# An Ethnopragmatic Analysis of Sam Ukala's *Iredi War*

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## Abstract

Sense relation is an important linguistic component used in the literary analysis of texts. The choice of words by a writer creates a distinct meaning that reveals the writer's message to the audience. The meaning associated with these lexical choices helps to communicate the message and the cultural views of the people in the society the work reflects. The linguistic parameters that cater for cultural meaning in language use are ethno-pragmatic. An ethno-pragmatic analysis of Iredi War by Sam Ukala is carried out to demonstrate his adroit manipulation of linguistic choices to create novel aspects of cultural meaning in the play. To accomplish the aim of the research, Hymes's ethnography of communication is selected as the theoretical framework. The data selected are 10 dialogues from the play with ethno-pragmatic features. These selected data are analyzed to show how they reflect the Owa and in essence African culture. The study finds that an understanding of the cultural meaning of the words and sentences in the play helps the audience to understand the text easily and at the same time comprehend the socio-cultural views of the people.

**Keywords**: Ethnopragmatics, Lexical choices, Culture, Ukala

## Introduction

In communicating ideas, language uses forms written and spoken form. The spoken form is the oral form which is mostly used in face-to-face conversation, it is usually for immediate interaction between two or more people; the other form of language is the written form, and both are used as means of communication. One distinct activity language is used for is literary writing which includes drama, prose, and poetry. While it is true that literature can be realized through spoken language, written literature has gained more publicity and thus has been given more priority over one age. Jantas (2006) defines "literature as written works, especially those considered of artistic merit" (71). Thus language serves as the crux of literary expression, and so understanding it also requires understanding the properties of language and how they are used in the field of literature.

According to Tulas (2006), perceiving the meaning of a literary text requires studying and understanding the language of the text. He encourages readers to interact with textual structures and linguistic parameters to infer meaning. Indicating the relationship between linguistics and literary studies Jakobson (1997, p. 174) states that "if there are some critics who still doubt the competence of linguistics to embrace the field of poetics, I privately believe that …linguists has been mistaken for an inadequacy of the linguistic science". He further argued that ignoring the function of language in literary texts is an equally flagrant anachronism. Carter (1998, p. 75) also posits that "a process of literary texts analysis which starts from a basic assumption that the primary interpretations procedures used in the reading of a literary text are linguistics procedures". (cf: Awhefeada, 2014; Emama, 2022; Awhefeada, 2010)

Language analysis of literary texts focuses on learning about the workings of language in literature and on developing the confidence to work systematically toward

the interpretation of literary text. This technical approach to meaning emphasizes the objectives and avoids the subjective view of meaning. African writers manipulate the English language to fit the African experience sociocultural world views, beliefs, and purpose. Their choice of lexical items has been well constructed to portray meaning beyond the conceptual meaning of words but have used peculiar words to create meaning that reflects the sociocultural context in which they write. The discipline that helps in such linguistic creativity is ethno-pragmatics.

The word "ethno-pragmatic" is used to describe explanations of speech practices that start with culture-internal ideas, such as the speakers' shared values, norms, priorities, and assumptions, rather than any universals of pragmatics that are assumed to apply to all situations. The focus on cultural particularity also known as cross-cultural pragmatics is the crux of ethno-pragmatics (Wierzbicka, 2002).

Ethno-pragmatic allows for the connection to be made between language and the cultural ideas and practices of the society and sees culture as playing a major explanatory role. The goal of ethno-pragmatics is to provide room for the understanding of culturally internal perspectives while language is being used. It deals with explaining and describing speech patterns in terms that are understandable to the target population, taking into account things like their cultural ideas, values, attitudes, social categories, and feelings. In terms of its meanings that are understood and shared by members of a particular community, it is based on cultural norms (Wierzbicka, 2003).

Ethno-pragmatics emphasizes the idea that there is a causal relationship between indigenous values, social models, and indigenous speaking practices. Finding the participants' "socio-cultural viewpoints" is one of ethnopragmatics' main objectives. This entails navigating and interacting with regional categories and cultural vocabularies – not in terms of complex English and technical concepts, but rather in terms that are familiar and approachable to the individuals in a given society.

**Statement of Problem**
Among the African literary writers, Sam Ukala stands out as a prolific playwright. However, a great deal of studies on his works have focused on the literary features, thereby neglecting the linguistic aspects. For instance, Bola (2020) is a folkloric study of the aesthetic of Sam Ukala's *Akpakaland* and *Iredi War* while Ezeugo (2020)  is based on historical realities in Sam Ukala's *Iredi War*. However much attention has not been paid to the linguistic dexterity of Ukala as it concerns his lexical choices and how they reflect socio-cultural meaning. This aspect is very crucial for a detailed interpretation of Ukala's plays. It is this gap that this study is meant to fill through an ethno-pragmatic analysis of Sam Ukala's *Iredi War*.

