 11	Female Adult	33	Basic
Respondent 12	Male Adult	29	Basic
Respondent 13	Male Child	13	Upper Primary
Respondent 14	Female Adult	48	Basic
Respondent 15	Male Adult	49	Basic
Respondent 16	Male Adult	56	None
Respondent 17	Female Child	14	Upper Primary
Respondent 18	Male Child	8	Lower Primary
Respondent 19	Female Adult	29	Basic
Respondent 20	Male Adult	36	Basic
Respondent 21	Male Adult	45	Basic
Respondent 22	Female Adult	40	Tertiary
Respondent 23	Male Adult	53	Basic
Respondent 24	Male Adult	27	Secondary
Respondent 25	Female Adult	26	Basic
Respondent 26	Female Adult	47	Basic
Respondent 27	Male Adult	49	None
Respondent 28	Female Adult	31	Primary
Respondent 29	Female Adult	48	Basic
Respondent 30	Female Adult	28	Basic

3.1. How People Perceive Threat

During our interview with the people in the Apewosika community, it became evident that about 98 percent of our interviewees have knowledge about what the speech act "threat" means. In their local language (L1), the people refer to threat as "ihubɔ" which is made up of two morphemes – {ihu-} (fear) and {-bɔ} (hit). They indicated that the speech act "threat" is sometimes referred to as "ihunahuna" (act of threatening) and they explained this as indicated in illustrations 1 and 2 below:

1) "When we talk of threatening someone, it means that, the person has done something wrong against you which you are not happy about and because you want that person to stop that thing, you either say or show some action that is very fearful or scary to that person so as stop to the person from repeating that mistake" (Respondent 6).

2) "Threatening someone means that you are putting fear into the person who has done something wrong against you by saying something which is very fearful or scary to the person so as to stop the person from repeating the same wrong act" (Respondent 30).

Pertaining to these explanations of verbal threat above, it could be realized that the people of Apewosika are of the idea that one of the ways that can be used to stop someone from doing something which one sees as very offensive is by issuing out a verbal threat to the offender. Following these explanations, it means therefore that the people believe that these threats do not come out just like that but they always come on a cause of a wrongful act that one does against another person.

3.2. Causes of Verbal Threat

It is a general idea that no human being in his/her sane state will act in one way or the other without having any cause of his/her action. In view of this, four causes were revealed during the data collection and discussion as being the main and serious causes that always prompted one to issue out a verbal threat in the Apewosika community, even though we identified others too.

3.2.1. Ill-speaking/Gossiping

Some scholars such as Goffman (1959) and Brown & Levinson (1987) indicate that every individual has face or self-esteemed image which he or she would want to protect and as a result Goffman (1959) contends that individuals work to maintain their face needs and the quality of their relationship by avoiding face threatening acts and preventing the relational detriment that it would potentially results in.

This means that positive image is what everyone wants to claim for him or herself no matter the status of that person and so some individuals in most communities especially in most Ghanaian societies, no matter how poor or rich the person is do not take it very lightly at all when he/she realizes other persons go around talking negatively or gossiping about him/her to other people.

Some of the respondents shared their experiences that what is more painful about this act is that it allows people to make fun of them in the community which makes them feel very unhappy emotionally and so the best way to prevent this act is to issue out a serious threat to people who go around gossiping about other people.

Two of the examples from our data gathered which illustrates a threat as a result of someone gossiping about another person is presented in illustrations 3 and 4 below:

3) "Hei lady, are you out of your senses? Why do you want

to make my life in this community very difficult for me? I am going to beat you and drag you down like my own child the next time I hear you gossip about me to those good for nothing friends of yours" (Respondent11).

4) "Idiot like you, if you think you can destroy me to that lady and have your way through, then you are joking. If you continue to speak ill things about me to that lady again and I find out you will have to kill me first or I will kill you with my bear hands" (Respondent 3).

