TOWARDS THE ERADICATION OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF NIYI OSUNDARE’S *THE WEDDING CAR*

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The nature and forms of corrupt practices in Nigeria have been studied from various political, social, economic and literary perspectives. Most of these studies have proposed different suggestions for reducing and eradicating the social menace of corruption. However, not much literature abounds in the linguistic study of the phenomenon, especially from the pragmatic perspective. Therefore, this work investigates the pragmatics of Niyi Osundare’s *The Wedding Car* whose main theme is corruption in different forms and at different social levels in Nigeria. In view of the highly embarrassing level of corruption in Nigeria in recent publications of the huge loots by public officers who have depleted the country’s coffers (even her foreign reserves), this study seeks a more effective and immediate solution to this menace that is responsible for the present (almost hopeless) state of economic recession experienced in Nigeria. Therefore, based on the theoretical framework of relevance, this study employs the pragmatic tools of presupposition, entailment, and implicatures to explore the nature of corrupt practices in Nigeria, and hinder or totally eradicate these practices. Within the linguistic theory of Relevance, these pragmatic tools are expected to aid relevant contextual interpretations of the data. Being a dramatic text, the data constitute stage directions and characters’ utterances that are randomly but purposively selected based on their relevance, to explicate the themes of corruption, wastefulness, social injustice in *The Wedding Car*. In addition, the selected data are examined pragmatically to explicate the roles of the different characters in the projection of the theme on one hand, and in its eradication on the other hand. This study concludes with a feasible solution of arresting the culprits and confiscating the contraband, which is recommended as a means of totally eradicating corruption in Nigeria, over time.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Implicatures, Presupposition, Entailment, *The Wedding Car*

**Introduction**

In every human linguistic interaction, the use of language is the ability to mean (Kreidler 2002). A pragmatic investigation of Niyi Osundare’s drama text, *The Wedding Car*, provides clear and ample options of the meanings of what is said as well as what is not said (implied), based on the context of the linguistic text. Thus, the pragmatic function of a text does not only emphasize the communicative competence of a discourse, but also the function of language use to achieve communicative goals. In view of the fact that most of the studies on Osundare’s works have been on his poetry, this work is significant focusing on one of his drama texts to fill the paucity of studies in that area. Being a major stakeholder in study of meaning, Pragmatics deals specifically with the various ways in which meaning is read into utterances. According to Leech (1990:139), “Pragmatics studies the relation between linguistic and their users”. In other words, it helps in solving various problems of meaning due to the ability of
meaning to vary from one context to another, and thereby relates the language user to the society. Consequently, the pragmatic investigation of Niyi Osundare’s drama text, *The Wedding Car*, is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the complexity of language use as a tool for concept manipulation in any society.

Located within the theoretical framework of Relevance, the study employed the pragmatic tools of presupposition, entailment and implicature to provide explicit understanding of the utterances and stage directions of the text, in order to explicate the debacle of corruption in Niyi Osundare’s *The Wedding Car*, which is the focus of the text, as well as the consequent complexities in human relationships as evident in the utterances of the characters in the dramatic text. Thus, this in every instance of language use, there is a creative use of the resources of meaning and a continuous modification of these resources in the process of communication; which corroborates Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis of linguistic relativism, that people see things from different perspectives.

**Literary Texts as Town Criers**

The various forms of literary works serve as effective vehicles for conveying social information about the various communities in which they are produced, across to all those who come in contact with them. By implication, writers who produce these literary works can be compared to the town criers of the traditional African societies because they usually write poems, plays, and fiction about social events and issues. Osundare’s *The Wedding Car* is one of such literary works. It is a dramatic piece that centres on the family of an affluent Nigerian politician who is preparing for the wedding ceremony of his daughter. Mirroring the common happenings among the wealthy and the members of the high social class in Nigeria, this text is an appropriate choice for this study. It is examined to discover the nature and the extent of corruption in the society with a view to finding enduring solutions to it and by extension, eradicating it in the present state of the Nigerian financial condition.

