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## THE PRAGMATIC IMPORT OF INTONATION OF QUESTIONS AND FORCE IN NIGERIAN HOME MOVIES

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### **Abstract**

*Questions have different functions according to context; it takes pragmatic experience to interpret them appropriately. Also, intonation contrasts play a critical role in conveying pragmatic meaning. Many scholars have worked on pragmatics of questions and prosody separately, but this study married the two by investigating the pragmatic import of intonation of questions and force in Nigerian home movies. Five Nigerian home movies were randomly selected from two cultural areas where major movies are produced in Nigeria. Three out of the movies exhibit the Igbo culture and the other two movies exhibit the Yoruba culture. The movies were: Abattoir Season 2 Episode2 by Damilola Mike-Bamiloye, Abattoir Season 2 Episode 3 by Damilola Mike-Bamiloye, Cravings by Uchenna Mbunabo, The Poor Beautiful Village Girl by Chika Lann, and A Call From The Past by Mary Jane Nkem. Relevant data were extracted and transcribed from 10 hours 30 minutes streams of conversations. Mey's Pragmatic Acts theory and Couper-Kuhlen's Interactional Prosody theory are adopted for the analysis of the data collected. The study discovers that a question can have more than one import depending on the context and situation. The results show that intonation changes the interpretation of an utterance by virtue of its structure into another interpretation which the speaker actually intends to convey. The pragmatic force of intonations of questions on the addressee results to*

*actions like; apology, leaving the scene, stepping back and offering of chair/seat to visitor(s).*

**Key words:** pragmatics, tonality, import of intonation, prosody, question.

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## **Introduction**

The study of intonational meaning, or information structure, is concerned with those conventionalized aspects of meaning that are embodied in the way that a sentence is pronounced, and which interact in key ways with the way that the sentence is structured. Research in this domain cuts across multiple subfields of linguistics, including phonetics, phonology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and typology, making it a challenging topic for novices and experts alike. The way an utterance is pronounced belongs to the realm of prosody and the acoustic analysis of prosody can be very complex to assess individual differences between speakers in terms of sex, age, emotional state, dialectal origin, etc.

Questions, on the other hand, have different functions according to context; it takes pragmatic experience to interpret them appropriately. Also, intonation contrasts play a critical role in conveying pragmatic meaning. Therefore, this study is set to examine how intonations are used in pragmatics of questions to convey meaning in relation to cultural context.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Nigerian home movies are an integral part of the country's vibrant film industry, known as Nollywood. These movies often reflect the cultural, social and linguistic aspects of Nigerian society. One important aspect of communication that plays a significant role in Nigerian home movies is the intonation of questions and the use of force in dialogue delivery.

However, there is a lack of comprehensive research and understanding regarding the pragmatic import of intonation and force in Nigerian home movies. The way questions are asked, the tone used, and the force behind the delivery can convey subtle meanings, intentions, and emotions that contribute to the overall understanding and interpretation of the dialogue.

The problem at hand is the need to explore and analyse the pragmatic significance of intonation and force in Nigerian home movies. This involves the examination of how these elements influence the interpretation of the dialogue.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this research work is to examine the Pragmatics Import of Intonation of Questions and the effect of its Force in Nigerian home movies.

To achieve this, the study:

1. Identifies types of questions and tunes commonly used in Nigerian home movies.
2. Infers the pragmatic import of intonation of questions in Nigerian home movies.
3. Explains the effects of the pragmatic force on the addressee.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are types of questions and tunes commonly used in Nigerian home movies?
2. Are there pragmatic imports of intonation of questions in Nigerian home movies?
3. Does pragmatic force have any effect on the addressee in Nigerian home movies?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study hopes to stimulate the interest of researchers, who are non-native speakers of English, into the intonation patterns of the English language and to identify various dimensions of interpretation to questioning in Nigerian home movies based on the choice of the intonation patterns. This will also help the listeners or the non-native users of the English language to know when a question is actually a question and when it is not, so as not to misinterpret the intention of the speaker so that the intention may not backfire.

