"The minister they killed used to live around here, *abi*, aunty?" A postcolonial pragmatics theoretical study

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Abstract
As a subfield of linguistics, pragmatics has kept evolving, drawing scholars' attention to the constantly growing nature of knowledge and scholarship. A recent addition to pragmatic theories is postcolonial pragmatics. Its application to text analysis has continued to engage the attention of scholars who do pragmatic research. In this study, we attempt to introduce postcolonial pragmatics as well as provide insights into how texts from the Nigerian postcolonial context could be analysed in line with the analytical tenets of postcolonial pragmatics. We examine eleven excerpts following five postcolonial pragmatics components, namely, collectivist cultures and in-group norms, kinship, ethnicity, religion, and social class or status. Also, the pragmatics of codeswitching and politeness as conceptualised in postcolonial pragmatics theory are discussed with textual examples drawn from the Nigerian postcolonial context. This study enriches the understanding of how ideations are emplaced in context, and how discourse participants generate meaning from interactions as motivated by the peculiar linguistic environment in which they put English to use. Besides, by accounting for the peculiar ways Nigerians use English, we contribute to extending the frontiers of postcolonial pragmatics.

Keywords: postcolonial pragmatics, postcolonial Nigeria, context, English, pragmatic components

1. Introduction

This article explores ways through which postcolonial pragmatics as a theoretical framework can be applied to pragmatic research in the Nigerian context. Since its emergence, postcolonial pragmatics has increasingly become a viable pragmatic theory that scholars employ to explicate the dynamic nature of language use, especially colonial languages in postcolonies. The emergence of new Englishes across excolonial societies has necessitated the evolution of theories that are compatible with African thoughts and capable of appropriately engaging indigenous ways of thinking through English. The evolution of new Englishes accounts for the continuously evolving nature of the English language. Scholars have advanced the argument that the way English has been adapted, "domesticated", "nativised", and "indigenised" in many ex-British colonies has brought significant changes in the syntax and semantics of the language (Ugwuanyi & Aboh, 2025).

These changes, in syntax and semantics, even in lexis, are motivated by Nigerians' desire to express their lived experiences in their distinct Nigerian ways and in a language that expresses as well as resonates their *Nigerianness*, leading to the emergence of a variety of World Englishes known as Nigerian English. This unique way of using English in Nigeria is also known as Nigerianism (Aboh, 2018; Eburuaja & Udoh, 2021). According to Eburuaja and Udoh (2021), "Nigerian English emerged and evolved due to the nativisation of the English language in Nigeria, so it can be defined as the type of English spoken and used by Nigerians" (2025, p. 3). English, perhaps Nigerian English, exists alongside indigenous languages such as Nigerian

Pidgin, Hausa, Igbo, Tiv, Idoma, Yoruba, Bette-Bendi, Efik, Ibibio, among several others. In such a multilingual context, it is not uncommon to find people who speak more than two of these languages.

The foregoing details the hybridised identity of many Nigerians. Some Nigerians speak about five indigenous languages. While this kind of multilingualism would appear unusual in most Western societies, "it is a normal fact of life and a natural consequence of migration in the complex multiethnic societies" (Anchimbe & Janney, 2017, p. 105). These Nigerians can speak or understand these languages because of migration and the multiethnic composition of the Nigerian linguistic ecosystem. These multilingual and multiethnic situations make many Nigerians a cornucopia of languages, cultures, and identities. It therefore suggests that, given Nigerians' postcolonial experience and upbringing, they are hybridised beings. It also implies that a theory or framework that is conversant with Nigerians' hybridised identities will be required to appropriately explain the dynamic complexity of their linguistic biography. Obana and Haugh stress the fact that "theoretical assumptions underpinning pragmatics often do not readily address characteristic features of languages beyond those typical of European languages, particularly English" (2023, p.11). As already hinted, the aim of postcolonial pragmatics is to provide a framework that addresses the peculiar features of excolonies.

