

A Sociolinguistic Study of the Language of the Announcements of Obituary and Obsequies

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ABSTRACT

The study examines closely the interplay of culture and language usage on obituary announcements and obsequies in contemporary Nigerian society. With data from announcements of death and obsequies in posters and newspaper adverts, the study examines the influence of socio-cultural variables such as folk philosophy about death, religious and cultural inclination, among others, on the forms and features of the English language used in communicating information relating to death and funeral rites in Nigeria. The study also aims to show the nuances of sociocultural influences such as identity and status on the forms of the

English language used in announcing death. This work reflects the impact of language on the culture of the society. The study adopts a sociolinguistic orientation. In addition, pragmatic principles as propounded by Grice (1975) provided the tools for analyzing data. In the bid to negotiate and establish identity, announcers of death and obsequies flout Grice (1975) maxims yet communication is not affected as the society adequately interprets and accommodates the forms. Findings from the study highlight the dynamism of the English language in diverse domains of communication in Nigeria. It also points attention to the patterns of language development in Nigeria.

Key Terms: language, communication, culture, identity, status, Nigerian English

1. Introduction

Nigeria is characterized by diversity of languages and cultural practices. Every society and language group in the Nigerian plural state has its own beliefs and practices in relation to death and funeral rites. Such folk philosophies and cultural practices are often reflected in the language of communicating information about death and obsequies. However, some of the philosophies and cultural practices are common in most societies. For example, some lexical items relating to death are considered sacred, hence, such information are often expressed with the use of euphemism.

Information about the death of a member of the society is usually of public concern; it is not concealed as other members would want to know the date as well as the cause of the death. However, the mode of announcement differs from culture to culture. In traditional Igbo society for example, announcement of death is initially communicated by a piercing cry by a member or members of the deceased family, which attracts other members of the community to the compound of the deceased. Subsequently, information about the death and funeral rites will be passed across both formally and informally. Formally, through the beating of the gong – this serves to summon other members of the community and through announcement by the town crier. Informally, such information

is spread by personal messages and ‘each one tells one.’

Contemporary realities in societal development which include migration to urban centers, urbanization of erstwhile rural communities, extension of kinship relations, inter-tribal marriages, inter cultural affiliations, technological advancements, etc., have made such primordial means of communication grossly inadequate. These factors as well as western literacy and technology have also encouraged a kind of uniformity in the modes of communicating information about death of a member and even the cultural rites of interment among different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Thus, in modern Nigerian societies, various mediums of communicating information relating to death and obsequies include interpersonal and mass media. Some of the practical means include informal communication – telephone calls, personal messages, gossip and formal communication via print and electronic media – invitation cards, letters, memos, posters, banners, bannerettes, newspaper adverts, radio announcement, television and cable station announcements, bulk SMS, blogs in social community networks such as facebook, 2go, tweeter, etc. The announcements usually comprise details of funeral rites but sometimes such information is provided in a funeral brochure.

Nigeria as a multilingual nation implies that the myriad languages that inhabit her luxuriant linguistic landscape are employed in the announcement of death of members and obsequies in informal

situations. We note here that the linguistic diversity inherent in the country has contributed to the ascendance of English as the official language as well as the language of mutual intelligibility. Hence, English is the dominant language of announcing death and funeral rites in Nigeria.

Intrinsically embedded in the English language used in the announcement of death and obsequies are forms and features of the indigenous languages in contact. This work reflects the intercourse between language and culture. The focus of this study, therefore, is to examine the forms and features of the English language used in communicating information relating to death and obsequies in contemporary Nigerian society with the aim to highlight the nuances of socio cultural influences on the language used in communicating information relating to death and on the other hand show the influence of the English language used on the culture of the society.

1.1 Background on Announcement of Death and Funeral Rites in Nigerian Societies

The relationship between language and society has been an age long subject of inquiry in linguistics and in sociolinguistics in particular. While studies such as Chomsky (1957, 1995) propose models that are asocial in orientation for the study and description of language structure, others in the tradition of Sapir (1929) Bernstein (1972) Halliday (1973) Labov (1994) posit that an asocial perspective in the study of the structure of languages may not be productive as ‘meaningful insights can be

gained when such matters of usage and variation form part of the data in explaining the nature of the language’ (Wardhaugh, 2010: 5). Some scholars in this later group promote sociolinguistics; ‘the descriptive study of the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context, on the way language is used, and the effects of language use on society’ (Wikipedia).

