

PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE CREATIVE USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AMONG STUDENTS OF KOGI STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION TECHNICAL, MOPA.

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Abstract

This study applies Jacob L. Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory to examine the creative use of English among students of Kogi State College of Education (Technical), Mopa. Pragmatic Act Theory emphasizes that meaning is not only encoded in linguistic forms but is constructed through interaction within specific sociocultural contexts. Guided by this framework, the study investigates how students employ pragmatic acts such as adaptation, contextualization, inference, prosody, and activity-based expressions to achieve communicative goals in both academic and informal interactions. Data were collected through classroom observations, peer-group conversations, and semi-structured interviews with selected students. The analysis reveals that students creatively manipulate English through practices such as humorous reframing, metaphorical expressions, and code-mixing with Nigerian Pidgin and indigenous languages. These linguistic practices function as context-sensitive pragmatic acts that enable participants to negotiate meaning, express identity, and maintain social relationships within a multilingual environment. Rather than indicating linguistic deficiency, the findings demonstrate students' pragmatic competence and linguistic resourcefulness. The study contributes to scholarship on pragmatics in African educational contexts by showing how Pragmatic Act Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the dynamic relationship between language use, social context, and communicative practice.

Keywords: Pragmatic Act Theory, creative use of English, Nigerian English, multilingualism, student discourse

1.1 Background to the Study

Language functions not only as a system of grammar and vocabulary but also as a social resource through which individuals construct meaning, negotiate relationships, and express identity within cultural contexts. In multilingual societies such as Nigeria, English serves as the official language, a medium of instruction, and a lingua franca that enables communication across diverse ethnic groups (Bamgbose, 1995; Jowitt, 2019). However, English in Nigeria has evolved beyond formal usage, as speakers continuously adapt and localize it to reflect their sociocultural realities, resulting in recognizable forms of Nigerian English (Adegbija, 2004; Igboanusi, 2014).

Among students in tertiary institutions, English is often creatively modified through practices such as code-mixing, humour, metaphor, and indirect expressions. These linguistic practices demonstrate pragmatic competence and communicative

flexibility rather than deviation from Standard English (Mey, 2001; Odebunmi, 2006). Although English plays an integrative role in Nigerian education, everyday student communication frequently diverges from standardized forms due to the influence of local languages and peer-group norms. Such creative adaptations are sometimes misinterpreted in academic discourse as signs of linguistic deficiency (Jowitt, 2019). Existing scholarship on Nigerian English has largely focused on structural features, lexical variation, and code-switching patterns, with limited attention given to students' communicative practices as pragmatic acts embedded in social interaction. Previous studies highlight the role of cultural context, humour, and identity in shaping language use among Nigerian youth (Akindele & Adegbite, 1999; Taiwo, 2010; Odebunmi, 2015). However, relatively few studies apply a systematic pragmatic framework to analyse how meaning is constructed in student discourse.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the creative use of English among students of Kogi State College of Education (Technical), Mopa using Jacob L. Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory (2001). The study examines how students employ pragmatic acts such as adaptation, contextualization, inference, and activity-based expressions in both academic and informal interactions. By doing so, it seeks to highlight students' linguistic creativity, sociocultural awareness, and pragmatic competence, while contributing to scholarship on pragmatics, Nigerian English, and language use in multilingual African educational contexts.

2.1 Review of Related Literature

Research on pragmatics and English use in Nigeria shows that language functions within sociocultural contexts where speakers constantly negotiate meaning in multilingual environments. Existing literature generally falls into four areas: pragmatics and speech acts in cultural discourse, creativity in Nigerian English, youth and student language practices, and language use in educational contexts.

Early studies emphasize the role of culture in shaping pragmatic meaning. For example, Odebunmi (2006) shows that Nigerian communication relies heavily on shared cultural knowledge and contextual interpretation, while Olateju (2005) highlights how discourse in Nigerian interactions is shaped by politeness norms, proverbs, and indirect communication strategies. These studies demonstrate that pragmatic competence in Nigeria involves sensitivity to social and cultural context, although most of them focus on literary or political discourse rather than everyday student communication.

Another body of research examines Nigerian English as a localized variety. Bamgbose (1995) explains that English in Nigeria has been domesticated to meet local communicative needs while maintaining global intelligibility. Similarly, Adegbija (2004) argues that Nigerian English shows pragmatic flexibility through the use of cultural references and indigenous linguistic resources. Igboanusi (2014) further observes that Nigerian youths drive linguistic innovation through humour, slang, and code-mixing between English, Nigerian Pidgin, and indigenous languages. While these studies highlight the creativity of Nigerian English, they largely describe linguistic features without deeply analysing the pragmatic processes behind them.

