

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF YOUTHS' ACTIVISM IN TANURE OJAIDE'S *THE ACTIVIST*

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Abstract

A number of works has been done by scholars from several perspectives on *the Activist*, especially through the lens of literary and critical analyses. Most of such studies on the text often focus on its critic of bad leadership, economic and oil explorations, and environment degradation. Youth activism is one of the major areas of interests; he is especially concerned with the social and living conditions of the youths. This study is concerned with the linguistic analysis of youths' activism in *the activist*. The aim is to ascertain the pragmatic implications of youths' activism in the text. Activism is a practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of, or opposition to one side of a controversial issue. Theory of Cooperative Principle was employed in the prosecution of the study. It, thus, sought to discover the extent to which these maxims were adhered to, or violated. The results of the investigation indicate that these maxims are, at times, adhered to, but most often they were flouted because speakers, during conversations, employ avoidance strategy, which made it possible to evade some questions asked. The implication is, therefore, that youths are often encumbered and thus circumvent questions put forth to them.

Keywords: youth activism, cooperative principle, pragmatics, the activist, maxim, language

Introduction

Communication is the primary function of language. Language is what makes man distinct from animals. Language is therefore used to communicate ideas, thoughts and opinions. These ideas, thoughts and opinions are governed by situations or events at a given point in time, and meaning is derived based on the context in which the utterances occur; this is what Pragmatics is all about.

Pragmatics is that level of linguistic analysis which studies meaning in context. Yule (1996) as cited in Osisanwo (2003, P. 55) asserts that Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meanings as communicated by a speaker (or

writer) and interpreted by the listener (or reader). Pragmatics deals with meanings beyond the linguistic data; that also includes implied meaning of an utterance which could only be inferred within the context. In a similar vein, Thomas (1995) claims that the most common definition of Pragmatics is meaning in use or meaning in context; i.e., contextualized meaning. Pragmatics could be used to provide an inroad into the study of language and, by extension, youth activism in *The Activist*.

One of the theories of Pragmatics is Conversational Implicature (Cooperative Principle), propounded by Grice. He introduced a set of rules which were expected in his opinion to be observed by participants in a conversation. That, when someone is speaking to us, we base our understanding of what he is saying on the assumption that he is saying what needs to be said, rather than more that needs to be said. The present study seeks to uncover the extent to which these maxims could be adhered to, or violated in *The Activist*. It argues that quite often, during conversations, speakers violate the maxims, which results in what Grice calls Conversational Implicature. According to Grice, to conversationally implicate means to go beyond what one says in such a way that it must be inferred from non-linguistic features of a conversational situation together with general principles of communication and cooperation.

Most activities performed by the youths are done through language. This includes: dialogue, declaration, protest and campaign. Thus, the primary purpose of youths' restive speeches is to influence, enlighten, persuade and incite other youths. The youths need constant touch or link with other youths, and one of the ways of achieving this is through communication as can be seen in text under study.

The exploration of oil and the attendant politics continue to pose potential dangers to the existence of people (especially the youths). This has led to confrontations or crisis of different shades emanating from the youths, as they try to resist the devastation of their environments, their future and survival. As a result, many youths become disgruntled and take their destinies in their hands in whichever manner they deem fit. While some youths articulate their displeasure and demand for change through dialogue, consultations and peaceful demonstrations, others have taken the paths of violence, resistance, destruction of oil installations. Thus, the problem of youth activism in the text can be described as the after-effect of the politics of marginalisation suffered by the youths. Hence, *The Activist* provides an anchor to examine and understand the relationships that exist between language and youth activism.

