

# The Pragmatics of Kiswahili Literary Political Discourse

by

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## Abstract

*This discussion attempts a pragmatics analysis of Kiswahili literary political discourse. Specific examples will be drawn from poetic texts; Chembe cha Moyo by Alamin Mazrui (1988), Sauti ya Dhiki by Abdilatif Abdala (1973) and Jicho la Ndani by Said Ahmed Mohamed (2002). A pragmatics account of literature assumes that in literary communication we not only have a text, but that the production and interpretation of such a text are social actions. Without this kind of cognitive analysis of literary communication, no serious insight can be gained into the emotive effects of literary interpretation involving the needs, wishes, desires, likings and feelings of the author. A text induces its interpreter to construct an image, or may be a set of alternative images. While the image construction and image revision is going on, the interpreter also tries to figure out what the creator of the text is doing- what the nature of the communication situation is all about. Considering that the reader only confronts the poem in the absence of the poet creates more confusion since the poet is not present to intervene for any misinterpretations of his propositions. For any successful interpretation then, the reader has no option than drawing up a set of inferences whereby the contextual implication can be derived. In other words, the critic has an advantage of inferring the meanings of the message surpassing the worldview of the author.*

*Our understanding and interpretation of poetry requires understanding and appreciation of historical and social conditions and, ideological factors under which the writers find them in. Hence the pragmatic impact of the poem embraces the totality of the poem; combined with its emotional, intellectual and imaginative appeal. Kiswahili poets cited in this discussion have written on issues touching on their passion and desires, political aspirations, freedom, justice and social change, both meaningful to themselves and their social community.*

*We detect the emphatic plea for justice and hope embodied in the poetic language, and the poets call for societal reformation. We realise a mutual intelligibility between the poet, the poetic sensibility and the poetic vision as the poets call upon solidarity amongst their audience to overcome stereotype vehement causing states of absurdities in the so called democratic societies.*

*In conclusion this discussion notes that it is not easy to construct meanings not only from ambiguities realised in the texts but from contexts that are themselves constructs from writers knowledge, beliefs, experiences and assumptions about their world and the world of fiction.*

## **Introduction**

This article is an attempt to understand the meaning of the pragmatics of Kiswahili political poetry. Pragmatics is concerned with the meaning of the utterance, how what is said was meant by the speaker, and how the utterance is to be interpreted by the audience (indede 2003:191). The article employs the Cooperative Principle developed by H.P Grice whose *Conversational Implicature* is central to the discussion. Grice sees pragmatics as speaker meaning. He goes further to give distinction between what a speaker has said and what he has implicated taking into account that what he has implicated may either be conventionally implicated by virtue of the meaning of some word or phrase which he has said or non conventionally implicated. This is to say the specification of the implicature falls outside the specification of the conventional meaning of the words used (Strawson 1974:54)<sup>1</sup>. Hence the Gricean reasoning of conversational implicature that we shall apply to this analysis reminds us that literary meanings are unique in some sense, that the conventional meanings may not do justice to the intentions of the writer since this may differ completely to what is displayed on the surface by the words used.

As we shall realize in this analysis, the entire world of literary communication is fundamentally different from oral communication in which Grice's theory is based. The addresser and the addressee in literary communication are temporally, locally and possibly culturally distanced. As a result literary communication is a one-sided process of communication with no one to one feedback on the part of the addressee to the addresser, that is, writer and reader (audience). Though basically Grice's explanations deal with natural conversations, it is important to note that the general display of Grice's approach to discourse create room for analysis of literary texts. It is against this background that this article attempts a pragmatics analysis of literary political discourse. The conversational strategies in literature and more so in poetry as shall be seen in this article invite an open-ended world in which the reader acts creatively just like the author if they have to share the meaning and meet communication goals. The discussion will focus on specific examples drawn from Kiswahili written poems; *Chembe cha Moyo* by Alamin Mazrui (1988), *Sauti ya Dhiki* by Abdilatif Abdala (1973) and *Jicho la Ndani* by Said Ahmed Mohamed (2002).

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<sup>1</sup> Strawson's paper on Intention and Convention in Speech Acts; found in *Philosophy of Language* edited by J.R Searle.1974.

