

A Socio-pragmatic analysis of a death palaver « Osambo la Oboo» among Mbosi community

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Abstract

This paper dealt with the socio-pragmatic analysis of a death palaver among Mbosi community. The emphasis is put on the study and scrutiny of one of Mbosi people customs in terms of *Osambo*. The study is based on the ethnography of communication model developed by Hymes. It comes out from discussions that *Osambo la oboo* custom is a significant identity marker among Mbosi community as it a stepping stone to solidify family relationships and ties as well as bring peace within the community. The focus of the current paper was to describe the concept of osambo in connection to the death of a person. Osambo la oboo ceremony is socially characterised by the usage of formal and legal language terminology, the style is more symbolic and metaphorical; proverbial expressions colour the speaker's speech.

Keywords: Socio-pragmatic analysis, osambo la oboo, language patterns, Mbosi community, death.

Résumé

Cette contribution s'appuie sur l'analyse socio-pragmatique de la rencontre familiale osambo chez les peuples mbochi. L'accent est mis sur l'étude et l'examen des aspects langagiers liés aux us et coutumes mbochi par le truchement d'Osambo. L'étude s'est penchée sur l'approche de l'ethnographie de la communication développée par Dell Hymes. Il résulte de ce travail qu'Osambo la Oboo est un élément culturel communautaire qui solidifie les liens familiaux et apporte la paix au sein de la communauté. Cette étude a été consacrée à l'analyse d'Osambo en rapport avec un cas de décès. Le discours d'Osambo est marqué par l'usage d'un langage formel avec une terminologie légale, le style est symbolique et métaphorique, les expressions proverbiales émaillent le discours des locuteurs.

Mots clés : analyse socio-pragmatique, osambo la oboo, aspects du discours, communauté Mbosi, la mort.

Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to provide a socio-pragmatic analysis of a Mbosi cultural facts driving data from a Mbosi community death palaver. In fact, the death of a Mbosi inhabitant gives rise to a family meeting gathering both maternal and paternal family members to solve the deceased person's problems. This is socially termed *osambo la oboo*. This work falls in the domain of the sociolinguistics and pragmatics. It tackles the scrutiny of language patterns in connection to a societal event. As language usage varies according to the context together with the event, we want to assess the contextual senses accounting for the death palaver in Mbosi community. We are going to follow Dell Hymes' model of the ethnography of communication (1968, 1972, 1994). This paper addresses the following questions:

- (1) What characterises the language usage during Osambo?
- (2)- What are the socially meanings attached to language expressions?
- (3)- What are the social discourse organization, symbols, artefacts values, and participants?

This study includes two main parts based a descriptive analysis of Osambo and a socio-pragmatic analysis. The former is dedicated to the structural organisation of the event, whilst the latter is devoted to the analysis and the interpretation of the social event.

1. Descriptive analysis of Osambo

1.1 Setting

The osambo event place differs from the village to the city. As such, in the city, it can be organized at the deceased home or any paternal home place, whereas at the place, it can be held at a traditional palace named *kandza* or beneath a big tree at the paternal home place. At the village, the favourite day is often *Tsono*, a day during which people do not go the forest or the river. But, in the city, the decision on the day depends on the availability of the different family members. The order of the seats is generally done so as the members of the two families sit face to face. The disposition of the seats may also be arranged in the form of (...) or a circle where the concerned families also sit opposite each other.

1.2 Participants

This social event involves the attendance of Twèrè, the traditional judges who have good command of traditional knowledge to settle societal problems, paternal family member, maternal family members and related family members. The last group includes people who married one of the children from the deceased person maternal or paternal family members. As things stands, there are two kinds of participants notably active and passive participants. The active participants are Twèrè, whereas the passive participants are parents and relatives. The former refer to the Speakers, whilst the latter refer to the audience.

