



Shared Knowledge and Communication: A Pragmatic Analysis of Taofiq Azeez's Brigandage

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Abstract

Pragmatics is the study of meaning as used in context and interpreted by the listener. Bearing the focus of Pragmatics in mind, this work adopts Cooperative Principles formulated by Paul Grice to analyse Taofiq Azeez's **Brigandage**. The aim is to see how the cooperation between the characters facilitates communication in the text and to determine the extent to which the characters in the text observe the principles formulated by Paul Grice. This work also identifies the implicature generated by the characters as they break the maxims. That is, what meaning a character implies as he fails to observe the maxim(s). Some data were collected from the text and analysed. It was observed that interlocutors, as represented by the characters, strive to cooperate with each other but, for obvious reasons, flout the maxims; thus, implying additional meaning beyond what is explicitly said. The study revealed that non-observance of maxims does not impair communication owing to the fact that listeners, through shared knowledge, infer the implied meaning from the speaker's contribution and this sustains communication.

Key words: Communication; Conversational Implicature; Cooperative Principle; Gricean Maxims; Satire

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is the process of speaking or writing to someone to exchange information or idea, Rundell, Michael et al (2007). Shannon and Weaver (1964) also define communication as "all the procedures by which one mind may affect another". This definition substantiates the fact that communication, alongside oral and written media, is multimodal in nature and involves message transmission from an encoder to a decoder with the purpose of getting a feedback. Communication is key to our everyday endeavours about what makes life worth living and, so, it should be devoid of barriers that could lead to miscommunication so that the listener or reader can correctly infer the intended meaning of the speaker or writer. In Discourse Analysis, explanations are sought to issues such as the methods adopted by the listeners to interpret what speakers intend to convey as opposed to what they actually say or how meaning is made from what is read in the text; differentiating text from series of sentences in order to effectively communicate. In every conversation, there are implicatures and these are meanings that are not explicitly conveyed in what is said but can be inferred. Conversational implicature is an indirect speech or implicit speech act; that is, what is meant by a speaker that is not part of what is explicitly said or uttered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bossan (2017) posits that Pragmatics which is the study of language is closely related with Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL). Emphasising language use and function, the main concern of Pragmatics, was first popularised by SFL. Allot (2010) states that scholars and practitioners of Pragmatics view Pragmatics (a field of linguistic enquiry) from divergent points. To Leech (1980), Pragmatics is the study of how utterances have meaning in situation. The speaker strives to achieve his conversational goal while the hearer has the task to make

meaning out of the speaker's utterance. Conversational implicature thrives when additional meaning is conveyed by the encoder in the way required by the maxim and involves locally derived inferences from specific context Bossan (2017). Olatunde (2017) asserts that interlocutors communicate some non-literal meanings by simply violating or flouting the maxims.

Levinson (1983) sees the concept as the study of the relations between language and context which are germane to the comprehension of language account. He explains that understanding an utterance involves making inferences that will connect what is said to what is mutually assumed or what has been said before. Yule (1996) holds that Pragmatics is the study of unseen meaning or how we arrive at what is meant even when it is not expressed in words. This means that for meaning to be derived from an utterance, the interlocutors must largely depend on shared knowledge. This is an expansion of what Grice calls implicature. Osisanwo (2008) stresses that background knowledge keeps discussions going and added that the same occurs in written texts between writers and readers. He stated various forms that background knowledge could take which include: frames, scripts, scenarios, schemata and mental models. Dijk (1992) opines that talking about Pragmatics is to talk about how are intentions and interpretation of intentions of actions of other interlocutors are based on a set of knowledge and belief. Olatunde (2017) concludes that all pragmatic approaches to language study are concerned with the functionality of utterances performed in different contexts of interaction.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study hinges on the concept of Cooperative Principle as propounded by philosopher, Paul Grice (1975) in his article "Logic and Conversation" (Syntax and Semantics). In the article, Grice argues that "talk exchanges" aren't merely a "succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they do. They are characteristically, to some degree, cooperative efforts, and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction." Grice (1975), with Cooperative Principles, states that "make your conversational contribution such as is required at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange in which you are engaged".

