AN ANALYSIS OF CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE AND POLITENESS MAXIMS IN HELON HABILA'S *TRAVELERS*

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Abstract

The human language is dynamic and always evolves based on situations. Most times, people tend to communicate a lot more than the mere words spoken in the course of conversation. The study sought to unearth the pragmatic significance of the novel, Travelers. The basic concern is on contextual meaning as against content or semantic meaning. Focus was also given to background information as a prerequisite for understanding. Therefore, the study was limited to pragmatic features of conversational implicature and politeness maxims in the novel. The study was an analysis of the pragmatic contents of Travelers by Helon Habila. Content analysis was utilized and the data generated from the selected texts were subjected to qualitative analysis, which is concerned with data interpretations and description of results and findings. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS frequency distribution tables which showcased the percentage of occurrence. Research findings revealed Conversational implicature was richly abundant in the novel and added to the beauty of the dialogue and made the language of the novel very interesting, while Politeness occurrence reflected on nearly all the characters in the travelers, therefore, it was revealed that non-observance of maxims can lead to distortion of meanings in language.

Keywords: *Conversational Implicature, Politeness, Maxims, Travelers, Language, Pragmatics*

Introduction

As a method of communication, every language operates in the context of situations; be it verbal or virtual, there must be a corresponding intelligible communication; meaning, any form of discussion must be mutually comprehensible for the purpose of accomplishing its desired objectives.c The lack of cooperation in communication almost always leads to misunderstanding and misperception, which is against the objective of any meaningful communication. With language or communication, people share their thoughts or ideas and these thoughts and ideas are interactional. Brown (1984) emphasised that the interactional use of language is to describe our reactions to event and to regulate our interaction with other people.

Humans communicate with each other by conversation. Based on Pridham (2001), conversation is any interactive spoken exchange between two or more people and can also be face-to face exchanges, which can be private conversations or public conversations and non-face-face exchanges as well. The human language is dynamic and always evolves based on situations. Most times, people tend to communicate a lot more than the mere words spoken in the course of conversation. In the interpretation and expression of meaning, the concern is usually with how an utterance truly represents what it intends to represent and how other meanings are deduced, implied or felt from supposed utterances. In conversation, there tend to always be more to the spoken ordinary language than can be understood by the surface structure of the sentence, the ability to interpret these underlying meaning is what pragmatics aim to undertake. This variation in intention and interpretation of language is the very core of this very study. Understanding an utterance requires a lot more than just its literal semantic contents. Leech (1983) explained that, in order to understand an utterance with certain context, it is important to recognise its pragmatic interpretation. So, to understand this pragmatic interpretation, we must first understand pragmatics itself.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics was propounded by an American philosopher called Charles Morris. It was defined by Charles W. Morris (1938) as the branch of semiotics that studies the relation of signs to interpreters, in contrast with semantics, which studies the relation of signs to designata. In practice, according to Gazdar (1979), it has often been treated as a repository for any aspect of utterance meaning beyond the scope of existing semantic machinery, as in the slogan; Pragmatics which means minus truth conditions. Pragmatics, to Griffith (2006), is the use of utterance in context, how people manage to convey more meanings in utterances than what is literally encoded by the semantics of words or sentences. This means that pragmatics relies on what is semantically encoded in the particular language used. He further explained that, semantics is the study of the 'toolkit' in meaningful communication. This also means that pragmatics describes language from the point of view of the users, especially, as regards the choices the users make, the constraints they encounter in using their language for social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in an exchange.

Pragmatics depicts that the meaning of the utterances delivered by the speaker is not only limited to the meaning from the speaker but also how the hearer interprets it. Therefore, different situations in which the conversation takes place also influence the interpretation drawn from the utterance. Thus, different contexts will definitely lead to different interpretations.

Pragmatics encases several scopes; which are deixis, cooperative principles, references, speech acts, implicature, presupposition and politeness. But there are two basic variables involved in pragmatic analysis of texts; linguistic and non-linguistic aspects. The linguistic aspects of texts are related to the language of utterance itself. For the purpose of this study, the focus is firmly on the pragmatic aspect which are hinged on implicature and politeness maxims.

Implicature

According to Brown and Yule (1983), Grice firstly proposed the term of 'implicature' in William James lectures at Harvard University in 1967.

