



PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE INSCRIPTIONS ON MOTOR-VEHICLES AND SIGNBOARDS

Samaila Yakubuⁱ,

Ishaya, Yusuf Tsojon

Department of English and Literary Studies,
Federal University Wukari,
Wukari, Taraba State,
Nigeria

Abstract:

This paper analyzes the inscriptions on the motor-vehicles and signboards in Taraba State of Nigeria. Samples of inscriptions and signs were collected and analyzed using Austin's Speech Act Theory which was later developed by Searle. The result of the analysis showed that each inscription has a connotative meaning, that is, meaning beyond the denotative or literary level. It was observed that contextual factors contribute a lot to the pragmatic meanings of the inscriptions. The paper concluded that to grasp the meanings embedded in inscriptions on motor-vehicles and signboards, readers should analyze them beyond their denotative or literal meanings.

Keywords: pragmatics, speech acts, inscriptions, signboards, motor-vehicles

1. Introduction

This study is concerned with the pragmatic analysis of inscriptions on motor-vehicles and signboards. In speech acts, speakers employ words to do somethings. Motor-vehicle owners and the users of signboards often use words to write inscriptions so as to lure travelers and customers into boarding their motor-vehicles and buying their goods and services. Therefore, writers of inscriptions should write inscriptions in such a way that readers would grasp their pragmatic meanings with ease. A writer who writes the inscription "Pleasure travel" on a bus has committed himself. A passenger who reads such an inscription may be tempted to board the bus with the hope that his journey from the car park to his destination will be hitch-free. A motorist who reads the inscription "caution" on a signpost by the roadside may ride carefully so as to avoid an accident because he has been warned not to drive recklessly. However, inscriptions on motor-vehicles and signboards are often invested with meanings which are not related to their linguistic contents.

ⁱCorrespondence: email samailayaku@gmail.com, ishayayusuf234@gmail.com

2. Objectives

The general objective of this study is to analyze inscriptions on motor- vehicles and signboards in Taraba State. The study strives to achieve the following specific objectives:

- 1) To identify various types of speech acts from the inscriptions on motor-vehicles and signboards
- 2) To discuss the pragmatic implications of the inscriptions.

3. Theoretical Framework

Austin's (1962) speech acts theory which was later developed by Searle (1969) is adopted as the theoretical framework of this study. Kempson (1979) asserts that speech acts focus on what we use language to do. Language is used to promise, to insult, to agree, to criticize, etc. She further states that Austin (1962) observes that to utter a sentence, the speaker is often engrossed in three different acts, namely, locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. Explaining this point further, she states that the locutionary act is concerned with uttering a sentence which is invested with a particular meaning; illocutionary act dwells on what the speaker intends his sentence to convey, e.g., praise, criticize, agreement, etc. while perlocutionary act deals with the effect of the speaker's utterance on the hearer, e.g., to frighten, to amuse, etc.

According to Searle (1969), speech acts are classified into five, namely, directives, representatives, expressives, declarations and commissives.

a. Directives

According to Black (2006) in Sharndama (2015), directives are speech acts employed by the speaker to enable the listener to do something. Directives are commands, e.g., a parade commander gives orders to the soldiers on parade and the soldiers carry out the order. Examples of actions that a speaker can obtain from the listener are requests, suggestions, challenges, commands invitations, entreaties, and dares.

b. Representatives

Black (2006), in Sharndama (2015), states that representatives are in form of statements and descriptions. Speakers use these speech acts to give their opinions about the world and how they grasp it. Representatives are concerned with the anticipated and authentic meaning of lexemes. These speech acts show that the speakers have confidence in the utterances of the people they declaim. A prime minister may ban the importation of certain goods into his country. Examples of representative speech acts are: assertions, claims, reports, statements, hypothesis descriptions and suggestions.

c. Expressives

Black (2006), in Sharndama (2015), explains that expressive speech acts disclose the speaker's attitude. They express the speaker's state of mind; they also show the speaker's feelings and how he reacts to a situation, e.g., apologies, condoling, thanksgiving, congratulations, confessing, denying, and complaints.

d. Declarations

According to Ayodabo (2015), declarations are speech acts in which speakers utter what changes the world of someone through lexemes, e.g., if a president of a country says “*you have been granted an amnesty*” to a prisoner, the utterance will change the world of the prisoner totally.

e. Commissives

Ayodabo (2015) explains that commissive speech acts are “*those kinds of speech acts that speakers use to commit themselves to future actions*”, e.g. intents, threats, promises, pledges, and refusals.