Statement of the Problem

Tanure Ojaide's works apparently constitute a major propelling force in the growth of postcolonial and cultural studies. As usual, his text, *The Activism*, has been subjected to analysis from various perspectives. However, a pragmatic interpretation of the texts is not common. The conversations that capture youth activism in the text have rich pragmatic implications that can be better understood when subjected to Grice's Cooperative Principles' analysis. This study therefore examines the issue of youth activism in the text using Grice's Cooperative Principles. The problem which this study investigated with the use of pragmatic principles, is youths' activism in *The Activist*

Literature Review

Some studies which were anchored on Grice's Cooperative Principle have been carried out. Hayder (2005) examined the language of literary text using Grice's maxims. The data for the study were elicited from Lois Lowry's *the Giver*. The findings revealed that most times Lowry made the character violate the maxims by generating implicature, hiding the truth, or persuading and convincing the readers about a message Lowry wanted to convey.

Zor (2006) explored the relationship between coherence-related problems of Turkish EFL students and their English and Turkish essays also using Cooperative Principle. Twenty upper-intermediate level students participated in essay writing both in English and in Turkish. Both essays were rated for coherence by three different raters. The essays were analyzed to find the violations of each maxim in comparison with the coherence judgment of the raters. The results showed that the raters agreed on similar coherence judgment. The maxim of relation was the most significant maxim that affected the coherence judgment in both essays. The maxim of manner was significant for Turkish essays, while the maxim of quantity was significant for English essays. However, in comparing the violation of individual maxims in both essays, the violation of maxim of relation in English correlated with the violation of the maxims of relation, quality and quantity in Turkish essay. Similarly, the violation of the maxim of manner in Turkish essays correlated with the violation of the maxim of quantity in English essays. The study concludes that the relationship in both essays revealed the inadequacies in English academic writing skills.

Li (2015) studied the application of Cooperative Principle in Oral English learning. The study proposed that the application of the principle will improve speaking skills and stimulate the students' learning interest. The study

concludes that the application of Cooperative Principle in spoken English learning can be conducive, to develop students' oral ability which is the ultimate goal of Oral English learning.

Igwedibia, A. (2016) examined Obama's speeches on "Race and Economic Renewal in America" within the framework of Cooperative Implicature. The findings revealed that Obama's speeches obeyed Grice's maxims to a great extent and flouted the same to a lesser extent in order to alert the addressee that there is an implicit meaning.

Foroogh and Ains (2016) investigated how the Cooperative Principle was employed in two Iranian Newspapers. Twenty-five commercial advertisements were selected and analysed from each newspaper (total, 50 ads). The result indicated that in both newspapers the maxim of quality has suffered the highest flouting, which the aim was to attract customers.

Otemuyiwa Adebola (2018) examined the rate of flouting and obeying the cooperative maxims in WhatsApp conversations among undergraduates in the Federal University of Technology Akure. The data for the study were got from the conversations of interlocutors from October 2016 to February 2017. The result revealed that the level of cooperation is high to some extent. The maxims of relation and manner were the same percentage, showing that the rate of obscurity, diversions from the topic of discussions were high.

The literature review shows that Grice's maxims can be applied in different areas beyond natural conversation. However, none of the studies on pragmatic analysis of language and youth activism in *The Activist*. This observation inspired the researchers to examine the use of language in youth activism in Tenure Ojaide's *the Activist*.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. examine the extent to which selected conversations capturing youth activism in the text violate or adhere to the Maxims of Quantity, Quality, Manner and Relation; and
2. provide possible interpretation of the selected conversations based on the violation or otherwise of Grice's Cooperative Principles.

Theoretical Framework

Cooperative Principle

The linguistic framework of any linguistic research serves as the tool for the analysis of data. Hence, the theory of cooperative principle served as the tool for the analysis, and evaluation of some selected conversations in the text under study. The choice of cooperative principle as the linguistic framework for this study is premised on the fact that the theory is a vital tool for analysis of communication, and it reveals people's behaviour during conversations.

