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Pragmatic Implicatures of Animal Metaphors in Selected Nigerian Pidgin English Proverbs

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Abstract

Proverbs are deeply embedded in Nigerian culture and function as indirect yet powerful tools of communication. Their interpretation relies heavily on metaphor and contextual knowledge, with animal metaphors standing out for their vivid portrayal of cultural beliefs and moral values. This study investigated the pragmatic use of animal metaphors in Nigerian proverbs, focusing on how meaning is conveyed through conversational implicatures. Grounded in Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature, the study examined how such proverbs deliberately flout conversational maxims, such as relevance, quantity, quality, and manner to communicate implicit meanings. The data comprised five proverbs purposively selected from Nigerian oral traditions and written sources. The analysis considered the literal and metaphorical meanings of the proverbs, identified the conversational maxims flouted, and explicated the implicatures generated by these violations. The findings revealed that Nigerian proverbs strategically exploit maxim flouting to stimulate inference and transmit underlying messages. Through animal metaphors, the proverbs address themes such as caution, persistence, wisdom, and contentment, emphasising their cultural and moral significance. The study concludes that animal metaphors in Nigerian proverbs exemplify the pragmatic richness of language, demonstrating how conversational implicatures function as effective tools for moral instruction and the preservation of cultural norms.

Keywords: Conversational implicature, Cultural values, Grice's maxims, Nigerian Pidgin English, Proverbs

Introduction

Language serves as an avenue through which cultures can be understood as most forms of communication in most cultures are

done with language. Language and social reality are strictly tied together, hence language is said to be culturally transmitted (Heath, 2003). This means that changes in produce



change in language because peoples' cultural orientation, attitude, belief, disposition, worldview and social value among others are reflected in their language (including proverbs). Proverbs are products of human experiences and mostly culture specific. They (proverbs) are concise in structure, often known by heart, loaded with philosophical meaning and passed from one generation to another. Proverbs, deeply embedded in Nigerian culture, are often used as indirect tools of communication. They rely on metaphor and context for interpretation, with animal metaphors being particularly vivid in capturing cultural beliefs. These proverbs often rely on implicature, requiring listeners to infer meanings based on shared cultural knowledge.

The place of proverbs in societies where discourse is tied with assorted forms of proverbs for different communicative functions cannot be over emphasized. Proverbs are one of the means through which the cultural background of a group of people could be known. It reveals a people's historical development, worldview and attitude. Proverbs provide hard-hitting messages in a profound way rather than in a nasty or demoralizing manner. They pass very weighty messages in a mild or gentle way. The persuasive and highly philosophical nature of proverbs makes them a special means of communication in any discourse. Proverbs softly appeal to the subconscious level of human reasoning because they symbolize the accepted code of behaviour in a society, by praising social virtues and

condemning vices. They transcend the boundary of religion as even the people who have no attachment to any faith use proverbs from time to time. They are also common products in both formal and informal discourses if they are appropriately used. It is against this backdrop that Nigerian writers such as Chinua Achebe, Zulu Sofola, Zainab Alkali, T. M. Aluko, and Ola Rotimi among others deploy proverbs in their literary works as way of passing (weighty) messages with societal approval. This perhaps explains the reason for the growing interest in research on use of proverbs among linguists, philosophers and sociologists.

In the past few decades, several scholars (African and non-African) have exhibited great interest in proverbs. Proverbs have been, and remain, the most powerful and effective instrument for the transmission of culture, social morality, manners and ideals of a people. The reason behind the efficacy of proverbs is that as aphorism or wise saying, they are based upon people's experiences and reflect the social values and sensibility of such people. According to Adedimeji (2007), proverbs are especially elegant in the conciseness of their forms, the peculiarity of their structures, the logicity of their meanings and the universality of their messages.