Where he stated that implicature is 'what a speaker can imply, suggest, or mean as distinct from what the speaker literally says' (53).

'Implicature' is gotten from the verb 'to imply' which means 'to fold something into something else. It is meaning that is not clearly conveyed in what is said, but can still be inferred. For instance, if Mike points out that Greg is not present, and Jimmi replies that Greg has a cold, then there is an implicature that the cold is the reason, or at least a possible reason for Greg's absence; this is because Jimmy's comment is not cooperative, does not contribute to the conversation, unless his point is that Greg's cold is or might be the reason for her absence. Grice in Levinson (1985) classified implicature into two kinds: **conventional** and **conversational** implicature. However, for the purpose of this study, conversational implicature shall be the primary concern. Conversational implicature to Brown and Yule (1996) is derived from general principle of conversation plus a number of maxims which speaker will normally oblige (31). Unlike conventional implicature, conversational implicature depend on context for their interpretation. The theory about conversational implicatures was proposed by Grice (1975), according to Charles Meyer (1938) who said that the cooperative principle meant 'to explain how conversation involves a certain level of cooperation among communicants' (55).

He quoted Grice as saying:

Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at lease, cooperative efforts, and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purpose, or at least mutually accepted direction (26).

In line with the cooperative principle, Grice postulated four maxims to explain how people cooperate in a conversation. As the following:

Quantity: Give the right amount of information; that is,
    1) Make your contribution as informative as required
    2) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required
Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true; that is,

1) Do not say what you believe to be false
2) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

Relation: Let your contribution be relevant

Manner: Be perspicuous; that is,

1) Avoid obscurity of expression
2) Avoid ambiguity
3) Be brief (avoid unnecessary verbosity)
4) Be orderly

   The point of cooperative principle and the maxims is not to tell people over and above the literal meaning of their utterance. It is possible a participant fail to fulfill any of the maxims in a number of ways

   i)   She/he may violate it, in which case she/he will be likely
   ii)   She/he may opt out of observing the principle by saying things like I don't want to talk about it.
   iii) There may be a conflict of maxim, for example, it will not be possible to be as informative as required without having adequate evidence
   iv)   She/he may blatantly flout a maxim.

   Meyer said whenever "a maxim is violated, a conversational implicature result, that is, the utterance receives an interpretation that goes beyond words that are spoken" (56). The obvious reason is that; if one maxim is to be maintained, another must be violated. It has to be noted too that by violating maxims, meaning can still be typically conveyed through implicature and cooperative principle maintained.

   Speaker A: Have you been to the cinema lately?
   Speaker B: No, but I'm going to watch a movie next weekend.

In this conversation, maxims are followed. Speaker B supplies information as required in the relevant manner and amount.

a) Speaker A: When is your next class?
   Speaker B: Sometime this afternoon

By not providing enough information. Speaker B above violates the maxim of manner. However, based on the assumption that he does not do this deliberately and really does not know when the class is, Speaker B is not violating the cooperative principle as he does not want to lie or guess which violates the maxim of quality.

Politeness

Politeness is an important value in human behavior. Grundy (2000) looked at politeness as the function of language to imply the most appropriate speaker and hearer relationship. Appropriateness, in this regard, essentially encompasses a lot of linguistic considerations to effect and maintain acceptable interpersonal relationship. A relationship devoid of threat and tension. Hence, Izadi (2013) described politeness as a means of avoiding conflicts and establishing harmonious interpersonal relationship between social interactants. Politeness, thus, is something people learn and acclimatize themselves to so as to foster peaceful coexistence. In pragmatics, politeness, to Kasper in Barron (2003), are ways in which the relational function in linguistic action is particularly exhibited. This shows how language is used in a strategic way to achieve such aims as supporting or maintaining interpersonal relationships.

