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Pragmatic Analysis of Tones and Tonal Patterns in Igala Language

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Abstract
This study explores the intricate relationship between pragmatics and tonal variations in the Igala language, highlighting how these elements function together to convey meaning and facilitate effective communication. Igala, a tonal language spoken in Nigeria, employs pitch variations to distinguish word meaning and sentence structure. The study delves into the pragmatic aspects of Igala, examining how context, speaker intention, and social factors influence communication. By analyzing various communicative strategies used by Igala speakers, the research underscores the role of tone in modifying pragmatic meaning, such as indicating politeness, emphasis, or questions. Through a comprehensive analysis of spoken Igala, the article identifies specific tonal patterns and their pragmatic implications. It discusses how different tones can alter the semantic content of utterances and how speakers navigate these tonal nuances to achieve desired communicative outcomes. The findings reveal that tonal shifts are not merely phonetic but are deeply intertwined with pragmatic functions, enhancing the richness and flexibility of the language. The study employs qualitative method, including introspection, observation, interviews and phonetic analysis, to provide a robust understanding of the interplay between tone and pragmatics. This research contributes to the broader field of linguistics by offering insights into how tonal languages manage complex communicative tasks and by providing a detailed account of the pragmatic use of tone in Igala. The work concludes by highlighting the findings of the study bearing in mind the impact for linguistic theory and language learning, emphasizing the importance of considering tonal and pragmatic dimensions in language studies.

Keywords: Tone, Tonal patterns, Pragmatics, Phonetic realisation and Speech Act.

Introduction

The Igala language is part of the Yoruboid cluster of the Niger-Congo language family and is primarily spoken by the Igala people, who predominantly reside in the Kogi State of Nigeria. With over two million speakers, Igala holds significant cultural, social, and historical importance in Nigeria, (Omachonu,2004). The language, like many in the Niger-Congo family, is tonal, meaning that the pitch or tone used when pronouncing words affects their meaning. This tonal quality introduces a rich layer of linguistic complexity, as variations in tone can transform the semantic and syntactic meaning of words, phrases, and even sentences.

The linguistic significance of Igala goes beyond its grammatical structure and vocabulary; its tonal system plays an essential role in everyday communication and interpersonal interactions. Tones in Igala do not merely serve phonological functions; they carry important pragmatic and social meanings that facilitate effective communication and relationship management among speakers, (Akin, 2007). Similar to other West African languages, Igala speakers rely on tonal patterns not only for word differentiation but also as a means to express subtle social cues, emotional undertones, and communicative intents. As such, understanding the pragmatic roles of tone in Igala is crucial for appreciating the full communicative repertoire of its speakers.

Statement of the Problem

The existing studies on Igala often emphasize morphology, phonology and syntax, but did not provide detailed descriptions of tonal structures and how tones function pragmatically to convey social cues, manage politeness, express emotions, and facilitate social harmony. This lack of focus on the pragmatic use of tone has created a gap in understanding how Igala speakers use tonal variations as communicative tools to shape and navigate social relationships, assert politeness, and adjust the impact of speech in various contexts. Consequently, there is a need to analyze how tonal patterns contribute to meaning-making in this language. Thus, this study aims to address this gap by providing a detailed analysis of the pragmatic implications of tones and tonal patterns in Igala, shedding light on how tonal modulation serves as a key component of effective and culturally appropriate communication among Igala speakers.

The study has several objectives, aimed at understanding and analyzing the pragmatic functions of tone in Igala. These objectives include: identifying and analyzing tonal variations in Igala, examining how tonal variations influence communication strategies and understanding the role of tonal patterns in social interactions.

In order to achieve the objectives outlined above, the study seeks to answer the following research questions: How do tonal patterns affect meaning in Igala? What are the pragmatic roles of tone in Igala language? How do speakers use tonal variations to convey politeness, emphasis, or other communicative intentions? These research questions guide the investigation, providing a framework for exploring the unique role of tone in Igala pragmatics and helping to unravel the ways tonal modulation enhances communicative effectiveness in the language.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics concerned with the study of language in use and how context influences the interpretation of meaning. It goes beyond the literal meanings of words and examines how speakers use language to convey intentions, achieve goals, and navigate social interactions. Adeyemi, (2009) opines that pragmatics is "the study of how

