



doi 10.5281/zenodo.7086653

Vol. 05 Issue 09 Sept - 2022

Manuscript ID: #0704

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED KOLOKUMA PROVERBS

OKOTORI, EBIKILA BETTY

*General Studies Department, International Institute of Tourism
and Hospitality, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.
ebikilaokotori@gmail.com; 08063302696*

*Corresponding author: *OKOTORI, EBIKILA BETTY
Email: ebikilaokotori@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

This study is a pragmatic analysis of selected Kolokuma proverbs. Kolokuma is a North-Central Ijoid-Lect within the Niger Congo Phylum. It is spoken in the Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The objective of the study is to analyse the pragmatic acts performed through the use of proverbs in the dialect. The method of data collection was through oral interviews. The use of proverbs is an integral part of the language and culture of a people. We have observed that most of the proverbs in the dialect are didactic : teaching morals and societal values. The study demonstrated that, the proverbs perform illocutionary acts of asserting, advising, warning, admonishing, informing, cautioning and encouraging.

KEYWORDS

Pragmatic, Proverb, Illocutionary, Kolokuma and Speech Acts.



1. Introduction

Proverbs are pieces of wisdom handed down from generation to generation, derived from the socio cultural values, beliefs way of life of the people of a particular speech community. The use of proverbs is not peculiar to any one speech community; it is an integral part of the language and culture of a people universally. It adds colour and certain aesthetics to language use. In the words of Chinue Achebe (1980), in *Things Fall Apart*, ‘Amongst the Ibos, proverbs are the palm wine with which words are eaten.’ Proverbs are used to perform certain functions like; encourage, advise, warn inform, criticise, teach etc, Taylor (2013; 13) as quoted in Olarewanju, ‘Observes that proverbs are simple truths of life that contain the ethical, moral, and sociological values of a society.’

2. Proverbs

The origin of proverbs cannot really be ascertained as they were not written but were part of the oral traditions of communities, handed down from one generation to the other. Be that as it may, the use of proverbs can be traced as far back as bible days, proverbs like; ‘It is easier for a Camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a sinner to enter into the kingdom of God’. There are proverbs dating from ancient history such as ‘While there is life, there is hope’ or ‘Hunger is the best sauce’ Ramirez and Rebollar (2015).

Proverbs form a great part of a people’s traditional repository of what they consider to be of great value and concern to them. They are a collection of pure and wise sayings of a people preserved and handed down from generation to generation. Lawal (cited in Lawal, 2015). Proverbs allow a given speaker from a speech community to express common ideas or beliefs using a fixed phrase in the appropriate context Ayeni (cited in Ramirez & Rebollar 2015). Russel (cited in Wolfgang (2009) says ‘A proverb is the wit of one and the wisdom of many.’

Wolfgang on his part opines that a proverb is a short statement of an apparent truth that has past, present and future relevance among the people. Wolfgang, (2009). Burger, (2010, p. 107) says proverbs are considered as communally accepted practices, mores and established ways that are peculiar to a community or culture within a period.

2.1 Pragmatics

According to Chrystal (1991, p. 120), ‘Pragmatics studies the factor that govern our choice of language in social interaction and the effect of our choice on others’. Jackson opines that pragmatics is the ‘Study of language in context, in particular, how context influences the interpretation of language. It looks at how we make sense of utterances in ongoing discourse, the kinds of inferences that we draw, the rules we observe in order to participate successfully in conversation’

2.2 Speech Acts

Speech acts in linguistics is an utterance that is performative, which means that, the utterance of the word performs the act. The theory of speech acts was first introduced by the British philosopher, J. L. Austin, who says that utterances are not mere statements, but actions, that is, when an utterance is made, that utterance is equal to an action. According to him, these performatives are different from statements (constatives), which merely pass on information and can be true or false. J L Austin came up with three types of speech acts : Locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts.

