Analysing Metaphor and Implicature in Poetry: A Study of Obari Gomba's *Eleme* and *Lines on Ten Places*

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Abstract

Metaphors convey embedded meanings, which implies an interpretation beyond the literal meaning, and pragmatics is concerned with the contextual implicatures of an utterance or piece of communication. Hence, this study investigates the intertwining roles of metaphor and implicature in Obari Gomba's Poetry. The study uses the Searlian account of metaphor and Grice's Principle of implicature to analyse the poems. The research findings indicate that the poet used metaphor and conventional implicature to express his angst about the ill effects of pollution in oil-bearing communities, the deplorable conditions of living in some Nigerian cities, and the misfortunes of colonialism. The study concludes that metaphors and implicatures play a significant role in literary works by helping the poet to explain his experiences, emotions, and conjectures without ambiguity and too many clarifications.

Keywords: Metaphor, Implicature in Pragmatics, Poetry, Obari Gomba, Eleme, Lines on Ten Places.

Introduction

Traditionally, metaphors exhibit an age-long attribute of non-literal meanings, indirectly comparing two dissimilar entities in speech or writing. This often implies that more is unsaid than said and that meaning may not be revealed at the surface and cognitive levels (Maduako, 2022, p. 7). As such, meaning interpretation may be somewhat elusive, especially in the language of literature where writers must employ the use of literary devices in their various fields of expressions (poetry, drama, and prose).

According to cognitive linguists, metaphor is more of a way of thinking than just an ornamental patterning of words on a page. They assert that the creation and interpretation of metaphor involve transferring or conceptual mapping features from one domain to another, considering a conceptual domain to mean "a body of knowledge within our conceptual system that contains and organises related ideas and experiences." (Evans & Green, 2006, as cited in Gibson and Whiteley, 2008, p. 205). In the following anonymous lines, metaphor expresses itself in the comparison between the speaker's love and a journey:

> *My love for you is a journey; starting at forever and ending at never.*

Two domains are identified in the expression: the target domain (love), which is the idea being described by the metaphor, and the source domain(journey), which is being drawn to

describe the target. To interpret the metaphoric expression, the relevant features of love are identified and transferred to the journey. A journey usually has a start and end point. Furthermore, it is an experience that covers a specific duration. However, the speaker's love(target) is not like the source domain (journey), which signifies a beginning and an end because the expression introduces the negation "never", placing it in sharp contrast to a journey, implying that the speaker's love is unending.

In pragmatics, the implicature of the expression will take into cognisance what the speaker said, the meaning of what was said and what that meaning implies. Implicature emphasises the agreement between what is said (written) and what it means and what the speaker or writer can imply, suggest or mean as distinct from what he says or writes. (Osisanwon, 2003, p.92) So, a pragmatic analysis will examine the context in which the expression is made, which presupposes an emotional connection between two people or one who is overwhelmingly in love with another, the indirect speech act (commissive) performed by the speaker in making such a bold declaration and the implicature of that statement would aid the receiver's interpretation. Paltridge (2012), quoted in Yunia, Suwandi, and Sriwahyuni (2021) states that "Pragmatics is the study of meaning in relation to the context in which a person is speaking or writing." This corroborates the general notion that language describes the world around us.

The speech acts theory in pragmatics, which was made famous by the duo of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), began with the introduction of the locutionary (the act of saying something, the literal meaning/expression), illocutionary (the implication of what is said and this could be achieved directly and indirectly) perlocutionary act (the effect of an utterance on the listener). In furtherance of the study, Searle expanded the illocutionary acts into five distinct categories, namely the commissives (commits the speaker to a future course of action), expressives (shows the speaker's attitude towards a particular state of affairs like apologising), declaratives (these utterances instigate change in the external situation), directives (compels the receiver to perform an action), and assertive (the speaker pledges to a certain action). In each of these classifications, the speaker is seemingly enacting an action through utterances, and the meaning intended within the context of use affects the receiver's interpretation. Basically, a speech act is an action that is performed in saying something directly or indirectly. Yule (1995:48) mentions the direct and indirect speech acts where a direct speech act could be described as an ordinary or plain way of saying something without recourse to any underlying considerations, while an indirect speech act bears implicit meaning beyond the literal. Indirect illocution, Hurtford, Heasley, & Smith (2007 :291) also quoted in Yunia, Suwandi & Sriwahyuni (2021) opines, is any further illocution an utterance may have.