Leech's (1983) maxims of Politeness Principle were presented thus:

a. **Tact Maxim:** Tact maxim minimizes cost to other and maximizes benefit to other. For instance:
   (1) *How about having a cup of coffee?*
   (2) *May I have the honor to have a cup of coffee with you?*
   From the sentences above, it can be seen that the hearer gets more benefit, thereby, having a high level of politeness. If done otherwise, it imposes much on the part of hearer, the choice for hearer may be less, therefore the utterance will be considered impolite.

b. **Generosity Maxim:** The generosity maxim minimizes benefit to self and maximizes cost to self. Here are some examples of the maxim:
   (1) *You can lend me some money.* (impolite).
   (2) *I can lend you some money.*

c. **Approbation Maxim:** The approbation minimizes dispraise of other and maximizes praise of other. Here are some examples of this maxim:

(1) *Her dance was great!*

(2) *Yes, wasn't it?*

d. **Modesty maxim:** The modesty maxim minimizes praise of self and maximizes dispraise of self. Examples below:

(1) a. *They were very good to us.*

 b. *Yes, they were. Weren't they?*

 (2) *How stupid of me!*

e. **Agreement Maxim:** The agreement maxim minimizes disagreement between self and other and maximize agreement between self and other. Some examples below:

(1) a. *It was an interesting match, wasn' it?*

 b. *No. It was very uniteresting.*

f. **Sympathy Maxim:** The sympathy maxim minimizes antipathy between self and other and maximizes sympathy between self and other. For example: *I am really sorry to hear that your car broke down.*

Travelers

Helon Habila is a Nigerian poet and novelist whose debut novel, *Waiting for An Angel,* won the 2003 Commonwealth Literature prize for the best first novel by an African writer. He has to his credit several award-winning collections of books; of which *Travelers*, a novel of 295 pages, published under the W.W. Norton & Company in 2019, is listed. In Travelers, Helon's unnamed narrator, a graduate student, lives with his US citizen spouse (Gina) in America. He decides to accompany Gina to Berlin, where she has been offered Art Fellowship in a bid to save their shaky relationship. In Berlin, he meets several characters of which he establishes friendship. The narrator's friendship with these people translates into a series of events that see the narrator turning from a privileged immigrant to an African refugee. In this brilliant work, Helon exposes the predicaments, inhumane

living conditions of the unnoticeable men of Europe and their battle to become noticeable.

Travelers, a 2019 novel by Helon Habila was chosen because, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is no record or information as of the time of this research that anyone else has done a pragmatic analysis of Travelers. To this end, a total of twenty (20) utterances for each pragmatic feature, for example; 20 utterances for politeness, 20 utterances for Implicature and 20 utterances for presupposition, totalling sixty (60) utterances, will be respectively analysed. The study spanned between September, 2019 to March, 2020.

Statement of Problem.

Readers mostly do not pay attention to some of the underlying meanings which are instrumental in shedding light on the direction of a text for better understanding. Hence, most readers are usually lost in the context of a text when such pragmatic meanings are not deducible to them. Readers may sometimes deduce some pragmatic meanings without knowing what they are and how they function or the significance of the deduced meanings. The outcome of which has affected the appreciation of so many literary works in the past.

Aim and objectives.

The major aim of this study is to explore the pragmatic features of Travelers. The specific objectives are:
   a. To assess the use of conversational implicature and politeness strategies in Travelers.
   b. To determine the preponderant maxims upheld and violated in the text.
   c. To ascertain the politeness strategies adopted in the text.

Methodology

The study is an analysis of some pragmatic features of Travelers by Helon Habila. Content analysis was utilized for the research methodology. The

items for analysis were drawn from pragmatic features of implicature and politeness in the text. The research instruments are conversations in Helon Habila's Travelers. A total of twenty (20) utterances for each pragmatic feature, for example; 20 utterances for politeness and 20 utterances for Implicature, totalling forty (40) utterances, were respectively analysed. The data collected were analyzed, while SPSS frequency distribution tables was used to showcase the percentage of occurrence.

Results
Implicature Analysis
Datum 1. P.17
Background: Narrator and Mark meet in a Bar and are getting to know each other better since they were unable to do so when they first met at the Narrator's house. Mark tries to know Narrator's country of origin.

Mark: "Where are you from?"

Narrator: "Originally, Nigeria."

Narrator's response in the above turn fulfills the maxim of quality since it gives the true fact of the Narrator's country of origin. In this case, Mark knows the Narrator's actual country of origin, therefore, the question was truthfully answered. The conversation, thus, **upholds** the **maxim of quality**, which requires the speakers to not say what they believe to be false and to not say something for which they lack adequate evidence.

Datum 2. P.19
Background: Narrator visits Mark and his other friends who are all temporarily living in an abandoned church building. Mark is introducing the Narrator to his other friends and telling the Narrator what each of them do. Amazed at the fact that one of Mark's friends, Uta is writing a novel, the Narrator exclaims...