Although there is a consensus in sociolinguistics that there exists a relationship between language and society, yet there are divergent views on the nature of this intricate relationship. These divergent views can be categorized into three groups. The first group reasons that social structures influence linguistic structure or behavior (Labov, 1970, 1994, 2001; Coupland 2007). The second group believes that language structures affect the pattern of social organization and world view of the users (Sapir 1929 as cited in Wardhaugh 2010; Lucy 1996; Romaine 1999). The third group posits that the relationship between language and society is bidirectional. In this vein, Dittmar (1976: 238) argues that “speech behavior and social behavior are in a state of constant interaction.” (Wardhaugh 2010: 10-12).

This present study impinges on the last proposition that the intercourse between language and society is mutual and can be clarified by studying specific instances of language usage in socio-cultural context. It is in this vein that this study sets to closely examine language usage in a cultural communication context – the language of

announcement of death and funeral rites in Nigerian societies. The aim is to examine how people employ the English language in the Nigerian situation as a functional tool to convey their peculiar communication needs. The analysis of data is set to highlight the forms and features of English usage in the context and to reflect on the various social and cultural factors that influence linguistic choices, patterns of usage, interpretation of forms and development of Nigerian English. Information from the study is bound to reflect on the influence of language usage in this domain on the societal social structures.

Some significant factors provide justification for this study. As stated in the introduction, this study is premised on the proposition that there exists a bidirectional relationship between language and society. Hence, the study and description of the structure of a language has to take cognizance of the various societal cum contextual variables that influence language choice, the forms of language used and patterns of language development. In this vein, any theory on the linguistic structure of Nigerian English need to recognize the above mentioned variables as they contribute significantly to issues relating to its development. Data on the study of the language of obituary announcements and obsequies serve as one instance of language usage that can be used to demonstrate the intricate intercourse between language and society and provide insights on language development.

Besides, how people use language to achieve communication in different contexts

and situation is central in language studies. The forms of language used in the announcement of the death and interment rites of a member of a society reflect aspects of the culture of a people as well as the functionality of language in meeting the needs of the users. It highlights how people employ language to achieve communicative and strategic competence. This study stands to be relevant not just to language studies but to cultural studies as well. Information from this study can also be of direct relevance to other areas of theoretical and applied linguistics.

Data for this study were derived from obituary announcements on posters and newspaper from different parts of the country. The quest to collect samples from all the communities and different language groups in Nigeria may be illusory, this study, thus, adopts the random sampling technique to collect samples from different cultures and groups in the Nigerian society. A total number of sixty samples served as data. Nigeria has six geopolitical zones and ten samples from each zone provided data for analysis.

Although this study adopts a sociolinguistic orientation in its study of the language of announcement of obituary and obsequies, the analysis of data requires some explanatory tools from linguistics and pragmatics. Thus, in addition to sociolinguistic models, some insights from Systemic Functional Grammar as propounded by Halliday (1973) serve to account for the functionality of the linguistic choices in the samples of data, while the

pragmatic principles of the study of meaning in relation to context of language usage as propounded by Grice (1975) provides the tool for analyzing the information and pragmatic content of the announcements.

Sociolinguistics involves the study of language in relation to society (Hudson 1996: 4). This approach to language studies aims to provide a better understanding of the structure of language and how it functions in communication (Wardhaugh 2010:12). Hence, sociolinguists have developed diverse models to examine different levels and points of interaction between language and society. Sometimes, some of these models overlap with other aspects of linguistics study such as Stylistics, Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics. For instance, in the study of interrelationship between language and society as it relates to the meaning of linguistic structures, sociolinguistics and pragmatics which involve the analysis of meaning from a contextual background overlaps (Holmes, 2008: 359).

Pragmatics has developed principles for the analysis of the meaning of utterances from the context of communication. One of such models is the Cooperative principle by Grice (1975). This model is premised on the assumption that participants in interaction are guided by some principles which influence the encoding and interpretation of meaning of utterances. These principles according to Grice (1975) include:

Quantity maxim – Be sufficient: Do not say what is not necessary and not more.

Quality maxim – Be truthful: Do not say what you believe is false or for which you lack evidence.

Relation maxim – Be relevant: Do not say what is not relevant.

Manner maxim – Be clear, brief and orderly: Do not be ambiguous.

It has been observed that sometimes participants in interaction flaunt the principles as a result of social factors such as politeness, which involves social roles, relative status, social contexts of communication, among others. Holmes (2008: 361) also adds that among other factors, people sometimes flout the maxims in the bid to construct particular social identities.