The theory, according to H. P. Grice (1975), is about people's conversation, which is an important component of pragmatics. Grice states that persons involved in a conversation are essentially rational beings who cooperate with each other in order to achieve the purpose of the conversation. He adopts what he labels "cooperative principle", and a deliberate violation of the principle results in conversational implicature. This principle holds that one makes one's conversation contribution, such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, and by the accepted purpose or direction of the exchange in which one is engaged. Thus, when one is speaking to us, we base our understanding of what one is saying on the assumption that one is saying what needs to be said, rather than more than needs to be said. Within this principle, Grice proposed four maxims, which include:

The maxim of quantity: This means that you make your contribution as informative as is required. It also means that you do not make your contribution more informative than is required. For instance, if you are directing me to Mr. A's shop to buy a laptop at Ogige Market, I need your contribution to be neither more or less than is required. Also, at a particular stage in giving the direction, I need you to give me his shop or phone number, not his house number as such over formation maybe confusing in that it is liable to raise side issue.

The maxim of quality: Here, you make your contribution one that is true. Do not say what you believe to be false, and do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. This maxim demands interlocutors in a conversation to make their contribution genuine and not phony. For instance, if I need the direction to the Department of English and Literary Studies, do not mislead me by giving me the direction to school of General Studies. This violates this maxim, thereby hampering my movement.

The maxim of relation: This means that you should be relevant. For instance, if there are two responses to this question: "Can you tell me the time?"

A: It's 11:30 am.

B: Well, it's break time.

Apparently, the answer of **A** is more relevant than that of **B**. **A** directly answers the question, which needs little inference, while **B**'s answer is indirect and has to be inferred.

The maxim of manner: This means that you should be perspicuous. Here, you avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity. You should be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity) and be orderly. This maxim enjoins participants in a discourse to make it clear what contribution it is they are making, and be as brief as possible.

Emezue (2006) pointed out that the application of these maxims alongside a shared knowledge of the social, cultural and even psychological imperatives that surround the discussion at hand enables conversationalists to distinguish between sentence meaning and speaker's meaning. This ability enables persons engaged in the exchange to understand each other. Also, Grundy (2008) agrees that these maxims are known to both speaker and hearer; hence, the latter infer meaning that are conveyed, but not stated.

After Grice, there are further developments of cooperative principle; for instance, Kempson (1975) outlined five characteristics of the cooperative principle and the maxims as follows:

- Conversational implicature are dependent on the recognition of the cooperative principle and its maxims;
- They will not be part of the meaning of the lexical items in the sentence;
- The implicature of an utterance will characteristically not be sole possible interpretation of the utterance;
- The working out of an implicature depends on the assumption about the world which the speaker and the hearer share; and
- The assumptions and implicature are cancellable.

Although Kempson's procedure seems to be unique, Onuigbo (2003) points that these characteristics do not provide any information radically different from the original approach.

Whichever way, Grice's principle, which provides a guide for utterances in conversation, is the anchor pin of this study.

Methodology

Design of the Study

The design the researchers employed is the analytic survey, or what is known as cross-sectional study design. This, in this study, entails testing out hypothesis to ascertain if the conversations of youths' activism, in *The Activist*, violate the four maxims, or whether they adhere to the maxims.

Data and Data Collection

The data for this study are conversations between characters, in the text under study, and which are related to youth activism. Such conversations were purposively selected. The purposive selection is predicated on Nworgu's (2006) assertion that in purposive mode of sampling, specific elements which satisfy some predetermined criteria are selected.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

In this section, we examine how Grice's maxims were violated or adhered to in the text. Grice's cooperative principle posits that the basic underlying assumption we make when we communicate is that we are trying to cooperate with one another in order to construct meaningful conversation or interaction.

The first maxim to be applied in the analysis of conversation involving youth activism is the maxim of quantity, which instructs the speaker to make their contribution as informative as is required, not saying too much or too little in a conversation. The violation of the maxim of quantity means that the speaker does not provide enough information or gives more or less information than what is actually needed in a conversation. Consider the following conversation between the Elderly man and the Activist:

Elderly man: Was it true that you left America where you were working to come and teach in Nigeria?

Activist: Yes.

Elderly man: Are you on a visit or come to stay with us permanently?