It is interesting to note that proverbs have been comprehensively studied from both language (linguistics) and literature perspectives, although, the



concern of this study is on linguistics-oriented studies. While Adedimeji (2007) is concerned with meaning explication in Chinua Achebe and Ola Rotimi's works (through semantic and pragmatic theories), Akinwumi (2006) from a literary point of view, focuses on the use of proverbs as a tool for the restoration of social order. In other recent efforts, Sanusi and Omoloso (2008) examine the use of proverbs in preserving archaic lexical items and expressions. The preoccupation of Adeleke (2009) is the aspect of Yoruba history in proverbs, while Adejumo (2009) examines power perspectives in Yoruba fauna proverbs. The above studies are indication that some previous works have considered the didactic nature of proverbs. However, there are few studies that have focused on using linguistic theories list conversation implicature to examine proverbs. From the foregoing, it is evident that proverbs occupy a vintage position in both language and literary studies, and this stimulates research in both fields. There is also a growing interest in proverbs because of the multidisciplinary nature of Linguistics, Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology.

Although previous studies have examined animal metaphors across different languages and cultures, many of these works privilege conceptual metaphor theory or stylistic analysis, often neglecting the interactive inferential processes through which hearers derive meaning in actual discourse. Specifically, there is a noticeable gap

in research that systematically applies Grice's conversational maxims to explain how animal metaphors in Nigerian Pidgin English proverbs deliberately flout cooperative principles to convey implicit meanings. Furthermore, Nigerian Pidgin English, despite its extensive use across social classes and communicative domains, remains underrepresented in pragmatic proverb studies. This neglect limits a full understanding of how shared cultural knowledge and contextual reasoning operate within Pidgin discourse. Consequently, there is a need for a focused pragmatic investigation that explains how conversational implicatures are generated, interpreted, and culturally grounded in animal-based Nigerian Pidgin English proverbs. Addressing this gap will contribute to pragmatics, African linguistics, and proverb studies by illuminating the inferential strategies embedded in indigenous forms of expression. Specifically, the study aims to:

- i. analyze the conversational implicatures of five animal metaphors in Nigerian pidgin English proverbs;
- ii. determine the maxims flouted in each proverb; and
- iii. explore the cultural relevance of the proverbs' implicatures.

Conceptual Overview of Pragmatics

Etymologically, the term "pragmatics" is from the Greek word "pragma" meaning deed or action.



Osisanwo (2003) traces the term “pragmatics” to Charles Morris (1938) who describes it as one of the three (with syntax and semantics) component fields of semiotics, which is the study of sign and sign systems. Morris regarded syntax as the study of the relationship between signs while semantics as the study of the relationship between signs and the things for which they stand. Pragmatics was to be the study of the relationships between signs and their users.

Akmajian et al. (2010) identifies the coverage of pragmatics to the study of language use, and in particular the study of linguistic communication, in relation to the structure and context of utterance. Thus, pragmatics must identify central uses of language; it must specify the conditions for linguistic expressions (words, phrases, sentences, discourse) to be used in those ways, and it must seek to uncover general principles of language use. Much of this work was originally done by philosophers of language such as Wittgenstein (1953), Austin (1962), Searle (1969), and Grice (1975), in the years following world-war II. In the 1970’s linguists such as Ross (1970) and Lakoff (1970) attempted to incorporate much of the work on performatives, felicity conditions, and presupposition into the framework of Generative Semantics.

According to Davis (1991), pragmatics has as its domain, speakers’ communicative intentions, the use of language that require such intentions, and the strategies that

hearers employ to determine what these intentions and acts are, so that they can understand what the speaker intends to communicate. The Encyclopedia Dictionary of Language and Linguistics (p. 130) defines pragmatics as “the study of language from the point of view of the users especially of the choices they encounter in using language in social interaction.” This indicates that pragmatics relates to sociolinguistics. It is also related with stylistics and discourse analysis in the sense that they are all concerned with the link between language and social variables.

Pragmatics can also be viewed as a subfield of linguistics which studies the way in which contexts contribute to meaning. Wisniewski (2007) views pragmatics as an aspect of linguistics which is concerned with the meaning that words convey when they are used, or with intended speaker meaning as it is sometimes referred to. Pragmatics can be defined as the study of the rules and principles which govern language in use, as opposed to the abstract, idealized rules of, for instance, grammar, and of the relationships between the abstract systems of language on the one hand, and language in use on the other. Quoting Leech and Short (1981), Adegbite (2000) defines pragmatics thus the pragmatic analysis of language can be broadly understood to be the investigation into that aspect of meaning which is derived not from properties of words and constructions, but from the way in which utterances are used and how



they relate to the contexts in which they are uttered.

