

THE TONAL PATTERNS OF INVECTIVES IN UMUCHU DIALECT

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Abstract

In the social act of doing things with words, speech acts, there is a kind of illocutionary force known as invective. This paper intends to subject the concept of invective in Umuchu dialect of the Igbo language to tonal pattern analysis within the theoretical spectrum of speech act theory and possibly explore the way the change of the pitch forms on syllables can be used to achieve semantic effects. The paper seeks to ascertain the fitting criterion for the classification of the invectives in the dialect. It also seeks to identify the regular sequence of the tones that characterize the invective. The researcher's intuitive knowledge as the native speaker of the dialect is employed to good effect. The paper finds out that semantics is the suitable basis to classify the invectives. With that as the yardstick, the paper also establishes the many types that abound in the dialect. Among other things, the paper establishes the characteristic prominence of imperative constructions of the invective and also notes that the tone of both low and high tone of the speech act verbs develop into a rising tone.

1. Introduction

It is a welcome development that linguistic study has the feature of not only being concerned with the written language, but also with the spoken aspect. The crux of this statement is that we do more things with spoken language than with the written; spend more time speaking than writing or reading. Hence, knowing a language also includes the knowledge of the usage patterns. This also includes the knowledge of the tonal patterns of the Igbo language.

The import of the above conclusion is that the role of pitch in a native speaker's language should be a part of the measure of his linguistic competence. It is not only that a native speaker of the Igbo language is

supposed to know that pitch is used as differing configurations on individual syllables, but also to be conversant with the regular ways in which the differing configurations occur. The occurrence of the differing configurations affects the meaning of utterances.

An insulting or abusive language is called invective. The pitch of voice can be manipulated in various forms to generate some invectives in the Umuchu variant of the Igbo language. It is as a result of this that the present study is focused on establishing the tonal patterns of invectives in Umuchu dialect, their categories and tonal patterns or sequences. The road map to the accomplishment of this task is divided into the literature review, the theoretical framework, the data presentation and analysis, and the summary and conclusion.

2. Literature Review

This section introduces the concepts of context, language use and invectives. All these concepts have some roles to play in the discussions of the rest of the paper. Context plays a big role in the interpretation of a linguistic unit. According to Furegan (2008), the key function of every language system is to connect meaning and expression. That is, to provide verbal expression for thought and feeling. To him, grammar has two sides, expression and meaning. The third side which overrides all others is context. He maintains that it is only in a specific context that an expression can convey a speaker's intended meaning and interpreted properly by the hearer.

Furegan (2008), asserts that conversationalists are not capable of interpreting an utterance from a mere expression. If the intended meaning of an expression is to be grasped, hearers must consider it from the point of view of the context. The intention for which an utterance is made has to be recognized by the hearer in a specific context. Context makes reference to the social situation in which an expression is uttered and includes whatever has been expressed earlier in that situation (Furegan, 2008). It is on the basis of these facts that Furegan (2008), postulates that apart from meaning and expression, the base of language use is context.

It is grammar that connects expression and meaning while what connects grammar and interpretation is context. What this implies is that the way language works cannot easily be appreciated without recourse to both grammar and context.

Language use on the other hand is about the communicative use of language. It is about the various ways language is employed in information dissemination. It can be compared to usage, which has to do with the rules for making language and the structures used in making it. Language has such structures as words, phrases and sentences. How these structures are in ordinary special interaction to accomplish things socially and communicatively is all about language use (Furegan 2008).

The primary form of language use is interpersonal. Human beings exchange words and utterances to communicate with each other. This is the view of Clark (1996) who opines that for any conversation to occur there must be a common ground. That is, the set of knowledge shared by the speaker and listener. Both must be mindful of the common ground. Common ground helps the conversationists to coordinate their language use. Ndimele (1999), claims that in language use for communication, there are six notable roles: informational role, expressive role, phatic role, directive role, ideational role and performative role. Of all these roles, informational, expressive and performative roles stand out.

Informational role is about passing information from one person to another. Expressive role of communication is about language being used as a means by which one can let out his emotions, feelings or attitudes towards one's fellow being or a state of affairs. Performative role is when language is used to bring about a sudden change in the state of affairs in the real world as soon as a utterance is made. Invective according to examples.yourdictionary.com is abusive or insulting language. It is possible to be a word or a phrase that is meant to insult or degrade a person. Any spoken or written word that is abusive is an invective. Invective expressions are not only abusive, but antagonistic contemptuous, defamatory, derogating, humiliating, insolent, rude, reproachful, spiteful, vilifying, etc.

