

Exploring the Semiotics and Praxis of Paralinguistic Signs between the Igbo and Hausa Extractions of Nigeria

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Abstract

The impact of paralinguistics on all forms of human interactions cannot be underestimated. It is perceived that this form of communication skill could enhance language appreciation, minimize semantic misinterpretations and consequently mitigate inter-tribal conflicts. The survey assayed these devices among the Igbo (n=45) and Hausa (n=45) ethnic groups of Nigeria randomly sampled. Data were analyzed using the Ferdinand De Saussure's theory of Semiotics. Statistical analysis with Chi-square showed that there is a statistically significant association between the similarities and differences of paralinguistics among these ethnic groups.

Keywords: Paralinguistics, inter-tribal conflict, Communication, Igbo, Hausa.

1. Introduction

Language is a universal human trait and has universal human properties that are unique to the language of human beings, which can be spoken or signed. Man and language are inseparable. It is through language that we recognize other peoples' feelings and emotions, which therefore helps us to appreciate our society and our multifarious languages. Nigeria is periodically encumbered with inter-ethnic clashes and religious wars which have consistently led to insurgency and massacres. People misunderstand the good intentions of others because they don't comprehend their utterances whether verbal or nonverbal. Nigeria is a country with multifarious languages, most of which are used in active discourses for communicative interactions which are either verbal or nonverbal. No discourse can be successfully completed in the absence of paralinguistics and the non-comprehension of such unspoken rules may lead to social, religious and political conflicts. There are no utterances or speech signals that are devoid of paralinguistic properties.

Igbo (Igbo language) and Hausa (Hausa language) are some of the major ethnic groups and languages in Nigeria.

Gimson sees language as:

A system of conventional signals used for communication by a whole community. This pattern of conventions covers a system of significant sound units, the inflection and arrangement of words and the association of meaning with words (4).

While Hall posits that language is 'the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral auditory arbitrary symbols' (158).

Language is far beyond mere words, it can be verbal or nonverbal. Nonverbal communication has varied categories, of which paralinguistics is one of them. Paralinguistic devices as semantic enquiries are 'those forms of behaviour which are used for transmitting meaning and are open to meaningful interpretation but do not use words...' (McQuail, 73). We cannot express ourselves without the complementary help of paralinguistics, etc. Scholarly investigations have revealed that verbal communication accounts for 35% of social interactions while the remaining 65% of meaningful negotiation is done nonverbally (Fisher, 119). This accounts for the preponderance of nonverbal language over verbal language in our everyday interactions. For example, when we say 'Action speaks louder than words' or 'Speech is silver, Silence is gold'. We re-emphasise the importance of paralinguistics. (Ajibade, 46) corroborated this postulation by opining that the face has more than 250,000 different expressions.

Para is a Greek word for 'beside or beyond' so Paralinguistics goes side by side with language or it is beyond or more than just language. Paralinguistic devices are culture bound due to the fact that all human languages are equally culture bound, so people of different ethnic groups are bound to misunderstand one another due to the inability to understand one another's paralinguistic behaviour.

According to O'Neil:

These auxiliary communication techniques are highly culture bound. Communication with people from other societies or ethnic groups is fraught with the danger of misunderstanding if their culture and paralinguistics is unknown to you or ignored' (Web)

According to Davies and Widdowson:

'the actual phonetic realization of language elements is only one component of face-to face communication.....and that this also includes such paralinguistic components as tone of voice and gesture. Paralinguistic features must be added to make more meaning (163-164).

When people consider language, they refer to it mainly as the words they speak or write. This is wrong and

totally unacceptable as the significant role of paralanguage has been disregarded. There is a nonverbal element in every communication process.

According to Davies and Widdowson,

The principal purpose of the paralinguistic elements in speaking is to express the speaker's attitude either to what he is saying or to whom he is saying it. Their function is essentially a modal one (164).