### **Scope of the Study and Limitations to the Study**

This research is delimited to home movies from two Nigerian cultural areas; Yoruba and Igbo. These cultural areas were chosen because, the use of the English language in Nigeria started from there in 16<sup>th</sup> century, and also, they are the major movies producers in Nigeria. Five Nollywood films were randomly selected for this study; three that exhibit Igbo culture and two that exhibit Yoruba culture. They are: *Abattoir Season 2 Episode 2* by Damilola Mike-Bamiloye, *Abattoir Season 2 Episode 3* by Damilola Mike-Bamiloye, *Cravings* by Uchenna Mbunabo, *The Poor Beautiful Village Girl* by Chika Lann, and *A Call From The Past* by Mary Jane Nkem.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Intonation**

Intonation is an important part of the suprasegmental phonology. Intonation involves the occurrence of recurring pitch patterns, each of which is used with a set of relatively consistent meanings, either on single words or on groups of words of varying length (Cruttenden 1997). According to Wells (2006), “intonation is the melody of speech”. In studying intonation we study how the pitch of the voice rises and falls, and how speakers use this pitch variation to convey linguistic and pragmatic meaning. “It also involves the study of the rhythm of speech, and the study of how the interplay of accented, stressed and unstressed syllables functions as a framework onto which the intonation patterns are attached”. The pitch of the voice plays the most important part in intonation, as pointed out in Roach (2009), because when we speak normally the pitch of our voice is constantly changing. This is in line with this research work in that it aims at how the pitch variations in questioning convey pragmatic meaning.

Also, Carr (2008) opines that intonation can be seen as the kinds of pitch modulation which are found in whole utterances. Intonation contours can be used to highlight certain elements in an utterance, to bundle words together into information chunks (tonality), and to convey the speaker’s attitude to what he/she is saying. This buttresses Wells (2006) submission in the introductory part of his book that “intonation - the rise and fall of

pitch in our voices - plays a crucial role in how we express meaning.” According to Roach (2009), one of the most important tasks in analysing intonation is to listen to the speaker's pitch and recognise what it is doing; this is not an easy thing to do. Pitch is described in terms of high and low, and some people find it difficult to relate what they hear in someone's voice to a scale ranging from low to high.

