

DISAMBIGUATION AND EXPLICATURAL MEANING IN CONVERSATIONS: INSIGHTS FROM ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

‘NIYI OSUNBADE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES,
AJAYI CROWTHER UNIVERSITY, OYO

Abstract

Scholars have studied Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus (PH)* both from the literary and linguistic perspectives, with greater attention being devoted to it from the literary one. Linguistic studies on *PH* have however been approached from the stylistic and pragmatic angles. This paper complements the pragmatic ones by applying insights from Sperber and Wilson's relevance-theoretic notion of explicature to pragmatically investigate how language is used to explicitly thematize a range of issues across different discourse domains in conversations in the novel through, disambiguation strategy. The findings reveal three thematic foci: resistance against domestic violence, love, and rejection of religious imposition, as parts of the explicatures of characters' conversations in the novel, recoverable fairly differently through disambiguation. The study concludes that the relevance-driven investigation of explicatures in the conversations in Adichie's *PH* is significant for aiding a context-sensitive understanding of domestic, health and religious challenges of the characters in the novel, and has an input in facilitating its overall interpretation for pedagogical use.

Introduction

Scholars (both within and outside Nigeria) have recognised the literary ingenuity of Adichie, and have carried out studies on the use of language in her novels to create contact with reality, "given the closeness of the prose genre of literature to the everyday language experience of the people" (Odebunmi 154) (see Heather 2005, Bruce 2006, Highfield 2006, Oha 2007, Tunca 2008, Osunbade 2010a; 2010b, Osunbade 2014, etc). Except Tunca (2008) which investigates language in *Purple Hibiscus (PH)* alongside other recent Nigerian fictions such as Ben Okri's *the Landscapes Within* and Gbenga Adenuga's *Another Lonely Londoner* from the broad stylistic perspective, and Osunbade 2010a; 2010b, Osunbade 2014, which engage the pragmatic strategies of explicature and implicature in the interpretation of *PH*, the remaining studies cited above are literary endeavours that differently examine how Adichie has

unraveled the hydra-headed problems of politics, violence, and so on, within the threshold of governance (both within the family and in the larger society). It is, thus, evident that many of these works have examined language as an aid to character presentation as well as thematic exploration, almost to the neglect of the use of language in communication of meaning in her novels.

The fact is that work on linguistic investigation of Adichie's novels, especially with respect to the interpretation of her intentions in them, has not enjoyed robust scholarly attention from researchers. The present study therefore plays a role in filling this gap by attempting an exploration of meaning generation in conversations at the explicit level via disambiguation in the the prestigious Commonwealth award winning debut novel of Adichie, *PH*, to facilitate access to a context-driven interpretation of thematic issues in the text. For data, conversations in the novels, which manifest ambiguous usages of certain words that aid thematic projection in the text, were sampled and subjected to content analysis, with insights from the Sperber and Wilson's (1986) (pragmatic) relevance-theory of explicature. Delving into the pragmatics of Adichie's *PH*, by considering her thematic foci motivated by the explicatural feature of disambiguation in the sampled transactions, in the text, will shift literature on pragmatics forward, and, at the same time, provide new theoretical insights into the analysis of contemporary African prose literature. More specifically, a better interpretation of the novel will be enhanced once the reader is able to recover the right propositions explicated.

Conversation in Prose Fiction

Conversation has been variously defined. For instance, Osisanwo (10), following Sacks (1967), refers to conversation as a talk having a string of, at least, two turns between at least two people. In his own conceptualisation of the term, Mey (10) conceives of conversation as

“the linguistic interchanges between two or more partners - the conversationalists.” Central to these submissions is the notion of conversation being an interactional gesture that requires the coordinated efforts of two or more participants. Such a gesture, which depicts the participants’ (speaker and hearer) signalling involvement in the communicative act, may however either be verbal or non-verbal. Hence, the term conversation could actually apply to a very large number of quite different social encounters, e.g. a teacher talking to a student in the classroom, a doctor talking to a patient in the clinic, a character talking to another character in a drama or prose fiction, which traditionally includes novels, short stories, fables, plays, poems, and so on, but now encompasses films and comic books (see Provost 1988). Influenced by the modifier *prose*, the term *prose fiction* would then refer to an imaginative form of narrative in free flowing speech, although it may also revolve around historical incidents.

