

# A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF INTIMATE EXPRESSIONS IN RELATIONSHIPS USING IGBO LANGUAGE.

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## Abstract

*This study examines the use of intimate expressions in relationships within the Igbo language community. The overall aim of the study is to provide a pragmatic analysis of the use of these expressions and how they are used to strengthen or weaken the bonds between partners. The study utilizes the pragmatic framework to examine how these expressions are used in conversation and what specific communicative functions they serve. Specifically, the study explores the use of intimate expressions such as terms of endearment, compliments, and nicknames in romantic relationships. There is a gap in scholarly research regarding the pragmatic analysis of words employed in expressing intimacy within the Igbo linguistic context. The research design involves a qualitative approach that relies on extensive extraction of words used in Igbo language to maintain intimacy through Igbo novels. The findings of the study demonstrate that intimate expressions are an important aspect of communication within relationships, serving to reinforce the bonds between partners and to communicate affection and intimacy. The study further reveals that the use of intimate expressions in Igbo language relationships is determined by various situational factors, including the level of intimacy between partners, their cultural background, and their individual personalities. Furthermore, this study contributes to our understanding of how intimate expressions are used in romantic relationships and provides insight into the communicative functions they serve in the context of the Igbo language community.*

Keywords: Intimate expressions, Speech acts, Igbo Culture, Pragmatics

## Introduction

Language is an essential and unavoidable part of human existence, serving as a medium of communication between people. Language does not only perform communicative function but also its profound influence on societal dynamics and its important in human existence human existence (Ifechelobi 2015). Igbo language is one of Nigeria's most frequently spoken languages, with roughly 20 million people speaking it (Echeruo 2001). It is the primary native language of the south eastern people, with around 20 dialects according to Odinye 2019. Igbo language has a rich cultural and historical past and is spoken by people in Nigeria's south-east area, mainly in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo state, some sections of Rivers and Delta, and Cross River States. Igbo people are generally found in the aforementioned places, but they can be found in small and large numbers all over the world (Igbokwe, 2013). The Igbo language is noted for its tonality, which means the meaning of a word can alter depending on the tone. The Igbo language is known for its depth and intricacy and serves as a remarkable means of expressing profound emotional bonds. According to Ugorji (2009), "nne" in its affectionate form derives from "nwanne," which translates to 'brother' or 'sister. Ugorji also stated that children are refrained from calling their parents by their names, which can be understood as a way of respecting age and status. This practice underscores the significance of adhering to linguistic norms even in casual or intimate relationships. The following terms are commonly used: Mpa/Papa/Dad/Daddie for 'father,' and Mma/Mama/Mum/Mummie for 'mother.' Additionally, "Mpa m" translates to 'my father,' and "Mma m" means 'my mother.' "Nnaa m" refers to '(my) father,' while "Nne" means 'mother.

Yule (1996:3) emphasizes that pragmatics is primarily concerned with the analysis of meaning as conveyed by a speaker and grasped by a listener. He highlights the significance of pragmatic analyses in deciphering what people communicate through their chosen utterances rather than merely dissecting the isolated meanings of individual words within those expressions. Mey (2001: 6) asserts that a genuine pragmatic

account should not confine itself to grammatically encoded aspects but rather engage with language users within their social contexts. Pragmatics seeks to bridge the gap between language and its practical application by considering the broader social and contextual dimensions of communication.

The Igbo language, a prominent Nigerian language with a rich cultural heritage, serves as a vital medium for communication, reflecting the values, norms, and social dynamics of its speakers. Intimacy, a fundamental aspect of human relationships, is often expressed through language. However, there is a noticeable gap in scholarly research regarding the pragmatic analysis of words employed in expressing intimacy within the Igbo linguistic context. The problem at hand stems from the limited understanding of linguistic choices and pragmatic strategies employed by speakers of Igbo when engaging in intimate communication.