1.3. Ends

In traditional African societies, the settling of societal problems gives rise to a gathering of worthy people to decide of the issue at stake. This is reason why, further to a death, the parents and relatives of the deceased person gather under the governance of a traditional judge to solve the heritage and other societal issues. The whys of osambo la oboo is to end up the life of the deceased in such a way everyone in the different families should know for example who is the current ruler of this family. If the deceased has debts, if he did not recognise some of his children, the families present at this event are going to provide adequate solution to all his problems.

1.4 Act sequence, Keys, Instrumentalities, Norms and Genres

The structure of the Act sequence is composed of an opening, exchange and discussions, and a closure.

1.4.1 Opening

This event is performed at the residence of the deceased's father. Once "itàà la ingɔɔ" (the paternal and maternal sides) of the deceased are gathered; Twèrè a dzange (the chief spokesperson) before starting he checks whether the two sides are ready and every member is present. Then, he introduces himself and asks "itàà amba owè" (the deceased's paternal side) the reason why he is invited in saying:

Mbya, ndzambe andzambe andzambe atso nga ilegi uh alomi a ngoo.
 your attention please, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon!
 Ware obela, Elenga ewura ateku, odza ma ôlêngé, onioya ma ôlêngé.
 I am Elenga ewura ateku, the chief spokesperson, I am here to do my job.
 yana nga layamba toma amba Yoka la Ongagna asere la nga dé.
 Two days ago I received a messenger from Yoka la Ongagna family. He told me that
 «ma oko ma tsonɔ nga ili la ikambi la oteene la abwe a nga».
 On the holiday I want to meet my in-laws.
 Paa Tsonɔ, abwe la akanga asikoya, aɓosere bisi okoo la otsina ma obeya no bisi,
 Today is the weekend, the in-laws and your family are all here, so tell us the reason you invite us
 Atwere isumi, ipii.
 Insiders, am I being understood?

Then, Twèrè ya alomi (deceased paternal side's spokesperson) responds on saying: 'wa abei binu tina ma elonda pɔɔ amba mwasi la bana; la ekaba mpengɛ ya owè.' (he summoned you to solve the problem of the wife and children as well as the division of the deceased's property.)

1.4.2 Exchange and discussions

It is a conversation exchange concerning between speakers. It is made of statements, explanations, approvals, and repetitions. It looks like a question-reply talk.

The Obela amba olomi goes on: “Binu beyahi, lemokoba akyesu ma ebembe” you guests, have this drink first ! .

Twere a dzange repeats what the Twere ya olomi said to the Twere ya abwe in this way:

Isia Osaga oyogi olomi amba no Yoka la Ongagna, aseri nde
Osaga lineage, did you hear your husband Yoka la Ongagna? He said that

« Binu beyahi, lemokoba akyesu ma ebembe »

you guests, have this drink first !

Twere ya abwe takes the floor and replies by saying this: “Binu lebeyi bisi kaka mo akyesu ma ebembe”
(Did you invite us for the drink only?)

Twere a dzange communicates what have been said in this way: “Osaga aseri nde no obei ba kaka mo akyesu ma ebembe” (Osaga family asked if you just invited them for the drink only).

Now, the turn is to the Twere ya olomi to explain the situation:

Wa abora mwana, aswesi, akoyisi lékòli, mwana abai osalu, ayaa la mboa la nganda,
He gave birth, he fed and paid school fees, the child became a civil servant and a father.

oko mungu ambwande abari wa, aberi okoro o tse,

that day the dogs bit him and he was dead.

ndzambe tungu odza yò, ladza kaka baro.

God does not eat greens, but eat people.

Wa abei binu menga lewo pò ya mwasi la bana amba owè; la ekaba penge ya owè.

he summoned you to solve the problem of the wife and children; as well as the deceased's wealth.

Twere a dzange repeats what has been said above by the Twere ya olomi. Then, he says: “eyaa ma ombea, ombea amba no te emugu” (the one who has come by invitation, here is the core news for your invitation)

At this level, the paternal and maternal side of deceased begin to settle the wife and children's situation.