One can do things directly or indirectly. As such, Lafi (n.d.) expatriates that a statement of how often depends upon who says what to whom, when, where and why; the interpersonal relationship, nature of the topic, presence or absence of a third party, shared knowledge, etc. Meanwhile, the linguistic determinants include lexical items, phrasal and idiomatic expressions, and syntactic structures. Thus, in the example above, the speaker's expression

of love is directly assertive and indirectly commissive because it commits the speaker to fulfil the obligations associated with such a proclamation of undying love. While the speaker is directly stating (assertive), indirectly, he is applying the commissive, which commits him to act.

On the other hand, the receiver is trusting(perlocutionary) the speaker's sincerity and commitment. This elucidation becomes necessary in elaborating the linguistic features in the above statement. In as much as the focus of this paper is not the speech acts, it is necessary for better comprehension of the concept of implicature and how it is achieved consequently and further buttresses that all the suggestive presentations point to the implicatures of the utterance under review.

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, implicature denotes either (i) the act of meaning or implying one thing by saying something else or (ii) the object of that act. Implicatures can be determined by sentence meaning or conversational context and can be conventional (in different senses) or unconventional.

Therefore, the interpretation of the expression: "My love for you is a journey; starting at forever and ending at never" is considered to be the same as the metaphoric conceptualisation of an unending love, and the act of making that utterance further implies a commitment to love at all times, good or bad. Literally, the conventions of a journey imply a destination through time and chance. Human existence denotes an experience that begins at life and supposedly ends (temporarily) at death, as human life is believed to continue in the celestial world – the afterlife. While on life's journey, humans encounter many experiences that could involve turbulence, calmness, sickness, health, wealth, lack, and emotional highs and lows, to mention a few. The unending nature of the professed love entails all of those mentioned above, thereby implying that the love is gallant for all seasons.

The encyclopaedia further notes that figures of speech such as metaphor and irony provide familiar examples. In his book "The Philosophy of Language, H.P Grice categorises metaphors as part of implicatures. As such, they provoke a search for the intended speaker's meaning and serve multiple purposes such as communication, maintaining good social relations, misleading without lying, style and verbal efficiency. Hence, it is not out of place that this researcher seeks to investigate the use of metaphors and implicatures in this study. This paper focuses on a linguistic analysis of metaphors expressed in Obari Gomba's "Lines on Ten Places" from his collection of poems entitled "The Lilt of The Rebel". Obari Gomba is an award-winning Niger Delta poet who is a strong voice in the advocacy for enhanced living conditions in oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta because the people ought to be the primary beneficiaries of the largesse accruing to the crude in those communities. Ironically, these communities have continued to wallow in abject poverty, and these issues have become the predominant subject matter in the literary works of many writers from the region.

Theoretic Framework and Literature Review

The theoretical framework for this paper is anchored on John Searle's account of Metaphor and H. P Grice's theory of implicatures. According to Macha (2012), Searle builds his account of metaphor based on a general framework that tends to investigate the question, "How do metaphorical utterances work, that is, how is it possible for speakers to communicate to hearers when speaking metaphorically in as much as what they mean? Searle's theory entails that metaphorical utterances are indirect speech acts because speakers try to communicate something other than what is said. That is, the speaker says "S is P" and metaphorically (indirectly) means that "S is R". Searle describes what the speaker says (S is P) as a sentence meaning and what she means (S is R) the speaker's utterance meaning. Searle argues that if one communicates that: if one can communicate "S is R" using "S is P" then the relation between the sentence meaning and utterance meaning must be systematic. Therefore, an appropriate analysis or interpretation will consider shared principles or strategies for arriving at sentence meaning to the utterance meaning. This means that if a speaker uses S is P to describe S is R, S and R would exhibit possible values from P. Be that as it may, Searle posits that there is no single principle that is distinctive about metaphorical utterance and the principle that allows speaker's utterance to be taken metaphorically is the strategy that checks whether the utterance is defective if taken literally, i.e., whether it is patently true or false. This means that the literal composition of an utterance may affect the truthfulness of the metaphoric expression. Searle further expatiates his account of metaphor in eight principles and their examples in a compendious survey quoted in Camp (2003, Ch.1 &2), as cited in Macha (2012).