Of significance is scholars’ observation that the term prose fiction seems to have been lent to semantic narrowing (see Provost 1988; Osunbade 2010). Therefore, at the mention of the term, especially as a prominent genre of fiction, “it is the novel that readily comes to mind” (Provost 12). A novel has been referred to as “an invented prose narrative of considerable length that deals imaginatively with human experience, usually through a connected sequence of events involving a group of persons in a specific setting” (Burgess 1970). Essentially, it is typical to find in novels conversations of the characters captured in direct speech, and a robust narrative portion. In a good novel, such conversations involving the use of direct speech as well as the free indirect one mostly resemble the common speech appropriate to the characters interacting; whereas the narrative portion is usually in a much more elaborate style (see Boulton 1980:33). Ultimately, such language use is of great literary merit, as it attempts to blend a dialogic orientation of language (Bakhtin 1992) with a characteristic narrative style of

prose fiction. An important discourse style used by a writer in conveying his/her message to the reader(s) is the use of fictional speech known as “conversations” (Leech and Short 128). Conversations take place between characters in the novel and these conversations are, of course, embedded within the talk between the narrator and his/her interlocutors. The analysis of characters’ conversations in the novel (which is a prose genre of literature) is therefore central to the present study, because it can contribute to the understanding of the author’s thematic foci in the text selected.

Studies on *Purple Hibiscus*

Adichie is undeniably the new voice of Nigerian literature who has already gained a measure of success that eludes many writers both within and outside Africa. Significantly, her debut novel *Purple Hibiscus (PH)*, for instance, represents fictional reality through her incisive, graphic and apt use of language. In fact, her effective manipulation of language enhances a cerebral analysis and interpretation of her environment, which consequently makes the novel worthy of scholarly attention. The submissions of some of the existing works on the novel are presented in this section.

Heather (2005) discusses the coming of age of Adichie as a novelist. In that study, he presents Adichie’s *PH* as projecting the voice of the third generation of African writers. He observes that the novel thematises the complexity of human problems, ranging from abuse through patriarchal relationship to political instability. These generally result in breakdown of families and communities under the pressure of colonialism and religion. The study further shows that Adichie also writes about the embodied experiences of women in Africa, and this is shown in the brutalities suffered by Kambili in the hand of her own father in *PH*. Heather then submits that Adichie’s portrayal of the socio-religious and political problems of her society,

through the narrative stance of Kambili, aptly depicts her concern with social realism, which is the most patronised literary convention in the contemporary African novel. The study is concluded by stating that *PH* ends with Kambili looking resolutely into the future to suggest continuity of human struggles with the utmost belief that better days are ahead. This, he says, is the spirit of social realism being projected by Adichie. The exposition of the literary convention of the contemporary age patronised by Adichie in *PH* will be of benefit to the present study, especially in gaining sufficient background that will aid a better reading of her text.

In his own study of Adichie, Bruce (2006) explores the complex relationship between women and silence in *PH*. The study demonstrates that the forces of patriarchal culture attempt to silence women, but women too have come to develop various strategies of resistance in the face of oppression. It then shows that women experience silence in two ways, in the novel, namely, as a force of oppression, and as a means of resistance. In the study, Bruce presents Kambili's experience of silence as an indication of oppression, as she is forced into silence by her father's abuse and other socio- cultural factors. Bruce, on the other hand, reads Mama's silence as a strategy designed to conceal her true intentions. According to him, "by maintaining a facade of feminine virtue, by holding her tongue about Eugene's abuse, and pretending to be meek and submissive, she is able to murder him and end his abuse on her" (Bruce 2006:17). In this respect, Bruce views Beatrice's silence as a kind of protective camouflage under the cover of which she is able to assert herself in a violent and dramatic way. *PH* is, therefore, ultimately read in the study as a novel which speaks on behalf of the women of the African continent with respect to the present and the urge for a change in the future.