Research on youth and student discourse also reveals patterns of linguistic creativity. Akindele and Adegbite (1999) note that students frequently use hybrid forms of English shaped by peer identity and campus culture. Taiwo (2010) identifies humour, metaphor, and playful language as strategies used by young speakers to

negotiate social relationships. Similarly, Odebunmi (2015) shows that humour among university students relies heavily on shared contextual knowledge. However, these studies rarely analyse such practices using a structured pragmatic framework.

Studies on language use in educational contexts often adopt a deficit perspective. For instance, Jowitt (2019) attributes deviations from Standard English among Nigerian students to interference from indigenous languages, while Banjo (1996) highlights challenges in English proficiency among learners. In contrast, other scholars provide more nuanced views. Ufot (2013) demonstrates that code-switching in classrooms can facilitate comprehension, and Omoniyi (2006) argues that multilingual speakers strategically use different linguistic resources to negotiate identity and meaning.

Despite these contributions, few studies have applied systematic pragmatic frameworks to examine students' creative language use in tertiary institutions. In particular, limited research has explored how pragmatic acts such as contextualization, adaptation, inference, and prosody function in everyday student interactions. Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory offers a useful framework because it views language as action embedded within social contexts, yet empirical applications of this theory in Nigerian educational settings remain limited. Additionally, most studies focus on universities, leaving colleges of education relatively underexplored despite their importance in Nigeria's teacher-training system.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the creative use of English among students of Kogi State College of Education (Technical), Mopa using Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory. The study analyses how students employ pragmatic acts in both academic and informal interactions, highlighting their pragmatic competence, sociocultural awareness, and linguistic creativity rather than framing their language use as deviation from Standard English.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory (PAT), which focuses on meaning as a product of language use within social contexts. PAT developed as a response to classical Speech Act Theory proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), which primarily emphasizes speaker intention in individual utterances. Mey argues that meaning cannot be understood solely through linguistic forms but must be interpreted within real-life communicative situations. In PAT, communication involves pragmatic acts (practs) that occur within broader contextual structures called pragmeme. A pragmeme represents the situational conditions that shape how language is used and interpreted. For example, language used in a hostel conversation differs from that used in a classroom discussion because each context creates different communicative expectations.

Mey (2001) explains that pragmatic acts rely on several contextual resources: Physical resources: the setting of communication such as classrooms, hostels, or cafeterias; Social resources: relationships and power dynamics between participants; Psychological resources: attitudes, emotions, intentions, and shared assumptions; Cultural resources: shared cultural knowledge, idioms, proverbs, and indigenous expressions; and Linguistic resources: vocabulary, slang, code-mixing, metaphor, and prosodic features. PAT also identifies mechanisms through which pragmatic acts are realized in discourse, including adaptation, contextualization, inference, prosody, and

activity types. These mechanisms help explain how speakers modify language to suit particular contexts and how listeners interpret implied meanings. Because students in Nigerian tertiary institutions often combine English, Nigerian Pidgin, and indigenous languages, their communication reflects creative adaptations that cannot be explained through grammar alone. By applying Pragmatic Act Theory (Mey, 2001), this study interprets students' language practices as context-driven pragmatic acts, demonstrating how linguistic creativity, sociocultural knowledge, and communicative competence shape English use in multilingual educational settings.

3.1 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design based on Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory to examine how students at Kogi State College of Education (Technical), Mopa creatively use English in natural communicative contexts. The qualitative approach enables an in-depth exploration of pragmatic acts such as adaptation, inference, and contextualization in everyday interactions.

The study population consists of students from different departments of the college. Through purposive sampling, 60 students (30 male and 30 female) were selected based on their active participation in classroom and peer-group interactions. This sample size was considered sufficient for generating rich qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data were collected through three main methods: Naturalistic classroom observations to examine English use in academic interactions; Observation and audio recording of peer conversations in informal settings such as hostels, cafeterias, and study groups. Semi-structured interviews with ten students to understand their perceptions of language creativity and code-switching.

All data were transcribed, coded, and analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006), with coding guided by Mey's (2001) categories of pragmatic acts.

The analysis focuses on how students construct meaning using contextual resources, identifying pragmatic acts such as adaptation, contextualization, inference, prosody, and activity types, consistent with the principles of Pragmatic Act Theory (Mey, 2001).

