

SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS IN IGBO LANGUAGE: A STUDY OF CHILD NAMING CEREMONY IN ORAIFITE IGBO

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ABSTRACT

This research work studies speech acts in Oraifite Igbo child naming ceremony. The data was collected using audience participatory and personal interview methods. Austin (1962) and Grice (1989) Speech Act Theory were used in the data analysis. In the analyses, we present sentence classifiers that can identify speech act sentences in child naming and classify them as Commissive, Directive, Expressive and Representative. The analyses of the data prove that the felicity conditions were met and that illocutionary forces and perlocutionary effects exist in Oraifite Igbo child naming ceremony.

Keywords: Speech, Igbo, Language, Ceremony and Analysis

INTRODUCTION

In the distance past, the study of linguistics was basically couched under the structure of words and sentences (i.e. grammar) of a language and the speech sounds (i.e. phonology) of such language. There was little or no interest in the study of what happens when utterances are made. [1] notes: "When we speak, we can do all sorts of things, from aspirating a consonant, to constructing a relative clause, to insulting a guest, to starting a war. These are all, pre-theoretically, speech acts- acts done in the process of speaking."

The neglect of the above fact by linguistics drastically restricted the study of languages to a large extent. This is because, the study of languages is not completely covered under one or more of the major divisions of grammar-phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics- or under some general theory of actions. In line with this, [2] asserts, "The study of language should be all encompassing in its framework so as to cover such areas as are independent of language analysis". [3] agrees with this when he asserts, "Language goes beyond the mouth of the speaker as there should be a meaning relation between the uttered words and the understanding of the hearer." This explains that utterances are not merely for the speaker but should also make meaning to the listener. Because little or no attention was paid to this fact, the study of linguistics was not complete.

However, good enough, many linguists, especially of the 21st century saw the need to go beyond the borders of the major divisions of grammar. For instance, [4] state that, "In the 1990's, the natural language processing community shifted much of its attention to corpus-based learning techniques. Since then, most of the text corpora that have been annotated and studied are collections of expository text.

At this point, meaning needed to go beyond words and sentences. Theories began to arise as a result of this phenomenon with all its shortcomings. According to [5]: In a bid to find lasting solutions to the shortcomings of the denominational and mentalist theories of meaning, emphasis shifted from linguistic meaning, that is, word and sentences meaning, to speaker meaning, that is, context or situational meaning; hence the necessity for the introduction of yet another subfield, pragmatics into linguistics.

[6] [7] are of the view that some linguists see pragmatics “As an independent level of language analysis, as it is based on utterances in the same way as phonology is based on sound, syntax on sentences and semantics on both words and sentences.” For this reason, it is said that pragmatic analysis goes beyond the ordinary meaning that is merely encoded by linguistics. [8] [9] takes a step further to explain that pragmatics as a branch of study concerns itself with the language of user’s “ability to pair sentences with the context in which they would be appropriate.” According to [10], “the subject of pragmatics shows the relationship between the speaker’s intention and the hearer’s interpretation and how it affects meaning in context”.

In this sense, pragmatics and semantics can be said to share a common relationship because, meaning is concerned at both levels of analysis. [11] suggests the three possible ways of structuring the relationship between pragmatics and semantics:

- Semanticism - having some features or elements of pragmatics inside semantics.
- Pragmaticism - having some features or elements of semantics inside pragmatics.
- Complementorism - Semantics and Pragmatics. Complementing each other while remaining as independent areas of research.

Despite the relationship between them, there is a clear cut distinction between them as they pose new opportunities to study, discourse and pragmatic phenomena that are fundamentally different in their respective genres. While semantics deals with the systematic ways in which language structure meaning of words, phrases and sentences, pragmatics deals with the meaning of words, phrases and sentences in context.

Furthermore, utterances that can be discussed in terms of truth and falsity belong to semantics while such judgments those speakers make in their decisions about what to say, how to say it and when to say it belong to pragmatics.

[12] [13] lend credence to this view when they assert that: “While semantics attempts to relate meaning to logic and truth and deals with meaning as a matter primarily of sense-relations within language, pragmatics attempts to relate meaning to context of utterance; it views languages as action which is performed by speakers”.

Child naming is a phenomenon that cuts across geographical and cultural backgrounds especially in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. From the natural language processing perspective, the action of child naming is an interesting hybrid semantic genre and pragmatic genre.

