

PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF RURAL DISCOURSE OF IGBO VILLAGE MEETINGS: AMANDIM OLO VILLAGE AS A CASE STUDY

Goodluck C. Kadiri & Joekin Ekwueme

Department of English & Literary Studies

University of Nigeria, Nsukka,

Enugu State, Nigeria

goodluck.kadiri@unn.edu.ngjoekinekwueme@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study is a pragmatic analysis of rural discourse of Amandim Olo village meetings. It explores how pragmatic inferences and contexts help in the maximization of point of relevance in communicative events, using Sperber and Wilson's (1986) Relevance Theoretical Approach. Data are retrieved from audio recorded minutes of the discourse which is transcribed into English and analyzed qualitatively according to RT procedures. The findings reveal that complex (long) sentences, proverbs, elliptical statements, ostensive cues and deixis take longer processing efforts; but familiar words, and simple (short) sentences are easily processed. Thus, the researchers conclude that pragmatic inferences and contexts assist the hearer to interpret the speaker's communicative intentions in oral rural discourse of Igbo village meetings.

Key Words: rural discourse, relevance theory, context, inference and pragmatics

1. Introduction

Language is a medium by which people communicate and interact. Encyclopedia Britannica Online defines language as system of conventional spoken, manual, or written symbols of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves (<https://britannica.com> Retrieved on 5th, May 2018). Nonetheless, Agbedo (2015) mentions that multiple opinions on the concept of language approached from different metaphorical perspective abound. Since language is 'purely human' as most scholars believe, humans manipulate it in various ways to communicate different ideas and intentions. It is no doubt that people use language in various contexts and interpret meanings based on sociolinguistic contexts in which utterances are made. It is, however, pertinent to note that the interpretation of meanings can pose little problems to the interlocutors in that, the hearer may not actually interpret correctly the speaker's intended meaning due to the long cost of the processing efforts which could be as a result of the irrelevance of the utterances made.

Conversely, language is the carrier of one's identity and personality stamp. It is an indispensable part of our culture because it is through the use of language that cultural nuances are expressed. Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010) amplify that language is the means the older ones in the society use to 'teach' the younger ones the culture of their people. Every language

group, therefore, has its own distinct way of using language to convey meaning. Meaning in itself is an abstract concept. The borderline between semantics and pragmatics lies in the fact that semantics studies meaning at the lexical and sentential level. Agbedo (2015) explains further that semantics explains the way in which words and sentences of various grammatical constructions are used and understood by competent writers and speakers of a given language. Pragmatics on the other hand is understood to be the study of meaning over and above the level of the sentence; it is the study of utterances based on the context of use. In the same vein, Stalnaker (as cited in Agbedo2015) avers that pragmatics is the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed.

Pragmatic analysis deals with the study of what is intended by a speaker/writer and how it is or should be interpreted by the hearer/reader. Pragmatics, therefore, focuses on the meanings of a text, spoken or written, over and above their purely conceptual senses. In other words, pragmatics looks at meanings behind the words because many speakers/writers say one thing but mean another. This is perhaps why Korta and Perry (2015) explain that Grice conceived the semantic notion that words and sentence meaning were ultimately based on the speaker's intention or what he calls the M-intentions. Hence, speakers/writers normally say things in different ways depending on who they are talking or writing to. The contexts of the text may lead the listener/reader to infer a meaning that is intended. Generally, speakers or writers communicate intentions through the contexts of the text. Consequently, hearers infer the speaker's communicative intentions via shared background knowledge, mutual contextual beliefs and general assumptions. Igbo village meeting discourse and of course other discourses, written or spoken, are such that background experience, contexts and assumptions are put into considerations before meanings, whether implicit or explicit are reached.

The amount of efforts put in processing one form of utterance is, nonetheless, different from efforts put in processing another. All these depend on their points of relevance. Inference and cognition may assist in the interpretation of the speaker's or writer's intentions. But this is yet to be established. The problem of this research, therefore, is to find out how cognition and communicative inferences aid in interpreting the speaker's or writer's communicative intentions. Since the study is based on oral discourse of village meetings, it would be limited to how cognitions and communicative inferences assist in the listener's processing of meanings in rural discourse of Igbo village meetings, using AmandimOlo as a case study.