This present study aims at examining the language of obituary and obsequies announcement in Nigerian society from the sociolinguistic perspective. Grice (1975) model of studying meaning from the contextual background becomes relevant in the aim to examine and highlight the societal variables that influence the encoding and the interpretation of linguistic structures used to convey information, express politeness and negotiate identity. This model also serves to highlight how these linguistic forms affect the societal structures.

2. Data Analysis

The information content of the samples of data collected for the study reflects that the major purposes of communication include to formally inform

the general public of the demise of a member of their family, church, social, religious, professional or cultural group and to provide direction on the burial rites of the deceased. Although from the linguistic choices and pragmatic context, one can infer other communication intent which includes class aspiration, identity negotiation, and language accommodation, among others. But, it is important to note some social structures and cultural variables that influence the use of this medium and the information content on the posters which include: social, financial, educational and religious status of the deceased as well as the status and aspiration of the chief mourners. These factors in overall affect and influence the form and content of the language usage in the posters and newspaper adverts.

2.1 Linguistic Forms and Features of the Language of Obituary and Obsequies

A. Headline

Announcement of death and funeral rites as found in posters and newspaper adverts is often introduced with a banner headline such as:

1. Call to Glory
2. Obituary
3. Transition! Transition!! Transition!!!
4. Exit of an Icon
5. Call to Eternal Rest
6. Sunset at Noon
7. Untimely Departure
8. Painful Exit

The headlines are often encoded in attractive font sizes and colours, which serve to express the theme of the announcement as there are many other posters and bills on different places on the streets and the media such as posters for advertisement, political campaigns and religious programmes. The headings also serve as attention getters. The choice of expressions used as heading for the posters and newspaper announcements is influenced by so many other factors such as age of the deceased, nature of death, among other factors. For example, the announcement of the death of an aged man who was acclaimed to have achieved huge success before his demise was entitled, 'Exit of an Icon' while that of an aged woman who did not suffer any serious ailment before her demise, 'Glorious Exit'. The death of a twenty eight year old man was entitled 'Sunset at Noon' while that of a thirty two year old woman who died during childbirth was entitled 'Painful Exit'.

Cultural belief, personal philosophy, religious affiliation of the deceased and the mourners also influence language usage in this context. For example, the Christian belief that death is the beginning of a journey home to God, the creator is seen in these headings – 'Glorious Home Call' and 'Triumphant Entry', while the cultural belief of death as a transition to another life is seen in the heading, 'Transition'. This study notes the prevalence of the Christian belief about death and its influence on the development of Nigerian English usage in this context. Consequently, the word 'obituary' is fast disappearing from societal lexicon (Mgbemena, 2010). Of the sixty samples

used as data, the word ‘obituary’, which was common before now, was found only in thirteen.

The societal cum cultural nuances that actuate the attachment of a heading to such announcement has given rise to creativity in language usage. Emotive situation has been noted as a flowery ground for poetic expressions. Announcement of death has served as a spring board for creativity and poetic writings which have come to characterize not just the headings alone but the language of obituary announcement. Even those who are not educated have been known to hire the services of educated people to write for them. This also reflects aspiration. Language usage here does not just convey emotion laden information; it has become a status marker.

B. Identity of Announcers and the Deceased

Following the headlines are usually expressions, which convey the identity of the announcers and the deceased. The expression, which is often a multiple sentence, is another obligatory feature of the communication content of announcement of death as found in posters and newspaper adverts. Sometimes embedded in the multiple sentence structure used to convey information on the identity are expressions which relay the emotion and philosophy of the announcer (s) over the death. See the samples below:

9. With gratitude to God for a life well spent, the government of Abia state,

Osisioma Ngwa LGA council, Oha Ngwa traditional rulers, Okpu Umuobo ancient kingdom and the entire family of His Royal Majesty XYZ of the Okpu 11 of Okpu Umuobu Autonomous community wish to announce the passing on to glory of our patriarch His Royal Majesty (Eze) XYZ, Chairman/CEO XYZ and sons ltd. (XX Petrol), Okpu 11 of Okpu Umuobo Autonomous Community.