Empirical Review

Animal metaphors have been studied from different perspectives. Some of the studies focused on the source domain, particularly on the manifestation of the concept of animal in reference to human behaviour. Many researchers have studied animal metaphors across culture, as well as comparing data from two languages. Examples of such studies include the use of animal metaphors in Bukusu and Gusii (Barasa & Opande, 2017), the similarities and differences in Malay and English proverbs associated with the cat metaphors (Muhammad & Rashid, 2014). Other works are Yoruba and English proverbs that compared women with plants, animals, food, property and trouble (Yusuf, 1997), and animal metaphors for women in English and Spanish (Rodriguez, 2009). The studies also have farm animals' metaphor in figurative expressions in both Malay and Arabic, which was conducted by Sabariah, Pabiyah, Nurul & Nadia (2012).

Muhammad and Rashid (2014) examined the similarities and differences in the meanings associated with the cat metaphors in Malay and English proverbs. The data for their study were selected from Malay and English books and online databases of proverbs. The study revealed that the meanings associated with cat in Malay and English proverbs do not conform to the common proposition of Lakoff

and Turner (1989). The paper concluded that various differences in meanings are associated with the metaphorical schemas of the English and Malay proverbs, which are attributed to cultural differences of the two languages in question. While Min and Thida (2020) assessed the metaphorical role of animals in Myanmar proverbs and Myanmar society. The study investigated the most common animals used in Myanmar proverbs and the role these animals play in everyday life of the people. The findings reveal that there are 291 metaphors used for 40 animals in 251 proverbs. These animals include domestic animals, wild animals, insects and also mythical creatures such as Dragon and Garuda. The most common animals are birds, fish, elephant, cattle, tiger, dog, chicken, cat, mouse and buffalo. The examples of these ten most common animals are presented and interpreted under the Contemporary Metaphor Theory and it is found out that the animal metaphors describe a lot about the conceptual mind of Myanmar people and Myanmar historical, geographical, cultural, social, economic and religious conditions.

On the other hand, Barasa and Opande (2017) assessed the use of animal metaphors in Bukusu and Gusii proverbs that sought to ascertain whether the common proposition proposed by Lakoff and Turner is applicable to the data of their study. The study further examined the similarities and differences in the meanings and representations associated with the



animal metaphors in both Bukusu and Gusii proverbs. It also investigated the main attributions that are attached to women and men in Bukusu and Gusii proverbs. The findings in this study suggest that there is no difference in the proposition and metaphorical schemas in the semantics of animal proverbs and it is related to the social and cultural beliefs upheld by the Bukusu and Gusii community. The metaphors reinforce the gender ideologies as a belief system in Bukusu and Gusii culture. Thus, the metaphors portray women as inferior, worthless and weak. The implication drawn from this attribution is that women are marginalized, discriminated in issues of decision making, participation, resource distribution, policy formulation and in politics because of the prejudices.

Kobia (2016) conducted a metaphorical analysis of domestic animals in selected Swahili proverbs with a focus on chicken metaphor, based on their source domains. This study examined the socio-cultural and economic background that shapes the Swahili proverbs and their underlining meanings inherent in them. The paper revealed that the Swahili proverbs are used metaphorically as a repository of traditional wisdom of the Swahili people and a vehicle to articulate their worldview. Furthermore, Olateju (2005) examined the animal metaphors in the Yoruba language with a view to highlighting the stylistic and communicative potentials of these metaphors. The

study discusses the sources of animal metaphors, which are said to be located in three areas, namely: Yoruba naming culture, animal characteristic habits and behaviour, and Yoruba poetry. In the first, the semantic features of animals involved in metaphors are decomposed into semantic markers that are of two types. The first is the High Priority Semantic Markers (HPSM), which determines the cognitive/conceptual meaning of the metaphors, and the second is the Low Priority Semantic Markers (LPSM), which determines the secondary metaphorical interpretation.

