

A Socio-Pragmatic Investigation of Sound Communication in Ejagham Culture

Okang Ntui Ogar

ogarokang608@gmail.com

Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages
University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria.

Lucy Mishina Ushuple

mishinalucy@gmail.com

Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages
University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria.

Jude TerkaaTyoh

judetyoh70@gmail.com

Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages
University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the intricate nature of sounds in the Ejagham culture, identifies the sources of these sounds, and explores how they serve as a means of forewarning and communicating events and situations within the Ejagham socio-cultural context. Sounds are everywhere and are nested in the sociocultural experience of a society. No society exists without sounds, and they serve as communication tools, helping humans learn to interact and understand their cultural and natural environment. This paper adopts the interdisciplinary approach of sound studies to drive its analysis. The paper employed a survey method approach in data collection, utilizing oral interviews and participant observation. Thirty participants were selected using the purposive Sampling technique. 10 females and 20 males. Other participants' demographic information includes traditionalists, farmers, traditional rulers, and the elites. The findings of this work revealed that different sounds heard in an Ejagham socio-cultural context are very significant and hold within them a socio-cultural interpretation that reflects the understanding of the world around the people who perceived them. The findings show that the sounds include birds, animals, and traditional instruments. The Ejagham people interpret these sounds as representations of events and happenings around them. These sounds, therefore, are used as a system of communication independent of speech. This article aims to highlight the uniqueness of Ejagham sound ecology and the crucial role these sounds play in communication within Ejagham society.*

KEYWORDS: *Communication, Ejagham, Sound, Environment, and Ethnography.*

INTRODUCTION

The Ejagham people are found in the southeastern region of Nigeria and the southwestern region of Cameroon. In eight Local Government Areas of Cross River State, including Akamkpa, Akpabuyo, Odukpani, Ikom, Ogoja, Etung, Akpabuyo, and Calabar Municipality, and are also found in large numbers in southern Cameroon. The Ejagham occupy a fascinating landscape of savanna rainforest, rivers, and uplands, bringing them closer to nature. This natural habitat exposes the Ejagham people to different types of sound produced by humans, instruments, nature, especially birds and animals. The

different types of Sound in Ejagham culture are believed to communicate specific information interpreted and understood by people, and they serve as communication tools. The Ejagham people are a traditional group known for their unique cultural practices, which include the mgbe (leopard), nsibidi ideograms, and annim female society, among other aspects of their culture. The population is estimated at about 222,000 according to the 2006 census.

Communication is generally defined as the imparting of information (Webster's, 2001). It can also be seen as the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, by speech, signals, writing, or behavior (American Heritage, 2000). Communication can be Linguistic, meaning communication through language, which is the system of arbitrary signals, such as voice sounds, gestures, or written symbols America Heritage, 2000). When a person is using language, he/she is using a rule-governed communication system to represent his /her thoughts and feelings to members of his /her community that share his /her language (Valli, 2000). Non-linguistic communication, on the other hand, is the imparting of information without using language (Vicars,2001).

Consequently, Sound from Non-Linguistic acoustics has both communicative and cultural implications. Newman and Sacks (2023) contended that over the past decades, sound studies scholars have drawn heightened attention to show how sound shapes both the everyday behavior of man and how exceptional sound is a critical route for constructing relationships between the individual, the society, and the wider world. Sound is said to have manifold manifestations as a social force and formation; its diversity in the African context is a subject of a multidisciplinary approach (Newman & Sacks,2023). Cobussen (2013) argued that the world is not for the beholding, but it is for hearing; it is eligible, but audible. They further explain why, "science has always desired to monitor, measure, abstract and contrast meaning, forgetting that life is full of noise... work noise, noise of man, noise of beast, noise bought, and noise sold or prohibited, nothing essential happens in the absence of noise." The fact is that noise affects and relates to industry, social justice, technology, nature, and the urban environment, and is culturally constructed(Graper,2023).