The general objective of this study is to analyze the rural discourse of AmandimOlo village meeting with the aim of juxtaposing how inferences and contexts aid communication. In a specific term, this study explicates the role of contexts, shared background experiences and general assumptions in the interpretation of speakers' communicative intentions by the hearer. The study is also set to determine the cost and effect of processing an utterance and how relevance is achieved in communication.

A good number of researchers and scholars have written and contributed to knowledge in areas related to this particular field of research. Ayeomoni and Akinkulere (2012), in the paper, "Pragmatic Analysis of Victory and Inaugural Speeches of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua", pragmatically analyzed President Yar'Adua Victory and Inaugural addresses with the goal of identifying the speech acts features of the President's speeches. This was done in order to determine the global pattern of pragmatic moves of the selected political speeches. Data of this study was drawn from the Victory and Inaugural addresses downloaded from the internet and analyzed following the speech act theory of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). The findings

revealed that the Overall Relative Frequency Percentage for the selected speeches were as follow: Assertive 60%, Directive 35%, Expressive 15%, Vindictive 40%, Commissive 30% and Declarative 20%. The result showed that President Yar'Adua relied more on sentences that perform assertive acts than other speech acts.

The focus of Pragmatics as a functional linguistic discipline was further ignited by the work of Ubong and Effong (2012) who conducted a study entitled "Pragmatic Analyses of President Goodluck Jonathan and Barrack Obama's Inaugural Addresses" with the aim of determining the similarities and differences in the speeches. Ubong and Effong drew the data for this study from the published speeches of both presidents from the Punch Newspaper and the internet respectively. The study employed two approaches for its analysis: qualitative and quantitative approaches. The analysis was anchored on Speech Act Theory and Politeness Principles of Face Acts. The result showed that the speeches were relatively alike because each spoke for the entire nation, regardless of his political party. Both speeches made use of 'representatives' and 'commissives' however, President Jonathan's commissives show predominance in the use of modal verbs to express intentions; President Obama's commissives consist of modal verbs and infinitive clauses to project volition and intentions.

Similarly, Afeez (n.d) made a wonderful contribution in the field pragmatics when he conducted a study on the pragmatic analysis of selected cartoons in Vanguard Newspaper. The aim of the study was to investigate how pragmatic elements could be deployed to adequately interpret the ways in which cartoons and their utterances depict and satirize sociopolitical realities in Nigeria. The data of this study was drawn from sixteen pocket cartoons from Vanguard editions between June and September, 2010. The analysis was anchored on pragmatic elements such as speech acts, implicature and deixis. The findings revealed that utterances used in these cartoons were mainly 'assertives' and 'directives' which signified the state of sociopolitical affairs of the state. Afeez also found that an utterance can have more than one 'illocutions' and 'perlocutions' and the 'perlocution' may vary with regard to the addressees.

Osunbade (2009) also carried out a study on Explicature in Conversational Discourse in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, anchoring it on Relevance Theory of Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995). The aim of the study was to explore the processes by which meanings of utterances are driven and modified in use. The method employed in this study was the selection of 25% of transactions in the novel. The findings revealed that the recovery of explicature involves reference assignment, bridging, gap-filling, disambiguation and embedding propositional contexts of expression into higher level explicatures. Osunbade concludes that the study of explicature in *Purple Hibiscus* helps greatly in understanding conversation in the text and also assists in providing access for the interpretation of a text.

In conclusion, there are much scholarly works on pragmatic analysis of speeches, using various theoretical frameworks such as speech acts, conversational implicature, politeness theory, explicature, deixis etc. However, it appears that no scholar or researcher has done an in-depth Relevance theoretical account of rural discourse of Igbo village meeting, taking Amandim Oloas a case study. This is, therefore, the gap this study intends to fill.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson's Relevance Theory as its analytical tool. The theory was first propounded in 1986 and later revised in 1995. Relevance Theory borrowed insights from Grice's Cooperative Principle, which attempts to work out in detail one of Grice's central claims: that an essential feature of most human communication is the expression and recognition of intentions.

