Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Selected Wedding Invitation Cards in South-Eastern Nigeria

Justus Chidi Ugwu

Department of English and Literary Studies,
Enugu State University of Science and Technology
justus.ugwu@esut.edu.ngng, justicechidi27@gmail,com

Abstract
Despite the socio-semiotic import of wedding invitation cards (WICs) in Nigeria in general and southeastern Nigeria in particular, enough scholarly attention has not been accorded its textual and visual dimensions to determine the socio-cultural-cum-ideological motivations. The above gap is the motivation for the present study. A total of 20 WICs each were collated from all the southeastern states of Nigeria, namely: Abia, Anambara, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. This amounts to a sum total of 100 WICs which constitute the corpus for this study. This corpus was analysed following the insights provided in Bhatia (2004) and Kress and Leeuwen (2001). Bhatia's (2004) genre analysis was utilised in the analysis of the linguistic features (textual components) of the WICs. The non-linguistic features (visual components) were analysed following Kress and Leeuwen's (2001) socio- semiotic multi-modal analytic approach. Dynamics like printed forms, colors, layouts, graphics, and paper materials were analysed by means of this analytic paradigm. As for the linguistic features, attention was paid to the different moves in the WICs to identify text units expressing particular functions. The linguistic and non-linguistic features are characterized by nine different moves. Six of these moves are obligatory while three are non-obligatory elements. It was noted that the materiality options of cards and prints can carry an ideological implication that weddings have an elevated status or otherwise in the Igbo society.

Keywords: South-east Nigeria, Igbo, invitation, multimodal, moves.

Introduction

Invitation is a commemorative social action which informs others about a person's intentions and requests the presence or participation of other person(s) to some place, gathering, entertainment or to do something (Al-Ali, 2006, p. 961). An invitation is of great significance for a wedding as it entails making the celebrants' intention a public knowledge. Miller (1984) cited in Al-Zubaidi (2017) points out that the genre of wedding invitation cards belongs to a text typology commonly known as "homely discourses" along with other ceremonial texts like birth announcements, thank-you notes and death notices. Such kind of printed invitation cards share common generic patterns and properties, and communicate many socio-cultural conventions and practices of the speech community wherein these texts are written.

Wedding is one of the most memorable and happiest moments in human life. It is "a day when two individuals embark on a life-long journey of togetherness" (Hill, 2015, p. 15). A wedding invitation text is the first public manifestation of a young couple's co-constructed matrimonial discourse and marks the beginning of their marriage, as one of their "rites of passage" (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002). It typically contains information about the names of the host and the intending-couple and the arrangements of the wedding ceremony. As

ceremonial texts existing in almost every society, wedding invitation cards (henceforth WICs) is a very popular kind of invitation and many people around the world are well acquainted with it. It needs to include some basic information that will help the guests understand where they need to be and what time the ceremony will begin. It usually includes the date and time of the wedding, the location, and the names of the hosts. All of this information helps invitees to clear up any confusion and prevent people from showing up too early, too late, or at the wrong location in such a special day (Al-Refaei & Momani, 2010).

In southeastern Nigeria (henceforth SEN), just like other parts of Africa where the socio-cultural realities of the people have been shaped by the effect of colonialism, a large number of WICs perform dual functions. They are used to invite guests for both white wedding and traditional wedding. The white wedding in SEN conforms to the teachings of Christianity while the traditional wedding relates to cultural demands of marriage amongst the people. To satisfy the above nuptial bipolarity, WICs in SEN usually utilises the coordinator "and" to capture the dual function, as in "the families of Mr and Mrs A and Mr and Mrs B invite you to the solemnisation of holy matrimony *and* traditional marriage ceremony of their children...." In the eyes of the tradition of the Igbo of SEN, a lady is not considered to have been married off if the husband does only the white wedding leaving out the traditional wedding. However, traditional wedding alone does not also satisfy the religious curiosity of the people who tend to associate white wedding with "marital purity" which probably accounts for the preponderant use of the phrase "holy matrimony" in most of the WICs collated for this study. The above situation largely accounts for the above duplication of function amongst the Igbo of SEN.