Paralinguistic devices are nonverbal actions, though not all nonverbal actions are paralinguistic. Paralinguistic devices are meant to complement vocal linguistic expressions. So all paralinguistic devices must according to Abercrombie: 'Communicate and be part of a conversational interaction' (164). For example, the people that have Parkinson disease nod their heads while speaking. It is not a linguistic non-verbal behaviour. They are not trying to communicate anything linguistically through that nodding of head because it is controlled by reflex. So also tribal marks on the faces of people to show their tribes are nonverbal behaviours that are non-linguistic because though the marks communicate the tribes of their owners, they are not part of a conversational interaction. Other examples are colours, clothing, though there are gestures that are linguistic. Through their use one communicates a vast amount of feelings. The emission of paralinguistic cues can be intentional or unintentional.

The crucial need of paralanguage can also be viewed in the use of emoticons in writing mails to add context to what is being said as the facial expressions and tone of voice cannot be seen at the point of communication. There are many nonverbal ways to communicate such as kinesics, haptics, proxemics, dressing and physical appearance.

1.1 Materials and Methods:

The study participants (n=90) from the sampled ethnic groups were orally interviewed. The questions were tailored to elicit vital information such as the awareness of paralinguistic devices in the study area, whether these paralinguistic devices are culture bound, the awareness of voiced paralanguage and gestures. The data were analyzed using the Semiotic Theory by Ferdinand de Saussure.

Anambra and Imo states were representative of the Igbo ethnic group while Sokoto and Kano states represented the Hausa ethnic group.

1.1.1. Results:

1.1.2 Table 1: Table Showing the Analysis of Igbo and Hausa Paralanguage Using the Semiotic Theory.

| | | Vocal Paralanguage | |
|-----|--|--|--|
| S/N | Signifier | Signified(Igbo) | Signified (Hausa) |
| 1. | Shaa!/Taa! | Used to hush a child. | Not Applicable |
| 2. | Ohoo! | Used to indicate that 'I told you' | Used to indicate that 'I told you' |
| 3. | Kum | Sound made with the tongue and the upper palate, to indicate displeasure over something. | Sound made with the tongue and the upper palate, to indicate displeasure over something. |
| 4. | Hiss | Sound made with clenching the teeth, rounding the lip and exhaling air, used to stop people from making a noise. | Sound made with clenching the teeth, rounding the lip and exhaling air, used to stop people from making a noise. |
| 5. | M..m..m..m..! | Sound made in the glottis, used to indicate 'danger' | Not applicable |
| 6. | Mm! | Assent indicator | Assent indicator |
| 7. | Mm..m! | Negative indicator | Negative indicator |
| 8. | Ah! | Surprise | Surprise |
| 9. | Scream | A high-pitched sound indicating fear, pain, excitement or amusement. | A high-pitched sound indicating fear, pain, excitement or amusement. |
| 10. | Ehh! | Expressing surprise | Not Applicable |
| 11. | Tsk tsk with shaking the head sideways. | Indicating disapproval | Indicating disapproval |
| 12. | Gasp | Used to indicate when somebody is shocked, afraid or when something suddenly happens. | Used to indicate when somebody is shocked, afraid or when something suddenly happens. |
| 13. | Cry | A loud inarticulate expression of pain, rage or surprise. | A loud inarticulate expression of pain, rage or surprise. |
| 14. | Laugh | To express amusement. | To express amusement. |
| 15. | Rhythm | Moderately fast. The pattern of sound that characterizes a language or dialect of the ethnic group. | Slow rhythm. The pattern of sound that characterizes a language or dialect of the ethnic group. |
| | | Gestures | |
| 16. | Wagging the forefinger before somebody. | Be careful. | Be careful. |
| 17. | Calling someone with the forefingers. | Derogatory, for animals. | Derogatory, for animals. |
| 18. | Calling someone with your palm facing up or down and wagging your whole fingers. | Polite way of calling someone. | Polite way of calling someone. |
| 19. | When a woman rejects a man's handshake. | She is angry at the man. | Shaking a woman is not allowed. |

| | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|
| 20 | Opening One's lower eyelids with One's hands . | Used to Indicate 'Serves you right' | Used to Indicate 'Serves you right' |
| 21. | Slanting ones mouth to one side. | Used to indicate 'Surprise' | Disrespect/snubbing |
| 22. | Turning ones back, opening the under garments, holding the buttocks in both hands, bending down and showing the other person the bare buttocks. | Used to indicate that the other person is despicable. | Not Applicable |
| 23. | Nodding | Yes | Yes |
| 24. | Shaking the head sideways | No | No |
| 25. | Holding and pulling both ears while talking with somebody. | Used to warn somebody. | Used to warn somebody. |
| 26. | Spreading ones palm at the other person, when one is angry. | Used to indicate displeasure at ones action.(Waka) | Used to indicate displeasure at ones action.(Uwaka) |
| 27. | A man shakes a lady and scratches her palm softly. | Used to indicate a proposal of love. | Used to indicate a proposal of love. |
| 28 | Snapping with the third finger and the thumb at somebody. | Used to indicate being disgusted at someone. | Used to indicate being disgusted at someone. |
| 29. | Waving gently | Goodbye | Goodbye |
| 30. | Waving one's palm backwards | Go | Go |
| 31. | Wrinkling your nose at someone. | Mocking someone or betrayal. | Not Applicable |
| 32. | Clenching both fists and raising them to the stomach level and scowling at someone. | Not Applicable | Do you want to fight? |
| 33. | If the person being challenged, clenches his right fist and raises it towards the person, while spreading his left palm. | Not Applicable | The person wishes to fight. |
| 34. | If the person being challenged hits the back of one palm on the other palm facing up. | Not Applicable | The person wishes not to fight. |
| 35. | During a marriage ceremony, when the bride wears a short sleeved dress and looks up boldly greeting guests. | Polite bride | Non-virgin bride. |
| 36. | When a man clenches his fist and raises the arm to shoulder level after greeting someone. | Not Applicable | It is an acknowledgement of esteem. |
| 37 | Using the left palm to hold on the lower right arm when greeting someone. | It is an acknowledgement of esteem. | Not Applicable. |
| 38. | When a man after greeting one, touches his chest. | Not Applicable | It means peace. |
| 39. | Raising two hands beside the ears. | Not Applicable | Prayer mood. |
| 40 | Joining the two hands together, closing the eyes and bending the head. | Prayer mood. | Not applicable |
| 41. | When a bride shies away from her guests and does not look at them boldly. | Impolite bride | Polite/Virgin bride. |
| 42 | When a woman shakes someone with both hands and bows slightly. | To indicate respect | Not applicable |
| 43 | When a woman rejects a man's handshake. | She is angry at the man. | Shaking is not allowed. |
| 44 | Hitting the two laps while listening to a story. | To indicate a strange story. | Not Applicable |
| 45 | Thrusting forward the hand and showing the palm in a vertical position. | Stop | Stop |

