

International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies
(LALIGENS), Bahir Dar- Ethiopia

Vol. 9 (1), Serial No 19, February, 2020: 86-94
ISSN: 2225-8604(Print) ISSN 2227-5460 (Online)
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/laligens.v9i1.8>

**A PRAGMA-SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF SLOGANS ON
T-SHIRTS**

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Abstract

The T-shirts and the slogans on them are used to achieve different discourse and communicative themes. The T-shirts help to describe people, events, positions and situations. This article written the confines of the theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis and the qualitative design, investigates five different types of T-shirts. The T-shirts and the inscriptions on them as exemplified in the themes of readiness, position and desire, happiness and celebration, and protest are used to describe the wearers, address situations and pass information to the public. The paper therefore concludes that T-shirts and the slogans scripted on them perform different types of illocutionary actions which cause different forms perlocutionary reactions

Key Words: T-shirts, slogans, themes, multimodal, cloth; communication

Introduction

Cloth is part of man. This history of cloths dates back to the age of enlightenment. Cloths come are made in different types, shapes, designs, qualities, which corroborates the ever-evolving and changing nature of man and his social environment. Apart from the normal feature of cloths, which serves as a cover to the nakedness of man, protection to his body against the environment, cloths now serve as a channel of communication. Cloths, especially the T-Shirt now appears in different shapes, styles and designs (inscriptions), which perform different communicative functions, ideational, descriptive, expressive, directive and informative.

The development of science and technology has made it possible for T-Shirts to appear with all forms of semiotic designs, which define situations, events and activities. People make and wear T-Shirts that reflect their character, life-style and even positions on issues and context. The content of the design of T-Shirts can be used to occasions and the wearers in terms of the formality and informality of the occasion, and in terms of the age, exposure and character of the wearers. What is very evident here is the general distinction between **dress** and **dressing**. According to Barthes (2006), individuals, particularly young people in the society have shown

that there is a difference between dress and dressing. While dressing is the actual act of putting some specific items of cloths, a dress is a system of shared meaning evoked by elements of clothing and rules governing the allowed combination. T-Shirt slogans, the focus of this paper, mediates between fashion and social discourse, revealing that T-Shirt messages are much more than just putting on cloths. A T-Shirt demonstrates the fact that fashion indeed can communicate. The slogan is created to arouse the interested of the customers; they are crafted in such an attractive manner that is daring and catchy to the people.

A slogan in simple description is a word, a phrase or even a sentence that is catchy, easy to remember, to read, to say, to memorise and to translate. Every slogan contains linguistic and semiotic inscriptions which try to arrest the attention of the people. Slogans are like trade designs which function as tools of business strategy used to get the interest of the consumers activated; to suggest ideas openly, and to inform the audience of the existence of the products or situation. Slogans on T-Shirts are packages of products, which are capable of convincing a consumer into purchasing the product and which can as well be used to show differences between products. Working on the pragma-stylistic interpretation of the packages of selected body creams and soaps, she shows that the use of the words Ivory and black colour on the package of the Ivory Soap like slogans on T-Shirts metaphorically indicates the presence of two cultures

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Multimodal discourse analysis or multimodality is a frame work that draws from Halliday's (1978, 1985,) social semiotic approach to language. It is the appropriation of different arrays of modes to explain an idea. It is defined as the integration of different communicative modes (for example, language, paintings and music) in a communicative artifact or event (Van Leeuwen, 2005). A multimodal discourse analysis is concerned with the meaning making process of semiotic contents. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) opined that each of the elements has a meaning potential and their meaning is realized when analysed in relation to each other. Multimodality asserts that language is just one among the many resources for making meaning. This implies that the modal resources available in a culture need to be seen as one coherent, integral field of resources for making meaning. The point of a multimodal approach is to get beyond approaches where mode was integrally linked. In a multimodal approach, all modes are framed as one field or one domain. Jointly, they are treated as one connected cultural resource for meaning making by members of a social group at a particular moment. All are seen as equal, potentially in their capacity to contribute meaning to a complex semiotic entity, a text, and each is treated as distinct in its material potential and social shaping.

Multimodality is a theory of communication and social semiotics which describes communication practices in terms of the textual, linguistics, spatial and visual resources or modes used to compose messages. Everything from the placement of the images to the organization of the contents creates meaning. The concept of multimodality according to Kress (2010) emphasizes the situated action that is the importance of the social context and the resources available for meaning making with attention to people's situated choices of resources rather than emphasizing the system of available resource. Thus, it opens up possibilities for recognizing, analysing and theorizing the different ways in which people make meaning and how those meanings are interrelated. Multimodality as defined by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) is 'the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event' (p.20). In the words of Jewitt (2009a) 'multimodality describes approaches that understand communication and representation to be more about language, and which attend to the full

range of communicational forms people use — image, gesture, gaze, postures and so on- and the relationship between them (p.14). So, while language is regarded as the most significant in communication, from the multimodal perspective, it is just one part of the multimodal ensemble. The researcher adopted this approach because of its flexibility, which makes it possible to analysis semiotic meaning making resources, such as drawings and painting, which do not involve oral speech sounds.