An invective in a speech or writing attacks, insults or denounces a person, topic or institution. It involves the use of abuse and negative use of language. Invectives are known to be used in poetry and prose to reiterate the significance of the deeply felt emotions of the writer. Invectives are characterized by venomous language used to express blame, censure or bitter deep-seated ill will. It is a kind of vituperation. Invectives are known to be verbal attacks which are present in speech events. They are used to express severe disapproval. Invectives can take the form of a single word or expression. It can constitute an entire discourse. As a form of discourses, invectives can be an act of communication and an expression

of thought through the use of language. Invectives are speech acts because as spoken words they are utterances made by a human being. Any utterance made by a person is a speech act (Austin, 1962).

Invectives involve the use of constative verbs because, according to Osisanwo (2003:62), ‘constative verbs are verbs used in making statements: describing situations, events, state of affairs, observing phenomena and asserting their truth or otherwise’. They are also illocutionary acts because according to Osisanwo (2003: 63), ‘an illocutionary act is a non-linguistics act performed through a linguistic or locutionary act’. This is because, as a form of utterance, invectives reflect the intention of the speaker. According to Austin (1962), as long as an utterance is used in communication to report the state of affairs, such an utterance should be seen as a performance of an act. Invectives should also be seen in the same light because they are also characterized by the use of performative verbs. It is the performative verbs that spell out their illocutionary force.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the concepts of context, language use and invectives have some roles to play in this paper. Their connections have been established by the fact that invectives are forms of language use. They are expressions that have meaning, but it is only in a particular context that an expression can transmit or convey the speaker’s intended meaning and be interpreted correctly. That is to say that as a form of language use, invectives can best be interpreted in a specific context.

3. Data Presentation and Analysis

The area of study is limited to Umuchu community in Aguata local government area of Anambra state. The town shares boundaries with Akokwa in Ideato LGA, and also with Achina, Amesi and Umunze in Anambra state. The researcher, being a native speaker of Umuchu dialect, is a major primary source of data. A careful collection of different types of invective from Umuchu community will be done. These invective types will be semantically categorized. Based on the resultant categories, the tonal patterns will be identified and analysed.

The main purpose of this section is to make the facts of the study available and use the available facts for the tonal pattern analysis. In presenting the data of invectives in the Umuchu dialect, it is proper to start with their semantic classifications. Each class shall be followed by the analysis of its tonal pattern.

3.1 Degrading Names Invective

Degrading names invective refers to the act of using offensive names to insult somebody. It is an attempt to negatively impact an opponent through character assassination or mudslinging. In other words, it occurs where abusive names are employed to belittle or humiliate another person. Degrading names invective is of two types: the one-word degrading names and the two-word type.

(a) One-word Degrading Name Invective

It is the type that uses only one word to indicate the invective.

- i. Anụmànụ (an animal, person not behaving well)
- ii. Ìtì (a dunce)
- iii. Aturụ (a sheep, a foolish person)
- iv. Éghú (a goat, a misbehaving person)
- v. Òfèkè (a foolish person; person with below par reasoning)
- vi. Àgàfù (an irresponsible person who can indulge in theft and many bad things without fear or shame)
- vii. Édí (a sleeping person)
- viii. Àkwulà (a prostitute)
- ix. Èkpèrìmà (a die-hard, notable thief)
- x. Ashà (a talkative, talking too much like a bee)
- xi. Àbàlidięgwù (armed robber)

The one-word degrading name invectives retain their inherent tones.

(b) Two-word Degrading Names Invective

This type also calls a person degrading names, but does it using two words combined. The added word gives the invective the targeted description.

- (2) i. Anụ ọhịà (wild animal; beastly person)
- ii. Anụ ntị (a stubborn person)
- iii. Òke oyibo (a smart, petty thief)
- iv. Ònyinyò mmụọ (one who fools around)
- v. Ozu ndụ (dead like a moth; useless person)

This is a case of adjective phrase noun and its modification. In two-word degrading names invectives, most of the subject nouns except (ii) retain their inherent tones. All the adjectival modifiers retain their tones except (iv). The utterances involving one-word degrading name invectives mostly involve a low-tone pitch level is mostly used. High pitch level is not common. But for the two-word degrading name invective, there is a

characteristic change of tone at syntactic junctures, the effect of which is determined by the tone type at the point of meeting (the juncture). For instance, in example 2(iv), the individual high tone of the syllabic nasal [m] is changed to a low tone at the syntactic juncture because of the influence of an adjacent low tone. The same is true in example 2(v) where “ozu” is combined with “n̄dù”. The individual low tone of the syllabic nasal, [n], is influenced by the adjacent high tone to become a step tone.

From this observed feature, it could be inferred that in degrading invectives the tone of the preceding syllable at syntactic junctures influences the succeeding tone, which it transforms into its tone type or a semblance of it.

3.2 Negative Specialty Invective

This refers to a person who is said to specialize in something bad; good at doing bad things.