1.1.3 Table 2. Table Showing Similarities in Paralinguistic Devises between Igbo and Hausa Ethnic Groups.

Vocal Paralanguage

| S/N | SIGN | MEANING | IGBO | HAUSA |
|-----|--|---|------|-------|
| 1. | Ohoo! | Used to indicate that 'I told you' | | |
| 2. | Hiss | Sound made with clenching the teeth, rounding the lip and exhaling air, like the sound of a continuous 's' used to stop people from making a noise. | √ | √ |
| 3. | Mm! | Assent indicator | √ | √ |
| 4. | Mm..m! | Negative indicator | √ | √ |
| 5. | Mm! | Assent indicator | √ | √ |
| 6. | Tsk tsk with shaking the head sideways. | Indicating disapproval | √ | √ |
| 7. | Kum | Sound made with the tongue and the upper palate, to indicate displeasure over something. | √ | √ |
| 8. | Gasp | Used to indicate when someone is shocked, afraid or when something suddenly happens. | √ | √ |
| 9. | Cry | A loud inarticulate expression of pain, rage or surprise. | √ | √ |
| 10. | Laugh | Make sound expressing amusement. | √ | √ |
| 11. | Scream | A high-pitched sound indicating fear, pain, excitement or amusement. | √ | √ |
| | | Gestures | √ | √ |
| 12. | Spreading ones palm at the other person, when one is angry. (Waka) | Used to indicate displeasure at ones action. 'Uwaka' is a hausa word meaning your mother. | √ | √ |
| 13. | Calling someone with the forefinger | Derogatory, for animals. | √ | √ |
| 14. | Calling someone with your palm facing up or down and wagging your whole fingers. | Polite way of calling someone. | √ | √ |
| 15. | Nodding | Yes | √ | √ |
| 16. | Waving gently | Goodbye | √ | √ |
| 17. | Waving one's palm backwards | Go | √ | √ |
| 18. | Wagging the forefinger before somebody. | Be careful | √ | √ |
| 19. | Shaking the head sideways | No | √ | √ |
| 20. | Holding and pulling both ears while talking with somebody. | Used to warn somebody. | √ | √ |
| 21. | Calling someone with the forefingers | Derogatory, for animals. | √ | √ |
| 22. | Calling someone with your palm facing up or down and wagging your whole fingers. | Polite way of calling someone. | √ | √ |
| 23. | A man shakes a lady and scratches her palm softly. | Used to indicate a proposal of love. | √ | √ |
| 24. | Snapping with the third finger and the thumb at somebody. | Used to indicate being disgusted at someone. | √ | √ |
| 25. | Thrusting forward the hand and showing the palm in a vertical position. | Stop | √ | √ |

1.1.4 Table 3: Table Showing Differences in Paralinguistic Devises between Igbo and Hausa Ethnic Groups.

| S/N | SIGN | MEANING | | IGBO | HAUSA |
|-----------------|---|--|--|-----------------|-------|
| | | Vocal Paralanguage | | | |
| 1. | Shaa!/Taa! | Used to hush a child. | | √ | × |
| 2. | M..m..m..m..! | Sound made in the glottis, used to indicate 'danger' | | √ | × |
| 3. | Ehh! | Expressing surprise | | √ | × |
| 4. | Rhythm | The pattern of sound that characterizes a language or dialect. | | Moderately fast | Slow |
| Gestures | | | | | |
| 5. | When a woman rejects a man's handshake. | It is not allowed. | | × | √ |
| 6. | When a man clenches his fist and raises his right arm to shoulder level after greeting someone. | It is an acknowledgement of esteem. | | × | √ |
| 7. | Using the left palm to hold on the right lower arm when greeting an elderly person. | It is an acknowledgement of esteem. | | √ | × |
| 8. | When a man after greeting someone, touches his chest. | It means peace. | | × | √ |
| 9. | Turning ones back, opening the under garments, holding the buttocks in both hands, bending down and showing the other person the bare buttocks. | Used to indicate that the other person is despicable. | | √ | × |
| 10. | When a woman shakes someone with both hands and bows slightly. | To indicate respect | | √ | × |
| 11. | When a bride shies away from her wedding guests and does not look at them boldly. | An indication of virgin bride. | | × | √ |
| 12. | Clenching both fists and raising them to the stomach level and scowling at someone. | Used to ask whether one wants to fight? | | × | √ |
| 13. | If the person being challenged clenches his right fist and raises it towards the person, while spreading and raising his left palm to shoulder level. | To indicate a desire to fight. | | × | √ |
| 14. | If the person being challenged hits the back of one palm on the other palm facing up, continuously. | The person wishes not to fight. | | × | √ |
| 15. | When a woman rejects a man's handshake. | She is angry at the man. | | √ | × |
| 16. | Hitting the two laps while listening to a story. | To indicate a strange story. | | √ | × |
| 17. | Wrinkling your nose at someone. | Mocking someone or betrayal. | | √ | × |
| 18. | During a marriage ceremony, when the bride wears a short sleeved dress and looks up boldly greeting guests. | Non-virgin bride | | × | √ |
| 19. | Raising two hands beside the ears. | Prayer mood | | × | √ |
| 20. | Joining the two hands together, closing the eyes and bending the head. | Prayer mood | | √ | × |