*The Wedding Car* is written by Niyi Osundare, a provocative contributor to public discourse on culture, politics and the economy. His major areas of concern include issues of the human rights, social justice and the environment in Nigeria specifically, and in Africa by extension. Based on his passionate concern for such issues, he contributes to public discourses on culture, politics and the economy using the Nigerian examples. One of such contributions is the production of *The Wedding Car*, the second of his *Two plays*. The drama text centers on the preparation for the wedding of the daughter of Chief Chamberlain, a renowned politician whose level of affluence can be measured in terms his extravagance and wastefulness, size and furnishing of his sitting room, status of his visitor, his illegal importation of champagne, and his avoidance of the payment of customs dues on imported goods. The play ends with the arrest of the politician, and this was the climax of the play.

**Context and Meaning**

In any social or cultural approach to linguistics, the contexts of the instances of language use are germane. In addition to the general understanding of context as the physical setting of a communicative event, context pragmatically includes the status and roles of participants and the affinity between them; the message content in terms of its relevance and influence on the hearer; as well as the nature of the instance language use in terms of its norms in structure and level of formality. Therefore, the use of context clues discover linguistic meaning is highly reliable for comprehensive and appropriate understanding. In situations where the clues are not sufficient for accurate interpretation, the contexts still aid reasonable guesses by the recipients of linguistic messages. This justifies Halliday’s claim that, “language spontaneously in the individual, for the imitative and symbolic instinct is inherent in all intelligent …, but the development is social (1978; 1) and his conclusion that, as the third major component of any semiotic theory, pragmatics… operates in the realm of the interpersonal and textual functions of language. This background explains the reason for employing the pragmatic tools of presupposition, entailment, and
implicatures to investigate relevant utterances and stage directions of *The Wedding Car* in order to understand the linguistic codes and their communicative purposes. This mutual relationship between context and meaning explains the use of the relevance theory to complement a pragmatic study of this nature because they both highlight the importance of context for their operations.

**The Justification for This Study**

Being a dramatic text, *The Wedding Car* provides a prototype of any corrupt human society and enhances the authenticity of the linguistic experiences within the data. The themes of corruption, injustice, oppression, financial recklessness and social injustice in different forms are the major preoccupations of the text, and the relevance of a linguistic consideration of such themes in the present realities of the Nigerian nation to enhance national development cannot be ignored. Moreover, using a pragmatic approach which relates texts to language users will not only project the concept of corruption, but render the conclusions applicable to the contemporary Nigerian society (the immediate setting of the text); or any other corrupt society for immediate and lasting solution to the problem of corruption which has eaten deeply into the fabric of integrity of the nation to threatened the survival of the country’s economy. Similarly, the use of the actual utterances of the characters in the dramatic text authenticates the prevailing social vices and provides an array of pragmatic capabilities that can enhance readers’ understanding of the text, in terms of the pragmatic function of language use to achieve the communicative goals of the text. Thus, the application of the conclusions and recommendations of this study can provide realistic and enduring solutions to this social vice of corruption.

**Methodology**

For this study, in order to achieve the communicative goals of Niyi Osundare’s *The Wedding Car*, pragmatic the tools of implicatures, presupposition, and entailment are employed to investigate the actual utterances through which the message or the theme is projected, as well as the stage directions which give background and complementary information to the verbal actions of the text. The qualitative approach is used to analyze stage directions and utterances of characters that are randomly but, purposively selected based on their relevance to the theme of corruption, financial recklessness and social injustice in the play. Thus, the selection of the data is based on its relevance to the themes of the text. In the analysis, each relevant stage direction and utterance (in no particular order) is examined for its various pragmatic capabilities that can enhance readers’ understanding of the text.

The main issue in pragmatics is to find out the basic principles that a language user employs to construct words and sentences, in order to be perceived, understood and reacted to. This implies that a pragmatic analysis of the data for this study aims at eliciting the intentions and the communicative purposes of language use in the data in form of presuppositions, entailments, and implicatures. In other words, the pragmatic approach to language study is a means of explicating the message of the text, as well as the communicative effectiveness of the message.

