A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF APPELLATIONS IN OHIMINI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BENUE STATE

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ABSTRACT
This study is a sociolinguistic analysis of appellations among the Idoma speaking people of Ohimini Local Government Area of Benue State. The objectives were to identify the appellations and analysis these appellations using Dell Hymes's model of SPEAKING. This is a descriptive research and data was elicited through observation, and informal interviews from selected respondents. Also, the intuitive knowledge of the researchers and secondary sources provided additional data. The findings reveal that appellations do exist and are used when greeting among Idoma speakers of Ohimini LGA. These appellations are gender and clan specific, can be traced to the progenitors of a clan and can be used alone or in conjunction with statutory greetings. Furthermore, these appellations help to preserve and promote the culture, pass down history and traditions of the people, convey information about a person's lineage as well as foster a sense of oneness and brotherhood. This study, therefore, has shed light on an aspect of the culture of the Idoma people of Ohimini LGA and added to the body of written works on the Idoma language.

Introduction

As man lives in the society, interaction and communication are pivotal to existence. In a society or community, there is usually an agreed manner of behaviour, or way of doing things. This can be said to be embodied in culture. To Schaefer (2000), "culture is the totality of learned, socially transmitted behaviour. It includes the ideas, values, customs, and artifacts (for example CDs, comic books, and birth control devices) of groups of people" (p.47). Certain peculiarities arise when a group of people live together or are related in one way or the other. This is reflected in both concrete and abstract aspects as can be seen in the language, behaviour, belief systems, political system, manner of doing certain things such as cooking, dressing, arts and crafts among others. Language is an abstract aspect of culture as it cannot be seen or felt. The connection between language, culture and society cannot be overlooked. To Ikima (2012),

> *language is a veritable and practical means of communication. It is the most efficient means or potent vehicle for transmitting cultures, values and beliefs from generation to generation. Language is indeed a central force in determining the unity and identity of a people; it is the carrier of a people's culture, and to a large extent a determinant of the status of any group of people (p.61).*

This points to the fact that language is the verbal side of culture. Humans are able to think and express inner thoughts using language. As an aspect of culture, language verbalizes the collective decisions a group of people have decided on concerning their way of life, and such groups then have their identity. With language, culture is made known and handed down from generations to generations.

One distinctive and important feature of humans is the ability to communicate using language. According to Anasiudu (2000),

> *it is language that makes the human society what it is as it plays a predominant role in the cultural orientation of the individual in the socio-cultural group he belongs. Language is a very strong tie that binds a group together, serving as a means of identifying the ethnic group whose mother tongue it is. It is the vehicle for culture and values of the group (p.204).*

Language, therefore, is the way humans communicate as sounds are combined into words, phrases, clauses and then sentences, all in a systematic manner to bring out meaning. Man is indeed unique as language gives man an edge over other animals being able to communicate, socialize, and bring about development that is particular to a group of people. Language and its use are therefore structured according to culture of its users.

Statement of Problem

An important aspect of culture as man lives in the society is interaction, which usually begins with greetings. Greetings are expressions used to show a kind of social relationship. Just like societies and cultures differ, so also the manner of exchanging pleasantries differs. The Idoma speakers of Ohimini Local Government Area are no exception and this study seeks to investigate the peculiar manner of greeting using appellations and add to the exiting literature on the Idoma language.
Ohimini Local Government Area was created from the then Otukpo Local Government Area in 1996 with its headquarter in Idekpa. Ohimini LGA has six clans: Aume, Agadagba, Ochobo, Okpiko, Oglewu and Onyagede and is one of the seven LGAs classified as Zone C in Benue State. It is inhibited by the Idoma ethnic group who speak the Central Idoma dialect of the Idoma language. The Idoma language which is an African language is now grouped under the West Benue -Congo along with other languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Edo.

Literature review

Appellations can be said to unique names given to both animate and inanimate things and are used to identify them. To Susuawu (2021), appellations indeed are sources of pleasure and satisfaction because they are sublime, beautiful and useful. They stimulate and soothe people, teach, encourage people for strenuous work and invigorate people's spirit (p.254). Appellations which are a means of identification are specific names or titles which are used by a specific group. These appellations become a sense of identity and pride. For a group of people, it fosters oneness and brotherliness.