Following proponents of postcolonial pragmatics, we aim to account for how postcolonial pragmatics could be applied to the analysis of language practices in Nigeria. Although studies such as Otong (2019), Ugwuanyi and Aboh (2025), among others, have drawn analytical insights from postcolonial pragmatics to drive the analysis of texts in the Nigerian context, there is still a need for more research in the field, given that studies in the area are grossly inadequate. Additionally, given its relative newness, not many scholars are conversant with the pragmatic theory and its application to text analysis. Thus, in undertaking this study, we extend the frontiers of postcolonial pragmatics and enrich the understanding of the context-determined nature of pragmatic analysis. We start by outlining the features and concerns of postcolonial pragmatics, discuss the methodology, and proceed to provide practical examples of how postcolonial pragmatics analysis could be understood in the postcolonial Nigerian context.

2. Postcolonial pragmatics theory

Postcolonial pragmatics evolved out of the realisation that theories developed from predominantly monolingual and monocultural Western societies do not adequately address the amalgam of pragmatic patterns common in postcolonial societies. Arguing against the inadequacy of Western-based theories in providing useful insights into the significations emplaced in postcolonial discourses, Wierzbicka (1991) called for an understanding of the cultural scripts of a people and how they play out in the people's use of language rather than appropriating the culture universalist approach in interpreting languages. In this regard, Wierzbicka critiques the one-sidedness of Western-based theories and their incapacity in explicating localised and conventionalised symbolic codes as are obtained in ex-colonies.

Proponents of this sociocultural pragmatic framework –Anchimbe (2011a, 2011b) and Anchimbe and Janney (2011, 2017) – developed, or are formulating, postcolonial pragmatics to account for the deficiencies of Western-based pragmatic theories. Postcolonial pragmatics is a crossbred pragmatic approach that puts text in sociocultural contexts by depicting the complex multicultural significations that background the production, interpretation, and consumption of texts. It "is an analytical framework for investigating the realities of postcolonial communities" (Otung, 2019, p.3). In this regard, postcolonial pragmatics can be understood as an instrumental analytic method that stresses the pragmatic and situational aspects of

language use in larger postcolonial communities. It conceives the use of language in postcolonial societies as a hybrid of the colonised and colonisers' identities (Anchimbe, 2020). Taking intermixed language and communicative practices in postcolonial multilingual societies as its focus, postcolonial pragmatics approaches speakers whose communication strategies have been shaped by the heterogeneous postcolonial environments in which they interact daily. Anchimbe and Janney (2017) argue that postcolonial pragmatics analysis explicates how various forms of identities are formulated in discursive situations, and how role projection, group maintenance, gate-keeping, and social empowerment and marginalisation are given expression in interactive contexts in postcolonial settings.

Proponents of postcolonial pragmatics argue against "the limitation of individualistic Western pragmatic theories in accounting for non-Western pragmatic practices" (Anchimbe & Janney, 2017, p. 106). They contend that we understand texts better when the cultural ecologies that embed their production are explicated. Given the peculiar linguistic situation of most postcolonies, Western-based pragmatic theories are inadequate in explicating the nuanced speech acts that characterise postcolonial discourse (Rocha Azevedo 2020). According to Rocha Azevedo, "postcolonial pragmatics consists of a framework based on an emic perspective which aims at taking into account the hybrid settings found in postcolonial societies in pragmatic analysis" (Rocha Azevedo 2020, p. 1). In the light of this, postcolonial pragmatics investigates pragmatic features in the use of excolonial languages in postcolonial societies, which are characterised by their distinct mix of ethnic communities, languages, cultures, and social practices. This implies that postcolonial pragmatics aims to interrogate language use in interactive encounters in communities that speak languages such as English, neither as a native nor as a foreign language, but rather as a second language. This language is often an official language and an interethnic lingua franca (Anchimbe & Janney, 2011).