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

Adaptation

Extract 1 (Classroom Observation) "If the projector no gree work, we go use manual style. At least, our voice still dey loud enough." (*If the projector refuses to work, we will use the manual method. At least, our voices are loud enough.*)

Extract 2 (Peer Conversation – Cafeteria) "No light for hostel again. I go carry my phone go charge for market side." (*There is no electricity in the hostel again. I will take my phone to charge at the market area.*)

Contextualization

Extract 1 (Interview) "Sometimes we mix Yoruba or Igala with English so the meaning go balance well. If you talk only English, the thing no dey sweet for ear."

Extract 2 (Classroom Discussion) "Sir, that definition dey carry book sense, but for our own side we go say am simple: teaching na how you fit make person sabi something." (*Sir, that definition sounds too theoretical, but in our own way we explain it simply: teaching is how you help someone understand something.*)

Inference

Extract 1 (Peer Conversation – Hostel) Student A: “Guy, abeg shift small, you dey block my network.”

Student B: “Na you and MTN get wahala, no be me.”

Extract 2 (Group Study Session) Student C: “If you no read, you go carry over sure.”

Student D: “Carry over na our department anthem already.”

Prosody

Extract 1 (Classroom Interaction) Lecturer: “Who can define pragmatics?”

Student: “Na the English wey no gree for dictionary but dey gree for street.”

Extract 2 (Peer Conversation – Hostel) Student A: “Good evening, honourable roommate, distinguished senator of bunk 3!”

Activity Types

Extract 1 (Group Discussion) “Bros, that exam question be like Arsenal hard to win but we go still try.”

Extract 2 (Sports Field Conversation) “If you miss this penalty, na F9 you go score for exam too.”

4.2 Table showing the Pragmatic Acts and Contextual Resources in KGCOT Students’ Creative Use of English

Pragmatic Act	Example from Data	Physical Resource (Setting)	Social Resource (Participant Relations)	Cultural Resource	Psychological Resource	Linguistic Resource	Function Observed	Implication
Adaptation	“If the projector no gree work, we go use manual style. At least, our voice still dey loud enough.”	Classroom environment where technology fails	Student–student interaction during class activity	Shared understanding of infrastructural challenges in Nigerian schools	Collective acceptance of improvisation and problem-solving	Code-mixing between English and Nigerian Pidgin	Adjustment of language to express situational constraints	Demonstrates pragmatic flexibility and context-driven language adaptation
	“No light for hostel again. I go carry my phone	Hostel environment during power outage	Informal peer communication	Common cultural experience of electricity shortages	Pragmatic decision-making regarding coping strategies	Hybrid English–Pidgin structure	Expressing everyday realities efficiently	Reflects students’ ability to adapt linguistic resources to real-

	go charge for market side.”							life contexts
Contextualization	“Sometimes we mix Yoruba or Igala with English so the meaning go balance well.”	Interview setting	Researcher–student interaction	Multilingual cultural environment involving Yoruba, Igala, and Pidgin	Desire for clarity and cultural resonance	Code-mixing between English and indigenous languages	Embedding meaning within shared sociocultural knowledge	Enhances communicative effectiveness through culturally grounded expressions
	“Sir, that definition dey carry book sense, but for our own side we go say am simple.”	Classroom discussion	Student addressing lecturer	Academic knowledge reframed through local discourse patterns	Attempt to simplify complex theoretical content	Simplified English blended with Pidgin elements	Reinterpreting academic language within local communicative norms	Illustrates how students contextualize knowledge to improve comprehension
Inference	Student A: “Guy, abeg shift small, you dey block my network.” Student B: “Na you and MTN get wahala.”	Hostel environment	Peer-to-peer interaction	Shared awareness of poor telecommunications infrastructure	Humorous reinterpretation of the request	Pidgin expressions and informal address forms	Meaning inferred through contextual knowledge rather than literal interpretation	Demonstrates inferential reasoning in everyday communication
	“Carry over na our	Group study session	Student–student	Academic culture where	Use of humour to cope	Metaphorical use of	Reframing negative	Strengthens peer solidarity