4. Review of Related Literature

In pragmatic analysis, the meanings of utterances or write-ups are best interpreted if the analyst has the knowledge of how these utterances or write-ups are used in contexts. Utterances or write-ups may be invested with meanings which are not related to their linguistic contents.

Syal and Jindal (2014) assert that “*pragmatics attempts to relate meaning to the context of utterance.*” To buttress this fact, Cann (1993) states that “*one of the most important influences on meaning is that of the context of utterance... context plays a vital role in determining how a particular utterance is to be interpreted...*” The assertions of these linguists show clearly that the meanings of utterances are best explained if the analyst grasps the contexts of the utterances.

In a similar vein, Yule (2004) maintains that “*...generally, we know what words mean on the basis of context...*”. The context of a sentence and the linguistic context of a word contribute immensely to the pragmatic meanings that the sentence and the word convey. Illustrating this point further, he explains that if someone says “*The bank is overgrown with weed*”, we know which type of “*bank*” the speaker is speaking about. If someone says he needs to go to the “*bank*” to withdraw some money, we know from the context which type of “*bank*” he means. The above remark confirms that the linguistic context of a word has a strong effect on the meaning of the word. The meaning of such a word can be explained with the help of other words that occur in the same clause or sentence with the word. The word must be analyzed in conjunction with other words that occur in the same clause or sentence with it if we really want to be conscious of its pragmatic meaning.

According to Akwanya (2007), the theory of pragmatics strives to explain sentences that convey meanings which are not related to the linguistic contents of the sentences. Kempson (1979) shares a similar view with Akwanya by stating that Pragmatics explains “*how...speakers of any language can use the sentences of that language to convey messages which do not bear any necessary relation to the linguistic content of the sentence used.*” These assertions are true because, in pragmatic analysis, the meanings of sentences are often interpreted without a link to their linguistic contents.

Palmer (2002) states that pragmatics deals with “*all the judgment that speakers make in their decisions about what to say and when to say it.*” Palmer’s viewpoint shows that pragmatics embodies the opinion that speakers give about what they want to utter and the time they wish to utter it.

5. Method of Investigation / Data Collection

Speech Act Theory of J. L. Austin which was later developed by J. R. Searle was deployed to analyze the inscriptions on the motor-vehicles and signboards.

The researchers used the observation method to collect data related to the study; they randomly selected forty-five (45) inscriptions on motor- vehicles and forty-six (46) inscriptions on signboards and copied down the inscriptions on each. The above numbers, in each case, were considered to give room for in-depth analysis.

5.1 Conceptual Clarification

In this section, important concepts are clarified to give orientation to the readers for better understanding. The concepts include:

a. Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics that studies the meaning of an utterance in a context. Matthew (2007) maintains that pragmatics deals with the meaning that a sentence conveys in a certain context. Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007) hold the view that pragmatics is *“the study of how context and situation affect meaning.”*

b. Pragmatic Analysis

The pragmatic analysis is the process of analyzing utterances in order to bring out the meaning which may not be invested in them.

c. Inscriptions

Inscriptions are pieces of writings or lettering upon something; a set of words written on something.

d. Sign

The sign is a written or printed mark which has a standard meaning; a notice giving information, directions, a warning, etc.

e. Signboard

A signboard is a board generally bearing an inscription used to indicate its occupant and the type of business being carried out there.

5.2 Data Related to Inscriptions on Motor-vehicles

The following inscriptions are without errors, they are presented here for the sake of their pragmatic implications.

