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THE USE OF FIGURATIVE AND IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN SHARIAH-BASED RECONCILIATION CASE PROCEEDINGS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In contrast to being on record, speakers in Shariah-based Reconciliation Case Proceedings (RCP) normally do the Face Threatening Acts (FTA) off record strategy if they intend to convey their meaning to an addressee in an ambiguous ways or hinting manner. Thus, the aim of this paper is to explore the use of Figurative and Idiomatic Expressions (FIE) in the RCP. The study utilized 12 various cases on Family Dispute Marital Issues (FDMI) and the data was obtained through audiovisual recordings in Bauchi State Sharia Commission (BSSC) in Nigeria. The data were coded and analysed using Nvivo, focusing on Brown and Levinson's Off-Record strategy as part of the conditions in determining the choice of politeness strategy. The study showed that FIE FTA off record strategy was richly used across the 12 cases. However, the FIE were mostly employed by court officials in the attempt to avoid being perceived as bias or unfair to other parties during RCP. A total of 24 participants used 75 Interactive Turn-Takings (ITT). The findings revealed the use of various kinds of FIE FTA off record strategies including metaphors, personifications, climax, anti-climax, metonymy, hyperbole, and euphemism among others. The findings also indicated that sarcasm was used by the court officials to address or query the actions of addressee/s. Disputing parties were found of using metonymy, hyperbole to exaggerate their claims and euphemism in expressing unpleasant information in the attempt to establish defences. Finally, the paper demonstrates that it is a cultural practice of the speakers in Shariah-based RCP to use FIE in the quest to achieve settlement of matrimonial and family disputes. The implications of this study were also discussed on adoption and teaching of FIE in shariah legal schools to enhance the quality of RCP in Shariah-based courts. The paper also recommends further studies on other aspects of sociopragmatic acts of RCP to improve the value of Shariah-based courts of Nigeria and the world at large for the benefit of mankind.

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs are natural language expressions people globally recognised and use for ages on daily bases. Figurative and Idiomatic Expressions (FIE) fall within the preamble of Proverbs. The use of FIE reveals the culture, behaviours and living conditions of the speakers. Record shows that the origin of the word "idiom" began in Greek to denote "one's single strangle" (Phillips, 2005; Hayati, et al., 2013). Studies highlight that idioms and figurative expressions do not have definite definitions suitable for experts across the subfields of applied linguistics. However, Grant and Bauer (2004) argued that the terms could be considered as a sub-type of multiword units been viewed as "a fixed and recurrent pattern of lexical material sanctioned by usage". Idiom or figurative expression is by far seen as a term or phrase whose definition could be found difficult to infer from the literal meanings or its structural arrangements. Meanwhile, Irujo (1986a, p.199) claimed that every idiom or figurative expression is perceived as "expressions whose meaning cannot be derived from their constituent parts". In fact, studies revealed that teaching of idioms and figures of speech provides special opportunities for language learners to understand and appreciate language effectively (Liontas, 1999).

In this paper, an attempt is made to explore and discuss the use of FIE in Shariah-based Reconciliation Case Proceedings (RCP) of Nigerian courts. There are quite number of reasons that make this paper worthy. For instance, despite the multi-ethnicity of Nigeria, nearly 70 per cent of the populace are Muslims. Furthermore, the Nigerian constitution has recognised the validity and practice of shariah laws especially in the regions where the predominant people are Muslims. Interestingly, upon the implementation of shariah, the attention of most Nigerian Muslims and some Non-Muslims with litigations were shifted to the Shariah-based courts for free and fair trial. The litigations were mostly amongst the business associates, people of consanguinity or affinity relationships over marital issues, inheritance, and breach of contracts among others. All these falls within the civil aspects of the Shariah-based Islamic jurisprudence (Wali, 2009).

