

**Discourse patterning in discourses in traditional Igbo
setting: An analysis of Rosecolette Ewurum's
*A fight for the gods***

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Abstract

This work investigates the Discourse Patterning in traditional Igbo culture as reflected in Ewurum's (2016) A Fight for the gods. It affirms that language reflects the effective history of the communication of a community and the world's opportunity of getting enriched experiences through the tradition and language of a people. The predominant culture and values inherent in a community shape not just their ways of life, but, their linguistic choices, expressions and experience. This study assesses the various performatives exploited in the selected text using the theoretical framework propounded by Austin (1975) on performative speech acts, which explain that utterances in discourses play specific roles. Insights are also drawn from Searle's (1999) speech acts which are improved form of the study on Austin's five categories of performatives. Thirteen samples of interactions from Ewurum's A Fight for the gods constitute data base for analysis. From the study, it is concluded that utterances have functional relevance in discourses among interlocutors in traditional settings. The uninterrupted turn-taking norms in discourses reflect the linguistic behaviour as well as relationship between language and the traditional society.

Linguistic choices are to a great extent context-dependent. The solidarity dimension accounts for patterns of linguistics interaction. How well one knows the interlocutor partner determines how to talk to them. The linguistic choices reflect the degree of solidarity between the speaker and addressee. It is recommended that users of language should avoid the use of some behavitives like cursing and challenging which can stir conflict and use of altercative utterances like name calling. Also teachers of literature and English as second language should teach the language of the text, not just the thematic preoccupations, so that appropriate linguistic competences will be inculcated especially in the use of exercitives. Also, the societal norms and values conveyed in the languages of a community will be learned by the students and other readers of the culture-based texts.

Introduction

Linguists and sociolinguists have observed that the social environment and the background of interactants play vital roles in interpreting and understanding every discourse. When people belong to the same group, they often speak similarly but there are many different groups in a community, and so an individual may share some linguistic features with a range of other speakers.

Many ethnic groups use a distinctive language that depicts their ethnic identity, which means that each language caters for its own culture. Where a choice of language is available for communication, it is often possible for individuals to signal their ethnicity by their language use. Even when a complete conversation is not possible, people may adopt short phrases,

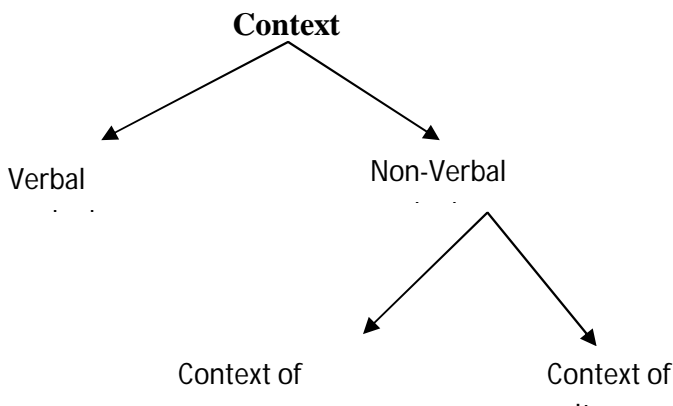
verbal fillers or linguistic tags, which signal or reflect ethnicity. So interactions which appear to be in English for example, may incorporate linguistic signals of the speakers' ethnic identity. "Vernacular languages are often used between people who share attitudes and values and who may belong to the same ethnic group. In-group language is the language of solidarity ... certain speech styles are also used most often between intimates" (Holmes 2008, P.440).

Literature as a representation of a culture, projects the significance of the various ideologies, behaviours, customs and happenings in a creative and artistic way. Language is the material of literature. Language is a creation of man and is thus charged with the heritage of a linguistic group. Niazi and Gautam (2010) opine that language through choices of meaning can represent a particular view of the fictional world. Literature operates in a world of fiction or nonfiction. The statements in a novel, poem, or play may or may not be literally true. In some cases, they may not be logical propositions, but imaginative and mental constructs. Obibolo (2015). A character in a novel may reflect a historic figure in real life. He can be imbued with language or sentences describing him, or put into his mouth by the author.