Greetings are conventional expressions used for welcoming people, or for expressing pleasure when meeting people. Akindele (2007) defines greetings "as the exchange of expressions, pleasantries or good wishes between two people or a group interacting for the purpose of establishing interpersonal relationships" (p.3). Greetings can be a word, phrase or statement that performs a phatic function asking about a listener's wellbeing or expressing goodwill. Greetings aid in establishing and maintaining social relationships. Generally, it shows the person is cultured and well brought up. According to Holmes (2008), "greeting formulae universally serve an affective function of establishing non-threatening contact and rapport, but their precise content is clearly culture specific" (p. 290). Greetings are, therefore, expressions used by humans which could be verbal, non-verbal or both to initiate and uphold relationships. There is no universality as to what constitutes greetings because

basically, it depends on the members of a society and how they use language.

The manner in which language and society are connected is studied under the field of linguistics called sociolinguistics. Agbedo (2015) states that 'sociolinguistics investigates the relationship between language and society with the goal of a better understanding of the structure of how languages function in communication" (p.267). Language does not exist in a vacuum but is used by members of a society. Sociolinguistics brings to the fore how members of a society use language to communicate in different situations. Giving a broader description on what sociolinguistics is all about, Holmes (2008) says that "sociolinguists study the relationship between language and society- investigating why people speak differently in different social contexts, identify the social functions of language and how language is used to convey meaning" (p.1). This goes to show that to a very large extent, the way and manner the members of a community speak or use their language depends on the norms and traditions of the people. Sociolinguistics, therefore, looks at language (or dialects of a language), its use (national, official, regional, lingua franca, etc.) and the users (age, sex, status, etc.) in various contexts.

Olaosun (2013) investigated on creating new brand identities: a stylo-rhetorical study of car appellations in Nigeria. The paper looked at how discourse practice explicated the grammatical notion of epithet and the concept of branding/rebranding as an aspect of rhetoric and advertising. Twenty-six appellations of some popular cars in Nigeria were selected through some retail car dealer shops in Nigeria, participant observation, questionnaire and introspection. The study employed stylo-rhetoric as the theoretical framework. The rhetorical significance of rebranding was analysed under four headings: epithet of value (such as time- *first lady* -Toyota Corolla 1.4 or 1.6, shape – *pencil* -Toyota Camry 1998/1999 model, power – *muscle* -Toyota Camry 2007 model, etc), rhetoric of power competition (such as *end of discussion* -Honda Accord 2003 model), rhetoric of demeaning humour (such as *pure water* – Honda Accord 1986 model) and rhetoric of endorsement (such as *end of discussion* - Honda Accord 2003 model). From the empirical analysis, 83% agree that car rebranding affected purchase behaviour, while 13% were not influenced by the rebranding. Of the 103 with the later claim, 75 were illiterates/semi-illiterates while 55 were literates. The findings reveal that appellations are a form of material honorifics which capture youth sentiments. Car rebranding significantly affects purchase behaviours and youths in Nigeria are effective in linguistic innovations. While the former study looks at car appellations using stylo-rthetoric framework, the current study examines the appellations of the members of a speech community using the ethnography of communication as the framework.

Odebode (2016) did an ethnographic analysis of round characters' onomastics in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. The objective was to look into onomastic studies on Soyinka so as to shed more light on one of the playwright's works to reduce the problem of interpretation that often arises with the use of artistic ingenuity and literary versatility. The study employed the ethnography of communication. From the findings, the playwright who has to keep his readers/audience informed about pre-independence Oyo and the names bring different backgrounds which in turn stresses the themes of death and scapegoatism. Conversation genre is a major tool which the author uses to show his naming power over his characters. While five names -Iyaloja, Elesin, Pilkings, Amusa and Joseph have conversations as their linguistic event or genre, only Olunde has paradox or proverbs as its genre. It reveals that the author is conversing and informing his readers/audience through naming strategies. This is evident as there is economy of words in naming though more is being said through these few letters. The similarity in the former and current study is in the use of the same theoretical framework. The former is on a novel, the current study focuses on a speech community.

Susuawu (2021) did a thematic analysis of appellations among the Tongu-Ewes of the Volta region of Ghana: the case of Agave traditional area. The objectives of the study were to identify the various themes of appellations among the Ewe and the usefulness of the classification of these appellations into themes. Participant observation (from the Ewe communities especially from the Volta region) and interview were used to elicit the necessary data. The study showed that the environment has significant influence on the life of the Tongu-Ewe as appellations are performed orally through dialogue while others are on the drum. The appellations are based on life situations such as

truth, love, honesty, struggle etc. which are virtues of life. Also, appellations have a strong hold in resolving conflicts in order to ensure peace and stability in the society. The themes can evolve from political, economic, religious life and social life of the people. Furthermore, these themes are important as the audiences are interested in knowing the central idea in the text. Both studies are similar as they are on appellations. The differences lie in the languages under study and the framework used. While the former is on appellations of Tongu-Ewe, the current study is on appellations used by Idomas of Ohimini LGA using the ethnography of communication as the framework for analysis.

