

REFERENCE, POLITENESS AND PARTICIPANT: COMPLAINTS IN LETTERS TO THE EDITOR IN *DAILY GRAPHIC*

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Abstract

This paper focuses on complaints as found in ‘Letters to the Editor’ (LEs) in the *Daily Graphic* of Ghana. It seeks to discover the forms and modes of reference that writers use for the various participants in the LE. The paper brings together the politeness theory and Hymes’ (1972) categorization of participants in the complaint event. From closely analyzing fifty-three samples of LEs that were collected in over a period of four months, the study establishes that complainants of LE writers identify or refer to the participants either by a variety of specific terms (such as first personal pronouns and personal names) or by a range of plurality terms (such as *the police*, *IMT staff*), as this has implications for politeness. The findings support earlier findings by Hartford and Mahboob (2004), but also reveal a preponderance of generalized terms and no-mentions in reference to the parties responsible for either causing or redressing the grievance.

Keywords : complaints, Letters to the Editor, participants, , reference, politeness

1.1 Introduction

A speech act, as first introduced by John L. Austin in 1962, can be defined as “an utterance as a functional unit in communication” (Deveci, 2003). It is an act that a speaker performs when he makes an utterance. An apology, a greeting, a complaint, an invitation, a compliment, or a refusal, are well known examples of speech acts. Contrary to Dowty, Wall, and Peters’ (1985) claim that to explain the meaning of a sentence is “to specify its truth conditions”, Austin describes “the total speech act in the total speech situation” and warns against oversimplifying complexities of meaning, in particular, by reducing meaning to descriptive meaning. Thus, Austin distinguishes between two kinds of utterances: ‘constative utterances’ (also called ‘constatives’) and ‘performative utterances’ (also referred to as ‘performatives’). Constatives (e.g., statements and assertions), according to Austin, can be evaluated along a dimension of truth (i.e., as true or false), but performatives (made with performative verbs such as promise, name, bet, agree, swear, declare, order, predict, warn, insist, declare or refuse) on the other hand cannot be evaluated as either true or false but by what he calls ‘felicity’. Oishi (2006) explains that by uttering a performative sentence,

the speaker indicates a certain speech situation where a certain convention exists.

Dovetailed with the concept of speech acts are the concepts of ‘face’ and ‘(im)politeness’ (Goffman (1955), Brown and Levinson (1978), etc.). According to Redmond (2015), some definitions of face focus on the social context, some on the linguistic, and some on the interpersonal with certain commonalities cutting across. Brown and Levinson (1978) account for two varieties of ‘face’ - ‘positive face’ and ‘negative face’, and claim that every individual has these two face-wants. For positive face want a person wishes to be well thought of; this being manifested in ‘the desire to be understood by others and the ‘the desire to be treated as a friend and confidant’ (Grundy, 2008). Negative face on the other hand refers to a person’s wish not to be imposed on by others and to be allowed to go about their business unimpeded with their rights to free and self-determined action intact. The concepts of speech acts and face had been thought of as universal until quite recently. For instance, Spencer-Oatey (2005) points out that many linguists such as Matsumoto (1988), Ide (1989) and Mao (1994) condemned Brown and Levinson’s notion of (negative and positive) face

from the Japanese point of view. This is on the basis (according to Matsumoto) that “they have ignored the interpersonal or social perspective on face, and they have over-emphasized the notion of individual freedom and autonomy” (Spencer-Oatey, 2005) against collective face.

This study is a follow-up to an earlier study on politeness strategies in letters to the editor (LEs) in which the relationship between politeness and the kind of reference (specific or generalized) assigned to various participants of the LE was noted (Acheampong 2017). This phenomenon led to the current investigation into how authors of LEs selectively make references to the various participants of this special kind of complaint speech events as a means of (im)politeness (i.e., a strategy minimizing the effect of such complaints) and thereby, threatening or saving face for the various participants or otherwise. Thus, in a collection of fifty-three LEs from the *Daily Graphic* of Ghana, the study assesses the referencing forms (whether direct or indirect, etc.) that writers of the LEs select for identifying each of the four participant types that are usually involved in the speech act of complaint – i.e., 1) the object of complaint; 2) the affected party; 3) the offending party; and 4) the redress party.

