

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF MARKET COMMUNICATION IN KATSINA METROPOLIS

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Abstract

This paper examines Market Communication in Katsina Metropolis. It analyses two different buyer-seller interactions from two different shops in Katsina city, adopting Speech Act Theory. The data were collected through phone recording of the interactions between buyers and sellers at two shops in Katsina city. The findings of the study reveal that Expressives are mainly used at the beginning and end of the market exchanges to establish politeness, build rapport and maintain social relations; Directives appear mostly in the middle stages of the interaction where the buyer asks questions, and they show how language is used to move the transaction forward. Also, Assertives present factual information such as prices or availability of the products, defining the negotiation space. In addition; at the end of the market interactions, Commissives are employed when either party (Seller or buyer) signals commitment to buying, selling, or future patronage. The study concludes that Speech Act Theory provides an effective framework for explaining how ordinary market interactions or communication are organised and interpreted in real-life contexts.

Keywords: Language, Pragmatics, Context and Market Communication

Introduction

Wherever human beings exist, language inevitably exists for communication, as most everyday human activities are bound to language. Scholars have long seen language as a social phenomenon whose primary function extends beyond the transmission of information. John Langshaw Austin points to the social and action-

oriented nature of language, arguing that “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (6). Similarly, Michael Kirkwood Halliday maintains that “language is as it is because of the functions it has evolved to serve in people’s lives” (13). These positions establish that language is not an abstract system detached from use but a dynamic medium through which individuals perform social actions. Consequently, modern linguistic inquiries prioritise language use, context, and function rather than focusing solely on formal structure.

The limitations of structural approaches to language gave rise to pragmatic inquiry, which explains how meaning is generated in context. Charles Morris identifies pragmatics as the branch of semiotics concerned with “the relation of signs to interpreters” (6), leading to the shift of attention from form to use. This view is further developed by Stephen Levinson, who defines pragmatics as the study of “those relations between language and context that are grammaticalised, or encoded in the structure of a language” (9). Pragmatics, therefore, addresses aspects of meaning that cannot be captured by semantics alone. One of its most influential contributions is Austin’s Speech Act Theory, which reconceptualises utterances as actions. Austin’s distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts shows how speaking itself constitutes social action, such as requesting, promising, warning, or commanding.

Building on Austin’s work, John Searle develops Speech Act Theory by emphasising that “speaking a language is engaging in a rule-governed form of behaviour” (16). He argues that “the meaning of an utterance is not exhausted by the meaning of the sentence uttered” (18). He introduced five categories of speech acts: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. This refinement highlights the role of shared social conventions in recognising communicative acts. Similarly, Dell Hymes stresses the importance of context by asserting that “there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless” noting that “communicative competence involves knowing when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, and in what manner” (13). These views stress that

pragmatic analysis must account for the social conditions under which speech acts are produced and interpreted.

Speech Act Theory therefore provides a robust framework for analysing goal-directed interaction, particularly transactional discourse. Searle notes that many illocutionary acts are designed to “get other people to do things” or to commit speakers to future actions (18). Eggins and Slade observe that transactional conversations are goal-oriented and centred on achieving specific outcomes rather than maintaining social relationships (19). In real-life market situations, sellers use language to influence buyers, while buyers deploy bargaining strategies to negotiate. However, there is a noticeable gap in empirical studies that examine face-to-face buyer-seller interactions using naturally occurring data, particularly within Nigeria. Many existing studies rely on elicited or non-recorded data, limiting insight into spontaneous market discourse. Given the context-dependent nature of pragmatic meaning, this study therefore applies Speech Act Theory to selected buyer-seller interactions in Katsina Metropolis to reveal how actions are performed, interpreted, and negotiated through the use of language.

In the contemporary world of technology, researchers pay limited attention to the application of the Speech Act Theory to face-to-face interactions, as many pragmatic studies focus on social media interactions, political speeches, legal documents, emails neglecting buyer-seller conversations in face-to-face interactions. To fill this lacuna, therefore, this study aims to carry out a pragmatic investigation on selected buyer-seller interactions within Katsina Metropolis in order to reveal how language functions as actions in transactional discourse.