Language is a communal possession. Communication among people who speak the same language is possible because they share common knowledge. According to Osuafor (2004,p.14) "Language does not operate in a vacuum, situation humanizes and actualizes it. What man actually does is to vary language usage according to context. Much of what we hear and read depends on the physical background, time and place in which the speech event takes place". According to the

source, context is what determines the use of words, expression and meaning in a given discourse situation. The nature of discourse affects the form of language in use. Osuafor's (2004) exposition on language and context is relevant to this study.

Malinowski (1923, p. 71-103) discusses the issue of context and the domain of applied linguistics. He argues that meaning has a function in determining context. This he did in his article "meaning in primitive society" which proposed that meaning can be derived through the study of context of culture (interpretation of kingship terms and colour terms). Malinowski postulates that 'the meaning of an utterance cannot be wholly ascertained outside the environment of its use. He further summarizes the analysis of the various types of context thus



He posits that since context of culture is critical to meaning derivation, inevitably then, context of situation is important to language analysis. Though Malinowski's (1923) view on context is brought to bear on the present study which analyses discourses in literature in traditional Igbo setting.

Firth (1950, p. 240-248) dwells on the idea of context of situation. In his paper entitled ‘personality and language’, language is explained as essentially functional and being best realized when used in a context/environment. According to the source, “there is an inalienable connection between language and social setting, context, participants, end, medium, genre, background, belief and norms of social context... The general idea is that ours is a socially built world of event which shape and are shaped by language”. He explains that situationally, we take into cognizance everything we know about the environment, what is going on and what function language is performing and the participants involved. The environment in question can be materials but at the same instance can be social, political, ideological, cultural, economical, religious and so on. Firth’s (1950) exposition on context and situation has some similarities with the present study.

According to Brown and Yule (1983:p.10) Discourse analysis is concerned with what people using language are doing, and accounting for the linguistic features in the discourse as the means employed in what they are doing. This study consequently highlights the choices interlocutors make in discourses to depict in their social setting as exemplified in Ewurum’s (2016) *A fight for the gods*.

Objectives

This study sets out to:

- i. highlight the discourse patterning in traditional Igbo culture in *A fight for the gods*.

- ii. investigate how interactants' language use reflects a typical Igbo traditional setting. assess the process of encoding and decoding meaning in talks.
- iii. Examine the linguistic choices as shaped by the predominant culture.
- iv. examine verdictive types in parameology.

Conceptual Clarification

Discourse in the content of this work is treated at the oral (speech) and written levels and cuts across the expressive, the persuasive, the referential and the literary. Discourse analysis is the scientific study of naturally occurring (i.e spontaneous) conversation (or what is meant to be so rendered in written mode) which exists between at least two participants in a social context. When face to face discourse is reduced to writing especially in a novel, it includes it's narrative tags that explains who said what, his actions and his preparations.

Johnstone (2014, P. 1) defines discourse as actual instances of communicative action in the medium of language. The interest here is in what happens when people draw on the knowledge they have about language, knowledge based on their memories of things they have said, heard, seen, or written before, to do things in the world: exchange information, express feelings, make things happen, create beauty, entertain themselves and others and so on.

Fassold (1996, P. 66) points out that the analysis of discourse behaviour in interactive events reveals two tendencies:

- (a) to analyze how people manage their discourse behaviour with respect to their cultural background and their interactive goals at the time of talk
- (b) to discover explicit rules for the management of conversation, turn –taking, initiating and closing, error correction etc. The people speaking are taken as secondary facts, whereas the structural event of interaction is of prime importance.