1. *Locutionary act*: The locutionary act is simply the act of saying something; words, phrases and statements.
2. *Illocutionary act*: The illocutionary act is an act of doing something by saying it. It expresses, states, tells, declares, informs etc the hearer what the speaker intends.
3. *Perlocutionary Act*: Perlocutionary act refers to the result or outcome of the illocutionary act. For instance, Mary wants to go to the movies and she tells Peter, ‘please take me to the movies (locutionary), she wants Peter to take her to the movies (illocutionary) and Peter takes her to the movies (perlocutionary). (Austin 1962)

2.2.1 Indirect Speech Act.

Whenever we communicate with each other, we are performing speech acts. We can decide to communicate literally or directly, that is, the content of what we are saying can be taken on face value, or we can couch our words non literally or indirectly, meaning, the hearer has to decode the connotative or hidden meaning of what is said. The content of what is said could be direct but have an indirect (underlying) meaning. For instance, the speaker tells his friend, I don't have money for the cab fare. Directly, the speaker is only informing the hearer, but indirectly, the speaker is asking the friend to pay the fare.

Proverbs are said directly, but they usually carry indirect meanings. Most often, the speaker uses proverbs to advise, warn, encourage, rebuke or buttress a point indirectly to soften the effect of the words on the hearer, or just to avoid giving direct advice or rebuke.

4. Data Analysis and Result

The proverbs which constitute the data for this work was gathered from informants who are adult native speakers of the language. In what follows, the proverbs and a literal translation of what they mean is presented, after which, the proverbs are analysed.

1) Utterance Act (proverb) :

Yenumugha olotu, sukiri ko fiyemi

It is on the battlefield that a foolish champion dies.

Speech Act (Illocutionary Act) :

a) *Direct* : Asserting (Informing)

b) *Indirect* : Directing (Advising)

Linguistic: The use of 'olotu' (champion) here does not necessarily refer to a champion, it is a metonymy, a figurative way of referring to acts of foolishness seen as bravery. Bravery is closely associated with champions.

Situational: Somebody thinks too highly of himself (his intelligence, bravery and self worth), and does not listen to advise.

Psychological: The speaker disapproves of the hearer's foolish disposition

Pragmatic Content: The speaker is indirectly advising him against unnecessary or unwise acts of bravery or heroism.

2) Utterance Act (Proverb):

Ama wari kaan mu bou wari gbeingha

A house in town is not deroofted to roof a house in the bush.

Speech Act (Illocutionary Act) :

a) *Direct* : Asserting (stating)

b) *Indirect* : Verdictive (judging)

Linguistic: Deroofing the house is used metaphorically to talk about injustice and trampling on people's rights.

Situational: Somebody is been denied of his rights

Psychological: The speaker shows his strong aversion to injustice.

Pragmatic Content: It is indirectly warning against trampling on people's rights. You don't take somebody's rights and give it to another person.

3) Utterance Act (proverb) :

Ma eke na keni kpotumo da ba, keni kpo la korigha

If you pursue two rats at the same time, you will not catch even one.

Speech Act (illocutionary act) :

a) *Direct* : Assertive (stating)

b) Indirect Directive (advising)

Linguistic : The speaker uses the pursuit of rat (eke) metaphorically to depict goals, visions and aspirations.

Situational: Somebody is trying to achieve too many things at the same time.

Psychological: The speaker frowns at the listener's lack of focus and pursuit of too many things at the same time.

Pragmatic Content: The speaker is indirectly advising the hearer against the futility of pursuing too many things at the same time, as the hearer may end up achieving none of the goals.

4) Utterance Act (proverb) :

Uyakemi, uyagho fiigha

A poor man does not die in poverty.

Speech Act (illocutionary act):

a) *Direct* : Assertive (declaring)

b) *Indirect* : Directive (recommending)

Linguistic: The use of 'poor man' here is not limited to poverty but also refers to problems and difficult situations people face in life.

Situational: Somebody is passing through difficult times and is wallowing in self pity.

Psychological: The speaker is empathetic and understands what the hearer is passing through.

Pragmatic Content: The speaker is indirectly encouraging the hearer to hold onto hope as no situation is permanent.

5) Utterance Act (proverb) :

Okuru dangain nanabo deingha

Okra (the vegetable plant) can not grow taller than its owner.

Speech Act (illocutionary act) :

a) *Direct* : Asserting (declaring)

b) *Indirect* : Directive (advising)

Linguistic: Okra and its owner are used metaphorically to represent a child and his parents, and any other relationship between a younger person and an elderly person.

Situational: A younger person is disrespectful and disregards what he is told by the older person because, he thinks he knows it all.

Psychological: The speaker is disappointed at the younger person's disrespect and lack of regard for elders.

