



The Pragmatics of Love Text Messages among University of Uyo Students

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Abstract

In line with the trends in media and pragmatic discourse, studies on texting have been examined, focusing on the creative utilization of language resources as well as their contextual cues. The purpose of this paper is to examine the socio-pragmatic manifestations of love and gender differences in the love text messages of the University of Uyo students. Specifically, the objective of the paper is to confirm whether or not the differences are statistically significant and culturally conditioned. Thus, adopting quantitative analytical methods (chi-square and percentages), the analysis is anchored on the socio-pragmatic theory of Leech (1983) and supplemented by Thurlow and Brown's (2003) romantic and sexual orientations. Twenty (10 male and 10 female) students of the Faculty of Arts supplied their two most preferred love text messages. The data are categorized according to thematic frames of Love Reiteration (LR), Wooing (Wg), Love Wordplay (LW), and Sexual Behaviour (SB). The results indicate that LR texts were the most preferred (18/45%), while SB texts were the least preferred (5/12.5%). Again, whereas the male students preferred both LR and Wg texts most (6/31.6%) and LW texts least (3/15.7%), the female ones loved LR texts most (12/57.1%) and SB texts least (1/4.8%). Thus, the chi-square quantitative analysis of the results shows that the differences in the text preferences are significant. The paper submits that the University of Uyo students' love text preferences affirm the second-wave feminist linguistic typology of socio-cultural differences in the language use of men and women in Nigeria. Again, the findings have revealed interesting

and varied ideologies about how women and men ought to speak in their speech communities. Based on the conclusion, it is recommended that further socio-pragmatics research be carried out in other tertiary institutions, preferably in the South Eastern and Northern parts of Nigeria or schools outside Nigeria, but beaming research light on the socio-pragmatics of age and status differences as well as differences in the students' years of study.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Socio-pragmatics, Common ground, Love textese, University of Uyo students, Mobile telephony

1.0 Introduction

Mobile telephony and computer-mediated communication have since become an essential feature in the communicative habits of not only Nigerians but people worldwide. Adetunji (2011, p. 103) observes that before the year 2001, the acquisition of a mobile phone in Nigeria was adjudged a status symbol for the rich and influential.' However, with the return of the country to civil rule on 29th May 1999, during President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration, many aspects of Nigeria's socio-economy, like mobile telephony, have been liberalized, resulting in the commodity being on the palm of almost every firm hand.

The impacts of electronic discourse – otherwise tagged 'netspeak,' in the jargon of Crystal (2006, p.1) – have been observably overwhelming. In addition to creative innovations on the English language, text- messaging (an instance of 'netspeak' and the focus of this study) has enhanced interpersonal relations (Adetunji, 2011). On the creation of the internet and the mobile phones through which media, interpersonal or social communication has been remarkably facilitated, Crystal (2006) quotes former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, as commenting thus:

The web is more a social creation than a technical one... the dream of people-to-people communication through shared knowledge must be possible for groups of all sizes, interacting electronically with as much ease as they do now in person.

This assertion is typical of the Nigerian telecommunication situations, as people, young and old, irrespective of sex, status, occupation, religion, etc., constantly share their intimacy, wishes, and lofty dreams with their heterosexual partners as observed among Nigerian students, including those in the University of Uyo.

The phenomenon of 'text-messaging,' simply refers to an act of exchanging 'brief typed messages via the SMS ('short message service') of mobile/cell phones, PDAs ('personal digital assistants), smartphones or web

browsers,' (Thurlow and Poff, 2009), cited in Adetunji (2011, p. 103). Adetunji (2011) explains that a message is realized in an average of 160 characters (including pictures and emoticons) per message on a mobile phone. Corroborating this report, Mgbemena (2007) reveals that the first commercial SMS was sent over Vodafone on 3rd December 1992 in the United Kingdom from Neil Papworth with a personal computer to Richard Jarvis' Orbitel 901 handset. This marked the beginning of the use of GSM/SMS messages. Meanwhile, Crystal (2008, p. 28) demarcates 'texting' from 'txtting,' the former (done by the older generation and infrequent 'texters') containing largely standard linguistic forms; and the latter (exhibited by the younger generation and frequent 'texters') being characterized by novel and innovative expressions, such as vowel free words (e.g. 'dbt'), alpha-numeric combinations (e.g. 'gr8' for 'great'), acronyms (e.g. 'lol' for 'laugh out loud'), and emoticons (graphic symbols representing feelings).

Linguistically, the register of text-messages is termed *textese* or *textisms*. *Textese*, in the words of van Dijk, Witteloostuijn, Avrutin, and Blom, is a form of abbreviated written – or actually typed- language, that is characterized by the omission of words and use of *textisms*, such as abbreviations, letter/number homophones, emoticons, etc. (2016, p. 2).

