

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF IMPOSTERS IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AMONG IGBO SPEAKERS

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Abstract

In communication, it is expected that a speaker should use the 1st-person pronoun forms such as *n'í* 'I', *nmu* 'I' and *anyi* 'we' when referring to himself/herself. However, it has been observed that speakers do not always follow this norm, as they sometimes use third-person pronouns and even nouns. Deviations of this kind are referred to as Imposters. The study employs John Austin's Speech Act Theory to explain the use of Imposters by Igbo speakers in interpersonal communication. Data were elicited through primary and secondary sources. Primary source of data collection includes the non-participant observation of people's discourse in commercial buses, churches and marketplaces. Secondary sources of data collection include books and movies. The paper reveals that Imposters in interpersonal communication serve to perform various communicative functions. These functions include expressing anonymity, advertising, attention seeking, and expression of self-importance.

Keywords: Imposters, Speech Act Theory, Deviations, Interpersonal Communication.

1. Introduction

Jespersen (1924) opines that in most cases, there is complete agreement between notional and grammatical person. Notional person is the semantic category which distinguishes DPs according to whether their denotations involve the speaker(s), the hearer(s), or neither of those entities. Grammatical person refers to various morphosyntactic properties regularly associated with specific notional person forms. However, it has been observed that there is not always a strict

connection between the notional person and the morphosyntactic features that encode such a person. An instance of such is when some writers avoid the mention of 'I' as much as possible by using passive constructions, and when such devices are not possible, they say '*the author*', '*the (present) writer*', or '*the reviewer*'.

In layman's terms, imposters are third-person DPs that refer to the speaker. At first glance, each imposter appears to have the same form as other 3rd person DPs that do not denote speaker or hearer. These DPs have forms whose actual analysis is distinct from that suggested by their appearance. Collins and Postal (2012) propose that Imposters have a more complex syntactic structure than any regular DPs they may be homophonous with.

For instance, even though Imposters are used to refer to the speaker, Collins and Postal claim that they cannot be the local antecedent (in the same clause) of a 1st person reflexive:

Consider the examples below:

1. *Nnà gi mètù-rù **ónwe m'** àhú
 Father your hurt-PST self- 1SG body
 Your father hurt myself
2. Nnà gi mètù-rù **ónwe ya** àhú
 Father your hurt-PST self-3SG body
 Your father hurt himself
3. N' mètùrù **ónwe m** àhú
 1sg hurt- PST self-me body
 I hurt myself

Expression (1) is ungrammatical because the reflexive **ónwe m'** '*myself*' has no antecedent to draw its reference from. There is no agreement between the reflexive and the subject DP in the sentence. Examples (2) and (3) are grammatical because the reflexives **ónwe ya**

'*himself*' and *ó^hnwe m' 'myself'* both agree in person and number with the subject DPs.

Other scholars, just like Collins and Postal (2012), have focused their research on investigating the grammatical properties and classification of imposters, thereby leaving out their pragmatic behaviour and relevance. This paper reveals that such third-person substitutes are not just employed by speakers for the mere fun of it; rather, there are pragmatic reasons for such usage. The research, therefore, attempts to identify the illocutionary force associated with the use of imposters in grammatical constructions, determine the different communicative functions that imposters serve in discourse, and identify the class of imposters that conceal the identity of speakers and those that reveal it.

2. Previous Studies

Collins & Postal's work (2012) can be said to be the foundational work on which other research on imposters build on. The paper having introduced imposters as a syntactic unit attempts to examine its agreement features in natural languages. This research investigates the interaction between imposters and pronominal agreement, binding principles, epithets, coordinate structures and fake indexical. (Collins & Postal, 2012) propose that pronouns agree with a "source," which may be an imposter DP rather than just an antecedent. On binding principles, the work posits that imposters interact with binding principles (A/B/C), sometimes behaving like ordinary DPs and other times, like pronouns depending on context, and sometimes, depending on their structural position, they can circumvent Principle B to effect or create ambiguous antecedence relations.

Adams & Conners (2020) examined the two approaches to imposters in reference to Korean and Indonesian. The first approach posits that imposters are elaborate DPs with embedded pronominal material while the second approach emphasizes that imposters obligatorily encodes person features. The paper favours the latter approach as the former does not adequately capture the behaviour of imposters in Korean and Indonesian.