Narrator: "A novel?"

Mark: "The novel is dead. Cinema is the present and the future."

In the exchange above, the speaker did not respond with an answer that has a relation with the question asked neither did he stay within the context of the conversation. Hence, **flouted** the **Maxim of Relations.** The

consequence of which downplays the relevance given to Uta writing a novel. The maxim of relation would have been upheld if the speaker gave the contribution that is relevant to the subject of discussion.

Datum 3. P. 26

Background: While among the people protesting on the street, the Narrator in the middle of the chaos falls to the ground and is been trampled on by the mob, seeing his distress Mark reaches out and pulls him up from the ground…

Mark: "Are you okay?"

Narrator: "I am fine."

In the exchange above, Narrator's response is **violating** the **maxim of quality** the answer given to Mark does not imply the fact that Narrator is 'fine' as he is obviously on the ground struggling to get up. The reason for his maxim violation is to avoid being seen as a weak person who cannot handle himself in tough times.

Datum 4. P. 28

Background: Mark returns with Narrator to the church where he and his friends stay together only to find out the place has been ransacked by policemen and all his friends are nowhere to be found. The Narrator is worried about where Mark would stay so he asks Mark…

Narrator: "Why don't you go over to your girlfriend's place?"

Mark: "Lorelle? Won't work. She has a flat mate…"

The exchange above **upholds** the **maxim of relation** since his answer is relevant to Narrator's question. In this case, Narrator asks Mark about staying at his girlfriend's place and Mark answers Narrator's question relevantly by giving reasons why he cannot go over to his girlfriend's place.

Datum 5. P. 31

Background: After looking for Mark for several days of worries, Narrator and Lorelle meet after Lorelle calls him, and there at the drinking bar, Narrator is really concerned about Mark's whereabouts so he asks…

Narrator: "Well, where is he now?"

Lorelle: "In detention, at one of their centers. I was there yesterday and he told to call you…"

 The conversation above is an example of **Maxim of quantity** which demands that the speakers give contributions that are as informative as what is required, but not more informative and not less informative. The maxim of quantity is, nevertheless, **upheld** as it can be seen that the information delivered by Lorelle is informative enough since she gives enough contribution to Narrator's question about the whereabouts of Mark.

Table 1. Distribution showing the total number of Conversational Implicature analyzed in Travelers.

No.	Types of Conversational Implicature maxims	Upheld	Violated/Flouted	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Quantity	2	6	8	40%
2.	Quality	2	3	5	25%
3.	Relation	3	2	5	25%
4.	Manner	1	1	2	10%
Total		8	12	20	100%

In the Table presented above, the maxim of Quantity is statistically more frequent in occurrence at 40%, with two (2) upheld maxims and six (6) flouted or violated maxims, followed by maxim of Quality at 25%, with a total of two (2) upheld maxims and three (3) violated or flouted maxims, and also maxim of Relation at 25%, with three (3) upheld maxims and two (2) flouted or violated maxims, while maxim of manner garnered 10% occurrence with one (1) upheld maxim and one (1) flouted or violated maxim.

Politeness Analysis
Datum 1. P. 50
Background: Mark decides to leave Narrator's house when he realized that his continuous stay in the house will not be welcomed by Gina; and the fact that Gina did not respond to his greetings when he greeted her in the morning.

Mark: "Listen, I am not sure your wife is happy with me being here... I appreciate all you have done for me."

The utterance above is a good example of **Sympathy Maxim,** which is intended to minimize antipathy between self and other and maximize sympathy between self and other. In this case, the speaker, Mark, tries to minimize the antipathy between himself and the hearer, Narrator. By saying *"I appreciate all you have done for me"*, the speaker states his effort to reach an agreement.

Datum 2. P. 54

Background: Narrator coincidentally meets Julius, the Lawyer in charge of Mark's case at Gina's exhibition and Julius reveals to him a very sensitive issue about Mark...

Julius: "This is none of my business, but... you know, his real name is Mary."

The above is a **Generosity Maxim.** It is a 'self-centered' expression. The view of this maxim is to minimize benefit to self and maximize cost to self. In using this maxim, the speaker tends to put the cost on himself rather than on the Narrator. In the utterance 'This is none of my business', Julius reduces any concern he has to a minimum level by opening up to the Narrator just to save the Narrator the stress of finding out another way round.

