



PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF FICTIONAL CONVERSATIONS IN IFEOMA OKOYE'S *THE FOURTH WORLD*

Obiageli NNAMANI

English & Literary Studies Department, Enugu State University of Science & Technology, Enugu.
obiageli.nnamani@esut.edu.ng

&

Martha UGWU

Godfrey Okoye University, Uguommu, Nike.

Abstract

*During communication, parties engaged in conversations do so in order to send and receive effective and meaningful information. In fiction, conversations are crucial as they reveal the uniqueness of characters while advancing the plot of the novel. Conversations also allow characters to express their thoughts, feelings, philosophies and perceptions which result to effective communication. Some writers have explored Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World* from social and eco feminist perspectives, but none have examined the conversations in the novel using pragmatics lens. Using Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicature – Co-operative Principles- this study sought to analyze diverse conversations involving the main character and other characters in order to discover the degree to which the characters in the novel adhered or violated the maxims. The study concluded that in the pragmatic analysis of the fourteen selected conversations involving the main character, the Maxim of Quality was obeyed twice and flouted four times, the Maxim of Quantity was obeyed twice and violated twice, the Maxim of Manner was obeyed five times while the Maxim of Relevance was flouted once.*

Keywords: Pragmatics, Grice Theory, Conversational Implicature, Co-operative Principles, Maxims:

Introduction

Pragmatics is mostly interested in the process of producing language and in its producers. Pragmatics according to Chomsky centres on the performance – the use to which language is applied for communicative purposes. In Chomsky's view, language users and how they use the language remain the main focus of Pragmatics. Parties in communication often recognize the language use within a particular context and the speech act being performed. Participants in a communication intend to convey to their listeners their knowledge, perceptions and philosophies of life. This information may be verbally expressed or implied by the interpretation of utterances or gestural dispositions. Hence in Pragmatics, context plays a significant role in the interpretation of non-verbal communication and deductions (presuppositions) are made within the speech contexts.

Ifeoma Okoye's "*The Fourth World*" is a fictional story which portrayed the social divides between the haves and have nots in our societies. It succinctly reflects the marginalization,



humiliation, injustice, oppression and pitiable condition within which the poor in our society lives. On the other extreme, those who have access to wealth take it for granted and at the same time, use it to oppress the underprivileged both in word and in action. Okoye using the second person narrative technique engaged her characters in continuous communicative interaction. These characters lived their normal everyday life where interactions and communication among their neighbours flowed naturally.

In order to understudy the type of communication that transpired among the characters in this fictional text, a pragmatic analysis of the conversations in the novel needs to be conducted. Mey, (2004) suggests that pragmatics involves the process of producing language and language users. Pragmatics is not only concerned with the subject of language use but also the people who use language and the context within which they use it. It also embodies the meaning ascribed to the varied interactions and utterances. Grice's Cooperative Principles states that in a communication event, the parties should make their conversations suitable to the communicative need and context while giving desirable and relevant information.

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. Grice (1975)

Thus, in order to study the conversations that transpired between the main character and other characters in the text, Grice's Cooperative Principles or maxims will form the tool of analysis. In every discourse, the knowledge and understanding of context and background play a meaningful role in helping the parties to arrive at meaning of what is communicated. Sometimes this meaning can be inferred or implied. Grice' conversational theory suggests that communication is a cooperative effort of both parties which means they are by implication meant to obey the conversational cooperative maxims.

The Four Conversational Maxims

Grice's conversational maxims include the following:

⇒ **Quantity:**

- ❖ Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the talk exchange).
- ❖ Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

⇒ **Quality:**

- ❖ Do not say what you believe to be false.
- ❖ Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.



⇒ **Relation:**

- ❖ Be relevant.

⇒ **Manner:**

- ❖ Avoid obscurity of expression.
- ❖ Avoid ambiguity.
- ❖ Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- ❖ Be orderly.

