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Sociopragmatic Underpinnings of Language Use in the Advertisement of Okrika in Nigerian Markets

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Abstract

Within the purview of sociolinguistics and pragmatics, language use is investigated to reveal its dimensions and motivations. The use of language in any kind of advertisement is fascinating, as it is immersed in the advertiser's illocutionary goal(s). Different products are advertised in Nigerian markets, including okirika which is the focus of this study. In human communication, language use is informed by speaker-meanings with regard to "hearer-ends". An analysis of "why" and "how" language is deployed in the advertisement of okirika essentially elucidates the performance of discrete speech acts from the advertiser's end. This study hinges on two theoretical frameworks because of the unique function of each of the frameworks in the data analysis: Bach and Harnish (1979) Speech Act Theory as well as the Stance and Engagement Theory by Hyland Finnegan (1989) and Finnegan (2005). The study concludes that in the advertisement of okirika, the advertiser essentially persuades the market audience to buy the okirika by using discrete communicative strategies which include: using skillfully selected speech acts, exploring speaker-hearer shared knowledge, use of attributive adjectives, inducing panic-buying, accusation and fixing false price.

Keywords: *Advertisement, Sociolinguistics, Pragmatics, Okirika, Bach and Harnish's Speech Act Theory, Stance and Engagement Theory*

INTRODUCTION

An analysis of the language of advertisement is engaged in elucidating the effectiveness of the advertiser's communicative strategies towards prospective buyers. According to Akinnaso, 2011), "communication is said to be effective when the sender's aim or objective of sending a message is achieved by acknowledging, understanding and implementing the message." In any kind of advert, the advertiser wants the conveyed information to be understandable. This is why such adverts are immersed in socially realistic phenomena. The advertiser of *okirika* in Nigerian markets brings to the fore, the crucial role of communicative competence in seller-buyer discourse. Wardhaugh R. and Janet M. Fuller (2015, p. 400) posit that "communicative competence is "the ability to produce and understand utterances which are socially appropriate in contexts; contrasts with competence." Research in sociolinguistics and pragmatics are interested in contextual nuances and message-driven factors that impinge on language choice, as evident in the use of certain discourse strategies in advertising *okirika* in Nigerian markets. The significance of this study is established by the fact that we do not know of any study on language use in the advertisement of *okirika*.

ADVERTISEMENT OF OKIRIKA IN NIGERIAN MARKETS

Advertisement is a domain in commerce. It deals with the promotion of goods and services. Via advertisement, the publicity of a wide range of goods, services and programmes are made fast and result-oriented. There are different means and agencies through which advertisement can be done. While some adverts are sophisticated, others are not. The advertisement of *okirika* in Nigerian markets is quite simple as it is usually done with or without the use of loudspeakers. Adverts are similar in language goals.

Okirika are second-hand wares (clothes, bed sheets, underwear, sports wears, bags, etc.) that are commonly sold in markets. In Nigeria, such wares are imported from neighbouring countries and beyond. Nigerians, irrespective of their social status, buy *okirika* due to the popular belief that *okirika* are not only better in quality, but are also cheaper. Average Nigerians believe that the availability of *okirika* is their opportunity of buying foreign, quality products without the enormous cost of travelling out of the country. Despite governments' attempts to ban the importation of *okirika* into Nigeria, its influx into Nigerian markets remains a reality. The expressions "boys' corner", "bend down select", etc. are sometimes used to make reference to *okirika*. Although there are different parts of the country where traders buy *okirika* for sale, Lagos, Onitsha and Aba remain famous points for such purchase. *Okirika* wares have gained so much recognition in Nigeria, that there are certain large portions of Nigerian markets where only *okirika* traders operate.

The widespread belief by Nigerians, that *okirika* wares have unique odour, accentuates its widespread in the country. This situation necessitates thorough washing to evade the stigma associated with wearing *okirika*.