Despite the significance of intimacy in interpersonal relationships, there is little or no studies that investigate pragmatic features inherent in expressions of intimacy in the Igbo language. This knowledge gap impedes understanding of how intimacy is conveyed through language in the Igbo cultural context. The Igbo people, with their diverse cultural practices, may exhibit unique linguistic patterns in expressing intimacy, and this research aims to establish the relationship between intimacy and the use of language in romantic relationships in Igbo culture, it also aims at providing insights into effective communication in romantic relationships in Igbo culture.

This research aims to study of language use within the context of intimacy, shedding light on the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions embedded in Igbo expressions of closeness. Understanding the words and linguistic strategies employed in expressing intimacy contributes to the preservation of the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people.

The research bridges the gap between linguistic and cultural studies, providing valuable interdisciplinary insights. The findings will aid in the development of pragmatic competence among language learners and educators. Understanding how intimacy is expressed in the Igbo language equips individuals with the necessary skills to navigate social interactions appropriately, fostering effective communication in various contexts. Insights from the study may influence language policies and curriculum development. The research contributes to improved cross-cultural communication by uncovering cultural ingredients embedded in expressions of intimacy. This knowledge is essential for individuals engaging in intercultural interactions, promoting mutual respect and understanding among diverse communities.

This study meticulously identifies and selects a set of words in the Igbo language that are commonly used in expressing intimacy. These words will be chosen based on their frequency, cultural relevance, and contextual significance. The research will study pragmatic functions of the selected words.

### **Pragmatics**

Pragmatics describes the meaning intended by the speaker and received by the hearer. Griffiths (2006:1) elucidates pragmatics as an encompassing "toolkit" for conveying meaning, rooted in the language's vocabulary and its mechanisms for constructing richer meanings during meaningful communication. Yule (1996:3) emphasizes that pragmatics is primarily concerned with the analysis of meaning as conveyed by a speaker and grasped by a listener, highlighting the significance of pragmatic analyses in deciphering what people communicate through their chosen utterances rather than merely dissecting the isolated meanings of individual words within those expressions. Mey (2001: 6) asserts that a genuine pragmatic account should not confine itself to grammatically encoded aspects but rather engage with language users within their social contexts. In this light, pragmatics seeks to bridge the gap between language and its practical application by considering the broader social and contextual dimensions of communication.

In accordance with Horn and Kecskes (2013:356), pragmatics endeavours to extend the traditional scope of linguistics by encompassing a wide array of issues and aspects that collectively define language in practical use. It, thus, emerges as a multifaceted discipline that sheds light on the intricate dynamics of language in the real world, where context and communication intersect.

### **Implicature**

Peccei as cited in Mochamad (2015) describes implicature to the inferences that cannot be derived from isolated utterances but depend on the context of the utterance and shared knowledge between the speaker and the hearer. Language possesses its inherent logic, allowing certain meanings to be implied beyond what is explicitly stated. From the definition above, Mochamad (2015) concludes that implicature represents an alternative to implication, encompassing additional meanings in both logical and informal language contexts.

### **Deixis**

Yule (2006:115) defines deixis as linguistic elements whose understanding relies on the speaker's intended meaning, such as terms like "tomorrow" and "here." As a result, it can be inferred that deixis includes words or phrases that are generally considered inherent elements to some degree in all natural languages.

### **Entailments**

Yule (1996:25) describes entailment as something that logically follows from an utterance. One-way entailment implies that sentences cannot be paraphrased to be true, while two-way entailment suggests that sentences can be paraphrased. Hence, we can state that "entailment pertains to logical conclusions that arise from what is asserted within the utterance.

### **Speech Act**

Speech act theory involves language processes that enable actions through both connotative and performative utterances. It was originally introduced by Austin as an idea in the realm of language. Yule (2006:118) defines speech acts as actions performed by a speaker through their utterances. Peccei (1999:47) further breaks down speech acts into three levels: "the locution (the words the speaker uses)," "the illocution or illocutionary force (what the speaker is doing by using those words)," and "the perlocution (the effect of those words on the hearer).