Activist: I am here permanently. I like it here.

Elderly man: Do you know what you are doing to yourself?

Activist: Of course, I took the decision to leave America and come home.

Elderly man: You took a decision to leave there for here?

Activist: Yes.

Elderly man: Do you like us as we are here?

Activist: Of course I do. You seem happy to me, and that is very important in life.

The above conversation between the Elderly man and the Activist (pp. 36 - 37) depicts a perfect adherence to the maxim of quantity. The Activist's responses to the questions of the Elderly man are not too much nor too little; they are confined within the limits of Grice's maxim of quantity. The decision to return home is predicated on the Activist's political aspirations; to radicalize people within and outside the university environment towards a counter potent force against the exploitation and subjugation of the oil companies and the Nigerian Military Government.

Also, consider the following conversation between Chief Tobi Ishaka and his son Dennis (pp. 178 – 179):

Chief Tobi Ishaka: Is that not the degree one can use to prospect for oil

Dennis: Yes, father.

Chief Tobi Ishaka: My son Petroleum Engineering must be a difficult course, but do it. I will give you all the support that I can, and with hard work you will succeed. After university, you'll gain more experience and you can drill for oil in our family's land.

Dennis: That may not be possible, because the Federal Military Government has already sold the right for prospecting oil on our land to the foreigners.

The above extract, similarly, shows that the maxim of quantity is adhered to, because the speakers during conversation provide information which is just enough for the conversation. Chief Tobi Ishaka sends his son to study Petroleum Engineering in order to reverse the predicament perpetuated on them by the Federal Government and multi-national oil companies. This vision was actualized, though, in the absence of the Chief. The Activist contested for the Governor of Niger Delta State and won the election. As the Governor, he appointed Dennis the Commissioner for Environmental and Mineral Matters.

The second maxim applied in the analysis of the data of this study is the maxim of relation, which posits that a speaker should make his/her contribution in relation to the ongoing subject matter. Let us consider the conversation between Pere and Owumi (pp. 148 – 149):

Pere: Who owns this compound?

Owumi: Is it not fuel you want?

Pere: Is it a fuel depot?

Owumi: Have you heard of bunkering?

Pere: I don't really know what it is.

After explaining what bunkering is to Pere, in trying to make up his mind to join, Pere asked:

Pere: Is it as simple as that?

Owumi: Until you try it, you won't know.

Pere: But what of soldiers and police guarding everywhere there are oil pipelines?

Owumi: Police and soja no be Nigerian?

The above extract shows the violation of the maxim of relation. When Pere asked who owns the house, Owumi responded with another question that is in no way related to the question asked. However, Owumi's question is indirect and has to be inferred. This results in what Grice calls Conversational Implicature. Another instance of the violation of the maxim of relation is instead answering if, "bunkering is simple", Owumi gave an indirect response which has to be inferred. Even the last question Owumi asked in response to Pere's question is a perfect violation of the maxim of relation. This is an example of the avoidance strategy in which a speaker rather than answer the question put forth to them, respond with another question. This indicates that youths avoid direct answers, especially when involved in some kind of unlawful activities.

The extract below captures the conversation between Pere and the Activist (pp. 154 – 155).

Activist: You want the army boys to execute me by firing squad?

Pere: God forbid that bad thing! No be so. Nobody go catch us. We know the way.

Activist: What if they catch us?

Pere: I go tell you how to do am. No be me and you go do am as such.

Activist: You don't do business before or na dis one you go take start?

Pere: Na one day business dey start. Oga dis na better business.

The above extract shows the violation of the maxims of quantity, manner and relation. Pere provided more information than was required of him, thereby violating the maxim of quantity. The latter part of the response violated the maxim of manner and relation simultaneously. The violation of the maxim of manner made the Activist repeat the question. Instead of answering the question regarding "if they catch them", Pere went ahead to talk about how the oil bunkering business would be managed. This prompted the Activist to repeat the question in another way, since Pere did not answer the question. This is an example of another avoidance strategy in which speakers rather than answer the questions put forth to them, resort to diverting attention to other things.