Illustration 3 above shows an example of threat which we observed as it came from respondent 11 to a female offender. The threatner who issues this threat is a female and she issued it because she realized the offender was gossiping about her to other people which she was not happy about. In this threat, even though the one who issues it is a female, she employs certain harsh and impolite words and she does not mean to maintain the face of the offender. Thus, in this threat, the threatner employs both the bald on-record and negative politeness strategies identified by Brown & Levinson (1987) because the threatner makes use of words which will embarrass and make the offender feel very bad within. As a result, this finding contradicts with Yule (1996) and Lakoff (1973), who claim that females turn to show more politeness in speaking than men because they use more prestigious and polite language. This means that not all females make use of such polite words in their speeches.

However, illustration 4 confirms their claims since the male who issues out this threat also employs some level of impoliteness as well as both the bald on-record and negative politeness strategies. Also, considering these threats, they confirm the objective view of a threat act identified by Al-Ameedi & Al-Husseini (2005) which suggests that in such threat, the speaker makes a statement with an intention to cause a serious harm to the offender. Thus, in these threats, it could be seen that the offended persons of each of these threats do not hide the harm which they intend to cause. In both threats it could be seen that the offenders face are negatively threatened because the threatners do not make use of words which will preserve their face.

3.2.2. Invectives/ Insults

Insult/invective was also seen as one of the main causes which always bring about the issuance of verbal threat among the members in the Apewosika community. According to Agyekum (2004), insults or invectives are seen as linguistic, paralinguistic of symbolic communication forms which are meant to cause mental pain, embarrassment or disgrace. Sekyi-Baidoo (2006) concurs that insults are non-politeness or anti-politeness forms, and they usually cause the breakdown of social cohesion. Leech (1983) supports this by indicating that insults can, thus, be considered a violation of the principles of politeness.

Brown and Levinson (1987) assert that Face Threatening Acts such as insults infringe on the individual or addresser's need to maintain self-esteem and be respected in a particular society. In this regard, it became very clear in the gathering and analysis of our data that the members in the Apewosika community would always want to do anything to prevent such insults in order to maintain their self-image or self-respect in the community and one of the tool which they use to curb this situation is to issue out a threat to people who insult so as to scare them off from continuing with such act. See illustrations 5 and 6 below:

5) "One thing I hate in my life is a lady who does not have any respect for herself and others as well. If you there insult me as a mad person again, I will personally give you a hard slap on your face for you to know that indeed I am mad" (Respondent 12).

6) "Could you let me know what I have done wrong against you that you always insult me as a prostitute? You either stop that or I will fight and damage you" (Respondent 2)

The first threat as seen in illustration 5 came from our respondent 5 to a female offender and illustration 6 also came from female respondent 2 to a female offender. These threats when compared to the types of threat identified by Gales (2012), it could be realized that the two threats signals a conditional threat. Thus, in these threats, although the threatners intend to carry out the perlocutionary effect involved in the threat, they still give some conditions to the respective offenders and until such conditions are met, the offenders of the respective threats cannot escape the perlocutionary effect involved in the threat. Culpeper (1996) writes that a threat uttered in a conditional form stresses the urgency to comply on the part of the listener because he/she is confronted with two undesirable actions to choose between. In these same threats too, one could realize that they also involve a direct speech act and according to Saeed (2003) direct speech acts are explicitly stated and that by making the condition or speech act explicit, the hearer can infer what the speaker implies. It is justifiable in both threats that there is no vagueness as to what actions the threatners intend to cause and the respective offenders can infer that. Also, whereas Sekyi-Baidoo (2006) indicates in his research that insults are used among University students to regulate social behaviour, foster social cohesion, identity and solidarity, this research does not confirm this claim because the data gathered and analyzed reveals that insults among Apewosika members causes social breakdown among the people and it always call for the issuance of verbal threat.

3.2.3. False Witnessing Against Someone

Bearing false witness against people is something which we may say is very common in most Ghanaian societies. In most Ghanaian societies, especially in the urban areas the poor or weak people mostly end up going to prison or receiving punishment as a result of a false witness that one may bear against them. Thus, in most cases if the rich and the poor engage in some dispute, the rich as a result of his or her riches influences other people with money just to bear false witness against the poor even though the poor may have a good case.

In December 2014, one of the most renounced Ghanaian Hip-Life Artists who bears the name "kwaw Kesse" who had

just returned from the Kumasi Central Prisons confirmed on one of the famous Frequency Modulation Stations in Kumasi (Ghana) that he encountered some people in the prison who confessed to him that they have been in the prison for years for the reason that they had disputes with some rich people in their community and because these rich people were able to manipulate their ways through by luring or influencing other people with money to bear false witness against them, they were pronounced guilty and jailed.