### **Methodology**

The data for this work was extracted from an in-depth analysis of three carefully chosen Igbo literary texts as primary sources namely: *Nwata Rie Awo* (Oju Anu) by Goddy Onyekaonwu, *Ukwa Ruo Oge ya* (O daa) by Tony Ubesie and *Enyi mere Enyi ya* by Nkechiyere Nwokoye and Nkoli Nnyigide. Comprehensive examinations of these literary texts are carried out, focusing primarily on the interpersonal interactions between the characters within their respective narratives. Fourteen names were selected for this study. The primary objective of this analysis was to discern the multifaceted ways in which characters conveyed and expressed intimacy throughout the course of the novels. This entailed a meticulous scrutiny of the linguistic aspects, non-verbal cues, and emotional dimensions inherent in the characters' communication.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

The data collected is analyzed in this section. Particular attention is devoted to the examination of speech acts, a fundamental aspect of pragmatic analysis. Speech acts, being the cornerstone of how language conveys meaning and intentions, assumed a central role in the analysis. The research employs the various speech acts used within the narrative, such as direct and indirect speech acts, perlocutionary acts, and illocutionary acts. These forms of language use were scrutinized to discern how they contributed to the portrayal of emotional closeness and the expression of intimacy within the literary context.

<b>N/S</b>	<b>Literal meaning</b>	<b>Speech Act performance</b>	<b>Contextual factors</b>
1.	"Oriaku m" (Nwokoye & Nnyigide 2021:77) literally translates to "someone that eats my money" in English.	Expressive/Affective: The primary speech act here is expressive, conveying a sense of financial expenditure and perhaps some level of jest or humor. By using the term "Oriaku," the speaker is expressing a relationship dynamic where the person referred to has an impact on the speaker's finances	The phrase is likely used in social settings, particularly in conversations about shared finances, expenses, or financial responsibilities. It may be employed during moments of playful banter, possibly within relationships, friendships, or familial contexts, where financial discussions take on a light-hearted tone.
2.	Ada nkem" (Nwokoye & Nnyigide 2021:64) literally translates to "my own daughter" in English.	Expressive/Affective: The primary speech act is expressive, conveying a deep sense of affection and ownership. By using the term "Ada nkem," the speaker is expressing a close and personal relationship with the daughter being referred to as "my own."	The term is likely used in familial settings, especially within conversations or interactions involving family members. It may be employed during moments of affection, in greetings, or when referring to the daughter in a context that emphasizes the close and personal nature of the relationship
3.	"Ada nna ya" (Nwokoye & Nnyigide 2021:64) literally translates to "her father's daughter" in English.	Descriptive: The primary speech act is descriptive, providing information about the familial relationship between the female individual and her father. By using the term "Ada nna ya," the speaker is describing the specific identity of the person as the daughter of a particular father.	The phrase is likely used in intimate or affectionate contexts, such as expressing love or a close connection. It is usually used in family relationships, where the speaker wants to convey a sense of ownership and closeness.
4.	"Di m" (Onyekwonwu 2008:15) is an abbreviation derived from the phrase "my husband" in English.	Expressive/Affective: The primary speech act is expressive, providing a quick and convenient way to refer to one's husband. By using the term "Di m," the speaker is expressing familiarity and a close relationship with their spouse	The term is likely used in various contexts, such as text messages, social media, or casual conversations, where brevity is valued. It may be employed as a term of endearment or when discussing the husband in a familiar and informal setting. Non-verbal cues are less applicable in this case, as the term is often used in written communication.
5.	"Ezigbo M" (Onyekwonwu 2008:70) can be broken down into "Ezigbo" (good) and the suffix "M"	Expressive/Affective: The primary speech act is expressive, conveying a positive and appreciative view	The term's usage depends on the context in which it is employed. It could be used to express approval, admiration,