Adaramoda, Owoeye, Ayoola and Dada (2021) examined the sociolinguistic application of names and appellations as expressions of desires among the Yorubas: Biodun Ilori and Olukayode Falegun as the case study. The objectives were to investigate the social contexts of names and appellations among the Yoruba people, explain the effects of names and appellations, determine if these names and appellations are used as social tags for personal identity and to examine the importance of names. The study was descriptive and qualitative. Data was obtained through interview with the key informants who are on air personalities. Garfinkel's (1984) ethnomethodological approach was adopted for the study. The study showed that many African names are meaningful though the culture of naming has undergone transition as language is dynamic. A lot of value is placed on the meaning of a name. Also, names reflect the dialects that a person speaks for instance *Faokunla* – Ekiti, *Sobowale* – Egba etc. In naming, the physical structure of a person, the complexion, or even jobs are used as seen in *Adumaadan* which means a very dark person. Names are, therefore, markers of identity and are an important aspect of the Yoruba culture as these names have extensive socio-cultural, political and emotional meanings. The similarity between the former and later study lies in the fact that the focus is on appellations. However, the approach used for analysis and the focus of the researches are different. The former focuses on two on-air personalities using the ethnomethodological approach, the current study focuses on appellations used by members of a speech community in this case Ohimini LGA using ethnography of communication as the framework for analysis.

Rogo – Laurilla (2022) did a qualitative analysis of meetings in a New Zealand and an Australian work environment using Dell Hymes' ethnography of speaking framework. The objectives were to explore the characteristics of meetings in one (1) New Zealand medical corporate team environment and an Australian team environment a not-for-profit sector. The SPEAKING framework by Dell Hymes was adopted for the analysis and the similarities and differences were examined qualitatively. Data analysed were meeting protocols, paper work related to the meetings and verbal interactions. Four themes were identified: degree of formality, adherence to roles and purpose of the meeting, agenda (minutes verses 'notes') and mode of interaction and communication. The study demonstrated that the model SPEAKING has helped to characterize how speech communities work and how members of the group function. This goes to show that the model SPEAKING can be applied to analyse different speech communities. The similarities in both studies are in the framework used and the fact that it is speech communities that are analysed. The difference lies in the different speech communities.

Methodology

This descriptive research aims to systematically describe an existing phenomenon which in this case is the use of appellations. In this survey research, data was collected through participant and non-participant observation, informal interviews and the intuitive knowledge of the researchers who are native speakers. Secondary sources were from books, journals and the internet. Greetings using appellations were observed around formal and informal settings such as weddings, meetings, gathering among friends, etc. Purposive sampling was used to select thirty respondents (fifteen males and fifteen females) who are indigenes and have in-depth knowledge of the language. Informal questions were asked which centered on the use of appellations. The appellations and greeting patterns were noted through note taking and phone recording which was then transcribed.

Theoretical framework

Ethnography of communication was developed by Dell Hymes. Initially known as ethnography of speaking in 1962, it became ethnography of communication as it was broader, embracing features of non-verbal

communication in 1964. This theory concerned itself with the use of language in specific contexts that is how people communicate and the language peculiarities of the people as they interact. This theory which analyses communicative events brings to the fore the unspoken rules that exist as people in a speech community interact and in turn reveals the uniqueness of every culture. Hymes opines that the study of language must concern itself with describing and analyzing the ability of the native speakers to use language for communication in real situations (communicative competence) rather than limiting itself to describing the potential ability of the ideal speaker/listener to produce grammatically correct sentences (linguistic competence). This theory, therefore, describes all the relevant factors that would help in understanding specific utterances in specific situations. One of the models in this theory is SPEAKING where each letter corresponds to a particular communicative event. From the acronym, S- which is situation means the scene or setting of a communicative event, P - which is participants looks at the characteristics and role of the people involved, E- which is ends means the expected goals at the end of the conversation- goals in the mind when talking and the outcome that is actually achieved, A - which is acts looks at content, form and arrangement of communicative events, K - which is key looks at the manner and spirit with which the communicative event is done, I - which is instrumentalities looks at how the communicative event is carried out- written, oral, non-verbal, variety of a language etc., N - which is norms are the ways in which the communicative event is carried out and finally G - which is genre and it looks at different possible speech activities. This theory has been used to analyse various communicative events such as meetings, texts, personal names, etc. In this study, the theory would be used to analyse an aspect of communicative events -greetings using appellations.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Greetings are important and in the Idoma culture, it is usually accompanied by appellations. These appellations called *Ichagba* can be used as greetings in themselves or they can accompany either the statutory greetings. Thirteen appellations were identified, eight are used for females while five are used when greeting the men. The various appellations are first presented then the analysis using the model of SPEAKING.