Most obviously, the action of child naming in Igbo contains the four different speech act classes which are Commissives, Directives, Expressives and Representative. The person performing the action of child naming often engages in speech acts with the audience. Most of what he wants to say contains factual information as well as general knowledge. [14] opines that “Real-Life acts of speech usually involve interpersonal relations of some kind: A speaker does something with respect to an audience. Thus, it would seem that ethnographic studies of such relationships and the study of discourse should be central to speech act theory”

In this paper, we present sentences classifiers that can identify speech act sentences in child naming and classify them as Commissive, Directive, Expressive and Representative. Speech could be useful for many applications according to [15]. Information extraction system could benefit from filtering speech act sentences (e.g. promises and questions) so that facts are only extracted from expository text. Identifying Directive sentences could be used to summarize the questions being asked in a forum over a period of time. Representative sentences could be extracted to highlight the conclusions and beliefs of domain experts in response to a question. This is the crux of this paper as it concerns the analysis of speech acts in Oraifite Igbo child naming.

Objectives

It is the objective of this paper to study language use in child naming ceremony in Oraifite Igbo to find out to what extent speech is used in performing actions in these ceremonies using the [16], [17] Speech Act Theory.

METHODOLOGY

The Igbo languages is spoken mainly in five states of South east Nigeria; Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo as well as in parts of Delta, Akwa-Ibom and Rivers states. The study focuses on the Oraifite dialect of Igbo spoken in the four villages of Oraifite community in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State.

The speech act theory

[18] posit that, "There has been relatively little work on applying speech act theory to written genres, and most of the previous work has focused on email classification." [19] agrees with this when he asserts that, "The theory of speech act has little application to the study of the correspondence between speech and intended meaning". This notwithstanding, this paper tries to adopt a working theoretical framework [20] opines that, "The modern study of speech acts begins with engaging monograph 'How to Do Things with Words', the published version of his William James lectures delivered at Harvard 1955". Therefore, we adopt, for the purpose of this research: [21] felicity conditions and also [7] Co-operative principle. It is observed that for Austin, certain sorts of sentences seem designed to do something. He called such sentences performative, which are different from such other sentences that seem, pretheoretically, at least, to be employed mainly for saying something rather than doing something. This class of sentences, he called constantives.

The term felicity condition is based on the fact that some utterances should not be seen as true or false; rather, they should be seen as being used effectively or not in speech act. [5] posits that, "utterances that work as speech acts are work said to be infelicitous". So, [18] observes that "for utterances to work as speech acts, they must satisfy certain social conventions". These conventions are what he referred to as "Felicity Conditions". While the distinction between performatives and constantives is often involved in some genres, Austin argues further that every normal utterance has both a descriptive and an effective aspect: that saying something is also doing something.

According to [13], "Apart from the felicitous/infelicitous nature of speech act to be effective, both speaker and hearer must share certain conventions known as conversational". It is this co-operation that makes speech acts in the form of conversations to be effective and efficient. [21] refers to these rules as "Co-operative principles."

According to [3], "Communication is an inferential process starting with a linguistic stimulus uttered by the speaker". [1] observes that, "they are very clear in saying that part of communication process is a decoding phase. Code communication is not the basic way linguistic communication is realized in the sense that coding and decoding are not sufficient in themselves to explain the richness of communication". In line with this, [6], [7] substituted a three-way contrast among the kinds of acts that are performed when language is put to use, namely the distinction between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, all of which are characteristic of both performatives and constantive.

Locutionary Acts

According to [11], "these are acts of speaking, acts involved in the construction of speech, such as uttering certain sounds or making certain marks, using particular words and using them in conformity with the grammatical rules of a particular language and with certain senses and certain references as determined by the rules of the language from which they are drawn".

Illocutionary Acts

These are acts that are apparent purpose for using a performative sentence: christening, marrying and so forth. Austin called attention to the fact that acts of stating or asserting, which are presumable of canonical constantives and such sentences are by assumption, not performatives. Furthermore, acts of ordering or requesting are typically accomplished by using imperative sentences, and acts of asking whether something is the case are properly accomplished by using interrogative sentences, though such forms are at best very dubious examples of performative sentences. [4] concludes that “the locutionary aspect of speaking is what we attend to most in the case of constantives, while in the case of the standard examples of performative sentences, we attend as much as possible to the illocution”.

Perlocutionary Acts

As the name implies, perlocutions are acts performed by speaking. [1] asserts, “perlocutionary acts consist in the production of effects upon the thoughts, feelings or actions of the addressee (s) speaker, or other parties, such as causing people to refer to a certain ship as the Joseph Stalin, producing the belief that Sam and Mary should be considered man and wife, convincing an addressee of the truth of a statement, causing an addressee to feel a requirement to do something and so on”.