In addition, studies also reported that the methodology of Shariah-based Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is gaining more concern beyond the Islamic countries and across western part of the globe (Wali, 2009; Keshavjee, 2013). This is due to its less expense, speedy adjudication and of course fairness to parties involved without fear of biasness compared to conventional and western type of courts. Since, this aspect of Islamic ADR is gaining momentum geometrically, legal students and teachers required the knowledge of the sociopragmatic aspect of RCP of Shariah-based courts. Notwithstanding, attention in this area of language use is very scanty. The only available empirical related studies this paper found were "*Sociopragmatics of Code Switching and Code Mixing in Reconciliation Case Proceedings*: *Shariah Courts of Northern Nigeria*" (Ado & Bidin, 2016) and "*Religious Quotations as declarative speech acts of Arbitrators in Shariah-based Reconciliation Case Proceedings*" (Ado & Bidin, 2017). Studies on the language use of FIE in Shariah-based courts RCP was not conducted. According to Li and Tat (2014), Figurative and Idiomatic expressions pose a considerable amount of learning difficulties for students across language cultures. Li and Tat (2014) further deliberated that such difficulties were generated due to a number of factors. Yet, there is still rarity of cross-linguistic studies over idiomatic and figurative language, especially the legal aspect.

In fact, this paper will expose the types of Figurative and Idiomatic Expressions (FIE) used in Shariah-based RCP of Nigeria. The paper will also enable stakeholders and the legal experts to understand the role of FIE in achieving successful resolution of family disputes marital issues in

Shariah-based courts. Moreover, due to the peculiarity of the cultural practices of language speakers in Nigeria, particularly the Northern Muslims, providing insight and description of how people manipulate or utilise language via FIE to achieve amicable solution to disputing issue/s in Shariah-based RCP will be of great value and interest. Therefore, the study on FIE in Shariah-based RCP could provide additional material to legal teachers, Islamic juries, legal practitioners, policy makers (i.e., stakeholders of Shariah legal schools) on how FIE enhance successful RCP in the Shariah-based courts. This will enhance the quality of proceedings process of the sharia-based RCP in Nigeria and many other countries that practice Islamic legal system.

Obviously, related studies to FIE in RCP are part of forensic linguistics. Therefore, the current paper focused on the sociopragmatic role of FIE in RCP. The aim is to provide the teachers of legal schools especially Shariah-based aspect with armful description of the use of FIE during RCP. This is because the central goal of forensic linguistics is to coordinate legal objectives within judicial system (Momeni et al., 2010; Momeni, 2012). Studies also revealed that forensic linguistics assists judicial system in conducting explorations of language use on issues related to offenses in both criminal and civil aspects (Shuy, 2007; Khoyi & Behnam, 2014). This is because the study on forensic linguistics normally provides judges and the juries with less difficulty in forming a well-defined and accurate judgement. Hence, the current paper may provide teachers and students of shariah-legal studies the avenue to assess, examine and understand the use of FIE in Shariah-based RCP. The paper will also provide readers with the style employed in using FIE during the Shariah court proceedings, arbitration, mediation and conciliation by arbitrators, other court officials and parties involved in disputes, witnesses and the principles of law itself within family disputes and marital issues.

The paper is positioned within the theoretical framework of Brown and Levinson (1978) Condition for Face-Threatening Acts (FTA), where Figurative and Idiomatic Expressions were identified, described and discussed under the off-record strategy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of related studies revealed that several studies were conducted related to politeness strategies used in language domains and the role it plays in the achievement of human related activities. For instance, in terms of studies on Figurative and Idiomatic Expressions (FIE), this paper traced that the interest of many scholars was mostly focused on learning and teaching of idioms (Irujo, 1986a). The studies also provided the reasons why idioms are difficult. Irujo (1986b) further conducted a study on the transfer in the acquisition of idioms in a second language. On the other hand, scholars as Liontas (1999) attempted to develop a pragmatic methodology of idiomaticity: comprehension and interpretation of SL vivid phrasal idioms during reading and explored second language learners' notions of idiomaticity. Grant and Bauer (2004) on the other hand, focused on the criteria for re-defining Idioms and subsequently concluded that figure of speech present problems for the EFL and ESL learners. Later, Ji (2007) conducted a corpus-based study of structural variants of Chinese idioms in naturally-occurring contexts where his focus was specifically from etymology to modern phraseology.