**Methodology**
The methodology adopted for this study is textual analysis. The literary text *Iredi War* by Sam Ukala serves as data for the study. To extract data for the analysis, lexical items with ethno-pragmatic features are selected and analyzed. In the data presentation, the data are written as dialogue, and the lexical items with socio-cultural meaning are thereby highlighted. The choice of text for this study is purposeful as Sam Ukala's *Iredi War* possesses elements of folklorism thus language of culture is evident in the choice of diction. The selected data are gathered from the dialogue of

several characters in the play and analyzed using Dell Hymes's ethnography of communication.

**Theoretical Framework**
The theory adopted for this study is Hymes's ethnography of communication. Hymes proposed the term 'ethnography of speaking', later amended to 'ethnography of communication', to describe a new approach to understanding language in use (Hymes, 1962, 1964). Hymes according to Farah (1998) argues "…that the study of language must concern itself with describing and analyzing the ability of the native speakers to use language for communication in real situations (communicative competence) rather than limiting itself to describing the potential ability of the ideal speaker/listener to produce grammatically correct sentences (linguistic competence)" (25). Speakers of a language in particular communities can communicate with each other in a manner that is not only correct but also appropriate to the sociocultural context. This ability involves a shared knowledge of the linguistic code as well as of the socio-cultural rules, norms, and values that guide the conduct and interpretation of speech and other channels of communication in a community.

Hymes (1968) believes what speakers can and do say, and the communal context in such speech occurs in correlates. Speech does not occur in a vacuum, but rather within a specific context, and 'when the meaning of speech styles are analyzed, we realize that they entail dimensions of participant, setting, channel, and the like, which partly govern their meanings' (Hymes, 1989). Thus Hymes offers a theoretical basis for language study that accounts for both linguistic variation from individual to individual and relative linguistic coherence across the social realm, while also offering a methodology for investigating communication, often represented in terms of the SPEAKING mnemonic.

The eight components of the SPEAKING mnemonic are: (S) Setting including the time, place, and physical aspects; (P) participant identity including personal characteristics such as age and sex, social status, and relationship with each other; (E) ends including the purpose of the event itself as well as the individual goals of the participants; (A) act, sequence or how speech acts are organized within a speech event and what topic/s are addressed; (K) key or the tone and manner in which something is said or written; (I) instrumentalities or the linguistic code i.e. language, dialect, variety, and channel i.e. speech or writing; (N) norm or the standard socio-cultural rules of interaction and interpretation; and (G) genre or type of event such as lecture, poem, letter (Farah, 1998).

**Literature Review**
The term "ethnopragmatics" designates an approach to language-in-use that sees culture as playing a central explanatory role, and at the same time opens the way for links to be drawn between language and other cultural phenomena. This approach involves a threefold alignment of objectives, methodological tools, and evidence base (Goddard 2006: 21). The objective of ethno-pragmatics is to articulate culture-internal perspectives on the "how and why" of speech practices in the diverse languages of the world. It is the quest to describe and explain people's ways of speaking in terms that make sense to the people concerned, i.e., in terms of indigenous values, beliefs and attitudes, social categories, emotions, and so on. Its methodological tools according to Wierzbicka (1996), are based on decomposing cultural notions and capturing cultural norms in terms of simple meanings that appear to be shared between all languages.

Goddard (2011), notes that ethno-pragmatics pays particular attention to linguistic evidence, for example; routine ways of thinking, and life writing, of cultural insiders themselves (216).