In a relatively similar literary endeavour, Highfield (2006) addresses the topical issue of gender-based violence in two African novels. In particular, he focuses on violence against

women, using Vyonne Vera's *The Stone Virgin* and Chimamanda Adichie's *PH*. Highfield notes that both novels clearly indicate that the causes of violence are rooted in the colonial past, and both turn to flower as a symbol of resistance against violence. He gives an account of *PH* as involving the domestic violence experienced by the young Kambili and her mother in the hand of Eugene (Kambili's father). The study reveals that violence results in two kinds of torture: physical torture and psychological torture (i.e. fear, loss of sense of association, etc.). It further shows that the hibiscus serves as a potent symbol of resistance of violence. The hibiscus, thus, becomes a symbol of both the memory of violence and Kambili's refusal to be continually under the influence of violence. In concluding the study, Highfield reiterates that violence emerges out of the continuing thrall of colonialism. He adds that to escape that thrall, Africans must turn to their own past and free their culture and history from colonialist distortion, borrow from other cultures worldwide and create a beautiful "purple hybrid" of freedom that blooms in perpetuity (168). The study, also, has a relative relevance to the present study as it provides a good background clue to the understanding of Adichie's thematic concerns.

Oha (2007), also, carries out a study on Adichie's *PH* by specifically examining how Adichie has unraveled the problems of politics, freedom, gender and development within the threshold of governance in Africa. Oha observes that in *PH*, there is a critical presentation of the oddities in Nigeria as well as Africa in general, as the continent trudges in the biting tyrannical trauma of the military and anarchical leaderships. Oha, thus, presents *PH* as dealing with the African image vis-à-vis contemporary politics. These are foregrounded in the thematic foci of the novel. Four paradigms of focus are, therefore, identified in the thematic structure of the novel; politics, religion, gender, and ethnic related problems. The study, finally, describes

Adichie's idea of exposing the odds as a way of effecting the truth and consequently midwiving freedom from all forms of leadership oppressions.

Adopting a linguistic approach, Tunca (2008) investigates language in recent Nigerian fictions, exemplifying with Adichie's *PH*, Ben Okri's *The Landscapes Within and Dangerous Love* and Gbenga Adenugba's *Another Lonely Londoner*. With respect to *PH*, Tunca moves towards an eclectic approach to stylistics (combining insights from sociolinguistics and grammar), and finds out that Adichie's styles manifest the use of Igbo, code-switching between Igbo and English and proverbs. He reveals further that Adichie also makes use of mind style, silence, speech and thought presentation, adding that these, combined with the linguistic elements employed, aid the author's thematic projection. His conclusion is that all these style features add aesthetics to Adichie's narrative and attest to her linguistic prowess. The study is significantly relevant to the present study as it demonstrates how linguistic theory can contribute to the elaboration of literary interpretation in Adichie's *PH*.

However, the exploration of Adichie's *PH* from the pragmatic perspective has dwelled on the application of the theoretical tenets of the notions of explicature and implicature to the interpretation of the text. The explicit pragmatic strategies for characterizing English usage, and tracking encoded literal meanings of characters in the text are focused in some studies, e.g. Osunbade (2010a; 2013), for reference assignment; Osunbade (2013b) for bridging; Osunbade (2014) for gap-filling. On the other hand, the investigations of implicatural meanings in characters' conversations in the literary text are done in some other studies, e.g. Osunbade (2010b), which explores implicatures of domestic discourse in *PH*; Osunbade and Adeniji (2014), devoted to the investigation of implicit meaning with respect to information-based infringement across in conversational discourse in the *PH*.

The foregoing shows that studies on the interpretation of Adichie's *PH* have been from the stylistic, pragmatic and literary perspectives. While the pragmatic ones have explored explicit meaning interpretation in Adichie's *PH* using such explicatural strategies as reference assignment, bridging and gap-filling, consideration for the contextual examination of explicit meanings of her thematic foci via the explicatural process of disambiguation appears to be lacking. This is therefore the focus of the present study.