Relevance Theory (RT henceforth) aims to describe and explain how humans understand communications. According to Grice (1989), as stated by Allott (2013), "when a speaker means something by an utterance the speaker has a set of nested intentions. The first set of these is the intention to produce a certain response in the hearer" (p. 11). Hence, the hearer deploys all kinds of information available to get at what the speaker intended to convey. RT, therefore, is a cognitive approach to human communication principally based on the claim that human cognition is geared to the hearer's search for (and maximization of) relevance in the information they process in the course of a conversational discourse (Wilson & Sperber, 2006). In sum, RT is a framework for the study of cognition, proposed primarily in order to provide a psychologically realistic account of communication (Allott 2013). Wilson and Sperber (2006) explain further that RT claims that the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise enough and predictable enough to guide the hearer towards the speaker's meaning. Consequently, RT is restricted to the relationship between utterances and interpretations. RT is also understood to be a psychological model for understanding the cognitive interpretation of language as well as inferential approaches to pragmatics. Inferential approaches to pragmatics hold that the linguistic meaning of a word decoded by the receiver is just one of many inputs that can affect interpretation. RT argues that the thing that causes an input to stand out from others is its relevance to the receiver. Wilson and Sperber (2006) further expound that 'processing effort' is the effect required to process an input (utterance) to the point that its cognitive effects are derived. Specifically, "this is the effort taken to represent the input, access contextual information and derive any cognitive effect" (Wilson 2009: 394). Wilson and Sperber exemplify that a longer sentence will require more effort to process than a shorter one. An uncommon word, or an uncommon sense or an ambiguous word, requires more processing effort than common ones.

According to Wilson and Sperber (2006), there are two broad principles of RT. They are cognitive principle and communicative principle of relevance. Cognitive principle of relevance is geared towards the maximization of relevance; that is, to achieve as many contextual cognitive effects as possible for a little processing effort as possible. On the other hand, communicative principle of relevance states that by the act of making an utterance, the speaker is conveying that, what he has said is worth listening to; that is, it will provide 'cognitive effects' worth of processing effort required to find the meaning. To explain the second mode of communication therefore, inferences and contexts might come to play. Inference is a step in reasoning, moving from premise to conclusion. Inferential model of communication involves attempts to share, distribute and recognize acts of intention, emotion and other modalities delivered in communication. The attempts are what contribute to the relevance of utterances intended to communicate particular pieces of information. Context is, however, understood to be central to RT, since what is relevant is that which produces a tangible contextual effect, or which penetrates the

context of discourse. An input (utterance) is relevant to an individual when, and only when, its processing yields such positive cognitive effects. For detailed discussions on RT (See Sperber & Wilson 1986a, 1995; Wilson & Sperber 2006; Korta & Perry 2015; Wilson 1998, 2009).

3. Methodology

The data of this study comprised a thirty-five minute oral text-proceedings of Amandim Olo village meeting, which was held on the 3rd December, 2016. The text was collected using an audio recorder and loosely transcribed into English for analysis. In order to ensure objectivity, the 35 minute-text was collected without the participants' knowledge. The minutes carefully explicated two Agenda: the first on the issue concerning the recovery and sale of a ram which was owned collectively; and the second concerning the issue of Fulani herdsmen's invasion and destruction of farmlands in Olo district of Ezeagu Local Government of Enugu State.

3.1 Population and Sample

The people that made up the population of this study consisted of the entire male adults of Olo district of Ezeagu Local Government of Enugu State. However, the sample of this study only consisted of Amandim Youths in Olo district. This sample was selected through cluster sampling. This type of sampling technique was employed because the population under investigation was concentrated in a definite area; so, Amandim Olo was selected in this regard.

3.2 Method of Data Analysis

The researchers adopted the qualitative method of data analysis since the research aimed at discovering how inferences and contexts aid in the interpretations of meanings of utterances made by the speaker. 3 long sentences, 3 short sentences, 3 elliptical statements, 2 ambiguous expressions, 2 ostensive cues, 2 proverbs/ idiomatic expressions and 2 spatial and temporal deixis were randomly selected for the analysis. These utterances were grouped accordingly and analyzed according to RT procedures.