Explaining further, van Dijk, Witteloostuijn, Avrutin, and Blom (2016) observe that in the register, texters make use of phonetic replacements, such as 'ur' instead of 'your' and acronyms, such as 'lol' for 'laugh out loud'. However, for the purpose of this study which centers on love and gender enactment as recovered from the communicative intents of the students' love text messages, Crystal's distinctions are converged in 'texting,' and as such, the data have been written out in standard orthographic forms, for ease of socio-pragmatic analysis.

Love and gender are two socio-cultural issues that have influenced human behaviour and received critical attention in research. Whereas people, each moment, are found expressing love for their partners, contemporary society has made people more gender-sensitive than before. This paper views 'love' as the overt and covert expressions of tender passion or romance between two heterosexual partners (i.e two lovers of opposite genders). In this context, such an expression is enacted through text messages by students. In many cultures, 'love' exchange begins in childhood and grows towards the end of elementary school (Eckert and Mc Connect- Ginet, 2003). In Nigeria, for example, teens are often teased by being paired by adults into 'husbands and wives,' sometimes, to the children's chagrin (Adetunji 2011, p. 106)

On the other hand, 'gender' is viewed as 'a social construct,' accounting for the unique traits that are conceived to constitute what is masculine and what is feminine in temperament and behaviour (Abrams and Harpham 2009, p.11). Thus, 'gender' is a product of civilization in different cultures, as Simone de Beauvoir affirms:

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman....
It is civilization as a whole that produces this
creature... which is described as feminine.
(Abrams and Harpham (2009).

Therefore, by this cultural process, the masculine gender in almost all cultures has come to be widely identified as active, dominating, adventurous and creative; whereas the feminine gender has been stereotyped as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional, and conventional.

Gender linguistics focuses on the various aspects of the representation of gender in language; that is, the way men and women speak or are spoken about. To Spender (1980), men's language is usually equated with the norms from which women's language is deviant. Moreover, gender linguistics has taken three broad dimensions, of which the first two are regarded as 'essentialist' and the other, 'anti-essentialist'. These are: 'first wave,' 'second wave,' and 'third wave' (Adetunji 2011, p. 105). Whereas 'first-wave' feminist linguistics focuses on the 'dominance' and 'deficit' frameworks, to suggest that men dominate most of the interlocutions they have with women, as well as the language system as a whole (Spender, 1980; Mooney et al, 2011), and that women's ways of speaking are 'deficit' when compared to men's ways of speaking (Cameron, 1997); 'second-wave' feminist linguistics argue that men and women are different, not just because they are brought up from childhood to use language differently (Tannen, 1991), but also because language, as symbolizing social and political identities and relations, affects them differently (Crawford, 1995; Lakoff, 1975). However, 'third-wave' feminist linguistics, as explained by Adetunji (2011), views women as individuals rather than a homogenous group, whose use of language is shaped by interactions and contexts. Thus, a woman's identity may vary in the process of using language both as a teacher and a wife, for instance, while having a conversation with her husband. In this manner, gendering has become a process or phenomenon that is performed or enacted (Butler, 1997).

Pragmatics concerns itself with the general conditions of language use or context-based meanings. Affirming this stance, Aboh and Uduk (2016) explain that: "Pragmatics deals with meaning in contexts. It studies how human communication is affected through the intended meaning of the speaker and is decoded by the hearer taking into account the context" (p.7). Thus, the underlying meaning of an utterance is tied to its context of use.

Context is conceptualized as ‘the spine of meaning’ (Odebunmi, 2006, p. 25). Corroborating this notion, Verschueren (2008, p.15) posits that ‘things’ are made into context in the service of the overall process of meaning generation. He argues that the context-structure link must be kept in mind in pragmatic research. Doing so enables pragmaticists to empirically assess the relevance of elements of context without lapsing into speculations. By pragmatic context, Odebunmi (2015, p. 200) cited in Aboh and Uduk (2016), defines it as ‘the dynamic, talk-connected condition that evokes co-experiential and current activity frames for the determination of senses of utterances.’ This explication informs that context is dynamic and not something fixed. It occurs in interactions in so far as the meanings of utterances are interpreted based on the experiences interlocutors had before the current interaction. Many things can suggest pragmatic contexts: situational, linguistic, cultural, or paralinguistic elements. It follows that when a word is used either in isolation or in discourse, one needs to place it in a situational, linguistic, or cultural context for its meaning figuration because no word can really be understood out of context. Meanwhile, it should be noted that pragmatic language is a complex, multi-faceted domain, covering such diverse skill sets as reciprocal conversational skills, word choice based on specific conversational partners (e.g registers), the understanding and deployment of non-verbal aspects of communication that complement speech (Marchena and Eigsti, 2015).