THE SOCIOPRAGMATICS OF LANGUAGE USE

Sociolinguistics is the study of language and society as evident in the different communicative situations in which language is used in society. Language use in advertisement is essentially a sociopragmatic phenomenon as it contributes to the linguistic system which is immersed in choice-making from the repertoire of language. The use of language in society is about the relationship between language and social structure. Martin Pütz, Justyna A. Robinson and Monika Reif (2012, pp. 247-249) submit that "in sociolinguistics, the categorization of people, their relationships and social activities make up what is called "social structure", i.e. social groups, networks and social situations. The main task of sociolinguistics is to relate variation in language to variation in social structure, whereby an individual's use of language is determined by that individual's recognition – their perception of the social groups and networks around them." Sociolinguistics and pragmatics account for the social significance of language rules, by deviating occasionally from norm to context-driven linguistic choices. This view corroborates Goethals (2002) who opines that "language is human interaction. It is active and dynamic. It shapes: it deconstructs the world through fiction, myth and narration. Learning a foreign language is essentially learning to interact as an 'intercultural competent speaker'." The sociolinguistics of language use simply means that language use is contextual as it addresses varied discourse worlds. The sociopragmatics of language use captures the setting (physical context), participants and time of the communicative event. Noun, cited in Butari Nahum Upah (2018) submits that features of the physical context of human communication include:

(i) Participants, e.g. boys, girls, men, traders

(ii) Ongoing activity, e.g. playing, chatting, debating

(iii) The place, e.g. church, class, stadium, dining table

(iv) The time, e.g. time of the day or season.

Context determines the use and interpretation of language. Participants of discourse are aware of the contextual underpinnings of an on-going communication. In the advertisement of *okirika* in Nigerian markets, the listeners process speaker-meanings by exploring discrete contexts. Adegbija (1999) submits that "… we may identify at least four types of context as impinging on utterance interpretation: the physical, the socio-cultural, the linguistic, and the psychological.

Did the communicative exchange occur at night, in the morning, twenty years ago, at a church, at a mosque, in a bedroom, in the market, at a cemetery, at a hospital? Socio-culturally, one may ask questions such as these: what are the beliefs, habits, value systems, or cultures of those involved? Are their religious and cultural beliefs at hand? Linguistically, what are the other words appearing in the environment of the word used? What do they mean? What do they imply within the physical and socio-cultural setting? Psychologically, what is the state of mind of those involved in the interaction?"

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

This study explores Bach and Harnish (ibid.) Speech Act Theory as well as Stance and Engagement Theory (cf. Hyland (2005:176; Finnegan (1989:124) cited in Ayo Osisanwo 2017).

Bach and Harnish (1979)

Bach and Harnish's (ibid.) Speech Act Theory elucidates the crucial roles of shared knowledge in human communication. They contend that for speakers to perform illocutionary acts, it is intended that their listeners have the understanding of the acts (mutual contextual beliefs). Their terminology, "Speech Act Schemata" (SAS) refers to an inevitable part of the inferential process in a communicative event. According to them, S (speaker) infers what H (hearer) says via "Presumption of Literalness" (PL); the hearer should know when the speaker uses either literal or non-literal language. Apart from mutual contextual beliefs (MCBs), Bach and Harnish recognize other types of beliefs shared by an entire linguistic community, which the hearer relies on for inference-making:

(i) Linguistic Presumption (LP); and

(ii) Communicative Presumption (CP).

Linguistic Presumption (LP) refers to the moral belief that members of a Linguistic Community (LC) share on the particular language (L). Therefore, any expression (e) uttered by a member to any member of the community, is taken by the speaker for granted; the speaker presupposes that the hearer understands the expression or utterance. An act of communication is successful as soon as the hearer recognizes the speaker's illocutionary intention.

Bach and Harnish (ibid.) recognize two broad categories of illocutionary acts: communicative and non-communicative. While the former requires the recognition of S's R-intention, the latter does not. In their theory, there are four main categories of communicative illocutionary acts: Constatives, Directives, Commissives and Acknowledgements. These four main categories correspond roughly to Austin's (ibid.) Expositives, Exercitives, Commissives, and Behabitives respectively and closely to Searle's (1969) Representatives (Assertives), Directives, Commissives and Expressives, differing mainly in their characterizations. There are two classes of non-communicative illocutionary acts: Effectives and Verdictives, corresponding roughly to Searle's (ibid.) Declarations. A detailed account of the categories

established by them are speech acts which express the speaker's belief and intention, or, at least the implication or desire, that the hearer form (or continue to hold) a like belief. Fifteen subcategories of this group are recognized as follows: Assertives, Informatives, Confirmatives, Concessives, Retractives, Assentives, Dissentives, Disputatives, Responsives, Suggestives and Suppositives.