On the contrary, Fialkova (2010) studied proverbs and medicine in the attempt to understand the problem of applied folklore. Hayati et al. (2013) paid attention on Short Message Service (SMS) use to teach English idioms to EFL students while Li and Hin Tat (2014) explored the acquisition of Chinese Quadra-syllabic Idiomatic Expressions (QIE) to determine the effects of semantic opacity and structural symmetry. In fact, Li and Hin Tat (2014) concentrated on the learning of Chinese

four-character idioms using 11-year-olds and adult native speakers through Participants First Completed Sentence Production Task and then a multiple-choice comprehension test of QIE.

The current paper also reviewed studies on cultural features of idiomatic expressions, their teachings and approaches to translation (Hinkel, 2017; Ping, 2018). The paper equally came across recent studies on strategies used in translating idioms from some Asian languages into English. For instance, Wicaksono (2018) and Liswahyuningsih et al. (2020) analysed the strategies used in translating idioms from Indonesian legends into English and compared their phrasal nouns. In the same vein, Destaria and Rini (2019) focused on the translation of strategies used in conveying meaning of English idioms into Indonesian via the subtitle of Pitch Perfect 3 movie. Similar and recent studies were found on translation of idioms use in movie subtitles (Manipuspika & Winzami, 2021).

In fact, from the relevant studies reviewed, it is clear that studies on idiomatic expressions received much attention. For instance, Van Thao (2021) analysed selected idiomatic utterances used in Ed Sheeran's lyrics songs. Ilana and Ardi (2021), on the other hand, studied the figurative language used in the song lyrics of Saif Adam. Yastanti et al. (2018) identified the figurative language used in song lyrics of Linkin Park. Other studies reviewed were found to pay more attention on the strategies used in analysing idioms used in movies. The examples include Yahya and Islami (2019) who studied the strategies used in translating idioms in the Iron Man movie, while Ahdillah et al. (2020) concentrated on English-Indonesian translation of idiomatic expressions utilised in the Adventure of Tom Sawyer. Nevertheless, the attention of Ahdillah et al. (2020) were more on the strategies used and their resulted equivalence, while Hulu et al. (2021) on the analyses of figurative language in Ariana Grande's album. However, based on the extensive review, it is clear that attention was not paid on the sociopragmatic approach to Figurative and Idiomatic Expressions (FIE) used by speakers in Shariah-based court proceedings.

In terms of politeness strategies, Gillani and Mahmood (2014) for instance conducted research on politeness strategies used in Pakistani business letters written in English using Brown and Levinson's (1978) conditions for politeness strategies as a model of approach while Ramadhani (2013) identified the types of politeness strategies and the gender variances used in Javanese indirect speech acts. Gillani and Mahmood (2014) and Ramadhani (2013) used a descriptive qualitative design and the interview data were equally collected and transcribed through interviews and recorded observations.

Similarly, review of relevant studies equally revealed the availability of much literature on language use in religious discourse (e.g., Van der Merwe, 2003; Singh et al., 2011; Ivey, 2012), *sulhu* and alternative dispute resolution (e.g., Usman, 2009; Keffi, 2009; Wali, 2009) and discourse of law in the courtroom (e.g., Shuy, 2007b; Khoyi & Behnam, 2014). In addition, there are several studies found on the speech of lawyers from the viewpoint of critical discourse analysis, pragmatics and conversational analysis (Jianmin, 2014; Zhang, 2014), the language of power dominance of judge(s) in legal proceedings within courts (Yu, 2010; Wang, 2014), the Non-Lawyer Agents *ad litem* courtroom debate (Li, 2014; Zhang, 2014) as well as legal mediation and interpretation (Lu, 2014; Hale, 2004). Hence, there is paucity of studies on FIE as FTA off record strategy. Thus, the current paper will explore the FIE of speakers during RCP in Shariah-based courts of North-Eastern Nigeria using Brown and Levinson's (1978) FTA as the model of approach.