Inscriptions	Remarks
The Lord is my shepherd. (speech act)	The illocutionary force in this inscription is a presupposition. The writer assumes there is God. The perlocutionary act is to make the addressees be aware that there is evil in the world.
Repent or perish. (speech act)	The speech act is that of warning; the readers are warned to do something otherwise they will die. The intention of the writer might be to make the readers fear death.
No condition is permanent (speech act).	The speech act is assertive; its effect might be to make the readers have hope in the future.
Let them say. (speech act)	In this inscription, the illocutionary act is a statement while the perlocutionary act is to make the addressees give deaf ears to what people say.
Live and let us live. (speech act)	In this inscription, the sense of advice that people should live with one another without quarrelling is the illocutionary act, and its perlocutionary effect might be to make people coexist with one another peacefully.
Your best friend can be your worst enemy. (speech act)	This speech act is assertive; the writer wishes the addressees to be aware that there are foes.
Man has no rest. (speech act)	The speech act here is assertive; its perlocutionary effect might be to make the addressees know that human beings have to labour all the days of their lives.
Remember the judgment day (speech act).	The speech act presupposes that the writer is a godly man; its perlocutionary effect might be to frighten the readers not to do evil so that they will not be judged by God.
Leave me alone. (speech act).	The speech act here is a warning; the addresser warns the addressees. Its effect might be to infuse fear on the addressees not to bother one another.
Nothing is new. (speech act).	Here, the speech act is assertive; the perlocutionary act might be to make the readers be aware that things have been happening right from the day the world was created.
No hurry in life. (speech act).	The notion of advice in this inscription is the illocutionary act while its perlocutionary effect is to make the addressees have knowledge that there is a pace of life.
Life is what you make it. (speech act).	The Speech act is that of advice; If the addressees abide by the advice of the writer, they will have the desire to work hard.
All men are equal. (speech act)	The illocutionary idea here is that of assertion; the perlocutionary act might be to make people ignore status in society.
Nothing good comes easy. (speech act).	The speech act here is to advice. If the readers follow the advice of the writer, they will be infused with the spirit of hard work.
I am hard nut to crack. (speech act)	The speech act is to warn, the illocutionary act is for the people to heed the warning; the perlocutionary act is to make the readers know that there are hard-minded and soft-minded people in the world.
God's time is the best. (speech act)	The speech act presupposes that the writer is a godly man; the illocutionary speech act is to advise while the perlocutionary act is to make the addressees know that there is time for everything.
Nemesis will catch up with evil doers. (speech act)	Here, the illocutionary act is to warn; its perlocutionary act might be to make the addressees know that there is nemesis.
Beautiful women are dangerous. (speech act)	The speech act is to warn; if the readers heed the warning, they will be infused with fear not to approach beautiful women because they are dangerous.
Good men do not live long. (speech act)	The speech act is an assertion, the illocutionary act is to inform; its perlocutionary act might be to make the addressees know the difference between the life span of decent people and the life span of evil ones.
Men are mortal. (speech act)	The speech act is assertive; its effect might be to make the addressees be aware that there are mortal and immortal beings.
The world is a temporary home. (speech act)	In this expression, the illocutionary act is to inform; its <i>perlocutionary</i> effect is to make the readers have the knowledge that there is another home other than the world.
Destiny is unchangeable. (speech act)	The illocutionary speech act here is a statement while the perlocutionary act is to make the addressees know that fate decides one's life
Think about others (speech act).	In this inscription, there is the sense of advice that people should think of one another as an illocutionary act while its perlocutionary effect might be to make the people be their brothers' keepers.