Stalnaker’s (1974) pragmatic theory of ‘common ground’ is very useful in establishing the juncture between pragmatic context and meaning-explication in utterances. Kecskes and Zhang (2013, p. 376) believe that Stalnaker theorized a strategy of information-generation discourse in which ‘assertion is intended to update common ground, and presupposition is intended to shape or narrow down the common ground.’ The pragmatic presupposition is interpreted as the speaker’s belief in the common ground status of the proposition.

Also called ‘assumed familiarity’ by Prince (1981, p. 232), ‘common ground’ constitutes ‘what speakers (take) for granted – what they (presuppose) when they (use) certain sentences (Stalnaker, 2002, p. 701, cf. Keith, 2013). More explicitly, the common ground of a context of utterance is the conjunction of all those propositions that interlocutors take for granted in that context either because they are permanently shared beliefs in their community or because they have been established in the course of the preceding conversation. Simply put, common ground is a precondition to illocutions. It further refers to the tendency of interlocutors to modify how they communicate based on shared knowledge. Marchena and Eigsti (2015) explain that common ground is usually incorporated seamlessly into conversations by adolescent or adult speakers. When that happens, the

speakers would use fewer words to instantiate socio-pragmatic phenomena such as gender and love, being the focus of this investigation.

Thus, the phenomenon of common ground can be a reconstruction of the real world, or some other possible world that can be imagined, desired, or supposed. Basic to common ground as an aspect of contextualization is the interactants' 'sensitivity to the cultural and procedural knowledge' (Duranti, 1997, p. 299). Gumperz (1982) explains further that:

Speakers design their speech according to their on-going evaluation of their recipient as a member of a particular group or class, [... And] speakers change the content of what they say depending on whom they identify as their primary recipient. *Sic* (p. 131)

Interestingly, Duranti's and Gumperz's positions have aptly related Stalnaker's (1974) common ground theory of pragmatics to Leech's (1983) sociological interface of pragmatics which defines the domain of socio-pragmatics.

Socio-pragmatics, therefore, is one of the major approaches to pragmatics. Usually traced to Leech (1983), socio-pragmatics technically is 'the sociological interface of pragmatics,' referring to the 'social perception underlying participants' interpretation and performance of communicative actions.' (p.10). Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983) subdivided pragmatics into 'pragma-linguistics' (relating pragmatics to its structural context) and 'socio-pragmatics' (relating pragmatics to its social situation). It occupies the sociological interface of pragmatics, specifying the 'local' condition of language use, especially 'culture-specificity' (Adetunji 2011, p.106). Thus, a socio-pragmatic study investigates the interrelatedness of the linguistic and the sociological features in the explication of context-bound meaning.

Socio-pragmatics has been very useful for studying social or culture-specific preferences in gender enactment (Adetunji, 2011), sex differences (Bryne, 2004; Cupples & Thompson (2010), etc. This present study draws a great deal from these investigations, beaming its fresh search light on the instantiation of love and gender by the University of Uyo students through love text messages. The aims of the study are three-fold: to investigate how: (1) students enact gender differences through their preferred love texts; (2) romantic love is instantiated in the students' texts; and (3) to analyse the socio-pragmatics or functional orientations of the love texts. It is hoped that such a scholarly engagement will account not only for the socio-pragmatics of love and gender in the genderlects of Nigerian students but also for the aesthetics of Nigerian English, (a subset of West African and World English), thereby contributing significantly to research in gender linguistics and Nigerian

English usage for the intellectual community. Besides, the barely-illiterate community will also benefit from the aesthetics of the language use as well as the love enactments in the data.

1.1 Justification for the Study

As a modern trend in linguistics, the language of electronic texts has attracted many a linguist. This is mainly due to its innovative and novel features which have greatly enriched the English language. Thus, previous studies have principally revealed its unconventional linguistic forms in spellings. Mgbemena (2007), for instance, investigated the language of GSM/SMS with a focus on the pedagogical implications. The work appears to be among the pioneering work in Nigerian texting research, establishing its unique alpha-numeric system of writing among users of English language in schools. Furthermore, adopting Uses and Gratification Theory, Akinde, Bukola and Paul's (2022) study of the impacts of text- messaging abbreviations on the written English essays of students of Federal Polytechnic Ede revealed that students derived multiple benefits from text- messaging. Such benefits include: cost effectiveness, sustenance of interpersonal relationship, etc. However, their investigation shows some demerits such as the use of non-standardized form of writing and malpractices during examinations in schools.

Similarly, Michael (2012) examined the features of SMS language to include contra-spelling conventions, use of both written and spoken features and a general pseudo-deviation of English syntactic form. On his part, Akande and Akinwale's (2010) investigation of the functions of text messages in Nigeria, as well as strategies used by students of Obafemi Awolowo University in texting, disclosed that although different texters on the campus used some common spelling systems in some words, there is need to standardize the spelling conventions in SMS so as to make it more systematic and less chaotic. Besides, the findings revealed some of the strategies which students used in texting to include: clipping, abbreviations, initialization and phonetic spelling, being the most commonly used strategy by Nigerian students.