2.1 The Complaint Act

Complaints are considered as Face threatening speech acts. Unlike other speech acts such as requests and apologies which usually threaten the speaker’s own face and sometimes both the speaker’s and hearer’s face, the complaints may threaten the hearer’s face only. In the complaint act, the speaker expresses a displeasure, discontent or disappointment “about someone or somebody” in the speech event (Allami, 2006). The person or ‘thing’ being talked about may be present on the scene of the speech or not, and the ‘complained to’ may or may not be the one responsible for the unacceptable act. There are thus two types of complaints – direct complaint and indirect complaint (also commiserations – a kind of complaints that is meant to foster friendship and healthy relationships). According to Allami, ‘complaint has also been classified as a particular speech act – in reaction to a “socially unacceptable act” – to imply severity or directness’ (citing Brown & Levinson, 1987). He states further

that complaint has been further defined as a speech act to give the speaker a way to express “displeasure and annoyance” as a reaction to a past or on-going action the consequences of which are perceived by the speaker as affecting him unfavorably (Olshtain & Wienbach, 1993). Here then, in complaint, the speaker is given the opportunity to get off his chest what he feels a bother.

Among other things, the complaint act functions 1) to express displeasure, disapproval, annoyance, censure, threats, or reprimand as a reaction to a perceived offense/ violation of social rules; 2) to hold the hearer accountable for the offensive action and possibly suggest/request a repair (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993), and 3) to confront a problem with an intention to improve the situation (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

2.2 The nature of an LE/Public Complaint

Public complaints may refer to complaints which are made for the consumption of the general public. This kind of complaint may express public opinion on something or the view of a selected minority group or even that of an individual. Usually, it is meant to draw public attention to an event, past or ongoing, which may affect all or only those concerned. Public complaints are mostly found in newspapers in the form of editorials and Letters to Editors. This paper focuses on Letters to the Editor (LEs).

As Hartford (2002) notes, public complaints have received very little attention among speech act analysts. Perhaps, this is because they often do not regard written discourse as actual speech acts. But what is spoken can also be written down (Hartford 2002). This kind of complaint may be seen to exhibit characteristics of both direct and indirect complaints: not all “hearers” of the complaint (i.e., potential addressees and readers in the case of LEs) are held responsible for the offence, while other participants (also potential addressees and readers) are. In a direct complaint, the addressee is held responsible for the offence, while in an indirect complaint the addresser is not blamed for the offence but some third party. This distinction is necessary because not the entire readership of the complaint letter is held responsible for causing the problem; and it is also possible that those responsible for the offence may

not even get to read the complaint at all, thus making it an indirect complaint. When the offending party reads the particular letter in question it then becomes a direct complaint.

One typical feature of the LE as an example of public complaints is that there is usually no means of determining the authorship of a particular LE. For example, there is no means of accessing the name of the author of an LE and other important variables such as age, etc.

2.3 The LE as a speech act

There has been so much work done on speech act, and some on complaints too. There have also been several works on LEs within journalism and media studies (e.g., da Silva, 2012; Nielsen, 2010) and in other fields of linguistics such as discourse analysis (e.g., Ewurum & Chukwu 2021). As a means of complaint, the LE promises a lot to be discovered from it as a type of indirect complaint within speech act theory because it also involves speakers and audiences, although the audiences may be physically absent from the scene of the complaint.

In fact, Cook (1989) indicates that spoken and written language are different but yet similar in many ways by pointing out how “conversation, being unplanned, relatively unpredictable, unaided by writing and involving frequent turn taking is different from other discourse and needs different treatment in the classroom” (p 115). He explains that many types of speech (like trials and meetings) are planned in advance or structured by customs and rules, while many types of discourse exist intermediate between writing and speech; there is also spoken language which is read or learned from a script (like news bulletins and plays) or based on written notes (like talk and lectures)’ as examples.

Olshtain and Wienbach (1993), Allami (2006) and Hartford and Mahboob (2002) are examples of studies on the speech of complaints). The focus on the complaint LE in speech act studies has primarily been on the structure of the genre and politeness as a means of mitigating the face-threat (Acheampong 2016, Hartford & Mahboob 2004 and Boxer and Pinkering 1995).

