

Socio-linguistic appraisal of language of reprimand between lower and higher classes of the society

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Abstract

Language is a system of communication; it is a medium through which information is passed from one person or group to the other. Language is very crucial to the entire existence of man. This work mirrors the usage of language in the society, specifically it explores the language use in reprimanding /correction of some misdeeds by children/young adults in the society, using the insights from Dell Hymes Ethnography of communication as the theory. Works in this regards has been done using socio-linguistic analysis but the existing literature is not holistic and this necessitated the new drift to be explored. This therefore necessitated a new drift in socio-linguistic studies. The societal strata which comprise of the mainstream and non - mainstream of the society have different ways of using language in different ideal situations. The work discovered that language used is *pari passu* with class in the society and this affects and re-model the psyche of the individuals involved. The language of reprimand used was both loud and soft and was gathered through oral interviews and observation from the two classes. The language of reprimand for the upper class is discovered to be soft and mild while that of the lower class is loud and harsh.

Key words: Reprimanding, psyche, societal strata, communication, Ethnography of communication

Introduction

In today's world, language plays an indelible role in virtually every area of human endeavour. Man communicates mainly by means of language, in trade, education, worship, politics, social life and what have you. Language performs but is not limited to informational, directive, aesthetic, phatic and expressive functions. Our point of interest however is the language of reprimand which we are exposed to on a regular basis. The language of reprimand falls under the expressive function of language where parents in both upper- and lower-class families reprimand children differently. Our primary concern however, is language used in reprimanding children of higher and lower classes when they misbehave. This study though not entirely novel, necessitates a more thorough enquiry required to reveal the nuances of the language used in reprimanding children from both upper and lower classes when they misbehave considering the fact that most scholars interrogated it using ethnopoetics. This therefore is the gap in scholarship that the work intends to fill. Previous studies have used ethnography of communication to interrogate conversational situations between a tomato seller and a buyer in the market. There have been other studies in analyzing proverbs using other forms of ethnography studies but this study saw the need to interrogate the peculiarities of approaches employed in reprimanding or correcting children when they deviate from approved or normal behaviour. Ethnography of communication will be used to engage the work using Dell Hymes SPEAKING Mnemonics as a guide. By the end of this work, we would have been able to give evidence that the language of reprimand varies between the upper and lower class.

Theoretical Underpinnings

To pursue the objectives of the above, this paper is anchored on Dell Hymes Ethnography of Communications (EC). The major thesis of Dell Hymes idea is that language does not exist in a vacuum. There must be a concept of field which implies that the research or work is carried out in the real world. Hymes advocated a shift in focus away from linguistic code “la langue” to actual speech” la parole.” It is in this la parole that individualized meanings are given to words appropriately and not as a general entity. This is because communication is what people make of it.

There are some aspects of communication that are often overlooked such as gender role enactment, social process of litigation, marginalized styles and incorporated style. EC incorporated all these sidelined aspects. However, communication event according to (Hymes & Gumpez, 1972) is said to be from the point of view of participants an integral, patterned part of social life.

In their view, communication events involve actions of many kinds such as gossip, reprimand, talk shows, political meetings etc. Ethnography of Communication therefore brings together the performance of that action and its interpretation from the speaker to the audience. Most of Dell Hymes EC analysis is summarized in the SPEAKING mnemonic. Furthermore, this pooled understanding of language is very important according to Hymes, (1972) because it equally foregrounds two aspects of speaking that cannot be separated. These aspects which are what the speaker can do and say in the communal context such speech occur in. In his view, every word is constructed and reconstructed to suite the context and settings that govern their meanings. “Speech does not occur in a vacuum, but rather within a specific context and when the meaning of speech is analyzed, we realize that they entail dimensions of participant, setting, channel which govern their meaning” Hymes (1989: 444). Hence, Carbaugh (1989) corroborates that ethnography of communication is an approach, a perspective and method. it is a study of culturally distinctive, means and meanings of communication.

The SPEAKING mnemonic of Hymes is very relevant here, considering the objectives of the paper, more insights would as well be drawn on the communicative audience. Communication is the host of this theory in the sense that it involves both the addressee and the addressee. According to Hymes (1974), a speech situation can only be understood if not only linguistic but also other aspects like the place where communication took place, the participants and other variables are taken into consideration. And to reflect all these variables, the speaking mnemonic has to come into play.

S: setting and scene; this refers to the time and place of the speech act.

P: participant; this involves the addresser and the addressee. The participant refers to the speaker and the audience

E: ends; this refers to the expected outcome; the particular goal the speaker intends to achieve

A: act sequence; the actual content of the communication. The main word that is said to the audience.

K: key; this is the tone a message is passed from the speaker to the audience. It refers to the tone, manner in which a particular message is passed to the audience.it maybe serious, mocking, sarcastic etc. here, again the audience is [passed with the information on how to interpret whatever information he or she has been passed on.

I: instrument; the channel through which the message is passed, it may be verbal or written. For instance, Code switching from English to Igbo to make the child understand the depth of his or her offence

N: norms; this is the acceptable behavior in a given speech community and it is assumed that everybody keys into it.

