

[Discussion notes]

The significance of casual and intimate registers used in Nubuni Idiolect

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Abstract: Certain registers are associated with a language, dialect or idiolect. The changes of times, events and occurrences can cause these registers to change, disappear, or exist. The Nubuni idiolect is one such variety that has a number of significant casual and intimate registers that are used rarely. Based on a number of interviews conducted with some elderly people in Nubuni village, it was identified that unusual registers are occasionally used amongst some people. In certain speech acts, whether it is direct or indirect illocution, people use these registers to refer to certain things which they are able to understand each other. Thus, these registers are uncommon in any ordinary speech acts. Those who are well versed in these registers would use in their daily conversations just like any other registers used in ordinary conversations. Those casual and intimate registers may refer to common concepts, things or words with hidden literal meanings although the contextual or related meanings are present in the conversations.

Key words: Registers, casual/ intimate registers, speech act, direct/ indirect illocution, contextual/ literal meaning

1. Introduction

Language is seen as the “source of human life and power. To understand our humanity, one must understand the nature of language that makes us human” (Fromkin & Rodman, 1993: 3). Therefore, it is vital that different linguistic communities have a language to communicate with. As such, the people of Nubuni village in Chuave District of Simbu Province in Papua New Guinea speak the Nubuni Idiolect as part and parcel of their lives. Nubuni Idiolect is a variety of the Bomai language which is one of the Papuan languages (Non-Austronesian language).

Based on the moderate or weak version of the Whorfian hypothesis, it holds that “a language shapes how its speakers perceive the world” (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004: 23). Hence, the linguistic relativity of the people of Nubuni enables them to utter words appropriately. Paltridge (2004) further elaborated that words can be used either in the

context of locutionary act (referring to the factual or literal meaning) or in the context of illocutionary act (referring to the speaker's intention in uttering the words). Those speakers who do not possess the ability to distinguish or figure out the meanings of these registers are incompetent to use them in their conversations. Otherwise, they might have problems with grammar and syntax which will not give the intended meanings to the hearer.

The research was done to identify and recognize the uncommon registers that are rarely used among the people of Nubuni village. It is vital to preserve the original flavour of the native Idiolect of the village than to lose it. Hence, the interview was done with a number of elderly villagers. Within the linguistic community of Nubuni, there exists a speech community who "...have regular and frequent interaction that is characterized by shared patterns of interaction and communication" (Paltridge, 2004: 63). This speech community knows the norms, values and taboos that are associated with certain unique words or phrases that are used rarely. Although there are a number of related issues to this discussion, this paper will specifically focus on casual and intimate registers.

Casual register refers to the informal language used by peers and friends which include slang or colloquialisms, vulgarities, idioms, etc. It is spoken as a group language. That means, to engage in this register, people must be members of that group. Example: buddies, teammates, chats and emails, blogs, and letters to friends, etc. Intimate register includes communications that are private. It is reserved for close family members or intimate people (people you have some kind of relationship with). Example, between elders or chiefs, husband and wife, boyfriend and girlfriend, siblings, parent and children, and so forth (Montano-Harmon, n.d). Through this discussion, it will identify some examples of words and phrases that are used as casual and intimate registers by speakers of Nubuni Idiolect.

2. Findings & discussions

It was revealed through the interview that certain specified concepts or words are used as substitutes of commonly used words or concepts in the Nubuni Idiolect. Fromkin and Rodman (1993: 13) elaborated that "...our unconscious ability to speak and understand and to make judgments about [words] and sentences reveals our knowledge of the rules of our language." This is evident in the use of those special registers in Nubuni Idiolect.

2.1. Some commonly used registers and how they are used

Table 1 contains some unique registers used amongst some people of Nubuni

Commonly used words	Substitute words	Commonly used words	Substitute words
'yai' (man)	'hiki kowiye'	'doidi' (corn)	'doidipapa'
'opai' (lady)	'bopiyen'	'kua' (sweet potato)	'emi kan'
'dumanom' (old)	'bariyom'	'ami' (peanut)	'amikarapu'
'boma' (pig)	'gugu'	'pisoro' (salt)	'pigani'
'kei' (dog)	'akoi'	'are' (sun)	'arepupe'
'gan' (kid/ child)	'korua'	'korua' (chicken)	'korua baikane'
'kua peke' (rice)	'keke miyom'	'kuakawa' (cloud)	'okomiyom niom'
'dakom' (cliff)	'guwom'	'kui' (grass)	'kuikan'
'dimambu' (pumpkin)	'diwa'	'komo' (drain)	'kuakomo'
'kopa' (red pandanus)	'kapu niom'	'gawa' (ground)	'gawakua'
'kongo' (stone)	'kongokari'	'kakako sunguwa nem' (leader)	'yaki nem'

Table 2 shows examples of how those special registers are used in oral communication giving the literal and related meanings with the English Translations

	Literal Meaning	Related Meaning	English Translation
1	'No yai mopnia.'	'No hiki kowiye mopniya.'	(I am a man).
2	'Ne opai moiniya.'	'Ne bopiyen moiniya.'	(You are a lady).
3	'Kua ta iyawo.'	'Emi kan' ta iyawo.'	(Give me a sweet potato).
4	'Gan ya ki tekeiyo.'	'Korua ya ki tekeiyo.'	(Kid, don't play).
5	'Kopa no.'	'Kapu niom no.'	(Eat red pandanus).