Problem statement

In SEN, this kind of homely genre has received little investigative attention as shown by the literature reviewed for this study. A motivating reason for the researcher for considering WICs is its highly conventionalised content and the clear manifestation of socio-cultural realities of a people. The present research analyses a corpus of SEN wedding invitation cards to identify their textual and visual patterns. In addition, the researcher intends to determine the influence of social, cultural, and religious orientations of the people on the textual and visual organisation of WICs in SEN. Specifically, a total of 20 WICs are collated from each of the southeastern states in Nigeria which include Abia, Anambara, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. This amounts to a sum total of 100 WICs which constitute the corpus for this study.

Related literature

The written genre of WICs belongs to a colony of homely discourses that are socially constructed texts of everyday life including thank-you notes, congratulations, obituaries (Johns, 1997). WICs can best be described as an exemplary amalgam of language-culture chemistry (Al-Zubaidi, 2017). These cards serve the communicative function of informing people that a wedding ceremony will be held in a particular place and time, and guests' attendance to the ceremony will be pleasantly requested. There is a paucity of research on the homely genre of WICs, and the available studies are not many. In this respect, Mirzaei and Eslami (2013) note that despite the importance of wedding invitation discourse, it has surprisingly received little attention. This means that there is a dearth of related studies that form the background of this study, though we can lay hands on a few of them. Such studies include Al-Ali (2006), Mirzaei and Eslami (2013), and Faramarzi (2015).

Al-Ali (2006) examined a corpus of 200 Jordanian WICs collected by 45 undergraduates at Jordan University with the aim of identifying their discourse generic component patterns and the role played by the socio-cultural norms and values in shaping

these texts. A detailed genre analysis specified eight obligatory and non-obligatory generic moves that generally appeared in Jordanian WICs. Utilizing critical discourse analytic tools on the data, the researcher finds that religious affiliation and masculine kinship authority play important role in constructing the text component moves and naming practices.

Similarly, Mirzaei and Eslami (2013) investigated the genre of Iranian WICs. The work probed into the discourse and social variability evident in wedding invitation texts collected from 150 couples. The findings showed that besides religion, other socio-culturally emerging factors such as education, feminism, socioeconomic status, profession, and age had massively impacted the young couples' preference for a certain type of discourse. They maintained that modern couples had created various discursive practices to serve their own interests largely inspired by the newly emerging societal influences or agendas. The findings of the study shed light on the socio-cultural aspects that influenced the communicative behaviour of Iranian youths and provided insights into innovative wedding invitation texts in Iran as shaped by socio-cultural beliefs and values.

Faramarzi (2015) analysed the genre of WICs in Iraq to find out the generic components, linguistic features used as well as the communicative functions expressed by the generic components. A corpus of 200 Iraqi WICs was randomly selected. The results showed that the Iraqi invitation genre was built around eight moves out of which one was optional. The study makes a significant contribution as it investigates textual and visual aspects of the discourse of Iraqi wedding invitations. Here, it is necessarily believed that not only verbal features but visual ones as well can contribute a lot to achieving the communicative goals of the genre of WICs. Moreover, the study integrates a critical discourse analytical framework investigating how the textual and verbal components of WICs are interwoven with the socio-cultural practices. In other words, the study draws on a multimodal analysis that takes a combination of textual and visual modes of meaning making into account. Specifically, it probes into the analysis of the typical verbal and non-verbal features of the wedding invitation discourse, and the socio-cultural norms embedded in this type of discourse. The results of the study is promising for raising socio-cultural awareness of how the genre of Iraqi WICs is articulated.

While the above works relate to the present work in that they are all investigative efforts that explored the features of wedding invitation cards cutting across its textual and visual components as found in Faramarzi (2015), they also differ from the present research in some significant ways. For instance, while the works reviewed are predominantly from scholars in the Middle-east (Al-Zubaidi 2017; Al-Ali 2006; Mirzaei and Eslami 2013 and Faramarzi 2015), the present research is conducted in southeeastern Nigeria. Similarly, while the people of Middleeast are predominantly Islam, southeasterners are largely Christians. This provides us with the opportunity to see how the interaction between Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR) shapes the textual and visual components of WICs.