The Theory of Explicature

The concept of explicature was coined by Sperber and Wilson (1986) in their relevance theory (RT). As observed by Odebunmi (2007), these scholars' attempt at tinkering with the implicatural classifications of Griceans and neo-Griceans motivates the coinage of "explicature" to complement the Gricean concept of implicature. Relevance theorists then classify as explicatures Griceans and neo-Griceans conventional implicature, generalized implicature, scalar implicature and short-circuited implicature. They, however, associate particularised implicature with the concept of explicature. Also, some examples of generalised implicatures are treated as explicatures, while others are treated as implicature (see Carston 1998, Haugh 2002).

What is referred to as explicature in RT is simply put 'an explicitly communicated assumption (Sperber and Wilson 1986; 1821), or "an explicit assumption communicated by an utterance, which is a development of the logical form encoded by the utterance" (Haugh 20). Put differently, it is "the result of fleshing out the semantic representation of an utterance" (Blakemore59). More elaborately, Carston defines explicature as:

a propositional form communicated by an utterance which is pragmatically constructed on the basis of the propositional schema or template (logical form) that the utterance encodes; and whose content is an amalgam of

linguistically decoded material and pragmatically inferred material...(Carston 10).

As would be clear from the above, an assumption is said to be explicit if it is a development of the logical form. Sperber and Wilson (1989) hint that the logical form can either be complete or incomplete. When the logical form is semantically complete and, therefore, capable of being true or false, it becomes a proposition. The hearer's first task in recovering the explicature(s) of an utterance is thus to identify its propositional form, especially the right propositional form (i.e. the one the speaker makes mutually manifest that s/he intends to communicate). Essentially, this will be the propositional form that leads to an overall interpretation which is consistent with the principle of relevance (see Sperber and Wilson 1984, Carston 471, Yus 489). Incomplete logical forms, on the other hand, are usually stored in conceptual memory as assumption schemas, which need to be completed on the basis of contextual information. The presence of semantically incomplete or manifestly vague or ambiguous terms is a clear indication of where the schema might be enriched (Sperber and Wilson 1989).

Scholars (e.g. Blakemore 1992, Odebunmi 2007 etc.) have observed that explicatures are necessary where high indeterminacy, such as the phrase "high in number" (with no contextual clue) is involved; but given the fact that language usage is generally characterised by indeterminacy (as the actual sense intended by a speaker needs to be constantly picked out from a variety of possible interpretations, whether or not the full structural form is engaged), "explicatures have to be determined in all communicative interactions" (Blakemore 1992), and this recovery is largely "an inferential activity" (Ruiz de Mendoza 2), "based on contextual information" (Blakemore 1992). According to Blakemore (1992), the hearer's reliance on contextual information in the recovery of explicature varies. In some cases, the semantic representation provides only a very skeletal clue as to the explicature the hearer is expected to

recover, and the process of developing this representation into an explicature depends heavily on contextual information; while in other cases, the speaker is more specific and the hearer's reliance on the context is less.

Generally, relevance theorists have shown in their works that a variety of different pragmatic processes are involved in the recovery of explicature, namely, reference fixation/assignment, disambiguation and enrichment (see Carston 1988, Recanati 1989, Blakemore 1992, etc). For Ruiz de Mendoza (1998), explicatures can also be obtained through downgrading and/or modification of an assumption schema by means of a conceptual mapping. However, given the claim that 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 (Blakemore 102), Odebunmi (2007) submits that explicature can be derived through enrichment, which includes gap filling, reference assignment, bridging, disambiguation, and embedding the propositional content of an utterance into a higher level description of the speaker's attitude.