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$$

Difference = 20 = 44.44%. Similarities = 25 = 55.55%

1.1.5 Table 4: Chi- Square Frequency Distribution Table

| Frequency | Difference | Similarity |
|-----------|------------|------------|
| O | 20 | 25 |
| E | 32.5 | 32.5 |

$$X^2 = \frac{(20-32.5)^2}{32.5} + \frac{(25-32.5)^2}{32.5}$$

$$= \frac{(12.5)^2}{32.5} + \frac{(-7.5)^2}{32.5}$$

$$4.8 + 0.2 = 5.0$$

$$= X^2_{Cal} = 5$$

$$= X^2_{Tab} = 3.84.$$

1.1.6 Discussion

Statistical analysis using chi-square (x^2) showed that there is a statistically significant value (association) between the similarities and differences of the paralanguages of the Igbo and Hausa ethnic groups.

The results of the data were discussed hereunder. This work agrees with Saussure's theory of semiotics that there is no connection between a sign and its meaning, as one sign can have varied meanings in different cultures. Generally, the findings unravelled some forms of paralinguistic devices in the two major ethnic groups

in Nigeria, highlighting their similarities and differences. Four tables were used for this work and tables 1-3 were classified into two sections namely: Vocal paralanguage and Gestures.

Table 1: The different forms of paralinguistic devices among the studied ethnic groups are as highlighted in table 1. In the first section of Table 1, there are fifteen 15(33%) vocal paralanguage identified in both the Igbo and Hausa ethnic groups, some of them are:

Vocal Paralanguage

- a) Shaa!----- Used to hush somebody, especially children.
- b) Ohoo!-----Used to indicate 'I told you'
- c) M..m..m..m!—Sound made in the glottis, used to indicate 'danger'
- d) Ehh!-----Used to express surprise.
- e) Mm!-----Also used as an assent indicator.
- f) Mm..m!-----Negative indicator.
- g) Hiss-----Sound made with clenching the teeth, rounding the lip and exhaling air, used to stop people from making a noise
- h) Scream----- A high-pitched sound indicating fear, pain, excitement or amusement.
- i) Gasp-----Used to indicate when something is shocked, afraid or when something suddenly happens.
- j) Tsk tsk with a shake of the head.--- Indicating disapproval.
- k) Cry-----A loud inarticulate expression of pain, rage or surprise.
- l) Laugh-----Make sound expressing amusement.
- p) Rhythm-----Moderately fast. The pattern of sound that characterizes a language or dialect of the ethnic group.

Gestures

In the second section: Gestures, there are 30(67%) gestures identified here. Some of them are:

- a) Spreading ones palm at the other person, when one is angry. (Waka)-- Used to indicate displeasure at ones action.
- b) Calling someone with the forefinger facing up-- Used to indicate displeasure at ones action.
- c) Calling someone with the forefinger facing up--Derogatory, usually for domestic animals.
- d) Calling someone with your palm facing up or down and wagging your whole fingers--Polite way of calling someone.
- e) Thrusting forward the hand and showing the palm in a vertical position—Stop.
- f) Intertwining the fingers on the head, with a frown on the face—indicating trouble or confusion.
- g) Opening ones lower eyelids with ones hands—Used to indicate 'Serves you right'.
- h). Slanting ones mouth to one side-- Used to indicate 'Surprise'
- i). Turning ones back, opening the under garments, holding the buttocks in both hands, bending down and showing the other person the bare buttock- used to indicate that the other person is despicable
- j) Nodding—Assent indicator
- k) Shaking the head sideways—Negative indicator
- l) Holding and pulling both ears while talking with somebody-- Used to warn somebody.

The Signifier in No. 1 of Table 1: Shaa!/Taa! Used to hush a child in the Igbo paralanguage but this vocal paralanguage is not applicable in the Hausa paralanguage.