10. With deep sense of loss but with total submission to the will of God Almighty, we sincerely announce the call to eternal glory of our husband, father, grandfather, uncle and in law Pa XYZ.
11. With pains in our hearts, but with total submission to the will of Almighty God, the family of late Mr XYZ of Umu-olata (Uriem Kindred) of Okposi town in Ogba/Elegbema/Ndoni LGA of Rivers state Nigeria announces the death of our son, brother, father, cousin and uncle, Dr. XYZ, C.N.C., BSc (Hons), M. Ed., M.B.A. PhD

From the samples, it could be seen that a rider is often provided to convey the identity of the announcers – *with pains in our heart but with total submission to the will of God*. The expressions before the actual announcement are often emotive structures which attempt to convey the passion of the announcers over the loss of a member. An analysis of this expression with Grice’s

maxims of quantity and relevance will put a question tag on the inclusion of the linguistic items. However, the cultural context of communication gives relevance to such expression as they relay indirectly such information as the religious inclination of the announcers, their philosophy over death as well as their emotions over the bereavement. A culture that encourages ostentatious and sometimes exaggerated display of grief gives impetus to such expressions that clearly flouts the maxim of quantity.

Announcement of death is a serious issue and the identity of the announcer is important as it validates the information officially. Before the official announcement, information about death is often handled as classified and sensitive. At any point of release, even in informal situation, the source of information is often required. Hence, stating the source of information in the identity of announcers fulfils a cultural requirement. It also performs the interpersonal function of language, as it establishes the relationship between the deceased and announcers. Sometimes, the announcements provide further elaboration on the nature of relationship between the announcers and the bereaved – *brother, father, colleague, grandfather*, etc. Announcement of death in traditional societies is supposed to be done by immediate family of the deceased, but we observe in this study some announcement made by friends and professional colleagues, a consequence of cultural shifts, urbanization and extension of kinship relation.

Another important linguistic variable found embedded in the identity of announcers is the copious use of adverbials and adjectival, which serve to express the emotions and attitude (grief, sorrow, resignation, anger) of the announcers over the death of their loved ones – ‘*regret to announce the painful exit*’, ‘*sincerely announce the untimely exit*’. Thus, modifiers such as *deep sorrow, untimely death, and painful death* have become characteristic of the language of announcement of death. This usage sometimes flouts Grice’s maxim of quality. The truth value cannot be easily determined but it can be rightly inferred that the linguistic choice is influenced by culture of ostentatious display of grief. The mourners are expected to express sorrow over bereavement, whether it represents their emotions or not, as it is considered a taboo not to or to say evil about the dead. None inclusion of expression of passion over the loss precludes that the bereaved do not show politeness to the dead.

The identity of the deceased is another obligatory feature of the language of obituary announcement. In the samples of data used in this study, information which serve to provide the identity of the deceased include – names, titles and nicknames, age. See samples 9-11. Very rarely does one observe the attachment of ‘late’ to the titles. In the case of a woman who had married and changed her name, the maiden name is also stated to ensure proper identification. It is clear here that the communicative function of stating the names in full is for proper identification as more than one person can bear a name. But, the use of honorifics,

elaborate listing of titles and nicknames in addition reflect an attempt to deliberately project the status of the deceased and by implication that of the mourners! Linguistic choices are carefully made to negotiate status and identity. One clear candidate that can account for this usage is culture, in particular the African penchant for honorifics. Hence, the elaborate listing of titles (some of which have been observed to be false). But, burial in many Nigerian societies has been identified as a status marker; it is not just used to inflate the status of the dead who is believed to see and can become a malevolent force against the members of the family if they fail to accord honour to the deceased, it is also used to negotiate identity for the mourners – inflate their status. But, identity as being expressed in the announcements often flouts the truth maxim.

C. The Use of Graphics

The photograph of the deceased that was taken while he/she is still alive is often used to validate the identity. The number, size, the quality and colour of the pictures in each poster vary. We note that in the samples of data, in particular those announcing the death of aged people, the photographs provided often contrasts with the age stated, as the pictures appear to have been taken at a much younger age. This form of usage flouts the truth maxim. If the essence of the photograph is to aid the identity of the deceased, then those who knew the deceased at a later age or shortly before the demise may not be able to use the picture to achieve proper identification. But,

one can infer that there is an attempt by the mourners to boost the image of the deceased and leave a worthy memory of his/her image in the minds of the public, the purpose which the current photograph of the deceased before demise may not meet. In this instance, it would be clear to the audience that the maxim of quality – truth – has been flouted but the society accommodates such usages.

D. Date/Nature of Death

One other common feature in the announcement of death is the date of demise and often the nature and cause of the death. Samples of expression which convey the information include:

12. ...who passed on to life eternal on Saturday 20, January 2013 at San Diego California in USA. Age 62.

