

A pragma-sociolinguistic deconstruction of ‘dress’, ‘meet’, and ‘toast’ in Southwestern Nigeria

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Meaning in language is a phenomenon that has attracted the attention of language scholars, particularly those in the fields of language such as semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis. Of central concern to these fields is the role context plays in meaning realisation. This paper examines the influence of the Nigerian socio-cultural context on the semantic realisations of three prominent words, ‘dress’, ‘meet’ and ‘toast’ in the Nigerian context of English language usage, within the purview of Adegbija’s pragma-sociolinguistic theory. The study reveals the words, dress, meet, and toast, manifest some senses which are peculiar to the Nigerian L₂ context of English, apart from the senses that the words depict in the English L₁ context. For instance, dress in the Nigerian sociolinguistic environment manifests senses such as to adjust, to slap, and to position. Similarly, ‘meet’, and toast, alongside all other senses which are applicable in L₁ and Nigerian contexts of English usage, manifest some senses which are peculiar to the Nigerian sociolinguistic environment. Thus, lack of adequate knowledge of the contexts that produce these Nigerian senses of the words in utterances by L₁ and non Nigerian speakers of English could pose a problem of meaning decoding.

Keywords: *English in Nigeria, ‘dress’, ‘meet’ and ‘toast’, pragma-sociolinguistic theory*

1. Introduction

The dynamic nature of language has been emphasised in language studies, especially among sociolinguists, pragmaticists, and discourse analysts. This dynamism of language explains why there exists variation in the semantic realisations of words even among speakers of the same language. In a recent personal interaction with a colleague, for instance, there was a heated debate on the appropriateness or otherwise of the popular question among many Nigerian users of English ‘How was your night?’. According to this colleague of mine, the English culture frowns at such a question as it is considered prying into the privacy of the fellow being asked. To my friend, the question is like asking ‘how was your sex experience last night?’ However, as a sociolinguist, I tried to provide a justification for possible appropriateness of the statement in the Nigerian context, given the fact that the (Nigerian) socio-cultural context that births such a question would not interpret it as asking for one’s sexual experience, as it could as well be viewed within the purview of the totality of one’s experience during the night, including having a sound sleep, not being visited by armed robbers, among others. This dynamic interpretation of the expression could be hinged on the indigenisation of the language in Nigeria which apparently has birthed ‘Nigerian English’ variety. Hence, the interpretation of certain English words in Nigeria is subject to different contextual realisations that define the socio-cultural realities in the country. In view of this development, many scholars and observers have clamoured for the recognition of the Nigerian variety of English. However, this agitation has not been pragmatically addressed. The crux of this paper, therefore, is to further engage the impact of the Nigerian socio-cultural environment on English (in the country) usage in the country. In particular, this

study, taking a cue from Adebija & Bello's (2001) work on the semantic nuances of OK in the Nigerian context, and Adeyanju's (2011) pragma-sociolinguistic dissection of the word SEE in Nigerian English, attempts a pragma-sociolinguistic deconstruction of the words DRESS, MEET, and TOAST among Nigerians, particularly in the southwest. As shall be seen in this paper, the words 'dress', 'meet' and 'toast' are confronted with different contextual interpretations, some of which align with its L₁¹ contextual usage and in some other instances depict the Nigerian L₂ context. This is in line with Adebija & Bello's (2001:89) submission that:

With the transplantation of English to new contexts, especially through colonisation, the language is forced to confront new contexts which come to bear on its use in the process of encoding and decoding of meaning.

Thus, some instances of the interpretation of the words 'dress', 'meet' and 'toast' might be difficult if not totally impossible for an English speaker from another socio-cultural background, given their Nigerian peculiarity. This submission reinforces the opinion of Adebija & Bello (2001: 89) as follows:

Given the potential depth of all utterances and the variety of human intentions, word knowledge, experiences and motifs in any particular speech situation, it is not surprising that in the addressee's attempt to infer meaning, the actual value of a speakers' intended message may depreciate, or be entirely misconstrued.