Theoretical orientation
This work feeds from the insights provided in Bhatia (2004) genre analysis and Kress and Leeuwen's (2001) multi-modal approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA). Bhatia (2004) views discourse as genre and argues that this extends the analysis beyond the textual product to incorporate context in a broader sense in order to find the way text is constructed, the way it is often interpreted, used and exploited in specific institutional or professional contexts to achieve specific disciplinary goals. He attributes the popularity of analysing discourse as genre to the fact that through genre analysis one may understand

members of a specific discourse community who use genre to achieve their community goals.

In other words "genre analysis explores discourse features in the broad context of the communicative event, and attempts to provide the rationale of the discourse features in terms of authors' publicly retrievable intentions and institutional conventions." (Allison 2004, p.265).Hence, texts become "typical" because people who produce these texts follow "certain rules, prescriptions, traditions, ingrained habits, role models that have effects on three 'typical characteristics' of genres: content, form and function" (Leeuwen 2005:121). Thus genre is a model or schema, because its regularity in this specific discourse community serves as an example for constructing new issues in the same field, which share the same purpose. Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2001) social semiotic multi-model of textual analysis was equally used.

The term "semiotic resource" is a key term in social semiotics. It originated in the work of Halliday who argued that the grammar of a language is not a code, not a set of rules for producing correct sentences, but a "resource for making meanings" (1978: 192). Van Leeuwen (2005) extends Halliday's idea to the "grammar" of other semiotic modes, and defines semiotic resources as the actions and artifacts we use to communicate, whether they are produced physiologically – with our vocal apparatus; with the muscles we use to create facial expressions and gestures, etc. – or by means of technologies – with pen, ink and paper; with computer hardware and software; with fabrics, scissors and sewing machines, etc. Van Leeuwen (2005) further observes that traditionally they were called "signs". For instance, a frown would be a sign of disapproval, the colour red a sign of danger, and so on. Signs were said to be the union of a signifier – an observable form such as a certain facial expression, or a certain colour – and a signified – a meaning such as disapproval or danger. Dynamics like printed forms, colors, layouts, calligraphy, graphics, and paper materials were analysed by means of this analytic paradigm.

Methodology

A total of 20 WICs each were collated from all the southeastern states of Nigeria which include Abia, Anambara, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. This amounts to a sum total of 100 WICs which constitute the corpus for this study. The sample for this study was carefully drawn from both high and low income families to aid a balanced analysis and conclusion. This corpus was analysed following the insights provided in Bhatia (2004) and Kress and Leeuwen (2001). Bhatia's (2004) genre analysis was utilised in the analysis of the linguistic features of the WICs. Specifically, attention was paid to the different moves in the WICs to identify text units expressing particular functions.

As to the analysis of non-linguistic features associated with WICs, Kress and Leeuwen's (2001) socio- semiotic multi-modal approach of textual analysis was used. Dynamics like printed forms, colors, layouts, graphics, and paper materials were analysed by means of this analytic paradigm. This helped us to identify the textual and visual component patterns, the moves that characterise the textual and visual components and to determine the influence of social, cultural, and religious aspects on the textual and visual organisation of the genre of SEN WICs.

Analysis and findings

Linguistic features of wedding invitations in southeastern Nigeria
The analysis of the present corpus revealed that the schematic structure of southeastern

Nigeria WICs is built around nine component moves that generally come in the following sequential order.

Component moves	Communicative functions	No. & %
M1. Opening	Initiating the wedding invitation by giving reverence to God,	44 44%
	mentioning the pseudo name of the groom, or	50 50%
	leaving out the opening move.	06 06 %
M2. Identifying the names of the couple's parents	A conventionalised expression containing the names of both parents as the people issuing the invitation	100 100%
M3. Identifying the address of the couple's families	Naming the communities, local governments and states of the couple's families	100 100%
M4. Inviting the guests.	Mentioning that the guests are invited for the wedding which constitute the central message of the card	100 100%
M5. Pointing out the type of occasion	Specifying whether the occasion involves white wedding, traditional marriage or both.	100 100%
M6. Identifying the couple	Mentioning the names of the couple beginning with the name of the bride	100 100%
M7. Identifying the marriage arrangements	Details about the date, place and time of the occasion	100 100%
M8. Colour of the day	An expression or phrase enumerating the colours that have been chosen for the occasion which is to direct the invitees' sense of dressing	85 85%
M9. Toast	A poetic piece expressing the love shared by the couple	90 90%