context influence the interpretation of meaning in communication". Adeyemi emphasizes the importance of understanding how speakers use language in social interactions to convey intended meanings beyond the literal content of their utterances. This involves considering factors such as the speaker's intention, the listener's interpretation, and the situational context in which communication occurs. Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader) (Yule, 1966). This definition focuses on the relationships between linguistic signs and their users, examining how people comprehend and produce communicative acts in real-life situations. This includes analyzing speech acts, implicature, presupposition, deixis, and conversational maxims. Yule's definition encompasses the various ways in which context, speaker intention, and social norms shape the way language is used and understood in communication Crystal (2008), outlined that pragmatics is perceives as the branch of linguistics concerned with the study of language in use and the contextual factors that influence the interpretation of meaning. Crystal highlights that pragmatics goes beyond the analysis of linguistic structure to examine how language is used in specific situations to achieve communicative goals. This includes investigating the effects of context, speaker intentions, presuppositions, and implicatures on the interpretation of utterances. In essence, pragmatics seeks to understand how language users navigate social and cultural conventions to effectively communicate and interpret meaning in real-world interactions, (Okpanachi, 2021).

Drawing from the opinions of different scholars and within the context of this study, pragmatics is an aspect of linguistics that studies how context influences the interpretation of meaning in communication. Unlike semantics, which is concerned with the literal meaning of words and sentences, pragmatics examines how language is used in real-life situations, where meaning is often shaped by social and cultural factors.

Tones

Tone, in linguistic terms, refers to the use of pitch to distinguish meaning in words and sentences. In tonal languages, such as those found across Africa and Asia, tone is phonemic, meaning that differences in pitch can change the meaning of a word entirely. Thus, tonal variation in these languages is fundamental to correct interpretation, affecting both the lexical and grammatical meaning, (Ojo, 2007). In tonal languages, tone can also carry pragmatic significance, influencing how messages are delivered and perceived. For example, tonal shifts can signal politeness, assertiveness, or urgency, allowing speakers to modulate the social impact of their words. Therefore, studying tone from a pragmatic perspective is particularly relevant in tonal languages, as it can reveal subtle layers of meaning that go beyond lexical distinctions. Yuka and Adewale, (2012), defined Tone as "a

phonological feature that involves the use of pitch to distinguish meaning at the word level". They emphasize that tone in Igala is not merely a matter of intonation or pitch variation for expressive purposes, but a fundamental aspect of the language's phonological system that must be understood and correctly applied to ensure accurate communication. Tone refers to variations in pitch within a spoken utterance that can alter the meaning of words or phrases. While all languages use pitch to some extent, tonal languages, such as Igala, utilize pitch variations systematically to distinguish between words or grammatical elements, (Alan, 1997).

Theoretical Framework

For the study, a suitable theoretical framework is Speech Act Theory combined with insights from Pragmatics of Tone. This framework effectively bridges the connection between tone and communicative intent, highlighting how Igala speakers use tonal patterns to convey pragmatic meaning within various communicative contexts, (Dunmade, 2022). The Speech Act Theory, pioneered by philosophers J.L. Austin in 1962 and later expanded upon by J.R. Searle in 1969, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how language is used to perform actions beyond simply conveying information. In the context of the study of pragmatics and tones in the Igala language, Speech Act Theory provides valuable insights into how utterances are employed to achieve communicative goals and how tonal patterns contribute to the realization of pragmatic intentions.

In summary, Speech Act Theory offers a robust analytical framework for studying the interplay between pragmatics and tones in the Igala language. By examining the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions of utterances, researchers can uncover the intricate ways in which tonal patterns facilitate the performance of speech acts and shape communication within the Igala community,(Elizabeth,2021).