This study, as mentioned earlier, focuses on three lexical items (verbs) in the English language. Of course, these are not the only items that manifest the Nigerian sense of the use of English. For instance, the word traffic, a noun, is commonly used in the verb sense among Nigerians as in 'trafficate'. However, the lexical items: dress, meet and toast have been purposively selected for analysis in this study because they are prominent among English lexical items often used in the Nigerian sense. Although these words are part of the lexical items examined by Igboanusi (2010), their various contextual senses, especially as explored in this study, have not been captured.

2. English and its status in Nigeria

English language remains the most enduring legacy the British colonial masters bequeathed to Nigeria, as years after the country attained independence, she has held tightly to the language, particularly in important domains such as education, administration, health, judiciary, among others. As reported by Banjo (1982), the adoption of the language as a language for wider communication dates back to 1862. This was the period when Lagos was formally established as a colony by the British colonial masters. Taiwo (2009) reports that in 1882, in an attempt by the to promote the assimilationist culture, the British colonial government introduced an act that brought education under government control and made English the medium of instruction in schools. This tradition has continued years after the country gained independence as the language remains the major language of instruction in Nigerian schools across the various levels of education in the country. The language is

¹ As captured in the Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary (ninth edition).

recognised as the official language (see Bamgbose, 2000; Fadoro, 2012). It is also conceived as the language of upward mobility in the country as it is often believed ‘to make headway in Nigeria, one must have an English head’ (Ajayi, 2013).

3. Context and language

Several arguments have been put up by language scholars with respect to the role context plays in language use. However, the conclusion of such arguments, as Verhagen (1997) opines, is the fact that meanings have to be taken as *constraints* on interpretations and for processes of interpretation, features of the context of utterance, whether linguistic or non-linguistic, can also be made recourse to. In the opinion of Ervin-Tripp (1994), context permeates language, and contextual assumptions influence how human beings comprehend language. Thus, a good knowledge of the contexts of speech is vital to develop realistic theories of language (use) and language learning. This position is reinforced by Doyle’s (2007) submission that the fact that context affects meaning in language is not contestable. According to van Dijk (2008), context refers to some phenomena related to text, discourse and language usage. van Dijk differentiates between linguistic context, which is the verbal context of an utterance, and social or cultural context. According to him, the linguistic context has to do with the internal relationship between the elements of an utterance, while socio-cultural context of speech refers to linking talks or discourses to cultural values or beliefs of a people. Odebunmi (2006) describes situational context as location of a speech event, in terms of the physical arrangements, the objects in the environment, the participants and the topic of discourse, etc. van Dijk’s conception of socio-cultural context, as espoused by Adebija’s (1982) pragma-sociolinguistic phenomenon forms the guide for analysis and discussion in this study.

4. Analytical tool

Following Adeyanju’s (2011: 26) submission that ‘the study of meaning in an L₂ setting of English usage demands a comprehensive theory such as the pragma-sociolinguistic theory because it addresses all the pragmatic and sociolinguistic factors that affect the total meaning of an utterance’, Adebija’s (1982, 1988) pragma-sociolinguistic theory is adopted for analysis in this study. According to the theory, decoding the meaning of words and utterances in a discourse requires the understanding of the historical, personal, environmental, socio-cultural and linguistic aspects relating to the context in which the discourse took place (Adebija, 1982). Accordingly, the meaning of an utterance cannot be understood without recourse to factors such as:

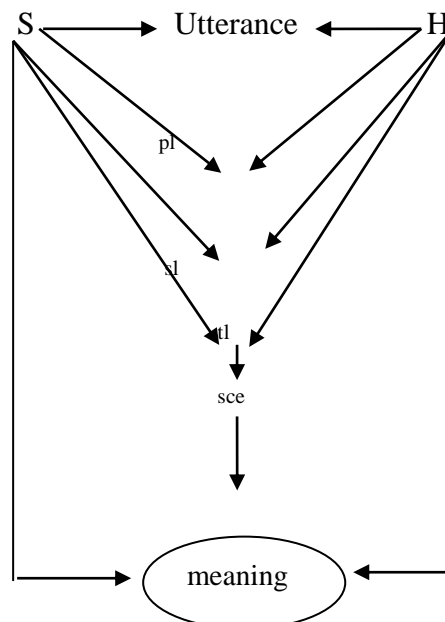
- a. the history of the word or utterances;
- b. the environment where the utterance is made;
- c. the interlocutors (involved) and the relationship between them;
- d. the socio-cultural values of the environment; and
- e. the linguistic elements employed in performing the illocutionary act.

