

Explicatures in Conversational Discourse in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates meaning generation at the explicit level in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, given that no context-driven study of the text has been attempted. It specifically explores the processes by which the meanings of utterances are modified in use, exemplifying with twenty five percent of transactions in the novel. The study routes its findings through the more recent relevance-theoretical perspective as well as insights from relevant pragmatic models of context, and reveals that the recovery of explicatures involves reference assignment, bridging, gap-filling, disambiguation, and embedding propositional contents of expressions into higher level explicatures. It further demonstrates that these processes facilitate access to the author's thematic foci, character exposition, location of settings, and cohesive unity. Ultimately, the paper concludes that a study of explicature in *Purple Hibiscus* assists greatly in understanding conversations in the text, and also aids access to the intended meaning of the author vis-à-vis the overall interpretation of the text.

Keywords: *Purple Hibiscus, transaction, context, relevance, explicature.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Scholarly studies on Adichie have attracted increasing interests in the literature in recent times, given her recognition as the new voice of Nigerian literature who has already gained a measure of success that eludes many writers both within and outside Africa (Heather 2005). Scholarship on Adiche's works has generally shuttled between literature (see Heather 2005, Highfield 2006, Oha 2007, etc.) and linguistics (e.g. Tunca 2008). While studies from the literary perspective have generally dealt with the investigation of language as an aid to plot advancement, character presentation, thematic projection, and aesthetics achievement in her works, those from the linguistic angle have been limited to the investigation of the stylistic resources harnessed to realise *Purple Hibiscus* (henceforth PH).

Unfortunately, however, no context-driven (i.e. pragmatic) attention has been paid to the study of language as a tool for character presentation, thematic hint, and ultimately, meaning recovery in Adichie's works. The present study therefore fills this gap as it draws on the more recent perspective of relevance theory, uses insights from various pragmatic models of context, and examines the processes by which explicit meanings are contextually recovered in *PH*.

Our data consists of transactions from the sampled text (i.e. PH). Out of a

total number of 164 transactions in the novel, 41 instances (representing 25%) were randomly selected for the analysis with consideration for their thematic salience. The choice of *PH* has been informed both by the little attention paid to the text in linguistic scholarship and the consideration for the conspicuous role it plays in the reflections of the reality of the Nigerian socio-cultural, economic, and political experiences. This study of explicatures in the novel of Adichie ultimately hopes to shift literature on pragmatics forward and equally provide a new (theoretical) insight into the interpretation and understanding of contemporary African fiction.

2. STUDIES ON LITERARY TEXTS AND THE WORKS OF ADICHIE

Largely, scholarship on literary studies has dealt with the manipulation of language as an aid to character presentation, plot advancement, and thematic projection. Of course, as a work of imagination, literature mirrors the events of the past, transmits socio-cultural values and creates great awareness of the traditions of its enabling society (Kehinde 2005: 301). It is only expected therefore that literature finds its expression in language, since the study of language is a complement and aid to the study of literature. While all genres of literature have been studied with respect to the exploration of language in literary texts, prose and drama have been the predominant forms, given their “closeness to the everyday language experience of the people” (Odebunmi 2006: 154). One important thing though is that the role of language in the genre of prose does not vary greatly from that in the genres of drama and poetry.

Studies that have discussed the role of language in literary texts directly or indirectly include those of Eberhard (1985), Ogunsiji (2005), Fashina (2006), Adegbite (2006), etc., for prose; Bryan (2002), Monye (2002), Odebunmi(2006), Olateju (2006), etc., for drama; and Dare (2005), Babajide (2007), etc., for poetry. In Nigeria, the study of the use of language in prose text, which is our concern in this paper, has largely dwelled on the texts of the older generation of writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, etc., especially with consideration for the different style features that can aid character presentation and help the author to achieve some stylistic effects in the texts. Interestingly, it has been demonstrated in the literature that – as in the works of the older generation of literary writers – the younger generation of Nigerian writers (which includes Adichie) equally exhibits a careful manipulation of linguistic resources to aptly express the “civilizing function which literature performs...by dealing with the African image in the past or the politics of the present” (Izevbaye 1979: 14). Adichie, a prominent member of this generation of writers, has been metaphorically described in the literature as the new voice of Nigerian literature who has already gained a measure of success that eludes many writers both within and outside Africa (see Heather 2005, Highfield 2006).