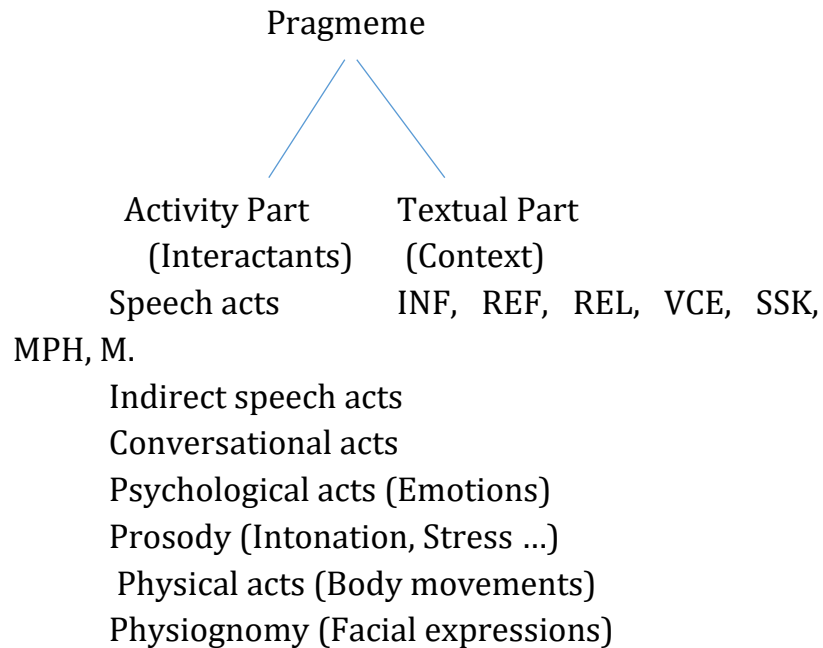
### **Pragmatics**

Pragmatics is recognized as a branch of language study and in recent times, the operationalization of power within, or through, the use of language in society has become a central concern of discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics (Wilson 2009). Pragmatics is concerned with meaning in the context of language use. Basically, when we communicate through language we often mean more than what we say; there is often a gap between speaker meaning and sentence meaning. According to Yule (2008) cited in Bwoganet (2017), pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning... it is the study of contextual meaning... it is the study of how more gets communicated than said. It is a discipline that is concerned with the interpretation of what people mean in a particular context and how the context influences what is said. Its studies involve a consideration of how speakers organize what they want to say in accordance with whom they are talking to, where, when, and under what circumstances. Mey (2001: 6) defines pragmatics as “the field of linguistics which studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society”. To him, a truly pragmatic consideration has to deal with the users in their social contexts; it cannot limit itself to the grammatically encoded aspects of contexts, as the grammatical requirement seems simple.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Mey's Pragmatic Acts theory and Couper-Kuhlen's Interactional Prosody theory are adopted for the analysis of the collected data in this research work. The pragmatic acts theory is a socio-cultural international view of

pragmatics which emphasises the priority of socio-cultural and social factors in meaning construction and comprehension (Odebunmi and Unuabonah, 2014 cited in Osisanwo and Akintaro, 2020). It is a context-based theory which is divided into two parts as shown below:



(Source: Odebunmi, 2011 and Odebunmi & Unuabonah 2014).

The activity part and the textual part interact to produce a pract and allopract. The activity part covers speech acts, indirect speech acts, Conversational acts (dialogue), Psychological acts (Emotions), Prosody (Intonation, Stress ... our focus), Physical acts (Body movements), and Physiognomy (Facial expressions). The textual part involves context elements: INF -inference, REF- reference, REL- relevance, VCE- voice, SSK- Shared situation knowledge, MPH- metaphor, and M- metapragmatic joker.

### **Interactional Prosody Theory**

Interactional Prosody Theory is an offshoot of Interactional linguistics which is grounded on the premise that language should not be analyzed in terms of context-free linguistic structures but as a resource for the

accomplishment of actions in social interaction. In contrast to previous approaches to prosody (such as acoustic analysis, a self-instructional device etc. which lay emphasis on how speakers produce the sounds of particular linguistic systems rather than on how speakers actually speak to each other), it attempts to reconstruct prosodic categories 'from within' as participant categories, showing how speakers use prosody as a resource for the management and negotiation of interactive meaning (Selting and Couper-Kuhlen, 2004). The interactional approach to prosody which is the focus here is in effect inspired by the theoretical insights of contextualization theory coupled with the methodological procedures of conversation analysis.

This theory (IPT) focus is that prosody can be seen as one of the orderly 'details' of interaction, a resource which interlocutors rely on to accomplish social action and as a means of steering inferential processes. Prosodic features can be reconstructed as members' devices, designed for the organization and management of talk in social interaction. They can be shown to function as part of a signaling system which - together with syntax, lexico-semantics, kinesics and other contextualization cues - is used to construct and interpret turn-constructive units and turns-at-talk.

### **Methodology**

The researcher made use of observation to extract and transcribe relevant data from 10 hours, 30 minutes streams of conversations. The data were collected from five Nigerian films that are from Yoruba and Igbo parts of the nation. The target populations of this study were people in Nigerian home movies. They include parents, siblings, visitors, friends, relatives, in-laws and co-workers. Sampling technique and stratified random sampling technique were used to obtain the required sample for the study. A stratified sampling technique was used to select the used films from among others. This qualitative research adopted the Pragmatic act theory of Mey (2001) and Couper-Kuhlen's (2001) Interactional Prosody Theory for the analysis of the data collected from the five selected Nigerian films.