The fact is that to gain the propositional form expressed by an expression, especially where no sufficient linguistic clues are provided, the hearer may have to form concepts around particular uses of language; that is, reference must be assigned to referring expressions, ambiguities must be resolved, etc. (see Odebunmi 86). In the cognitive approach, disambiguation, which is the explicatural process in focus in this paper, has to do with resolving the case of the multiple sense of a word resulting in indeterminacy in a given context. It is necessary, given the characteristic indeterminacy of language in different domains of its use (Grundy 104). It is done via cognitive selection of the sense a speaker intends of an ambiguous expression from the various options provided by the grammar of a language. The present study therefore draws theoretical insights

from this relevance-theoretic disambiguation tool, given its capability to account for how explicit meanings can be recovered in literary discourses, as will be evident in the next sub-section.

Analysis and Findings

A content analysis of the sampled data reveals that disambiguation manifests in them with respect to three central issues, namely, domestic, health and religious issues, to explicate three different thematic concerns of Adichie in *PH* respectively: resistance against domestic violence, love and rejection of religious imposition.

Disambiguating Domestic Issue

Within the context of domestic discourse, certain ambiguous words that border on domestic issues are lent to disambiguation to explicate Adichie's thematic focus on resistance against domestic violence. This thematic concern is projected through the characters of Jaja, Kambili and Beatrice, who are the victims of Eugene's abuse. An example is given in a conversation that follows involving Eugene, his wife, and his children:

Example 1: (Background: during lunch, a sample product brought by one of Eugene's employees is being served, and everyone, except Jaja, passes a compliment after tasting it)

Kambili (T₁): It's very good, Papa

Eugene (T₂): (happily) yes yes.

Mama (T₁): It tastes like fresh cashew. Just like white wine...

Kambili (T₂): yes

Eugene (T₂): (Staring pointedly at Jaja) Jaja, have you not shared a drink with us, gbo? Have you *no words* in your mouth?

Jaja (T₁): *Mba*, there are *no words* in my mouth.

Eugene (T₃): (annoyingly) What?

Jaja (T₂): (defiantly) I have *nothing* to say.

Beatrice (T₂): Say the juice is good Jaja.

Eugene (T₄) : (Annoyingly) Let him be.

(PH, pp.12-13)

The interaction here centres on food (i.e. juice) as a medium used by Adichie to raise a sensitive topical issue. When Jaja refuses to pass a compliment on Eugene's newly produced juice, Eugene is provoked, but Jaja remains defiant. Since saying something to someone is a case of ostensive communication, it becomes pragmatically clear that there is a set of assumptions, which Eugene and Jaja intend to make manifest to each other, in the adjacency pair below:

Eugene : Have you *no words* in your mouth?

Jaja : Mba, there are *no words* in my mouth.

The phrase "no words" in the utterances is lent to ambiguous usages. Two levels of ambiguation therefore become disambiguated to recover the right propositions expressed by the utterances; first, from the father, and second, from the child. While the lexical ambiguity in Eugene's utterance pragmatically disapproves of Jaja's behaviour, that in Jaja's is engaged as a tactic to question Eugene's authority, and free himself from the psychological abuse being subjected to.

On the assumption that the participants are making relevant conversational contributions, the following encyclopaedic information about the ambiguous expressions are assessed:

(i) No word₁ = No comment

(ii) No word₂ = Not anything or no thing

This range of encyclopaedic information then becomes part of the context for the interpretation of the utterances which contain the expression in question, and, of course, for the interpretation of the entire discourse. In the present context, it is inferable that the phrase "no word₁" enters

into a relation of synonymy with the word “nothing”, in Jaja’s T₂, which co-textually guide the disambiguation process.

The explicatures: “Have you no comment in your mouth?” and “*Mba*, there no comments in my mouth” are therefore recoverable, with least processing efforts, as the propositions communicated by Eugene and Jaja’s utterances respectively. These explicatural contents are constructed inferentially by using contextual information available to memory in enriching, via disambiguation, the logical forms of Eugene’s T₂ and Jaja’s T₁ to propositional forms which make the utterances relevant enough to be worth processing. Ultimately, the propositional content of Eugene’s utterance reflects his domineering nature while that of Jaja’s reflects his journey to freedom, as he begins to display defiance as well as resist his father’s excessive control. The fact is that having no word₁ to say suggests Jaja’s determination to resort to silence as a mode of resistance against the father’s authoritarian grip. This message ends in the pragmatic effect (i.e. helpless annoyance) evident in Eugene’s last utterance in his T₄ “let him be”.