Assertives are characterized by S's expression of belief that the hearer (H) also believes that P. Examples of verbs denoting Assertives are: affirm, allege, assert, aver, avow, declare, and deny.

Informatives are speech acts in which S expresses "the belief that P" and also "the intention that H form the belief that P". Examples are advise, announce, appraise, disclose, inform, insist, notify, point out, report, reveal, tell, and testify.

In Descriptives, the speaker declares that "a particular quality is possessed by a person, place or thing"; the speaker expresses "the belief that O is F" and "the intention that H believes that O is F". Examples are appraise, asses, call, categorize, characterize, classify, date, describe, diagnose, evaluate, etc.

Directives express the speaker's attitude toward a future action by the hearer and the speaker's intention or desire that the hearer considers his utterance as reason to act. Six subcategories of illocutionary acts are listed under this category: Requestives, Questions, Requirements, Prohibitives, Permissives, Advisories.

Questions are "special cases of requests; the hearer is requested to provide the speaker with certain information. A speech act is considered a question if S expresses "the desire that H tell S whether or not P" and "intention that H tell S whether or not P because of S's desire". Examples are: ask, interrogate, query, questions, quiz, etc.

Advisories express the belief that "there is (sufficient) reason for H to A (act)" and "the intention that H takes S's belief as (sufficient) reason for him to A". Examples are: advise, caution, counsel, propose, recommend, suggest, urge, warn, etc.

Commissives involve "the undertaking of an obligation or proposal to undertake an obligation". Two main types of this category are distinguished: Promises and Offers. S promises H to A if S expresses "the belief that his utterance obligates him to A", "the intention to A", and "the intention that H believes that S's utterance obligates S to A and that S intends to A".

Stance and Engagement Theory

Ayo Osisanwo (ibid.) presents elaborate perspectives on Stance and Engagement Theory:

Stance, according to Hyland (2005:176), expresses a textual 'voice' or community recognized personally. Stance can be seen as an attitudinal dimension and include features which refer to the ways speakers or writers present themselves and convey their judgments, opinions, and commitments about a particular topic. It is the ways that writers intrude to stamp their personal authority onto their arguments. According to Biber and Finnegan (1989:124) 'stance is 'the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgments or commitments concerning propositional content of a message' Specific word choices are made to convey such judgments and opinions. Other scholars have used words such as appraisal, attitude, evaluation, among others, to represent the concept stance. Stance, therefore, gives the speaker an opportunity to present his views on a propositional content … The four elements of stance as identified by Hyland include Hedges, Boosters, Attitude markers, Self-mention.

Engagement, according to Hyland (2005:176), is "an alignment dimension where writers acknowledge and connect to others, recognizing the presence of their readers, pulling them along with their uncertainties, including them as discourse participants, and guiding them to interpretations." Hyland acknowledges that stance and engagement overlap; they are two sides of a coin and contribute to the interpersonal aspect of discourse. The four elements of engagement as identified by Hyland include Reader-pronouns, Directives, Questions, Shared knowledge Personal asides.

Methodology

The data of this study are generated from tape-recording. The selection of corpora from the entire recorded utterances is based on: quality of pragmatic features and clarity of expression. We do not list perlocutionary acts in the analysis. However, they are mentioned in the integrative analysis which answers the classical communication questions: Who says what, to whom and why? The entire text is divided into utterances (locutionary acts). In the analysis of each utterance, illocutionary acts are first listed, before mentioning the sociopragmatic motivations that underpin them. The discussion draws insights from related literature.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Presentation of Data

In this section, eleven selected utterances are presented for analysis as follows:

Your size is available. Any size is here. Come and buy new, new Okrika, mama Ejime. Na fo big baka, small baka (ringing a bell as he advertises). Two, two hundred naira. Uncle, aunty, brother, sister, mama papa, no let harmattan sama your pikin dem. I won comot o. Your pikin dey wear tear-tear clothes. My okirika na carry-go, na follow-come, na tear-leather. I just open bale (picking the okirika and throwing them up repeatedly). Do you want mama oyoyo, papa oyoyo?