4. Data Presentations

(Background: the oldest man in Amandim presenting the first agenda of the meeting and expressing his own opinion concerning the ram which belongs to the community)

U₁: If we kill this ram now, I want to believe that the meat won't go round; so, you are going to sell it if at all, it has not been stolen.

(Background: the second speaker is reacting to the oldest man's statement)

U₂: My people, I greet you. When I went to Nkwo market at noon, I saw the ram where it was tied against a tree; my mind was telling me that it had been sold.

(Background: there is an agreement that the ram should be sold and the oldest man is suggesting who the ram be sold to)

U₃: What I am telling you is that, instead of selling this ram to a non-native of Amandim, we should sell it to our brother from Amandim.

(Background: the third speaker noisily chipped in)

U₄: The ram is preparing to die.

(Background: there is a hot argument on whom the ram be sold to and immediately, the fifth speaker makes a proposal)

U₅: I want to buy the ram.

(Background: the oldest man was told that someone had earlier priced the ram #18000)

U₆: Will he still agree to buy it at that price?

(Background: the second agendum is raised concerning Fulani Herdsmen's invasion and destruction of farmland and the invitation of a witch doctor that will use charms to eliminate them)

U₇: listen up please! What I am saying concerning this issue is this: there is no how a man will see something... what you should understand is that, this man that is hardly making a step, that cannot run any longer...

(Background: after a prolonged argument on how and why Jerome the witch doctor deceived the people, collected their and absconded without performing the assigned task, the 8th speaker reacted thus)

U₈: Look at now and tomorrow... provided that his money is complete and...

(Background: one of the speakers is expressing disappointment with the witch-doctor)

*U₉: He tested his **work** but it was a flop.*

(Background: expression of anger and disappointment)

*U₁₀: We told **him** that we would be coming back here the next day*

(Background: expression of disappointment after Neneya failed to go Jerome's residence as he was directed to)

U₁₁: If a man wants to go for a war, he won't remember that he will be killed because if he does remember, he will not have the courage to go that war.

(Background: the 14th speaker advises **the others to seek a violent free way of solving the problem**)

U₁₂: Whoever that has his/her item fall inside a river; it is with his/her leg that he searches for it.

(Background: the oldest man directing a question to Onugbu using signs and body language)

U₁₃: Onugbu, how much did you say they are pricing the ram?

U₁₄: Anake's son, I hope you know Anake's son. He priced the ram #18000

(Background: expression of disappointment)

*U₁₅: Neneya promised that he would go **there** again and he would come today to brief us on the outcome.*

(Background: the registering of anger and apportioning blame)

U₁₆: This is because a warrior is ready to go to war and then you confiscated his gun and knife and you order him to go to the battleground without any weapon, however, you are also part of this war. So, we shall start with them because they are responsible for what is happening to us now

4.1 Interpretations and Discussions of Findings

4.1.1 Complex(long) Sentences

The cognitive and communicative efforts required in the interpretation of complex or long sentences are quite greater and more complex than the efforts required in processing simple or shorter sentences. For example in U₁ above, the hearer must exert more linguistic energy to arrive at the speaker's intended meanings. This is because to infer correctly what the

speaker wants to communicate, it must be understood that there was a ram that the community owned together. It is at this point that contexts would assist the hearer to arrive at the point of relevance. If this is done, the hearer will stop processing automatically. This is because despite the fact that the sentence is long; the hearer is able to infer that the ram has not been stolen even when its whereabouts has not been made known to the people. Similarly, in U_2 , the efforts exerted are similar to that of U_1 in that the hearer may infer that the ram has not been sold despite the fact that it was seen in the market previously. However, the cost of processing U_3 is quite faster than the first two because the hearer may infer correctly that the reason for such advice is that selling the ram to a native is more beneficial than selling it to a total stranger. So, the cost of processing complex(long) sentences is much more energy sipping in maximizing relevance.