**Theoretical Framework**

The Relevance theory which is also known as the principle of relevance has been chosen for the analysis this work. It is one of the leading theories in Pragmatics. This theory was first proposed by Dan Sperber Deirdre Wilson who argued that the theory is about the hearer (who is the reader in this study) looking for the meaning of a certain communicative event until he finds it, but will stop processing the meaning as the meaning is found. This theory approaches linguistic studies from the perspective of competence rather than the perspective of behaviour or performance (Sperber Dan and Wilson Deirdre,1996). Thus, it provides a clear account of how our minds work as information processing faculties to aid our abilities to
communicate. This implies that the theory helps us to deal with mental faculties rather than text. Therefore, it is appropriate for this study because as a framework for cognition and primarily for utterance interpretation, the theory will aid in an explicit analysis of the stage directions and utterances in The Wedding Car for appropriate application to social relevance.

The Pragmatics Analysis of The Wedding Car

The data analysis for this work is the explication of the pragmatic capabilities of presupposition, entailment, and implicatures within The Wedding Car, which constitutes the data for this study. The dramatic nature of the text renders the stage directions and the verbal actions ready platforms for the analysis. Consequently, each relevant stage direction is and utterance is investigated one after the other to discover their contributions to the projection of the theme as well as their communicative goals as comprehensively as possible.

The Pragmatics of Stage Directions in The Wedding Car

Generally speaking, stage directions constitute unique features of drama which no other literary genre possesses. It occurs in italics at the beginning of every act and scene of a drama text to provide contextual information on the physical setting and the participants in the play. The stage directions in the data for this study are useful in projecting the themes of financial recklessness and social injustice. For instance, in the following stage directions,

1. The lights reveal a large sitting room furnished in a grotesquely opulent way...walls are decorated with family photographs...hangs a large picture of Jesus Christ...general flurry of activities...houseboy and housegirl...cleaning up the heavily upholstered chairs. P. 33

2.....The lights reveal chief Ninalowo-Chamberlain’s sitting room. Seated here are...Prof. Harold Jim-East and his wife, Alagba Fagbo Ogunpade...Chief Chamberlain is clad in 'soro' and 'buba'...made Of expensive lace...neck bedecked with beads of assorted shapes and colours...Prof. Jim East in suit, wife wears a frock complete with hat and gloves P. 8

3. Enter two servants, one carrying assorted wines and whiskies on a large tray, the other following with a large tray of glasses...brings in a bowl of fried meat...The party helps themselves to it. P. 39

the conventional implicature of wealth and affluence is projected in 1-3 above. This is apparent from the descriptions of the sitting room in 1; the presentation of some of the characters who constitute the wedding party in terms of their social positions and attire in 2; and the ostentatious presentation of the objects of entertainment in 3. In1, there is a conventional implicature that there are very rich Nigerians like Chief Ninalowo-Chamberlain who occupy houses that are large, extravagantly furnished and decorated with expensive and state of the art materials. In the physical context of this play, the sitting room of Chief Chamberlain is so large that it constitutes an arduous task for two adults who clean the heavy upholstery, to the extent that they had to take a break after working for some time because they were fagged-out and had backaches, resulting from their hard work. One of the servants, Lazarus, describes the pain as having a thousand needles stuck in one’s back, and Jemina, another servant interprets the pain as a sign of overwork. This is expressed with the following stage directions about the servants thus,

4. Lazarus shows signs of fatigue, tries to stand erect, one of his hands holding his lower back. He grimaces painfully and yawns loudly...p. 33