The use of the term 'attempt' here implies that the issues raised in this article are not absolute since the pragmatic analysis of literary texts as noted by Van Dijk (1981) and Pratt (1977) poses its own complexities. As it is noted by Pratt, the author or rather fictional speaker, or fictional reader explores many ways in which a literary text can implicate meanings. In this article then, I have concerned myself with the question; what is being communicated by the writer and how it is communicated, thus backing other philosophers' views that pragmatics denote meaning as understood in context. All in all the article draws a conclusion that the communication success of a literary text depends on our abilities to reason about the writer's meaning verses sentence meaning. This kind of communication strategy is supported by certain choice of diction, mood, tone, intentions and motivations supplied by the composer of the poem.

### **Pragmatics and the Literary Concept**

Various critics of literary works have come up with interesting ideas which either contradict or agree with the theory of pragmatics. One of them being Emmanuel Ngora (1990) who sees literary works as communicative utterances produced by the author and received by the reader (or hearer especially when the poem is read aloud). He further observes that a poem is not like everyday speech in that it is patterned in order to give its communicative effects a greater impact. He further notes that the impact of a poem comes from the totality of the poem, from the weight of its message combined with its emotional, intellectual and imaginative appeal (pp 14-15). These views intelligibly coincide with Van Dijk (1977: 246-247) who observes that not only the structures of literary texts are important, but also its functions as well as the conditions, its production, processing and reception. A pragmatic account of literature assumes that in literary communication we not only have a text, but that the production (and interpretation) of such a text are social actions. Without this kind of cognitive analysis of literary communication, no serious insight can be gained into the emotive effects of literary interpretation, involving our needs, wishes, desires, likings, and feelings.

Grice first makes a distinction between what the speaker says and what he implies. This sense of 'say' is closely tied to the words actually uttered and their ordinary meanings; but more so it includes all the references and the predications that result from that utterance, and whatever force, direct or indirect it might have (Martinich 1991:508). As realized most of the poems displayed by the composers are metaphorically expressed. Thus the metaphoric meaning is not explicit in the utterance. Using this kind of hypothesis Searle (1991:502) distinguishes what a speaker means by uttering words, sentences and expressions by terming this *speaker's utterance meaning*, and what the words, sentences and expressions mean, which on the other hand he calls them, *word or sentence meaning*. In order for the poet to communicate using metaphorical, ironical, and allegorical sentiments, there must be principles according to which he is able to have more than one meaning, or something different from what he says, whereby the reader using knowledge of them can understand what he or she means.

Hence the knowledge that enables readers understand metaphorical utterances goes beyond their knowledge of the literal meaning of words and sentences. This is what Grice refers to as cooperative principle as applied in this discussion.

Against this background then, it is imperative that the speaker who is the writer in the text supplies relevant information to the context, so that the poetic analyst can be able to create meaning out of what is said. For instance, when talking about power, political oppression, social inequality, mismanagement of national resources as conveyed by the poets' chosen texts in an oblique language, then the writer needs to supply a lot of leading information to enable the reader be at the same level of understanding with him or her. It is possible that at times the analyst end up with a different meaning from that originally intended by the creator of the text. This is grounded on the assumption that the analyst only confronts the poem in the absence of the poet. The poet therefore has no room to intervene for any misinterpretations of his information. Therefore the analyst cannot ascertain any truth values deduced from the 'lies' given by the poet. In other words the critic has a wide range of directing the meanings of the message surpassing the world view of the author.

## **Cooperative Principle and Implicature on Kiswahili Poetry**

In his cooperative principle Grice points out that our talk exchanges are characteristically, to some degree, cooperative efforts. Besides, each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction. For a detailed explanation of the cooperative principle, Grice gives four categories of maxims of conversation or general principles underlying the efficient cooperative use of language which we have applied to analysis of a few poems in this section.

### 1. Maxim of Quantity

This maxim is subdivided into other sub maxims as below;

- (i) Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange).
- (ii) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

Under this maxim the poetic analyst is faced with the task of finding out how informative is the poet in handling the subject matter at hand. Here the question of concern is; does each and every verse supply enough information to the reader? It may also be important for the analyst to question the illocutionary act of the poem; whether its intention is to amuse, awaken, advice or provoke thoughts of the audience. Finally, it may be judged if the poet has accomplished this maxim or violated it intentionally, ignorantly or carelessly. For instance in the poem *vinyago* (Mazrui: 1988:20) the poet says:

Translation

Waangalieni	<i>Look at them</i>
Wale wanaotuongoza	<i>Those who lead us</i>
Wanavyochechemea	<i>as they limp</i>
Wanavyopepesuka	<i>as they stagger</i>
mara huku mara kule	<i>at times here at times there</i>
marahapa marahapa	<i>at times here at times there</i>
kila mahali ulimwenguni	<i>everywhere in the world</i>

The opening utterance draws and captures one's attention to an image of creatures (which the poet equates them to carvings or laughing stocks) who are not still. This is an outright disgust by the author who makes fun of the leaders who limp and stagger, roving all over the world. The poet may be implicating that these leaders go looking for favours or aids from other countries or other personal gains. Sarcastically the poet calls upon the citizens to clap, applause and praise them as this seems to be the duty of the masses. He goes on to say that in so doing we are blind more than them (verse 5 p. 21):

Translation

Haya basi tupigeni mayowe	<i>Let us then shout</i>
tupigeni makofi	<i>Let us clap</i>
ili wakuu wacheke	<i>for the leaders to laugh</i>
ili wakuu wafurahike	<i>for the leaders to be happy</i>
Haya!	<i>Alright!</i>
Haya!	<i>Alright!</i>
Haya!	<i>Alright!</i>
Hiyo ndiyo kazi yetu	<i>This is our duty</i>
Kwani tu vipofu	<i>Because we are blind</i>
kuliko hao vipofu	<i>More than them</i>

As we detect the bluffing intonation in the poem, it is pertinently clear that the poet is not happy with the culture and practice exhibited by the members of this particular community. They sit back only to applaud the evils of the leaders so as to impress them. Pragmatically the intention of the poet is not to call upon the audience to clap as it may appear in the above stanza. Ideally the poet feels that that has been our preoccupation because we are blind more than them. We have been accustomed to dance to their tunes as robots. On the other hand, Mohamed is very assertive in his poem *Simwabudu Mtu* (p. 42) which can be translated to mean 'I adore no one'. The poem poses many rhetorical questions affirming the speaker's state and position. For instance verse 1 states:



Translation

*For the longer period I have stayed  
Looking at my country sink  
and saddened  
as I look at my people harassed  
and oppressed  
as I feel our hearts pierced  
and pained*

*Now my youthhood is enlightened with boiled blood  
fitted in the middle of circumcised fire  
that does not care the bang of war, death nor loss  
that is coming to end poverty  
and dissolve the chains' perseverance*

In the above stanzas, the poet expresses disappointment about the oppression that has been experienced in his country for along time. Finally the poet decides that he will not tolerate this kind of mistreatment but will take up the risk of fighting back without caring the outcomes. The retaliation is aimed at eradicating poverty and cutting the chains of patience to oppression. As we realize, the poem is self informative and explanatory. Although the poet has used a bit of the figurative language, the figures used are easily comprehended. The poet has adhered to the maxim of quantity by supplying appropriate information and has succeeded in communicating his message.

However, the second sub maxim 'Do not make your contribution more informative than is required' when applied would implicate exaggerations in poetic dialogue situations as experienced in the poem *Kilio cha Afrika* (Mazrui p. 30) which means 'The cry of Africa':

Translation

Shuhuduni utu ukiumbuka      *Witness the denigration of the self*  
    ukikatwa yake dhakari      *when its reproductive system is chopped off*      na  
beberu akitucheka      *and the alien laughs at us*  
    kwa shibe ya kutughuri      *for the sake of making fun of us*

The analogous expression of 'the chopping off of the male reproductive system' reflects the harsh conditions inflicted on both the physical and psychological nature of the African. Though the poet employs exaggerations through this mode of presentation, extreme oppression, emotive feelings of the dehumanisation and denigration of the African self is realised.

## 2. Maxim of Quality

To support and clarify this maxim, Grice divided the maxim in sub maxims as follows:

Super maxim: "Make your contribution one that is true"

- Maxims: (i) Do not say what you believe to be false  
(ii) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

This maxim places the poetic discourse in a more intricate situation as there is no factual evidence in this genre. Basically the writing is fiction in itself and the author has to employ a lot of creativity to satisfy the reader. More so the reader has no chance for interlocution. The state of affairs being represented and the world we intend to have thoughts about as introduced to us by the author- speaker is fictive and imaginary. That is to say that for poetry to qualify as a literary text, fiction plays a major role in its creation. However in most cases examples are drawn from worldly experiences.