4.1.2 Simple (short) Sentences

Simple (short) sentences required very little cognitive and communicative efforts to process. In U_4 above, "*The ram is preparing to die*" could be inferred by the hearer to mean that the ram had been sick and it got so thin that it could eventually die so; it is advisable to sell or eat it. The hearer could through context process the most relevant point of meaning which is, the ram should be sold or it might die. In U_5 , the processing effort is very easy because, it does not take much cognitive efforts to understand the explicit intention of the speaker that he would like to purchase the ram. In U_6 , it is a question that is very simple to interpret through shared background knowledge. So, the hearer may infer correctly that the buyer had already priced earlier. So, simple(short) sentences and phrases are very easy to process with very little processing efforts.

4.1.3 Elliptical Statements

Elliptical statements require the hearer to fill in what the speaker does not say based on contexts and background experiences. The hearer infers what the speaker intends to communicate; in U_7 therefore, the speaker left something unsaid. For example "*what you should understand is that, this man that is hardly making a step, that cannot run any longer...*" this could be understood by the hearer to mean that the man that was invited to take care of the problem of Fulani herdsmen has failed in his responsibility. So, the hearer must exert more mental cognition to adequately fill in the missing words/expressions. Therefore, he would continue processing until he arrives at the point of relevance. Similarly, in U_8 "*Look at now and tomorrow... provided that his money is complete and...*" the hearer has maximized all effort to complete the gap in the utterances and rightly interpret the speaker's intended meanings. The above expression could be interpreted thus: if you provide the money now or sooner, your problems would be solved instantly.

4.1.4 Ambiguous Expressions

Disambiguation is essentially informed by the necessity of ensuring clarity of expression as a result of the semantic multiplicity of lexical units that sometimes characterizes Igbo rural discourse. In U_9 and U_{10} , the lexical item "work" and the grammatically item "him" are ambiguous. A word that is capable of expressing more than one sense is said to be ambiguous. Ambiguity in itself poses problems in the interpretation of meaning. In the first utterance, "work" could stand to be any type of activity. Contexts play an important

role in disambiguating the expression and enabling the hearer to rightly infer that lexical item “work” denotes “charm”. On the other hand, the word “he” could mean any of the male participants in the conversational discourse, therefore, contexts too pave way for the maximization of relevance in this discourse. “He” is used as a referent for the “leader” and not the “witch doctor”. It is, however, important to note that more cognitive energies are needed for the processing and disambiguating of ambiguous expressions just like the examples above.

4.1.5 Proverbial and Idiomatic Expressions

Proverbs and idioms take greater cognitive efforts to process. Hence, the hearer must continue to search and maximize relevance before he or she will stop processing. In the U_{11} above, in line with RT procedures, to arrive at the speaker’s intended meanings, the hearer must infer correctly what those intentions are. The speaker’s intention is interpreted to mean that courage is a prerequisite for any form of eventuality. In a similar vein, U_{12} suggests that issues are better settled amicably through other means (dialogue) other than violence. In all these, social contexts assist the hearer to correctly interpret these proverbial intentions.

4.1.6 Ostensive Cues

In U_{13} above, the speaker selected the hearer by calling his name “Onugbu” and then made some non-verbal signs. These demonstrations aid the hearer in the interpretation of the speaker’s intention. The hearer, thereby, understood that the speaker directed a question to him, which is an inquiry about the cost of the ram, bargained. On the other hand, U_{14} also used naming and reference assignment to prepare the hearer’s attention towards the maximization of relevance in the utterance which was sought to inquire the amount the buyer had proposed to buy. The addressee’s (hearer’s) understanding process starts when he perceives an ostensive stimulus and stops when his expectation of relevance is satisfied, that is, when he has the most relevant hypothesis (the one with the most positive cognitive effects at the least processing cost) about the speaker’s communicative intention.