Table 1. Appellation for Men

S/N	Clan	Appellation
1.	Agadagba	Agbo
2.	Aume	Ude
3.	Ochobo	Agbo
4.	Oglewu	Ọ̀bandè
5.	Onyagede	Idọga / Omonu Ankpa
6.	Okpiko	Ọ̀bandè

Table 2. Appellations for women

S/N	Clan	Appellation
1.	Agadagba	Aagbo
2.	Aume	Ẹ́naji / aagbo
3.	Ochobo	Aagbo
4.	Oglewu	Ogodo / Ouno / aagbo
5.	Onyagede	Ogodo / oigo / ààna
6.	Okpiko	Ọ̀nyẹ̀tẹ/ aagbo

Appellations in Idoma are usually traced to the progenitors of the clan and the appellations of the Ohimini people are no exception. These appellations can be traced the people's ancestors directly showing their paternal lineage. This is in a bid to preserve the paternal lineage of that clan so that the name of the progenitor would not be lost. These appellations are therefore identity markers and a thing of pride and honour to be addressed and greeted using these appellations. The concept of '*ọ̀lẹ ada'* meaning father's house / place but connotatively place of origin is very important in the Idoma culture. Everyone is traced back to their fore fathers even the women. In the Idoma culture, if a woman marries from another clan, she is still greeted using the appellation of her paternal lineage and not where she is married into. It is frowned at when a wrong appellation is used when greeting and, in some cases, when a wrong appellation is used, it means the paternity

of that person is questioned. It means the person does not know where he / she comes from. Because of the importance placed on appellations, it is usually preferred more than the statutory greetings.

Using these appellations shows ancestral connection, common heritage and a bond related by blood. The appellations which can be traced to the names of the progenitors or the first chief in the area (as in the case of male appellations such as Ọ̀bandè) reveals the history of these people as well. For instance, the appellation *aagbo* (for females) can be traced to the father of the clan whose name was *agbo* and came from Apa. This appellation (*aagbo*) is also used in Apa Local Government Area. It shows they share a common heritage. Also, an appellation like *ààna* shows that the progenitor came from Northern Nigeria. This is evident in their way of life (mode of dressing, religion, etc.). Some other appellations show affinity with the Igalas. Basically, these appellations are not just names formed and given; they have a history traced to the progenitors of the clan.

Analysis using the S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G model

S - situation

Generally, people greet in almost every occasion and when they come across people on the way. In formal or informal settings such as social gatherings, visitations, community meetings or meeting someone on the way, it is customary to greet using these appellations to ask about the person's wellbeing or before serious conversations or discussions begin. These appellations are not time bound as they can be used any time of the day to greet. Anyone can initiate the greeting though most times the younger one initiates. In these situations, the appellations can be used alone or with other types of greeting such as statutory greetings. For instance:

1	Speaker: ouno		Listener: aagbo		
	Greetings		Greetings		
2	Speaker: Nma ọchi, ogodo		Listener: Nma ọchi, ọ̀nyẹtẹ		
	Good morning, greetings		Good morning, greetings		
3	Speaker: ọ̀bandẹ, nma ẹnọ		Listener: Agbo, abo lẹ̀?		
	Greetings, good afternoon		Greetings, how is it?		
4	Aa	Ọ̀bandè	Ọ̀bandè		
	You (pl)	Greetings	Greetings		
	Greetings to you all (used when addressing more than one person).				
5	Aa	Bi	ichagba	Ka	a
	You (pl)	Hold	Appellations	Your	the
	I greet you all with your appellations				

In examples (1) and (4) above, the appellations stand as greetings alone, or can be used with statutory greetings (examples 2,3,4). Examples 3 and 4 show that the appellation can come before the statutory greeting or after it. When greeting a group of people, the second person pronoun (plural) '*aa*' is added to the appellation. The repetition of the appellation in example (4) is just for emphasis as 'aa Ọ̀bandè' is also accepted if every male in that situation is from the same clan. In a situation where the speaker does not want to mention the various appellations possibly due to want of time or the speaker does not know the appropriate appellations to use and does not want to offend the listener(s), the sentence in example (5) would suffice.