According to Aloysius Martinich (Levinson, 1983), "the sum and substance of the Cooperative Principle might be put this way: do whatever is necessary to achieve the purpose of your talk; don't do anything that will frustrate that purpose." Cooperative Principle is not about being positive and socially "smooth" or agreeable. It is a presumption that when people speak, they intend and expect that they will communicate by doing so, and that the hearer will help to make this happen. No one speaks

and expects nothing to come out of it, expects no result and no one communicates when no one is engaged with them.

Paul Grice describes Cooperative Principle and Maxims of cooperation as a set of norms that interlocutors should observe in their conversations and the maxims have to be followed in order to be cooperative and understood. However, the principles and maxims are not prescriptive but descriptive. Interlocutors are confined to the maxims. Breaking the maxims is more of interest to pragmaticians than upholding them because failure to observe the maxims does not lead to the breakdown of communication but generates implicatures which keep the communication going.

MAXIMS OF COOPERATION

a. Maxim of Quality

- Make your contribution as informative as is required (that is, for the purpose of the on-going exchange)
- Do not make your contributions more informative than necessary.

b. Maxim of Quantity

(1) Your contribution should be based on truth: (a) Do not say what you believe to be false. (b) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

c. Maxim of Relation

- Be relevant

d. Maxim of Manner

- Try to be perspicuous (i.e. be clear)
- Avoid obscurity of expression
- Avoid ambiguity
- Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
- Be orderly i.e. present your materials in the order in which they are required. (pp. 45-47)

Terna-Abah (Ternad-Abah, 2016) highlights the focus of Pragmatics as posited by Grice and asserted by Yule: utterance interpretation is not a mere issue of decoding messages but rather taking the meaning of the sentences together with contextual information, using inference rules and working out what the speaker means on the basis of the assumption the utterances conform to the maxims. According to Grice, the main advantage of this approach is that it provides a pragmatic explanation for a wide range of phenomena, especially for conversation implicature.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were obtained from the play, *Brigandage* by Taofiq Azeez (2002).

Brigandage – Plot Summary

The Senate Chambers of the Democratic Republic of Nigeria is set to elect its Chief Mover of all motions and Proposer of bills and there are two contestants. The first

contestant reels out his qualifications: he has five degrees including a PhD, he flirts only with the married women and assures the senators that he is a thief like all the other senators who steal people's sweat and blood. The second contestant's academic qualifications and experience are evident on him, his arms are disappearing because they are idle and his belly is becoming larger because it is overfed. He describes himself as the combination of all the wise thieves and robbers painted in the *Devil on the Cross* by Ngugi. He promises the senators to make them billionaires if he is elected because the essence of leaving one's business for the senate is to legitimately corner the wealth of the people. Presenting a "richer" curriculum vitae, the second contestant is spontaneously given standing ovation and unanimously elected. Elected Senator Ota proposes a bill on land sale that the rich should buy up the entire land in the country; repeal the failed Land Use Decree and begin selling soil from the Very Capital Territory in pots and tins in order to make them richer. They would legislate and empower only the senators to trap the air in the sky, put it in tins and bottles for sale to people. This would help check-mate political enemies instead of using violence or assassination. He proposes an act of the parliament to create youth village where there would be a farm for all youths to work.

In addition, he proposes the use of electrically operated machines fixed on the bodies of the youth to extract their blood, sweat and brains which would be sold to industries and channelled through pipelines abroad like oil and gas. In effort to achieve this, more churches and mosques would be established because Africans are religious. So, they would be sermonized into believing that their patience and endurance of the system guarantees their salvation. There would be no trade or students' union and journalists would be employed to propagate the new system. The proposal leads to the establishment of committees to consider the bills which would be passed at the next national conference so that the senate would not breach any provision of the constitution. Subsequently, Senator Dindirin, charged with sexual harassment, accuses the Judge of committing the same offence, emphasizing that four of the six girls are also customers of the Judge. Senator Ota, in his own defence of corruption charges against him, tells the Judge that he (the Judge) has immensely benefitted from the allegations. He also accuses their traditional rulers and the police of connivance. The shocking revelations from the testimonies of the two senators, having revealed that all the institutions of state including the Judiciary (the last hope of common man) have failed, prompt a revolution in the Democratic Republic of Nigeria.

