A Pragmatic Analysis of Tricycle Inscriptions in Aba and Umuahia in Abia State

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Abstract

This study attempts a pragmatic analysis of inscriptions on tricycles (Keke). The purpose of the study is to examine the inscriptions, the language act they carry, and their communicative import. Corpus were collected using observation of writings on the keke and interview. The corpus was classified according to language use and language acts. The language acts were interpreted using Speech Acts Theory, to understand the communicative import of each language use such as religious belief, assertion of identity, rejection of poverty, etc. The findings from the study reveal the writers' emotive import, adherence to Grice' principles of cooperation, and that every inscription, no matter the language in which it is written, has communicative import and belongs to a particular language act. The researchers conclude that Speech Acts are language universal.

Keywords: Language Use, Pragmatics, Speech Acts

Introduction

Human beings communicate through language, irrespective of the channel. Thus, language use marks the major distinction between human and non-human communication. As an instrument that is purely human specific (Sapir, 1921), language has been variously put into use by man in different contexts of situation. It is, thus, viewed as the most effective means of communication that a civilized society cannot do without.. Consequently, communication, here, using language is geared towards achieving some meaningful functions such as expression of feelings, ideologies, experiences and so on (Halliday, 1970; Jackobson, 1960; Hymes, 1962; Stubbs, 1995). Since meaning is fundamental in human communications, this meaning is derived from the context and situations, and these contexts and situations determine specific purposes or messages expressed through language. This is the concern of Pragmatics.

Mgbemena (2013) posits that inscriptions on auto-mobiles and other automotive devices such as tricycles and trucks have become a very peculiar way people in urban societies use language to communicate. According to Abdusalam (2014), tricycles, popularly known as *keke napep*, is a transportation system used within particular cities. It was introduced in Nigeria as part of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) aimed at what Kpakol (2004) sees as meeting the needs of the young and unemployed individuals within the society for self-employment. Mgbemena (2013) opines that many people who lost their means of income, following the ban of the use of *okada* , (popular name given to the commercial motorcyclist) from 2009 in Abia State, resorted to the use of tricycle.

It is at the domain of pragmatics to analyze language use from the view point of the users. Pragmatics has had various definitions by scholars in the field. In the opinion of Ogbulogo (2005), pragmatics is concerned with the pairing of sentences with their appropriate contexts. By this definition, it can be deduced that it is the context that brings to the fore those factors that affect choices in language in social interaction. Kempson (1986), on his part, describes pragmatics as the study of the general cognitive principles involved in the retrieval of information from an utterance. This definition implies that there are certain cognitive principles required for the interpretation of sentences or utterances, considering that there may be differences between the literal and implied meanings of such utterances. Ogbulogo (2005) argues that such differences that exist between literal and implied meanings are as a result of situation, the shared background knowledge of the participants in the interaction, and the linguistic context of the expression. Pragmatic analysis of language, in the views of Leech and Short (1987), is:

> The investigation into that aspect of meaning which is derived not from the formal properties of words and constructions, but from the way in which utterances are used and how they relate to the context in which they are uttered (p.290).

Their viewpoint directs the attention of the listener or reader to look into certain other factors involved in the context, rather than just the formal properties of words and the sentence construction. Wales' description can be seen to lay more credence to the opinion of Leech and Short. Wales (1989) maintains that pragmatics is the study of language use which is concerned with the meaning of utterances rather than a grammatical sentence or proposition.

In this study, the researchers adopt the definition of ragmatics posited by Yule (1996) as pragmatics being concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader).

Justification of the Study
The underlying justification of this study is drawn from the description of Pragmatics in the *Encyclopedia Americana* (1994) as a subfield of the study of language that investigates the techniques by which language is used for communicative purposes. In the context of our study, the tricycle operators have used their inscriptions for communicative purposes. Most of these inscriptions are written in very interesting style with their contents arousing scholarly attention. Consequently, this study analyses the language use in the inscriptions on the tricycle, examines the purpose of the inscriptions, and also accounts for the linguistic features embedded in them.