Theoretical Framework

Once we begin to look at utterance from the point of view of what it does, it is possible to see every utterance as a speech act of one kind or the other that is having some functional value. The issuing of an utterance is the performing of an action. A discourse cannot progress if there are no facts already known to the participants and mutually shared by them. Hence conversations are often built on assumptions about shared information. It is interesting to note that shared knowledge seems so obvious to participants that they are not even conscious of the assumptions they are relying on. Many of these assumed facts are culture –specific and not universal. One thing that many utterances do is to make propositions which could come in the form of either questions or statement. Austin (1975) a philosopher, distinguished yet another kind of utterance, the performative utterance. In using a performative utterance, a person is not just saying something but is actually doing something if certain real world conditions are met. Austin also mentioned certain felicity conditions that performatives must meet to be successful.

A conventional procedure must exist for doing whatever is to be done and that procedure must specify who must say and do what and in what circumstances.

All participants must properly execute this procedure and carry it through to completion.

Finally, the necessary thoughts, feelings, and intentions must be present in all parties. Austine divides performatives into five categories: the verdictives, the exercitives, the commissives, the behavitives, and the expositives.

i. The verdictives

This is typified by the giving of a verdict, estimate, grade or appraisal, for example ‘we find the accused guilty’

ii. The exercitives

This is the exercising of powers, rights, or influences as in appointing, ordering, warning or advising ‘I pronounce you husband and wife’

iii. The commissives

This is typified by promising or undertaking and committing one to do something for example announcing an intention (I hereby bequeath...)

iv. The Behavitives

This has to do with matters such as apologizing, congratulating, blessing, cursing or challenging (I apologise).

V. The Expositives

This term is used to refer to how one makes utterances fit into an argument or exposition (I assume, I argue, I reply). While Austin must be given credit for his pioneering work in the speech act theory, it should be pointed out that he has been criticized for making convention the root base of his theory. According to Cohen (1978, P. 21) and Beaugrande and Dressier (1986, P. 118) the speech act theory is incomplete in its usual framework, and it fails to appreciate the interaction of conventions with current context. Searle (1999, P. 145-6) says that illocutionary acts must be performed intentionally, for one to communicate something in a language that will be understood by another speaker of that language as an utterance it must

- be correctly uttered with its conventional meaning and
- satisfy a truth condition for example when one says 'It is raining' it must indeed be raining and the hearer must recognize the truth of (1) and (2)

If the hearer knows the language, recognizes my intention to produce a sentence of the language and recognize that I am not merely uttering that sentence but that I also mean what I say, then I will have succeeded in communicating to the hearer that it is raining.

Searle also replicates Austin's five categories of performatives by what he calls their point or purpose. The five categories of illocutionary acts, Assertives (expositives) which commit the hearer to the truth of a proposition, Directives (verdictives) which get the hearer to believe in such a way as to make his or her behaviour match the propositional content of the directive, Commissives (commissives) which commit

the speaker to undertake a course of action represented in the propositional content, Expressives (behabitives), which express the sincerity conditions of the speech act, and Declaratives (exercitives), which bring about a change in the world by representing it as having been changed. Fotion (1981, P. 116) criticize Searle for focusing on individual speech acts without fully appreciating the complexity of acts such as deduction, explanation, argument, marrying and betting.

Data Analysis

Data is derived from Ewurum's (2016) *A Fight for The Gods*. This literary text (drama) portrays certain African archetypes and superstitious beliefs. It mirrors the dominant role of the supernatural elements (gods) in a traditional Igbo society with particular reference to the python- Eke Atamiri. The text is divided into five acts and three scenes for each act. The following excerpts will be used for the analysis:

The verdictives

This is typified by the giving of a verdict, estimate, grade, or appraisal

Excerpt 1

Amara: (Stares at Obidi) 'Bring seven tubers of yam, seven balls of alligator pepper, seven Oji Igbo, white and red George wrapper, a casket, twenty one cowry shells, seven shillings, seven pence. Then, cook and feed 21 children. All the items must be produced in four days'. (P. 6)

Amara here gives Obidi a list of what is needed for him to appease Eke Atammiri, which he killed mistakenly while cutting palm fruit head and also an ultimatum was given for these items to be produced within four days. The verdict is that Obidi and his family members will face the wrath of eke atammiri which is extermination (death) of every member of his family if these items are not produced on time and the gods appeased.