Choice of Text and Relevance to this Pragmatic Analysis

The choice of this text for pragmatics analysis arises from the fact that the play is a satire on the height and width of corruption in our contemporary society. However, the

presentation of the issues of concern using utterances by the characters especially as they make the utterances in public places such as the Senate and in court is strange and thus attracts the attention of the analyst in terms of the implicatures that are generated by such conversations. The entire play was carefully surveyed and the relevant utterances were selected and analysed as presented below.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data 1

Senate President: What are your qualifications for this job?

First Contestant :... (1) Let me start from my education and you must excuse me if I sound arrogant. It is part of my training ... (2) I am Dr. and Dr. Dindirin B.A (Hons), MA, MSC and PhD... (3) I have other degrees but because of the Toronto saga, I prefer to flaunt only these five verifiable ones... I am Dr. Dr. Dindirin BSC, Soc. Mr. IBM, FNM, FNSMMB....

Senator: What is the meaning of all these? (pp.7-8)

First contestant has obviously failed to observe the **maxim of quantity** by giving more than the information required. The part of his response numbered "2" above would have sufficed as the answer to the question posed to him. He also violates the **maxim of relation** in the parts numbered "1" and "3" because the content of these two parts is not relevant to the question asked by the Senate President.

Communication, however, has not broken down because the two interlocutors are corrupt politicians who have a shared knowledge of the fact that the success in the interview is not based on merit but on corrupt process. Once the applicant has money to offer as bribe, or has anyone who could influence a job for him or her, then he or she has the job whether he or she qualifies or not. Similarly, when first contestant starts reeling out his academic qualifications, a senator shouted "what is the meaning of all these?" because that is not what they are waiting to hear from him. Getting a job in our society today is based on bribery, favouritism and nepotism.

Data 2

Senate President: What are your qualifications for this job?

Second Contestant: Are you blind? Can't you see me? Let me tell you something, you can well see that my hand have almost disappeared. They have disappeared because they have no work to do. I have academic qualifications like my friend over there. But I am educated enough to know how to make it in this country and to share the secret of success with whoever cares to gain from me... Have you read *Devil on the Cross*? I am a combination of all the wise thieves and robbers painted by Ngugi... As a politician, I do not consider it proper to tell you how I made and still make my money. The taste of the pudding is in the eating. Just vote for me and you join our club, the club of billionaires (p. 11).

Second contestant has consciously failed to observe Cooperative Principle as supported by its maxims. In this case, he willingly violates the **maxim of relation** as his response does not directly provide an answer to the senate president's question. But the Senate President and other senators see him cooperating in the fact that he is trying to convince them that he is not only educated but also so rich that he no longer does any work by himself except to feed himself. And that is evident in his protruded belly. He has the wisdom of stealing and so, he is now a billionaire. Also, he is ready to teach anyone, who cares, how to steal and since politics is a game of self-centredness, the senators do not only carry him shoulder-high, they start shouting "You don win". The Senators are actually looking for who understands their language - bribery and stealing. Everyone sees his or her political office as an avenue to cut their share from the national cake, and by so doing, enriching themselves.

Data 3

Okoro: ...You Yorubas have your language spoken among people in how many states in the whole of the South West. Your language cannot go into extinction. As for you Hausa your language has not only become the adopted language in the whole of the North, courtesy, your political domination... Friends, I have been talking about political marginalisation before now, I think we must be discussing linguistic marginalization and genocide.

Prof: Now, Mr. Linguist, you have only succeeded in confusing yourself again... What is the value of all the abracadabra pidgin you blew on us which we did not understand? ...And let me come straight to you Okoro, whose fault is it that pidgin is killing your Igbo language and at any rate in what way is that related to marginalization? ... (pp.17-19)

Okoro violates the **maxim of manner** which demands that the interlocutor should be clear, orderly, avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity. His choice of "marginalization" and "genocide" in his contribution leaves his listeners confused and that makes the Prof to explicitly say to him that they do not understand his abracadabra pidgin. Okoro also violates the **maxim of relation** because "marginalisation" and "genocide" do not have any relevance in their current usage and could also be the main reason why his listeners could not understand him.