Twere ya abwe reacts in the following way: “paba o nga imbengu o no, aloma a ngoo, nga ili oyuru ya kaa. Ehe ka no la obanda oboso”(By my wisdom, I would rather you the father, you decide).

Twere a dzange transmits what has just been said by Twere ya abwe and he said: “ih eyogi nga otô” (have you understood?)

Twere ya olomi reacts by asking the permission, to go to discuss with the family that he is speaking on their behalf in the following way: “lemodzwa gaakusa” (let's go to the secret meeting).

After they came back from the secret meeting, they bring an object called “gyele” (a wife).

The Twere ya abwe tells the Twere ya alomi this: “obia o ngolo, yaa la ya embwembwe, tese ya obé.”
(You who have just conferred, bring us the solution and discard the evil.)

Twere ya alomi reacts on saying: “Oyuru wo adzaa lalamba, latumba wa la olomi, aswesi bana, paba mwana amba bisu efo ayaa miso ikô.O bisu mwasi la bana amba wa ma abunga la Mboko ” (This woman was cooking, toasting , she and her husband fed the children, today our son is dead. For us, his wife and children will stay with Mboko).

Twere a dzange repeats what have just been said above by the Twere ya alomi and he asks the maternal side this question: “binu lebenyi” (Are you agreed).

The Twere ya abwe answers in this way: “ih ewo ko, olongo la yoga” (yes, what the forest said the savannah heard)

At the last level which is “ekaba penge amba owè”(divide the deceased's property), the paternal and maternal side of deceased before dividing the deceased's property, they first ask “ baro eli la pò, la ibèbo la owè alea boso” (those whose deceased was due and those who were due to come). Then, the division of its assets can be done.

Twere ya alomi gives the floor to the head of the family “Odi” to speak, he declares:

Mwana amba nga yedzwe wo,

My child who died

oyii eli pò amba ndzambe,

maybe it's God's will,

nga isaga epei moro pendo ka.

I did not allow people to touch witchcraft.

ebugi ba, banungwa twa húlè húlè húlè,

those who have remained, they must remain in good health,

andodo mabe ka,

not bad intentions, on these children,
moro eli la bana ba indzogo, akaraka ambwande.
The one who has these bad intentions, he should stop!

1.2.3 Closure

Obela a dzange (the chief spokesperson) summarizes all the steps of the event from the beginning until the end. Then when he finishes, he gives the floor to Mwene. So, Mwene (the chief) concludes the ceremony in these declarative sentences:

Awo, mbogà ware ològi ali ka.
Good afternoon everyone, here at the village, there is no sorcerer.
mbogà amba nga eli ngé ngé ngé.
My village is at peace.
moro eli la esukulukutu, la mbomo, akara ba.
The one who has owl, boa, he should hold them
witchcraft, he should stop with these practices!
Leyaa mbogà amba nga ngé.
Don't disturb my village!
Leyaa ngamene ilògi ba.
Let's me be their unique sorcerer
Pó esi ee
The ceremony is over
The wine is shared after Mwene discourse and each member of the family goes back home.

During the Osambo meeting, the tone of the speakers coupled with the attitudes of the different participants is serious. There is no room for a joke or entertainments. The atmosphere looks like at a church or a justice courtyard. People gather to settle down a social problem. Hence, any joke is viewed as an attack to the deceased person's family.

Furthermore, the style of speech is more formal than informal. The different active speakers use a formal register because the case being discussed requires a good command of the community language. Symbolic, metaphoric and proverbial is the expression. Young people sometimes fail to understand the message delivered by Twere and the like. The language is tailored to show socially high standard of the speakers.

Next, during the Osambo gathering, the audience only acknowledges. The discourse evolves in such a way that when one speaker is speaking, no one dares speak. When he finishes, there are concluding expressions that he uses to mark the end of his speech. The other speakers start by repeating what was said previously for a good understanding before providing any reaction further to that speech. The speech looks like a question-response talk. It is the judges who can allow a person from audience to speak regarding their social responsibility and social rank.