2.3 Participants of the Complaint Event

‘Participants’ form an important inclusion in Hymes’ (1972) SPEAKING mnemonic which

forms the core of his ethnography of speaking. Hymes identified four possible participants of a communication in general and by extension speech acts. These are 1) the addressor (originator of the message); 2) the Speaker/Writer (conveyor of the message); 3) the Hearer/Reader (direct recipient of the message); 4) the addressee (the intended recipient of the message). These participant roles have a typical deixical nature – the roles identified here are not static: any participant can assume any role depending on where they stand in the conversation at any particular time. For example, the person who has audience at any time is the speaker/writer, while whoever is giving audience at any time is the listener/reader. Whilst making the complaint, the writer or addresser would employ various means, devices and strategies aimed at politeness as well as reducing the full negative effect of the complaint. In the case of the complaint event, four specific participants are manifest in terms of the roles they each play in the event, i.e., 1) the object of complaint; 2) the affected party; 3) the offending party; and 4) the redress party. I analyze how these four specific roles apply in the case of Ghanaian complaint LEs in English published in the *Daily Graphic* of Ghana.

Public complaints are a very interesting phenomenon to study as speech acts. Meant for public consumption, the genre embraces all manner of topics from all manner of people and complainers employ all manner of strategies at putting across their cases. Since the addressee of an Indirect Complaint (IC) is not held responsible for the unacceptable act but rather some third party, it is worthy of note that in LEs the editor is only a passive actor in the complaint event in spite of the fact that he receives the letter of complaint. He/she is not even the complained to, neither is he expected to course redress. In some way, he s/he is more like a commiserator, a mere conduit for addressing the persons concerned. In Direct Complaints (DCs), however, the speaker takes responsibility to call the attention of the hearer to the undesirable outcome of some action on his (hearer’s) part.

3.1 Methodology

Fifty-three LEs of complaint nature were purposively sampled from the *Daily Graphic*, a

daily newspaper of Ghana, for the study. Although not for the purposes of comparative analysis, secondary and primary data were gathered from two sources – Acheampong’s 2017 data based on the *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Graphic* April to July, 2020 respectively. The combined data helped to ascertain the consistency of the phenomenon in the LEs over time and to ensure that unique relevant cases, which appeared in one set of data only were not overlooked. It is important to note that all the published LEs section of the newspaper were of the complaint type – some were praise/appreciation to some deserving entities, etc. It was thus necessary to specifically hand pick only those in the form that would be relevant for the purpose of the study. The LEs covered issues on education, roads, road traffic/safety, tele-communication companies, etc. Once selected, each letter was read to determine the set of participants involved, i.e., 1) the object of complaint; 2) the affected party; 3) the offending party; and 4) the redress party were identified. The manner of referring to each participant(s) was analyzed and some inferences were drawn.

4.0 Results and discussion

4.1 How LE writers make reference to the participants in the complaint event of the Ghanaian LE

This section presents the analysis and results from the data, which sought to find out how writers of the LEs make references to the various parties to the complaint event, i.e., the affected party, the offending part, the redress party and the object of complaint in terms of directness or otherwise. Generally, three reference types were identified for each of these participants – specific reference, generalized reference and unmentioned, except in the object of complaint for which the references tend to be either specified or unspecified. The detailed discussion is presented below.

4.1.1 The party affected by the problem

The affected party is usually the group or individual that suffers the effect of the problem alluded to in the complaint. In the majority of cases, the LE writers generally give some form of identity to the party that is affected by the problem described in all the LEs analysed. This identity is both direct and specific, and sometimes, generalizes. Where a specific reference occurred,

the writer specifically named an individual (personal or institutional) name or his office or both, or a pronoun as the conversation may demand. Specific reference to the offending party occurs very minimally. In fact, there were only two cases of specific reference examples in the entire data. The fact that specific references occurred a very few times in the data indicates how rare and unpopular this type of reference is. This way of referencing the affected party is as a means to save face for them, the writers probably not wanting to embarrass them in the process of doing them a favor by reporting on their behalf something that they otherwise may not be in a position to do for themselves. In the first example below, the writer wrote on behalf of another person, while the writer of the second did so on his/her own behalf as part of a group of which he is a member.