Yusuf (1997) examined how 46 proverbs in Yoruba and English compared women with plants, animals, food, property and trouble. In the study, women in state affairs were likened to monkeys; in that women in state affairs would look awkward and be destructive as monkeys living in glass house. In the study, both English and Yoruba proverbs compared women with dogs. Here, a man kicking his dog (pet) is likened to beating his wife. Women, through the analysis, were also seen as 'vessels' who can convey troubles and inconveniences to their husbands. According to the findings, women in their matrimonial homes are considered as 'meat', since men enjoy women through sexual intercourse. The study explicated that any man who marries a beautiful woman marries problems, since she claims to be related to everybody.



Also, Alimi (2012) examined some proverbs used in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. He focused on the use of proverbs as literary devices. According to Alimi, Achebe intentionally uses the proverbs, not merely to add touches of local colour, but to sound and reiterate themes, to sharpen characterization, to clarify conflicts and to focus on the values of the society he is portraying. Eme et al. (2016) assessed the loss of metaphors in Igbo proverbs. They point out that contemporary realities such as globalization, current developments in science; technology and modernization have eroded some of the metaphors that capture the nuances of meaning of some of the proverbs. According to them, the proverbs that hinge on words with reference of objects, things and events that existed or were common in the Igbo traditional society would need some more explanations to help the modern Igbo generation understand them. They selected some proverbs to illustrate this claim, and the basic tenets of conceptual metaphor have been applied to the illustration. With recourse to this, the paper identifies documentation of the proverbs with annotation that incorporates specification of the metaphors. This, among other things, will serve to preserve the Igbo worldview as contained in the proverbs and could be a veritable tool for the revitalization of the use of the proverbs by the younger generation.

Theoretical Framework

Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature forms the foundation of this study. The thrust of Grice's influential theory is the concept of conversational implicature. The often regarded 'theory of conversation' starts with a sharp distinction between what someone says and what someone "implicates" by uttering the sentence. This implies that what is said sometimes may not mean what is intended although the statement must be relevant to the context of use. Grice (1913 - 1988) was the first to systematically study cases in which what a speaker means differ from what the speaker says as determined by the conventional meaning of the sentence uttered and contextual processes of disambiguation and reference fixing. What the speaker implicates is associated with the existence of some rational principles and maxims governing conversation. These conversation principles according to Osisanwo (2003, p. 102) make Grice to be regarded as the inventor of the „cooperative principle' in communication. Wardaugh (2010, p. 308) argues that "we are able to converse with one another because we recognize common goals. In any conversation, only certain kinds of „moves' are possible at any particular time. This is there are certain constraints that operate to govern exchanges. These constraints limit speakers as to what they can say and listeners as to what they can infer." According to Yule (1996), the preoccupation of Grice's contribution



to pragmatic theory is his „cooperative principle’ through which he posits that people involved in a conversation with each other in order to facilitate meaning negotiation and avoid ambiguity. The four maxims which are the tenants of the cooperative principles as propounded by Grice are:

Quality: Make your contribution true, that is, be truthful. Speakers and writers are expected to say only what they believe to be true and to have evidence for what they say. Again, the other side of the coin is that speakers are aware of this expectation; they know that hearers expect them to honour the maxim of quality. Without the maxim of quality, the other maxims are of no value or interest. Whether brief or lengthy, relevant or irrelevant, orderly or disorderly, all lies are false (Finegan, 2008, p. 289). This sentiment is also echoed by Yule (1996), Romaine (2010) and Wardaugh (2010). In summary, the maxim of quality stresses that one should not convey what you believe to be false, should desist from saying that for which one lacks adequate knowledge.

Quantity: Be as informative as required, that is, do not say more than what is required for the current purpose of exchange. Speakers are expected to give as much information as is necessary for their interlocutors to understand their utterances, but to give no more information than is necessary. According to Finegan (2008, p. 287), in most Western cultures, listeners expect speakers to abide by this

maxim, and speakers know that hearers believe them to be abiding by it. According to Finegan, it is this unspoken cooperation that creates conversational implicatures. In a nutshell, the maxim of quantity emphasizes the need to make one’s contribution in a discourse as adequate as needed, not to make the information supplied to be surplus to the requirement.