Excerpt 2

Amara: (Stares at Obiechina.) Bring one ehi Igbo, fourteen tubers of yam, fourteen balls of alligator pepper, seven native kolanuts not gworo, seven pieces of red and white clothes, and two pieces of George wrapper, a casket, two bags of twenty one cowry shells each, seven shillings, two thousand naira, then, cook and feed children. All these should be produced in seven days. (P.7)

Obiechina's case is worse than Obidi because of his family's delay as regards appeasing eke atammiri which his brother killed. This leads to the death of eight prominent members of his family including his father and mother. According to Obiechina in (P.7) '...our family is about to be swept off completely. 'The verdictive carries the penalty for the delay in producing the list of items for appeasing the gods within seven days. The use of code mixing "Bring one ehi Igbo, fourteen tubers of yam..." is designed to add local flavour to the discourse.

The Exercitives

This is the exercising of powers, rights, or influences as in appointing, ordering, advising or warning.

Excerpt 3

Ogbuebule: (Authoritatively) How dare you quarrel in the presence of Atammiri. Don't you know it is an abomination? (P.4)

Ogbuebule, the chief priest, or Ezemmuo, exercises his authority by warning Okafor and Obiechina concerning the unacceptable behaviour (quarrelling in the shrine) they exhibit before the gods which he says is an abomination and can attract penalty. The use of interrogative heightens the speaker's authority.

Excerpt 4

Ogbuebule: The mouth and the nose are too close to be enemies. It is not changing into a lion that is hard, it is getting the fish, that is hard. Sit down both of you. (p.4)

Ogbuebule is advising Okafor and Obiechina on the need to maintain a cordial relationship. The duo are referred to anaphorically as mouth and nose in the proverb which explains that Okafor and Obiechina are related by blood, also what they need at this point in time is unity and not rancor.

Excerpt 5

Ogbuebule: Tell this young man what it takes to appease eke atammiri. (P: 6)

Ogbuebule in this excerpt appoints Amara, his grandson, the mouth piece of the god's. By this appointment Amara, though

a small boy, boldly stares at Obidi while enumerating the items he should bring for the sacrifice and none was questioned by the victim.

Excerpt 6

Mama Ora: (Stares at her intently). I don't want you to marry now. I want you to go to school for nine years. No, it is no longer in vogue. Study for ten years. Then you go and serve your father land, when you return, you will get married. Ugo (Extends her hands.) (P:26)

Mama Ora is advising Ugo, her grand- daughter, on the need to study up to the tertiary level before getting married. According to her, early marriage is no longer in vogue. Though an old woman, Mama Ora is conversant with the current trend which is western education and she does not want her grand-daughter to be left behind. She is an archetype of both the old and younger generation.

Excerpt 7

Mr. Thomas: My grandchildren cannot be soaked in this noisomeness, Emenike. You cut yourself from this family the very day you marry Vera or her like. (p.50).

In this excerpt, Mr. Thomas exerts his authority over his son, Emenike, a medical doctor, who studied in America's choice of a girl in marriage. His refusal is based on the fact that the lady in question, Vera, is from Abakalibo, a town where its occupants are referred to as outcasts. Consequent upon this action, the individual will be ostracized. In a typical Igbo

culture, parents especially the father, must approve the family which their sons or daughters are getting involved in marriage. In (p.18) Vera told Emenike vehemently “because I am good for loving but not for marriage”.’ This confirms ‘the soaking in noisomeness’ Mr Thomas is referring to. The Igbo in some culture does not compromise outcasts religion and education notwithstanding. Mr. Thomas’ use of exercitives reflects his opposition to his son’s medling in traditional matters.

The commisives

This is typified by promising or undertaking, and committing one to do something.