Austin goes further to illustrate the distinction between these kinds of acts with the example of “shoot her!” which he trisects as follows:

Act (A) or locution

He said to me “shoot her!” meaning by shoot “shoot” and referring by her to “her”

Act (B) or illocution- He urged me to shoot her.

Act (C) or perlocution- He persuades me to shoot her.

Speech Acts Classes

[20] classifies speech acts that are commonly used in language into four which include: Commssives, Directives, Expressives and Representatives.

❖ **Commssives:** A commissive speech act occurs when the speaker commits to a future course of action. In conversation, common commissive speech acts are promises and threats.

❖ **Directives:** A directive speech act occurs when the speaker expects the listener to do something as a response. For example, the speaker may ask a question, make a request or issue an invitation.

❖ **Expressives:** An expressive speech act occurs in conversation when a speaker expresses his or her psychological state to the listener. Typical cases are when the speaker thanks, apologizes or welcomes the listener.

❖ **Representatives:** According to Searce, a Representative speech act commits the speaker to the truth of an expressed proposition. It represents the speaker’s belief of something that can be evaluated to be true or false.

Speech act clause types and force

In performing a speech act, the speaker is expected to be in a particular mood. Speber and Wilson (1988) proposed some semantic representation of the three basic moods:

- **Declaratives**

According to [9], “Typically, a declarative sentence is used to make an assertion.” Sperber and Wilson believe that a declarative sentence communicates what the speaker believes. In other words, a declarative sentence allows the hearer to infer what the speaker believes. Therefore, declarative sentences represent the speaker’s belief about their propositional content as being relevant.

- **Imperative**

Imperative can perform a wide variety of different types of illocutionary acts according to [7]. [8] assert that what the speaker communicates represents a description of a state of affairs as being both potential and desirable. A state of affairs is potential if it is conceived as being true in at least a possible world compatible with the individual’s assumptions

about the actual world, which may therefore be, or become actual. Therefore, imperative sentences communicate that the fact that the speaker considers a variable as representing a potential and desirable state of affairs is relevant.

- **Interrogatives**

[10] asserts that “Interrogatives perform acts too. There are two sub cases, depending whether the interrogative is yes/no or ‘wh’, Sperder and Wilson (1988). If the interrogative is yes/no, the speaker communicates that the represented thought would be relevant if true, namely that it is desirable. On the other hand, if the interrogative is ‘wh’, the speaker communicates that there is some completion of the represented thought that would be relevant if true, namely desirable. A proposition form which is used to represent not a state of affairs but another thought is said to be used interpretively, and to interpret the thought it represents. Therefore, interrogative sentences communicate that the fact that the speaker considers a variable as a desirable thought is relevant.

Performing Speech Act in Igbo

The major forms of speech acts in Igbo are constatives and performatives. However, speech acts in Igbo can be classified according to contextual usage of semantic representations. It is based on this backdrop that we discuss speech acts in Igbo under the following conversational conventions.

Making requests in Igbo

According to [5], “The act of making request in Igbo involves the expression of a wish or desire for an action to be carried out.” This implies that the basic rule for making requests stems from the fact that speaker wants the hearer to perform an action in future. However, the sincerity of a request meets certain conditions of conversational conventions. So, making requests in Igbo could be formed in several ways and geared towards conforming to the semantic and pragmatic rules of making requests. [12] [13] states that “The rules, which are essentially determined by conversational conventions for speaking politely and indirectly are important in making requests.”

Performatives in Igbo

In their day to day conversational activities, the users of the Igbo language perform many actions through the language - issuing commands, warning, threats and giving advice. [16] [17] asserts that, “These actions performed through language are context-based in which case one utterance may be used to perform two or more different actions or different occasions, depending on the participants in a discourse situation. Under such conditions, such factors like age, status and degree of relationship among participants are put into consideration.”

Interrogatives in Igbo

Questioning as a speech act in Igbo follows the same rule as stated above. [1] in [2] writes that “Generally speaking in Igbo discourse, questioning is usually unidirectional, i.e. subordinates may not pose questions to superiors unless such questions genuine inquiries for information the questioner does not already know”. [8] further asserts that, “Young people or subordinates do not keep mute when being asked questions by their elders or superiors. Breaking these rules will amount to disregard or rudeness.”