Disambiguating Health Issue

Sometimes, love is thematised in the discourse of domestic issue bordering on health in the context of *PH*. Data reveal that this thematic preoccupation is commonly reached through the enrichment process of disambiguation.

Example 2 below gives an instance of the context involving disambiguating ambiguous expressions with respect to paying attention to a debilitating health issue of a character in *PH*, to pragmatically modify their meanings, and hint at the theme of love.

Example 2: (Background: Papa-Nnukwu is ill and efforts are being made by his daughter, Ifeoma, to give him proper treatment)

Amaka (T₁) : Mummy, when will you take him to do the *tests*?

Aunty Ifeoma (T₁): Tomorrow. Doctor Nduoma said I have two *tests* done instead of all the four. The private labs in town always want full payment, so I will have to go to the *bank* first. I don't think I will finish in time to take him today, with all those lines at the bank.

Amaka (T₂) : You need to go early then. Maybe you can still take him.
(PH, p.161)

The conversation above manifests instances of Ifeoma's engagement of ambiguous expressions that have to be interpreted on the explicit side via disambiguation to satisfy the hearer's (Amaka's) expectation of relevance. When Ifeoma says "Doctor Nduoma said I should have two *tests* done instead of all the four... so I will have to go to the *bank* first", Amaka is left with the interpretative task of selecting (from the encyclopaedic knowledge available to the senses) one of the semantic representations assigned to *tests* and *bank* respectively by the grammar on the nominal plane thus:

1 (a) tests₁ = A set of questions, exercises, or practical activities to measure someone's skill, ability, or knowledge

(b) tests₂ = Medical examinations on parts of the body or substances (e.g. blood, etc.) taken from the body, to check someone's health or to discover what is wrong with someone

(c) tests₃ = Processes used to discover whether equipment or products work correctly, or to discover more about them

(d) tests₄ = Difficult situations in which the qualities of someone or something are clearly shown

2 (a) bank₁ = Financial institution

(b) bank₂ = The side of a river

(c) bank₃ = A place where human blood, sperm, etc is stored until someone needs

it

In Ifeoma's utterance in example 2, the use of the ambiguous stimuli above, i.e. *tests and bank* covertly attracts Amaka's attention and focuses it on the speaker's (Ifeoma) meaning. In the given context, the interpretations in 1b and 2a become highly accessible, guided by contextual variables such as the mention of a medical doctor, and the necessity of getting money for Papa-Nnukwu's laboratory test. These interpretations are less effort consuming, and are preferred because they obtain adequate contextual effects (i.e. they hint at efforts being made to give Papa-Nnukwu proper medical attention as a way of demonstrating that he is loved). Assisted by co-text, Amaka therefore rightly infers that Auntie Ifeoma's utterance in the conversation is optimally relevant to her since she wants to know the efforts being made to ensure her grandfather's (Papa-Nnukwu's) recovery from his illness. Of course, unless the denotations of "tests" and "bank" are narrowed as we have in 1b and 2a above, the explicit content of Ifeoma's utterance will not warrant the contextual assumptions below, which assist Amaka to satisfy her expectation of relevance:

- (i) Running a medical examination on someone ill will help to diagnose what is exactly wrong with the person, and subsequently dictate the nature of the treatment needed.
- (ii) Failure to go to the bank₁ may prevent Auntie Ifeoma from getting money needed for Papa-Nnukwu's laboratory tests.

On these assumptions, the explicature of Ifeoma's utterance can be constructed as:

... Doctor Nduoma said I have two *medical examinations* done instead of four...,
so I will have to go to the *financial institution* first.