Notably, Adichie's literary writings span the three broad genres of literature: drama, prose, and poetry. She has written a play, *For Love of Biafra* (1998), a collection of poems "Decisions" (1998), two novels, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), and several short stories. However, she is better known as a novelist. Like most African writers, Adichie has demonstrated concerns for the happenings in her society. She is therefore preoccupied with the reflection of the historical and socio-political condition of her society. She is particularly concerned with the exposition of the ill's (social, political, economic, and religious) in her society and the attack of their imperfections. The attack is however governed by love for the society rather than by disenchantment with it.

Significantly, her works generally enjoy the representation of the fictional reality through her incisive, graphic and apt use of language. In fact, as Osofisan says "she beautifully manipulates syntax and trope, as well as controls irony and suspense" to achieve great aesthetics and heighten effects (see back cover of *Purple Hibiscus*, 2006). Her effective manipulation of language enhances a cerebral analysis and interpretation of her environment, which makes her works worthy of scholarly attention.

PH, for instance, cinematically presents the oddities in Nigeria as well as Africa in general. Particularly, it x-rays the tyrannical trauma of anarchical-cum draconian leaderships (both within the family and society at large) being experienced by the Africans. This is portrayed through the family of Eugene Achike blessed with material wealth, but mined tragically by the cruel abuses of this father turned callous by a conservative form of Catholicism. He appears to uphold moral standards, as he uses his newspaper, *the standard*, to challenge the socio-political malaise-cum abuse of power that characterizes the governance in the post-independent Nigeria. However, his private life is as dictatorial and abusive as the leaders whom he attacks. He constantly batters his wife and uses other violent means to correct his family. This weird behaviour has therefore caused Kambili, her brother Jaja, and their mother, Beatrice both physical and psychological destructions.

The children's lives assume a positive dimension however when they go to spend their holidays with their Aunt, Ifeoma, and her children in Nsukka. Like Eugene, her brother, Ifeoma is also a catholic, but she does not embrace a "fanatic brand of Catholicism" (alá Femi Osofisan). She allows her children to leave in an atmosphere of freedom and corrects them subtly when they go wrong. She also demonstrates love to everyone, including their father, papa-Nnukwu, who still holds to the traditional Igbo religion of Odinani, and whom Eugene has rejected as a heathen. Ultimately, Kambili and Jaja's stay in Nsukka plays a significant role in their self discovery and journey to freedom. Apart from the much they learn from Aunt Ifeoma and her children, they also learn a lot from their aunt's family friend, father Amadi. This young priest believes in a form of Catholicism that is liberating and life-affirming rather than the oppressive and conservative one upheld by Kambili's father, and his lifestyle effects some positive changes in Kambili and Jaja. As Kambili slowly begins to

rediscover her voice as well as desire freedom from her father's control, Jaja starts to display defiance which seems to infect their mother, who also starts to disobey her husband.

The love that binds these victims of Eugene's brutalities together rescues them in the end. Out of love for her children and herself, Beatrice poisons Eugene so as to ensure their freedom from his inhumane acts to them. Jaja reciprocates the love shown by mama when he confesses to the murder and goes to prison instead of their mother. When mama and Kambili visit Jaja in the prison and everyone keeps mute, Kambili expresses her awareness that a new and different silence now prevails among them; suggesting freedom from their father's subjugation and brutalities, which 'Purple Hibiscus' metaphorically connotes.