Similarly, in the presentation of some of the characters who constitute the wedding party in 2, the description of their social positions and attire was given prominence as underlined above to enhance the...
affluent and wealthy status of the characters, the atmosphere of the play and the Nigerian society at large. The implicature of this is the society’s love for social respect and titles as underlined in the stage In 3, the manner of serving drinks and fried meat for refreshment by the servants have the implicature of financial recklessness, abuse of power and position, as well as a social imbalance. Thus, a comparison of stage directions 1-3 with 4 also reflects social injustice due to the social imbalance between the extremely rich and the helplessly poor of the Nigerian society, especially as expressed in the discussion of the two servants in the following;

5. **Lazarus:** Honestly, this servant work is the worst in this world.
**Jemina:** I know. You are the last to sleep.
**Lazarus:** And the first to wake up.
**Jemina:** You cook business breakfast.
**Lazarus:** And contract luncheons.
**Jemina:** You prepare christening feasts.
**Lazarus:** And birthday feasts.
**Jemina:** House-warming parties.
**Lazarus:** And funeral feasts…
**Lazarus:** You cook the food.
**Jemina:** But you eat the left-over (p. 35).

This high level of social disparity is reinforced by their claim that for all the “overwork”, they earn two thousand naira per month which can only buy two bottles of the rich man’s whiskey. In fact, for these servants, the relationship of the poor to the rich in the Nigerian society is similar to the slave-master relationship of the slave trade era.

It is also important to mention that the above dialogue between Lazarus and Jemina involves a high level of presupposition or shared knowledge between them, in the way that they fill the gaps to complete each other’s thoughts. The fact that their names indicate that they are likely to be from the eastern and the northern parts of Nigeria respectively, but working for a politician from the south-western part of the country, entails unity and a strong sense of nationhood among the characters. The sense of unity in diversity is also evident in 2 above through the presentation of the invitees (Prof. Harold Jim-East and his wife, Alagba Fagbo Ogunpade) who represent the members of different parts of the country. Equally significant to the use of presupposition is the presentation of the hybrid name of the protagonist, Chief Ninalowo- Chamberlain which is a combination of a Yoruba name (Ninalowo), and an English name(Chamberlain). This presupposition is symbolic of the realities of the Nigeria’s experience of the British colonial rule, prior to Nigeria’s independence.

Lastly on stage directions, the applause that accords the arrival of the wedding car is pragmatically useful in defining the social values of the characters and Nigerians by extension. This action of applause entails that Nigerians love good and flashy things; adore and exhale the rich in the society, without minding the source of the wealth or their own lack of the same. At the announcement of the car by Chief Chamberlain thus,

6. **Chief Chamberlain:** I have just been told that the wedding car is parked outside.

(*Everyone rushes to the window. There are approbative nods and grunts, and praise names of the Mercedes: Obokun Baba! MeesiOlove, OnibehePonbe, Koroboto, bi oka etc. Then they return to their seats*) p. 38

Consequently, all the invited guests expressed their excitement and hailed the car using different nicknames as underlined above. This stage direction presupposes that all the characters present approves of the extravagant wedding car except Alagba Ogunpade, who considers it as a drastic “change” from the norm that existed in times past when he wedded his wife and had to walk to the registry.
The Pragmatics of the utterances of Characters in *The Wedding Car*

Furthermore, the utterances or verbal actions in the data for this study display a good measure of presupposition. Beginning with excerpt 4 above, several utterances by the characters in the drama text presuppose that the Nigerian Society is highly close-knit, despite the multicultural nature of the nation as the names suggest. While Lazarus is connected to Jemina by virtue of their vocation and suffering; Chief Chamberlain is connected to Prof Jim East, and Alagba Fagbo Ogunpade in 2 above, based on their social status. These connections provide the backgrounds for the different meaningful linguistic interactions between the characters, and the backgrounds constitute the social system or culture of the language users’ speech community. Thus, Presupposition is clearly an important tool for pragmatic studies to explain how people manage to decode meanings (Butler, 1988:21). It is a pragmatic tool that has to do with what a speaker and a listener can suppose each other to know before a given speech act begins (Hetherington 1981:422). This explains why the presupposed content varies from one speech situation to another, depending on the influence of intention and expectation. In the following utterances:

7. Chief Chamberlain: There it is. I have always nursed the hope that my daughter will answer the wedding bell in the most expensive car in the country. You can see the colour is white, it is the colour of angels. P. 39

8. Prof Jim East: …Things are different now. I attended a wedding in Lagos last week where people had so much Champagne… emptied dozens of bottles into a large bowl and washed their hands in it. P. 39

9. Chief Chamberlain: Yes to those who don’t know their way around. You see, nobody bans anything in this country unless he has already secured a channel for his personal supply. P.39

10. Madam Ngozi Ogunpade: … Why are weddings so expensive these days? Many families have gone into crippling debt to finance weddings. The whole drama lasts less than two hours but the young couple may spend the first ten years of their life together trying to clear the debt. It’s sheer madness, and I think something ought to be done about it. Our people should be taught the difference between wedding and marriage. P, 40

11. Alagba Ogunpade: …people embezzle public funds to finance weddings. Not long ago, a young man committed armed robbery to raise money for his wedding P. 40

12. Chief Chamberlain: …as a businessman and Politician, I know nobody holds expensive parties for nothing. …he invites other businessmen who not only bring rich gifts, but also bring friends and other businessmen with extensive connections.. P. 43

There is an implicit understanding of the popularity of corruption among public officers, extravagant, frivolous spending, the wastefulness of personal and public resources, as well as the love for elevated social positions and titles as expressed in the listing of expected guests for the wedding party below:

13. Prof. Jim-East: Talking about guests and connections, how many important people are coming to the wedding?
   Chief Chamberlain: Uncountable!
Madam Ogunpade: The President?...
Alagba Ogunpade: His Vice?
Mrs. Jim East: The Vice-chancellor?
Chief Chamberlain: Will surely come. He has even made the University hall available for the reception. You still remember I was one of those who helped him get the post.
Madam Ogunpade: The Governors?
Chief Chamberlain: Actually, three Governors are coming….
Prof. Jim-East: Senators?
Chief Chamberlain: Yes, many of them, and representatives and assembly men
Madam Ogunpade: The Army chief?
Mrs. Jim East: Officiating Clergy/…

Similarly, in the spirit of his social social status, social connections and power control Chief Chamberlain continues,

... besides, I am sure you know that I have won a fifty-million naira contract to kill all the rats in the new capital city. This party is a celebration of that. P.44

The apparent implicature of excerpts 7-13 is that Nigerians are generally speaking, materialistic, financially reckless, corrupt and have misplaced priorities. This is especially emphasized by the use of ‘I know’ and ‘you know’ in 12 above, thereby making it the societal norm. Otherwise, the ideal would have been to get the contract effectively executed, prior to wasting the funds on parties. This is evident of misplaced priority because after the party in most cases, there would not be enough money to successfully execute the project. This is also responsible for the action of the groom-to-be in 11 above, which is in –turn presupposed by Chief Chamberlain’s statement in 12, to conventionally implicate that Nigerians hold these unreasonable parties for their selfish gains and display undue social status.

The financial recklessness of Nigerians in form of extravagance and wastefulness is presupposed by 7 and 8 above; while the extent of corruption in the society is highlighted strikingly by Chief Chamberlain’s response to the fact that Champagne was a contraband. In his response, his use of “yes, to those who don’t know their way around”, presupposes that rules are made for some members of the society and not for all. This concept of having sacred cows in the society has the conventional implicature that there are social injustice and unfairness in the Nigerian society. It can be inferred from the politician’s “knowing their way around” that the leaders who make the rules also circumvent them, as demonstrated in the banning of Champagne as well as in the importation of the wedding car.

However, the author has employed the voices of Alagba Ogunpade and his wife to stress the ideal, and raise questions about the social vices as expressed by Ngozi Ogunpade in 10 above. She questions the extravagant and wasteful spending for weddings as expressed in 7 and 8 by the protagonist and Prof. Jim. In the same vein, Alagba Ogunpade wonders at the turn of events in the society, compared to earlier times and values. Thus, his use of “How the times have changed”, presupposes that the social values of the earlier or more traditional Nigerian society are better and different from those of the contemporary society. The utterance presupposes that Nigeria had a less expensive, more purposeful, and simpler social system than in the present dispensation.