In interpreting bank to denote bank₁ (i.e. financial institution) via disambiguation, Amaka definitely takes Ifeoma to be referring not merely to visiting the bank₁, but visiting it in order to get money needed to carry out test₂ (i.e. medical examination) on Papa-Nnukwu. This understanding is demonstrated in Amaka's T₂: "You need to go early then. Maybe you can still take him". The situation being described here therefore has implications for the projection of the theme of love in *PH*. The fact is that Ifeoma's endeavour to get money for her father's treatment demonstrates her commitment to the ethos of love. Unlike Eugene who rejects their father, Papa-Nnukwu, as a heathen, Ifeoma and her children never fail to show him true love.

Disambiguating Religious Issue

The context of religious discourse in *PH* also manifests ambiguity of expressions whose explicit contents are necessarily recoverable through the enrichment process of disambiguation to aid projection of the theme of rejection of religious imposition. An interesting instance is found in the following conversation between Eugene and Jaja, his son:

Example 3: (Background: Eugene, Jaja's father, did not see Jaja in church during communion on Easter Sunday, and on getting home, he challenged him).

Eugene (T ₁) :	Jaja, you did not go to communion.	
Jaja (T ₁) :	<i>The wafer</i> gives me bad breath. . .	
Eugene (T ₂) :	<i>It</i> is the body of our Lord. You cannot stop receiving the body of the Lord. It is death, you know that.	
Jaja (T ₂) :	Then I will die.	(<i>PH</i> , p.6)

In the above conversation, Eugene accuses his son, Jaja, of being absent at the communion on Easter Sunday and while reacting to this accusation, Jaja resorts to lexical ambiguity. Specifically, he lends the word "wafer" in his T₁ to an ambiguous usage. In the

example, Eugene accepts that the utterance produced by Jaja is relevant enough to him (Eugene), and is worth attending to because it provides a rather sufficient information on why Jaja is absent at the communion on the Palm Sunday. Essentially, his interpretative process of Jaja's utterance in his T_1 involves constructing hypotheses about the explicature of the utterance, given the ambiguous nature of the lexical unit "the wafer" in it. Intuitively, "the wafer" has the following encyclopaedic entries:

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

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

Wafer₁ evokes the idea of "host", a term which, according to Eugene, "comes close to capturing the sacredness of Christ's body (*PH6*), while wafer₂ more appropriately suggests such biscuits as "chocolate wafer(s) and banana wafer(s) made in one of Eugene's factories. The pragmatic preference for "wafer" capable of evoking the two senses is definitely suggestive of Jaja's commodification of Eugene's sacrosanct religion. The fact is that a rational speaker aiming at optimal relevance might have intended either of the interpretations above. However, in the present context, 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. Eugene therefore reaches this interpretation on the basis of information provided by the co-text. Of course, the disambiguation in wafer₁ is the first interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance. This particular mental representation is then logically accessed by Eugene and incorporated into the proposition expressed to recover the enriched proposition that:

The wafer₁ gives Jaja bad breath...

As his reference to the wafer as the body of the Lord in his T₂ suggests, it is therefore this explicatural interpretation that Eugene takes Jaja to have intended. This explicatural content of Jaja's utterance, no doubts, plays a role in thematic projection, as it hints at the rejection of religious imposition, being the issue thematised, in the given context in *PH*.

Conclusion

This study has examined the pragmatic process of disambiguation through which explicit meanings are conveyed in Adichie's *PH*. The study has demonstrated that the cognitive architecture of the characters who are involved in conversations in the novel is usually geared to the maximisation of relevance with respect to domestic, health and religious issues in two discourse domains, namely, domestic and religious, to activate the hearer's search for the explicit speaker's meanings in the novel. The study ultimately revealed three thematic foci - resistance against domestic violence, love and rejection of religious imposition - as part of the explicatures of characters' utterances in *PH*, recoverable fairly differently through disambiguation.

This relevance driven examination of explicatures in the conversations in Adichie's *PH* is therefore significant for aiding a context-sensitive understanding of domestic, health and religious challenges of the characters in the text, thereby facilitating the overall interpretation of the novel.

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