Many studies have been devoted to sound, approaching their investigation from a specific corner and interest. We are surrounded by sound every day, and this constitutes a domain of research interest across various disciplines. For instance, the debate about noise places the sonic environment at the center of the question about cityness and has aroused the interest of Joella Bitter's paper, which attempts to explore the knowledge of the repertoire of how human Non-Linguistic acoustics is crucial to communication, specifically in the Ejagham cultural setting. The present study, however, attempts a socio-cultural exploration of acoustic sound in Ejagham cosmology and how the people interact with sound as a means of communication.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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This paper adopts the interdisciplinary approach of sound studies as its theoretical basis to drive its analysis. Sound studies is a multidisciplinary approach that deals with sounds from numerous perspectives (Worthington & Bodie, 2020). Sound studies touch on important themes such as noise and silence, media and reproducibility, listening, voice and disability, culture, community, and the meaning of sounds across cultures (Stern, 2012). Due to its complexity, the study of sound and acoustics can be fully understood from different perspectives. Its multidimensional approach (including historical and cultural context) (Thompson, 2020) explores the various aspects of sounds as well as their impact on society. Every sound heard matters and carries a culturally significant symbolic load (Hugh & Rice, 2024), and there is no such thing as absolute noise.

The sound study, in its initial stage, has been restricted in scope, focusing on the emergence of the concept of sound in Western modernity, with an emphasis on the development of sound technologies. However, in recent years, the scope of inquiry has been broadening to cover areas such as music, anthropology, and sound art, among others. Many studies on sound were centered on the idea of "soundscape", architectural acoustics, nature sounds, deafness, loudness, and voices, especially, in Johnathan Stern's (2023) book, "Audible past", Jacques Attali's "Noise: The political economy of Music"(1985) and R. Murray Schaefer's "The turning of the world"(1977). Coubussen (2013) and LaBelle (2007) studied the sound in relation to life and society. The current Study adopted this approach to offer insight into the role of sound in the Ejagham cultural context as an attempt to understand the source and the communicative relevance of the sound.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted among native speakers of Ejagham found in a contiguous area covering the Southwest region of the Republic of Cameroon and the South-South region of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In Nigeria, the people are predominantly found in eight Local Government Areas of Cross River state. These include Akamkpa, Akpabuyo, Bakassi, Calabar Municipality, Etung, Ogaja, Ikom and Odokpani Local Government Areas. The study adopted the qualitative design method to gather data for the research since the research is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research typically relies on four methods for gathering information, which include participating in the setting, observing directly, conducting in-depth interviews, and analyzing existing materials or documents. For this study, the researchers employed participant observation and conducted in-depth interviews with selected Ejagham individuals. The researchers held in-depth interviews with 30 interviewees spanning both sexes and ages. The interviews were structured in a nature-based approach to achieve the aim of the study. Additionally, the researchers interacted freely with native Ejagham speakers to observe their use of sounds in conveying messages within their culture.

RESULT/ DISCUSSION

The research explores two sources of sound in Ejagham culture that play a key role in communication. However, Sound in the Ejagham culture can be produced from different sources, but the study concerns itself with instruments, animals, and birds. From instruments such as òfírikó (the traditional flute), èyúk (the wooden gong), òkám (drum, including various sizes of drums), and ngùn (a dain gun), each of these instruments produces a sound that conveys specific information to the people. Ejagham people adjudge the sounds made by certain birds in many instances to communicate specific information, and the information encoded in the sound allows the individual to be alert and take precautions or take a particular action. The implication of this sound interpretation is that it keeps people informed about events that are about to happen. Some of the animal sounds that have cultural implications in Ejagham society are the èkúknkók (cock crow). In the Ejagham socio-cultural context, the crow of a cock is used to determine the time of the day, primarily, at 5 A.M, it signals the dawn of the day. It serves as a traditional alarm of the community. The crow of the cock at odd hours, for instance, 9 or 10 P.M suggest an ill omen and in many cases, the death of someone.