What, then, are the basic assumptions of postcolonial pragmatics? Postcolonial pragmatics assumes that:

- colonialism created sociocultural and political mixes in many areas: Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean, etc.;
- pre-colonial cultures and colonially-introduced cultures (including languages, religions, political administrative systems, formal education, etc.) merged into new hybrid patterns;
- the outcomes include, among others, hybrid identities and hybrid languages yielding hybrid communication patterns, and
- pragmatic components of age, religion, ethnicity, and kinship, among others, are key to understanding how meaning is derived from language use in postcolonial societies (Anchimbe, 2018).

How all these aspects function together in these complex multilingual and multicultural spaces is worthy of research from emic perspectives, especially taking into account that most pre-colonial cultures have collectivist structures or are group-based. We analyse our data following the postcolonial pragmatics model, offering insights into the distinct ways English and its users make sense of their social universe.

3. Methodology

Through the purposive sampling technique, data were generated mostly (nine excerpts out of the eleven) from literary texts, Nigerian novels to be specific, namely, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *A Man of the People,* Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun,* Abimbola's Adelakun's *Under the Brown Rusted*

Roofs and Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*. We elicited our data from literary communication for the reason that "literature has played an important role in the history of Africa's antihegemonic resistance" (Ayandike, 2008, p.27). Ayandike's view is consistent with the emancipatory underpinning of postcolonial pragmatics. Data were categorised into ten excerpts and analysed following five postcolonial pragmatics components, namely, collectivist cultures and in-group norms, kinship, ethnicity, religion, and social class or status. Also, the pragmatics of codeswitching and politeness as conceptualised in postcolonial pragmatics, and how they could be understood in the Nigerian postcolonial context, were critically examined. The textual data were analysed descriptively; this method allowed for value-laden interpretation of our data.

4. **Data analysis**

Data were analysed based on some components relevant to the postcolonial pragmatics theoretical framework: collectivist cultures and in-group norms, kinship, ethnicity, religion, and social class or status. These components play central roles in explaining the complex and dynamic nature of postcolonial discourse. Each of these components serves as a building block in the making of meaning out of the microcommunicative strategies used in postcolonial societies. It should be noted that the choice of one component does not preclude that of another, which is why Anchimbe (2018) emphasizes that these are components and not variables – variables would suggest that the choice of one precludes another, but "components" implies that these could all work individually or otherwise, i.e., everything depends on the data before us. A speech act may have age, religion, and kinship ties all at work simultaneously. Sometimes, we have one component and not another. So, the speech act determines which component is at work and what pragmatic functions they perform. Therefore, in the analysis below, the intention is to discuss how these components are relevant to pragmatic analysis of language use in postcolonial pragmatics contexts. We analyse each of these components in turn.

4.1 Collectivist cultures and in-group norms

Proponents of postcolonial pragmatics insist that the cardinal focus of postcolonial pragmatics "is the collectivist or group-based constitution of cultures in postcolonial societies" (Anchimbe, 2018, p. 42). In postcolonies, an individual is first, before any other identity, a member of a social, ethnic, or linguistic group whose values and esteem they defend above their individual face wants. Consequently, praises or insults make a deeper impact on the individual if they are directed at the group to which they belong (Anchimbe, 2018, p. 42).

Excerpt 1:

> Go and make peace with your husband and don't be living here in shame, *mara kunya kawai* (p. 137).

In Excerpt 1, taken from Adam Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*, Hureira is advised by her mother, Binta, to return to her husband's house to avoid bringing shame on herself and her entire family. Binta's admonition is based on the fact that Hureira's first marriage had failed and the second one is at the brink of crashing. And if it does crash, it will be a slur on Binta's identity, an indication that she did not bring up her daughter in accordance with cultural expectations. *Mara kunya kawai* is a Hausa expression that translates

as *You are very stupid*. Binta's linguistic construction is discursively significant in that it emphasises the magnitude of the shame Hureira wants to bring upon her family. It is the collective selves that more significantly obligates Binta's linguistic production. This collectivist identity is also seen in Extract 2 taken from Abimbola's Adelakun's *Under the Brown Rusted Roofs*

Excerpt 2:

> It was in Lagos that I learnt to eat bearded snail.
> With my banana, I eat bearded snail (p. 194).