METHODOLOGY

This paper was guided by a qualitative ethnographic design. Creswell (2012, p. 161) viewed an ethnography approach as "writing about groups of people". Hence, with the aid of an ethnographic qualitative design, participants were drawn from court officials, parties in disputes and their representatives. Data were collected in Bauchi State Shariah Commission (BSSC) of North-Eastern part of Nigeria (West Africa). The collection of the data was done through an in-depth audiovisual recordings and observations of 12 different Shariah court's Reconciliation Case Proceedings (RCP) as a unit of analyses. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted during the data collection in a form of a snowballing strategy in the selection of the cases suitable for this paper. The rationale was that quite a number of cases were normally tried per day in the BSSC. The collection of the data was made possible through the support and guide of the court officials (Creswell, 2012; Keyton, 2015). The court officials and parties to cases were informed and consented before the commencement of the data collection. The data analysed was strictly on Family Disputes (FD) and Family Disputes Marital Issues (FDMI) using the coding category involved in the Interactive Turn-Taking (ITT) of arbitrators' speech acts in RCP.

The data were transcribed and subsequently reviewed by experts in order to authenticate its validity and reliability as recommended by Patton (1990) and Creswell (2012). Then, the paper employed the strategies recommended by scholars (e.g., Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clark, 2006; Creswell, 2012) and familiarised with the data transcripts. Upon completion, the researcher used a qualitative analysis QSR Nvivo data management software, coded the data, generated themes and created models ready for interpretation. The general features of the cases used as units for analyses consist of matters relating to mismanagement of trust, child abuse, immorality, divorce, abuse of marital obligations and others. These issues mostly occur among or between close relatives, parents-children and couples. The total numbers of participants used in the study were 72, while the overall duration of the whole case proceedings being analysed was 5 hours, 35 minutes and 15 seconds.

According to Searle (1975), an utterance can be considered appropriate in as much as the addressee is able to perform the act being requested for, which he desires to do it and the predicative used is in future tense. The paper is guided by Brown and Levinson (1978) conditions for politeness strategy (figurative and idiomatic expressions off-record strategy). Based on the ethnographic methodology approach, the researcher was able to collect the data systematically and defined the target population successfully. The participants were dealt with in accordance to their ethnolinguistic status, interpersonal relationship, and ethnic group among other social characteristics as emphasised in Wolfson (1983). Regardless of the diversity of the participants' social background, the researcher was able to unify the analyses on the use of FIE relating to their ethnolinguistic paradigm within the RCP of Bauchi State Shariah Commission of Nigeria.

FINDINGS

Figurative and Idiomatic Expressions (FIE) were employed as FTA off-record strategy by the speakers during RCP in the attempt to avoid been held responsible for their intention. However, the meaning of their speech was understood by the addressee(s). The speakers opted FTA off-record when they wanted to avoid commitment to their intents or did not want to be held responsible for their intents. Table 1 below illustrates 75 interactive turn-taking (ITT) of FIE of FTA off-record strategies used by 24 speakers during RCP from 12 cases as found in the data.

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Table 1

Sources and Interactional Categories of Turn-Taking of Figurative and Idiomatic Expressions as FTA Off-Record Strategy

S/N	Cases	Sources	Interactive Turn-taking	Percentage
1	1	FD-Arb.C1	3	4.00
2	2	FD-Arb.C2	2	2.67
3	7	FD-Arb.C7	10	13.33
4	10	FDMI-Arb.C10	2	2.67
5	11	FDMI-Arb.C11	6	8.00
6	3	FDMI-Arb.C3	5	6.67
7	4	FDMI-Arb.C4	10	13.33
8	6	FDMI-Arb.C6	4	5.33
9	8	FDMI-Arb.C8	1	1.33
10	9	FDMI-Arb.C9	4	5.33
11	5	FDMI-Arb-C5	4	5.33
12	11	FDMI-CLRC.C11	2	2.67
13	3	FDMI-CLRC.C3	1	1.33
14	4	FDMI-FC.C4	3	4.00
15	11	FDMI-FG.C11	4	5.33
16	12	FDMI-GREP.C12	1	1.33
17	4	FDMI-MR.C4	4	5.33
18	5	FDMI-MR.C5	1	1.33
19	6	FDMI-MR-C6	1	1.33
20	10	FDMI-MW.C10	1	1.33
21	5	FDMI-Sec.C5	1	1.33
22	4	FDMI-WFC.C4	2	2.67
23	1	FD-MR.C1	2	2.67
24	7	FD-MW.C7	1	1.33
Total	**12**	**24**	**75**	**100.00**

Based on the results found in Table 1 above, court officials were the most common users of FIE strategy with 14 sources and in particular the arbitrators were found to be the highest number having 11 from the 12 participants found in 12 RCP being used as units of analysis in the study.