For an analyst whose poetic experience is not versed would automatically look at the writer as one who has violated the maxim of quality in so many ways. But we, however, note that the text may be rendered obsolete when it represents a model of the real world. Pragmatically speaking it is not relevant either for the poet to follow the principle of truth representation as depicted in the real world. On the other hand, the maxim gives the critic an opportunity to examine the quality of the text being handled in terms of themes and expressions. For instance, is the theme or the expression of the poet thought provoking, interesting or discursive? What are the aesthetic values and the ideologies behind the literary work? Let me apply Ngara's (1990:11) definition of ideology to illustrate the maxim of quality.

Ideology refers to that aspect of the human condition under which people operate as conscious actors. Ideology is the medium through which human consciousness works. Our conception of religion, politics, morality, art and science is deeply influenced by our ideology, ideology being the medium through which we comprehend and interpret reality. Reality itself exists objectively outside our consciousness and independently of any particular individual, but how one sees and interprets it depends in part on one's level of ideological development.

Let us now look at a few poems in which the writer has expressed different ideologies in different forms and stylistic devices. For instance, in the poem *Wasiwasi Enda zako* (Abdalla p. 32), which means 'Depart from me worries', the word 'worries' is personified in a way that one wonders if worries have the ability to argue with the writer. For example, in stanza 4 the poet says:

Tukaapo wanambiya, hayawi niyatakayo  
Kwamba tamaa ngatiya, nasumbuwa wangu moyo  
Kwamba hata hingojeya, haya niyangojeyayo  
N'go! Siyapati hayo, ni bure najisumbuwa

Translation

*When seated you tell me, what I want will not happen  
Even if I tried, I am bothering myself  
Even if I waited, whatever I am waiting for  
N'go! I will not get, I am wasting my time.*

The truth of the matter is that the poet may have had a soliloquy with his conscience about the rough time he was facing. At one time he felt like giving up, but he searched his soul to overcome the fear. He feels that his heart is making weaker decisions. This is why the poet decides to dismiss his 'heart' which is disheartened so that he can forge ahead. As discovered with Alamin Mazrui's writing environment, Abdilatif faces the same trouble as all his poems written in this anthology (apart from Nisharudi p. 111) translated to mean 'I have come back' were composed in prison. The most captivating aspect is the way the writer confronts his heart and dialogues with it as if it is a human being, a device that indicates the loneliness that one faces while in prison. The dramatic antagonism between the poet and his heart reveals the conflicts of his ideology and that of his political leaders. But the poet vows to pursue his ambition despite the heart's discouragement. The same device is employed by Mohammed in his poem *Moyo Wangu Umefumba* (p. 64):

Moyo wangu umefumba toka kuingia wewe  
Kama tumba kama tumba hifadhi yako na iwe  
Wewe ni ua la mimba na chipukizi na ikuwe  
Na furaha imewamba imekuzunguka wewe  
Moyo wangu umefumba

Translation

*My heart you're enclosed from the time I came in  
Like a young flower let your shelter be  
You are the flower of a pregnancy that springs to growth  
And happiness has wrapped you have been surrounded  
My heart you're enclosed*

In this poem Mohammed uses allegories and similes, and presents the whole poem as a metaphor. The poet praises his heart for being a shelter for many happenings. The heart is alleged to be a pregnancy's flower, of course something that creates joy under hard circumstances. Ideally this is the language of poetry and we find that poetry is justified to use such a language. So it will be unfortunate to conclude that the message conveyed is untrue since the characters employed in these poems are just body parts which cannot express the information displayed. In fact these devices display the aesthetics and artistic creativity of the composer.

As Grice has noted (p. 45-46), the violation of this maxim amounts to moral offence. The same sentiment is shared by the literary writers who want to convince and influence their audience as much as possible. Indeed, I want to believe that the author is aware that violation of maxim of quality by being insincere, expressing or advocating ideas s/he does not believe in, is considered immoral and leads to ethical and aesthetic failure. This is why almost all the authors in question have specifically dwelt on the theme truth in details as analyzed below. In the poem *Ndivyo ipasavyo kuwa* (Mohamed p. 86) which can be translated to mean 'That is what it should be' the poet states:

Si kosa	kusema unalotaka
Si kosa	moyo ukiupa faka
Si kosa	`kitoka katika shaka
Si kosa	na kweli ukiishika

Ndivyo ipasavyo kuwa!