Ramoni, Alhaji's first son, releases his first album and goes to Ibadan to perform. In the song, he uses some expressions –*bearded snail and banana*– that are thought to threaten the positive face of the listeners. *Bearded snail* is a euphemism for vigina and *banana*, a euphemism for penis; thus, to *eat beaded snail* with *banana* means to have sex. Alhaji and the members of his household are perturbed because it is a slur on the collective identity of the family. This causes Alhaji to remark: "I don't know what the world is coming to. Then, if this is the kind of music that sells in Lagos, then Lagos people know nothing about music (p. 194). The implication for pragmatic analysis is that Western frameworks, which prioritise individual wants, become inadequate and could misrepresent speakers' intentions if interpreted from the atomistic perspective of the West (Anchimbe, 2018, p.42).

4.1.2 Kinship

Anchimbe (2018) clarifies that the collectivist nature of postcolonial cultures could be accounted for through the elastic use of kinship terms. Being someone's brother, sister, mother, father, uncle, or aunt, does not depend entirely on blood tie, but also on social relations and the social roles members of society are expected to observe in their interaction with others. The following example from *Half of a Yellow Sun* suffices:

Excerpt 3:

> The driver stopped in front of her parents' walled compound in Ikoyi. He peered at the high gate. 'The minister they killed used to live around here, *abi*, aunty?' he asked. (2007, p. 165)

Two basic pragmatic components are realised in Excerpt 3: kinship and ethnic identity. As it is a practice in Nigeria, one does not have to be related to someone for the referent to be addressed respectfully through the use of an endearment term such as *aunty*. Obviously, the driver has no blood ties with his passenger, but he calls her *aunty* as a code of respect and politeness. Such constructions of oneness not only draw from the cultural practice that elderly people or those who are socially above others are addressed through the use of endearment and respect-indexing lexica. Endearments also indicate that most Africans see themselves as a family of some sort. Apart from indexing kinship, there is also the pragmatic component of ethnic identity in the diver's use of *abi,* a Yoruba word that translates to *right?* The lexical item catalogues the driver's Yoruba ethnic identity, on the one hand, and the Nigerian multicultural/multilingual setting on the other hand. In identity discourse, one's use of language can serve as a window to their ethnic affiliation; this does not suggest that we have turned a blind eye to the social constructivist postulation that identity is not fixed; rather, it is enunciated in context.

We provide another example taken from an Igbo endearment term. The term, *Nna anyi,* is used by any person in the speech community to refer to any old man or an elderly man in recognition of the man's status as a father or husband, irrespective of whether or not he is related to the speaker biologically or by marriage. This is in line with most African societies, where the concepts of fatherhood and motherhood extend beyond the biological parents to cover other people in the community who are old enough to be fathers and mothers (see Aboh & Igwenyi, 2021).

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo calls Nwakibie *Nna anyi* (A chebe, 1958, p. 14). Nwakibie is not Okonkwo's biological father, yet he calls him *our father*. Okonkwo's linguistic choice is, thus, strategic to Igbo culture and in-group maintenance, which "illustrates how members of a group 'construct' terms with reticent and sympathetic gestures when referring to [members of their group]" (Aboh, 2015, p. 519). Also, Sabao's extrapolation that a people's "tradition is encapsulated in the living museum of language" (2013, p. 85) resonates with the postcolonial pragmatics' conceptualisation of age, community, and in-group maintenance. Were it in Britain, Okonkwo would not have called Nwakibie *Nna anyi*; he would have called him Mr. Nwakibie. This does not suggest that Brits do not appreciate people or are disrespectful. The difference is that referring to someone who is not one's biological father is not encapsulated in the living museum of the Brits' language, English. Thus, if Okonkwo calls Nwakibie by his name, he will surely be reprimanded for being disrespectful in the symbolic Igbo culture in which language is put to use.