Adebija, in his pragma-sociolinguistic theory, argues there are three layers of meaning by which utterances can be understood. These are the primary layer, the secondary layer, and the

tertiary layer (Adegbija's, 1988). At the primary level, we speak of the literal or ordinary level of meaning. It involves explaining the linguistic elements and the prosodic elements such as intonation, pitch, stress and rhythm of an utterance. The secondary layer, which handles the connotative or symbolic level of meaning (Adeyanju, 2011), deals with indirect speech acts- utterances in which one says one thing and means another; or says one thing and means what one says and also means another illocution with a different propositional content (Adegbija, 1982:32). The tertiary level of meaning involves knowledge of the different aspects of the socio-cultural environment in which an utterance is made. According to Adegbija, such aspects of socio-cultural environment most times give further information on meaning. Expatiating Adegbija's tertiary layer of meaning, Emuchay (2001: 196) submits:

One's ethnic, religious and political background is an important part of one's identity. Thus, if the interlocutors do not share the same world view, the presuppositions they bring to bear on an utterance may differ and misunderstanding or lack of understanding may result.

The schema below, as designed by the researcher and adopted in this study, summarises the operation of the tenets of Adegbija' pragma-sociolinguistic theory.



Key:
 S: speaker (s)
 H: hearer (s)
 pl: primary layer
 sl: secondary layer
 tl: tertiary layer
 sce: shared socio contextual environment

Figure 1: Ajayi's Model of Pragma-sociolinguistic Theory

In the schema above, meaning, at the primary, secondary and tertiary layers, is generated by both the speaker(s) and hearer(s) who share the knowledge of the contextual environment in

an interaction. For instance, decoding the meaning of words and utterances at the literal level requires participants are familiar with the referential and linguistic elements of words and utterances. At the secondary level, for meaning to be decoded, participants are equally expected to bring their common experiences to decode indirect utterances. Similarly, at the tertiary level, knowledge of the socio-cultural environment shared by the participants plays a vital role. Thus, in this schema, as applied in this study, shared context environment (SCE) comprises all forms of knowledge- linguistic, psychological, sociological, or physical- shared by participants in interactive discourses.

5. Methodology

Given the nature of this study, an ethnographic research design was adopted. Data were gathered through participant and non-participant observation methods. Participant observation was employed in interactions in which I was personally involved, while non participant observation was used in interactions which I did not partake in but observe from a relative distance. These methods made it possible to gather data that reflected the true language practice of the participants in natural settings. Participants were observed in educational settings such as lecture rooms and hostels, social gatherings, including football viewing centres, shopping malls, parties and commercial vehicles in Southwestern Nigeria, comprising Lagos, Ondo, Oyo, Ogun, and Osun states between 2015 and 2018. A special field note was employed for documenting the observed interactions. However, for ethical considerations, the actual names of the participants where they were heard being mentioned were presented using pseudo names. Data were analysed within the purview of Adegbija's (1982, 1988) pragma-sociolinguistic theory.

5.1 Contextual deconstruction of *dress*, *meet*, and *toast*

This section of the study focuses on the contextual interpretations of the lexical items examined. My focus is on the verb forms of the words.

5.2 *Dress*

The word *dress* is a polysemous word whose semantic realisations are context-driven. In line with the submission of Adegbija, some of the meanings of the word can easily be decoded through the primary layer (literal) of meaning, while others can only be understood by making recourse to the secondary layer (connotative) of meaning. Some of the literal semantic senses of the word *dress* (which require the deployment of the primary layer of meaning realisation) include (1) to put on clothes, (2) to clean or treat a wound, (3) to clean and prepare meat, (4) to put an attractive arrangement in a shop window, (5) to stand in a straight line or to make soldiers stand in a straight line, among others. These senses of the use of the word *dress*, although require specific contexts, are basic to both the L₁ and L₂ contexts of the use of English, hence no reference to the secondary or tertiary layer of meaning interpretation is required. However, senses 6, 7, 8 and 9, as shall be presented in our analysis, are peculiar to the Nigerian socio-cultural context, hence recourse to the primary layer of meaning might not be helpful to L₁ speakers in decoding the meaning of the words in certain context-bound utterances.