Ethnopragmatics is compatible with the insight from cultural psychology (Shweder 1991, 1993, 2004) that people in different cultures speak differently because they think differently, feel differently, and relate differently to other people (Emama, 2020). As Clyne (1994) puts it: "cultural values constitute 'hidden' meanings underlying discourse structures" (83). Before the rise of generative linguistics in the 1950s and 1960s, the study of languages was integrally connected with the humanistic tradition and with cultural and historical studies Under the influence of Chomsky, mainstream linguistics, especially in North America, disavowed its links with culture studies and sought to define itself first as a part of cognitive psychology and later as a branch of biology (biolinguistics). Interest in cultural aspects of language survived in anthropological linguistics and the newer field of ethnography of communication, but it would be fair to characterize late twentieth-century linguistics as largely culture blind. This was the context into which ethno-pragmatics emerged, in the late 1980s, in a series of studies by Anna Wierzbicka.  Wierzbicka argued, with unprecedented attention to matters of linguistic detail, that the then prevailing approaches to pragmatics, especially Grice's account of conversational implicature (Grice 1975). Brown and Levinson's (1978), Politeness Theory, and Searle's (1969) aspects of speech-act theory, were descriptively inadequate and profoundly Anglocentric. She called for a new approach, one that would ground conversational practices in cultural values: "Interpersonal interaction is governed, to a large extent, by norms which are culture-specific and which reflect cultural values cherished by a particular society" (Wierzbicka 2003). She further insisted that cultural values should be accessed via semantic analysis of actual words in the language of the people concerned. A major advance in the development of ethnopragmatics occurred in the mid-1990s when Wierzbicka articulated what became known as the theory of cultural scripts (Wierzbicka 1994). These papers drew on contrastive examples from English, Japanese, Polish, Malay, and Russian. Others followed on a variety of other languages, by a growing community of researchers. In 2004 there came the publication of the edited collection *Cultural Scripts* (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2004), followed by *Ethnopragmatics* (Goddard, 2006), and *Semantics in/and Social Cognition* (Goddard, 2013).

There are two main methodological tools of ethno-pragmatics, namely: semantic explications and cultural scripts. A semantic explication is a reductive paraphrase of the meaning of a word, phrase, or lexico-grammatical construction. It is an attempt to say in simpler words what a speaker is saying when he or she utters the expression being explicated. Explications have to make intuitive sense to native speakers when substituted into their contexts of use and to generate the appropriate entailments and implications.

According to Wierzbicka (2007) cultural scripts are not paraphrases of word meanings: but they are "representations of cultural norms which are widely held in a given society and are reflected in the language" (93). Cultural scripts exist at different levels of generality and may relate to different aspects of speaking, thinking, feeling, and acting. Some scripts capture cultural beliefs that are relevant to interaction

(Goddard 2009). Importantly, cultural scripts are not about actual behaviors but about participants' shared understandings and expectations, that are about social cognition.

Maledo (2020) is an ethnopragmatic study of Sam Ukala's *The Slave Wife* and *The Placenta of Death.* The study focused on proverbs in the plays, with emphasis on how they are reflections of the socio-cultural knowledge of the Owa people. It applies Brown and Levinson" 's (1987) politeness theory with insights from Dell Hymes's ethnography of communication. The main goal was to clarify how, while paying attention to the ethnographic aspects of proverb usage, politeness elements were appropriated to direct proverb usage in the selected plays. Ten proverbs were chosen from the texts on purpose to conduct a thorough and qualitative examination. Findings demonstrate that the appropriate use of proverbs in the sociocultural setting of the plays is guided by politeness routines and ethnographic elements of speaking, which also ensure that there is no breakdown in communication. While Dell Hymes' speaking reveals that the employment of proverbs in the texts complies with the social-cultural norms of the interaction of Owa people, the politeness elements inherent in the proverbs are face-saving tools that serve to reduce tensions in their mitigating roles. The study thus demonstrates the value of linguistics' role in understanding Sam Ukala's plays.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**
This chapter will analyze the selected data for this study. The data are selected from Sam Ukala's *Iredi War*. The analysis will employ the Hymes ethnography of communication which focuses on how the meaning of the lexical items are reflections of the culture of the Owa people.
Excerpt One (1)
>       Narrator II: Okay. (To audience). People, we have this proverb;
>       "**one does not sit in his own home and crush his scrotum in**
>       **the process**", but our story tonight belies that proverb.
>       Narrator I: Yes. **Obi Igboba of Owa was sitting in his place**
>       **and he crushed his**… say if it you dare. (12)

From the expect above the proverbial saying depicts the care a man takes in sitting down to avoid accidentally causing injury to his scrotum. While this means the need to show care, ethno-pragmatically it connotes a deeper sense, as the use of the expression shows, Obi Igboba has crushed his which in its denotative meaning has not happened. Therefore, the connotative meaning of one sitting and crushing his scrotum contextually means one does not sit down and allow his house, dignity, or life to be destroyed without taking any action. This lexical expression employed by Ukala is easily understandable to the readers based on the context of the white men's oppression against the blacks as represented by the people of Owa. Culturally, Africans in a sense are sitting in their own home without offending the white men only to be oppressed and see their taking away from them. The reader thus has to view the expression from a cultural perspective to deduce its connotative meaning.
Excerpt Two (2)
>       Igboba: (Amused) Oh, yes, we do. When tortoise was asked to
>       visit the lion; who was ill, he said, "I saw the footmarks that
>       went into the lion's den, but didn't see any that came out of it.
>       Until I see **footmarks** returning from the lion's den, I am not.
>       (18)