G: genres: the type of utterance made, it can be poems, jokes etc.

Methodology

The data used for this research is basically gathered from primary sources from Zik's flat area of Nsukka which is densely populated with both the upper class and the lower class, mostly staff of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

DATA PRESENTATION

The data below is a transcription of reprimands given to deviant adolescents in the area by their parents/guardians. The data is grouped into sub headings and their words of reprimand for: stealing/taking what does not belong to one without permission, lying,losing personal belongings, underage dating or boy and girl friend relationship and constant playing of truancy/unseriousness in his /her academics.

Deviant Behaviour Words of Reprimand for Upper Class Words of Reprimand for lower Class

Stealing/taking what does not belong to one without permission.

I am ashamed of you. Are you insane?

How could you do such a thing? Direct labeling (you are a thief, you will get burnt one day)

Lying: I am disappointed in you Verbal abuse (liar,like mother like daughter,)

Constant playing of truancy/unseriousness in his/her academics.

You are banned for vacation.

You are grounded from watching television . I will never pay your school fees again .

You will end up being a wheel barrow pusher.

Underage dating or boy/girl friend relationship. You are not of age yet.

Be careful When you get pregnant you will not enter my house. Prostitute.

Losing Personal Belongings Why are so careless ,being careful is a viture.

I will never buy another one for you.

Make sure you get it before coming back to this house or you sleep outside.

Data Analysis:

Situations call for reprimand especially in homes where young adults or even children feel they can do anything and go scort free.In African speech communities it is believed that everyone owns the child ,that the child is of his or her parents only when the child is still in the womb. Hence ,the reprimand is from older persons in the society to the younger ones.Just as Hymes put it ,there must be a conversational environment/situations.

SPEECH EVENT 1

Stealing/taking what does not belong to one without permission.

Here the child steals outside his/her house .

Setting or scene: The setting or the scence of the action is outside the home maybe in aneighbbours house or even in the school.

Participant: this is either the father or the mother or any elder around and the culprit which is either the child or the young adult.

End: the expected outcome . The child here feels remorseful and plead for forgiveness ,also the child feels embarrsed.

Act Sequence: first, the elder states it clear that what the child did which is stealing is not acceptable by using words that will evoke feelings of shame to the child.

Key: here, the tone is harsh,scarstic and code switching from English to Igbo language typical of a bad mood.

Instrument: The instrument for communication is oral/verbal and strictly informal.

Norm: The child apologizes and promises not to do it again.

SPEECH EVENT 2

Lying

Setting: School/home/any public place

Participant: the elder /addressor/adult and the addressee /young adult /child

Ends: the adult figure is totally annoyed with the way the addressee lies.

Act sequence: Here ,he /she shows his annoyance by letting the child know that he is disappointed in him or rather use the unapologetic word on the child like mother like daughter or like father like son as the case.

Key: The tone is serious here.

Instrument: The channel is totally oral and the register is both formal and informal.

Norm: Here, the deviant child should be made to understand the stands of the family whenever an unacceptable behavior is observed.

SPEECH EVENT 3

Constant Playing of Truancy/Unseriousness in His /Her Academics.

Setting: School/Home

Participant: The elder /addressor/adult and the addressee /young adult /child

Act Sequence: Here ,he /she shows his annoyance by letting the child know that he is disappointed in him and then banning him from some privilege he enjoys.

End: The overall end of this speech event is to make the child understand that he/she has to be more careful with his things , that money does not fall from the sky.The child is deprived of some privileges to make him or she understand that is an opportunity he has and not right.

Key : The tone here is stern and very serious.

Instrument: The channel of this speech event is purely oral.

Norms of interaction: The adult's reaction on the child shows disappointment and disapproval of what he has done.

Genres: Stern warning

SPEECH EVENT 4

Underage Dating or boy/girl friend relationships.

Setting : Home /Family

Participant: An elder/adult and the addressee

Act Sequence: Here the addressee is told about the chances of getting an unwanted pregnancy or even contacting a sexual transmitted disease.Again ,he/she is also meant to understand that underage dating can cause his /her untimely dropout of school.

Key: The tone here is very serious.

Instrument: the channel with which the message is passed is purely verbal.

Norm: the child would be educated on how the society frowns at people that get pregnant outside wedlock.

SPEECH EVENT 5

Losing Personal Belongings

Setting: Home /school

Participant: Adult and the addressee

Ends: The overall end of this speech event is to make the child understand that he/she has to be more careful with his things.

Act Sequence: Here ,the child is meant to understand that he /she has to be incharge of his things.

Key: The tone here is dialogue /explanatory

Instrument: Oral

Norm: The child learns that it is a virtue to take proper care of ones property.

Conclusion

From our findings, we discovered that there exists a visible difference between the language of reprimand in upper class homes and middle class home. Whereas the tone in upper class homes is mild, questioning and incredulous, that of the lower class is harsh, raw, abusive and loud. Sometimes they code switch from English or pidgin to

their mother tongue just to drive home their point. We conclude therefore that the addressee whether he/she likes it or not, adheres strictly to the norms and conform to the values of the society which the adults advocate.

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