Based on the individual users, the finding shows FDMI-Arb.C4 and FDMI-Arb.C7 as the participants having the highest number of FIE strategy, each with 10 ITT (13.33%), followed by FDMI-Arb.C11 with 6 ITT (8.00%), and FDMI-Arb.C3 with 5 ITT (6.67%) as being the average users. The participants being identified as having the least number of FIE were 8, consisting of FD-Arb.C1, FDMI-Arb.C8, FDMI-CLRC.C3, FDMI-GREP.C12, FDMI-MR.C5, FDMI-MR.C6, FDMI-MW.C10 and FDMI-SEC.C5. Each of them with a single use of ITT at 1.33%. Examples of excerpts were presented based on general patterns of Figurative and Idiomatic Expressions FTA off record strategy as appeared in the data.

Based on the data, it was observed that across the 12 RCPs, speakers utilised various kind of Figurative and Idiomatic expressions as FTA off-record strategies. Meanwhile, majority of these

participants used personification in order to exemplify something, gave hint about the case outcome or position of an issue in dispute, as shown in the excerpts below:

> *"This is what Islamic law **follows**. If one mate with her before she did menstruate, then sharia does **delay its decision** until when the woman delivered to assess whether she reaches six months? Or it won't." [FDMI-Arb.C7: ITT 48(5)]*

> *"The sharia law **has given** you a solution. It **didn't say** you must accept the pregnancy by hook or by crook. But according to sharia due to the rights of the child, if he reaches six months, then the child must be attached with the husband. You see, she **doesn't permit** someone to understand." [FDMI-Arb.C7: ITT 50(2-5)]*

> *"The sharia **says** you must… you must give. You must accept the child. "If you feel that you don't want to accept the child then you conduct a ritual swearing. The sharia **will give** you chance to disclaim the child." [FDMI-Arb.C7: ITT 100(5)]*

The above excerpts demonstrated the level at which arbitrators employed personification as a category of metaphorical expression FTA off-record strategy used. It was used in their attempt to exonerate themselves from being held committed to the intention of what they said during RCP. This is clearly shown when FDMI-Arb.C7 personified the term "*shariah*" as if it was a human being capable of performing many actions by itself as in the excerpt [ITT 48(5)] he used '...law **follows**', '**…**sharia does **delay its decision**' in giving hints of what he as a judge intended to do but then ambiguously attributed the actions with Shariah. In a similar trend, the FDMI-Arb.C7 in [ITT 50(2-5)] used the clauses 'sharia law **has given**', '**It didn't say**' and 'she **doesn't permit**' while giving hints about the position of pregnancy of a married woman in accordance with Islamic law without committing himself as the one who said it. In excerpt [ITT 100(5)] it was equally found that the arbitrator case 7 attempted to impose the unwanted pregnancy on the FDMI-MC.C7 by using 'the sharia **says** you must..." and in subsequent line indirectly assuring him by saying 'The sharia **will give** you**…'**

Strategically, FDMI-Arb.C7 also metaphorically personified sharia as if she has legs and can walk down the street as shown in the excerpts below:

> "*Honestly speaking, due to this, the issue of criticising the judgement made by the judge should be stopped. That's how sharia **came** with it for the sake of maintaining secrecy.*" [FDMI-Arb.C7: ITT106 (2-3)]

> "***It came** with it for secrecy.*" [FDMI-Arb.C7: ITT108 (2)]

This is similar with the instances where sharia was also metaphorically personified depicting as if she is a physical object or someone that can be seen and touch or as if the sharia is a person capable of accepting or rejecting something, when FDMI-Arb.C7 and 8 says in the following excerpts:

> *"No, now she won't say it **in front of sharia**. [FDMI-Arb.C7: ITT 118(1-2)]*