The opening move is an introductory component that comes first in southeastern Nigeria (SEN) WICs. Its distribution is sub-classified into: Reverence to God--- 44%; mentioning the pseudo name of the groom--- 50% and ignoring this opening move---6%. It appears in the central top position on the wedding cards printed in different English calligraphies with a variety of font type and size. This opening element has the main communicative function of announcing the invitation. It is often realised by the mentioning of the groom's pet name followed by the year of the occasion, as shown in the following examples: IYKMORE 2015; CHIDON 2017; WAYS-MAN 2020. Sometimes, they begin with conventionalised and formulaic clichés cited from Biblical verses, such as: TO THE GLORY OF GOD; TO GOD BE THE GLORY; IN OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD. The formulaic openings and clichés are functional in enhancing the marriage promotion. The general tendency in SEN WICs is the use of one of the opening rhetoric, but sometimes, the two are left out, taking us to zero opening move. The corpus shows that the zero-opening move constitutes a minute 6% of the entire distribution. The use of the groom's pet name with

the year boldly written makes appeal to the sense of wealth. It covertly implicates the groom's readiness to feed the invitees, while the expressions drawn from biblical verses can be interpreted as a sign of adherence to Christianity.

The second component is a conventionalised expression containing the names of both parents as the people issuing the invitation. Among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, courtesy demands that when a man is ready for marriage, he announces his intention by saying that his father wants to get a wife for him. This credit to one's father is part of the socio-cultural realities of the Igbo such that it has to be acknowledged even if the groom's father was late. The above explains why the couple's parents are presented as the people inviting the guests in SEN WICs, with the names of the bride's parents coming first before those of the groom's parents. It usually reads something like "The families of Mr. A. & MR B. Cordially invite..." Invitations are often issued by the bride and groom's fathers without necessarily referring to the mothers of the couple. This prevailing tendency has a sort of socio-cultural bias. It shows paternal dominance and authority. Again, this cultural preference highlights the collectivistic nature of the Igbo society where familial interdependence and authority are emphasised in comparison with the individualistic nature of most western countries where autonomy and independence of individuals are highly sought.

Naming the communities, local governments and states of the couple's families constitute the third move. This move comes immediately after each of the names of the couple's parents. It's important to note that the information provided on the address of both parents is not for the purpose of direction. It rather has a socio-cultural significance. It is used to show that both parents and the couple are proud of their roots. It shows that the parties involved are not hiding their identities. This move is usually captured as this "The families of Mr and Mrs A. of Uruagu in Nnewi North LGA of Anambra state & Mr and Mrs B of Umuopu in Oji River LGA of Enugu state cordially invite "U" to the...." This move cuts across all the WICs that make up the corpus for this study.

The fourth move that has been identified in the data is *the move of inviting the guests.* This obligatory component constitutes the backbone of the wedding invitation genre since the principal purpose of any wedding invitation is to request the presence of guests to attend and participate in the wedding and the ceremonies that follow it. With this move, the inviting parents ask courteously and cordially the honor of guests' presence to share the joy with their children. This move is typically realised by a conventionalised phrase form requesting the honour of the guests᾿ presence and participation. Typically, the phrase "…cordially invite "U" constitute the key lexical items used to tag this move. It is normally printed with a large font size in the middle of the WICs with the "U" performing a generic function.

The fifth move deals with specifying whether the occasion involves white wedding, traditional marriage or both. This move is a very significant one among the Igbo of SEN because of their cultural and religious orientation. The Igbo of SEN usually engage in two kinds of wedding (white and traditional) resulting from colonial contact and impact. The Igbo are predominantly Christians who are also passionate about their culture. This explains why they engage in dual functions of holding both the Christian marriage (white wedding) and the Igbo-culture-oriented wedding (traditional wedding). As pointed out earlier, engaging in one and leaving out the other from the two categories of marriage among the Igbo does not satisfy the religious and cultural curiosity of the people, thereby, often, compelling the couple to engage in the two. However, both the white and traditional weddings are usually done the same day as a way of minimising cost.