Sense 6 (to adjust)

Context 1: This was an interaction between a commercial (taxi) car driver and his passengers.

Driver: *Ibo lẹ n lọ?*

Where are you going?

IP (Intending Passenger): Bodija

Driver: *Ẹ wọlé*

Come in

Driver to a sitting passenger (SP): *Ẹ jọ̀ò, ẹ ba mi **dress** diẹ fún wọn*

Please help adjust a bit for him/her

SP: Adjusts to create a space for IP

Context 2: This interaction took place between two undergraduate university students in a lecture room. One of the students was already seated waiting for the arrival of the lecturer. The other came in shortly before the arrival of the lecturer and this interaction ensued.

Student A: (Already seated)

Student B: (notices an empty seat beside Speaker A) Can you please *dress* for me?

Student A: Okay (shifts)

Student B: Thank you.

In the two contexts presented above, it is observed that the word *dress* is worn a meaning entirely different from what is obtainable in the L₁ context of the use of English. In Context 1, the driver of the car, a semi-(il)literate Yoruba-English bilingual, pleads with the sitting passenger to adjust, that is move in a bit so as to create a sufficient space for the incoming passenger. In doing this, he employs the word *dress* instead of the verb *adjust*. This message is well understood by the passenger who quickly *dressed* in response to the plea of the driver. This mutual interpretation of the word *dress* by both participants as meaning ‘adjustment’ is a function of the shared socio-cultural background by them as Nigerians. If, for instance, the passenger were to be a native speaker of English who just finds him/herself in the country, there might have been a break down in communication, given his/her inability to interpret ‘dress’ as ‘adjust’ in that context. In Context 2, even though the interaction is between undergraduate students of a university who are assumed to have had exposure to the rules guiding the use of English in an L₁ context, the same semantic nuance is attached to the word *dress* by both participants. Given the socio-cultural environment speaker A shares with B, she naturally uses the word *dress* to mean *adjust* in this interaction, knowing it will be easily understood by him. This shared socio-cultural knowledge is shown by B who responds to A’s request by adjusting himself on the seat to create a space for her.

Sense 7 (slap or hit)

Context 3: This interaction was a fight situation between two young men. It took place in Nigerian Pidgin (also known

A: *Na me you dey talk to like that!*

It is me you are talking to like that!

Am I the one you are addressing/talking to like that?

B: *Wetin you wan do?*

What do you want to do?

What can you do/what do you want to do?

A: *Màa dress etí ẹ̀ fún ẹ̀ nísìn yìí*

I will dress your face for you now

I will slap you now

B: *Wà gbá ojú mi! O ò tó bẹ̀ ẹ̀*

You will slap me! You dare not

The interpretation of *dress* in this interaction by both participants is predicated on their shared socio-cultural understanding of the word as such. It would be observed that in the statement of threat issued by Speaker A, no reference is made to the word ‘slap’. He just simply says ‘*màa dress etí...*’ “I will dress your ear”. Speaker B gets the message and responds accordingly. A critical appraisal of this interaction, just like the first one, shows reference to the ordinary or literal sense of the word *dress* will not bring out the socio-cultural or contextual interpretation of the word. In other words, the word has assumed new semantic realisations defined by the realities that define the L₂ context in which it is used. Thus, in agreement with the tenets of Adegbija’s pragma-sociolinguistic theory, some words need reference to the tertiary layer of meaning in their semantico-contextual interpretation. Such is the case of *dress* in the excerpts above where the word is used connotatively to mean ‘slap’.

Sense 8 (to position) This is usually found among football lovers and fans to describe the handling of a ball at a point in time.