> *"That is why I say she won't say it **front of sharia**.* [FDMI-Arb.C7: ITT 120]
> *"If she says it **in front of sharia** then she made a confession/claim."* [FDMI-Arb.C7: ITT 122]

*"Even a lower court you go, **it will accept**."* [FDMI-Arb.C7: ITT 146]

"Sharia law needs justice." [FDMI-Arb.C8: ITT 254(2)]

By implication, the FDMI-Arb.C7 employed several verbs and attribute them with shariah in order to exonerate himself of being held responsible and been committed to the intent. It is observed that sarcasm is also employed by Arbitrators sometimes as part of FIE FTA off record strategy in addressing or querying the actions of addressee/s as exemplified in the excerpts:

"You did share the inheritance, are you an Islamic scholar?" [FD-Arb.C1: ITT 192]

"In fact, we are trying to attach you with your father Bashir and you are keeping your head aside and murmuring in silence. And your name is called Najaatu Bashir!" [FD-Arb.C2: ITT 23(3&4)]

"But I Hope you are not offended. The issue of whether mother is feeling uncomfortable or angry over her child's attitude is all the same." [FD-Arb.C2: ITT 61(2&3)]

As part of the FIE off record strategy, it is found that metaphor is among the most commonly used category by court officials during RCP in giving hint as in the excerpts, thus:

"*Na biyu, da tazo dinnan ka **sadu** da ita ko baka **sadu** da itaba?*"-Secondly, as she came did you **meet** her or not? [FDMI-Arb.C7: ITT 48]

"*Na biyu kuma tabbacin ka sadu da ita ko baka sadu da itaba.*" -The second also is the assurance that you have ever **met** her or not. [FDMI-Arb.C7: ITT 48(2)]

In the excerpt [ITT 48] the FD-Arb.C7 used the Hausa word '*sadu*' which literarily means **meet** to avoid direct use of vulgar words 'sex' while giving hints to the addressee/s. This shows how speakers in RCP manipulate words to avoid committing themselves to the intent as they speak, yet conveyed their meaning successfully. Similarly, at some points, the Arbitrators do employ Hausa proverbs and Idioms as category of FIE FTA off record strategy to tender suggestion or to disapprove the action of the addressee/s as shown in the excerpts below:

*"Bai kamata mu shigar da wasu wadan za'a zo **a bar jaki ana dukan taikiba**."* -We should not involve some of these by trying **to beat the loads and leave the donkey**. [FDMI-Arb.C10: ITT 143(2)]

"ai dama laifi bashi da ubangijinshi."- surely fault has no godfather. [FDMI-Arb.C11: ITT 4]

*"Ke ya kamata kiyi **ingiza mai kantu** ma mariya."* -you should do **a push of groundnut hawker in the stream** to Mariya. [FDMI-Arb.C11: ITT 6(3)]
*"Wallahi shedan ne yake kokarin **zai kaiki ya baroki**."* -I swear by Allah it is **a devil that is trying to take you and leave you**. [FDMI-Arb.C11: ITT 6]

In [ITT 43(3)] the idiomatic expression ***a bar jaki ana dukan taikiba*** "*to beat the loads and leave the donkey*" stands for losing direction/tract or misusing priority. FDMI-Arb.C10 used the above expression to politely suggest the addressee to do the right thing while at the same time trying to avoid being perceived as bias or siding with the other party to the case. In [ITT 4] on the other hand, FDMI-Arb.C11 made the expression to dismiss and disapprove the addressee's statement of defence. …***ingiza mai kantu***"…*a push of groundnut hawker in the stream*" in [ITT 6] the FDMI-Arb.C11 tried to suggest the addressee to lure the complainant into agreeing to go back to her matrimonial home and …zai ***kaiki ya baroki*** "*a devil that is trying to take you and leave you*" has same implication.

There were other various reasons that usually attract the Arbitrators to employ FIE FTA off record strategy and these include the display of power dominances in the RCP, especially when an addressee is trying to go out of points during interaction. As in the instance when [FDMI-Arb.C4: ITT 214] said: "*I am coming*!" which may suggest wait let me speak, allow me to speak or may even suggest 'wait a minute' in form of warning.