4.1.3 Ethnicity

Ethnicity is another postcolonial pragmatic component that speakers often rely on to make choices in interpersonal communication and social behaviour. Given that colonialism ended by creating multiethnic nation-states in the colonised world, competition and conflicts between these diverse groups were an expected outcome. A further explanation gleaned from Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is quite helpful:

Excerpt 4:

> Kainene snorted, 'Socialism would never work for the Igbo!' She held the brush suspended in mid-air. 'Ogbenyealu is a common name for girls and you know what it means? "Not to Be Married by a Poor Man." To stamp that on a child at birth is capitalism at its best' (2007, p. 91).

Kainene's linguistic construction demonstrates how events in postcolonial societies determine people's linguistic choices. It illustrates interactants' exploitation of the resources of language in creating and recreating discourses, in projecting a people's ethnic identity as well as an economic ideology. Besides the fact that Kainene relies on her Igbo cultural values to polemically resist the imposition of a politico-economic ideology that does not align with the economic reality of the Igbo, Kainene's deployment of the Igbo name — Ogbenyealu — is a deliberate act of Igbo ethnic identity construction (see Aboh, 2018, p 18). — a symbolic explication of the *postcolonialness* of discourse.

Also, in John Elnathan's *Born on a Tuesday*, we encounter acts of identity being performed. Sheikh tells Dantala:

Excerpt 5:

> A Yoruba man is always a Yoruba man. No matter how Muslim they become. They stab you in the back. That is how they are. Hypocrites (p. 210).

In the above interaction between Sheikh Jamal, a religious leader, and Dantala, Sheikh's faithful, two pragmatic components are identified: ethnicity and religion. Although it appears religious affinity is relegated to the background and ethnic membership takes the front burner, the conversation illuminates how religion and ethnicity are interwoven in postcolonial Nigeria. In the first case, Abdul-Nur, the referent, is seen as a Yoruba man, not a Muslim. No matter how we conceive of Sheikh's views, they speak of the mutual hate that exists between northern and western Nigeria. Alhaji Usman, a politician who is one of the major funders of Sheikh Jamal's Mosque, also shares Sheikh's views.

Excerpt 6:

> How can some Yoruba convert come here and be doing all this? We will send him back to whatever bush he came from. Sheikh, please remind me about this (p. 216).

There are also the pragmatic components of ethnicity and religion in Alhaji Usman's ethnic outburst. The expression, *Yoruba convert*, typifies the way Nigerians identify with one another. The question that readily comes to a reader's mind is, who are the *we*, as used by Alhaji Usman? '*We'* is symbolically embedded with hostility. It is selectively inclusive as it refers to not only Sheikh and Usman, but also other northerners who share similar ethnoreligious sentiments. Usman, therefore, uses the expression to distance himself from Abdul-Nur and other Yoruba people. Abdul-Nur is described as someone who comes from a bush. To say a person comes from a *bush* is to deactivate the person's humanity. The above exchange implies that a pragmatic approach that takes into account the diverse identities that embed themselves in discussants' use of language is required. This is why postcolonial pragmatics is the most appropriate pragmatic theory that can be applied to postcolonial situations such as Nigeria because it enables us to understand English beyond Western geographies and sociologies.

4.1.4 Religion

As another component of postcolonial pragmatics, religion provides a platform for various forms of conflicts and the construction of religious (in-group) identities. These religious conflicts (or the conscious avoidance of such conflicts) and religious identities are codified and indexed in discourse and interpersonal interactions. Unlike in most Western societies, where religion is simply another space for another type of interaction, in most postcolonial societies, religion is fully integrated into most other aspects of life. Religion can hardly be disentangled from the cultural imagination of the Nigerian. See the example below.

Excerpt 7:

> SC: Please, have a drink
> You: Thank you, sir, but I'm already leaving.
> SC: Are you refusing my drink?
> You: Oh, not exactly sir.
> SC: What do you mean by 'not exactly'?
> You: Because it is time for me to go.
> SC: But just one drink will not take any time.
> You: I am a Muslim so I don't drink.