Waambiye	visa vinavyotufika
Waambiye	na kisirani cha myaka
Waambiye	mambo yanabadilika
Waambiye	hiyana ina mipaka

Hasa ikikithirika

`Sichoke	kwa kuingiwa shaka
`Sichoke	kamba hiyo hiyo shika
`Sichoke	papatu papatuka
`Sichoke	hadi siku ya hakika

Dhoruba itapopucha

Translation

*It is not a crime to speak your mind  
It is not a crime if you enlightened your heart  
It is not a crime to come out of doubt  
It is not a crime to hold on the truth  
That is what it should be!*

*Tell them our experiences  
Tell them and the antagonism of the years  
Tell them things are changing  
Tell them this has an end  
Especially when it floods*

*Do not give up hang on the same rope  
Do not give up for having doubts  
Do not give up hang on  
Do not give up hold it tight  
When the storm will calm*

Compare this with Abdala's poem *Nishishielo ni Lilo* (p. 21) which can be taken to mean 'I hold fast what I believe in' whereby the poet reveals that it is through saying the truth that he was arrested and jailed. In his completion he insists that this is not the end of his fight against injustices, he will keep on saying the truth to the world (verse 21):

Kweli natiya tama nikuage, ndugu yangu  
Kweli si mwenye kukoma, kuwambiya walimwengu  
Kweli si'yati kusema, katika uhai wangu  
Nami kwa upande wangu, hiyambiwa takubali

Translation

*Truth I end to bid you my brother  
Truth I will not cease to tell the world  
Truth I will not cease to say when I am alive  
As for me when told I will accept*

On the same theme Alamin Mazrui in his poem *Kweli* (p.50) which means ‘Truth’ poses rhetorical questions satirising the state of affairs in the African societies, that is, “that we should not tell truth to the ‘fat ones’ since it is an offence”. In this context the term fat ones connote leaders who have usurped government property. He emphasises that he will keep on fighting for equality in his poem *Usawa* (Equality) (p.48):

Usawa nitautetea	
	ni idhini sitajuta
Usawa nitauzengea	
	wala hautanisuta
Usawa ukinipotea	
	sichoki kuutafuta
Usawa utapojikita	
	dhuluma tatokomea

Translation

*Equality I will defend*  
*it is an obligation I will not regret*  
*Equality I will approach it*  
*it will not deceit me*  
*Equality if it disappears*  
*I will not hesitate to look for it*  
*Equality when it will stand*  
*Oppression will disappear*

In these poems the poets’ ideology is to hold on to the truth till justice is found. They insist and encourage their readers to hold on truth even if it means suffering for the same. The world we are revealed to by the poets is that the African politics and governance is not a bed of roses. The glory once hoped for when fighting for independence has not been realised by the country men. Nevertheless, the poets offer a state of hope if, and only if, the target audience keep on fighting for justice. The poets have used the poetic forum to give vent to their ideas of governance of the polity in power. They have expressed their feelings and stand points on the importance of truth and equality and the sense of universal fraternity. In short, the truth of the utterance within a poetic situation can only be reached at if the reader and the poet share the same ideology; however this could still create a problem as the degree of consciousness between the reader and the poet over the issues discussed vary tremendously. At this stage we question if the contribution of the poets is neither more nor less than is required, and if it is appropriate to the immediate needs of the audience. We would basically say that the poets have not flouted the maxim of quality since the contextual discourse provides evidence that their expressions are sincere. Abdilatif, Mazrui and Mohamed were once trapped in the political hegemony.

### 3. Maxims of Relations

Under this maxim, Grice placed a single maxim namely, 'Be relevant'. This maxim has received various interpretations some of which treat it as a 'special kind of informativeness'. According to Grice, though this maxim is terse, its formulation conceals a number of problems that exercise a good deal of questions about what different kinds and focuses of relevance there may be in a conversation, and how this shift in the course of a talk exchanges (Bach and Harnish 1991:308). In this analysis, the relevance maxim is a guide in finding out the relevance of the poem to the audience, what causes the speaker to make shifts in his conversation or choice of the topic. For instance, in the poem *Niguse* (Mazrui: 1) which means 'Touch me' the poet writes:

#### Translation

Nitokapo kizuizini	<i>When I come out of prison</i>
Nitamwomba yeyote mwendani	<i>I will request a friend</i>
aniguse	<i>to touch me</i>
taratibu	<i>carefully</i>
polepole	<i>slowly</i>
lakini	<i>but</i>
kwa yakini	<i>with care</i>
Niguse tena	<i>Touch me again</i>
Nijuze tena	<i>Inform me again</i>
Unifunze tena	<i>teach me again</i>
maisha yalivyo	<i>the way of life</i>
maisha yaonjavyo	<i>the test of life</i>
ladha yake	<i>its test</i>