## Analysis and Discussion of Findings

### Types of Questions

**Table 1: Table showing Wh Questions**

S/N	Films Name	Questions
1	Abattoir Season 2 Episode 2	2 Where are you going? What case? Why are you doing as if you don't care for this boy? Why don't you love him the same way? Why don't you treat this boy like your son? Why are you now turning your back against this boy? What about your son? When will you remember you have a son?
2	Abattoir Season 2 Episode 3	2 When exactly are you ringing her home? How am I talking?
3	Cravings	What is going on here? What are you doing in front of my house?
4	The Poor Beautiful Village Girl	And why are you ladies standing there when we have people to attend to? What are you doing here?
5	A Call from the Past	And what given silly excuses? And how is that your business?

Table 1 above shows that there were 16 Wh questions from the collected data. There were 10 Wh questions from the Yoruba cultural related films and six from the Igbo cultural related films.

**Table 2: Table showing Yes/ No Questions**

S/N	Films Name	Questions
1	Abattoir Season 2 Episode 2	2 Did I say I did not?



2	Abattoir Season 2 Episode 3	Taking you out?
3	Cravings	So, this is what you do when I am not around? Are you mad? Are you crazy?
4	The Poor Beautiful Village Girl	Are you asking him question?
5	A Call from the Past	Do you think this house belong to your father? Can't you just forgive this one time she is late? Are you going to use the whole day cleaning just this? Did you just talk back at me?

Table 2 shows that there were 10 Polar questions in the data collected, two from the Yoruba cultural related films and eight from the Igbo cultural related films.

**Table 3: Table Showing Statements Changed to Questions**

S/N	Films Name	Questions
1	Abattoir Season 2 Episode 2	Nil
2	Abattoir Season 2 Episode 3	Taking you out? When she is done corrupting you? When she is done planting the seed of immorality in your life?
3	Cravings	So, this is what you do when I am not around? This is what you do?
4	The Poor Beautiful Village Girl	Nil
5	A Call from the Past	Nil

Table 3 shows that there were five statements changed to questions from the data, three from Yoruba and two from the other region.

### Types of Tunes

**Table 4: Table Showing Rise and Fall Tunes**

S/N	Film Names	Rise Tune ↗	Fall Tune ↘
1	Abattoir Season 2 Episode 2	Why don't you treat this boy like your son? Did I say I did not?	Where are you going? What case? Why are you doing as if you don't care for this boy? Why don't you love him the same way? Why are you now turning your back against this boy? What about your son? When will you remember you have a son?
2	Abattoir Season 2 Episode 3	Taking you out? When she is done corrupting you? When she is done planting the seed of immorality in your life?	When exactly are you bringing her home? How am I talking?
3	Cravings	Are you mad? Are you crazy? What are you doing in front of my house?	What is going on here? So, this is what you do when I am not around? This is what you do?
4	The Poor Beautiful Village Girl	Are you asking him question or you should go and get him a seat?	what are you doing here? And why are you ladies standing there when we

			have people to attend to?
5	A Call from the Past	And what given silly excuses? Do you think this house belongs to your father? Are you going to use the whole day cleaning just this? Did you just talk back at me?	Why are you late? Can't you just forgive this one time she is late? And how is that your business?

Table 4 shows that there were 13 questions said in a rise tune and 17 in a fall tune. This suggests that fall tune is mostly used for pragmatics of questions in Nigerian home movies.

### Pragmatic import of intonation of questions

#### Pragmatic import of warning

Two questions from *Abattoir Season 2 Episode 3* show import of warning.