	(indicating possession or association). Therefore, it could mean "my good one" or "my good [something]" in English.	of the individual or thing being referred to as "Ezigbo M." By using the term, the speaker is expressing a favorable and positive perspective.	or affection in various situations. It may be employed during conversations, greetings, or moments where the speaker wants to convey a positive sentiment.
6.	"Ada oma" (Nwokoye & Nnyigide 2021:66) literally translates to "good daughter" in English.	Expressive/Affective: The primary speech act is expressive, conveying a strong sense of affection, pride, and admiration. By using the term "Ada oma," the speaker is expressing a positive and appreciative view of their daughter.	The phrase is used in contexts where expressing admiration or complimenting someone's appearance is appropriate, such as in social gatherings, celebrations, or interpersonal interactions
7.	"Nwa mma" (Onyekonwu 2008:71) literally translates to "beautiful child" in English.	Expressive/Affective: The primary speech act is expressive, conveying a positive and complimentary view of the child being referred to as "Nwa mma." By using the term, the speaker is expressing admiration for the child's beauty.	The term is likely used within familial or close relationships where expressing admiration for a child is appropriate. It may be employed during conversations, greetings, or moments where the speaker wants to convey affection and appreciation for the child.
8.	"Ugo m" (Ubesie 1996:58) literally translates to "royal and regal woman" in English.	Expressive/Affective: The primary speech act here is expressive, conveying a sense of admiration and reverence for the woman being addressed. By using the term "Ugo m," the speaker is expressing that the woman possesses qualities reminiscent of royalty and regality.	The phrase is likely used in contexts where expressing admiration, respect, or endearment is appropriate, such as in personal relationships, celebrations, or moments of appreciation. It can be employed during moments where the speaker wants to highlight the woman's dignified and majestic qualities.
9.	"Mma di n'obi" (Nwokoye & Nnyigide 2021:23) literally translates to "beauty is in the heart" in English	Compliment: It functions as a compliment, acknowledging and praising the worth and special attributes of the person who has a loving and kind heart.	The phrase is likely used in contexts where expressing admiration, respect, or appreciation for the person's uniqueness and value is appropriate. It can be employed during moments where the speaker wants to highlight the rare and special qualities of the person, emphasizing their worth.
10.	Nke m" (Nwokoye & Nnyigide 2021:20)	Possession: It functions to denote possession, indicating that the object or person is	The phrase is likely used in contexts where expressing a personal connection or

	literally translates to "my own" in English.	associated with the speaker in a special and personal way	ownership is appropriate, such as when referring to a loved one, a cherished possession, or something of personal significance. It can be employed during moments when the speaker wants to emphasize the closeness or personal nature of the relationship
11.	"Obi m" (Nwokoye & Nnyigide 2021:12) literally translates to "my heart" in English	Compliment: It functions as a compliment, recognizing the position of someone in one's life, conveying the romantic relationship between the lovers.	The phrase is usually used amongst lovers to express the value placed on the other party and how indispensable the person is to the speaker.
12.	"Nnam ukwu" (Onyekaoonu 2008:25) literally translates to "my big father" in English.	Expressive/Affective: The primary speech act is expressive, conveying respect and a sense of hierarchy. By using the term "Nnam ukwu," the speaker is expressing reverence for the person being referred to as a big father.	The term is likely used in contexts where showing respect and acknowledging authority or seniority is appropriate. It may be employed when addressing elders, leaders, or individuals who hold a significant role within the community or family. Non-verbal cues, such as a respectful demeanor, a bow, or other gestures, may accompany the utterance, reinforcing the respectful and hierarchical nature of the expression.
13.	"Olu gbajie" (Nwokoye & Nnyigide 2021:19) literally translates to "Necks are breaking trying to look at you" in English	Expressive/Affective: The primary speech act here is expressive, conveying admiration and playfulness. By using the term "Olu gbajie," the speaker is expressing that the person being referred to is extremely attractive, to the point that people are straining their necks to get a better look. Compliment: It functions as a compliment, acknowledging and praising the physical attractiveness or presence of the person. The use of this expression goes beyond a simple acknowledgment and conveys a sense of awe.	The phrase is likely used in social settings or situations where someone's appearance is particularly striking or attention-grabbing. It may be employed during moments of giving compliments or playful banter, perhaps in the context of social events, celebrations, or casual interactions.