The sixth move is concerned with identifying the intending couple. It occurs in all

the invitation texts analysed. This component identifies the bride and groom's names, usually beginning with their first names. Their names are printed with a large font size but not larger than the names of their parents reflecting the ideology of paternal authority and dominance. The corpus analysis reveals that the name of bride comes before that of the groom and never on the same line. This move cuts across the corpus for this study.
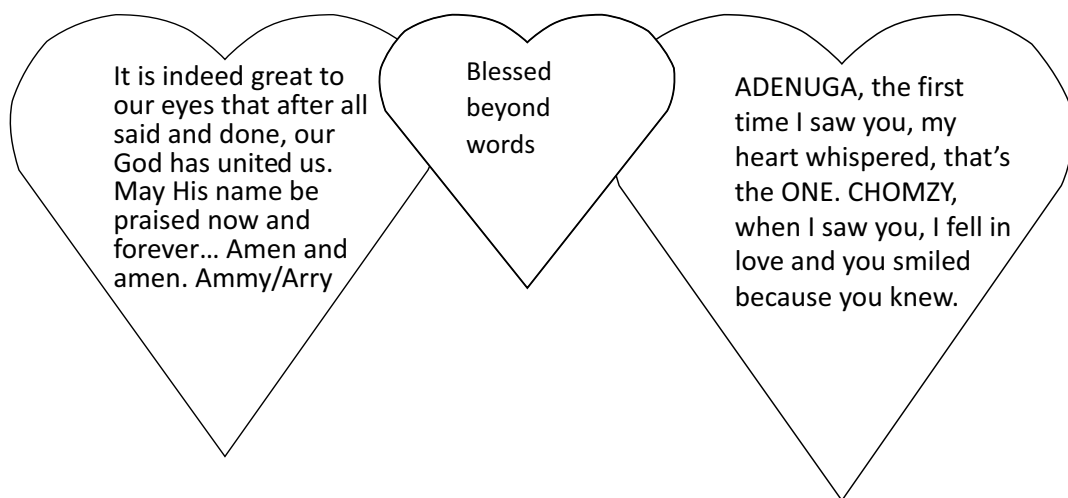
The move of identifying the marriage arrangement points out the location and time of the wedding ceremony. It makes explicit reference to the date and location variants of the wedding ceremony so as to properly guide the invited guests. This move assumes obligatory status in SEN WICs. The data reveals that wedding ceremony (traditional) in SEN is held in the bride's parents' house. It has been observed that Fridays and Saturdays are often selected for the wedding ceremonies. This may be encoded on some socio-religious considerations as Fridays are the last days of work for civil servants in a week while Saturdays are totally free for them which enable them to participate in the wedding ceremonies followed by Sundays which provide the opportunity for the couple to go for a thanksgiving service in the church.
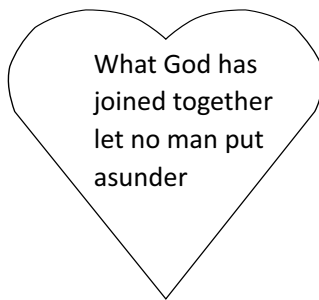
Colour of the day deals with the dropping of some lexical items enumerating the colours that have been chosen for the occasion which are to direct the invitees' sense of dressing. The colours chosen are usually in tandem with the background colour to be provided by a decorator on the wedding day. This move is associated with the ecstatic component of the occasion. Colour of the day constitute part of the reasons the WICs are expected to be ready and circulated a month or two before the wedding day as it prompts the invitees on the colours of the clothes to be purchased in readiness for the wedding. It usually occurs this way:

Colour of the day
Wine red, beach, silvery & golden.
The last move is the toast; a poetic piece expressing the love shared by the couple. This move draws from a socio-religious orientation. This is because it is usually captured in the WICs of the educated and has its roots in the Biblical account of Adam's reaction on sighting his wife, Eve, with the expression "This is the bone of my bone and the flesh of my flesh." (Genesis chpt. 2 Vs 23).   Sometimes, they summarise the experiences of the couple before their intention to become man and wife came through. They are often captured in love-shaped drawings. The following are some examples from the present corpus:

What God has joined together let no man put asunder

God we bless your holy name for bringing us together. May the fire of our love never grow cold

Non-linguistic features of wedding invitations

It has been observed that there are certain non-verbal features that are pertinent to the genre of WICs serving its unique communicative function. In general, SEN WICs vary in terms of their printed forms, colors, layouts, graphics, and paper materials. All the visual features are optional in the present corpus. SEN WICs are customarily printed in rectangular and square shapes. They are printed in an array of bright and shiny colors such as pink, red, purple, white, golden, silver, and cream ranging from ready-designed cards to custom-designed ones. The use of such colours and designs helps achieve the communicative function of this genre. By and large, it has been noted that SEN higher class families tend to design their own cards rather than choose ready-made ones as these cards cost more money and could look more appealing.

Also, the selection of certain colours and designs seem to display the socio-economic status and education of the intending couple because SEN higher class families show a general tendency toward the use of elegant, yet simple designs and cold colors like beige, white and cream, whereas low-income earners tend to use these colors in addition to other ones. The cards' size often varies depending relatively on the socio-economic status of the couple as they cost more money (the larger the invitation cards, the higher the socio-economic rank), but may also reflect the attitude of the celebrant's personal orientation. The size is an optional feature in SEN WICs.

In the present corpus, the use of images and pictures like roses, wedding rings, fictitious portraits of bride and groom, hearts, palm trees and kegs of palm wine plays a significant role in communicating a lot of the meaning making of this genre. Though not always, the use of persons' image and wedding rings stands out in SEN WICs. The above has the communicative function of making the invites to understand that it is white wedding. If it were only palm trees and kegs of palm wine that were captured on the card, it effectively communicates to the guests that they have been invited for a traditional wedding. However, if the card contains both pictures, it indicates that both white and traditional weddings are involved. In general, the materiality options of cards and prints can carry an ideological implication that weddings have an elevated status in the Igbo society as in other world contexts.

Conclusion

The analysis reveals that there are the linguistic and non-linguistic features that characterise WICs in southeastern Nigeria. The linguistic and non-linguistic features are characterised by nine different moves. Six of these moves are obligatory while three are non-obligatory elements. The analysis reveals that the Igbo of SEN usually engage in two kinds of wedding (white and traditional) resulting from colonial contact and impact. Being predominantly

Christians and also passionate about their culture, the Igbo engage in dual function of holding both the Christian marriage (white wedding) and the Igbo-culture-oriented wedding (traditional wedding). It was noted that engaging in one and leaving out the other from the two categories of marriage among the Igbo does not satisfy the religious and cultural curiosity of the people, thereby, often, compelling the couple to engage in the two. It was equally noted that the materiality options of cards and prints can carry an ideological implication that weddings have an elevated status in the Igbo society.

Works Cited

Al-Ali, N.(2006).Religious affiliations and masculine power in Jordanian wedding genre. *Discourse & Society*, *17*(6), 691-714

Bhatia, V. K. (2010) Interdiscursivity in professional communication. *Discourse and Communication*, *21* (1), 32-50

Bhatia, K. (2004). *Worlds of Written Discourse: A Genre-based View*. New York: Continuum.

Clynes, A. & Henry A. (2004). Introducing genre analysis using Brunei Malay wedding invitations. *Language Awareness*, *13*(4), 225-242.

Faramarzi, S., Elekaei, A. & Tabrizi, H. (2015). Genre-based discourse analysis of wedding invitation cards in Iran. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *6* (3), 662-668

Hill, O. (2015). Muslim wedding invitation. Available: http://www.articlesbase.com/weddings-articles/muslimweddinginvitation-5386378.html

Holmes, R. (1997). Genre analysis and the social sciences: An investigation of the structure of research article discussion sections in three disciplines. *English for Specific Purposes*, *16* (4), 321-337.

Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (2nd Ed.). New York: Routledge.

Leeds-Hurwitz, W. (2002). *Wedding as Text: Communicating Cultural Identities through Ritals*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers

Momani, R. & Al-Refaei, F. (2010). A socio-textual analysis of written wedding invitations in Jordanian society. *LSP Journal*, 1(1), 61-80