On (pp. 183 – 187), we see the violation of all the maxims, because the conversation here is more of argument. In a bid to project each other's idea, Dr. Mukoro and Omagbemi violated the maxims of quantity, quality, manner and relation. For instance, when Dr. Mukoro argued that "...but we are not retrogressing. We are developing but we could do much better than we have achieved", the maxim of quantity was violated; more information than was required was provided. The statement, "We are developing..." is the necessary formation; the rest offers redundant information. In a similar vein, Omagbemi's response violated the maxim of relation, when he digressed from the line of the argument by stating that his cult group is ready to carry out a revolution. Again, there is a violation of the maxim of quality, which is to offer a false message deliberately or say something which do not have enough evidence. For instance, Omagbemi does not have enough evidence to illustrate what he meant by "taking matters into their own hands for the general good of the society". There is the violation of the maxim of manner, because Dr Mukoro perceives "taking matter into one's hands" as "a misuse of youth's energy". Another violation of the maxim of manner is revealed in Omagbemi's question; "what's youth meant for, if not to take risk?", which is quite confusing for Dr. Mukoro to comprehend, because to him, it means indulging in wild activities. Here, Omagbemi's question is ambiguous, therefore, violates the maxim of manner.

Another extract vis-a-vis data is the conversation between the Delta State students and Professor Tobore Ede (pp. 194 – 195):

Student: Why did Bell Oil not send firefighters to stop the fire?

Prof. Ede: My company did its best, but the fire overwhelmed everybody.

Student: How could the fire overwhelmed firefighters that were not there to put it out?

Prof. Ede: I say they tried their best.

Student: Why have the displaced villagers not been taken care of?

Prof. Ede: The villagers are arsonists, and the blow out is a product of sabotage led by the people themselves who are lazy and unwilling to work (paraphrased).

Prof. Ede: Why would the people burn their own homes and lose all they had?

Prof. Ede: As I have said, they are lazy and want an easy way to riches.

Student: Don't you know that you are insulting our parents?

Pro. Ede: I am telling you the truth.

There is a violation of all the maxims here. A careful look at the response to the first question reveals that Professor Ede provided more information than was required of him; also, his response is not true. This, therefore, violates the maxims of quantity and quality simultaneously. Another instance of the violation of the maxim of quantity is when the students asked "Why the displaced villagers have not been taken care of"; if he had stopped at "the villagers set their village on fire because they wanted to extort money from Bell Oil Company", he would have obeyed the maxim. But he went on to provide more than what was required to answer the question. The later information provided was not required; rather, the students were incensed by the callous accusation (over informative). However, there is an instance of adherence to the maxim of relation, which expects partner's contribution to be appropriate to the immediate conversation. An instance is when a student asked, "Why would people burn their homes and lose all they had?" The response, "they are lazy and want an easy way to riches" is relevant, and a direct answer to the question. Though, from the perspective of the students is the violation of the maxim of quality that is why the students view the response as an "insult to their parents".

Conclusion

This study examined the pragmatic implications of youth activism, and the medium use to express dissatisfaction and fight against oppression in different ways in Tanure Ojaide's *the Activist*. The study adopted Grice's cooperative principle, specifically the four maxims which not only underpin the rules to be

followed in conversation, but also the reflection of the interlocutor's mental mechanism. In other words, their aspiration, fear and weakness are presented through dialogues, which can be reflected in their behaviour. From the discussion, it is discovered that the four maxims were violated; only two were adhered to: the maxims of quantity and relation. However, the maxim of relation suffered the highest violation, which indicates that the rate of obscurity, diversion from the topic of discussion, is high. Nevertheless, the violation was to alert the addressee that there was an implicit meaning. The implication is that the youths are often encumbered, and more often employ avoidance strategy in order to evade questions asked especially when involved in unlawful activities.

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