Significantly, the correlation between school children's texting behaviour in the Netherlands and its impacts on their grammatical performance and cognitive development became the focus of van Dijk, van Witteloostuijn, Avrutin and Blom (2016). Combining Friedman test and Wilcoxon signed rank test, the paper – after studying a sample of 55 Dutch children (28 boys and 27 girls aged 10-13 years) from grades 5 and 6 in six primary schools in the Netherlands – discovered that the relation between the elicited replies and the spontaneous messages was marginally significant, suggesting that children's personal texting style was maintained in the text

messages. It also found out that children's texting behaviour varied considerably. While some children did not use *textisms* at all and omitted very few words, some others substituted 50% of conventional words by *textisms* and omitted more than 50% of the words. Thus, *textism* ratio and omission ratio were significantly, but marginally, correlated with children's grammatical and cognitive development. The findings, therefore, have refuted the prediction that the use of *textese* may lead to language deterioration.

As pointed out earlier, the previous studies paid much more attention to the creative and unusual graphological features of *textese*. Little is done regarding its socio-pragmatics. Thus, researches into *textese* with a focus on its socio-cultural or relational orientation abound (Bryne, 2004; Thurlow and Brown, 2003; Chiluya, 2007; Adetunji, 2001). Bryne (2004), for instance, investigated sex differences in the use of texts and telephone calls for initiating first moves toward first date and romantic love. He found out that while female youths were more likely to initiate first moves through SMS than telephone calls, male youths did it via telephone calls than SMS, therefore confirming the enactment of gender-prescribed behaviour in Australian culture.

Similarly, employing socio-pragmatic frame work and quantitative analysis to the study of gender enactment in the romantic texts of Nigerian students, Adetunji (2011) discovered that out of 160 students studied, 120 preferred 'Romance Reiteration' texts, while 40 went for 'sexual Organs' texts. He submitted that Nigerian students' romantic text preferences endorsed the second-wave feminist linguistic paradigm.

As noticed from the review, most of these investigations are either too limited or non-native to satisfactorily address the heterogenous Nigerian context, although they provided the springboard for the present study. Besides, the University of Uyo students have been regularly observed to be addictive in their interpersonal, mobile communication, exchanging text messages among colleagues and care-givers within and outside of the campus. Meanwhile, close scrutiny of these texts disclosed an interesting discovery: a significant corpus of them centred on heterosexual love or intimacy. The above scenarios therefore triggered this research. Hence, by domesticating this study, the effort is a bold attempt to investigate, socio-pragmatically, the use of love texts by students to enact love and gender, thereby bridging the observed gaps in the research. It is hoped that the outcome of the study will contribute significantly to the advancement of research in gender linguistics and Nigerian English usage, itself being a variety of World English.

1.2 Methodology

Five out of nine departments in the Faculty of Arts of the University, randomly selected, constituted the study population. These are the

Departments of English, Communication Arts, Philosophy, Linguistics and Theatre Arts. Each of the departments accommodated over four hundred (400) students. The choice of the faculty was natural and data collection was made easier since the researchers work in the same faculty. Altogether, twenty (20) undergraduate students (four from each of the departments, two per gender) were randomly sampled from the faculty for the study. The final year students, aged between eighteen (18) and twenty-eight (28) years who were in love relationships with the opposite sex were preferred to students below the age range and who were not in active love relationships. The researchers distributed the twenty (20) questionnaires to the willing students in the selected departments. The students voluntarily took part in the study. A total of forty (40) texts from the participants were used for the study.

The study relied on both primary and secondary data. The former was drawn from the sampled students through questionnaire and semi- structured oral interview. Each respondent was requested to write out (or forward to the researchers' mobile phones) two of the most preferred love texts s/he had either sent or received from his/ her heterosexual lover. They were also asked to explain their choices: first, what they considered appealing or romantic in the texts; second, why they preferred the texts to others in their corpus. To obtain realistic data from the students, the researcher explained to them, in addition to oral interview, the demands of the questionnaire.

Theoretically, the analysis of the data was anchored on the socio-pragmatic theory of Leech (1983), supported by Thurlow and Brown's (2003) romantic and sexual orientations. Specifically, Stalnaker's (1974) pragmatic theory of common ground was adopted to establish and account for the juncture between pragmatic context and meaning- configuration in the data. Socio-pragmatics was adopted for the study because it effectively investigated the socio-cultural contexts of language use and their culturally- relevant meanings. Thurlow and Brown's relational orientations of language, especially as they relate to romantic and sexual communicative intents, allowed the texts to be categorized into thematic frames for ease of analysis. Therefore, since linguistically-relevant socio-cultural phenomena such as love and gender are the targets of this study, it found the approaches quite suitable.