The general observation of the above poem indicates a lot of relevant information as far as the poet's situation is concerned. The underlining background to the general theme shows that the poet is writing in prison and hence longing for a day when he shall be free. He longs for the day when he will be 'touched' by his friends and probably his relatives. He is actually longing to have a feeling of the world outside prison once more. However the most surprising thing is the shift of the tone and the mood of expression in the second and the third stanza in which the poet sounds as if he has already come out of prison and he is embracing his friend face to face. For instance in the third stanza below, he writes:

Translation

Nipo hapa nimekukabili  
Niguse tena tafadhali  
Niguse!  
Niguse!

*Here I have encountered you  
touch me again please  
Touch me!  
Touch me!*

The expression that comes out in this stanza sounds as if the poet has already been released. Perhaps the mood of the poet indicates the excitement of a prisoner who visualises the feeling of freedom in his dream.

Conversational goals realised in the maxim of relevance may capture both social goals and personal goals. Then we may ask ourselves what the social goals of the poets are. For example are the poems relevant in handling the political, social and cultural situations of the societies in context? What is the relationship between the poet and the society? Is he polite or impolite in handling the discourse and what are the social factors precipitating his dimension? The examples given below will address a few of the questions raised as this discussion cannot exhaust all questions of the cooperative principles. For example in the poem *Wasafiri Tuamkeni* (Adilatif: 1973) which can mean 'Travellers let us wake up', the poet expresses the message below:

Bado safari ni ndefu, wasafiri tusichoke  
Na tusiwe madhaifu, twendeni hadi tufike  
Tusafiri bila hofu, wenye nazo ziwatoke  
Huu ndio mwanzo wake, sio mwisho wa safari

Translation

*The journey is still long, travellers let us not be weary  
Let us not be weak, lets go till the end  
Lets travel without fear, those with it relieve it  
This is the beginning, not the end of the journey*

With the use of imagery and symbolism of a journey the poet is persuading and encouraging his fellow country men or supporters of democracy to keep on struggling for their rights, and that they should not give up. In the last verse the poet implicates the flag to symbolise independence. This is ironical since Kenya had already had independence by the time the poet wrote his poems in 1973, but within this context the poetic implicature is that, through solidarity, national liberation would be achieved. Abdalla comes out strongly as an advocate and leader of change in his society. On the other hand, Mohammed in his poem *Anga* 'The horizon' (p.verse 3) is optimistic that there is hope as he says:

Anga!  
Anga, Anga la matumaini           ‘taja angaza kumulika  
    Lilete muono dhahiri           kwa maovu kubainika  
Anga!

Translation

*Horizon*  
*Horizon, Horizon of hope will come to enlighten*  
*It will bring a clear vision to reveal the wrong deeds*  
*Horizon!*

As one reads through the whole poem, one can feel the semantic coherence between the scattered and repeated words in the poem which build up the effective communication of the message that the horizon of hope is the limit; it will save the situation through the dawning of a bright day when the evils will be revealed. The semantic paradigm ‘angaza’ and ‘mulika’ are treated as synonyms to enlighten.

4. The maxim of Manner

Grice further subdivided this maxim into a super maxim and sub maxims as follows:

Super maxim: Be perspicuous; this maxim seeks for clarity in the conversation, easily expressed or understood messages.

Maxims: (i) Avoid obscurity of expression (be clear)  
(ii) Avoid ambiguity  
(iii) Be brief. (Avoid unnecessary prolixity).  
(iv) Be orderly

It is very difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between avoiding obscurity and ambiguity in a literary text. So I will discuss the two sub maxims together. It is important to note that indirectness of expression and ambiguity are the constituent features of the literary genre in question. This maxim as noted in the preceding maxims places the poetic discourse in a complex situation if we have to abide by their literal implication. There is no factual evidence in literary issues. More so validating the truth and falsity of the figurative language used poses its own complexities.