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No one knows all. (speech act).	Here, the illocutionary act is a statement; the perlocutionary act is to make the addressees be aware that knowledge has no beginning or ending.
Anti crime team, vehicle. (speech act)	The illocutionary act in this expression is a statement; its perlocutionary act is to make the readers be aware that vehicles are used for different purposes.
Goods only. (speech act)	The illocutionary act is to state something; the perlocutionary act is to make the readers have the knowledge that motor-vehicles are used for conveying different things.
No standing (speech act)	The speech act is that of warning; the readers are warned not to stand where this inscription is displayed. The effect of the warning might be to infuse fear in the readers.
Man is the architect of his problem. (speech act)	The illocutionary act is to inform; the perlocutionary effect might be to make the addressees be aware of the existence of problems.
God is my witness. (speech act)	The speech act is presupposition; the writer is a godly man. His intention might be to make the addressees be aware that there is a being that watches him (the writer) all the time.
Sound your horn before overtaking. (speech act)	The speech act is to warn, the illocutionary act is for the people to heed the warning; the perlocutionary act might be to infuse fear on the drivers not to overtake other motor-vehicles without sounding their horns.
Mass transit bus. (speech act)	The inscription advertises a mass transit bus; the intention might be to make the addressees be aware that some buses convey a small number of passengers while others convey a large number of passengers.
Pleasure travel. (speech act)	The inscription advertises a passenger bus; the main objective might be to make passengers feel that their journey from the park to their destinations will be hitch-free.
Slow and steady. (speech act)	Here, the speech act is to warn, the illocutionary act is for the people to heed the warning while the perlocutionary act might be to infuse fear on the readers not to over speed.
Do good to the people. (speech act)	The speech act is to advise, if the readers follow the advice of the writer, they will treat one another well.
My God is powerful. (speech act)	The illocutionary force in this inscription is a presupposition. The writer presumes there is God. The perlocutionary act might be to make the readers be aware that there are powerful and weak beings.
Nobody is greater than. God. (speech act)	The speech act presupposes that the writer is a godly man; the illocutionary speech act is assertive while the perlocutionary act is to make the addressees be aware that there is an entity that nobody can compare himself with.
Do not rely on people. (speech act)	The sense of advice that people should not rely on one another is the illocutionary speech act in this inscription while the perlocutionary effect might be to infuse the readers with the spirit of self-reliance.
Taraba United Football Club. (speech act)	The illocutionary act here is a statement; its perlocutionary act is to make the readers be aware that there are different types of football clubs in the world.
Christ Ambassador. (speech act)	The illocutionary force here is a presupposition. The addresser presumes there is God. The perlocutionary act is to make the addressees be conscious of the fact that there are different types of ambassadors in the world.
God is my guard. (speech act)	The speech act presupposes that the writer is a godly man; the illocutionary force is assertive while the perlocutionary speech act is to make the readers be aware that each individual has a being that protects him/her.
Fair plus. (speech act)	The inscription advertises a transit bus; the intention is to make the readers be aware that there are buses that render second to none services.
Dangote Motors. (speech act)	The illocutionary force here is assertive; its perlocutionary act might be to make the readers be conscious of the fact that every motor-vehicle has its owner.
No Jesus, no life. (speech act)	The illocutionary force in this inscription is a presupposition. The addresser is a godly man; he assumes Jesus is the giver of life. The perlocutionary act is to make the addressees be aware that there is a being that gives a guarantee of life.
Driver and a pair of passengers. (speech act)	The speech act is to advice. If the conductor abides by the advice of the writer, he will load only two passengers in addition to the driver in the front part of a lorry; the essence is to frighten the conductor not to overload the lorry.
Fear God. (speech act)	In this inscription, the sense of warning that people should fear God is the illocutionary speech act, and its perlocutionary effect might be to make the readers know that there is a being that people should fear.

Forty-five inscriptions on the motor-vehicles were collected and analyzed; the outcome of the analysis reveals that each inscription is invested with meaning beyond the denotative level. Contextual factors play a vital role in the pragmatic imports of the inscriptions. Some inscriptions have religious context such as *God is my witness, The Lord is my shepherd, God's time is the best, God is my guard, No Jesus, no life, fear God, etc.*; others are tied to socio-cultural beliefs and values such as *Good men do not live long; No condition is permanent, Destiny is unchangeable, man is the architect of his problem, etc.*; there are those that are linked to warning such as *No standing, Leave me alone, slow and steady, etc.*; others are tied to advice like *Do good to people, Do not rely on people, etc.*

5.3 Data Related to Inscriptions on Signboard

The following inscriptions are without errors, they are presented here for the sake of their pragmatic implications:

Inscriptions	Remarks
Reckless driving kills. (speech act)	Here, the illocutionary act is to warn; the perlocutionary act is to put fear in drivers not to drive recklessly.
Stop. (speech act)	The illocutionary speech act in this inscription is to warn; its perlocutionary idea might be to make the riders feel unsafe to ride beyond the point where this inscription is displayed.
Mattress store. (speech act)	In this inscription, the illocutionary act is to advertise; its perlocutionary act is to make the addressees know that there are different types of stores.
Hotel for decent people. (speech act)	The speech act is to advertise; its effect might be to make the readers be aware that hotels are built for different kinds of people.
Narrow bridge. (speech act)	The illocutionary speech act is to warn; its perlocutionary act might be to frighten riders to ride carefully.
Speed skills. (speech act)	The speech act in this expression is to warn; its effect might be to put fear on the driver not to over speed.
Double bends. (speech act)	The illocutionary act in this inscription is to warn; the perlocutionary effect is to put fear on the riders not to ride recklessly.
No parking. (speech act)	In this inscription, there is a sense of warning that riders should not park where it is displayed, the essence is to make them feel unsafe to park there.
Road closed. (speech act)	In this inscription, the illocutionary act is to warn; the perlocutionary act is to put fear on the drivers not to drive beyond the point where the inscription is displayed.
Caution. (speech act)	There is a sense of warning here; the essence is to infuse the riders with fear to ride carefully.
Decent guest inn. (speech act)	This inscription advertises a guest in; the intention might be to make the addressees feel at home.
No smoking. (speech act)	Here, the illocutionary act is to warn while the perlocutionary act might be to make the readers feel unsafe to smoke where this notice is displayed.
Men at work. (speech act)	In this inscription, there is the notion of warning as an illocutionary act; its perlocutionary effect might be to make drivers drive carefully in order not to hit men at work.
Referral hospital. (speech act)	Here, the illocutionary act is descriptive; the perlocutionary act is to make the addressees know that there are different types of hospitals.
Paradise church. (speech act)	The illocutionary speech act in this inscription is to describe; while its perlocutionary effect might be to make the readers know that some worshipers will go to paradise while others will go to hell.

Don't dump your refuse here. (speech act)	In this inscription, the speech act is to warn; and if the addressees heed the warning, they will fear not to dump refuse where this notice is put up.
Drive with care. (speech act)	The illocutionary speech act in this inscription is to warn; the perlocutionary speech act is to frighten the addressees not to drive recklessly.
Slow down. (speech act)	In this expression, there is the notion of warning, the readers that heed the warning will fear not to engage in high speed.
Royal College. (speech act)	The speech act is descriptive; the intention is to make the addressees know that there are different types of colleges.
Beware of dogs. (speech act)	The illocutionary speech act here is to warn; its perlocutionary act is to frighten the addressees not to approach the place where this notice is displayed.
Dead silence. (speech act)	In this inscription, the illocutionary speech act is to warn; the perlocutionary speech act is to frighten the readers not to make noise.
Beans-cake restaurant. (speech act)	The illocutionary act is to advertise; the perlocutionary act is to make the addressees know that some restaurants sell particular food.
Herbal Doctor. (speech act)	In this inscription, the illocutionary act is to advertise; the perlocutionary act is to make the readers know that there are different types of doctors.
Future leaders academy. (speech act)	In this inscription, the illocutionary act is to describe; the perlocutionary act is to make the readers know that there are different generations with different leaders.
No entry for non-members. (speech act)	In this inscription, the illocutionary speech act is to warn; the perlocutionary act is to frighten non-members not to enter the place where this notice is displayed.
Bottom gear. (speech act)	The illocutionary act here is to warn; the perlocutionary act is to restrict the riders to use only bottom gear.
Unbeatable barber. (speech act)	The inscription advertises a barber; the essence is to make the readers be aware that some barbers are genius while others are not.
Children Crossing. (speech act)	The speech act is to warn; the illocutionary act is for the riders to heed the warning; the perlocutionary act might be to put fear on the riders, not to over speed where it is displayed.
Road Construction Company. (speech act)	The speech act is descriptive; the intent is to make the readers know that there are different types of companies.
Ministry of Health. (speech act)	In this inscription, the illocutionary act is to describe; the perlocutionary act is to make the addressees be aware that there are different kinds of ministries.
Nigerian Army. (speech act)	The speech act here is descriptive; the intention is to make the addressees be conscious of the fact that every country has its own army.
Cattle Ranch. (speech act)	Here, the illocutionary act is to describe; the perlocutionary act is to make the readers be aware that there are different types of ranches in which different animals are breed.
A Dealer in Different Kinds of Cosmetics. (speech act)	The inscription advertises cosmetics; the purpose is to make the readers be conscious of the fact that there are different types of cosmetics.
Rough road 200 metres ahead. (speech act).	The speech act here is to warn; the addresser warns the addressees. Its, effect might be to make riders ride carefully where the inscription is displayed.
No motor-vehicle is allowed to go beyond this point. (speech act)	The sense of warning that drivers should not drive beyond the point where this inscription is displayed is the illocutionary speech act while the perlocutionary effect is to frighten the drivers not to drive beyond the point.
Heavy Trucks Crossing (speech act)	In this inscription, the illocutionary act is to warn; the perlocutionary act is to put fear on the drivers not to drive recklessly where it is displayed.