Datum 3. P. 68

Background: After hearing about Mark's death, Narrator asks Lorelle about how she and Mark met in Germany. When Lorelle finishes the touching story about how she and Mark met and how Mark made her grow up and took an important decision in her life, Narrator is sympathetic. He takes her hand...

Narrator: "I am so sorry."

The utterance above is another indication of **Sympathy Maxim.** In this instance, a face-saving act is performed, which emphasizes a person's positive face by showing solidarity and drawing attention to a common goal or objective.

Datum 4. P. 69

Background: Narrator while talking with Gina broke the news about his unwillingness to return to America and this seems to hurt Gina. She pathetically reminisced the times they used to be very happy.

Gina: "We used to be so happy together…. I thought Berlin would heal us."

The utterance above is an example of **Modesty Maxim**. The modesty maxim as a principle of politeness minimizes praise of self and maximizes dispraise of self. By stating that she thought Berlin would heal them, she is politely indicating that her choice of bringing them to Berlin did not work out after all. So, the statement is a face-saving act as she tries to minimize the threat, using modest words, rather than saying the Narrator is not helping in making things work out between them by refusing to return to America.

Datum 5. P. 75

Background: Manu at a Nightclub, standing in front of a Nightclub manager asking for a job to work as a Bouncer. The Manager, a Lady, asks him…

Manager: "Aren't you a bit too old for this job?"

The turn above is an instance of **Generosity maxim.** Here, the speaker, Manager, does little or nothing at all to maximize threats to the hearer's, Manu's, face. This maxim minimizes benefit to self and maximizes cost to self. In this case, the manager believes he is doing Manu a favour by telling him the truth.

Table 2. Distribution showing the total number of Politeness strategies analyzed in Travelers.

No.	Types of Politeness	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Tact maxim	3	15%
2.	Generosity maxim	6	30%
3.	Approbation maxim	0	0%
4.	Modesty maxim	1	5%
5.	Agreement maxim	7	35%
6.	Sympathy maxim	3	15%
Total		20	100%

From the table above, the Agreement maxim has the highest number of frequency occurrence with 35%, closely followed by Generosity with a frequency occurrence of 30%, with both Tact maxim and Sympathy maxim occurring with 15% respectively, while Modesty maxim occurred with 5%.

Discussion of findings

The study has attempted to analyze the pragmatic features of conversational implicature and politeness strategies in *Travelers* by Helon Habila. The analyses were carried out by using two major aspects of pragmatic features, which are implicature and politeness.

From the analysis of data collected, some significant observations and findings were made in order to meet the objectives. Based on that, the result of the research can be concluded thus:

The pragmatic features of conversational implicature and politeness strategies were adequately present in the novel.

The presence of Conversational implicature in the novel added to the beauty of the dialogue and made the language of the novel very intriguing. Having the maxim of Quantity frequently occurring eight (8) times at 40%, followed by maxim of Quality occurring five (5) times at 25%, and maxim of Relation also occurring five times (5) at 25%, while maxim of Manner occurred two (2) times at 10%. It was found in the course of the study that a total of eight (8) maxims were upheld, while a total of twelve (12) maxims were either violated or flouted.

Politeness occurrence reflected on nearly all the characters in the travelers, with Agreement maxim having the highest number of frequency, occurring seven (7) times at 35%, Generosity occurring six (6) times at 30%, Tact maxim and Sympathy maxim occurring three (3) times at 15% respectively, while Modesty maxim occurred once at 5%, only Approbation maxim of politeness was not found in the novel.

From the findings above, it can be inferred that; non-observance of maxims can lead to distortion of meanings in conversations. Therefore, Habila's application of pragmatic features was highly instrumental to unveiling the hidden meanings embedded in the novel.

Conclusion

The study has shown that conversations can be used to achieve succinctness and precision when pragmatic features are put to use. Therefore, the pragmatic features have played major roles in deciphering intrinsic meanings in messages. As a linguistic aspect, pragmatics discuss speaker meaning based on context to make sense and assertion. Being pragmatic elements, the study of politeness, implicature and presupposition in a text is a very interesting feat to embark on, because it enables people see the beauty and art of language.

Recommendation

The novel, Travelers, is rich in several other linguistic endeavors and language scholars as well as students are encouraged to explore more of its linguistic contents to advance knowledge.

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