Analysis of Data

Below are the analyses of eleven utterances:

Utterance One

Your size is available.

Illocutionary acts: informing (informative), persuading, ascribing (ascriptive), requesting (requestive).

The advertiser informs the market audience that irrespective of their body size, they can get their various sizes from his wares. He is aware that the information makes his wares attract more attention; those who worry about the possibility of getting *okirika* of their sizes, will no longer worry on hearing the advertiser's unsolicited response/information. **Utterance One** subtly qualifies the *okirika*, by implying that in terms of size, they are small, medium or large. By ascribing quality to the *okirika*, the advertiser uses an ascriptive speech act, which can make the market audience rush to the spot and buy the wares. This communicative strategy enlarges the scope of prospective buyers of the wares. Therefore, speech acts performed in **Utterance One** is bipartite ("informing/informative" and "persuading"). It is an established fact that people who visit a market end up buying items that they do not plan to buy. This being the case, **Utterance One** is pragmatic. Indeed, advertisers of *okirika* in Nigerian markets have certain beliefs about their audience (speaker-hearer mental states). Language use in such an advertisement is informed by speaker-hearer mutual beliefs (presuppositions) for effective communication. This view corroborates Chilton (cited in David Bara (2010) who submits that cognitive pragmatics is defined as "a study of mental states of the interlocutors, their beliefs, desires, goals, and intentions … produced and interpreted by human individuals interacting with one another …"

Utterance Two

Any size is here.

Illocutionary acts: informing (informative), ascribing (ascriptive), persuading, requesting (requestive)

Utterance Two is another way of saying **Utterance One** (a paraphrase semantic relationship). The expression "any" is an exaggeration. The addressees process the expression accordingly as part of the linguistic context of the utterance. The sentence (utterance) is short and conveys how resolute the advertiser feels about the *okirika*; the decoder does not need to doubt the certainty of the proposition of the sentence – a sentence that essentially persuades the decoders to buy the *okirika*. *Okrika* wares are advertised with communicative strategies that reflect the setting, participants and purpose of the communication. Janet Holmes, (2008, p. 9v) rightly notes that "in any situation linguistic choices will generally reflect the influence of one or more of the following components:

1. The participants:

a. who is speaking and

b. who are they speaking to?

2. The setting or social context of the interaction: where are they speaking?

3. The topic: what is being talked about?

The function: why are they speaking?"

Utterance Three

Come and buy new, new Okirika, mama Ejime.

Illocutionary acts: informing (informative), ascribing (ascriptive), requesting (requestive)

The advertiser's addressees do not know that the *okirika* wares are new. By informing them that the wares are new, the advertiser ascribes (ascriptive) attributes to the okirika, making them more attractive to the market audience. As a matter of fact, people do not like old-looking, faded *okirika*. The advertiser is aware of this fact (speaker-hearer shared knowledge). He therefore articulates the knowledge into his choice of words as he requests (requestive) his market audience to buy the *okirika*. Considering the fact that many Nigerians lack money, and have so many pressing needs to purchase when they go to a market, it is crucial for advertisers of *okirika* in Nigerian markets to be very persuasive in language use.

Utterance Four

Na fo big baka, small baka (ringing a bell as he advertises).

Illocutionary acts: informing (informative), ascribing (ascriptive), requesting (requestive), persuading

In **Utterance Four**, the advertiser informs the market audience about the different sizes of the *okirika* ("for big baka", "small baka"). By ascribing such qualities to the wares, he persuades the prospective buyers who already know the meaning of the preposition "for" as they process the linguistic context. Advertisers of *okirika* in Nigerian markets subtly engage their audience in logical reasoning, and sustain this strategy for optimal commercial benefits. They use different communicative strategies to ensure that they capture different categories of buyers. Speech acts are focused on this goal.