Conceptual Review

Pragmatics

Quite a number of scholars in the field of pragmatics have conceptualized on the nature of pragmatics. One of such is Leech (1983), who sees pragmatics as “the study of meaning in relation to speech situations.” In his opinion, the speech situation allows the speaker use language to attain a desired effect on the mind of the hearer” (p.6). Related to the above, Levinson (1983, p.9) notes that pragmatics is “the study of those aspects of the relationship between language and context that are relevant to the writing of grammars.” Here, interest is primarily on the inter-relatedness of language. Leech and Short (1983), sum up the concerns of pragmatics when they observed that pragmatic analysis of language can be understood to be the investigation into that aspect of meaning which is derived not from the formal properties of words or constructions, but from the way in which utterances are used and how they relate to the context in which they are uttered.

In stressing his own opinion, Yule (1996) states pointedly that pragmatics is in so many ways the study of invisible meaning. That is, how users of language recognize/deduce meaning, even when the message is not actually stated. Similarly, Morris (1938, p. 6) asserts that the study of pragmatics is “the study of the relations of signs to interpreters.” This therefore creates an avenue which allows one to investigate how meanings can be deduced from signs, and one of such is the use of the writings and drawings in the T-shirts.

Similarly, Nwala (2015) described pragmatics as the study of meaning which emphasizes the context and situation. This means that pragmatics studies the practical aspects of meaning which is usually socio-linguistically, psycholinguistically and stylistically defined.

Linguists generally have proposed various descriptions to account for pragmatics on the levels of meaning. To Mey (1993), pragmatics is the science of language in relation with its users. Yule (1996, p.8) argued that there are four areas which explicitly describe pragmatics:

- a. As that which studies the speakers meaning
- b. The study of contextual meaning.
- c. Studies to a great extent how what is unsaid is recognized as part of what is communicated i.e. the study of how more gets communicated than is said
- d. The study of the expression of relative distance.

He goes further to conclude that pragmatics is both “unique and frustrating” as it allows people to make sense of each other linguistically. And that this unique attribute contributes to making pragmatics a great task of linguistic study in the account that it requires one to make sense of what people have in mind.

Pragmatics is a significant field of study because it allows one to study language use on the basis of what is implied, i.e. it allows one to derive the intended meaning of language use and the reason why such is communicated. To further capture the usefulness of pragmatics, Nwala

(2015) rightly noted that with it (pragmatics) the task of having to discover the intended meaning of words and sentences contained in an expression can be inferred.

Leech (1983, p. 57) considered the scope of pragmatics to cut across the following:

- e. The message communicated
- f. The speakers involved in the message
- g. The existing knowledge they share
- h. The inferences on the basis of the context
- i. The effect of the non-verbal aspect of meaning

It is pertinent to state here therefore that pragmatic study in T-shirts allows one the opportunity to investigate into the hidden messages communicated in the drawing, paintings and writings on the shirts and also the period, time, season or reasons for the particular design. This is related to what cartoons do to people and to events. It may not be out of place to also argue that the essence or the core of every slogan on a T-shirt is for consumers to decode what is either said or unsaid, and pragmatics provides the channel through which consumers can access the minds of the T-shirts wearers.

From the foregoing, one can boldly say that pragmatics defines the choices language users make, the constraints associated with the choices, the effects on the users, the participants, the channel of the text, the linguistic situation among others. Pragmatic roles are not necessarily grammatical roles but that does not mean according to Nwala, (2015) that pragmatics is flagrantly opposed to the grammatical rules; it deals with how to do things with words; how to represent texts and how to interpret semiotics signs that are implicit and do not convey messages which do not bear any necessary relationship with the linguistic content of the symbols and writings.

T-Shirts

A few works on T-shirts (from disciplines other than linguistics) have only examined T-shirts designs and social functions as items of fashion.

T-shirt (or tee, t-shirt) is a style of unisex fabric shirt named after the “T” shape of its body and sleeves. Traditionally, it has short sleeves and round necklines, known as a crew neck, which does not have collar. T-shirts come in different styles, types, colours and sizes, to suit the uniqueness of taste of an occasion, event, age and message. At times, T-shirt can be made of flannel with no buttons. It may have a woven band that keeps the shirt from fraying and gives it some shapes.