Other FIE FTA off record strategy being identified that were used by Arbitrators include **anti-climax** which was used in giving verdicts; as in [ITT 25(2)] when FDMI-Arb.C6 says: "*no matter how high the shot reached must come down*." Sometimes they use **climax** to show the gravity of the offence committed by the addressee as in [ITT 93(4)] "*Footprint of an elephant overshadowed that of a Camel*." **Metonymy** is also identified as part of the FIE FTA off record strategy used. For instance; FDMI-FC.C4 says in [ITT 50(8)]; "*I spent two days without seeing his **face***." The female complainant used the word '*face*' to refer to a '*child*'. Respondents were also identified of using **hyperbole** to exaggerate the facts with the aim of establishing their defence, as exemplified in the following excerpt: [FDMI-MR.C1: ITT 51(2)] "*one can touch the boy's eyeballs and he couldn't be able to wink*." This is similar with FDMI-MR.C5 when he tried to seek the support of FDMI-Arb.C5 indirectly; he exaggerated his claim as shown in the excerpt, thus: [ITT 80] "*on that day there was a heavy rainfall and heavy winds as if it was falling from the edge of a bowl*." From the data, it was also identified that parties to a case usually employ FIE FTA off record strategy with the aid of **euphemism** in expressing unpleasant information, as when FDMI-MR.C4 wanted to inform the FDMI-Arb.C4 about the dead of his dad as in excerpt [ITT 288] said: "*Allah has taken him away*."

In a nutshell, the result of the findings shows that Figurative and Idiomatic FTA expression off record strategy is richly used in RCP as found across the whole 12 Cases. However, it is mostly employed by court officials in the attempt to avoid being perceived as bias or unfair to certain classes of parties. It was equally found that many categories of FIE were utilised including Metaphor and personification as the most used, followed by euphemism, sarcasm, hyperbole, climax and anti-climax in the quest to achieve resolution of matrimonial and family disputes.

DISCUSSIONS

In RCP, speakers do the FTA off record when they opted to convey their meaning to the addressee in an ambiguous ways or hinting manner. This corresponds with Brown and Levinson's (1978) viewpoint that speakers opted FTA off-record when they wished to avoid being committed or held responsible for their intents. This study identified the use of Figurative and Idiomatic Expressions as FTA off record strategy in RCP. The findings differed from other related studies such as Gillani and Mahmood (2014) who also adapted Brown and Levinson's conditions for politeness strategies.

The findings in Gillani and Mahmood (2014) suggested the nonexistence of any FTA off-record strategies in the writing style of Pakistanis business correspondence. Besides, the findings in Ramadhani (2014) claimed the absence of FTA off-record strategy in the Javanese politeness strategies.

The findings of the current paper suggest the use of Figurative and Idiomatic Expressions (FIE) FTA off-record strategy by speakers as an exhibition of unique and salient features of RCP. The results show that speakers, most specifically the court officials, used various kind of FIE as FTA off record strategies during RCP to exonerate themselves from being held committed to the intention of their expressions during RCP. Most of these participants employed personification in order to exemplify something, give hint about the outcomes or position of issues in dispute. Sometimes sarcasm is employed by arbitrators as FIE FTA off-record strategy in addressing or querying the actions of addressee(s) and mostly uses metaphors to give hint. Similarly, at some points, the arbitrators employ Hausa proverbs and idioms as FIE FTA off-record strategy when they wish to tender suggestion or to disapprove the action of the addressee(s) politely without perceiving any sort of biasness or siding with the other party to the case. There are other reasons that usually attract the arbitrators of using FIE FTA off-record strategy and these involved the display of power dominances in RCP, especially when the addressee is trying to go off points during interactions. Likewise, the arbitrators' use of FIE FTA off-record strategy also revealed the existence of anti-climax in giving verdicts. Sometimes, climax is used to show the gravity of the offence committed by the addressee.