SC: Oh! Sorry. See you another time. (Source: Achimbe 2018)

The pragmatic component, religion, is used as a justification for refusing an offer since refusal in itself, within this hierarchical arrangement between an older person and a younger one, would be considered rude. In most African societies, religion plays a defining role in interactions. In Nigeria, for instance**,** religion often implants itself in Nigeria's sociopolitical system. Another example taken from *Born on a Tuesday* will further enlighten our understanding of the role of religion in Nigerians' interaction with reality.

Except 8:

> Let your women study, Sheikh said, and let them vote. Let them learn how to read. The wives of Christians read and write and our wives cannot even read the Quran. There is no sin if a man accompanies his wives to go and queue up to register to vote (p. 116).

In the context of the novel, Sheikh Jamal, prior to an election, gathered people at the primary school football pitch and argued for the inclusion of women in the political process of the country. It takes a Nigerian or someone who is very conversant with the socio-political realities of Nigeria to appreciate the speaker's illocutionary acts of persuasion and command, as well as their underlying significations. The pragmatic components of gender, religion, and politics are identified in the above speech. Their interwovenness, the identified pragmatic components, is explicitly tied to first, the politics of gender, religion, and the politics of living in northern Nigeria. Second, the comparison between Muslim and Christian women shows, on the one hand, the illogic of disenfranchising Muslim women and on the other hand, the usual contest or competition that exists between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, and how this contest is elaborated in Nigeria's political narrative. Third, there is the need for the Muslim woman to be as educated as her Christian counterpart, and doing this will bridge the gap between the north and the south of Nigeria in terms of level of education.

Accordingly, the notion that Nigeria is a secular entity is, of course, a theoretical construct. In reality, religious groups are as powerful as any political formation. In fact, religion is politics and politics is religion**.** Another instance in which religion and politics co-exist can be seen in many Nigerian universities. Unlike Western universities, including some universities in East Africa, meetings in Nigerian universities start and end with prayer. And one who does not believe in such a practice is considered as unreligious.

4.1.5 Social class or status

There is a concurrence between an individual's stylistic choices and their social status. This affects the ways they present themselves and are addressed by others. Social status defines the new social achievements that grant an individual access to a higher social level in society; it could be wealth, riches, social position, educational achievement or political elevation. The conversation below is between two friends, A got his PhD from Bristol and B from Ibadan:

Excerpt 9:

A: Hi Unimke.
B: The Docky, the Docky! How has it been?

A: I met with Charles yesterday and it was resolved.
B: You mean the HoD, Prof Unimashi?
A: Yeah. It was cool.
B: Hmm!

In the above excerpt, both friends are colleagues who teach in the same department. B's Nigerianness obligates his linguistic choices. Unlike A, who calls people by their first name and drops their titles, a common practice in the UK where he was educated, B's Nigerianness informs his recognition of people by both their status and social composition. In the first instance, B does not call his friend by his name, but by his academic title, *Docky*. B's question in Line four, and the exclamation in Line 6, further depict his Nigerian construction of politeness as well as illuminate his amazement at A's selection of the address form, *Charles*. Also, in Nigeria, we are perhaps conversant with the situation in which members of a class call a brilliant colleague of theirs *Prof* even when the classmate has not yet attained the social status.

This pragmatic way of connecting with people by their social status can also be seen in literary situations. An example taken from *Born on a Tuesday* will further elucidate our argument for the need to apply indigenous pragmatic methodologies to the analysis of postcolonial discourse:

Excerpt 10:

> I see an open chemist. I walk into the store and meet many other people there. Everyone calls the store owner Doctor but one man calls him Chuks (p. 21).