Utterance Five

Two, two hundred naira.

Illocutionary acts: informing (informative), persuading

In this study, we contend that the advertiser's information about the price ("Two, two hundred naira") of the *okirika* may be false; apart from the fact that it is likely that none of the wares is as cheap as that, it is also unlikely that they are of the same price. Thus, "false fixing of price" is a communicative strategy in the advertisement of *okirika*, and the purpose is to make the market audience rush to the scene, and end up buying the wares. In the advertisement of *okirika* in Nigerian markets, the intentions and attitudes of the advertiser is noticeable in his communicative strategies.

This view aligns with Pratt (1977) who notes that "speech act theory provides a way of talking about utterances not only in terms of their surface grammatical properties but also in terms of the context in which they are made, the intentions, attitudes, and expectations of the participants, the relationships existing between participants … rules and conventions that are understood to be in play when an utterance is made and received."

Utterance Six

Uncle, aunty, broda, sister, mama papa, no let harmattan sama your pikin dem.

Illocutionary acts: advising, warning, requesting (requestive), persuading

The expression "harmattan" is suggestive of the fact that the advertisement takes place either during the harmattan season or when the season is about to begin (implicature). The advertiser is aware that people do not want to be exposed to cold weather because of the health implications. He explores this world knowledge in an advisory speech act. Therefore, he requests, warns and persuades the market audience to buy the *okirika*. The expressions "papa" "mama", "aunty", "uncle", "broder" and "sister" make the advertiser's human targets more encompassing; the addressees are people from homes where there are fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers. The advertiser's use of Nigerian Pidgin (NP) is informed by its widespread and communicative potential in casual and trade discourses. David Harrah, cited in Savas L. T. (1994) notes that "most speech acts seem to be focused and directed. They are intended as coming from the agent and going to the receivers or audience. They are intended to have a certain point, and they are intended to be construed as having a certain point."

Utterance Seven

I won comot o.

Illocutionary acts: persuading, informing

The encoder of "I won comot o" is not telling the truth. The utterance is aimed at inducing panic-buying. The addressees, who hear it, become anxious to get there, see and possibly buy the *okirika* (persuasion). The link between the advertiser's communicative strategies and the effects of such strategies on the addressees reveal the performance of speech acts as intention-driven. This view aligns with Faigenbaum (2003) who posits that "the meaning of the sentence is its use in the speech act … speaker meaning is a matter of the intentional content."

Utterance Eight

Your pikin dey wear tear-tear clothes.

Illocutionary acts: asserting (assertive), condemning, ascribing (ascriptive), rejecting, persuading

The advertiser utters **Utterance Eight** to condemn tattered appearance which is common among children from some homes. The expression "tear-tear clothes" (ascriptive) is interpreted by the decoders as a signification of poverty. This expression is a direct attack that is so mind-arresting that it can spur patronage from the market audience.

Utterance Nine

My okirika na carry-go, na follow-come, na tear-leather

Illocutionary acts: ascribing (ascriptive), informing (informative), persuading

The advertiser uses "Nigerianisms" (expressions that evolved in Nigeria with Nigerian meanings) to impress his message on the minds of Nigerians. The expressions "follow-come", "carry-go" and "tear-leather" connotatively mean "as originally manufactured", "reliable" and "new" respectively. They are commonly infused into Nigerian Pidgin (NP) in communicative events. In order to persuade the market audience, the advertiser ascribes these three qualities to the *okirika* that he sells. He is aware that the qualities are very basic expectations of prospective buyers (world knowledge). The advertiser succeeds in conveying his intentions because the addressees make use of their world knowledge (shared knowledge) to interpret the discrete illocutionary acts conveyed in the advertiser's utterances.

Utterance Ten

I just open bale. (picking them and throwing them up repeatedly).