Child Naming in Igbo

Child naming is a form of tradition contracted under native law customs. Viewed from the traditional perspective, child naming is more of a social than a personal affair involving several parties. [8] posits that: “Child naming in Igbo land is an age long affair that is as old as the existence of the Igbo tribe. Igbo people hold this custom in high esteem as the practice serves as a great identity”. Once a child is born, the child is entitled to a name with which to identify the child. The procedure of naming a child in Igbo land, however, varies from community to community depending on the aspect of that cultural practice they hold in high esteem.

In Oraifite, when a child is born, it is joyfully announced in the kindred. The married women immediately go to the house of the couple to chant some interesting songs. [6] opines that “These songs serve as welcome into the new world for the child who is seen as

goodly thing happening to the family". The next stage is the circumcision which takes place eight days after birth (i.e. for a boy child). The moment the wound of the circumcision is healed, child naming ceremony takes place. The eldest man in the village, who is a strong and wise custodian of culture, is invited. He is to perform the act.

Two of the symbolic elements that feature greatly in child naming ceremony are kolanuts and drinks (especially palm wine). [9] asserts that "Presentation of kolanuts in Igbo culture is an expression of harmony, peace, goodwill and unity." She posits further that before kolanuts are 'broken', prayers are offered to God and the ancestors for the success of the ceremony. The palm wine on its own has its significance. For instance, a portion of the palm wine and alcoholic drinks are poured out in libations to God and the ancestors as an invitation for them to be present, for their permission to give the new born baby a name. [5] asserts that "These libations are important as they complement the prayers said over kolanuts." For many, the libations and prayers over kolanuts constitute the religious part of the ceremony.

The advent of Christianity has to a large extent affected the Igbo traditional child naming ceremony. This is highlighted in the fact that many Igbo people do not care about the traditional child naming ceremony anymore. Many prefer the Christian naming ceremony (i.e. Christian baptism). In such cases, some Christian denominations see the traditional child naming ceremony as sinful. Suffice it to say that western civilization has eaten deep into the fabrics of the cultural practices of Africa in general and Igbo culture in particular.

ANALYSIS OF SPEECH ACTS IN ORAIFITE IGBO CHILD NAMING CEREMONIES

The framework used here for the purpose of analysis is those of [10] [11]. The data is purely the speech acts from the speaker of Oraifite dialect presented below as performative utterances (both explicit and implicit); in other words, they are illocutionary acts. For the purpose of this research, we adopted the method of tone marking all the tone bearing elements using the three tone marks in Igbo which are (/) high tone, low tone and (-) down step tone.

Child Naming in Oraifite Igbo

The action of child naming in Oraifite Igbo is usually a responsorial effect as the performance of the action expects responses from the audience. By way of introduction, the performer of the action introduces the business of the day by saying:

Custodian: Oraifite Kwenu!	<i>I greet you my people!</i>
Response: yaa!	<i>Yes!</i>
Custodian: Mụọnu!	<i>Give birth (to children)!</i>
Response: Yaa!	<i>Yes!</i>
Custodian: Zụọnu!	<i>Train them/Bring them up!</i>
Response: Yaa!	<i>Yes!</i>
Custodian: Kwezuonu!	<i>I greet you!</i>
Response: Yaa!	<i>Yes!</i>

The series of the utterances are illocutionary acts that have the illocutionary force of greeting. In this situation, they are meant to show satisfaction and acceptance and also to elicit quietness. The effect on everybody present is orderliness and quietness.

Custodian: Nde be anyị sị na nwa bụ ife ọma.	<i>Our people say that child is a good thing.</i>
Nwa arsha ada n'enu.	<i>A child doesn't fall from the skies.</i>
Ọ chukwu na-enye nwa mgbe ọ sọlụ ya.	<i>It is God that gives child(ren) when it pleases Him.</i>

The first and second utterances are illocutionary acts whose illocutionary forces are those of assertion. They are intended to throw more light on the business of the day. The third utterance has the illocutionary force assertion and warming.

Custodian: Nde mụlụ nwa kuputalụ anyị nwa ka anyị mee ife anyị ji maka ya wee bja ebe a.

Let the parents of the child bring the child out for us to do what we came to do.

The above has an illocutionary force of request. Its perlocutionary effect on the audience is that the business of the day is about to start and demands rapt attention.