4.1.7 Spatial and Temporal Deixis

In U_{15} and U_{16} , the adverbs “*there*” and “*now*” represent spatial and temporal deixis respectively. “*There*” is understood to mean that particular place that the interlocutors already know through shared background knowledge. Any person who was not part of the previous conversation might not understand the interpretation of the adverb “*there*” which could only be interpreted through contexts. The adverb “*now*” could also require contexts to make the right inferential interpretation. The hearer could interpret the word “*now*” to mean what was happening to them ‘then’ (at the time of filling this report). These adverbs may, however, require high level of cognitive efforts to process which could, as a matter of fact, be reinforced by contexts.

4.2 Summary of the Findings

This study did a pragmatic analysis of rural discourse of AmandimOlovillage meetings using The Relevance Theory of Sperber and Wilson (1995). The results, however, showed that sociolinguistic contexts are used in communicative events to make the right

inferences. Specifically, the results showed that complex(long) sentences, proverbs and idiomatic expressions, elliptical statements and ostensive cues have greater cognitive efforts and require more cost of processing them through the use of contexts, background experiences, shared assumptions and inferences. On the other hand, simple (short) sentences and phrases and common or familiar words have less cognitive efforts and the cost of processing them is relatively easier according to RT. It is, therefore, pertinent to argue that for communication to be successful, the hearer must, as a matter of fact, infer what the speaker does not explicitly say and interpret it until he/she reaches the point of relevance.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Studies

The researchers have good reasons to conclude that utterances made in AmadimOlovillage meetingdiscourse could be interpreted by various linguistic contexts. The researchers also affirm that inferences aid the interpretation of the speaker's communicative intentions. The study concludes that complex(long) sentences, ambiguity, elliptical statements and deixis could be interpreted by inferences, shared experiences and contexts; although they require greater processing effort and high cognitive cost; while shorter expressions and phrases could be inferred quickly with little cognitive efforts. It is, therefore, worthwhile to assert that communication is one of the human activities that makes use of cognition to interpret implicit utterances.

We suggest that the hearer should always aim at applying situational or cultural contexts in rural oral communications in order to make plausible inferences, which are capable of interpreting the speaker's intentions. Also, we suggest that the speaker should deploy simple, succinct and unambiguous word/expressions in rural discourses so that the hearer would maximize relevance with just little processing efforts. Finally, we suggest that scholars and researchers should carry out research on "Incantation and language of chief priests: a pragmatic analysis"; and "Pragmatic Analysis of Igbo War songs".

References

- Anagbogu, P., Mbah, B.M. & Eme, C.A. (2010). *Introduction to Linguistics (2nd ed.)*. Awka: AmakaDreams Ltd..
- Agbedo, C.U. (2015). *General Linguistics Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Nsukka: KUMCEE-Ntaeshe Press Inc.
- Allolt, N. (2013). Relevance Theory: Draft for Forthcoming Volume. In A. Capon, F. Piparo & M. Carapezza (eds), *Perspective on Pragmatics and Philosophy*. New York: Springer.
- Ayeomoni, O.M. & Akinkuolere, O.S. (2012). Pragmatic Analysis of Victory and Inaugural Speeches of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 2 (3): pp.467- 471.
- Encyclopedia Britannica Online (n.d.). *Definition of Language*. Retrieved from <https://britannica.com> 5th May, 2018.
- Grice, H.P. (1989). *Studies in the Ways of Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Korta, K. & Perry, J. (2015). Pragmatics. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter Edition)*. In E.N. Zelte (ed.),

- URL= <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/pragmatics/>> Retrieved on 6th May, 2018.
- Osunbade, N. (2009). Explicature in Conversational Discourse in Adichie's Purple Hibiscus. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, Vol 18 (2), pp. 138-153.
- Sperber, D. and Wilson, D. (1986a). *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. (1995). *Postface to the Second Edition of Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ubong, E.J. & Effiong S.J. (2012). Pragmatic Analyses of President Goodluck Jonathan's and President Barrack Obama's Inaugural Addresses. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol.2(12), pp. 261-267.
- Wilson, D. & Sperber, D. (2006). Relevance Theory. In L.R. Horn & G. Ward (eds.), *The Handbook of Pragmatics*. USA, UK and Australia: Blackwell Publishing.
- Wilson, D. (2009). Relevance Theory. In Cummings (ed), *The Pragmatics Encyclopedia*. London: Routledge.