Theoretical Framework
This study analyses the inscriptions using Speech Acts Theory. The underlying tenet in Speech Acts Theory is that utterances carry in them some communicative purposes. In the view of J.L. Austin (1962), the proponent of the theory, Speech Acts refers to the theory that gives an explanation on the roles of utterance in shaping the attitudes of participants in interpersonal communication. Commenting on Speech Acts, Osisanwo (2003) argues that every utterance is a Speech Act. It is , thus, deduced that in every utterance, one can state a fact or opinion, confirm or deny something, make a request or prediction, ask a question, issue an order, grant permission, give an advice , make an offer or promise, or even thank or condole somebody. Speech Act, therefore, shows the speaker's intension and the effect the utterances have on the hearer.

Although scholars in a field of pragmatics have some differences in terms of the number of Speech Acts (Austin, 1962; Leevin, 1977; Levinson , 1980; Allan, 1986), there are three main types of Speech Act: Locutionary Act, which involves the act of producing grammatical and meaningful utterances; the Illocutionary Act, which is uttered by the speaker for the purpose of communication such as asserting, predicting, commanding, requesting etc.; and the Perlocutionary Act , which involves the effect of the speaker's utterance on the hearer.

Method of Corpus Collection
The corpus for this study was gathered through observation and structured interview. Observation was used to gather the corpus of inscriptions on the tricycle (Keke). The inscription and interviewees were, however, randomly selected from commercial *keke* in Umuahia and Aba metropolis in Abia State, as these are two major cities where keke is mostly used in the state. A total of one hundred and six (106) inscriptions were collected by observation, while twenty *keke* riders whose ages range between twenty-five and fifty were interviewed on a face –to- face method.

Corpus Presentation and Analysis
The corpus was first grouped according to the language used and thereafter, regrouped according to the language acts where they fall in, in order to show their communicative import

Table1. Language of Tricycle (Keke) Inscription

S/N	Language	No of samples
1	English	59
2	Igbo	24
3	Nigerian pidgin	9
4	Code-mixing of English and Igbo	11
5	Code-mixing of pidgin and Igbo	3
	Total	**106**

English
1. Keke today, private jet tomorrow
2. Jesus is my transportation
3. Speed kills
4. Play boy
5. Relax , God is in control
6. Only Jesus saves
7. Have faith in God
8. Fear God
9. No weapon formed against me shall prosper
10. God's time is the best
11. Am blessed beyond the curse
12. Jesus is the way to God
13. In God, am at rest
14. Drive carefully, life has no duplicate
15. Future will tell
16. Slow and steady
17. Struggle continuous
18. Call to duty
19. No time is late
20. Trust no woman
21. Boys are not smiling
22. Change 4 better
23. Bright days
24. Pain is love
25. We live to see
26. I am a winner
27. A .A .boy
28. Infinity jeep
29. Busy boy
30. Self made
31. Hot line
32. Heaven is real
33. High rank
34. Back to sender
35. Angels on guard, keep off
36. Silent! Are you God?
37. Says who?

38. Two sides
39. Save me
40. Winning team
41. More!
42. This is my year
43. No storm in the Lord
44. God is good
45. Omega will stand
46. N.D Boy
47. Behold he cometh
48. Don prince
49. Final solution
50. Chief driving
51. That was then
52. Network
53. Saint oh!
54. I am a champion
55. There is God oo
56. United we stand
57. No food for lazy man
58. Don't conclude yet
59. Know me when am poor

Igbo
1. ch nwa ọk kọ nwe ada -- 'whoever goes against an innocent person will fail'.
2. Kwuo ihe doro g anya-- 'Say what you are sure of'.
3. I si m s g n ?-- 'What do you want me to say'.
4. Papa Ejike – 'Ejike's father'
5. Chika Dib a-- 'God is greater than the witch'
6. Ebe a nọ—'The trend'
7. J kwa ese—'Enquire very well'
8. Akachi 1—'God's hand'
9. Ejike eme wa—'Life is not by struggle'
10. Onye h r ak kpawa – 'Whoever sees wealth should amass it'
11. Penny b ego—'Penny is money'
12. Ije nd —'Life's journey'
13. Onyeọma—'Good person'
14. Onye iro h r m gbafuo—'my enemy saw me and ran away'
15. Ike dina ọbara Jesus—' There is power in the blood of Jesus'
16. Nzukọ 1—' Number 1 gathering'
17. Obiaj r —' Peace of mind'
18. Oko hafia—'Oko from Ohafia'
19. Ako na uche—' Wisdom'
20. Udo d —'There is peace'
21. Onye chi gọziri—' One blessed by God'
22. Ab ọma—'Good song'
23. Onye maara echi—'Who knows tomorrow'
24. Sọ chi ma—'Only God knows'