The narrator, Dantala, tells us of how a medicine store owner who does not have the training of a medical doctor is called a *Doctor*. Two things account for this kind of pragmatism. One, he is identified by what he does, that is, he sells medicine and also treats people, though he is not qualified to do so. Two, the Nigerian society is a status-loving one. People like titles because they see them as ego-boosting. While it will be abnormal in Western societies to describe or call people by what they are not, in Nigeria, it is an act of politeness. Chuks will surely feel disrespected if he is not called *Doctor*, and may not attend to people who downplay his *medical* identity by calling him Chuks.

This pragmatic component underpins how interpersonal communication takes place in most non-Western societies. For instance, the former governor of Cross River State is addressed as His Excellency, Senator Professor Barr Ben Ayade, KSM. He was a one-time senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, a professor of immunology, a lawyer, and a member of the Knights of Saint Mulumba of the Catholic Church. He gets irritated whenever he is not addressed in the entire appellations he has acquired; it punches his ego.

4.2. The pragmatics of code-switching in postcolonial pragmatics

Code-switching is part of the precolonial norm. However, it got heightened with the advent of colonialism and the lumping of different peoples into new social and political structures. Code-switching, within the paradigm of postcolonial pragmatics, extends beyond the sociolinguistic notion of deficiency-motivated orientation to the thoughtful enunciation of linguistic competence. Competence in this context defines an individual's ability to gauge the conversational situation before selecting the appropriate code. Appropriateness of code is significant to any linguistic encounter because meaning is not only encoded in codes, but also in the understanding of the people's socio-cultural worldview, which is implanted in the code they select in specific instances of language use (Odebunmi, 2015). Dumanig and David maintain that in multilingual contexts,

language users code-switch not because they have to, but because they want to "with clearly intended purposes" (2011, p. 216). The example below is taken from Achebe's *A Man of the People*.

Excerpt 11:

> If you put *juju* on a woman it will catch that old trotter, said Max after I had told the story (p. 76).

The above extract explains a situation where Max uses *juju*, a word for charm, to construct a demeaning sexual identity for Chief Nanga after Odili told him how Chief Nanga snatched his girlfriend from him. In this instance of code-switching, two components of postcolonial pragmatics are activated– religion and age. *Juju* is a religious icon activated here to show the place of religion in the lives of the interactants. As members of this society, everybody knows that anything that has to do with *juju* should be treated with caution, but not Nanga. Nanga is called an *old trotter*, which activates the component of age. Age symbolises wisdom, good manners. So, an old person should know not to toy with *juju*. The significance of these components here is that Nanga does not observe what could be considered responsible societal norms. Thus, in his insatiable sexual desires, he is ready to go against the *juju* despite the consequences and despite his age.

In postcolonies like Nigeria, language serves multivalent communicative functions. A speaker has to select from multiple languages in their daily socio-discursive encounters. To be linguistically competent in a multicultural and multilingual society, a language user not only has to switch from one code to another, but also needs to be very strategic as to know when to and when not to switch codes.

4.3. The concept of politeness in postcolonial Nigeria

Across cultures, politeness exists. However, politeness is relative. Ayola and Alabi (2018, p. 2), cited in Otung (2019, p. 14), use of the expression, *good manners*, articulates not only the relativity of politeness, but also the inadequacy of Western-based theories, such as the Brown-Levinsonian face management theory, in accounting for the cultural significations that entrench themselves in the concept of *good manners*.

We provide an example from one of these researchers' personal experiences. During his master's days at the University of Ibadan, an American lady joined them on the programme. One beautiful day, she and some of this researcher's colleagues saw one of their professors and, they, the Nigerians, bowed and greeted him. She, the American, stretched her hand for a handshake. The professor collected her hand and beamed. The Nigerians looked at one another in agitated amazement. For them, so long as their notion of politeness was concerned, the white lady did not have *good manners*. While it was no big deal for her, for them, it was something they would never contemplate. The pragmatic component in this instance is social status – professor vs student. There are expected norms of *good behaviour* within postcolonial societies that are not found in the same way in Western societies. So, while the Nigerians observed the norms required or dictated by their Nigerian postcolonial culture, the American observed what obtains in her American culture of interpersonal relationships. The Nigerians saw her as being impolite, but she did not understand them. The professor beaming is a polite way of acknowledging the lady's cultural background; perhaps some polite way of forgiving her for not understanding the norms in her new environment. These respective semiotic

behaviours signpost the fact that politeness "is a culturally defined phenomenon, and therefore what is considered polite in one culture can sometimes be quite rude or simply eccentric in another cultural context" (Ayola & Alabi, 2018, p. 2). In this same way, in the Bette-Obudu cultural imagination, along with some ethnic groups in Nigeria, it is disrespectful for a younger one to maintain eye contact with an elderly person while conversing.