Sometimes also, even apart from one being influenced by another person to bear false witness against someone, the false witness bearers also do so because of familiarity. We must therefore make it clear that, the order of the day in most Ghanaian societies today is either the "rich or strong" oppressing the "poor or weak" as a result of their riches or strength respectively. There is what is even referred to as "who you know", which means doing something to favour who is very close to you though that fellow might not deserve that. During our collection of data for this study, this cause revealed itself as being one of the main causes for which one issues out a threat.

Two examples from our data gathered signaling verbal threats as a cause of someone bearing false witness against another person are presented in illustration 7 and 8 below:

7) "You have no idea about how everything started, but, if you think because that woman is your friend you can say anything in her favour and make me suffer at the end of the day, then you are joking. If you dare try to say anything you don't know about this case, I promise you that I will send you to your early grave" (Respondent 29).

8) "I don't want anyone to describe me as a wicked person so it will be in your own interest if you stay out of this land issue. But if you take any money from that man and you say anything against me that will make me lose my land, I will wipe up you and your entire family from the surface of this earth" (Respondent 15).

In illustrations 7 and 8 above, the respondents indicate that they issued out these threats as they realized that the respective offenders wanted to bear false witness against them. In illustration 7, respondent 29 indicates that she had a quarrel with her neighbour and it turned into a fight. The case was sent to the chief and his elders and they (the chief and his elders) asked them to bring their witnesses but she realized that a particular lady who did not know the genesis what brought about the fight wanted to bear false witness against her because she is so close to the other woman and so she (the threatner) issued out this threat so as so scare the young lady of.

In illustration 8 male respondent 15 also explains that he had a dispute with another man over a land which he the threatner inherited from his father and the case was sent to the chief and his elders where they were asked to present their witnesses. He indicated that his neighbour because of his riches had gone to give money to someone who knows nothing about the land to come and witness against him (the threatner) so that the land will be claimed from him to the rich man. So in order to save this situation, the threatner

issued out the above threat to the offender so as to scare him off from what he intends to do.

In both threats, it could be inferred that the threatners do not seek to maintain the faces of the offenders and so issue the threats in a direct manner. Therefore, when we compare these threats to the views of a threat act according to Al-Ameedi & Al-Husseini (2005) these threats can be regarded as an objective view of a threat act which indicates that a threatner makes a statement with an intention to cause a serious harm to an offender without hiding his intentions. Also, these threats could be realized as a form of aggression as identified by Baron and Richardson (1994) since the threatners exhibit a form of behaviour directed towards the goal of seriously harming or injuring another human being. Thus, in both threats, the threatners explicitly mention out the violent act they intend to cause against the offenders.

3.2.4. Wrongly Nicknaming Someone

Basically, a name is something which is given to people to give them an identity in a society. Agyekum (2006:208) concurs that in our cultural contexts we name in order to differentiate, to recognize and to know. He adds that in every culture, names have cultural and social contexts that identify the bearer (p. 208). Agyekum believes that the name which people are given can either affect them negatively or positively. In this regard, most people do not like it when others want to spoil their names or call them by a particular name which they are not happy about. These names which other people sometimes prefer to give to others aside their original names are mostly referred to as nicknames.

Some people in the Apewosika community expressed the idea that it is not wrong to be given a nickname but sometimes the nicknames which people try to give to others are so annoying that if one does nothing about it at the very early stage to prevent such names and many people in the community hears of it, he/she will be teased with it and that alone can make that individual feel very bad to associate with other people. Yeboaba (2012) posits that teasing an individual usually leads to the loosing of the individual's self-dignity. As a result of this, the people believe that one of the best ways to avoid being called by such nicknames is to seriously threaten such people who try to give wrong nicknames. Some of the respondents indicate that, what is so annoying which sometimes compel them to issue out a serious threat is that sometimes those who try to initiate these nicknames do so by basing on some word one might has pronounced out wrongly or even some mistake the initiators may find on an individual.