Hong (2005) looked at slogans on T-shirt as a form of communication that have strong social or political views or opinions as a means of communication. This is very true, especially if one thinks of **no war, no drugs, antismoking, protect the environment, and race or sex discrimination** among others usually found on some T-shirts. The slogans convey different locutions and illocutionary forces on the audience. They help to describe or identify context and the participants (Martins 2002), and they are prominent forms of communication in our contemporary linguistic landscape; and further notes that little researches on it have examined the semiotics of this unique mode of communication.

Ghilani (2010), examining the use of T-shirts as a type of propaganda to promote the contributions of women in post-war America, argued that T-shirts like posters with images of women heroes have continued to recruit women who preach and support the course of womanhood. Related to the above is the postulation of Penny (2009). According to him, the use of political T-shirts in the American 2008 presidential campaign was a powerful and

important medium of communication; though, its exact role was ambiguous, the medium would continue to remain a key feature of American political and cultural life. The T-shirt as shown here serves as a veritable means political and social awareness; a situation where organizations, churches, clubs and political parties use it to reach their audience, sell their manifestoes, inform, instruct and even educate the populace. This is also a truism, when one recurs that in the Apartheid years in South Africa, the T-shirts, were commonly used to preach against it and to show the ills of it on humanity.

Kelly (2003) looked at T-shirts slogans as a means of the protecting image and expressing identity in Hawaii. According to him, T-shirts with slogans is as ubiquitous as leisure wears among residence of Hawaii that it could be considered as standard attire. It is very popular; it comes in different styles and with different slogans.

From the literature review, it is quite clear that pragmatics can be described as an aspect of semantics or an extension of semantics because it also studies meaning of words and sentences. But unlike semantics which studies the logical and explicit meaning, pragmatics looks at meaning from the context, the interplay between the linguistics science and social factors. Pragmatics looks at implicit meanings. The reviewed literatures alluded to linguistics approach of pragmatics but from different perspectives. For T-shirts, scholars agreed that they come in different forms, shapes, styles, and serve as simple means of communication, expression of identity, personality, protection, position etc.

Methodology

In this paper, the researcher adopted the descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey design is the type in which the researcher collects data from a large sample drawn from a given population and describes certain features of the samples as they are at the time of the study. Using this design, the researcher was able to choose five different T-shirts with different inscriptions, which were grouped under four different discourse themes.

Analysis

The T-shirts as the writer mentioned earlier are used to portray different discourse or communicative themes. Five of the themes discussed in this article are:

Theme of Readiness

T-shirts can be used to show one's readiness and disposition so as to remove all forms of fear and suspicions. One can script on a T-shirt such words and phrases **I am here, here I am, tomorrow is late, let the ideal begins**, which show that one is fully prepared and ready to take an action; to dawn the consequences. In such instances, the locution of the word or phrase will be very clear to the addressee or the public at large. The T-shirt, worn by the formal governor of Ekiti State, Nigeria, on his visit to the headquarters of the Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) in Nigeria scripted **EFCC, I am here** dared the commission and tells the Commission about his readiness to confront any situation:



Figure 1.

The syntax of the wordings clearly shows a case of movement and topicalization of the object and complement of the verb, **hear**. The initial or underlying structure of the sentence from which the surface was got is **I am here EFCC**. But the movement of EFCC to the sentence **Top** position is for emphasis, to draw attention to his readiness and presence in the commission who before his presence has claimed that he has clandestine plans to abscond. With the slogan on the T-shirt, the commission or any other related context will be duly informed of the preparedness and readiness of the wearer to confront the situation head-on.

Theme of Position and Desire

This discourse theme is closely related to the theme of readiness. Here, people use T-shirts slogans to define, declare and show their position on issues. This is quite common during protest and political campaigns. In times of protest, and campaigns, people use T-shirts to announce their position, give reasons for such and announce the consequence of the refusal of the addressees. Similarly, during political campaigns, political parties, different groups and even lobbyists appear in T-shirts with slogans that define their groups, interest, declarations and positions. For instance, the T-shirt figures2 and figure3 below are used to show desires and positions.



Figure 2.

The T-shirt with the inscription: **can't keep calm, I need morning sex** generally appeals to emotions and negotiates sex. The wearer uses this T-shirt to declare her intention, and even makes it very focal with the phrase, **can't keep calm**. The wearer using the expression, dared

any feeling, thought or definition of another person; her concern is the satisfaction of her desire – which is sex in the morning.

In the slogan, one reads or sees the use of two independent clauses – **the keep clause** and **the need clause**. The subject of **the keep clause**, which is the first-person personal pronoun is understandable; the pronoun was stylistically left out or deleted. This is not a case of deletion under identity as it were, but one used for emphasis and to show both the seriousness and resoluteness of the desire. The use of the noun modifier, **morning**, is to specify the period when the speaker wants the desire to be achieved.