Similarly, the consistent screaming of íkómé (squirrel) at the corner of a bush is interpreted as a warning of the presence of a snake. This helps the individual to avoid a snake bite. Additionally, the ékú (owl) is a bird that, according to the Ejagham people, is believed to have a strong connection with witchcraft, and it is therefore abhorred by them. The sound of the owl is taken to mean the sound of a witch or a wizard. Often, this sound is met with a severe rebuke by the people. Òsarí persistent (type of a bird) is believed by the Ejagham socio-cultural setting to have the capacity to forewarn. It is culturally believed among the Ejagham people to be a warning to you of a possible danger ahead or to look out for something good ahead. Gunshots in the Ejagham community communicate an essential message to those in the farm and at the outskirts of the community. The guns are not used within the community; they are used for hunting in the forest, and as such, gun shots heard in the forest suggest the killing of an animal by a hunter. This message is consistent in the Ejagham cultural setting that a gunshot in the bush communicates the message that a hunter killed an animal. However, gunshots heard in the community multiple times communicate information that a significant event has occurred, usually a celebration.

Sounds from instruments in the Ejagham culture that possess communicative capabilities are the èyúk and the òfírikó. The èyúk is a source of sound in Ejagham culture that is used to inform the community of events or happenings in the community. A skilled player often plays it and produces accurate sounds that communicate the event. When the sound of èyúk is heard, it can only speak two things: the death of an influential person in society or a celebration. Either way, it depends on the skill of the player to produce the sound that communicates the event appropriately. Òfírikó, on the other hand, is a traditional flute that, when it is played, means an invitation to the warriors and brave men in preparation for an act that requires bravery. It also refers to an event that suggests what is termed "òsénghè" in Ejagham philosophy. This concerns a situation that connotes oppression, sorrow, and tears. This typically attracts a specific type of action.

CONCLUSION

The study explored the concept of sound in the cultural life of the Ejagham people. It established that the sounds of humans, animals, birds, or other cultural items played a crucial role in the socio-cultural life of the Ejagham people, as they communicated various types of messages, including positive, negative, and warning or cautionary messages, and alerted them to a particular action for any eventuality. It is further discovered in this research that all sounds made by humans, animals, birds, and Ejagham cultural instruments signal a potential message and action. From an artistic perspective, and within the context of the Ejagham socio-cultural setting, sounds extend beyond words and music. These sounds are used in communicating events and significant happenings. It is understood that the correct interpretation of sounds protects the individual from harm, helps them take the right action, and safeguards their environment and life. The research, therefore, concludes that the different types of sounds have profound socio-cultural implications for the Ejagham people's perception of the world around them.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

Okang Ntui Ogar is a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Calabar, Nigeria. His research interests include phonology, sociolinguistics and Ejagham linguistics. He has many publications to his name in many academic journals. Some of his articles include, "Efik and English loanwords adaptation in Ejagham; the role of proverbs in the intellectual development of Bette child; Phonological analyses of Anaang compound names; Nutriceutical and Nutrients: The role of language in curbing the high risk of unhealthy eating habits and Verbal venom in National discourse: Nigerian ethnic and religious perspective." He is visible on Google Scholar and Research Gate.

Lucy Mishina Ushuple is a lecturer with the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages at the University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria. Her area of interest includes Morphology, Syntax, and Applied Linguistics. Her latest publications include, but are not limited to, Expressive morphological deficiencies in children with autism: regular past inflections and pluralization morphemes, My stunning angel: endearment terms strategies of gender identity construction in Facebook picture uploads in Nigeria, The role of proverbs in the intellectual development of the Bette Child and the role of English Language in Nigerian development. Ushuple Lucy Mishina is visible on Scopus, Google scholar and Researchgate.

Tyoh, Jude Terkaa is a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Calabar, Nigeria. His research interests include sociolinguistics and Applied linguistics. He has many publications accredited to his name in many academic journals. Some of his articles include; the role of proverbs in the intellectual development of Bette child; Nutriceutical and Nutrients: The role of language in curbing the high risk of

unhealthy eating habits and Verbal venom in National discourse and Theta role assignment in Tiv. Tyoh Jude Terkaa is visible on Scopus, Google scholar and Researchgate.

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