Extracts

- 1) I wish to comment on the unfair treatment that I think has been meted out to *Mrs Abrokwa* ...
- 2) I wish to share this grievance about the behaviour of the West African Examinations Council
- 3) I need intervention, Mr. President

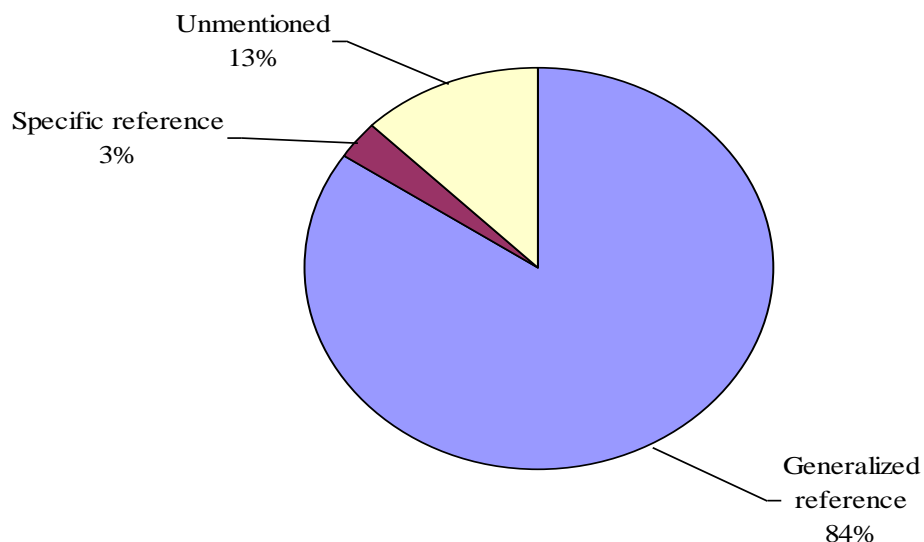
The affected party may also be addressed in generalized or plurality terms which is common. The fact that generalized reference terms are more popular than specific reference terms may stem from the fact that most of the complaints affected groups and pluralities and rarely individuals (Hartford and Mahboob, 2004). The probability of avoidance for face-saving and politeness is also high under the circumstances. Below are examples where the affected party is referred to in generalized terms. It will be noted that while these references identify some specified groups of people, they fall short of identifying particular persons/individuals who are affected by the object of complaint.

Extracts

- 4) I wish to express my feelings and those of many contractors on the plight of *Contractors* in the country.
- 5) Where the *service persons* would lay his/her head throughout the service period is something that is less important to us as a nation.
- 6) ... about 90% of the *IMT Staff* in Ghana are casual workers and are not properly paid.

Figure one shows a representation of percentage values for the analysis that reference the affected party.

Figure 1: Reference type for offended party



As can be noted from figure 1, the references for the affected party are usually in generalised reference terms (84.0%, N=44). This probably results from the fact that the affected party is usually a group of people and, therefore, cannot be named individually. It is only in cases such as '*I need your intervention, Mr. President*' where the affected party may be named personally because the problem affects him personally as an individual. Even then, the person's actual name may be cited only as part of the subscription appended at the end of the letter. It will be noted from figure 1 that more LE writers preferred to leave the affected party unmentioned (13.2%, N=7) rather than refer to them in specific reference terms (3.8%, N=2).

4.1.2.1 The causing or offending party

This party involves the person or people whose action or inaction has brought about the problem being described, i.e., the object of the complaint. The LE writers mostly named the offending party, although, similar to the situation of the offended party, writers of the LEs made minimal specific references to them. However, the indicated names were often group (plurality) or generalized names while a few writers left this

party unmentioned. For instance, the reference terms in the following examples are institutional names of those held responsible for causing the problem. Although these types of references name a group or an entity, they are nonetheless classified as specific because they do hold accountable, a particular identifiable group responsible for the causing the undesirable situation. However, for better clarification, this kind of reference will be preferably referred to as quasi/semi specific reference based on the fact that it refers to a relatively small number of people (e.g., the people who work in a particular company or the executive or the management of such an outfit), but fails to name any particular identifiable individual/person as the referent. For instance, the names *Menzgold*, *Passport Office* and *Brussels Airlines* in extracts 7-9 below are all names of specific, identifiable bodies but they do not identify any personal individual as the culprit. They are thus quasi/semi-specific references.