Two examples from the data gathered illustrating the issuance of verbal threats as a result of wrongly nicknaming someone is shown illustrations 9 and 10 below:

9) "Idiot, why do you call me by that name? Don't you know my real name? The next time you address me by that name I will beat you and tear you into pieces" (Respondent 10).

10) "Excuse me; what name did you just call me? Listen and listen to me carefully, you idiot. My name isn't 'Nkoso', so never again in your life call me by that name. Because, if

you do, I will give you a dirty slap in your face for you to know that there are some ladies in this town that are stronger than men, Bush man" (Respondent 2).

In the illustrations 9 and 10 above, the respondents issued out these threats to their respective offenders because they indicate that the offenders wanted to give them some nicknames which they do not want. It is therefore evidenced from the above threats that the threatners do not want to bear any other nickname apart from their original names that is why they react impolitely towards the offenders. With respect to illustration 10, when we decided to probe further to know more about the nickname which the respondent was being referred to, most of our female respondents explained to us that, the term "Nkoso" is a nickname which is given to a lady who is regarded as a 'sex helper' or 'prostitute' in their community and so the moment someone calls you by that name then, you begin to lose your self-esteemed image or respect in the community. That is why they do not take it friendly with people who refer to them by such a name.

When compared to other literatures, these two threats can be seen as a social harm to the offender which Tedeschi and felson (1994) indicate that it involves damage to the social identity of a target person and lowering of his status by using insults or impolite words to address a listener. Thus, in both threats, it could be realized clearly that the threatners use impolite words such as "idiot" and "bushman" to address their respective offenders and this threatens the offenders face negatively. Brown & Levinson (1987) indicates that behaviours or actions such as insults, threats or sarcasms undermine the face of an addressee since it goes contrary to the wishes of the addressee as well as Adjei and Bosiwah (2015) also indicate that the use of sarcasms threatens an individual's face negatively.

3.3. Aims/Objectives of Verbal Threat

It is generally believed that nobody on this earth will do anything without having an aim or without seeking to have an end result Yeboaba (2012). This means that whatever one does in life comes with an aim or what that person seeks to achieve as a result of performing that particular act or action. In most of our Ghanaian societies, people who do anything without aiming to achieve an end result are regarded as good for nothing people. In other words such people are seen as aimless or ambitionless. The word aim may have other synonyms such as "goal", "purpose" "reason" "objective" or even "ambition".

Yeboaba (2012) defines an aim as something that you want to achieve by doing something. In this regard, we will also define an aim as something one seeks to attain in life as a result of performing a particular act or action. It is only through an aim that one can realize whether he or she has been successful in doing something and this is what Hymes (1974) refers to as 'Ends' in his acronym of SPEAKING.

The data which was collected and analyzed showed that the people of Apewosika also have an aim which they seek to achieve after issuing out a verbal threat. The analysis therefore reveals that the people have three main aims or

reasons why they issue out a verbal threat. These aims/objectives include the following:

- They issue out verbal threat to stop or prevent the offender from repeating the same offence which called for the threat. Thus, the threatners believe that issuing out a verbal threat to an offender creates some kind of fear in him or her to refrain from continuing such an act. This was one of the main findings of Yeboaba (2012) who also states that the people of Amamoma issue out verbal warning to prevent the offender from repeating the same mistake which called for the issuance of the warning.
- They issue out verbal threat to serve as a deterrent to others so as not to commit similar offence that called for the threat. Thus, threatners believe that when such threats are issued out, it scares other people off and so may not commit the same mistake which one did and was threatened.
- They issue out verbal threat to present themselves as very fearful to the offender so as to demand some kind of respect from the offender. The people indicated to us that in their community, people do not respect or fear other people who are seen as very soft and so anybody at all can prey on such people, therefore people who become offended by other people's action do not hesitate to issue threat so as to present oneself as very fearful in order to gain some respect in the community.

However, the discussion and interviewed showed that these threatners sometimes do not achieve their aims after these threats have been issued out. In view of this, the data gathered reveals that if their goals for issuing the threat fail the people resort to the following means to make sure that their end results are finally achieved.