Finally, since Osambo draws its origin from the culture of Mbosi inhabitants, it is generally observed that the speakers make use of myths, tales, proverbs, riddles to make the event not only serious but also relaxing and vivace. All these types of messages are used appropriately to draw the audience attention on a particular behaviour that is to be blamed or honoured. The speakers sometimes use those rhetoric styles to show their good command of the language. Their talents in speaking can be a kind of plea to the audience to become a member of Otware social organisation. As things stand, the osambo meeting is a fundamental social event worthy for sharing to the audience, non initiated people, the customs, the wisdom and the canonical judgment procedures ancestors used to reinforce peace in families and community.

2- A socio-pragmatic analysis of Osambo

It is noticeable that aspects that are going to be developed here are related to the interpretation of this social event related Osambo and death. In fact, osambo is a social opportunity for the demonstration of the usage of Otware (Ganongo (1979), Elenga (2019), Itoua Joseph ()). As developed by Baudry (1997), the key objective is social harmony in communities. Niagalé Bagayoko and Fahiraman Rodrigue Koné (2017:14) highlight this point in the following terms:

Lorsque des mécanismes traditionnels sont mobilisés, l'objectif poursuivi est avant tout de préserver l'intérêt du groupe ou de la communauté et non pas de promouvoir ou de défendre des droits individuels. Le rétablissement de l'harmonie au sein de la communauté apparaît comme l'objectif premier.

This reinforces the fact that the African palaver is an institution worthy for the quest of living together harmoniously. Niagalé Bagayoko and Fahiraman Rodrigue Koné (op.:22) summarise the role of the African palaver as follows:

La palabre fait ainsi figure de thérapie collective. La décision arrêtée à l'issue des discussions et débats est généralement célébrée par la prise d'un repas en commun réunissant les différents protagonistes, dans le respect des alliances et des préséances et au rythme de danses et de chants, manifestations de la volonté de vivre dans la paix et l'harmonie.

Then, the upcoming lines are dedicated to the analysis of language patterns focusing on the opening stage, exchange and discussions, and closure step.

On the introductions, the term “mbya” (quiet) used by the chief spokesperson at the beginning of the event shows that the Ambosi people like discipline while doing something because in disorder nothing can be done. It is the sense of organization. At the same time, the spokesperson gives instruction related to the discipline matters so that from the beginning to the end of the event there is a good atmosphere. The traditional judges ask laymen to take off hats, to avoid any trouble behaviours.

Then, it is noticeable that the sentence *Ndzambe, andzambe, andzambe* “(God, gods, gods) is common in the different types of introductory statements by traditional judges. It refers to the prayer towards God almighty and the other gods. It characterizes the monotheist *Ndzambe* and polytheist ‘andzambe’ dimension of Ambosi people. The repetition of the word *andzambe* (gods) shows that in spite of the existence of God *Ndzambe*, this linguistic community is often focused on ancestors. From this prayer, it is understandable that the Ambosi people are aware of the fact that without the implication of a supernatural spirit nothing can be done. Then, this prayer purports to ask assistance from them to well organize these ceremonies without any obstacle. It is also a source of inspiration for the spokespersons *Obela*. Note that the Ambosi people are tolerant in the matter of religion. Moreover, the term *andzambe* also means ancestors. Indeed, in Mbochi linguistic community, ancestors and dead persons play an important role in life because they protect them and contribute to their success in their everyday life. For the same reason, during the construction of buildings or the inauguration of any enterprise, a quantity of wine is sprayed on the ground to praise their spirits in order to ask them to have the whole control of the ceremony.