When the child is handed over to him, he lifts the child up with his two hands to heaven in a bid to show the child to God the Creator (Chukwu) and the ancestors at that point says:

Obinigwe, nde nna nna anyị fa, anyị echee nwa nke a n'irshu ụnụ. Nalụnụ ya gozie ya ka ọ bụrụ ezigbo nwa.

He that lives in heaven, our ancestors, we present this child before you. Accept him and bless him to be a good child.

The above has the illocutionary force of request and respect. The first utterance shows respect to the creator and the ancestors while the last utterance requests their blessings on the child.

Custodian: Gụonụ nwa nke a afa *Name this child.*

The above assertion has the illocutionary force of command and demand. The parents of the child or any other elderly relative can give the child a name. When that is done, the custodian goes further to say:

Nwa ọfụu, anyị abaa ghị afa nke a taa. Ka Chukwu okike na nde nna anyị fa nnyelụ ghị n'mbosị ndụ ghị niine.

New born baby!, we give you this name today. Let God the Creator and our ancestors be with you all the days of your life.

Response: Iseee! *Amen!*

The above utterance by the custodian had the illocutionary force of declaration and request from God and ancestor to be with the child all the days of his life. The response is in agreement to what the custodian has declared and it is done by the audience.

At this point, kolanut and palmwine are presented to be used for prayers over the child.

The custodian goes on to pray over the child.

Nwa ọfụu, ebe ibiagolu ụwa, anyị na-anabata ghị n'obi ocha niine. Chukwu ga-agọzi ghị mbosị niine nke ndụ ghị. Nna nna anyị fag ya-enyelụ ghị aka. Ọ ga-adị ghị na mma. I ga-etoputa bụlụ mmadụ. I ga-abalụ obodo, ezinụgọ ghị na onwe ghị ulu. Igaghị enye nne na nna ghị nsogbu. Ife ọbuna itinyelụ aka ga na-aga-aga. Asị m na ọ ga-adị ghị na mma mbosị Eke, mbosị Orie, mbosị Afo, mbosị Nkwo.

New born baby, since you have come to us in this life, we welcome you with all our heart. God will bless you all the days of your life. Our ancestors will help you. It shall be well with you. You will grow up into an adult. You will be useful to your family, yourself and your community. You will not be troublesome to your parents. Everything you lay your hands on will prosper. I say, it shall be well with you on (every day of the Igbo week) Eke day, Orie day, Afo, Nkwo day.

Response: Isee!

Amen!

The utterances have the illocutionary force of blessing. They serve as the concluding part of the child naming ceremony. Its perlocutionary effect is that the child has been given a name in the traditional way.

After the fan fare that goes with different people coming to touch the baby, the custodian says to the couple:

Ebe anyị megolu ife anyị ji maka ya bịa, nwoke na nwunye ya ga-ebuputazị nni ka anyị lie.

Since we have done what we came to do, let the parents of the child bring out the food for us to eat.

The utterances above have the illocutionary force of statement and request respectively. They are intended to show that job of child naming has been done so the request to be served. The perlocutionary effect is merry-making and feasting as everybody is served very well with food and drinks.

Felicity conditions in Oraifite child naming

In accordance with the felicity condition, the utterances in the data collected under child naming ceremony are in every aspect related to the occasion and the circumstance. Certainly, these utterances used here cannot be used in burial, marriage or judicial ceremonies. Since they are related to the occasion and circumstance at hand, they are said to meet the first felicity condition.

The second felicity condition involved the parents of the child inviting people to the occasion to act as witnesses. The third felicity condition required that both the custodian and the people will agree in their prayers over the child in question. So the fourth condition involved using the appropriate utterances in accordance with the tradition and custom.

Based on the discussions above, the speech acts in the data collected satisfy the felicity conditions.

CONCLUSION

Speech act is an interesting phenomenon in linguistic study. It shows how important a tool language is to man. Speech act recognition is always a pragmatic process. Sentence types offer the initial clues and direction to drive the inferential process in order to understand the illocutionary intentions of the speaker. Alessandro (1994) posits that "This does not exclude that certain inferential patterns have become as standard as to acquire almost the status of conventionalized forms".

This research work has shown that illocutionary forces and perlocutionary effects exist in Oraifite Igbo child naming ceremony. All these were highlighted in the work with all the felicity conditions being met as [20] [21] framework of analysis were used. For speech act analysis to be effective, it is essential for understanding and producing illocutions with the knowledge of rational human behavior. The study of speech act must therefore look at the study of human behavior and cognition in general according to Alessandro (1994), since the speech act competence is the result of the interaction between those different skills.

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