Relation: Be relevant, that is, do not say anything that is not related or relevant. This stresses the need for logical orderliness of the information to be provided. Speakers are to organize their utterances in such a way that they are relevant to the on-going context. It means one’s contribution in any discourse must be in agreement or conformity with the topic of discussion. It must be relevant to the time of the utterance. The concept of timing is very fundamental to the maxim of relevance. Sometimes, delay responses may violate the maxim of relation because events might have overtaken the question(s) earlier asked. In short, maxim of relation is concerned with the usefulness of the information provided to the on-going discourse.

Manner: Be polite or perspicuous, avoid obscurity of expression, and avoid ambiguity. This maxim stresses the need to be orderly and clear in one’s expression. It dictates that speakers and writers avoid ambiguity and obscurity and be orderly in their utterances. This means that logical sequential arrangement of information



provided is necessary to make the hearers have a good understanding of a discourse. The information that should come first must not be placed last, and the one that is to come last should not come first (Encyclopedia Britanica, 2009). When any of the maxims are flouted, there is a conversational implicature which is an additional unspoken meaning conveyed beyond what the words mean (Adedimeji, 2010), (Finegan, 2008). According to Grice, the 'calculation' of conversational implicatures is grounded on common knowledge of what the speaker has said, the linguistic and extra linguistic context of utterance, general background information and the consideration of the cooperative principle (CP) (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2011). The Gricean principles are powerful because they enable a language user to draw inference on the implied meanings (implicature of utterances). Also, the four maxims proposed by him have been found very useful in explaining indirect speech acts (Mey, 2001; Kepson 2004). A participant in a talk exchange may fail to fulfill a maxim in a number of ways:

- He or she may violate it, in which case he or she will be likely to mislead.
- He or she may opt out of observing a principle by saying things like *I don't want to talk about it*.
- There may be a conflict of maxims: you cannot be as informative as is required if

you do not have adequate evidence.

- He or she may blatantly flout a maxim.

When a maxim is being flouted while it is still clear that the co-operative principle is being observed, the hearer will supply whatever implicature is necessary to reinstate the maxim, and when conversational implicature is generated in this way, Grice says that a maxim is being exploited (Malmkjar & Anderson, 1991, p. 356). According to Malmkjar and Anderson, conversational implicature must possess five features:

1. It can be cancelled, since it depends on the co-operative principle being observed, and it is possible to opt out of observing it. You can simply add *I don't mean to imply...*
2. It is non-detachable from what is being said. If the same thing is being said in a different way, then the same implicature will attach to both manners of expressions: the same implicature of having failed to achieve something which attaches to the expression, *I tried to do it*, will also attach to the paraphrases, *I attempted to do it*, and *I endeavoured to do it*.
3. It is not part of the meaning of the expression, since if it were, it could not be cancelled, but is, rather, dependent on the prior knowledge of that meaning.
4. It is not carried by what is said-the meaning-but by the



saying of what is said-by the speech act, not by the propositional content.

5. It is indeterminate: there are often several possible implicatures-though the types data mentioned above will, of course, help hearers determine the most likely implicature (Malmkjar & Anderson, 1991, p. 356).

One obvious weakness of Grice pragmatic principle is that the maxim of manner is perhaps flouted by Grice himself through the use of 'perspicuous' and 'prolixity' both of which are bombasts (Adedimeji, 2010, p. 76). Grice's account of pragmatic inference has also been criticized by Sperber and Wilson (1986), Neale (1992) for serious overlaps in his four maxims which often results in confusion due to lack of clear-cut boundaries. They further argue that all Grice's maxims can be replaced by a single principle of relevance – which when suitably elaborated, can handle the full range of data that Grice's maxims were designed to explain (Wilson & Sperber, 1986, p. 381). In addition, Grice's concept of conversational implicatures is the most controversial part of his theory of conversation for many followers, for several reasons. For instance, the category of conversational implicatures blurs the distinction between what is said, usually conceived as determined by the semantic convention of language, what is implicated, usually thought of as a matter of inference as to a

speaker's intentions in saying what he or she does (Yhosikate, 2007). Finally, Gricean theory is flouted because it places the study of the conventional meaning of some expressions within the realm of pragmatics (study of implicatures), rather than semantic, usually conceived as the home of conventional meaning.