Quantity: This maxim demands that speakers be as informative as required. They should not say more than what is required for the current purpose of exchange. Speakers are expected to give as much information as is necessary for their interlocutors to understand their utterances, but never give more information than is necessary. The speaker/writer should give sufficient information that buttresses and makes communication effective for both parties. The inability of the participants to observe this maxim in the talk exchange causes floating or violation of the maxim. The maxim of quantity emphasizes the need to make one's contribution in a discourse as adequate as needed, but not to supply excess information.

According to Grice, the principle of **Quality** requires that in every speech event, speakers make their contribution true and honest. This means that the speakers are bound by this maxim to give information and evidence only for what they know to be true. At the same time, readers and hearers expect that the writers and speakers on their part adhere to the maxim by telling exactly what needs to be heard or known in the speech event. Therefore telling lies or giving false information means the violation of the maxim of quality. When the violation of this maxim is done intentionally, it leads to Implicature.

Relation: This maxim insists that speakers should be relevant. That is, do not say anything that is not related or relevant to the speech event. This maxim stresses the need for logical orderliness of the information to be provided. Speakers/writers are to organize their utterances/discourses in such a way that they are relevant to the on-going conversation. This means that each person's contribution in any discourse must be in agreement or conformity with the topic of discussion. It must be relevant to the time of the utterance. The concept of timing is very fundamental to the maxim of relevance. Sometimes, delayed responses may violate the maxim of relation because events might have overtaken the question(s) earlier asked.

Manner: Be polite or perspicuous, avoid obscurity of expression, and avoid ambiguity. This maxim stresses the need to be orderly and clear in one's expression. It dictates that



speakers and writers avoid ambiguity and obscurity in their utterances. This means that logical sequential arrangement of information provided is necessary to make the hearers/readers have a good understanding of a discourse. The information that should come first must not be placed last, and the one that is to come last should not come first. When any of the maxims are flouted, there is a conversational Implicature which is an additional unspoken meaning conveyed beyond what the words mean (Adedimeji, 2010), (Finegan, 2008) in Anieke, et al. (2020).

Ordinarily, parties in conversation aim at giving out information in order pass across achieve a communicative goal. However, the conversational analysis theory assumes that individuals in communication are adhering to the cooperative principles rather than at other times of unplanned communication. Thus, Grice provided ways by which participants can be observed as flouting the maxims either intentionally or disobeying the rules of the maxims. Grice was well aware, however, that there are very many occasions when people fail to observe the maxims. These include;

Ways of failing to observe the maxims:

- ❖ **Flouting a maxim** - Grice calls it deliberate violations of the maxims ‘...flouting of a maxim results in the speaker conveying, in addition to the literal meaning of his utterance, an additional meaning, which is a conversational Implicature. (Brown & Yule, 32).
- ❖ **Violating a maxim** - The speaker may **violate** a maxim e.g. by telling lie or speaking about a matter that he/she lacks concrete evidence.
- ❖ **Infringing a maxim** – A speaker/writer may infringe a maxim by mixing up information. For instance, telling a long story which is untrue and irrelevant to the speech event. At the end, whatever is communicated would not be understood by anyone.
- ❖ **Opting out of a maxim** - The speaker may **opt out** of a maxim by using a phrase that eliminates or mitigates the effect of the maxims and signals this to the addressee—this phrase is called a hedge. The action is hedging.

Statement of the Problem

A few scholarly attentions have been given to Ifeoma Okoye’s, *The Fourth World*. Ekpang (2016) assessed the proverbs in *The Fourth World* as they relate to speech acts, pragmatics, Implicature and supposition. Onyeamechi (2016) explored the novel from an ecofeminism lens, while Odinye assessed the novel from Marxist and feminist standpoints. No study has examined the conversations in Okoye’s *The Fourth World* through the lens of Grice’s Conversational Theory. In the light of this identified gap, the problem which this study investigates is the extent to which characters in selected conversations with the main



character in Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World* violated or adhered to the maxims of Quantity, Quality, Manner and Relation based on Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicature.

Objective

The objective of this study is to undertake a pragmatic analysis of the conversations in Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World* in order to examine the extent to which the characters in their conversations obeyed or flouted Grice's maxims of Quantity, Quality, Manner and Relation.