However, the continued flouting of the maxims is an advantage to Grice's theory as the implicatures come out conspicuously. The author of poetry does not convey the message openly as he has to survive the harsh environment faced, that is, he has to avoid direct confrontation with his enemies. At times the moral lesson passed to the society has to be hidden for purposes of observing societal ethical principles. As a result, the author and the reader have to employ high sensitivity of the cooperative principle to be able to communicate. For instance, in the second stanza of the poem *Mamba* 'Crocodile', (Abdalla p. 10) states:

Translation

Kuna mamba, mtoni metakabari  
Ajigamba na kujiona hodari  
Yuwaamba kwamba taishi dahari

*There is a crocodile in the river  
It brags and imagines it is powerful  
It claims it will live for ever*

In the real sense one wonders how the poet realised the pride of the crocodile which is a fierce animal that lives in the river. One wonders if a crocodile is capable of uttering a word. Realistically crocodiles are feared by all animals apart from the hippo. So Abdilatif Abdalla has no option than to throw curses at it (stanza 4 and 5). Looking at the literal meaning of this poem then it will be easy for it to be dismissed as not qualifying the maxim in question as all that the poet gives us is lies. But remember that applying literal meaning to poetry is suicidal as almost all poems would be rendered meaningless. Ngara advises that our understanding of poetry requires understanding and appreciation of historical and social conditions, and ideological factors surrounding the poem. Basing on this background, in reality, the poet metaphorically warns a leader who believes that he will be on the throne for ever. To create meaning out of the poem, Abdalla's metaphoric use of *Mamba* (Crocodile) has to be inferred from the historical background of the poet and his relationship with the then ruling system during the composition of the poem.

At this level Grice observed and understands that a meaningful utterance depends on recognizing the intention behind it. Evidently the conversational implicature will be determined by the intentions of the speaker in every case. Given these circumstances, the reader could assume, among other things, that he and the writer are in agreement about the purpose of the information provided and that the information supplied by the poet is appropriate for the genre. Agreeing to these conditions then the reader is entitled to assume any conspicuous deviations and hence, cannot be seen as flouting the maxim in question. Grice acknowledges (p. 58) that in some cases the hearer may be unable to rule out one or more possible interpretations. This is why the meaning and intentions of this poem lies on the historical knowledge and shared assumption between the poet and the reader. One of the interpretations would be that the crocodile symbolizes a political leader whose leadership is dictatorial and how Abdilatif so hopes that his tyrannic rule will come to an end.

To share the composer's world of meaning, both the reader and the writer have to be creative enough. Thus ambiguity, obscurity, and lack of orderliness can also be part of stylistic innovation that the author has employed deliberately to test the imagination of his reader. This stylistic device is used by the author to challenge the reader's creativity and invites the reader to participate in building up the meaning. Generally we realise that before delivering the message it is assumed that the author had time to plan and prepare his themes and that to the best of his knowledge, this is a satisfactory version which he has chosen to deliver his intended opinions to his intended audience. The manner of presentation is relevant to the information passed on to the target audience.

### **Challenges in the Application of Grice's Maxims to Poetic Texts**

As realised in the analysis, sometimes some of the maxims clash. Under normal circumstances the poet cannot be fully explicit, clear and truthful at the same time. In this case the poet has two coexisting major goals: to inform his readers and to conceal the same from his enemies, that is, political leaders. One reason for the concealment of the truths as noted in various examples is that the poets were facing the wrath of imprisonment, but wanted to sorjourn on with their deliverance message: as noted by Abdalla in his poem *Telezi*, 'Slippery ground' (p. 24) that he will employ other strategies and tactics since the previous ones failed. However, with the readers' presumption of a cooperating author, the reader succeeds in confronting the text in the absence of the author.

As noted in application of the maxims, the poetic genre presents its information in brief and at times it becomes very difficult to cope with the maxim of quantity. Therefore this maxim is flouted at all costs. The short and scattered information makes matters worse for the analyst. Unless the readers have a prior knowledge of the background information that gave rise to the composition, then definitely it would be very difficult for them to do justice to the piece of text at hand. On the other hand, supplying so much information might also be dangerous to the genre and to the maxim as proposed by Grice.

As much as we want to classify the work of poetry to belong to the world of fiction, we should put into consideration that it is one thing for the poet to claim that his art exists in a universe of its own and bears no relation to the society in which s/he and his readers live in. Such a claim would free the critic from any obligation to refer to the poet's values, the society's and his own values. Indeed, it is true as noted by Udentia (1996: ix) quoting Georg Lukacs saying 'modern African poets write about things which are meaningful to the African both as a private individual and as a member of a social community, his passion and his desires, his great aspirations as social affirmation, the character and structure of polity, freedom, justice and social change<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted from Udentia O. Udentia: *Art, Ideology and Social Commitment in African Poetry (A discourse)*, Fourth Dimension publishers limited 1996 pp ix

We realise a situation whereby the author is interested not only in reporting states of affairs but also in enabling his audience to join him in contemplating them and interpreting them. This subjects poetry to the analysis of truth values of sentiments expressed, a point that removes it from the world of fiction to real world. Such a move then dismisses all poems as lies thus flouting the maxim of quality.