Context 1: The case of a footballer who is preparing to take a penalty kick in a football match.

Speaker A: *Mo jẹ̀ẹ̀ri, o maa farabalẹ̀ dress ball yẹn ni*

I trust him; he will take his time to position the ball

Other viewers: (Laugh) *wón ti fì sẹ e*

He is being jinxed to do that

Speaker A: *À bẹ̀ẹ̀ri ni*

Can you imagine!

Context 2: A footballer is seriously criticised for wasting time with the ball when he should have kicked the ball to the back of the net.

A: *Kí ló máa ń sẹ̀ bọ̀bọ̀ yìí náá?*

What is wrong with this guy?

B: *Ó sị ń dress ball, instead kó tètè gbá shot*

He keeps dressing the ball instead of him to quickly kick the ball

C: (Hisses in annoyance) *Bó sẹ̀ máa ń sẹ̀ niyèn. Idiot!*

He is fond of doing that. Idiot

In contexts 8 and 9, the word *dress* assumes another meaning other than its literal sense. In Context 8, the act of the player trying to properly position the ball in the right spot is described by Speaker A as ‘dressing the ball’. The message is clearly understood by Speaker B in particular and other members of the audience in general to mean ‘positioning’ the ball. This mutual understanding of the word ‘dress’ as ‘position’ in this context by the participants is clearly a function of their shared socio-cultural background. The situation would be different in an L₁ context where such contextual interpretation of the word *dress* might be

found queer. Similarly in Context 9, the word *dress* is clearly interpreted as ‘position’ among the interlocutors. Speaker B, drawing on the socio-cultural understanding of the word to mean position in a context like this in Nigeria, bemoans the delay on the part of the said footballer in kicking the ball. The response of Speaker C, which is apparently relevant to the comment of Speaker B, shows the trio share the mutual understanding of the word ‘dress’ to mean ‘position’ in this interaction. Although the word *dress* in the L₁ carries a meaning that is similar to the one expressed in the contexts presented above (to mean to position), it is particularly interesting to report that the sense in which it is used in the Nigerian L₂ is peculiarly different. It is never used in a football context to refer to positioning football in the L₁ context. This practice is in tandem with the claim of Adegbija and Bello (2001) that the transplantation of English to new environments confronts it with new contexts which play a major role in semantic nuances.

5.3 Meet

The word *meet*, very much like ‘dress’ examined earlier in this paper, has many senses which are both literal and socio-cultural. Some of the literal senses of the word which require recourse to the primary layer of meaning interpretation in both L₁ and L₂ contexts include (1) to see somebody at an arranged or appointed place, (2) see someone by chance, (2) see somebody for the first time, (3) come together to discuss something, (4) compete against somebody in a competition, (5) experience a problem or difficult situation, (6) to join or touch. However, in the Nigerian context of English language usage, the word ‘meet’ can as well carry a new meaning borne out of the socio-cultural environment of the Nigerian sociolinguistic space. In that wise, reference is made to the tertiary layer of meaning interpretation as captured in Adegbija’s pragma-sociolinguistic theory. This is illustrated with the examples below:

Sense 7 (to have sexual intercourse)

Context 1: This is a case of a young man lamenting his being jilted by his girl lover to a friend.

A: I can’t believe Juliet has finally left me... in spite of the love she claimed to have for me...

B: You don’t know women. They can be very funny. Anyways, how many times have you *met* her?

A: Several times...

B: Omo, why you dey worry yourself? You never lose now

A: Guy, you cannot understand; I love this babe...