	departm ent anthem already. ”		interactio n	course repetition is common	with academic pressure	“anthe m”	experien ces through humour	and shared identity
Prosody	“Na the English wey no gree for dictiona ry but dey gree for street.”	Classro om interact ion	Student respon ding to lecturer	Popular discourse contrasting formal and informal knowledge	Playful interpret ation of academic concept	Rhythm ic phrasin g and informa l Pidgin syntax	Meaning shaped through tone and rhythm	Demonst rates supraseg mental creativity in defining academic concepts
	“Good evening , honoura ble roomm ate, distingu ished senator of bunk 3!”	Hostel convers ation	Peer interactio n among roommat e	Familiarity with Nigerian political titles and formal greetings	Humoro us exaggera tion and playful teasing	Mock- formal vocabul ary and exagger ated politene ss	Creating humour through exaggera ted intonatio n and address forms	Shows how prosodic cues generate pragmati c humour
Activity	“Bros, that exam questio n be like Arsenal —hard to win but we go still try.”	Group discuss ion	Informal peer conversa tion	Shared interest in football culture	Motivati on and encourag ement through humour	Footbal l metaph or integrat ed into English discour se	Linking academic difficulty to sports competiti on	Reinforc es group identity and shared cultural reference s
	“If you miss this penalty, na F9 you go score for exam too.”	Sports field convers ation	Student– student interactio n	Cultural familiarity with grading systems and football	Playful warning or teasing among peers	Metaph orical analogy between sports and academ ic perform ance	Relating two activity domains to create meaning	Demonst rates activity- based metaphor in student discourse

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate that students at Kogi State College of Education (Technical), Mopa employ English creatively through multiple pragmatic strategies. These strategies demonstrate not only linguistic competence but also sociocultural awareness and communicative adaptability.

One prominent pattern observed is adaptation, where students reshape English expressions to reflect immediate realities. For example, references to electricity shortages or malfunctioning classroom equipment illustrate how language is adjusted to address situational constraints. Such practices confirm Mey's (2001) view that pragmatic acts emerge from the interaction between linguistic resources and contextual conditions.

Another key finding relates to contextualization, where students embed English within local cultural frames. Code-mixing with indigenous languages and Nigerian Pidgin enables speakers to convey meanings that resonate more strongly within their social environment. These findings align with previous studies suggesting that multilingual speakers often draw upon multiple linguistic resources to enhance communicative effectiveness (Adegbija, 2004; Igboanusi, 2014).

The data also reveal the importance of inference and humour in student interactions. Participants frequently reinterpret statements in playful ways, transforming potentially negative experiences such as academic difficulties into moments of shared laughter. These inferential processes illustrate how meaning is collaboratively constructed during interaction.

In addition, prosodic features such as exaggerated intonation and rhythmic emphasis contribute significantly to meaning construction. These suprasegmental features enable speakers to express humour, irony, and playful politeness.

Finally, the analysis shows that students frequently situate their language use within familiar activity types, particularly sports and academic experiences. By linking language to shared activities, speakers create metaphors that strengthen group identity and solidarity.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students' creative use of English reflects pragmatic competence rather than linguistic deficiency. Their communicative practices illustrate how English is dynamically adapted within multilingual contexts to express identity, negotiate relationships, and respond to social realities.

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the creative use of English among students of Kogi State College of Education (Technical), Mopa using Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory. The findings reveal that students actively reshape English through pragmatic acts that reflect their sociocultural environment and communicative needs.

Through strategies such as adaptation, contextualization, inference, prosody, and activity-based metaphors, students transform English into a flexible communicative resource. These practices demonstrate linguistic creativity, social awareness, and pragmatic intelligence.

The study therefore challenges deficit-oriented interpretations of Nigerian student English and instead highlights the communicative competence embedded in multilingual language practices. By applying Pragmatic Act Theory, the study contributes to ongoing scholarship on African pragmatics and expands understanding of how English functions within multilingual educational environments.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends several measures to improve the teaching and understanding of English in multilingual educational contexts. First, educators should view students' creative use of English as evidence of pragmatic competence rather than linguistic deficiency. Recognizing this creativity can help shift perspectives from deficit-based interpretations to a more inclusive view of multilingual communication. Second, English teaching should become more context-sensitive by incorporating examples from students' everyday communication. Using real-life language practices can help students connect formal academic English with their natural communicative experiences. The study also recommends teacher training in pragmatics so that educators better understand how meaning is shaped by context, culture, and interaction. This will enable teachers to appreciate students' linguistic creativity while supporting their development of academic language skills.

Additionally, multilingual practices should be supported in classrooms. The strategic use of indigenous languages alongside English can enhance comprehension, inclusivity, and reflect the linguistic realities of Nigerian educational settings. The development of contextualized teaching materials is also encouraged. Instructional resources should include authentic examples of Nigerian English, code-mixing, and pragmatic language use to reflect real communicative situations. Furthermore, future research should explore pragmatic acts in digital communication, particularly on platforms such as WhatsApp and social media where students frequently interact.

Finally, colleges of education should create institutional platforms such as debate clubs, drama groups, and communication workshops to encourage active language practice and the development of students' pragmatic and communicative skills.

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