The study sets out to:

- a. identify the various speech acts employed by buyers and sellers in selected face-to-face market interactions in Katsina Metropolis;
- b. examine how illocutionary acts are realised in the buyer-seller interactions;
- c. analyse the perlocutionary acts in the buyer-seller interactions

Literature Review

Language

Language has been defined in various ways by different scholars, each emphasising different aspects of its nature. Edward Sapir defines language as “a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols” (8). Similarly, Henry George Widdowson describes language as “a system of arbitrary vocal symbols which permit all people in a given culture, or other people who have learned the system of that culture, to communicate or to interact” (20). Ayo Osisanwo defines language as “the human vocal noise or the arbitrary representation of the noise used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for the purpose of communication” (1). Also, Edward Hall, in his *Essay on Language*, defines language as “the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols” (158). Comparing these definitions, it is clear that all the above scholars agree on language being a system of symbols used for communication. However, they differ in how they approach it. Sapir focuses on language as a human, learned tool, while Widdowson and Hall highlight its social function and its use in cultural contexts. Osisanwo adds a more physical element, drawing attention to the vocal aspect of language. Despite these differences, all agree that language is used to express ideas, emotions, and desires, making it a powerful tool for social interaction and communication, which pragmatics tends to examine.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics has been defined in various ways, each emphasizing different aspects of its study. Jacob Mey defines pragmatics as the study of the conditions under which language is used in social contexts (42). Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short describe it as meaning derived from how utterances are used rather than from their formal properties (290). Similarly, Stephen Levinson links pragmatics to the relationship between language and context (9). George Yule foregrounds intended

speaker meaning and inferred interpretation (127). David Crystal further explains pragmatics as the study of language from the users' perspective, focusing on choice, constraint, and effect in interaction (101). Van Dijk views pragmatics as concerned with achieving a successful outcome for an utterance (189). These definitions share a common focus on the context and social function of language, all agreeing that pragmatics examines how language is used in interaction and the meaning derived from that use. However, they differ in their emphasis. Mey emphasizes the conditions under which language is used in social contexts, while Leech and Short focus on meaning derived from how utterances are used rather than their formal structure. Levinson highlights the relationship between language and context, whereas Yule centers on the speaker's intention and how listeners infer meaning. Crystal focuses on the user's perspective, particularly the choices and constraints in interaction, and van Dijk underscores the importance of achieving a successful outcome in communication, making pragmatics goal-oriented. Despite these differences, all definitions agree that pragmatics is concerned with the practical use of language in real-world communication.

Context

Scholars in pragmatics have consistently emphasised the central role of context in meaning interpretation. Adegbiya identifies physical, socio-cultural, linguistic, and psychological contexts as key factors influencing how utterances are understood, arguing that meaning depends on the situation, time, environment, and mental states of participants (192). Similarly, van Dijk defines context as the immediate "here and now" of interaction, involving shared time, place, and cognitive assumptions of speaker and hearer (26). Labov further maintains that language use cannot be separated from its social context, since meaning emerges from social roles, relationships, and cultural norms rather than from linguistic forms alone (297). This view is reinforced by Siebert, who notes that word meanings are not fixed but change with context, showing that interpretation varies according to

use and communicative purpose (297). Dell Hymes also provides a systematic account of context through his SPEAKING model, which integrates setting, participants, goals, norms, and genre into the analysis of communicative events, demonstrating that meaning depends on shared cultural knowledge. Likewise, Fillmore and Firth stress that interpretation is shaped by situational variables such as speaker identity, purpose, time, and social action, with meaning arising from interaction rather than isolated utterances. All these scholars agree that context is essential for meaning interpretation, with meaning varying based on situational factors. However, they differ in focus: Adegbija emphasises multiple contexts, while van Dijk and Labov emphasise the immediate social context. Siebert and Fillmore & Firth stress the fluidity of meaning depending on context, while Hymes offers a structured model, considering various components of communication. Even with all the differences in views, all agree that meaning emerges from interaction within a shared context, not from isolated linguistic forms. And this is the concern of pragmatics.

Market Communication

Scholars generally view business communication as a strategic and goal-oriented activity essential to organisational effectiveness. Gareth Morgan argues that effective managers must be able to “read” situations they seek to organise or manage, suggesting that market communication involves interpretation of organisational contexts, power relations, and human behaviour rather than mere message exchange (3). This view is supported by Fee-Alexandra Haase, who defines market communication as the use of specific means and tools for performing market activities, emphasising its functional and instrumental nature (59). Meredith further broadens this perspective by linking organisational success to effective communication among internal and external stakeholders such as employees, customers, and the public (88). Similarly, Laster Nancy and Russ Thomas describe communication as the lifeline of organisations, stressing its role in influencing action and driving change (249). All the definitions agree

that market communication is strategic and goal-oriented in the society, essential for organisational success. They also highlight its role in facilitating relationships, influencing actions, and achieving good results. However, they differ in focus: Morgan emphasises understanding organisational contexts, power relations, and human behavior. Haase focuses on the tools and methods used for market activities. Meredith connects communication to success through interaction with both internal and external stakeholders. Laster and Russ stress its importance as the "lifeline" of organisations that influence change. While all view market communication as crucial, they approach it from different angles Morgan looks at interpretation, Haase at tools, Meredith at stakeholders, and Laster & Russ at influence and outcomes of market communication.