The sentence *abaa lepwé* ‘ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon’ or *uh alomi a ngoo* ‘ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon’ is a greeting expression. In fact, there are several ways of greeting people in Mbochi land. This type of greeting suits to the ceremony. Although the use of the term *abaa* ‘men’, this greeting is addressed to the whole audience made of male and female people. It is a way for the spokesperson to be interacted with the audience. This strategy is useful for a good exchange. It is also an expression of politeness and good social integration in the Mbochi community. In addition, the use of the term *abaa* ‘men’ means that in Mbochi linguistic community, men are needful to solve problems than women. Then, most of initiatory associations are composed of male persons. For the same reason, according to Ambosi people, the birth of a boy appears more interesting than a girl because he is going not only to solve problems, but also to perpetuate mankind. Moreover, the use of the word *abaa* also shows that as other languages, Mbochi is also made of gender nouns such as : *abaa* (men) *Ayuru* (women), *olomi* (husband)... *mwasi* (wife), *taa* (father)..... *ngoo* (mother). In the same linguistic community, gender names are also made of prefixes : *Ny-* and *Mw-* (*Elenga*.... *Nyelenga* , *Ndinga*..... *Mwandinga*). Other female names are : *Ingoba*, *Somboko*, *Imongui*, ...etc.

The word *ibondzi* or *akyesu ma ebembe* in Mbochi community, is a kindness expression to receive visitors and a refreshment for visitors who are supposed to come from far places. It symbolizes two boxes of wine plus an amount of 12000F or 6000 F which is given to the in-laws at the opening of “*ikanda la idigi*” and “*Osambo la oboo*” palavers in order to well receive them before tackling the topic. It is also a way to consider the in-laws and to beg them to contribute to this ceremony.

The expression *Lehembisa tsotso* ‘make the cock walks’ is often used during *osambo oboo* namely while holding palaver after funeral. As a matter of fact, this process consists in showing different members of the family and the deceased’s family chief. It is composed of a coin covered with a leaf. It takes place in both sides, that is, the deceased paternal side and the deceased distaff side. It helps the members of both families to know each other so that when there is a situation, each of the part knows the responsible person to contact.

From *Ndzambe tungu odza yo, ladza kaka baro*, literally means God does not eat vegetable, he only eats men. This saying is a complaint towards God because he has created men and is also the one who has the power and the last word in human beings life. Without his permission men cannot die.

Then, the expression *ambwande abari wa, aberi okoro o tse* ‘the dogs bit him and knocked him down’ is a metaphorical sentence which expresses the death. Dogs represent the evil agents who contributed to the death of a person. This is a metaphorical way to mention sorcerers who killed a person.

The word *Ngaakusa* ‘behind the house’ expresses the place of conversation which does not concern everybody. Indeed, during palavers each family often retires and goes may be behind the house or in the street in order to analyse and give solution to the topic under discussion. There, only members of the family stand up and

each of them suggests a solution to the problem. It is the culture of dialogue by the Ambosi people. Also, the same term signifies a place par excellence where important decisions are taken collectively.

The expression *wa adzaa lalamba, latumba* 'She was cooking, toasting' is a metaphor which means that she was at ease at her home because the fact of "cooking and toasting" in the Mbochi land symbolizes that the person has money to buy food if not he cannot afford, he cannot cook food because he will beg it from other members of the community.

The sentence *wate ware ali oyuru, oboso ka nɔ la osere wa, menga wa la leng'ang'ɔ amba wa apura ayeli* 'Spokesperson, here he is a woman, the best thing would be for you to tell him what is missing to help them see what they can do!'. This means that the distaff side does not want to speak before the paternal side. This strategy reflects the Mbochi culture where the wife cannot speak before the man in some situations. It is the expression of respect toward men.

The proverb *paba o nga imbengu o nɔ* 'Each day has enough trouble of its own' which means don't laugh at me today because no one knows the future, is used to make understand the audience that if you don't take care of my situation today, the coming days, when you are in difficulty, no one is going to help you too.

The use of group of words *isumi, ipigi* ' is a specific twere code of stopping any declaration during osambo in Mbochi community. The present group of words is considered as an interrogative is followed by answers such as "Opanegheghe" which means "all right" This one is directly accompanied with the repetition of any of the following words by all people who have been initiated in Otwere school: *Woga* and *Iswa* . Both words are used to reinforce the audience namely twere affirmation and encourage Obela. Then, *iswà* is used by traditional chiefs such as Kani, "mwene, yombi. However, woga is pronounced by the other members of otwere.