3. THE RELEVANCE – THEORETIC CONCEPT OF EXPLICATURE AND CONTEXT

The idea that humans communicate their assumptions explicitly underlies the concept of explicature coined by Sperber and Wilson in the development of their Relevance Theory (henceforth RT). RT is a cognitive approach to human communication principally based upon the claim that human cognition is geared to the hearers' search for (and maximisation of) relevance in the information they process in the course of a conversational discourse (see Blakemore, 1992; Yus, 1999; etc.). This process (which is the first (cognitive) principle of relevance) involves the achievement of as many contextual effects as possible for a little processing effort, especially to ensure successful communication. Of course, for a communicative act to be successful, the speaker needs the addressee's attention. The speaker's utterances then need to be made relevant enough to be worth the addressee's attention, given that, in relevance-theoretic account, everyone is geared towards the maximisation of relevance. This thus leads us to the second (communicative) principle of relevance which states that "every act of ostensive communication (e.g. an utterance) communicates a presumption of its own optional relevance" (Sperber and Wilson, 1986). By 'ostensive', relevance theorists refer to the overt nature of the speaker's communicative intentions in acts of communication. Central, therefore is intention-recognition to understanding of an utterance or a lexical unit. As Perry (2006: 25) says "communication will be successful when the addressee recognises those intentions."

Within RT, it is claimed that the hearer starts off the interpretation of an utterance with the identification of its logical form. This logical form is then enriched with contextual information to generate an explicature. According to Odebunmi (2007: 86), the relevance theorists coined the notion of explicature to complement the Gricean concept of implicature. Grice and his followers (known as Griceans and neo-Griceans) have referred to implicature as "an additional

conveyed meaning” (Yule, 1996: 35), and have come up with different types of implicature; viz, generalized conversational implicature, scalar implicature, and particularized implicature (ibid: 41). This classification of implicature by Griceans and neo-Griceans has however been tinkered by relevance theorists in their conceptualization of explicature. They argue that conventional implicatures, short-circuited implicature, and metaphors/metonyms all contribute to explicatures of utterances (see Haugh, 2002).

What is referred to as explicature in RT is simply put “an explicitly communicated assumption” (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 182), or “an explicit assumption communicated by an utterance, which is a development of the logical form encoded by the utterance” (Haugh, 2002: 19–20). Put differently, it is “the result of fleshing out the semantic representation of an utterance” (Blakemore, 1992: 59). This explicit side of communication, according to Sperber and Wilson (1986), is just as inferential and worthy of pragmatic attention as the implicit side. Establishing the pragmatic significance of explicature, Blakemore (1992) notes that explicatures have to be determined in all communicative interactions, and they can be derived through enrichment, which includes gap filling, reference assignment, bridging, disambiguation, etc. So, enrichment captures the whole essence of relevance theory, especially in its emphasis on the development of an initial assumption schema to a fully elaborated propositional form (see Blakemore, 1992; Ruiz de Mendoza, 1998). By and large, to work successfully on explicatures in application to our data of English usage in prose literature therefore, we shall (following Odebunmi’s (2007: 86) operational definition) treat explicatures as what is literally said which is inferentially recoverable through enrichment, and remains within the bounds of the proposition form recovered.

The fact is that the rules of language leave a lot of propositions open (Perry, 2006: 24), and to gain the propositional form, the hearer may have to form concepts around particular uses of language, especially where no sufficient linguistic clues are provided; that is, reference must be assigned to referring expressions, ambiguities must be resolved, etc. (see Odebunmi, 2007: 86). On a cognitive approach, reference assignment involves accessing a mental representation which uniquely identifies the intended referent, and incorporating the representation into proposition expressed by the utterance. It is necessary because it either makes a certain representation accessible or assumes the accessibility of a given representation (Blakemore, 1992: 63–69). Disambiguation has to do with resolving the case of the multiple sense of a word resulting in indeterminacy. It is necessary given the characteristics indeterminacy of language (Grundy, 2000: 104). Bridging occurs when assumptions signalled by referring expressions “are constructed by series of inferences on the basis of what the hearer knows or beliefs” rather than being stated directly in preceding utterances (Blakemore, 1992: 72). It contributes to the establishment of the referential content of an utterance or lexical unit by identifying the given as well as new assumption based on the context of use (ibid: 80).