Illocutionary acts: asserting (assertive), ascribing (ascriptive), informing (informative), persuading

By informing the market audience that he has just opened (expressed as "open" in Nigerian Pidgin) his bale, the advertiser invariably ascribes the quality of newness to the contents of the bale (*okirika*), thus persuading the market audience and motivating them to rush to the spot and buy the wares. The utterance "I just open bale" is an indirect speech act with two layers of meaning: the primary illocutionary act (Come and buy *okirika*/The *okirika* that I sell are new) and the secondary illocutionary act (The bale of *okirika* has just been opened). In the adverts, language is modified to make buying the *okirika* wares very necessary. Given the fact that the "topic relevance" of **Utterance Ten** is "buying of wares", the advertiser makes the audience use their rational thinking to process the propositional contents of the utterance.

Utterance Eleven

Do you want mama oyoyo, papa oyoyo?

Illocutionary acts: requesting (requestive), persuading

The advertiser is aware of facts in a family setting: parents like to be welcomed by their loved ones (children) when they return home; parents buy things for their kids when they go out; children are happy to welcome their parents if the parents buy things for the children. The advertiser's choice of words

is for the purpose of persuading the addressees to consider buying the *okirika*. Speech acts used in the communication are skillfully selected and sequenced; the illocutionary forces of the advertiser's utterances are dominantly persuasive. Therefore, his language is simply the performance of actions, as targeted towards the addressees. **Utterance Eleven** reveals that in the advertisement of *okirika* in Nigerian markets, the advertiser explores his awareness of the human mind, particularly in terms of what people desire.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The analyses of the entire utterances reveal that there are three basic contexts explored by the advertiser in the use of speech acts: pragmatic, social and linguistic contexts. Each context conveys speaker-based communicative strategies which are essentially sociopragmatic underpinnings as presented in brackets below:

i. Pragmatic Context (speech acts, shared knowledge, presupposition, implicature).

ii. Social Context (seller-buyer relationship and buyer-beneficiary relationship);

iii. Linguistic Context (use of personal pronouns, rhetorical questions and attributive adjectives).

In the use of discrete communicative strategies, the advertiser explores the three basic contexts mentioned above. Table 1 below shows the advertiser's communicative strategies and their functions.

Table 1. Communicative Strategies and their Functions

S.No	Communicative Strategy	Function
1.	Exploring speaker-hearer shared knowledge	- for processing information; - for making linguistic choices
2.	Paraphrase	- for linguistic variation; - for emphasis
3.	Accusation	- for persuasion
4.	Use of personal pronouns	- to establish speaker-hearer bond; - for persuasion
5.	Inducing panic-buying	- for making a requestive; - for persuasion; - for getting attention
6.	Fixing false price	- for persuasion
7.	Non-verbal accompaniments	- for amplifying verbal elements; - for persuasion
8.	Making comic-remarks	- for getting the attention of the audience
9.	Use of attributive adjectives	- for persuasion; - to make a requestive

This study reveals that in the advertisement of *okirika* in Nigerian markets, speech acts are mainly used to persuade the audience to buy the wares; this explains why the Master Speech Acts are requesting and persuading (requesting patronage from the market audience via persuasion). According to Adegbija (1982), many extended body of discourse have one or more Master Speech Acts which are the dominant speech acts. Other speech acts are performed in relation to the Master Speech Act via a process of communicative selection and sequencing.

In the analyses of all the eleven utterances, speech acts have specific functions. For example, while informatives are used to ascribe good qualities to the *okirika*, requestives are used to request patronage. On the whole, the communicative strategies deployed by the advertiser include: exploring speaker-hearer shared knowledge, accusation, comparison, inducing panic-buying, fixing false price, non-verbal accompaniments, making comic remarks, use of personal pronouns, use of rhetorical questions and deploying attributive adjectives. These strategies show that there are actions that speakers perform: linguistic actions beyond the sentence. Pragmatics emerged from the conviction of early language philosophers, that the minimal unit of communication is not the sentence, but acts (actions) performed by using such sentences in various contexts of communication: requesting, persuading, rejecting, informing, acknowledging, etc. The use of Nigerian Pidgin (NP) in the text is not incidental. It is a trade-originated language in the country. The advertiser uses it for effective communication because of its socio-cultural underpinnings. The language fosters textual cohesion and helps the advertiser gain the attention of the addressees. As far as language use in advertisement is concerned, this study reveals that the advertisement of *okirika* in Nigerian markets, shows the functional perspective of language use.

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