13. ...aged 59 which sad event occurred on 3rd February 2013 after a brief illness.

14. This sad event occurred on the 7th September 2012 in a fatal motor accident. 1974 - 2012.

Again, one can observe a deliberate flouting of the maxim of relevance and manner as seen in sample 12. It is apparent that the information about the place of demise is to enhance the status of deceased and the mourners as access to medical facility in the USA is an identity marker in the society.

E. Obsequies

An obsequy is mainly aimed to provide directive function. It gives direction to those who wish to identify with the interment rites of the deceased. Information concerning interment rites of a deceased is integral to announcement of death in contemporary Nigerian societies. It even appears that the essence of the announcements recently is to provide information about the obsequies, because the announcements are not usually made officially until the date of funeral is fixed. Interment is a significant aspect of culture which is influenced by several variables: cultural practices, financial status, social status, religious belief of both the deceased and the mourners. For example, the common African cultural belief that death is a journey to the world of ancestors and proper funeral rites facilitates easy passage without which the spirit of the death hovers around and disturbs the peace of the living influences elaborate funeral rites. Again, the cultural belief that proper burial is the last respect the living can give to their loved ones who died can be seen in the programme of event which includes stop over at several places. The impact of social structure that uses elaborate burial as a status marker for the living can be seen as a candidate in determining the linguistic choices and information content. Consider these examples of obsequies:

15. 2nd April 2013: 5-6pm Service of Songs at his residence Olaoba Idowu close Ketu Lagos.

4th April 2013: Christian wake-

keep Ajebamidele Okoko Ipetumodu state of Osun.

5th April 2013: 9-11 am Burial at The Apostolic church Sooko, Ipetumodu state of Osun.

16. 21 Feb. 2013: Service at his palace

22 Feb. 2013: 9:00am corps leaves Allied medical center to Osisioma L.G.A. headquarters.

9:30am corps leaves Osisioma L.G.A. to his palace for lying in state.

10:00am valedictory service at St Augustine's Anglican church

Interment follows immediately after service at his palace.

24 Feb. 2013: Outing service at St. Augustine Anglican church

F. Signature of the Announcer

The name and the signature of one of the announcers is an obligatory feature in the announcement of death and burial rites. The identity of the announcers as discussed above is often elaborate, as it includes all the people who are believed to be directly bereaved by the death, yielding to an extension of kinship relation. However, the

announcement has to be authenticated and signed by at least one person or few people – the chief mourner (s) in the case where the announcement is placed by the family or the chief executive where the announcement is made by a professional or social group. See these examples:

17. Signed: Sir Justice XYZ, Chairman Central Working Committee

18. Signed: XYZ jnr. for the family

In some samples, the signature column contains in addition, the mourners – *he is survived by mother, wife, sons and daughters.*

G. Valedictory Remark

Although this feature is not common in all samples but it can be observed that some samples had a concluding remark after the announcement such as:

19. May His gentle soul rest in the bosom of the lord

20. May the Good Lord that ordered his good steps here on earth order them in life beyond and console you. Adieu Papa!

21. May his gentle soul rest in peace

22. Adieu Chinny Adieu Babara Adieu Queen Nephtali Adieu Nwanyioma Good bye Girly until we meet to part no more. May your gentle soul rest in the bosom of the Lord.

It is clear from the announcement that these remarks do not have direct relevance to the discourse as it attempts to convey a

valedictory message which would have been more appropriate in funeral oration. However, the emotive import and aesthetic appeal of these expressions are worthy of note. Some of these remarks are direct address to the deceased as seen in sample 22. This linguistic feature is recognized as an apostrophe. Other concluding expressions which do not directly address the deceased can be interpreted as a prayer for the deceased. The act of speaking to the dead can also be seen as being influenced by the belief that the dead can hear and that they hover around the living until they are buried. One could explain such expression as an attempt to appease the dead, who is believed to be potentially harmful.

3. Discussion

This study has highlighted linguistic choices from Nigerian English used to encode information concerning the death and interment rites in Nigerian societies. It has also reflected on the issues of the intricate relationship between language and society

The features of the language of announcement of death as highlighted in this study include the use of clause structures as headlines, the use of multiple structures sub headlines to convey the source of announcement as well as the identity of the deceased, the use of modifiers to convey emotions, the use of honorifics, among others. The study has also reflected non verbal modes such as graphics to validate identity as well as the not literal and indirect expression used to negotiate status and identity.