Leaning on lexical specification, Imposters in Indonesian can serve as antecedents to anaphors, thereby binding them. However, this is not the case in Korea, imposters in these languages, cannot license person-marked anaphors except another functional head which person specification is introduced into the clause.

The foregoing shows that imposters have been commendably engaged syntactically. While this is relevant to the study, there are marked divergences in terms of its pragmatic relevance and theoretical orientation. The studies are commendable, considering their brilliant engagement with the syntax of imposters. However, there has been a neglect of the illocutionary force associated with the use of this phenomenon. To address this shortcoming, the study sets out to investigate the pragmatic roles that imposters play in communication. The study interrogates purposively selected data elicited through the non-participant observation of people's discourse in commercial buses, churches and marketplaces.

3. Theoretical Framework

The speech act theory is a product of the British Philosopher John L. Austin, in his lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955 and published posthumously as "How to do things with words". In linguistics and the philosophy of language, a speech act is an utterance that has a performative function in language and communication. The central tenet of speech act theory (SAT) is that the uttering of a sentence is, or is part of, an action within the framework of social institutions and conventions.

According to Kent Bach, "almost any speech act is really the performance of several acts at once, distinguished by different aspects of the speaker's intention: There is the act of saying something, what one does in saying it, such as requesting or promising, and how One tries to affect one's audience".

Austin proposed that communicating a speech act consists of three elements: the speaker says something, the speaker signals an associated speech act, and the speech act causes an effect on the listeners or the participants. This can be summarised below:

a. A *locutionary act*: the act of saying something, which is roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference, according to specific grammatical conventions. A locutionary *act* involves what is known in traditional philosophical semantics as the utterance's proposition or its propositional content. In performing a locutionary act, the speaker uses an identifiable expression, which is usually assessable in terms of its truth value.

b. An *illocutionary act*, which is the main focus of this paper, is the goal(s) of an utterance. The act that the speaker intends to accomplish by means of a certain locution and by the conventional force assigned to the locution. Beyond the propositional content of the utterance, the speech act acquires its performative dimension. Discrepancy may arise between the illocutionary force as conceived by the speaker (the speaker's *intended illocutionary force*), and the illocutionary force as conceived by the hearer (the *actual illocutionary force* or the *uptake*). Consequently, there may be more than One illocutionary force assignable to an utterance. The most significant constituent of a speech act is, undeniably, the illocutionary act. (Austin 1962), because the illocution signals what the Speaker DOES in uttering that particular utterance to the Hearer in a specific context

c. A *perlocutionary act*: the act that is produced as a *consequence or effect* of uttering a specific locution, what is brought about or achieved by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even surprising or misleading.

Such an effect may be predictable by the conventional status of most illocutions but may be equally produced irrespective of the speaker's intentions and the illocutionary force of their speech act.

4. A Pragmatic Analysis of Imposters

This section focuses on investigating the illocutionary acts of Imposters. It reveals that third-person substitutes are not just employed by speakers for the mere fun of it, but there are pragmatic reasons for such usage. Imposters, as determined by their illocutions, can therefore

be broadly divided into two: those that conceal identities and those that reveal them. Imposters that express the illocutionary acts (a) and (b) below are identity-concealing Imposters, while those that denote illocutions: (c), (d) and (e) are identity-revealing. The Illocutions are stated below:

- a. Expressing anonymity
- b. Attention seeking
- c. Advertisement
- d. Expression of self-importance
- e. Announcing a presence / Revealing identities

4.1 Imposters Expressing Anonymity

Example 1: *Onye ntùcha akwukwo a rù-rù ezigbo orú*

Person review book this work-PST good work

The reviewer did a good job

This is in the context of two friends having a conversation about a reviewed paper. The speaker, who is also the reviewer of the paper, utters the above after his friend presents him the reviewed paper. The illocutionary force associated with the use of imposter in the above expression is to conceal the identity of the reviewer.

Example 2: *Ófu onye obioma è-nye-go umùazì ahù egó nní*

One person good-hearted AGR-give-Perf children that money food

‘A good Samaritan has given those children some money for food’

In the above statement, the speaker himself is the good Samaritan. His use of the imposter *onye obioma* ‘good Samaritan’ serves to conceal his identity. This is the illocutionary force associated with the use of the imposter. He probably does not want his addressee to know that he played the role of benefactor to the kids.