Literature Review

This literature review is designed to examine the studies that have been done on Okoye's *The Fourth World* as well as those carried out on H.P Grice's (1975) Theory of Implicature in order to establish the relevance of the current study. Onyeamachi (2016) explored Okoye's *The Fourth World* from the lens of ecofeminism and environmental psychology, arguing that the human mind and behaviour are shaped by the environment. She avers that the damage meted out on the environment leaves a scar on the characters in the novel.

Iwuchukwu (2018) studied the faces of apartheid depicted in two novels, Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World* and Festus Iyayi's *Violence*. The researcher's main focus was to expose the faces of apartheid prevalent in Africa as occasioned by the social injustices, discrimination, exploitation, social class stratification, and oppression of the majority group by a simple minority holding power. The author concludes that the social attitude of the affluent occasioned by the political structure projects the vision of a callous and insensitive society that encourages and perpetuates apartheid.

Using the lens of Feminism, Marxism and the Post-Colonial Theory, Odinye (2018), explored how the female gender is adversely affected by social, political, cultural and economic factors in *The Fourth World*. The researcher uncovered how high levels of corruption, marginalization, oppression, poverty, hopelessness and gender subordination can aggravate the suffering of most women and children in our society, limiting their opportunity for self-reliance.

Ekpang (2016) assessed the pragmatic implication of the pervasive use of proverbs in *The Fourth World*. Subjecting the proverbs used in the text to pragmatic implicature, the researcher concludes that proverbs, besides their use in conveying varied messages, relied on contexts, speakers, audiences, situations and topics that initiated their use. By so doing, the context eliminates any possible pragmatic failures.



Igwedibia & Anieke (2020) examined the conversations in Achebe's *Arrow of God* using Grice's Cooperative Principles. Besides revealing that some characters obeyed the maxims, and others violated it, their study indicated that 'implicatures are triggered by violations to underscore the authorial intention and achieve literariness of the text'.

Dewi (2021) used a qualitative descriptive analysis to examine the conversations that occurred during COVID 19 pandemic EFL online classes. The result of the study showed that due to the challenges associated with virtual teaching, violations of the Maxim of Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner occurred, which resulted in conversational implicatures. Dewi suggests that these implicatures could be minimized if speakers obeyed the maxims.

Rich- Adigun (2020) examined implicatures inherent in responses to questions asked in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* Through the use of purposive sampling and H.P Grice's Cooperative Principle, it was discovered that while the character's violation of the maxims generated implicature, implicature perfected the playwright's theme, characterization and style.

Using the Grecian Theory of Implicature, Osunbade and Ononye (2017) investigated implicit meanings of conflict discourses in Chimamanda Adichie's novels, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The findings of the study demonstrated that pragmatic inferences of figurative and non-figurative expressions contributed to implicit meanings in domestic, religious and ethnic conflicts.

The research studies reviewed in this section of the paper examined Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World* from Socialist, Feminist, Marxist and the Post-Colonial perspectives. The only pragmatic study carried out on *The Fourth World* focused on the proverbs used in the novel, leaving out the conversations. The other studies examined in this review used the Grecian Theory of Implicature to examine conversations in Achebe's *Arrow of God*, EFL online teachings, Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease* as well as Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of the Yellow Sun*. None of the studies dealt with conversations in Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World*. This is what differentiates the earlier studies from this current one.

Methodology

In order to analyze the conversations of the characters in Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World*, this study adopted the linguistic analytic tool of H.P. Grice, Conversational Implicature, which is expressed in the cooperative principles and tabulated into four – 4 maxims .To ascertain the extent to which the characters obeyed or flouted the Cooperative



Principles, fourteen conversations involving the main character and relevant to the maxims were purposively selected and weighted using the scale of H.P. Grice's Cooperative principles.

Analysis of Conversations

An analysis of the fourteen conversations connected to the main character and relevant to the maxims revealed that some of the characters in the novel obeyed while others flouted the maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relevant and Manner.