Then, when a traditional chief says *Iswa*, no one else cannot repeat the same word until the spokesperson continues. The words *woga* and *iswa* are words produced by spokespersons to tell each other that we are following what is being said. Also, these codes are used for the new members of Otwere to make a sign of their adhesion in the group and to show to the other members of the community that they are no longer non-initiated persons *opombo* in singular and *apombo* in plural. It gives an individual a new status in society. It is established that the newcomers in otwere and obela when there are events or ceremonies for signalling their presence, they can only use *woga*.

The literal expression of *ewɔ kɔ, olongo la woga* 'when the forest speaks, the savannah hears'. In fact, the contextual meaning is when the central spokesperson says *eyaa ma ombea ali kaa* 'Is the invited person absent? The central spokesperson knows his interlocutor is present listening to him and will react very soon. It is a metaphoric style made of the personification of "kɔ" (forest) and *olongo savannah*" since both of them are often closed to each other in the Mbochi environment.

The expression *ekaba penge amba owè*, literally signifies to share the deceased's bag. But metaphorically, it expresses the division of the deceased's property. This is a statement used to ask people to show the belongings of the deceased person. Generally, people could see blankets, bags of garments and a symbolic amount of money.

The sentence *mbogà ware ologi ali ka* 'here at the village, there is no sorcerer' is the chief's speech to forbid the two parts to accuse each other during the event. Then, *mbogà amba nga eli nge nge nge* 'My village is at peace' represents a public call to all members of the deceased person who can have bad witchcraft practices to stop with it.

The sentence *moro eli la esukulukutu, la mbɔmɔ, akara ba* is literally translated in this way: The one who has magic, witchcraft; he should stop with these practices! This is sentence stands for stop bad practices. It is a way to draw attention of bad persons. Then, *Leyaa ngamènè ilogo ba* 'Let's me, be the unique sorcerer' is the sentence expressed by the traditional chief who undertakes the ceremony, to play the appeasement function. Gemma Cliff Nguia Oniangué (2017: 33) states: "In the Koyo socioculture, all death cases are due to a sorcerer". In so doing, the traditional chief avoids conflicts between members of the deceased families.

Moreover, it is interesting to mention that apart from discourse style dominated by metaphor, there are symbols used such as *Mwandzo, epumbu*. Indeed, *Mwandzo* is a special broom used by Obela during Osambo. We distinguish two types of *Mwandzo*: a *Mwandzo* made of a metallic object at the hand and the *Mwandzo* without metallic object. According to one of our informant, the former is said to be for the skillful Obela. After the resolution of a problem by atwere, if one part in conflict refuses to apply the decision taken, a *Mwandzo* is put down in front of the person who brings conflict and if he or she passes over it, he or she will be victim of all kinds of mystic troubles which may bring him to death. Finally, when it is pointed towards someone, it may have negative drawbacks to him/her.

Epumbu is the buffalo tail and symbolizes power. It is only held by traditional chief *Mwene* or Kani. He always walks with it. If *Epumbu* is directed towards an individual, he or she may die. It is said that thanks to *Epumbu*, some traditional chiefs may arrest the thunder *mwandza*.

Conclusion

This paper addresses the analysis of the question of the settling of a social problem among Mbosi community focusing on a case of death palaver. *Osambo la oboo* is a social meeting involving the presence of two kinds of participants: traditional judges and audience. The former are the one who are going to discuss, debate, analyse and draw conclusions in close relationship with the issue under discussion. The social event has three main parts that we termed opening, exchange and discussion and closure. These parts refer to the presentation of the problem, the exchange and development of the problem and the end of the ceremony. Everything is carried according to traditional norms. The speakers' speech is marred with traditional sayings, proverbs, symbols and artefacts. The overall objective of the *Osambo la oboo* is to put a peaceful end to the life of the deceased person together with guarantying peace and harmony to living persons in different families.

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