Empirical Studies

Abutu, (2020) in her "Communicative Strategies in Igala: A Pragmatic Analysis" explores the communicative strategies employed by Igala speakers, with a particular focus on how these strategies are influenced by tonal patterns. The study reveals that Igala speakers use a range of communicative strategies, such as code-switching, indirectness, and politeness strategies, which are often marked by specific tonal patterns. For example, rising tones are frequently used to soften requests or commands, making them more polite. Adejoh, (2019) has a study on "Tonal Patterns and Pragmatic Meaning in Igala: Insights from Conversational Analysis", aims to investigate how tonal patterns contribute to the pragmatic meaning of utterances in Igala conversational interactions. Using conversational analysis, this study examines recordings of natural Igala conversations. The focus is on identifying recurring tonal patterns and their pragmatic functions. Ejima, (2022) works on "Pragmatics of Tone in Igala: A Sociolinguistic Perspective" focuses on the sociolinguistic aspects of tonal usage in Igala, examining how

social factors influence tonal variation and pragmatic interpretation. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining sociolinguistic surveys with acoustic analysis of speech data from different social groups within the Igala-speaking community. The research found that social factors such as age, gender, and social status significantly influence tonal usage and interpretation in Igala. For example, younger speakers tend to use more innovative tonal patterns, while older speakers adhere to traditional patterns. Gender differences were also observed, with women using more varied tones in politeness strategies.

The review on the Igala language has provided foundational insights into its phonology, tone and syntax, yet there is limited work on its detailed analysis of pragmatic and tone in Igala language. This research seeks to address these gaps by conducting a pragmatic analysis of tones and tonal patterns in Igala. By examining how tones function in real conversational contexts, this study aims to uncover the implicit meanings conveyed through tone and how Igala speakers use tonal variation to achieve communicative goals. In doing so, this research will contribute to the broader field of pragmatics in African languages, highlighting the intricate ways that tonal modulation shapes social interaction and meaning-making in Igala-speaking communities

Methodology/Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing a pragmatic approach to analyze the use of tones and tonal patterns in the Igala language. By focusing on the functions of language in communication, this design aims to uncover how tone conveys meaning and influences interpretation in various contexts. The research relies on naturalistic data, combining observational and elicitation techniques to gather authentic Igala conversation and narrative.

The study is grounded in Speech Acts Theory as developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). This theory posits that language is not merely descriptive but performative, with utterances carrying out actions (such as requesting, commanding, or questioning) in addition to conveying information. The Speech Acts framework helps to analyze how tonal variations in Igala modify the illocutionary force (intended communicative act) of utterances, including directives, commissives, expressives, declarations, and assertives.

Data Collection

Participants for the study include fluent Igala speakers-specifically adults aged 20–60, from various regions within the Igala-speaking areas. A purposive sampling method is used to select participants, ensuring they are native speakers with minimal influence from other languages. Data are gathered through two primary sources: naturalistic observation and semi-structured interviews and elicitation tasks. All interactions are recorded using high-quality audio and, where possible, video recording devices. The recordings focus on the tonal

variations in spoken Igala, allowing for detailed phonetic and phonological analysis of tonal patterns.

Data Analysis

Data are transcribed with specific attention to tone markings. Tonal patterns are annotated to capture the high, low, rising, and falling tones characteristic of Igala. The analysis involved tone patterns in Igala language, classifications of tones and their phonetic realisation, pragmatic strategies in Igala communication, patterns and variations in Igala tone usage for pragmatic purposes, pragmatic analysis using Speech Acts Theory. The analysis examines how tonal variations affect the interpretation of speech acts, particularly focusing on: directives, expressives, and declarations. The study further explores how tonal patterns function pragmatically within Igala discourse, thus:

Tonal Patterns in Igala Language

The tonal system in Igala language is a defining feature that shapes its phonological structure and contributes to the richness of its linguistic expression. The Igala language, like many other African languages, is tonal, meaning that differences in pitch alter the meaning of words or phrases. In Igala, tones play a fundamental role in distinguishing lexical meanings, marking grammatical distinctions, and conveying nuances of emotion and emphasis. There are two major determiners in terms of tone system in the language which are:

Tonal Inventory: The tonal system in Igala typically comprises three primary tonal levels: high, mid, and low tones. Each syllable in Igala is associated with one of these tonal levels, leading to distinctive tonal patterns that differentiate between words and convey grammatical information.

Tone Sandhi: Igala exhibits complex tone sandhi phenomena, where the tonal realization of a syllable is influenced by its surrounding phonological context. Tone sandhi rules govern the alteration of tones at morpheme boundaries, resulting in systematic tonal changes in connected speech.

Classification of Tones and Their Phonetic Realisation in Igala

There are five tones in Igala: extra high, high, mid-high, mid, and low.