Extracts

- 7) Victims of *Menzgold* have still not got over the nightmare and betrayal of the company.

- 8) Why did the *Passport Office* give us February 7 as the collection date when they knew our passports won't be ready?
- 9) Please help me to get the attention of *Brussels Airlines* and their local office because they have misplaced my suitcase, since September, and they do not seem to be serious tracking it.
- We find examples of generalized references in the sentences below.
 Extracts
- 10) The reason for this is that *commercial drivers* park right on the dual carriage lanes to drop off and pick up passengers.
- 11) Lately, I have observed that most *ladies* driving to work in the mornings, due to pressure at home and / or time, either fail to apply or leave partly complete their makeups.
- 12) Thus, *they* have resorted, while behind the wheels, to using the interior driving mirrors as dressing mirrors, posing a danger not only to themselves but the entire commuting public.
- 13) In some cases, the *technical workers* leave the bricks on the sidewalks without replacing them even though they have finished working.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of values for the three types of references for the offending party.

Figure 2: Reference type for offending party (Causing)

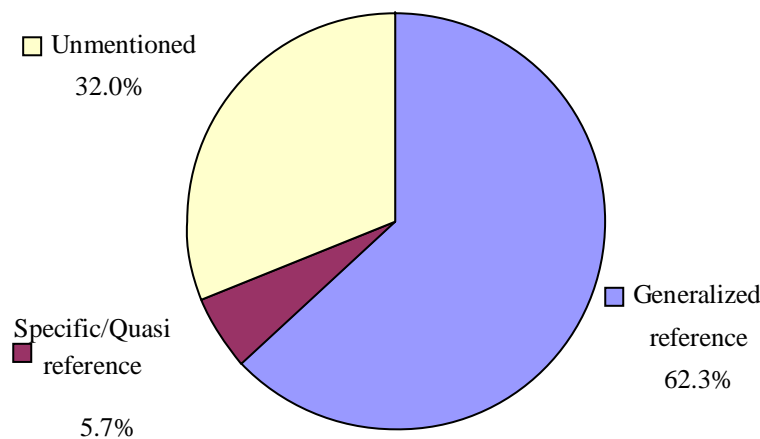


Figure two indicates that most LE writers (62.3%, N=33) refer to the offending party in generalized reference terms and only 5.7% (N=3) in specific reference terms, whereas 32.0% (N=17) prefer to leave the party unmentioned. The party is unmentioned probably because, as Hartford & Mahboob, 2004 noted, the writers do not know who the perpetrators are, or they deliberately want to avoid mention of them as a means to save face for them. The fact that a mere 5.7% of the total letters made specific reference to the offending party shows how unwilling LE writers (to wit complainers) are to reveal who the real culprit(s) of an offence is. An interesting observation here though is that LE complainants are more likely to

name a culprit in specific reference terms than they would the affected party. This is communicated by the reduction from nearly 84% in generalized to the affected to 62.3% versus the respective slight rise from about 4% to 5.7% in specific reference terms. We see a rather phenomenal rise in the unmentioned references from 13.2% for the affected party to 32% for the offending party. There appears to be no clear reason why this pattern, except the apparent reason of writers not knowing who the culprits are, or deliberately leaving them unmentioned because they consider it unnecessary or simply to save face for either the offending party or themselves or both.