1. Things that are P are, by definition, R; usually, R will be one of the salient defining characteristics of S. Example: "Sam is a giant means "Sam is big."

2. Things which are Pare contingently R: again, R will usually be a salient or well-known property of P things. Example: "Sam is a pig", which means Sam is filthy, gluttonous, sloppy, etc.

3. Things which are P are often said or believed to be R, even though both the speaker and here may know that R does not, in fact, apply to P things. Example: "Richard is a gorilla "means that Richard is mean, nasty, prone to violence, and so on."

4. It is a fact about our sensibility, whether culturally or naturally determined that we perceive a connection so that P is associated in our minds with R. Example: "Sally is a block of ice" means "Sally is unemotional."

5. The condition of being P is like the condition of being R. Example: "You have become an aristocrat" means "Your new status is like that of being an aristocrat."

6. P and R are the same or similar in meaning. However, one, usually P, is restricted in its application and does not literally apply to S. Example: "His brain is addled" (no interpretation provided.

7. A principle extending the simple 'S is P' form to other syntactical forms, basically by applying 1-6 at a higher order. Example: "The ship moves the sea to the side of the prow as it moves forward.

8. P and R may be related as part-whole or container-contained, so metonymy and synecdoche also count as metaphors.

From the principles above, it is worth noting that they are not necessarily context-dependent, nor are their input data taken from the context. Context-dependence here is based on the fact that the meanings of P and R are context-dependent. This means that P and R stand in isolation, generating all the possible values of the R term. In their book Metaphors, We Live By, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as cited in Binder (2003) claim that the human conceptual system primarily works with Metaphors and humans think, act and live in terms of metaphors: "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of the other."

Generally, the term implicature derived its essential nomenclature from the word "imply, " which means having an embedded or unspoken meaning. Jacob Mey (2006, p. 45) described it as originally meaning "to fold something into something. Its etymology is derived from the Latin verb *plicare* 'to fold'. In order for a "folded" utterance to be correctly understood, it had to be unfolded. Implicature is the midway between what is said and what is implied but not entailed or overtly stated. There are two types of implicatures identified by Grice (1975)- conventional and conversational implicatures.

Conventional Implicature

This refers to the natural ability of certain words to self-implement themselves and not necessarily by their use. Thus, they were determined by the word's conventional meaning and did not depend on a particular context. For example, the word "first" in English is often denoted (by conventional implication) as the beginner item in a sequence. For example, "first week of the year" and "Firstborn". It retained its grammatical meaning no matter the context. According to Yule (1996, p. 45), quoted in Osisanwo (2003, p. 92) conventional implicatures are not based on the cooperative principle, do not have to occur in conversation, do not depend on special contexts for their interpretation, are associated with specific words and result in additional conveyed meaning when those words are used. Examples include but, yet, and (conjunctions) and even—sometimes, I and 2 support the explanation.