It must be said here that the interpretive process for the recovery of the explicit content of communication requires that the hearer apply relevant contextual information in determining the meaning of a word that best fits the given context (see Ran, 2006: 137). The term context itself has a wide scope of usage, ranging from the environment in which words occur to the situation in which language is used (Mey, 2001: 7). To Odebunmi (2006: 22), “context is the spine of meaning”. Odebunmi’s idea of context presupposes a (mutual) contextual ground on which participants operate and negotiate meaning. This contextual consideration recognises contextual beliefs (i.e. certain beliefs or assumptions held prior to or even during occasions of human interactions) as coming into the communicative process and of course facilitating it (Odebunmi, 2006: 24). The fact is that hearer(s) “must share knowledge of subject matter and other properties of context with the speaker(s), at least to some extent; if otherwise, adequate information has to be contextually provided” (see Odebunmi, 2005: 39).

Context has ultimately been described as a key element in the pragmatic perspective (see Hoyer and Kaiser, 2007: 53). The user, within the pragmatic approach depends on the context for negotiation of meaning, but can change or vary the context; that is, “the context is not a given or a constant” (Ibid). This view is also consistent with Culler’s (1988: xiv) view that “context is not given but produced; what belongs to a context is determined by interpretive strategies...” The right context is therefore not necessarily constructed in advance of an utterance, but may be constructed in the course of interpreting the utterance. This, of course, is the dynamic view of context. The notion of context is, in fact, a central one in RT. In his cognitive approach to context, Kokinov (1995) refers to the perception of the environment and the creation of new representation; memory and the reactivation or modification of recent or old residual representations. In this sense, context is best conceived as the set of assumptions that a hearer uses in the interpretation of a particular utterance. This cognitive stance thus tilts towards the dynamics of context being currently advanced in the pragmatic literature.

Though the role of context can be explained in terms of the relevance – theoretic framework, this cognitive view of context is not sufficient to enable hearer understand the speaker’s utterances. This work therefore benefits from contextual models developed by various scholars (e.g. Cruse, 2000; Mey, 2001; Kokinov, 1995; Hoyer and Kaiser, 2007). This is because enrichment processes largely have close affiliation with a variety a context features. In fact, the hearer has to apply relevant contextual information while assigning reference to referring expressions, filling missing gaps, disambiguating ambiguous utterances, etc., towards assessing the relevance of the proposition in focus for the addressee(s). Explicatural contents can then be made clear after contextual enrichment. Following Cruse (2000: 314), the hearer therefore has to make a search through possible domains, roughly in this order:

- (i) the immediate preceding discourse (strictly within short term memory);
- (ii) the immediate situation (currently available to the sense);
- (iii) the broader situation;
- (iv) memory/ general (or mutual) knowledge.

4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Our findings revealed that the recovery of explicatures in *Purple Hibiscus* (PH) involves reference assignment, bridging, disambiguation, gap-filling, and embedding propositional context into higher level description, and that these processes facilitate access to the thematic foci of the author, character exposition, cohesive unity, etc.

4.1 REFERENCE ASSIGNMENT

Instances of reference assignment (RA) found in our data reveal that in textual interpretation the author usually provides the readers with clues so that s/he can identify specific referent or intended meaning of a referring expression within a certain context. Then, provided that the reader can identify the referent, the information will suffice in context. It is however an interesting finding that references are assigned to referring expressions in *PH* through definite and indefinite tokens, as well as phoric references.

4.1.1 Definite and Indefinite Tokens

Definite tokens in our context refer to words/lexical units used to identify specific persons, places or things; while indefinite tokens denote lexical units used to refer to particular but not precise or specific persons, places, or things. Definite tokens appear as proper nouns such as “Ade” (p. 42), “Anikwenwa” (p. 69), “Aokpe” (p. 99), etc. as well as noun phrases (e.g. “the missionary”, p. 83; “the standard”, p. 57, “the meeting”, p. 59, etc.). Indefinite ones, on the other hand, feature as unmodified common nouns (e.g. “staff”, p. 42; “meeting”, p. 59, etc.), noun phrases (e.g. “a church council meeting”, p. 59, “this bush place”, p. 58, etc.), and spatial deixis (e.g. “here”, “there”, p. 57, etc.). These tokens complement the definite descriptions in achieving the textuality of a transaction as well as thematic projection. Let us consider, first, examples manifesting definite tokens:

Example 1: (Background: Amaka raised the topic of apparition about virgin Mary at appearing at Aokpe).