As stated above, the first group of sentences contain the literal meanings which are commonly used by the people. The second group of sentences carry the related meanings according to the contexts they are used. When those group of words are to be used, people are considerate and careful especially when to use them taking note of the cultural implications, the audience or the speech participants and the situation. As Montano-Harmon (n.d) supported, the appropriate language register depends upon the audience (who), the

topic (what), purpose (why) and location (where). You must control the use of language registers in order to enjoy success in every aspect and situation you encounter.

DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004: 244) further maintained that “much of the difference between speech act use is embedded in different cultural norms and assumptions governing communicative interactions.” That is, these utterances are uncommon and people use them when need be and they are not misused. The speakers take into account the significance that is associated with these registers. Some times, the people use these words in informal or colloquial speeches. That is, to show case the kind of mood that the speakers are in when they interact with other speech participants. At the same time, the information structure is organized in a manner that is understood by the speaker. That is, “which part of the message the speaker assumes the hearer already knows and which parts of the message are new information” (Richards, et al., 1985: 140). It is evident that there is a distinction linking the knowledge necessary to produce words and sentences of a language and applying this knowledge. “It is a difference between what you know, which is your linguistic competence, and how you use this knowledge in actual speech production and comprehension, which is your linguistic performance” (Fromkin & Rodman, 1993: 11-12).

Now, let us look at the kinds of casual and intimate registers that exist in Nubuni Idiolect.

2.2. Casual registers

Table 3 presents some examples of casual registers

casual registers	literal meanings
‘keke miyom’	‘kua peke’ (rice)
‘yaki nem’	‘kakakosunguwa nem’ (leader)
‘bariyom’	‘dumanom’ (old)
‘akoi’	‘kei’ (dog)
‘okomiyom niom’	‘kuakawa’ (cloud)

These examples show that the words and phrases are used using the indirect illocution. Indirect illocution is an illocutionary act in which the speaker expresses another illocutionary force other than that literally expressed in the utterance, by relying on:

- shared background knowledge
- principles of conversation
- convention
- the ability of the addressee to make inferences (Searle and Vanderveken, 1985).

In a casual register, the words and phrases are put together using appropriate grammar and syntax to give the meaning that is understood by the hearer. That is, the speaker uses the indirect illocution in a speech act to deliver a message which the receiver should respond accordingly. If the receiver is not part of the group but happens to be at the scene or time of the conversation, he or she would try his or her best to figure out the meaning of what is uttered.

2.3. Intimate registers

Table 4 shows some examples of intimate registers

intimate registers	literal meanings
'korua'	'gan' (kid/ child)
'hiki kowiye'	'yai' (man)
'bopiyen'	'opai' (lady)
'dimambu' (pumpkin)	'diwa'
'kuakomo'	'komo' (drain)

These examples indicate some intimate registers which are used as direct illocution. A direct illocution is an illocutionary act in which only the illocutionary force and propositional content literally expressed by the lexical items and syntactic form of the utterance are communicated (Searle and Vanderveken, 1985). Say for example, when a mother is trying to call her child to fetch water when the child is playing, she would say, '*korua ya, ni koinana po*' with certain force. As soon as the child hears these utterances, he or she would quickly get a container and rush to fetch water because this speech act is directly calling for the child to stop playing and to quickly fetch water before the mother could do anything to him or her if the child does not respond favourably.

Interestingly, there are not many alternative words or phrases to refer to certain words or phrases given in both the casual and intimate registers in Nubuni Idiolect as in the English language. The English language has number of alternative words or phrases

to choose from as in these examples: the word ‘woman’ - how many words can you think of which refer to ‘woman?’ How about ‘lady,’ ‘chick,’ ‘gal,’ ‘female,’ ‘girl’, or ‘madam?’ Or idioms like, all the words we have to describe the word ‘death.’ Terms like; ‘kicked the bucket,’ ‘croaked,’ ‘bought the farm,’ and how about ‘passed on,’ ‘passed away’ or ‘crossed over’? (Carter, n.d). All these are examples of how complex and diversified English language is compared to the Nubuni Idiolect. Thus, Nubuni Idiolect has limited number of casual and intimate registers as identified in this study.

3. Conclusion

The Nubuni Idiolect is one such variety that has a number of casual and intimate registers which are used occasionally by the native speakers. Unfortunately, not every speaker knows those special registers but only certain individuals are well versed in these registers and they seem to use them when need be. These registers can be applied using either the direct or indirect illocutionary acts. However, the casual and intimate registers are used taking into consideration the speech participants, time, situation and the place of conversation. These vital aspects govern the use of these registers which enable the speakers to be mindful of every word or phrase uttered. The speakers ensure that the words or phrases are grammatically and syntactically correct to give the intended meaning to the hearers. Hence, the significance of these registers is somewhat part and parcel of the culture of the Nubuni people because they are associated with certain norms, values and taboos of that society.

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