1. He is obsessed but healthy.
2. They screamed for joy and ran inside the house.

Conversational Implicature

Mey (2006, p. 46) posited that conversational implicature concerns how we understand an utterance according to what we expect to hear. Conversation is sustained by cooperation between two interlocutors and based on what is implied contextually. Grice suggested four maxims within his notion of the Cooperative Principle: maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner.

i. The maxim of quantity:

    a. The speaker is required to be as informative as required only, especially as it concerns the ongoing exchange.

    b. the information should not be more informative than necessary to avoid misconception.

ii. The maxim of quality: Every contribution should be based on the truth.

    a. Do not say what is believed to be false

    b. Do not say that which you lack evidence

iii. The maxim of relation: whatever is said must be relevant

iv. The maxim of manner: Speaker is required to be perspicuous (i.e. be clear)

    a. Avoid obscurity of information

    c. Avoid ambiguity

    d. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)

    e. Be orderly (present your materials in the order in which they are required)

In addition to the preceding, Beldadj (2018), in his study of Implicatures in Metaphor in Arabic poems, opines that in trying to prove his stance, Grice gives a range of examples of conversational implicatures and divides them into three groups, namely:

Group A in which no maxim is violated. Group B is where a maxim is violated, but the supposition of a clash with another maxim explains its violation. Group C includes examples involving exploitation, a procedure by which a maxim is flouted to get into a conversational implicature using a figure of speech. Grice introduces irony and metaphor as a result of maxim exploitation, more precisely when the maxim of quality is flouted. Therefore, metaphorical expressions result from contradictions or clashes between what an utterance expresses and what is meant. In his conclusion, after analysing two Arabic poems entitled "The Day Has Gone" by Rahala Al-Nahar and "Chant of Rain" by Usnsoudat Al-Mataar, Beldad states that there are no universal frameworks for interpreting texts and explaining their implications. However, the context and cultural circumstances enunciated with a given text play a significant role in helping the receiver understand the intended meanings conveyed in the poems he studied and other kinds of writing. As such, to grasp the meanings foregrounded in the imagery expressed in any piece of writing, it is pertinent to refer to the contextual dynamics presented in that piece. Though this study shares similarities with the current study in its scope and conceptual framework, the analysis method differs significantly. While the analysis of the current study dwells mainly on the Searlean principles of implications in Metaphor and Grice's conventional and the conversational implicatures, the aforementioned include expressions containing hypallage–a figure of speech in which the natural relations of two words in a statement are interchanged.

Drawing upon the foundation laid by Grice, Raoud (2022), in his extended essay on the Cancellability of Metaphors in Conversational Implicature, notes that one of the most controversial areas in analysing meaning is the issue of metaphors. In his remarks, a conversational implicature may be cancelled without leading to a contradiction. A speaker,

without sounding odd, may deny a conversational implicature that may have arisen from his utterance yet is still in the position to deny the implicature. For instance:

John is impossible, but I like him.

The hearer of this utterance may infer that the speaker dislikes John to a certain degree but does not desire an outright announcement of his opinions about John. Raoud (2022) asserts by way of conclusion that the cancellability of metaphors is almost impossible because metaphors have been incorporated into language and internalised in the speaker and hearer for so long that many of them even pass as unnoticed as metaphors as in the case of 'devour a book,' or 'the mouth of a river. In addition, the non-cancellability of conversational implicatures is that the meaning of the metaphor, what the speaker says in a sentence, cannot be cancelled. Instead, the implicature resulting from the author of the utterance within a given talk exchange is cancellable. The subject of metaphors and implicature highlighted in this study is closely related to the current study on metaphors and implicature. However, the current study is not concerned with the cancellability and non-cancellability of metaphors and directly reviews Grice's contribution to the study of implicatures and meanings.

It is almost impossible to talk about metaphors without mentioning implicature because both concepts are intricately interwoven and rely on each other to interpret the meanings of spoken utterances. This paper is a study of metaphors and implicatures in Obari Gomba's poetry using the combination of Searlean's account of metaphor and Gricean principle of conventional implicature where the metaphoric implication of the words in the *Lines on Ten Places* are analysed from a linguistic perspective. Even though there have been many scholarly publications on Obari Goma's poetry, there has not been a specific study of metaphors and implications in his collections of poems. Nsirim Akani wrote on the politics and resistance of resistance and emancipation in Obari Gomba's *The Ascent Stone*, highlighting the poet's vision of the Nigerian as a totally egalitarian one where justice, equity, and fairness reigned supreme. Kenneth Chukwu & Chioma Chinedu-Oko studied *Ambiguity in The Ecological Terms Poems On The Niger Delta*, which included poems of the poet understudy and concluded that ambiguity can be could be positively exploited to realise brevity through duality of relevant significations. In a review of Gomba's collection of poems *For Every Homeland,* Uchechukwu Umezuirike applauds the poet's confidence in addressing global shortcomings, which have continued to express themselves in racism, death, terrorism, genocide, etc.