The Signifier in No. 2 of Table 1: Ohoo! Used to indicate that 'I told you' both in the Igbo and Hausa vocal paralanguage.

The Signifier in No. 5 of Table 1: M..m..m..m.! Sound made in the glottis, used to indicate 'danger'

The Signifier in No. 26 of Table 1: Spreading ones palm at the other person, when one is angry (Uwaka), and the Signified: To indicate displeasure at ones action, is originally a Hausa word but in the Igbo paralanguage, the 'Uwaka' transmutes into 'Waka' meaning still the same thing.(Your mother).

The Signifier in Nos 23 and 24 of Table 1: Nodding and shaking the head sideways signifies yes or no respectively.

The Signifier in Nos 29 and 30 of Table 1: Waving gently and waving one's palm backwards Signify goodbye and disinterest respectively in both ethnic groups.

The Signifier in No. 30 of Table 1: Waving ones palm backwards signifies the instruction to depart/Go.

The Signifier in No.35 of Table 1: In the Hausa paralanguage, the bride in a marriage ceremony wears a short sleeved dress and looks up boldly greeting their guests. The Signified: Non-virgin bride; but in the Igbo culture, the Signifier is the same but the Signified is: Warm and a loving bride.

The Signifier in No. 45 of Table 1: Thrusting forward the hand and showing the palm in a vertical position,

signifies stop.

Table 2: Table Showing Similarities in Paralinguistic Devises between Igbo and Hausa Ethnic Groups:

Vocal Paralanguage: This table has eleven 11(24%) vocal paralinguages. Some of them are:

The Signifier in No.1: Ohoo! Used to indicate 'I told you so' for both ethnic groups

The Signifier in No. 3: Mm! Assent Indicator for both ethnic groups.

Gestures

This table has thirteen 13(29%) gestures. Some of them are:

The Signifier in No. 13 of Table 2: Calling someone with the forefinger signifies derogation of the person in both ethnic groups.

Signifier in No. 14 of Table 2: Calling someone with your palm facing up or down and wagging your whole fingers is a polite way of calling someone in both ethnic groups.

The Signifier in No. 25 of Table 2: Thrusting forward the hand and showing the palm in a vertical position signifies stop in both ethnic groups.

Table 3: Table Showing Differences in Paralinguistic Devises Between Igbo and Hausa Ethnic Groups.

Vocal Paralanguage:

This table has four 4 (20%) vocal paralinguages. Some of them are:

The Signifier in No. 1 of Table 3: Shaa! Used to hush a child only in the Igbo paralinguage.

The Signifier in No. 2 of Table 3: M..m..m..m..! used to indicate danger.

Gestures

This table has sixteen 16 (80%) gestures. Some of them are:

The Signifier in No. 5: When a woman rejects a man's handshake. Handshakes for women are not allowed in the Hausa ethnic group.

The Signifier in No. 7: Using the left palm to hold on the right lower arm when greeting an elderly person. This is only allowed in the Igbo ethnic group.

The percentage similarity of the paralinguistic devices among the two ethnic groups is 55.55%, while the percentage difference is 44.44%.

1.1.7 Conclusion

The communication process consists of more than the spoken or written language. Most people are largely unaware of the existence or even the importance of paralinguistic communication yet it manifests in interpersonal relationships and influences our assessment of other people and theirs about us. It is not difficult to understand the benefits a person can derive when he understands the paralinguage of other people. The study showed that the percentage similarity of the paralinguistic devices among the two ethnic groups is 55.55%, while the percentage difference is 44.44%. The Statistical analysis showed that there is a statistically significant value between similarities and differences of the paralinguages of the Igbo and Hausa ethnic groups. The implication of the result of this study is that the similarities and differences of paralinguage among these ethnic groups are considerable factors in inter-tribal conflicts. It could therefore be postulated that the discrepancies or otherwise in paralinguage is co-related to inter-tribal conflicts.

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