On the other hand, it was found that female complainants employed metonymy as FIE FTA off record strategy while male respondents used hyperbole to exaggerate their claims with the aim of establishing their defence in RCP. At the same time, with the aid of FIE FTA off-record strategy parties in dispute used euphemism to express unpleasant information in RCP. This corresponds with Searle's (1975) viewpoint that the utterance meaning of a speaker and the sentence meaning often diverge. In this sense, the meaning of a given utterance carried by speakers in most cases differed with the intended force in the speech act, given the intended force as a secondary meaning. Searle (1975) further stated that a speaker, who utters a sentence, could mean what he said, but also means something more and this is more common with irony, insinuation and metaphorical uses. These include putting into consideration the idiom theory and other inferred uses of language, such as irony and metaphor.

The findings of this paper are incongruent with most of the recent related studies (e.g., Destaria & Rini, 2019; Manipuspika & Winzami, 2021; Van Thao, 2021; Milana & Ardi, 2021) in terms of scope, approach and context of language use. These studies were situated within the scope of strategies used in translating idioms from Asian languages into English language. The current paper, on the other hand, analysed the politeness strategies used in the Shariah-based reconciliation case proceedings. Moreover, these studies revealed various transfers of idiomatic meanings from English to Bahasa Indonesia and Malay in contrast to the current paper which revealed the use of various FIE FTA off-record strategies in the attempt to achieve everlasting peace between conflicting parties.

Furthermore, most of the recent and relevant studies were focused on idiomatic utterances (e.g., Van Thao, 2021) and figurative utterances (e.g., Milana & Ardi, 2021) used in lyrics songs. Other studies centred on the strategies used in translating idioms found in movies (e.g., Yahya & Islami, 2019; Ahdillah et al., 2020), while others focused on figurative language found in the contents of musical albums (Hulu et al., 2021). Even though, both these studies and the current paper are domesticated

within the frame of qualitative design, yet they differed in terms of context and theoretical approach. The current paper adapted Brown and Levinson's (1978) conditions for politeness strategies as theoretical guides in understanding the kind of figurative and idiomatic expressions used during RCP in Shariah-based courts of North-Eastern Nigeria. On the contrary, recent studies used different theoretical frameworks. For instance, Yahya and Van Thao (2021) situated their study within the theory of Makkai (1972) while Milana and Ardi (2021) adopted the theory of Perrine (1983) as their theoretical framework in analysing their data on figurative expressions. Similarly, Ahdillah et al. (2020) in the attempt to transfer the idiomatic expressions into the target language utilised the theory proposed by Baker (1992) and Wang (2006). Interestingly, most of these studies shared similar results with the present study. For instance, Milana and Ardi (2021) and the present study found similar findings in terms of hyperbole, irony, metaphor, personification, metonymy. However, Milana and Ardi (2021) further revealed the use of simile, litotes and paradox in their study. These additional results are probably due to the illocutionary intent of the artist. Thus, the intention of most artists is to entertain audience than providing the solution to disputing issues. In contrast, the illocutionary intent of the interlocutors in RCP is to resolve issues in dispute.

CONCLUSION

In view of the results in this study, the findings suggest that the Figurative and Idiomatic Expressions off-record strategies are unique attributes of RCP and dominantly utilised by almost all classes of speakers. The court officials were the most common users of FIE in order to avoid being perceived as biased or unfair to certain classes of parties. It was also found that many categories of FIE were utilised and these include metaphor and personification as the frequently-used feature, followed by euphemism, sarcasm, hyperbole, climax and anti-climax in achieving the resolution of matrimonial and family disputes.

As a result, FIE off-record strategy plays a significant role in the successful resolution of disputes in Shariah-based RCP. The findings of this study provide insights and descriptions of how speakers manipulate or utilise a language with the aid of FIE to achieve amicable solutions to the disputing issue(s). Hence, as part of pedagogy, the adaption of these findings in teaching students and legal experts on training in shariah legal schools may enhance their skills towards successful RCP in Shariah-based courts.

In fact, the paper recommends that other aspects of sociopragmatic speech acts of RCP should be explored by linguistic researchers, stakeholders, Islamic juries, legal practitioners, and policy makers in law and jurisprudence (e.g., both national and state legislatures) in order to enhance the quality proceedings process of the sharia-based RCP not only in Nigeria but also across the globe for Muslims and those interested to be tried under an Islamic legal system.

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