(1) Why are you doing as if you don't care for this boy? ↓

The question here is between a husband and his wife talking about their adopted child. The statement was uttered by the husband because he noticed some changes in his wife's attitudes towards the boy in question. Then, he challenged and warned his wife of her indifference to the boy. The warning is that she should not behave as if she does not care for the boy. There is inference that she had been caring for the boy before the change in her action. The response of the woman (Did I say I do not care for him? ) validates the local understanding of the message. Meaning, I still care for him. ↑

(2) When she is done corrupting you?

When she is done planting the seed of immorality in your life? ↑

The above are directed to a daughter by her mother in a telephone conversation. The woman has two daughters, one who is morally upright and the second with moral decadence though, she is the elder. She lives a promiscuous life, in fact, she had left home since. The younger sister, when

on break, took permission from their parents to go in search of her elder sister in order to bring her home. The parents (most especially their mother) had been eager to see them but they seem to tarry or delayed. She then called the younger one and asked of the time she will bring her sister back home which she replied with “we will come back very soon” then, the above questions.

We observed that there is evidence of local understanding and shared situation knowledge between the two interlocutors. The task of the message (warning) is accomplished with the use of rise tune by the speaker. The message is that she should not allow her elder sister to plant the seed of corruption in her but she should be focus.

### **Pragmatic Import of Request and Plea**

(3) Can't you just forgive her this one time she is late?

The scenario that brought about this is between three interlocutors from *A Call from the Past*: two attendants and their boss. One of the attendants was late to office and the boss started to abuse and insult her. The second attendant realised the weight and the effects of the insult, she responded with a plea: “Please, take it easy on her ma. Can't you just forgive her this one time she is late?” The question said in low fall tune is an indirect speech act that indicates plea: meaning forgive her since it is not in her habit to come late to work.

### **Pragmatic Import of Surprise**

(4) What is going on here?

(5) So, this is what you do when I am not around? This is what you do?

Practs (4) and (5) are from a scene in *Cravings* where a mother met her daughter with a male friend outside their gate. The boy was helping the girl to remove dirt from her eye. The woman alighted from her car in anger and discontentment said in a fall tune “What is going on here?” There is unexpected in her voice and look. “So, this is what you do when I am not around?” coupled with physical act suggests surprise. The children knowing fully that she was not asking question tried to debunk the erroneous idea, thought, insinuation and imagination of the woman,

though not verbally but with gesture. She then faced her daughter in disbelief with “So, this is what you do when I am not around? This is what you do?” The pragmatics of these question is betrayal of trust. Meaning, she flirts with boys whenever she is not around, even outside the gate where passers-by and neighbours could easily see them. That is abomination and abberation.

### Pragmatic Import of Doubt

(6) What is going on here?

(7) So, this is what you do when I am not around? This is what you do?

As they have been just examined above, they also show the pragmatic import of doubt. The woman could not believe her eyes. She does not expect to see her daughter outside the gate behaving amorally. The questions, (What is going on here? So, this is what you do when I am not around? This is what you do?), suggest doubt, displeasure and disappointment.

(8) By this hour of the day?

(9) Night party? Where, when, and with who?

The two practs above have been examined under pragmatic import of surprise (4) and (5). They also perform the import of doubt. The father doubt the fact that his children could do such, most especially night partying.

(10) Taking you out?

This is from *Abattoir Season 2 Episode 3*. It is extracted from a telephone conversation between mother and her younger daughter. The girl had travelled to visit her wayward elder sister in the city in order to bring her back home. After an exchange of greetings, the girl informed their mother of her sister’s plan of taking her out for weekend. The woman was set aback with the information, and then with a rise tune exclaimed “Taking you out?” This shows doubt as she could not believe what her daughter told her. She was not expected to join her waywardness but to convince her to stop such attitude and bring her home.

### Pragmatic Import of Call to Order and Order

- (11) When? When she is done corrupting you? When she is done planting the seed of immorality in your life? When exactly are you bringing her home?