Empirical Studies

Several studies have examined advertising and market communication from a pragmatic perspective. Abimbola Olabode Thomas analysed Nigerian newspaper advertisements using Pragmatic Act Theory and found that advertisers employ direct and indirect acts such as asserting and persuading, while Sri Haryani, drawing on Speech Act Theory and Grice's Cooperative Principles, showed that English advertisements rely on both explicit and implicit illocutionary acts. Similarly, Rosika Sapitri's semio-pragmatic study of Toyota Land Cruiser printed advertisements combined Charles Sanders Peirce's Semiotic Theory and George Yule's Pragmatic framework to demonstrate how visual signs (icons, indexes, and symbols) and speech acts convey persuasive meanings. Pam Jonah and Blessing Dakat also demonstrated, through H. P. Grice's Conversational Implicature, that modern advertising frequently depends on implied meanings to strategically influence consumers. Likewise, Nirmalasari P. analysed Sprite television advertisements using John Searle's classification of illocutionary acts and revealed the dominance of representative and directive acts aimed at shaping viewers' perceptions and actions.

These studies are similar to the present research because they are grounded in pragmatic approach and focus on market-related discourses. However, they differ in scope, data, and context, as they primarily examined printed or broadcast advertisements and scripted texts. In contrast, the present study investigates spoken buyer-seller interactions at the Katsina Central Market, applying Austin and Searl's Speech Act Theory to uncover the hidden meanings in the conversations.

Theoretical Framework

This study applies J.L. Austin and John Searl's Speech Act Theories which explain how language functions as action. The main idea of the Speech Act Theory is that whenever people speak, they are not only producing sentences but also performing actions with those sentences. This idea was first introduced by John Langshaw Austin in his popular work *How to Do Things with Words*. Austin argues that "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action" (6). This is to say that speaking itself is an act of doing something. He later strengthens this idea by saying "to say something is to do something" (94). So, language performs roles such as warning, accusing, greeting, promising, ordering, or declaring, actions that people carry out through words.

Austin identifies three layers of action. The first one is the locutionary act which refers to the actual words spoken; it is the literal sentence and its basic meaning. The illocutionary act refers to the intention behind the utterance. This is the action performed in saying the words. The perlocutionary act refers to the effect the utterance has on the hearer. When a parent says "Where is my cane?" the literal question is the locution; the intended warning is the illocution; and the child's quick obedience is the perlocution. This example shows clearly that meaning is not only in the grammar of the sentence but also in the intention and the effect that lies in it. This idea is central to the present study because online comments often carry hidden or implied intentions that are not in the surface of the words.

Speech Act Theory was later developed by John Searle. He surmises that “talking is performing acts according to rules” (22). This means that language behaves like a rule-governed system where certain utterances perform specific actions. Searle also submits that “speech acts... are the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication” (16). That is, communication is built from the actions people perform when they speak or write. On this note, Searle identifies five major illocutionary act types, and each one serves a particular function:

- i. assertive: it is used to express beliefs, opinions, or facts. When someone says something that commits them to a belief about the world, they are performing an assertive act.
- ii. directive: it is used to get someone else to do something. These include commands, requests, suggestions, or warnings.
- iii. commissive: it is used to commit the speaker to a future action, such as promising, pledging, or vowing.
- iv. expressive: it is used to express psychological or emotional states such as joy, anger, disappointment, praise, regret, or gratitude.
- v. declarative: it is used to change a situation simply by being uttered. These acts take effect once the words are spoken.

Generally, buyer-seller interactions which are the concern of this study are not mere words; they are performing acts. Therefore, this study applies Austin Speech Act Theory based on three levels: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary and Searl's classifications of illocutionary acts: Assertive, Directive, Commissive, Expressive and Declarative. The theories are suitable for this study because they are simple and clear for identifying different functions of language found in buyer-seller interactions.