A. Maxim of Quality- truth

The maxim of Quality states that the parties in a conversation speak the truth and not tell lies. The following conversations are examined to ascertain the level of compliance to the maxim of quality:

1. Ogo: 'I am not going back to FGSS', Ogom said solemnly.
Chira: Chira stared at her. 'You're joking, Ogom,' she said.
Ogo: 'No, I'm not. I'm not like you, Chira. I hate studying. Classwork has been tough for me even with your help. 'I'm finished with studying. I am really.'

2. Priest: 'He could have borrowed from someone to pay his church dues... was your father Starving before he died? Was his family starving? I hear you are at secondary school. From where does he get the money to pay your school fees?'

Chira: He mortgaged some of his share of the family land and borrowed heavily too.
Priest: Couldn't he have used some of the money to pay his church dues? Was sending you to the secondary more important than saving his soul? (Okoye, p.78)

3. Amos: Your father must have kept some money behind' Amos said. Don't tell me You've spent it all already and have borrowed money on top. Something must be wrong somewhere?
Chira: 'He didn't leave any money behind. He never had enough.' (Okoye, p.82)

4. Maks: Maks smiled. Chira, you go to university because you want a degree. You want a degree because you want a good job. You want a good job because you want a good salary and you want huge fringe benefits. All these lead to one thing- money. (Okoye, p. 190)



In the first conversation between Ogom and Chira, Ogom obeys the maxim of quality because she told Chira exactly the truth about her recent plan. Although Chira initially did not believe her, Ogom had spoken the truth. In that regard the maxim of Quality was unconsciously obeyed, not calling forth any kind of Implicature. They both understood the information communicated

The second conversation that ensued between Chira and the Catholic priest in Umuba portrayed a violation and opting out of the maxim of quality. The priest in his desperate desire to obtain what he claimed to be his right told lies to Chira as well referred to some information unconnected to the present state of discussion and thereby causing conversational Implicature. The priest's insistence on Akalaka paying his dues even if it meant borrowing by implication insinuates that salvation is bought with money paid as dues in the church. The priest's unspoken intention called forth Conversational Implicature or inferred meaning as proposed by theory of Conversational analysis.

Again, the interaction between Amos, Akalaka's brother, and his niece, Chiralum, violates the maxim of quality. In the conversation, Amos pretends that he was unaware that his late brother, wife and children are indigent yet he accused Chira of squandering money. His lie violates the maxim of quality which demands that the parties state only what they know to be truth. Amos' lie calls forth implied meaning or Implicature of his communicated discourse. The unspoken meaning behind Amos's words is that he is a wicked man who has no good intention for his late brother's family.

In addition, Maks' subtle boast during his interaction with Chira completely opted out of the Maxim of quality. He lied in the sense that people do not go to the university only to make money. People can go to a university to receive training or to become exposed. Maks intentionally made that statement to show off his affluence in order to ridicule Chira's quest for education. Maks' unspoken statement called forth conversational Implicature of his hidden intention.

The few conversations sampled from Okoye's *The Fourth World* revealed that the characters in their daily interactions, though unaware of the requirement of Cooperative maxim of quality, obeyed it at some point and at other times, flouted the maxim by either telling lies or making statements they lack evidence for.

B. Maxim of Quantity - Be informative. Do not say what is more than is required for the exchange

1. Chira: 'You can do only two things to yam. Boil it or roast it.' (Okoye, p.14)



2. Chira: 'Engaged to who? When?'
Ogom: 'His name is Chikeson. He lives in the US and was here briefly to see his parents.
Actually, his main reason for visiting Nigeria was to find himself a wife. He has returned to the US but will be back again in a month's time to see to the second part of the traditional wedding. Then he'll take me with him to the US. We'll have the white wedding in the US. He's such a pleasant man, Chira. I'm sure you'll like him when you meet him. (Okoye, p.112)

3. Kodili: 'I'm disgusted with you, Chira,' Kodili said. 'Other young women would have jumped at Maks' proposal. You must be stupid to continue talking about going to university when you couldn't even finish secondary school. Who's going to pay for your education, Chiralum? Is it me or your dead father? (Okoye, p.198)