P - participants

Participants look at the people involved in the use of appellations when greeting. Participants can be looked at as speaker / addresser and listener / addressee. Participants cuts across both genders and it is not restricted to any age or age range. However, as seen from tables (1) and (2) above, there are appellations for males and different appellations for females. An appellation for a male, for instance, cannot then be used to greet a female and vice versa. Roles and role relationships do not matter as a parent

can greet a child using the appellation and vice versa, friends can use appellations as well as business acquittances as far as the right appellation is used.

E - ends

The purpose can be said to be 'phatic'. The use of appellations creates an opening for conversation and a kind of bound between the speaker and listener. In essence, these appellations are used to establish and maintain relationships as people go about their daily activities. It is also a way to impact the culture of the people (as males have different appellations from females, the reasons etc.).

A - act

The act looks at how the communicative event is structured with emphasis on the content, form and order of arrangement. Here, we have the actual words used and how they are used. The communicative event of greeting is achieved using appellations which are structured in such a way that an appellation can stand as a greeting or the appellation can go with statutory greetings either before the statutory greetings or after. This is shown in examples 1-5 above. These greeting forms can be followed with handshakes for both males and females, genuflecting a little for the females, squatting for some men, and hugging. All these depend on the relationship between those in the communicative event. People who are not too close might not perform any of the non-verbal acts or might decide to. This depends on the individual.

K - key

In a communicative event, there is also the manner and tone with which something is said. This is the key. Greetings are usually uttered in a happy, joyful mood especially when used with the appellations. The person addressed feels light hearted, excited and respected. The speaker is also happy as he/she feels the right thing has done – greeting with the right appellation.

I - instrumentalities

Most times, greetings are done when people meet face-to-face. In addition to face-to face conversations, the use of appellations for greetings are also done over the phone. Just like meeting someone face-to-face, when one picks the phone to answer a call, pleasantries are exchanged which usually starts with greeting. The greetings over the phone can also follow examples 1, 2, and 3. In the face-to-face conversation, other non-verbal acts can accompany the greeting. The variety here depicts that of the community that is, the appellations belong to the variety of language spoken by members of the speech community and not another dialect.

N - norm

Norm here refers to the rules or regulations that members of a community has adopted to be guided by. The norm generally in the Idoma culture is that one is greeted with the appropriate appellation which is gender and clan specific. By gender specific, the appellations for males cannot be used for females and vice versa. For instance:

*Speaker: ogodo. Listener (male)

*Speaker: agbo Listener (female)

Furthermore, the appellations for females are based on their paternal lineage even if they are married. In fact, in some situations, it is highly frowned at when someone is not greeted with an appellation and even more with the wrong appellation. It is expected that if the speaker does not know the appellation to use, questions should be asked. This is shown below:

*Speaker: ọ̀nyẹtẹ Listener (a female from Onyagede)

*Speaker: Ọ̀bandè Listener (a male from Agadagba)

G - genre

Genre looks at the type of utterance which in this case is a unique name and manner for greeting. The use of appellations when greeting is an expressive act which shows some form of emotion.

Conclusion

This study has undertaken an analysis of appellations in Ohimini Local Government Area of Benue State from a sociolinguistic point of view. Thirteen appellations were identified and analysed using the SPEAKING model. The findings reveal that greetings are part of the culture of the Idoma people of Ohimini. The way they greet using appellations reflect their culture. These appellations are gender and clan specific, that is, there are different appellations for males and different appellations for females. There are also different appellations for different clans though there are instances of overlapping as some appellations are used by more than one clan. These appellations reflect where an individual comes from. In the case of females, the appellations used reflect their paternal lineage even if they are married. When the right appellation is not used, you hear statements such as 'ng nma abo ng' I am not from there, 'o wẹ ichagba kum ya abo a no' meaning that is not my appellation or 'o wẹ ọ̀lẹ adam ya bọ a no' meaning that is not my father's place.

Using appellations to greet shows respect, love for the culture and knowledge about the rules of the language and the culture. Indeed, the culture of a people can be reflected in the language of a people as shown in the use of appellations. The use of appellations is a practice that is encouraged, highly regarded and gives the people a form of identity. Furthermore, the use of appellations is a way of preserving the culture, and language of the Idoma people of Ohimini LGA.

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