This land is not for sale. (speech act).	There is a sense of warning here; if the readers heed the warning, they will be infused with the spirit of fear not to buy the land where this notice is put up.
This land belongs to Christian Reformed Church in Nigeria, Wukari. (speech act)	The speech act is to warn, the illocutionary act is for the addressees to heed the warning; the perlocutionary speech act is to frighten them not to buy the land where this inscription is put up.
This bridge is weak structurally. (speech act).	There is a sense of warning in this inscription; if riders heed the warning, they will fear to ride recklessly on the bridge.
Delicious Bread Bakery (speech act).	The illocutionary force in this inscription is to advertise; its perlocutionary act might be to make the readers be conscious of the fact that there are different types of bakeries.
Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Aids) is real. (speech act)	The speech act here is to warn; its effect might be to put fear on the readers not to live a reckless lifestyle.
Army shooting range: keep away. (speech act)	The sense of warning that people should keep away from the army shooting range is an illocutionary force in this inscription; its perlocutionary effect might be to frighten the addressees not to go near the place where this notice is put up.
Diversion. (speech act)	The speech act in this inscription is to warn; the illocutionary force is for the riders to heed the warning; its perlocutionary effect might be to make the riders use a temporary road when the usual one is closed.
Agyo International Trading Company Limited. (speech act)	Here the illocutionary act is to describe; its perlocutionary effect is to make the readers be conscious of the fact that some companies do business within the countries where they are located while others do business in the countries where they are located and others.
Danger. (speech act)	There is a sense of warning in this inscription. If the readers heed the warning, they will be infused with fear not to go near the place where the the inscription is displayed.
Eye clinic. (speech act)	The illocutionary force in this inscription is descriptive; its perlocutionary act is to make the addressees know that there are different types of clinics.

Forty-six inscriptions and signs on signboards were collected and analyzed. The result of the analysis indicates that most of the inscriptions are tied to advertisements such as Mattress store, Beans-cake restaurant, Hotel for decent people, Unbeatable barber, A dealer in different kinds of cosmetics, Delicious bread bakery, etc.; some are linked to road signs such as Speed kills, Narrow bridge, Double bends, Road closed, This bridge is weak structurally etc.; others are tied to warning such as Caution, Beware of dogs, Army shooting range: keep away, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Aids) is real, No entry for non-members, No smoking, Don't dump your refuse here, etc.; there are those that show direction to the cites of establishments such as Royal College, Paradise church, Referral hospitals, Nigerian Army, Ministry of Health, etc.

6. Findings

The researchers found out that motor-vehicle owners and signboard users often write inscriptions that are in form of speech acts such as presuppositions, warnings, assertions, comments, pieces of advice, advertisements, descriptions and pieces of information.

7. Conclusion

The study has revealed that the inscriptions on both motor-vehicles and signboards are full of connotative meanings. Contextual factors contribute immensely to the pragmatic meanings of the inscriptions. Some of them are tied to a religious context, socio-cultural beliefs, advice and express diverse speech acts. The study concludes that the meanings of inscriptions on motor-vehicles and signboards do not depend only on their literal meanings but also on their relationship to context.

7.1 Suggestions for Further Studies

The paper recommends that Pragmatic Studies be carried out on inscriptions on trains and aeroplanes in Nigeria.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

About the Authors

Samaila Yakubu and Ishaya, Yusuf Tsojon are lecturers in the Department of English and Literary Studies, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria. Their research interests include Semantics, Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis (CA), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Phonetics and Phonology, and Stylistics.

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