Amaka: Did you hear about **Aokpe**, uncle Eugene? It's a **tiny village in Benue**. The Blessed virgin is appearing **there**.

Eugene: Yes, I heard about it.

(PH p. 99)

The definite proper noun “Aokpe” refers to the noun phrase “a tiny village in Benue” and the existential “there”; that is, it strikes a cohesive relationship with them. This relationship eventually helps in the location of the spatial setting of a significant event in the novel. “Aokpe” in the context of the novel is made salient as an apparition ground where pilgrimage is being held, given the believe that the blessed virgin is appearing there. This, no adults, has implication for the projection of the theme of religion in the novel. However, to gain access to the referential content of the referring token engaged in the utterance, the following enrichment would be recoverable:

Aokpe is a tiny village in Benue.

Ultimately, this interpretation is predicated upon inference, especially on the basis of contextual information.

On the other hand, indefinite tokens too need to be enriched based on certain contextual considerations so that what they assign reference to would be made pragmatically clear to generate an explicature. Essentially, they serve as referring terms to pragmatically keep an earlier mentioned expression/ index on track as well as illuminate the sense of a prior structure. Example 2 can be considered:

Example 2: (Background: Ade Coker went to visit Eugene and his family in their country home during Christmas and had a warm interaction with Kambili and Jaja).

Ade Coker (U₁): Jaja, Kambili, how are u? Do you like coming to the village?

Kambili and Jaja (U₂): (simultaneously) Yes.

Ade coker (U₂): Eh? You like coming to **this bush place**? Do you have friends **here**?

Kambili and Jaja (U₂): No

Ade Coker (U₃): So what do you do in **this back of beyond**?

Kambili and Jaja: (smiled and said nothing)

(PH p. 57–58)

In example 2 above, the indefinite rhematics “this bush place”, “here”, and “this back of beyond” in Ade Coker’s (U₁) and (U₂) respectively do not just refer to “the village” in his (U₁) to form a cohesive chain, they equally function to keep the earlier index “the village” in Ade Coker’s (U₁) on track and give a clear elaboration on it. In the canonical treatment of RT, the only possible explicatural

interpretation for the utterance “Do you like coming to the village?” would involve fixation of reference as in:

- (i) Do you like coming to this bush place?
- (ii) Do you like coming here?
- (iii) Do you like coming to this back of beyond?

The referent of the referring tokens (i.e. the phrases “this bush place” and “this back of beyond” as well as the essential “here”) is thus contextually specified as “the village”, and this aids the location and exposition of a notable setting of events in the novel.

4.1.2 Phoric References

Our idea of phoric reference presupposes a word, commonly pronoun, used to maintain reference to someone or something already mentioned, or that is more fully identified later. Phoric references in *PH* manifest as anaphors (e.g. “it”, p. 12; “they”, p. 84; “his”, p. 42, etc.) and cataphors (e.g. it”, p. 68) but present a predominance of anaphors. Driven by context, phoric references generally serve to create cohesive effects, aid indexing of events/objects and achieve economy of expression in the novel. An example of anaphoric relationship existing between lexical units in characters’ conversations would be considered:

Example 3 (Background (Jaja did not attend communion on Easter Sunday and his father, Eugene, became furious over this act))

Eugene (U₁): Jaja, you did not go to communion.

Jaja (U₁): **The wafer** gives me bad breath. And the priest keeps **touching my mouth** and **it** nauseates me.

Eugene (U₂): **It** is the body of our Lord. You cannot stop receiving the body of the Lord...

(PH p. 6)

In example 3 above, the pronoun “it” is used in two different instances with varying anaphoric references. In the first occurrence in Jaja’s (U₁), it refers to the act “touching my mouth”, thereby making the event in question pragmatically salient, while in the second, it refers to the thematic “the wafer” to anaphorically strike a cohesive tie and equally assume the salience of the object in question. It is therefore contextually established on the basis of preceding utterances that different entities are being economically referred to. Of course, without such a clear contextual sensitivity, the addressee may be unable to find the intended referents of the pronoun “it” in the example. The right assessment of the contextual information therefore facilitates access to the preferred interpretations below (based on enrichment):