In most cases, however, literary authors violate various maxims intentionally. In so doing the readers encounter numerous failures in fulfilling the maxim of manner, quality and relation. The reader therefore exploits this situation by resolving it through implicature. However, in other circumstances the critic could come up with different or more valid interpretations of the meaning as opposed to what the composer intended. On this note we also have no idea of what is the most valid interpretation. As noted earlier the poetic text is one of the unique literary spheres that uses few words to express big ideas. The poem in its artistic presentation is brief. Unlike the novel, poetry is capable of condensing its message, a point that motivates readers. In such a state, the author and the reader have to cooperate so as to access the supplement information outside the poetic words. Most of the poets try to observe this maxim.

Any speaker both in natural or written conversation would surely consider the expectations of these maxims rather unrealistic since what is told and what is withheld depends on situation, role and goals of the speaker. So then, do we have any right of accusing a poet for not fulfilling any of the maxims? This is rather complex as we may not be in a position to ascertain if the flouting was intentional or not. But at times we can detect if the poet is careless or ignorant of the themes that s/he is handling and therefore not being informative. In reality then, for the reader to get any meaning out of the utterances produced by the poets s/he must capture the intentions of the poet through the expressions uttered, and associate the expressions with the production of the effect. Through the poems cited in this article, we detect the emphatic plea for justice, and hope embodied in the elitist poetic language. They call for reformation and establishment of independent societies. We also detect a mutual intelligibility between the poet, the poetic sensibility and the poetic vision as the poets call upon solidarity amongst their audience to overcome stereotype vehement causing states of absurdities in democratic societies.

The cooperative principle as discussed is not a means to an end but rather a guideline to the conversational meanings to be shared by the participants. This is why despite the outline of the various maxims by Grice, there may be many cases of unexpected outcomes, misunderstandings and disagreements between various readers of this article. However, the general assumption made is that, the interpretation of poems depends on the interpreter.

## Conclusion

This article may have not exhausted maxims of cooperative principle by Gricean conversational implicature. This is because of reasons mentioned earlier that the field of literature is rather complicated. These maxims were designed for the speech situations of natural language where conversation is held by more than one person and therefore the conversation is build on by turn taking, unlike in a poetic environment where the conversation takes a monologic dimension. However, the article has tried an application of all the maxims and indicated the challenges faced in testing this principle on the literary genre. As realised, most of the principles may be flouted at the surface to a non literary analyst but the literary analyst finds the skill technically interwoven in the poetic dialogue through thematic and aesthetic entries.

It is important to mention that, it is not easy to construct meanings not only from ambiguities realised in the texts but from contexts that are themselves constructs from the writers knowledge, beliefs, experiences and assumptions about his world and the world of fiction. For any successful interpretation then, the reader has no option than to draw up a set of inferences whereby the contextual implication can be derived, thus the analysis will gain from the readers supplied context. As noted in the analysis, the contextual implications of the poems are not the implications of the content alone, but the implications of both the content and a set of assumption being supplied by the reader. The major observation made is that at times the reader has to implicate conditions outside the text to be able to interpret metaphors, allegories or imageries used by the poet for purposes of interpreting the meaning. This requires high level application of the cooperative principle by both the reader and the author. The poetic dialogic understanding of the author's theme or message involves recognizing his rationale for using an utterance in context. Such a rationale will link the utterance to the agreed context and purposes of the conversation, as understood by him and by the reader or the critic. Accordingly, it will provide a platform of the communicated messages. The internalized responses of the audience mean acting cooperatively to meet the requirements of the ongoing dialogue.

In analyzing various poetic messages we realized that discovering the authors intention is a complex mental process that needs a high level of intelligence and as noted earlier; creativity on the part of the reader. This calls for a relation of various aspects of related actions, identities and circumstances that might have led the author to write that piece of work, and used some of the literary devices that would lead to flouting some of the maxims. A poetic interpretation in particular, must spell out sufficient assumptions about the context to derive the conclusions.

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