In this interaction, the interpretation of the word ‘meet’ cannot be done within the primary level of meaning (the literal level). Even though the meaning of the word in the excerpt is connotative, its interpretation cannot still be handled at the secondary layer of meaning decoding. This is because the use and understanding of the word in the context of use is symbolically connotative whose semantic realisation can only be appreciated if reference is made to the socio-cultural values of Nigerians, particularly as it relates to the social norms which place certain constraints on language use. The word, as used and interpreted in this context, means to have sexual intercourse (with someone). It is obvious that, although interlocutors in this interaction are communicating largely in English, reference and reverence is shown to the socio-cultural norms of language use in the African system in

general, and the Nigerian socio-cultural environment in particular. Speakers in this interaction demonstrate their knowledge of the stance of the Nigerian sociolinguistic environment on taboo words and expressions. As defined by Oyetade (1994), taboo expressions are such expressions whose use, especially in the public space or discourse causes feelings of maladjustment among participants in a communicative activity. They are thus often avoided in embrace of their euphemistic alternatives (see Ajayi, 2017). As observed by Adeyanju (2011), sex is a taboo expression in the Nigerian sociolinguistic space. Hence, public discourses that require reference to sex are often loaded with expressions that make indirect and metaphoric reference to it.

Being aware of this socio-cultural reality, Speaker B in the excerpt above employs the use of ‘meet’ as a euphemistic alternative reference to sexual intercourse in order not to violate the taboo associated with direct reference to sexual intercourse and activities. This phenomenon is well understood by Speaker A who does not have to struggle to interpret the point being made by Speaker B with the use of the word ‘meet’. Since neither of the primary and secondary levels of meaning can handle the interpretation of meet as used in this context, recourse to the tertiary level in decoding its meaning is imperative.

Context 2: A discussion between two brothers on a relative who keeps a diary where he keeps the record of his sexual activities.

Speaker A: *Ègbón, ẹ ẹ ri pe Bòda Kúrúki yìí ò serious*

Brother, can't you see this Brother Kuruki is not serious

Speaker B: *Eni tí ò gbádùn*

One that is not okay

Speaker A: *Can you imagine, ó n' keep record iye ìgbà tó ti meet iyàwo ẹ*

Can you imagine he is keeping the record of the number of times he sleeps with his wife

Speakers A and B (Both laugh)

The situation in Context 2 is not different from what is observed in Context 1. The two siblings are commenting on an ‘absurd’ practice of the man at the centre of their discussion. Even though the interaction is between two brothers in a private and intimate discussion in which the socio-cultural norm of language use in the country could be relegated to the background, it is observed that the phenomenon of taboo is avoided. Speaker A, in order to avoid being obscene, resorts to the use of the word ‘meet’ to describe sexual intercourse in the interaction. Sharing the same socio-cultural background with Speaker A, Speaker B understands clearly the message embedded in the lexical item ‘meet’ in the interaction, and as such makes his contribution as relevant to the statement of Speaker A.

5.4 Toast

The word toast is another word that manifests different senses in the L₁ and Nigerian L₂ contexts of English language usage. Some of the senses include (1) to drink a glass of wine to thank or wish someone well, (2) to make bread or other food brown by heating it up, (3) to sit or stay near a fire to catch some warmth. However, beyond these senses that are applicable to both English L₁ and L₂ (Nigerian) contexts, the word has assumed a semantic nuance that is peculiar to the Nigerian sociolinguistic environment. This is evident in the excerpts below:

Sense 4 (to woo or ask (someone) out)

Context 1: An interaction between undergraduate students of a university in a salon

Speaker A: Eh en, I even forgot to tell you

Speaker B: What

Speaker A: You won't believe Kaka invited me for a chat last week Friday

Speaker B: (showing interest to hear more) Okay...

Speaker A: Guess what; he *toasted* me!

Speaker B: Yeh! this guy is in love

Speaker A: He said he loves me and would want to spend the rest of his life with me

Speaker B: That is serious; what did you now tell him?

Speaker A: I said I would think about it...

A critical appraisal of the deployment of 'toast' in the excerpt above reveals its meaning does not fall within the various senses that have been listed out earlier whose semantic realisation can be handled by the primary and the secondary layers of meaning realisation. Imagine if Speaker B, for instance, is a native speaker of English who is yet to familiarise herself with the sociolinguistic environment of English in Nigeria, deconstructing 'toast' in this context as 'woo' or 'ask out' would be very difficult. She would have been wondering about the appropriateness or otherwise of the use of the word, considering there is no celebration or party going on. She would also wonder if there is any loaf of bread to be toasted, especially considering the fact that the interaction takes place in a salon where the facilities to toast bread might not be readily available². But, since both speakers share a common sociolinguistic environment of English usage, it is not difficult for them, and Speaker B in particular to make out the meaning of the word as used by Speaker A. In decoding the meaning of 'toast' in this interaction, both speakers make reference to the tertiary level of meaning realisation. This is because the word in this context depicts another meaning of the word, which is neither literal nor connotative in the Nigerian sociolinguistic environment. This sense of the word is also reinforced in the interaction below:

Context 2: An interaction between a young man and a female friend about another lady whom the young man is interested in.