4.1.3 The redress party

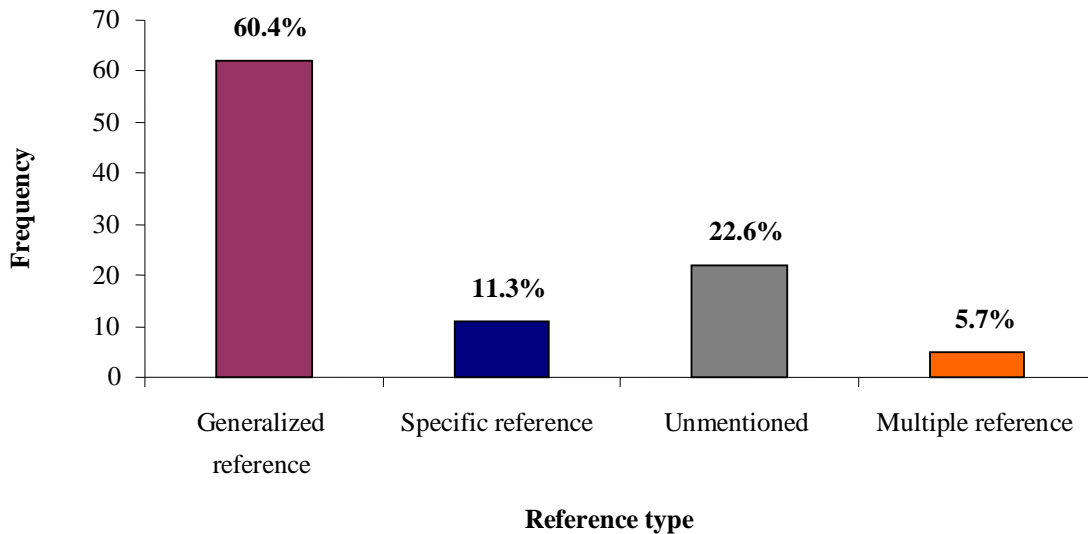
This refers to the person or group of persons who wield some form of authority or power and are either expected to correct the problem described, or are actually called upon by the writer to do so. The case of this group, in terms of reference, is not very much different from that of the offending group. However, there is an additional reference type dubbed *multiple* reference when it comes to the redress party. The writers mostly named the redress party in generalized/ plurality terms. The following are some examples.

Extracts

- 14) I kindly recommend that *journalists* become a little more circumspect with the ranks in the military
 Figure 3 represents reference types for the redress party.

- since the Ghana Armed Forces are particular with their ranks and a disciplined institution as such.
 15) I am, therefore, calling on *the police* to check this nuisance on the N1.
 16) While it plainly poses potential danger, no worker of *the Ministry of Roads and Highway* has taken action to date.
 17) *The Anorfu and Konkombas* (redress) must cease fire now and realize that the common enemy they must fight together is poverty, hunger, illiteracy and underdevelopment.

Figure 3: Reference type for the redress party



The figure shows 60.4% (N=32) of the writers using generalized reference terms for the redress party. Other examples of the generalized reference types of the redress party include the following from the data: *The government, ...authorities/ powers that be, all the stake holders, the general public, Ghanaians* and pronouns such as *us/we*. A handful of quasi/semi-specific references were identified for the redress party too. For instance, although a reference term such as *hospital administration* is to a degree more specific than others like ‘the general public’, authorities, or ‘Ghanaians’, they still fall short of naming a

particular individual to go for.

Whereas the references name some people as responsible for redressing the problem, these reference terms are not specific enough to point to a particular individual. The problem with this kind of reference is two-fold: while it shields the actual parties responsible and thus saves face for them, it puts other innocent members who are probably doing their part by working hard into/within the same bracket with those who are in one way or another responsible for causing the problem.

Only 11.3% (N=6) of the articles studied used specific reference terms for the redress party.

This is close to one hundred percent increase of the 5.7% specific reference to the offending party as in the examples below. Specific reference is made to certain individuals as the redress party either by their actual names, or by their official titles or both. In the first example both the official position and the actual personal of the redress party are mentioned.

Extract

- 18) In the same newspaper, we read that the *Minister of the Interior, Mr Ambrose Dery*, rendered an unqualified apology for the physical assault on the journalists.

Other examples of specific reference to the redress party include '*the minister for communication*', '*the president*' and '*The Chief Justice, Mrs Theodora Woode*'. The 22.6% (N=12) which did not mention the party at all may have done so for reasons similar to those of the writers who failed to mention the offending party, i.e., they did not know who, or they wanted to save face for them or they deemed it as obvious and unnecessary to mention. The case for the unmentioned redress party, however, is particularly face-saving for the entity concerned especially where the redress party is also the causing entity or wields the power for redress but is simply negligent or resting on their responsibility. The first example below seems to encourage this line of reasoning.