In view of the prevailing unfavourable socioeconomic situation in Nigeria, the focus of this work is to seek for a way out of the dysfunctional system in order to have a better Nigerian society. As demonstrated in the play, the arrest of Chief Ninalowo-Chamberlain for the illegal importation of the highly expensive wedding car can be considered as the anticlimax of this play.
It is significant to this work because his arrest was in spite of the claims of the protagonist to ‘know his way around’; and his threat to ‘take the matter up from above’, where the police officers also claim to have taken their orders from. Also, despite the fact that he thought he had bribed his way as in the following;

14 Chief Chamberlain: … And with all the fortune I gave to those rogues at the. Or didn’t your bosses tell you that I have already seen them? Didn’t they give you your own share….

15. Ok. Tell your master I will see them again after the wedding… and you … you need something to make that waistline a little rounder. What do you want? How much…

the arrest of Chief Chamberlain is an evidence that he could no longer pervert justice as he had usually done earlier. The conversational implicature of this is that the text is communicatively balanced. The ending of this play with the arrest of the politician for the unlawful importation of the brand new white Mercedes car, which is his wedding gift for his daughter, therefore constitutes the anti-climax. It is a significant point of the story and very important for the pragmatic essence of this paper. This constitutes the hope of the Nigerian country because in the present state of difficult financial conditions of the citizenry, Nigeria needs to shun wastefulness, extravagant spending, looting the public treasury, by bringing up measures, policies, finding defaulters and punishing them so that the economy can be salvaged and improved for a better future. Chamberlain represents the many guilty public officers of the Nigerian society. Consequently, the arrest of Chief Chamberlain which ends the play is an indication of hope for the country because such arrests have the conversational implicature of serving as a deterrent to such actions; and enforcing the rules even for the lawless leaders. Thus, it is expected that this will hinder further damage to the public treasury, deter others from looting, mismanaging public funds, and all forms of indiscipline.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has not only presented a hopeless situation of indiscipline in terms of the corrupt practices, financial impunity, oppression of the masses, injustice; it has also presented a way out as well as a balanced picture of communicating corruption in the Nigerian society. With the arrest of Chief Chamberlain, if the example of this play is followed by the Nigerian government, it will be possible to totally eradicate corruption, and make Nigeria corruption free, mass-oriented; and maximize all the resources for economic growth. Similarly, it is evident that there are some non-corrupt citizens who are loyal, men of integrity, know what is right and are willing to do it. Unlike Chamberlain, his wife, and other characters who display a high level of corruption and injustice which hinder national development; they rebuke evil and call evil by its right name.

Furthermore, it is apparent that the pragmatic field of linguistic study can contribute immensely to the understanding of practical problems of communication, as well as to concept manipulation in any modern society through the Relevance theory of meaning. This work also shows that pragmatics explains how language users assign meanings to the words used by linguistic interlocutors directly or indirectly in a particular context, through the explication of presupposition, entailment and implicatures in the sample utterances and stage directions. Thus, this study helps in the determination and recovery of the intended or implicitly communicated ideas that are expressed in drama texts by the characters and the author as language users. As such, this pragmatic study has not only clarified the message of social ills in the society, but has explicated the purpose of the message which is to eradicate the menace. In addition, this study has shown that the complexity of human interactions in every communicative situation is such that clearly expresses the social values of the interlocutors involved. Lastly, based on the Relevance theory of pragmatics, this study has ascertained that comprehension is a process of inference guided by certain
relevant expectations. Thus, when utterances are made, the words may not totally express what is meant, but the context aids in providing a variety of relevant interpretations. Finally, it is expected that this work will foster other pragmatic studies that can project the communicative goals of various other instances of language use.

References