Speaker A: *Bambo, o ò believe pé mi ò mò bí mo ẹe máa toast baby yẹn*

Bambo, you can't believe I don't know how I am going to toast that lady

Speaker B: *Kí ló ẹlẹ?*

What happened?

Speaker A: *Each time tí mo bá ti ri, àyà mi máa n'já*

Each time I see her, I am always scared

Speaker B: *Ẹ̀bí ọ̀kúnrin ni ẹ̀*

You are a man

Speaker A: (Laughs) *o ò serious*

You are not serious

Speaker B: *Wáá ẹ̀ẹ sọ fun pé o like ẹ̀, and you will like to date her*

You will tell her you like her, and that you will like to date her

² Although personal experience has shown some hairdressers in Nigeria do keep cooking utensils as toasting machine, stove among others in the salon.

Speaker A: Okay o, it is just that there is something so unusual about this lady.

Speaker B: Eh en!

Really!

Speaker A: *Yes, kò yé mi...* but I will summon courage to meet her soon.

Yes, I don't understand...

Speaker B: *Ábí kí n bá ẹ lọ?*

Or should I go with you

Speaker A: (Both laugh) Go and sit down...

Here again, just like what obtains in Context 1, the word 'toast' assumes a meaning sense out of the senses found applicable in an L₁ context of English language usage. Both speakers orientate towards their sociolinguistic environment in decoding the actual meaning of 'toast' in the context of use. In some sociolinguistic environment other than Nigeria's, the word 'woo' or 'ask out' would be found; hence, Speaker A's statement *Bambo, you can't believe I don't know how I am going to toast that lady* could have been rendered '*Bambo, you can't believe I don't know how I am going to woo or ask out that lady*'. Since the interpretation of the word 'toast' in this context cannot be done making reference to the literal sense of the word, nor can it be done with recourse to the secondary layer since its use here is not connotative, making recourse to the tertiary layer of meaning interpretation becomes imperative. This is because it is the Nigerian sociolinguistic environment that has bestowed the 'woo' or 'ask out' sense on the word toast. This is line with Igboanusi's (2010) submission that 'toast' in the Nigerian context is often used to mean to 'woo' a girl or ask a girl out.

6. General discussion and conclusion

This paper has attempted a pragma-sociolinguistic deconstruction of three English words in Nigerian sociolinguistic environment. The words are 'dress', 'meet', and 'toast', with particular focus on their grammatical status as verb. As shown in our analysis, the words, apart from their meaning senses in the English L₁ context, manifest other senses that define the socio-cultural and sociolinguistic environment of English language usage in Nigeria. For instance, the word dress, depending on the context and participants, could be interpreted as 'to adjust, to position, and to slap'; the word meet connotes 'to have sexual intercourse', and the word toast can as well be decoded as 'to woo' or 'to ask out'. These Nigerian senses of the interpretation of these words, among others, are pointers to the indigenisation of English in Nigeria. This is a development to which Adegbija (2004:20) reacts thus: 'domestication, in the context of English in Nigeria, connotes 'home-grown', 'made native', adapted and tamed to suit the Nigerian environment'. As Adeyanju (2011) observes, the domestication of English in Nigeria constitutes a difficulty for L₁ users in particular and non-Nigerian speakers of English when interacting with Nigerian speakers of the language, particularly when it comes to understanding of the meaning of certain utterances in some specific contexts. To get round this problem, therefore, making recourse to the different layers of decoding meaning as encapsulated in Adegbija's pragma-sociolinguistic theory which takes in to consideration all the linguistic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic factors might be very essential.

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