Extracts

- 19) These can be corrected (*by who?*) if there is proper and effective staff supervision at the centers.
20) Please help (*who should?*), as the Daily Graphic is now difficult to buy, unless you buy the Daily Guide.

In a small number of cases, LE writers made references that can be referred to as multiple references to the redress party. This was in situations where the writer felt that more than one person or entity was responsible for or at least could bring their authority to bear in ensuring that the issue is redressed. A meagre 5.7% (N=3) of the writers made reference to more than one entity for the redress. Although small in figure, this type of reference was recognized as very important to the study as it added an entirely new item to the analysis. The move was seen to be more the case of authors wanting to save face for the supposed

responsible party than of they not knowing who they should be. In the example below as many as eight separate but related entities are called on, albeit indirectly, to bring their expertise and authority into action to get the issue redressed.

Extracts

- 21) With the uncontrolled sprawling communities dotted on both sides of the motorway, it has become apparent that interested bodies, notably *the Ghana Highway Authority (GHA), National Road Safety Commission (NRSC), National Security, the Motor Traffic & Transport Department (MTTD) of the Ghana Police Service, the Ministries of Transport and Roads and Highways*, particularly *GHA*, charged with ensuring safety on the stretch have deliberately refused to think outside the box and/or are playing ostrich to the apparent danger associated with crossing the facility, especially by school children.

In certain cases, the offending party is at the same time the redress party. Many of the letters considered had this kind of reference, which is due to the nature of the problem described where the offending party is the same expected to have the problem redressed. For example, in an LE titled *UDS students encounter many difficulties* (Acheampong' 2017data), the writer blames the problem on the inaction of the university *authorities* and therefore expects the same authorities to take action to correct the problem. Also in *Nii Kojo Mankralo of Bortianor* (Wed, April 29), and *Nii Teiko Akpake Family denies story* (Mon, June 15), both of which were rejoinders reacting to previously published letters, the newspaper and its editor, implicated in '*your*' *paper*, were considered both the offending and redress party at the same time because it was the paper that published wrong information and was expected, therefore, to correct it.

4.1.4 The problem or object of complaint

Since the head act forms the core of the complaint act, there can be no way of making a complaint without stating it categorically. As a result, the LE writers (100%) always explicitly name the problem being described, which also forms the head act. The object of complaint is usually introduced in a summarized form at the beginning of the letter as part of the introduction/background, or as the head act as the case may be.

The object of complaint, i.e., the head act, is usually described with negative and pity-drawing adjectives, adverbs and expressions, which are clear indications of the writer’s strong emotions and attitude toward the various participants of the complaint (Hartford and Mahboob). Examples of such examples from the data include the following: Extracts

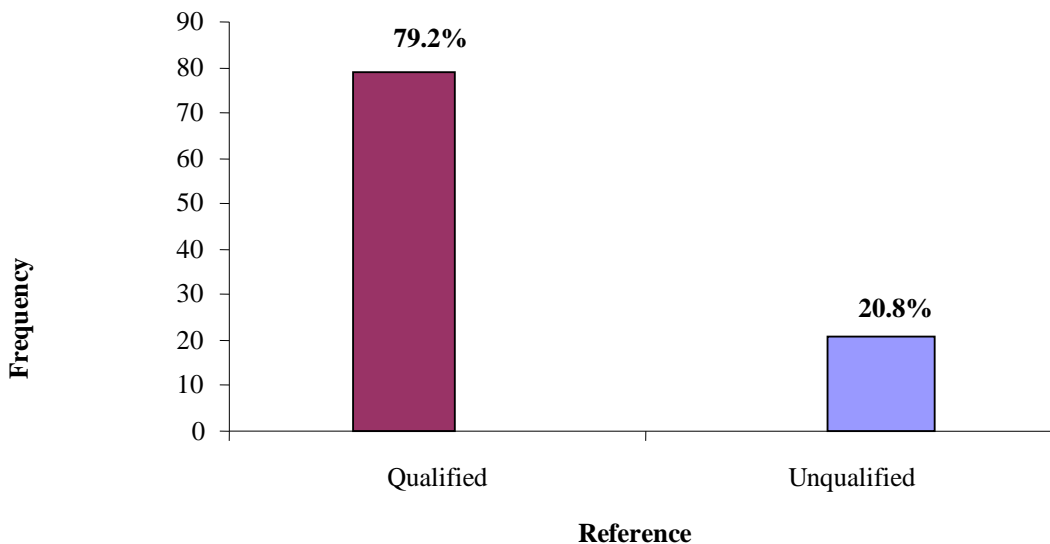
- 22) It is unfortunate that the management of the Ghana Railway Company Limited is looking on *sheepishly* as its numerous patrons are given a *raw deal*.