However, Okoro is still cooperating in the sense that all the interlocutors have a common knowledge that Hausa is the most popularly used language while other languages are being threatened by the incursion of English language in Nigeria. Thus, the poor usage of English language could be due to the negative effect of English on Ibo language. Also, while the Yorubas in Nigeria are solely pursuing western education, thinking that riches and success lie there, the Ibos are more interested in business acumen, where they hope success and riches lie because he who knows the secret of business can succeed in Nigeria without the western education or the assistance of the bad

government in Nigeria. So, speaking incomprehensible English does not make Okoro inferior to the Professor but only suggests that he does not have proficiency in English but experienced in business which is of higher priority to him.

Data 4

Judge: What is your name?

Accused: My name is Jibiti, I live in 419, Gbewiri Street, Agbako village.

Judge: We have not asked about your address, but it is profitable ... (p.21)

The Accused, in his contribution, violates the **maxim of quantity** as supported by the sub-maxim which requires that "do not make your contributions more informative than necessary".

The Judge only seeks to know his name but he gives his name and his address. And that makes the judge to call his attention to it that he, the Accused, has given information more than is required. This implies that the accused is not afraid of the Judge as he is aware that corruption is everywhere. Even the law enforcement agents are guilty of it. The judiciary that used to be the hope of the common man now leaves much to be desired as Judges have been found guilty of the crime. It also implies that the accused is a sacred cow that is above the law. His financiers are so rich and influential that they can overturn justice and set the criminal, who is their agent free at whatever cost.

Data 5

Judge: Can you proceed with your case?

Counsel: My Lord, let me first thank you for your magnanimity. You see, some judges would not even as much as investigate the semantic, contextual, circumstantial and realistic evidences before they pass obnoxious, bias, myopic and prejudiced judgment.

Judge: Mr. Sekoni, please, be brief. There are other cases.

Panel Member 1: ...You are before a panel which needs to understand your points clearly.

Panel Member 2: In other words speak simple English.

Counsel: ... There are several ways of saying: "birds of the same feather flock together". For example, you can reduce that to "on ideological specimen of identical plumage invariably congregate to the closest proximity)..."

Judge:...Defend him briefly and simply (p.22).

The Counsel undoubtedly opts out of the maxims as he fails to observe the **maxim of relation**. The words such as "semantic", "contextual" and "circumstantial" are irrelevant in the context of usage and so, leaves the panel with vague message of his argument. More so, he gives several adjectives to qualify nouns in his first contribution to the conversation. This made the panel to caution him to be brief and clear. In fact, he is asked to "speak simple English."

The contributions of Counsel are not only verbose, they also contain words that are high-sounding and difficult to be understood. Consider words such as “itological”, “plumage” and proximity”. In short, the word “itological” does not exist in English dictionary but the Counsel coined the word in order to confuse the panel. Still, he is perceived to be cooperating because both the Judge and the Counsel share some background information that law profession permits lawyers (Counsels) to use technical language and other legal strategies to convince the court, panel, tribunal or any other judicial institution so as to win their cases. It also implies that the lawyer has been paid for his service and having known that his client is guilty, he is expected to twist the case so that he could win on the ground of technicality.

Data 6

Counsel: ...We have, therefore, subverted, perverted and declared inferior and undesirable all real breasts and made fake breasts more real than the real item. In this way, my Lord, we have made fake breasts more socially and culturally potent in order to assist the sexuality of our young and old men. My Lord, are we guilty on this ground too?

Panel Member II : You cannot be guilty. Ah! You have changed the world. What is true about your fake breast is true of the world at large. The real is now under siege... You can go, you have a father on this panel (pp. 25-26).

Panel Member II fails to observe the **maxim of quality** which requires the contribution of any speaker to be based on truth, “do not say what you believe to be false”. His reply to the Counsel’s question, “You cannot be guilty” is false because the panel member II does not mean what he is saying, he wants to be sarcastic. So, he lies. Also, panel member II violates **maxim of quality** when he tells another lie saying, “you have a father on this panel”. The person he refers to as the counsel’s father is the Judge who is not actually the counsel’s father. Panel member II refers to the judge as counsel’s father because he knows that as a father is ready to protect his son who would carry on his name when he dies, so is the Judge ready to shield the counsel and his guilty client from the wrath of the law since the counsel has earlier exposed the Judge’s corrupt practices and how the Judge benefits from the counsel’s client’s corrupt practices. Thus, the counsel and his client are Judge’s children in corruption.

Data 7

Counsel: What is the relationship between you and honourable senator Ojelu?