We also present an example that took place in one of these authors' offices before the Covid 19 lockdown. A female student missed the author's continuous assessment. The next day, she came to this author's office, kneeling, and asking for his kind consideration. She told him of how sick her mother had been, and she was the one who was nursing her mother. Two pragmatic acts, verbal and non-verbal, are performed concurrently. She combined these communicative forms in recognition of older persons (age) and persons of higher status. The semiotics of kneeling, which speaks of the student's good upbringing, "also symbolizes gender differences in some Nigerian ethnic groups, in which the wife usually kneels or genuflects as a sign of honour to the husband when greeting, communicating or giving him something" (Otung, 2019, p. 41). We may argue that the distinction between masculine and feminine behaviours is not actually definite. However, normative expectations about fitting masculine and feminine ways of behaving, of conducting one's self do vary across cultures. The author was made to believe the student because her kneeling, to him, underscores the sincerity of her narrative, that she was remorseful, and that she was a well-behaved girl. The polite act invoked sympathy from the author because he is conversant with such semiotic practices and the meaning they codify. She could have told a lie, though.

We are motivated to think that a student in a Western-based university would not kneel while talking to, or asking for a favour from, her lecturer. It is not as though Western students are rude; it is simply because kneeling or genuflecting either to greet or perform other linguistic acts is not a component that is entrenched in their culture. Thus, cultural practices determine what is taken as polite or impolite behaviour. While the Nigerian lecturer appreciates such semiotic acts, we guess that a Western lecturer would consider such an act eccentric if not impulsive. This is because linguistic behaviours like these may seem unusual from a Western point of view. Be that as it may, they are quite natural features of interactions in culturally and linguistically heterogeneous social settings.

5. Conclusion

Using postcolonial pragmatics as our theoretical point of reference, we analysed some extracts gathered from literary and non-literary situations. The analysis shows that there is a conjunction between Nigerians' linguistic choices and their cultural realities. As a postcolony, Nigeria's linguistic space features multilingualism, multiculturalism, intermixed or hybridised identities and ethnicities. Postcolonial pragmatics is, therefore, a response to the call for indigenous pragmatic frameworks dedicated to emancipatory research on non-Western pragmatics from the ethnocentric constraints of Western pragmatic theories. Thus, the difficulty of applying individualistic, monolinguistic notions of speech acts and principles of politeness to the study of collectivistic, multilinguistic discourse birthed postcolonial pragmatics.

Following the postulations of Anchimbe and Janney (2011), we have explained, through textual examples, how, as a consequence of colonialism and the consequent mixture between indigenous and colonisers' cultural and linguistic practices, postcolonial societies are characterised by hybridised forms of ideations, language, social norms, and speech acts such as code-mixing and code-switching. This brings about

communication strategies that have been shaped by these heterogeneous settings. The implication is that for research on social communication in excolonies to be nuanced and representative enough or appreciated, it must take into consideration the dynamic history of these societies' emergence. The argument that postcolonial pragmatics advances is that the specific sociocultural context of interaction not only determines the way language is put to use, but also the meaning elicited. Central to this argument is the fact that the meaning of an utterance is tied to or derived from the overall sociocultural and interactive contexts, as well as the culture-specific elements and the speech acts and events in which they are entrenched. Thus, postcolonial pragmatics, as we have illustrated, advances the recognition of the diverse factors that condition the way excolonies perform their collectivist identity through language.

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