This is the continuation of pract (10) above from *Abattoir Season 2 Episode 3*. After the question "Taking you out?" that suggests doubt and surprise, the girl assures their mother that she will definitely bring her sister home. Then, the mother replied with the above questions. From these questions: (When? When she is done corrupting you? When she is done planting the seed of immorality in your life?), there is an inference that the elder sister is corrupt and promiscuous. Wh questions are said with a fall tune in standard English for making enquiry or seeking for information, but the above are said with a rise tune to perform different task which are to warn and call to order. Their mother would not want the younger daughter to be influenced negatively. Therefore, she tried to remind her of her mission or purpose of going to her elder sister by calling her to order in order not lose her priority and warning her of not been introduced to corruption and immorality.

There is shared background knowledge between the two interlocutors, this made the girl responded with "Don't talk like that mum". This means an assurance that she knows what she is doing and that she cannot be negatively influenced. That the mother should neither entertain fear nor insinuate wrongly about her, and that she will definitely bring her elder sister home.

- (12) Why are you doing as if you don't care for this boy?  
(13) Why don't you love him the same way?  
(14) Why don't you treat this boy like your son?  
(15) Why are you now turning your back against this boy?

The questions above are from *Abattoir Season 2 Episode 2*. The interrogation is between a husband and his wife. The questions are directed to the wife by her husband and Pract (12) has been treated in Pract (1) to show the import of warning. Like it has been explained above, the boy in the question is their adopted child who both of them had nurtured and cared for from his teenage. But from the dialogue above, there is inference that things have changed. The speaker tries to remind

her of her first love and care for the boy. Practs 12, 13, 14 and 15 are indirect speech acts to mean, care for this boy, love him the same way you had been doing in the past, treat him like your son and do not turn your back against this boy now. They are a way of calling her to order. She got the message but tried not to accept the fact that she is no more caring for the boy. She then responded with “Did I say I did not?” meaning I still care for the boy. From the woman’s response, it could be inferred that there is a reason for her change of attitude towards the boy. This could be seen in her further responses bellow.

(16) What about your son?

(17) When will you remember you have a son?

The woman’s further responses (practs 16 and 17) indicate that there is more to the woman’s action towards the boy. It could be a transfer of aggression, because there is an inference that the man had neglected and forgotten his own biological child at the expense of their adopted child. The questions are situated and as well serve as a way of reminding and calling the attention of the man to the fact that he has neglected his own son.

(18) What are you doing in front of my house?

This is from *Cravings*. This statement is an effect of psychological acts of the speaker because she did not expect to meet her daughter with a man outside the gate touching each other. After the rain of the abuse and insults (to be examined later), she faced the boy in question with the above pract. It is a wh question said with rise tune instead of fall tune. In this situation or context, she was not asking for a reason he was in front of the house but she ordered him to leave her house. There is shared situation knowledge. The boy understood the message, he turned and ran away.

### **The Pragmatic Import of anger/ annoyance**

(19) When she is done corrupting you? When she is done planting the seed of immorality in your life?

The practs here have been discussed as practs (11) under the import of warning and call to order. The questions are indirect speech acts that are pragmatically interpreted as she will corrupt and plant the seed of immorality in you if care is not taken. Had if she was not angry, it could be said directly as do not let her corrupt you or plant the seed of immorality in you. That was why the girl responded with “ don’t talk like that mum”.

(20) Are you mad? Are you crazy?

The practs here are directed to the boy helping the girl removing dirt from her eye at the gate in the movie called *Craving*. The boy was trying with gesture (waving) to debunk the erroneous thought of the woman and the woman replied him with the above statement. They are said in annoyance to mean he was mad and crazy.

(21) Did you just talk back at me?

The pract is from *A Call from the Past*. The interaction is between a boss and his subordinate. The boss accused her of lazziness and sluggishness to which she tried to disagree with the accusation, hence the pract as a response. This shows annoyance because in a typical Africa setting, it is not expected of a subordinate to give response to his or her boss accusation. It is an aberration and insult to do such, that was why he was not welcome with such an attitude.