- (3)
- i. Onye oshí (a thief)
 - ii. Onye ísí mmebì (person who has obvious mental problem)
 - iii. Onye ojọọ (evil person)
 - iv. Onye àghàrịghà (unorganized, careless person)
 - v. Onye ańụrụma (a drunkard, an alcoholic)
 - vi. Onye nzuzù (a notorious foolish person)
 - vii. Onye arụ (a wicked person)

All the words in negative specialty invective retain their inherent tones without exception. A careful observation of the tonal behaviour of the negative specialty invective indicates that there is no change of tone in their associative construction. This is true in all the examples (from 3(i) – 3(vii)).

3.3 Expressive Invective

In expressive invective, the speaker brings out his psychological state about a person. That is, he voices out his feelings towards a person in a sentential form. It is a sort of constative act.

- (4)
- i. Asị m gị rìjuó nshị ọnụ (I say that faeces should fill your mouth)
 - ii. Gbaikwa ndị ọchù n'aka (may you run into the waiting hands of murderers)

- iii. Kitikpá enweghị nwanne gbagbukwee ghị (may small pox that has no relation (a wicked one) kill you)
- iv. Aka nshi bàkwaa gi ọnú (may a hand of poison enter your mouth).

In expressive invectives, all the subjects retain their inherent tones. For emphasis sake, all the action verbs are on high high tone double vowels. The object of the invective gi is on step tone. Being sentential constructions that have to do with the state of mind of the speaker, expressive invective has no uniform tonal pattern. The only striking thing is that the verb that reflects the speaker's main state of mind is emphatic in the construction. As such, it emphatically retains its inherent tone in all the constructions. Perhaps, the goal is to inform the addressee about where the emphasis lies.

3.4 Negativised Expressive Invective

Here, the state of the speaker's feeling is expressed sententially, but in a negative form. It is a kind of constative act,

- (5) i. Ì ladighị ihe nà-ekwò ahuma (may you not survive a prevalent calamity or epidemic)
- ii. Ì pụdighị echi (may you not live up to tomorrow)
- iii. Kpọsakwa ereghị eré (may you display your wares with nobody to buy them)
- iv. Ì ladighị ya (may you not survive it)
- v. Rikwee anyughị anyụ (may you eat food that will never be excreted)

In negativized expressive invectives, all the subjects are on low tone and all their action verbs' roots are on high tone with their negative marker all on step tones. This is noted to consistently begin with a characteristic second person singular pronoun, which is on low tone. In all the constructions the negativiser (the negative marker) [-ghị], is consistently on down step tone. The negative marker specifies the illocutionary act.

3.5 Wrath of Dieties Invective

This invective is the type that invites the wrath of the deities upon the addressee.

- (6) i. Àlà chụbakwa gi ọsọ (may the land pursue you)
- ii. Àmadiọhà gbùkwèe ghị (may Amadiọha deity kill you)
- iii. Arụsị gbùkwèe ghị (may the god of the shrine)

- iv. Ogu/ofọ gbùkwèe ghị (may the symbol of justice kill you)
- v. Àlà hùbakwaghị oku (may the land be too hot for your).

All the wrath of deities' invectives has all the subjects constant on their inherent tones. All their action verbs' roots are also on low tone, all their objects are on step tone. The observation here is that the verbs of the illocutionary act have the roots consistently on low tone. In most cases the ending vowel of the verb is doubled and they are on high tone regularly to denote the imperative nature of the invective. Also, the second person singular pronoun, ghị, is consistently on a step tone.

3.6 Body Defects Invective

This is the kind of invective that uses different parts of the body to wish the addressee bad. It prays that bad things should happen on the addressee's body parts.

- (7) i. Isi gbakwakwaa ghị (may you have mental problem)
- ii. Isi kwopùkwe ghị (may your head cut off)
- iii. Anya nyukwaa ghị (may your eyes switch off)
- iv. Anya kpòkwaa ghị (may you become blind)
- v. Isi mebikwee ghị (may your head get spoilt)
- vi. Ntị chikwee ghị (may your ears be blocked)
- vii. Ukwu jikwee/rùkwaa ghị (may your legs break or be disfigured)
- viii. Afọ tokwee gị (may your belly be swollen)
- iu. Ire tókweghị n'ònu (may your tongue stick to your mouth)
- u. Ezé kwápukwee ghị (may your teeth forcibly pull out)
- ui. Aka sòkwaa ghị n'àlà (may your hand hit the ground)
- uii. Ibì dàkwaa ghị (may you have haenia)
- uiii. Àgbà wakwaa ghị (may your jaw break).

The remarkable thing about body defects invectives is that:

- i. All subjects retain their tones
- ii. Most of the action verbs have their cv roots on low tones and their extentional suffixes have high high double vowels at the end.
- iii. All the objects (ghị) are on down step.