Nigerian Pidgin
1. Money yab man
2. Small body no be sickness
3. E go beta
4. Who you be?
5. God dey
6. Ahead! Ahead!
7. Nothing pass God
8. God's pikin
9. Water no get enemy

Code-mixing of English and Igbo
1. A b m a well hustler—'I am a well hustler'
2. Onye na way ya—' Everybody in his own way'
3. sọ life—' Life's race'
4. Nothing mega—'Nothing is happening'
5. A big nwa—'A rich fellow'
6. Okorobia like me—'A young man like me'
7. M nwa on point—'I am getting it right'
8. Kọta sign—'Uderstand the sign or the happenings'
9. kwa co-worker ka a na aya—'Our problem is the co-worker'
10. A no m on the move—'I am on the move'
11. Amagh m tomorrow—' I do not know tomorrow'

Code- mixing of Igbo and Pidgin
1. Amaghi m wey—' I do not know the way'
2. I no wan know, onukwuwa—' I do not care, let them talk'
3. Weta de money—' Bring the money'

The grouping, here, into language acts conforms to Searle's (1969) proposition of five (5) language acts. This regrouping, to evoke the communicative import of the inscriptions provides the following language acts in sight:

Direct Acts
Directive Acts carry in them persuasive force that makes the addressee to perform certain required functions. Here, the speaker intends to make the hearer carry out certain actions either verbally or through other physical actions. Examples in this study include:
1. Relax, God is in control
2. Have faith in God
3. Fear God
4. Drive carefully, life has no duplicate
5. Trust no woman
6. Change for better
7. Back to sender
8. Angels on guard, keep off
9. Silent! Are you God?
10. Says who?
11. Save me
12. Behold, he cometh

13. Don't conclude yet
14. Know me when am poor
15. Kwuo ihe doro gi anya
16. Jukwa ese
17. Onye huru aku kpara
18. Kota sign
19. Weta de money

Some utterance under the directive acts expresses truth and confidence in God, as in utterance 1,2,3,8; while others express caution, as in utterance 4,5,15,16 and 18 (18, is a popular slogan that come up from the Abia State PDP gubernatorial candidate of the 2019 general election). More so, others are used to express rejection of certain forms of negativity as in utterance 7,9,10,13

Expressive Acts
The expressive acts are used by speakers to convey the psychological state of mind or attitude towards certain situations as in the following example:
1. Play boy
2. God's time is the best
3. Am blessed beyond the curse
4. In God, am at rest
5. Future will tell
6. Slow and steady
7. No time is late
8. Boys are not smiling
9. Bright days
10. Winning team
11. A.A Boy
12. Infinity jeep
13. Chief driving
14. Onye chi goziri
15. Money yab man
16. Ije ndu
17. Busy boy
18. A big nwa
19. A bu m a well hustler
20. Small body no bi sickness

Since expressive acts portray the speaker's psychological state of mind or attitude towards situation or state of affairs, it is obvious that the writers of the expression in the examples above are communicating the feeling to their audience. For instance, in the utterances in examples 2, 3, 4,5,14, there is a depiction of trust in God as the source of blessing and that God blesses at the right time. Those in examples 6, 7 and 10 are expressions of personal opinion as to when and how one begins to get rich, thus, advocating for people to slow down in their get- rich- quick syndrome. Utterance 8 and 15 depict some bad experience of life which the writer had, seen or heard. Lastly, utterances 1, 11, 12,13,16,17, 18 and 19 are mere depiction of self – praise, probably as a result of personal achievements of attainment of the writer. Finally, example 20 is used to express life's difficulties and or inability of the speaker to achieve certain things, either financially, materially, or otherwise, hence it is not his fault for having not achieved whatever it is.