- They will consult other persons to serve as witnesses whilst they issue another threat to the offender so that the latter will know that they mean what they intend to do.
- They will report the problem to other people like the elders in the community who can help resolve the issue.
- They will also report the problem to the police who are seen as the peace-makers in the community so that if anything negatively happens they will not be blamed much.
- They will hire other wild and fearful members who are referred to as gangs in the community to also issue out the same threat on their behalf.

3.4. Effects of Verbal Threats on an Individual

Austin (1962) points out that every speech act involves a perlocutionary effect, which either affects the hearer in an interaction. In this vein, Yule (1996) writes that a perlocutionary act is the actual effect of an utterance on the hearer by means of uttering the utterance. Verbal threat is a negative face threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987) which inherently damages the face of the addressee by acting in opposition to the wants and desires of the addressee. This means that whenever a threat is issued out, the face of the

offender is totally damaged and our data gathered and analyzed reveals that verbal threat in whatsoever way that one issues it out has some negative effects on an individual. These effects include:

- Breaking the smooth relationship between the threatner and the offender.
- Putting so much fear into an offender.
- Making an offender look so worried and disorganized that he or she cannot concentrate very well on anything that he or she does.

3.5. Other Interesting Findings

Although this research has been done within the scope of some research questions, the data gathered and analyzed also showed other interesting findings which were not part of the research questions but we think it will be very relevant to discuss them. These other findings include: Self-Harmed Threat and verbal threat as a form of advice giving.

3.5.1. Self-Harmed Threat

We believe that most people had it in mind that threats are issued out to someone who has offended another person to alert the person that something very unsound or unhappy will occur to him or her if he or she continues doing what one dislikes. This conclusion can be based on the fact that most people have the idea that "A policeman can never arrest himself". Thus, no matter a crime that a policeman may commit, there is no way he will arrest himself to the police station. However, the data gathered from the people and discussed reveals that sometimes, the perlocutionary effect involved in the threat referred back to the offended person and this we refer to as a "Self-Harmed Threat". In this regard, we seek to define self-harmed threat as, a form of threat in which an offended person threatens to harm him or herself as a result of one's action or behaviour which the offended person dislikes. Thus, in this type of threat although one is offended by the actions of another, he or she does not threaten to do or cause violent act or harm to the offender, rather, that individual threatens to do harm to him or herself if the offender continues with his or her actions disliked by the offended person. Illustrations 11 and 12 below are two examples of threat which we revealed during our interview and data collection as indicating a self-harmed threat:

11) "Why are you treating me this way? What is it that that lady has which I don't have? I swear on my mother's grave that, if you don't stop chasing after that lady, I will hang myself up and kill myself (Respondent 25)."

12) "Mum, why is it that anytime you see me playing with Ekuwa you beat me when I come home? Mum, if you do that again, I promise you that I will not eat your food again. I will starve myself to death (Respondent 18)."

The two examples above illustrate what we refer to as a self-imposed/self-harmed threat and in both threat, it could be realized that even thought the threatners involved are affected by the actions of other people, they (the offended people) do not intend to cause harm to the offenders but they make an utterance indicating a threat in which the perlocutionary effect involves in the threat refers back to them.

3.5.2. Verbal Threat as a form of Advice Giving.

There was one other thing which we found very interesting during our analysis of the data gathered. We realized that most of the threats which we received were in one way or the other in a form of advice to the offender. An advice may be defined in this work as a speech event which seeks to notify or direct someone what to do so as to help mould the life of that individual or prevent that individual from anything that will harm him/her. Advice is a type of speech event (Advice, 2010) that is concerned with providing information, giving recommendations, and proposing a course of action. Advice is therefore very important to every individual since it helps direct one as to what to do to enjoy success or free from an impending harm.

During our data analysis, it became evidenced that some advice contains threats since it subjects the freedom of the advisee to willingly do what the adviser requires from him or her. This means these forms of advice orders one by force to stop doing something which may invite the wrath of another person. This claim can be supported by Kouper (2010) who concurs that advice is a delicate task, especially among peers, because it may impose upon the freedom of an advisee.

Therefore, from the above definitions and explanations which have been given to advice, verbal threat on the other hand can also be seen as a form of advice since it also imposes upon the freedom of the offender in that it leaves the offender with no other options than to desist from doing something which one dislikes or to continue and experience the wrath of an offended person.