4.2 Imposters Employed for Attention Seeking

Example 3: **Nye yá uzò**
 Give 3sg road
 Make way for him

This expression is used by porters in the marketplace. Such porters use this to call the attention of shoppers to clear the road to allow them passage. The illocutionary force of the use of the imposter above is to draw the attention of shoppers. The perlocutionary force of this on the shoppers is that they give way, since they are not aware of the magnitude of the load carried by the porter

Example 4: **Ka ó pùó**
 COMP 3SG leave
 Let him/her go

This expression is usually used by passengers when they are about to alight from public transport. The expression is used to attract the driver's or bus conductor's attention. The illocutionary force in the above expression is that of drawing attention to oneself. The expression above has almost become a register in transport among the Igbo speakers, such that bus drivers and their conductors only listen for such a statement. The perlocutionary force this would have on the driver would be to stop the bus or car.

4.3 The Use of Imposters for Advertisement

Example 5: **Onye òkpà' nọ ya**
 Person òkpà stay COMP
 'The òkpà seller is here'

The above presents a case of a hawker/vendor who is advertising her goods. She uses the imposter, **onye òkpà**, 'òkpà seller' to inform potential customers about her business, thereby calling for their patronage. The perlocutionary force of the above is that of persuasion.

¹ **òkpà** is a local dish commonly eaten by the Igbo people in South-Eastern Nigeria.

Example 6: *Nwànyị àbàchà² á bía gó*

Woman abacha AGR come PERF

The abacha woman has arrived

Just as in the previous example, this presents a scenario of a hawker advertising her goods. She uses the imposter *Nwànyị àbàchà* 'abacha woman' to inform potential customers of her presence and readiness to serve. The perlocutionary force of the above is that of persuasion.

4.4 Imposters for Expressing Self-Importance

Example 7: *Onye amuma á-dighí é-nwe ùgwù na bé nnà yá*

Person prophecy AGR be-NEG PREF-have honour PREP
house father 3SG

A prophet has no honour in his father's house.

This expression is uttered by a Pastor whose siblings do not take him seriously. The illocutionary force associated with the use of the imposter above is that of a reminder, which reminds the addressees of the pastor's worth. The perlocutionary force of this is that of exaltation.

Example 8: *Nné gí na á-gwa gí ókwú, i na a-chi ochi*

Mother 2SG PROG AGR-tell 2SG talk, 2SG PROG AGR-
laugh laughter

Your mother is talking to you and you are laughing

This explains a situation in which a child is making a jest of her mother. The mother, in anger, utters the above statement. The illocutionary force of the statement above is an expression of self-importance, showing that one's mother must be respected. The perlocutionary force of the statement is that of rebuke.

4.5 The use of Imposters to announce a presence

² *Àbàchà* is another Igbo delicacy made from dried shredded cassava and it is often called African Salad

Example 9: *Gwà Óbi na nwùye ya nọ́ be ya*

Tell Obi COMP wife 3SG stay house 3SG
 'Inform Obi that his wife is in his house'

This expression is used in a circumstance where a woman sends a message to her husband while she awaits him at home. She tells her addressee to inform Obi of her presence. The illocution of the imposter reveals the identity of the visitor who awaits Obi. The perlocutionary force of this would then be for Obi to come home since he would not want to keep his wife waiting.

Example 10: *Sì nne gí ná nwúye igwé ná é-che yá*

Say mother 2SG COMP wife king COMP AGR-wait 3SG
 Tell your mother that the queen is waiting for her.

This expression is used when a Queen is awaiting someone outside her home or in the palace. If she is awaiting someone outside her home, she is merely announcing her presence. But in the case that she awaits the fellow in the palace, then she reveals her identity. The illocution of the imposter reveals the identity of the sender. The perlocutionary force of this would either be for the woman to step out immediately to see the queen or to hurry to the palace.

5. Conclusion

This study has presented a pragmatic analysis of the use of Imposters among Igbo speakers. The study reveals that Imposters serve to perform various communicative purposes such as anonymity, attention seeking, introducing dignitaries, etc. in discourse. The study also reveals that some Imposters are identity-revealing while others are identity-concealing.

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