Representative/Assertive Acts

The representative/assertive acts usually appear in the form of assertions, claims, reports, suggestions, predications, descriptions, conclusions or hypothesis (Ogbulogo, 2005). Following their forms, they can be used to describe events, processes and situations. More so, the speaker usually sticks to the truth of what is said. Consider the following examples:

1. Keke today, private jet tomorrow
2. Jesus is my transportation
3. Speed kills
4. Only Jesus saves
5. Jesus is the way to God
6. Heaven is real
7. Final solution
8. Onye iro h r m gbafue
9. Udo d
10. So chi ma

The inscriptions that come under the representative/ assertive acts in this study are used by the writers to portray high hopes and faith for better years to come, strong belief in God and personal victory. There is also a depiction of strong personal conviction, intended to serve as an advice or warning to the public as in 3, and 6.

Declaration Acts

The declarative acts change to the state of affairs when uttered. Evidently, the change that takes place when there is a declarative act does require the interaction of the co-interactant to be effective. See example below:

1. Struggle continues
2. Call to duty
3. I am a winner
4. No food for a lazy man
5. Och nwa ọk kọ nwe ada
6. E go beta
7. Ahead! Ahead!
8. Nothing pass God
9. Good day

The utterances in the example above are used to spur the people into action. The speakers, although, did not ask anyone to particularly, do anything, but the utterances have some perlocutionary effects, which moves the hearer or reader into action either physically or emotionally. For instance, a lazy man is made to work when told there is no food for idle fellow. Also, someone engages in an activity when something is presented for him to do and then the expression "call to duty". More so, one gets psychologically ready for more work when told " struggle continues". All these are the result of the perlocutionary force of the utterances.

Commissive Acts

In commissive acts, the speaker is committed to certain course of actions either on the spot or in the future. See examples:

1. We live to see
2. Omega will stand
3. Network
4. United we stand

The utterances in the examples above carry in them some expression of commitment to ensure certain things come to be. For instance, when one says *united we stand* there is a level of commitment to be part of the unity.

Also, hope is expressed in the utterances *we live to see*; *Omega will stand* and *network*. The speakers, here, are committed to ensuring that whatever is hoped for comes to be either individually or collectively.

Apart from the grouping of the inscriptions into the five language acts proposed by Searle (1969), there are some inscriptions that have more than one acts. For instance, the following inscriptions are both expressive and declarative.

1. This is my year
2. No storm in the Lord
3. God is good
4. I am a champion
5. Chika dibia
6. Ike din a obara Jesus
7. A bu m a well hustler

The inscription is examples 1, 4 and 7 are used to depict self –confidence and determination to achieve desired goals. On the other hand, ones in examples 2, 3, 5, and 6 express strong belief and trust in God and his ability to save.

Major Findings

From the inscriptions analyzed above, it is obvious that the tricycle drivers are able to communicate using language at their disposal, which is the concern of pragmatics. They have communicated personal feelings which people can learn from, others revealed their belief. These findings also conform to those of Mgbemena (2013) and Tuluah and Musah (2015). A notable scenario was seen as a tricycle (keke) operator was seen fighting because he felt the passenger was wasting his time, yet he had the inscription *no time is late*. This implies that some of the operators in some situations actually act contrary to the inscriptions on their *keke*. It is also noteworthy that writers of these inscriptions on the tricycles adhere to Grice' (1975) cooperative principles as the inscriptions were as informative as possible (maxim of quantity), truthful (maxim of quality), relevant (maxim of relative) and finally brief and perspicuous (maxim of manner).

Majority of the inscriptions, irrespective of the language used, turn out to be religious inscriptions which reveal, in the opinion of the researchers, that the Igbo society is a Christian religious society. Furthermore, the inscriptions convey 'emotive import' (Oluikpe, 1996). By emotive import, it meant that the inscriptions serve to express the emotions of the operators. Such emotions invoked are inform of the religious beliefs, assertions of their identity, attack on perceived enemies, rejections of poverty etc.

Conclusion

We have done a pragmatic analysis of the inscriptions on tricycles in this study. Writers, here, have communicated their emotive imports which are depicted by the mood observed in the inscriptions. As noted in the study, these inscriptions variously fall within the four maxims of cooperative principles postulated by Grice (1975).

More so, each of these inscriptions carries in it communicative implications which are not based on the grammaticality of the expression. Thus, even ungrammatical utterances still have effective communication, as in the inscription *chief driving*, and *change 4 better*. This is the concern of pragmatic as expressed through various language acts used for the analysis in the study. Since all the language forms used in the inscriptions fit into certain language acts, the researchers are of the opinion that speech acts are language universal.

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