It must be concluded however that there is a thin line between advice and a threat because a threat is born out of an advice. In most of the examples of threats which have been discussed above, it could be realized that even though the offended persons seek to threaten the offenders to stop doing something that will invoke their wrath on them, it at the same time advises the offender that if care is not taken something very harmful or unsound will occur.

The only difference is that an advice can be given to someone at any point in time, but, a threat in a form of advice is giving only when one has done something disliking to an individual. That is to say that whereas a threat always come on the cause of something negatively or wrongfully done against another person, an advice does not necessarily always come on the cause of something wrong which one may do against another person but advice could be given to anyone at any time.

4. Conclusion

Basically, the main objective of this research was to find answers to the research questions. Firstly, the study identified four main causes of verbal threats among the people of Apewosika. These causes include: ill-speaking/gossiping about someone, insults/invectives, false-witnessing against

someone and wrongly nicknaming someone. When these causes are compared to the types of threat identified by Gales (2012), it could be realized that all the threats signal either a direct or conditional threat. Also, pertaining to the claims of Yule (1996) and Lakoff (1973) which indicate that females tend to use more prestigious language than men and that they try to be more polite in their speeches or interactions with other people, this research has revealed that not every female in the Apewosika community makes use of such prestigious or polite languages when issuing a threat, rather, they make use of harsh and impolite words when they are seriously offended or affected by other people's actions. Again, the results show that most of the threats which the people issued out conform to the objective view of a threat act identified by Al-Ameedi & Al-Husseini (2005), which states that a threatner makes a statement with an intention to cause a serious harm to an offender without hiding his intentions. Thus, almost all the threats which we identified indicate such serious harms.

Secondly, the research reveals that the people have three main aims which they seek to achieve when these threats are issued out and these aims include:

- Stopping or preventing the offender from repeating the same crime which brought about the threat.
- Deterring other people from committing a similar crime which may call for the issuance of threat and
- Presenting oneself as very fearful in the community so as to demand some respect from other people.

The results of this research also identify that sometimes these threats do not achieve their intended purposes when they are first issued and if it happens that way, the people resort to other means in order to make sure that their end results for issuing the threat are finally achieved. It must be emphasized that most of these aims which we have identified in this research are similar to the aims which Yeboaba (2012) also revealed when she researched on verbal warning among the people of Amamoma in the Cape Coast Metropolis.

Thirdly, the results confirms the claim of Austin (1962) who indicates that in every speech act there is a perlocutionary effect involved which affects either the speaker or the hearer. Thus, this study reveals that the speech act threat also has such effects on an individual and that these threats are not meant to bridge any relationship between interlocutors. Thus, verbal threat negatively affects the face of an offender when a threatner imposes on the wish and will of the offender to rather do what the threatner wishes.

Aside these findings, there were other findings which we found very interesting. These include self-harmed threat as well as verbal threat coming in a form of advice. Talking of a self-harmed threat, the result revealed that it is not always the case that the perlocutionary effect involved in the threat refers to the offender but in some cases, people issue out a threat and the harm involved in the threat refers back to them. Also, we found out that most of the threats which were received came in a form of advice since in most of the threats though the offended persons issue out a threat, they at the same time advice the offenders not to do something which

will invoke their wrath on them.

Recommendation

It must be announced therefore that, after a hard and thorough interview and analysis of the data on the phenomenon of verbal threat, we still feel there are more gaps to be filled pertaining to this language phenomenon and so other future researchers should dive into the area of speech act and specifically, they should concentrate on the phenomenon of verbal threat by considering other areas that goes into the issue of verbal threat so as to fill up the gaps which have been left behind by the early researchers. In view of this, we want to make the following recommendations for other future researchers who find it very interesting to work on this topic or other verbal behaviours:

i.   A comparative study of verbal warning and verbal threat so as to bring out the main differences or similarities that exist between the two language phenomenons.
ii. A comparative study of verbal threat and advice to see if there exist between them any similarities or differences.
iii. Positive and negative effects of verbal threat on both the threatner and the offender.
iv. The studies of Verbal threat on other groups of people, paying particular attention to the various types of threat that are commonly used.

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