1. The wafer is the body of the Lord.
2. The priest’s act of touching my mouth nauseates me.

4.2 BRIDGING

Apart from assigning reference to referring expressions, the recovery of explicatural contents of utterances sometimes involves bridging. Bridging involves enriching the logical form of an utterance with assumptions which are not directly mentioned in the preceding utterance, but constructed on the basis of the hearer's knowledge or beliefs. The following instance will suffice:

Example 4: Background (Amaka engages her cousin, Kambili, who just arrives Nsukka from Enugu in a conversation)

Amaka (U₁): There's no happening place in Nsukka in case you haven't realised that already. Nsukka has no Genesis or Nike Lake.

Kambili (U₁): What?

Amaka (U₂): ... the happening places in Enugu. You go there all the time, don't you?

(PH p. 117)

In example 4, there is a bridge between "happening place" in Amaka's U₁ and U₂ as well as "Genesis or Nike Lake" in her U₁, given the indirect relationship between them. Obviously, the hearer (Kambili) would be able to access the assumption that Genesis and Nike Lake are certain happening places in Enugu on the assumption that the utterance is consistent with the principle of relevance. It would then be taken that the logical form of the speaker's (Amaka) utterance is to be enriched to an assumption whose truth is guaranteed by the speaker. The following proposition can possibly be recovered through inferences:

The happening places in Enugu are the (restaurant) Genesis and (the hotel) Nike Lake. This new assumption thus establishes the referential content of the lexical units, Genesis or Nike lake, thereby aiding the description of the setting in question.

4.3 DISAMBIGUATION

Another notable process of contextual enrichment, especially to generate explicatures in our data is disambiguation. This process is essentially informed by the necessity of ensuring clarity of expression as a result of the semantic multiplicity or indeterminacy of lexical units that sometimes characterizes literary discourse. The transactions below can be considered:

Example 5: Background: (Eugene, Jaja's father did not see Jaja in church during communion and on getting home, he challenged him).

Eugene (U₁): Jaja, you did not go to the communion.

Jaja (U₁): **The wafer** gives me bad breath...

(PH p. 6)

Example 6: Background: (On Christmas day, the Igwe surprisingly visits Eugene in his house, and the following conversation ensues between Kambili, Eugene's daughter, and her cousin, Amaka):

Kambili (U₁): I thought the Igwe was supposed to stay at his palace and receive guests. I didn't know he visits people's home.

Amaka (U₁): I guess that's because your father is a **bigman**.

(PH p. 93)

In (5) above, Eugene's interpretative process of Jaja's U₁ involves constructing hypotheses about the explicature of Jaja's utterance. Intuitively, the lexical unit "the wafer" makes the following encyclopaedic entries accessible:

Wafer₁ = a piece of special bread used in the Christian religious ceremony of communion.

Wafer₂ = a thin biscuit eaten especially with ice-cream.

A rational speaker aiming at optimal relevance might have intended either of the interpretations above. However, in (5) above the most accessible interpretation of the lexical unit "the wafer" which yields adequate contextual effects for no unjustifiable efforts is the narrowing of the phrase to mean wafer₁. Of course, this is the first interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance, as it answers the question "why" with respect to Jaja's absence at the communion service. This particular mental representation would then be accessed by Eugene and incorporated into the proposition expressed to recover the enriched proposition that:

The wafer₁ gives Jaja bad breath...

It will therefore be this explicatural interpretation that Eugene takes Jaja to have intended. The explicature, no doubts, plays a role in thematic projection – it specifically hints at *rejection of religious imposition(s)* which is one of the issues thematised in the novel.

Also, in example (6), for the lexical unit "bigman" in Amaka's U₁ to be interpreted as relevant, Kambili needs to have access to the encyclopaedic assumption in 'bigman₂' (rather than 'bigman₁') below:

Bigman₁ = a man of more than average size or weight.

Bigman₂ = a very successful and popular person.

Guided by expectation of relevance, and using contextual assumptions made accessible by the encyclopaedic entry of the linguistically encoded concept in bigman₂ above, the following would become recoverable by Kambili as the proposition expressed by Amaka:

I guess that's because your father is a very successful and popular person.