### **Pragmatic Import of Insult and Abuse**

Abuse and insult are borne out of annoyance. This could be seen in the pragmatic import of anger and annoyance, because some of the practs there also feature in this import.

(22) Are you mad? Are you crazy?

The scenario that brought about these practs has been briefly discussed under the import of anger and annoyance. The woman pragmatically told the boy that he is mad and crazy for caressing a lady outside the gate.

(23) Do you think this company belongs to your father?

This is the continuation of the interrogation between the boss and his subordinate from *A Call from the Past* as discussed in a pract below. The statement is said with a rise tune to show anger and insult. Meaning, the company does not belong to her father, she is employed to work and not to behave like the owner. It could also be interpreted as your father is too poor to own this kind of company. This suggests that she is not free to do as she wants but her job must be dilligently done.

### **Pragmatic Import of Displeasure**

(24) And what given silly excuses?

A scene that happened between two persons: a surbordinate and her boss from *A Call from the Past*. The lady arrived a little bit late to the office. The boss enquired of the reason for her lateness to which she responded with apology followed by explanation. After the explanation, the boss reacted



with pract (24) in anger. Meaning her excuses are not tenable. Further to this is “Do you think this house belongs to your father?”

(25) Are you going to use the whole day cleaning just this?

This is another extract of conversation between the boss and the same lady that came late to the office in *A Call from the Past*. The maid is seen cleaning an apartment and the boss challenged her with this pract. The voice of intonation used here is not of a question really, but of a displeasure to how she performs her duty. Meaning, she has been there for long. She is too slow/sluggish. She is wasting or has wasted a lot of time on that portion alone. There are other assignments waiting for her. She should do quick.

(26) Did you just talk back at me?

The pract here is the continuation of the pract (25) above. The lady tried to respond to the accusation of been sluggish, then the boss reacted with the pract in this discussion. It is inferred that he was not pleased with that attitude of putting up a defence by the lady. The question could be interpreted as: you insult your boss. It is not right to talk back at your superior. Or you are proud.

(27) When she is done corrupting you? When she is done planting the seed of immorality in your life?

The above have been examined under the pragmatic import of warning and call to order. Here, it shows that the mother was not pleased with the attitude of her younger daughter agreeing with her elder sister who is so corrupt and promiscuous to take her out.

(28) And why are you ladies standing there when we have people to attend to?

The pract has also been examined as import of call to order. The ladies stood aimlessly doing nothing when they should attend to customers. So, the owner of the shop was not happy with the attitude and she shows her displeasure with pract (28). Meaning, you ought not to stand aimlessly when there are customers to attend to. It is also a way of calling their attention to the fact that there are customers to attend to, they should not stand aimlessly. The use of rise tune here shows displeasure of the woman to the ladies' act of leaving their work undone.

### **Effect of the Pragmatic Force on the Addressee**

In the film *Cravings*, the expression “what are you doing in front of my house?” suggests go away from my house. The addressee understood the effect of the message and immediately turned to pick race. In pract 26, *Did you just talk back at me?* means, keep quiet, do not respond when I, your

boss talks. The lady in question understood the message and she kept quiet even when her father was later insulted.

Lastly, from the film *The poor Beautiful Village Girl*, those ladies had to move to their duties when heard “ And why are you ladies standing there when we have people to attend to?” Also, when a lady was addressed by her mother saying “Are you asking him question or you should go and get him a seat?”she understood the message passing across to her. She then went and offered a chair to the man.

### Conclusion

Intonation of questions in Nigerian home movies has been examined in the discourse of the Nollywood films. The prosodic information realised vary across speakers and contexts. Therefore, the interlocutors need to be familiar with the socio-cultural contexts of their environment to achieve mutual understanding, social cohesion and to avoid misrepresentation of intentions.

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