Methodology

The data consists of five proverbs with animal metaphors, purposively selected from Nigerian oral tradition and written sources. Each proverb was analyzed in terms of: Literal and metaphorical meanings, The Gricean maxim flouted, The conversational implicature and its cultural significance.

Data Analysis

This section presents the analysis of the selected Nigerian proverbs that employ animal metaphors. The proverbs are examined through the framework of Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature, with attention to how each one flouts conversational maxims to generate implicit meanings. The analysis proceeds proverb by proverb, highlighting the literal expression, the maxim(s) violated, the implicatures derived, and the socio-cultural significance embedded in each saying. By foregrounding the interplay between language, context, and culture, this section demonstrates how animal metaphors serve as pragmatic tools for conveying moral instruction and



cultural wisdom in Nigerian discourse.

Proverb 1

Proverb: Monkey wey see banana for ground, go chop am, forget say hunter set trap.

Literal gloss: A monkey that sees a banana on the ground will eat it, forgetting that a hunter may have set a trap.

Gricean diagnosis: The proverb flouts the maxim of relation and also flouts quantity. It does not state the admonition directly. Instead it offers a short anecdote and depends on the hearer to infer the warning. The flout is deliberate. The speaker withholds the explicit advice in order to prompt inference. That creates a particularized conversational implicature. The implicature is cancelable. For example, adding the explicit warning, “but I am not warning you,” would defeat the intended reading.

Inferential path: The hearer maps monkey → human person, banana → immediate reward or temptation, hunter+trap → hidden danger or long term harm. From these mappings the hearer infers the pragmatic content: avoid immediate gratification that hides danger.

Cultural function: This proverb is used as a cautionary device. It places emphasis on prudence and foresight. It functions in parent to child, elder to youth and community-counsel settings. It also preserves a cultural

script that values moderation and wariness.

Critical reading: The proverb enforces a conservative risk posture. It discourages impulsive behaviour, which can be protective. At the same time it can be employed to police adventurous or innovative acts by labelling them reckless. In contexts of social change the proverb can be invoked to justify inaction.

The proverb “Monkey wey see banana for ground, go chop am, forget say hunter set trap” flouts Grice’s maxim of relation by refusing to state its moral directly. Rather than issuing a plain warning the speaker offers a concrete scene and relies on the hearer to make the transfer from animal behaviour to human choice. The consequential implicature is that immediate gratification often masks danger, and prudent actors must delay impulse for safety. This implicature is particularized and cancelable, which shows that the proverb functions as an interpretive prompt rather than as a literal assertion. Pragmatically the proverb serves an injunctive role in discourse. It disciplines risk taking while teaching foresight. At the level of ideology the same pragmatic strategy can work conservatively, since endorsing caution becomes a resource for resisting novelty or social change.



Proverb 2

Proverb: As dog dey waka, na so hin go see bone.

Literal gloss: As a dog walks, that is how it will find a bone.

Gricean diagnosis: The utterance flouts the maxim of quantity by offering a tautological or minimally informative statement. It deliberately understates the point to produce a generalized conversational implicature. The hearer is expected to generalize: persistent effort produces reward. This implicature is normally calculable without heavy context, so it behaves like a generalized implicature in many uses.

Inferential path: The hearer abstracts from the literal image to a social rule: steady movement or continuous effort increases the chance of success. The image uses cumulative time and routine as the route to reward.

Cultural function: The proverb functions as encouragement. It validates steady labour and patience. It is often used in moral instruction, in pedagogy, and in workplace or family advice.

Critical reading: The moral of persistence has clear positive values. At the same time the proverb naturalizes outcome inequality by implying that effort alone explains success. In contexts of structural constraint the proverb may undercut

social critique by individualizing hardship.