Excerpt 8

Emenike: Yes, if you will agree to marry me. Yes, I can work at the Teaching Hospital and start a clinic here if that will please you...p.80

Emenike in this excerpt promises Ugo that he will forgo his initial plans of establishing his medical practice in the United States, since that is all that is required for Ugo to marry him. Also, Emenike has finally succumbed to the pressure of culture and threat from his father and has abandoned the idea of marrying Vera for Ugo who is a free born, which implies that nobody is above the culture and traditions of his community.

Excerpt 9

Obiechina: Atlantic ocean is very large, yet, ships ply it. I shall return in seven days. When one is awake and sees a lion waiting at the entrance of one’s door, all one

needs to do is get a raffle and send it to exile
(Leaves with Okafor.) p.8

Atlantic Ocean here refers to the enormous list of items he is to produce for the appeasement of eke atammiri which his brother killed. The implication of the proverb is consent to the demands of the gods inspite of his financial strength. When one is awake...’ cataphorically refers to his statement in p.7 ‘Ogbuebule help us. Our family is about to be swept off completely. It has lost eight prominent people including my father and mother.’ It cataphorically refers to our family. When one is awake has, the semantic import of being ‘knowledgeable’. Knowledge is power. He knows the solution to their problem and is determine to carry it out to avert the impending danger of annihilation.

The Behabitives

This has to do with matters such as apologizing, congratulating, blessing, cursing, or challenging

Excerpt 10

Okafor: (Presenting seven white kolanuts) We’re sorry, Ogbuebule. We never knew you were around.(p:4).

Okafor apologizes for himself and Obiechina, as both of them are quarreling before atammiri shrine which Ogbuebule rebukes them and reiterates the consequences of such behaviour.

Excerpt 11

Mama Ora: (Spits into her palms) May God lift you my daughter. May He make you great in life. I want...(p.28)

Mama Ora is blessing her granddaughter Ugo. The act of spiting into her hands is an Igbo culture which is usually done by old people while blessing someone younger, showing that it's from their heart.

Excerpt 12

Amara: Don't tell me that the dowry paid on your mother's head is a waste. (Spits, walks on and stops.) (p:18)

This statement is derogatory, it is usually used when one falls short of expectation, especially when it comes to asking questions on issues one is supposed to be conversant with. The interlocutor states that the interlocutor partner is ignorant. The proverb challenges his knowledge of customs, norms and values of his people. Proverbs depict context and add local flavour todiscourses.

The Expositives

This is a term used to refer to how one makes utterances fit into an argument or exposition.

Excerpt 13

Amara: (Appears from a path opposite and interrupts them)
 Son of Micheal, listen to her, she is right. Tell your parents first. Tell them that she is from 'Abakalibo'. That alone settles it. Meanwhile, Vera the gods said in case you forget, *atammiri* said I should give you this

(Bends down and fastens palm fronds around Vera's ankle.) (p:18).

This excerpt fits into the argument between Vera and Emenike over the legality of consummating their relationship into marriage. Amara instead of telling Emenike out rightly that Vera is an outcast, only asked him to tell his parents that Vera is from Abakalibo which explains her true identity. The fastening of palm fronds on Vera's ankle signifies that she is not a free born and should she forget this, the palm frond serves as a reminder.

Conclusion

This study examines language as a context-based phenomenon. Context is the frame that surrounds the event and provides resources for its appropriate interpretation; context refers to those objects or entities which surround a communicative event. The study observes that in an Igbo setting, language performs different functions which vary in terms of the context, the position or social class of the interlocutors. Proverbs are also a regular feature in the language use. They are often used to make emphasis, it is also metaphoric, and consequently has an element of implicature. The linguistic experience of the people determine to a great extent how they do things with words. From the study, it is concluded that language use in Igbo culture as depicted in Ewurum's *A Fight for the gods* is loaded with expressives, commissives, behavitives, exercitives and verdictives. Power differential also account for the choices individuals make linguistically. Social requirements condition linguistic choices and expressions. Turn taking norms are never interrupted in sacred places like

the shrine except by the custodian of the deities. It also concludes that exercitives are predominant linguistic element in Igbo culture because power differentiation is strictly adhered to.

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