This study has also attempted to identify the cultural variables and social structures that influence language choice and usages in this domain. As stated in the introduction, English is the main medium of encoding information in this context as no sample was found in any other language in the Nigerian plural state. It points to the spread and dominance of English in Nigeria. Hence, its use in a communication context that bothers on traditional culture. This in turn reflects the dominance of Western culture and Christianity in cultural practices in Nigeria. We also note that those who use the print medium to announce the death and obsequies of their loved ones are mainly Christians. The influence of the social structures and cultural variables are also reflected in the linguistic structures and cultural communicative patterns. For example, the influence of folk philosophy on death and cultural speech norms are seen in the shift in kinship relations, elaborate use of honorifics, ostentatious use of modifiers to express grief, absence of the use of 'late' in identity of the deceased, among others. In the same vein, we note the influence of the church in English usage in this domain which can be seen in the choice of lexical items – 'Glorious Home Call', 'Triumphant Entry', and expressions 'who slept in the lord...', 'outing service' 'wake keeping'. To this extent, one can rightly assert that Nigerian English usage and development in this domain is heavily impacted by the environment of usage – by cultural belief and speech pattern as well as social structures such as Christianity, western culture and not just by the classroom teaching. This study notes other variables

that influence both the use of this medium and language usage in this domain which include the educational background and financial status of the encoders, among others.

On the other hand, language usage in this domain impacts on some societal structures. The use of English in the documentation and announcement of a cultural issue, especially in situation where the majority of the target audience is from one language group marks a shift in culture. We note that the use of English yields to some form of uniformity in the mode of announcement and interment rites as no significant variations in style and content were observed in the samples collected across tribes and cultures. To this extent, one can infer that language affects social structures.

This study has also considered the impact of social factors in the encoding and interpretation of linguistic structures using the explanatory tool cooperative principles as posited by Grice. The analysis of data show a direct and indirect flouting of the maxim, yet, communication is not impaired as interpretation of forms is dependent on the context and not on the linguistic structure. Bloommaert (2005: 44) points out that communication involves exchange of meaning between co-operative willing and bonafide partners, who offer large spaces for negotiating meaning. This meaning negotiation accommodates the flouting of communication maxims. In this vein, Levinson (2001: 141) explains that Grice's framework still operates even when it is

being flouted as what is left unsaid may be just as important as what is said. Wardhaugh (2010) adds that conversations is cooperative because speakers and listeners tend to accept each other for what they claim to be; “that is they usually accept the face that the other offers.” Hence, in this society, although the audience could rightly interpret that the truth value of some forms, especially forms used to express passion and identity of the deceased, are questionable, they still accept whatever information that is provided at least without physical opposition or by writing a rejoinder.

4. Conclusion

Although there could be exceptions in cultural orientations but bereavement generally is conceived as a painful and sorrowful experience. Equally, the task of communicating information about the loss and funeral rites of a loved one could be challenging as it will involve both literal and non literal, direct and indirect messages. Thus, the encoders are often consciously or unconsciously faced with the challenge of choosing linguistic elements that will convey their intricate communicative needs to the audience. This study has attempted to interpret some of these literal and non literal devices which the encoders have employed to provide information and direction, negotiate the status and identity of the deceased as well as the bereaved, and relay their emotions over the bereavement. The analysis of these literal and implied meaning show that in the bid to achieve their ends, the encoders flout the Cooperative Principles as stated by Grice in the maxims – quality,

quantity, relevance and truth. Yet, the target audience, who are predominantly members of the society do not hold it against them but rather understand and attempt to identify with the bereaved over the loss as they too use such forms. Much as this study recognizes the flouting of Gricean maxims in the samples of data but to the extent that the style and patterns of language usage in this context is able to achieve communication, it stands as an instance of communicative and strategic competence in language usage.

This study has also demonstrated that information from the sociolinguistics can significantly impact on theoretical study of a language. Specifically, the present debate in Nigerian English studies over the codification and development of the language in linguistics and language studies in Nigeria should note the pervasive influence of social structures on language usage and development. Theory on the linguistic structure of NE and its development from an asocial perspective may not be significant as empirical studies of this nature has shown the roles socio-cultural variables play in shaping the patterns of development in language. It has also highlighted the subtle influence of the English language in facilitating convergence in the cultural practice of communicating information relating to death and on the burial rites in Nigeria. There is need therefore to consider the intercourse between language and society in other aspects of cultural communication in Nigeria to determine trends in the development of English in Nigeria.

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