“As dog dey waka, na so hin go see bone” works by under-informing the hearer and thereby generating an implicature about effort and reward. The surface sentence is minimally informative, yet it licenses the generalized inference that steady, persistent action tends to yield returns. Under Grice’s framework the proverb exploits the maxim of quantity. Because the inference is culturally widespread it behaves like a generalized conversational implicature in ordinary exchange. Functionally the proverb encourages patience and toil. Critically, however, the same pragmatic form can obscure structural causes of inequality by framing success as primarily the result of individual perseverance.

Proverb 3

Proverb: Fish no go learn swim from crab.

Literal gloss: A fish will not learn to swim from a crab.

Gricean diagnosis: This proverb flouts the maxim of quality by asserting a claim whose literal truth is odd or impossible in a natural learning account. The flout is rhetorical. The hearer recognizes the literal falsity and therefore seeks an implied meaning. The derived implicature is that people should not seek instruction from those who lack the relevant competence. The implicature is cancellable, which



identifies it as conversational rather than conventional.

Inferential path: Hearers map fish → novice or person in a domain, crab → incompetent adviser, learn swim → acquire a skill. The incongruity of the literal claim triggers scalar and contrastive reasoning that yields the normative message.

Cultural function: The proverb polices epistemic authority. It instructs interlocutors to choose teachers and mentors carefully. It is a tool for maintaining standards of competence in apprenticeship, trade, or leadership selection.

Critical reading: While the proverb promotes sensible gatekeeping it can also justify exclusion and elitism. In contexts where access to expert instruction is limited the proverb may be used to blame the learner rather than the system that denies competent teachers.

“Fish no go learn swim from crab” is a paradigmatic case of flouting the maxim of quality. The literal claim appears false or absurd, and this strategic falsity directs the hearer to search for an implied proposition. The implicature is that one should seek instruction only from persons with demonstrable expertise. The pragmatic mechanism is contrastive inference. By presenting an impossible learning path the proverb foregrounds epistemic fit between teacher and learner. Pragmatically the proverb preserves standards of competence; ideologically it can be

enlisted in discourse that excludes novices from training opportunities, especially where access to qualified mentors is uneven.

Proverb 4

Proverb: Frog wey no get tail, na God give am.

Literal gloss: A frog that has no tail, God gave it to the frog.

Gricean diagnosis: The proverb flouts the maxim of relation by shifting from a physical description to a theological justification that is not obviously relevant to the practical concern at hand. The indirectness produces an implicature of acceptance and contentment. The hearer infers that certain bodily or social lacks are not personal faults but part of providential order. The implicature is particularized and context sensitive.

Inferential path: The hearer understands the frog’s lack as a metaphor for an individual who lacks some desired trait. The appeal to divine agency yields the pragmatic upshot: accept your condition and cultivate gratitude or humility.

Cultural function: It is a socializing tool. The proverb supports resignation, gratitude and social harmony by framing disadvantage as ordained. It is often used to check envy and to urge contentment.

Critical reading: This pragmatic strategy can support social complacency. When structural



remedies are possible the proverb may function to discourage protest or redistribution by framing inequality as natural or divinely sanctioned.

“Frog wey no get tail, na God give am” uses theological attribution to perform a pragmatic act of consolation. By invoking divine agency the proverb directs the hearer toward acceptance of an apparent lack. In Gricean terms the utterance flouts relation through indirectness, and the resulting implicature is that resignation and gratitude are appropriate responses. The proverb thus operates as a cultural device for maintaining social equilibrium. At the same time its pragmatic effect may be ideologically loaded, since appeals to providence can inhibit collective efforts to change unjust conditions.

Proverb 5

Proverb: Ant wey get sense, no dey follow dead body enter grave.

Literal gloss: A sensible ant does not follow a dead body into the grave.

Gricean diagnosis: The proverb flouts the maxim of manner by using vivid, somewhat cryptic imagery that forces the hearer to resolve indirection and metaphor. The oblique phrasing increases processing effort so the hearer must infer the intended rule of conduct. The implicature is that a wise person keeps away from harmful company or hopeless causes. This is a particularized conversational

implicature and it is cancelable in discourse.