Methodology

For the data, thirty-four utterances (34) from the conversations between two buyers and two sellers at two shops, Central Market area in Katsins city, were purposively selected. The two shops were selected

because they are located at the Katsina Central Market and there are always daily business transactions there. While recording the conversations the buyer's and seller's body language was greatly observed as this observation (context) is one the important tool in interpreting utterances in pragmatics conversations were made in Hausa language, recorded with a smartphone, transcribed, and translated into English on a notetebok. The translated form was the version presented under data presentation for analysis. This study employed qualitative research design to enable an in-depth assessment of the text. In addition, the study applied Austin' and Searl's Speech Act theories for a thorough analysis of the data.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Datum 1 shop 1

S/N	Locutionary Act	Illocutionary Act	Anticipated Perlocutionary Act
1	Peace be upon you (Buyer)	Expressive	It prompts reciprocal greeting and establishes a peaceful interactional atmosphere from the buyer
2	Peace be upon you too (Seller)	Expressive	It reinforces mutual respect and initiates good relationship
3	You are welcome! (Seller repeated)	Expressive	It makes the buyer feel accepted and valued
4	Thank you (Buyer)	Expressive	It strengthens interpersonal harmony before transaction
5	What do you want Malam? (Seller)	Directive	It drives the buyer into the transactional stage
6	I want to buy Viva (seller)	Directive	It makes the seller know the precise product and leads him to state the price
7	N10500 per pack. (Seller)	Expressive	It makes the buyer to know whether he can afford the price or negotiate
8	I am going to buy 10 packs! (Buyer)	Commissive	It indirectly tells the seller that he should reduce the price since he is buying in large quantity

9	This is the last price I can offer to you please! (Seller)	Assertive	It attempts to stop the buyer from bargaining
10	I need Onga also (Buyer)	Expressive	It tells the seller that he needs to reduce the price since he is buying many goods
11	N13, 600 per pack (Seller)	Expressive	It indirectly tells the buyer that buying in large quantity does not reduce the price of any good
12	Uhm! Uhm! Uhm! I heard the price but we have been together for a very long period of time (Buyer)	Expressive	It tells the seller that the price is too high and he needs to consider the fact that he is a regular customer
13	I know and I did the best for you please (Seller)	Assertive	It tells the buyer that the price cannot be reduced for any factor and he is the one to decide to buy or leave the goods
14	Okay! (With a smile) (Buyer)	Commissive	It tells the buyer that he accepts to buy the goods
15	Thank you very much. I appreciate your patronage (Seller)	Expressive	It encourages continued business relationship
16	Till I come back again next time (Buyer)	Commissive	It assures the seller that the buyer is satisfied and happy with what he purchased and he expects his next patronage
17	See you later		It tells the buyer to patronise him next time and he will still accommodate him

The analysis clearly explains each utterance by separating what is locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. Locutionary act is the act of producing sounds or words that form a sentence. In other words, it's the actual form of the speech, the words and grammar

used to express something. The illocutionary act refers to what the speaker is doing with their utterance. This refers to the effect that the utterance has on the listener or hearer. It's the resulting effect or response from the listener after hearing the utterance. This is more about the reaction the speech generates. Therefore, all the utterances produced by speakers are treated as locutionary acts; what the speakers do with their utterances are treated as illocutionary acts such as Expressives, Directives, Assertive and Commissives in accordance with how Searle classified them. In the data, greetings and thanks are properly treated as Expressives because they express appreciations. So the Expressives show social attitude and help build good rapport before the transaction begins. Requests and questions that move the interaction forward are identified as Directives, since they guide the next action in the exchange.

Price statements and other factual contributions are appropriately analysed as Assertives, because they provide information and present the speaker's view of reality. Utterances showing agreement to buy or intention to return are treated as Commissives, which is accurate since they commit the speaker to future action. By assigning these categories carefully, the analysis shows how each line of the conversation performs a specific communicative function, not just conveying words.

The perlocutionary acts identified above show how each utterance influences the listener and the direction of the negotiation. The listener's body language was observed critically to deduce the effects of the utterances produced by the speaker on him. Some utterances open the interaction, some strengthen the relationship, others limit bargaining, and the final ones signal closure on the bargaining and continued patronage. Because the analysis links speech act categories to the actual progress of the transaction, it demonstrates how meaning is created through interaction, and not just through sentences.