14.	"Ihunanya m" (Ubesie 1996:31) literally translates to "the only one I see with my eyes. My love" in English.	Expressive/Affective: The primary speech act here is expressive, conveying profound love and exclusivity. By using the term "Ifunanya m," the speaker is expressing that the person being referred to is the only one they see with their eyes, emphasizing a unique and special bond	The phrase is likely used in intimate and romantic settings, such as during moments of expressing deep emotions or in the context of a romantic relationship. It may be employed during moments of intimacy, special occasions, or as part of daily expressions of love.
15.	Oriaku" or "Odozie Aku" literally translates to "the eater of my money" or "the caretaker of my money" in English.	Expressive/Affective: The primary speech act here is expressive, conveying a playful and teasing tone. By using the term "Oriaku" or "Odozie Aku," the speaker is referring to the person who spends or manages their money, adding a humorous twist.	The phrase is likely used in the context of a relationship, where financial dynamics, expenses, or budgeting are being discussed in a light-hearted manner. It may be employed during moments of playful teasing or banter between partners, possibly during conversations about shared finances or financial responsibilities
16.	"Ola'm" literally translates to "my diamond" in English.	Expressive/Affective: The primary speech act here is expressive, conveying a profound sense of value and admiration. By using the term "Ola'm," the speaker is expressing that the person being referred to is as precious and valuable as a diamond.	The phrase is likely used in personal relationships, especially in romantic contexts, where expressing admiration and endearment is common. It may be employed during moments of intimacy, celebrations, or expressions of love to convey a deep emotional connection.
17.	Enyi di ya" literally translates to "her husband's friend" in English	Descriptive: The primary speech act is descriptive, providing information about the nature of the relationship. By using the term "Enyi di ya," the speaker is describing a person who is a friend of the woman's husband	The phrase is likely used in social settings, such as when introducing or referring to individuals in a community or family context.

The language used in expressing intimacy is both descriptive and expressive, reflecting cultural norms surrounding marital relationships, the significance of family, and the importance of love and affection within the Igbo community. Non-verbal cues, such as gestures and tone, often accompany these expressions, reinforcing their emotional and relational impact. These verbal expressions are complemented by non-verbal cues such as gestures and tone, amplifying their emotional and relational impact. The findings highlight the rich linguistic and cultural intricacies embedded in expressions of intimacy within Igbo relationship.

## Findings and Conclusion

The paper focuses on the pragmatic analysis of expressing intimacy in relationships with Igbo language. The findings show that these intimate expressions serve as powerful and emotional terms within the cultural and social context of Igbo relationships. These expressions primarily function as acts of endearment and acknowledgment, conveying deep emotional connections, affection, and ownership. Majority of the words are formed by attaching a possessive pronoun “m” to a word.

Some expressions like ‘Ugo m’, ‘Mma di n’obi’ extends beyond mere possession to encompass qualities of goodness. The language used in expressing intimacy is both descriptive and expressive, reflecting cultural norms surrounding marital relationships, the significance of family, and the importance of love and affection within the Igbo community. Non-verbal cues, such as gestures and tone, often accompany these expressions, reinforcing their emotional and relational impact. These verbal expressions are complemented by non-verbal cues such as gestures and tone, amplifying their emotional and relational impact. This research through the meticulous analysis of data extracted from romantic novels written by Igbo authors, revealed compelling findings. Notably, expressions like "Oriaku m, "Ihunanya m," "Ugo m," "Ezigbo m," "Nke m," and "Obi m”, emerged as potent and emotionally charged terms within the cultural and social context of Igbo relationships. These expressions, characterized by the attachment of a possessive pronoun "m" to a word, served as acts of endearment, acknowledgment, and conveyed deep emotional connections, affection, and a sense of ownership.

Furthermore, the linguistic exploration extended to expressions such as "Ada nna ya" and "Nwa mma," demonstrating that certain terms transcended mere possession to encompass qualities of goodness. The paper concludes that the language used in expressing intimacy is found to be both descriptive and expressive, intricately reflecting cultural norms related to marital relationships, the significance of family, and the paramount importance of love and affection within the Igbo community. context helps to clarify the intended meaning of intimate expressions in Igbo language, and partners need to have a shared understanding of the context to use such expressions effectively This research serves as a foundation for further exploration into the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and intimacy, fostering a more comprehensive comprehension of interpersonal communication within the Igbo community

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