Inferential path: The hearer interprets the dead body and grave as symbols for destructive enterprises or dishonourable people. The ant becomes a model of prudence. From these mappings the hearer draws the normative inference about social distancing and self-preservation.

Cultural function: The proverb is a warning against bad company and dangerous loyalty. It supports reputation management and sometimes social exclusion. It is used to counsel prudence in relationships and political alliances.

Critical reading: The proverb can be ethically protective. At the same time it can sanction ostracism and stigmatization. In crises it may encourage individual withdrawal where collective solidarity would be more appropriate.

“Ant wey get sense, no dey follow dead body enter grave” relies on image and indirection to prompt inference. The proverb flouts the maxim of manner by compressing a moral into an arresting, somewhat opaque scene. Hearers map the dead body and grave onto ruinous involvements and infer that prudent people avoid destructive associations. Functionally the proverb enforces self-preservation and reputation management. Yet the same pragmatic device may support social exclusion in situations where



communal support would be ethically superior.

Discussion

The five proverbs illustrate how Nigerian animal metaphors function pragmatically by deliberately flouting Grice's conversational maxims to generate implicatures. Each proverb requires the listener to move beyond literal meaning and engage in cultural inference, thereby reinforcing shared norms of caution, perseverance, competence, contentment, and prudence. The analyses reveal that these proverbs are not merely decorative elements of speech but powerful communicative strategies that encode collective values and guide social behavior. The following section synthesizes these individual insights to show the wider cultural patterns and ideological implications of animal metaphors in Nigerian discourse.

This study has demonstrated that Nigerian proverbs employing animal metaphors strategically flout Grice's conversational maxims to generate implicatures that communicate culturally significant messages. The analysis reveals that these proverbs serve as vehicles for moral instruction, social commentary, and cultural preservation. Each proverb flouted specific maxims, such as relevance, quantity, quality, and manner, to prompt listeners to infer deeper meanings beyond the surface-level expressions.

By analyzing the proverbs' literal and metaphorical meanings, as well as their conversational implicatures, the study highlights the interplay between pragmatics and cultural context in shaping communication. The findings underscore the importance of context and shared cultural knowledge in understanding the implicit messages embedded in Nigerian proverbs.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the pragmatic analysis of proverbs not only enriches our understanding of conversational implicature but also sheds light on how traditional expressions adapt linguistic strategies to convey timeless truths and societal values. This reinforces the relevance of pragmatics in interpreting proverbs and emphasizes their enduring role in fostering cultural identity and wisdom. This study has demonstrated that animal metaphors in Nigerian Pidgin English proverbs function as powerful pragmatic tools through which speakers communicate meanings that extend beyond literal interpretation. By deliberately flouting Grice's conversational maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner, the proverbs generate conversational implicatures that rely heavily on shared cultural knowledge and contextual inference. The analysis reveals that these implicatures encode core Nigerian values such as caution, perseverance, wisdom, contentment, and social prudence.



Rather than stating moral lessons directly, the proverbs invite listeners to engage cognitively, thereby strengthening their persuasive and didactic force. This confirms that proverbs are not merely ornamental expressions but strategic communicative acts that exploit pragmatic principles to achieve social and cultural goals.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Future studies should examine a larger corpus of Nigerian Pidgin English proverbs and extend the analysis to other metaphor types beyond animals, such as plant, object, or human metaphors.
2. Comparative analyses between Nigerian Pidgin English proverbs and proverbs in indigenous Nigerian languages or Standard English could provide deeper insights into cross-linguistic pragmatic strategies.
3. Pragmatic analysis of proverbs should be incorporated into linguistics and language education curricula to enhance learners' understanding of inference, indirect meaning, and cultural communication.
4. Given existing critiques of Grice's framework, future research may complement implicature analysis with Relevance Theory to account for cognitive processing and interpretive efficiency.

5. Scholars and language planners should document and analyze Nigerian Pidgin proverbs as part of broader efforts to preserve indigenous knowledge systems and communicative traditions.

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