Datum 2 Shop 2

S/N	Locutionary Act	Illocutionary Act	Anticipated Perlocutionary Act
1	Good day (Buyer)	Expressive	It makes the seller feel respected and happy
2	You are welcome (Seller)	Expressive	It makes the buyer feel welcomed
3	I need some chickens (Buyer)	Directive	It prompts seller's response about availability
4	I need small ones (Buyer)	Directive	It directs the seller to check for the specific stock
5	I am sorry, I don't have the small ones	Expressive	It persuades the buyer to ask for another option
6	How much are the big ones	Directive	It shows the seller that the buyer is ready to know the price
7	N6,000 (Seller)	Assertive	It sets negotiation baseline
8	Would you reduce? (buyer)	Directive	It calls for negotiation
9	Let us see if we can find a solution (Seller)	Directive	It signals willingness to reduce the price
10	I will give you for N5,500 (Seller)	Commissive	It encourages acceptance with the discount
11	I need a discount from you (Buyer)	Directive	It persuades seller for further reduction
12	I can offer more discount if you are going to buy 3 pieces and above (Seller)	Commissive	It encourages bulk purchase
13	I appreciate your flexibility (Buyer)	Expressive	It encourages goodwill and further concession
14	I will sell for 5,300 each (Seller)	Commissive	It encourages buyer's consent that it is an opportunity
15	Okay (Buyer)	Expressive	It tells the seller that the buyer is satisfied with the price
16	Thank you for your patronage (Seller)	Expressive	It encourages buyer in further patronage
17	See you later (Buyer)	Commissive	It makes the seller expect further patronage

The second table also shows how the interaction develops from greeting to bargaining and finally to agreement on price and closure of the interaction. The early utterances such as greetings and welcoming are treated as Expressives because they express politeness and prepare the ground for a smooth transaction. Requests like asking for chickens or asking the price function Directives, since they move the conversation forward and prompt the seller to provide information or take action.

In the bargaining stage, price statements are properly treated as assertives because they present factual information, while offers like “I will give you for ₦5,500” or “I will sell for ₦5,300 each” are analysed as Commissives since they commit the seller to a possible course of action. Requests for reduction also represent Directives, which reflect the buyer’s attempt to influence the seller’s decision in reducing price and choosing product. These choices help show how negotiation is built through different types of speech acts rather than through isolated sentences.

The closing stage of the interaction is also explained lucidly. Expressions of appreciation are treated as Expressives, reinforcing goodwill and maintaining the social relationship after the transaction for the next transaction. Acceptance markers like “Okay” signal agreement and help conclude the bargaining, while “See you later” functions as a Commissive because it suggests future patronage. By linking each utterance to its role in greeting, negotiating, and closing the transaction, the analysis vividly demonstrates how speech acts structure everyday commercial communication in a logical and understandable way. Finally, the perlocutory act of each utterance was deduced based on the context of the communication particularly the listener's body language which was observed during data collection.

Discussion of Findings

Having examined the data critically, it is established that market conversations are systematically structured through different speech act types that guide the interaction from greetings to closing of the business

interactions. Expressives are mainly used at the beginning and end of the exchanges to establish politeness, build rapport, and maintain social relations, which reflect the importance of interpersonal harmony in commercial interactions. Directives appear mostly in the middle stages where the buyer asks questions, requests prices, or seeks reductions of the products, showing how language is used to move the transaction forward. Assertives present information such as prices or availability of products, helping to define the negotiation space. Also, Commissives are used when either party (Seller or buyer) signals commitment to buying, selling, or future patronage.

Generally, the analysis reveals that bargaining is not random but follows a clear pragmatic pattern in which speech acts perform specific roles at different stages of the exchange. The interaction typically progresses from relationship-building, to negotiation, to agreement and closure of interaction, with each stage marked by dominant speech act categories. This demonstrates that meaning in commercial discourse is created through the strategic use of language to manage relationships, influence decisions, and secure good outcomes. The findings therefore establish that Speech Act Theory provides an effective framework for explaining how ordinary transactional conversations are organised and interpreted in real-life contexts.

Conclusion

This study examined selected buyer-seller interactions at two shops in Katsina Metropolis in order to understand how meaning is constructed through language use. Using Speech Act Theory as the analytical framework, the research identified and analysed the locutionary, illocutionary, and anticipated perlocutionary acts of each utterance in the conversations. The study classified the speech acts into categories such as Expressives, Directives, Assertives, and Commissives, and interpreted how these functions contribute to the organisation of transactional discourse. Through this systematic analysis, the research unveiled how pragmatic choices shape both the structure of the interaction and the social relationship between participants.

Beyond identifying speech act types, the study also showed how conversational exchanges follow a recognisable progression from greeting, to negotiation, to and mutual agreement. The research establishes that everyday commercial interactions are pragmatically organised and socially meaningful by linking linguistic forms to communicative purposes within their social context. Overall, the study contributes to pragmatic and discourse studies by illustrating how Speech Act Theory can be applied to real-life market communication, thereby deepening understanding of how language functions in economic and social activities.

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