**Societal norms and communicative acts in a collectivist society: A postcolonial pragmatics perspective**

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The aim of this talk is to illustrate how societal norms and expectations drive the flow of communicative acts in social interactions. These norms moderate all aspects of social interaction ranging from physical to verbal patterns of deference, in-grouping, respect, identity, as well as determine how interlocutors qualify as deserving and worthy members of their society.

Using the postcolonial pragmatics framework, I study the communicative act of childbirth hospital visitation in a radio programme in Cameroon. I illustrate that the flow of the conversation between the radio host, a 55-year mother of four, and the newly delivered mothers in the maternity ward, depends on whether the generally happy episode of childbirth followed the norm expected by society. This norm simply requires that childbirth should be within wedlock. So, any unwanted, unplanned out-of-marriage pregnancy is considered bad and hence a breach of the societal norm. Using postcolonial pragmatics components like age, gender, social norms and kinship I explain why the host quickly switches from her professional role as a journalist to that of a mother, aunt or adult society member in order to reproach, blame, advice (and forgive) the young girls who have put to bed out of wedlock. The collectivist thrust of the society forces her to do so based on her age, her gender (woman to woman), the societal norm she feels compelled as an adult member to implement or draw attention to, and the metaphorical kinship status of society, captured in the structural metaphor, SOCIETY IS FAMILY, wherein a mother, for instance, is any adult old enough to be one’s mother.

The communicative act therefore comprises several speech acts that serve to ascertain respect for the society’s norms and expectations. These include the greeting act, the reproach act, the advice act, among others.