Other references occurring in the same LE are *so irregular, ostensibly, dilapidated, looking on without doing anything* and *poor service*

((Acheampong’s 2017 data)). Another example is the case of *plight, a lot of nightmare and unpalatable experience...*, ... *at very exorbitant cost, cumbersome procedures, embarrassment and unrealistic rates*, all of which pertain to the LE (Acheampong’s 2017 data).

The fact that each set of expressions above was used in one LE as indicated by the source of reference is an indication of the strong emotions the authors attached to the object of complaint. Some writers, however, presented the objects of complaint plainly without any modifying or qualifying words or expressions. The chart below is representative of letters with qualified/modified object of complaint and those without such modification.

Figure 4: Reference to the object of complaint



The chart above shows 79.2% (N=42) representation for qualified/modified object of complaint and 21% (N=11) for unqualified object of complaint. The chart shows that whereas the majority of LE writers will either choose to refer to other participants of the complaint in generalized terms or leave them unmentioned, most of them would apply the use of emotional expressions in making reference to the object of complaint. Of course, this points to the attitudes of desperation, frustration, anger and dismay that are often attached to the object complaint.

5.1 Discussion and Conclusion

Two main referent strategies were identified by which LE writers made reference to the participant of this speech act: to mention or not to mention. When mentioned, it is one of typically three types, i.e., specific reference, generalized reference, or multiple reference. They may either refer to participants in specific terms (either by their real names or by their office), or in general/plurality terms as it is typical of such complaints

to affect groups. The kind of reference technique employed may have certain politeness (face-saving/ face-threatening) implications for the various participants as was seen in the analysis. Whereas specific reference terms are usually face-threatening, generalized reference terms tend to save face of the named party, likewise the situations of non-mention. The offended party is described with words and expressions that draw pity from the reader, while especially the object of complaint, and sometimes the offending party is described blatantly with 'harsh' words to show the complainer's attitude to the issue at stake and its perpetrators. For each case, the object of complaint, without which there is no complaint, is specifically mentioned.

Constituting a form of complaint, it appears that the LEs are inherently face-threatening because they come up against some participant members of the speech act, whether conspicuous or hidden. Given the fact that politeness strategies such as avoidance (of mention) and generalized referencing are typically face-saving whereas others like specific referencing may be face-threatening (Acheampong, 2016), it appears that authors of the LEs make use these strategies to deliberately or unconsciously preserve or shame face for selected participants of the speech event. It seems to emerge that LE writers are more specific with mention of the redress and affected parties more than the offending parties (at % yet to be measured. While there is usually a single

referenced offending party to a complaint, there could be multiple redress parties referenced for the same complaint event, some of whom sometimes are themselves the culprit. Is this resulting from our scare to name and shame or from the sheer desire to avoid or even to save face?

Implications

The study has both social and educational implications for all.

- 1) Politeness is a social value that all people are expected to display in our day-to-day interaction with others and the way/manner of referencing others is a key way to demonstrate this. It is imperative, therefore, to deliberately expose people at all social levels (including those in the corporate world) to employing various forms of reference terms and use them appropriately with greater understanding of the dynamics and be intentional about their choices.
- 2) The LE is a special type of easy that students are taught in schools. Given the fact that (im)politeness is a key element in social interactions, and that the complaints act is highly potentially face-threatening, it is necessary that learners are deliberately taught at some point early enough in their education to make informed and intentional selections of reference forms in the LE as well as in other cases where relevant. A common understanding base of such dynamics will help to make a better and fairer judgment of LE writers on what is (im)polite in terms of the reference forms they employ.

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