Furthermore, both quantitative (chi-square and percentage) and qualitative analytical approaches were adopted. Whereas the quantitative approach sought to determine if the socio-cultural performance of the students in the love texts significantly differentiated the two genders or not, the qualitative analysis was geared towards establishing the love acts as well as the romantic orientations of the interlocutors in the texts.

In line with the purpose of the study, one research hypothesis was formulated for testing: There is no significant relationship between respondents' gender and their love-text preferences.

2.0 Data Analysis/ Results

As earlier hinted, the data were analyzed based on the functional orientations and the statistical distribution of the preferred love texts.

2.1 Functional Orientations of the Love Texts

The interpretation of the responses gathered and the orientations of data resulted in the grouping of the texts into the following four categories:

- (i) Love Reiteration (LR): projects or evokes an existing/ established love affair;
- (ii) Wooing (Wg): aims to win the love of the partner;
- (iii) Love Wordplay (LW): juxtaposes love experiences through love registers and humour;
- (iv) Sexual Behaviour (SB): depicts sexual acts.

These classifications served as heuristics for the study. First, we present a quantitative analysis of the data, balancing gender against text-types.

2.2 Statistical Analysis of the Distribution of Preferred Love Texts

The analysis did not consider the socio-demographic variables of age, department, level and marital status as they were not relevant to the study.

In Table 1, the observed frequencies of preferred texts as distributed between the male and the female students are shown. The total number of texts for both genders is 40. Generally speaking, for both genders, while LR texts were the most preferred (n= 18), the SB were the least preferred (n=5).

Table 2.1. Observed Frequencies (f_o)

Gender	LR	Wg	LW	SB	Total
Male	6	6	3	4	19
Female	12	4	4	1	21
Total	18	10	7	5	40

Source: Field work, 2021

In Table 2.2, the results of the expected frequencies are presented. These were obtained when a multiplication of the value- types of text and gender were divided by the text-types. As shown on the table, a total of 19 male and 21 female Arts students participated in the study.

Table 2.2. Expected Frequencies (f_e)

Gender	LR	Wg	LW	SB	Total
Male	8.5 5	4.75	3.33	2.3 8	19
Female	9.4 5	5.25	3.67	2.6 2	21
Total	18	10	7	5	40

Source: Field work, 2021

Shown in Table 2.3 are the cell distributions of the total chi-square contributions. This is calculated by dividing the squared differences between the observed and the expected frequencies by expected frequencies.

$$\frac{(f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e}$$

Table 2.3. Chi-Square Table of Texts' Distribution

Gender	LR	Wg	LW	SB	Total
Male	0.761	0.329	0.033	1.103	2.226
Female	0.688	0.298	0.030	1.002	2.018
Total	1.449	0.627	0.063	2.105	4.244

Source: Field work, 2021

From the chi-square table, at 3 degrees of freedom and margin error of 0.05, the chi-square value is 7.81. Therefore, since our calculated value of 4.244 is less than the chi-square value of 7.81, we, therefore, reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the text preferences are significantly dependent on the respondent's gender.

On the other hand, in Table 2.4 are the percentages of the frequencies of text-preferences as identifying text types and demarcating male and female genders.

Table 2.4. Percentile Distribution of Observed Frequencies

Gender	LR	Wg	LW	SB	Total
Male	31.6	31.6	15.7	21.1	100
Female	57.1	19.0	19.0	4.8	100
Total	45	25	7.5	12.5	100

Source: Field work, 2021

Combining the figures of Tables 2.1 and 2.4, the results revealed that on the whole, LR texts were the most preferred (18/45%), while SB texts were the least preferred (5/12.5%). Also, the male respondents preferred LR and Wg texts most (6/31.6%) and LW texts least (3/15.7%); while the female ones loved LR texts most (12/57.1%) and SB texts least (1/4.8%).

3.0 Discussion

3.1 Love Reiteration

Quantitatively, the data revealed that love enactments of LR texts showcased in six (6) categories, viz: appreciation, commitment, wishes, heart break, love play and loneliness. ‘Appreciation’ texts expressed the sender’s respect and value for and appreciation of the receiver’s love as exemplified in (I).

- I. To the world, you may be one person, but to me you mean the world.

Contextually, the interlocutor relies on common ground to instantiate love act with her lover. With shared knowledge and terseness, she has manipulated the meaning of the *world* to mean *value*. Thus, in the words of a female respondent who preferred this text to others in her phone, the choice was contingent upon the effects it had on her: ‘I love the text because it was sent to me by my first love. It made me feel treasured, valued and loved.’ Again, some ‘appreciation’ texts were couched in metaphors as this male respondent’s text illustrates:

- II. You are the sun in my day, the moon in my night, the spring in my desert; indeed, my everything, I love you.