Here, all the body parts are unchanged in their individual tones. A great number of the verbs of the illocutionary act have characteristic, corresponding, double, high-tone vowels that denote the imperative nature

of the construction. Like in others, there is always the second person singular pronoun, *ghị*, on a step tone, specifying the addressee.

3.7 Disease Invocation Invective

Disease invocation invective is the one that prays for some specific illness to befall the addressee. It invokes a disease upon somebody.

- (8)
- i. Òtòrò gbawukwee *ghị* (may diarrhea strike you to death)
 - ii. Kìtìkpa gbawukwee *ghị* (may small pox kill you)
 - iii. Oyi tgbukwee *ghị* (may cold kill you)
 - iv. Afo sàwukwee *ghị* (may stomach upset kill you)
 - v. Ñchìchè tàbirikwe *ghị* imi (may leprosy bite off your nose).

The imperative marking double high tone vowel is constant here. Same is true about the second person singular pronoun on down step tone. The disease invocation invectives have their subjects consistent on their natural tones. Their action verbs have low tone cv roots and high high double vowels on the extentional suffixes. The objects are on the down step tone.

3.8 Accident Invocation Invective

This type invites some kind of accident to happen to the addressee.

- (9)
- i. Ònyà makwa *ghị* (may a trap catch you)
 - ii. Mmiri ejighi eji màwukwee *ghị* (may sudden rainfall drench you to death)
 - iii. Oshishi dàwukwee *ghị* (may a tree fall upon you to a point of death)
 - iv. Egbè-eligbé gbawukwee *ghị* (may thunder strike you to death)
 - v. Agu tàwukwee *ghị* (may a tiger bite you to death).

Here, again, the high-tone doubled vowel denoting imperative construction occurs. The second person singular pronoun on down step also features in all the examples. This tonal pattern is the common characteristic of the misfortune invective. Accident invocation invectives have their subject's inherent tone unchanged. All the action verbs have their initial syllable on low tone with high high double vowel ending. Their objects are on step tone.

3.9 Misfortune Invective

Misfortune invective is about a wish of bad luck, unfortunate event or unfavourable happening

- (10) i. Òwù dàwukwee ghị (may you die of solitude)
 ii. Nyàrakwa àkpà m (may you carry a bag of suffering like me)
 iii. Ugwọ dọwukwee ghị (may the incessant worry of creditors kill you)
 iv. Ama ghị chikwee (may you not have descendants)

The misfortune invectives have unchanged inherent tones of their subject. The cv stem of the action verbs are on low tone with the double ending vowels on high high tones. The objects are on down step. They are so because they carry the full weight of the abuse. The presence of double ending vowels on high tone on the verbs appears to have the connotation of emphasis on the abuse or insult type. The double ending vowel tends to consistently emphasize 'let the insult I have pronounced happen to you as I said'.

3.10 Mild-Intense Invective

This is a dual invective type. It can be mild in some cases and intense in some.

- (11) i. Zuzù pụọ (Go away in your foolishness.)
 ii. Nyinyò pụọ (Go away in you folly.)
 iii. Nyinyòrò gàba (Keep on going in your foolishness.)
 iv. Nyinyò bịa (Come in your foolishness.)
 v. Takò pụọ (Go way foolishly).

The mild-intense invectives have the cv stem of their action verbs on high tone. All their imperative marker bearing verbs except (iii) have double low high ending vowels. This is a unique imperative construction with a consistent low tone verb root. It is obvious that the tone of both low and high tone verb in the simple command characteristic construction is low and high. It has a rising tone behaviour of the verb of the illocutionary acts. This appears to be the only invective in which the second person singular pronoun is never present, but is implied in the deep structure. This type consistently begins with the second person singular pronoun, which is on low tone. In all the constructions the negation marker, *ghị*, is consistently on down step tone.

4.0 Summary and conclusion

The study has found out that invective speech act lends itself easily to semantic classification. The classification has been found to take the forms

of degrading names, negative specialty, expressive, body defects, wrath of deities misfortune, mild-tense, accident and disease invocation.

The study has established that the suitable criterion to classify the invectives in Umuchu is meaning. Through the semantic classification, the following types of invectives have been found to exist in the dialect: degrading names, negative specialty, expressive, body defects, wrath of deities, misfortune, mild-tense, accident and disease invocation. In terms of tonal patterns, it has been discovered that even as the patterns vary according to types, most of the subject of the invectives retain their inherent tones. Another commonality discovered in the tonal patterns is that variations occur mainly on the action verbs and their consistent object, 'gi' is always on the down step tone.

The study has enabled us to see the relationships existing amongst context, language use and invectives. It is now clear that the intended meanings of expressions cannot easily be established without recourse to context. Context appears to be the ultimate interpreters of the appropriate meanings of invectives. It has also been made clear that the tonal patterns of invectives in Umuchu vary according to the different types of invectives.

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