Analysis of *Lines on Ten Places* from the Collection *The Lilt of The Rebel*

The section of the book *Lilt of the Rebel* entitled *Lines on Ten Places is* a collection of eleven on various themes. However, only two of those poems were considered in this study.

In the prologue of Lines on Ten Places, the metaphoric description for a stable and democratic country devoid of terrorism, anarchy, divisive politics, and outright neglect of the value of human life is "a people". In the words of the poet in lines 4,5, &6

It is a people – their laughter and cry,

Their joyous songs and dirges

Their victories and defeats.

The cohesive attributes of a people living harmoniously in the face of staggering social phenomena such as death, accident, and intermittent feuds are expressed using words that portray their conventional meanings as much as their implied meanings. The conventional implicature of the expression "a people" further denotes people as a collection of human beings existing within a given geographical location regardless of their demographic categorisation. Thus, human beings constitute a country more than national symbols. According to the poet:

A country is more than a map

or a flag or a coat-of-arms

or a fierce army that puts everyone jackboots.

Furthermore, the poet emphasises that if a people were to make up a country, then it would be pertinent for such people to choose their candour conscientiously.

The second poem, *Eleme*, is the name of an oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta situated in the east of Port Harcourt. Incidentally, it is the metaphor the poet persona uses to depict the devastating and deplorable environmental and medical anomalies prevalent in most oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta region. Conventionally, the name Eleme does not change its meaning as the name of a town in Ogoniland, regardless of the context in which it is used, but rather the values it denotes as a representative of such communities. For example, to say that Eleme is polluted is to imply that the Niger Delta is polluted. Ironically, the Niger Delta region is the supposed "cash cow" of the Nation.

In the poem *Eleme*, the poet is deliberate in his choice of words, which achieves an elevated level of metaphors and implicature in his poetry. The conventional notions of the words express his angst for the decay in all spheres of the spatial contraption called Nigeria.

In lines 3 & 4, the metaphor "deafening alarm on the level f benzene" implies the nonchalant attitude of the multinationals in handling the issues of extensive oil contamination, which has led to the emission of toxic and non-toxic elements in the air, water and land of the Niger Delta Contamination emanating from human anthropogenic activities, especially oil drilling activities. Even though the media is awash with humongous reports of the impact of environmental pollution on humans and aquatic ecosystems, they have attracted less attention from key players in the country and beyond. Benzene is a recognised contaminant of air and water and a significant contributor to environmental pollution. The poet uses it to express the extent of the damage oil exploration activities have caused to the land and people of the Niger Delta.

Conclusion

The poet draws heavily on conventional implicature to express his worries and displeasure without losing the conventional and metaphoric meanings of words such as country, a people, jackboots, work to uplift the weak benzene, deafening silence, mortality rate, harsh light, medicare mocks seasons, great and brave, but of life that always. This paper

concludes that metaphors and implicatures play a significant role in literary works by helping the poet to explain his experiences, emotions, and conjectures without ambiguity and too many clarifications.

Recommendations

The findings of this paper advocate the following recommendations for further consideration.

i. Further research into the interconnectedness between metaphors and implicature should be conducted to expand the frontiers of linguistic analysis of literary works.

ii. While extensive research has been conducted on conversational implicature, conventional implicature still begs for attention in linguistic and literary research. Hence, the study of conventional implicature in research works is needed to broaden scholarship, as it is equally significant in understanding meaning interpretation.

iii. The use of metaphors and implicature across the various genres of Obari Gomba's writing should be studied to identify areas of stylistic consistencies and innovations.

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