In this text, the receiver is being compared to the ‘sun,’ the ‘moon,’ and the ‘spring.’ These are light and life-sustaining natural elements. Socio-pragmatically, the lady is now an undying source of light and life to the lover. The male respondent who chose this text from others said: ‘I prefer this text because my sweet heart appreciated it so much and would not want to delete it from her phone. She loves its poetry...my lady likes being appreciated and petted...’ This may imply that ladies tend to prefer texts from their lovers which esteem their worth; whereas men would choose texts that flatter women.

‘Commitment’- LR texts, on the other hand, expressed vows, commitment and assurances towards a lover. Text (III) is an example:

- III. I’m not planning to live without you, but with you.

This text is an indication of a committed love for the lover as the respondent explained: ‘The text reflects truthfulness and sincerity on my part. It is my vow to love him forever.’ Again, notice the terseness, yet the effectiveness of the text which is made possible through common ground.

Some LR texts expressed ‘wishes’ for their partners as shown in the next text:

- IV. No shadows to depress you, only joys to surround you.
Many friends to love, God himself to bless you. These are my wishes for you today, tomorrow and every day.

The text reveals the shared beliefs of the respondent and her lover in the divine providence. It has situated the discourse within the socio-religious context of Christianity, with the belief in and hope on ‘God’. Christianity, the product of westernization and colonization, has dominated the locutionary force of the majority of both Nigerian youth and adults; hence, the suitability and preference of this category of LR text by a female respondent.

Thus, the female respondent who preferred this text believed that the text captured the wishes and prayers she had been having for her lover on daily basis. The wishes focus on the rejection of evil or pains, symbolized by “shadows” but the acceptance of joy, love and divine blessings for her lover.

‘Heart break’ – LR texts indicated the texter’s feelings of regret and disappointment over the lover’s maltreatment of her or his insensitivity. An illustration is text (V):

V. Why are you doing this to me? Is it because I
 love you? You just forget how we started;
 honestly you’ve broken my heart. Remember I
 was ready to stand by you.

In the words of the respondent, the text helped her to remember her first love. ‘I vowed I would not love again...yet I can’t stop loving him.’

‘Love play’ in LR texts revealed the deployment of lexical items to convey a near-real display of romantic love act between the lovers. This expression explicated by (VI) evocatively enacts love play when the receiver must have complied with its paralinguistic demands.

VI. Draw me close - good
 Hold me tight - beautiful
 Now kiss me softly - cool
 Then squeeze me hard- perfect
 This is my hug for you.
 Good night. Love you heart.

Common ground as a pragmatic context is a contextualization of the states of affairs in terms of objects, place, communicative acts, participants, etc. It can be a reconstruction of either the real world or some other possible world that can be imagined, desired or supposed (Kecskes and Zhang, 2012). The text in (VI) demonstrates the imaginary or desired state of affairs being reconstructed from the real world shared by the lovers. Thus, the lover pragmatically, but imaginarily, enacted realistic love acts of ‘holding tight, kissing, squeezing and hugging’ one’s lover. The success of such socio-pragmatic enactment of love play is recovered in the perlocutionary force on the recipient.

Accordingly, the respondent who wrote (VI) as her favorite linked her choice to the text's amusing quality and close proximity to reality. According to the lady, 'I could feel his presence on receiving the text...I unconsciously obeyed the text's instructions before I realized it wasn't real.' As observed, the desired perlocutionary force of the text is enabled by the common ground shared by the interlocutors. This has to do with love play. The students thus deploy love-play textese in their communicative habits as a means of self-other sexual gratification. The socio-pragmatics in turn could serve as a strategy to lure the lovers into the real acts of love by the heterosexual partners.

The last sub type of LR texts enacted 'loneliness' and 'longing' as depicted in (VII):

VII. Your absence stabs me and I die every day.

Here, the female lover preferred the text because, according to her, 'It always describes the way I miss my love....'

In all, the majority of the female participants prefer the LR texts. Common to their explanation of this preference is the value of the texts in making them feel loved, cared for, treasured, as well as feel the presence of their absent lovers in their heart always, thus confirming the positions of Thurlow and Poff (2009). On the contrary, most of the male students who prefer the LR text do so mainly because of the soothing and 'flattery' effects it has on women.

3.2 Wooing

From the data, Wg texts were of three types, namely: direct, subtle and desperate. The 'direct'-Wg texts, such as (VIII), were overt and less-disguised in their socio-pragmatics or functional orientation. In this case, the sender asked the receiver for a date or love relationship, leaving the receiver with little or no option, but to acquiesce in:

VIII. Don't go for looks they can deceive/ Don't go for wealth even that fades away/Go for someone who makes you smile/ Because only a smile makes a dark day bright/This is why I chose you/I love you.

As submitted by a male participant who preferred (VIII), 'it makes me to always remember how I got my girl. I sent the text to her and it did the magic....' However, when this text was shown to another respondent, she pointed out that the text had the tendency to convince any lady because of its persuasive strength to make her focus on love rather than on wealth, 'As for me, I don't believe so much in wealth because it doesn't last. But if my guy showers love on me, I fall for him....'