In the first conversation, Chira adhered to the maxim of quantity by stating her intention in a plain proverb. She did not make a long speech nor use a proverb that would be difficult to interpret. Thus she did not signal any Implicature. Furthermore, Ogom and Kodili flouted the maxim of quantity in the second and third conversation above in various contexts. In the second conversation between Ogom and Chira, Ogom, out of excitement, gave more information than was required. She equally opted out of the maxim of quality by stating with certainty that Chikeson will come back to take her when she lacked the evidence to prove such a statement. In the third conversation, Kodili, out of frustration and depression, poured out her anguish on Chira instead of asking the simple question she intended to put before her. The conversational Implicature Kodili signalled was her unspoken quest for a change of social status which she expected Chira to orchestrate by accepting Maks' marriage proposal. In the literary text, Kodili, Chira's mother, further violates the maxim of quality because one who is determined to complete one's studies in spite of obstacles is not stupid but ambitious.

C. Maxim of Manner

The maxim of manner has four sub maxims: Be perspective, avoid obscurity of expression, avoid ambiguity be brief and be orderly. Some of the characters in *The Fourth World* obeyed the maxim of Manner while others flouted or opted out at different points of conversations in the text. In the following conversations, Ogom, Jude and Chira obeyed the maxim of manner that required that a conversation should be brief and orderly.

i. Maxim of Manner (Be orderly)

1. Jude: I admire your courage, Chira, Jude said.



- Ogom: 'I do too,' Ogom said. She took Chira's hand in hers and squeezed it.
Jude: 'Keep it up. Chira, Jude said.
Ogom: 'I'm sure she will.' Ogom squeezed Chira's hand again. (Okoye, p.60-61)
2. Chira: 'Please Madam, give me a trial. I need a job desperately. My mother and I are starving.'
Dr. Ajali: 'Where is your father?'
Chira: 'He's dead. My mother is ill. She can't continue with her hair plaiting job.'
Dr. Ajali: 'What's wrong with her?'
Chira: 'I don't know. She complains of tiredness and dizziness and chest pain. She complains of a splitting headache all the time.'
Dr. Ajali: 'Has she seen a doctor?'
Chira: 'No, Madam.'
Dr. Ajali: 'You must take her to the hospital as soon as possible.'
Chira: 'There is no money to do so. We are in debt...' (Okoye, p.176)
3. Chira: 'Ogom, I think looking for the signboards is not enough, Chira said.
Ogom: 'What else can we do?' Ogom asked.
Chira: 'Go into the business houses and ask whoever we see there whether they need workers.'
Ogom: 'Don't you think they would put up a notice if they did?'
Chira: 'What if they were putting off writing the advert indefinitely or haven't quite made up their minds?'
Ogom: 'You mean we'll make up their minds for them?'
Chira: 'Exactly', Chira said. I suggest we go to Ogui Road this time,' (Okoye, p.135)
4. Mama Egodi: 'Sorry about what happened today', Mama Egodi said. She was carrying a large hand of green bananas on her head,
Chira: 'What? Chira asked...
Mama Egodi: 'Were you not at your mother's hair –plaiting place today?'
Chira: 'No, I didn't go there today.'
Mama Egodi: 'Was your mother there?'
Chira: 'No, she wasn't. She's ill again. Any trouble there today?'
Mama Egodi: 'Yes, and I'm happy both of you were not there.'
Chira: 'What happened, Mama Egodi?'
Mama Egodi: 'Bulldozers, Chira, four of them. They razed everything to the ground...' (Okoye, p.144)



Certain turn-taking cues guide conversations between two people. In the sampled conversations above, the characters adhere to the maxim of Manner and conducted their discussion in an orderly manner. This means they asked and answered questions in a brief, unambiguous, and orderly manner. In the first dialogue, Ogom and Jude, in commiserating with and appreciating Chira's courage in dealing with the pain of her father's death, put their views in clear and plain sentences. The three shared the background knowledge of Chira's current predicament and so could make accurate statements that are relevant to the context.

The characters in sample two- Dr. Ajali and Chira- observed the Maxim of Manner by being orderly, brief and unambiguous in their dialogue. They equally observed the other maxims of Quality and Quantity by asking relevant questions and offering honest, brief and straightforward responses. Thus, there was no room for implied meaning of their interaction that could call forth Conversational Implicature.