1. The high tone is represented with an acute accent ⟨◌́⟩.

2. The mid tone is unmarked ⟨◌⟩.

3. The mid-high tone, which is an infrequent tone, is marked with a macron ⟨◌̄⟩.

4. The low tone is marked with a ⟨◌̀⟩.

5. The extra-high tone, which is usually found in negative statements, is marked with a dot ⟨◌̣⟩.

Patterns and variations in IgalaTone usage for pragmatic purposes

The phonetic realisation of the Igala tones is possible through homograph.

For instance, the word spelt, "agba", depending on the tones used to pronounce it, may have four different meanings, namely:

i. agba (casual greeting); pronounced with static, sustained Mid or Neutral tone – / a gba/

ii. àgbá (hand-cuffs); pronounced with Low-High tone combination / à ‘gbá /

iii. àgbà (chin); pronounced with Low tone replicated – / à gbà /

iv. ágbá (Balsam tree); pronounced with the High tone duplicated – / á gbá /

The bi-syllabic noun spelt, "iga", can generate three other words pronounced differently each having its distinct meaning as follows:

i. ìga (Weaver bird); pronounced with Low-Mid tones – / ì ‘ga / – and a secondary-primary stress pattern.

ii. ìgà (net); pronounced with the Low tone duplicated – / ì gà / – and a secondary-secondary stress pattern.

iii. ìgá (estate); pronounced with the Low-High tone combination – / ì ‘gá / – and a secondary-primary stress pattern.

In summary, pragmatics and tones are essential linguistic elements that contribute to the richness and complexity of human communication. Pragmatics enables speakers to convey meaning beyond the literal interpretation of words, while tones provide a nuanced system for distinguishing lexical and grammatical distinctions within tonal languages like Igala. Together, these elements shape the dynamics of language use and facilitate effective communication across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

Pragmatic Strategies in Igala Communication

In Igala communication, speakers employ both direct and indirect speech acts to convey their intentions and achieve communicative goals. Direct speech acts involve explicit linguistic expressions that directly correspond to the speaker's intended meaning, while indirect speech acts rely on contextual cues, shared knowledge, and cultural norms to convey meaning indirectly.

Direct Speech Acts in Igala

In direct speech acts, the speaker's intended meaning is overtly expressed through the linguistic form of the utterance. For example, a direct request in Igala might be expressed using imperative verbs or direct interrogatives, where the illocutionary force of the utterance is clear and unambiguous. Direct speech acts are straightforward expressions where the speaker's intention matches the grammatical form of the utterance. Here are precise examples illustrating different types of direct speech acts:

1. Direct Requests in Igala

Imperative: example, "fona re", this means "Close the door" in Igala, directly instructing the listener to perform the action.

Direct Interrogative: Example, "Ẹ́ ronaa?", this means "Can you close the door?" directly asking the listener to perform the action with a clear intent.

2. Direct Statements in Igala-Declarative: "Ọ́mialo." this means "It is raining" directly stating the fact.

3. Direct Questions in Igala-Interrogative: "ikogbo de?" This means "What time is it?" directly asking of the time.

In these examples, the form of the utterance (imperative, interrogative, or declarative) directly matches the speaker's intention, making the illocutionary force clear and unambiguous

Indirect Speech Acts

Indirect speech acts in Igala involve the use of linguistic strategies that imply the intended meaning indirectly, often relying on politeness strategies or conversational implicature. For instance, instead of directly commanding someone to do something, an Igala speaker might employ mitigating language or indirect requests to convey the same intention more politely or less confrontational. Indirect speech acts involve the use of language in a way where the speaker's intended meaning is not explicitly stated by the linguistic form of the utterance. Instead, the intended meaning is inferred from the context, tone, or additional cultural or conversational cues. Some precise examples illustrating different types of indirect speech acts in Igala are:

Indirect Requests in Igala

i. Statement: Example, "afu de mi." This means "It is cold in here." An Igala speaker might use this statement to indirectly request that someone close the door or window without directly asking them to do so.
ii. Question: Example, "Ẹ́ ma che n koonacheree?" This means, "Do you know if the door is closed?" This question might be used as an indirect way to prompt someone to check and possibly close the door.