In Igboba's statement, the lexical item "footmark" carries an ethnopragmatic meaning. In the analogy by Igboba, the tortoise depends on the returning footmarks to be sure if it needs to go greet the lion also. If viewed denotatively, the analogy would mean that the tortoise needs to rely on ordinary marks on the soil to decide whether to pay a visit to the lion or not. But culturally, the footmark of a man depicts his being alive. The returning footmark would mean that the animals who visited the lion were not killed by the lion. The cultural undertone of this analogy is easily understandable to Africans who believe the lion as the king of the jungle does not spare any animal alive. It also shows the cultural perspective of the Nigerian fable of the tortoise being the wisest in the animal kingdom. The footmark thus goes beyond the print on the soil but signifies the life of the animals who had earlier visited. In the context in which Igboba made use of the lexical expression, he meant he could not send more men to Crewe-Read unless he saw the men he had sent to him earlier as carriers. The use of these significant lexical items helps portray the cultural beliefs and views of the Owa people and as such also helps its African readers to easily understand the text's message.

Excerpt Three (3)

> Nwobi: No, you haven't (To Iwekuba). Indeed he has never.
> And it's all getting clearer now…. (To Igboba) My brother,
> what the white man is saying is that you should come down
> from the throne the throne of your father, because (pointing at
> Crewe-Read) he does not recognize you as the king of Owa!
> Because the throne you sit on now belongs to one Eduwardu,
> whose **bottom** spreads like the clouds over a thousand thrones,
> thrones of both Oyibo and African ancestors Ikuru-Iredi say
> Obi Agun should climb down the throne. (20)

One prominent lexical item that requires ethno-pragmatics understanding is the word "bottom". In Nigeria pidgin the word "bottom" is used synonymously with anus. This is thus a case of semantic shift, the "bottom" which is the lowest part of anything is used to represent one's anus. But Nwobi's use of the word goes beyond its physical sense of a man's body part. The term in the cultural usage depicts kingship – one sitting on a throne. Since kings sit down on their elevated Palace-chair controlling the vie affairs of the community, the bottom (anus) of a king is thus viewed as representing kingship. As such, Nwobi asks if the king of England Edward VII (Eduwardu) bottom (Kingship) also extends to Africa in particular Owa kingdom. The use of these lexical items by Ukala creates social meaning in the text and also shows his linguistic aesthetics as it helps the African audience to easily grasp the meaning of the text with the help of the ethnopragmatic features.

Excerpt Four (4)

> Iwekuba: Ask him, my brother. *His* been arguing with me.
> Iyase. If a stranger climbed your wife on your own bed in your
> presence and you did nothing, whose fault would it be? The
> strangers or your wife's? ... It's our fault, Iyase. **We shouldn't
> have the face of a word and speak its back.** (26)

"We shouldn't leave the face of a word and speak it back". This clause entails cultural meaning. A "word" is an abstract noun that does not possess the human feature of a face or a back that needs to be spoken to, thus the expression cannot be taken literally. To comprehend the sense of the expression it has to be taken into an ethno-pragmatic context. To leave the "face of a word and speak its back means avoiding the facts of a case. In Nigeria, it is a common belief that people speak ill behind someone in power.

But when one is courageous enough to tell an individual directly if his actions are right or wrong, it is speaking to the face. This is the idea portrayed by Ikewuba's use of the word ¨We shouldn't have the face of a word and speak its back". In essence, the reason the white men could destroy the shrines and the gods is the fact that they did not fight to protect their land. Using a lexical expression that connotes cultural beliefs helps the African evidence to easily understand the message beyond a surface level to a deep and better understanding of the message.