IX. I see you, my heart drops; I hear your voice,
my heart melts; you look at me, I fall. Please
catch me, I've fallen for you.

The female respondent explained that she had felt embarrassed by the time she had already sent this text to her heart-throb. '...I felt he would regard me as too cheap... thank God he felt the same way for me....'

X. I have found arms that will hold me at my
weakest eye; that will see me at my ugliest
heart; that will love me at my worst; I have
found love.

This text was sent and preferred by a female respondent. According to her, 'I love this text because it gave me a chance to express myself to a guy I cherish...you know you couldn't walk up to him to say 'I love you...you know our culture forbids such from a woman....' Thus, the two comments on texts (IX) and (X) are illustrative of a (Nigerian) woman's manipulation of traditional femininity, where gender is enacted relationally and friendship and love expression could either be rebuffed or accepted (Adetunji, 2011). On the other hand, it supports the cultural belief that it is not in the position of a woman to openly woo a man, no matter her degree of affection; hence, both ladies felt rather embarrassed in their love enactments. This is another clear deployment of Nigeria's socio-cultural context and common ground to instantiate love and gender.

Lastly, the 'desperate'- Wg texts expressed some degree of desperation and readiness of the sender to do everything possible to win the love of the partner. Text (XI) instantiates this love enactment:

XI. Adam and Eve created love/ Romeo and Juliet
made love/ Julius Caesar fought for love/
Samson died for love/ Jesus Christ was nailed
for love/ What will you do for my burning love
for you?

In this instance, love affair is poetically anchored on classical and biblical allusions to famous love relationships and heroes in history. A male respondent who chose this text preferred it because he loved its sacrificial, vicarious demands of love. He added that the text worked for him: 'I prefer this text because it allowed me to get this babe who tortured me from my year one....'

In summary, both male and female respondents who preferred the Wg texts claimed that the texts offered an alternative, non-face-to-face, option for the sender to win the heart of the receiver, especially when the former could not directly express such an intimacy. However, their explanations imply that,

for the sake of cultural appropriateness, the Wg text should rather be sent by the male gender to the female counterparts, thereby alluding to the stereotype of male dominance and female passivity/ shyness in sexual relationships in Nigeria (Adetunji, 2011; Plotnicov, 1995).

4.3 Love Wordplay

The texts under this category juxtaposed love experience as well as conveyed humour; hence, the reason for their preferences by both genders. Pragmatically, a text is humorous when its 'perlocutionary force (effect) is laughter' (Attardo 1994, p. 13). Again, humour is characterized by 'Script opposition'. That is, a joke is identified when two conditions are met: 'The text must be compatible with two distinct scripts,' which must be in a 'relation to antonymy' (Corduas, Attardo and Eggleston 2008, p. 345). Two of the LW texts are provided below:

XII: Pity, you have AIDS!
A: Abundant beauty
I: Instant attraction
D: Divine sex appeal
S: Supernatural statistics.
May your AIDS be incurable.

XIII: You're my love, my hate/My day, my
night/My water, my fire/And one more
thing:/If there's no you, there is no me.

The respondents and their lovers share the backgrounded information on AIDS as well as mutual expression of love. Both respondents, male and female, who preferred (XII) and (XIII) said their choices were conditioned by the opposing manner in which the same set of words could juxtapose negativity (AIDS) and positivity (Physical attraction) in a text. The lady said, 'I was shocked at first instance, when he said I have AIDS, but was amused at the end by my understanding of the text.' Similarly, in (XIII), there is also a humorous juxtaposition of 'love' and 'hate,' 'day and night,' 'water' and 'fire' and 'no you, no me'.

Moreover, whereas men pay much attention to the physical attraction of their lovers, women prefer to be warmly appreciated and valued by their men, paying less attention to their handsomeness, but status in society, so explained the female respondent. It is germane to also point out from the data that the love and gender enactment has to do with youthful exploration of language. It is characteristic of youth to innovate and play with words to achieve desired meanings.

4.4 Sexual Behaviour

In this last text type, sexual acts and experiences were enacted in a realistic manner. They looked so real and visible. Besides, metaphors and symbols were adopted to describe sexual organs and love affairs. Text (XIV) and (XV) are illustrative of these texts.

XIV: Let's play it. Like soccer, it is fun although tasking. You enjoy the trapping, dribbling, kicking, scoring and jubilation.

XV: When feelings of love are so powerful, it leads you to someone who can make you happy beyond your wildest dreams. That is you to me.