Indirect Politeness Strategies in Igala

Statement: "unejukiediateko mi." This means "I was hoping you could assist me," a polite indirect request for help. In these examples, the speaker's intended meaning is implied rather than directly stated, relying on the listener's ability to infer the true intent from the context or the nature of the utterance. This can make communication more polite, less direct, or more nuanced, depending on the situation.

Speech Acts and Pragmatic Functions in Igala Discourse

Speech acts in Igala discourse serve various pragmatic functions, ranging from asserting propositions to expressing emotions or negotiating social relationships. The choice of speech act and its pragmatic function depend on contextual factors such as the speaker's intentions, the relationship between interlocutors,

and the situational context of the communication. It covers the following areas:

Expressive Speech Acts

Igala speakers use expressive speech acts to convey emotions e.g*kai*, *ha! (*for sudden occurrences *),* attitudes, or personal opinions e.g, *e chenyo* (It is good). Expressive utterances may include exclamations, interjections, or emotive language that reflects the speaker's affective state. Expressive speech acts allow speakers to express empathy, solidarity, or emotional support towards others in the discourse.

Directive Speech Acts

Directive speech acts involve the speaker's attempt to influence the behavior or actions of the listener. Directives in Igala discourse may include requests e.g*agba du ugba mi* (please give me plate), commands e.g*dufukwemi*(leave here), invitations e.g*liabu mi gwuojoochunaoma mi* (invitation for a naming ceremony), or suggestions e.g*ewe gbona (you have to wait till tomorrow)* aimed at eliciting a specific response from the listener. The pragmatic function of directive speech acts is to prompt the listener to perform a particular action or to comply with the speaker's wishes.

Assertive Speech Acts

Assertive speech acts involve the speaker's assertion of propositions or statements about the world. Igala speakers use assertive utterances to convey factual information, make claims, or express beliefs. The pragmatic function of assertive speech acts is to inform, persuade, or convey information to the listener, contributing to the exchange of knowledge and ideas in the discourse. Examples of Igala assertive statements are: *Unaalo to omo*(I will go there), *una ale* (I will go)*, Unaaję (*I will eat) etc.

In summary, pragmatic strategies in Igala communication encompass a range of linguistic behaviours and speech acts aimed at achieving g effective communication while adhering to cultural norms of politeness and social interaction. Understanding the pragmatic functions of speech acts in Igala discourse is essential for interpreting the intended meaning of utterances and navigating social interactions within the Igala community.

Findings

The exploration of the interplay between pragmatics and tones in the Igala language reveals several key findings:

Firstly, the study finds out that pragmatic contexts significantly influence tone choice in Igala. The tone used in a word or phrase can change based on the communicative context, such as in questions, commands, or statements.Secondly, emotional states, politeness, and speaker attitudes are conveyed through specific tonal patterns, demonstrating the integral role of tone in expressing pragmatic nuance.Moreover, listeners rely heavily on tonal cues to make pragmatic inferences and understand conversational implicature. Tones

help convey implied meanings that are not explicitly stated.Additionally, the interpretation of tones is highly context-dependent, requiring listeners to consider both the tonal pattern and the situational context to accurately infer meaning. Again**,** specific communicative strategies, such as emphasis, politeness, sarcasm, and emotional expression, are realized through distinct tonal patterns in Igala discourse.Lastly, the use of rising tones for questions, falling tones for statements, level tones for politeness, and varied tones for emotional expression illustrates the systematic nature of tone usage in the language.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the pragmatic functions of tones and tonal patterns in the Igala language, offering insights into how tone operates as a vital communicative tool beyond its phonological role. The findings reveal that tone in Igala is instrumental in conveying meaning, expressing emotions, managing conversation, and signaling social contexts. Tones and tonal patterns are not merely phonetic markers; they are integral to the language's pragmatic and semantic framework, enabling speakers to encode subtle distinctions and navigate varied social interactions. The study contributes to a broader understanding of tonal languages by emphasizing the need to analyze tones not only in phonological but also in pragmatic terms, as this approach yields a more comprehensive view of language use. For Igala and other tonal languages, such an approach highlights the complexity of communication where tone plays a dual role, shaping both lexical meaning and the subtleties of interpersonal dynamics. Future research could expand upon these findings by exploring tonal pragmatics in different Igala dialects and comparing Igala tonal pragmatics to those in other languages, thereby deepening the understanding of tone as a universal communicative strategy.

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