Theme of Happiness and Celebration

T-shirts are usually used to show significant and joyous moments by people. These days people, especially the teens, youths and celebrities use T-shirts to announce their birthday, victories and successes. The T-shirts and the inscriptions written on them help to interpret and define the psychology of the celebrants. Recently, in the universities (for instance University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria) students on graduation days make T-shirts of different types with different write-ups or slogans to show their joyous moments.

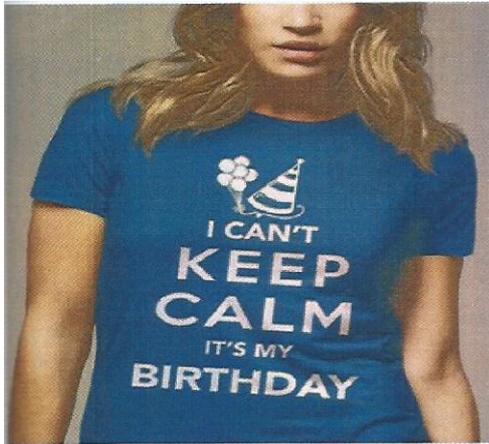


Fig.3

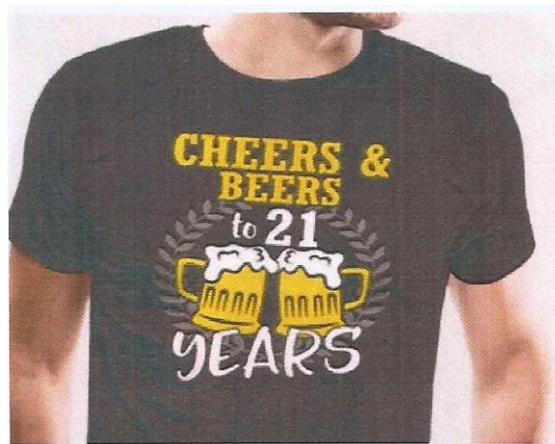


Fig.4

The T-shirts **I can't keep calm, it is my birthday** and **Cheers and beers to 21 years** portray how happy the wearers are, their psychology and joyous moments. Using the T-shirts both try to capture the attention of the on-lookers and pass the message of their birthday to them. Syntactically, the wordings of the first T-shirt presented in two clauses with the first personal pronoun **I** as subject of the **keep clause** and with the neutral pronoun **it** as the subject of the **is clause**. The use of the neutral pronoun **it** is both anaphoric and cataphoric. It makes reference to why she cannot keep calm, which is her birthday contained in the second clause.

The slogan **Cheers and bears to 21 years** points to the hilarious moment of the wearer. **Cheers** is an exclamation words used to show happiness and greetings. But here, the designer combined it with **beers**, a noun, to form the subject of the phrase. The subject syntactically is ill-positioned because it occurs as the subject of the infinitive 'to', a position that is not allowed because of the concept of case of the GB grammar. The phrase is verbless; the figure, 21, is not a verb. But the phrase pragmatically shows that the wearer is twenty-one years old and he is generally identifying in celebration with all who are twenty-one years old, hence the use of **cups** to create the image of celebration and happiness.

Theme of Protest

The T-shirt with the inscription of the scarlet letter **A**, in the phrase *not A distraction* was used by students of Charleston count school of the Arts in South Carolina to protest against the misconception about the dressing of the teen girls, which led to the introduction of a dress code in the school. The girls wearing the T-shirts with the scarlet letter **A** on it try to show the authority that they were not against the dress code but against the misconception about their dressing which led to the introduction of the dress code. They used the T-shirt to speak out their mind and show their position on the subject matter.



Fig.5

The expression or phrase ‘**Not A Distraction**’ is an extract of the entire sentence: **it is not a distraction**. The subject – the pronoun **it** refers to the dressing of the girls misconceived to be ill and amorously intended. Apart from the sentence, the scarlet letter **A** on the T-shirt alone passes the message. This attests to the position of this paper that T-shirts are a good mode of communication which people can use to register their position, inform the public and correct erroneous views.

Conclusion

Thus far, the writer has shown in this article that T-shirts which are adorned and designed with different forms of slogans can be used to achieve different discourse illocutionary effects. The T-shirts can be made or designed to appear in different forms and styles so as to achieve the designer’s or wearer’s discourse goal. The different drawings, paintings and writings on the T-shirts create different metaphorical images and semantic features that can be better interpreted with multimodal discourse analysis.

The syntax of the words / sentences as the sample T-shirts used in this article show is a flexible one that is totally influenced by the assumptions of pragmatics. This is why most T-shirts suppress the subjects of sentences, appear in phrases, adopt poor collocations and also allow usual graphization. It is abundantly clear from this paper that the slogans of T-shirts are generally informative, expressive and instructive. They are used to perform different types of illocutionary actions which cause different forms perlocutionary reactions.

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