Furthermore, the third and fourth dialogue between Chira and Ogom and Mama Egodi and Chira respectively also observed the Maxim of Manner. They were unambiguous in their statements and the elicited responses were appropriate to the questions asked or statements made.

ii. Maxim of Manner (Be Relevant)

In Okoye's *The Fourth World*, Kodili flouted this rule by giving an apparently unrelated response to the question asked.

1. Kodili: Who is it, Chira Kodili called.

Chira: It's Nebolisa,'Chira said, watching Nebolisa tug at her dirty oversized gown.

Kodili: What does she want?'

Chira: 'She wants some food,' Chira said looking at the dirty and chipped plastic bowl in Nebolisa's hand.

Kodili: 'Doesn't she know my husband is dead' I can't afford to give her food anymore.' (Okoye, p.93)

In the above conversations, Kodili flouted the maxim of relevance by switching from the topic of conversation to asking a question unrelated to the topic at hand. The unstated connection between Chira's statement and Kodili's question called forth conversational implicature because it unravels her unspoken intention that Nebolisa should not come to her for help as she did in the past when her husband was alive. Her question implicates that a widow's substance is reduced by the death of her spouse.



Results

Using Grice's Cooperative Maxims as a yardstick to judge the fourteen selected conversations involving the main character and other characters, it was discovered that the Maxim of Quality was obeyed twice while it was flouted four times. Again the Maxim of Quantity was obeyed twice and violated twice. The maxim of manner was obeyed five times while the Maxim of Relevance was flouted once.

Discussion

This study sought to investigate the extent to which conversations in Okoye's *The Fourth World* obeyed or violated H.P Grice's Co-operative Principles. Like Igwedibia & Anieke (2020) discovered from the conversations in Achebe's *Arrow of God*, this study revealed that while more characters obeyed the Maxims, others violated the maxims and each time a maxim was violated and implicature generated, a deeper meaning was added to the context. The finding from this study equally aligns with Osunbade and Ononye's (2017) finding that in Adichie's novels, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the violation of the Maxims of Quantity, Quality, Manner and Relation generated Implicatures which contributed to implicit meanings in the novels.

Again, whereas Dewi's study (2021) discovered that the challenges associated with virtual teaching caused violations of the Maxim of Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner, the finding from this study demonstrates that the flouting of H.P Grice's conversational principles is not limited to virtual conversations but occurs in face- to face conversations.

Conclusion

In communication, talk between two or more people are viewed as conversations. It is through this interactive means that they exchange their thoughts, feelings, ideas, explain their philosophy of life and share their doubts and fears. In every literary text, fictional and non-fictional, characters are assigned interactive roles through which the writers tell their story and advance the plot of the text. All the characters in the sampled text were able to negotiate the meanings of the various conversations/discourse because of their shared background knowledge or information. Their different realities were intertwined because there was often a context that provided for conversation and negotiation of meaning.

The conversations between the characters in Ifeoma Okoye's '*The Fourth World*' has been studied and analyzed using the Grice's theory of Conversational Implicature. By using this Linguistic tool of analysis - Cooperative Principle's maxims, it was discovered that some of the characters without paying attention to Grice cooperative principles, obeyed the maxims in their conversation without signalling any Conversational Implicature – inferring the unspoken intention of the parties within any context or speech occasion. On the other



hand, some of the characters, though unaware of the cooperative principles and how they can be violated, disobeyed some of the maxims through exaggeration, ambiguity, giving more information than was required or deviating from the topic of discussion in a speech event. This supports the assertion of Thomas (2013) who argues that pragmatics is not only the subject of language use and language user but one that revolves around “meaning in interaction.” This meaning represents the view that conversational meanings are not limited to words, speakers and hearers (readers) alone. Rather, he argues that making meaning of any discourse is a dynamic process which involves negotiation of the meaning between the speaker/hearer/reader, context of the utterance, (which could be physical, social and linguistics) and the meaning of the potential of an utterance. (Thomas, 2013).

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