Pragmatic Content : The speaker is indirectly advising the hearer to be more humble and listen to his seniors because, no matter what he thinks he knows, he cannot know better than the elders that have lived longer and experienced much more than him.

6) Utterance Act (proverb) :

Dabo wari o bein

There is plenty kola in the house.

Speech Act (illocutionary act) :

a) *Direct* : Assertive (informing)

b) *Indirect* : verdictive (assessing)

Linguistic: The speaker uses irony and metonymy in this proverb. He states the opposite of the actual situation using irony, and kola, something that is ingested to represent food.

Situational: A poor man with limited resources, is embarrassed at his situation.

Psychological: The speaker is unhappy and embarrassed at his dilemma and the hearer understands the situation.

Pragmatic Content: The speaker is indirectly telling the hearer that there is no food in the house.

7) Utterance Act (proverb) :

Ye nanabomo ye zuweigha.

You do not struggle for something with the owner of the thing.

Speech Act (illocutionary act) :

- a) *Direct* : Assertive (declaring)
- b) *Indirect* : Verdictive (judging)

Linguistic: Ye nanabo (owner of something) is used as a metonymy to represent the rights of someone.

Situational: Somebody is at the verge of losing something he has worked very hard for or something that ought to be his own by right.

Psychological: The speaker frowns at the injustice.

Pragmatic Content: The speaker is indirectly telling the oppressors that, eventually the thing will revert back to the owner (what is mine, is mine), injustice can only thrive for so long.

8) Utterance Act (proverb) :

Kon lagha ila, aki baratoru kakami

The chain that is not enough for the neck, is used to tie the wrist.

Speech Act (illocutionary act) :

- a) *Direct* : Assertive (stating)
- b) *Indirect* : Directive (advising)

Linguistic: Kon (neck), ila (chain) and baratoru (wrist) are used creatively to teach contentment.

Situational: The speaker gives a gift that he feels is not good or big enough.

Psychological: The speaker is a little embarrassed at his ability to give more.

Pragmatic Content: The speaker advises the hearer to make do with what has been given (manage). Generally, the proverb is also used to teach contentment, advising people to be content with whatever they have.

9) Utterance Act (proverb) :

Ekeu gbamee belegho suodeki I you eee.

Ekeu said, 'Let me enter the pot before you cry over me.

Speech Act (illocutionary act) :

- a) *Direct* : Assertive (declaring)
- b) *Indirect* : Directive (encouraging)

Linguistic: Ekeu (a specie of fish that does not easily die) is used metaphorically to show resilience and strength (staying power).

Situation: Somebody is faced with a lot of difficulties in life.

Psychological: The speaker is empathetic.

Pragmatic Content: The speaker understands the hearer's plight and encourages him to keep hope alive (it is not over until it is over).

10) Utterance Act (proverb) :

Ine ikpese aki baragho subo da zini kemi ikpese akin a tibigho subo kumo.

Do not carry your problems with your hands, while carrying another person's own on your head.

Speech Act (illocutionary act) :

- a) *Direct* : Assertive (complaining)
- b) *Indirect* : Verdictive (evaluating)

Linguistic: Ikpese (load), is used figuratively to represent problems or issues.

Situational: Somebody has enough problems of his own but leaves them unattended, while he tries to solve other people's problems.

Psychological: The speaker's attitude is that of disapproval. He frowns at the hearer's inability or refusal to solve his own problems

Pragmatic Content: The speaker is indirectly advising the hearer to take his problems more seriously and solve them rather than solving every other person's own.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have observed that most of the proverbs analysed are morally didactic; they teach, advise, warn, admonish, inform and encourage. The paper has noted that these speech acts are conveyed across different spheres of life, family relations, communal life etc.

Kolokuma proverbs are short, witty, creative and communicative. The proverbs capture the reality that life is full of problems and challenges, but one can overcome anything with patience, if one does not give up.

References

- Achebe, C.(1980). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.
- Austin, J.J (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, David. (1991). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of language* : Cmbridge University Press.
- Lawal, O. A.(2015). 'Pragmatic Use of some Proverbs on; 'Engungun' Among Yoruba Speakers'
- John Searl. *Speech Acts*. (1969). Cambridge : Cambridge University Press
- Ramirez & Rebollar. (2015). Proverb use and interpretation. Curso Academico 2014/2015 Feecha de presentacion 25/06/2015.