Such enrichment occurs by inference on the basis of encyclopaedic knowledge rather than on (that of) mere linguistic decoding, and the explicature recovered

echoes the theme of inequality – cum social distance equally made salient by Adichie in the text.

4.4 GAP-FILLING

Our findings further revealed that, sometimes, the linguistic properties of a speaker's utterance may provide only very skeletal clues to the proposition the hearer is to reach. This is common in instances of elliptical utterances, especially where the process of interpreting the lexical units (realising the logical form of the utterance) is a matter of filling in the slots left open in the linguistically encoded semantic representation. For instance:

Example 7: Background: (Jaja and Obiora were having a discussion about a students' riot that had taken place in the University at Nsukka)

Jaja (U₁): What was the riot about?

Obiora (U₁): Light and water.

(PH p. 131)

Obiora's U₁ being a phrasal form, a subject noun phrase as well as verbal anchor has to be supplied to the lexical unit. Given that Jaja's U₁ provides an immediately accessible antecedent for the interpretation of the lexical unit "light and water" in Obiora's U₁, the interpretation that is preferred on the basis of accessibility is that "the riot was about light and water". On the assumption that Obiora's utterance has been relevant, and is presenting information which yields adequate contextual effect, Jaja would then construe him as expressing this enriched proposition through gap-filling. Of course, the nominal slot "the riot" supplied is suggestive of violence, which is a major thematic focus of the author in the text. As such, the theme of violence is harboured in the explicature recovered.

4.5 EMBEDDING PROPOSITIONAL CONTENTS INTO A HIGHER-LEVEL EXPLICATURE

Some cases of enrichment of lexical units in characters' interactions in *PH* require consideration for such feature as embedding the propositional contents of the basic explicature into a higher-level description of the speaker's attitude. Doing this greatly depends on contextual knowledge of the on-going social interaction. One example can be considered:

Example 8: Background: (Beatrice's husband has just died and she briefs her daughter on efforts being made to know the cause of his death):

Beatrice (U₁): They did an autopsy. They have found the poison in your father's body.

Kambili (U₁): Poison?

(PH p. 283)

Recognising that Kambili has produced an ostensive stimulus: she has conveyed the proposition in her U_1 , Beatrice intuitively takes the stimulus as conveying the presumption that it is surprising to Kambili that the autopsy done on her father's corpse reveals poison. So, on the assumption that Kambili's utterance satisfies Beatrice's presumption of relevance, Beatrice would be expected to derive the following higher-level explicature:

Kambili is amazed that her father died of poison.

This enriched proposition thus indicates Kambili's attitude to the discovery that the father was murdered. The inhumane act which further illuminates the major thematic concern of the novel, *PH*, (i.e. man's inhumanity to man) therefore, seems to be covertly and indirectly condemned.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the processes by which linguistically modified word meanings are modified in different contexts of use in *PH*, from the relevance-theoretical perspective. The enrichment processes involved in making explicit information conveyed match contextual requirements have thus been discussed. We have observed that given the semantic incompleteness and/or under-determinacy of certain utterances in our data, enrichment is necessary, especially with consideration for contextual variables. As Yus (1999: 508) says "contextual attributes are often essential for words and sentences to acquire adequate senses for the purpose of the on-going conversations."

The paper posits that an adequate understanding of such cognitive processes of contextual enrichment as reference assignment, bridging, disambiguating, gap-filling and embedding the propositional contents into a higher level description of the speaker's attitude casts some light on the recovery of what is said. Establishing that contextual enrichment of utterances is not merely a pragmatic but also a cognitive phenomenon, the paper has ultimately revealed that:

- a) when we deal with enrichment, the richer explicated proposition entails what is literally said, and
- b) such enrichment is a necessary process of specification which constitutes part of utterance interpretation(s) – as it has introduced the facility of understanding into the reading of prose fiction.

The study is therefore expected to expose ESL users to how to tread on addressee's inferential path towards gaining access to the author's approach to character presentation, setting description, and thematic projection in prose text, especially from the pragmatic perspective. Future research can however focus on the investigation of the various enrichment processes in other genres of literature, especially in respect of meaning.

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