Excerpt Five (5)

> Igboba: Rise, loyal ones, rise. **The fart that would disgrace a man doesn't come through the middle of his anus**; it escapes through the side. Rise (they rise.) Like a treacherous snake, the white man has struck and slid off. We won't let him take us unaware again, would we? (29)

Igboba's comment is based on the attack of the dies shrine and the gods by the white man. The word denotes the Owa's unpreparedness during when the attack. To make his point Igboba says "The fart that would disgrace a man doesn't come through the middle of his anus". Culturally, to fart in public is offensive and when one is caught in the act it brings disgrace. Since the anus is not known to have sides such as which fart can come from the expression has to be viewed from an ethno-pragmatic angle. To reduce the sound associated with farts individuals commonly adjust their sitting position which brings the fart from the side of the anus; in this way, the sound is reduced and can thus conceal the offender from being identified. But when it is done indiscreetly it might produce sound that makes it easy to identify the individuals who did it. Using this cultural context, Igboba describes the attack on their shrines as being done secretly to avoid instant retaliation from the villagers. Thus an understanding of the cultural context of the lexical expression helps to gain a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the dialogue.

Excerpt Six (6)

> Iwekuba: you see what I mean? People don't win wars with stories and paths only. **I'll take these ones along to have them bathed and cooked** while you bury the dead. Where will they meet you? (42)

From its surface, the lexical item "cooked" creates a misunderstanding of the message in Iwekuba's speech if taken literally. To get something cooked means to prepare food for eating; to cook the warriors would mean to kill them and offer them as food. But within the cultural context, the lexical item cooked entails a deeper meaning. Ethno-pragmatically, the word cooked when used alongside a human in the Nigerian context means enabling one to have certain supernatural power, using charm or amulets as a means of being protected from danger. The word cooked is given a new meaning which conforms to the African cultural belief.

Excerpt Nine (9)

> Igboba: That's me! Let the white man come. My blood is boiling kutunku like the deadly soup of the dead. Let the white man come. He calls us barbarians. So I will kill and eat him up! (50)

Language is best understood, when the context of usage is put into account. Within this usage, it is vital to understand the socio-cultural views that influence certain lexicons. In Igboba's dialogue with his other chiefs, he declares he is waiting for the white man and their soldiers, in his anger he states his "blood is boiling". This assertion in a literal semantic view is impossible as human blood cannot be heated in

his own body to a point of boiling. It thus encompassed a cultural meaning. The expression "my blood is boiling" is from Nigerian Pidgin which means being very angry. This expression employed by Ukala enables readers to grasp the degree of Igboba's anger at the white man.
Excerpt Seven (7)

*Ekome: When you appreciate the great farmers his cutlass gets sharper. (64)*
The expression "cutlass gets sharper" when used in the context of a farmer with a cutlass denotes an object used in sharpening irons such as the mentioned cutlass. But in this excerpt Ekome attributes the cutlass being sharp to the appreciation bestowed on the farmer. This must be understood within cultural context as praises do not make an object sharper in itself. But in Nigerian cultural belief when one is praised they tend to do more because of the commendation. Using this analogy Ekome meant the farmer would do more in cutting the grass or the wood. The expression "sharper" thus refers to the farmer doing more because of the commendation received. In this context, the warriors of Owa deserve gifts after performing well in their first battle so that they can do more for the community.

**Discussion and Conclusion**
In analyzing ethno-pragmatic features in Sam Ukala's Iredi War, the study encounters different findings. The study finds that ethnopragmatic deals with the cultural views and beliefs of a society and thus affects the linguistic meaning of words and sentences used in society. The study also finds that words and sentences that portray cultural meaning both share denotative and contextual meanings. For instance while "footmark" literally means a mark on the soil, it connotes being alive in the cultural usage.'

It is noticed in the study that the use of certain lexical items helps create cultural meaning. It is also observable that Ukala's lexical choices such as "juju" are cultural terms that help to portray the cultural beliefs of the Owa people and also help the audience fully understand the text. From this research, it can be deduced that the reader or listeners need to possess cultural knowledge of the community or society's beliefs and ways of life to easily comprehend ethno-pragmatic words and sentences. For instance, to understand the term "white man's dog", the reader would have to depend on existing knowledge of African history with the colonizers. This research also shows that the use of cultural lexical items creates an easy understanding of the text against its cultural background.

**Conclusion**
The study has focused on ethnopragmatic analysis of Sam Ukala *Iredi War* to show how the culture of the Owa people is linguistically represented in the play. The study employs Hymes's ethnography of communication as the theoretical framework for its analysis. Ten dialogues are carefully selected based on their possession of ethno-pragmatic features in the dialogue. These data were then analyzed to show how they reflect the culture of the Owa people and Africa at large. The study finds that shared knowledge of the culture of the Owa people would make it easier to understand the meaning of the words and sentences that possess these cultural features. The study also shows Sam Ukala's dexterity in language use. In addition, it also linguistically explores African folklore and Sam Ukala's dexterous exploration of African folkloric features in his modern African plays.

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