Here again, the interlocutors' and their lovers' sensitivity to the common grounded experience of the game of soccer and love has made it possible for the respondents to enact the sexual behaviour in the shared love textese. The male respondent who preferred (XIV) located love act in the apt, analogous mapping of the game of soccer onto the rigorous and romantic process of love-making: 'It amused me discovering how love-making could be compared to the game of soccer... and both games are sweet...' Socio-pragmatically, we could decode the sexual acts encoded in the lexical choices of 'trapping, dribbling, kicking, scoring and jubilation' as describing the onset, the climax and pent-up process of love affair. In (XV), the female respondent preferred the mild and subtle expression of similar love act, believing that it would be embarrassing for a lady to express forbidden acts explicitly.

It is germane to also point out the pragmatic element of Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) in (XIV) and (XV). Aboh and Umoekah (2016) explain 'face' as the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting of 'negative face,' which refers to the basic claim to territories or personal reserves and 'positive face, signifying the desire for approved or appreciated self-image of interlocutors. Citing Brown and Levinson (1987), Aboh and Umoekah (2016) delineate the negative politeness strategies which interactants adopt in instantiating FTAs. One of such strategies which are being used in (XIV) and (XV) is doing FTA off record. That is, by being conventionally indirect, vague, hedging or by giving hints. Thus, sexual engagement is evident in the texts by the cautious and indirect use of 'trapping, dribbling, kicking, scoring, jubilation' or 'wildest dreams' by the lovers. By so doing, the interactants cautiously deployed the lexical choices to function as 'hedge performative makers', aiming at softening the negative impacts of Face-Threatening Acts as perceived in the overall context of the interaction (Aboh and Amgbapu 2022). In Nigerian socio-cultural milieu, it is derogatory to use salacious expressions in public; hence, the

essence of the hedge device pragmatically deployed in the texts to soften the impacts of the lover's locution, which in this context carries a negative implication. It has succeeded in mitigating the face threats to the speaker and his lover.

On the whole, SB texts have been used to project women as being more sexually disadvantaged than men. In (XIV), for instance, female subjugation and torture as it relates to sexuality is implicitly encoded in the verbs: 'trapping, dribbling, kicking, scoring and jubilation.' This exemplifies biased sexual power which situates the man as the 'actor' or 'master' who has the woman under his control as a passive object (Walton, Weatherall and Jackson, 2002). Apart from instantiating male dominance sexuality, the language of the texts has conformed to Nigerian cultural appropriateness which forbids people from discussing sexual matters in public, otherwise they would become too salacious, promiscuous and anti-social to be appreciated by their audience.

Conclusion

This study has analysed the socio-pragmatics of love text messages of the University of Uyo students. Clearly, it has demonstrated how love and gender are enacted in the preferred love texts of the students in various ways, most often either to the disadvantage of women or as supporting traditional, essentialist gender roles in love relationships.

The statistics results and the analysis of the verbal and written responses of the respondents have revealed that the gender differences vary, although relatively. Most of the female students prefer LR texts and also Wg types, because of their affectionate, bonding, harmless perlocutions, but dislike SB text, owing to its 'impolite' content. SB texts appear 'impolite' in the sense that they project women as being sexually oppressed and more sexually disadvantaged than men. This has illustrated biased sexual power which positions the male gender as the 'actor' or 'master' who has the female gender under his control as a passive object – a postulate affirmed by Walton, Weatherall and Jackson (2002).

However, male respondents prefer LR, Wg and SB texts, because of their effectiveness in winning the love and affection of their lovers, while they dislike LW text, because it tends not to yield appreciable responses from their female counterparts. Thus, it is logical for these preferences to imply that, as educated mature adults, the students aim at securing their future life-partners as soon as they complete their degree programmes.

Again, the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses reveal an endorsement of the culture conservatism and male chauvinism obtainable in (Nigerian) male-female romantic relations in line with Plotnicov's (1995) assertion. In Nigerian communicative habits, it is derogatory and offensive to use salacious or pejorative expressions in public; hence, the interactants

pragmatically deploy hedge device in the texts to cushion the impacts of the lover's locution, which carries a negative implication. By so doing, the lover has succeeded in mitigating the face threats to himself and his lover. Consequently, the study has situated love and gender reality in the texting habits of the University of Uyo students within second-wave feminism, a discovery in which men and women use language differently as a consequence of cultural stipulations and social demands of language use. This is in confirmation of Adetunji's (2011) position.

Besides, the findings have revealed interesting and varied ideologies about how women and men ought to speak in their speech communities. This is in line with the postulations of Cameron (2003) and Pichler and Preece (2011), that gendered discourses reveal interesting ideologies about how men and women should speak and that the ideologies shape dominant discourses which are accepted as 'common sense' by members of socio-cultural groups, and therefore serve as points of orientation for speakers in their actual language use.

Based on the above conclusion, it is recommended that further socio-pragmatics research be carried out in other tertiary institutions, preferably in the South Eastern and Northern parts of Nigeria or schools outside Nigeria, but beaming research light on the socio-pragmatics of age and status differences as well as differences in the students' years of study.

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