Citizen: There is no relationship between us.

Counsel: You mean you don’t know senator Ojelu?

Citizen: Oh, I see, I know senator Ojelu but we are not related.

Counsel: ... He doesn’t seem to want to cooperate. He has not answered a single question directly before this panel...

The first contribution of the citizen is based on falsehood because he actually knows Honourable Senator Ojelu but he first denies it and he is also aware that Chief Ojelu has good information about the case at hand. Therefore, he violates the **maxim of quality** for twisting the truth.

The citizen fails to observe the **maxim of quantity** which demands from the speaker a contribution that is not less or more informative than is required. In his second response, he only admits that he knows Chief Ojelu but fails to give additional information, defining the nature of their relationship. This threatens the flow of communication as the required information is not supplied. The Citizen, therefore, incurs the attack of the counsel for wasting the time of the panel. This implies that the citizen is a liar and he is making huge effort to hide the truth that could help the court arrive at the truth of the matter as he is guilty of the charges against him.

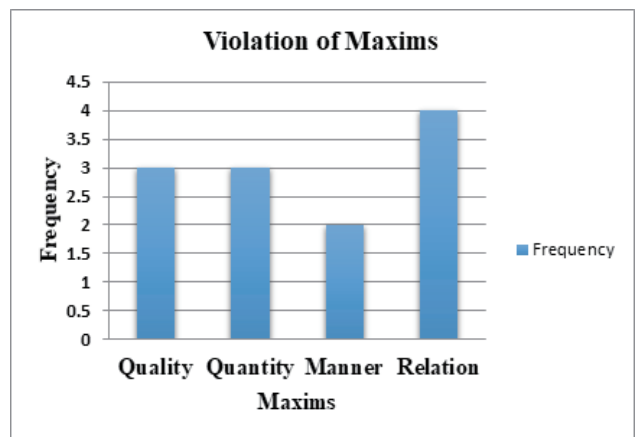
Data 8

Counsel: My Lord, I am a very honest liar. I am not brought up to tell a dishonest truth either. So, let me lie truthfully by telling you that we knew...

Judge: What exactly are you saying? (p. 55)

The Counsel does not observe the **maxim of manner** which stipulates that a speaker should avoid obscurity of expression but encourages interlocutors to be perspicuous. He describes himself as an *honest liar* and was not brought up to tell a *dishonest truth*. But, it is understood that whoever lies is dishonest and whoever says the truth is honest, but the counsel rather chooses to use the two opposite words (honesty & lie/ dishonesty & truth) side by side. This makes his contribution unclear and difficult to be understood. Consequently, the Judge asks him what exactly he is saying or the message he is trying to pass across. This implies that he is not only guilty of the corruption tendencies, but also proud of his dishonest act which he believes to be equal to honesty.

The frequency distribution of the violation of maxims as discussed above is presented in a bar chart below:



CONCLUSION

From the selected conversations above, it is observed that speakers try their best to cooperate between each other to enhance the flow of communication. However, each time that any of the maxims that support Cooperative Principles is not observed, implicature is generated. In *conversation one* above, **the maxim of quantity** and **maxim of relation** were not observed. In *conversation two*, the **maxim of relation** was violated. In *conversation three*, there was violation of the **maxim of manner** while the interlocutors broke the **maxim of quantity** and the **maxim of relation** in *conversations four and five* respectively. Similarly, the **maxim of quality** was not observed in *conversation six* but in *conversation seven* both **maxim of quality** and **maxim of quantity** were flouted. Also, the **maxim of manner** was violated in *conversation eight*. The bar chart above shows that maxim of relation is most frequently violated while maxim of manner is least. This implies that criminals, when they are tried in the court of law, deliberately avoids giving relevant answers to the questions that are posed to them with the intention of frustrating the judicial process that might bring them to book.

The instance of non-observance of the Cooperative Principles as supported by its maxims establishes the fact that as much as interlocutors strive to avoid anything that would cause communication breakdown, they still find it difficult to obey Grice's Cooperative Principles and its maxims because speakers have different ways of passing their messages across to the listener. The flow of communication, despite the violations of Gricean maxims, relies on basic assumptions and shared knowledge, believing that their listeners would be able to infer what they meant (implied) from their utterance(s) or what they explicitly say.

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